

**Agency Purpose**

The mission of the Minnesota State Academies (MSA) is to provide the highest level of self-sufficiency possible for deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired students in the state of Minnesota. Established in 1858, the MSA are statewide public schools that provide education and related services to students ages 0-21, who are blind, visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, including those with multiple disabilities. The MSA are composed of two separate and unique schools – the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind (MSAB), and Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf (MSAD). Federal law mandates that services provided by the MSA meet the student’s need for a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) within the least restrictive environment.

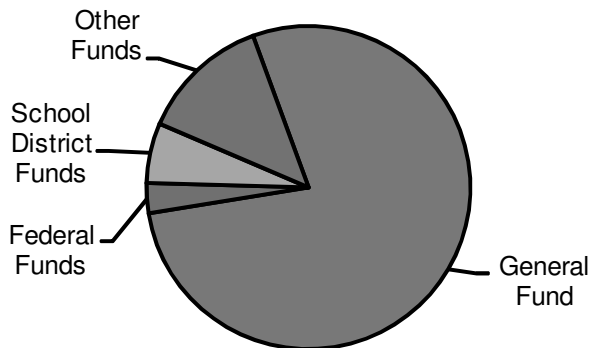
The decision to attend the MSA during the school year is made by an Individualized Educational Planning (IEP) team which includes the parent, the district of residence and MSA staff. For a student to enroll, the IEP team must decide that MSA provides the most appropriate placement. Students may also attend MSA to obtain social skills or for short-term skill development (for more information, refer to M.S. 125A.69 Admission Standards).

**At A Glance**

The Minnesota State Academies (MSA) is a state agency made up of two unique schools serving deaf and/or blind students. MSA serves as a resource to families, school districts and educators throughout Minnesota and the Midwest region. Specifically, students are served as follows:

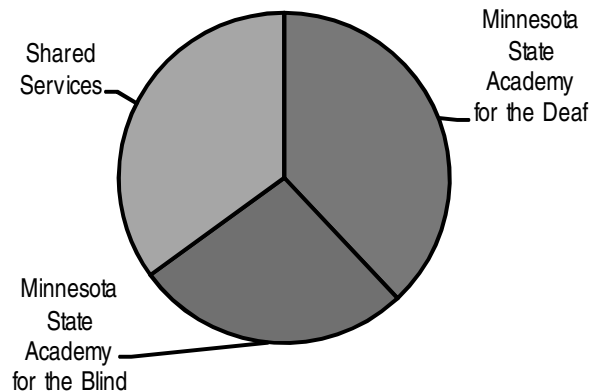
- ages 0-21 who reside in the state of Minnesota or the upper Midwest;
- in a special education environment with a residential component, providing 24 hour services;
- with additional disabilities, including physical and emotional needs.

**Est. FY 2010-11 Expenditures by Fund**



Source: Minnesota State Academies.

**Est. FY 2010-11 Expenditures by Program**



Source: Minnesota Accounting and Procurement System.

**Strategies**

MSA has reviewed its mission, vision and beliefs, developed a strategic plan to guide its improvement and is currently working on updating its facilities master plan (the Academies share a common mission to educate students who are blind/visually impaired or deaf/hard of hearing to their greatest potential. While the mission is a common one, the strategies to accomplish that mission are unique to each school). See link for details: <http://www.msa.state.mn.us/About/mission.asp>.

The decision to enroll at MSAD is not an easy one for parents and/or school districts to make. Research indicates that if there is early identification of deafness (now a reality due to Minnesota's newborn infant screening) and early language acquisition, children can avoid becoming delayed language learners. With specialized services by appropriately trained staff, students can develop the tools to be successful, responsible, independent citizens. However, if students do not receive appropriate language acquisition opportunities, their educational progress and future success is diminished. In addition, the social-emotional needs of deaf/hard of hearing students are unique and real. However, children with disabilities also have the same social-emotional needs as their non-disabled peers and have the right to form an identity; have a peer group; participate in activities; develop their maximum potential; share life experiences; and feel good about who they are. These principles inform the Academies' strategies:

- provide services that would be prohibitively expensive or unavailable in public schools;
- provide direct and indirect educational services through a number of program options;
- provide academic year programs, which include pre-K-12 academics, early childhood intervention, transition, and programs for students with multiple disabilities;
- provide off-campus services in support of local school districts for non-enrolled students including specialized evaluation, direct teacher services, orientation and mobility training, and consultations;
- provide on-campus services in support of local school districts for non-enrolled students including weekend parent training programs, family and teacher visitation at the Academies to review specialized resources, short-term direct services such as basic skills testing remediation, independent living training, assistive technology training, extended school year programming and transition programs;
- help the state meet federal statutory requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA);
- provide access to a direct communication environment, comprehensive services, additional resources and increased opportunities which meet the individual needs of students as mandated by their IEPs; and
- offer mainstream courses in conjunction with the Faribault Public Schools which provide access to broader curriculum choices, advanced coursework, opportunities to increase skill in working with interpreters, and integration with non-disabled peers;
- provide independent living experience and career exploration in conjunction with South Central College and State Services for the Blind; and,
- the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf provides support for teacher preparation programs. Student teachers work under the guidance of Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf licensed professionals.

