

A VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN MONTANA



STRATEGIC PLAN

UPDATED MARCH 2022

WHAT IS THE K-12 VISION PROJECT



The K-12 Vision Project was first formed by key education advocacy groups (MASBO, MFPE, MQEC, MREA, MTSBA and SAM) in 2011 with a charge of developing a comprehensive vision for the future success of public education in Montana and establishing a clear road map to achieve that vision.

Comprised of teachers, elected trustees, superintendents, principals, and school business officials nominated by their peers from across the state of Montana, the K-12 Vision Project has developed and annually updated an inspiring vision, aligned with the guarantees afforded Montana citizens under our Constitution, that holds great promise for the future of Montana.

The members contributing to the work of the K-12 Vision Project over the last decade have come from a wide variety of school districts, large and small, east and west, urban and rural, and includes districts from the State's eight Tribal Nations. The trustees who have served come from all walks of life, including farmers and ranchers, successful business people, retirees and early career professionals. Each member has come to share a focus on ensuring effective advocacy for each child in every public school.

The work of the K-12 Vision Project creates a clear path to a successful future and remains critical to fulfilling the vision of our Montana Constitutional Framers for a system of free quality public schools that fully develops the educational potential of each person.



CORE PURPOSE AND CORE VALUES



CORE PURPOSE

A system of public education which will develop the full educational potential of each person.
Article X, Section 1, Montana Constitution, 1972.

CORE VALUES

Montana's public school districts share the authority and responsibility with the Legislature, Governor, Board of Public Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction to provide a system of public education that affords children, their families and Montana's citizens each of the guarantees of Article X of the Montana Constitution. We collectively bear the responsibility for ensuring important constitutional guarantees afforded children under Article X of the Montana Constitution:

THE MONTANA CONSTITUTION GUARANTEES:

Article X, Section 1:

1. The preservation of a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools throughout Montana that is capable of developing the full educational potential of each person served;
2. Quality and equality of educational opportunity for each person;
3. The preservation of the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians;

Article X, Section 7: Prohibits discrimination on account of sex, race, creed, religion, political beliefs, or national origin in Montana's public schools;

Article X, Section 8: Each community's ownership of its publicly funded schools, with the support and engagement of school staff and the community exercised through supervision and control by elected trustees;

Article X, Section 9: General supervision of Montana's public schools by an appointed Board of Public Education

Article X, Section 2, 3, 4 and 5: The proper and exclusive use of state land revenues for Montana's public schools.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?



OUR ENVISIONED FUTURE - 2027

Montana's K-12 public schools work collaboratively with each other, with state policymakers, and with their communities to successfully develop the full potential of each person and educational opportunity for each student, through a system that is flexible, adequately, and rationally funded, and community-owned.

VIVID DESCRIPTIONS OF OUR ENVISIONED FUTURE:

Policymakers at all levels:

- Consistently recognize, honor and support the goal of the people to establish a system of public education which will develop the full educational potential of each person and use that goal to drive policymaking decisions;
- Consistently support each community's ownership of its public schools and each district's ability to develop the full potential of each child through supervision and control by locally elected school boards;
- Adequately and rationally provide the resources needed by Montana's public schools;
- Support the budgetary and other flexibilities needed by Montana's public schools to be responsive to community and student needs; and
- Demonstrate the courage to make informed decisions to promote the needs and attributes of each student in every public school.

Montana's public school districts are student-centered, focused, adaptable, innovative, engaging, safe and secure, and driven to:

- Ensure that each public school student's knowledge and skills match contemporary needs;
- Use innovation and technology to empower each student to engage in the world in which they will learn and succeed;
- Operate in well-designed, modern and updated facilities that further learning;
- Realize schools and school districts as generative workplaces to recruit and retain high-quality staff;
- Engage families, the community, and each other to develop the full potential of each child;
- Empower and engage each student to actively participate in their education and set high expectations for themselves;
- Design and use effective data systems to support and improve each student's success; *and*
- Increase academic excellence through equitable availability of the full spectrum of educational resources and opportunities.

