



### **Student Support Services Division Activities:**

**Special Education Advisory Panel:** Required by IDEA. Panel makeup is also in regulation. We include two extra members, a student with a disability and a representative from Disability Rights Montana. Dick Trerise is the lead on this activity, with support provided by Marlene Wallis.

**Comprehensive System of Personnel Development:** This is a project under IDEA and is in administrative rule. We are required to ensure that schools have qualified personnel and this is one of the activities that supports that goal. Jen Cline is the lead on this activity.

- **State Council:** In rule, the state council is made up of stakeholders from across the state and representing various roles in education.
- **Regional Councils:** 5 regions. The ARM requires that the system have regional representation. This has been accomplished by having a council in each region and a coordinator that is paid a part-time salary to manage the activities of the region.
- We have contracted with the center for Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE) to conduct a study of the CSPD system and to make recommendations regarding how to move forward with that system in a more efficient and effective manner.

**Montana Behavior Initiative/Multi-Tiered System of Supports:** Under the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) called Project REAL 2.0, we are in the process of bringing together our MBI (Behavior) and RTI (Academic) training systems into one unified Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS). The MTSS work has been supported by the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), which is entering into the last year of the grant. MBI has been supported through the IDEA Part B dollars and we are striving to have a MTSS program that can be sustained through that funding stream after the grant ends. Jen Cline is the lead on this project. Jen has been working with Deb Hunsaker and her group to align their work with the work that we have been doing for many years.

- **Training for school teams:** There is a two-year process for providing training to school teams in implementing the multi-tiered framework in their school. Some districts take longer than two years to complete the training. This model provides face-to-face training and a consultant to work with the school team to help them implement the framework with fidelity.
- **Youth Days:** Regional youth engagement activities that bring teams of students together to learn about how to be engaged in their school and community. Teams develop a plan for community services that is implemented at home.
- **High School Forum:** Provides an overview of the MTSS process and training specific to the challenges of implementing a MTSS framework in a high school setting.
- **Summer Institute:** Annual conference in Bozeman that provides over 300 sessions in several training strands. This conference has attracted over 1300 participants for the last several years. This conference is very highly rated by participants. We contract with MSU

Conference Services for this activity. The conference is designed by a team of stakeholders led by Marcy Otten.

**Montana Autism Education Project:** this activity is led by Doug Doty, our office Autism specialist.

- **Consultation:** The OPI has available several consultants who have training specific to educational and behavioral strategies that have proven effective with children with autism. These consultants are available to go to a school, at the school's request, to observe and provide recommendations and training for school staff.
- **Online training resources:** The OPI maintains a subscription to a catalog of online training through Relias Learning. This program makes available over 55 hours of training to educators in Montana. Doug manages the subscriptions and tracks usage to make sure that the system is being used effectively.
- **Staff delivered training:** The MAEP staff are also available to provide training to anyone regarding evidence-based practices in educating children with autism.
- **Conferences:** The OPI sponsors an annual Autism conference and provides support to other organizations that are providing training in autism. The OPI also provides scholarships for parents and educators to attend training that is relevant.

**Higher Education Consortium:** We work with the faculty and leadership from the teacher preparation programs in Montana to help them understand the skills needed by our schools, and to provide training to the faculty on evidence-based practices that can be taught to their teaching candidates. This project has been going for over 15 years and is facilitated by the staff from TAESE. Participants include the public, private and tribal colleges. This activity is led by Jen Cline.

**Hearing Conservation Program:** This program is funded by an appropriation by the legislature. Danni McCarthy leads this activity. The OPI contracts with 9 providers to cover the state. This program makes audiologists available to assist schools in conducting the required hearing screenings, and to provide follow-up evaluations when necessary. This is not a special education program, but has been managed by the special education division.

**Behavior Consultants:** Dale Kimmet manages this program that makes available a cadre of behavioral consultants to schools.

- **Consultation:** Like with the MAEP, the behavioral consultants are available at a district's request to go to a school and work with the staff to observe interactions with a student and to make recommendations regarding the development of a positive behavior intervention plan and the conduct of a functional behavioral assessment.
- **Staff delivered training:** The staff members are available to provide training to district staff regarding the implementation of evidence-based strategies.

