



The OPI Monthly Summary

FEBRUARY 2021

Putting Montana Students First **A+**



Superintendent's Message

We are 39 school days into 2021 with the hopes of a New Year to bring new solutions to our students. We do have a strong network of Montanans able and willing to help one another. This includes my staff at the O.P.I., where we are committed to excellent service to every school district as we all put **Montana Students First**.

My State of Education [speech](#), on September 11, gave the Legislators homework: to seek solutions for families, students, and schools. They have listened, like H.B. 15 BASE Aid Funding was signed by the Governor on February 25. They continue to work on Special Education allowable cost payments to embed in the BASE aid funding for future bienniums. Significant work has been done with more to do!



2019-2020 E.S.S.A. Report Card – scheduled for release March 9. In March 2020, the U.S. Department of Education waived critical requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (E.S.S.A.) due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. [Montana's E.S.S.A. report cards for 2019-2020](#), therefore, do not contain the following information:

- Statewide student assessment performance, academic growth, English Learning progress, attendance, or college and career readiness information
- Annual 2019-2020 accountability determinations and identification of school for support and improvement

The O.P.I. will be hosting a webinar on March 11 from 3:00 to 4:00 to dig in further and allow stakeholders an opportunity to ask questions. Here is a link to the webinar: <https://mt.gov.zoom.us/j/98061786948>

Federal Assessment waivers – a letter was received from the U.S.D.E. emphasizing the importance of flexibilities in testing students, the requirements for testing waivers, and the need to understand opportunities to learn in our school communities.

Legislative Transmittal starts on Wednesday, March 3. The Transmittal period officially marks the halfway point in the 2021 Legislative session. H.B. H.B.



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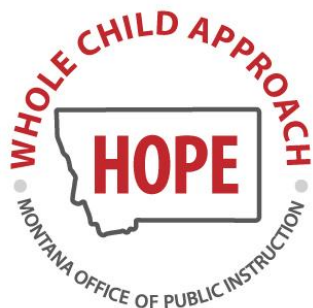
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Tribal Relations and Resiliency

Tribal Consultation scheduling and planning are on-going with each Tribal Nation. We recently met with the Chippewa Cree Tribal Council and the Crow/Apsaalooke Executive Board. There were fantastic discussions that will lead to better relationships and improved support.

With our Resiliency team in the Systems of Care, we recently completed and submitted a grant proposal to continue the focused support we offer students in our American Indian communities. We anticipate a response for the grant during the summer of 2021. These grants not only provide wellness support but also look at funding streams to see where they can improve and share resources and efforts for the benefit of our students.

For more information, contact Donnie Wetzel, Jr. at dwetzel2@mt.gov, 406-465-5307.

Student and Educator Safety and Wellness During Online Learning

The Coordinated School Health (C.S.H.) unit is pleased to present a new guidance document for promoting school safety and wellness. [*Strategies for Promoting Educator and Student Safety and Wellness During Online Learning*](#) provides schools with tips and resources for keeping both students and educators safe even when they are learning outside of the regular classroom setting. The C.S.H. unit worked with two separate advisory committees, comprised of state-level school stakeholder groups, to develop the guidance. The guidance is framed within the multi-tiered system of support (M.T.S.S.) model. It offers strategies at each tier level so schools can meet the varying safety and wellness needs of their educators and students. For more information, contact [Michele Henson](#) or [Tammy Lysons](#).

Keeping Students Safe: Emergency Operations Planning for Schools

Families and communities expect schools to keep their children safe from a range of emergency events, like crime, natural disasters, and accidents. Emergencies can happen at any time, and planning for different emergencies can be challenging for schools.

[Montana law](#) requires every Montana district or school to develop and implement an Emergency Operations Plan (E.O.P.). E.O.P.s should be comprehensive and describe the actions that students, teachers, and school staff should take before, during, and after an emergency. Everyone should have a common understanding of what will be expected of them. Any reduction of time between the beginning and end of an incident can save lives.

Start creating or updating your school E.O.P. today! The Office of Public Instruction (O.P.I.) offers an [Emergency Operations Planning course](#) on the Teacher Learning Hub and provides many resources on the O.P.I. [Emergency Planning and Safety website](#).

O.P.I. has also partnered with the [Salish Kootenai College Emergency Services Academy](#) to support schools in their efforts to understand, manage, and develop emergency operations plans unique to their schools and communities. This technical assistance could include topics relating to COVID-19 processes outlined in the [O.P.I.'s Reopening Guidance](#). This resource is provided to you at no cost to the school or school district.

