



State of Education in Montana Update: Summer 2026



Executive Director
Rob Watson, EdD

SFIC - Who Are they?



REPRESENTATIVE (R)
Bedey, David
Chair



REPRESENTATIVE (D)
Matthews, Eric
Vice Chair



REPRESENTATIVE (R)
Barker, Brad
Member



SENATOR (R)
Beard, Becky
Member



REPRESENTATIVE (R)
Deming, Lee
Member



SENATOR (R)
Mandeville, Forrest
Member



SENATOR (D)
Morigeau, Jacinda
Member



REPRESENTATIVE (D)
Muszkiewicz, Luke
Member



SENATOR (D)
Novak, Sara
Member



REPRESENTATIVE (D)
Romano, Melissa
Member



SENATOR (R)
Vinton, Sue
Member



SENATOR (D)
Windy Boy, Jonathan
Member

NON-LEGISLATOR MEMBERS



Burnett, Tom
Member
Public member appointed by Senate President
Regier



Christian, Clayton
Member
Commissioner of Higher Education
Board of Regents



Green, Rachel
Member
Policy Director
Governor's Office



Hedalen, Susie
Member
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Office of Public Instruction



Potter, Martha
Member
Public member appointed by House Speaker Ler



Schreiber, Matt
Member
Public member appointed by Senate President
Regier



Dr. Tim Tharp
Member
Chair
Board of Public Education



Waterman, Mike
Member
Public member appointed by House Speaker Ler



School Funding Interim Commission - Recs

1. Modernize the funding formula
2. Invest in students with greatest need
3. Ensure fairness in the formula for All Districts
4. Address School Facility Crisis
5. Improve Governance, Coordination, and Funding Stability



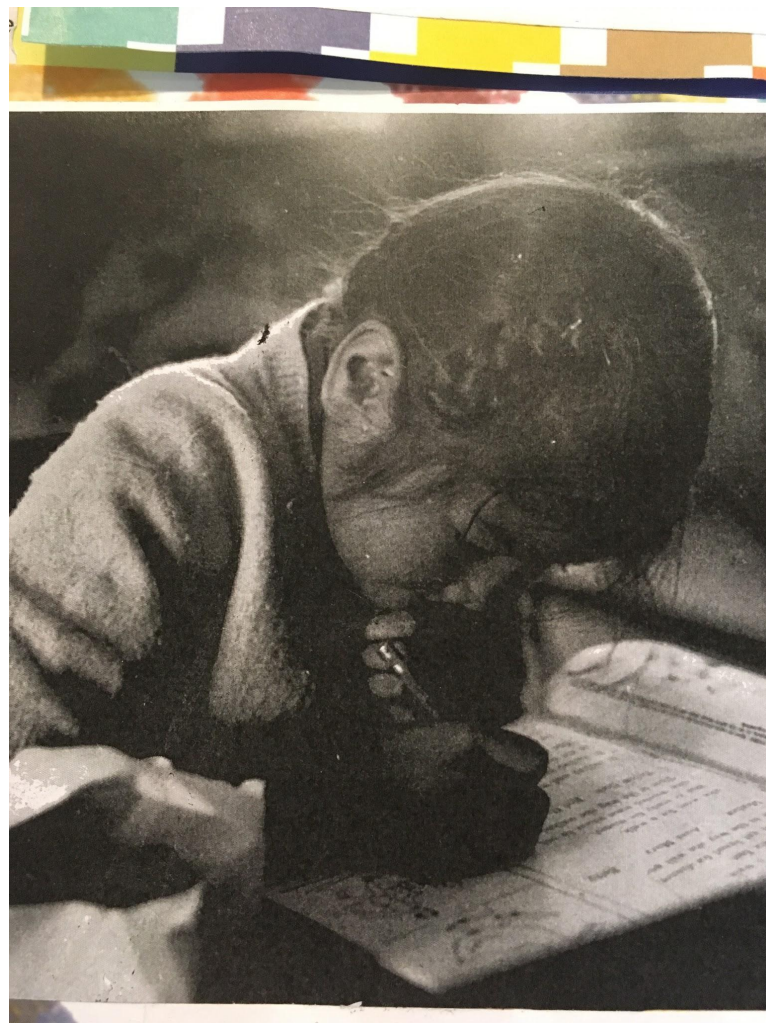
CAMPS Funding Recommendation:

1. Eliminate Over Base Levies, All districts funded at 100% w/o vote of local taxpayers
2. Eliminate the Decrement: First student funded same as last student
3. Reduce the ANB per student payment, but increase the Quality Educator payment.
4. Increase the basic entitlement and provide more equitable way to get second or subsequent entitlements.
5. Increase Special Ed payment, At-Risk student payment, Native American achievement gap payment.

