



CONNECTION

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Missouri School for the Blind
3815 Magnolia Avenue, St. Louis

RECYCLING & ROBOTICS

MSB staff and students enjoyed another successful summer of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) short courses. "Recycle City" and "Robotics Academy" were held for two weeks each this summer. MSB welcomed several of our students and also students from across the state to participate in these exciting programs which were offered in conjunction with our Extended School Year (ESY) program.

During "Recycle City," students explored the environmental impact of waste and learned ways to reduce waste, use less energy and help sustain the environment. Students explored opportunities for up-cycling and recycling in their own lives, met professionals in the field and experienced the challenges of living in a zero-trash society. Field trips included the Saint Louis Science Center where students discovered various types of energy, and the Boat House in Forest Park where they enjoyed a paddle boating adventure and collected algae to create a biomass lab. Other hands-on activities included building nuclear piles, windmills, dams, bloom boxes and solar ovens, among other things.

In "Robotics Academy," students learned how to use computer programming language, built robots and also explored basic robotic behavior. Students programmed robotic behaviors using motors and rotation, sound, light, touch and ultrasonic sensors. Field trips to Boeing and Innoventor allowed students to meet engineers who work with robots on a daily basis and learn about the impact of real-world robots. Students began their hands-on experience by writing human programs and were then introduced to LegoMindstorms, Raspberry Pi's and breadboards. During these two STEM sessions, students were introduced to speech-accessible tools as well as modified laboratory procedures that enabled them to perform laboratory experiments with limited sighted assistance. These accommodations were designed to transform the laboratory experience by giving students who are blind/VI a more active and independent role in laboratory investigations. Students also received instruction and access to state-of-the-art equipment for the visually impaired in MSB's newly renovated science and computer labs.



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OSERS Offers Guidance on Braille Instruction

In a letter dated June 19, 2013, the US Department of Education/Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) offered clarification and guidance to IEP teams regarding braille instruction. In that letter (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/index.html>) OSERS indicates that “in the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, the IEP team must provide for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless the IEP team determines, after an evaluation of the child’s reading and writing skills, needs and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of a child’s future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child.” As IEP teams consider whether braille instruction is indicated for students who are visually impaired/blind, Missouri School for the Blind offers the following resources and points for consideration:

1) A Functional Vision Learning Media Assessment (FVLMA) provides data which a IEP team can use to make informed decisions on the types of instructional media needed for students with visual impairments. A FVLMA includes information on how a student accesses, or may need to learn to access print materials.

2) Parents, students and other team members may have definite opinions about including Braille in education programming. The information obtained through assessment as required by IDEA will be useful to the team in determining the potential role for Braille and other media. Emphasis should be on “increasing options” for academic success.



3) IEP teams must ensure that students who are visually impaired are provided with the instruction they need in order to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and to ensure their meaningful access to the general education curriculum. When there is a discrepancy between a visually impaired student’s cognitive ability and their grade level in reading comprehension, additional assessment to determine the cause(s) of this discrepancy is advised.

4) Numerous studies have shown that braille reading proficiency enables visually impaired children to not only compete with their sighted peers in a school environment, but also increases their chances of productive employment in the future. IEP teams should consider the impact of braille literacy on successful transition to the workforce.

The letter from OSERS provides much needed guidance on the consideration of Braille instruction and the responsibility of IEP teams. The purpose of the letter is to reaffirm the importance of braille instruction as a literacy tool, to clarify the circumstances in which braille instruction should be provided and to reiterate the scope of an evaluation required to guide decisions of IEP teams in this area. As pointed out in the OSERS letter, factors such as the shortage of teachers certificated in the education of students with visual impairment/blindness should not influence the decision to provide braille instruction.

The KEYS (Knowledge to Empower Your Success) program at MSB offers short courses (6 weeks to 1 semester) for IEP driven program goals including braille instruction. For information on this program, which is provided free of charge to districts for qualifying students, contact Joy Waddell, Assistant Superintendent, at (314) 776-4320 (ext 1140) or visit our web site at <http://msb.dese.mo.gov/>. In addition to citation #5 provided in the OSERS letter, other sources on this issue include:

- <https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/bm/bm98/bm980204.htm>
- <http://www.nationalspecialedlaw.com/2013/06/braille-instruction-must-be-made.html>
- <https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/fr/fr14/fr04se22.htm>



MSB Staff Competes for the Gold in the MSB Olympics Team Building

MSB staff had an exciting week of professional development as they prepared to welcome back students. The week was filled with exceptional speakers, training and team building. Congratulations to team 6 (pictured) who won the gold the MSB Olympics team building challenge! Staff participated in five different Olympic challenges. The first required participants to be blindfolded and estimate their distance of travel. The second had blindfolded participants using a long cane to avoid obstacles in their path. The third challenge required participants to use only their hearing to determine the location of another individual across the gymnasium. The fourth event was a written quiz challenging the staff's knowledge of Orientation & Mobility vocabulary. As an added challenge, staff had to use braille writers to answer the questions. Speed was the key in the fifth and final event, where blindfolded participants used a long cane to navigate their way as quickly as possible through a predetermined course. All employees, including teachers, administrators, support staff, custodians and maintenance, participated in the event and had the opportunity to gain new perspective on the challenges our students may face in their journey to independence.