If you are interested in receiving technical assistance with your emergency operational planning, please reach out to [Michele Henson](#), School Safety Program Manager at O.P.I.



O.P.I. Education Virtual Job Fair

Saturday, April 17, 2021. 9:30 am - 1:00 pm for candidates

Districts will have access beginning at 9:00 am

Registration for districts opens on March 5, 2021. The link to register will be available on the licensing page of the O.P.I. website. District Registration to participate closes on March 23, at 7:00 pm M.S.T. The cost for district participation is \$40 per district and \$10 for each

additional person. When districts register, their booth space will be open for their set-up purposes beginning March 29 through April 12.

Employers are provided with booth space in the conference vendor space. Think of this as a big conference area where districts are located. Each district can provide links to their materials, set up individual appointments with candidates, and more. Job seekers will enter that space and be able to interact with districts of choice. Districts will have pre-access to resumes of candidates that are interested in visiting with them about potential employment.

The O.P.I. and partners are working to enhance recruitment efforts for Montana School Districts.

Welcoming our New Traffic Education Director, Dwight Nelson

We are pleased to announce that Dwight Nelson has accepted the role of Traffic Education Director. He holds an administrative Montana K-12 Principal endorsement, an M.Ed. in Leadership in Teaching and Learning, and a Bachelor of Education. Dwight has taught and coached K-12 students throughout his education career in various capacities, was a college professor, and has administrative experience. Dwight remembers his dad teaching traffic education while growing up in Nebraska, which, along with a lifelong dedication to education, influenced his interest in joining the Traffic Education team at the O.P.I. Join us in welcoming Dwight to the Traffic Education community!

Dwight can be contacted at Dwight.Nelson@mt.gov

Educator Licensure

New Document Upload Feature

The Montana O.P.I. has installed a new Upload feature to our Montana Educator Information System (M.S.E.I.S.). This feature applies to new applications and existing applications. Watch a brief instructional video at this link: [M.S.E.I.S. Upload Feature](#)

Educators are now required to upload supplemental documents to their online application. This eliminates the need for applicants to either U.S. mail or email any supplemental documents into the O.P.I. to complete a license application. All licensure applications require one or more supplemental documents to complete the application.

There are 3 Applications that cannot yet be submitted online through M.S.E.I.S.:

- Adding an Endorsement to your current license
- Reinstatement of a Lapsed License
- Upgrading (e.g., Class 2 to Class 1 or Class 5 Provisional to a full license)

For all three instances, applicants will need to continue to mail the application and supplemental documents to the Office of Public Instruction.

For more information, contact Virginia Diaz at virginia.diaz@mt.gov, 406-444-3150



Montana Autism Education Project Virtual Trainings

The O.P.I. Montana Autism Education Project is offering the following virtual training this spring:

[Social Thinking Training \(virtual\)](#)

The O.P.I. Montana Autism Education Project will be offering scholarships for Montana public school educators to attend the following training from Social Thinking. The sessions are 3.5 hours long, and attendees will have access to recording the training for 30 days after the training date.

March 4 - Me in the Social World—It All Starts with Social Self-Awareness

March 5 - Using Social Competencies to Navigate in the Social World

April 16 - The Social World: Practical Vocabulary and Concepts for Teaching How It Works

April 17 - Strategies and Concepts for How to Navigate to Regulate in the Social World

May 3 - Assessing Social Competencies with Practical Assessment Tools and Tasks

May 4 - Exploring Socially Based Executive Functions & Tips for Assessing Different Developmental Ages

Four O.P.I. renewal units will be provided for each training.

You can find more information and [register here](#).

[PECS Trainings \(virtual\) - Spring 2021](#)

The O.P.I. Montana Autism Education Project is offering the following full-day workshops from PECS this spring:

March 10 - Teaching Critical Communication Skills

March 24 - Transitioning from PECS to Speech-Generating Devices

April 7 - Guide to Managing Challenging Behaviors

April 28 - Transitioning from PECS to Speech-Generating Devices

You can request PECS training [here](#).

[PECS Level 2 Trainings \(virtual\)](#)

The O.P.I. Montana Autism Education Project is offering scholarships to attend the following PECS Level 2 trainings. You must have previously participated at a PECS Level 1 training to participate in a Level 2 training. We are not offering additional PECS 1 trainings this spring.

March 18-19 - [PECS Level 2](#)

April 19-20 - [PECS Level 2](#)

You can [request a scholarship](#) to a PECS Level 2 training here.

