

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF  
LEGISLATIVE SUB-COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS FOR EDUCATION

January 17, 1979  
8:30 a.m.  
Room 104  
State Capitol Building  
Subject: Montana School for  
Deaf and Blind.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Carroll South with the following members being present:

Sen. Larry Fasbender  
Sen. Harold Nelson  
Rep. Jack Moore  
Rep. Esther Bengtson

Rep. Oscar Kvaalen was absent. Also present in the meeting were Floyd McDowell, Superintendent of the Montana School of the Deaf and Blind; Mrs. Meloy, Board of Public Education; several staff members from the School and parents from several Montana cities whose children attend the School. Miral Gamradt of the LFA's office and Tom Crosser of the OBPP were also present.

Mr. McDowell distributed budget materials on the School to committee members, including the original budget document given to the budget office and a budget comparison sheet which the School made up. There was also a twenty-year study of the School, a justification to increase office staff at the School, the AD HOC committee report which would be explained, and a prioritized recommendation from that committee. (A copy of the materials are included as attachments to these minutes.)

Mr. McDowell first discussed the agency itself and the reasons for its existence.

The Board of Public Education established an AD HOC committee which was given the charge of identifying the role and scope of the School. The committee had representation from parents, public schools, universities, related professionals, agencies and deaf education. There is a report of that committee included as an attachment to these minutes, but it has not been finalized, nor has the Board officially accepted it for the record.

The committee concluded that the state needs a residential school for the deaf and blind. It is also the consensus of the committee that increased and added services are needed and that this agency should coordinate these services. The Board asked that these needed services be prioritized.

One group of recommendations could be done by the Board through the School itself; another group would need some administrative action

and another group contains strictly legislation. The AD HOC committee had a coordinating secretary who made contacts with federal agencies, other states, and professional organizations to gather the results of their efforts in the same areas the committee was concerned with. Public Law 94-142 was also examined. There is difficulty in a state like Montana applying the rules and regulations to implement the law because the state is rather rural in comparison to the other states.

The committee is well aware that the recommendations listed in attachment (f) are not 100% achievable in a short time and that some of the goals may properly be modified. The committee also recognizes that many of the recommendations carry a fiscal note that requires very serious study. However, much can be accomplished through decisions by the Board of Public Education and other governing bodies; the ability and capability to make progress also depends upon the Legislature's decisions. The proposed budgets are restrictive and will result in less service Mr. McDowell feels.

The scope of services and the role of the School in public education has changed and grown significantly in recent years. They are involved with a total of 356 children as of January 4, 1979, with 121 of these children being at the Great Falls campus; 235 children are in their local schools or programs. The 121 children in Great Falls receive a total support program; the 235 children located in various communities and programs throughout the state receive varying amounts and kinds of services. These various materials were described by Mr. McDowell.

Representative Moore inquired what Abacus was, and Mr. McDowell explained that it is an instrument used by the Chinese for counting; it is very efficiently used by blind students.

Of the 121 children at Great Falls, these children range in age from 2 years to 19 years of age. Thirteen are deaf-blind-multihandicapped, eight are visually impaired and five of them have other handicaps; one hundred are hearing impaired.

Representative Bengtson inquired whether the School has a working relationship with Boulder River School and Hospital on the contributing handicaps; whether there was a testing program where the MSDB took some of those individuals. Mr. McDowell stated that by statute the MSDB has to accept only educable children, but the determining factor of whether they go to MSDB or go to Boulder lies pretty much in experimentation. In the past 10 years the MSDB has not turned a child down who has any capability at all for functioning in that environment; however, if the child's behavior is at a level they can't handle, they must be sent to Boulder.

Representative Moore inquired about the six children taken out of Boulder in October, 1969, and put into the School, and asked how many more children they have taken out of Boulder since that time.

Mr. McDowell replied that 13 students had been transferred; that ten are in two group homes in Great Falls; two are in their natural homes and one resides in the School.

Twenty-eight of the 121 students at Great Falls are attending East Junior High School and Great Falls High School for part of the day. They go to regular classes at these schools for certain courses. To support these 28 children, School District #1 in Great Falls contracts with MSDB to provide interpreter-tutors and coordination. The alternative for this program arrangement is for this agency to hire staff and acquire tools and machinery to teach some of these courses. About five years ago the School phased out this type of effort in favor of the present arrangement.

Great Falls High School contracts for \$68,000 with MSDB to provide interpreter-tutors. There is a question with regard to this whether the School should receive the funding directly.