As a result of the support of policymakers and the leadership of Montana's public school districts, each student:

- Appreciates the value of their education and are inspired to ensure the success of public education as stewards of the future;
- Succeeds despite the circumstances of life that could otherwise interfere in achievement of their full potential; *and*
- Use the knowledge and skills they develop in Montana's public schools to think critically, engage and succeed as productive members of society.

FIVE YEAR GOALS



We have set our goals based on an understanding of our capacity for instituting change. These are areas focused on the intersection of our passion, our abilities and resources, and what each child needs to reach their full potential in our system of free quality public schools.

We establish these intended outcomes at the half-way point between today and our 2032 Envisioned Future in order to ensure that we will have made the progress needed by 2027 to get approximately 50 percent of the way toward achievement of our ultimate goal.

If our Envisioned Future is Mount Everest, then our five-year goals represent the base camp objective we hope to reach by 2027 to put ourselves on a path of success.

STUDENT SUCCESS: Statement of Intended Success, 2027

Continued growth in student success in Montana’s public schools is evident through multiple measures, including but not limited to:

- 100% of Montana’s students exit the public education system career and college ready, having experienced a rigorous curriculum and explored career pathways relevant to the interests of each child and greatest likelihood of personal and professional success;
- 100% of Montana graduates are contributing and learning members of society and well-prepared for the office of citizen;
- A continued increase in students graduating with postsecondary credits and/or trade certifications through expanded high-quality opportunities for dual enrollment and earlier career pathway knowledge;
- Continued improvement and greater focus in narrowing achievement gaps through targeted intervention and other strategies with an emphasis on early childhood education for at-risk children;
- Engaging with technology as a means of teaching, learning, working, and adapting;
- Use all available options and measures to assess and evaluate individual student learning and growth;
- Fostering growth mindsets, passion for learning, necessary supports, interpersonal skills, and preparedness to be part of a dynamic workforce that is agile and evolving; and
- Access to and use of the elements of a well-rounded, contemporary education with regular consideration of what is needed for success in the world of today and tomorrow, including:
 - Early childhood education
 - Full time kindergarten
 - Civics education
 - Gifted and talented education
 - Music and art
 - Physical Education
 - Career and technical education/certifications
 - Advanced Placement and Dual Credit Courses

As a result of these achievements, students in Montana’s Public Schools complete their K-12 education ready for a lifetime of post-secondary education and career success as productive and engaged citizens.

FIVE YEAR GOALS



TEACHING AND LEARNING: Statement of Intended Success, 2027

Supported by the widely held trust in educators and strong local control, Montana’s public school educators and students thrive. Montana’s public schools have the resources they need to focus on each student and maximize each student’s success. Teachers and administrators are empowered and enabled to continually avail themselves of the latest research, innovative uses of technology, multiple pathways of teaching delivery, and other evolving teaching and learning strategies to better provide meaningful, value-enriched, transformational personalized instruction for each child. Montana public schools elevate the status of their educators. Educators’ personal wellbeing and mental health is supported to ensure they experience professional fulfillment and provided opportunities for advancement to facilitate the development of the full educational potential of each child. Montana’s higher education system fully prepares exceptional teachers to meet the needs of schools and each student while Montana public school districts attract, mentor, and retain quality educators.

Educational leaders and educator preparation programs engage in continuous collaboration to ensure quality teachers are encouraged to fill roles in districts throughout Montana and systems exist to support and encourage students to take a career path in education. Additional opportunities exist for people in the trades to share their knowledge and skills with students in the classroom while encouraging those people to become certified teachers if they so desire.

GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

Statement of Intended Success, 2027

Locally elected school boards, administrative leaders, teachers, staff, parents, local communities, and student leaders collaboratively focus on the interests of each (whole) child educated in our public schools. This collaboration and focus is also reflected in the relationships among the statewide public education advocacy groups representing teachers, trustees, administrators, and school business officials. The Legislature, Governor, Board of Public Education, and Superintendent of Public Instruction all actively support and collaborate to continually improve and honor the guarantees of the Montana Constitution. As a result, this chain of advocacy causes Montana schools to be nationally recognized for excellence.

