

## Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood P-3, and Elementary Education Programs



Academic Program Review / Self-Study

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# Academic Program Review Self-Study

## Introduction, Program Purpose, and Background

By design, all programs in the Education Division are tightly focused on the mission and vision of Salish Kootenai College. The development of future teachers, especially Indigenous teachers who are masters of the art of teaching and also deeply knowledgeable of the cultures, languages, and homeland of the Séliš, Ksanka and Q'íspé peoples is central to all instructional decisions, both individual and collective, within the Education Division.

### Salish Kootenai College Vision Statement

Salish Kootenai College aspires to be the pre-eminent educational center of excellence for American Indian Students, grounded in the cultures of the Séliš, Ksanka and Q'íspé people of the Flathead Nation. The college will empower students to improve the lives of their families and communities through research, leadership and service.

### Salish Kootenai College Mission Statement

The mission of Salish Kootenai College is to provide quality postsecondary educational opportunities for American Indians, locally and from throughout the United States. The College will promote community and individual development and perpetuate the cultures of the Confederated Tribes of the Flathead Nation.

### Education Division and the SKC Mission and Vision

To fulfill its mission and vision, Salish Kootenai College has endeavored to create meaningful and substantive programs to improve the lives of Indigenous Peoples on the Flathead Indian Reservation and across the United States. The Education Division is a key to these efforts and currently offers the following degrees preparing future teachers from Early Childhood through High School.

- Early Childhood Education:\* (A.A. and B.S. Degrees)
- Early Childhood Education:\* P-3 (A.A. and B.S. Degrees)
- Elementary Education\* (A.S. and B.S. Degrees)
- Secondary Science Education (B.S. Degree)
- Secondary Math Education (B.S. Degree)
- Native Language Teacher Education (A.S. and B.S. Degrees)

\*reviewed in this APR

Salish Kootenai College established teacher education programs to address the major concern in Indigenous education of the absence of qualified American Indian teachers particularly in schools that serve significant numbers of Indigenous students. The following data points are now 7 years old, but the inequities they document are still relevant and compelling in 2023. A Montana Office of Public Instruction Report on American Indian Student Achievement (2016) reported the following demographics:

- “6.6% of Montana’s total population is American Indian (2015 Census Estimate), made up mostly of the twelve tribal nations of Montana: Assiniboine, Blackfeet, Chippewa, Cree,



Crow, Gros Ventre, Kootenai, Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa, Northern Cheyenne, Pend d'Oreille, Salish, Sioux

- For the 2015-2016 school year there were 20,401 American Indian/Alaska Native students in Montana that report American Indian/Alaska Native as at least one of their races. The number of American Indian students in Montana is increasing every year. 14.0% of Montana's students are American Indian.
  - 44.9% or 9,151 of American Indian students attend a school physically located within a reservation with 55.1% or 11,250 located outside a reservation boundary." (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2016)
- "The percentage of American Indian teachers in Montana has barely increased since the mid-1990s—rising from 1.9 percent in 1995 to 2.3 percent today." (Cummings, 2015) The Montana Office of Public Instruction notes that in the 2015-2016 academic year currently there were 10,334 licensed teachers working in Montana. By extrapolation, American Indian identified teachers are estimated at only 238. (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2016)
- However, the stagnation of Native teacher employment in Montana is undergoing some notable change. On the Flathead Reservation alone, in the late 1980s, there were only three Native American teachers serving in its seven public school districts (Ruhman, 2016). Due in large part to the efforts of the SKC's Division of Education and its graduates, this number has now risen to approximately 39 (DOE enrollment & graduate records, 2023). This number does not include the number of Native teachers SKC has prepared who are teaching elsewhere in Montana or in other states. Because of the fluidity of teacher employment, an exact number of SKC-trained Indigenous educators still teaching is difficult to ascertain; however, the Division is confident this number would be well in excess of 100 teachers beyond Flathead Reservation boundaries.

The effectiveness of the Education Division in meeting this critical need can be measured in many ways, but one of note is the record of 100% placement of our graduates seeking full time teaching positions in public schools or early childhood centers. In addition, there is a high

frequency of SKC teaching candidates being recruited and contracted, *before* completing the final student teaching term prior to licensure. The Division is proud of the record of our graduates as teachers of excellence and also as change agents within their schools.





## 2023 Self-Study

### A. Overview of Division of Education Changes, 2019-2023

Multiple changes have occurred in the Division since our last APR was completed in Spring of 2019. As this study will focus primarily on the Early Childhood Education, Early Childhood P-3, and Elementary Education programs, we will not address the following other DOE developments in depth, but will briefly list them:

- Changes in Secondary Education Dept. personnel, organizational structure
- Secondary Education enrollment issues, sustainability studies, outreach and analyses
- Development and implementation of Native Language Teacher Education program and its shift from Salish Language Educator Development (SLED) to NLTE
- Development of the B.S. program in NLTE
- Development of a new curriculum and instruction graduate program and its organizational shift from the DOE to the Division of Graduate Studies

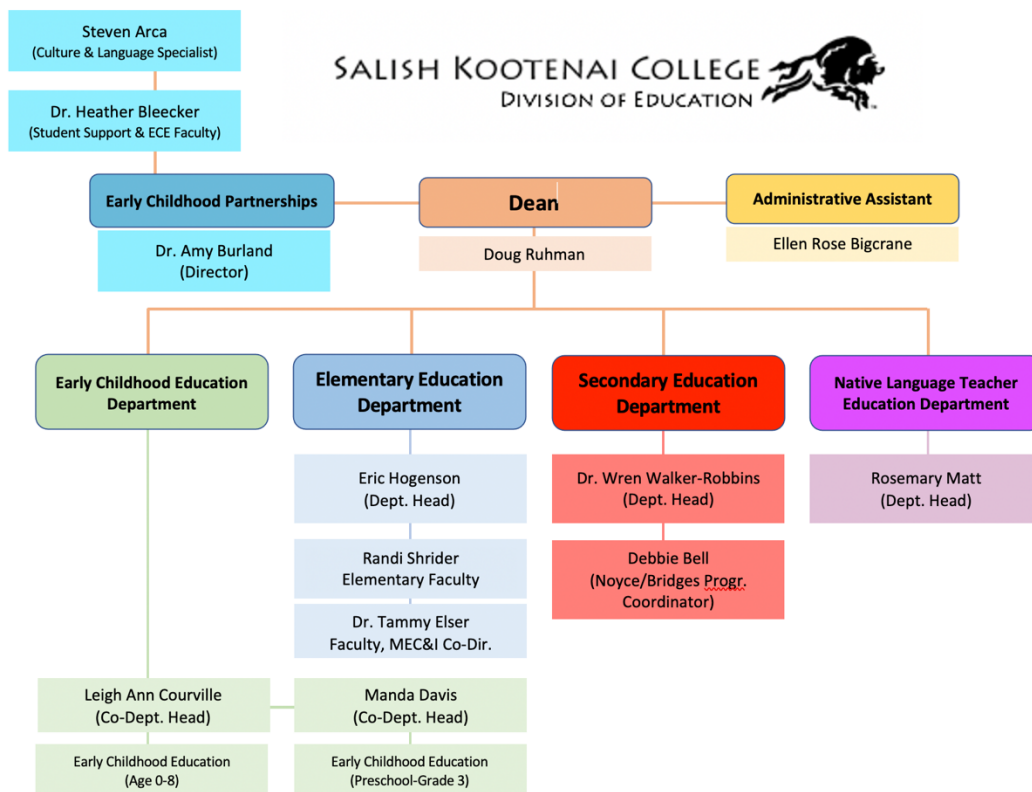
### Overall Division of Education Systemic Changes

#### *Leadership and Personnel*

During this review period the DOE experienced a substantial change in leadership as Dr. Amy Burland stepped down as Division Dean to manage grant programs and direct several initiatives aimed at strengthening early childhood education partnerships. Doug Ruhman took over as DOE Dean in January 2021, while retaining his existing role as faculty and Elementary Education Dept. Chair. Dr. Wren Walker Robbins assumed the role of Secondary Education Chair as the BSSE (Science) and BSSE-M (Mathematics) programs merged into a single department.

Dr. Heather Bleecker continued as Director of the Secondary Mathematics degree program. Faculty member Ann Stone took on the role of Student Teaching Supervisor for the Division in 2019. Dr. Jessica King and Randi Shrider were hired as Elementary Faculty in 2020 and 2021, respectively. Ms. Stone left SKC in March 2021, and Dr. King took over as Student Teaching Supervisor. Kathie Maiers, the Division's longtime Administrative Assistant, left the DOE in November 2022 to direct the TRIO program, eventually being replaced by Ellen Rose Bigcrane. Steve Arca was hired in early 2023 as the Division's Culture and Language Specialist. Dr. Michael Munson left the DOE to be Dean of Native American Studies, and Rosie Matt assumed the role of Department Chair for NLTE.

In 2022, Dr. Heather Bleecker transitioned out of her role in Secondary Math and became the DOE's Student Support Specialist and also helps coordinate ECED partnerships with Amy Burland. Manda Davis and Leigh Ann Courville continue to serve as Co-Chairs of ECED. Dr. Tammy Elser has continued in her role as Elementary faculty. Eric Hogenson was hired as faculty and Early Childhood Technology Specialist in 2022 but has transitioned to Elementary Department Chair with the start of the 2023-2024 AY. This represents the current configuration of the Division. See the following DOE organizational chart:



## ***Program and Student Assessment Systems***

As part of the normal process of program completion in the DOE, graduating seniors fill out evaluations of their experience at SKC, reflecting on the aspects of their teacher preparation that they feel were most helpful in preparing them as educators, as well as any aspects which they feel were least helpful. In reviewing these surveys, we came to see a pattern wherein one of the program components that students perennially questioned had to do with the portfolio system, in which students maintained a checklist of required assignments at three stages of their Teacher Education Program (TEP). This system was cumbersome for both students and for faculty, who often had to locate past assignments and the accompanying portfolio rubrics that had to be evaluated separately from the course's assessment.

In the ECE-P3 and Elementary programs, student portfolios were organized by 10 national teacher preparation standards (InTASC standards). Although comprehensive, these standards were not directly connected to SKC or to students on a personal level. Students in ECED maintained portfolios based on National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards.

In the interest of being responsive to student feedback and program improvement, work was initiated in 2018 and 2019 to revise and restructure the Division's assessment schema to better reflect the SKC experience, to align more closely with Indigenous worldviews, and connect with each student's personal and professional growth as an educator... while at the same time

maintaining measures of success that were tied to national InTASC standards for teacher preparation.

It was decided that student portfolios would be based instead on the Division’s “Five Central Beliefs”, which had been established back when the Education Department was first developed in 2007-2008, but which were updated and revised in 2019:

## 5 Central Beliefs

- ◉ **Culturally sustaining and revitalizing instruction and curriculum will lead education to its promise of opportunity and equity.**
- ◉ **Learning communities foster the construction of knowledge.**
- ◉ **Reflective practice leads to the continuous flourishing of both teacher and student.**
- ◉ **Each learner’s uniqueness, when valued and invited in all its diverse forms, enriches the learning community.**
- ◉ **Communication, critical thinking, cultural understanding and citizenship are essential to effective teaching.**

Working subcommittees were formed in the Division and this work was well underway when the COVID-19 pandemic forced SKC into lockdown in spring of 2020. These efforts to revise and improve student and program assessments were understandably stalled as the Division prioritized the delivery of its programs and classes using virtual and at-distance methods off and on for the majority of two academic years. Gradually this work resumed, was refined in 2021-2022, and put into preliminary implementation in 2022-2023.

Our revised assessment system exists in two domains: the Student Portfolio and the Critical Assessments.

### ***Revised Student Portfolio System***

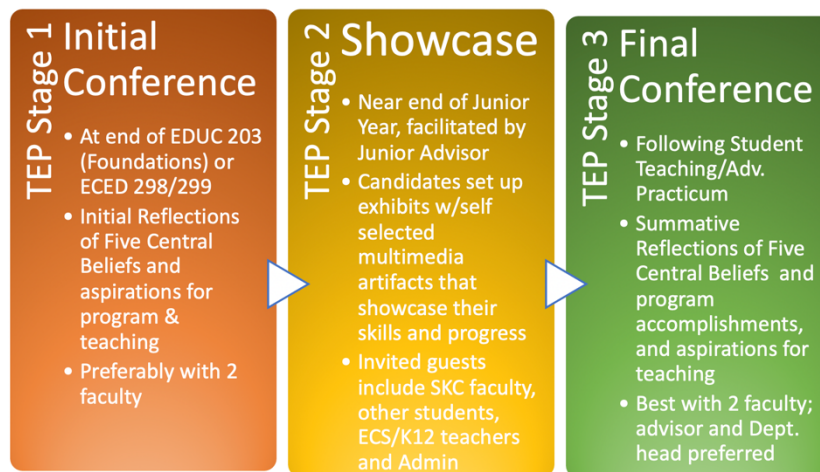
On the “front” side, students engage in an Initial Conference (Stage 1) associated with their program’s launch course into their third and fourth years of study (Teacher Education Program, or TEP). For ECED students, this would be ECED 298/299, Early Childhood Practicum. For P-3 and Elementary students, this would be done in conjunction with EDUC 203, Foundations of Education. There is a scored rubric associated with this conference, and a baseline is established



that sets the stage for documenting the growth of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are associated with the student's degree program.

