

HB 549 Public Charter Schools 101

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First a reminder...

- The 2023 Legislature enacted two bills allowing for the creation of new types of schools
- One was HB 549 (Anderson) which established “Public Charter Schools”
- The other was HB 562 (S. Vinton) which established “Community Choice Schools”
- HB 562 is being litigated, and a decision is expected soon
- If the court allows HB 562 to proceed, the committee may wish to have a similar presentation on the basics of Community Choice Schools



BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Two application "routes"
both through the sole
approving entity, the BPE.

"Route I"

- Board of Trustees of an existing school district submits a rigorous application to the BPE
- BPE selection process and approval/denial
- New charter school operates as school of the district
- If approved, governed by the existing Board of Trustees and funded through the regular school funding formula and as a separate budget unit receiving additional basic entitlement if enrollment thresholds are met
- Currently, all 22 public charter schools have been approved through the Route I process

Route II"

- Community group formally asks Board of Trustees (of school district in which desired charter school will be located) to pursue a Route I approval
- If Board of Trustees declines, the community group may independently submit to the BPE the same rigorous application as under Route I plus info pertaining to the physical location of the proposed charter school and background on the initial governing board
- BPE selection process and approval/denial
- If approved, a new "public charter school district" is created (composed only of land area encompassing school building), governed in the first year by the initial governing board, then by a board of trustees elected at the next school election
- The public charter school district is funded at the 80% BASE level by the state

2025 Legislative Changes – HB 28 (Bedey) and HB 251 (Bedey)

HB 28 - Clarify timelines and opening procedures for public charter schools

- Agency bill requested by EDIC on behalf of BPE
- Addressed issues related to approval timelines, opening procedures, and initial funding
- Public charters exempt from regular school opening laws
- Route I charter:
 - no per-ANB funding in 1st year;
 - basic entitlement based on planned enrollment (subject to clawback)
- Route II charter:
 - per-ANB; other ANB-driven components, and basic entitlement in 1st year based on planned enrollment (subject to clawback)

HB 251 - Generally revise laws related to public charter schools

- Clarified Route II public charter school district and authority (not a taxing district)
- Removed BPE authority to waive statute in charter contracts (BPE may still grant variances to accreditation standards if requested in charter proposal)
- BPE must limit new approvals based on LEG-determined funding limit and prioritize proposals emphasizing personalized and proficiency-based learning
- Resident district financial obligations for a child with a disability attending a Route II public charter school district same as any out-of-district

BOARD OF PUBLIC EDUCATION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



Charter Proposals



Charter Contracts



Continuous Oversight and Monitoring



Performance Framework



Renewal and Nonrenewal/Revocation



Public Charter School Account

Public Charter School Website

<https://bpe.mt.gov/INTRODUCTION-PUBLIC-CHARTER-SCHOOLS>

Performance Report

[2024-25 Public Charter School
Compiled Performance Report](#)

PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL TIMELINE

June

- The Board shall issue and broadly publicize a request for proposal by June 1 of each year.
- Include the criteria that will guide the Board's decision to approve or deny a charter proposal.

November

- If a public charter school proposal does not contain all of the required elements, the Board shall consider the proposal incomplete and return the proposal to the applicant without taking action.
- In reviewing and evaluating public charter proposals, the Board shall use procedures, practices, and criteria consistent with nationally recognized best practices, principles, and standards. The proposal review process must include a thorough evaluation of each charter proposal, an in-person interview with the applicant, and an opportunity in a public forum for local residents to learn about and provide input on each proposal.

January

- In deciding whether to approve public charter proposals, the Board shall grant charters only to applicants that have met the requirements and are likely to open and operate successfully, base decisions on documented evidence, follow charter-granting policies and practices, and heavily weigh the evidence of community support, projected student enrollment, and input received.
- The Board shall approve or deny public charter proposals within 90 business days after the filing. When approval is granted to a governing board other than a local school board, the approval constitutes corresponding approval of the creation of a separate public charter school district and its boundaries.
- The Board shall adopt by resolution all public charter approval or denial decisions in an open meeting. An approval decision may include reasonable conditions before a charter contract may be executed. For a charter denial, the Board must clearly state the reasons for denial.

March

- Within 45 business days of approval, the Board and the governing board of the approved public charter school district shall execute a charter contract that clearly sets forth the academic and operational performance expectations and measures.
- A charter must be granted for a term of 5 operating years, commencing on July 1 of the first school year. An approved charter may delay their opening for one school year to plan and prepare. If the school is delayed in opening, the school shall request an extension from the Board, which may grant or deny the extension.
- The charter contract must be signed by the presiding officer of the Board and the public charter school's governing board.
- A public charter school may not operate without a charter contract approved in an open meeting by the Board.
- The Board may establish reasonable preopening requirements or conditions to monitor the startup progress to ensure the school is prepared to open smoothly and meets all building, health, safety, insurance, and other legal requirements.