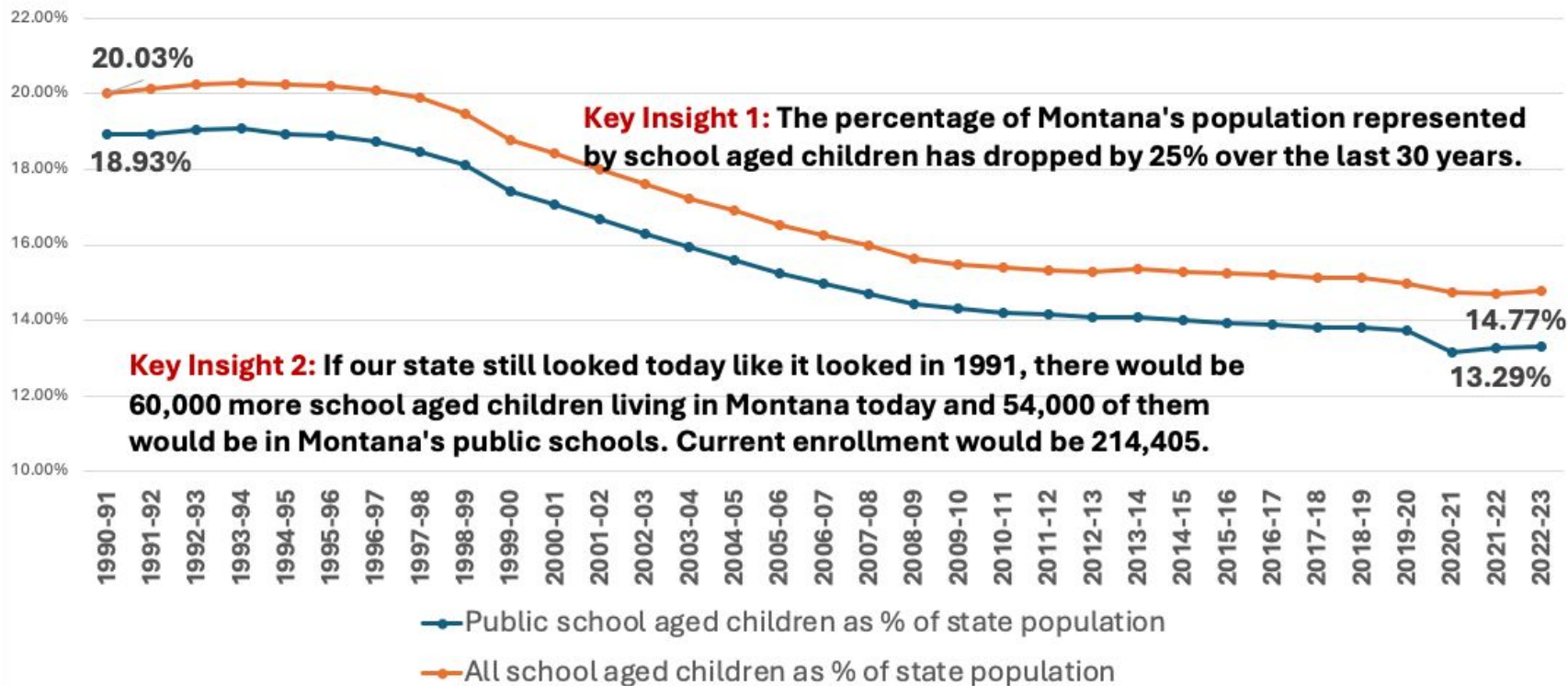
Total increase of nearly \$200M above current K12 spending. Reduce reliance on ANB, 65%