Then, near the end of Year 3, students participate in a "Junior Showcase" event (Stage 2) which provides an opportunity for them to highlight the coursework, projects, and other artifacts and experiences that they feel have most helped them to evolve as an educator. This event is held on campus as an evening showcase where students assemble a display of these formative artifacts and meet with visiting guests to explain and present evidence of their growth as teachers. Invited guests to the Showcase include PreK-12 classroom teachers, SKC and public school administrators, other students, faculty, family members, and community members.

Finally, when students are in their senior year and have completed student teaching- just prior to graduation- they engage in their Final Conference (Stage 3) in which they revisit the Central Beliefs and share about how their immersive clinical experience in the classroom impacted their growth as educators. The same rubric (as in the Initial Conference) is used and the growth in knowledge, skills, and dispositions can then be measured and evaluated to determine candidates' readiness for teaching. All three Stages of this process are collectively referred to as the Student Portfolio, as all documentation is kept in online folders that can only be accessed by the individual students, and their faculty and advisors.



### ***Critical Assessments System***

On the "back" side, numerous course assignments that represent student progress in relation to the ten InTASC standards are scored uniformly and these data are maintained by faculty in a common instrument that is organized by cohort. In this way, measures of student and program progress can still be documented and analyzed in relation to national standards (InTASC or NAEYC), but this occurs as a separate process in the background, maintained by faculty and apart from the student's portfolio. This critical assessments component was developed in 2021 and 2022 and is still in the process of being implemented.

	A	B	C	D	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V
1	Division of Education Critical Assessments Index 2023-2024				InTASC (all)	InTASC 9	InTASC 4	InTASC 9	InTASC 6	InTASC 7	InTASC 7	InTASC 2			
2					EDUC courses			EDUC 250	EDUC 307		EDUC 330		EDUC 354		Other courses
3					EDUC 203										MATH 132
4					TEP Stage 1 Portf	Teachg Philos 1	Scholarly WS	Constructvst Essay	Assessmnt Toolkt LP w/ Standards Integr.	Unit Plan	Year-long Plan	Case Study			
5	Student ID	Last Name	Last Name	Program											
6	12345	Student	Ima	ELEME	96	96	96				92				
7	66666	Student	Ima	ELEME	96	96	96				92				
8					92	92	92								
9					90	90	90		92	96	56				
10											86				
11															
12									88	90	88				
13					88	88	88		90	86	90				
14					96	96	96		98	94	90				
15					60	82	78		60	88	90				
16															
17															
18									86	90					
19					94	94	94		84	90					
20									88	76	68				
21					86	86	86		92	98	90				
22															
23											78				

The Division feels this newer approach to monitoring and documenting student progress (and simultaneously, program efficacy) around the Five Central Beliefs is more student-centered, more honoring of the development of the whole person, and more aligned with SKC's mission objectives and Séliš, Ksanka and Qíispé ways of being. In addition, the continued connection with and adherence to national standards allows us to gauge our effectiveness in a larger context. This new assessment model is unique to SKC's Division of Education, and the revision work became prioritized based directly on student feedback.

### ***Early Childhood (ECED) Significant Changes***

The Early Childhood Education Program has responded to the critical shortage of early childcare providers at the national, state, and local levels through grant funding specific to increasing the number of trained early childhood teachers. Successful projects include two TCU Head Start Partnership Projects entitled *Jump Start, Head Start* (2020 – 2025) and *Elevate Early Childhood Teachers: Build Indigenous Futures* (2023-2028); the Early Educators Investment Collaborative Project entitled *Pathways* (2021-25) and a supplement to the *Pathways Project* (2021-25) through the Kellogg Foundation. The primary purpose is to mitigate barriers to attaining Early Childhood Degrees for Head Start teachers and other early childcare teachers employed full-time in centers.

The projects developed partnerships between SKC and several other colleges with two-year Early Childhood programs. These partners include Northwest Indian College, Chief Dull Knife College, and Central Wyoming College. Students complete their two-year degrees in their community and continue their bachelor's at SKC from their home community. Then, they can stay in their communities and transfer to Salish Kootenai College to complete their bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. The mitigation of barriers through these projects includes allowing students to attend classes remotely outside workday hours through synchronous and asynchronous evening and summer instruction. In addition, tuition, books, and fees are covered for the students.

Additional Early Childhood 2+2 Articulation Agreements that are in place include Fort Peck, Little Bighorn College, and Stone Child College through the **Montana Tribal College Transfer**

**Pathways for Student Success Project.** This project is funded through the American Indian College Fund and is a collaborative effort among the seven Montana Tribal College Presidents. This project aims to strengthen transfer pathways between the Montana TCUs to support Native student completion and employment in two high-demand fields: healthcare and teacher education. The proposed initiative is building progressive education pathways from certificate to associate to baccalaureate degree attainment across the Montana TCUs through 1+1 and 2+2 articulation agreements. More broadly, it increases the capacity of the Montana TCUs to collectively support Native student success, on-time transfer, and degree completion and will also harmonize the Montana TCUs' transfer policies, procedures, and student support. The SKC Early Childhood program has closely partnered with CS&KT Early Childhood Services (ECS) for over 30 years. SKC and ECS have a longstanding MOA that provides tuition and fee waivers for their teachers pursuing Early Childhood degrees. These projects have increased the number of ECS teachers who have attained associate and bachelor's degrees, assisting ECS in meeting the Federal requirements for Head Start. The current projects allow us to provide stipends for completing courses and degree levels.

### **Stackable One-Year Early Childhood Certificate/CDA Equivalent**

At SKC, a stackable one-year certificate was developed to lead to the Associate degree. This certificate is equivalent to the Child Development Associate Certificate (CDA), a Nationally recognized Early Childhood Certification, but more importantly, provides the first year of an Associate degree. The CDA does not provide college credit and takes as much time to complete as the certificate. For this reason, the one-year certificate is an important piece that does away with the overlap of training that slows the attainment of EC degrees.

The SKC one-year certificate is the first step in establishing a stackable credential for those beginning their Early Childhood career pathway. For the fully employed Head Start teachers, this can be done with two summers of coursework and by taking two courses each quarter during the school year. If that is too rigorous, they will complete it in two summers and two school years by taking one course each quarter. The SKC one-year certificate is in the 2023-2024 SKC Catalog.

### ***Early Childhood P-3 (ECE:P-3) Significant Changes***

During the Covid pandemic, the P-3 program was able to provide synchronous, online learning for all students in the department and provided additional supports as needed for individual students. Courses in the P-3 degree plan added important content to reflect the ongoing strain and unique burden on local school districts, communities, and families due to school closures, illness, and increased poverty. Practicum experiences were completed by students in new ways, including using video recordings to complete observations and having students work with children in their neighborhoods. Various directed studies were also provided for students who became “out of synch” with the degree plan due to the disruptions caused by Covid.

Enrollment in the P-3 program has declined in recent years, reflecting the general trend in low enrollment in education programs across the state. However, we continue to have new and returning students interested in this unique program, which is the only P-3 program offered in Tribal Colleges in Montana. Additionally, this program provides candidates interested in teaching young children an opportunity for licensure with an emphasis in the early grades, a field that is



rapidly developing as our understanding of the importance of early education is refined and expanded.

### ***Elementary Education (ELEM, K-8) and Other Curriculum Changes***

Other than the changes already noted, curriculum in all three degree tracks (Early Childhood, P-3, and Elementary) remained relatively consistent during this review period, mainly due to the disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the priority assigned to maintaining program delivery. However, the following will serve to summarize some other notable curricular modifications that occurred from 2019-2023:

- Elementary Education (ELEM) added specific requirements for a minimum of two NASL courses in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years, with an emphasis on local (Seliš or Ksanka) language beginning in AY 2019-2020. This was based on the need for teachers employed in local schools to have a foundational understanding of local Native language to better ensure meeting the needs of Native students and their families.
- In AY 2020-2021, ELEM added a parallel track called “Elementary Education - Native Language Emphasis” which reconfigured the standard ELEM degree plan to include 5 courses in Native languages (especially emphasizing those of local tribes).
- As mentioned, ELEM substantially changed its Student Portfolio system and assessment matrix towards a more student-centric model that emphasizes the Division’s Five Central Beliefs and links understanding of these Beliefs to students’ own personal scholastic experience, rather than solely on a set of external teacher education standards. However, these same national standards are retained and candidate aptitude for teaching will continue to be measured by way of Critical Assessments throughout the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year of their programs.
- In AY 2020, 2021, and 2022, Early Childhood Education (ECED) and ECE P-3 made minor changes to their degree plans to accommodate students associated with 2+2 articulation agreements; most of these changes involved moving classes to different terms, and some delivery modes shifted from daytime to evening class times to allow those at distance and teachers in early learning settings to attend classes after the school day.
- Course delivery partnerships were formed with other departments on campus; for example- Division faculty networked with Psychology faculty and replaced an ECED developmental Psych class with a class delivered by the PSYC department, PSYC 340. In 2022 the DOE worked with the Business Education Division to begin creation of a resource room for aspiring professionals on campus with professional clothing, accessories, and supplies. Education and Native American Studies continue to network frequently on program development and cultural trainings, among other collaborations.
- The ECE:P-3 program created several specific endorsement programs to bridge from Elementary to P-3, vice-versa, and ECED to P-3 both directions as well. Originally named “Minors”, these names were changed in 2019-2020 to be more correctly identified as “Endorsement Programs”. Since their establishment, several students have completed these program bridges and now have credentials in both programs, making them more adaptable to changing employment scenarios.



## B. Access and Success for American Indians in Higher Education

### B1. Enrollment in ECED, ECE:P-3, and Elementary departments

Following we present summative enrollment data of the Education Division over the last 10 years, broken down by just the programs in this review. In reviewing enrollment trends, it is important to recognize that the number of available programs in the DOE has increased over time, reflecting a pattern of innovation in response to changes in the educational job market. This has occurred several times over the 15 years SKC has offered teacher education leading to licensure in Montana.

During the period of time addressed in this APR, the Division's enrollment was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, similar to other programs at SKC and across the nation. Particularly, as public and private education underwent radical shifts in teaching, learning, and the delivery of content, interest in teaching as a career declined as educators at all levels struggled to adapt to the ups and downs of remote learning. As we emerge from the worst of the COVID period, numbers of new recruits to the teaching profession are slowly climbing back, but it may be some time until we are able to see the numbers return to pre-COVID levels in our programs.

**Table 1: Recent and Historical Enrollment in ECED, ECE:P-3, and Elementary Education**

Major	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Early Childhood Education (AA)	20	20	21	18	28	25	19	16	18	14	15	7	8	11
Early Childhood Education (BS)	21	32	21	18	27	19	12	5	15	11	11	6	7	14
Early Childhood P:3 (AA)	New Program Fall 2015						0	12	14	13	19	6	3	3
Early Childhood P:3 (BS)	New Program Fall 2015						10	12	14	12	9	9	6	3
Elementary Education (AS)	52	42	45	48	40	36	19	33	16	23	23	17	15	16
Elementary Education (BS)	21	32	21	18	27	28	16	9	30	16	9	12	7	7
Totals	114	114	108	102	122	108	76	87	107	89	86	57	46	54

In addition to the table above, we have included detailed enrollment data obtained from SKC's Office of Institutional Effectiveness (please see Appendix A). Much of the analysis that follows is based on the data in App. A.

## **B2. Analysis of Enrollment in ECED, ECE:P-3, and Elementary programs**

As one can clearly see in the data from Table 1, it would be incorrect to attribute the declining numbers of education students seen in the table above solely to the COVID-19 pandemic. Numbers were reducing well before the pandemic took hold. These data reflect a decline in teacher education statewide and nationwide starting around 2014. However, the pandemic certainly did deal a resounding blow to teacher preparation programs as young peoples' (and, concomitantly, adults') educational experiences during the pandemic did not promote enthusiasm for becoming teachers. This circumstance has been keenly felt across the state of Montana, in all ten educator preparation programs in the state. In our own analysis, our enrollment scenario at SKC is aligned with and nearly parallel to the landscape of educator preparation programs throughout Montana, at both public and private colleges and universities (Montana Council of Deans of Education, August 2023 Convening). Despite this larger trend, there are specific understandings and insights that have emerged from our review of the data.

