



MT

Helena

Jenny Murnane-Butcher

Montanans Organized for
Education

08/28/2025 10:16 PM

Subject: MOFE Study Recomendations

Attachments:

Comment: Dear Commission Members,

 [VIEW](#)
ATTACHMENT 1

Thank you for your continued work on reviewing the Montana School Funding Formula. Attached are some specific considerations we would encourage you to keep in mind as you decide on the scope of your study of the funding formula. Please feel free to reach out to jenny@mofeactionfund.org with any questions or concerns.

Thank you again,
Jenny Murnane Butcher

Recommendations for 2025 Study of the School Funding Formula
Jenny Murnane Butcher, Deputy Director
Montanans Organized for Education

While Montana's school funding formula has grown more equitable and adequate over time, there are many aspects of the core formula that no longer support the expectations placed on school districts. Montana's history of local control and financial "buy in" from local communities suggests that local property tax payers will continue to have some say in how their communities fund their schools. However, the purpose of the 2025 Decennial Commission should be to ensure that the state is paying its fair share in an equitable and adequate funding formula to support all aspects of a "basic system of free quality schools" as defined by [20-9-309 MCA](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2025 DECENNIAL REVIEW:

At this juncture, it does not seem politically or financially feasible to fund a full costing-out study for every aspect of the funding formula. However, it is important that the 2025-26 review still comprehensively study the aspects of the funding formula that are no longer working for schools. As such, the School Funding Interim Commission should study the following issues:

- **Special Education:** Does the state pay its fair share of special education costs through the current "census" formula for special education funding? Would another model that takes into account severity of disabilities served result in a more equitable and adequate allocation of state resources for special education?
- **Facilities Costs:** What is the extent of deferred maintenance in the state? How could a new funding formula more adequately address facilities costs? What is needed for full lead remediation?
- **Equity and Adequacy:** How have disparities in general fund levy passage, additional levy passage for other funds (technology, building reserve, etc.), and cost of living increases across the state affected the equity and adequacy of funding?
- **Teacher Pay:** Does the funding formula allocate enough state resources to pay competitive teacher salaries that allow districts to both recruit and retain staff? What percentage of school district general fund budgets are spent on certified staff?
- **High-Cost Services:** Is there adequate funding for costs that have outpaced the general rate of inflation, such as health insurance, energy technology, and liability insurance?

BACKGROUND

Benefits of Full Costing Out Studies

- Utilizes empirical methods
- Third party conducts the study, which provides objectivity
- Focuses on [ensuring adequate funding](#) for students

Disadvantages of Full Costing Out Studies:

- Extremely costly
- Costing out experts can assume that overall historical trends will continue linearly, which can be an overgeneralization
- Different methods in a full-blown costing out study lead to very different numbers, making it difficult to determine tangible, politically feasible solutions

Montana School Funding Formula Review 2005 (Full Costing Out Study):

During the [2006 Adequacy Study](#), consultants used 4 methods to estimate the increase in annual funding necessary to fund schools adequately:

- Successful schools: a measure of funding allocated to schools with successful performance, which estimated increased costs of \$96 million to adequately fund schools.
- Professional judgment: a recommendation from focus groups of educators and policy makers, which estimated increased costs of \$329 million to adequately fund schools.
- Evidence-based: a recommendation based on research-based practices to increase school achievement, which estimated an increased cost of \$20.4 million.
- Advanced statistical analysis: a measure using statistical methods to account for different school populations, which estimated an increased cost of \$34 million to adequately fund schools.

Although this study provided valuable information for the development of the school funding formula, the wide range of numbers generated from the full adequacy study did not in and of itself generate tangible or politically feasible policy solutions for legislators. Rather, legislators largely relied on existing expenditure data when drafting the funding formula.

Montana School Funding Formula Review 2015 (Subject-Specific Review):

During the first [Decennial Review in 2015](#), members of the commission focused on four main areas: recruitment and retention; school facilities; special education and special needs; and district size, structure and equity. While this study allowed for the committee to make clear and tangible policy recommendations to the legislature, few of the major recommendations were carried out with the exception of [SB 307](#) (funding for facilities) in the 2017 Session, [HB 46](#) (special education) in the 2021 Session, and [HB 332](#) (health insurance) in the 2023 Session. As a result, many of the same funding areas have continued to be pain points for school districts and should be studied in the upcoming review.



MT

Great Falls

Dean Jardee

Montana PTA (Parent
Teacher Association

09/15/2025 02:39 PM

Subject: Public Comment from Montana PTA-9-15-25

Comment: -

Attachments:

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ATTACHMENT 1](#)



Chair Bedey, and Members of the Commission,

My name is Dean Jardee, and I am the President of the Montana PTA. On behalf of the thousands of parents I represent across Montana, I want to thank you for this opportunity to speak. We appreciate your dedication to this critical task of ensuring a high-quality education for all of our state's children.

