



The Great Work of Montana's Public Schools

Volume IX - October 2021

Developing the full potential of each child to dream and achieve.

A joint publication of the following education advocacy group - Montana Public Education Center

MASBO

Montana Association of
School Business Officials

MFPE

Montana Federation
of Public Employees

MQEC

Montana Quality
Education Coalition

MREA

Montana Rural
Education Association

MTSBA

Montana School Boards
Association

SAM

School Administrators
of Montana

WHAT IS THE MONTANA PUBLIC EDUCATION CENTER

The Montana Public Education Center (MT-PEC) is a coalition of public education advocates focused on ensuring success for each child in every public school, in furtherance of the Peoples' goal under Article X, Section 1 "to develop the full educational potential of each person."



We are united by our shared interest in the best interests of children.



Montana Public Education Center

A VISION FOR THE SUCCESS OF MONTANA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Starting in 2011, MASBO, MFPE, MQEC, MREA, MTSBA, and SAM convened school leaders from throughout Montana with a bold challenge - rethink and develop a comprehensive vision for the future success of Montana's public schools, focused on a goal of success for each child in every public school in Montana.

A decade later, the K-12 Vision Project continues with more energy than ever. Fueled by an increased awareness of how important our public schools and school communities are to children and families and inspired by the urgency of ensuring that Montana's public schools emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic stronger and more capable than ever before, Montana's public schools are ready to lead a resurgence of hope and optimism regarding the future of our great state and the children we serve together.

Developed and sustained by the cumulative work of over 400 teachers, elected trustees, superintendents, principals and school business officials from across the state of Montana, the K-12 Vision Project has created an inspiring vision, aligned with the guarantees afforded children under our Constitution and providing actionable steps to achieve goals that will strengthen the bonds between schools and communities, trustees, staff and families, all united by our shared interest in the best interests of each child in every public school.



OUR MISSION

A system of public schools that develops the full potential of each child.

OUR VALUES

Authority and responsibility for the success of Montana's public schools shared among elected trustees, the legislature, the governor, the board of public education and the state superintendent.

OUR VISION

K-12 public schools that work collaboratively with each other, with state policymakers, and with their communities to ensure the success of each child through flexible, adequately and rationally funded, and community-owned public schools.

OUR GOALS

Leadership,
Collaboration, Learning,
Innovation, Success

LEADING A PATH OF SUCCESS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

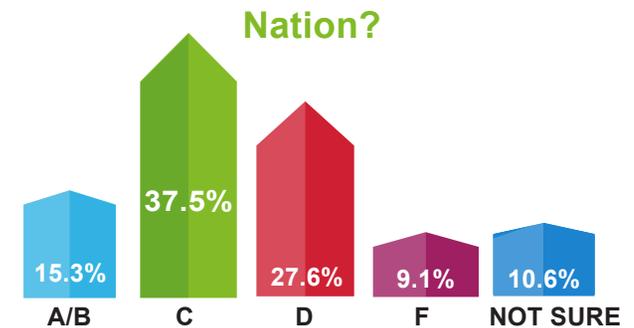
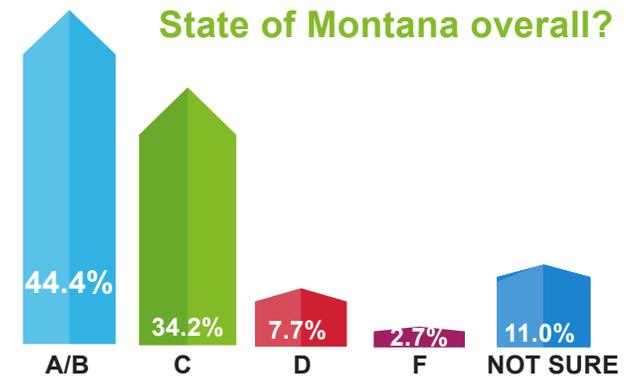
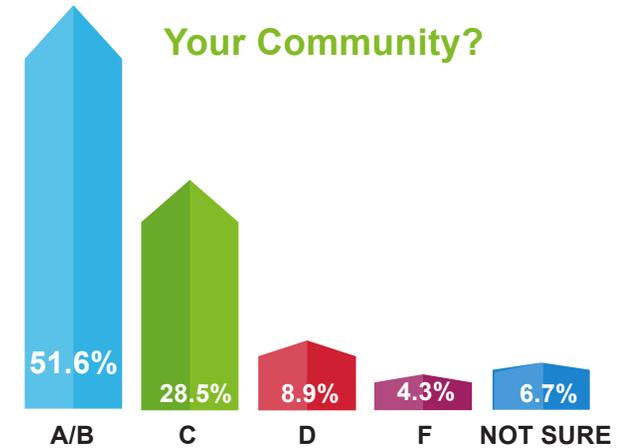
"When everything seems to be going against you, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it." - Henry Ford