### ***Enrollment Analysis by Programs***

#### **Early Childhood Education (ECED)**

In reviewing enrollment data from 2019-2022 for the Early Childhood Education 0-8 program, several aspects come to light. First... as a tribal college, it is an imperative that all academic programs at SKC consistently maintain an Indian Student Count above 50%. The data from OIE indicates that if students with tribal membership as well as first and second descendants are counted together, the ECED program has shown an average ISC of 75% over the four years included in this review. If 2<sup>nd</sup> generation descendants are removed (tribal members and 1<sup>st</sup> Gen. only, which is the federal definition of American Indian/Alaska Native), that percentage averages 63% in this period. We feel these numbers accurately represent a consistent enrollment trend in ECED over the breadth of early childhood educational offerings at SKC since the first programs were initiated in the 1980s. Many students in ECED are Head Start teachers who are seeking professional development and credentialing, as this is a condition of their employment. These students (who are actually employed EC educators) work for CS&KT Early Childhood Services and are only able to take one or two courses per term, due to their work loads and schedules. Much program scheduling and registration process revision has been facilitated by ECED staff in order to streamline this process and make classes more accessible to these teachers. The data also indicates that 98% of all ECED students in the 4 academic years included in this review are female. This underscores the vast gender inequity that exists in early childhood education here at SKC and globally. The Division recognizes this and has encouraged any interested males to apply, citing the dire need for male role models in all educational arenas - but especially in early childhood.



Enrollment data also show that ECED serves largely “nontraditional” students. The average age of ECED students at the A.A. level in these four academic years was 32 years old, and at the baccalaureate level that average age was 43. Again, it helps to know that many ECED students are already employed teachers of young children. This trend may continue, however the ECED Department understands this and aspires to focus on increasing its recruitment efforts with high school students during the next review period. It is worth noting that over the last four academic years, ECED faculty have prioritized close networking with ECS leadership to promote improvements in ECE teacher schedules, pay, and other contingencies so as to make the profession more attractive to young people. The ECED department will endeavor to increase its offerings of dual enrollment courses with the goal of bringing in more young students.



Along with age and gender considerations, enrollment data also shows us that students in ECED are more place-based than in other programs. Only 5% of ECED AA students in the reviewed period claimed places other than the Flathead Reservation as their permanent residence, whereby that number changes to 29% for bachelors level students. Again, the fact that many of these students work on the Flathead Reservation accounts for this high “local” student population. An average of 57% of associates level ECED students are first generation college students, but that number increased to 86% at the bachelors level. Another marker that suggests our ECED student population is strongly nontraditional. In terms of student retention, ECED students averaged out at a 73% persistence level, indicating that the department has seen consistently positive student retention over the years with little or no degree changing in the data we analyzed. Part of the story of retention success in the DOE in general has to do with exceptional systems of student support. Besides the excellent supports that help foster student success at SKC as a whole, the Division has its own Student Support Specialist in house, in addition to a culture and language specialist and faculty and staff who spend considerable time working with students one-on-one.

### **Early Childhood Education: P-3 (Preschool to Grade 3 - ECE:P3)**

The Division’s P-3 program came to be in 2015 in response to the growth of preschools being established within Montana public school districts. It prepares teachers to work with children from age 4 through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and leads to licensure with the state up until Grade 3. Although each legislative session in MT since that time has attempted to provide state funding for public preschools, this has not occurred. Since Elementary teachers in MT are only licensed to teach in grades K-8, and if a large number of state-supported preschools were to have been established, there would be a pressing need for these teachers. Anticipating a great need for Pre-Kindergarten credentialed educators, P-3 programs were developed in virtually all Montana EPPs. Since the funding has still not been forthcoming from the state, some school districts have started establishing their own preschool programs for 4 year olds as a “pre-Kindergarten” program on their own, without the special state funding. Consequently, some schools in MT have these Pre-K programs, and some do not. Therefore, the interest that once flourished in P-3 education from

2014 up until the pandemic years has waned somewhat. This accounts for some of the noticeable drops in enrollment that are shown in our data.

In the four academic years included in this review period, there have been a total of 27 P-3 students that have reached the bachelors level. If all tribally affiliated students are counted, the ISC percentage in the P3 program comes out at a 71% average. Excluding 2<sup>nd</sup> generation descendants brings that number down to 57%. Using this same set of data, 93% of students in this program are female... slightly more males than ECED but still dominated by females. The average age is lower than ECED, at 30 years old. 56% of these students are first generation college students, nearly the same as in ECED. The persistence rate in ECE:P-3 is calculated at 66% on average, slightly lower than in ECED. Due to the uncertainty of school funding and thus employment possibilities, some P3 students migrated to the Elementary K-8 program, which offers a wider potential employment landscape for graduates. Although this migration between programs is present in our programs (especially between P3 and ELEM-both directions), it has been relatively uncommon. The data suggests that 81% percent of P3 students, on average, identified the Flathead Reservation as their permanent home. This possibly suggests that some-but not a large number- of students are coming from outside the Flathead Reservation to SKC specifically for the P3 degree program.

### Elementary Education K-8: (ELEM)

ELEM has been the largest program by faculty and student count in the Division of Education since its inception in 2008. Prior to the establishing of programs like NLTE, ECE:P-3, Secondary Math and Secondary Science, the Elementary department saw a large number of students. The range of grades addressed in ELEM is substantial: Kindergarten through Grade 8 in all content areas. By default, this creates numerous employment opportunities for graduates.

2019-2023 Enrollment data for the elementary program suggests a student population that mirrors that of the K-8 teacher workforce throughout Montana and the nation. With a bachelors-level average of 66% female and 34% male, it is the most gender-diverse of the three programs reviewed here. The average student age is even lower, with the associates level ELEM students at SKC coming out at 25 years old, and the baccalaureate level at 27 years old.

ISC numbers in ELEM are similar to the other programs: including all tribally affiliated students, the average in the 4 years reviewed came out to 83% in the associates level and 75% in the bachelors level. Counting only tribal members and 1<sup>st</sup> generation descendants, those numbers are 80% and 70%, respectively.

The persistence rate in ELEM is statistically very similar to the ECED program, at 64% without changes in declared majors.

Student retention before and after the COVID-19 pandemic was relatively positive, as very few students disengaged from their program of study. During the 2019-



2020 and 2020-2021 academic years, however, the reliance on at-distance technologically based learning environments proved to be challenging for many teaching candidates (as it did in K-12 schools also) and we lost several ELEM students in those years. Some returned to us, and some did not. Again, this was the case at other EPPs in Montana.

An interesting data point that was noticed was the number of first generation college learners in ELEM. It seems this demographic is changing rapidly. In the 4 years reviewed here, the number of “firstGens” went from 78 to 60 to 43 to 29. Paired with the much lower age of SKC students in ELEM, one would have to conclude that younger students whose parents have attended college will increasingly represent the makeup of ELEM candidates for the time being. It is interesting to note that many of our ELEM students in the DOE are the children of educators, although this is more anecdotal than statistical.

ELEM enrollment data show that only 54% of students in that program identified the Flathead Reservation as their permanent residence, compared to much higher rates in ECED (71%) and P-3 (81%). This is likely owing to the fact that SKC represents one of only 2 TCUs in the state to offer K-8 Elementary programs that lead to licensure in Montana; therefore Native students interested in ELEM teaching come to our campus from several other tribal communities. Some stay and take positions in Mission Valley schools, others choose to return to their home communities to teach. The Division of Education’s ELEM teaching employment record is especially high, with 100% of graduates securing teaching positions, many in Flathead Reservation schools, and nearly all in tribal communities. To a large degree, this circumstance is the result of multiple professional development grant programs from the U.S. Dept. of Education’s Office of Indian Education. Program staff and Division leadership have successfully acquired these PD grants over many years in succession, including two that overlapped during this period of review: *I-STEM* and *Bridges*. Both of these grant programs have provided substantial financial assistance to students in the way of stipends, assistance with tuition and supplies, and professional development opportunities. Some of the requirements of these grants are to complete the academic program on time, to secure licensure in the area of specialization, and to engage in service payback for a time equal to the number of months the student received the support. The service payback must be in a school that serves a high proportion of Native students as defined in each state’s records. The financial incentives provided to pre-service teachers by these programs have been a primary driver of recruitment and retention and a keystone of our enrollment landscape... particularly in the Elementary Education program.

### B3. Student Retention

Data acquired from the OIE relevant to student persistence and retention has been discussed somewhat in the previous section in our analysis of enrollment information, including fall-to-fall persistence rates. The Division of Education has put forth several program components and systems of support to ensure student success and retention. What follows here is an annotated listing of some of these measures and practices, which have been implemented in all three of the departments and programs covered in this review, unless specifically noted:

- Office of Indian Education **PD Grant programs** (I-STEM, Bridges) are made available to all students, and offer incentives in the form of monthly stipends, so students can focus on their coursework and not have to work part-time jobs during their undergraduate training period. Also included is support for induction services after they are employed as teachers. Because the schools that qualify for service payback must be mainstream public schools, ECED students working in Head Start or other early learning settings generally do not



participate in these programs; however ECE:P-3, Elementary K-8, and Secondary students do qualify. Along the way, a federal grant programs coordinator (currently Debbie Bell) closely monitors student progress and helps to address academic issues if they arise.

- In 2020 the DOE created a new position, an in-house **Student Support Specialist** who mentors and supports students in all programs at all levels. The first implementation of this position had modest success, due in part to limitations with personnel, and part to circumstances relative to COVID-19 at the time. In 2022, Dr. Heather Bleecker took over this position, and her years of mentoring and teaching students, combined with a more broad re-opening of campus, led to a much more effective student support environment in our building. Dr. Bleecker established a revised system for referring students for support, created a “late night study session” on Tuesday evenings (with dinner provided by a rotating list of faculty and staff), facilitated trainings for staff and faculty, created a “Care Closet” containing personal and academic supplies that students can access with ‘no questions asked’... and more. The DOE SSS focuses on *some* academic mentoring, but allows the campus’s SSS coaches and their systems of student support to engage with students for many of their academic success needs. Dr. Bleecker also addresses non-academic needs student may have, such as financial aid issues, child care, food security issues, transportation challenges, and other impediments to success. This DOE student support system has been highly effective in creating stronger bonds between the Division and its students, and (we believe) promoting a more caring and supportive learning environment that has helped to retain our students in all programs.
- The Division also established a new 1.0 FTE position of “DOE **Culture and Language Specialist**” who has established a presence in our building with students, staff, and faculty for the use and application of local tribal languages in classes and in curriculum. Particularly for our more culturally-connected students, this has conveyed to them that the Division values their Indigenous identity and strives for integration of language and culture into the educational experience of its students... which we see as not only a way for the Division to address SKC’s vision and mission, but also as a way of retaining students. Moreover, the Specialist networks with other departments on campus, particularly the Culture and Language (CALS) program in NAS, and has facilitated weekly “Language Circles” where Salish can be learned by students and employees from all over SKC.
- The DOE hosts **student-centered events** throughout the school year such as the Welcome Back BBQ event which takes place at the beginning of each year and which is open to students of all programs and their families. Another such retention tool is “Teachers Teaching Teachers”, a quarterly presentation by educators for students and others in the DOE community in which special skills, methods, or experiences are shared out in an evening presentation. Students in grant related programs such as our current Bridges PD program gather regularly to meet socially and to keep them informed of ongoing and upcoming program requirements and any changes that might impact them. Since so many new tasks are associated with being a senior in education (student teaching, licensing process, etc.), the Division facilitates regular “Senior Meetings” to help students navigate these unknown waters.
- The **Flathead Reservation Educator Support Hub** (FRESH) is a monthly professional development and support group made up of a mix of pre-service and in-service educators around the Reservation and beyond. Students bring up concerns about their future roles

and responsibilities as teachers, and experienced mentor teachers address these issues in engaging ways that build relationships among educators at all levels. We feel students gain insights, motivation, and clarity about becoming teachers through this process, which helps keep their sights set on finishing their degree programs with professionalism and purpose.

This is just a sampling of the efforts the DOE has put into place to support and retain students in our programs. Besides the one-on-one advising and close relationship building that we have with students throughout their time in teacher training, we feel these efforts have been effective in student retention Division-wide.

#### B4. Graduation Rates and Analysis

As the data shows in Appendix A, our graduation numbers were profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; however there are other factors that have impacted our graduation numbers. What follows is an analysis of these data by department.



