

# THE Express



Montana School for the Deaf & the Blind

*Lifting students beyond expectations*

Volume XXXVIII Issue 2 Spring 2024



Meet the New Foundation Members

Page 8 & 9

Past Student Gives Back to MSDB

Page 6

**Mark Willmarth**  
Chair  
Vision West, Inc.

**Todd Carmichael**  
Vice President  
O'Connor Funeral  
Home

**Laura Walker**  
Secretary/  
Treasurer  
Attorney at Law

**Cathy Copeland**  
ASL Interpreter  
MSU Billings

**Vena Dagnall**  
MT Hands & Voices

**Bonnie DeNoma**  
Retired MSDB  
Foundation

**Kevin Eckhardt**  
VP First Interstate  
Bank

**Dee Dee Franzen-  
Wallen**  
Parent of Former  
VI Student

**Paul Furthmyre**  
MSDB  
Superintendent

**Jim Kelly**  
MSDB Student  
Life Director

**Connie Keogh**  
Legislator  
Retired Educator

**Tammy Lacey**  
Retired Great Falls  
Public School  
Superintendent

**Doug Little**  
Retired Teacher &  
Parent of MSDB  
Student

**Gary McManus**  
Retired MSDB  
Teacher/Coach

**Shyla Patera**  
North Central  
Independent Living  
Former MSDB  
Student

**Travis Stevenson**  
MSDB Parent

**Rick Thompson**  
Retired Hi-Line  
Home  
Programs



# From the Superintendent



Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (MSDB) is not just a community school found on a beautiful campus in Great Falls, MT. MSDB continues to increase the student population on campus but our school serves a much bigger population, our outreach students. Preparing for the 2023 Legislative session, we developed a report showing exactly how many outreach students we had in every county in Montana. At that time, we had outreach students in 48 of the 56 counties. Preparing for a State Lions Convention in 2021, we put together a similar map of all the hometowns of our past graduates. Although that map is not as easy to read, it shows the same information, that our community is the entire State of Montana.

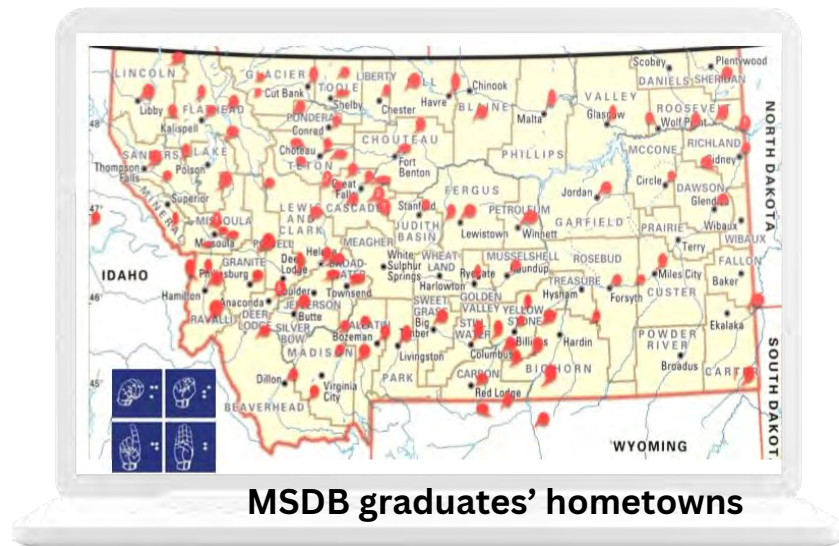
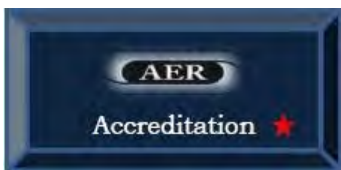
Our community has humbled MSDB the last couple of months. We are grateful for the support and love that has been shown to us. Our performance stage was old and needed replacing. While looking to upgrade our portable stage, we listened to our students and agreed to get a stage that can be all inclusive. The result of this was identifying a stage that will last a long time and allow any and all students a chance to be on stage. The community support from the stage project allowed us to possibly look at a new sound and light system to go with the stage. These possibilities were only a dream for us, and our generous community has made it a reality.

Then in January, our community showed us that they want to help with the future focus of MSDB. We had over sixty community members from around the state participate in our first Portrait of a Graduate meeting. The value that they provided to our conversations was very beneficial. For the first time, it felt like everyone involved with MSDB had beliefs that our students can and will be successful in their pursuits. This is critical for both our community and us. We need to know what the community expects of our students in order to prepare them to be successful. This needs to be a two-way partnership and it truly felt like that was the case.

Our goal is to keep expanding our community reach. It is not acceptable that residents of Great Falls don't know about our school and what we provide. We will continue building relationships with community members to teach them how to work with our population of students. For example, we currently have several airmen, nurses, doctor candidates, and other community members learning ASL. We want to give back to our community in any way we can. Please let us know how we can work together for the betterment of our students.

