



**STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION  
ADVISORY PANEL MEETING**  
**Thursday, July 9, 2020**

Heather Denny started with a Welcome and Introductions.

Advisory Panel Members in Attendance: Heather Denny, Ron Ream, Mandy Countryman, Tina Blair , , Dave Richards, Wendy Studt, Darrell Hanum, JP Williams, Nicole Thuotte, Millie Armstrong, Jodi Bartz, Chad Berg, Kyla Rock, Shawn Sonsteng, Millie Armstrong, Robin Farrell.

OPI Staff in Attendance: Kristie Sears, Dick Trerise, Jenifer Cline, Sheila Lovato, Marla Swanby, Ty House, Allyson Chance, Chris McCrea, Danni McCarthy, Jennifer Nettleton, Dale Kimmet, Mandy Gibbs, Yvonne Field, Anne Rainey, Doug Doty, Cheryl Allen

Guests in Attendance: Angie Watson, Rebecca Richards

Dick thanked all attending and advised the panel that the meeting is being recorded. The May Stakeholders meeting was cancelled due to Covid-19 and ended up being a phone call instead. The minutes from that meeting were sent to the panel. Dick stated there would be a slight change to the agenda with an update from Cheryl Allen, the Deputy Superintendent, on OPI reopening plans that were released to the public. Jenifer mentioned Cheryl will also discuss bringing a request for flexibilities to the state board of education.

Approval of Proposed Agenda with the addition of Cheryl Allen providing an update

Proposed: Darrell Hannum

Seconded: Dave Richards

Approved

Approval of May 8, 2020 Minutes

Proposed: Darrell Hannum

Seconded: Jodi Bartz

Approved

Update from Cheryl Allen

Superintendent, Elsie Arntzen has created a Covid-19 task force designed to support schools through this time and aid with how to reopen. There is special education representative on the task force.

#### Student Support Services Update

Jenifer introduced new employee Sara Bailey who joined the OPI team under Dale Kimmet. Dale introduced Sara to the panel.

Sheila Lovato was introduced to discuss MTSS spending and applying for the SPDG grant. Closing out the school climate grant. Sheila stated, we are currently in a no cost extension year. A grant committee has been formed to write a new SPDG with a district focus on database coaching. Jen stated we are working on closing out the school climate transformation grant.

Interim committees – MT legislature meets every other year. During the off year OPI is involved with the educational and fiscal subcommittees, where the legislature lays out plans for the next sessions. OPI is working to get Special education allocations under the regular school annual inflation increase. Special education funds fall behind because they do not get the annual inflation increase. It looks like the legislature is considering the education allocation inflation increase for Special Education but not the monies to make up the difference in monies that the Special Education has lost out on by not getting the inflation increases.

Darrell Hannum questioned if data is available for how many special education students participated in online learning? Dick stated there is no current data because each district had their own approach and challenges. Dick believes there will be more assessments going forward.

Jennifer invited Chad Berg to address how his district is dealing with offering online sped services.

Jenifer discussed the OPI reopening guide that is posted to the OPI website and stated that schools are going to need to be flexible as safety guidelines are lifted or increased.

Jenifer shared an article with the panel, Common Sense Media. Looking across the nation at how many students have access to technology. 35% Native American's do not have internet access. When you compare MT to nation, we are between 30-35% so we are still on the high side of states with connectivity issues. We have systemic connectivity issues that need to be addressed.

Darrell Hannum asked How will OPI address the connectivity in rural MT. OPI is looking for resources to assist schools and parents.

Dick informed the panel that OPI are all working remotely at this time. Assured panel that remote work has been highly effective.

Heather Denny, Chairperson made a call for public comments. No comments were made at this time.

#### Monitoring Update

Dale Kimmet the compliance unit manager gave a report on the previous year's monitoring results. The OPI monitors schools every 5 years, and supported organizations every 3 years. The schedule of monitoring is on the website. Monitoring is not only for compliance but also used for providing technical assistance. 650 files statewide were reviewed. The report is posted to the website annually.

#### Early Assistance Program Update

Mandi Gibbs, Early Assistance director at OPI stated that OPI is obligated under IDEA to offer dispute resolution. Mediation is a dispute resolution tool parents and schools can use to resolve disputes. Anyone can file a complaint with the OPI alleging there has been a breach in services offered. See Attached Form.

#### Additional Updates from the Superintendent's Office

Cheryl Allen presented regarding regulation changes needed during Covid 19. The OPI is looking at what needs to be asked of the Feds for waivers regarding ESSA, funding from the legislature, and aggregate hours for students' waiver. New bills were discussed to support flexibility in licensure, and accreditation process, assurances and performance data. There is no performance data for the 2019-2020 school year. Propose use of 2018-2019 data. Accreditation element is coming up on its term for a complete review. Licensure, the 5-year review is up. Recommending Emergency operations to allow teachers to fill in an area they are not certified and repurpose teachers into high needs areas.

The Panel discussed the Covid-19, Flex Task Force. The task force was designed to look at what information school districts need when reopening. Details of Flex Task Force are on the website and are constantly being updated and are not static documents.

See here: <http://opi.mt.gov/Portals/182/COVID-19/Reopening%20MT%20Schools%20Guidance-Final.pdf?ver=2020-07-02-114033-897>

Jenifer shared a report that is a good summary of all the activities that the division took part in. See attached.

Superintendent has restricted travel until Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>. CSPD's are impacted. Any OPI activity be offered virtually until January.

The Panel discussed the challenges of providing Special Education Services during school closures.

Panel addressed the election of new officers.

Motion of nomination for Vice Chair

Heather Denny nominated - Chad Berg

2<sup>nd</sup> - Ron Ream

No other nominations

Unanimously approved in Zoom chat.

Chad Berg agreed to serve as Vice Chair for 2020-2021 school year.

Motion of nomination for Secretary

JP Williams nominated – Tina Blair

2<sup>nd</sup> – Dave Richards

No other nominations

Unanimously approved in Zoom chat.

Tina agreed to serve for 2020-2021 school year

Panel members serving their last term were recognized. Kyla Rock was the only 3-year member and will come back for a 2<sup>nd</sup> term. We will carry forward with an October meeting with an orientation for new panel members.

Panel members were asked for agenda items they would like to see in October.

Jenifer Cline stated that she appreciates the time of the panel and their willingness to have open discussions. JP Williams wanted to congratulate the group on excellence in providing sped services throughout the state and thank Heather Denny for her work as chair.

Jodi Bartz would like to revisit getting a student on the panel.

Motion to Adjourn: Darrell Hannum

2<sup>nd</sup>: Ron Ream

Adjourned