Governance and leadership systems support nimble, contemporary, and innovative educational platforms that meet the diverse learning needs of each student today and into the future empowering students to take ownership of their own educational goals and providing the necessary supports for students to succeed.

CULTURE, CLIMATE AND SOCIAL VALUES: Statement of Intended Success, 2027

Montanans recognize their public schools as the key to the state’s future successes. As such, the independent spirit, unique values, respect for all, and strong work ethic of Montanans are well recognized and reflected in each of Montana’s public schools. Through our collective dedication to maximizing our resources for excellence, our commitments to quality public education in each community, recognizing the diversity of our state, including the preservation of our American Indian Culture, and transformational learning environments, each student, regardless of personal circumstance or ability, feel empowered and fully prepared for a successful future. By recognizing the individual needs of each child within the context of each community, each student in Montana’s public schools feels safe, supported, respected, and loved. Students will be provided an enriching positive learning environment and the necessary supports to be successful.

FIVE YEAR GOALS



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Statement of Intended Success, 2027

Montana's communities understand the generational gift public education provides and the importance of taking pride and ownership in their local public schools, setting high standards, being an integral part of the solution and sharing in the successes of our students and local public schools. Both the community and schools place emphasis on a shared narrative, ongoing collaboration, resource sharing and communication. Publicly celebrating the work of Montana's public schools and telling the stories of students, teachers, staff, and administrators has resulted in community engagement and support to ensure the success and safety of each child. Montana's public schools and communities collaborate to energize and effectively personalize the learning experience to increase success for each child in Montana. Meaningful community engagement provides opportunities for mutual understanding of the needs of the community and the school, while working jointly towards a robust participatory and informed relationship.



LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE 2023 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The K-12 Vision Project validates and supports the intersecting legislative priorities of the advocacy organizations partnering in the Montana Public Education Center addressing the following critical issues:

- Support initiatives and proposals that advance the interests of public schools and students as described in our vision and goals;
- Provide adequate and equitable resources and support to meet the needs of special education students;
- Enhance and ensure continued progress of closing the gap to fully fund public education through the established funding formula and support to schools, including but not limited to, inflation application to K-12 BASE Aid and infrastructure support;
- Advocate that all pre-k models proposed ensure the implementation of formula-based early childhood education;
- Expand opportunities to meet the needs of at-risk students;
- Support recruitment and retention of excellent educators and staff;
- Ensure the health and safety of students in every Montana school;
- Properly support high quality school conditions and infrastructure;
- Fulfill the constitutional promise of equality of educational opportunity for each child in Montana; and
- Oppose any proposal that diverts limited state general fund revenues to private education while failing to provide the funding support of public education needed to preserve the constitutional rights of each child to access a basic system of free quality schools that fulfills the educational potential of each person.



PLANNING HORIZON 5-10 YEAR

DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

1. We anticipate the trend of a disproportionate aging of Montana’s population will continue.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: A reduction of administration, trustees, staff to replace retiring/departing leaders. A generational shift on the level of commitment of staff, students, and community leaders. Impact on the reduced passage of levies and bonds as a result of an increase in families without children in public schools, may necessitate development of new revenue sources and marketing strategies.

2. We anticipate the trend of population expansion of urban areas to continue with a corresponding trend of depopulation in rural areas. Montana has a total of 56 counties. Forty-six of these counties have 6 or fewer people per square mile, so they are designated as “frontier counties.”

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: A need to maximize existing facilities and a need for new construction in those urban areas experiencing ongoing and significant population growth. In rural areas facing decreases in population and student counts, a need for repurposing/ redesigning facilities to preserve the value of existing facilities and to right-size for the declining populations served. This trend implicates a need for increased quality and quantity of distance learning options to ensure equality of educational opportunity for each child throughout Montana. Emphasis is placed on finding common ground and engaging all stakeholders with a united voice on behalf of each child in every public school.

