



Fiscal Year 2025 Operating Budget

**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
HOUSE EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE**

CHAIRPERSON, DELEGATE STEPHANIE SMITH

February 7, 2024

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**SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE
SENATE EDUCATION, BUSINESS & ADMINISTRATION
SUBCOMMITTEE**

CHAIRPERSON, SENATOR NANCY KING

February 8, 2024



Class of 2023

The Maryland School for the Deaf, a diverse, bilingual community, in partnership with families provides an equitable and exemplary education in a nurturing, engaging, and challenging environment to ensure our students achieve personal excellence and become responsible lifelong learners.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD) provides educational and developmental services for the State's deaf and hard-of-hearing children and youth. The School, founded in 1867, serves this population through its two campuses located in Frederick and Columbia.

MSD is an independent State agency governed by its 19-member Board of Trustees, which is appointed by the Governor and approved by the Senate. 86% of the School's operating budget is provided from State general funds, while the remaining 14% is provided through federal grants, various special funds (e.g. employee food sales, out of state tuition and County Participation fees) and reimbursable funds (Enhanced Program of Services) from the Maryland State Department of Education. Students who are residents of Maryland attend MSD at no cost. Students from outside Maryland may be admitted on a tuition basis.

MSD utilizes the Maryland State Curriculum and the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards offering its graduating high school seniors the Maryland State High School diploma. In 2018, MSD went through the accreditation process for the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA) and received a recommendation for full accreditation through May 2026.

The School's instructional programs operate on a 180-day school year, from the end of August through mid-June. Extended School Year (ESY) programs and enrichment camps are offered at MSD during the summer months. Approximately 24% of the Frederick campus students and 23% of the Columbia Campus students reside at the School during the week, returning to their homes on weekends and during school breaks.

MSD's Frederick Campus provides a comprehensive elementary/secondary school program, with separate departments for Elementary (pre-K through Grade 5), Middle (Grades 6-8), and High School (Grades 9-12). The Frederick Campus also offers a Career and Technology program, which provides students with career skills, including computer and technical courses. The Special Needs program is also offered at Frederick for students with additional learning and behavioral disabilities. In FY 2023, MSD launched the Oriole's Career Academy for students aged 18-21 who have not received a high school diploma, but can benefit from additional life skills training, employment training, problem-solving skills, and self-advocacy skills.

The Columbia Campus also provides a comprehensive elementary/secondary school program for Elementary and Middle School-age students that include Special Needs educational programs.

MSD's Family Education and Early Childhood Department (FEECD) works with families of deaf and hard-of-hearing infants and toddlers to develop early language skills for their children. Because the optimum time for language development is from birth to age three, children given early communication training have a much greater opportunity for social and academic development in later years. MSD's FEECD teachers work with approximately 70 children and their families throughout Maryland, through in-home and group sessions, to help ensure that these children will be prepared to learn at grade-level when they enter school.

The Program of Enhanced Services serves deaf students with other moderate to severe disabilities. Generally, students in this program require educational and developmental services of a more extensive and individualized nature. There are currently 49 students receiving enhanced services in the current school year.

Current student enrollment (representing 21 of 23 counties, and Baltimore City) reached 442 students.

On March 13, 2020 MSD responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by closing for in person instruction and within a few weeks began educating students virtually. MSD distributed laptops, Chromebooks and iPads to students and staff for use at home to continue operations.

In February, 2021 the Maryland School for the Deaf began to bring students back to campus, in small groups, for in person instruction. MSD opened the dorms to students who had no access to a day bus. Some athletics and clubs were held during the spring semester, but it was not a normal spring.

For the 2022 - 2023 school year and the current school year, MSD opened to full in person instruction. All after school clubs and athletics were held. MSD has found that the students are returning to pre-pandemic levels of excitement and enthusiasm for both academics and activities.

THE SCHOOL'S MISSION

The Maryland School for the Deaf, a diverse, bilingual community, in partnership with families provides an equitable and exemplary education in a nurturing, engaging, and challenging environment to ensure our students achieve personal excellence and become responsible lifelong learners.