In Mustang Spirit,

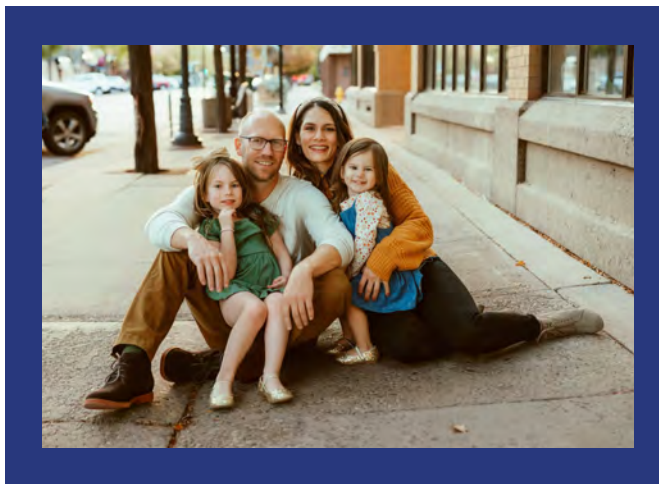
Paul Furthmyre  
Superintendent



**MSDB graduates' hometowns**

# A Huge MSDB welcome to our newest staff member

My name is Nikki Bonilla King, FNP, and I am the new Health Services Director. I have been a nurse for seven years and I recently graduated and received my master's for Family Nurse Practitioner. Prior to working at MSDB, I worked at the Great Falls Clinic Hospital in the PACU where I helped people before and after surgery. Besides work, I love to spend time with my husband Patrick, two daughters, Tennyson (6) and Brontë (3), and our goldendoodle Rosie. When I am not at work I love to read (everywhere I travel I try to visit the city's public library!), workout, and be outside.



## Braille Writer Award

By Michelle Cross, Outreach Consultant

The Braille Writer Award Masons of Great Falls certificate is awarded to an outstanding braille student from across the state of Montana whom has completed a braille program and has demonstrated the need for and use of Braille for a reading and writing mode for academic success.

I was so excited to be able to present this award to one of my outreach students, Leddy Anderson of Culbertson and present the certificate and a Perkins Braille Writer to her at her school with her classmates present. Leddy was also recognized on the schools Facebook page and she was acknowledged during a school assembly for this. A great accomplishment for a great student. Great Job, Leddy!

**Page 2**

Letter From Our Superintendent

**Page 3**

New Staff Member Braille Writer Award

**Page 4**

Preschool Corner

**Page 5**

The Power of Words  
Top Notch Care

**Page 6**

Eagle Scout Gives Back

**Page 7**

Great Falls Hockey Comes to MSDB

**Page 8-9**

Love Letter to Our Donors  
I Give Because..

**Page 10**

Rau School

**Page 11**

New Equipment for Audiology

**Page 12**

Professional Learning Communities

**Page 13**

Magic of Everyday Moments

**Page 14**

A Tribute to Our Outreach Gem

**Page 15**

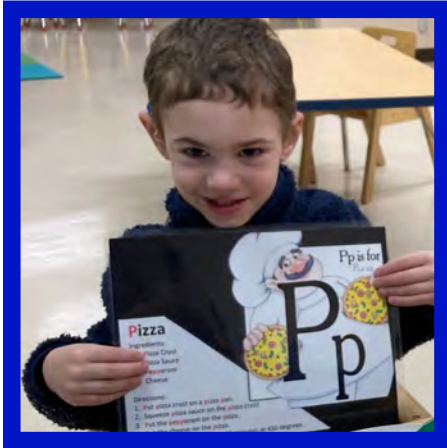
Transitioning to Their Future

**Page 16**

Letter from the Editor  
Where in the 406?  
Upcoming Events

# PRESCHOOL CORNER

## Early Learning at Its Finest



Oliver holding the letter P in front of a pizza on a plate



Oliver and Mrs. Warren showing off their letter "N" graham cracker and pretzel treats



Owen sitting on a sit-and-spin board with a smile on his face in Motor Lab



Owen sitting on a red scooter board in Motor Lab



Oliver pointing to the letter N while holding his letter doll



Owen smiling while sitting in a pit filled with colored balls in Motor Lab

# The Power of Words

by Naomi Witham-Travers, Teacher of the Visually Impaired

People are creatures of habit. We have daily, weekly, monthly routines. We drive the same route to work or school every day. We brush our teeth the same every day and put one leg at a time into our trousers. The way we talk follows routines as well. We have words that work for what we need to stay and we stick with those words fairly regularly. When we mean car, we say car. Rarely do we say automobile, motor vehicle, or horseless carriage. If we mean to give a compliment we may say "That's pretty." It is not often that we would remark that it is breath-taking, fetching, darling, charming, appealing, or delightful.

Perhaps we should consider introducing our children and students to the use of different, obscure, or unusual words when describing their surroundings and daily activities. I have found in my teaching and parenting that the use of these strange, unfamiliar words prompts conversation and inquisitive questioning among students. Conversations that result in far more stimulating exchanges than the go-to "How was your weekend?" Children are so naturally inquisitive that if I use an unfamiliar word, they will want to know what it means, children are never at a shortage for questions. So, the next time a child asks me how I am doing today, instead of saying "Okay," maybe I will say "adequate" or "satisfactory." The conversation that follows when they ask me to describe the meaning of those words will be far more fascinating than "okay." I would challenge you to do the same. Replace a common word each day with a new and interesting word that sparks interest and fuels the imagination. Research studies, like the one conducted by Huttenlocher et al. in 1991, is just one of many that demonstrate the input of vocabulary during the early years is a primary predictor of academic success. The child does not need to begin using the word, simply being aware that it is a word and its generalized meaning will make them more successful academically and foster more creative and imaginative writing and conversation.

