



**STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY PANEL MEETING  
MINUTES  
Zoom Meeting**

**Thursday, October 15, 2020**

**8:30 JP Williams, Chair, called the meeting to order.**

Introductions were made:

**Members:** JP Williams, Millie Armstrong, Mandy Countryman, Jody Bartz, Kyla Rock, Dave Richards, Chad Berg, Wendy Studt, Tina Blair, Ron Ream, Mandy Countryman, Nicole Thuotte, Heather Denny, Shawn Sonsteng

**Staff:** Marla Swanby, Jenifer Cline, Anne Rainey, Ty House, Kelley Brown, Doug Doty, Danni McCarthy, Jessie Counts, Dayle Kimmet, Sara Bailey, Chris McCrea, Mandi Gibbs, Kristie Sears,

**Visitors:** Ally Seneczko, John Copenhaver, Angie Wathan, Rebecca Richards, Sharyl Allen

The panel reviewed the proposed agenda. Jenifer Cline made an amendment to the agenda – Tim Johnson will join us at 10 to add to Legislative Report.

**The panel voted to accept the agenda.**

**Proposed: Heather Denny**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Dave Richards**

**Approved (with amendment): Yes**

The panel reviewed and approved the minutes of July 9, 2020, meeting.

**The panel voted to accept the minutes.**

**Motion: Chad Berg**

**2<sup>nd</sup>: Jody Bartz**

**Approved: Yes**

Jennifer Cline introduced Jessie Counts, Senior Manager of Student Support Services. Jessie discussed changes and restructuring that is being done within the OPI to be able to provide better external support. Creating a peer support team to improve internal alignment so information flows freely through the agency. There is no new organizational chart available currently.

The Panel discussed the annual Special Education report created for the Board of Education that is available on the OPI website. It covers not only data but also the

activities that the OPI Special Education Unit has been involved with over the year. Jenifer brought up the report for the panel and discussed the benefits of this resource to families and educators.

The panel discussed the process of getting CARES Act money out to the districts in Montana.

Ally Seneczko with Disabilities Rights Montana (DRM) was introduced and shared information about DRM. A federal funded agency that provides information, referrals, legal information and legal representation. Service are mandated by congress to ensure equal rights for those with disabilities.

Rebecca Richards with Montana Empowerment Center (MEC) was introduced and shared about MEC. This organization is funded through IDEA and is a required federal program designed to support families through the Special Education process.

Sheila Lovato from the Special Education Continuing Education and Technical Assistance unit shared that OPI applied for and was awarded another 5-year SPDG grant for 3 million. The grant focuses on continuing MTSS frameworks and looking to improve sustainability for school districts. A lot of the monies will go to rural schools for professional development.

Jenifer congratulated Sheila Lovato and her team for their work on the application for the SPDG Grant.

The Panel reviewed changes to the Early Assistance Dispute Resolution page on the OPI website and reviewed the new dispute resolution chart tool.

Tim Johnson, Deputy Superintendent, discussed the Legislative report.

JP Williams made a call for public comment: No comments were made at this time.

### **10:45-11:00 BREAK**

JP Williams introduced John Copenhaver to review Advisory Panel responsibilities. John discussed his background as a Special Ed. educator in MT. John reviewed the TAESE OPI Advisory Panel Booklet. John discussed best practices and the Panel requirements.

Recommendations of the panel go to the OPI and are brought before the Superintendent.

John discussed the acronym book available but cautioned the overuse of acronyms. Important that the panel adhere to state guidelines while also maintaining its own climate and culture.

Jenifer stated that the Advisory Panel is looking for a student representative to add to the panel but have not found someone to fill this position. The OPI will continue to reach out.

Jody Bartz went on record requesting a student representative on the Panel and mentioned the Life Scholars' program. Jody recommended a Life Scholar that would perhaps be a good panel member. Discussed the merits and requirements of a student representative.

Does the Panel create a by-law if the format of the panel meetings continues to remain a virtual platform? John advised that would not be a bad idea. Although this format has created better participation and equitability. Jenifer shared that the OPI would look into if this was needed and get back to the panel at a future meeting.

John called out the great work Doug Doty has been doing with his program for Autism.

Jenifer Cline opened the meeting to feedback and suggestions.

Jody Bartz Appreciated the change to this panel format. Being cognizant of others time and OPI offering a different format.

Jenifer asked if there is anything that needs to be addressed with COVID?

The next meeting dates were proposed as 1/21 -1/22 to discuss the APR and other proposed agenda items.

Panel members encouraged to email Ty House for certificate renewal forms.

JP Williams provided a closing focusing on the incredible accomplishments of this panel.

**Motion to adjourn: Dave Richards**

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

**Approved: Yes**

**1:30            Adjourn**