



STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2029

Achieve • Care • Thrive

OVERVIEW

2026–2029 Strategic Plan | Executive Overview

The Minnesota State Academies of the Deaf and the Blind is entering a defining chapter, building on a strong legacy while setting a clear direction for the future.

In the fall of 2025, MSA partnered with Dr. Dave Webb and Homerun Leadership to guide the development of a focused and forward-looking three-year strategic plan. The MSA Board established clear priorities to ensure the plan reflects both current strengths and future opportunities.



Throughout the 2025–2026 school year, MSA engaged students, staff, families, alumni, and community partners through 12 stakeholder sessions across both campuses. This process affirmed deep pride in MSA's student-centered mission, culture, and accessibility, while also identifying key areas for growth, including communication, organizational alignment, enrollment, staff stability, and facilities. A Strategic Planning Committee refined these insights into a clear and actionable framework, resulting in the 2026–2029 Strategic Plan.

The 2026–2029 Strategic Plan builds on MSA's legacy while directly addressing current priorities.

Over the next three years, MSA will focus on four strategic goals:

1. Academic Excellence & Student Outcomes
2. Statewide Outreach, Visibility & Engagement
3. Staff Excellence, Stability & Accountability
4. Safe, Modern & Accessible Facilities

This plan emphasizes measurable results, annual accountability, and transparent reporting. Each goal includes clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that will be reviewed quarterly and reported publicly each year.

Strategic Focus Shift from 2018–2023 Plan

The previous plan emphasized systems creation and school climate. The 2026–2029 plan shifts toward:

- Measurable accountability
- Enrollment growth
- Cross-campus unity
- Staff retention
- Visible leadership
- Public visibility
- Facilities modernization

By 2029, MSA will be recognized as:

- A unified statewide leader in accessible education
- A growing and thriving residential and outreach program.
- A high-performing organization, grounded in accountability.
- A school community where students achieve independence and belonging.

This plan is designed to drive measurable progress every year.

Stakeholder Involvement

There were 12 Stakeholder feedback sessions with students, families, instructional staff, dorm staff, non-instructional staff, alumni, community members, board members, and cross-campus groups.

After conducting feedback sessions, across all 12 groups, consistent themes emerged:

Celebrations

- Strong pride in students, with long-term students demonstrating impressive literacy growth
- Student-centered environment supported by specialized services
- Highly specialized, talented staff with rare and expert skill sets
- Confident, knowledgeable staff with deep expertise in their fields
- Strong, caring, mission-driven staff culture
- Deep culture and identity, including Deaf culture, Braille literacy, Expanded Core Curriculum, and bilingual ASL/English instruction
- Strong sense of family, especially within the deaf school community
- High staff commitment and retention, with many returning and investing in the school
- Supportive environment where individuals look out for one another.
- Positive, collaborative team culture across the organization
- Strong teamwork within departments
- Overall perception of a strong, effective team
- Established statewide legacy and strong reputation

Challenges

- Enhancing communication (internal, cross-campus, family, alumni, crisis communication)
- Ensuring accountability and follow-through
- Increasing enrollment and improving public visibility
- Improving staff retention – addressing burnout and stability
- Growth in cross-campus equity and collaboration
- Focus on mental health and behavior support.
- Maintenance and upgrade of facilities and infrastructure (HVAC, dorms, accessibility upgrades)

What follows is a three-year strategic framework (2026–2029) grounded in stakeholder voice and aligned to the original “Achieve, Care, Thrive” spirit, but modernized around clarity, accountability, and growth.

MSA MISSION

MSA empowers students to thrive in school and life through an accessible, inclusive, and language-rich educational environment, supported by statewide resources and professional expertise for parents, families, community partners, and educational programs across Minnesota.

MSA VISION

MSA empowers every student to achieve, care, and thrive.

MSA CORE VALUES

1. Student-Centered Excellence:

We prioritize student learning, growth, independence, and well-being across academics, social development, and life skills in every decision.

2. Accessibility & Language Equity:

We ensure that every student can fully participate and succeed by providing full access through ASL, Braille, assistive technology, and inclusive practices.

3. Belonging & Identity:

We honor culture, identity, and diverse lived experiences by creating inclusive opportunities for students to engage in academic, social, and extracurricular experiences.

4. Family & Community Partnership:

We value families, community members, school districts, and statewide partners as vital collaborators in supporting student success.

5. Collaboration & Statewide Impact:

We partner with families, districts, and statewide stakeholders to expand access, share expertise, and strengthen outcomes.