MSD BELIEF STATEMENTS

We believe that

- Our students learn best in a bilingual environment in which American Sign Language and English are used.
- Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs.
- Students have a right to a safe, caring, and engaging learning environment.
- Early and ongoing language acquisition is vital.
- Students are challenged to achieve their highest academic and career potential.
- Quality education and open communication is a shared responsibility between the school, its students, their families, and the community.
- Ongoing parent education and access to resources and services are essential to student success.
- Students learn in a variety of ways and have opportunities to grow and access services that support their learning styles.
- Diversity is valued and increases students' understanding and respect of different people and cultures.
- Cross-curricular literacy instruction is essential to student success.
- Our students develop academic and social behaviors through systematic application of evidence-based strategies.
- Access to and competency with current technology is essential for student learning.
- Student life and extracurricular activities promote wellness and personal growth.

GOALS

I. Students achieve their developmental potential.

Maryland School for the Deaf provides an unsurpassed level of experience, expertise, and dedication in the education and personal development of deaf and hard-of-hearing children and youth. And while MSD already serves almost 6 out of 10 deaf students in the State, it is our goal to continue to develop programs and services that will best serve the needs of all deaf and hard-of-hearing students in Maryland. The School has already implemented its Program of Enhanced Services for deaf students with additional moderate to severe disabilities. During the 2013-2014 School Year, MSD (in partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education) established a day program for elementary-age deaf students with autism spectrum disorder. MSD had also implemented Spoken English (as a language of instruction) classes for children who have cochlear implants as well as children who are hard of hearing. A Work-to-Learn program serves high school students who meet specific requirements for vocational rehabilitation services. Through this successful partnership between MSD and the MSDE Division of Rehabilitation Services, participating MSD Students receive training and support as they gain work experience.

With its convenient, centrally located two-campus configuration, MSD is well-positioned to pursue and achieve this goal by providing deaf students and their families with the best of both worlds—a progressive, enriching, state-of-the-art program dedicated to and focused on their special educational and developmental needs, and the proximity to allow most students to live at home and participate as members of their local community.

MSD offers two types of curriculum to its students. The first follows the Maryland State Curriculum and the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards. Students following this program are eligible to receive the Maryland State High School diploma. The second is a Life-Based Education Curriculum, which allows options for students to receive the Maryland State Certificate of Program Completion. Students receiving Enhanced Program services may follow a High School diploma or a Life-Based Education path. Students with severe developmental disabilities receive services based on their individual needs.

II. Establish communication for parents and their children in the Family Education and Early Childhood Department.

The Family Education and Early Childhood Department (FEECD) serves deaf and hard of hearing students from birth until their fifth birthday. Family educators who have skills necessary to deal effectively with the linguistic, social-emotional, and academic needs of this population provide services to parents of deaf and hard of hearing infants

and toddlers. Emphasis is placed on establishing communication between children and their parents using a bilingual approach. This means that the languages of instruction are American Sign Language (ASL) and English. Concepts and language are taught as early as possible since the prime time for language acquisition is between birth and three years of age. Children and their families are encouraged to consider the use of amplification as appropriate as well as speech therapy in order to develop all communication opportunities for the child.

In addition to providing individual home visits on a regular basis throughout the state, the department also sponsors regional parent meetings. In order to facilitate communication between parent and child, ASL instruction is offered during home visits, virtually and on campus at no cost to the parent during the school year. FEECD offers weekly parent meetings at both Frederick and Columbia during the school year. While the parent meeting occurs, the youngest children (birth to 24 months) may participate in infant/toddler playgroups with FEECD staff. Two-year-old and three-year-old classes are offered at both campuses throughout the week. Speech teachers work with children in individual and group sessions as appropriate for the child's age and developmental level.