**Early Childhood Education (0-8)****Graduates: Early Childhood Education, Associate**

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total # Graduates	2	0	2	0
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Enrolled/First Generation				
Non Indian				
<b>Gender</b>				
Male				
Female	2		2	

**Graduates: Early Childhood Education, Baccalaureate**

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total # Graduates	1	0	3	1
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Enrolled/First Generation				
Non Indian				
<b>Gender</b>				
Male				
Female	1		3	1

Appendix A's graduation data indicates the up-and-down nature of program completion in this degree. One of the most significant factors that affects our number of program completers in ECED is the fact that the overwhelming majority of these students are Head Start or other preschool educators who rely on SKC for their required professional training and development. Although we do have a small number of on-campus full time students, most are in this other category, whether they are located here on the Flathead Reservation or elsewhere, attending as a 2+2 (at distance) student. Since these students work full time and are only able to take 1 or 2 courses per term, it may take them many years to actually graduate. We recently (during the period of this review) had a senior in ECED who had been taking classes for over 15 years due to this circumstance!

That being said, we continue to be hopeful that our ECED numbers will increase in the future as we emerge from the COVID slump. Not included in the OIE data are the new students who have signed up just in the last year or two at other TCUs (and other colleges) in connection with the newer 2+2 articulation agreements that have just been established by the ECED department. Many of these students have already completed their associates track courses at their home institution and are now taking evening classes online with our ECED program. We feel confident that this will impact our graduation numbers positively in the next few years. Still, the majority of these (and other students locally) are employed early learning teachers, and though our numbers will likely rebound, we expect the graduation student count will continue to eb and flow over time.

**Early Childhood P-3 (Preschool - Grade 3)****Graduates: Early Childhood Education P:3, Associate**

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total # Graduates	1	1	4	0
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Enrolled/First Generation				
Non Indian				
<b>Gender</b>				
Male			1	
Female	1	1	3	

**Graduates: Early Childhood Education P:3, Baccalaureate**

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total # Graduates	3	2	2	1
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Enrolled/First Generation				
Non Indian				
<b>Gender</b>				
Male				
Female	3	2	2	1

In the P-3 program, several factors have led to low numbers of students and lower than previous graduation rates. As can be seen in the data provided, numbers had already dropped prior to the COVID slump (2018-2019) from their previous levels ([see page 13, Table 1](#)). This program has only existed in the DOE since 2015, and although the *total* student numbers in ECED: P-3 were in the 12 to 19 student range from 2015-2019, the *graduation* numbers have always been in the single digits. Our employment / placement rate in ECED: P-3 is 100% and alumni of this program are all actively teaching in classrooms or otherwise working in education settings connected to their program. However, given the circumstances stated above in section [B2](#), interest in this degree trajectory seems to show a pattern of waning interest. With this in mind, the Division will need to watch the enrollment patterns of this program carefully over the next few years and consider the long-term viability of maintaining this program in the Division. As we have to do with all programs, we will have to weigh the cost (fiscally, socially, and vocationally) of maintaining or retiring the ECED:P-3 degree program based upon our future enrollment and graduation data, and workforce needs. For the present, and based on our current knowledge and data we feel there is sufficient viability and need for this program. Fortunately, most of the local Flathead Reservation school districts have established public preschools internally, despite a lack of state funding. As this appears to be a permanent change, we will continue to prepare teachers in this program as long as viability remains consistent.



**Elementary Education (K-8)****Graduates: Elementary Education, Associate**

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total # Graduates	4	1	3	4
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Enrolled/First Generation				
Non Indian				
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	3		2	
Female	1	1	1	4

**Graduates: Elementary Education, Baccalaureate**

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total # Graduates	9	0	7	1
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Enrolled/First Generation				
Non Indian				
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	1		4	
Female	8		3	1

With regard to Elementary Education, a glance back at the enrollment table in [Section B1](#) is informative. Enrollment rates- and their close cousin, graduation rates- have been in a steady but relatively modest decline in the Elementary Education program since the 2016-2017 AY. Prior to this time, degree options in the Education Department (as it was called in those years) were more limited. As more programs were offered, numbers of students in SKC Education diversified and ELEM numbers (total enrolled and graduates) have continued to go down in number. The graduate numbers have been a rollercoaster ride, with some years in the more robust 7-10 range, and others at just a few graduates. For example, in the OIE table just above, one can see the rollercoaster on display... from 2019 to 2022, baccalaureate graduates went from 9 to 0 to 7 to 1, and this year's ELEM projected graduates based on our current senior cohort should be back up to 12. Some of these fluctuations are undoubtedly tied to instability during the COVID years, but some may be due to other factors. As stated previously, there have been issues in the overall education world- locally, statewide, and nationally- that have been impacted by social and political volatility- especially since around 2017. Support for public schools changes dramatically, and this is a workforce dynamic that (not surprisingly) impacts teacher education at all levels. Despite this, there will continue to be a need for new Elementary K-8 teachers in Montana, and SKC continues to be a partner to area schools for both professional development and as a pipeline for new educators. As our Division continues to ride the rollercoaster of graduation rates, we will continue to buckle up and hold on as we monitor future program completion data.



## B4. Student Placement Rates

Some aspects of placement and teacher workforce data have been discussed previously; however since we are addressing 3 different academic programs, we will provide specific information by program.

### **Early Childhood Education (0-8) program**

#### **1. ECED Program Need**

According to an online source for current and prospective ECE educators, [Preschool.org](https://www.preschool.org),

*“Montana preschool teachers can expect a 9.6 percent growth rate between 2016 and 2026 according to the state Department of Labor and Industry, creating 120 openings each year through attrition and new job creation. Preschool administrators will see a 5.6 percent increase through the same period.*

*According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2018, those professions could expect salaries within the following ranges (median, top 25%, and top 10%):*

*Preschool Administrators: \$37,180 – \$44,330 – \$60,930*

*Preschool Teacher: \$29,660 – \$36,470 – \$41,690”*

The need for qualified early learning educators on the Flathead Reservation, as well as in the state’s western region, has intensified in recent years, as the level of EC teacher salaries has not kept pace with inflation, particularly in the emerging post-COVID timeframe. A preschool teacher- even with training and credentials- earning less than \$30,000 per year will struggle financially...a situation that is a magnified problem if the teacher is a single parent (which many are). This low-pay scenario has an impact on early childhood workforce dynamics since it leads to high teacher attrition rates at Head Start centers and other early learning institutions both public and private, especially in rural locations. With turnover at these centers at a high level, new teachers are in high demand as relayed in the statistics above.

However, the low salary issue and lack of professional recognition and support afforded to early childhood teachers continues to be problematic in the field, and so impacts SKC’s ECED program in terms of recruitment and retention as previously noted. In their report entitled *Montana’s Early Childhood Educators: Recruitment and Retainment of an Essential Workforce* (Appendix B), authors Christine Lux, Ed.D., Cassie Noble, M.S., and Nanci Red Bird, Ed.D. stated:

*“Early childhood education is a valuable profession, but it is fraught with compensation disparity and barriers to the pursuit and attainment of higher education degrees. Wages must reflect the education, knowledge, and commitment of professionals who support young children and their families. Degree attainment, 29 coupled with ongoing professional development and mentoring, can ensure the delivery of high-quality early care and education...*

*... Through the study of the early childhood workforce and early childhood teacher preparation, stakeholders such as institutes of higher education, as well as public and private schools, can respond with opportunities that encourage early childhood teachers to grow and stay in the profession, creating quality and continuity for our youngest children.”*

Over the years, and especially in the last 4 years of this review, SKC’s Division of Education has taken steps to respond to these issues on several fronts. It has worked to maintain and strengthen its relationship with early learning providers in our region where our graduates become

employed... particularly the CS&KT Early Childhood Services department. Regular meetings have been established that include ECED staff and faculty with ECS leadership to cultivate more effective communication and shared understandings regarding course scheduling, program delivery, registration and tuition assistance, and other important factors that impact the success of students in the ECED program. The department has also established new program architectures that better serve the needs of early childhood teacher requirements by adding stackable credentialing that supports learners' professional growth and degree trajectories. Classes have been revised and rescheduled at times that work better for ECS teachers and 2+2 students, and more online courses have been developed and delivered to students on and off campus. Established partnerships have been expanded and new ones created, such as the latest program ECED has built with Central Wyoming College. Their Education Department has bachelor's degrees in Elementary Education and P-3 Education but only a two year degree in Early Childhood birth to eight. CWC worked with the SKC ECED Department to establish a 2+2 Articulation Agreement and fill the needs of CWC's neighboring Wind River Reservation's Eastern Shoshone & Northern Arapaho Head Start Program. SKC can now provide high quality training and credentialing to CWC's ECE students online and assist them in advancing their workforce with the professional requirements and educational fulfillment they need.

## 2. ECED Job Placement Rate Information

As was stated above, there is a significant shortage of early childhood teachers and it became more critical because of the COVID19 Pandemic. For example, because of the number of teachers that left CS&KT Early Childhood Services during the pandemic, they had to close half of their centers across the Flathead Reservation. ECS employed approximately 200 teachers and support staff pre-pandemic, which decreased to about 60 based on numbers reported during the 2022-23 school year. Other centers across Lake County, including SKC's Early Learning Center, report the same workforce shortage challenge; some have been forced to close because of it. For this reason, job placement with early childhood degrees is at a 100% placement rate.

## **ECE:P3 and Elementary Education program Student Placement Rates**

Because both the ECE:P-3 and the Elementary Education programs share many curricular components and courses, lead to state licensure, and are tied to employment in largely public school PreK - Grade 8 settings, we felt that reporting on them separately in relation to job placement information would be redundant. We have therefore combined them in this section.

### 1. ECE:P-3 and Elementary Program Need

It is true that some of the same dynamics that have affected new hirings in early childhood education exist in public school settings. Social, economic, and political forces beyond SKC have impacted public schools just as they have early childhood education... perhaps at even more pronounced levels, given the size and scope of public education in the U.S., in Montana, and in our local communities. On the public school front, the need for PreK to 8<sup>th</sup> Grade teachers is substantial... maybe even alarming. A story in the *Daily Montanan*, a non-partisan media outlet, summarized a summer 2023 Montana Board of Public education meeting that focused on the need for PreK-12 teachers in MT schools. The [article](#) quotes MT Superintendent Elsie Arntzen as stating, "A thousand new teachers or teachers will be requested within our 928 schools across our state, our 402 school districts." The article also reports that, "Despite boosts to their wages in

recent years, Montana pays the lowest average starting salary for teachers in the country at \$33,568, according to an April [report](#) from the National Education Association.”

In their report, *Educator Recruitment and Retention: Montana’s Teacher Workforce*, (Appendix C) the non-profit Learning Policy Institute states the same statistics, and cites declining persistence in the state’s teacher workforce. It reports that for those 1,000 needed teaching jobs, only 383 education graduates have been provided from the Montana University System in the last graduation cycle. Even though non-MUS graduates like ours at SKC were not included in this statistic, the number of total graduates from all teacher education institutions would still be far less than half of the teachers needed to fill these vacancies. All this points to a severe teacher shortage in Montana, and with a declining number of college students pursuing teaching coupled with the lowest teacher pay in the U.S., the need is great.

## 2. ECE:P-3 and Elementary Job Placement Rate Information

The Division of Education keeps track of graduate teacher employment data for a variety of purposes and stays in touch with its graduates using grant reporting records, social media outreach, professional development rosters, and other sources. Although these records hold individually identifiable information and cannot be shared directly in this self study, we have reviewed the data and can summarize our findings here.

In the last 4 academic years, the review of these records show that of all program completers in the ECE: P-3 degree program, all but one (92%) secured a teaching position upon graduation and have remained in their teaching position or in a related education position since graduating. The one student who graduated and didn’t enter a mainstream school started her own private early learning center on the Flathead Reservation and has continued in this endeavor, even expanding, to the present day.

In terms of Elementary graduates from 2019 to the present, 100% found teaching positions (nearly all in schools serving high percentages of Native American students) immediately upon graduation, and 100% of these graduates are still teaching today. One of these students transitioned out of the K-8 arena just last year and is now teaching in a local Head Start center and has returned to SKC in the ECED department to pursue her Early Childhood credentials.

## **C. Quality Education for Workforce and Transfer Preparation**

### **C1. Program Mission and Goals**

All of the SKC Division of Education’s six distinct degree pathways: ECED, ECE:P-3, Elementary, Secondary Science, Secondary Math, and NLTE encompass a common vision and mission:

#### **DOE Vision Statement:**

The Education Division envisions a culturally responsive teacher education program and curriculum supporting candidates’ development through fostering learning communities that build on past experiences along with life dreams. A culturally responsive education will support the



personal as well as professional development and success of SKC candidates, affording them greater life options.

