



The Newsletter of the Montana Traffic Education Association

MTEA NEWS

Volume 31, Issue 3

Spring 2026

2026 Montana Traffic Education Conference

The Science of Safe Driving: Education, Engagement, and Technology Great Falls, MT – April 26-28, 2026

By Steffani Grogan (Forsyth)

The Science of Safe Driving: Education, Engagement, and Technology brings together educators, trainers, and safety advocates to explore how modern driver education can better prepare students for today's complex driving environment. The conference focuses on evidence-based curriculum activities that actively engage learners, emphasizing when and how to introduce advanced driver-assistance systems (ADAS) so students understand both their benefits and limitations. Sessions highlight best practices for teaching technology as a support tool—not a substitute for attentive, responsible driving—while integrating real-world scenarios that reflect the increasing safety features and rising costs of modern vehicles.

A central theme of the conference is connecting with and influencing teen drivers. Presenters examine communication strategies that resonate with adolescents, helping instructors build trust while reinforcing accountability and sound decision-making. Workshops focus on building confident, capable behind-the-wheel (BTW) student drivers by balancing skill development with mindset, emotional regulation, and hazard awareness. Perspectives from both the passenger and driver's seat offer valuable insight into how instruction is experienced, helping educators refine feedback techniques and create calmer, more productive in-car learning environments.

The conference also addresses inclusivity and adaptability in driver education. Specialized sessions explore effective approaches for working with students who have special needs, offering practical strategies for modifying instruction, pacing, and in-car expectations without compromising safety. Attendees gain tools for recognizing individual learning differences and creating supportive environments that empower every student to succeed behind the wheel.

Finally, the program recognizes the well-being of instructors themselves and the evolving risks facing new drivers. An athletic trainer-led session provides self-care exercises designed to reduce physical strain and fatigue for instructors who spend long hours in vehicles. Additional discussions cover updates to the Montana drug education curriculum, ensuring instruction reflects current substance use trends and legal realities. Together, these sessions position the conference as a comprehensive look at the new driving reality—where technology, safety, education, and human factors intersect to shape safer drivers for life.

ADED Pre-Conference Workshop **"Driver Rehabilitation and the New Driver"**

By LeAnn Haas OPI

On April 25th, 2026, the OPI is pleased to announce the offering of "Driver Rehabilitation and the New Driver" presented by ADED - The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists. This seven hour in-person workshop will be available as a pre-conference offering with a one-hour Q&A session to wrap up on the 26th. The cost to participants is \$125. Traffic education reimbursement funds may be used for this educational opportunity. This workshop is designed for driver educators seeking to expand their knowledge and skills in service to novice drivers with disabilities.

Learning objectives for this workshop include:

- Understand best practices related to novice drivers with disabilities.
- Analyze the roles and responsibilities for working with novice drivers with disabilities for driver education and training.

(Continued on p. 3)

MTEA Executive Board

President:

David Murray (Havre)

Past-President:

Steffani Grogan (Forsyth)

President-Elect:

Steve McCormick (Bozeman)

Executive Secretary:

Jim Carroll (Conrad)

Legislative Liaison:

Charlie Brown (Fairfield)

Newsletter Editor:

Steffani Grogan (Forsyth)

Board Members at Large:

Riley Ramsey (Hardin)

Dan Williams (Lolo)

Classification Directors:

Denise Bordeleau (Butte, AA)

Warren Clark (Sidney, A)

Jeff Mead (Sidney, A)

Susan Carney (Arlee, B)

Bob Schalk (Deer Lodge, B)

Janette Arps (Augusta, C)

Scott Brown (Hot Springs, C)

OPI Staff (ex-officio)

Michael Houghton (Director)

LeAnn Haas (Specialist)

MTEA President's Message

Dear MTEA Members,

I'm excited to share that our annual convention will be held this spring in Great Falls, and I encourage each of you to make plans to attend. The convention is always a wonderful opportunity to learn, connect, and recharge. If possible, consider bringing along a colleague who hasn't joined us in a while—or even better, invite someone new to experience the benefits of being part of MTEA. Fresh perspectives and new energy are what keep our organization strong.

As many of our long-time educators move toward retirement, it's important that we continue to encourage and mentor new teachers who can carry on this vital work. Each of us can play a role in helping to find and support the next generation of traffic education instructors.

