



## Alternative Education Matters Summit

December 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Red Lion Inn Helena

Helena, MT

*The objectives of this meeting are to:*

- Make connections among Montana Alternative Education programs
  - Share successes and needs related to Alternative Education in Montana
  - Identify and answer questions related to Alternative Education
  - Determine whether Montana Alternative Education programs would like to work together as a community of practice
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On December 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and the Northwest Comprehensive Center (NWCC) convened a group of alternative education teachers and administrators to share practices, identify common needs and questions, and determine whether Montana alternative programs would like to work together as a community of practice.

The following programs and organizations were represented: OPI, NWCC, DPHHS, Montana Healthcare Foundation, Arlee High School, Blackfeet Learning Academy, Butte High Career Center, Columbia Falls High School, Columbia Falls Learning Center, Conrad High School, CTA Architects, Glasgow High School, Paris Gibson Education Center, Access to Success, Project for Alternative Learning, Linderman Education Center, Lewistown ABLE, Central School, Libby Public Schools Park High School, Willard Alternative High School, Polson High School, Sidney High School, Whitefish Independent High School, and Wolf Point High School.

The convening was organized around four conversations:

- 1) **Alternative Education in Montana- Success, Challenges and Opportunities.** Participants shared successes and identified technical assistance needs.
- 2) **Job-alike Group Conversations.** Participants self-selected into job-alike groups (Administrators, Teachers, SEA/District Representatives) for facilitated conversations on issues and topics identified by the job-alike group members.
- 3) **Roundtable Conversation.** Participants, including OPI Deputy Superintendent Dennis Parman, identified and addressed key policy and resource questions and concerns for alternative education in MT.
- 4) **Next Steps.** Participants discussed what they would like to work on together as a community of a practice, which included: Working together to shape narrative of alternative education in the public sphere; Shaping the alternative education policy conversation as ESSA comes online; Continuing to share program practices; and Finding sponsors to sustain the collaboration.

Notes from the convening are summarized in the following pages.

## CONVENING NOTES

### Alternative Education in Montana- Success, Challenges and Opportunities

During the convening, participants shared successes and identified technical assistance needs. This reflection and discussion was organized around four essential alternative program elements, identified by NWCC, that have emerged from the literature on successful alternative education programs. The four elements are (a) flexible and responsive school structures, (b) personalization, (c) individualized and relevant curriculum and instruction, and (d) supportive environments. Participants discussed practices aligned with these elements and reported out by recording highlights on posters.

Poster notes are included below. Note that these notes only represent practices shared by table groups, and do not capture discussion at tables.

<b>Personalization</b>	
What is working	What we need to work on
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexibility regarding time (i.e. opening early, late hours, providing students options)</li> <li>Authentic opportunities for students to provide input on how to improve</li> <li>Advisory (Paris)</li> <li>SEL</li> <li>Using first names to create a family atmosphere</li> <li>Ed Ready to personalize math (Willard)</li> <li>Three Act math</li> <li>Personal Finance (Glasgow)</li> <li>Partnership with credit union (Paris)</li> <li>Full Proof (Jodie @ Kalispell)</li> <li>Library/ Maker space (Glasgow)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Early disconnection</li> <li>Compassion fatigue</li> <li>SEL-CSCT teams need to be better equipped</li> </ul>
<b>Flexible and Responsive Structures</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexibility regarding time and breaking from the standard chronology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resist aging out students</li> <li>Ways to give schools credit for all graduates, even if they graduate late</li> </ul>
<b>Supportive Environments</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Missoula Foodbank partnership (Willard)</li> <li>In school suspension in superintendent's office (Park High, Livingston)</li> <li>Systemic renewal (Browning)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Looks at graduation rates, discipline, tardies, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Smudging and praying to reflect and start the day (Browning)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who supports us?</li> <li>Restorative justice circles</li> <li>PBIS</li> <li>Mindfulness training</li> <li>How to cultivate a culture of care and respect</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eagle feather (Paris)</li> <li>• Bell ringing (Paris)</li> </ul>	
<b>Relevant and Individualized Curriculum and Instruction</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Based Learning being done well in Browning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Includes community projects</li> </ul> </li> <li>• CTE partnerships with businesses</li> <li>• Career connections</li> <li>• School based businesses</li> <li>• Presentations student empowerment groups</li> <li>• Electronic portfolios (Willard)</li> <li>• Learning expos (Libby)</li> <li>• Blended learning (Glasgow)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certification programs (eg. Libby IT, Paris)</li> </ul>

