

THE IMPACT OF CLOSURE
OF THE MINNESOTA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND
MINNESOTA BRAILLE AND SIGHT SAVING SCHOOL FROM
THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS,
FAMILIES, AND LOCAL SCHOOLS.

Submitted to:
Governor Rudy Perpich

Submitted by:
State Planning Agency

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I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

On January 3, 1985, Governor Rudy Perpich made a preliminary recommendation to close the Minnesota School for the Deaf and Braille and Sight Saving School. At that time the State Planning Agency was requested to complete an analysis of the impact this proposal has on students and submit a report by the end of January, 1985. The Governor stated that he would review his decision by mid-February, 1985.

The responsibility for this analysis was given to the Developmental Disabilities Program of the State Planning Agency. In order to assess impact, four surveys were completed.

The first survey was a review of every student record, and was completed on January 12, 13, 14, and 17, 1985.

The second survey was given to students asking for their opinions and reactions to the proposal.

The third survey was mailed on January 11, 1985, to parents and guardians.

The fourth survey was also mailed on January 11, 1985 to special education directors who have students enrolled at the Faribault residential schools.

The next sections summarize the results in the following order: (1) executive summary, (2) student record review, (3) family survey, and (4) special education director's survey.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A. There is universal opposition by students and families to the proposed closure of the Minnesota School for the Deaf and Blind and Sight Saving Schools.
- B. The first preference of families is to keep the schools open followed by sending children to another residential school out of state in the event of closure.
- C. The local special education directors expressed concern about closure without following due process procedures. Local directors preferred placement in the home district followed by placement in another district.

- D. The schools were described in terms of educational quality, opportunity for socialization, extra-curricular activities, and a 24 hour environment conducive to total communication.
- E. Other issues that emerged from letters and phone calls include:
- Lack of qualified personnel to teach in local programs.
 - Concerns about inappropriate special education programs throughout the state. This issue was also described in terms of lack of leadership.
 - There is support for a thorough review of the quality of all deaf education and hearing impaired programs in all school settings statewide.

III. STUDENT RECORD REVIEW

At the Minnesota School for the Deaf there were 142 student records reviewed (90 males and 52 females). The level of hearing loss ranged from moderate to profound:

2	moderate
23	severe
<u>117</u>	<u>profound</u>
142	Total

In addition to hearing loss, there are 16 students with physical handicaps; 12 have behavior problems, 8 are mentally retarded, 6 have vision impariments, 2 have epilepsy, and 1 has chemical dependency.

The age range at the School for the Deaf is 5 years to 21 years. The breakdown is as follows.

<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Number</u>
5 - 11 (K-6)	44
12 - 17 (7-11)	74
18 - 21 (12)	27
	<u>145</u>

(Note: There are 9 students in ungraded programs.)

The home school districts for the students at the School for the Deaf are presented in Figure 1.

