March 5, 2019

To: District Superintendents, Boards of Trustees

RE: Computer Science Opportunities to Satisfy a Core Graduation Requirement

Every day innovations in computer sciences and technology are changing the way we need to prepare our students for success. Skills in computer science and technology are rapidly becoming key to increasing opportunities for all Montanans.

As schools look for ways to expand learning opportunities in these fields, local districts are encouraged to use **existing flexibility in current regulations** to offer courses in computer science and programming that can be used to meet core K-12 graduation requirements.

Teaching computer science is about more than preparing students for opportunities in tech. According to Code.org, a nonprofit leader in the area, computer science and programming ("coding") develop students' computational and critical thinking skills, showing them new ways to approach and solve problems.

There are 498 current open computing jobs in Montana, with an average salary for a computing occupation over $64,000, significantly higher than the average salary in the state.[1] Yet national studies show when computer science is not treated as an academic subject, students may not perceive it as relevant to their future academic or career success.

Local school boards have an opportunity to send a clear message regarding the value of computer science by allowing courses in computer science to satisfy a core K-12 graduation requirement. Montana Board of Public Education regulations give districts the **flexibility to allow a computer science course (including AP) to fulfill[2] a core credit requirement (please refer to the attached FAQ document for additional details)**.

To help educators meet the growing demand for computer science, the Board of Public Education recently created a high-quality pathway to certification in teaching computer science content. Teachers now have the opportunity to earn a Class 4 license to teach computer science after completing 80 hours of approved professional training.

Investing in our teachers is paramount to expanding computer science opportunities for all students, which is why we are inviting school staff to participate in a free webinar introducing the Technology Education and Literacy in Schools (TEALS) program to Montana. TEALS is an exciting co-teaching model that allows schools district to pair private sector expertise in computer science with the educational background of

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[1] https://code.org/advocacy/state-facts/MT.pdf
[2] http://www.mtrules.org/gateway/ruleno.asp?RN=10%2E57%2E421

licensed instructors. The webinar is on Thursday, March 14th from 4:00pm to 5:00pm. You can RSVP for the webinar at this link: https://aka.ms/PHL033AL-calendar. To learn more visit: https://www.tealsk12.org.

As state leaders, we understand how frequently our public schools are asked to do more with less. Allowing computer science courses to count towards a core math, science or other graduation requirement is a concrete step your school can take to prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow without further straining local resources.

Please contact the Office of Public Instruction's Content Standards and Instruction specialists for questions concerning computer science, to learn more about opportunities for professional development, or available resources. They can be reached at opicsi@mt.gov or 406-444-3583. Thank you for your continued support with this important and challenging work.

Sincerely,

Steve Bullock
Governor

Elsie Arntzen
State Superintendent