### Job-alike Conversations

Participants self-selected into job-alike groups (e.g. Administrators, Teachers, District Representatives, etc.) for facilitated conversations on issues and topics identified by job-alike members. Job-alike groups reported out on highlights from their conversations.

### Teacher group

- Most teachers in alternative education feel isolated from other staff members. This summit has been encouraging and has helped to reduce isolation. With that in mind, members asked: how often can we meet?
  - Positive reinforcement is important for alternative students, and in many respects, this is the primary responsibility of alt ed. teachers
- Can attendance be claimed if students are making progress?
- It is difficult to offer students all of the types of credits necessary for graduation in a small school. What are some strategies to increase access? Participants from other groups suggested:
  - Local school boards have flexibility
  - There are workarounds to HQT
  - Some programs are using hybrid or online options
    - Eg: Pearson Grad Point
- There is a nice diversity in programs, including work experience options and how students earn credit through experience
- Variation in personalized learning options
- The teachers expressed a desire to stay connected through some platform, perhaps virtual.

### OPI/State/District

- Local school boards have flexibility regarding how to meet needs of alt ed. students
- Hot topic regarding 1% of population that needs resources

- MBI as tier three
- The group suggested that it may be helpful to take control of how alternative education is defined and framed.
- What are opportunities within ESSA? Is there a policy window that has been opened?

### Administrators

- The administrator job-alike emphasized the importance of getting staffing right. It is important to have a diverse staff that embraces a shift to a student centered curriculum.
- Great Falls example – ask students about the teachers they like, and about the characteristics of effective teachers.
- Importance of de-privatizing teaching and creating conditions for collaboration
- Alternative settings need to be more personalized
- Need to build bridges and connection between traditional and alternative staff and schools
- It is important to tell the story of alternative education in ways that moves beyond a victim narrative; make successes public. One strategy to do this is to invite stakeholders to tour alternative programs.
- Create PLCs that include both traditional and alternative teachers
- The administrator group also identified some challenges.
  - Policy that hogs, such as special transportation that may be unfunded
    - Mental health issues and treatments
    - Communication with other residential programs in the state
    - Compassion fatigue
- Issue of alternative programs being a fundraiser for the district (recapturing students for the district—how can this be more visible and leveraged for resources?)

### Roundtable Conversation

During this activity, meeting participants, including OPI Deputy Superintendent Dennis Parman, identified and addressed key questions and concerns.

**Question: What is more important: Mastery or Carnegie unit (seat time)? Some students may be able to reach (and demonstrate?) mastery in less time than they would need to accrue the units.**

- Dennis: 1055906 High School Credit rule provides some room for flexibility
  - Need 8100 minutes for a credit (per year)
  - With permission of local board of trustees, **a student** may be given credit for a course satisfactorily completed shorter or longer than usually required, provided it is aligned with standards and assessment requirements
  - SB 175 20-9311
    - If a student meets requirement of rule 1055906, a district can receive full funding for that student
  - Digital academy credit recover: does not measure seat time; based on assessments of proficiency
    - Credit will carry same “weight” as a credit earned through seat time

**Question: How might districts support students who come to the district at non-convenient times (i.e. in middle of the term)? Is there policy that can give districts ability to be more maneuverable?**

- An unintended consequence of GMM may be a disincentive to enroll if the students appears to be on drop-out trajectory
- There are examples of districts providing flexibility in terms of length of school day and scheduling of attendance. Some districts have three week courses so that there are multiple opportunities in a term for a student to start a class.
- There are gatekeeping policies that create challenges to getting students enrolled
- May be aligned with innovations related to accelerated credit (i.e rule 1055906)
- Dennis: there are statues regarding enrollment, but there are no enrollment policy enforcers. Become with familiar with homeless student laws and regulations.
  - There can be issues with inconsistent or preferential application of policies
  - [Ed Ready](#) can be a resource for students enrolling mid-year
    - 21,000 students enrolled and using Ed Ready