I've been listening since 8:00 to the conversations today, and they have been both informative and interesting. However, I must express the growing concern that many parents are feeling about this process. We've been essentially in a waiting room, listening to the commissioners speak, and waiting patiently while small group sessions took place, and wondering what is being discussed, only to be offered a 15-minute public comment period at the end of the day to represent the views of hundreds and thousands of parents across our state. This format does not provide us with a meaningful opportunity to contribute to a study that directly impacts our children and our communities.

As research has consistently shown, a child's first and most important teacher is their parent or guardian. They are the ones who know their children best—their strengths, their challenges, and their unique needs. Any discussion about school funding that doesn't fully include the voices of parents is missing the most essential perspective. I know that many of you are parents and have children of your own, but how many of you currently have children in schools?

I also want to address the issue of professional educators at the table. While many of you on this commission may have been teachers or educators in the past, that was years ago. Where are the people on this commission who truly know what is going on in the classrooms today? How can we make decisions that will affect students and schools without having those people, the people on the front lines every day, at the table with all of the current commissioners? It is crucial that we hear from those who are actively working in our schools to understand the current realities of the educational landscape.

Parents and teachers feel neglected in this process, and not like we have a true "seat at the table." This is in direct contradiction to the spirit of the legislation that created this commission. House Bill 153 states that the "innovation and excellence in education working group" shall include "representation from teachers, school administrators, school trustees, and parent advocacy groups in forming the working group."

Some organizations have been provided a far more substantial voice. Organizations such as the Montana Federation of Public Employees, the Montana School Boards Association, and the School

Administrators of Montana have all submitted detailed memos and position statements for your consideration. The Montanans Organized For Education (MOFE), which represents parents and community members, has also provided a detailed memo outlining shortfalls in the funding formula. These documents are a crucial part of your work, but are also provided by organizations who have full time staff dedicated to providing this. Our volunteer parent groups like Montana PTA, and Kids Education Yes in Great Falls deserve the same respect and opportunity for substantive input.

Therefore, we believe there must be a better way forward for future meetings. We are not just a public comment; we are a key stakeholder group with a deep understanding of how school funding impacts our children's daily lives.

I would like to propose the following solutions for future meetings:

- **Create Dedicated Parent and Teacher Working Groups:** Aligning with the language in HB 153, establish dedicated working groups for both parent advocacy organizations and current professional educators to engage in in-depth discussions on funding.
- **Allow us to participate in Zoom discussions:** Just like you provided opportunities for Commissioners who attended via Zoom, you could provide us to be part of a group to provide comments to be shared with the larger group. We wouldn't necessarily need to speak out to the whole group.
- **Schedule Substantive Time:** Allot a dedicated portion of the agenda for a dialogue with parent advocacy groups and current professional educators, not just a brief public comment period at the end of the day.

The success of your work hinges on hearing from all stakeholders, especially parents and the professional educators who are in the classrooms every day. We stand ready to partner with you to ensure that the funding formula is studied and amended to benefit the education of all Montana students. Thank you.

Dean V. Jardee, President
Montana PTA (Parent Teacher Association)

Hello Pad, we met at the door and I spoke to the committee. Attached is a file re community engagement and was wondering if you could distribute this to the committee. I will speak to community engagement tomorrow.

Best,

--

Terry Marasco

Flathead Valley, Montana!

"Objects in the mirror are closer than they appear."

Community Engagement Checklist for Public Schools

1. Communication & Transparency

- ■ Provide regular updates via multiple channels (email, text, social media, flyers).
- ■ Use clear, jargon-free, and multilingual communication.
- ■ Hold regular town halls or 'listening sessions' with open Q&A.;
- ■ Share school data and goals honestly, including challenges and progress.

2. Shared Decision-Making

- ■ Create school/community advisory councils that include parents, students, and local leaders.
- ■ Invite families and stakeholders into strategic planning sessions.
- ■ Conduct annual surveys to gather community input.
- ■ Provide training so parents understand school budgets, testing, and policies.

3. Partnerships with Community Organizations

- ■ Develop formal agreements (MOUs) with local nonprofits, businesses, and colleges.
- ■ Bring in after-school programs (tutoring, sports, arts).
- ■ Partner with local health providers for school-based clinics or wellness days.
- ■ Connect students with internships, apprenticeships, and career speakers.

4. Volunteer & Mentorship Programs

- ■ Create an easy volunteer sign-up system.
- ■ Recruit community mentors for students (career, academic, social-emotional).
- ■ Recognize volunteers publicly (certificates, appreciation events).
- ■ Ensure background checks and training for volunteers.

5. Cultural Responsiveness & Inclusion

- ■ Host cultural heritage nights and family festivals.
- ■ Offer interpretation/translation for non-English speaking families.
- ■ Celebrate student work publicly (art shows, performances, exhibits).
- ■ Train staff on cultural competence and inclusive practices.