The Great Work of Montana's Public Schools has never shined brighter than during the pandemic, as school leaders have worked to overcome the barriers to learning presented by COVID-19. Public school leaders have demonstrated through their actions that the challenges presented by a once in 100-year pandemic cannot dampen their enthusiasm for helping children and families. Despite unprecedented barriers to learning and understandable differences of opinion regarding the best path forward, those serving in Montana's public schools have worked hard to earn and build trust with their communities. Together with our students and families, we have learned to stand tall, becoming better at what we already did very well and thriving amid circumstances beyond any of our power to control. And while we all continue to manage our way through these difficulties, we can look forward to a bright future. Once we have overcome these challenges together, the transformative power of what we have learned will serve the children of Montana into the future.

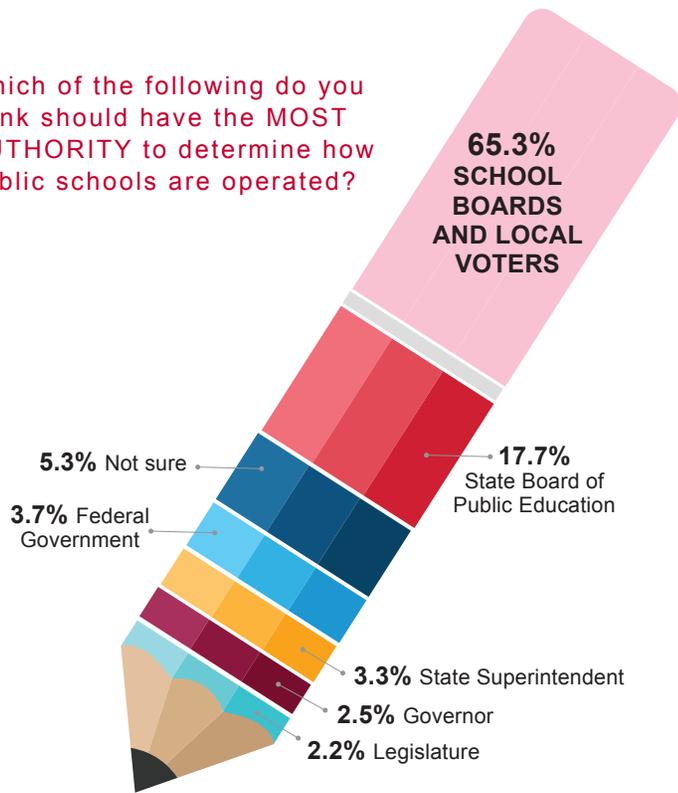
As reflected in the results of our recently-completed poll of Montana voters, Montanans recognize and appreciate the value of Montana's public schools. We are proud to have maintained that support through the pandemic and we are intent upon continuing to further build support and earn the trust of Montanans into the future.



WHAT GRADE, A through F, would you give public schools in:



Which of the following do you think should have the MOST AUTHORITY to determine how public schools are operated?