LIST OF APPROVED PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS

2024-25 PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL NUMBERS AND INFO AT A GLANCE

CHARTER SCHOOL NAME	SCHOOL DISTRICT	FIRST OPERATING YEAR
Big Horn Academy	Hardin Public Schools	2025-2026 – Year 1
Billings Early College School	Billings Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Billings Multilingual Academy	Billings Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Billings Opportunity School	Billings Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Bitterroot Polytech	Hamilton School District	2024-2025 – Year 2
Bridger Charter School	Bozeman Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Bronc Fast Track Public Charter School	Frenchtown School District	2024-2025 – Year 2
Butte Pathway Academy	Butte School District	2025-2026 – Year 1
Central Montana CTE Academy	Lewistown Public Schools	2025-2026 – Year 1
CORE School at Morningside	Great Falls Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
East Helena 227 Academy	East Helena School District	2024-2025 – Year 2
Flathead PACE Academy	Kalispell Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Helena Montessori Charter School	Helena Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Libby Central Charter School	Libby Public Schools	2025-2026 – Year 1
Missoula CONNECT Academy	Missoula County Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Missoula TEACH Academy	Missoula County Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Mount Ascension Learning Academy	Helena Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Project for Alternative Learning	Helena Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Rise Charter & Distance Learning Academy	Corvallis School District	2024-2025 – Year 2
Rise Charter & Pathways Learning Academy	Corvallis School District	2024-2025 – Year 2
Rising Wolf Charter	Kalispell Public Schools	2024-2025 – Year 2
Ronan Charter Academy	Ronan School District	2025-2026 – Year 1

There are roughly 1,486 elementary school students (K-6) participating in a public charter school (1.9%), roughly 415 middle school students (7-8) participating in a public charter school (1.8%), roughly 1,711 high school students (9-12) participating in a public charter school (3.9%), and roughly 3,612 total students participating in a public charter school (2.5%).

Public charter schools focused on a diverse range of goals tailored to the unique needs of each local community, focusing on college and career readiness, individualized learning, academic achievement, social-emotional learning, experiential learning, community engagement, and support for English language learners.

Each charter school crafted its goals to reflect its unique mission and educational approach. For example, **Rising Wolf Charter School** focuses heavily on outdoor education and experiential learning, integrating AP Environmental Science and outdoor career pathways, while **Billings Multilingual Academy** targets academic English growth using WIDA ACCESS scores and career exploration via BEABLE RIASEC-LEXILE assessments.

Several schools prioritize early college credit attainment. For instance, **Billings Early College School** set a goal for 90% of students to earn at least five college credits in their first year, and **Bronc Fast Track** aims for students to earn up to 30 college credits before high school graduation.

Schools like **Billings Opportunity School**, **Bitterroot Polytech**, and **Mount Ascension Learning Academy** emphasize personalized learning plans to tailor educational experiences and track student progress, especially for those who are off track or in non-traditional learning environments.

A number of schools have embedded social emotional learning goals to foster a healthier school climate. For instance, **Bridger Charter Academy** promotes social emotional growth through mentoring and community activities, and **CONNECT Academy** aims for 75% of students and families to report a positive school connection via surveys.

Many schools incorporate career readiness through work-based learning. **Flathead PACE Academy** aims to increase internships and employment placements, while **Bitterroot Polytech** target increases in work-based learning opportunities and industry certifications to support post-secondary success.

WHAT'S NEXT...

APPLICATION RESOURCES

The application and criteria will be publicly available by June 1 each year.

[2025 Public Charter School Approval Timeline](#)

[2025 Public Charter School Application](#)

[2025 Public Charter School Evaluation Criteria](#)

SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

To facilitate the Montana Board of Public Education's review of public charter school applications, applicants must submit the application to bpe@mt.gov between the dates of October 27-31, 2025, with a deadline of October 31, 2025 at 5PM. All submission materials must be submitted in a single electronic submission. Multiple attachments will not be accepted in the submission. The Board will review the public charter school application, and if determined complete, will facilitate an interview and take public comment on the application. Final approval of the application will take place at the January 2026 Board of Public Education meeting. Please note the timeline at the link above.

Please provide a brief, direct response to each question using this application template and limit the application to 26 pages. Any appendices, handbooks, policies, and additional documents will be considered as supporting documentation. Please include links, when possible, and refrain from including lengthier documents.

Please note that submitting a public charter school application does not guarantee approval and that a public charter school contract will be granted. Failure to adhere to any requirements may lead to an incomplete application that is rejected before consideration.

2025-26 APPLICATION AND APPROVAL

- Added HB 251 language to application and criteria, which was publicly available on June 1.
- Prioritizing personalized and proficiency-based learning responses in application review.
- Creating ranking process for application review (\$1M funding limit).

HIRED PROGRAM OFFICER

QUESTIONS?