**Early Assistance Program:** The EAP is in administrative rule and is the OPI's method of alternative dispute resolution. This program is led by Mandi Gibbs (from the legal division) and is funded using IDEA Part B funds. This program is effective in facilitating communication between families and schools and often can resolve disputes quickly and without the need for formal complaints.

- **Phone calls:** Mandi, and the rest of the division staff, field phone calls from parents and schools regarding issues related to the provision of special education and related services

to students with disabilities. The vast majority of these calls are simple questions and do not involve any type of dispute.

- **IEP Facilitation:** the OPI has a cadre of trained facilitators that are available to attend an IEP meeting, with the agreement of both the parents and the school. The facilitator functions to keep the process of developing an IEP for a student moving, and to facilitate communication between the various team members. The facilitator is not there to say who is right or wrong.

**Dispute Resolution:** required under the IDEA. Program managed by Mandi Gibbs and Nicole Hanni. All activities funded with IDEA Part B monies.

- **State complaint investigation:** Currently, the OPI does not employ a complaint investigator. We contract with TAESE for investigators. When a complaint is filed, the EAP process has 15 days to try to resolve it under ARM. If not resolved, we contact TAESE and they give us a list of investigators that are available at that time. Mandi chooses from the list and the investigation proceeds.
- **Mediation:** The OPI maintains a list of qualified mediators that the parents and district choose from. The OPI pays the costs for the mediator.
- **Due Process Hearing:** The OPI maintains a list of qualified hearing officers. The parties are given a strike list and then the OPI chooses a hearing officer based on the parties responses.
- **Training for mediators and hearing officers:** the OPI is responsible for ensuring that we have qualified mediators and hearing officers. To this end, the OPI participates in quarterly trainings provided by Lenore Knutsen from TAESE for the complaint investigators, mediators, hearing officers and IEP facilitators. The OPI also provides an annual hearing officer training with a nationally recognized expert and pays the costs for the mediators and hearing officers to attend the Northern Plains Law Conference.

**Teacher Learning Hub:** the special education division has been a primary supporter of the Hub since its inception. Annette Young has been the division lead on this project.

- **Fiscal support for staff:** the special education division provides funding for Jess's position and administrative support in CSI.
- **Develop courses:** our division has many courses in development and currently has several courses available on the Hub. Our primary focus with the MTSS work is on getting courses developed and available through the Hub.
- **Leadership team:** Frank has been involved with the Hub since the MDPLN project ended at UM. Special education has provided funding for the Hub since that time and Frank continues to serve on the leadership team for the Hub.

**Wrap-Around Facilitators:** The special education division funds two full-time positions for wrap-around facilitators in the Indian Education division. This project is funded through IDEA Part B dollars.

**Special Education Endorsement Project:** Grant program with MSU-B. Funded with IDEA Part B dollars. Dick Trerise is the lead on the grant.

**Communication Sciences and Disorders Project:** This is a contract with UM Communication Sciences and Disorders department to help support the training, certification and stipends for practicing speech

language pathologists to serve as supervisors for the internships of students in the CSD program that have agreed to serve in Montana's schools.

- **Contract with UM:** the annual contract with UM is funded through IDEA Part B discretionary funds and the contract was just renewed for three years. In addition to the supervisors, this contract also funds part of the salary of a faculty member in the CSD department to oversee the internship program.
- **Stipends:** In addition to the contract with the UM, the special education division contracts with students to provide reimbursement for tuition and fees while they are in the graduate program with the agreement that they will serve in a Montana school district for three years upon completing the program. This is funded through IDEA Part B discretionary funds.

**School Psychology Training Project:** Similar to the CSD program, this contract is with the UM School Psychology program. This project is funded with IDEA Part B discretionary funds and is overseen by Dick Trerise.

- **Contract with UM:** The contract with the School Psychology program is similar to the CSD contract. It provides funding for the training, certification, and stipends for school psychology internship supervisors.
- **Stipends:** In addition to the contract with the program at UM, the OPI contracts with students in the school psychology program for reimbursement of tuition and fees in exchange for an agreement to serve in Montana's schools for at least three years upon completion of the program.