So as we begin a new year, I would challenge you to consider joining me in being creative with words. You could begin by simply changing a common word in your daily language. Perhaps you start using the "word of the week" in your classroom or in your home. If you do, may I suggest rutabaga? It was always a favorite with my children! I imagine you will find this task entertaining not only for the children in your life, but for yourself as well! Please feel free to share your words with me, or stories of the conversations that develop as a result of the new language and vocabulary... I would be excited to hear them.

---

## Top Notch Care

by Emily LaSalle, Outreach consultant

Our job as Outreach Consultants vary from day to day. Each student we serve has individual needs that we address. Recently I attended an appointment with a student named Jesse. Jesse's right cochlear implant wasn't working properly. We met for the first time with Dr. Kate Savage, an audiologist with The Hearing Center at Rocky Mountain Ear, Nose, and Throat. It was so wonderful to experience a professional so comfortable and confident to put Jesse's needs, thoughts and fears first as a patient. Thank you Dr. Savage for treating our students/your patients with competence and care. Together we make a difference.



Jesse and Dr. Savage testing his cochlear

Start using the word of the week in your home. May I suggest rutabaga?



**James with three girls in front of the Kids Kabin**



**James at Kindergarten graduation**



**James' Eagle Scout award**

# Eagle Scout Gives Back to MSDB

by Leann Goss, Outreach Consultant

All teachers have their favorite grade level or subject matter to teach. For me, it was preschool! And like all teachers, I love when my students from past years come back to visit! During the summer of 2023, one of those special preschoolers came back not only to visit, but to do something extraordinary! Great Falls High School student (and Eagle Scout candidate at the time) James Tilman, came with a desire to do something to give back to the school that gave him so much in the earliest years of his life.

James was born hard of hearing and his family was immediately enrolled in MSDB's Outreach program. James began attending MSDB's preschool at 18 months of age and continued at MSDB through Kindergarten. He had a shared placement between MSDB and public school for 1st grade and then he was fully integrated into public school in 2nd grade. James and his mother, Kelsie, both credit MSDB for giving him the tools he needed and setting him up for success. In James' own words,

**"MSDB is where my life started. MSDB set me up to overcome challenges because they gave me such a strong foundation of self-advocacy and made sure I understood how to ask for the things that I needed.**

**I have overcome my challenges without knowing I was even doing it. I don't see any challenges in being hard of hearing, it just makes me different, and it's a good difference."**

James' favorite memories of being at MSDB include learning sign language (although he admits he has become a bit rusty), the friendships and bonds he made, and playing on the playground. These memories drew him to want to plan his Eagle Scout community project around improving MSDB's Tiny Town playground. James' project included extending the boardwalk and refinishing the log cabin, where children can come together, meet new friends, use their imaginations and create their own childhood memories in a fun and safe environment! Without the amazing support and incredible motivation of his mother, James does not feel he could have achieved his goals. He hopes to always be involved in Scouts, perhaps being a Scoutmaster one day and when he has children that they too will join Scouts.

The first merit badge that James earned was the music badge and just like Scouts, he knows that music will always be a big part of his life. At Great Falls High School (GFHS) he participates in three bands: concert, jazz, and pep. He plays alto, soprano, and tenor saxophone. He is in the chess club, drama club, plays soccer, and participates in track and field. And if that wasn't enough, James is the Sound Engineer for the GFHS Drama Department. He runs all of the music, the sounds, and the microphones. When asked what advice he would give younger students, James said, "Push through the challenges you have. Put your mind to what you want to do and nothing will stop you. Don't stop believing in yourself!!"



**Witham-Travers helping Caleb with his hockey stick**

## Great Falls Americans hockey comes to MSDB

by Cheri Luongo, Cottage Counselor

We are excited to share a heartwarming experience that unfolded on January 9, as five players from the Great Falls Americans hockey team, accompanied by their coach and team owner, paid a special visit to our students at MSDB.

The atmosphere in our Mustang gym was electric as five hockey players showcased their skills, leaving our students in awe of their talents. But this visit was not just about watching from the sidelines – the players took the time to teach the basics of the game to our eager students. It was a unique opportunity for everyone to learn and appreciate the nuances of the sport.

The highlight of the day was the 20-minute floor hockey game that unfolded right there in the gym. Laughter and cheers filled the air as students and players joined forces for a friendly match, creating lasting memories for all involved. The experience not only brought joy but also served as a valuable educational opportunity for our students.

Community involvement is a cornerstone of fostering positive connections, and we extend our heartfelt appreciation to the Great Falls Americans hockey team for their ongoing commitment to our school. This visit is just one example of their dedication to making a positive impact on the lives of our students.