MSB OUTREACH EXPANDS SERVICES

Missouri School for the Blind is pleased to announce a new position in our Outreach Program. Annette Miller, TVI, COMS, is our new Vision Supervisor. MSB's Vision Supervisor will be able to provide Functional Vision Learning Media Assessments (FVLMA), Orientation & Mobility Assessment and technical assistance in areas including, but not limited to the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). The assessments and resources are intended to support current programming efforts. The services are available to qualified students in any local or state board operated program at no cost to families, schools or programs. Services of the Vision Supervisor will be coordinated with services provided by the Blind Skills Specialists (BSS) who are located at the SW and NW Regional Professional Development Centers. We are delighted to be able to add to the state-wide "team" to assist school districts in the effort to serve students who are blind/visually impaired in their home schools. For more information contact:

Annette Miller, TVI, COMS
Annette.Miller@MSB.dese.mo.gov
314-776-4320, ext. 1240

MISSOURI INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE CENTER (MIRC)

MSB also houses the Missouri Instructional Resource Center for the Visually Impaired (MIRC). The MIRC assists educators who serve students who are legally blind by providing a multitude of resources and materials. The MIRC offers a statewide lending source for large print and Braille textbooks, free educational products and specialized equipment made available for loan by the American Printing House for the Blind (APH). Reference services help locate textbooks in alternate formats and provide product training. If you or your school may benefit from any of these services, we encourage you to contact the MIRC supervisor:

Yvonne Ali
Yvonne.Ali@MSB.dese.mo.gov
314-776-4320, ext. 3256

Comfort, Support and Life Skills Offered Through Residential Services

The residential program offered by MSB is a component for success for approximately half of our students who call MSB their "home away from home" during the school week. The MSB residential staff ensures the safety and well-being of the students living on campus and provides a nurturing environment for students who live on campus during the week. Our residential program provides many opportunities for students to increase their skills in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). These areas include, but are not limited to communication, social interaction, independent living, recreation and leisure, and self-determination.

Residential students from across the state arrive on Sunday evenings via charter bus services. After a hot dinner, staff help students prepare for the school week ahead. Residential staff encourage daily living skills by assisting students as they get ready each morning for the school day.

After school dismisses in the afternoon, many day and residential students participate in the extracurricular activities and athletic programs MSB offers. Residential staff is on hand to help with homework, get ready for dinner and prepare for evening activities. With a bowling alley, swimming pool, two gymnasiums and a playground on campus, there are many opportunities for students to participate. Other activities residential students enjoy include skating, board games, movies, picnics, holiday parties, dance night, trivia challenges, arts and crafts, and "tea time." Thanks to the generous support from Lions Clubs, our students have the opportunity to travel off campus for supervised outings to the mall, restaurants, laser tag, the Muny, the Shriner's Circus, Cardinals' baseball games, Blues hockey games and other St. Louis attractions. Students have a choice on how involved they want to be and can opt for simple "down time" in the evenings to read or listen to their favorite TV show. As the school week draws to an end, residential staff prepares students to return home on Friday afternoons to be with their families.

Residential services are provided throughout the school year, as well as during summer programs for qualifying students at no cost to districts or parents. If you have any questions about residential services provided by MSB, please contact Marsha Bryant, Director of Clinical, Ancillary and Residential Services, at 314-776-4320, ext. 1200 or Marsha.Bryant@msb.dese.mo.gov.





Upcoming Events

SEPTEMBER

- 13-14 NCASB Track Meet @ Kansas City
- 19 NCASB Track Meet @ Illinois
- 19 Welcoming Students with Visual Impairment to Your School Workshop
- 21-27 Space Camp
- 27 NCASB Track Meet Conference @ Indiana

OCTOBER

- 1-3 Session I: Hand In Hand: Understanding Deafblindness for Education Teams of Students Who Are Deafblind
- 4-6 INSITE training Session II
- 7 PLAN Test (10th Grade)
- 9 NCASB Goalball Meet @ MSB
- 14 Columbus Day (Observed) – NO SCHOOL
- 15 White Cane Day
- 16 NCASB Goalball Meet @ Illinois
- 25-26 NCASB Goalball Meet @ Kentucky
- 28 1st Quarter Ends
- 29 1st Quarter Progress Notes and Grade Cards Due
- 30 1st Quarter Achievement Assembly – 10:00a

NOVEMBER

- 1-2 NCASB Goalball Conference @ MSB
- 4-8 ACT Fall Testing (11th & 12th Grades)
- 7 Symbols and Meaning (SAM) Kit and the APH Intervention Continuum including the Sensory Learning Kit and Tactile Connections with Millie Smith
- 11 Veterans Day Assembly @ 10:00a
- 14 Tech-IT-Up-A-Notch MSB Tech Day (**SAVE THE DATE!!!**)
- 25-27 Staff Development (8:00-4:00) – NO SCHOOL
- 28-29 Thanksgiving – Holiday – NO SCHOOL

MSB Welcomes New Staff!



Clyde Dent
Residential Advisor



Allison Dotter
Spanish Teacher



Diana Guth
Music Teacher



Adnan Gotic
Braille Teacher



Kathon Jennings
Storekeeper



Eric Littles
Custodian



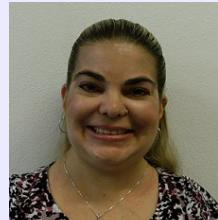
Annette Miller
Vision Supervisor



Laura Snow
Residential Activity
Director



Tonia Scherer
Communication Arts
Teacher



Debra Olson
Math Teacher



Missouri School for the Blind is operated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, State of Missouri. CONNECTION is available on MSB's website, via e-mail and in print or alternative formats upon request. To request an alternative format or delivery mode, correct a name or address or add or remove a name from the mailing list, please contact Patti Curran,

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