

Montana Council of Deans of Education



Carroll College • Montana State University Northern
Montana State University Billings • Montana State University
Rocky Mountain College • Salish Kootenai College
Stone Child College • University of Montana
University of Montana Western
University of Providence

TO: Education Interim Committee
FROM: Montana Council of Deans of Education (MCDE),
Alison Harmon & Stevie Schmitz Co-Chairs
RE: Gifted and Talented Education in Montana
DATE: August 15, 2018

Teacher preparation to identify and serve gifted and talented students:

Preparation for pre-service teachers to identify and serve gifted and talented students is provided at each of Montana's educator preparation programs (EPPs). Means of preparation and approaches vary across the ten institutions represented in the Montana Council of Deans of Education (MCDE), just as our teacher preparation coursework and curricula vary.

Most MCDE EPPs integrate content related to gifted education and exceptional learners into required teacher education coursework throughout the curriculum. The depth of the content depends very much on the expertise of the faculty instructor. Carroll College, UM Western, MSU Billings, U of M, University of Providence, and MSU Bozeman currently have faculty with specific expertise in gifted education and exceptional learners.

Several MCDE EPPs, including U of M, MSU Bozeman, Rocky Mountain College, Salish Kootenai College, MSU Northern, Stone Child College, and Carroll College devote an entire course and/or laboratory (eg. *Exceptional Learners*) to the study of differentiated instruction, categories of exceptionality, implications for educators, and best practices such as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). The University of Providence requires an additional course specifically for identifying and supporting gifted children in the elementary classroom. At all EPPs content related to identifying and supporting exceptional or gifted learners is integrated into additional content and pedagogy courses (such as *Emergent Literacy*, *Educational Psychology & Assessment*, *Curriculum & Instruction*) as well as practicum courses, methods courses, and capstone courses.

The University of Montana is unique with an endowed faculty line specific to gifted education (the Suzanne and Dave Peterson Endowed Professor of Gifted and Talented Education) and a certificate program in gifted education. Enrollments in this fully online Gifted and Talented Education Certificate program have been modest. More advocacy on the part of school districts or incentives for teachers to

seek additional preparation in this area would make a difference in participation. An endorsement or license in gifted education offered by the State of Montana would have a significant impact on teacher motivation to seek additional preparation, and for EPPs to offer additional programming.

The MCDE EPPs agree that the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) process can work for students across the continuum of abilities and talents. MTSS is the practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to the needs of each individual student, where progress is monitored and changes are implemented as needed, based on the student's response. The MTSS model assumes that each student receives high-quality, research-based, differentiated instruction from a general educator in a general education (classroom) setting. Students can be exceptional in one academic area and struggle in another. Students who have disabilities may also be exceptional learners, and are sometimes referred to as 'twice exceptional' or '2e'. Some gifted students will need an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Our teacher education programs are focused on addressing the learning needs of the whole child whether they are gifted, have a disability, both, or neither.

The MCDE EPPs recognize preparation is also needed for school administrators to enable school districts to systematically attend to gifted students in their schools. Most educational leadership curricula at MCDE EPPs offer content related to gifted education and exceptional learners in special education courses, law courses, and/or curriculum and instruction courses.

The Office of Public Instruction (OPI)'s guiding document: *Serving Montana's High Ability/ High Potential Students* is an excellent resource, and can be used to support and enhance teacher education and educational leadership coursework. However, it may not be a substitute for more comprehensive in person or on-line preparation for pre-service and in-service teachers. While MCDE EPPs fully defer to the Office of Public Instruction for holding school districts accountable for identifying and serving the needs of gifted and talented students, an OPI staff member focused on gifted education is essential and would continue to be very beneficial in providing support for both teachers and school administrators. The guidance, resources, and support of an OPI staff member focused solely on gifted education is also extremely beneficial and necessary to the MCDE EPPs to support comprehensive education for all Montana Students.

Thank you for the opportunity for MCDE to provide input on this important topic. MCDE institutions will continue support one another by sharing best practices related to integrating GATE concepts across our varied curricula.