We are also looking for members who are interested in becoming more involved by serving on the board. If you've ever thought about helping to guide the future of traffic education in Montana, now is the perfect time to step forward. Nominations will be taken at the conference.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to traffic education. I look forward to seeing many of you this spring in Great Falls!

Sincerely,

David W. Murray



Traffic Education Contributor of the Year Award

MTEA recognizes companies, organizations, and individuals who make generous contributions of time, energy, equipment and/or expertise to support and sustain the mission of the Montana Traffic Education Association. At the spring conference in Great Falls, we will be honoring those who have been selected for this year's award.

Activities To Drive Learning ~ Parallel Parking Competition

Sunday, April 26th from 11:00 am-12:00 pm, join some of our state instructors when they share quick teaching ideas to engage students in the curriculum. Like last year's conference, a few of your colleagues will give you quick ideas to jumpstart class. This will earn you another stamp of credit toward professional development.

The Parking Challenge consists of a single attempt per driver to park within a 20-foot space. There is no time limit; however, timing begins the moment the vehicle is shifted into reverse and ends when the driver verbally calls out "DONE." Precision and efficiency both factor into performance, making careful vehicle control essential throughout the maneuver.

A run will be disqualified if the vehicle hits another car, contacts the curb, or finishes more than 18 inches from the curb. No spotters or self-parking/automated parking systems are permitted during the attempt. Drivers may use factory-installed in-car aids such as cameras, parking sensors, and other driver assistance features, reflecting the real-world technology found in today's vehicles.

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.

(Continued from p. 1 "Driver Rehabilitation and the New Driver")

- Discuss the Spectrum of Driver Services and the team approach to providing driver rehabilitation services.
- Implement the use of tools and checklists to help determine driver readiness for on-road training.
- Identify perceptual, physical and cognitive challenges associated with common acquired and congenital disabilities and will appreciate how these challenges can affect driving performance.
- Review guidelines for client referrals for a healthcare assessment.
- Review the strategies for intervention, such as re-evaluation, driver cessation, potential plan of care for training, and how to determine if training is not appropriate.
- Develop procedures for driver education and training for novice drivers with disabilities.
- Understand ADED's Best Practice Guidelines for the Delivery of Driver Rehabilitation Services for working with special populations.
- Review best practices for documentation and communication with clients and other professionals.
- Review case studies that demonstrate skills and procedures taught.

The workshop is limited to 30 participants. Registration and payment are required to hold a spot. Participants will be responsible for their own lunch during the break. Registration for this workshop will be available when conference registration opens.

MSU-Northern is headed to Miles City and will be offering TED 462/562 *Methods of Behind-the-Wheel Instruction* at Miles Community College!

The on campus portion of the traffic ed classes will be held *in Miles City from June 15-June 26, 2026*. Carney and Grogan are teaching on Miles Community College campus this summer. Advance registration for Summer begins March 27, 2026. Students planning to register for the initial 8 credits can [APPLY FOR ADMISSION](#) now. A schedule with all traffic education courses is now available.

If you have any questions about this program, contact: Sandy Jappe, Montana State University-Northern. Call Toll Free: 1-800-662-6132 Ext. 4148 or 406-265-4148 or by e-mail: sjappe@msun.edu

Traffic Education at MSU-Northern

2026 SUMMER SCHEDULE

MSUN is shifting gears and headed to Miles City THIS SUMMER! ★

Required coursework necessary to begin teaching Traffic Ed:

<p>COURSE #1 May 11-29 TED 465/565 Motor Vehicle Law 2 Semester Credits ONLINE</p>	<p>COURSE #2 June 1-26 TED 461/561 Methods of Traffic Safety Education 3 Semester Credits ONLINE</p>
<p>COURSE #3 June 15-19 & June 22-26 (MUST ATTEND ALL DATES) TED 462/562 <i>Methods of Behind-the-Wheel Instruction</i> 3 Semester Credits Monday-Friday 8:00 am-5:00 pm ONSITE at Miles Community College</p>	

Pre-registration will open March 27, 2026!