The three-year-old classes have been expanded to a full day for children with an MSD Individualized Education Program (IEP). The children are immersed in language rich environments to ensure important gains in language acquisition are achieved. The program expansion allows for deeper daily instruction to provide these young learners with solid school readiness skills in the areas of language, literacy, mathematical thinking, early science and social studies. These young learners will enter Pre-kindergarten and then Kindergarten ready for the rigors of the College and Career Ready Standards.

Family engagement is a key factor in student achievement. The full day program for three-year-olds includes many opportunities for families to engage and support their child's early learning via parent support meetings, home visits, conferences with teachers and daily communication.

III. Provide quality educational and developmental services.

MSD is licensed by the Department of Human Services for residential services. The license requires that all student life staff receive training in CPR/First Aid, blood-borne pathogens, child development, identifying and reporting child neglect and abuse and other courses for a total of 40 hours each year. The School will continue to provide training to staff to enable a safe and nurturing environment for its students. All residential staff must be certified by the Maryland Department of Health (COMAR 10.57.03). Residential Child and Youth Care Practitioners (RCYCP) must take a training program and pass an examination to obtain initial certification. They are then required to complete 20 Continuing Education Units every two years to renew their certification.

MSD offers a tuition reimbursement program to assist teachers and staff in obtaining their educational requirements for certification and to obtain highly qualified teachers. This program is being utilized to provide education to staff to fill administrative positions for forecasted vacancies. The School is being proactive in succession planning to meet the future needs as senior staff begins to retire.

MSD's Master Plan identifies capital projects needed to provide MSD's future students with state-of-the-art program facilities. The Frederick Campus Veditz Building Renovation project has begun the construction phase of the project. The project provides an updated, state-of-the-art Career Technology Education Program at MSD. The design part of the Emergency Mass Notification System for the Columbia Campus has begun. This Emergency Mass Notification System will provide life safety improvements to the MSD Columbia Campus. The design contract for the Frederick Campus dormitory construction project is currently being advertised for a second time due to specification problems on the original solicitation. This project will provide updated American's with Disabilities Act compliant dormitories and a student center.

MSD recognizes that the world is changing and to prepare students for the future, the MSD curriculum includes innovative computer technology and media equipment. By becoming literate with computers, students leave MSD with skills that are valued in today's job market. MSD uses laptop computers, iPads and Chromebooks in order to provide quality technology for staff and students.

IV. Faculty Pay Plan

MSD develops and recommends a faculty pay plan every three years as required under COMAR 8-313 uniform pay plan for teachers and personnel. The plan is based on the average salaries of public school teachers and other professional personnel in Frederick and Howard Counties. MSD submitted a plan for review and approval as required with the Fiscal Year 2023 submission.

The MSD faculty is required to have the same certification and education as any public school faculty in the State of Maryland. MSD must remain competitive to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers.

The revised pay plan was implemented during Fiscal Year 2023. The Faculty Pay Plan will next be reviewed in Fiscal Year 2026. Due to the potential impact of The Blueprint for Maryland's Future, MSD is currently monitoring the pay plans of both Frederick and Howard County. Should these counties drastically change their pay plans prior to Fiscal Year 2026, MSD will re-evaluate its Faculty Pay Plan.

Legislative Audit

The Office of Legislative Audits published their findings from the most recent audit of the Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD). MSD is prepared to provide a report by November 1, 2024 detailing corrective actions taken to address the findings. MSD has enacted many of the corrections recommended by the auditors and is in the process of complying with the remaining findings.

The following findings have already been corrected:

1. The missing deliverables have been obtained
2. MSD is publishing contract awards in eMMA.
3. MSD is receiving contract bids securely through eMMA.
4. MSD recouped the amount of \$5,933 in overpayment.
5. MSD is complying with all corporate purchasing card regulations and fiscal personnel are ensuring purchasing card transactions are not artificially split.
6. MSD is reviewing and documenting the Level – 3 management data. MSD previously was reviewing the data. However, MSD lacked the documentation to certify this review was happening.

