

The Cooke City School District is and has been a member of Montana Small Schools Alliance for many years and actively participates in the professional development offered by the Alliance. As such, Cooke City is applying the work we have done with MSSA in Professional Development to our annual Professional Development Platform; however, the Cooke City teacher implements a much deeper professional development regimen as can be seen below.

## **Cooke City Educator Effectiveness and Professional Development**

Cooke City focuses on maintaining a Professional Development plan that improves the teacher's academic background as well as her instructional model. In the manner implemented at Cooke City School, the strong academic background combined with a strong instructional model allows for teaching and assessing student knowledge in all academic areas while incorporating IEFA across the curriculum. The result is students with a strong academic foundation (scoring well above the state and national averages) rooted in IEFA across the curriculum.

The Cooke City commitment to providing a strong academic foundation for our students is apparent in both the professional development initiatives and use of IEFA across the curriculum. As an educator dedicated to continuous improvement, the teacher actively participates in several key professional development programs annually that align with our goals. Here is the most recent implementation of the plan:

Since March 2024, the teacher has participated in the following:

1. **\*\*IEFA Best Practices Conference\*\***

This conference provided invaluable insights into effective strategies for incorporating IEFA principles into everyday teaching practices, enabling her to create a more inclusive and culturally relevant learning environment.

2. **\*\*National Endowment for the Humanities Buffalo Nations Landmarks Program\*\***

The teacher was selected to participate in this program from among the hundreds who applied. This program enriched her understanding of Indigenous histories and cultures across all subjects, which integrates into lessons, fostering a deeper appreciation among students for the diverse narratives that shape our society and the important connection to place.

3. **\*\*Montana Science Teaching Institute\*\***

This institute equipped the teacher with innovative science teaching methodologies that not only engage students but also emphasize inquiry-based learning, aligning with state standards.

4. **\*\*Graduate Level Course from Montana State University Native American Studies Department on Native Food Systems\*\***

This course enhanced the teacher's knowledge of Indigenous food systems, allowing her to incorporate these concepts into science and social studies curricula, thereby promoting interdisciplinary learning.

5. **\*\*The Montana State University Master of Science in Science Education Coursework\*\***

The teacher has been accepted into a graduate studies program which provides a solid foundation in pedagogical theories and practices, enabling her to further refine her instructional model to better assess and address the diverse needs of her students.

Through these more personal professional development experiences, and those of MSSA (below) that the teacher participates in, the teacher has developed a comprehensive plan that not only improves her

academic background but also strengthens our instructional model. By embedding IEFA principles throughout the curriculum, we aim to create a holistic educational experience that empowers all students with a strong academic foundation rooted in cultural relevance and respect.

The Montana Small Schools Alliance provides statewide professional development to “Consortium” members four times annually. MSSA has a schedule of K-12 curriculum which is reviewed and aligned each year to state standards according to a schedule on file with the OPI. Regional professional development for member schools follows that schedule. Member surveys prioritize what type of training will take place each year. In addition, member schools participate in Standards library and counselor training programs each August.

#### 2023-2024 School Year-

In 2023-2024, MSSA members focused on Indian Education for All Training: Lessons for classroom use, and Federal Programs assistance in September. In November MSSA members focused on Writing Across the Curriculum and Discovery Education lessons focusing on Science and Social Studies. In February, MSSA focused on Educator and Student Wellness, Stress and Resiliency and Brain Development, Trauma, and Balance Strategies and Tools. In April members were trained on Engagement Strategies and Aligning Unit and Lesson Plans to State Standards in art, writing and social studies. Additionally member schools participate in work that focuses on using and understanding Assessment Data.

#### 2024-2025 School Year-

In 2024-2025, MSSA members focused in September on learning the tools necessary for OPI programs and reporting, including early learning plans, federal programs, accreditation and graduate plans. In November MSSA members were trained on mental health issues with QPR certification training and training on use of the classroom curriculum **Character Strong**.

Upcoming in February, MSSA will focus on technology including cyber security for classrooms, schools and students, AI and its place and future in education. In April members will focus on Mathematics, training on OPI Standards being implemented in 2025, specifically their use in lesson planning with small schools and multi-grade classrooms. Additionally member schools continue focusing on using and understanding Assessment Data. MSSA member schools also have the opportunity for book studies throughout the year focusing on improving their teaching skills through engagement strategies, sustaining their productivity and improving their planning.

A MSSA statewide planning team both reviews the training and the curriculum being reviewed each year. The review team consists of the MSSA Board, County Superintendents, and member teachers. The Executive Director reviews evaluations of each member from each conference during the year to assist in determining success and future planning. Montana Small Schools Alliance Conferences incorporate formative strategies for teachers to assess student achievement based on developed classroom lessons. MSSA conferences always try to deliver material, resources and lessons that are classroom ready for the unique demographics of member school districts. Each conference throughout the year focuses on the scheduled K-12 aligned core curriculum and is always based on “best practices” research and current pedagogy. Technology is integrated in all professional development. Each conference also includes a component addressing Indian Education for All- IEFA.