



# 1998 Award Winner

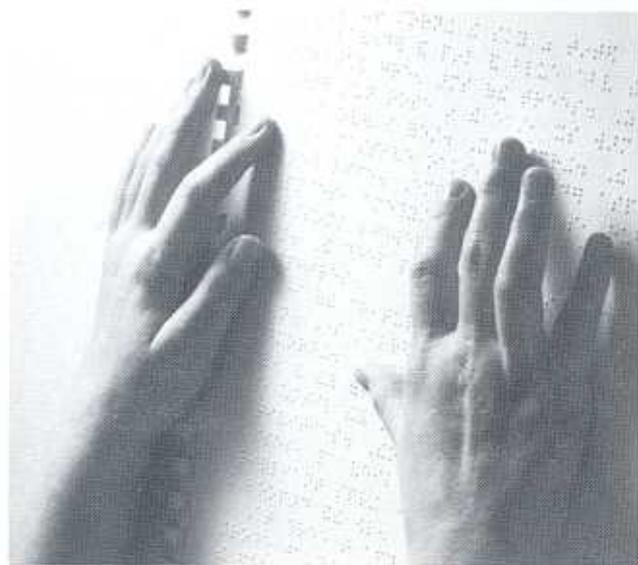
## MISSOURI SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND



Missouri School for the Blind

For almost 150 years, the Missouri School for the Blind (MSB) has made a difference in the lives of thousands of children and their families by helping them learn, grow and succeed. This purpose is further reflected in the school's vision of becoming the statewide resource center of excellence in assessment, professional development, technology and instruction for students, families and local school districts.

MSB is a state-operated day school with a residential component, located in the City of St. Louis. MSB is the state's leading educational service delivery system for blind and visually impaired children up to the age of 21 and the families and professionals who work with them. MSB is an administrative arm of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and receives its primary funding through the state legislative process.



The school's approach to education combines individualized academic, vocational and functional living skills appropriate to each level of learning. The school offers a standard nine-month term, a five-week extended school year program for current students and a four-week summer residential enrichment program for students enrolled in local public schools. Additionally through its outreach efforts, MSB provides a series of direct and indirect services at no cost to the 525 school districts and the more than 1,100 blind, visually impaired and deafblind children and their families across the state.

MSB employs 220 diverse and highly committed staff to work full-time or part-time at the centerbase or in its outreach programs operating statewide. MSB uses an employee recognition and suggestion system, an Employee Action Team and other improvement teams to get input from staff about ways to improve educational programs and services, and day-to-day operations.

MSB operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide wrap-around services to students, including counseling, as well as physical, speech, therapy and health services. Students can participate in extracurricular activities and clubs such as Boy and Girl Scouts and the Odyssey of the Mind program for gifted youth. With its association with the North Central Association of Schools for the Visually Handicapped, MSB students participate in wrestling, track, swimming, forensics and cheerleading. MSB also has students competing in the state's Special Olympics program, and in other nationally and international competition.

Since 1991, under the leadership of school superintendent Dr. Yvonne Howze, MSB has engaged in quality initiatives and continuous improvement activities. Employees are organized in teams to address daily work as well as improvement activities. Employees at all levels are encouraged to participate in a variety of team structures to promote innovation, communication and cooperation.

Five key themes provide the guiding principles for carrying out MSB's mission of around-the-clock quality, and for pursuing its vision of becoming the statewide resource center of excellence.

1. Develop, implement, and fund a program of core services which provide 24-hour quality educational, residential and recreational services consistent with individual students' interests and needs;
2. Support the continuing education and lifelong learning needs of **all** stakeholders, and assume a leadership role for statewide training in the field of blindness for professionals and paraprofessionals;
3. Maintain a balanced budget;



4. Promote communication, cooperation and inter-agency collaboration of all stakeholders in decision making and program evaluation processes;

5. Conduct ongoing research to determine program effectiveness and efficiency, impact on student and staff learning, parental involvement and delight, and results of interagency efforts.

Three major demographic trends are having a direct impact on the strategic direction of MSB: gang violence, premature births and an aging America. As more children and youth are affected by gang activity, an increased number of them will be disabled. As premature infants are kept on life support systems, they are more likely to have disabilities affecting their sensory and cognitive channels. The same is true for persons who are aging as growing older can equate to a loss of one's senses, specifically hearing and vision. MSB's experience is challenged by these trends, but it is moving forward to embrace these challenges.

MSB, which will celebrate its 150th birthday in 2001, is the twelfth-oldest school for the blind in the nation. As the first K-12 school in Missouri to receive the Missouri Quality Award, it will continue its efforts to self assess for continuous improvement. Its goal is to use its vision, commitment, resources and uniquely qualified expertise to advance the level of services to children with visual impairment and blindness to a new realm of quality — beyond success!

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