The following findings are in the process of being corrected:

1. MSD is training contract monitors in the proper procedures to approve deliverables and invoice payment to ensure that deliverables are received prior to payment of invoices.
2. MSD will document contract modifications and obtain required approvals. Agency procurement staff is taking training from the Office of State Procurement to ensure they understand the proper procedures.
3. Retroactive procurements have been submitted to the Office of State Procurement.
4. MSD is working with the Office of State Procurement to create a contract for ASL interpreting services. This contract will assist with ensuring that services are obtained at the lowest cost.
5. The annual report from the Maryland School for the Deaf Foundation has been received and is under review.
6. The MOA with the Maryland School for the Deaf Foundation is in the process of being revised to include safeguards to ensure that funds collected are used for the intended purpose, distributed properly and conflicts of interest are disclosed.

Kindergarten Readiness Assessment

MSD is a very small school as compared to local county kindergarten programs. With that in mind, a few students' scores that did not perform well has a larger statistical impact on program trends than would occur in a larger school system. When looking at MSD's pre-pandemic scores, one must look at several years for an average not just one year given that our sample size is so small, it is very possible for groups to be vastly different from year to year so using one year as the baseline would be difficult. Looking into this data and data trends more thoroughly will be part of our December report.

The majority of children exiting from MSD-Columbia campus, and some from the MSD-Frederick campus, have hearing parents who are learning ASL, and therefore cannot provide a fluent language model for their children at home. (Critical to note: nationally, statistics indicate that greater than 95% of children who are deaf or hard of hearing are born to hearing families who do not know sign language and who subsequently do not learn to sign.) Analysis of some of our early childhood data on our Child Outcome Survey (COS) showed once again that children with full access to ASL at home (either from Deaf parents, or from hearing parents who have become fluent signers) were much more likely to score better than those without access to ASL at home.

Facial expressions and mouth movements are a critical component of American Sign Language (ASL), and are needed in order for a clear message to be fully delivered/received in ASL. Due to CDC safety guidelines for school buildings, MSD was under a mask mandate until March 2022. This impacted students' acquisition of ASL and other academic skills due to MSD's environment being a full visual learning setting where the language of instruction is ASL.

Some of our own internal review of our early childhood education (ECE) data has also shown a connection between length of time a student is at MSD and their scores on assessments. However, due to the very small sample size, it is difficult to show direct correlation. Students often enter MSD with little to no ASL experience/exposure prior to his/her preschool/pre-k year; this includes children whose hearing status is late identified, as well as children who transfer to MSD after having been in a county program without full access to instruction in ASL. These children arrive with delayed language skills which puts those children at a disadvantage linguistically, socially, and academically.

The time of year that the assessment is given to students is also problematic. Our students return home for the summer, where many do not have access to language. The KRA is administered during September and finished by the beginning of October, not giving our students time to recoup for an entire summer with minimal communication or stimulation to support or maintain skills, even when they do qualify for Extended School Year (ESY) program.

This group of children experienced full-time distance learning until March of 2021, at which point some returned to in-person learning part-time while others remained in distance learning for the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year. Their pre-school year, when they were three years old, was the first full in-person school year that this group of children experienced since they were one, when school closed in March.

We have also experienced a lot of turnover in our kindergarten teachers since COVID, the current teachers have not received the same level of training for administering the assessment as our previous teachers. It is possible and probable that this has had an impact on the accuracy of scores as well, given that the assessment is based in observation data collection. We have been working to train and support our new teachers including the kindergarten teachers.

Given the above, it is important to note that the goal MSD has set for itself is quite lofty. The percent chosen is the percent the average hearing student is ready for kindergarten. When comparing MSD's numbers to either the percent of Special Needs (SN) students or English Language Learners (ELL) students that are ready for kindergarten, we find that our students are in line with these same scores. As well, the state of Maryland, while improved, is also not yet back to pre-pandemic scores for kindergarten readiness.

Recommended Actions

MSD concurs with the Governor's allowance.