

OFFICE OF CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER
Summary of State Board of Education Agenda Items
May 15, 2025

MISSISSIPPI SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAF AND THE BLIND

03. Action: Approval of school reconfiguration to grades PreK-3 through grade 12 at the Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind [Goals 3, 4, and 5 – MBE Strategic Plan]

Executive Summary

The Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and the Blind are proposing to reconfigure the schools to accommodate PreK-3 through grade 12 beginning with school year 2025-2026.

This item references Goals 3, 4, and 5 of the *Mississippi Board of Education Strategic Plan*.

Recommendation: Approval

Back-up material attached



PROPOSAL: MSDB Pre-K3 ON CAMPUS

Specific Proposal:

The Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and Blind School District seeks approval from the Mississippi State Board of Education to reconfigure the district from the current Pre-K (Age: 4) through 12th grades, to the Pre-K (Age: 3) through 12th grades. The following information details the current Pre-K program structure and how the MSDB plans to expand it to include students who are age 3 into Pre-Kindergarten.

Executive Summary

The **MSDB's Pre-K Program for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Blind/Low Vision Children** is a full-day, inclusive educational program aimed at supporting young children (ages 3-5) with sensory impairments. Located on the campus of Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and Blind (~~specifically located in the~~ Annex Building (the new home for Early Intervention Services), the program will provide a nurturing environment tailored to the needs of Deaf/Hard of Hearing children as well as children who are blind or have vision impairments. The program will operate from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM Monday through Thursday and will have a half-day schedule on Fridays, with pick-up at 12:00 PM. Staff will utilize 1:00 PM - 3:30 PM on Fridays for IEP meetings, parent-teacher conferences, services to children (to include Special Services such as: Occupational

Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech Therapy, Auditory Training, and Orientation & Mobility Training), professional development, and Staff/Team Meetings.

The staff will include trained preschool teachers and assistants, all skilled in working with children with sensory impairments. The program aims to promote language access through ASL for DHH children and pre-Braille and pre-O&M skills for BLV children, while fostering a sense of belonging and confidence in all children. **The program is FREE for those who qualify and are accepted by the school district's Admissions Committee after being referred by the student's IEP committee.**

“Play is the work of a child” ~ Maria Montessori and Jean Piaget

MSDB's Pre-K program believes that children learn best through play, as it fosters creativity, critical thinking, and emotional growth. Play provides children with the opportunity to explore the world, solve problems, and develop important social skills in a safe and nurturing environment. MSDB recognizes that play is not just a fun activity, but a vital tool for cognitive development that allows children to engage in hands-on experiences to help them make sense of concepts and ideas. Through play, children build confidence, independence, and a love for learning that will last a lifetime.

Classes will have low teacher to student ratios. The program will be designed to have no more than 5 students in each class, to ensure that each child has the attention and assistance they need to thrive.

Eligible Ages for Various Programs:

- **Early Intervention Services (Birth to Age 3):**
Children from birth to their third birthday receive services through the SKI*HI Program and/or the First Steps Program, which are affiliated with the Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH). These programs focus on early intervention to address developmental delays and provide support to families.
- **Early Childhood Special Education Services (Ages 3 to 5):**
Beginning on their third birthday, children may transition to the **MSDB Pre-K Program**, which serves children up to age five. This program provides early childhood special education services tailored to each child's developmental needs.
- **MSDB/LEA Kindergarten Program:**
Children who turn five on or before September 1st qualify for Kindergarten. This

program continues to support children in building the academic, social, and emotional skills necessary for elementary school success.

Each child enrolled in MSDB's Pre-K Program will have an **Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)** that outlines personalized goals and objectives for their development. Parents will be actively involved in the creation of their child's IEP and shall be required to attend regular IEP meetings to ensure the goals and progress are being met effectively.

Special Services and Interventions: MSDB's Pre-K Program is unique in providing all specialized services and interventions outlined in each child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) right on campus. The team includes certified Speech Therapists, Occupational and Physical Therapists, Auditory Training Specialists, Orientation and Mobility Specialists. Parents can feel confident knowing their child receives all necessary services during the school day, eliminating the need for outside appointments or additional travel.

Program Overview

Mission Statement

The mission of MSDB's Pre-K Program for Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, blind, or low-vision children is to provide a safe, engaging, and supportive learning environment where children with sensory impairments can thrive socially, emotionally, and academically. The focus will be on fostering communication, independence, and foundational life skills to help these children succeed both in school and beyond.

