



MTEA NEWS

A Principal's View of Traffic Education

By Ryon Noland - Dixon

I taught elementary school for seven years in various locations, then made the jump to administration. For the last three years, I have been a junior high and high school principal in a small community. Though this was originally out of my comfort zone, I accepted the challenge and did all that I could think of to do that would immerse me into the world of secondary education. One of my many observations was the importance of traffic education classes.

When I attended my first mandatory parent/student meeting, I was pleasantly surprised. For days leading up to this meeting, students were constantly checking into the office to make sure that they had the correct materials needed to sign up for traffic ed. When the meeting began, students who generally did not appear to be fully vested in their public education were completely and entirely ecstatic for this event. When the driver's ed instructors started to speak, students got very quiet and listened intently alongside their parents and caregivers. I got to witness many students check in with the driver's ed instructors before they left to make sure that everything was aligned so that they could start class the following week. It was truly wonderful to see the students be so excited for something in their lives. Not only was it obvious the students were excited for this class, over the next several weeks one could also state that it was very important in their lives to achieve this goal.

As the driver's ed instructors in our school had attendance requirements for the students, you could also see a decrease in the amount of absences and tardies by the students who were enrolled in traffic education. As all good teachers do, the driver's ed teachers had behavioral benchmarks set firmly in place and the students responded well to these high standards. Also, with many of these students now having greatly improved daily attendance, their academics were climbing as well. Throughout the entirety of this course, only one student had to be

removed due to behavior and only one student had to be dropped from the course due to attendance related issues. Over the following two years I got to watch these students drive in and around campus, as well as the community, and I can attest that this class was of vital importance to them. These new drivers also had an impact on things within our school.

This particular group of students started attending more extracurricular activities. I noticed more and more of those students who had earned their driver's license showing up to games and concerts and theatrical performances. As more and more of these students started to attend these events, it was easy to see that the student body dynamic was starting to change for the better.

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The Bonds of The Road

By Zach Holland



Miriam Sanguins of Denton, Montana is officially retiring after 41 years as a dedicated educator in the state of Montana. For 14 of those years

Miriam taught traffic education programs in the towns of Turner, Dodson, Whitewater, Geraldine, and Denton.

Miriam began teaching traffic education because she saw it as a need for the community of Turner. She soon began to love her time in the car with the students, especially the bonds that were built amongst the kids. Miriam explained that in her traffic education program you would often have kids who normally wouldn't hangout. The car brought the kids together and they began to communicate and express themselves more than inside the classroom. When asked about what she would miss most about teaching traffic education, Miriam mentioned the conversation, the laughter, and the friendships made.

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MTEA President's Message



Retired or retiring from the classroom and missing the student interaction just a little? I've got a gig for you. Montana teachers can currently return to work part-time and earn up to 49 percent of their regular salary while still receiving their pension after the 120 day break in work requirement. Driver's education is a perfect outlet for your talents:

1. Interaction with students in a more meaningful setting that the student is willing to work for.
2. Scheduling can usually be done around instructor's schedule.
3. Teaching only part of the year in a concentrated session of no less than 25 days.
4. Teach driver ed class then walk out and know that you don't have to deal with student management for the rest of day. Student/teacher interaction in small, pleasant doses without so many district policies to enforce.
5. Most administrators won't do a ride along or visit classrooms for this curriculum. No more last-minute district evaluations.
6. Know you, the instructor, are teaching important LIFE curriculum. You have a cause that actually reaches individuals at a very successful rate across the state of Montana.
7. Extra income!

As a few of my colleagues before me, I have filed our my **TRS FORM 146: Retired Member's and Employer's Notice of Postretirement Employment** so I can teach fall and spring sessions for my former school district. The relationship with students in my driver's ed classroom is more relaxed and kids really buy into me as a caring, trustworthy adult. Students know that I am retired and don't have to be here, but I choose to be here for them. I feel that I can make serious points without the teenage attitude that I sometimes experienced in the regular classroom. Join me in this delightful mini occupation.

Steffani Grogan(2024-2025)

The Bonds of The Road

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Some advice Miriam had for anyone new to teaching traffic education is to expand on your curriculum; always be looking for new and useful resources. You will learn a lot on the job, just remember your past experiences both as a student and a teacher. Enjoy working with all sorts of students. You'll see traffic education benefits students who normally struggle in a normal classroom setting. And lastly, be prepared to sit a lot. There will be plenty of time in the passenger seat.

