

INVEST IN K-12 EDUCATION

CREATING A BETTER PATH FOR MONTANA STUDENTS

Every student in Montana should receive a quality and modern education and finish high school with the skills they need. To support our kids, Montana should:

- Invest \$24.5 million to fund public school infrastructure and technology so all students, regardless of race, place, or family income, have what they need;
- Invest \$11.5 million in wrap around services for students and professional support for teachers in Montana's lowest performing schools;
- Establish a statewide school employee health insurance pool to improve teacher pay and benefits;
- Invest in proven programs to build a pipeline of teachers; and
- Invest in healthy food programs for school-aged children.



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



“The best way to keep a kid out of poverty is to educate them. We need to make sure our staff and schools are equipped to meet the full needs of our students.”

Craig Barringer, Superintendent,
Libby Public School District

HOW WE GOT HERE

Well-funded public-school systems are essential to help all children get a good start in life. Families and students face obstacles outside of the classroom that must be overcome if all students are to reach their full potential. Too many children do not have the food they need to be healthy and productive at school, contributing to an achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and income level. Further, systematic failures in Montana's mental health and support system leave many young people struggling to access early intervention services.

Many school districts face financial strain in providing Montana children with a quality education to be prepared for the workforce. School districts across the state lack adequate state investments and are often left to rely on local property taxpayers to pick up the tab, creating significant disparities based on location. The average age of Montana school facilities is 53 years, with well over \$300 million in needed repairs. Communities in rural parts of the state, including the seven tribal reservations, face increased challenges in attracting and keeping teachers due to factors like geographic isolation, low teacher pay or benefits, and a lack of affordable housing, leaving many Montana children without a quality education they need to succeed.

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ON THE HORIZON

1

Invest \$24.5 million to fund public school infrastructure and technology, so all students, regardless of race, place, or family income, have what they need. Good school infrastructure improves educational opportunities for future workers. Montana should fully invest in public school infrastructure to help even the playing field for students across the state.

2

Invest \$11.5 million in wrap around services for students and professional support for teachers in Montana's lowest performing schools. Montana should develop an on-site coaching model for the schools with lowest student achievement across the state, including funding a full-time coach. The Office of Public Instruction should work with school districts and communities to develop a trauma-informed plan for providing wrap around services and other student support.

3

Establish a statewide school employee health insurance pool to improve teacher pay and benefits. To help school districts struggling to recruit and retain qualified teachers, Montana should create a statewide school employee health insurance pool or a pathway for school employees to enroll in state employee health insurance. A statewide insurance pool will ensure alignment of benefits across employees and lessen the pressure on smaller districts to afford quality plans.

4

Invest in proven programs to build a pipeline of teachers. Montana should establish grow-your-own education and training programs to recruit young Montanans to the teaching profession. Creating a more diverse, community-based pool of teachers can help improve the well-being of American Indians and children of color, as students do better when they are taught by a teacher with similar background and cultural experiences. Funds should be used to help build a pipeline of teachers through meaningful training programs, financial aid, and loan forgiveness programs.

5

Invest in healthy food programs for school-age children. Twenty-five percent of parents living on low incomes worry that their children do not have enough to eat between lunch and breakfast the following day. Montana should provide grants to public schools to supply Montana-grown food, alternative breakfast models, after school meal programs, and summer EBT grocery benefits for kids on free/reduced price lunches.



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.