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*The Montana Office of Public Instruction is pleased to offer a new approach to professional learning. The Mission of the is to deliver digestible and relevant professional learning that honors educators' capacity in an increasingly busy world.*

*We believe that our state's educators empower minds, elevate futures, and inspire self-discovery - and we walk beside them.*

*We invite you to join us in this innovative approach to professional development, tailored to address the unique challenges faced by educators in Montana's ever-changing educational landscape.*

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**This guidebook has been developed by the hosts of this podcast to assist educators within our state in leveraging these episodes for their professional growth and development. This collaborative resource aims to provide valuable insights for both educators and administrators seeking to work alongside their colleagues. It includes recommendations for transforming podcast episodes into effective professional development opportunities, guidance on issuing professional development units, and suggestions for related events. We trust that this guide will support educators in earning and issuing professional development units, clearly outlining the steps needed to achieve this.**

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Note: The Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) define legal parameters for professional development of educators in the following items:

[10.55.714](#)   [10.57.215](#)   [10.57.216](#)

# The Last Best Learning Podcast:

## Collaborative Listener Guide



*We believe that effective professional development is achieved through the exchanging of ideas in a collaborative setting. The following guide provides suggestions for educators on how they can integrate the Last Best Learning Podcast into their professional learning communities in effective and engaging ways.*

### Recommendations for Facilitators

We encourage you to utilize these episodes along with the accompanying discussion questions ([page 6](#)) as an opportunity for school-wide professional learning for your staff or colleagues.

At a minimum, these episodes, when combined with a discussion period, or engagement activities, could be eligible for a professional development unit (PDU) certificate. Please note that certificates cannot be issued for fractional hours, so participation in a single episode alone does not qualify for a 1 PDU certificate. However, there are multiple formats in which sessions can be conducted to qualify for PDUs, with examples provided on [page 5](#).

If you are a registered provider of professional development within your school, you are authorized to issue PDU certificates to educators who complete the session in accordance with your standards, district policies, and Montana's Administrative Rules (items [10.55.714](#), [10.57.215](#), and [10.57.216](#)).

For those who are not registered providers but wish to organize a professional development activity with colleagues, please coordinate with school administrators to ensure their support in planning the event and in issuing PDU certificates to attending colleagues. Administrators who are not yet registered as providers can do so by [filling out this form](#).

We encourage the development of teacher-leaders. If you'd like to experiment with hosting a professional development event with these materials, but aren't sure where to start, consider reaching out to your administrator, a mentor-teacher in your building, a professor from your undergraduate experience, or the Office of Public Instruction [Content Specialists](#) for support. We would be happy to support new ways this model can be utilized to promote professional learning in our state.

Please consider having each participant complete our [Qualtrics Survey](#). Collecting this data is essential to understanding the efficacy of this model. Consider also, collecting feedback from participants about your own efficacy as a facilitator. This information can help develop your professional learning capabilities and offer new opportunities for you to grow as an educator-leader.



# The Last Best Learning Podcast:

## Collaborative Listener Guide and F.A.Q

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### Recommendations for Facilitators (continued)

#### MAXIMUM NUMBER OF PDUS FOR THIS MODEL.

For professional development activities that primarily involve listening to the Last Best Learning podcasts and completing a survey ([Qualtrics](#) or facilitator-designed), a maximum allocation of three (3) Professional Development Units (PDUs). This is designed to prevent our experimental model from overshadowing the time educators dedicate to professional learning, ensuring they still have opportunities to engage in dynamic face-to-face experiences such as district initiatives, the OPI Summer Institute, MFPE, or MCEL educator conferences.

Conversely, for activities requiring significant in-person participation, we do not impose a specific cap. Instead, we leave it to the discretion of the district administrator or facilitator to establish the appropriate PDU allocation, taking into account the unique aspects of their events. It is important to emphasize that [ARM 10.55.714](#) outlines the legal requirements for PIR events within districts.

### Q&A:

#### HOW SHOULD UNITS BE COUNTED?

Assuming that each episode is approximately twenty (20) minutes in length, facilitators will need to add forty (40) minutes of engagement activity to in order to issue one (1) PDU. Alternatively, facilitators could combine up to two (2) episodes with reflection or activities spanning an additional twenty (20) minutes to issue one (1) PDU. Examples of these formats are provided on [page 5](#) of this document.

Listening to one hour of episodes cannot result in one (1) PDU. This model will not meet the requirements and guidelines for professional learning as stipulated in the Administrative Rules of Montana.

#### WHO CAN BE A FACILITATOR?

Anyone is eligible to serve as a facilitator. While an administrator should be involved in the planning process, we encourage all educators to share these resources with their colleagues. Administrators may incorporate them into their monthly staff meetings, while educators may choose to integrate them into their Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).





## Q&A:

### WHO CAN ISSUE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT UNITS?

Only approved providers can issue professional development units (PDUs), but most administrators are registered providers through their district or school. If you are not sure if your administrator is a provider, search our [provider directory](#). If you are an administrator and you'd like to become a provider for your school, you can fill out this [registration form](#)!

### WHY CAN'T I ISSUE A CERTIFICATE FOR EACH PODCAST MY COLLEAGUES LISTEN TO?

The [guidelines and standards for professional learning](#) prohibit the issuing of fractional units, as well as, the Administrative Rules of Montana rules as to what constitutes professional development

### CAN INCRIMENTAL UNITS EARNED IN ONE YEAR CARRY OVER TO THE NEXT?

Unfortunately, no. Simply put - events spanning a single fiscal year conflict with our interpretation of the collective mandates and can, in some cases, invalidate an event for license renewal.

