

Presentation to the Joint Appropriation Subcommittee on Education
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SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE

The Superintendent's Office includes three work units: the Office of the State Superintendent, Legal Services, and Education Licensure.

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT **provides the leadership and central management support to ensure quality service to K-12 schools.** We strive to meet the Superintendent's constitutional and statutory duties in a responsible and cost effective manner.

- **The Superintendent's Office fosters good working relationships with our Education Partners** by working closely with the Board of Public Education, the Commissioner of Higher Education, the Governor's Office, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and state and national associations organized to promote best practices in education.
- **The State Superintendent serves as an ex officio member of the Board of Public Education and the Board of Regents.**

Superintendent Office staff provides on-going research, management and technical support to the Board of Public Education at no cost to the Board.

- **The Superintendent's Office raises public awareness and understanding of current educational issues and challenges.**

The Summary of OPI Activities is posted on OPI's webpage and disseminated via e-mail to school districts, county superintendents and interested parties each month. The monthly summary keeps educators updated on the activities and hot topics of OPI specifically and Montana education in general.

The Superintendent's Office responds to hundreds of data and information requests every year on topics related to enrollment, school finance, student assessment, and education policies and practices.

- **The Superintendent's Office focuses policy and planning processes on providing adequate resources to schools**

For the 2005 legislative session, we have identified key initiatives targeted at achieving adequate school funding, improving teacher recruitment and retention policies, providing services to schools to support classroom instruction and student achievement, and streamlining financial transactions and information exchanges with schools.

- **The Superintendent's Office promotes new and efficient ways of interacting with schools and students**
 - Some examples of our communication systems that you have already heard about are Official email system for communicating with school districts, assignment of OPI staff representatives to attend the monthly meetings of school superintendents, the Yellow School Bus Tours, and the Parent's webpage.
 - Another communication system that OPI enhanced in 2004 is our web-based electronic calendar for posting educational events, providing features that:
 - Allow the user to search by topic and date
 - Link to meeting agendas, conference registrations, and other materials associated with meetings and conferences
 - Identify those activities that provide renewal credits for educators
 - Assist OPI in meeting the public notice requirements of open meeting laws

[OPI now uses e-mail as our primary communication vehicle with 855 public schools. This is a survival technique that allows us to communicate regularly with the field and in a timely manner in spite of spending reductions in recent years. OPI sends an average of 25 e-mails each month to schools.

Each year, the Superintendent's Office assigns nine OPI staff members to regularly attend and represent the office at the regional monthly meetings of school superintendents.

Since 2001, the State Superintendent and her staff have visited 98 schools in Montana as part of OPI's Yellow School Bus Tour. 72 OPI staff have participated in these tours. Our staff, local educators and community members benefited from discussions of the educational successes and challenges facing our schools.]

- **Promote accountability through student assessment**

Our State Assessment Director manages OPI's contract with Riverside Publishing Company to ensure the successful administration of the Iowa tests to 35,000 students in grades 4, 8, and 11. She also manages the contract with Measured Progress for the administration of the criterion-referenced test to students in grades 4, 8, and 10. It is the CRT that is used to determine a school's adequate yearly progress under NCLB.

OPI reports information and analysis on the results of Montana's statewide assessment of students, distributes a monthly assessment newsletter called JUMP, *Join Us in Measuring Progress*, provides training and workshops to test coordinators and assessment directors regarding best practices in assessment and test administration, and has built query tools on our website for the public to access assessment results by school and by grade.

- **Provide management support for improved information systems**

You have heard about some of our information systems projects and later this morning I will be presenting OPI's request for a comprehensive Information Management System for K-12 education.

- **The State Superintendent is a member of the State Land Board. She strives to fulfill her fiduciary responsibilities to the school children of Montana by maximizing revenue from school trust lands.**

The State Superintendent and her staff must be knowledgeable about a range of land and resource management issues to ensure that, through good stewardship, school trust lands are managed to maximize the benefit to school children.

- **Perform OPI personnel functions**

OPI's Personnel Officer and Personnel Assistant oversee and manage agency's personnel functions, including recruitment and hiring of all OPI staff, personnel policy, position classification, staff training and professional development, and records management.