[ADOS -2 Initial Training \(virtual\) March 18-19, 2021](#)

The Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule-Second Edition (ADOS-2) is a standardized assessment tool that helps providers diagnose autism spectrum disorders (A.S.D.) in children and adults. The ADOS involves a semi-structured play or interview session determined by the age and communication level of the individual. ([Read more here](#).)

You can [register for the training here](#). Limited to 50 participants. O.P.I. renewal units will be available.

[High School Teachers - O.P.I. Training for Linking Assessment and Instruction for Independence \(virtual\)](#)

This one-day workshop from STAR Autism Support provides participants with information on how to implement evidence-based practices for secondary students using the Links Curriculum. Participants will learn to use a process for assessing and teaching functional routines. Extensive

information will be given on selecting and individualizing practices, and teaching specific skills to support success during routines.

The Links Curriculum includes extensive data collection systems, and participants will learn to collect and use data for instructional decision making, tracking student progress and writing I.E.P. Goals. Video examples and video practice activities will be incorporated into the workshop. An online computerized system will be demonstrated with hands-on practice by the participants. Attendees will receive one year of access to the LINKS online curriculum.

The trainings are from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm with a one-hour lunch break. Attendees will receive one year of access to the [LINKS online curriculum](#).

The training dates are:

February 19

March 18

April 14

You can [register for the training here](#).

If you have questions, please contact Doug Doty at ddoty@mt.gov

Y.R.B.S. Report

A new comparison report graphing data from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Y.R.B.S.) for the nine MASS regions is available on the [Y.R.B.S. website](#). The [Montana Regional Data Graphs](#) display the point of interest for each question asked on the Y.R.B.S. under the topics of unintentional injuries and violence, tobacco use, alcohol and other drug use, sexual behaviors, nutrition and dietary behaviors, and physical activity. The biennial 2021 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey (Y.R.B.S.) is scheduled to be administered in schools February 22-26. School-specific results should be available in early May. As always, check out your **School-Specific Results** which are always available for accessing from the Y.R.B.S. website. For more on the Y.R.B.S. contact Susan Court at scourt@mt.gov, 406-444-3178.

Montana DRIVE Workshop Registration is Open

Come to Lewistown this summer for a fun and active behind-the-wheel workshop that improves driver skill and confidence. All drivers are welcome! Register by March 5 for an early registration discount of \$10.00. Operated by the O.P.I. since 1979, our professional driving instructors have trained more than 16,000 drivers in off-road recovery, skid control, and evasive maneuvers. Montana DRIVE summer workshops include two hours of classroom instruction and six hours driving vehicles on a safe, closed track adjacent to the Lewistown Airport. The one-day workshop is limited to 12 drivers per day. Teachers can earn up to 9 renewal units or one college credit when they stay an extra day to student teach. School bus drivers can earn

training hours toward their professional development requirements. The one-day workshops begin June 7 and end August 12. Teen Week is July 19-23, and registration for the one-day teen workshops opens on March 29. Visit [Montana DRIVE](#) for registration details and to view the 2021 workshop calendar.

E.S.S.A.

Changes to the E.S.S.A. Accountability System through an Addendum to the 2019-2020 Waivers and a limited Waiver for Targeted Support and Improvement Identification

On January 28, 2021, the O.P.I. submitted an Addendum and T.S.I. waiver to the U.S. Department of Education and is awaiting a response. Prior to submitting this COVID-19 State Plan Addendum template to the Department, the Montana O.P.I. consulted with the Governor, afforded a reasonable opportunity for public comment, and considered such comments consistent with the consolidated assurances under E.S.E.A. section 8304.

The COVID-19 Addendum is important as it seeks to provide school districts with an extension of the COVID-19 Accountability waivers and relief from the impact of COVID-19 on the accountability system for the 2020-2021 school year. Montana is proposing to shift the identification process forward one year to 2022-2023.

Because the waiver addendum does not apply to the annual requirement to identify Targeted Support and Improvement (T.S.I.) schools, which are schools with one or more consistently underperforming subgroups for three consecutive years, Montana is also submitted a specific T.S.I. waiver. Montana will continue to advocate for school communities and students. These proposed changes do not preclude Montana from submitting amendments or additional waivers to gain greater flexibility in the future.

For more information, contact julie.murgel@mt.gov, 406-444-3174

New GEMS Website

The O.P.I. recently relaunched its statewide longitudinal data system, called GEMS, in late January. The website address remains the same (<https://gems.opi.mt.gov/>) as the old one but features a "cleaner" and easier to use navigate interface. The O.P.I. Data & Technology teams also modernized the underlying technology architecture of the system making it much more robust and capable of handling large and complex data sets. The teams have also been working to streamline O.P.I. policies and procedures around data collection, quality assurance and control and publishing. These efforts will enable the O.P.I. to publish and make available more data than before and ensure that it is accurate and timely. The original GEMS was launched in 2013 and improvements have been funded by grants from the U.S. Department of Education.