Program Features:

- **Duration:** Full-day (8:00 AM - 3:00 PM, Monday through Thursday) and half-day on Fridays (8:00 AM - 12:00 PM)
- **Age Group:** Children ages 3 to 5 *Eligibility begins on the child's third birthday.
- **Program Focus:**
 - **Deaf/Hard of Hearing children** – communication skills (Sign Language) and socialization
 - **Blind/Low Vision children** – early literacy (through pre-Braille skills) and pre-Orientation & Mobility skills (through structured play and socialization)
- **Core Activities:**
 - **Grade Level Instruction** Based on Mississippi Early Learning Standards

- **Language Development:** ASL vocabulary for DHH children; pre-Braille skills for BLV children
- **Socialization:** Interactive play centers, group activities, and social-emotional learning
- **Learning Time:** Centers for cognitive and motor skills development, as well as orientation and mobility for those who are BLV
- **Nap/Quiet Time:** A structured time for rest and relaxation
- **Support Staff:** Trained staff skilled in working with DHH and BLV children
- **Individualized Educational Plan (IEP):** Each child will have an IEP that outlines specific goals and objectives for their development, helping teachers tailor their instruction to meet the child's unique needs. Parents will play an active role in the creation and review of their child's IEP and will be required to attend regular IEP meetings.
- **Parental Involvement:** Parents are encouraged to engage in their child's learning process, especially in learning sign language for D/HH children and supporting pre-Braille skills for children who are Blind/low vision.
- **Staff Professional Development and Meetings:** Friday afternoons (1:00-3:30) are for staff to have time for Professional Development training, staff meetings, services to children, IEPs, parent education classes, and Parent-Teacher Conferences.

Market Analysis

Target Market

The program will focus solely on serving families with Deaf/Hard of Hearing or Blind/Low Vision children who are aged 3-5 years old. Parents in this community often seek specialized services to support their children's development in communication, socialization, and early literacy.

- **Location:** Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and Blind (Jackson, MS) in the Annex Building.
- **Demographics:** Families with children who have visual or hearing impairments, including children in the greater Jackson areas.
- **Target audience:** children who exit the First Steps with the Mississippi State Department of Health (or SKI*HI Program) beginning the date of their third birthday, that have "HI" or "VI" as their primary disability.
- **Need:** There is a growing demand for specialized early childhood education programs for students with sensory impairments, as these students benefit from early intervention to maximize their development potential. ***Students who exit the***

SKI*HI Program currently must rely on their local school district to be able to provide the necessary interventions they truly need.

Competitive Analysis

- **Existing Services:** Current early childhood programs may not offer the specialized attention required for children with sensory impairments. There may be some programs for either D/HH or B/LV children, but not a dual program that meets both needs in one space.
- **Differentiation:** This program stands out by providing specialized services for both Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Blind/Low Vision children in a setting which allows for an integrated social environment and shared learning experiences. MSDB will also have a holistic approach to language acquisition for Deaf/Hard of Hearing children, which will be key to their progress and set this program apart from other programs across the state.
- **Unique and targeted:** This program would be the only Pre-K in the state specifically for children who are D/HH or B/LV and the only program that will have a holistic approach to language for D/HH children (other programs make parents choose either sign language or voice).

Operational Plan

MSDB's Pre-K Program will continue to operate under the Mississippi Schools for the Deaf and Blind School District.

One Pod in the Annex (Closest to the Playground):

All classrooms include an **Observation Room**, allowing parents or therapists to observe how a child responds to the classroom environment. This space will also be used by the principal for classroom observation and support.

- **Classrooms 1 & 2:** Designed to support ASL-focused learning, these classrooms will include visual aids, signing resources, and designated areas for ASL-based activities and learning centers. They will also feature tactile learning tools such as tactile books, braille materials, and sensory play items.
- **Classroom 3 / Napping Room:** A dedicated space for rest and nap time, separate from the instructional classrooms to maintain consistent learning environments
- **Safety and Accessibility:** All classrooms will be equipped with adaptive furniture and tools to support accessibility. Features will include tactile pathways for children who are blind or low vision (BLV), and visual communication supports for children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH).

- **Common Areas:**
 - **Common Room** – a shared space between classrooms that provides opportunities for joint activities and group learning, fostering social interaction among all students
 - **Welcome Room** – located near the entrance, where parents can meet with teachers during drop-off and pick-up; this space can also serve as an indoor recess area during inclement weather
- **Nurse's Office:** Located near the front office, this room provides a quiet, supervised space for children who are ill while they wait for their parents to pick up.

Daily Schedule

Monday – Thursday

- **7:45 AM - 8:05 AM:** Arrival / Breakfast / Free Play / Socialization Time
- **8:05 AM - 8:35 AM:** Circle Time (Calendar/Weather/Music/Move to Learn)
- **8:35 AM - 9:00 AM:** Extension Class (Library, PE, Computers)
- **9:00 AM - 10:20 AM:** Whole Group/Story Time/Language and Communication Development (ASL and pre-Braille skills) and pre-Literacy skills
- **10:20 AM - 10:40 AM:** Lunch
- **10:40 AM - 11:00 AM:** Whole Group/Circle Time
- **11:00 AM - 12:00 PM:** Intervention/Small Groups/Centers
- **12:00 PM - 12:30 PM:** Physical Activity
- **12:30 PM - 1:15 PM:** Quiet Time/Nap Time
- **1:15 PM - 2:35 PM:** Mini Lesson/Afternoon Snack
- **2:35 PM - 2:45 PM:** Daily Review
- **2:45 PM - 3:00 PM:** Pick-up Time