In addition to the skills demonstration and floor hockey game, the team generously provided several tickets for our students to attend the Saturday night game. This gesture not only allowed our students to witness the professionals in action but also further strengthened the bond between MSDB and the Great Falls Americans.

This event follows an earlier invitation from the team, where they not only hosted our students at a game but also went above and beyond by ice skating with them. Such experiences go beyond the realm of sports – they create a sense of camaraderie and inclusion that is invaluable.

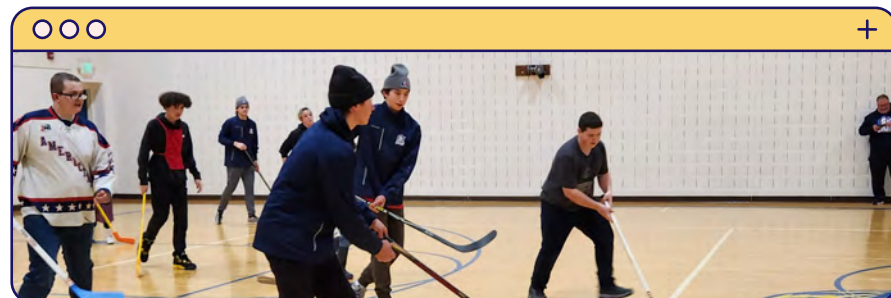
We would like to express our gratitude to the Great Falls Americans hockey team, their coach, and team owner for their continuous support and engagement with our students. Your efforts have left an indelible mark on our school community, and we look forward to future collaborations that enrich the lives of MSDB students.



**Brooke learns some skills**



**Marias and David face off**



**The hockey players watch Emery move down the floor**



**“Laughter and cheers filled the air as students and players joined forces for a friendly match, creating lasting memories for all involved.”**





# Montana School *for the* LIFTING STUDENTS

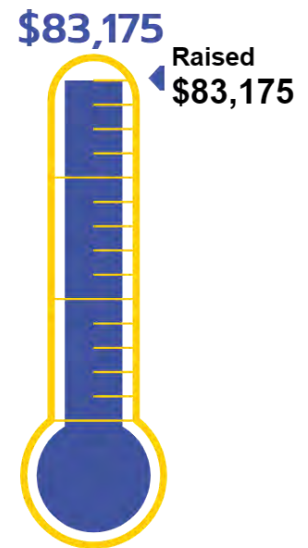
## Love Letter to Our Donors

Because of the generosity of you, our new ADA accessible stage will be here for our spring concert on April 16. We can't wait to see ALL of our students performing together on stage. For over 40 years, students with mobility issues could not be on stage during some of the most important moments of their young lives.

You were so generous, we were able to order lights and sound. We can't wait for performances and graduations for years to come!

**MSDB Alumna Shyla Patera recalls, "I'm so excited to see students be integrated. Being in a wheelchair myself, I was always on the side at events ... never right next to my peers. Now they can all be together on an inclusive stage!"**

MSDB stage goal



## New Foundation Board Members



**Connie Keogh** grew up on a ranch South of Billings. She graduated with a dual degree in Elementary Education/Special Education and later attained a Masters of Education in Learning Technology. She taught for 20+ years as an Elementary teacher and as a Special Education teacher in 3 different states. She also worked for 19+ years on the Faculty for Western Governors University as a Program mentor for students working on their teaching programs.

Most recently, she served three terms in the Montana State Legislature. Currently, a member of the House Education Budget committee. She has two sons and two grandchildren.



**Vena Dagnall**, a Townsend native and a graduate of MT State University, holds a Marketing degree with minors in computer science and information technology. After a short time at MT Commerce, she has rejoined the Disability Employment and Transitions division of DPHHS as the Vocational Rehabilitation Technician in Helena. She also brings experience from her role as the Independent Living Program manager within the same division. With an enthusiastic commitment to early intervention and improving outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing children, Vena has attended the National Hands & Voices Leadership Conference three times and the National Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Conference twice. Vena is a co-founder and board member of Montana Hands & Voices. She is set to become the first parent chair of the OPI Special Ed Advisory Panel and is actively engaged in the HB619 advisory committee. Vena, her husband and two children, including a deaf 4th grader, live near Helena in Canyon Creek.



# Deaf & the Blind Foundation

## BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

### Q. What are Giving Days?

They are days of giving fueled by the power of social media and collaboration. Giving Days are an initiative of the MT Community Foundation. To join us, use the QR code for your nearest city's webpage listed above.

### Q. Do I need to create an account to make a donation?

No. You do not need to create an account to make a donation. The benefits of creating an account include having your tax receipts collected in one location, being able to track your donations, follow the charities you support, and engage in future volunteering and donations. Your tax receipt is emailed immediately upon processing your donation.

*"Individually, we are one drop. Together we are an ocean." –Ryunosuke Satoro*

### How You Can Help

With your help, the MSDB Foundation has been able to provide funds for services and equipment not covered by state funding. The Foundation is committed to funding academic and extracurricular activities that help prepare students for independent lives.

