

DRAFT WORK PLAN FOR THE 2025-2026 INTERIM



Education Interim Committee
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EDIC WORK PLAN 2025-2026 DRAFT

PURPOSE

To help the Education Interim Committee plan its interim and establish work priorities. When finalized, the work plan will provide guidance to the members, staff, and the public on how the committee will conduct its business throughout the interim. It and the accompanying work plan outline will serve as a blueprint that allows the committee to complete its work over the next 15 months.

STATUTORY DUTIES

A NUMBER OF STATUTORY DUTIES ARE COMMON TO ALL INTERIM COMMITTEES

5-5-215. Duties of interim committees. (1) Each interim committee shall:

- (a) review administrative rules within its jurisdiction;
 - (b) subject to 5-5-217(3), conduct interim studies as assigned;
 - (c) monitor the operation of assigned executive branch agencies with specific attention to the following:
 - (i) identification of issues likely to require future legislative attention;
 - (ii) opportunities to improve existing law through the analysis of problems experienced with the application of the law by an agency; and
 - (iii) experiences of the state's citizens with the operation of an agency that may be amenable to improvement through legislative action;
 - (d) review, if requested by any member of the interim committee, the statutorily established advisory councils and required reports of assigned agencies to make recommendations to the next legislature on retention or elimination of any advisory council or required reports pursuant to 5-11-210;
 - (e) review proposed legislation of assigned agencies or entities as provided in the joint legislative rules;
 - (f) accumulate, compile, analyze, and furnish information bearing upon its assignment and relevant to existing or prospective legislation as it determines, on its own initiative, to be pertinent to the adequate completion of its work; and
 - (g) review proposed statewide initiatives as defined in 13-27-110 within the interim committee's subject area and vote to either support or not support the placement of the text of the proposed statewide initiative on the ballot in accordance with 13-27-228.
- (2) Each interim committee shall prepare bills and resolutions that, in its opinion, the welfare of the state may require for presentation to the next regular session of the legislature. An interim committee may by vote request four bill drafts on a partisan basis and an unlimited number of bill drafts on a bipartisan basis.

It is up to the committee to determine how it wants to execute its "agency monitoring" responsibilities. Previous committees have scheduled updates and conversations with the various agencies either at every meeting, on a rotating basis, or ad hoc.

(3) The legislative services division shall keep accurate records of the activities and proceedings of each interim committee.

(4) As used in this section:

(a) "bipartisan basis" means a vote in which members from more than one party vote to request a bill draft; and

(b) "partisan basis" means a vote in which members from only the majority party vote to request a bill draft.

EDIC'S ENABLING STATUTE

5-5-224. Education interim committee.¹ The education interim committee has administrative rule review, draft legislation review, program evaluation, and monitoring functions for the following executive branch agencies and the entities attached to agencies for administrative purposes:

- (1) state board of education;
- (2) board of public education²;
- (3) board of regents of higher education³; and
- (4) office of public instruction.

The entities attached to the State Board of Education (which is the Board of Public Education and the Board of Regents of Higher Education combined) are:

- the Montana Historical Society (MHS)
- the Montana State Library (MSL) and
- the Montana Arts Council (MAC).

ACCREDITATION STANDARDS ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

The accreditation standards for school, which include the content area standards (for example, the math content standards which describe what students at various grade levels should know and be able to do in math) are adopted by the Board of Public Education in a process described in 20-7-101, MCA. This process has been revised in

¹ 5-5-224 was amended in SB 151 (Brown, 2017) to remove all references to local government, replacing the former Education and Local Government Interim Committee (ELG) with two committees, one for education and one for local government. The 2019-20 EDIC requested SB 25 which was enacted by the 2021 Legislature and removed language related to fiscal oversight and budget planning for the Montana University System.