**Family Support Services Advisory Council:** The IDEA regulations for Part C (Infants and Toddlers) requires the DPHHS to have a representative of the SEA on their advisory council. As our IDEA Preschool (Section 619) Coordinator, Danni McCarthy serves on the FSSAC.

**Mental Health Oversight and Advisory Council:** The MHOAC originated as a requirement under a SAMHSA grant many years ago, and was then written into law. This is an oversight group for the Addictive and Mental Disorders division of DPHHS. The state education agency is a required member of the council, and traditionally the representative from OPI has been someone in the special education division. Most recently Holly Mook has had that role.

**State Rehabilitation Council:** this council serves to advise the Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services agency at DPHHS. As with other councils, the authorizing federal law requires participation of the state education agency on this council. Frank Podobnik is the current representative for OPI.

**School Climate Transformation Grant:** We are entering the 5<sup>th</sup> year of this project. This grant is a separate funding stream from our IDEA Part B grant. This grant is coordinated in conjunction with the SOARS grant in Health Enhancement.

- **Suicide prevention:** One major focus of this grant has been to develop and help districts implement a suicide prevention protocol. As part of this work, a study was conducted and a protocol developed. Hub courses are also available.
- **High-tiered Community of Practice:** This COP brings together stakeholders from the residential treatment centers, juvenile corrections, juvenile detention centers, and alternative schools to facilitate improved outcomes for students in those systems. One

major objective has been the development of a system to facilitate the transition of students between programs. This work has also resulted in the implantation of an MTSS system at several of the residential and prison facilities.

**Paraprofessional Consortium:** This consortium is supported by the IDEA Part B discretionary monies. It is made up of OPI staff and a diverse group of stakeholders from across the state that represent paraprofessionals, administrators, related service providers and other groups. This group works to ensure that the training needs of the paraprofessionals in our schools are addressed.

**Educational Interpreters Performance Assessment:** The administrative rules require that school districts employ educational interpreters who meet a minimum score on the Educational Interpreters Performance Assessment. This assessment is costly, and the OPI has a long history of paying for interpreters to take the assessment. This program is managed by Danni McCarthy and is funded through IDEA Part B discretionary dollars.

**TASK-12:** Montana participates as a charter member of this group that brings together leaders from 14 states to facilitate the training and assessment of educational interpreters. Under this program, the OPI is sponsoring a training program this fall, jointly with Wyoming, that will provide intensive training for those interpreters that have skills that are close to the level required for full certification to get them fully certified. This training is called TIPS (Training for Interpreters in Public Schools) and is provided with IDEA Part B discretionary funds.

**Differentiated Monitoring:** The special education compliance monitoring process has been evolving over the last several years to reflect an increasing focus on positive outcomes for students with disabilities. The monitoring process has been based on a 5-year cycle for many years. That cycle will continue. The methodology for conducting record reviews for compliance activities has changed. An on-site record review is the more traditional method of reviewing records. A team of monitors visits each school district and reviews the student records. The process now includes virtual record reviews and desk audits of records. No matter what type of record review is conducted, the OPI staff will continue to debrief with each special education provider. The determination of what type of review will be conducted will be based on a review of a data profile for each district that will help us judge the risk that the district will not be able to implement the requirements of the IDEA. Dale Kimmert oversees this work. Compliance monitoring is required under the IDEA grant and is funded through a specific set-aside that is required during the state application for IDEA funds.

**IDEA Fiscal:** As the Assistant Director, Dick Trerise is responsible for ensuring compliance with the fiscal requirements of the IDEA. This work is funded through the administrative set-aside of IDEA Part B funds.

- **Maintenance of Effort:** Each Fall the OPI draws data from the Trustee's Financial Summary information provided by each school district to determine the amount of Program 280 expenditures during the most recent year. This is compared to the Program 280 expenditures from the prior year to determine if the district has maintained fiscal effort as required under the IDEA. IF a district does not maintain effort it will be required to repay to the U.S. Treasury an amount equal to the failure in local funds. If a district fails to maintain effort it may request a hearing to determine if those funds must be repaid. Dick Trerise conducts those hearings.