### HOW ARE TOPICS FOR FUTURE EPISODES SELECTED?

We believe that this model will be the most successful if we address the needs Montana's educators are facing in the field. We want to listen to responses from the field anonymously; addressing the topics they self-identify as needing additional support or understanding. For that reason, our episode topics come from surveys collected by OPI staff and submitted by administrators through accreditation, as well as those requests that come directly from schools and educators. If you'd like to submit a request for a topic, ask a question, or you'd like to give us feedback, please fill out the [Qualtrics Survey](#).

### WHO DO I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?

If you have questions, please contact our content specialists:

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# Example Facilitated Activities:

PD Plan Overview	Practical Example
<p>20 minutes: Group podcast listening</p> <p>2 minutes: The facilitator sets up the think-pair-share activity.</p> <p>8 minutes: Self-reflection (think)</p> <p>10 minutes: Small group discussion (pair)</p> <p>10 minutes: All-group discussion (share)</p> <p>10 minutes: Call to action (how to use this information)</p> <p>Total Time: 1 Hour = 1 PDU</p>	<p>Addison is a school administrator who wants to offer a monthly professional learning opportunity while also fostering camaraderie among her staff. She decides to create a 'podcast club' as a professional learning community (PLC). Each time the group meets, they listen to the latest podcast episode and then spend some time journaling their responses to the thought-provoking questions posed by the hosts. Addison asks her educators to take time to answer the guiding questions from <a href="#">page 6</a> in small groups, and she concludes the session with a discussion involving the entire group. Before leaving, Addison asks her staff how the activities they just completed align with their district action plan and encourages them to revisit their professional goals to determine if they can be supported by what they learned.</p>
<p>1 hour: 3-episode independent study and self reflection</p> <p>15 minutes: Thought recording (Gallery walk)</p> <p>20 minutes: Group discussion about key takeaways.</p> <p>5 minutes: Sharing of related research or resources and activity set up.</p> <p>10 minutes: Reviewing resources (Jig-saw activity)</p> <p>10 minutes: Resource explanation (Jig-saw activity)</p> <p>Total Time: 2 Hours = 2 PDUs</p>	<p>Sam is a 5th-grade teacher. He and the other elementary teachers at his school have a professional learning community (PLC) that meets every Wednesday. Les has been listening to podcast episodes for a while now and has noticed that there are three episodes related to teacher mental health. He thinks this would be a great topic for one of next month's meetings. After clearing it with his administrator, he organizes a PLC meeting agenda and shares it along with links to the relevant podcasts and a quick self-reflection question: "How do you ensure that you're giving your students the best of yourself instead of what's left of you? In other words, how do you take care of your mental health?" The teachers listen to the three episodes independently in the month leading up to the meeting. At the start of the PLC, Les asks his colleagues to engage in a gallery walk activity. During this time, they walk around and respond to each question Les has posted around his classroom. They then have a group discussion about the responses and key takeaways from the episodes. Les also hands out various resources and research related to mental health for educators and educator self-care. Each person reviews their assigned resource for ten minutes before sharing with the group, concluding the PLC.</p>
<p>20 minutes: Independent listening</p> <p>10 minutes: Response to reflection sheet repeat 2-6 times.</p> <p>Total Time: 1 - 3 Hours = 1 - 3 PDUs</p>	<p>Darrious is a principal at a school in Montana. He appreciates the concept of ongoing professional learning but acknowledges that his staff feels overwhelmed by the various activities occurring in the building and the high turnover rates. He presents an option to his teachers: he will provide up to three Professional Development Units (PDUs) to staff members who listen to the podcast episodes and complete a reflection form for each episode they listen to. Given that each episode lasts about 20 minutes and the reflection form takes approximately 10 minutes to fill out, he explains that teachers must listen to a minimum of two episodes to earn one PDU.</p>

# The Last Best Learning Podcast:

## Reflection Guidance



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Consider asking the following questions to help participants in your sessions, or educators in your school get the most out of your sessions. These questions could be used to create a reflection form submitted to an administrator, or implemented within a facilitated session.

1. What were the most compelling insights from the podcast episode?
2. How did the content of the podcast resonate with your current teaching practice or educational philosophy? Provide specific examples from your experience that align with or challenge the ideas presented.
3. What were the central themes or takeaways from the podcast episode?
4. How do you understand these concepts in the context of your educational setting?
5. What specific actions do you plan to take based on the insights gained from the podcast?
6. Outline a practical plan for incorporating at least one new idea or strategy into your classroom practice.
7. What potential challenges might you face when implementing the ideas discussed in the podcast?
8. How can you address these challenges to ensure successful integration into your practice?
9. How might the strategies or ideas from the podcast impact your students' learning experiences?
10. Reflect on a recent lesson or unit where the ideas from the podcast could have been applied. What would you have done differently, and what impact might these changes have had on student learning?
11. How do the ideas presented in the podcast align with your long-term professional goals?
12. What steps can you take to ensure that these ideas contribute to your ongoing development as an educator?
13. How do you plan to share the insights and strategies from the podcast with your colleagues?
14. What collaborative opportunities could arise from discussing these ideas with your professional learning community?