Furthermore, the Education Division envisions SKC teacher candidates will be culturally competent and skilled educators empowered to transform curriculum and instruction to address the developmental, linguistic and ethnic diversity of every child they teach; SKC teacher candidates as future professional educators, advocates and leaders will empower the students they teach, expanding their life options through nurturing culturally responsive learning communities.

### **DOE Mission Statement:**

The professional education programs at Salish Kootenai College seek to support teacher candidates in making connections between their personal development and their professional growth, in meaningful integration of cultural learning and in collaborative efforts toward the larger good for local and global communities. The critical areas of professional preparation that distinguish Salish Kootenai College Division of Education teacher education graduates include:

- Knowledge of Native American student context and best educational practices leading to developmentally and culturally revitalizing and sustaining pedagogy.
- Identification with Native American culture and community values imbedded in content and pedagogy.
- Commitment to meeting the needs of developmentally, ethnically and linguistically diverse learners.
- Commitment to reflective practices leading to personal and professional development.
- Development of collaborative relationships with mentoring teachers and peers organized into learning communities that promote application of knowledge, skills and dispositions in real settings.
- Strong evidence of effective communication, critical thinking, cultural understanding and citizenship.

It should be evident that our [Five Central Beliefs](#) previously discussed in this self-study are directly connected to the Division's Mission Statement. In addition to being articulated in every course syllabus (as in all programs on campus), SKC's 4Cs are embedded in the Mission Statement and in the Five Beliefs, and therefore a central part of student portfolios. At two different stages (initial entry into the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of study and final conferencing just prior to graduation), students are required to respond both verbally and in writing as they reflect on their development as teachers in relation to SKC's 4Cs and the other components of the DOE's stated mission.

SKC's Mission Objectives are interwoven throughout all three of the programs involved in this review in a number of ways, and this is reviewed by the entire Division faculty and staff as part of the DOE Annual Plan. The most recently approved Annual Plan is from the 2022-2023 AY and is included as a reference to this self-study as Appendix D. This document shows a large number of ways the Division as a whole aligns its work with the Mission Objectives each year. At the time of this writing, the DOE is currently working on finalizing its revised Annual Plan for the 2023-2024 AY.

The ECED, ECE:P-3, and Elementary programs' relevance to state workforce need for these programs have been addressed previously in this self-study. For a review of the need for these programs in a Native American context, see the [Introductory section](#).

## C2. Curriculum and Assessment

### Summary of Direct Assessment Results

#### Early Childhood Education (ECED)

In the ECED program, students are assessed at multiple levels and their progress is scored with a tool that is aligned with national NAEYC standards, as mentioned previously. For Stage 1, early in their degree trajectory, students take ECED 298, Early Childhood Practicum. This course presents an opportunity for students who have completed most Associate of Arts Early Childhood Education courses to observe, teach and reflect upon their teaching experience. Students integrate knowledge gained from previous coursework and experiences to develop and articulate a philosophy and rationale for decisions. They apply knowledge of cultural and linguistic diversity to create and evaluate environments and experiences and review all major curriculum areas and develop and implement developmentally appropriate curriculum that is individualized and culturally relevant in the areas of physical, cognitive, creative, social, emotional and language development. In their final stages of the ECED program, student engage in a similar process where their progress is evaluated in conjunction with their student teaching / advanced ECE Practicum placement. Here are two screenshots that provide a glimpse of one of these tools:

Teacher Education Program (TEP) Stage I Portfolio Salish Kootenai College Early Childhood Education Stage I Portfolio				
Date: _____ Candidate: _____				
Faculty Interviewer: _____ Faculty Interviewer: _____				
<b>Evaluation of Candidate for TEP Stage I</b>				
<p><b>Interviewer:</b> Begin the interview by asking the candidate to discuss his/her strengths in relationship to the NAEYC Standards. Score each item for the portfolio in the documentation box. Artifacts previously scored in classes will be included with appropriate rubrics and should have a minimum score of one. All artifacts must be included for candidates to pass the interview.</p> <p>The TEP portfolio is organized around the SKC Education Division and Early Childhood Education program outcomes, which correspond to the NAEYC Standards. The candidate's portfolio is assessed based on the following ratings:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0 = Unacceptable    1 = Developing    2 = Proficient    3 = Exemplary</p> <p>There are six standards in all. Students will be asked to update reflection written analyses of their strengths based on the six NAEYC Standards during each TEP interview stage.</p> <p><b>Reminder for program faculty review:</b> To be accepted into the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program, the candidate must first meet the General Requirements (refer to the Student Handbook and the correct catalog for the candidate's program). The portfolio must be complete and have no unacceptable ratings and all artifacts must be included. The average all scores must be at least a 1.5 for the candidate to pass the interview.</p>				
<b>Introduction</b>	Table of Contents – Introductory Statement – Background Check Verification – Resume– Reference Letters (2) – Verbal Communication and Presentation Skills			
<b>Level of Performance:</b>	<b>0 Unacceptable</b>	<b>1 Developing</b>	<b>2 Proficient</b>	<b>3 Exemplary</b>
<b>Documentation:</b>				
<b>Introductory Materials:</b> ~Introductory Statement ~Table of contents ~Two Reference Letters (one faculty and one EC professional) Score: _____	Introduction lacks one or more components.	Introductory materials are all present, but may have a few errors.	Introductory materials are all present and are well organized and written.	
<b>Resume</b> Score: _____	Difficult to follow; numerous errors in spelling or writing mechanics.	Lists work experiences, but lacks information related to experience with children age 0 – 8. May have a few errors in spelling or writing mechanics.	Professional and easy to follow. Lists academic background, work and volunteer experiences, professional experiences with children age 0 – 8, & personal interests. Shows a clear commitment to becoming a professional educator.	Candidate demonstrates the skills described as "Proficient" beyond the expected level of a novice teacher. This score is reserved for the candidate who demonstrates skills of an experienced teacher or one who is able to mentor others.
<b>Transcripts</b> Score: _____	GPA below 2.5 in general education courses or required general education courses with a grade lower than C. GPA below 3.0 for required ECED and EDUC courses.	N/A	GPA in required general education courses 2.5 or above; no required general education course grades below C.  Required ECED and EDUC courses: No grade lower than B.	GPA in required general education courses 3.0 or above; no required general education course grades below B.  Required ECED and EDUC courses: No grade lower than B with a minimum average 3.25.
<b>Verbal communication and presentation skills (TEP Interview)</b> Score: _____	Speech during the interview may be inaudible or poorly articulated. Language may contain numerous grammar or syntax errors. Vocabulary may be vague or words are used inappropriately, or incorrectly.	Speech is generally clear and correct. Vocabulary is correct although limited. Presentation flows smoothly.	Speech is clear and standard usage is evident. Vocabulary is appropriate to the situation. Presentation is professional and the speaker is confident. Information provided is clear and concise.	Candidate demonstrates the skills described as "Proficient" beyond the expected level of a novice teacher. This score is reserved for the candidate who demonstrates skills of an experienced teacher or one who is able to mentor others.
<b>Reviewer Comments:</b>				

<b>NAEYC Standard 2:</b>	<b>Building family and community relationships:</b> <i>Candidates know about, understand, and value the importance and complex characteristics of children's families and communities. They use this understanding to create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families, and to involve all families in their children's development and learning: 2a) understanding family and community characteristics; 2b) supporting and empowering families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships; 2c) involving families and communities in children's development.</i>			
<b>Level of Performance:</b>	<b>0=Unacceptable</b>	<b>1=Developing</b>	<b>2=Proficient</b>	<b>3=Exemplary</b>
<b>Documentation:</b>				
<b>Reflective Written Analysis (RWA)</b> of your strengths related to NAEYC Standard 2. (Include the NAEYC Standard at the top of a 1-2 page essay. (1) Explain how the standard is important in your teaching; (2) describe ways you have implemented the principle in your lessons and what you plan to do when you teach; (3) conclusion should reinforce your belief in the importance of the standard and make reference to the artifacts/evidence in that section of the portfolio.  <b>Score:</b> _____	One or more of the required elements are missing. Candidate does not articulate an understanding of the standard. Standard is not related back to candidate's teaching, future teaching experiences or portfolio artifacts. Essay is not reflective of candidate's strengths related to the standard.	All required elements are addressed. Candidate articulates a clear understanding of the standard. Standard is related to candidate's teaching or future teaching experiences as well as portfolio artifacts. Essay is reflective of candidate's strengths related to the standard.	All required elements are addressed and candidate articulates understanding of the standard through reflective examples and ideas. The candidate provides several examples of his/her teaching and future teaching experiences along with portfolio artifacts to express the importance of the standard. The candidate reflects on his/her strengths related to the standard as well as how to build on those strengths in future teaching experiences.	Candidate demonstrates the skills described as "Proficient" beyond the expected level of a novice teacher. This score is reserved for the candidate who demonstrates skills of an experienced teacher or one who is able to mentor others.
<b>Interviewer: The following artifacts must be included in the portfolio with a previously scored rubric indicating a score of at least 1. If the artifact is incomplete, please write the artifact, date and plan to complete under reviewer comments, leaving the complete box blank until the item has been completed or a substitution is made.</b>				
<b>Artifact</b>	<b>Course Assessed in</b>	<b>Previous Rubric Score</b>	<b>Substitution</b>	
Parent teacher conference summary packet	ECED 209			
Parent Meeting Summary Packet	ECED 209			
Standard 2 component of Practicum Observation Form	ECED 298			
<b>Reviewer comments:</b>				

These records are maintained by the ECED Co-Chairs and kept in students' cumulative files. It is worth noting that unlike many other states, Montana does not require state licensing for individual Early Childhood teachers; Instead, it is the early learning centers that are certified. Each certified center has requirements for continual training and are closely regulated by state agencies to be certified. Childcare centers have stringent requirements that they have to comply with in regard to safety, employee background checks (employees cannot be on-site until they have a cleared background check), and other regulations. Head Start is also very regulated - at a higher level than the state. This is why our local CS&KT ECS employees have to take classes - it is a job requirement in order to meet accreditation for Head Start.

### ***ECE:P-3 and Elementary Education***

#### External assessment reporting


Since the ECE:P-3 and ELEM degree programs are linked to state certification, the Division is required to submit a Title II assessment report each year that details student outcomes. This is a very detailed mandatory report that documents student progress in programs that lead to state

certifications. All four of the previous academic years aligned with this self-study are made available in a single document, Appendix E. It is worth noting that because these programs require external reviews from both the federal (annual Title II reporting) and state (regularly scheduled OPI/BPE accreditation reviews) governments, SKC counts these myriad data reports as its comprehensive assessment system in lieu of other assessment processes at the College.

### Internal assessment models

Similar to the interview system provided above for ECED, Students in ECE:P-3 and ELEM engage in three stages outlined above (Stage 1: Initial Conference, Stage 2: Showcase, and Stage 3: Final Conference). The conferences are scored using a rubric that is in alignment to the Five Central Beliefs. Here are screenshots that illustrate these tools:

**Initial Conference**  
**TEP Stage 1**

  
**SALISH KOOTENAI**  
**COLLEGE**  


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DIVISION OF EDUCATION

Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Member Reviewers: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Program of study (degree/major): \_\_\_\_\_

**Central Principles and Beliefs of the Division of Education**

Instruction and curriculum in the professional education programs at Salish Kootenai College are guided by central principles and beliefs that respect and reflect the rich, holistic perspectives of the Séliš, Qlispé and Ksanka people.

**A. Culturally revitalizing and sustaining instruction and curriculum will lead education to its promise of opportunity and equity.**

*Faculty notes:*

**Scoring rubric** (Faculty reviewer – please select and circle a number)

*A1 Student demonstrates a sound understanding of the principle, and its application in the context of teaching and learning.*

0    1    2    3    4    5   

little or no understanding                      adequate understanding                      exemplary understanding

*A2 Student articulates this principle clearly in both written and verbal forms of communication.*

0    1    2    3    4    5   

Poorly expressed                      adequately expressed                      outstanding expression

CB-A Score:



Total score for Central Principles and Beliefs: ( x / 50)

**Teaching Aspirations**  
Describe your future aspirations as a teacher. Ideally, what kind of setting would you like to be in (*location, grade levels*)? What kind of teacher do you hope to be, and what kind of change do you hope to foster and inspire in your future students?