Please join us in that commitment by making a tax-deductible donation to [www.msdbmustangs.org](http://www.msdbmustangs.org) or mailing it to:

MSDB Foundation P.O. Box 6576 Great Falls, MT 59406

For more information, please call 406-771-6040

“This is a positive way to start every one’s day”

## A Small Rural School Near Sidney

by Emily LaSalle, Outreach consultant

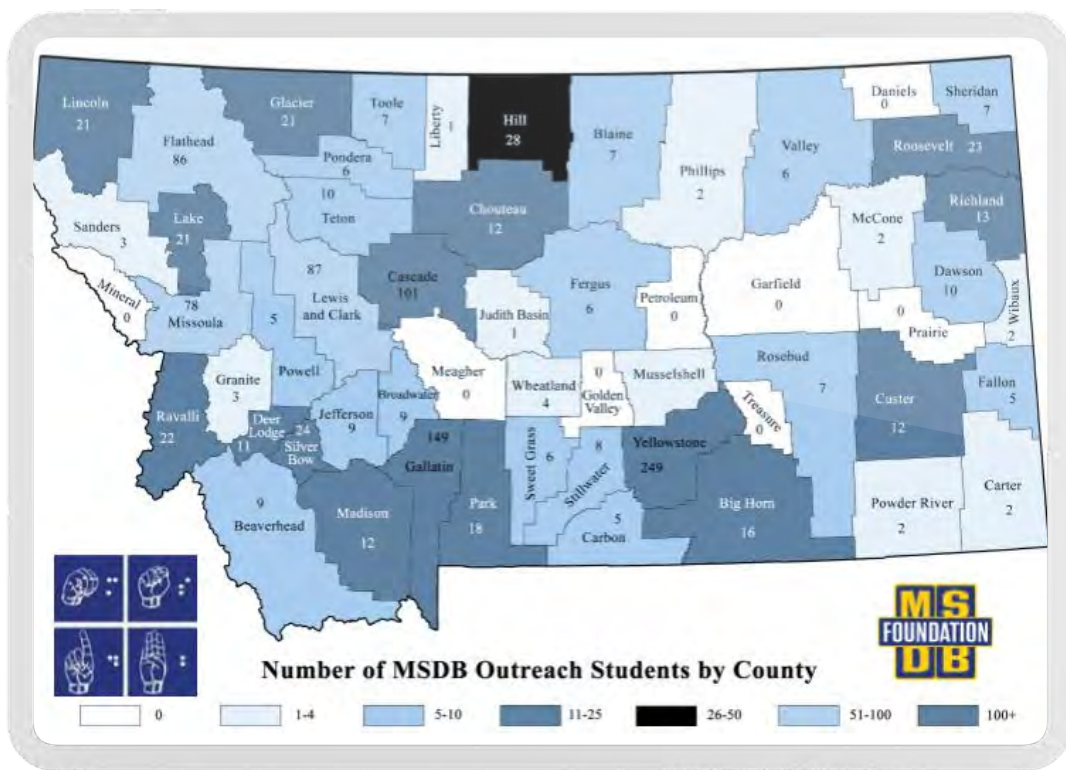
Each school we enter is as unique as are the students we serve. This morning I visited Rau School to observe a student. The teacher sent a schedule ahead of time so I could join the class at times that would benefit my observation. At 7:50 am school begins with a class meeting. My mind is thinking, a kindergarten class holds a meeting each morning, this will be good.

Unbeknownst to me, the “class meeting” is held in the small library with all grades, K-6. What an amazing way to start your day! The class meeting opens with all teachers and students standing and singing an uplifting song, “Thousand Miles,” the song is about Monarch butterflies’ journey they make each year. After the song was finished we said “The Pledge of Allegiance.”

At this point in the meeting, students take their seats and the agenda proceeds: Announcements were presented by an adult with weather and snow updates, specific areas of the playground to stay away from to avoid injury, and a reminder of safety rules. Any guests we want to introduce? I was introduced and given a warm welcome (this is a first!), followed by instructions, “If Ms. Emily is looking lost please direct her to a teacher.” My heart filled. Students were then questioned if there were any teams to be competing. A young lady raised her hand and then mentioned the wrestling team, to

which all members of the wrestling team stand and the audience wished them well, so encouraging to have support from the entire school. There are other chances to announce birthdays and celebrations before the school is dismissed to their classrooms to continue their day.

This was such a positive way to start everyone’s day. Any rough starts to the morning are now forgotten and the staff and students are starting the day with an optimistic attitude. Thank you to Rau School, you made this visitor’s day brighter!



# New Testing Equipment Thanks to the MSDB Foundation

by Katherine Lynch, Au.D, CCC-A

Thanks to the MSDB Foundation's support, our audiology services have undergone exciting changes aimed at modernization and adherence to best practice standards. In the past year, we acquired new equipment - FM systems for our DHH elementary classroom, a video system for our test booth, and the Verifit2 for hearing aid verification.