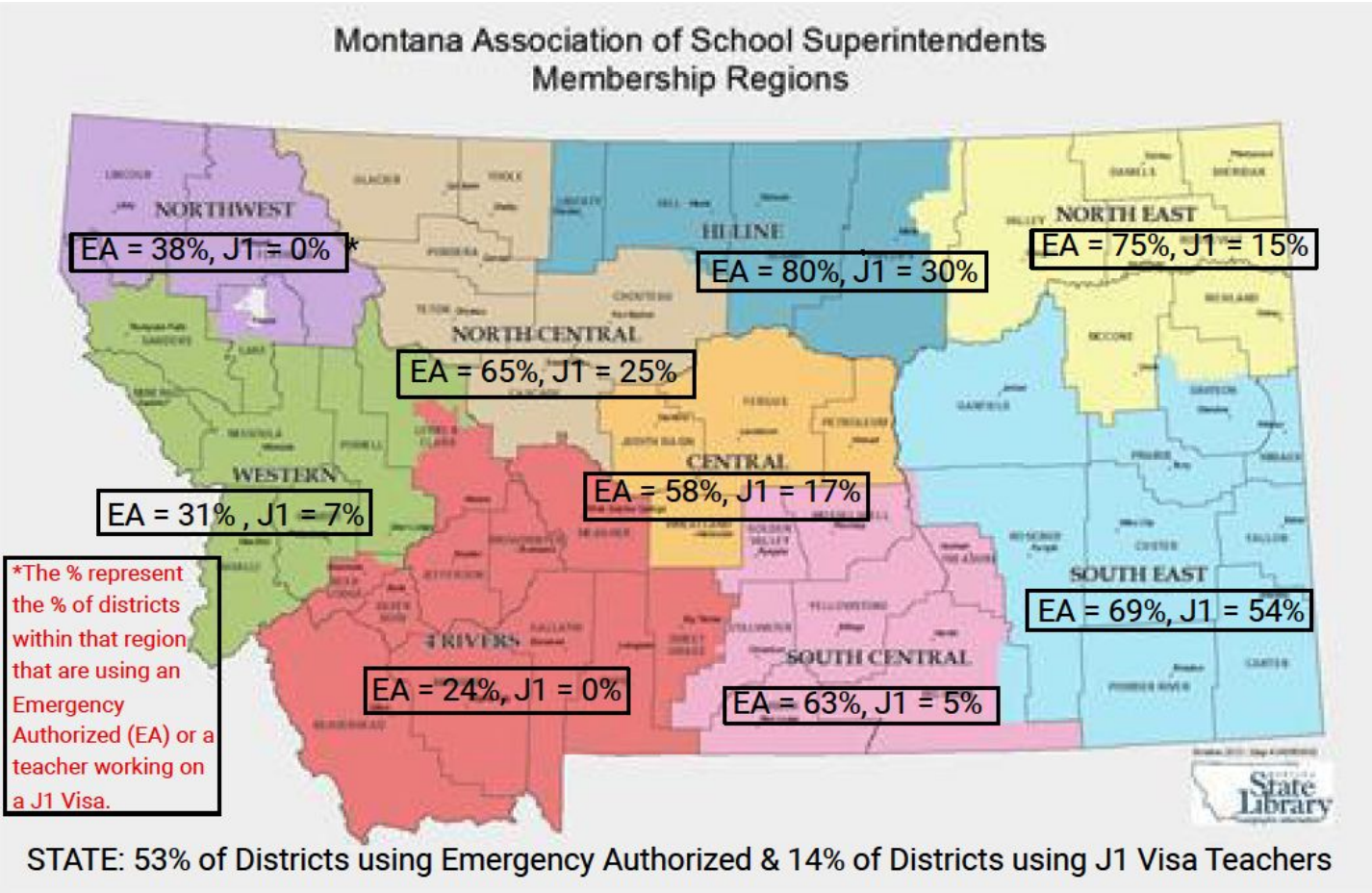
Who is in the Room?

1. What did SFIC Get Right?
2. What did they forget?
3. What would you want them to know about your school and/or community as they are making decisions?



The Changing Complexion of Montana's Population Public and Private School Aged Children as Percentage of State's Population, 1991-2023





HOW MUCH ARE MONTANA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS SPENDING PER PUPIL COMPARED TO ELSEWHERE?

Washington

spends approximately
\$18,534 per pupil

If Montana funded schools at Washington's level, Montana schools would receive approximately
\$756 million more per year.

Wyoming

spends approximately
\$20,478 per pupil

If Montana funded schools at Wyoming's level, Montana schools would receive approximately
\$1.06 billion more per year.

Montana spends
\$13,656 per pupil
(FY2024 Census Data)
Ranks 39th nationally.

North Dakota

spends approximately
\$17,080 per pupil

If Montana funded schools at North Dakota's level, Montana schools would receive approximately
\$531 million more per year.

Colorado

spends approximately
\$15,894 per pupil

If Montana funded schools at Colorado's level, Montana schools would receive approximately
\$347 million more per year.



National average current spending is approximately **\$17,595** per pupil.

Montana public schools operate **\$611 million** below the national average level of educational spending.

