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An early challenge: locating deaf and blind students

by [Luther Granquist](#) // January 8th, 2010

The 1858 law establishing the Minnesota State Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb required that its Board of Trustees include in annual reports “the names, ages and residences of deaf mutes ascertained to be in the State, who have not attended the school.” This “child find” requirement of Minnesota’s first law providing for special education services reflected the concern of proponents of the new school that all deaf children in the state have the opportunity to attend.



The school finally opened in September 1863 in a temporary location in downtown Faribault. Laws passed in 1863 and 1864 authorized blind children to also be admitted. The Minnesota Legislature appropriated funds for a permanent building in 1866. In 1874 the trustees recognized the need for a separate program for blind students and purchased Alexander Faribault’s Second Empire-style House for that purpose. Throughout this early period their annual reports continued to include a “List of Deaf and Dumb and Blind children in the state who have not attended this school.”

The state provided no other support for education of deaf and blind children until 1915, when they were included in a law allowing public schools to provide special classes for children with disabilities and providing limited support for school districts which chose to do so. “Child find” provisions appeared again in a 1931 law that compelled each school to prepare a list of deaf and blind students who were not attending either the School for the Deaf or the School for the Blind in Faribault. That law also compelled parents to send their deaf or blind students to one of these schools if the child could not, because of the disability, benefit from “the methods of instruction in vogue in the public schools.” Subsequent laws made it a misdemeanor for a parent to fail to do so.

Today’s laws include child find provisions for all children with disabilities, but no comparable list would ever be published. Parents are not required to send a deaf or blind child to the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf or the Minnesota State Academy for the Blind. But the academies remain an option for children with those disabilities, an option often sought when the child does not benefit from the methods of instruction provided by the local school.