

House Bill 549- Montana Public Charter Schools

- HB 549 defines “public charter schools” in Montana law and tasks the Board of Public Education (BPE) with establishing guidelines for charter school governance, approval, and evaluation.
- **Governance:** Public charter schools established under HB 549 will be administered and accountable to the Board of Public Education and a locally elected school board.
- **Approval Process:** The Board of Public Education reviewed 25 initial proposals and approved 19 to proceed. On February 28th, 2024, the BPE approved contracts with these newly established charter schools, unlocking \$6.5m in funding for approved schools and allowing most to commence operations July 1st.

MUS Engagement With Public Charter Schools

- 14 of the 19 approved charter applications support opportunities for collaboration with a Montana college or university.
- OCHE hosted a call between MUS and community college campuses on February 15, 2024, to share and coordinate regarding charter school opportunities and concerns.
- OCHE and the Montana Digital Academy are coordinating a follow-up call, incorporating K-12 district partners, for March 20, 2024.

Montana Public Charter School Executive Summaries

Billings Public Schools

Early College

Billings Public Schools (BPS) Community strives to inspire, educate, and empower students to be responsible and innovative global citizens to achieve their full potential. Based on community input in the spring of 2023, Superintendent Dr. Garcia identified four priority areas of concern for our stakeholders. One priority was the need to *Increase College, Career and Military Opportunities* for our students. While BPS has increased Dual Credit and Advanced Placement (AP) opportunities over the past several years, not all students are utilizing these opportunities

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or are aware of how earning college credit in high school may benefit them.

The Early College School concept gained momentum in the U.S. with the 2002 Early College High School Initiative. Today there are over 400 Early College Schools in our country, offering students the opportunity to earn a minimum of 12 college credits while most prioritize the goal of students earning both a high school diploma and an associate degree upon graduation. The rising cost of attending college partnered with the increased need for a workforce with post-secondary education beyond a high school diploma make this a critical time to expand opportunities for our students.

Billings Opportunity School

The Billings Public Schools Community has a mission to inspire, educate, and empower students to become responsible and innovative global citizens who reach their full potential. Their commitment to these core principles places a strong focus on education and empowering students, emphasizing the value of earning a high school diploma. This mission aims to instill in students a sense of inspiration and determination to achieve their graduation goals. The Billings Opportunity School (BOS) plays a vital role in this mission by providing an alternative environment for at-risk students within the Billings Public School system who may not graduate through traditional means. The BOS is dedicated to preparing these students for life after graduation, whether they choose to continue their education, enter the workforce, or serve in the military. The BOS's commitment to nurturing and refining students' educational experiences ensures they are well-prepared for success in the future. The community's celebration of these students' remarkable achievements reflects their belief in the power of resilience and determination.

Corvallis Public Schools

Corvallis Distance Learning Center

The Corvallis Distance Learning Charter's (CDLC) educational program is built on the understanding that there is an established need for a charter school in our community serving students with online platforms and distance learning options. The CDLC meets the needs of all its students by offering an almost infinite number of software program options for distance learning. Also, giving families options for part distance learning and part on campus instruction as an additional flexibility. The District has already instituted a distance learning program in the 23-24 school year that has engaged a significant part of our community that has traditionally shied away from public education. In the past two months we have enrolled 114 students that were separated from our school community and are now benefiting from a distance learning platform that will be the foundation of our Distance Learning Charter.*

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East Helena Public Schools

East Helena 227 Academy

The East Helena 227 Academy will be an alternative to traditional school programming for students of promise and students at risk. There has long been a need in our community for an alternative path to success for a select subset of students. The EHPS Board of Trustees recognizes this need and has set goals in its strategic plan to meet the needs of all students through the services we provide. The strategic plan specifically envisions charter school(s) in East Helena in the near future.

This charter school application will create opportunities to fully develop and create an alternative school for East Helena 6th - 12th grade students. The new school will provide a safe and nurturing environment for all students to succeed and thrive. The approach to instruction will be individualized in nature and allow for transformational learning credit as well as work credit for internships and workplace learning. The schedule will be flexible and adjusted according to student need and competencies, and there will be remote and hybrid learning options for students to utilize as needed. *

Frenchtown High School

In alignment with the current initiatives of the Montana OPI and Legislature, Bronc Fast Track Public Charter School aims to bridge the gap between high school and post-secondary education by offering students the opportunity to earn college credits during their high school years. By integrating post-secondary coursework into our curriculum, we offer students the opportunity to earn up to 30 college credits, which is the equivalent of their first year of college. We strive to equip students with a head start in their academic pursuits, reducing the financial burden and time constraints associated with obtaining a college degree. Through this initiative, we seek to foster a culture of academic excellence and empowerment, preparing a diverse community of students for successful futures in college and beyond.

Hamilton Public Schools

The Bitterroot Polytech 's purpose is to create student success stories through innovation in education by providing individualized, proficiency-based, and career-directed graduation pathways. The goals of the Bitterroot Polytech are to: (1) Provide every student with an Individual Success Plan; (2) Ensure that students graduate with a sound foundation in a rigorous academic core through a proficiency-based model of learning; and (3) Facilitate student connection with in-demand and personally rewarding career opportunities upon graduation. The Bitterroot Polytech 's mission, vision, and goals will dramatically improve Hamilton students' options and capabilities for reaching their fullest educational potential in a way that the current system does not afford them.

