NCEE

Innovation and Excellence in Education Working Group

Montana's School Funding Interim Commission

National Center on Education and the Economy
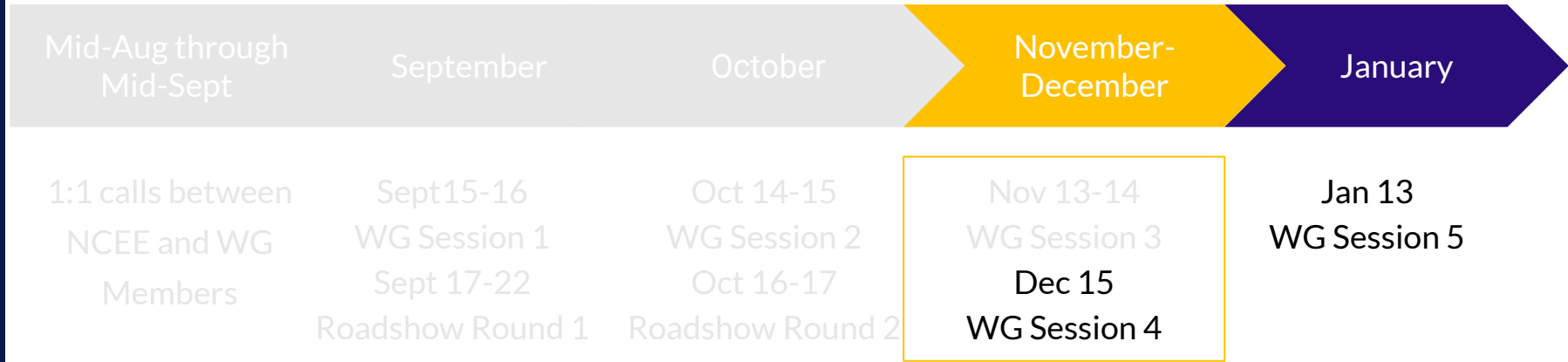December 15th 2025

The Statutory Charge

The Innovation and Excellence in Education Working Group

The IEEWG is 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.

Our Timeline: August 2025 - January 2026

Mid-Aug through Mid-Sept	September	October	November-December	January
1:1 calls between NCEE and WG Members	Sept15-16 WG Session 1 Sept 17-22 Roadshow Round 1	Oct 14-15 WG Session 2 Oct 16-17 Roadshow Round 2	Nov 13-14 WG Session 3 Dec 15 WG Session 4	Jan 13 WG Session 5

NCEE's role

Draft report and seek feedback from commissioners and public
Seek feedback from Commissioners on initial recommendations
Develop finalized recommendations and an implementation plan

Commissioner roles

Provide feedback on draft recommendations as written
Provide input on the sections yet to be written

Our Commitments

Bring Your Whole Self
Your ideas, questions, stories, and lived experiences are a part of the work. Share them.

Listen to Understand
Seek curiosity. Make space for perspectives different from your own.

Be Present
Make the most of our opportunity to be here in person together.

Embrace the "Yes, And"
Play with ideas. See where they can go.

Take Care of Yourself
Hydrate, stand, move. You'll bring your best self if you do what you need to do to be engaged.

Share the Air
Help us to promote equal air time and dialogue among Commissioners.

December 15th Goals

Design

Provide feedback on draft recommendations

Design

Identify issues and topics to include in the remainder of the report

Design

Provide input on the format of the implementation plan

Let's Connect...

Imagine it is 2035.