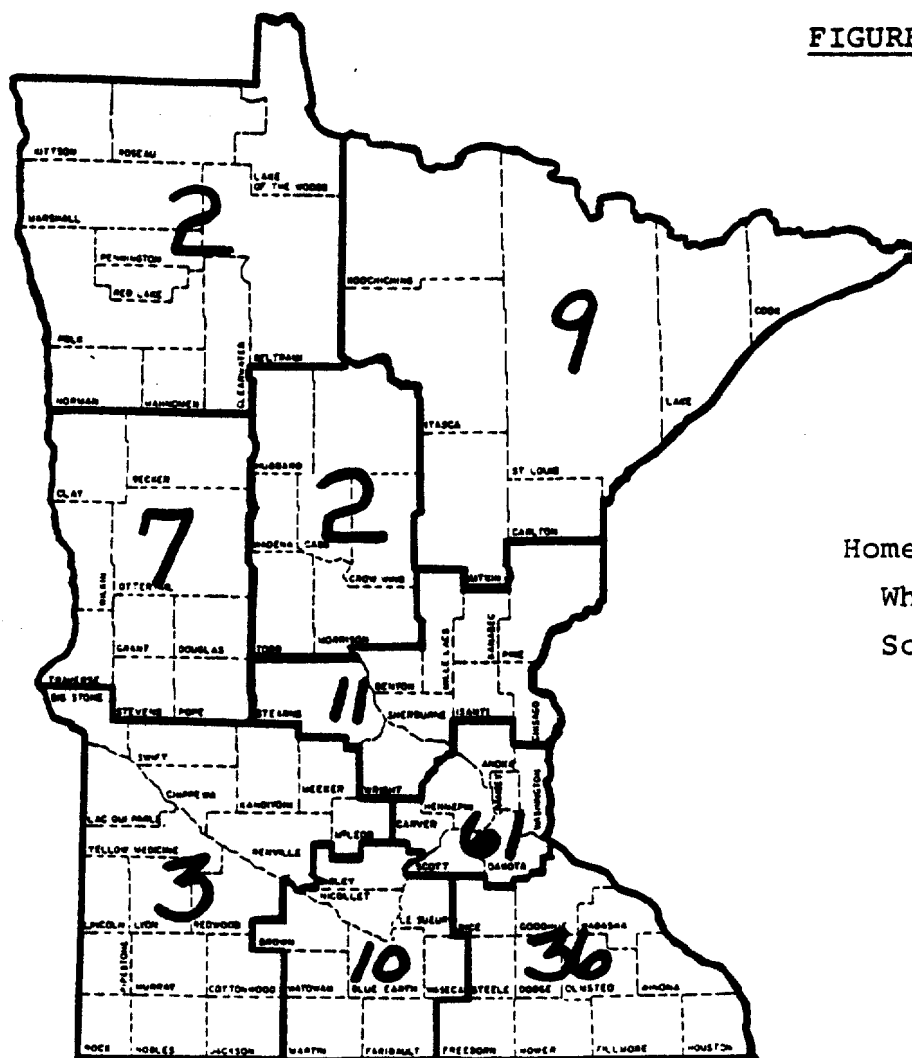


FIGURE 1

Home Location of Students
Who Attend Minnesota
School for the Deaf
1984-85

At the Braille and Sight Saving School, 47 student records were reviewed (26 males and 21 females). Not all students have documented blindness or visual impairment.

According to the "Registration of Blind Pupils," as of January 2, 1984, there were 30 students with the following levels of blindness:

Totally blind	5
No light perception	0
Light perception	7
Object perception	0
Counts fingers	8
Hand movements	5
Restricted field	0
Correction (20/200)	<u>5</u>
	30

The primary reading medium for these students is as follows:

Braille	13
Braille and	
large type	4
Large type	9
Unknown	<u>4</u>
	30

Of the 47 students reviewed, 22 individuals are deaf or hearing impaired (13 profound, 5 severe, 4 unknown). Nineteen (19) are physically handicapped, 10 have seizures, 30 are mentally retarded, and 11 emotionally disturbed.