VOTERS AGREE - ELECTED TRUSTEES AND LOCAL VOTERS SHOULD BE MAKING KEY DECISIONS ABOUT CHILDREN

WORKING TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE THAT HAPPEN

Although Montana has not escaped the polarization over COVID-19, we see signs of a growing understanding and support for locally-controlled decisions and an increase in civility and decorum at school board meetings that is in line with the strong tradition of interdependent reliance that comes from Montana's rural traditions. We have full trust and confidence in the civility of constituents and the sincerity and good intentions of those providing input. We can afford no less, as our children are watching and are taking their cues from us in learning how to problem solve and work together.

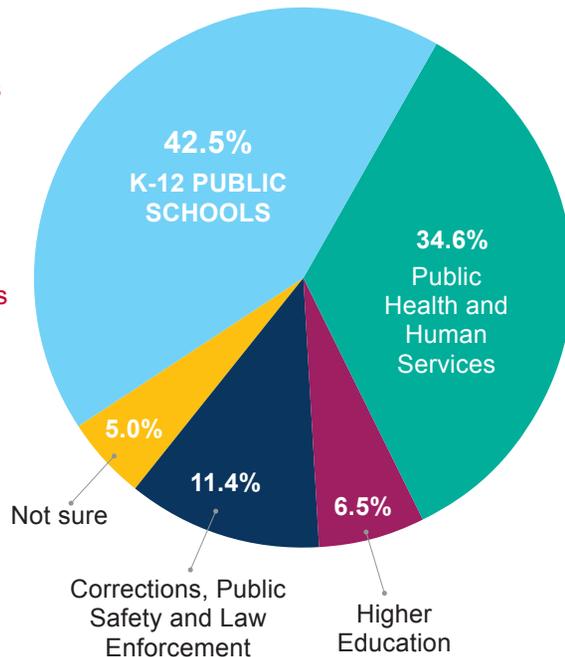
Montana's public schools prioritize safety for the 150,000+ children and their families we serve. Local school boards are also protective of the health and safety of over 22,000 dedicated educators and leaders who operate our public schools on a daily basis across Montana. Communities count on their public schools to provide a safe and effective learning environment. Constituents in each of our communities may differ regarding the specific methods by which we accomplish this important objective, but there is no debate over the goal of a safe and effective learning environment itself.

As we continue to manage our way through the 2021-2022 school year, we remain focused on prioritizing safety. There is no other line of business where employees are asked to congregate in large numbers and in close proximity over several hours each day where those served are not vaccinated. This unique circumstance comes with unique risks, which schools have successfully mitigated through a variety of public health measures.

Thanks to vigilance and commitment to public safety, COVID-19 case numbers in public schools are less than 40% of the overall rate of infection in Montana since the March 2020 onset of the pandemic.

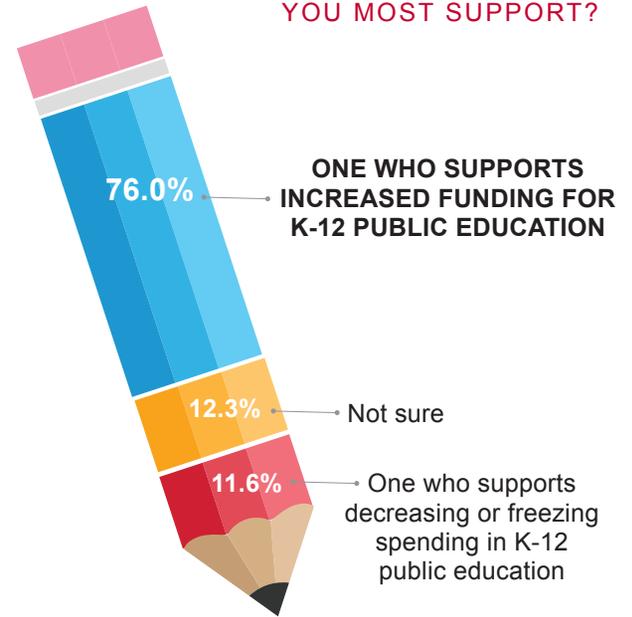
We cannot control COVID-19, but we can and have controlled the quality of our response to it. Montana's public schools are keeping communities safe and are providing safe and effective learning environments in each community in the state. We have done so through locally crafted solutions that meet the specific and unique needs of each community, working with students and families to ensure that opportunities to learn together are sustained.

