



# SFIC Phase 1 Final Report

The Innovation and  
Excellence in Education  
Working Group:  
Learning, findings, and  
recommendations





# Agenda

- **Introductions**
- **Who is NCEE?**
- **Phase 1 and Phase 2 - brief overview**
- **The plan development process**
- **The recommendations**
- **Discussion questions**



# The National Center on Education and the Economy

## We believe in...

shared prosperity, robust democracy &  
building lives of purpose and hope.

## We work with partners to...

Discover, Design, & Deliver high performing  
education & workforce development  
systems—with a commitment to young  
people furthest from opportunity.



Grounded in **global benchmarking**



Intensive state partnerships: **policy & practice alignment**



Centers **leadership** development &  
support



# The Statutory Charge

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## The Innovation and Excellence in Education Working Group

The IEEWG was tasked with:

- Comparing the education policies of Montana with the policies of high-performing international and domestic educational systems;
- Developing recommendations to adapt the appropriate education policies of high-performing education systems for the public education system in Montana;
- Developing an implementation plan for the recommendations; and
- Publishing its recommendations and implementation plan no later than January 30, 2026.



# How the IEEWG fits with(in) the SFIC

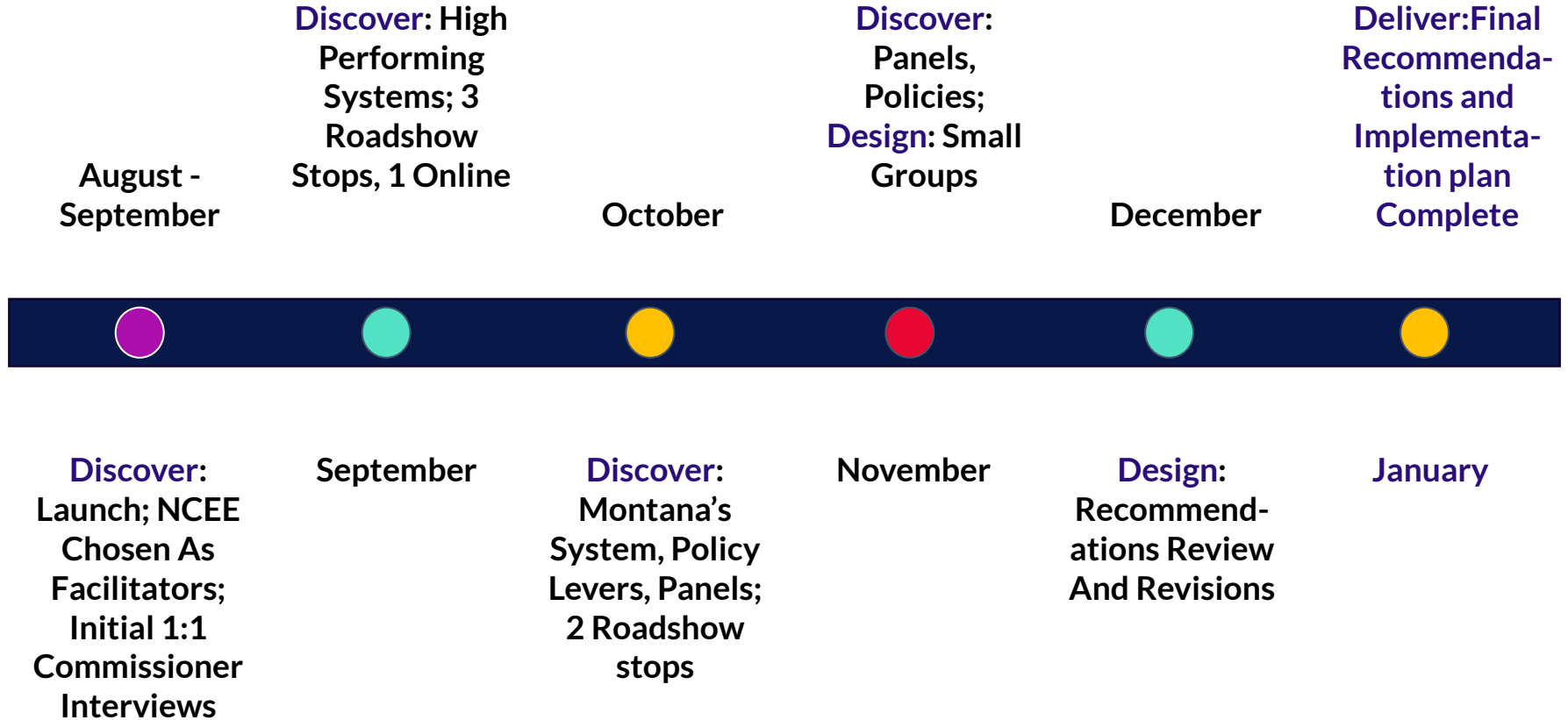
## Phase I: IEEWG

- What do high performing systems look like?
- What can we borrow to look more like them (and improve our results)?
- How should we implement it?
- What are the costs?

## Phase II: Funding Formula / Funding

- How do we fund our education system?