*Faculty notes:*

Student articulates her / his teaching aspirations clearly and with purpose.  
0...  ..... 5...  ..... 10...  ..... 15...  ..... 20...  ..... 25

Total score for Teaching Aspirations: ( x / 25)

**Current Cumulative GPA** \_\_\_\_\_ (2.75 or higher required)

**Teaching and Learning Dispositions**

*TLD 1: Student has a generally positive **attendance** history (is usually on time for class, relatively few missed classes, etc.)*  
0...  ..... 1...  ..... 2...  ..... 3...  ..... 4...  ..... 5  
Unacceptable Developing Proficient Exemplary

*TLD 2: Student has a generally positive **coursework** history (turns assignments in on time, work is generally at acceptable college-level, etc.)*  
0...  ..... 1...  ..... 2...  ..... 3...  ..... 4...  ..... 5  
Unacceptable Developing Proficient Exemplary

*TLD 3: Student has exhibited **positive and appropriate on-campus demeanor** befitting a preservice teacher (courtesy and respect shown to peers, instructors, and presenters)*  
0...  ..... 1...  ..... 2...  ..... 3...  ..... 4...  ..... 5  
Unacceptable Developing Proficient Exemplary

Similar to the rubrics used in ECED, these data are evaluated by department faculty and are part of the overall assessment used to evaluate student progress, as well as program effectiveness. The records are archived and maintained by department faculty and overseen by the Department Chairs.

### ***Program Changes Resulting from Assessment Results***

During the 4 academic years associated with this Academic Program Review, as a part of its regular internal assessment work, several data points came to light as faculty reviewed and analyzed these diverse tools. Here is a listing of a few of these program changes:

- Several students in ECED courses struggled to attend classes held at times and days that required them to have substitute teachers in their centers in order for them to be in class. This affected their grades in their courses, sometimes leading to failed classes or withdraws. Dept. staff and faculty redesigned courses to be delivered in the evenings, on weekends, and / or online so that Head Start teachers would not be forced to leave their classrooms to attend.

- In 2019 and 2020, certain ELEM and P3 students performed poorly on their TEP interviews and struggled to advance in their programs of study. When faculty conferenced with them privately, they disclosed that they had a poor understanding of the InTASC standards, which were an important anchor for those interviews. Faculty problem solved this and redesigned part of the Foundations of Education course (EDUC 203, wherein those standards are initially introduced) so that students had a chance to connect these to their own personal education experience. This resulted in improved scores on the rubrics. Later, these understandings were applied to the Five Central Beliefs, which replaced the InTASC standards in that course in 2021.
- In 2022, the Student Teaching Supervisor (serving multiple degree programs) evaluated student progress and rubrics associated with the Action Research Project that has always been associated with student teaching (ST). They concluded that some students may perform more successfully if the ARP was completed a quarter earlier, rather than simultaneously during ST. They designed a way for students to complete the research in advance of ST. The students who did this change were successful in their projects, and had less stress during ST since they did not have to gather data and write their papers while teaching. The Division is considering this as an improvement that may benefit all students.
- In an ECED class that addresses parent/family connections, an instructor evaluated course data and determined that their students were not grasping some of the communication techniques needed to successfully navigate parent-teachers conferences. They redesigned the class with more time spent on this topic, and used online videoconferencing tools acquired during the COVID pandemic to bring in an expert in family relations to model the techniques in real time and answer student questions. Students did much better on the assignments associated with these skills.

### ***Other Measures of Program Quality***

Throughout the Division of Education, and notably in the three programs reviewed in this Self Study, there are processes and procedures by which the departments evaluate the quality and efficacy of their programs.

### **Advisory Board**

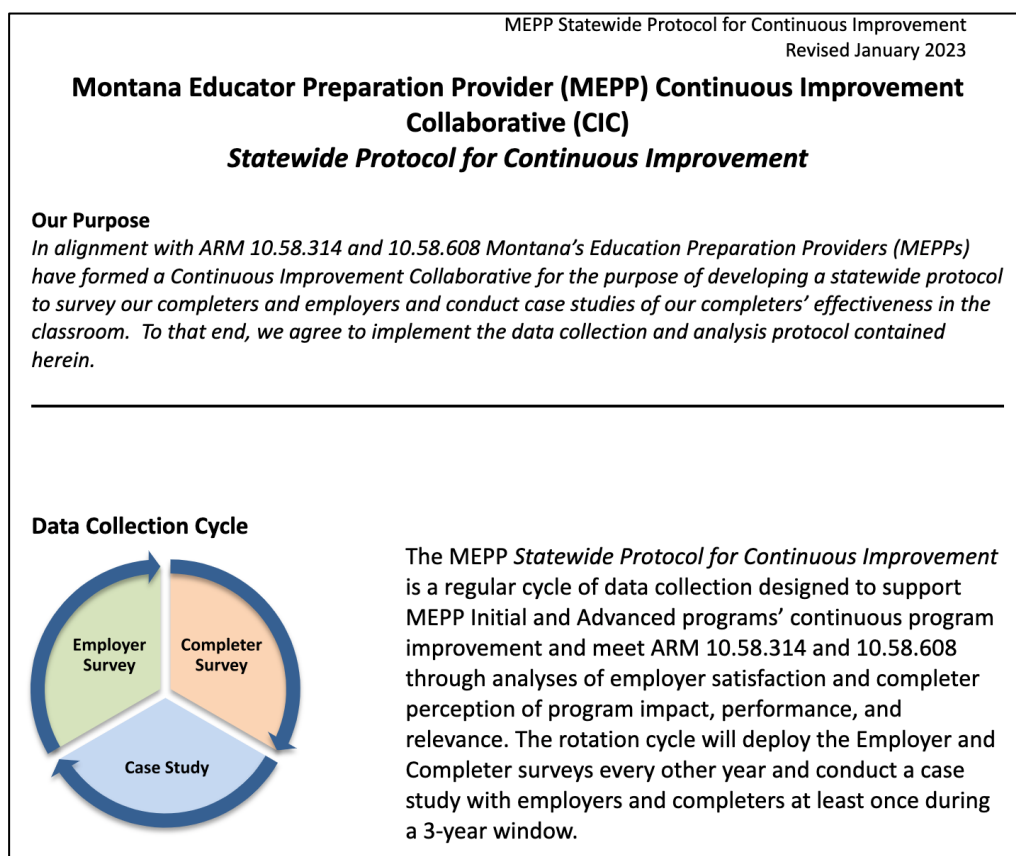
The DOE has a long history of engagement with its Education Advisory Board. This diverse group of stakeholders in the Flathead Reservation education community gather at Salish Kootenai College quarterly to guide and inform the ongoing efforts of the Education Division. Established in 2002, group membership changes from time to time but always includes teachers and administrators from area schools, tribal education personnel, and other local and county education officials. Our faculty and staff participate in all Board meetings in order to more deeply understand the needs in our community specific to our goal of providing highly prepared teachers for PreK-12 classrooms.

This group serves in a mentoring capacity, assisting, guiding, and informing the Education Division faculty and leadership as it continues to build and refine its initiatives and its academic programs. Through its diversity and high level of expertise, the Board offers unique perspectives that greatly enhance the department's potential for the successful implementation of its goals. The Education Advisory Board is composed of leaders in the educational community which includes former candidates (graduates), classroom teachers, principals, school superintendents,

county education officials, cultural experts, and tribal government officials. This extraordinary group provides insight and direction for the Education Division as it refines and improves its educational offerings and field experiences.

### Employer and Completer Surveys

As part of a statewide process involving all of Montana's Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs), SKC participates in the **Continuous Improvement Collaborative (CIC)**. This process involves three sequential stages of self-study procedures that address program progress: Completer Surveys, Employer Surveys, and Case Studies. These tasks are implemented by the EPPs for three academic years per cycle, and the results from each of these surveys are then sent to the OPI for aggregation and analysis at the state level. An overview of this process is included here:



The Employer survey (Step #1) is completed by a school administrator and evaluates the quality of teacher preparation received. The Completer Survey (Step #2) asks questions about the training the graduate (now classroom teacher) received in relation to their own teaching practices and self-perceived efficacy in the classroom, while the The Case Study (Step #3) is open-ended and can be implemented in a variety of ways.

In spring of 2021, to engage in this third part of the process, SKC's DOE conducted "talking circles" in Ronan and Browning, the two school districts with relatively high populations of teachers who were trained at SKC. The conversations were largely built around two areas:

application of culturally revitalizing and sustaining instruction, and classroom management relative to IEFA. The results of these conversations / talking circles indicated that teachers graduating from SKC felt they were very well prepared to implement Indian Education for All in their classrooms, in terms of content, management, and pedagogy. They cited their experience at SKC in which their own identity as Native learners was valued and emphasized in coursework; however they also noted the challenges they have faced in school districts where such culturally sustaining practice is not fully embraced, and even may be resisted by their school or district leadership. The DOE will continue to engage in the CIC process along with other EPPs in Montana.

### **Accreditation Reviews**

All EPPs in Montana are evaluated on a 7-year cycle by their peers as a part of their state accreditation review process. The EPP submits extensive reports aligned with their progress in meeting state Professional Educator Preparation Program Standards (PEPPS). The site visit is conducted by a special review team that is assembled from officials at other EPPs, along with selected accreditation officials from the OPI. When the time comes for the Accreditation Review, EPPs prepare institutional reports on each required standard and submits these reports along with supporting documentation to the review team approximately 6 to 8 weeks prior to the site visit, to allow time for the team to evaluate the documents. During the site visit, members of the team visit the EPP and interview students, administration, other faculty, graduates, and other key stakeholders. They then produce their own report indicating the strengths and challenges they see and whether or not the EPP's goals have been met.

The last time this process took place with SKC's Division of Education was in 2017, and the results of this visit were well documented in our previous Academic Program Review in 2019. In short, the programs reviewed received exceptionally positive marks for all program components and procedures, with just one recommendation- which was to improve our documentation of outreach and community engagement events. The Division has kept careful records of all our outreach activities since this time, and we feel this should be an area of strength in this next state AR cycle. Our next such Accreditation Review is scheduled for this academic year, in spring of 2024. These results will be included in the next Academic Program Review in 2027.

### **C3. Faculty Data**

Faculty in the ECED, ECE:P-3, and Elementary programs are highly qualified in their fields of specialization and engaged in the College community in numerous levels. What follows is an overview of faculty makeup in these programs, faculty member's qualifications, effectiveness, and continuing education. There are 8 regular SKC faculty teaching courses in the three programs reviewed in this self-study. Some teach in more than one program.

#### **ECED and ECE:P-3 Faculty:**

Dr. Amy Burland, Faculty and Director of Early Childhood Partnerships  
Leigh Ann Courville, Faculty and Co-Chair, Early Childhood Education Department  
Manda Davis, Faculty and Co-Chair, Early Childhood Education Department  
Randi Shrider, Education Division Faculty  
Dr. Heather Bleecker, Faculty, Student Support Specialist, EC Partnership Assistant



**ELEM Faculty:**

Eric Hogenson, Faculty, Elementary Education Dept. Chair

Dr. Tammy Elser, Faculty, Elementary Education / Co-Director, M.Ed.C&I Program

Dr. Amy Burland, Faculty and Director of Early Childhood Partnerships

Dr. Heather Bleecker, Faculty, Student Support Specialist, EC Partnership Assistant

Randi Shrider, Education Division Faculty

Douglas Ruhman, Faculty and Division of Education Dean

***Faculty detailed information***

**Dr. Amy Burland** acquired a Bachelor's in Elementary Education from Moorhead State University, MN, and a Master's of Education in School Administration from Grand Forks, ND. She attained a Doctorate of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Montana, emphasizing early mathematics. Amy has worked at Salish Kootenai College for over 20 years, serving in various capacities, beginning as an adjunct instructor, then as Elementary Department Chair, and eventually as Dean of the Division of Education. She is now the Early Childhood Partnerships Coordinator, overseeing Early Childhood projects under the Kellogg Foundation, Early Educators Investment Collaborative, and the Federal Office of Head Start. These projects are aligned with increasing the quality of care and learning for children and families on the Flathead Reservation and throughout Montana. Amy has been involved with revitalizing Native Games since she first became certified through the International Traditional Games Society in 2010. Since then she has secured funding to host numerous trainings at SKC that make the certification accessible to education students, SKC faculty, and Flathead Reservation teachers.

**Leigh Ann Courville** is currently Co-Chair of the Early Childhood Education department in the Division of Education. She earned her Bachelor of Elementary Education with an emphasis in Early Childhood from Western Montana College and an Associate in Early Childhood in Dillon, Montana (now University of Montana Western) and a Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from University of Montana, Missoula. Leigh Ann has worked at SKC since September 2013. Starting as an Assistant Director/Lead Teacher at the campus Early Learning Center where she provided support in the administration of a high quality program and moving into the Director position at the Early Learning Center in 2014. In this position managing day-to-day operations of the center and the Transitions grant coordinator. This included oversight of implementation of High Scope Curriculum, grant funding and childcare budget. During this time the center moved from a STARS to Quality level 2 program to a level 4 program. She joined the SKC Education department Fall of 2018 and teaches classes in early childhood and child development and serves as a supervisor to the Early Learning Center on campus and link to the Education department.