What is one difference in the lives of young people that resulted from implementation of the 2025 recommendations?
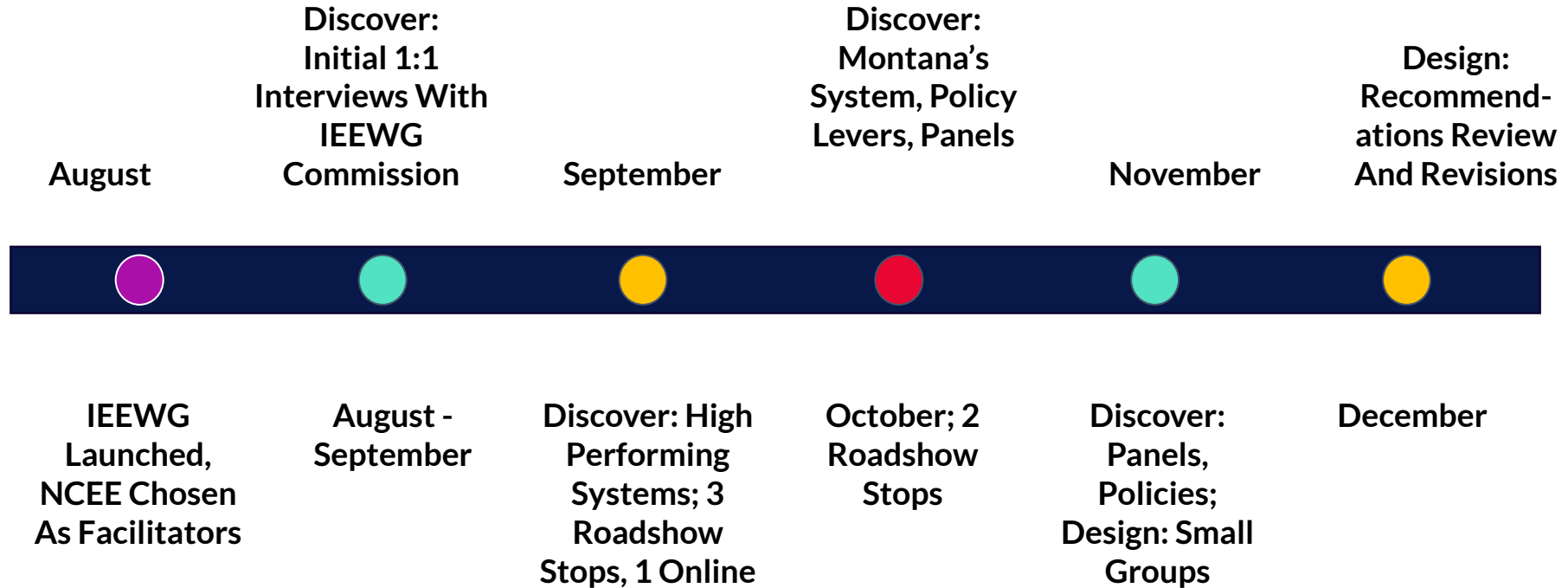
The Journey To Date

Purpose: Reviewing the process of developing the draft

How did we get here?

Discover:
Initial 1:1
Interviews With
IEEWG
Commission

Discover:
Montana's
System, Policy
Levers, Panels

Design:
Recommend-
ations Review
And Revisions

August

September

November

IEEWG
Launched,
NCEE Chosen
As Facilitators

August -
September

Discover: High
Performing
Systems; 3
Roadshow
Stops, 1 Online

October; 2
Roadshow
Stops

Discover:
Panels,
Policies;
Design: Small
Groups

December

The Final Report Outline: What's in there?