For more information, please contact Michael Sweeney at 444-4411 or msweeney@mt.gov.

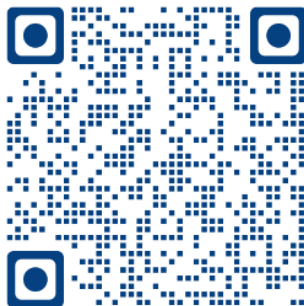
Cybersecurity Contact

In cooperation with the School Administrators of Montana's Montana Educational Technologist Association (META), the O.P.I. is asking districts to designate a Cybersecurity Contact in the [O.P.I.'s Contact System](#). In response to recent cyberattacks and threats affecting the data and IT systems of Montana school districts, META has requested a way for the cybersecurity experts in all districts to be quickly contacted and communicated with relevant information about cybersecurity threats and risks. Many cybersecurity incidents are time-sensitive and conducted by the "bad actors" as coordinated efforts, and often public information about them should not be disseminated until districts have been able to react or respond. Individuals identified as a district's cybersecurity contact will be able to receive such information in order to make sure they have awareness of critical events and can react and respond to best protect their district's systems and data. The O.P.I., META, the Montana Department of Administration and other partners are continuing to explore ways to further enhance the cybersecurity preparedness and response capabilities of Montana school districts. Having the Cybersecurity Contacts identified and a means to quickly and securely communicate with them is a first step towards doing that. Please note that designating a Cybersecurity Contact is OPTIONAL and NOT REQUIRED; however we strongly encourage your district to designate a contact. Cybersecurity Contacts will NOT be publicly published by the O.P.I.

For more information, please contact Michael Sweeney at 444-4411 or msweeney@mt.gov.



Build Montana



Adam Gilbertson explains the Build Montana program, a high school internship program to explore career opportunities in the construction industry.

Find the February CTAE Newsletter [here](#)

"The Prospects" Young Entrepreneur Competition

Thank you to all the outstanding educators and students for participating in our inaugural year of The Prospects business pitch competition that is building Entrepreneurship in our Montana Schools.

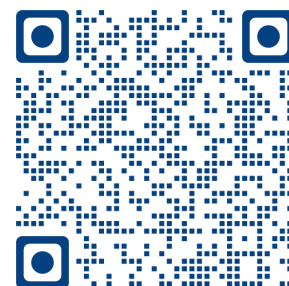
This year the total prize purse is **\$52,500** to reward the best entrepreneurial ideas from across the state. Competing for these prizes are **93 student submissions** from rural and urban Montana!

On behalf of all the parents out here, who are also business leaders, we recognize the tireless effort you give for our future. Working together virtually and the hundreds of text messages to promote this, in-and-out of your classrooms, has given me an insider appreciation for the uncertainty that the CV19 pandemic is wreaking on you, the students and our communities.

Judging & Awards

Submissions are currently being reviewed by more than **70 judges** from urban & rural Montana, Seattle, Denver and one judge with Montana roots currently in Moscow, Russia!

Winners will be announced on **Friday, March 12** at 1:00 pm (via Zoom).



UPDATES AND REMINDERS

Targeted Support and Improvement

If you are a recipient of the T.S.I. competitive grant, be sure monthly drawdowns are happening and if you need to make an amendment, you can do so at any time in order to meet the needs of your students.

For more information, contact Crystal Andrews crystal.andrews@mt.gov, 406-444-6325

Comprehensive Support and Improvement

The Title I School Support Unit continues to reach out and work with schools in comprehensive status. The work has ranged from attending district meetings to offering coaching opportunities for both administrators and teachers. As a reminder to our C.S.I. school leaders, be sure monthly drawdowns are happening consistently and if you need to make an amendment, you can do so at any time in order to meet the needs of your students.

For more information, contact Carrie.Kouba@mt.gov, 406-444-0864

Federal Programs

Spring Private School Participation Notifications

The Montana Office of Public Instruction will be sending out the annual spring private, nonpublic school participation notifications in early March. Districts that receive Title I, II, III, IV, Special Education, and C.T.E. funds must notify all private, nonpublic schools of their right to participate in these programs. The notifications to the districts will come by email, and the related documents can be downloaded from the O.P.I. private school web app. Please note that the large packet that has previously been mailed to districts is no longer sent out.