Did everyone see Steve McCormick on the news? He did an outstanding job of clarifying what we teach in Traffic Ed about underage DUI's. See more at:

[https://www.kbzk.com/news/local-news/law-enforcement-school-officials-in-gallatin-county-agree-education-is-key-to-preventing-teen-duis\[kbzk.com\]](https://www.kbzk.com/news/local-news/law-enforcement-school-officials-in-gallatin-county-agree-education-is-key-to-preventing-teen-duis[kbzk.com])

MTEA News is published by the Montana Traffic Education Association in the fall, winter, and spring. MTEA, PO Box 637, Conrad, MT 59425. Jim Carroll, Executive Secretary, (406) 278-7856. MTEA News is mailed to members and published at MTEAOnline.org. The spring issue is mailed to all traffic educators in Montana as an invitation to the annual traffic education conference. Submissions can be emailed to: sgrogan@forsyth.k12.mt.us. Articles are due 10/1; 12/1; 2/1. MTEA reserves the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, and/or grammar.

A Principal's View of Traffic Education

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I also began to notice many of these students becoming gainfully employed within many small businesses in the community. Whether they were part of a work-study program, or simply working to earn money (sometimes to keep their less than brand new vehicles operating properly), this group was becoming a more integral part of a small town life. Additionally, as many of them had younger siblings you could often see them supporting their parents by transporting those siblings to and from school as well as activities. Students earning a license to drive can have a great impact on not only their lives but all the lives around them and the biggest component to this is having high quality traffic education programs in our schools.

As a homegrown Montanan, I am well aware of how important the driver's license has been in my life throughout all these years and I hope that all high school principals can strive to continue these programs. Driving in the vastness of Big Sky Country is a necessity here and it all starts with having dedicated and highly qualified professional educators who are willing to sacrifice of themselves to continue this great tradition. Additionally, I would encourage other principals around this great state who are struggling to secure traffic education instructors to take the next step and earn the endorsement themselves. If for no other reason, it gives us administrators a chance to help out our schools and teachers, as well as a route to stay even better connected with our students, caregivers, and communities.

Outstanding Traffic Education Teacher of the Year Award

Since 1988, MTEA has routinely honored an outstanding Traffic Education teacher with an annual Teacher of the Year (TOY) award presented at MTEA's spring conference. Any active teacher who has devoted a good part of their teaching career to traffic education is eligible to apply for the award. Teachers can self-nominate or be nominated by someone who is familiar with their traffic education work. The deadline for the nomination form is March 1st, so don't delay!

Download the two-page nomination form from the website at MTEAOnline.org (which includes a section that is completed by the candidate). Members of the selection committee will then review the application. Contact Jim Carroll, Executive Secretary, at 406-278-7856 with any questions.

Outstanding Traffic Education Contributor of the Year Award

MTEA recognizes companies, organizations, and individuals who make generous contributions of their time, energy, equipment and/or expertise to support and sustain the mission of the MTEA. To nominate a person or business for this honor, download the COY nomination form at MTEAOnline.org and submit to MTEA by the March 1st deadline. Members of the selection committee will then review the application.

The Outstanding Contributor/Sustainer of the Year will be recognized at MTEA's spring conference in April. Examples of outstanding contributors or sustainers are MVD driver examiners who have gone out of their way to assist driver education teachers with their CDTP requirements and needs; car dealerships who have loaned vehicles to local school districts for their traffic education programs, and local experts who have visited driver education classes to share their knowledge about various topics such as tire safety, distracted driving, or DUI prevention; as well as business development organizations that have funded materials, equipment and learning tools for your TE program. Contact Jim Carroll, Executive Secretary, at 406-278-7856 with any questions.

Retiring from teaching TE?

If you are retiring from education / TE and have been an active MTEA member, we would like to honor you at the upcoming spring conference. In order to be recognized, please contact Jim Carroll, Executive Secretary, at 406-278-7856 with any questions and to receive the "Service Award" application form.

MTEA Executive Board Meeting

April 29, 2024 at Great Falls Conference

- Minutes, correspondence, financial, and board reports were reviewed.
- An overview of the conference was discussed, including the format, agenda, meals, awards, door prizes, and silent auction.
- A reminder was given to forward MTEA news articles to Steffani Grogan. An adjustment to newsletter submission dates was approved.
- Classification Meeting results were discussed. Feedback from both the classification meetings and post-conference survey will be used to help plan future conference agendas.
- Board and Classification appointments were made.
- The 2025 legislative session was discussed. MTEA will continue to monitor items of interest to TE.
- Preliminary planning for the 2025 conference took place with many of the details to be included on the fall meeting agenda.
- The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for fall (October-November).

MTEA Executive Board Meeting

November 17, 2024 (google meet format)

- Minutes, correspondence, and financial reports were reviewed.
- Due to some logistical issues, the fall and winter newsletters will be combined and sent out during December.
- Spring 2024 conference reports (classification meetings & surveys) were reviewed.
- The 2025 silent auction theme will center around a “Montana Experiences” format.
- President-Elect nominations were finalized. (Warren Clark & Steve McCormick)
- A continued discussion with online conference registration took place. More details to follow.
- An introduction of Mike Houghton, new TE Director, was made and an OPI report was heard. Items discussed included office changes, Montana DRIVE, the *Compass*, and ADTSEA.

