

MISSOULA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MCPS Education Priorities

Adopted by the MCPS Board of Trustees for the 2027 Montana Legislative Session

The Board of Trustees of Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS) is the locally elected body entrusted by our community to govern our public schools. As Montana's legislators prepare for the upcoming session, the Board respectfully offers the following priorities that reflect the perspective, concerns, and lived experience of trustees who oversee the education of the students of Missoula County Public Schools.

These priorities are offered in the spirit of partnership. MCPS trustees stand ready to serve as a resource to legislators by sharing data, experience, and the on-the-ground realities of running Montana's public schools, as the Legislature considers education policy and funding decisions that directly affect our students, staff, and families.

1. Support Local Control

Montana's constitutional tradition of local control places the responsibility for our schools in the hands of trustees elected by, and directly accountable to, our own community. MCPS trustees ask legislators to preserve and strengthen that authority rather than shifting decision-making to Helena.

MCPS Trustees will SUPPORT legislation that:

- Preserves the constitutional authority of locally elected school boards to set curriculum, policy, and operational decisions suited to our community's needs.
- Provides funding and flexibility with minimal new administrative strings, allowing trustees to direct resources where local data shows they are needed most.
- Respects the collective bargaining process and the ability of local districts to negotiate directly with their employees.

MCPS Trustees will OPPOSE legislation that:

- Micromanages classroom, curricular, or personnel decisions that are properly the responsibility of locally elected trustees and locally hired educators.
- Imposes unfunded or underfunded mandates that override local decision-making without providing the resources to implement them.
- Erodes the authority of locally elected boards to govern their own districts in response to the specific needs of their students and families.

2. Public Dollars Require Public Accountability

Montana's public schools serve every child who walks through the door, regardless of ability, income, or circumstance. MCPS trustees are committed to defending that mission against efforts that divert public dollars and public accountability away from public schools.

MCPS Trustees will SUPPORT legislation that:

- Directs public education dollars to public schools that are accountable to locally elected boards and open to all students.

- Strengthens transparency and accountability standards for any program that receives public funding for educational purposes.
- Invests in strengthening, rather than replacing, Montana's existing public school system.

MCPS Trustees will OPPOSE legislation that:

- Creates or expands vouchers, education savings accounts, or tax-credit scholarship schemes that redirect public funding to private, religious, or unaccredited educational providers.
- Establishes parallel funding streams for private education that are not subject to the same accountability, transparency, admissions, and reporting requirements as public schools.
- Diverts limited state resources away from the public school system that Montana's constitution obligates the state to fund and maintain.

3. Support Adequate Funding for Public Education

Montana's constitution guarantees a “basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools.” MCPS trustees ask the Legislature to fully fund that guarantee by keeping pace with inflation, rising costs, and the real needs of Montana's students and educators.

MCPS Trustees will SUPPORT legislation that:

- Increases base per-student (ANB) funding at a rate that keeps pace with inflation and the actual cost of delivering education.
- Invests in competitive educator and staff compensation to recruit and retain qualified teachers and support staff in Montana classrooms.
- Fully funds special education, mental health services, and other mandated support services rather than shifting those costs onto local levies.
- Address school facility, safety, and infrastructure needs through sustainable, equitable state funding mechanisms.

MCPS Trustees will OPPOSE legislation that:

- Freezes or reduces per-student funding in real terms, effectively cutting resources available to Montana classrooms.
- Shifts and creates additional financial burdens onto local property taxpayers without a corresponding increase in state support.
- Do not fund mandated programs and services, forcing districts to divert general fund dollars to cover state and federal requirements.

The MCPS Board of Trustees welcomes the opportunity to discuss these priorities in greater depth and to serve as a resource throughout the legislative session.

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Date: [INSERT DATE OF BOARD ADOPTION]

Contact: [BOARD CHAIR NAME] • [EMAIL] • [PHONE]