School Funding Interim Commission (SFIC): Adequacy

Per Pupil Spending: National Average Comparison	MT \$600M Behind
PP Spend: North Dakota Comp	MT \$500M Behind
CAMPS Proposal	\$270M Increase over current formula
SFIC Consultant Proposal, Foundation Formula	\$400M Increase over base formula \$180M Increase over adopted budget (current spend)

Elements of the Current Formula

<u>Major Elements</u>	<u>Minor Elements</u>
ANB	IEFA
Basic Entitlement	At-Risk Payment
QEP	Special Ed Payment
Inflationary Increase	American Indian Achievement Gap
	Data for Achievement Payment
	Major Maintenance (optional)

MONTANA EDUCATION POLICY: The Constitutional Players



State Superintendent



State Legislature



Local School Board



Board of Public Education



TOPICS

School Funding
Interim
Commission

HOT Topics: Montana Education

- IEP Graduates
- Spec Ed Savings Account
- STARS Future Ready Payment
- Immigration Enforcement in Schools
- Teacher Apprenticeship Grant
- Rural Health Transformation Grant

What to expect 2027

- Attendance
- AI Restrictions
- Screen Time
- Funding Changes
- Curriculum Overreach

What to Expect in 2027

- Attendance
- AI Restrictions
- Screen Time
- Curriculum Standards (?)
- Funding Formula
- Alyssa's Law, School Safety

ON SAMs Radar and Wish List

- Clean Up Items
 - Commemorative Days (MCA 20-1-306)
 - QEP Payment, Class 9, Sped Technician



HB393 Sped Savings Acct - Unconstitutional

On December 8, 2025, Judge Menahan issued an Order supporting the MQEC position that HB 393 violated the Montana Constitution (Article V)

SPECIAL ED SAVINGS ACCOUNTS TO END June 2026

“while there may be some harm to school district financing, that harm is minimal considering there are only sixty-four (64) students enrolled in the program over multiple school districts throughout the state. Balanced against that are financial impacts to the families who have acted in reliance on the funding from the ESA program and the education of special needs children whose educational development may be irreparably injured by a mid-year Disruption”.

Dual Enrollment, Class 8, and FP Background



Accreditation, Board of Public Ed eliminated Class 8

Best Guidance as of today (June 2026)

- Previously taught under a class 8? They have already completed BG check.
- OPI has also provided an exemption for those who are teaching virtually - don't have to have a FP, BG check.
- If you are sending a student to campus to take a class, then the University will need to confirm that the person has passed a FP, BG check, especially if they have not taught dual enrollment previously.
- University should use the attestation (SAM Website) to affirm that their employees passed a FB, BG check.



Immigration Enforcement in Schools

From a 1982 court decision, Plyer V. Doe, schools were prohibited from inquiring about immigration status of their students. About 1 year ago, January 2025, the current federal administration released [new guidance](#) which rescinded prior opinion that schools and churches were 'off limits' to immigration investigations. *However FERPA still applies - ask for a warrant or subpoena or court order.*



Rural Health Transformation Program

Initiative 4: Invest in community health and preventative infrastructure

Rural Montanans frequently lack access to preventative health care and infrastructure to promote healthy lifestyles. To address this, DPHHS plans to invest RHTP funds in:

- **Increasing care in community-based settings** by facilitating more primary care and behavioral health in schools through partnerships with FQHCs and other providers, purchasing/retrofitting mobile care vans to bring services to rural communities

Chronic Absenteeism



Key Legislative Trends

1. Prevention and Student Support

Shift from punitive truancy to early intervention addressing root causes (mental health, transportation, family barriers).

Implication: Emphasis on prevention and reduced punitive measures.

2. Early Warning Systems

Use of attendance teams and individualized plans to identify and support students early.

Implication: Likely requirement for structured intervention systems.

3. Data and Transparency

Expansion of real-time tracking, dashboards, and disaggregated reporting.

Implication: Statewide reporting and accountability measures.

4. State Guidance + Local Control

States set frameworks while districts implement locally.

Implication: State expectations with local flexibility.

5. Support vs. Enforcement

Ongoing balance between supportive interventions and accountability measures.

Implication: Debate over enforcement tools vs. supports.

Cell Phone Bills



Cell Phone Options:
Bell-to-bell
District defined

Screen time



K–3

- No classroom screen time (except limited testing/CS exposure)
- No take-home devices
- No homework requiring technology

Grades 4–6

- No take-home devices
- No 1:1 device programs
- Technology only under direct teacher supervision

Middle School

- Take-home devices allowed only with parent opt-in
- Continued emphasis on limited, supervised use

High School

- Take-home devices allowed unless parent opts out
- Balanced use with non-digital instruction required

Property Tax Fights



CI-_____ amends the Montana Constitution to limit the annual increase in the valuation of a primary residence to 2% when assessing property taxes unless there are changes to the residence or a change of ownership. Upon a change of ownership or a change to the residence, a primary residence is assessed at fair market value starting January 1 of the following year. New primary residences are assessed at fair market value as of January 1 of the year following their construction. Purchases or transfers of primary residences between spouses or between parents and children are not considered changes in ownership.



Thank you.

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