Leigh Ann has been in the field of early childhood education for about 28 years and that work has been in Montana and Alaska and included tribal Head Start and Early Head Start program teacher and site coordinator, Early Childhood Specialist and trainer for Alaska's CCR&R

(child care resource and referral), administrator/teacher in bi-lingual Montessori program, family child care, and substitute in public schools.

She brings a passion for the field of early childhood and the value of culture and place and its role in early education.

**Manda Davis** is also currently a Co-Chair of the Early Childhood Education department, along with Leigh Ann Courville. She received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology and English Literature from Willamette University in 1999. While attending Willamette, Manda worked at Fairview Mental Hospital as a research assistant and as an Applied Behavior Analysis treatment specialist for young children with Autism. Upon graduation, she returned home to the Flathead Valley where she received her Early Childhood Montessori Teaching Certificate. In 2001, Manda completed the certification for Montessori Elementary Teacher Training in Woodinville, Washington and returned to Kalispell to help establish a public Montessori program for grades K-3 at Helena Flats School. She has over 15 years' experience teaching in Montessori classrooms, both public and private, with children ages 2 through 12 and is currently a teacher trainer for the Montana Montessori Teacher Training Institute.

In 2006, Ms. Davis received a Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Early Childhood Special Education from the University of Montana. She then went on to Columbia University's Teacher's College as a Doctoral candidate in Early Childhood Education where she taught Master's Degree level classes in "inclusive practices and curriculum differentiation in early childhood education." Manda has an insatiable love of learning and is thrilled to be working with pre-service and experienced teachers on the Flathead Reservation. Manda began teaching at Salish Kootenai College in January of 2017. She teaches classes in leadership and professionalism, coaching and mentoring, meeting the needs of families, and supporting cognitive development in math, science, and literacy. She and her two sons participated in the Native Games certification clinic organized by the International Traditional Games Society at SKC and has a passion for working with pre-service and established teachers to host Native Game tournaments on the Flathead Reservation. Manda has collaborated with Dr. Amy Burland and Kathie Maiers on a Restorative Teachings Grant established by the American Indian College Fund that fuses the Special Olympics Montana Young Athletes Program curriculum with the Traditional Games curriculum so that all children can participate in Native Games events.

Manda serves on several committees at SKC, and has been active in the Food Sovereignty Program, including the distribution of food boxes to students and others at the College.

Ms. Davis is a member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, the American Montessori Society, and the Montana Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium. Manda is delighted to be an integral part of the faculty at SKC and particularly enjoys working with the dedicated teachers at the Head Start programs on the Flathead Reservation where excellence and innovation in early childhood education happens every day.

**Randi Shrider** was born and raised in Saint Ignatius, MT. After graduating from Charlo High School, she received a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from the University of Montana while also earning her Associate's degree in Early Childhood from Salish Kootenai College. In 2009, Randi moved to Alaska where she expanded her educational journey through serving the Yukon-Koyukuk School District (YKSD) as an early elementary teacher in the village

of Minto. During her time in Minto, she was recommended to participate in the Rural Alaska Principal Preparation and Support Project (RAPPS) that focused on helping prepare principals for high-poverty and remote Alaska schools where she earned her first Master's degree in Educational Leadership. After receiving her degree, she worked as a principal/teacher in the village of Allakaket. In her position as administrator, she developed a diverse knowledge and skill set displaying the competence and creativity that have helped to shape her professional goals. Her flexibility in working with students, teachers, staff and the public has earned her an enviable reputation as an individual who truly cares about individuals who live in small communities. Randi further advanced her career in education while carrying out her professional responsibilities within the district as high school counselor, during which time she earned her second Master's in Counseling from the University of Alaska. Randi eventually opened a new office in Eagle River, Alaska, and served as both a counselor and teacher to military families through a statewide correspondence program. During the 2020-2021 school year, Randi served as an assistant principal of a charter school in South Houston, TX, serving youth and families from various ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds. She teaches classes in both the ECED and Elementary programs, and also teaches the SKC Seminar class that onboards new students to the College. Randi serves on the Professional Development and Inservice Committees and helps out in many extra capacities across campus.

**Dr. Heather Bleecker** serves as Student Support Specialist in the Division, and also assists the ECED department with early childhood partnerships, including coordinating the numerous 2+2 articulation agreements and transfer pathways between SKC and other TCUs. Dr. Bleecker has 17 years of experience in mathematics education. Heather joined the SKC faculty in September of 2018 and serves as an instructor in the ECE:P-3 and Elementary departments.

Heather taught high school mathematics in Long Beach, California and Polson, Montana. She holds a National Board Certification in Adolescent and Young Adulthood Mathematics and is an HP Prime Ambassador. Heather has served as an adjunct professor for the University of South Dakota. Heather was a research associate and project manager at the University of Michigan for an NSF grant studying geometry instruction at the undergraduate level for instructors preparing future secondary mathematics teachers. She has accompanied students and graduates on several conferences and training opportunities throughout the U.S. and internationally. She traveled with elementary students to Guatemala in the summer of 2023 to engage in math teaching as part of the Mathkind program, and has attended and presented at numerous professional teaching convenings, such as NCTM national conference. Her research interests include studying mathematics teachers' perceptions of teaching competencies.

**Eric Hogenson** currently serves as the Department Chair for Elementary Education in the Division of Education. He earned his B.A. in Environmental Studies from Dartmouth College in 2001, and his M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from California Lutheran University in 2013. Eric was born in Missoula, MT and raised on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Polson, MT. He is the son of two life-long educators and attributes his love of learning to his parents. After graduating from Polson schools, Eric followed his love of the outdoors and attended Dartmouth College in the woods of New Hampshire. There, he earned his degree in Environmental Studies. After college, Eric helped pioneer Dartmouth's inaugural volunteer teaching program in the Republic of

the Marshall Islands. He lived and taught on Ejit Island, the home of the people of Bikini Atoll, who were displaced by the US Nuclear Testing program in the 1950s. After two extraordinary years, he moved to Los Angeles and worked at Brentwood School (K-12) from 2003-2016. During his time there, he honed his teaching and leadership skills as he assumed a multitude of roles, including teaching science to every grade K-12, serving as the high school science department chair, directing the summer programs, and serving on the senior administrative team. In 2016, Eric became the Director of the Upper Division at Laurence School (K-6) in Van Nuys, CA, where he mentored and supervised teachers, directed the curricular program, and developed many co-curricular programs. He is most proud about his work enhancing the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, math) program at Laurence. Among his accomplishments, he presented at regional and national conferences about the value of connected and experiential learning. As an enrolled member of the Little Shell Band of Chippewa, Eric has been reconnecting with his roots in Montana.

**Dr. Tammy Elser** joined the SKC faculty in the Education Division in December 2016 as a full time instructor focusing on literacy and Indian Education. Previous teaching assignments include integrated literacy, curriculum foundations, and multicultural education courses for the University of Montana; and content area reading and classroom management for SKC.

Dr. Elser earned her Ed.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, preceded by an M.Ed. in Guidance and Counseling, a B.A., English, a B.A. in Drama and A. A. emphasizing social work, all from the University of Montana. The emphasis of her doctorate and 35 years work in K-12 and higher education are on literacy, language acquisition and bilingual education, multicultural education and Indian Education for All. She taught, and designed and directed Federal Programs on the Flathead Reservation for 25 years, with three at Two Eagle River School and twenty-two years in the Arlee Public Schools. In Arlee, she developed the only comprehensive approach to literacy instruction to close the achievement gap between American Indian children and their non-Indian peers and sustained it for many years.

Through her educational consulting firm, *Insight Educational Services, Inc.*, Tammy has worked nationally as an educational consultant. Recent work for Montana Office of Public Instruction include writing *The Framework: A Practical Guide for Montana Teachers and Administrators Implementing Indian Education for All*, and development of seven curricula integrating *Indian Education for All* content into the communication arts while promoting 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Under contract with Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Dr. Elser developed two comprehensive and innovative curriculums integrating across content areas, emphasizing environmental science. *Fire on the Land* and *Explore the River*, distributed to classrooms across Montana, fulfill the Common Core Literacy Standards for Science and History as well as the Next Generation Science Standards.

She has developed curriculum for the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian associated with their Treaties Exhibit and protocols for NASA supporting climate science education. In addition, a textbook review was provided for Pearson publishing supporting Montana specific content in a 4<sup>th</sup> grade Geography text.

Professional development in higher education in the recent past include contracts with Creighton University providing professional development for five American Indian Catholic Mission Schools and a plenary session for STEM professors in minority serving institutions for the American Association of Colleges and Universities.



Over the last decade, Dr. Elser conducted classroom observations in over 520 P-12 classrooms examining technology integration and best practices. Her K-12 work focuses on practical, classroom-level supports, transforming teaching and learning. Literacy, curriculum integration and best practices in support of rigorous educational expectations are her enduring passions and the focus of about 40 days of teacher professional development each year.

In 2019 Tammy and colleagues in the Education Division began focused work to develop a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction, and in 2022 the first cohort of this program began its studies. In August 2023, 100% of the initial cohort of graduate students completed their program and graduated with honors. Dr. Elser is Co-Director of this program along with Dr. Wren Walker Robbins. Dr. Elser directs the Literacy, Equity, and Excellence strand of this advanced degree program for teachers.

**Douglas Ruhman** currently serves as Dean of the Division of Education. He oversees all aspects of the Division, and is responsible for grant management, personnel supervision, and the academic and operational workings of the Division. Prior to this position he served as faculty and Dept. Chair for Elementary Education. He earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education from the University of Montana and a Master of Education Degree with an Educational Technology endorsement from Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. Doug taught in several environmental science education programs prior to receiving his Bachelor's Degree in 1988. He was a Watkins Scholar, designing a supplemental elementary science program that traveled to various Missoula elementary schools teaching hands-on environmental science lessons to 2nd and 4th graders.

Doug began teaching in a 4th grade classroom on the Flathead Indian Reservation, and worked as a teacher, whole language specialist, technology coordinator, and staff development designer on the Reservation for 15 years prior to coming to SKC. Doug has been involved in curriculum design and selection committees in the areas of science, technology, and language arts. While still a classroom teacher, Doug helped to design and implement a comprehensive classroom civics/economics program for his school, which later was adopted by other schools on the Reservation. In 1999 Doug received the Outstanding Educator Award from the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes for his work in teaching about the Flathead River Ecosystem. Mr. Ruhman began working at Salish Kootenai College as faculty in the Elementary Education program in the summer of 2002, and has been involved in several outreach projects with Reservation youth since that time, including being the site evaluator for the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change project, a joint program of SKC and the Ronan School District. This project's goals sought to on empower American Indian youth, encourage academic excellence, and reduce the dropout rate among Indigenous learners.

In addition, Doug has served on faculty development focus groups dealing with student engagement in online learning, cultural competency, and the implementation of active learning techniques. He has attended national and regional conferences on technology education, distance education, generational poverty, community leadership, and teaching and learning at minority-serving institutions, among other topics. Mr. Ruhman has served SKC in several work groups and committees, including chairing the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Week committee, chairing the Community Service Day committee, serving on the SKC Marketing Committee, and representing faculty on the President's Advisory Council. Doug was the recipient of a Fulbright-Hays Scholarship which resulted in a cultural study abroad in China

during the summer of 2009. He was selected as the recipient of the American Indian College Fund Faculty Member of the Year Award in 2014, and still teaches in the Division.