The Personnel Officer represents management in labor – management relations and contract negotiations, maintains current policy sources, and ensures our compliance with all state and federal employment laws. In addition to serving our internal agency needs, the Personnel Officer also provides technical assistance to school districts on a variety of public employment and nondiscrimination topics and collaborates with the OPI Legal Unit on requests for assistance.

- **Ensure a rapid response and good communication in the event of a threat to safe schools and homeland security**

OPI staff serve on a number of state disaster and emergency response teams and homeland security efforts. Our role has been to educate others on school practices and ensure a level of communication-readiness between state agencies and schools. OPI's electronic systems have served us well in this regard.

We maintain an updated OPI Crisis Response Protocol, which describes OPI's method for responding to a school-related crisis, including natural disasters and threats to school safety.

OPI LEGAL SERVICES

OPI Legal Counsel provides legal advice and services to the State Superintendent and her agency. The unit includes legal support staff and the OPI Educator Licensure staff.

- The legal staff consists of 4 FTE: one attorney, an administrative officer, a paralegal and the director of the Special Education Early Assistance Program.
- OPI Legal staff is responsible for legal review of OPI policies and documents, including publications, correspondence, and contracts.
- The attorney also serves as the general manager of the Education Licensure program. Our legal staff reviews all applications for education licensure for prior criminal conviction. The attorney advises the Superintendent in cases of denial, revocation, or suspension of educator licenses and represents the State Superintendent in cases of license denial and revocation before the Board of Public Education.
- Our attorney represents the State Superintendent in court proceedings. We have assisted the Attorney General's office in two lawsuits against the state in the past year. This assistance included the preparation of expert testimony and generation of data from our automated systems.
- Assists with the adoption and amendment of administrative rules and legislation affecting OPI and schools. OPI legal staff also provides the administrative support for the Board of Public Education's rulemaking process at no cost to the Board.
- OPI produces the *School Laws of Montana* as a service to schools. The \$10 price of the book covers the cost of printing. Receipts from the sale of the *School Laws of Montana* are deposited in the state general fund.
- Within the legal unit, OPI's Early Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to provide technical assistance to parents, school districts, and advocacy organizations in regard to the delivery of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities. OPI receives up to ten requests for Special Education Due Process Hearings, in regard to FAPE. Only 2 or 3 requests actually result in a formal hearing. The others are resolved through the Early Assistance Program or through the 6-7 mediations facilitated by the EAP.
- The legal division handles on the average 8-10 formal complaints per year with only 2 – 3 complaints resulting in formal reports, largely due to the Early Assistance Program.
- Our legal staff handles all appeals of County Superintendent and County Transportation Committee decisions. We typically have 6-8 appeals to the State Superintendent each year.
- Our legal staff fields dozens of telephone calls and e-mails each week from parents, school officials, taxpayers, the media, and other members of the public. Our legal unit averages 30 calls per day.

OPI EDUCATOR LICENSURE

The State Superintendent is responsible for issuing all teacher, administrator, and specialist licenses in Montana. The Educator Licensure Program is responsible for evaluating all applications for teaching, administrative and specialist licenses.

- The Program staff consists of 3.5 FTE, including a program manager, two specialists, and one part-time assistant.
- In 2004, our education licensure unit issued 5,886 educator licenses and maintained the files for 24,690 active Montana educator licenses
- OPI's On-line Renewal system for education licensure allows an educator to apply for renewal, pay the renewal fee, and receive an updated certificate in as little as 15 minutes. To date 1,333 licenses have been renewed on-line.
- The Licensure Division handles the approval of providers of professional development for license renewal credits, as well as the requests for approval of individual renewal activities.
- Licensure data is entered in a searchable data base. Data from the Education Licensure system is used in the school accreditation process to verify that teachers, specialists, and administrators are certified, and endorsed, to teach in the subject areas to which they are assigned. The data is also used to provide information about school staffing, educator qualifications, and teaching assignments.
- The Education Licensure unit has more customer contacts than any other area of OPI. Each year, the Program staff responds to over 8,000 telephone calls, 10,000 e-mail requests, 1,800 letter requests, 300 on site customer contacts, and 12,000 pieces of incoming mail.