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(Fall meeting minutes, continued)

- The 2025 ADTSEA national conference scheduled for Billings was discussed. MTEA help will be needed in many areas.
- Tentative 2025 conference ideas were discussed.
- Funds for the purchase of conference door prizes were approved.
- Possible legislative issues (changes in DUI laws and/or a push for TE privatization) were discussed.

The next meeting was scheduled for January 12th in an online format. Anyone having items for discussion, should contact Jim Carroll, Executive Secretary.

New OPI Traffic Education Director

Greetings MTEA Members,

My name is Mike Houghton and many of you will already know me from my time as the Industrial Technology Ed Specialist for the OPI or my time as an MTEA board member.

I am anticipating growing Traffic Education in Montana, with you, some of the most dedicated and skilled instructors I have ever known.

I am excited and honored to be in the position of Director of Traffic Education and look forward to working together to build Traffic Education in Montana. Please feel free to reach out if there is anything I can help with or just to say hello.



Mike Houghton

Director of Traffic Education

Montana Office of Public Instruction

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Driver's Education and Its Future. Where Can Artificial Intelligence Take Us?

By Adam Tunnell

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is poised to revolutionize many industries, and driver's education is no exception. As technology rapidly advances, AI is set to play a pivotal role in transforming how aspiring drivers learn the essential skills needed to navigate today's roads safely and confidently.

One of the primary ways AI will influence driver's education is through personalized learning experiences. AI algorithms can analyze vast amounts of data collected from various sources, including driving simulations, real-world scenarios, and individual student performance. By processing this data, AI can tailor educational programs to the specific needs and learning styles of each student. For example, if a student struggles with understanding traffic signs or making lane changes, AI can generate targeted lessons and practice scenarios to reinforce these skills.

AI-powered simulations offer a safe environment for students to practice driving techniques and decision-making without the risks associated with actual road training. These simulations can replicate a wide range of driving conditions, from urban traffic to rural highways, and even extreme weather events. AI can dynamically adjust scenarios based on student progress, providing immediate feedback and guidance to improve performance.

Another significant application of AI in driver's education is in enhancing driver assessment and readiness. Through advanced analytics and machine learning, AI can evaluate a student's driving behaviors and capabilities more accurately than traditional methods. By monitoring factors such as reaction times, adherence to traffic laws, and overall situational awareness, AI can provide comprehensive assessments of a student's readiness to obtain a driver's license.

AI has the potential to improve road safety by identifying common driving mistakes and areas of weakness among students. Being able to instantly analyze nationwide patterns in driving behaviors and accident data, AI can highlight specific areas where additional training or emphasis is needed for each new generation of drivers. This can assist in creating a proactive approach to not only help students become safer drivers but also contribute to overall road safety by reducing the likelihood of accidents caused by inexperienced or poorly trained drivers.

Many of the vehicles that are coming onto the market currently have many of these systems in their design already. These systems are able to record the statistics and trends that drivers are performing in their daily operations. This data is able to be imported into the AI data systems and can be deciphered and analyzed instantaneously. Imagine being able to get an instant print out of reaction times, following distances, velocity graphs, or any other data you can probably imagine.

In additional aspects of support for us as driver's education teachers, AI tools can assist by automating administrative tasks, assist in scheduling lessons based on student progress, and providing insights into teaching strategies that are most effective. These advancements can help to focus more on personalized instruction and mentoring, rather than on routine administrative duties.

While the integration of AI in driver's education holds immense promise, it also presents challenges, such as maintaining the accuracy of AI algorithms, and addressing the digital divide among schools and students who may not have access to AI-powered technologies. However, with the continual advancements in the technologies and the drop in the pricing of available products, progress is leading this to become a norm.

As we look to the future, AI has potential to become an indispensable tool in shaping the next generation of drivers. By leveraging AI's capabilities in personalized learning, simulation-based training, assessment, and instructor support, driver's education programs can equip students with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to navigate today's complex and evolving roadways safely. Ultimately, AI promises to not only transform how we learn to drive but also contribute to a safer and more informed driving community worldwide.



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2025 Montana Traffic Education Conference

April 27-29 - Great Falls Heritage Inn

Look for additional conference information coming soon on the MTEA website at www.mteaonline.org.

The 2025 ADTSEA national conference will be held July 20-23 in Billings, Montana! This is a great opportunity to see what is happening on the national level in regard to traffic education and an opportunity to network



with other professionals from across the United States. MTEA is looking for people to help with some of the on-site logistics. If you plan to attend and are willing to help in any capacity, send an e-mail on the MTEA webpage. Look for more information on their website. Even if you can't

attend, at least consider joining your national organization. For more information, check it out at www.adtsea.org.