3. We anticipate an increase in both the identification of and required services provided to students with special needs and at-risk students.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Montana’s Public Schools will need to recruit and retain quality staff to meet the needs of these students. Given Montana’s Public Schools’ authority to levy amounts on a nonvoted basis to pay for some of the needs of students with disabilities, with a simultaneous decline of political will to adequately support special education from state and federal sources, which currently funds only 15% of such costs, leaves the burden of fully funding necessary programs to the local taxpayers. Montana’s Public Schools will need to adapt and update school resources to meet the diverse needs of each student. Effective communications with parents and communities is vital to ensure understanding and support for the necessary resources to serve each child well.

4. We anticipate the continued trend of increasing numbers of socio-economically challenged families with school-age children, including families of teaching staff.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Montana’s Public Schools will need to identify and ensure adequate & appropriate resources for at-risk students to ensure equality of educational opportunity for each child throughout Montana.

Continued on next page



5. We anticipate a continued trend of increased use of illegal prescription drugs, illegal drugs, alcohol, and abuse of vaping and nicotine products among school-age children and their parents along with other risk factors that negatively impact our youth.

Implications for Montana's Public Schools: Montana's Public Schools will need to partner with community resources to provide prevention education to the staff and parents regarding the new methods used, the dangers of use, and identifying available resources

6. We understand the possibility of a loss of students to homeschooling or remote learning options following COVID-19 and related responses.

Implications for Montana's Public Schools: Montana's public schools will need a developed engagement strategy to address changes in ANB, loss of students to privatization of schools and public funds. This will require united and direct advocacy in order to confirm continued funding of public schools. Poverty implications and childcare issues will likely exacerbate the current lack of qualified school staff.

BUSINESS / ECONOMIC CLIMATE CHALLENGES

1. We anticipate continued business growth in our urban areas and continued economic challenges for rural areas, particularly those areas where agriculture is the primary economic force. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the economy as a whole.

Implications for Montana's Public Schools: Some of Montana's Public Schools will experience an increase in tax base with an increase in business and economic development while others will experience no increase and/or decreases in tax base due to a diminution of businesses and economic growth. This will result in enhanced local support for some and significant challenges for those experiencing a shrinking tax base. As new residents from out-of-state purchase property in growing and urban areas, residential tax bases may be growing and property values increasing.

2. We anticipate continued volatility of our natural resource-based economy that will continue to create budget difficulties at the state level. We anticipate the cost of living and housing will increase the financial burdens of teachers. Employment has been limited, resulting in anticipated loss of enrollment. Though some communities more impacted by extreme boom/bust cycles have experienced a loss of good paying jobs but families remaining in the community and taking lower paying jobs, resulting in enrollment remaining steady.

Implications for Montana's Public Schools: Continued volatility in natural resource-based funding will continue to create uncertainty and instability in funding for Montana's public schools with particular emphasis on schools located in impact zones.

There is also a concern that transient populations will fail to engage and support public education in their communities.

Continued on next page



3. We anticipate ever-changing and increased competition in the global economy with an increased reliance on skilled labor. In turn, we anticipate an increase in the number of students interested in seeking skilled labor positions.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Montana’s Public Schools will need to ensure that we are educating students with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in an ever-changing world.

4. A continual increase in the number of students who speak English as a second language or are English language learners will become significant.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Our schools will need the resources to provide these services in compliance with legal requirements.

5. A continual reliance on grandparents, other relatives and non-related adults assuming educational authority for students.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Our schools will need to coordinate with legal guardians, caretaker relatives and others who have power of attorney to make educational decisions for children. This will result in a need for enhanced resources for student-support services.

6. Economy switch from one driven by natural resources (logging/mining/power/oil etc.) to clean energy will decrease money coming into the state coffers.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: If there is less revenue coming into State, this could impact the State’s share of funding public education in Montana. Schools may need to find other revenue sources and this could lead to another legal challenge should this occur.