An FM system, or Frequency Modulation system, is a technology used to transmit sound directly from a microphone worn by the speaker to a receiver worn by the listener, improving clarity and reducing background noise. FM systems are important to use for students who are Deaf and/or hard of hearing who learn auditorily. Research has shown DHH students need a teacher's voice to be 10- 15 dB louder than their normal hearing peers. Previously, in our DHH elementary classroom our teacher wore multiple microphones to accommodate students' FM equipment, leading to potential noise interference. To address this, we transitioned to using a streamlined FM system, Roger Touchscreen Mic. Now, our teacher can wear a single microphone and send a signal that is adaptable for any hearing device, ensuring a strong, clear signal for our students.

Visual reinforcement audiometry is a hearing test method for young children (as young as 6 months!) that uses engaging stimuli to prompt responses. We've modernized MSDB's testing tools for behavioral audiometry through the purchase of the Flex VRA system. We replaced old wooden clowns with lightbulbs as their noses to three video screens with a variety of stimuli that can continuously be updated and changed. Through this upgrade we are able to keep kids involved in testing for longer periods of time and gain more accurate tests.

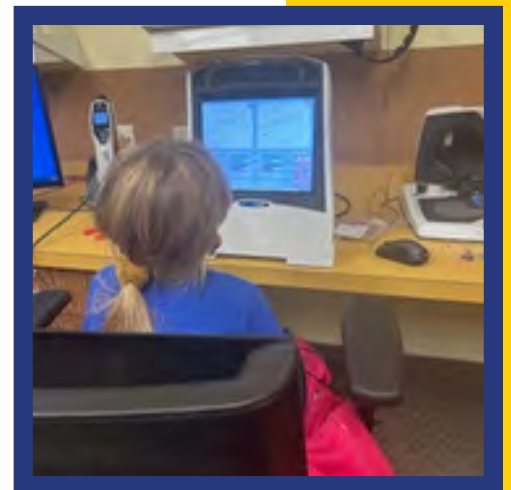
One of the most exciting changes is the purchase of the Verifit2, offering on-campus verification for hearing aids. Hearing aid verification is a process of assessing the function, fit, and prescription accuracy of hearing aids to ensure optimal performance and is considered best practice for pediatric audiology. By having the technology to do this on campus we can ensure uninterrupted education for our students through eliminating the need for long journeys to their clinical audiologists when minor adjustments need to be made to their devices.



**Elijah smiles at the screen**



**Mrs. Kline smiles as Myra raises her hand**



**Brooke testing on new equipment**

# P

# L

# C



## Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

by Alissa Kline, teacher

According to the US Department of Education, “Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) provide an environment that encourages professional development, collaboration and innovation among teachers. Research suggests positive school reform occurs when teachers participate in authentic PLCs, with improved student achievement as a byproduct.” So what is a PLC? Authentic PLCs utilize five guiding questions:

- 1) Where are we going? (In other words, what is expected of students at this age/grade level?)
- 2) Where are we now? (What do our assessments or observational data show us about students’ current levels?)
- 3) How do we move learning forward? (What instructional strategies can we use to increase student learning?)
- 4) What did we learn today? and
- 5) Who benefited and who did not? (These reflective questions guide us to think about whether the strategies used were effective for those particular students or whether new strategies need to be explored.)

MSDB Education staff members have been engaging in PLCs this year to discuss student progress and instructional strategies in order to move learning forward. Topic choices for 1st quarter included Vocabulary Acquisition, Social/Emotional Learning and Explicit Instruction. These topics align nicely with our Strategic Plan. Staff members each chose which topic they would like to focus on. Teams were formulated and remain the same for the duration of the quarter. Each team meets for 45 minutes, once a week, to discuss the 5 guiding questions. At the end of each quarter, teams will celebrate their progress and share with the other teams what they have learned. Each quarter, new topics will be offered and new teams will be formulated for the following quarter.

The staff members in the Cottage are beginning to engage in this process as well. They are calling it CLC’s (Cottage Learning Communities). These teams are focusing on social and emotional skills. Like the PLCs in education, these teams meet weekly and use the 5 Guiding Questions to direct their conversations. Staff members collect data and use that data to determine what strategies to put in place to help students succeed. It is exciting to listen to the conversations and see the progress being made as a result of PLCs and CLCs!



# The Magic of Everyday Moments: The Listening and Spoken Language Way

by Sherri R. Widhalm, MS, CCC-SLP, LSLs Cert. AVEEd.

Did you know that everyday routines can lead to extraordinary learning? You can teach your child to listen and talk during everyday moments in your home. It is not about the toys in your home, but it is about seizing the moments embedded in routines to grow your child's brain. Parents and caregivers can support healthy brain growth by speaking to their child and inserting language into routines occurring in the home. These daily routines from morning to bedtime provide for many listening and spoken language opportunities. Any routine can be a learning opportunity for a child, which ultimately builds the brain.

