



MTEA NEWS


Self Driving Cars

By Erik Pritchard (Helena)

Most of us have heard the term *self-driving car*, but what does that really mean? Can the car truly take you to the store and back without any input? Can it drop your kids off to practice by itself? The answer depends on the level of driving automation—and these are defined by the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE).

Advanced driver-assistance systems (ADAS) are broken down into six levels, representing their level of autonomy. **Level 0** represents what you think it would—no driving assistance. Level 0 is limited to giving warnings and momentary assistance. For example, blind spot warnings and even automatic emergency braking. Unsurprisingly the driver is still considered to be fully in control and driving the car.

Level 1 can manage some part of your steering or your brake/acceleration. A car with lane centering would be level 1. However, if you add adaptive cruise control to that same car it is now considered level 2. (If you're not familiar with adaptive cruise control, it manages both acceleration and braking). *(Continued on p. 3)*



SAE J3016™ LEVELS OF DRIVING AUTOMATION™

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	SAE LEVEL 0™	SAE LEVEL 1™	SAE LEVEL 2™	SAE LEVEL 3™	SAE LEVEL 4™	SAE LEVEL 5™
What does the human in the driver's seat have to do?	You are driving whenever these driver support features are engaged – even if your feet are off the pedals and you are not steering			You are not driving when these automated driving features are engaged – even if you are seated in “the driver's seat”		
	You must constantly supervise these support features; you must steer, brake or accelerate as needed to maintain safety			When the feature requests, you must drive	These automated driving features will not require you to take over driving	
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	These are driver support features			These are automated driving features		
What do these features do?	These features are limited to providing warnings and momentary assistance	These features provide steering OR brake/acceleration support to the driver	These features provide steering AND brake/acceleration support to the driver	These features can drive the vehicle under limited conditions and will not operate unless all required conditions are met	This feature can drive the vehicle under all conditions	
Example Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • automatic emergency braking • blind spot warning • lane departure warning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lane centering OR • adaptive cruise control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lane centering AND • adaptive cruise control at the same time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • traffic jam chauffeur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local driverless taxi • pedals/steering wheel may or may not be installed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • same as level 4, but feature can drive everywhere in all conditions

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MTEA President's Message

Dear MTEA Members,

As we head into the Christmas break and wrap up another busy first half of the school year, I want to thank each of you for your hard work and dedication to traffic education across Montana. I hope the upcoming holiday season brings you rest, joy, and a chance to recharge.



Looking ahead, I'm excited to remind you that our annual MTEA convention will be held this spring in Great Falls. I encourage you to start making plans to attend. The convention is always a valuable opportunity to learn, connect, and re-energize for the year ahead. If you can, please consider inviting a colleague—especially someone who hasn't joined us recently or someone new who may benefit from being part of our community. Fresh perspectives keep our organization thriving.

As many of our experienced educators move toward retirement, it's more important than ever that we mentor and encourage new teachers to step into the vital work of traffic education. Each of us can play a role in building the next generation of dedicated instructors.

We are also seeking members interested in serving on the MTEA Executive Board. If you've ever considered helping shape the future of traffic education in Montana, now is a wonderful time to get involved. I encourage you to visit with me if you are interested in finding out more about serving.

Thank you once again for all you do. I wish you a safe and joyful holiday season, and I look forward to seeing many of you this spring in Great Falls!

Sincerely,
David W. Murray
President, MTEA

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(Continued from page 1– Self Driving Cars)

The keynote to ADAS **levels 0-2** is that the driver is driving the car, even if the features are engaged and steering/braking/accelerating. This creates the appearance that the car is driving itself, but it's important to understand this can be very limited. For example, the cutting-edge Tesla ADAS is only a level 2, as it requires a human to be constantly monitoring and ready to take over in an instant.