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Helena Public Schools

Project for Alternative Learning

The HPSD Project for Alternative Learning (PAL) Charter School will provide personalized learning experiences in which staff, students and community members work in collaboration to create a rich, engaging learning experience, build vital community partnerships, and support students in an intellectually diverse, active learning community.

Current PAL students' mission statement: "This is our school, a place of knowledge, tolerance, respect and understanding. We welcome the people who want to be here, and we invite them to share in our unique learning community. We are unique individuals and allow individuals to be unique. We work together not only to listen, but to hear what each other has to say and to respect and learn from our differences."

The HPSD PAL Charter School will engage students in a collaborative learning environment with staff and community members to provide engaging learning and teaching experiences, to contribute to significant increases in student retention and graduation rates, and to meet the diverse academic needs of our students. We hope to engage with the 120 students and their families seeking an alternative educational option for their students, providing families choice and students personalized educational experiences.

Jefferson County Public Schools

Jefferson Academy

Jefferson Academy will provide blended proficiency-based educational service for the targeted groups. Our mission is to provide family-focused behavioral health treatment and the best possible education for at-risk Jefferson County students, founded on the principles of an actively caring and trauma-sensitive culture, so that students can realize their full potential and choose their path in life, while also being the school of choice and the heart of the communities we serve.

Missoula County Public Schools

TEACH Academy

The TEACH Academy is an innovative public education approach that provides a flexible approach to demonstrating mastery for our youngest learners while also seeking solutions to the teacher shortage plaguing our state. TEACH Academy will be an interdisciplinary arts integrated school that provides opportunities for rising and preservice educators to gain field experience. By tackling these two issues in one charter school, we believe the results will be a passionate learning community that fosters creative and educational excellence for learners of all ages.

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Connect

MCPS is proposing the Connect Academy Charter School to provide a flexible and innovative virtual 6-12 grade school for Montana residents. By providing an accredited online public-school option, students can access a wider range of courses and instructors than may be available at a single traditional school. The online format allows for innovative teaching methods and individualized support for each student. Students will have access to a variety of education pathways including AP, CTE Courses, Work Based Learning opportunities, and credit recovery. This charter has set the goal to be a fully competency-based program by year 5.

Great Falls Public Schools

Great Falls Core Elementary School

We propose to create a public charter school to engage a continuum of learners in a “learning exchange”. Currently forty-four percent of our elementary teachers are in the first three years of their career. While these teachers bring valuable energy, enthusiasm, and excellent ideas; they have not yet developed the full repertoire of skills and competencies that more experienced teachers possess. The Core school will build classrooms staffed with the most innovative, collaborative, and experienced teachers in our district. These teachers will assume leadership roles within the school and collaborate to design and deliver timely, adaptive instruction that will serve as a model to pre-service teachers. Instruction will involve the key elements necessary for high student achievement: evidence-based math and literacy practices, knowledge building, cross-curricular connections, authentic problem-solving, hands-on experiential learning opportunities, and student discourse.

The next layer of the learning exchange focuses on pre-service teachers. We propose to “grow our own” teachers, beginning late in high school or early in their college career. Key to this is employing college students as paraeducators who will be immersed in the school's day-to-day operations, allowing them to observe, learn, and gain practical experience while completing their degree in Elementary Education. By extending the time they spend in a school setting with kids to three full years, we better equip them to assume responsibility for their own classroom when the time comes. The complexity of classroom teaching has increased in the past twenty years. We predict this extended, immersive experience will prepare our new teachers more fully, lead to increased teacher retention and reduce teacher burnout in the first years of teaching. We have worked to develop a new partnership with University of Montana Western to provide undergraduate credit in a sprint model, allowing students to attain a teaching degree in three years’ time. We are also continuing a longstanding partnership with Great Falls College MSU to provide additional local options for undergraduate coursework. Pre-service teachers would observe, learn, plan and practice in all areas of the school while they complete coursework and acquire skills. Many of their college courses will be taught by the Core school teachers, who will also be employed as adjunct faculty with our college partners.

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Kalispell Public Schools

PACE Academy

Our goal is to create a public charter high school that allows greater flexibility and more connections to career and post-secondary opportunities for students. Some students benefit from traditional education, but others do not. These students often thrive when given guided and self-directed learning opportunities and the chance to explore an internship or career area. The path to a high school diploma should not be governed by a seven-period day or 180 day school year. It can be personalized and relevant while preparing students for their next journey. Our proposal for the Flathead PACE Academy captures these elements and aligns with the requirements of Montana's Public Charter Schools.

Rising Wolf Academy

The program is modeled after the University of Montana Western Experience One program and will provide for Individual Learning Plans for each student. The RWA model would provide one class at a time in a 2.5-hour block for 24 school days. In addition to the one course at a time model, RWA would provide different academic year start and end dates to provide for most flexibility in supporting students to high school graduation. The individual plans could consist of Work-Based Learning as well as internships. Students could also participate in career exploration and workforce training. *

Bozeman Public Schools

Bridger Academy

Bridger Academy was an already existing Charter School when the 2023 legislation was passed. It has existed since 2016, but the 2024 proposal offers an opportunity for the program to build on its existence. The new program will implement a competency-based pathway to graduation. It will also ensure stronger connections to the workforce through new assessment and accountability measures. Finally, the Academy will build upon the strong climate and culture already established in the 2016 Charter. There are no full-time students at the Academy and students may join for part of the day from Bozeman or Gallatin High School. *

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