**Question: [HiSET](#) options- will we reconvene a committee to discuss policies, including where it is housed? Why can't we count a student who completed HiSET within the same year as a graduate?**

- Dennis: students at MT Youth Challenge who complete HiSET options will not be counted as a drop-out. Still working on job corps
  - GED baggage is now gone and we now have some more flexibility
  - Recommends further advocacy regarding reconvening HiSET committee
  - Drop outs can be calculated two ways. Virginia does what feds ask, but does not put that information in a press release. They also calculate drop-out rates at a state level in a way that captures less traditional forms of graduation. OPI is trying to move to be able to create a Montana drop-out calculation.

**Question: Is it possible to regain flexibility or create more flexible licensing and credentialing options for alternative education teachers?**

- Elementary teachers used to be able to grant HS credit, but that is no longer possible under the HQT model. Rural schools often struggle to find HQT math and science teachers.
- Dennis: It is still unclear what will be the implications of ESSA and if it will provide flexibility regarding HQT. It appears that HQT will not be part of ESSA. If there is flexibility, then MT gets to set own policy. As state begins the process of developing policy, make sure that the alt ed. community has its "voice ready" to talk about its teachers. There may be an opportunity to say we do not need one set of rules for all contexts.
- Dennis: most common reason why HS has an accreditation issue is over licensure. No school should have a ding for a non-licensed teacher. There is emergency licensure, which will avoid the ding. It is only good for one year.
  - Class five is good for three years. It requires a BA and plan of study approved by an accredited institution. But there are not many MT teacher prep programs

who are signing off on this. Western Governors University may be a good option. Class five is “once in a lifetime”

- Dennis: You can have a licensed and endorsed teacher of record, but may not be the teacher in the classroom.
- Dennis: Out of state licensed teachers: the state is looking to fix rules that make it difficult for teachers licensed out of state to get a MT license.

**Question: Is it possible to think about an alternative school as an entity that can receive a basic entitlement?**

- Dennis: Watch what happens with a charter school application. If created, it will create a school within a school. Variances to standards may serve as a template. Hopeful that this may create a path for more schools in the future.

**Question: How can alternative schools get a piece of the Perkins pie?**

- Dennis: There may be possibilities within career readiness.

### **Next Steps**

Meeting participants discussed what they would like to work on together as a community of a practice, which included:

- Working together to shape narrative of alternative education in the public sphere;
- Shaping the alternative education policy conversation as ESSA comes online;
- Continuing to share program practices; and
- Finding sponsors to sustain the collaboration.

Next steps included:

- 1) Meet/Communicate regularly (in person, online): At least annual summit statewide and regional gatherings once per quarter or semester (content & self care/support)
  - a. Spring 2<sup>nd</sup> all group gathering
  - b. Half day at Grad Matters convening
- 2) Shape the narrative regarding alternative education, and influence the conventional system
  - a. Maybe also sharing with conventional schools
  - b. How: social media, collaborative group, twitter chat
- 3) Advocate for alternative education and help shape policy regarding alternative education
  - a. e.g. HQT going away, what happens next?
  - b. How to find time for this?—working group
  - c. OPI facilitates community meeting to get Alt Ed more front and center
- 4) Raise profile of alternative education students and staff that conveys and inspires transformation
  - a. E.g. TEDx in MT
  - b. Highlight, bright-spot innovative practices
  - c. Film, documentary

- d. Events live podcast (YouTube) E.g. Youth experiencing homelessness forum, smudge & bell ringing rituals/events
  - e. Graduation Matters, Grad talks—Monday June 20, 2016
- 5) Share resources in groups
- a. Create/distribute a directory of alternative programs
  - b. Formalize discussions around content areas at next meeting (20 min per site)
- 6) Partnerships
- a. MTHCF—startup funds for school-based healthcare center
  - b. OPI partner in proposals for funding for programs to build local capacity