In order to meet the requirements of general law and 504 regulations, the MSDB went to the Board of Education and asked that 12 weekends per year be designated as official closing dates of the school; the children travel home Friday and come back Sunday night. For their transportation, the parents can go to their local school district and get reimbursed by the state at 12¢ per mile. The school makes the travel arrangements and buys the ticket for whatever means of transportation is used; the MSDB then bills the parents.

Mr. McDowell does not feel the School will come out equal using this method of reimbursement. He feels that perhaps it would be more convenient for the school to receive the funding directly.

Representative Moore inquired whether Mr. McDowell knew exact amounts the School would spend and exact amounts that would be received back from the parents. Secretary Mary Fenton said that they kept an exact accounting record of the transportation transactions.

Chairman South inquired whether Mr. McDowell had a rough estimate of what the transportation costs were for the last fiscal year. This was the first year this was done; the School took the exact population they had and got costs of transportation for each student; it costs just under \$1,500 per weekend.

Representative Moore asked from what fund the money came which was used to buy the tickets. The general fund was used--current operating funds.

Chairman South asked what the length of time was between the time the School bought the ticket and the time they were reimbursed. Some of the parents keep an account at the School so general fund monies do not have to be used for every child; the parents get reimbursed by the school districts twice a year--at the end of January and at the end of June. The MSDB will bill those parents whose children they have bought tickets for at the end of January, 1979.

Representative Moore asked whether the State Warrant for transportation reimbursement is made out to the parents. It is made out to the parents, and Rep. Moore commented that the School has no assurance that the parents will repay this money into the current operating fund. Mr. McDowell concurred. Mr. McDowell said there would be a problem with a few children, but didn't think they were out more than \$1,200 to \$1,500 at this time. Mr. McDowell believed there would

be a problem when the account was audited.

Representative Bengtson was concerned about the whole justification of having twelve weekends at home and also having the transportation paid. Mr. McDowell said it does fall within the scope of the law; he stated that there are schools in other states which do it 36 weeks a year and others doing it 18. He attended a conference of executives American Schools for the Deaf last spring, and this was an item of discussion; he feels that there is no question, but that it is justified.

Chairman South commented that some current operating account monies would be used if parents were not reimbursed the total amount it costs to send children home. Mr. McDowell said the program is so new he cannot foresee the answers at this time.

Representative Moore inquired what time period was used to constitute a weekend. Mr. McDowell stated it was from Friday night to Monday morning. Rep. Moore asked how much savings was made by closing the school on weekends. There would be very little savings because it is only 12 weekends; if it were every other week, the School would realize considerably more savings. Two-forty hour work weeks can be put back to back. The only savings at the present time are in food, heat and lights. There is very little effective savings in personnel costs. At Rep. Moore's request, Mr. McDowell said he would have an estimate run on the actual savings during the first quarter that this program has been in operation.

Sen. Nelson asked how much the School bills the parents; Mr. McDowell said they were billed the actual amount of the ticket. They do use the most convenient transportation they can get. For a group of children they have in the Kalispell area and the Browning area, the School has contracted with Red River Valley Bus Lines to transport the children to the Browning area and then over to Kalispell and back. The arrangement is made on a cost basis of about 10¢ per mile. Approximately four families have to travel to Kalispell from surrounding towns to pick their children up and transport them home. They then have to return the children to Kalispell on Sunday afternoon.

Sen. Nelson asked whether the parents are reimbursed for that trip, and Mr. McDowell said they were reimbursed at 12¢ per mile. The School only bills the parents for the cost of the trip from Great Falls to Kalispell.

Sen. Fasbender inquired whether the parents can retain the extra 2¢ per mile they bill from the school districts if the cost of the trip is only 10¢ per mile. Mr. McDowell said it would appear they are recovering the full 12¢ per mile. Added to this is the local transportation problem. Only 58 of the children attending the school reside at the school and the remainder of the 121 have to be transported. Parents asked whether some transportation arrangement could be secured for the local children. The local school district in Great Falls made arrangements for two buses. This is an added cost for that school district. Mr. McDowell said there have not been any complaints from the School District so far.

There was discussion as to whether the local school districts are required to transport these children to and from the MSDB; it is an out-of-district placement when the child goes to the MSDB.

Rep. Bengtson inquired whether students that go to the MSDB have gone through local evaluations with study teams and have determined that the local district is not capable of handling that child; Mr. McDowell said every child at the School has gone through a local child study team originally. Once an out-of-town child has been assessed and determined to be handicapped and does, in fact, attend the School, subsequent evaluations are made in Great Falls but the records are still transmitted to the school district where the child is originally from. The School invites the local school districts to send a representative to the child study teams. They are trying to follow the exact letter of the law.