For further information regarding the Traffic Education Endorsement and scheduling updates, please scan the QR code:

If you have any questions about this program, contact:
Sandy Jappe, Montana State University-Northern
Call Toll Free: 1-800-662-6132 Ext. 4148 or 406-265-4148
Email: sjappe@msun.edu



 MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
NORTHERN

MTEA Executive Board Meeting

January 25, 2026 (google meet format)

- Minutes, correspondence, and financial reports were reviewed.
- Reports on the newsletter, OPI updates, membership letter, and website were heard.
- The TOY, COY, and Service Awards were discussed. Nominees are being submitted.
- Detailed planning for the spring MTEA conference took place with planned speakers & sessions.
- Silent auction, door prizes, college credit, renewal units, and Board assignments for the conference were reviewed.
- Plans for the ADED pre-conference were discussed. OPI will take the lead on this.
- Classification and meeting agendas were reviewed.
- Filling open board positions was discussed.

The next meeting was scheduled for April 27 at the spring conference. Anyone having discussion items should contact Jim Carroll, Executive Secretary.

Are Drivers Becoming More Complacent Because of Automated Features?

by Mary Guffin (Kalispell)

Lately, I've noticed something surprising when I switch from driving my own car to riding in my teenage driver's car. My vehicle has automated features as blind spot monitors and a backup camera that beeps when I am getting close to objects behind or beside me. But when I get into my teen driver's car, which doesn't have those features, I find myself in a state of shock when I am not even considering looking back or checking my blind spots.

Suddenly, I'm reminded of just how much attention and awareness driving really requires. There's no beep if I back close to an object or light that illuminates to the side. Everything depends entirely on the driver; every glance, every decision, every reaction. For my teenager, this is the only way they know how to drive. For me, it's a return to a reality of more hands on, alert style of driving that I've taken for granted.

What I've come to realize is that the helpful tools in my car have made it easy to become complacent. I have come to rely and trust technology too much sometimes. It's tempting to glance at my phone or drink my coffee when pulling out of the garage because I assume the car will "catch" my mistakes. But in my teen's car, there's no safety net and I catch myself surprised by actually having to turn my head and having to look. Every distraction becomes a bigger risk. Especially because she is inexperienced.

That realization has helped me better understand what my teen is going through as a new driver. They're building habits without assistance from technology and learning to judge space, check mirrors, and stay alert—all on their own. It's made me think more carefully about how I talk about driving with them and the students I teach. I want them to develop strong foundational skills, not just rely on features that might not always be there.

It's also made me more aware of how easy it is to overestimate what automated features can do. Terms like "driver assist" or "autopilot" make it sound like the car can drive itself, but that's just not true. When drivers assume the car is doing all the work, "we" are

more likely to let our guard down and that's when accidents happen.

Driving my teen's simpler car reminds me that being safe on the road comes down to attention and responsibility. Technology can help, but it doesn't replace good habits. If anything, it's made me more focused when I go back to my own car. I've started treating those safety features as a backup, not a replacement and a check of the skills required to drive a car.

Watching my teen learn to drive in a car without high-tech support has given me a new appreciation for just how much we depend on our awareness behind the wheel. No matter how advanced cars become, the most important safety feature will always be a fully alert driver that is not dependent on reminders as lights and vibrations to keep us alert and responsive.

A Tale of Two Conferences

By Taylor Lammerding (Rocky Boy)

For the last five years, I've attended my music professional development conference every October. It's always been a bit of a sore spot for me—not just because it falls on my birthday week, but because I often feel completely out of place there. While I don't usually consider myself the least capable person in the room, something about this conference makes me feel like I'm constantly trying to catch up. The conversations around music pedagogy and other advanced topics often go over my head. I've even caught myself daydreaming about pulling an "Irish Goodbye"—slipping out without saying a word.

Then came April 2025, when I attended the Montana Traffic Education Association (MTEA) conference in Great Falls. At this point in my driver's ed teaching journey, I hadn't yet taken the official course in Havre with Steffani Grogan and Susan Carney. Still, I was welcomed by everyone I spoke with. Despite my beginner-level knowledge, my ideas were genuinely heard and valued during group activities.

What struck me most was how different this conference felt. Instead of being told what I was doing wrong or that I wasn't doing enough—as has often been the case in other PD settings—MTEA focused on growth from wherever you are. *(Continued on p. 5)*

(Continued from p. 4)

The workshops, led by experienced Montana educators, were not only practical but also encouraging. They showcased how others structure their programs, fun physics activities, and potential presenters to bring into my classroom; offering insights I could actually apply.

