

LEARNING ON THE ROAD

EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE
PAD MCCRACKEN – DECEMBER 2025

THE EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE IN MISSOULA – NOVEMBER 20-21, 2025

Once again, the Education Interim Committee made its biennial November pilgrimage to Missoula to meet jointly with the Board of Public Education and the Board of Regents of Higher Education on November 20 and 21, 2025. (*Just to nip any suspicions of Griz favoritism – the committee twice traveled to Bozeman before the pandemic caused the rotation to skip a year...*) These travel meetings also afford the committee the opportunity to visit local area schools and educational programs (see this [write-up](#) of the Committee's 2021 trip).

The committee joined with members and staff of the Board of Public Education, Superintendent of Public Instruction Susie Hedalen, and trustees and administrators of Missoula County Public Schools on the morning of November 20 for visits to three school sites.

The first stop was at the 43-acre, multi-building campus of **Hellgate Elementary**, the largest K-8 school district in the state with 1,500 students. The focus of the visit was on the district's numerous efforts to enhance school safety and security, from reflective window coverings and a silent alarm system to a no cellphone policy and district-wide mental health and behavioral initiatives like PAX. (For more info on this tour, see [this article](#) in The Missoulian, subscription required.)

The morning tour continued with a visit to the **TEACH Academy Charter School**, which emphasizes arts integration into the curriculum and creative learning, and concluded with a visit to **Rattlesnake Elementary**, where the school's efforts to improve inclusion and outcomes for special education students were highlighted.

Joint meetings:

- Board of Public Education
- Board of Regents

Site visits:

- Hellgate Elementary School District
- TEACH Academy Charter School (MCPS)
- Rattlesnake Elementary (MCPS)
- LAB School (UM)
- Montana Digital Academy

Following lunch, the committee held a joint meeting with the Board of Public Education, graciously hosted by Missoula County Public Schools in their district board room. Highlights of the afternoon included:

- a panel discussion with directors of educator preparation programs that emphasized the importance of high-quality district and school leaders – superintendents and principals;
- a presentation from the Office of Public Instruction on statewide assessment results from the 24-25 school year and an update on the first year of statewide implementation of the MAST (Montana Aligned to Standards Through-Year) Assessments for both English/Language Arts and Math in grades 3-8; and
- a panel discussion with superintendents from Hamilton, Frenchtown, Corvallis, and Missoula on their districts' experience with public charter schools.

The following morning, November 21, the committee visited the Phyllis J. Washington College of Education on the UM Campus with time divided between the **LAB (Learning and Belonging) School** and the **Montana Digital Academy** offices. The LAB School serves children ages 3-6 and provides university students in the Early Childhood Education program with numerous opportunities to work directly with young children. The committee had the opportunity to visit with several aspiring teachers in the program and was interested to learn that their journeys in early childhood education began with exposure to the profession through work-based learning opportunities during high school (Pathways matter!). The committee was equally impressed with the work of the Montana Digital Academy where the Academy's efforts to support Montana schools' use of virtual reality technology and artificial intelligence were highlighted.

The morning concluded with a joint meeting with the Board of Regents of Higher Education, including presentations on the expansion of dual enrollment courses across the state, and on the implementation work being done for the new Future Ready funding component for K-12 schools as part of 2025's STARS Act (HB 252, Jones).

More information on the November travel meeting, including links to video recordings of the two joint meetings, can be found [here](#) on the committee webpage.