Another program effort which answers what the School does and for whom is the Parent-Intervention Program (PIP). The coordinator for this program has 36 babies and infants on the rolls. All are under 5 years of age, most are deaf or hearing impaired from all over the state.

Rep. Moore asked if these 36 infants were included in the total number of 356; the answer was yes.

Rep. Bengtson inquired whether there is a duplication of PIP with the developmentally disabled; Mr. McDowell stated that a deaf child is not developmentally disabled by definition of law. A deaf or blind child is not developmentally disabled by law. Rep. Bengtson made the comment that the school does handle the other handicapping conditions such as cerebral palsy. Mr. McDowell said they did only when it was in conjunction with loss of hearing or loss of vision. Mr. McDowell stated that of the 121 children at the school, approximately 70% have other handicapping conditions. Rep. Moore asked whether there was any Down's Syndrome in the School; there had been one who passed away and they presently don't have any.

Mr. McDowell stressed the importance of the PIP program in giving parents some kind of help. The staff of the School can see a very marked positive difference in the progress of some of the children who had the benefit of the PIP at an early age.

There are only eight children in Great Falls who are vision impaired. There are 160 to 170 in local school districts around the state who are served by the School's itinerant consultants. Being served by these itinerant consultants doesn't mean that they are taught by them; they are in their local school taught by their local teacher. The itinerant consultants go to the schools and to the home, find out the materials needed by the student, and have these materials supplied. Billings is the one school district in the state which has assumed the responsibility for their blind children and are doing it well. They are hiring two teachers for the visually impaired grade school children.

Rep. Moore inquired whether these children are in the Special Education Program at Billings; a few of them are, but most of them are not. The reason Billings has such a program and other areas do not is that Billings is quite an urban area and they have a number of children with vision impairments. Great Falls has a large number also, but the School can serve these children.

Rep. Moore inquired about Missoula and other towns; Mr. McDowell stated that the MSDB is handling these children and they are going to their local schools.

Rep. Bengtson inquired how many consultants there are and whether the MSDB waited for a contact from the schools in order to go out and work with the children. Whenever a consultant goes into a school, his first contact is with the principal. There are four consultants--Missoula, Billings, Bozeman, and Great Falls. Some of the materials are given to the various students on a loan basis so they can be reused at a later date by children elsewhere; there is a central library in Great Falls.

The School does not have the capability of delivering that kind of service to all the children in the state; they have attempted to do it through a summer program run by Title I monies. A camp is rented at Flathead Lake and children whose skills in these areas need upgrading attend for two weeks. They attempt to upgrade their mobility and orientation skills, their self-help skills, their skills in braille and the use of the abacus. Mr. McDowell feels that the seriousness of this intervention could be questioned, although it is greatly needed. The Division of Visual Services has a need for this kind of instruction with adults. He feels that a person strategically located within the state could just as easily serve an adult as a child, but with the present division of duties, it is not possible.

There are 44 children under the age of 21 who are deaf and blind. Eight are at the Boulder River School and Hospital; fifteen are in Great Falls, two being in the Special Education Center; and twenty-one are in local programs throughout the state or in their own homes. The School gets \$100,000 from the federal government to support this program in 1979. The general fund budget supplements this. The federal money flows from the Bureau of Education of the Handicapped to a regional program which is comprised of several states who in turn dole the money out to the individual states. Up until this year, Montana was in the Northwest region out of Seattle. This year the states had the option of whether they wanted to go with the region or on their own; there was not enough state support so the Northwest regional office was abandoned and Idaho and Montana were placed in the Mountain-Plains regional center out of Denver. That is a consortium of ten states. There is a feeling that there will be a decrease in federal financial support of the deaf-blind programs.

Rep. Moore asked what the federal support was in fiscal 1978; \$105,000.

Rep. Bengtson inquired whether there were any deaf-blind persons in group homes throughout the state; there are two in a group home in Kalispell and one in Deer Lodge.

These persons are housed with DD people. Rep. Bengtson questioned whether the deaf-blind persons are also developmentally disabled. She stated that the definition of a developmentally disabled person is quite encompassing and has changed recently. She is wondering about the duplication of the School's programs with DD programs. Mr. McDowell stated that with the children there is no duplication. The only place where there is any overlapping is with the group home situation of the deaf-blind children. DD provides the group homes but those children leave the homes and come to the School for the day to receive instruction. The School is not in any way involved with the conduct and support of those group homes.

Mr. McDowell stated that they are involved in the child study team process, involving staff time and travel. The only problem is that it does involve staff travel of the School's people to provide their expertise.