Friday

- **7:45 AM - 8:05 AM:** Arrival / Breakfast / Free Play / Socialization Time
- **8:05 AM - 8:45 AM:** Circle Time (Calendar/Weather/Music/Move to Learn)
- **8:45 AM - 9:20 AM:** Whole Group/Story Time
- **9:20 AM - 9:40 AM:** Outdoor/Physical Activities
- **9:40 AM - 10:30 PM:** Whole Group/Story Time/Language and Communication

Development (ASL and pre-Braille skills) and pre-Literacy skills

- **10:30 AM - 10:50 AM:** Lunch Break
- **10:50 AM - 11:10 AM:** Weekly Review
- **11:10 AM - 11:30 AM:** Intervention/Small Groups/Centers
- **11:45 AM - 12:00 PM:** Pick-up Time

*On days when *SKI*HI's Friday Program* joins in, the schedule will be: 9:00 AM - 9:30 AM Outdoor Activities and 9:30 AM -10:30 AM combining Snack Break and Structured Learning Centers with visitors.

*Mondays-Thursdays 3:00 PM - 3:30 PM is for teachers to have time to prepare their classroom for the next day and make sure lessons are in order.

*Fridays from 12:00 PM - 3:30 PM is for Teachers to have a Planning Period, holding IEP meetings, holding parent-teacher conferences, parent training sessions, attending staff meetings, holding service to students (which may involve Special Services such as OT, PT, Speech, Auditory Training, O&M professionals, and Counselors or Behavioral Specialists), and attending staff development classes that target their population.

Parent Expectations

- **Active Involvement in the IEP Process:** Parents must attend annual and regular IEP meetings and provide input into their child's educational goals and progress.

Financial Plan

The program is FREE for those who qualify and are accepted to the school, who have IEP Committees that agree for the child to attend.

- Students must meet specific qualifications based on their disability to receive free enrollment.
- The student's IEP committee must agree for the student to be placed at the MSDB, where existing funds will continue to fund the district's programs (that include Pre-K).

Marketing Plan

Outreach Strategies

- **Local Partnerships:** Partner with MSDH, First Steps, Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center (MSPTI), Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), local Head Start Programs, local PPEC Directors, pediatricians, and other local organizations to reach families who may benefit from the program.
- **Social Media & Website:** Create a website with details about the program, including the benefits of early intervention for Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Blind/Low Vision children. Use social media (Facebook and Instagram) to showcase success stories and engage with the community.
- **Community Engagement:** Host open houses, informational sessions, and collaborate with local events related to sensory impairments to raise awareness about the program.

Conclusion

The **Pre-K Program for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Blind/Low Vision Children** offers an essential, specialized service for families in need of a nurturing and inclusive learning environment. Through a carefully structured curriculum that promotes socialization, communication, and early literacy, MSDB strives to empower children with the foundational skills they need to succeed.

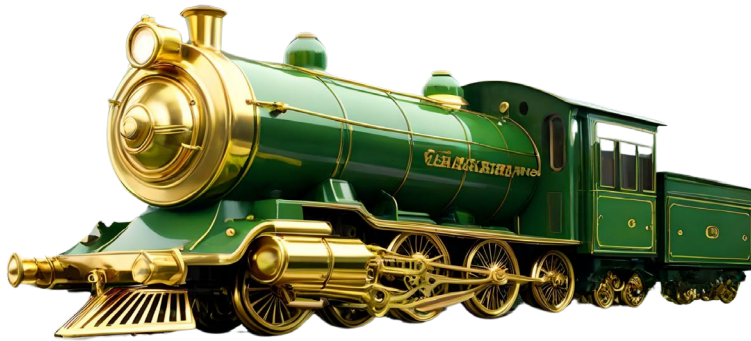
By focusing on language access through ASL, pre-Braille skills, pre-Orientation and Mobility skills, parental involvement, and the development of Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), MSDB ensures that every child's needs are met with personalized goals and ongoing support. With **no cost for eligible families** and a strong emphasis on safety, inclusion, and accessibility, MSDB's aim is to become a cornerstone in the community for children with sensory impairments and their families.

Through continuous evaluation, collaboration with specialists, and a commitment to sustainability, MSDB is confident that this program will provide lasting benefits for both the children and the families served.

Additional Information:

School Colors: The school colors—**green and gold**—symbolize key aspects of the school's values:

- **Green** represents hope and growth, highlighting MSDB's dedication to nurturing every child's development socially, emotionally, physically, and academically.
- **Gold** symbolizes success and excellence, reflecting MSDB's confidence that every child will thrive in the Pre-K Program and carry a strong foundation of achievement with them as they leave the program and continue their educational journey.



All Aboard!