In what is perhaps aggressive marketing, Tesla has branded its ADAS “Full Self Driving” or “FSD”. Because it requires constant monitoring and hands on the wheel, it remains firmly in the level 2 category. There have been Tesla crashes as a direct result of drivers ignoring this classification and not watching the road.

General Motors has also achieved level 2 with its “SuperCruise” ADAS. Unlike Tesla’s FSD, which requires the driver to keep his/her hands on the wheel, GM’s SuperCruise lets the driver take his/her hands off the wheel. It uses a driver-facing camera to monitor the driver’s eye position and movement, and will begin to disengage if it senses the driver is not watching the road.

In **level 3** the hands-on-the-wheel requirement changes. Level 3 considers that you are no longer the driver, even when in the driver’s seat. It can still request that you take over, but it’s no longer required for you to be actively monitoring the vehicle. You don’t have to have your eyes on the road or your hands on the wheel. Instead you could check your email or read a book.

At the time of this writing, the only vehicle available for purchase with level 3 ADAS is from Mercedes. They’ve branded their ADAS “Drive Pilot” and it specializes in stop-and-go traffic under 41mph. It will work on approved roadways in the United States.

Level 4 and 5 are probably what most people imagine when they hear the term “self-driving.” Level 4 would include the current Waymo fleet of robotaxis operating in Phoenix, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and most recently in Austin. These vehicles can be hailed via an app and do not have a human driver in the driver’s seat. They are therefore incapable of having a human take over and are more truly self-driving.

Waymo’s approach to ADAS (and GM and Ford) is very different from Tesla. It essentially uses highly

detailed maps to create a bounded area in which to drive. It’s true that it is driving autonomously, but it’s also true that it knows in advance exactly where the boundaries of all roadways lie. Additionally Waymo relies on a suite of high-tech, expensive sensors to determine the dynamic physical environment around it. A Waymo car couldn’t just be plopped down in Forsyth, Montana and function.

Tesla’s approach would like to see its cars placed anywhere and figure it out for themselves. Unlike Waymo, Tesla is not relying on high-definition maps of predefined areas; instead Tesla wants a sort of eyeballs and brain approach that can adapt to anything. It basically uses cameras for the eyeballs and a computer for the brain.

Which approach will get to the finish line first is anyone’s guess.

MTEA Executive Board Meeting **April 28, 2025 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.
- 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.
- Preliminary planning for the 2026 conference took place with many of the details to be included on the fall meeting agenda.
- The upcoming ADTSEA conference in Billings was discussed. Board assignments were made with those planning to attend.
- The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for fall (October-November).

Crashing Through the Language Barrier

- Tips for Supporting English Language Learners in the Driver's Education Classroom

by Augustus Goldberg (Billings)

As we work to help all members of our community take to the roads safely, I have been astonished by a distinct lack of resources online for supporting those with low to moderate English proficiency. As such, I thought I would gather some tips and tools for my fellow driving instructors that I think will make our lives and the lives of our ELL students a bit easier.

1. Use your words wisely. For many of our students who speak English with moderate proficiency, a mindful ordering of the integration of vocabulary will go a long way. As driving instructors, we already work to be concise and specific when cueing in the car. Having a list of cues that we will use as vocabulary ahead of time can help students to feel confident that they will know how we want them to perform, as well as let us know that we will be understood on the drive. Additionally, many ELL students struggle academically even after they can speak English socially. Taking time to cover critical terms at the start of the unit (before they need to accurately use it to understand a lesson) can help make our students more successful and reduce their cognitive load from lesson to lesson. For more info on teaching academic language, check out www.colorincolorado.org/academic-language. I find their article on language objectives to be especially practical. For testing, know that our state written exam is available in 39 languages at the MVD. Consider talking with your ELL student about taking the test in their home language if they would be more comfortable that way.