MSA STRATEGIC GOALS (2026–2029)**1. Academic Excellence & Student Outcomes:**

MSA will deliver rigorous, accessible, and culturally responsive instruction supported by aligned systems, clear communication, and data-driven practices to ensure student growth, independence, and post-school success.

2. Statewide Outreach, Visibility & Engagement:

MSA will expand statewide outreach, visibility, and engagement through coordinated communication systems, strong partnerships, and accessible, inclusive engagement with families, districts, and community stakeholders.

3. Staff Excellence, Stability & Accountability:

MSA will build a high-performing, aligned workforce through clear expectations, strong communication systems, and structures that support accountability, collaboration, and staff well-being.

4. Safe, Modern & Accessible Facilities:

MSA will ensure safe, accessible, and modern environments supported by strong infrastructure, reliable technology, and clear communication systems that enhance safety, learning, and daily operations.



GOAL #1: Academic Excellence & Student Outcomes

MSA will deliver rigorous, accessible, and culturally responsive instruction supported by aligned systems, clear communication, and data-driven practices to ensure student growth, independence, and post-school success.

Goal #1 Action Strategies:

1.1 Align Curriculum, Instruction, and Standards*

- Conduct curriculum audit and alignment
- Ensure ASL bilingual integrity and Braille/ECC alignment with state standards
- Identify and address gaps
- Provide training and instructional support
- Ensure consistent implementation

1.2 Strengthen Behavioral, Mental Health, and Student Life Supports*

- Examine behavior and discipline systems
- PBIS across classrooms and residential settings
- Mental health access
- Strategic staffing adjustments

1.3 Position Academic Excellence as the Driver of Enrollment & Growth*

- Share outcomes and success stories
- Align outreach with academic results

1.4 Strengthen Staff Expertise & Professional Learning

- Ongoing professional development
- Targeted training (e.g., behavior support, PBIS, differentiated instruction)
- Certification opportunities
- Instructional support and continuous learning systems

1.5 Implement a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

- Develop MTSS across academics, behavior, and social-emotional supports
- Establish intervention tiers and progress monitoring
- Use data to inform decisions

1.6 Expand Course Offerings & Student Pathways

- Explore additional electives (e.g., STEM, Fine Arts)
- CTE and vocational programming
- Transition programming (14–22) with emphasis on both college and career pathways

1.7 Strengthen Data, Assessment & Accountability Systems

- Identify and utilize appropriate growth metrics
- Regular data review cycles
- Annual outcomes report
- IEP compliance monitoring

1.8 Strengthen Internal Communication for Instructional Alignment

- Establish clear communication protocols across instructional teams
- Define roles and expectations for decision-making and student support
- Use shared platforms for collaboration, data sharing, and instructional alignment

**Action Strategies marked with an asterisk are priority areas for Year One*

GOAL #2: Statewide Outreach, Visibility & Engagement

MSA will expand statewide outreach, visibility, and engagement through coordinated communication systems, strong partnerships, and accessible, inclusive collaboration with families, districts, and community stakeholders.

Goal #2 Action Strategies:

2.1 Strengthen Educational Programming as the Foundation for Outreach*

- Align outreach efforts with high-quality academic, social, life, and transition programming
- Showcase educational expertise and student outcomes through outreach
- Ensure programming reflects best practices

2.2 Expand Statewide Outreach & Access to Services*

- Increase outreach efforts in rural and underserved regions
- Develop a statewide support model for educators
- Provide virtual learning opportunities for families
- Expand Deaf/Blind support services across the state

2.3 Increase Visibility & Public Awareness*

- Develop and maintain an accessible, professional website
- Implement a consistent social media strategy
- Share regular spotlight stories
- Strengthening public relations and legislative engagement

2.4 Launch a Family & Stakeholder Engagement Framework

- Annual town halls (1 in-person, 1 virtual)
- Web-based communication tools for families and stakeholders
- Strategies to engage families from diverse backgrounds and languages
- Ongoing feedback opportunities

2.5 Strengthen Partnerships & Statewide Relationships

- Expand relationships with districts and stakeholder groups
- Build partnerships to support learning and service delivery
- Increase collaboration with Deaf, Blind, and Deaf/Blind organizations

2.6 Establish a Comprehensive External Communication System

- Define communication expectations: who communicates what, when, and to whom
- Develop stakeholder-specific communication matrix
- Ensure consistent messaging across platforms and campuses
- Ensure all communication is accessible (ASL, Braille, translations, inclusive formats)

2.7 Measure & Improve Communication Effectiveness

- Continuing to conduct annual satisfaction surveys
- Use feedback to refine outreach, engagement, and communication strategies

**Action Strategies marked with an asterisk are priority areas for Year One*

GOAL #3: Staff Excellence, Stability & Accountability

MSA will build a high-performing, aligned workforce through clear expectations, effective communication systems, and structures that support accountability, collaboration, and staff well-being.