Mr. McDowell stated that they are a one-of-a-kind of school in the state of Montana although there are a few small programs; therefore it is felt that the travel monies are justified in order to obtain guidance and professional exchange and an overall improvement in the programs. This requires travel to other states.

Chairman South inquired about the dollar amount of out-of-state travel in 1978; they did not have the 1978 figures. Chairman South said the committee would get the information.

In his concluding remarks, he believes it is important to get an overview of the agency - school - and its services. Federal and state laws and methods of financing are now in place to provide for the public school placement of every child at the school. The budgets the school has had over the past 4 years and the budget proposed by the legislative fiscal analyst or executive for the next biennium will only place the school at a mediocre level.

Rep. Moore asked what the School's request is in FTE, General Funds, and total funds for the next biennium. Mr. McDowell stated there were 96.05 FTE requested, the total funds requested was \$1,794,397.

Rep. Bengtson inquired what the total number of persons who worked is, 109 persons.

Chairman South commented that the School had reverted money to the general fund in 1978 and that fiscal 79 spending authority of \$5,000 was taken forward into fiscal 79 and then it was determined that it was not needed and it was reverted; Mr. McDowell stated that they received federal money from several sources--Title I and Title VI; toward the end of June they received a collection of \$24,000 from the Denver office for the Title VI program and a check for \$6,000 from School District I in Great Falls. They had put this \$30,000 into some kind of special account which cannot be touched for some time and then would be transferred. In order to pay the various expenses, Mr. McDowell said he had asked for a \$5,000 supplemental appropriation which is unnecessary because \$13,000 was reverted.

There was a \$41,000 pay-off last year of back wages. The School got the money from various accounts and they paid it. When something like this is done, the base for calculating subsequent budgets is based on a history of actual expenditure by line item so the more they try to help themselves, the more they destroy themselves.

Rep. Moore inquired about the School's being \$96,000 short about two years ago. He wondered if that methodology had been corrected.

Mr. McDowell stated that he will run the school for whatever amount is budgeted. There are capital items which have not been replaced--they keep getting older and older but the necessities have been paid for.

Chairman South asked for an explanation of the \$41,000 back payment to the employees. It was basically overtime. Live-in house parents' hours were not counted; the Labor Department audited the School and they presented them with the bill. Now there are more employees and it is rare that there is any overtime.

Sen. Fasbender asked for a little more detail on how the \$41,000 used to pay the back wages was saved. Mr. McDowell stated that during those years they waited until the last possible moment to fill vacancies other professionals assumed the duties. An automobile was not replaced. Mr. McDowell stated there was no incidence of suffering when this was done.

Sen. Fasbender inquired why the operating expenses declined from \$45,474 in 1977 to \$33,096 in 1978. Mr. McDowell explained the School got into a food program of the Office of Public Instruction so \$18-20,000 was saved.

Rep. Moore inquired why the 1979 amount authorized under Equipment was \$25,904 and the legislature had appropriated \$45,174 for 1979. The School has to use the money in other operations or personnel costs, Mr. McDowell stated. Mr. McDowell stated that the School still doesn't have its present operational plan in the computer for 1979; they still don't have a read-out from it. Tom Crosser explained that there was a delay in the allocation of the budget--the operating plan was submitted per the guidelines and approved; however the School wasn't able to determine what their actual operating budgets would be so they weren't put into SBAS until the session started. The other reason for the delay is due to the Governor's hiring freeze. Mr. Crosser thought that the read-out should be available now for the School to use. Mr. Crosser further stated that the reason the budget amendment wasn't included in the original budget preparation document was because the forms weren't filled out and the budget had already been processed.

Chairman South inquired how essential the \$5,000 supplemental was since the School usually reverts money at the end of the fiscal year. Mr. McDowell said \$5,000 wouldn't make that much difference. He said he wished the \$5,000 request wouldn't be processed.

Rep. Moore moved that the committee deny the deficiency appropriation of \$5,000 as requested, and Chairman South said it would be taken up later in executive action.

Chairman South stated that sometimes agencies were penalized for reverting money, especially in those years when the budget is based on a year when money was reverted.

Chairman South complimented the School on running a very tight ship.

Mr. Crosser stated that on the comparison table between the various budgets, the FA's budget and the executive's budget did not contain provision for any salary increases, and those are in the School's budget figures for personal services. The School's increase for personnel not contracted (business manager, school nurse, etc.) they put in a 9% factor; for the contracted personnel (teachers) they put a factor of 4.25% each year. This would translate into 9% for teachers also because of their step-level increases which are 4.75.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

  
CARROLL V. SOUTH, CHAIRMAN 4/13/79

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Jeanne Glennon, Secretary