For more information, contact Sheri Harlow, at sharlow@mt.gov, or 406-444-5660

Indian Education for All

The Montana Office of Public Instruction's Indian Education for All Unit is excited to announce our virtual **I.E.F.A. Best Practices Virtual Conference on May 15 and 16**. Each day will offer a keynote address from a high-profile Indigenous leader, followed by a 60- to 70-minute interactive presentation by an I.E.F.A. expert(s) and selected from a shortlist of offerings. The conference will focus on the Essential Understandings, tribal resiliency, and honoring Montana's first peoples' accomplishments and perspectives. **Further details and registration information will be provided soon.**

For more information, please contact Joan Franke at 444-3694 or jfranke@mt.gov

Traffic Education Program Applications Due for Summer Courses

TE01 District Applications must be approved before courses begin. Use the [Traffic Education Data & Reporting System \(T.E.D.R.S.\)](#) to submit the application. Summer 2021 courses ending before June 30, 2021, are entered in the 2021 school year. Courses ending on or after July 1, 2021, are entered in the 2022 school year. Visit <http://opi.mt.gov/DriverEd> for traffic education program requirements, forms and reports, and traffic education resources for schools and families.

For more information, email [Patti Borneman](#) or call 406- 444-4432.

Prepare in March for 2021-22 Community Eligibility Provision Snapshot on April 1

Please use the Direct Certification Application (D.C.A.) to conduct matching for all eligible students before the April 1 snapshot is taken for 2021-22 school year C.E.P. Direct certification eligibility sources include SNAP, T.A.N.F., F.D.P.I.R., Foster Care, Homeless and Migrant data. While the D.C.A. system automates most of the matching, you can check to ensure that all eligible students are identified as directly certified in the D.C.A. system.

For more information, contact [Alie Wolf](#) at 406-444-4413 or visit the [School Nutrition Programs Meal Eligibility website](#).

Spending Reminder for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Schools

Operating extra programs has been tough this year, but O.P.I. School Nutrition Programs wants you to take advantage of as many F.F.V.P. dollars as possible! Please try to spend down your Quarter 2-4 F.F.V.P. allocation if you have not done so already (deadline June 30, 2021).

If you are unsure whether your elementary school qualified this year, [click here](#) for the list of S.Y.SY 2020-21 eligible F.F.V.P. sites and their allocations.

Please contact [Caroline Olson](#) at 406-437-4688 if you have questions.

Off Site Technical Assistance Visits

Due to the circumstances surrounding COVID-19, your [regional O.P.I. School Nutrition Programs Specialist](#) will be reaching out to applicable program staff (food service director, claim contact, determining official, and/or administrator) to conduct an offsite Technical Assistance (T.A.TA) visit between January 2021 and the end of the school year. Administrative Reviews originally scheduled for S.Y.SY 20-21 will instead take place in S.Y.SY 21-22.

The purpose of the T.A. visit is to answer any questions about your meal program(s) and available waivers and to provide targeted training and support to assist you in meeting school nutrition program requirements.

We hope this process will be helpful and supportive of your efforts to ensure your students have access to healthy meals. You do not need to do anything to prepare for this visit—your [regional O.P.I. School Nutrition Program Specialist](#) will be reaching out to provide any required assistance at a time that works best for your team.

We appreciate your cooperation and dedication to feeding students through the U.S.D.A. Child Nutrition Programs. We look forward to working with you!

[School Nutrition F.A.Q.s](#)

For more information, contact [Camille Biazzo](#), School Nutrition Programs Assistant Director at 406-444- 4415.

March

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3 Transmittal	4 *Me in The Social World	5 *Using Social Competencies to Navigate in the Social World DRIVE Workshop Registration Opens	6
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21	22	23	24 *Transitioning from PECS to Speech-Generating Devices	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

April

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7 *Guide to Managing Challenging Behaviors	8	9	10
11	12	13	14 LEARN Virtual Training	15	16 *The Social World: Practical Vocabulary	17 *Strategy and Concepts for How to Navigate the Social World
18	19 PECS Level 2 Training	20 PECS Level 2 Training	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

All Montana Autism Education Project Virtual Trainings are marked with a *

All PECS Virtual Trainings are marked with a *

May

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
2	3 *Assessing Social Competencies	4 *Exploring Socially BAsed Executive Functions	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15 IEFA BEST PRACTICES VIRTUAL CONFERENCE
16 IEFA BEST PRACTICES VIRTUAL CONFERENCE	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

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All PECS Level 1 Virtual Trainings are marked with a *