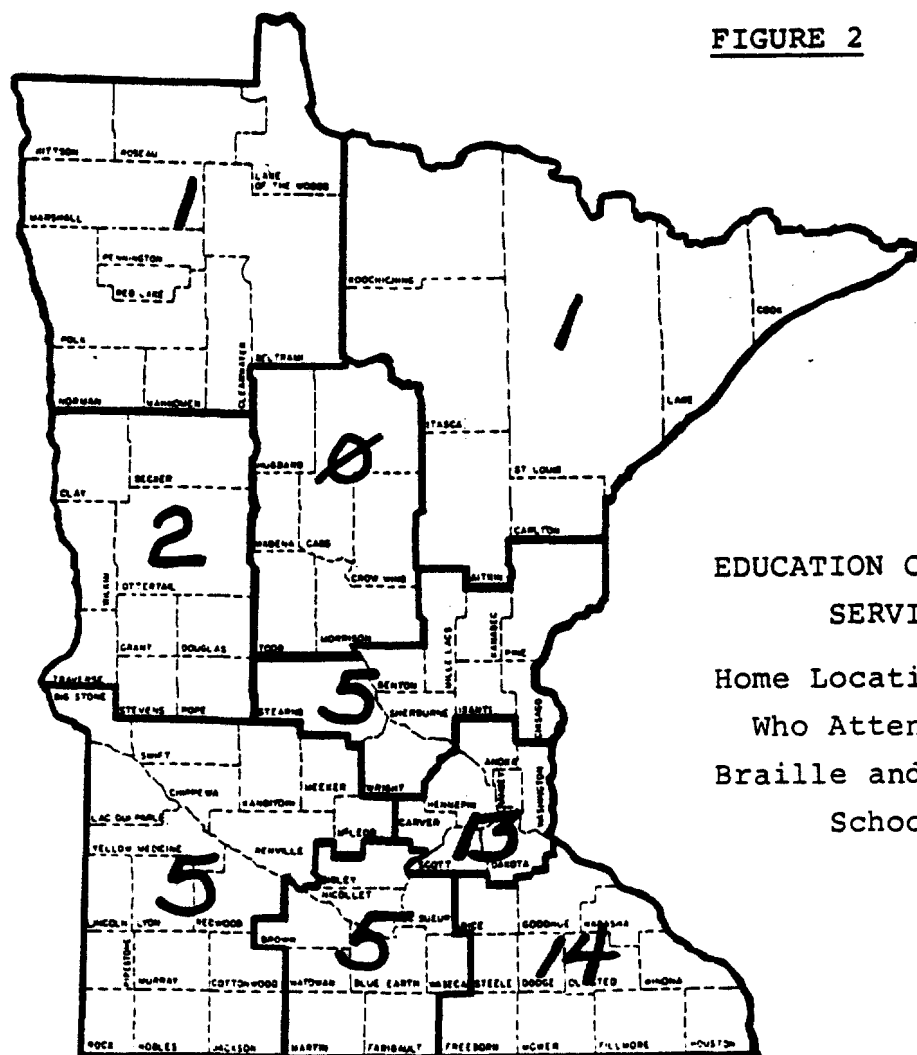
The age range of students at the Braille and Sight Saving School is 5 years to 20 years. The breakdown is as follows:

<u>Age Category</u>	<u>Number</u>
5 - 11	8
12 - 17	18
18 - 20	<u>18</u>
	44

There are 35 students in the ungraded program and 11 students in the graded program.

The home school districts for students in the Braille and Sight Saving School are presented in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2



EDUCATION COOPERATIVE
SERVICE UNITS
Home Location of Students
Who Attend Minnesota
Braille and Sight Saving
School 1984-85

IV. SUMMARY OF SURVEY OF STUDENTS

During the week of January 14, 1985, school staff administered a survey to the students. The results are:

Against phase out/closure	= 112
In favor of phase out	= 5
No response	= <u>3</u>
Total questionnaires received	= 120

Most students have a deep appreciation for the Minnesota School for the Deaf campus, its staff, and its activities. The students view it as their home away from home, where they have many friends.

Most students value the education they are receiving.

Many extracurricular activities are appreciated:

- sports (football, basketball, wrestling, skating, etc.); in the public schools, they would very likely be "sitting on the bench."
- drama
- student council
- captioned films
- arts
- deaf history and American Sign Language

Their view of public school experiences have been marked by failure, loneliness and as one student (who had been mainstreamed in a school of 2,000 students) said, "I felt like a second class citizen."

Also, in public schools, the students had great difficulty in understanding and relating to their teachers and peers. Even with an interpreter, the teacher would be relating to the interpreter, not the student.

Several students were worried about the possibility of having deaf children, themselves, and would want to know that this specialized school would be available for their children, if needed.

Many see the "deaf community" as a refuge--a necessity for survival, solitude, understanding. As one student said, "I don't have any hearing friends, only hearing relatives."

One of the few students who favored closure, thought that public school education was by far superior.