Maybe my positive experience came from having a more open, “just wanting to learn” mindset. But honestly, this was one of the most supportive and productive professional developments I’ve ever attended. Unlike other conferences, where social circles are clearly divided by age or familiarity, MTEA felt inclusive. People of all ages mingled in both professional and casual settings, and I never once saw someone awkwardly sitting alone.

I think part of that camaraderie comes from the nature of teaching driver’s ed. While it can offer a small financial boost, for many of us, it’s a passion project. There’s a kind of thrill—yes, even a roller-coaster kind of adrenaline rush—that comes with sitting in a car with a novice driver. That shared experience builds a strong sense of community. And at the end of the day, it’s this spirit and the commitment to helping students grow that make teaching driver’s education so fulfilling.

Outstanding Traffic Education Teacher of the Year Award

Since 1988, the Montana Traffic Education Association has honored an exceptional 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. Teachers can self-nominate or be nominated by someone who is familiar with their traffic education work. While the yearly deadline for nomination of March 1 has already passed, it’s not too early to start thinking of nominations for next year’s award. In the meantime, we hope you will attend the conference and honor this year’s winner (to be revealed at the Sunday night awards banquet).

News from OPI Office of Traffic Education



Greetings all,

I hope that your year is progressing well and that everyone is having a great start to 2026.

As spring approaches and the cold weather hopefully breaks, we begin to think about the coming state conference.

This year, OPI is sponsoring a very exciting pre-conference opportunity, and I would like to encourage those who are interested to register as soon as possible. ADED (The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists) speaker Kate Lopez will be presenting “Driver Rehabilitation and the New Driver”. This course will provide driving instructors with the tools and knowledge to provide proper screening for students with disabilities, determine if they should be referred to a driver rehabilitation specialist for further evaluation and training to promote their success behind the wheel, as well as how to complete the referral process.

Registration is only online, the cost is \$125.00 for the pre-conference and will take place on Saturday, April 25. This does not include lodging or meals but will be held at the Heritage Inn in Great Falls prior to the Sunday start of the annual Traffic Education Conference. The site to register for this event can be found at: <https://www.eventcreate.com/e/mttrafficeducationpre-conference2026> or scan the QR code below.



In other exciting news for anyone needing their initial 8 credits to teach Driver’s Education, MSU-Northern will be offering TED 462/562 *Methods of Behind-the-Wheel Instruction* at Miles Community College in Miles City. Please note that the *Methods of Behind-the-Wheel Instruction* course will **not** be scheduled in Havre this year. Advance registration for Summer begins March 27, 2026.

Please share this information with your colleagues and administration. I look forward to seeing you all in Great Falls.

Mike Houghton

Did you know? (news from the field.....)

Hello:

We had a young man come into the pizza shop in Havre, and we carded him as required by law as he looked 12. His ID is still vertical and he is over 21, but it is valid for 12 years. He explained that he renewed his driver's license ID early, and at that time he wasn't told to return once he was of age to have it corrected from a vertical ID to a horizontal one. The main reason for vertical vs horizontal is so you could tell if they were under age.

David Murray, Havre

Hello All -

I thought I would share an experience I recently had to confirm the driver license card picture orientation for minors. I had talked to David Murray regarding his story about a person who was 21 but was still issued a vertically oriented DL. The examiner didn't seem to have a straight answer for this, or whether they had to get another duplicate ID if they received it early, just before they turned 21. Anyway, we just took our daughter in to get her license in December. I asked the examiner this question, and she had a great clarification. Here is the response:

If you go in 5 or 6 months before your 21st birthday, they will issue the license as the same vertical license. However, if you wait until within 30 days of your 21st birthday, they will hold the card (operating on your temporary card) and issue it for your 21st birthday as the regular, horizontal, of-age license. I hope this helps anyone who has found an issue with that information over the last 6 months or so. It would be a good clarification for students to set up an appointment to renew their 21 year old license NOT sooner than 30 days from their birthday to avoid this issue.