- **Excess Cost Calculation:** Each year every district is required to calculate the amount of funds that it must expend for providing special education and related services prior to using IDEA funds. The OPI must collect the results of that calculation and determine if the district met the excess cost requirement. Dick and Frank worked with the School Finance division to develop an addition to the MAEFAIRS system that performs this calculation automatically based on the information submitted in the TFS report. This saves the districts from having to complete a separate reporting process.
- **Proportionate Share Calculation:** Each district is required to set-aside an amount of funds for providing services to students with disabilities who attend private schools within the district's boundaries. The calculation of the amount of the set-aside is done within the Egrants system using information provided by the special education data manager and verified by Dick Trerise. Dick verifies the calculation when approving district applications.
- **Egrants application:** Dick Trerise reviews and approves applications for the IDEA Part B and Preschool grants to programs. This requires him to review around 400 applications each year, and then additional reviews are required when budget pages are amended. This system is also used to provide funding for the 5 CSPD regions.
- **Program Narrative:** Each IDEA Part B program is required to have on file with the OPI a Program Narrative that describes the policies and procedures of the program related to the child find requirements of IDEA. Each cooperative and standalone district submits a program narrative for review. Dick Trerise is the lead reviewer, with approval by Frank Podobnik. The program narrative must be in place before an application for funds can be approved
- **Annual State Application:** Dick oversees the completion of the State Application for Funds Under the IDEA and submits the application once it has been signed by the Superintendent.

**Written Guidance:** Dale Kimmet takes the lead on this work. Under the IDEA, that OPI is required to maintain written guidance to assist in the implementation of the IDEA across the state. This guidance must be written in a manner that is understandable to parents, as well as professionals in the field. We maintain a regular schedule of review and updating the guidance documents. These documents are available on the website. This activity is funded with IDEA monitoring set-aside funds.

**Data:** The special education division has continued to have a data manager as required under the IDEA. Anne Rainey is our data manager for IDEA purposes. Anne oversees the collection and reporting of all IDEA data in conjunction with M & A staff and the EdFacts coordinator. Anne has an impeccable record in maintaining timely and accurate reporting of all IDEA data. Under her lead, Montana was one of the first states that was allowed to do all data reporting through the EdFacts system when it was originally brought online. In addition to the regular reporting of data, Anne also responds to data requests from across OPI, other agencies, and the public. Anne's work is funded through the IDEA Administrative set-aside.

**AIM Support:** Mary Graff provides support for the Special Education module of the AIM system. This requires specialized knowledge of the data system and the special education documentation process. Mary also facilitates data reporting for the data collections that involve inputting data into the AIM system. Mary works closely with the AIM team in M & A and the vendor to maintain the system and to design any needed updates.

**Annual Performance Report:** Under the IDEA, the OPI was required to develop a State Performance Plan (SPP) that was approved by the Department of Education. This plan was last updated during the 2015-16 school year. Each year, the OPI must submit an Annual Performance Report (APR) documenting the most recent data regarding the 17 indicators included in the SPP. Dick Trerise is the lead on developing the annual report, with the data work provided by Anne Rainey. This is an activity funded through the administrative set-aside.

- **State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP):** Indicator 17 in the APR is also known as the State Systemic Improvement Plan. This plan was developed with a large group of stakeholders and after a thorough review of data regarding the state's performance, district performance relative to the APR indicators, and the infrastructure in place to support special education in Montana. The identified measurable goal for Montana is to increase the number of American Indian students with disabilities completing high school. We are in the fourth year of the five year plan cycle. Montana's plan includes activities that require an increased presence in the targeted school districts. We have been unable to fulfill that requirement and are at risk of being found out of compliance by the Office of Special Education Programs.

**Preschool special education training:** Danni McCarthy is the OPI 619 coordinator and takes the lead for our division in providing preschool training for districts and Head Start programs. The relationship with the Preschool Grant program has been spotty. This work is funded through our IDEA discretionary funds.

**Part C to Part B transition:** Danni McCarthy also is the lead for the OPI on the coordination of IDEA Part B (age 3 through 21) programs with the IDEA Part C (Birth through age 3) programs managed by the DPHHS. Danni works closely with the Part C director to ensure a smooth transition for children between the two programs. This includes doing extensive training for both school districts and Part C providers. This work is funded through the IDEA discretionary funds.