Let us consider three basic types of routines. A daily routine is something that happens every day, such as dressing, cooking, mealtime, bath time, laundry, reading, or bedtime. When your child is young, you can teach your child to answer questions while dressing (i.e. "Do you want to wear the RED shirt or the BLUE shirt?") or to follow directions by telling them 2-3 things they need (i.e. "Get your shoes, coat, and mittens."). As your child gets older, these language activities can become increasingly complex (i.e. "Before you take the garbage out, please empty the dishwasher" or "Don't forget to put on the striped blue shirt with your black pants for dinner tonight."). These activities will build your child's vocabulary as well as their ability to listen and remember details within a spoken message. Cooking is another example of a daily routine that can build your child's brain. What happens when you are cooking a meal? This is a perfect time to talk about the different ingredients in a recipe as well as the steps of the recipe. Descriptive words like "sticky," "thick," or "greasy" can be used when cooking to build vocabulary. A conversation by a parent may sound like this: "It is time for breakfast. I think we'll make pancakes. Let's get the big blue bowl. First we will beat 1 egg, and then we will add ½ cup of milk. Next we will measure and add the flour, baking powder, and salt. Stir-stir-stir," and so on. There are many daily routines in which we can teach our children, by simply labeling objects/actions as well as narrating what is happening and encouraging children in conversation.

Another type of routine is a play routine, which includes fun activities that you like to do with your child (i.e. playing peek-a-boo, singing, playing with trucks or dolls, building Legos, or even a game of Uno). This is a great time to follow your child's lead. What is your child interested in doing or talking about? During these activities, make sure to use a variety of action words such as "walking," "digging," "stomping," and "swinging," as well as words like "my turn, your turn," "in," "on," "over", and "between." Expand on what your child understands and says. Don't be afraid to use a few words that are unfamiliar to your child. Even if a child doesn't know the meaning, the brain will figure it out with time and repetition. When we use synonyms for already known words, we can exercise the brain and promote vocabulary development.

Lastly, a social routine involves going places such as the grocery store, grandma's house, or the park. These are great opportunities to build conversational skills that will benefit a child their whole life. Whether you are visiting with a neighbor, a friend, or the grocery store cashier, your conversations can provide a model to help your child learn how to interact with people in their life. For example, your child will benefit from hearing you greet people: "Good morning! How are you today? It has been wonderful to see you." Don't be afraid to talk about the expectations of social interactions (i.e. "When someone says hello, you could say hello").

No doubt, parents and caregivers have a lot of demands on their time, but a child's developing brain desperately needs parents and caregivers to create an environment for young children to flourish and develop their brains. It is important to remember that in the early years of life, a child is making massive neural connections in their brains, which support cognitive skills that are important for later learning in the school environment. Early language is best developed within natural conversations and during daily experiences. Face-to-face interactions with family members cannot be replaced with the use of electronic devices. Conversations with young children are important for brain development, which in turn develops their listening and spoken language development. Everyday interactions during daily routines are not only fun, but also provide great opportunities for learning. This learning then carries over into the school setting and leads to academic success. Routines help children of all ages learn because of their repetitive nature. Always remember, there is magic in everyday moments! This magic builds your child's brain!



**Oliver helping make pancakes**



**Sherri and Oliver play with a dump truck**



**Oliver holding the lid of the washer open**

# A Tribute to our Outreach Gem: Jane Garrison

by Kerri Norick & Michelle Cross, Outreach Consultants



Barb Peterson & Jane Garrison

Jane's favorite memories working at MSDB:

"The kids & seeing the growth as the kids reach their potential."



Amy Tangen, Jane Garrison, and Lisa Cannon with their 15 year pins

The name Jane is of English origin and means "God is gracious." This is definitely just one adjective we would use to describe Jane Garrison. Jane's grace, calm demeanor and nurturing trademark will be felt for years all across the state. Jane started her teaching career in public and private education across northwestern Montana and Missoula area. She taught in East Glacier Park, Browning High school and Browning Middle School before taking a short leave to raise her two sons in Missoula. Her early itinerant teaching began while she taught title classes in Browning in the mornings and was a special education teacher at Starr school in the afternoons. When Jane's boys were 8 & 3 years old, she moved to East Glacier Park; and Jane's adventurous spirit allowed her to experience life in Glacier Park. One morning she woke up to a noise and bear claw marks on her shed. Jane also taught at a private parent cooperative school for a whopping salary of \$300. Finally, making her way back to Missoula county, Jane took a new job teaching at Woodman Elementary up Lolo Creek with the Missoula Special Education Cooperative and before learning her true passion of teaching students with visual impairments, Jane taught at Big Sky High School for 8 years working collaboratively with another teacher managing 35 students and 9 paraprofessionals. Jane, along with a few other MSDB peers completed her Master's Degree in teaching students with visual impairments and blindness through the Project Vision federal grant with Stephen F. Austin State University. As an option plan, Jane completed most of the coursework needed for an orientation & mobility certificate which allowed MSDB to have a bonus O&M instructor for many of our Enrichment and Family Learning weekends. In 2008, MSDB offered Jane the Outreach Consultant position in Kalispell, MT. Her first caseload as an MSDB consultant started with 36 children; now Jane averages 84 children on her caseload. Jane's favorite memories working at MSDB, "The kids & seeing the growth as the kids reach their potential." She guided braille teachers and education teams to help several students become prolific braille readers. Jane will miss working with her MSDB family and always felt the utmost respect and value working on the Outreach team. In total, Jane has fostered the love of learning across her area for 32 1/2 years. Her love of teaching came from the love of learning herself. Jane will always cherish the love of learning she instilled in her outreach students for the excitement of learning and reading braille. What Jane is looking forward to most in retirement: More time to garden, use of her greenhouse, hunting, hiking, camping, and traveling to Eastern Montana with her husband Barry. Jane and Barry continue to love their children and soon to be 12 grandchildren. Her son, Luke, is getting married in Anchorage, AK, in July 2024. Our desire is for Jane to make her bucket list and enjoy time with her family.