Riley Ramsey, Hardin

**INDUSTRY'S BEST
PASSENGER SIDE**

**Brakes &
Accelerators**



Call us at:

506-799-5071 or 1-888-370-5050

tarsussystem.com



MONTANA TRAFFIC EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The Science of Safe Driving: Education, Engagement, & Technology

Great Falls, Montana ~ April 26-28, 2026



*The Montana Traffic Education Association and Montana Office of Public Instruction invite you to the
2026 Montana Traffic Education Conference*

The conference will focus on techniques and resources available to develop stronger teen drivers. Workshops will include how to better connect with and influence teens, working with special needs students (ADED), building confident and capable drivers, strategies for student engagement, the Huff Symposium with a panel of students and parents, OPI/TEDRS/CDTP updates, responsibilities of teen drivers, technology and driving with today's advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS), instructor health & mobility, curriculum applications with teen drug & alcohol use, a variety of teaching techniques for the classroom and in-vehicle, roundtable discussions, classification meetings, and more!

PRE-REGISTRATION: Attendees must pre-register (*no walk-ins accepted*) with MTEA by **Friday, April 10, 2026**. The registration fee is \$225 and includes access to five meals and all regular conference sessions. Under OPI guidelines, traffic education reimbursement funds may be used for educational teacher trainings. Complete the registration form and mail to MTEA along with a check for \$225 (*sorry, no credit card option at this point*). **Cancellation policy:** Upon written notice of cancellation before the conference only, \$150 of the \$225 registration fee is refundable.

BOOK YOUR HOTEL: The conference takes place at the **Heritage Inn**, 1700 Fox Farm Road, in Great Falls. Rates are \$109.00 (plus tax) for a single or double room, based on availability. Attendees will need a credit card to secure a room. Call the **Heritage Inn** at **(406) 761-1900** and mention the group name (Montana Traffic Education 2026) to get the special rate. Cut-off for the group rate is **April 13th**, so reserve early!

COLLEGE CREDIT OR RENEWAL UNITS: Register for one semester credit through MSU-N beginning at 10:00 am on Sunday, April 26. The cost is \$200. You can alternatively choose to earn up to 16 renewal units which can be used toward your Montana educator license renewal. **You may register for college credit OR renewal units, but NOT both.**

SCHEDULE/AGENDA: Registration packets will be available beginning at 10:00 am on Sunday, April 26. Some "hands-on" activities are available during registration. The first general session will begin at noon. The conference ends at 12:00 pm on Tuesday, April 28. **Conference agenda and other updates will be posted at MTEAOnline.org.** **Note:** The special OPI ADED pre-conference workshop on Saturday, April 25th has a separate registration process and can be accessed through <https://www.eventcreate.com/e/mtrafficeducationpre-conference2026>



2026 Montana Traffic Education Conference Registration

HERITAGE INN

April 26-28, 2026 – Great Falls, Montana

You must pre-register to attend.
MUST PRE-REGISTER BY
APRIL 10, 2026
Consider bringing an item to donate as a door prize!

Name (for name badge) _____

Home Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP Code _____

E-mail _____

Telephone (Cell) _____ (Home) _____ (Work) _____

School(s) where you teach _____

____ I would like to register for the MTEA conference and join/renew my membership in MTEA. Enclosed is a check to **MTEA** for **\$225**.

____ I am unable to attend this year's conference, but I want to join/renew my MTEA membership and receive MTEA's newsletter. Enclosed is a check to **MTEA** for **\$45**.

- MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO: **MONTANA TRAFFIC EDUCATION ASSOCIATION** or **MTEA**
- MAIL TO: **MTEA, PO Box 637, Conrad, MT 59425**
- QUESTIONS? Call Jim Carroll at **(406) 278-3285** (days) or **(406) 278-7856** (evenings)

MTEA USE ONLY

Date _____

Check No. _____

Received check from:

Amount \$ _____

The conference registration fee does not include the college credit fee. The cost for the one semester hour of credit is \$200 and must be paid to MSU-N at the conference.



Montana Traffic Education Association
PO Box 637
Conrad, MT 59425

Return Service Requested



2026 Montana Traffic Education Conference April 26-28 ~ Great Falls Heritage Inn

Refer to the mailing that was sent out in February about conference details and on the MTEA website at www.mteaonline.org. Don't forget to register by the April 10th deadline and make your room reservations!

The 2026 ADTSEA national conference will be held July 12-15 in Cary, North Carolina. 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. Look for more information about agenda and registration materials on the ADTSEA website at www.adtsea.org.

Even if you can't attend, at least consider joining your national organization.