

May 20, 2026

From: Deputy Commissioner Joe Thiel

To: Board of Regents

Please see below for an executive overview of the Request to Plan items that are being proposed for your review and action at the May 2026 meeting of the Board of Regents. These items have been submitted by the campuses and reviewed by the Chief Academic Officers of the Montana University System and community colleges. OCHE staff has reviewed the items and provided a short analysis below, relying on information submitted by the campuses. For more information and specific details on each item, please see the supporting documentation included on the Academic, Research, and Student Affairs Committee agenda.

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### **Montana State University Northern**

#### **Request to plan an Associate of Science in Integrated Health Sciences**

Following conversations with Northern Montana Health Care, Montana State University Northern (MSUN) proposes a 60-credit Associate of Science in Integrated Health Sciences. The program is designed to be stackable into the existing Bachelor of Science in Integrated Health Sciences. The degree serves as a flexible on- and off-ramp: students may enter the workforce at an entry level, complete prerequisites for competitive allied health programs elsewhere in the MUS, or continue into the bachelor's degree at Northern. A final program proposal is expected in May 2027.

The program addresses three identified needs. (1) The passage of Montana HB 252 (STARS Act) will incentivize high schools to place students in dual enrollment programs leading to early certifications and two-year degrees; (2) MSUN serves rural Hi-Line communities where such options in health sciences are currently limited. Regional healthcare partners, including Northern Montana Health Care, have shared that foundational certifications embedded in the program — Medical Assistant and Certified Nurse's Aide — would provide immediate value to critical access hospitals. (3) The program also prepares students to apply to competitive allied health programs across the state, such as physical therapy assistant and dental hygiene, addressing a documented access gap for students in more isolated communities.

The program will require adjunct faculty for certification courses such as EMT and CNA, estimated at a maximum of 12 credits per year at \$750 per credit, approximately \$9,000 annually. All other coursework will be delivered by existing faculty, and no new equipment is anticipated. Miles City Community College and UM-Western offer broadly similar programs, both with low enrollment in recent years. Conversations with those institutions are ongoing. Collaboration opportunities include partnerships with regional high schools for dual credit, articulation agreements with MUS allied health programs, and integration of co-operative education credits with clinical apprenticeship hours through the local healthcare system.

### **University of Montana Missoula**

#### **Request to plan Instrumental and Choral Concentrations in the Bachelor of Music Education**

The University of Montana School of Music proposes to add two concentrations — Instrumental and Choral — within the existing Bachelor of Music Education (BME). The restructure does not change total credit requirements (72 credits within the School of Music; 120 overall) but creates discipline-specific course sequences aligned with best practices and meets the standards of the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). A final program proposal is expected in December 2026.

The music education field increasingly requires music educators to demonstrate proficiency in a specific discipline before entering the classroom. The proposed concentrations respond to that request and better prepare graduates as K–12 music educators in Montana. UM's BME has seen strong enrollment with headcounts doubling from 41 students in Fall 2023 to 84 in Fall 2024.

No additional faculty, staff, facilities, or substantial financial resources are proposed. MSU-Bozeman offers the only comparable program in the MUS. Enrollment counts at both institutions suggest that having two programs is currently sustainable. The proposed concentrations are expected to enhance collaboration across disciplines, including eligibility of jazz and musical theatre ensembles for degree credit, incorporation of existing techniques courses from those areas, and potential co-curricular coursework in music and movement with the Department of Theatre and Dance.