² In a 1992 decision, Judge Jeffrey Sherlock of the First Judicial District ruled that the Board of Public Education is vested with constitutional rulemaking authority that is independent of any power delegated to the Board by the Legislature. Any rules adopted by the Board of Public Education are not subject to legislative review. However, in the 2003-2004 interim, the Board requested that the former ELG review its rules. That may continue to be the case. In addition, 20-7-101, MCA, requires that the Board submit proposed accreditation standards to the committee, as discussed in this work plan.

³ The Board of Regents is exempt from the Montana Administrative Procedure Act (2-4-102(2), MCA), so any "rules" adopted by the Board of Regents are not subject to legislative review. The Board adopts policies which helps with this distinction.

recent legislative sessions so that the economic impact statements associated with revisions to the accreditation standards go to legislative budget committees; however, these statutory changes to the process have also made it clear that the Education Interim Committee retains its authority “to review administrative rules, including accreditation standards.” The committee can expect updates from both the Office of Public Instruction and the Board of Public Education on accreditation standards under review during the 2025-2026 interim.

SCHOOL DISTRICT BUDGET AMENDMENT REPORTING

Section 20-9-161 requires school districts to report to EDIC and to the Board of Public Education any budget amendment adopted to address an unforeseen need affecting the educational functions of the district if the budget amendment, in combination with other budget amendments within the same school fiscal year, exceeds 10% of the district's adopted general fund budget.

REVIEW OF STATUTORILY ESTABLISHED ADVISORY COUNCILS AND REPORTS

Pursuant to 5-5-215(d), any member of EDIC can request that the committee review statutorily established advisory councils and required reports of agencies within the committee's purview “to make recommendations to the next legislature on retention or elimination of any advisory council or required reports”. The number of required reports within EDIC's purview has grown from nine in 2013 to 30 currently.

Advisory councils relevant to EDIC's subject area jurisdiction and the entities to which they are attached are:

1. Fire Services Training Advisory Council (2-15-1519, MCA); Board of Regents
2. K-12 Data Task Force (20-7-105) Office of Public Instruction

Unless otherwise directed in statute, written reports to the legislature, including reports to specific interim committees, are biennial reports and need to be submitted by September 1 of the year preceding a legislative session.

Reports that are statutorily required to be submitted to EDIC are:

Report	Entity	Deadline	Statute
SMART Act Annual Performance Report	Multiple ⁴	Oct 1, 2025	2-12-105
Reemployment of Retired Teachers (by districts)	TRS	Sept 1, 2026	19-20-732
Reemployment of Retired Teachers (by OPI; NEW)	TRS	Sept 1, 2026	HB 349
Indian Education for All (annual report; NEW; SB 181)	OPI	Sept 1, 2025	20-1-503
Educational Opportunity for Military Children	OPI et. al.	Sept 1, 2026	20-1-231
Grow Your Own Grant Program (annual report)	OCHE	Sept 1, 2025	20-4-601

⁴ SMART Act “annual” plans and performance reports are prepared by OCHE, BPE, OPI, MHS, MAC, and MSL.

Out-of-district Attendance (annual report)	OPI	Sept 1, 2025	20-5-324
Education and Workforce Data Governing Board	DofA	Sept 1, 2026	20-7-138
State-Level Strengthening Career and Technical Student Organizations Program	OPI	Sept 1, 2026	20-7-320
Educational Programs for Children Receiving In-State Inpatient Treatment	OPI	Sept 30, 2026	20-7-435
Montana Digital Academy	MTDA	Sept 1, 2026	20-7-1201
Advanced Opportunity Act	BPE	Sept 15, 2026	20-7-1506
Transformational Learning Programs⁵	BPE	Sept 1, 2028	20-7-1602
Early Literacy Targeted Interventions (annual report)	OPI	Sept 1, 2025	20-7-1804
School Funding Inflation Report (odd years; NEW)	OPI	Sept 1, 2025	20-9-326
Indian Language Preservation Program	OPI	Sept 1, 2026	20-9-537
Resident Student Financial Aid (annual report)	OCHE	Sept 1, 2025	20-26-105
Montana Foster Youth Higher Education Assistance Program (annual report)	OCHE	Sept 1, 2025	20-26-633
State Agency Heritage Properties	SHPO	Sept 1, 2026	22-3-423
County Interdisciplinary Child Information and School Safety Team	OPI	Sept 1, 2026	52-2-211
Montana Early Childhood Account and (annual)	DPHHS	Sept 1, 2025	HB 924