Goal #3 Action Strategies:**3.1 Establish Clear Expectations, Accountability & Staff Consistency***

- Review roles, schedules, and responsibilities
- Consistent performance reviews
- Strengthening accountability systems
- Improve attendance and reliability

3.2 Strengthen Onboarding & Staff Training Systems*

- Structured onboarding program for all staff
- Pre-service training aligned to essential skills
- Clear expectations for roles and performance
- First-year support systems

3.3 Deepen Professional Learning & Ongoing Support*

- Targeted training aligned to needs
- ASL proficiency training for non-signing staff as appropriate
- PBIS and behavior training
- Professional Development Support, PLCs, and follow-up

3.4 Strengthen Instructional Leadership & Monitoring Systems*

- Increase classroom observations
- Provide actionable feedback
- Use observation data for improvement

3.5 Support Staff Well-Being & Sustainable Work Systems

- Review staffing structures and workload for instructional staff
- Ensure equitable prep time
- Address burnout systemically

3.6 Implement a Unified Internal Communication System

- Review and standardize communication expectations and protocols across campuses
- Monthly all-staff updates
- Shared documentation and collaboration systems

**Action Strategies marked with an asterisk are priority areas for Year One*

GOAL #4: Safe, Modern & Accessible Facilities

MSA will ensure safe, accessible, and modern environments supported by strong infrastructure, reliable technology, and clear communication systems that enhance safety, learning, and daily operations.

Goal #4 Action Strategies:**4.1 Strengthen Technology Infrastructure & IT Systems***

- Examine current Wi-Fi access (including evenings/residential) and address dead zones
- Improve IT support responsiveness
- Strengthen safety and filtering systems

4.2 Strengthen Campus Safety & Emergency Systems*

- Conduct safety and emergency audits
- Enhance lockdown and communication systems
- Ensure regular drills and monitoring systems
- Define roles and protocols for emergency response

4.3 Establish Maintenance, Monitoring & Sustainability Systems*

- Define maintenance expectations
- Establish and communicate inspection cycles and preventative maintenance
- Replacement timelines
- Continuous monitoring and improvement

4.4 Strengthen Crisis & Operational Communication Systems*

- Multi-modal emergency communication (visual, text, email)
- Clear chain of command across campuses
- Ongoing review and improvement of communication during drills and real events

4.5 Conduct Facilities Audit & Capital Improvement Planning

- Comprehensive facilities audit
- Develop phased improvement plan
- Align facility needs with funding and legislative priorities
- Increase transparency on plans and timelines

4.6 Advance Accessibility & Innovation in Campus Design

- Integrate innovative accessibility features
- Model best practices for Deaf, Blind, DeafBlind environments
- Continuously improve accessibility

**Action Strategies marked with an asterisk are priority areas for Year One*

IMPLEMENTATION

- Internal structure for addressing goals in the 3-Year Plan (2026–2029)
- Annual Action Plan Review
- Quarterly Progress Dashboard
- Public Annual Report

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Katie Wangberg, Vice Chair
- Sara Pratt, Officer of Business Affairs
- Diane Dohnalik
- Jamers Kane
- Hernan Moncada
- Oluwagbenga Ogungbe

MSA Strategic Plan Review Committee:

- Dr. Annette Freiheit, Board Chair
- Dr. Dave Webb, Consultant from Homerun Leadership
- Madeline Christensen, MSAB Student
- Riley Novacinski, MSAD Student
- John Davis, MSAB Director
- Jason Cox, MSAD Director
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- Nichelle Steffen, MSA Student Life Director
- Amber Miller, MSA Director of Fiscal Services
- Heather Smisek, MSA Director of Human Resources
- Meghan Lewis, MSAD Teacher
- Harry Weber, MSAB Teacher
- Jamie Jindra, MSA Outreach
- Christine Adams, MSAD Student Life Representative
- Stephanie Franek, MSAB Shared Services Representative
- Molly Peters, MSAD Shared Services Representative
- Terry Wilding, MSA Superintendent

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