1. The Commission's Charge and Vision
    a. History of Commision
2. The Case for Change (from the Roadshow)
3. The Current Montana Context
    a. Performance
    b. Structure
    c. Challenges
4. Policy Recommendations
5. Systems Design Recommendations
6. **Considerations for Phase II**
    a. **Funding**
    b. **Policy**
7. Implementation Plan
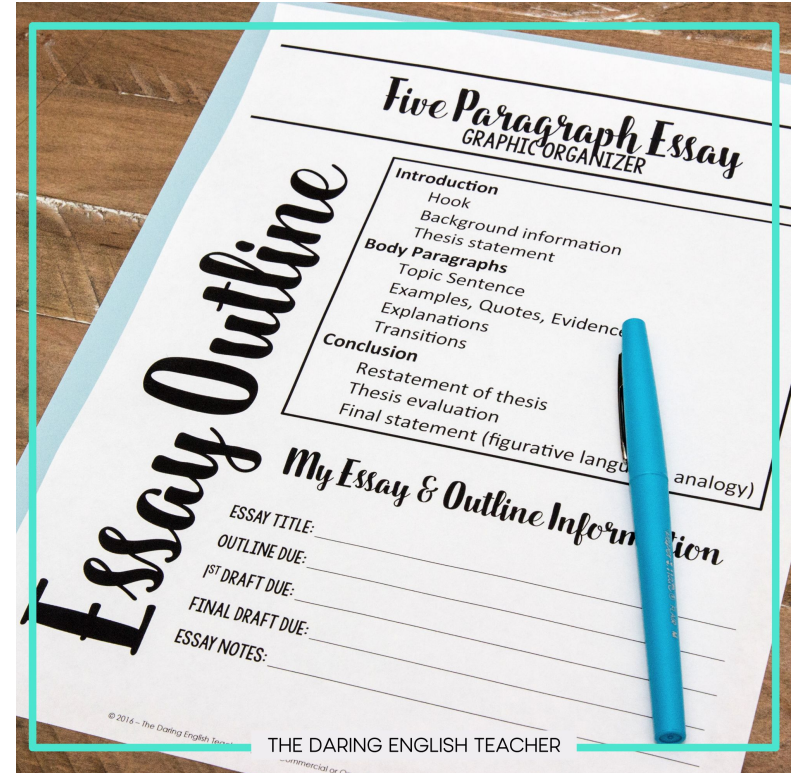
Our Process Today

Review Recommendations	• Focus on what is included in the recommendations • Discuss open issues / questions and record notes
Review System Recommendations	• Add content from the topical recommendations • Raise new systems level issues for consideration
Obtain input on the rest of the report's content	• Consider contextual and case-making information that the Commissioners would like to see included
Consider the structure of the implementation plan	• Review an initial outline and design for the implementation plan and provide input

Reviewing the Recommendations

Synthesizing input from the Commissioners

Recommendation Review Process

Individually	Whole Group	Whole Group	Whole Group	Whole Group	Final
Scan the discussion document (10 min)	Small group members offer initial reflections	Confirm no discussion is needed of the feedback already accepted to incorporate	Discussion focused on questions regarding conflicting feedback and open questions	Record resolutions and move forward	Open questions from NCEE

Recommendations
Transform Teaching

a. **Strengthening Recruitment and Preparation Pathways**
b. **Building a System of Real-Time Professional Growth**
c. **Redesigning school staffing structures**
d. **Creating Career Pathways that Retain Excellent Educators**
e. **Supporting National Board Certification**
f. **Developing a Continuum of Leader Preparation and Support**
g. **Ensuring Competitive Compensation**

Transform Teaching Feedback: Overview

Summary

- Some feedback considers the analysis of the teacher situation naive and incomplete, emphasizing the need to understand true costs to improve recruitment and retention.
- Suggestions include equitable funding and coherent governance among educational bodies.
- Concerns are raised about funding formulas and the scalability of National Board Certification.
- There is support for livable wages, dynamic professional development, and team-based teaching models. The importance of mentorship, accountability, and alternative pathways for educators is recognized, alongside the need for collaboration among educational institutions.

Common Ground

Need for Teacher Support and Development
- The feedback recognizes the importance of supporting and developing teachers and of providing pathways for professional growth and ensuring teachers receive adequate compensation.
- The feedback aligns on a need for a system that supports educators throughout their careers, with a focus on mentorship, professional development, and creating an environment that encourages retention and quality teaching.

Transform Teaching Feedback: Discussion

No open feedback discussion items from NCEE for the report

Please drop other topics for discussion into the chat.

Recommendations
Early Childhood
Early Learning

a. Provide upfront funding for districts in their first year of administering early targeted intervention programs.

b. Incorporate the current and future needs of early learning programs into the redesigned funding formula.

c. Provide high-quality professional development and instructional materials for ECE teachers and administrators

d. Establish the use of universal screeners across the state

e. Provide transportation reimbursement for 4-year-olds.

f. Create a voluntary, opt-in early learning program.