V. SUMMARY OF SURVEY TO PARENTS, GUARDIANS AND FAMILIES

One hundred and thirty-three questionnaires were returned as of 4:30 p.m. Wednesday January 23, 1985. Two hundred fourteen questionnaires were mailed. This is a response rate of 62%. The questions and brief summaries are as follows:

1. Why was your child placed at this school?

All but two answers fell into the broad category "best place for my child." Many cited the high quality of the program and the fact that the local school district did not have programs for students with similar disabilities. Some wrote of the rapid progress made by the students after placement at Faribault. Many wrote of the need for deaf students to have good role models and to be able to learn and use signing full time as opposed to "ten minutes a day in the local school." Others wrote of the opportunity to participate in sports and to associate with peers in an environment where their children were not different. One respondent did not answer the question and one explained the choice as resulting from the State being unwilling to pay for a private school.

2. If this school closed, what are your preferences for future placement? Please rank order, use #1 for your top priority.

- A. Return to your home school district and develop a program to meet your child's needs.
- B. Enroll your child in another school district in a program to meet your child's needs.
- C. Enroll your child in a residential school outside Minnesota.
- D. Other preference: (write in).

The responses by choice are as follows:

Choice A:	Rank 1.	23
	Rank 2.	21
	Rank 3.	21
	Rank 4.	8
	No answer	<u>60</u>
Total		133

Choice B:	Rank 1.	11
	Rank 2.	29
	Rank 3.	20
	Rank 4.	7
	No answer	<u>66</u>
Total		133

Choice C:	Rank 1.	43
	Rank 2.	16
	Rank 3.	15
	Rank 4.	9
	No answer	<u>50</u>
Total		133

Choice D:	Rank 1.	46
	Rank 2.	7
	Rank 3.	4
	Rank 4.	3
	No answer	<u>73</u>
Total		133

Of the 45 that ranked Choice D as number one, 37 indicated the Minnesota School for the Deaf should be kept open. Other options that were presented included: move, use tutors, keep the child at home, place in a private school, and work toward creation of a new school.

On the basis of being ranked 1, Choice D was preferred by a small margin over C. However, combining the 1 and 2 rankings, Choice C was the clear preference.

3. Please feel free to use this space to express your opinions about this proposal.

The responses to this question ranged from a succinct, "It stinks" to hand written or typed letters of over two pages. Without exception the respondents were opposed to closing of the two schools. The reasons given varied; following are some of the more common themes.

- The cost of providing individualized programs in local school districts will cost as much if not more than keeping the two schools open. In addition there aren't enough qualified special education teachers to staff the local school districts.
- The two schools offer very high quality programs that do not exist anywhere else in Minnesota.

- The deaf student makes faster and better progress in the all deaf environment. Some parents cited the lack of progress in the local school district and the marked improvement after a very short time at Faribault.
- Governor Perpich in his State of the State address spoke of the benefits of education for his generation. Deaf people also need the benefits of quality education and this is the only place it can be acquired.

Following are a few representative quotes.

- * MSD has education and programs to meet the needs of a variety of students. Classes are small, teachers are trained in education of the hearing impaired, after-school activities are offered with chances for optimum involvement and leadership opportunities, and a peer group is present. The deaf child has deaf role models.
- * If 11th and 12th graders can choose their own school, I am sure my son will choose MSD.
- * We feel this program is needed. In order for us to meet his educational, social and work adjustment needs, we need this type of school.
- * We have the right to have our child educated in the "least restrictive environment" and by closing the school you would be taking that right away from our children.
- * Our son is in his fifth school year at M. S. D. We saw him grow from a shy withdrawn child to a well rounded outgoing young man.
- * I understand the cost--but compared to what it will cost to keep many of these people on welfare, because they never had a chance to get the right education ... there is no other choice but to keep the school open.
- * I feel that the local districts cannot provide appropriate educational opportunities for a multi-handicapped child. The schools were not able to do so in the past and will not in the future.
- * Our son is now well adjusted, well educated and secure in the knowledge that blindness can be conquered.