When it comes to how state government spends your tax dollars, which of the following areas do you think should be the HIGHEST PRIORITY?





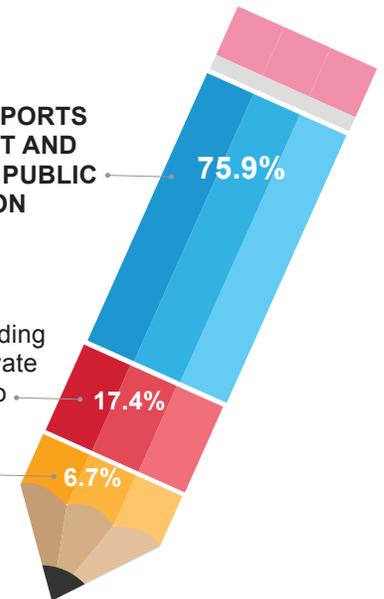
Please tell us which type of elected official YOU MOST SUPPORT?



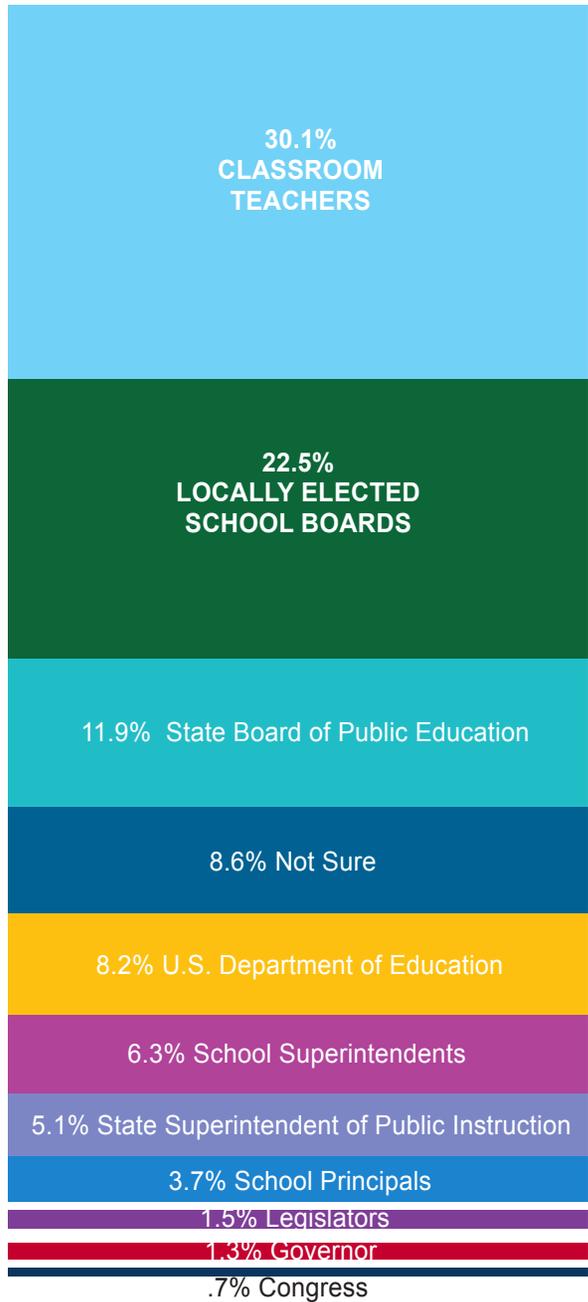
ONE WHO SUPPORTS IMPROVEMENT AND INNOVATION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

One who supports providing taxpayer funding of private school alternatives to the public schools

Not sure



Who among the following public employees and officials
DO YOU TRUST the most when it comes to deciding what is
best academically for students in Montana's public schools?