2. Be visual. Our greatest resource when supporting students who have a language barrier is shared reference points. The Adapted Illustrated Driver Manual (AIDM) is a major asset as the language is simplified and many graphical supports are available. While it is not chapter-by-chapter aligned with our state curriculum, the AIDM covers all of the necessary information and could be an easy supplement to our texts we use. Having the illustrations as support helps lessen misunderstandings. I would personally avoid tools that use google translate or AI to translate our texts into the students' home languages as we have no way to verify that the information remains accurate. Simplified resources like the AIDM are preferable.

3. Ask for help. Many of us live in communities where members of our communities could act as translators. When available, having someone able to act as a go-between in instances of confusion is excellent, especially for BTW instruction when clarifying questions for the driver can be vital.

Differentiation in Traffic Education: Why It Matters

By Britney Shooter (Browning)

This concept may not apply to every certified Montana teacher, but I want to talk about something that impacts all of us who work with students: the importance of differentiation. Whether we teach in elementary classrooms, middle school math, high school English, or traffic education, we know one thing for sure; students don't all learn the same way. Differentiation is more than a buzzword or checklist; it's a mindset. According to Tomlinson (2014), differentiation involves planning and adjusting instruction based on students' readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles. It's about being flexible and responsive to the learners in front of us. Whether we're explaining sentence structure or how to safely execute a three-point turn, the principle remains the same: every student deserves access to learning in a way that works for them.

Before I became certified to teach traffic education, I lived in Browning, a small rural community on the Blackfeet Reservation in northern Montana. People in the community knew I was a teacher, and soon I became the "go-to" person for help with parallel parking; especially for those preparing for their driving exams. At the time, I didn't know much about formal driving instruction. I didn't use reference points, angles, or targeting techniques. I just shared what had worked for me, and we practiced until each person figured it out in their own way. I realize now that I was unintentionally using differentiated instruction. My way didn't work for everyone but together, we found what did.

That experience stayed with me. And when I entered my traffic education certification program, I began to understand how powerful true differentiation can be when it's intentional. I'm especially grateful to my instructors, Steffani Grogan and Susan Carney, who taught me multiple ways to teach key driving skills like parallel parking.

(continued on page 5...)

(Continued from page 4—*Differentiation in Traffic Education: Why It Matters*)

They didn't just show us one "right" method, they modeled how to adjust instruction based on each student's learning needs. Their teaching helped shift my mindset. And that's the heart of this reflection. Being an effective traffic education teacher means shifting our mindset. It means letting go of a one-size-fits-all approach and embracing the reality that our students need different things at different times.

Subban (2006) emphasizes that differentiated instruction supports student engagement and motivation, especially when students are given various pathways to learning. As teachers, whether full-time in the classroom, part-time driver education instructors, or both, we wear many hats. But at the end of the day, our role is to help students succeed. That means being open-minded, flexible, and willing to change. It means planning ahead for different learning styles and being ready to adapt in the moment when something isn't working.

So whether you're teaching geometry or gear shifts, remember: not all students learn the same way, and that's okay. Our job is to meet them where they are and guide them safely forward; one mile, and one mindset shift, at a time.

References:

Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners* (2nd ed.). ASCD.

Meet the New Mayor of Hardin; our very own Riley Ramsey!

A special "Congratulations" to Riley Ramsey! In the November, 2025 elections, he was voted in as the new Mayor of Hardin. Riley will start his four-year term in January. He will continue to teach and stay involved in MTEA as well. He indicated he is looking forward to his new duties and that he is "excited to help with some things in our town".



News from OPI Office of Traffic Education

Mike Houghton

Greetings,

As we progress into the school year, I pause to reflect upon the past several months.

My spring and summer were filled with travel, and I was fortunate to meet and work with many incredible people.

March found me in Long Beach, CA where I attended the Lifesavers Conference on Roadway Safety. Workshops included conversations about supporting older drivers, the use of telematics in self-evaluation while driving, advances in child restraints and an intense focus on distracted and impaired driving.

Education and prevention were heavily emphasized as the keys to changing dangerous behaviors and I was encouraged by the amount of support for best practices in traffic education.