## Operations

The Academies are governed by a seven member board which is appointed by the governor. The board meets six times a year and is made up of the following membership: one member with school superintendent experience, one member with special education director experience, one deaf community representative, one blind community representative, one representative from the Minnesota Department of Education, and two members of the business/finance community.

The range of services provided by the MSA in support of the agency's mission is unique and often complex when compared to most public schools, making the Academies a necessary option for school districts. The MSA have provided educational services to deaf and blind students for more than 140 years. Historically, the MSA were the only educational options available to deaf or blind students. If students were deaf or blind it was assumed that they would attend the MSA. Today most deaf or blind students attend school in their local community and the Minnesota State Academies are viewed as an extension of the school district. The Minnesota State Academies is a state agency that functions under the leadership of the Academies Administrator. Each special school operates under the direction of a director who is a specialist with expertise in its disability area (blindness at the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind and deafness at the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf).

In its daily operations, the MSA educate enrolled and short term placement students and/or support public schools to educate students to:

- develop self-esteem, social skills, leadership skills, and specialized skills like Braille or sign language;
- complete a course of study equivalent to public schools;

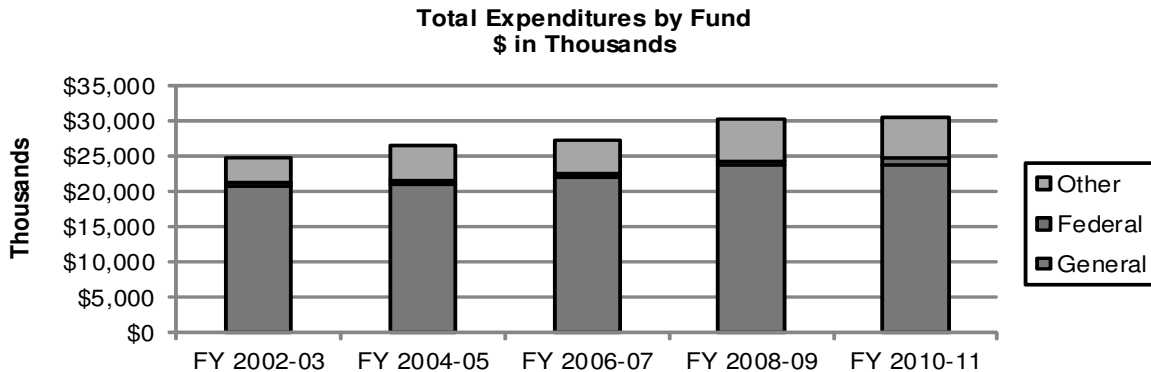
- earn a living, become integrated into the community, and/or live on their own or in supported living arrangements;
- prepare for higher education or vocational training;
- access and utilize state-of-the-art technology to prepare for employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
- acquire technology skills to access information otherwise inaccessible because of their disability; and,
- prepare severely, multiply-disabled blind children for adult life.

In efforts to be fiscally responsible, we have consolidated the services that support the programming at MSAD and MSAB. These services include our health services, nutrition department, human resources, business office and maintenance department. While our schools are located on separate campuses, they are less than a mile apart within the Faribault community, and staff is able to meet the needs at both locations. RNs work in our health clinic to provide the necessary expertise needed by our complicated students. This is especially important on the MSAB campus where we have medically fragile students. Food is prepared at each site and both schools have students whose dietary needs are complicated. The human resources office and business office are located on the MSAD campus but staff spends time at MSAB on a regular basis. Some of the maintenance staff work at one school or the other, while other staff may spend time at each site. This is determined by their work responsibilities. Whenever possible, equipment is shared to reduce costs. This is also true for vehicles and buses, which are also shared.

**Budget Trends**

The total budget for the MSA for the 2010-11 biennium is approximately is \$30.4 million. This includes educational aides, all gifts, revolving and federal funds. MSA staff include approximately 200 full-time equivalent employees.

Of the total budget, the majority (78%) comes from direct state appropriations from the general fund. The Department of Education accounts for another 13% in the form of management aid reimbursements, tuition, and compensatory education revenue. The remainder of the budget is federal funding, student deposits, and gifts. Additionally, approximately \$1.75 million in tuition from school districts for students attending the Academies is returned to the state's general fund.



*\*FY2010-11 is estimated, not actual.*

*Source data for the previous chart is the Minnesota Accounting and Procurement System (MAPS) as of 8/24/2010*

The Academies is heavily reliant on its general fund appropriation to fund operations. It does not have levy authority and receives limited federal funding. The Academies' designation as a state agency, and not as a school district, has limited its access to federal ARRA funds targeting the education sector, including \$167 million in federal Educations Jobs funding. The financial challenges that public school districts are facing impact the Academies when attendance at the Academies is viewed as an additional cost to their budgets. The Academies' goal is to be as "cost neutral" as possible, though school districts do have to make some contributions to students' education when they attend the Academies. Another factor that impacts the Academies is how the admissions

process works. At the present time, families access enrollment at the Academies through the school district of residence. The school district must agree that placement at the Academies is an appropriate placement or the child cannot attend. Finally, there are no preparation programs for teachers of the visually impaired in the state of Minnesota. As the current staff at MSAB reaches the age of retirement, it will become exceedingly difficult to find licensed teachers of the visually impaired. We are working with professionals in the state, as well as across the country, to find solutions to this staffing dilemma.

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