**Significant Needs Grants:** Dale Kimmet takes the lead on this program. Each biennium the legislature provides an appropriation to the OPI to pay the education costs of Montana students who are placed in the in-state residential treatment facilities. Any money that is left over after having paid those costs is made available for the OPI to provide grants to school districts to assist in covering the costs of high need students, whether or not the student is eligible for special education. This is largely a clerical process that does not necessarily require special education staff to oversee.

**Discretionary Grants:** Under the IDEA, the OPI is allowed to use a portion of the IDEA Part B funds to support the activities of other agencies that will improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Many programs supported through discretionary grants are aimed at improving the qualification of staff providing services to students with disabilities. These grants are frequently provided to professional organizations to support training. These are funded with IDEA Part B discretionary funds.

**American Indian Achievement Task Force:** over the life of the AIA, several division members have been active in the work of the task force. This work is closely aligned with our State Systemic Improvement Plan and will be critical in our implementation of strategies with our targeted school districts.

**New Teacher Training:** Each year, several sessions are held at locations across the state to provide training to teachers with 3 years or less experience in special education. This training provides an overview of the

special education process, training in how to develop a quality IEP, and practice in using the AIM special education module to complete the required documentation.

**Experienced Teacher Forum:** The program specialists from across the division participate in providing this training. Each year the OPI provides a day-long session for teachers who have at least a few years of experience in special education. The forum is designed to provide participants with an opportunity to engage in discussion with their peers on topics related to special education. Each year six topics are chosen, based on input from the field, and the participants rotate in groups through the six topical discussions over the course of a day. This format is very well received.

**New special Education Director Training:** In conjunction with the SAM leadership program, the new director's training consists of a one-day session at the beginning of the school year, with monthly virtual discussions throughout the year on topics relevant to people who are new to the role of special education director. This activity is funded through IDEA discretionary funds.

**Administrator Training:** This training is available upon request, and is provided an average of 6 times per year across the state. Dick, Dale and Frank take the lead on this training which is designed to help building and district administrators better understand their role in special education, and the requirements of the IDEA that might impact them in the performance of their job. This training is funded through IDEA discretionary funds.

**Special Education Funding Training:** Frank and Dick are the providers of this training. This is a half-day or full-day training on the sources of funds available for providing special education and related services. This training also covers the allowable costs and other requirements for each source of funds.

**Northern Plains Law Conference on Students with Disabilities:** The OPI sponsors this conference jointly with the state education agencies from North Dakota and South Dakota. This is a two-day conference, with an additional pre-conference session for IEP facilitators. This conference brings together experts in special education law from across the country to provide training relevant to special education directors, building and district administrators, parents, and other staff. This year will be the 5<sup>th</sup> annual conference and it will be held in Bismarck, ND. This activity is funded through IDEA discretionary funds.

**Administrative Rule Development:** The superintendent maintains Administrative Rules for the provision of special education and related services in Montana. The special education rules are reviewed and changes recommended by the division leadership. There are a number of rules currently ready to go to public hearing. This activity is funded through IDEA administrative funds.

**Technical Assistance:** In addition to the MAEP and Behavior Specialists, the OPI special education staff are available to provide on-site or virtual technical assistance to districts, agencies, parents or others regarding the appropriate implementation of the IDEA requirements. This type of technical assistance can occur in two ways, districts that are targeted for technical assistance by the OPI, and requested technical assistance that is provided when the OPI is contacted by someone who has identified a concern they would like help in addressing. These activities are funded through IDEA discretionary funds.

**Training (i.e. Transition, Data, Mandt, etc.):** As with technical assistance, the OPI provides training specific to an identified topic to districts, agencies, parents or others. These training sessions can be ordered by the OPI through a monitoring process, or can be at the request of a district, agency or other group. These training activities may be provided by OPI staff, or may be provided through a contract with another

provider. These activities are funded through IDEA discretionary funds, or through other grant funds as appropriate.

**Gifted and Talented Education:** The division has recently hired a program specialist who will have responsibility for providing support to families and schools regarding the education of gifted students.

**Early Learning:** Early childhood education is a new area in the Student Support Services division. We are working to incorporate the work of the Montana Preschool Development Grant into our division to join our IDEA preschool coordinator in providing a unified approach to supporting early childhood education in Montana.