

EXPAND SUPPORT FOR MONTANA FAMILIES ATTENDING COLLEGE

ENSURING A STRONG WORKFORCE AND REWARDING CAREERS

Every Montanan deserves the chance to build the skills they need for a fulfilling career. Rebuilding our economy will require having a skilled workforce and investing in education and training in our communities, Montana should:

- Invest \$10 million in need-based aid for Montana families entering college or university;
- Invest \$1.5 million to expand support for Montana students enrolled in tribal colleges and universities; and
- Expand programs such as SNAP food support and TANF assistance for eligible families attending postsecondary education.



BIG SKY
Brighter Future
Charting the course for a better Montana.



HOW WE GOT HERE

Access to college and workforce training has a significant impact on the amount an individual can earn and reduces the likelihood a worker will face financial insecurity. However, only two in five working-age Montanans have an associate's degree or higher, with American Indian families facing even greater barriers in accessing higher education or workforce training opportunities. Over the past two decades, tuition and fees at Montana's four-year colleges have grown 3.5 times faster than median household income. State investments in targeted support for families living on low incomes has fallen behind nearly every other state.

At a time when Montana has seen greater diversity in the educational pipeline, state policies have failed to adapt to this reality. Students of color continue to face significant barriers to accessing and completing postsecondary education, including increased costs and lack of support to get into and finish college. By 2020, national economists project that 65 percent of all jobs will require at least some college education, and yet many Montanans face barriers in accessing postsecondary education.

“Tribal colleges are a critical part of the Montana economy. They help educate tribal and non-tribal citizens. Montana can make higher education more accessible to more students. Investments in higher education are investments in our future.”

James Steele, Jr.,
Salish Kootenai College,
Student Success Coach

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ON THE HORIZON

1

Invest \$10 million in need-based aid for Montana families entering college or university. Without sufficient investment in need-based aid, families are often left filling the gap with college loans, putting many families at risk of financial insecurity. The growing burden of student debt can slow college completion, particularly for families with lower incomes. Montana should bolster its currently modest investment in need-based aid with a focus on racial equity and non-traditional students.

2

Invest \$1.5 million to expand support for Montana students enrolled in tribal colleges and universities. Montana should expand its investments in tribal colleges and universities, providing increased workforce training and adult education. Out of the 32 fully accredited tribal colleges in the U.S., seven of them are located in Montana. The state of Montana has recognized the critical role that tribal colleges play and provides a state investment tied to the number of non-beneficiary students attending. Although this investment provides some support, it falls well below the amount the state provides on a per-student basis to non-tribal, two-year programs. Montana should expand its investment in tribal colleges, including continuing to expand investments in HiSET and other support for students served by tribal colleges and universities.

3

Expand programs such as SNAP food support and TANF assistance for eligible families attending postsecondary education. Roughly one third of postsecondary students nationwide are at risk of food insecurity, struggling to cover the costs of higher education and basic necessities. Struggling to meet these basic needs can often result in delayed completion or, in many instances, students failing to complete entirely. Programs aimed at helping to reduce poverty and improve financial stability are often not aligned with policies to encourage postsecondary education and workforce training. Montana should reduce barriers for SNAP and TANF to better ensure that families with low incomes attending postsecondary education can access support making it easier to complete college and improve economic mobility.



ABOUT BIG SKY BRIGHTER FUTURE

Big Sky Brighter Future is charting a clear course to rebuild our state. This concrete plan for lawmakers has specific proposals to help families, workers, children, and communities, and creates a tax code that works for everyone. Montana cannot go back to the time when families faced barriers to build their best future. We can move our state forward and make it one where we can all live, work, and enjoy all Big Sky Country has to offer. There's a better Montana on the horizon, and this is how we get there.