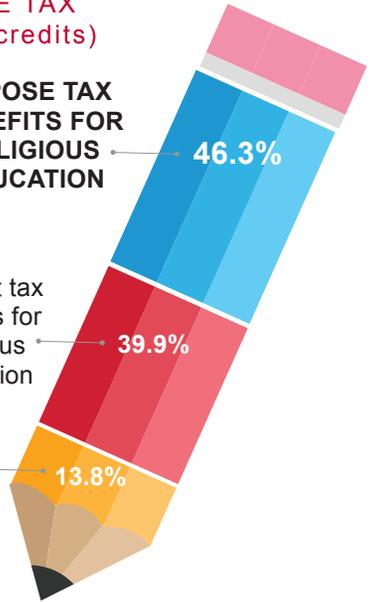


DO YOU SUPPORT OR OPPOSE TAX BENEFITS (e.g., vouchers, tax credits) for religious education?

OPPOSE TAX BENEFITS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Support tax benefits for religious education

Not sure

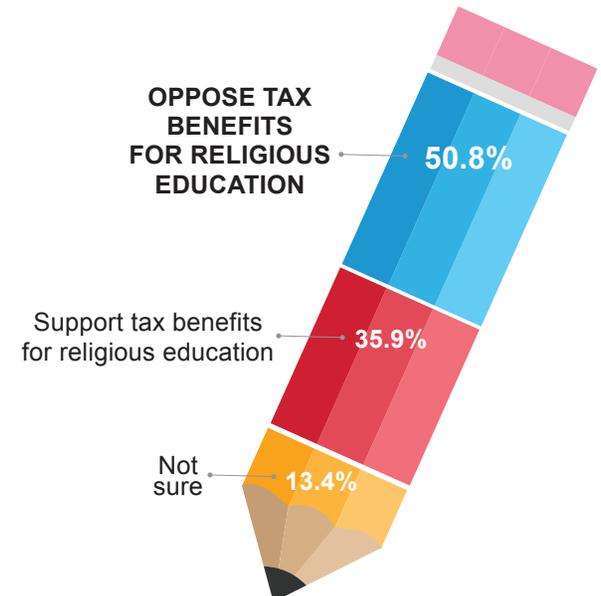


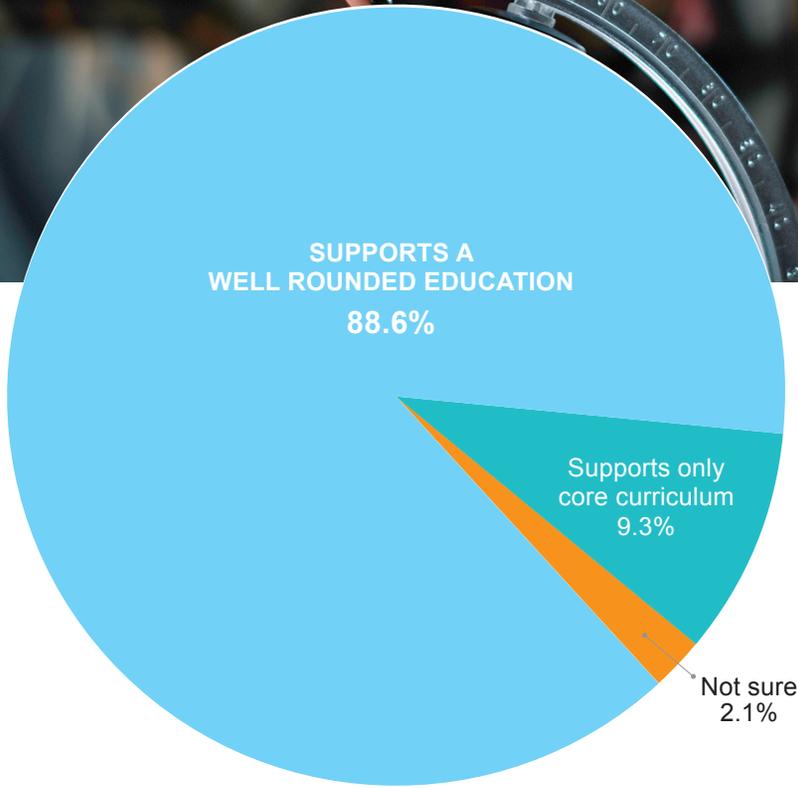
WOULD YOU SUPPORT OR OPPOSE TAX BENEFITS (e.g., vouchers, tax credits) for religious education if you knew that some tax benefits would be used to pay for education expenses other than Christianity (e.g., Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism)?