Early Learning Feedback: Overview

Summary

- The feedback calls for a rethinking of per-student funding, particularly questioning the logic of funding high school students more than younger students.
- Concerns are raised about the decay of social-emotional learning skills and the need for a universal screener for better metrics.
- While some feedback expresses skepticism about the efficacy of early childhood education, others strongly support the recommendations, emphasizing the importance of upfront funding, early intervention, and moving towards universal pre-K.
- The need for professional development and teacher preparation is also underscored, alongside concerns about transportation costs and funding formula adjustments.

Common Ground

- Feedback broadly reflects the idea that upfront funding is essential for schools to build and maintain effective early learning initiatives.
- Ensuring that funding formulas are right-sized and address the needs of all school districts is a shared concern.

Early Learning Feedback: Discussion

Discussion of feedback

- I'm passe about this. Data in past decades has been underwhelming. Current data is too fresh, longitudinal studies are needed before launching into this area with more taxpayer dollars.

- Providing upfront funding for districts in their first year of administering early targeted intervention programs is putting a band aid on a fundamental problem with the funding formula. Why is this program being singled out for this type of treatment?

Open Questions from NCEE

- How should we best incorporate the feedback regarding ANB calculations/per student funding calculations for ECE?

Other Discussion Topics?

Please drop other topics for discussion into the chat.

Recommendations
Learner Centered Design

a. Adopt common definitions of key terminology used across the state and reconcile competing definitions already in statutes and rules.

b. Develop a roadmap for progress in moving toward a learner-centered model that provides each district with milestones for each phase of implementation.

c. Resolve issues arising from current reporting systems that are misaligned with the policy intent and program implementation needs of learner-centered instructional models.

Learner Centered Design Feedback: Overview

Summary

- While some feedback appreciates the focus on learner-centered education and the need for a clear roadmap, others find the recommendations overly abstract and lacking in practical guidance.
- There is a call for more specific strategies, particularly regarding proficiency-based learning and funding implications.
- Concerns about the scalability of successful models, the need for common definitions, and the potential impact of policy changes are also noted.
- Overall, there is a strong desire for clarity, alignment, and practical support to effectively implement these recommendations

Common Ground

Need for Clear Roadmaps
- The feedback recognizes the importance of having clear roadmaps and practical guidance to implement learner-centered design effectively and that without specific plans and examples, it will be challenging to transition to this new educational model.
- The need for alignment in terminology and the removal of barriers such as outdated policies is also recognized as essential for successful implementation. Providing educators with high-quality instructional materials and support is seen as a critical step in achieving the goals of learner-centered education.

Learner Centered Design Feedback: Discussion

No feedback discussion items

Open questions from NCEE
- If you successfully implement the recommendations, will you be promoting the learner centered schools you want to see for Montana?

Viewer version of feedback document

Please drop other topics for discussion into the chat.

Recommendations
Pathways

a. **Increase overall funding for middle school CTE pathways programs. C**
b. **Increase the number of activities that schools can fund in Middle School to encompass a greater range of career exploration activities.**
c. **Clarify the intent of the STARS future-ready payment and resolve distortionary effects before it is distributed.**

Pathways Feedback: Overview

Summary

- Concern is raised about the heavy focus on Career and Technical Education (CTE) potentially leading to stratification and neglecting foundational academic skills like algebra.
- There is support for learner-centered design and collaboration with local businesses, but some find the recommendations underdeveloped and overly focused on middle school.
- Funding discrepancies between middle and high schools are noted, with calls for increased funding for middle school programs.
- While some express ambivalence about early career decisions, others emphasize the need for continued investment in diverse educational pathways.

Common Ground

- Feedback recognizes the importance of providing a balanced education that includes both academic and practical skills.
- Feedback supports the need for diverse educational pathways, whether they are CTE-focused or academically oriented.
- Feedback acknowledges the importance of middle school as a critical developmental period and agree that it should be adequately funded to offer a wide array of opportunities for students.

Pathways Feedback: Discussion

Discussion of Feedback

- Is the sponsor of STARS amenable to this policy change? (changes to future ready payment)

- By heavily focusing on CTE, are we forgetting other post-secondary pathways?

