



STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY PANEL MEETING MINUTES
DECEMBER 12, 2025
Zoom Meeting

8:00 – 8:45 Call meeting to order

8:30 Chair Deva McNiven called the meeting to order and led introductions.

Members Present: Deva McNiven, Theresa Baldry, Rebekah Serrine, Christina Petersen, Cindy Galbavy, Lucy Galarus, Jennifer Schoffer Closson, Heidi Gibson, Josh Kendrick, Natalie Bahnmler, Kyla Minor, Christa Gabriel, Bridget Coleman

Members Not Present: Jeremy Shields

Staff Present: Ty House, Patrick Cates, Victoria Petersen, Craig Baringer, Kristi Sears, John Gorton, Danni McCarthy, Rachel Wilkinson, Tammy Lysons, Katie Mattingly

Public Present: None

Approve the Proposed Agenda (Action Item)

Proposed: Jennifer Schoffer Closson

2nd: Heidi Gibson

Approved: Yes

Review/Approve Minutes of September Meeting (Action Item)

Proposed: Theresa Baldry

2nd: Christina Petersen

Approved: Yes

Danni McCarthy discussed the Panel Bi-laws. 51% of the Panel must be an individual with a disability or Parents of CWD.

- Bylaws SPECIAL RULE (p. 2 Article II Section A) – A majority of the members of the panel shall be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities (aged birth through 26). 34 CFR 300.168(b)

Private School & Public Charter Schools' role on the Panel is currently vacant. Dwight Nelson is expected to fill this role.

Announcements:

- Panel discussed the college successes of a former Panel member with disabilities.
- Lucy Galarus discussed ongoing work with the University of MT to make the campus more inclusive.
- March 24th and 25th the Inclusive Health Summit is being held at UM.
- The Blue Envelope is a program for autistic or disabled people. When someone with a disability gets a driver's license, they put all important information in the blue envelope so if pulled over they have instructions on what to do. OPI offered support for the Blue Envelope program.
- Annette Gorton was asked to play a larger role with the Panel as she brings valuable perspectives.

8:53 There was a call for public comment

Kristi Sears and Rachel Wilkinson of OPI went through an explanation of the SPP/APR. Specifically Indicators 3, 4, 9, 10 (Methodology)

These reports and the data ensure we are properly aligned with IDEA rules.

The MAST assessment was discussed. Only grades 4-8 take MAST assessment

- There are Alternate Assessments for approximately 1% of students. There are braille versions available.

The Panel were asked for input on Indicator 4.

A copy of the Power Point presentation will be made available to the Panel.

10:07-10:20 Break

SPP/APR Discussions continued.

Katie Mattingly with OPI presented work being done through the Montana Autism Education Project (MAEP). A copy of the Power Point will be made available to the Panel.

Jennifer Schoffer Closson discussed planned school district trainings.

OPI Updates:

- Para Pathways Program
- New OPI Staff
- New Associate Director Position

Craig Baringer stated that the Superintendents Agenda will be released in the next couple of weeks.

The Panel discussed the April meeting agenda.

11:30 – 12:00 Lunch

Nick Staffileno from Dawson Community College discussed Level 3 of the Para Pathways program. Credits for prior learning and apprenticeships were discussed.

Updates from the OPI Special Education Director were presented to the Panel. Underlined items are live links.

- The Differentiated Monitoring System Final Letter was discussed. A copy of the letter was posted to the OPI website and was given to the Panel.
 - What is it?
 - What it means for MT
- Graduation OPI/Disability Rights MT
 - Lawsuit
 - Guidance
- Parentally Placed Private School Student
 - Part Time Enrollment
 - Guidance
- Occupational & Physical Therapy
 - Guidance

2:00 – 3:00 Work Group Breakouts

Panel reconvened and reviewed breakout work.

Adjourn Meeting(Action Item)

Proposed:

2nd: Christina Petersen

Approved: Yes

3:30 Adjourn