

Montana

This profile examines Montana’s elementary and secondary public school facilities. It reports on current facilities funding and investments using publicly reported data from local education agencies (LEAs) and compares them to the spending and investments needed to meet modern standards for healthy, safe, educationally appropriate and environmentally responsible school buildings and grounds for all students and communities. In fiscal year 2024, there were 486 local education agencies (LEAs) in Montana, including 477 regular school districts, charter LEAs, and 9 other LEAs. Together, they operated 831 public schools supporting 172,234 students and staff.

	477 Regular Districts
STUDENTS	150,120
STAFF	21,939
SCHOOLS	827

Montana Public School Facilities Inventory 2024

The location, design, and condition of public school buildings and grounds impact student and staff performance, health and safety, and community resilience and well-being. Montana public school districts provide 29 million gross square feet (GSF) of building space for elementary and secondary public education and community use. At an average new school construction cost of \$368 per GSF for 2024, Montana’s elementary and secondary public education facilities have a current replacement value (CRV) of \$11 billion.

Building Area (estimated)	Avg New Construction Cost	Current Replacement Value
29 million GSF	\$368 per GSF	\$11 billion CRV

Maintenance & Operations (M&O)

Maintenance and operations expenditures are reported annually to the U.S. Census of Governments by school districts, charter, and other local education agencies. The fiscal data reported includes expenditures for routine, preventive, and reactive facilities maintenance and repairs, cleaning, groundskeeping, utilities, and building security.

M&O STANDARDS: School buildings require continuous maintenance to be healthy, safe, and operationally efficient. Montana districts can meet modern standards for cleaning, groundskeeping, routine and preventive maintenance and minor repairs, utilities, and building security when spending 3% of Current Replacement Value (CRV)—\$319 million each year.

Montana public school districts spent an annual average of \$216 million, about 9.9% of their total education spending on maintenance and operations of facilities for fiscal years 2019-2023. Compared to the M&O standard, Montana’s public school districts are underfunded for maintenance and operations by \$685 per student, totaling \$103 million a year statewide.

Maintenance & Operations	Annual M&O Standard 3% of CRV	Actual Expenditures Annual Avg FY2019–2023 (2024\$)	Gap Annual Avg Shortfall
Total	\$319,247,269	\$216,356,515	\$102,890,754
Per Student	\$2,126	\$1,441	\$685
Per Gross Square Ft	\$11.05	\$7.49	\$3.56

UTILITIES: Energy and water expenditures are included in the districts’ maintenance and operations totals. In FY2023, Montana LEAs reported spending \$37,820,895 for utilities — \$252 per student. Utilities accounted for 17.5% of M&O spending and 1.7% of total current elementary and secondary school education expenditures.

MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS FUNDS (*Fiscal Years 2019–2023*): Maintenance and operations of facilities are included in state education formula funding and local public education general operating funds. However, local education agencies had access to federal funds for M&O during the COVID pandemic, and Montana LEAs reported that they used \$29,447,032 in federal ESSER funds for COVID-19 pandemic health and safety standards. These ESSER M&O funds are excluded from actual M&O expenditures because they are not available in the future and so will not help close the M&O gap.

PK-12 Facility Capital Investment

School districts require periodic capital investments to replace and upgrade building systems and components and to alter facilities to ensure they meet modern standards and are maintained in a state of good repair. Additionally, new school construction is required when the population of families with school-age children grows, and schools become crowded. Over the 10 years from FY14 to FY23, enrollment in Montana increased by 5,981 students (4.1 %) and operated 3 fewer schools.

FACILITY STANDARDS: Public school buildings and grounds need to meet modern health, safety, education, security, energy, environment, and resilience standards defined in codes, guidance, and with the help of third-party certificates.

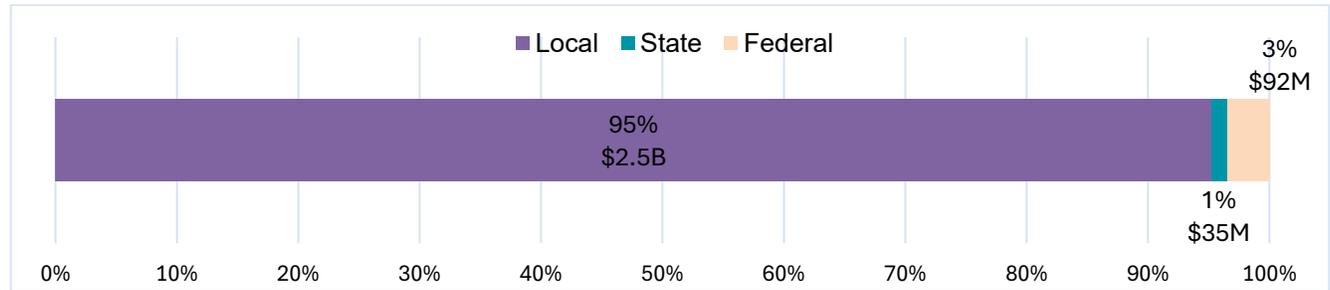
Montana school districts can deliver modern facilities by investing 4% CRV about \$426 million per year on their existing buildings and grounds. However, Montana public school districts averaged \$268 million (2024\$) a year

on school construction capital outlay for fiscal years 2014-2023, which included capital spending on existing facilities and new construction. Montana public school districts fall short of capital investment standards by \$158 million every year. Local education agencies held about \$1.6 billion in long-term debt at the end of fiscal year 2023—\$10,425 per student, as compared with the national average of \$8,953 per student. Montana communities paid \$53 million for interest on long-term debt in FY2023.

Facilities Capital Investment	Annual Capital Standard <i>4% of CRV</i>	Actual Annual Average <i>FY2014–2023 (2024\$)</i>	Annual Investment Gap <i>Annual Avg Shortfall</i>
Total	\$425,663,025	\$267,607,835	\$158,055,191
Per Student	\$2,834	\$1,782	\$1,052
Per Gross Square Ft	\$14.74	\$9.27	\$5.47

Revenue for Capital Outlay - Fiscal Years 2014 to 2023 Inflation Adjusted to 2024\$

From FY14-23, Montana’s local education agencies, including regular, charter, and other districts paid 95.3% of school construction and capital equipment outlay with local funds. Over the 10 years from FY14-23 the state paid \$34,528,344 about 1.3% of all school construction and capital outlay expenditures, as compared to a national average of 21%. Montana’s federal facility funds from FY14-23 were \$92 million, about 3.4%.



Following major crises, such as the COVID pandemic, the 2008 housing crisis, and natural disasters, federal funding for public education infrastructure has been available. There are other ad hoc programs from various federal agencies, but no federal program funds the modernization of elementary and secondary facility buildings and grounds.

Montana’s Federal Funding FY2014-2023	
FEMA Public Assistance	\$198,478
American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) FY14	\$
Elementary and Secondary Education Relief (ESSER) FY20-23	\$91,951,216
TOTAL Federal \$	\$92,149,694

NOTES: Go to www.21csf.org for the 2025 State of our Schools: America’s PK-12 Public School Facilities national report, other state profiles, data sources and glossary. Updated January 29, 2026 with corrections to M&O inflation adjustment.