Open Questions from NCEE

- If these are resolved, will you get to the vision?
- Did we address the "yes/and" and not "either/or" divide for pathways (all kids should be able to take rigorous academics and pursue pathways programs)?
- How should we emphasize equality of opportunity checks for rural, small, etc.?

Other Discussion Topics?

Please drop other topics for discussion into the chat.

Systems Design

Policy infrastructure design features

- **Harmonized policy language and nomenclature**
- **Hard-coded policy 'triggers' should be written into enacting legislation**

Performance management and monitoring design features

- **Sufficient capacity to conduct continuous improvement activities**
- **Clear performance-based 'on-ramps' and 'off-ramps' for recommendation implementation initiatives**
- **Equality of opportunity checks**

Governance

- **Coherent governance**
- **Purpose-built entities built to coherently govern implementation**

Instructional Materials design features

- **High Quality Instructional Materials**
- **Avenues for consistent public engagement**

Public engagement design features

- **Avenues for consistent public engagement**

Systems Design Feedback: Overview

Summary

- The feedback highlights a need for harmonizing policy language and ensuring educational success through clear, measurable outcomes.
- Concerns include the potential stifling of innovation by rigid mandates, the lack of focus on necessary infrastructure, and the disconnect between policy and funding.
- Emphasis is placed on elevating professional educators, addressing diverse learner needs, and ensuring financial capacity.
- Coordination among entities and a supportive data system are crucial. The importance of public engagement and understanding among legislators is noted, alongside a call for thoughtful implementation that prioritizes student learning and equitable opportunities.

Common Ground

Stakeholder Coordination and Engagement

- Feedback is aligned on the idea that various entities involved in defining, implementing, and funding the education system need to work together effectively.
- Public engagement and understanding of the education system are seen as crucial for successful implementation of the recommended features.
- This suggests that improved communication and collaboration among stakeholders could bridge the gap between high-level policy and practical implementation.

Systems Design Feedback: Discussion

Discussion items from feedback

- I also note the low priority of academics in the bullet points.
- I need to hear more before I can give feedback of where the basic skills of education are embedded.

Open questions from NCEE

- If you successfully implement the recommendations, will you be promoting the learner centered schools you want to see for Montana?

Setting the context

Front Matter that Matters

Setting the context: Front Matter that Matters

1. The Commission's Charge and Vision
   a. History of Commission
   b. Development of IEEWG
2. The Case for Change (from the Roadshow)
   a. The world students enter
   b. The key features of high performing systems

3. The Current Montana Context
   a. Landscape Scan
      i. School Performance
      ii. Student performance
      iii. Educator Pipeline status quo
      iv. Facilities/Technology challenges
   b. Current Funding
      i. Recent Investments
      ii. Current unresolved budget pressures and investment needs
   c. Recent/Current OPI context/efforts
   d. Recent/Current BPE efforts

Thought Exchange question

Consider the outline for the report front matter presented by NCEE. What topics do you think are most important to include in the front matter? Please add as many thoughts as you like, each in a different 'thought' so that your fellow Commissioners can rate them.

Implementation Plan Development

NCEE plans to share a draft implementation plan with the IEEWG in advance of the January 13th meeting

Plan design features

The plan is

- An initial guide to the implementation of the recommendations in the report
- A time-bound plan
- A plan that includes specific proposed strategies and/or policy levers
- A plan that includes anticipated impacts

The plan is not

- A binding, fully developed plan imposed upon the implementers
- An exhaustive compilation of all of the possible strategies

Proposal: Plan on 3 horizons

We propose to author a plan that includes three time horizons, from the next legislative session through the next Decennial. This implementation plan will be future forward across the multiple time horizons

Next legislative session: the actions that will need to occur to enact the plan and implement the initial efforts

Five years from now: anticipated efforts and impacts between plan enactment and the five year horizon

Ten years from now: a description of the system of education that could be operating as the next Decennial commission approaches

Other Discussion Topics

- How will the implementation plan be consistently monitored and supported over time?
- How will we assign ownership in the implementation plan?
- How will we adapt for initiatives not 'covered' by the funding formula?

Reflections

What's one thing we have to get right in the final report?

Drop it in the chat!

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