In July, it was off to Billings, where Montana was fortunate to host the ADTSEA National Conference. Again, the focus was on teaching safety and doing all that we can to ensure safe roads.

With summer Traffic Education programs wrapped up and fall/winter programs already underway, I wanted to remind everyone of a few things that I have noticed.

- (1) If you are a CDTP instructor, you must not test students who are under 14½ years of age. This is in CDTP training, and these student permits are not legal. This puts students at great risk and potentially adds liability to you.
- (2) Traffic Education endorsement renewal requires that you complete 4 applicable credits in every renewal cycle. One easy way to achieve this is to attend and register for the credits offered at the annual Montana Traffic Education Conference. Be certain that you are remaining current on your endorsement.
- (3) Student lists, applications, test results, and course completions are all due to your local MVD office within 3 days, as each of these is completed.

Our program integrity is the key to safer drivers and safer roads. As the school year progresses, it is my hope that we, as professionals, can set the standard for all our peers.



Jim Carroll selected for ADTSEA “Teacher of Excellence Award”

At the national ADTSEA conference held this past July in Billings, Jim Carroll was awarded the Teacher of Excellence Award, honoring outstanding driver and traffic safety educators. The award is sponsored by The National Road Safety Foundation (NRSF). Candidates are selected for outstanding teaching and service to driver and traffic safety education. Carroll also presented his topic “Towards Safer Driving” in a session.



2025 Teacher Excellence Award Recipients: Duane Kjono, MN; Paul McNamara, MA; Oscar Outen, NC; Jim Carroll, MT

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 (which includes a section that is completed by the candidate) through the MTEA website at mteaonline.org. Members of the selection committee will then review the application. Questions? Contact Jim Carroll, Executive Secretary, at 406-278-7856 or by leaving a message on the MTEA website (mteaonline.org).

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, local experts who have visited driver education classes to share their knowledge about various safety topics, as well as business development organizations that have funded materials, equipment and learning tools for your TE program. Questions? Contact Jim Carroll, Executive Secretary, at 406-278-7856 or by leaving a message on the MTEA website (mteaonline.org).

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 or by leaving a message on the MTEA website (mteaonline.org) with any questions and to receive the “Service Award” application form.

MTEA Executive Board Meeting

November 2, 2025 (google meet format)

- Minutes, correspondence, and financial reports were reviewed.
- Spring 2025 conference reports (classification meetings & surveys) were reviewed.
- Warren Clark was nominated for President-Elect.
- Recruitment efforts were discussed to get more teachers in attendance at the spring conference.
- Items discussed in an OPI report included an ADED pre-conference, MT DRIVE, and the Hub courses.
- An ADTSEA follow-up took place. Committee members are looking for ways to incorporate speakers and materials into our conference.
- A discussion on MSU-N teacher training courses took place with a “pilot” format proposed for 2026.
- Tentative 2026 conference ideas were discussed.
- The Teacher and Contributor of the Year awards were discussed in regard to more involvement.

(continued in next column)

Fall meeting minutes, continued)

- Conference costs were discussed and a \$10 registration increase was approved.
- Funds for the purchase of conference door prizes were approved.

The next meeting was scheduled for January 25th in an online format. Anyone having items for discussion, should contact Jim Carroll, Executive Secre-

ADTSEA National Conference Hosted in Billings, July 20-23, 2025 a Success!

Close to 150 educators, presenters, and vendors converged in Billings this past July for the ADTSEA conference. MTEA and OPI helped in sponsoring the event. Those attending from Montana included Susan Carney, Jim Carroll, Steffani Grogan, LeAnn Haas, Michael Houghton, Mikal Jones, Jodi Stugelmeyer, Adam Tunnel, and Dan Williams. All reported coming away with insightful information.

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

Look for more detailed conference information in the spring newsletter and on the MTEA website at www.mteaonline.org.

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.

ADTSEA
American Driver & Traffic Safety Education Association