7. ESSER Funding will sunset in September 2024. These funds have significantly assisted our schools in preventing, preparing for, and responding to COVID-19.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Sudden loss of significant federal funding may result in putting many programs and services into jeopardy that were put in place to prevent, prepare for and respond to COVID-19. Our schools will need to adequately utilize and prepare for the sunset of these funding sources.

LEGISLATION / REGULATION CHALLENGES

1. We anticipate continued uncertainty in the funding of public schools due to the current political climate, changing economic circumstances, and increasing needs of students.
 - a. Espinoza (U.S. Supreme Court) fallout and potential negative effect on constitutional prohibitions on indirect aid to private education. We are facing a likely future where the prohibition on indirect aid to parochial education in Montana is eliminated by the U.S. Supreme Court.
 - b. The shift toward/increased reliance on local level funding because of the lack of federal (e.g., Impact Aid and IDEA) and state resources.

Continued on next page



- c. Increased resistance at the bureaucratic and other levels of the federal and state departments of education to community ownership and local control of public schools. These departments are being regulatory in nature and inconsistent resulting in a lack of support for the public school system.
- d. The current conditions are requiring schools to develop delivery methods (blended models and others) that will need on-going funding (which districts cannot provide adequately) and flexibility in order to provide the best education for the whole child. This would include, but not limited to technology resources (hardware, software, etc.), professional development, availability to internet/broadband capabilities, expansion of staff to meet the contemporary educational needs including wages, benefits, etc.

Implications for Montana's Public Schools: Montana's Public Schools will need to maximize the resources and the flexibilities that are available to them. They will need to make concerted ongoing efforts to engage the communities in planning for and supporting the future needs of students and the communities served. They will further need to protect the legislative gains we have made and hold firm in order to prevent the diminution of the funding formula. Funding flexibility will need to remain intact and expanded.

2. We anticipate continued increases in employee healthcare costs.

Implications for Montana's Public Schools: Continued increases in healthcare costs will stress all other areas of school finance. It will also impact Montana's Public Schools ability to recruit and retain quality staff if we are unable to offer competitive benefits. Schools need to be included, not excluded, in the permissive levies allowed by county departments to offset the expanding costs of healthcare costs.

3. We anticipate an increased desire by students to access advanced opportunities.

Implications for Montana's Public Schools: We will need to ensure access to these opportunities by all students and not just those students who have easy access because of geographic proximity to higher education institutions.

4. Recruitment and retention of educators and administrators will continue to impact schools exacerbating the teacher and administrator shortage.

Implications for Montana's Public Schools: A teacher and administrator shortage across the state will continue to impact schools and will result in a crisis beyond what any local district can address on their own accord.

Continued on next page



TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE CHALLENGES

1. The increased reliance on technology and sciences, moving at a rapid pace, will substantially exceed the speed at which regulations can be adjusted or removed to accommodate available innovations.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Montana’s Public Schools will continue to have challenges keeping up with the cost of science and technological advancements (applications, licensing, hardware), technology plans, staff well-versed in science, technologies and innovations that advance student success, and ensuring equitable access to technologies and sciences that support student learning and opportunities. Local school districts will need to advocate within the community and at the state level for technology integration. College/ university education preparation programs will need to address the need to prepare teachers on various platforms. Local school districts will need to provide quality professional development on the programs and platforms used in the district. Providing reliable internet is crucial to ensure equality of educational opportunity among students, both in the school buildings and in the community. Schools should be using technology to enhance cross-curricular content, this could change the make-up of a classroom that is not necessarily age-based.

2. We acknowledge ongoing security issues, taking appropriate steps to eliminate security breaches and appropriate use of technologies by staff and students will present ongoing issues for Montana’s Public Schools.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Montana’s Public Schools need to be hypervigilant in taking measures to ensure databases and other electronically stored information are secured with industry-leading technology. Montana’s Public Schools need to provide ongoing professional development of staff and instruction to students on acceptable use policies.