6. Support Services & Wraparound Programs

- ■ Offer adult education classes (ESL, GED, digital literacy).
- ■ Provide access to food pantries, clothing closets, or resource fairs.
- ■ Partner with social service agencies to support families in need.
- ■ Use the 'community school' model if resources allow.

7. Student Voice & Leadership

- ■ Include students on advisory councils.
- ■ Host student-led conferences and exhibitions of learning.
- ■ Create opportunities for student service projects that engage the community.
- ■ Encourage student journalism, podcasts, or social media takeovers.

8. Celebration & Relationship-Building

- ■ Recognize community partners publicly (events, newsletters).
- ■ Highlight success stories of students and families.
- ■ Create annual community appreciation days.
- ■ Build traditions that strengthen identity (homecoming, neighborhood fairs).



MT

Great Falls

Dean Jardee

Montana PTA (Parent
Teacher Association

09/16/2025 03:29 PM

Subject: Public Comment from Montana PTA-9-16-25

Comment: -

Attachments:

 [VIEW
ATTACHMENT 1](#)

Chair Bedey, Members of the Commission, and Fellow Advocates,

Thank you again for allowing public comment, and for the fact that you are allowing it more than just once throughout the day. We are grateful for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you.

We would like to recommend that in future commission meetings, if you are to break out into small groups or pairs, that those of us who are logged in virtually are also given the opportunity to partner with someone in the room. This could be facilitated by phone calls to cell phones, just as you are already doing with the commissioners working remotely. Many of us are giving up our whole day to focus on this important work, and it would be more timeworth if you would provide a more meaningful opportunity for parents and other advocacy groups to provide important feedback. We don't need to share back to the full group.

We also want to raise a deeper concern. It seems to many of us that this commission is attempting to do work that has already been done by hundreds of educators and educational administrators across Montana. I am referring to the required activities of the revised Accreditation standards, such as the learner profiles and portraits that are required to be posted on district websites. I have to ask: why do we need to recreate something that has already been done by the very people who understand education the best and who know the students and families they are working with? Most of these districts already included parents and families in the creation of these profiles.

For example, the Great Falls Public Schools District, which is a highly respected and celebrated district in the country and yet is not represented on this committee, has a clear learner portrait. Their portrait highlights the skills of a successful student: critical thinkers, strong communicators, problem solvers, and individuals with a strong work ethic and integrity.

Yesterday, there were questions from commissioners about the lack of critical thinking on the list of skills students need to learn. Critical thinking is what inquiry learning is all about. Students are asking questions, demonstrating curiosity, generating multiple solutions, evaluating sources of information, considering bias, and synthesizing information to take action. This is being taught in all schools in multiple curricula such as science, media literacy, and trades classes. It's good teaching, and it is not new or innovative.

Chairman Bedey, we were encouraged to hear your comments about maybe needing less focus on NAEP scores and other formalized assessments, and to trust in the assessment methods of our professionally trained teachers who know their students the best. We agree completely. The same trust should be extended to other issues, such as AI. The issues of AI use in schools and policies are best dealt with at the school level. Professionally trained teachers are already receiving the training and direction they need on how and when to use AI. Higher education professionals are providing the resources and training for future and current educators.

The foundation of a great education is built on strong relationships and relevance with and to the students. The people who best understand the needs of our students are the professional educators and parents who work with them every single day. This is why we need to trust the work they are already doing. The legislature doesn't tell doctors, lawyers, or engineers how to do their jobs, so they shouldn't be in the business of doing that to educators. This commission needs to get to work on using what has already been created by educators and figuring out how to fund schools equitably across the state. Thank you for your time.

We also want to express a concern about the discussion around this commission establishing proficiency levels. While setting high expectations for our students is important, this is typically a responsibility of the Montana Board of Public Education and the Office of Public Instruction. This commission is tasked with establishing the necessary funding to provide a quality education, and in doing so, should trust in the expertise of those who are already working on these standards. You should be focused on how to fund what is needed, not on recreating the work of those who are already charged with setting our state's educational standards.

It was mentioned to include discussion and resources for utilizing the Montana Digital Academy for providing distance learning for students. We also want to highlight the fact that local districts like Great Falls Public Schools are already using online learning opportunities to provide options for families who want or need their children to receive learning from qualified educators but prefer not to have their students attend physically. This is a perfect example of a district providing innovation and choice that meets the needs of its families, while maintaining the high quality of Montana's public education system. This type of family choice is happening on the local level, and it is something that this commission should be looking to support, not regulate or recreate.

Finally, we want to voice a concern about the suggestion to provide students with eight hours free from their screens. While this is an admirable goal for helping students cope with distractions and mental health issues, it may not be realistic in a world where technology is so central to their lives. If we are going to give them eight hours free from their screens, are we going to do away with technology in our schools and preparing them for a technology-focused future? This commission should be focused on funding schools to ensure they can provide the education that prepares students for the world they will live in, not the world we wish they lived in.

Dean V. Jardee, President

Montana PTA (Parent Teacher Association)