OPPOSE TAX BENEFITS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

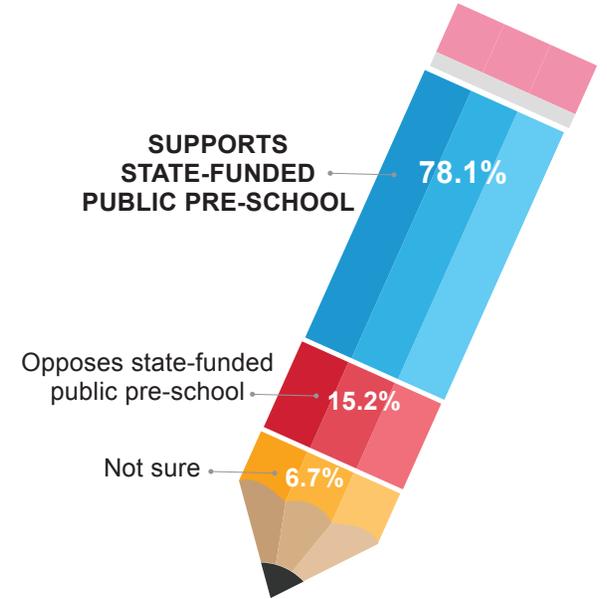
Support tax benefits for religious education

Not sure





DO YOU SUPPORT OR OPPOSE state-funded public pre-school?



IN YOUR OPINION, SHOULD PUBLIC SCHOOLS PROVIDE A WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION to all children, including items such as all-day kindergarten, gifted and talented, music, art, physical education, technology, and advanced placement courses or should public schools provide only core curriculum (math, English, science, social studies)?

PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE VITALLY IMPORTANT TO EVERY COMMUNITY IN MONTANA

- 1 Schools Sharpen Our Minds:** Our community schools provide safe, healthy centers where our children learn.
- 2 Schools Build Kind and Generous Hearts:** Our community schools are the heart of each community – the place where our towns gather, socialize, and work together to create a wonderful Montana life for our children and all who are fortunate to live here.
- 3 Schools Develop Brave Spirits:** Our community schools provide a launching point where Montanans rise up and collaborate to support the growth and development of children, supporting academics, the arts, activities, and athletics and other components of a well-rounded public education.
- 4 Schools Help Our Economies Thrive:** Our community schools drive the economic success of our communities.



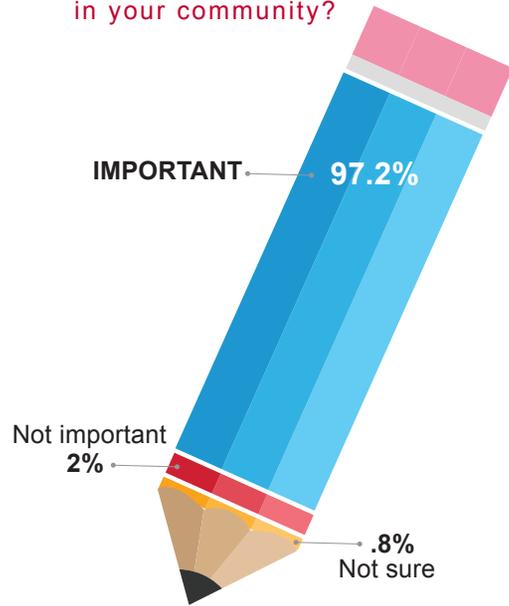


THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT - THE BENEFITS OF A STRONG PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IN EACH COMMUNITY