3. We anticipate a continued trend of future jobs and careers requiring skills in technology and science. As well, we anticipate a continued trend of traditional “in-person” jobs and careers may be replaced by remote work jobs.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Montana’s Public Schools will need to adapt to advancements in technology and science in order to prepare students for the jobs/careers of tomorrow. We will need to continue our advocacy and support for student advancements and flexibilities that support personalized learning to prepare students for future jobs/careers in these areas.

4. We anticipate a continued trend of cyber-bullying and other social media conflicts from the ever-evolving platforms which negatively impacts the learning environments of Montana Public Schools.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Montana’s Public Schools need to be vigilant, in both proactive and responsive manners, to the social media issues and threats that have potential to negatively impact our students. Montana’s Public Schools need to continue to develop and implement acceptable social media policies and usages in all contexts. Montana Public schools will need to incorporate social media literacy skills into future curriculum.

Continued on next page



5. We anticipate the continued need for hybrid and remote learning, even as the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic subside. Technology will be the driving force to give more tools to schools to personalize learning.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: While in person learning continues to be the optimal method of learning, Montana Public Schools will need to have plans in place to address the potential of disrupted learning in the future. There will also need to be adequate human resources to address these needs, including community outreach and in-school support.

POLITICS / SOCIAL VALUES CHALLENGES

1. We anticipate the ongoing trend of public engagement in the work of public schools to continue. We also anticipate increased scrutiny of public schools.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: There is growing support for alternative delivery methods and privatization of education. If this trend continues, there will be a loss of state and/or federal public funding that will be redirected to private/monetizing education services. This will impact the quality of education students receive and the financial burden on local taxpayers. School districts must deliver high quality instruction and effectively increase public awareness of the outstanding things that are happening in their public schools. The pandemic is being used as a fuel for mischaracterization of the work in public schools.

2. We anticipate a continuing trend of a political and philosophical shift toward the rejection and distrust of government at all levels. We anticipate a greater need for transparency to counter distrust.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Montana’s Public Schools will need to restore and maintain high levels of trust by visibly engaging communities in working together to fully develop the educational potential of each child. We will need to continue to promote the great things that are happening in our public schools, highlighting innovations and other changes that support the needs of and increase the success of children in our public schools. Political shifts will impact school funding and restrict access to critical resources as a result of volatile legislative sessions. Public expectations of schools will change as the result of the political landscape.

3. We anticipate a continued societal expectation and emphasis on CTE readiness. However, we also anticipate an increase in tuition costs and continued limited access to local communities for post-secondary options.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Montana’s Public Schools will need to increase available options for students to be prepared for all possible post-high school options, including but not limited to, dual credit, CTE opportunities, immediate careers, 2-year college, 4-year college or armed services. We have great opportunities to use K-12 resources to increase the affordability of entering the workforce, access to apprenticeship programs, and post-secondary education, through expanded access to advanced placement and dual credit courses that can be used to satisfy or waive postsecondary credit that would otherwise require the payment of tuition. The need to address how schools prepare students for jobs now proven to be essential through the COVID-19 pandemic is apparent.

Continued on next page



Though many of these jobs do not require post-secondary education, there is a need to understand their potential for innovation and growth. Remote opportunities may now be able to be explored more readily and offer opportunities for partnership for our CTE students. With greater access to college bound opportunities, dual credit programming will require certification and schools and state bodies may need to find other opportunities for stipends or incentives for teachers to obtain certification.

4. We anticipate the need for civic education to frame dialogue that respects differing views.

Implications for Montana’s Public Schools: Montana’s Public Schools will need to continue balancing students’ rights while maintaining safe school environments, minimizing the disruption to school operations and violations of district policy and protocol. Modeling critical thinking and respectful behavior will assist in teaching students how to “disagree with grace.” Supporting and implementing curricula that supports conflict resolution and facilitation of these respectful conversations and opportunities for growth.