### **Contribution to SKC through Committee Work and Other Contributions, Past and Present**

#### **Dr. Amy Burland**

- Institutional Review Board (IRB) (2018-present)
- Secured funding and coordination for Montana Early Childhood Native Language Summit (2017 to present)
- Native Games Professional Development to local pre-service and in-service teachers (2010-present)
- National Presentations on American Indian College Fund projects, including:
- Restorative Teachings (incorporating Native Games into MT Special Olympics curriculum), Denver, CO (2017 & 2018).
- For the Wisdom of the Children Early Childhood STEM Initiative – Our People’s Timeline (building STEM into early childhood education teacher training). National American Indian Education Conference (NAIE), Hartford, CT (2018); and Early Childhood Education Funders Workshop, Minneapolis, MN (2019);

#### **Doug Ruhman**

- M. L. King, Jr. Celebration Week Committee (past Chair)
- Community Service Day Committee (past Chair)
- 4Cs / Citizenship Committee (2018-19, past Chair)
- Academic Advising Work Group (2013-2015)
- Faculty Handbook Committee (2014-2016)
- New Faculty Orientation task force
- Academic Program Reviews (several)
- Presentations at Faculty Inservice (several)
- Presentations at Flathead Res. PIR Day (multiple years)
- Volunteer, SKC Harvest Dinner Event (multiple years)
- Montana OPI Praxis Working Committee (9 years)
- Montana Higher Education Consortium
- Building Emergency Coordinator (2016-present)
- SKC Marketing Committee (4 years)
- Co-Chair, Montana Council of Deans of Education (current)

#### **Leigh Ann Courville**

- Food Access Committee (current)
- Teachers Teaching Teachers- Reggio Presentation Spring 23
- Building Strong Foundations (BSSF)
- Zero to Five Collaboration Early Childhood Tribal Policy Coordinator
- BPC Webinar Tribal Childcare featuring SKC/ECED Feb 2023

- Native Roots MPR Radio March 23

**Randi Shrider**

- Student Referral Team (DOE) collaborator
- Advisory Board (DOE) collaborator
- Junior Cohort (DOE) advisor
- ATD: Holistic Student Support (SKC) collaborator, facilitator, note-taker
- Professional Development Committee (SKC) collaborator
- General Education Committee (SKC) collaborator
- Scholarship Committee (SKC) Collaborator
- Distant Education Committee (SKC) Collaborator
- Strategic Plan Community Help (SKC) (Community Focus Groups)
- NSO (SKC) collaborator
- High School Engagement (SKC) collaborator
- Animal Shelter
- Bread Basket
- Food Box Distribution

**Manda Davis**

- SKC Scholarship Committee
- MT Committee for 2019 revision of MELS
- NAYC Professional Standards Committee
- Tribal Language Summit
- Food Boxes
- SKC Scholarship review team
- ATD (Achieve the Dream) Faculty support initiative
- Women for Wellness
- MLK Day
- Reggio Emilia training in Italy
- Families First Learning Lab provider
- Early Childhood Services training and support
- SKC ELC training and support
- Local ICWA volunteer and supporter
- Montana Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium
- EsF Educateurs Sans Frontières - (coalition of educators across the world focused on social justice)
- All Nations Health Center Volunteer in Missoula

**Eric Hogenson** (new employee 22-23)

- Distance Education Committee
- Benefits Committee
- Community Service Day Committee

**Tammy Elser**

- Institutional Review Board (IRB) (2018-present)
- Graduate programs working group (2019-present)
- Professional Development Committee (2017)
- Presentation at Faculty In-service (Spring 2017)
- Presentations at Flathead Res. PIR Day (multiple years)
- Presentations at Best Practices Conference OPI (multiple years)
- Collaborative professional development events (TED, OPI, Others 4 to 8 times annually)
- In-service professional development provider - all Flathead Reservation Schools (4 to 8 sessions annually)

## D. Cultural Perpetuation

We feel that numerous examples have been presented relevant to ways the ECED, ECE:P-3, and Elementary programs engage in perpetuating the cultures of the Séliš, Ksanka and Qlispé people of the Flathead Nation. The following information summarizes and emphasizes several important program features built into these academic programs and into the Division as a whole that address cultural perpetuation.

- **Redesigning Science content courses**
  - The faculty and staff of these three programs worked to re-design science content courses to be more culturally sustaining. Instead of focusing only on categorized western constructs of science disciplines, new courses were built around the seasonal round of the Séliš, Ksanka and Qlispé tribes.
- **Redesigning portfolios and evaluation tools to include culturally revitalizing practice**
  - ECED, ECE:P-3, and Elementary faculty and staff participated in a re-design of the student portfolio systems used in their programs to measure student progress and program efficacy around the Five Central Beliefs, which were established with consultation from local cultural leaders on the Flathead Reservation.
- **Culture and Language Specialist for all degrees**
  - The Division created a new position of Culture and Language Specialist, to assist faculty with the integration of Native language and cultural content into courses. This position also works across campus to promote language inclusion in other programs, and the Division hosts campus-wide Talking Circles for those faculty and staff interested in bringing more Native language into their courses.
- **Native Language Teacher Education program**

The Division helped to develop, house, and continually revise the NLTE program over the four years of this review period. Its Chair, Rosie Matt, engages fully in Division meetings and in decision making for all programs in the Division, and advocates for connecting program changes with the tribal community. This work includes networking with the NASD and CALS departments.



- **Division Personnel**
  - The Division has prioritized tribal preference in each new hire over the last 3 years. This has resulted in tribal members or descendants filling these positions, such that 8 of the 13 personnel in the Division now have a tribal affiliation.
- **Office of Indian Education PD Grants**
  - In the interest of promoting academic success for AI/AN education students to become teachers, faculty in these programs wrote and were awarded OIE professional development grants (I-STEM, Bridges) that provide support for students through stipends, PD opportunities, and other resources.
- **Emphasizing NASL in all DOE program degree plans**
  - During this review period from 2019-2022, faculty and staff in ECED, ECE:P-3, and ELEM successfully worked to add more Native language requirements in all Division programs, and have prioritized local languages whenever possible.
- **DOE connections to tribal entities**
  - The Division has a liaison that has established communications and connections with various cultural entities on the Flathead Reservation, such as the SQCC, Tribal Council, Nk<sup>w</sup>usm, and CSKT Tribal Education.
- **Indigenous Research Methodologies in ARPs and other research**
  - The programs in this review and others in the Division have engaged in learning circles centered around Indigenous Research Methodologies, and is working to build more IRMM into Action Research Project templates used by seniors in their programs.
- **Facilitating and hosting the Native Language Summit**
  - During this review period, the ECED and ECE:P-3 program faculty and staff have planned, developed, and facilitated an annual conference, the Native Language Summit, to promote learning and application on local native languages in early childhood learning settings across the region.

## E. Research and Service

### *Department Service to the Community*

The ECED, ECE:P-3, and ELEM departments engage in community outreach in a myriad of ways. First and foremost, there is robust community engagement through many required **practicums and field experiences**, which are woven into nearly every education course in all three programs. Students in all programs spend considerable time engaged in actual classroom experiences, whether in early childhood centers or in mainstream PreK-8 public school classrooms. In so doing, students interact with community members, visit with teachers and other staff in schools, and gain insights about community needs, and at the same time, learn how to teach content effectively with mentorship from experienced teachers who know their community.

Second, in order to facilitate these practicum experiences, **faculty network regularly with education entities** to plan and revise expectations and fieldwork procedures and processes.

Faculty meet with teachers and school administrators to plan student teaching, implement classroom projects, and foster better communications with schools.

Third, the programs require education-centric **service learning coursework** in which students design and implement a project that identifies and addresses a community need. EDUC 175, Community Service in Education requires 30 hours of community service and is taken in the second year of the programs.

Another important way the Division as a whole - and thus the programs reviewed here - engage with community is through its **Education Advisory Board** which meets each quarter. As explained earlier, the EAB provides feedback on program content and procedures, and guides the departments' work so as to be rooted in meeting community needs.

### ***Research***

Students in all departments in the DOE, including those reviewed in this self-study, engage in research learning in an educational context. This occurs on multiple levels. Several courses incorporate small-scale research embedded in their classes, such as the case study involving children's reading development that is associated with EDUC 354, a reading methods course. In EDUC 311, Cultures, Diversity, and Ethics in Education, students are required to research and present a project that explores education-related issues affecting tribes in Montana.

Beyond the integration of research into courses, students also take courses specially addressing research writing, such as EDUC 321, Research Writing in Education, in which they learn the forms and structure of research writing for their methods courses.

The next level of research application is Action Research, which takes place in the senior year and involves identifying an authentic educational issue and designing an intervention to address it. Students take EDUC 471, Action Research in Education the term preceding student teaching, to identify an area they are passionate about in teaching, and learn the forms and structures of action research. In this course students construct a template they will follow to implement this action research project (ARP) the following quarter when they student teach and can gather actual student data in their classroom. Once the data is completed, students work to write a comprehensive ARP paper and present their findings to their faculty and peers. This teaches candidates how to think about and address educational problems in a structured, methodical manner instead of with "trial and error". The ARP provides students with a scholarly experience that celebrates their evolution as an educator and gives them real-life problem solving skills they can use in the classroom.

## F. Summary

### **1. Summary of Program Strengths**

The ECED and ECE:P-3 programs have worked hard to be responsive to the early learning communities they serve and partner with. Faculty have reached out to these partners to find ways of making their programs accessible to their unique student needs, and have consistently fostered positive relations with early childhood providers. These programs have prioritized curricular changes (detailed above) that emphasize culturally revitalizing and sustaining content and pedagogy, and have done an outstanding job networking with other colleges to improve transfer pathways and program alignment across complex and differing curricular landscapes at different institutions. The program staff are extremely student-centered and make themselves available to students at times that work for them, both in terms of advising and instruction. This may involve classes delivered in online or hybrid settings, or in the evening when students are not working. These departments have been nationally recognized for these efforts.

The Elementary Education program in the DOE has an extraordinary placement record and has retained its students successfully for years. A hallmark of the ELEM program at SKC is its adherence to children's development and research-based practices that place the child's holistic wellness and their cultural identity at the highest priority. Its purpose is to train teachers to advocate for best practices that foster healthy relationships and engaged learners first, and content acquisition second. This is modeled in the program's unwavering dedication to candidate success through holistic advising and a balanced approach that values flexibility with accountability for its teacher graduates.

### **2. Summary of Program Areas for Improvement**

The ECED program has grown and expanded in its reaching out to include other institutions and communities and in its multiple grant programs. Although this is certainly a positive development, it can present staffing concerns as the breadth of workload on faculty and staff have increased. It will be important to move forward with an eye to this dynamic. The department is currently down at least one full time FTE, as Eric Hogenson transitioned over to the Elementary Dept. Chair position. That position was advertised but had no applicants, and so it has been restructured and will be re-advertised. We are hopeful that the department will acquire a new faculty member before the start of winter quarter; this will help alleviate some of the workload currently being carried by the existing team.

The ECE:P-3 program is suffering from low enrollment. Student numbers need to be monitored by the Dept. Chairs and the long-term viability of the program should be assessed. Networking with local schools, the Education Advisory Board, and other stakeholders will be need to determine if the program is meeting the needs of the larger educational community. An exploration of the state of P-3 education in the state would be helpful, and perhaps SKC's program staff can facilitate, or at least participate in this process so that the future of the program can be better understood.

The ELEM program has experienced inconsistent enrollment that has been characterized by up-and-down student numbers for several years in a row. Both the ELEM program and the P-3 program should consider expending more efforts in recruitment, including more visits to schools

as well as opportunities for increased dual enrollment courses that can bring in more high school students (especially more Native students) into teacher preparation at SKC.

In addition, ELEM program faculty have recognized the need to strengthen its communication and partnerships with local K-8 school leadership, also. This is an important and necessary facet of the program's success and could (and should) be prioritized.

### **3. Program Priorities for the Future**

The programs detailed in this self-study are large and involve many students, on-campus and now at distance, as well as multiple staff and faculty. As they move into the future and emerge from the COVID era, especially in the next three to four years, it will be important to for these programs to strive for balance in workloads as they seek to grow their enrollment. We hope to engage in more professional development in the areas of socio-emotional learning and the implementation of Indigenous research methodologies in all programs. We will seek to engage with language learning in a more intentional way, and build more integration of these languages into our courses in all programs. We also wish to continue building strong bonds among the people we work alongside every day, in our departments and throughout the Education Division. When we create strong, mutually respectful, and supportive relations with our colleagues, we foster a happy and productive team. This promotes a better educational experience for our students.

Lastly, several members of the ECED, ECE:P-3, and Elementary program staff and faculty will likely be retiring in the next three to five years. The Division will need to build its leadership capacity in order to sustain the positive accomplishments it has experienced thus far. This is no small task, and it will be important in the next few years to plan for these changes systematically to ensure the ongoing success of the programs and of the Division as a whole. If we are careful and do this well, these programs can thrive and grow well into the future.

## **Appendices** (provided separately)

**Appendix A - OIE Enrollment Data Tables** ("App A EnrollmtData.xlsx")

**Appendix B - MT Early Childhood Workforce Report** ("App B EC workforce report.pdf")

**Appendix C - MT Teacher Recruitmt. and Retention** ("App C LPI MTworkforce.pdf")

**Appendix D - Division of Educ. Annual Plan for 2022-2023** ("App D AnnualPlan22-23.pdf")

**Appendix E - Compiled Federal Title II Reports, 2019-2022** ("App E title2.19-22.pdf")