Reports that are statutorily required to be submitted to the legislature, but may be of interest to EDIC include:

Report	Entity	Deadline	Statute
School Funding Interim Commission (SFIC)	SFIC	Sept 1, 2026	5-20-301
Education Commission of the States (annual report)	ECS	Sept 1, 2025	20-2-501
Public Charter Schools (annual report)	BPE	Dec 1, 2025	20-6-804
Perkins CTE Plan	OCHE	Sept 1, 2026	20-7-330
Gifted and Talented Programs	OPI	Sept 1, 2026	20-7-904
At-Risk Students	OPI	Sept 1, 2026	20-9-328

⁵ House Bill No. 573 (Bedey; 2025) revised the Transformational Learning Program to sunset the existing program a year early (at the end of fiscal year 2026) and replace it with a Phase II Grant Program in which the Office of Public Instruction will select up to five districts that received Transformational Learning funding previously to receive a 2nd round of funding to further their efforts. While the formal reporting for this Phase II Grant Program is not until the 2027-2028 interim, the committee could request updates from OPI on Phase II earlier.

American Indian Students	OPI	Sept 1, 2026	20-9-329
Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (annual)	WICHE	Jan 15, 2026	20-25-801
MHS Trustees	MHS Board	Sept 1, 2026	22-3-107

ADMINISTRATIVE RULE REVIEW

As noted above, the committee has varied degrees of administrative rule review responsibility for the State Board of Education and its attached entities, the Board of Public Education, the Board of Regents, and the Office of Public Instruction. The committee determines the extent to which it will exercise that authority. The options range from detailed committee examination of all proposed rules to a summary of proposed rules by EDIC's legal staff to EDIC's legal staff providing members notice of any particularly significant or unusual proposed rules.

Title 2, chapter 4, part 4 of the Montana Code Annotated provides for legislative review of administrative rules. In summary, interim committees may:

- request and obtain an agency's rulemaking records;
- submit to an agency written recommendations for the adoption, amendment, or rejection of a proposed rule;
- require that a rulemaking hearing be held;
- poll the legislature to determine whether a proposed rule is consistent with legislative intent; and
- request an economic impact statement for a proposed rule.

EDIC legal staff will lead the committee's administrative rule review activities.

REVIEW PROPOSED STATEWIDE INITIATIVES

The EDIC is required to review proposed statewide initiatives that relate to its subject area pursuant to 13-27-228, MCA.⁶

Statute requires the interim committee to hold a public hearing on a statewide initiative referred to the committee by the executive director of the Legislative Services Division. The committee then votes to either support or not support the placement of the proposed statewide initiative on the ballot. The petition used to gather signatures to place the statewide initiative on the ballot must include the interim committee vote.

⁶ The statutory requirement for interim committee review of statewide initiatives is being litigated at the Montana Supreme Court. EDIC legal staff will update the committee when litigation is completed and if the committee has any duties in this area while the case is pending. (Case: *Ellingson v. State*, Montana Supreme Court No. DA 25-0142 (Filed Feb. 18, 2025)).

The review process may result in additional committee meetings because the committee vote must be submitted to the secretary of state no later than 14 days after receipt of the final text of the statewide initiative.

INTERIM STUDY ASSIGNMENT – HJ 53: A STUDY OF SCHOOL SAFETY

Legislative Council assigned HJ 53, a joint resolution requesting a study of school safety, to EDIC at the Council's June 10, 2025, meeting. HJ 53 was ranked 10th of 36 study resolutions in the post-session legislator poll.