- * I feel this proposal is taking away any chance the students at MSD have to make a decent life for themselves.
- * The closing of MSD would place unmanageable burdens on the various independent school districts in which these deaf students reside.
- * If the State of Minnesota is truly interested in "special education" for the deaf they should listen to what the deaf community has to say about MSD.
- * MSD has provided the opportunity for progress in our son's education and growth as a person. The proposal to close the school will only cause setbacks and frustration. Is that fair?
- * True! We all like lower taxes but it cannot be done by taking away our children's education!
- * We feel to close MSD would deny our son a quality education that we know he could only receive at MSD.
- * If the Braille School closes, I am bringing my son home and seeing that the school hires teachers able to meet his needs.
- * My wife and I have grown up in mainstreaming classes and we never want to go back to hearing classes. We felt we missed many opportunities and wasted our lives. We don't want to see our son follow our past.
- * An attempt was made to have our daughter attend mainstream classes and it proved to be impossible for her to cope. In that setting she made little if any progress. On the other hand, while attending Braille School she has made excellent progress, including learning to walk.
- * School districts with already limited budgets will have to find money to get teachers for our special students. It would take several years to implement such programs, and in the mean time our students loose out.
- * I'm a deaf person myself, and an alumni and parent of a deaf son. If the school closes, there will be no more deaf culture; it will fade out and there is nothing left for deaf individuals. It will be the first school for the deaf in the U. S. A. to close. This would be a shame for Minnesota.

VI. SUMMARY OF SURVEY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTORS

A total of 193 questionnaires was mailed to special education directors who had students from their respective districts placed at the Minnesota School for the Deaf and the Minnesota Braille and Sight Saving School in Faribault. The response rate was 87% (168 responses). The directors were asked to complete a separate questionnaire for each student, as some districts had more than one student enrolled at the Faribault residential schools.

Nine (9) of the 168 surveys were completed on students who will be graduating this spring, and their responses were not applicable to the survey. Therefore, there were 159 completed survey forms included in this study.

SURVEY RESULTS

Question 1: "If the School for the Deaf and Braille and Sight Saving School closed at the end of this school year, what would your preferred placement be? Please rank order, use #1 for your top priority." The choices on the questionnaire were:

- A. Return to the student's home school district and develop a program to meet the student's needs.
- B. Enroll the student in another school district in a program that meets the student's needs.
- C. Enroll the student in a residential school outside Minnesota.
- D. Other preference.

Table 1

Preferred Placements if the Schools Were to be Closed in Spring 1985 (Special Education Directors, N = 159)

Type of Preferred Placement	No. Selected by Priority (#1 as highest priority)			
	#1	#2	#3	#4
Home District	76	58	17	5
Other District	70	49	8	0
Out-of-State	6	15	58	24
Other				
- Group Home	5	--	1	1
- Foster Home	--	--	--	1
- Cooperative/Regional				
Arrangement	2	10	1	6
TOTAL	159	132	85	37

Although a substantial number of the directors preferred placements for students in their home districts, there was a considerable number who selected other districts, often because it was believed that another school district with greater numbers of students with similar disabilities could best meet the student's needs.

Cooperative arrangements between neighboring districts were considered feasible.

Out-of-state placements would be the least preferred placement.

Question 2: "What additional costs would be incurred by your school district for the preferred placement given in question #1."

Forty-four (44) respondents could not estimate what additional costs might be incurred by the type of preferred arrangement. Twenty-four (24) responded that the cost would be minimal if the placement were within their own district. Six others indicated minimal cost if the placement were in another district. There was a wide range of cost estimates from \$500 to \$30,000 per year (Table 2).