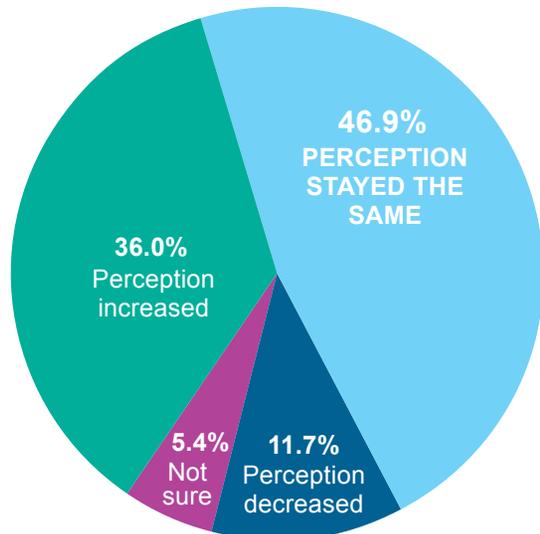
The presence of a vibrant public school in each community provides invaluable benefits. Everyone's lives are fundamentally enriched by their community public schools. In addition to developing the full potential of each child and creating a bright future for Montanans everywhere, quality schools provide tangential benefits for each community.

- **Montana's public schools employ over 22,000 full-time equivalent staff** who serve over 150,000 children in schools throughout Montana each day, developing students for a lifetime of success as Montana's future labor force. In addition to the direct benefits to children and their families, expenditures of each public school provide reverberating benefits to each community.
- The National Bureau of Economic Research has found that for every dollar spent on public schools in an area, **home values increased** by \$20. These benefits accrue to all homeowners in a community, regardless of whether they have children in the public school system.
- Direct expenditures by schools on local businesses for services, goods, and supplies necessary to operate the school are estimated at over **\$300 million annually**.
- **Wages paid to school employees are spent within the community**, becoming income for businesses who then spend that income on worker wages, services, and building and distributing profit.
- The perpetuation of this cycle provides benefits at five-fold the original expenditures attributable to the presence of a public school in the community. With total public school expenditures of approximately \$2 billion per year, that translates into **\$10 billion in total economic benefit to the people of Montana** or approximately \$10,000 for each Montanan. Public schools provide value added benefits while creating our future Montana leaders and entrepreneurs.

HOW IMPORTANT IS HAVING QUALITY K-12 public schools operating in your community?



THINKING ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT K-12 public schools are to your community, have your experiences over the last year increased or decreased your perception regarding the importance of having quality K-12 public schools operating in your community?



THE IMPORTANCE OF STRIVING FOR UNITY, COURAGE AND FOCUS DURING POLARIZED TIMES

There is little surprise that the characteristics of grit, determination, commitment, and independence are equally applicable when describing Montana's public schools, our children and Montanans alike. Montana's public schools are a natural reflection of and intrinsically linked to the communities they serve. Like it or not – *and we like it a lot* – we are in this together. There may only be seven people per square mile across the expanse of our great state, but when we care for one another, when we are loyal to a fault, and we lead rather than follow, we cannot help but succeed. We are better together than we are alone and the combined power of our efforts to serve children is greater than the sum of our individual parts when we pull together.

These shared commitments of Montanans and their public schools are what have sustained and will continue to nurture the endurance, resilience, unity, courage and focus that will allow us to prevail during these challenging times. While others elsewhere may choose to give into the temptation to fight with one another, Montanans will do better, standing tall for what we believe in but also leaving ourselves open to the positions of others who may have different points of view. We will find a way to respectfully disagree when necessary, recognizing and delivering on our debt of civility and respect for the individual dignity of each other. This is the Montana way and we can remain “The Last Best Place” if we honor and abide by this simple but powerful practice of decency.



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