This study resolution was sponsored by Rep. Barker and co-sponsored by Rep. Keogh. The Montana Safe Schools Center, a specialty unit of the Phyllis J. Washington College of Education at the University of Montana, was a strong proponent and contributed to the drafting of HJ 53. The Center organized a panel presentation for a joint meeting of the 2023-24 EDIC and the Education Interim Budget Committee on September 17, 2024, and has indicated a desire to work with EDIC on the study. HJ 53 focuses on examining the current adoption of “Ten Essential Actions to Improve School Safety” (recommended to the Attorney General of the United States by the School Safety Working Group of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services in 2020) in Montana school districts and ways to increase and maximize the positive benefits of broader adoption and more coordinated efforts to improve school safety.

In undertaking this study, the committee could enlist the support of the Center in a manner that leverages the Center’s expertise and reduces the workload on committee staff. The committee could devote a portion of each of its meetings to the HJ 53 study as follows:

September 2025 meeting:

- familiarization with the Ten Essential Actions and how these recommendations align with existing Montana statutes and funding mechanisms related to school safety followed by a panel discussion with some of the stakeholders listed in the resolution on ways Montana might improve the adoption of the Ten Essential Actions

November 2025 meeting:

- the contemplated committee meeting in Missoula would allow the committee to visit the Montana Safe Schools Center on the UM campus and/or visit a school in the Missoula area that has emphasized the Ten Essential Actions to learn about the effort involved and the impacts; the Center could provide results of a survey of current implementation of the Ten Essential Actions in Montana schools (if completed)

March 2026 meeting:

- the Center could provide a review of best practices for implementing the “Ten Essential Actions” and improving cross-agency collaboration and coordination in supporting school safety, including examples from other states; the Center could provide draft recommendations for the committee’s consideration

June 2026 meeting:

- based on committee direction in March, staff would work with the Center on potential legislation for the committee’s review and/or other draft recommendations to be included in the committee’s HJ 53 final report

September 2026 meeting:

- based on committee direction in June, staff would work with the Center to revise recommendations and prepare the committee's HJ 53 final report for the committee's review, modification, and approval

ADDITIONAL TOPICS WITHIN EDIC'S SUBJECT AREA JURISDICTION

In addition to monitoring the activities of the agencies and entities that are charged with carrying out the state's K-12, higher education, and education-related programs, the committee may wish to examine specific education policy areas. Staff will provide a separate document listing some possibilities, based on phone conversations with committee members. The work plan envisions some time for member-initiated education policy studies, depending on other committee work and availability of staff resources.

It is vital to remember that while the interim spans 14-15 working months, the capacity of any interim committee is finite and limited by the committee's meeting time, as well as staff workload. As the committee discusses additional topics, the guiding principle will be the need to communicate clearly what topics are priorities and to what degree the committee wishes to explore these topics. Realistically the committee can cover a few topics at depth or a number of topics in a more cursory manner; it is not realistic to tackle many topics deeply.

PROPOSED MEETING SCHEDULE

For the 2025-2026 interim, interim committees have the budget and staff capacity to meet a maximum of 10 meeting days. Below is a proposed committee meeting schedule, which includes a meeting in Missoula (to allow for possible joint sessions with the Board of Regents and the Board of Public Education and visits to area educational sites) and the opportunity to meet jointly with the Education Interim Budget Committee (EIBC) on several occasions.

Also, these proposed dates include three opportunities to overlap and hold joint sessions with the Education Interim Budget Committee (EIBC), which proved valuable last interim.

1. Tuesday, July 22, 2025
2. Wednesday, September 17, 2025 (the School Funding Interim Commission is scheduled to meet Sept 15-16; the EIBC meets Wednesday, Sept 17, and this may allow for a joint meeting that morning)
3. Thursday-Friday, November 20-21, 2025 (Missoula-area educational site visits; possible joint sessions with the Board of Regents and Board of Public Education)
4. Monday-Tuesday, March 16-17, 2026 (EIBC meets Wednesday, March 18)
5. Monday-Tuesday, June 15-16, 2026 (EIBC meets Wednesday, June 17)
6. Monday, September 14, 2026