# How did we get here?



# Recommendation Development Process

## Review Policies/Programs

- Collect prominent education policies related to discussed topics
- Review policies alongside leg. staff, agency and Montana independent experts
- Discuss those policies
- Suggest changes

## Resolve policy/program issues

- Validate the policy
- Modify the policy
- Prioritize policy changes

## Prioritize changes

- **Critical** issues were the focus of the recommendations report
- **Important** issues were not included in the report but should not be dismissed
- **Desirable** issues were not included

# Plan design features

## The plan is

- An initial plan to guide the implementation of the recommendations in the report
- Co-created by Commissioners and stakeholders (December 'small groups')
- A time bound approach
- Specific proposed strategies and/or policy levers
- A plan that includes anticipated impacts

## The plan is not

- A reconsideration of the funding formula itself (Phase II)
- A binding, fully developed plan imposed upon the implementers
- An exhaustive compilation of all of the possible strategies



# A note regarding the report

- The report **represents a collaborative effort** among the broad and diverse stakeholder groups represented by our Innovation and Excellence in Education Working Group (IEEWG)
- There is **not complete consensus**, given the many policy priorities of the IEEWG, the ambitious nature of Montana's constitutional guarantee, and the breadth of our policy recommendations
- Commissioners agreed that **the report is faithful to the substance of the deliberations**
- All **recommendations warrant further discussion** as the plan continues to evolve
- The report **represents a strong foundation** with significant agreement about the direction Montana's education system must take

# Discussion Questions

Please keep these four questions in mind while reviewing the recommendations.



**Which  
recommendations  
feel most  
appropriate for  
your committee's  
leadership?**



**Which of these  
recommendations  
feel most doable?**



**Is there work to be  
done to set the  
stage for these  
recommendations?**



**What else is on  
your mind?**

# Transforming Teaching

- **Redesign School Staffing Structures**
- Strengthen Recruitment and Preparation Pathways
- Build a System of Real-Time Professional Growth
- Create Career Pathways that Retain Excellent Educators
- Expand Support for National Board Certification
- Develop a Continuum of Leader Preparation and Support
- Ensure Competitive Compensation

**“We must attract high-quality teachers – and pay them as the professionals they are.”**

**“Teacher preparation, mentoring, and meaningful professional development are essential; pass along the best practices that actually work.”**

**“Young adults no longer want to become teachers because of low salaries and lack of support; that pipeline is drying up.”**

# Early Learning

- Establish A Single Suite of Statewide Universal Screeners
- Update Funding Formulas to Include Early Childhood Education
- Provide Upfront Funding to Launch Early Targeted Intervention Programs
- Provide Early Childhood Educators with High-Quality Professional Development and Instructional Materials
- Provide Transportation Reimbursement for Early Childhood Programming Participants
- Create the Conditions for a Voluntary, Opt-In Early Learning Program
- Continue to Allow Communities to use Community-Based Programs to provide ECE
- Develop clear “policy triggers’ that provide clear “go/no go” decision rules for expansion

“It should be our priority to ensure **all children have access to high-quality early literacy and numeracy programs.**”

“**Universal Pre-K** – getting kids acclimated to a school setting will help them succeed sooner, stay successful, and identify support needs early.”

“Early intervention works, so **fund Pre-K, K, 1st & 2nd grade**; if kids aren’t reading by the end of 1st grade, they rarely catch up.”

# Pathways to Graduation

- Increase the Number of Funded Middle School Career Exploration Experiences.
- Increase Overall Funding for Middle School Career Exploration.

“Work-based learning experiences – job shadows and internships – let students apply skills, build networks, and evaluate career paths.”

“Provide more opportunities for **flexible accreditation** so schools can create innovative programs aligned to real-world skills.”

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# Learner-Centered Design

- Resolve And Reconcile Competing Definitions
- Develop a Roadmap for Learner Centered Design

“Truly meet students where they are and take them further; benchmarks and assessments must stay flexible, not fixed by age or seat-time.”

“Individualize education; **don’t standardize everything.** Kids don’t learn at the same rate or in the same way.”

“Break down the four walls of traditional classrooms and **provide multiple experiences for ALL students to learn and grow** – they’ll be more engaged and empowered to take risks.”

# Governance and implementation

## Policy design features

- Harmonize policy language and nomenclature
- Write specific policy 'triggers' into enacting legislation and policy

## Performance management and monitoring design features

- Provide sufficient state capacity to conduct state and local continuous improvement activities
- Clarify processes for resolving reporting challenges that arise from policy changes
- Develop clear performance-based 'on-ramps' and 'off-ramps' for recommendation implementation initiatives
- Provide consistent, clear, public quality of opportunity checks
- Identify and support "innovation laboratories"

## Governance design features

- Seek coherent state governance
- Reconsider existing governance - don't just add new governance
- Design new systems structures to coherently govern implementation

"Local control and decision-making for small and rural districts—communities know what is best for their students."

"We need to revamp the entire system; the traditional model isn't meeting 21st-century needs."

# Governance and implementation (cont'd)

## Infrastructure Policy Design Features

- Consider how any expansion in transportation services is funded and for whom
- Develop solutions for providing necessary infrastructure upgrades
- Design new infrastructure for the needs of the future, not the past

## Educational program design features

- Ensure statewide information about and access to high quality instructional materials
- **Pursue statewide efforts to improve student mental health and school culture**
- Consider the impact of the school year on Montana's education system

## Public engagement design features

- Provide consistent avenues for consistent public engagement

“Create a **statewide process that values teacher and parent input** when designing curriculum and assessments—voice matters.”



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