"Jane was a loyal employee who worked to support each family with a calm steady approach. She worked well with the Outreach Team to support events and always has a smile on her face!" -**Carol Clayton-Bye**

"I will miss how willing she was to always jump in and help with many of our on-campus events--so many years of fond memories of Showdown, VI Games, goalball, etc. I think we take for granted all of the "old timers" that know how to play and run these games so we will definitely be missing her knowledge and skills." -**Denise Rutledge**

"Jane Garrison has been such an awe-inspiring Outreach Consultant with the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind. She served MSDB for over 15 years. Jane not only served as a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments, but also as a special education classroom teacher for many years prior. Throughout her years of service, I have held her consultation and teaching directions in high esteem. She has a keen sense of commitment working with children diagnosed with a wide variety of challenges to include blindness. In our years of service together, I have come to appreciate Jane as a true friend. I will miss our many quiet talks together as well as her calming approach to life situations. She always had a way of seeing the world in the light of the "glass being half full" rather than empty. Jane, you will be missed!"

-**Barbara A. Peterson**

Susan Davis, Barb Peterson, Jane Garrison, Sharon Woods, Kerri Norick, Carol Clayton-Bye, Michelle Cross, Amy Tangen



# Transitioning to Their Future

by Sheri Devlin, Transition Coordinator

During the past legislative session, MSDB received additional funding to develop a transition coordinator position. This is the first year with the position that is filled by Sheri Devlin. Sheri comes to MSDB with nearly 20 years of experience as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, the past 10 of those working as the liaison for MSDB students transitioning to adult services and post high school goals and support.

The year started with learning the systems and processes already in place at MSDB. As the year progresses, long term goals and processes are being identified and developed to establish a sustainable transition program for all students. The goal will be for every student to have an opportunity to experience transition services and support directly to include hands-on planning for post high school goals and activities for independence.

Students have been working directly with Sheri, the Transition Coordinator, to explore career goals, interests, and develop work experiences. So far this school year, students have attended a college and career fair, World of Work job fair, and on campus jobs. For the spring semester, we are developing community work experiences to learn about local businesses as well as the opportunity to gain work skills. Many students have a goal to obtain summer employment. We will be attending job fairs and working with local businesses to pursue summer employment opportunities.

This summer MSDB will host its first transition camp for students ages 14-21. This will be for both the Visually Impaired and Deaf and Hard of Hearing departments and include students who attend MSDB campus as well as students served through outreach throughout the state. This will be an overnight camp at MSDB June 3-7, 2024 being provided in collaboration with MSDB and Vocational Rehabilitation Pre-ETS.

In early fall, four staff were trained in the "Putting Your Best Foot Forward" transition curriculum and program through Mississippi State University and the National Research and Training Center. This program is a job skills training program specifically for youth with visual impairments. MSDB will also adapt the program for our Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. We will be implementing the program in the Cottage and LEAP and eventually into the employability and life skills classes on campus.



Jordan and Levi at the College Job Fair





**Montana School for  
the Deaf  
and  
the Blind**

3911 Central Avenue | Great Falls, MT 59405



## From the Editor

**Missie Williams**

Spring, for many, brings to mind warmer temperatures, the earth turning green again, and being outdoors. When spring comes around I tend to reflect. I stand in the halls between classes and see students moving from here to there. I see a student who, at the beginning of the year, was quiet and unsure of his movement through these halls due to his visual impairment, now walking with confidence. I hear laughter as a group of high school students head to class, talking about something funny that had happened. I see a student who could not sign last year and this year his hands sign quickly as he retells a story of his weekend. I see kids who don't let their disability define them, who are some of the greatest kids I have ever taught. I see happiness. I see excitement. I see family. And I love every minute of it.

Missie Williams [mwilliams@msdb.k12.mt.us](mailto:mwilliams@msdb.k12.mt.us)  
Special Education Coordinator/Indian Education Coordinator/  
Science Teacher/ Express Editor

## WHERE IN THE 406?

These are places and things seen by our Outreach consultants on their many travels around the state.

**Can you guess where this is located?**



**Crazy Mountains near Wilsall, MT**

### Upcoming DHH Outreach events:

April 19th - 20th, beginning 4:00pm on Friday- DEW  
June 7th, 8th and 9th - DEW Family Learning Weekend  
Deaf Camp- TBD

### Upcoming VI Outreach events:

March 15-16 - Spring VIEW  
April 12-13 - Spring UTD  
May 31- June 2 - Blind Family Learning Weekend  
June Summer Skills camp for B/VI students



**Let's get social!**

#MtSDB

@msdbfoundation



The MSDB Express is published three times a year and is graciously funded by the MDDB Foundation. To receive it electronically, please contact Carmen Turnbow at [foundation@msdb.k12.mt.us](mailto:foundation@msdb.k12.mt.us)