Table 2

Estimated Additional Costs of Preferred Placements
(Special Education Directors, N = 151)

Type of Preferred Placement	ESTIMATED AMOUNTS IN DOLLARS								Unknown
	0 or Minimum	500-2,999	3,000-4,999	5,000-9,999	10,000-14,999	15,000-19,999	20,000-24,999	25,000-30,000	
Home District	26	5	10	3	5	1	4		
Other District	6	9	6	13	1	2			
Out-of-State				3	1			1	
Other									
- Group Home		4			3				
- Foster Home									
- Regional/Cooperative Arrangement			1	1				2	
Don't Know									44
TOTAL	32	18	17	20	10	3	4	3	44

Question 3: "If the School for Deaf and Braille and Sight Saving School closed by the end of the school year in 1987, what would your preferred placement be? Please rank order, use #1 for your top priority." The choices on the questionnaire were:

- A. Return to the student's home school district and develop a program to meet the student's needs.
- B. Enroll the student in another school district in a program that meets the student's needs.
- C. Enroll the student in a residential school outside Minnesota.
- D. Other preference

The responses to this question are similar to those in question #1 and presented in Table 3. Many directors preferred placement in the home district followed by placement in other districts.

Table 3

Preferred Placements if the Schools Were to Close by 1987
(Special Education Directors, N = 155)

Type of Preferred Placement	No. Selected by Priority (#1 as highest priority)			
	#1	#2	#3	#4
Home District	75	56	16	4
Other District	64	51	7	0
Out-of-State	3	10	57	20
Other				
- Group Home	4	--	--	--
- Foster Home	--	--	1	--
- Cooperative/Regional Arrangement	9	6	1	2
TOTAL	155	123	82	26

Question 4: "Are there any students currently in your district with similar characteristics to those students who attend the School for the Deaf and Braille and Sight Saving School?"

Ninety-nine (99) directors identified a total of 263 students in their home districts who have similar characteristics to the students at the Faribault residential schools.

Sixty (60) directors responded, "No."

Question 5: "If the School for the Deaf and Braille and Sight Saving School were to remain open, do you have any students currently in your district that you anticipate would be placed in the next two years?"

28 directors indicated a total number of 30 students who would need placement within the next two years.

121 directors responded placement would not be needed.

SUMMARY OF OPINIONS OFFERED BY SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTORS:

Finally, the directors were asked to express their opinions about the proposal. Their responses are in the following order:

- A. Opinions regarding the survey technique/process;
- B. Opinions regarding the students or families;
- C. Opinions regarding the local school district situation; and
- D. Opinions regarding state policy formulation.

A. Opinions Regarding the Survey Technique/Process

Some of the directors stated that quick decisions regarding closure violate both state and federal laws regarding due process procedures and parental involvement.

Many directors could not estimate additional costs without knowing what actual options for placement and programming might be required or realistically obtained.

Individualized and appropriate programming takes coordination, discussion, and decision-making with involvement of parents and supportive services. Therefore, many of the special education directors hesitated to determine educational and residential alternatives without these procedural safeguards.

B. Opinions Regarding Specific Students/Family Situations

Many of the special education directors indicated that certain students were placed at Faribault for reasons other than strictly educational. Such placements were made either by social service agencies or by parents, without the school district's involvement. These students have behavioral and emotional problems, often resulting from disrupted homes (e.g., divorce) or having parents who could not cope with the additional responsibilities of parenting a child with special needs.

More than half of the school districts indicated that even with the special emotional/behavioral problems characterized by some students, they could accommodate these students in their home district, often without much additional cost.

C. Opinions Regarding Local School District Situations

Most of the special education directors who indicated the limitations of local school districts in meeting these students' needs were from small to mid-sized communities in rural settings. Such limitations included:

1. Obtaining adequately trained/certified staff (quantity and quality).
2. Providing appropriate recreational and leisure activities that would prevent isolation/non-peer interaction and communication.
3. Lack in numbers of people who know sign language, including parents.
4. Lack of vocational training resources.

D. Opinions Relating to State Policy Formulation

Many districts seem to doubt their ability to provide appropriate, quality educational programs, particularly for deaf students who have additional disabilities.

Additional costs to local school districts to meet these students' needs would include: transportation, board and room if in foster placements, and personnel-teachers and specialists.

Many school districts indicated that use of foster homes, group homes, and inter-district cooperative arrangements provided acceptable options for some students. Many students need out-of-home residential supervision because of inadequate family situations.

Some school districts feel better equipped to handle these students than they did a few years ago.

Very few would consider out-of-state placements. In fact, many were adamantly opposed to such a consideration.