

RECAP OF THE MEETINGS OF "THE CONSTITUTIONAL PLAYERS" IN 2022 AND SUMMARY OF RELATED LEGISLATION IN THE 2023 SESSION

EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE
PAD MCCrackEN - SEPTEMBER 2023

BACKGROUND

In June and September 2022, the Education Interim Committee and the Education Interim Budget Committee jointly convened meetings of the "Constitutional Players" – those entities with authority to govern education under the Montana Constitution:

- The Legislature – represented by members of the two interim committees
- The Governor – represented by two policy advisors in education and workforce
- The Board of Public Education – represented by several members and the executive director
- The Board of Regents of Higher Education – represented by several members and the Commissioner of Higher Education
- The Superintendent of Public Instruction – represented by Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, and Chief Operating Officer
- Local School Boards – represented by the board officers and executive director of the Montana School Boards Association

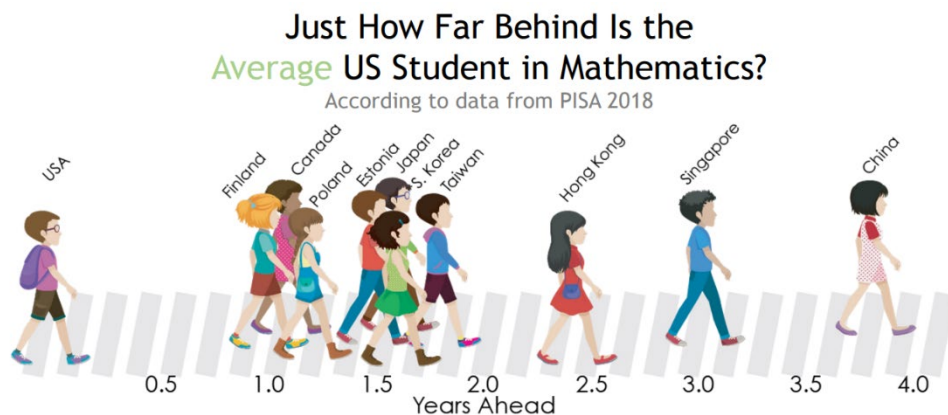
The meetings of 30+ state and local policymakers were co-facilitated by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) and the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) based on those organizations' work in analyzing commonalities in high-performing education systems around the world. More info on the meetings can be found [here](#) (select "Studies/Topics" tab and see entries for June 6, 2022, and September 13, 2022 under heading "School Innovation").



A CASE FOR CHANGE AND LESSONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

A significant portion of the first meeting was spent focusing on the question: "Is there a Case for Change to the Montana Education System?" Jason Dougal, NCEE President, offered a critique of the current "factory model" of education predominant in the United States and acknowledged that this model had been highly successful and a driving force in the prosperity enjoyed by many Americans, for a while. But the existing system has not evolved and has been doing a progressively worse job of preparing Americans for the jobs and economy of today and more importantly, tomorrow. Evidence presented by Dougal making this case for change and urgency behind it included:

- Stagnant PISA scores with other countries passing the U.S. (see example to the right of one of Dougal's slides)
- Stagnant achievement on NAEP spanning decades
- Increasing wealth disparity and decreasing economic mobility
- With increased automation, reduced demand for the middle-skill occupations our system was designed to produce large quantities of workers for
- Increased demand for high-skill occupations
- 20% of Montana's workforce will retire in the next decade



Dougal was then joined by Michelle Exstrom, Director of NCSL's Education Program, to share what they had learned through NCSL's International Education Study Group. Two iterations of this group have dived deeply into high-performing education systems around the world. What they have found is not identical approaches, but foundational commonalities. One of these common elements is "Coherent and Aligned Governance."

The gathering of the "Constitutional Players" was in essence an effort toward this aligned governance. At the end of that first day-long meeting in June, there was a general consensus that there was indeed a case for changing Montana's education system and several topics of interest had begun to emerge.

The second gathering took place in September and was spent unpacking these topics, and ultimately Montana's constitutional education entities determined four areas of strategic focus for each entity to work on within their respective "lanes" of constitutional authority:

1. Proficiency-based Education
2. Transforming the Teaching Profession and Retaining Effective Teachers
3. Career and Technical Education
4. Early Childhood Education

It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person. Equality of educational opportunity is guaranteed to each person of the state.

Article X, Section 1, Montana Constitution

2023 LEGISLATION RELATED TO THE FOUR AREAS OF STRATEGIC FOCUS

This section will list and briefly describe efforts made by the 2023 Montana Legislature that align with those four areas.¹

PROFICIENCY-BASED EDUCATION

HB 946 enhances the reporting on the Transformational Learning Grant Program.

SB 8 provides statutory definitions of both "proficiency" and "proficiency-based learning" and increases oversight of the Transformational Learning Grant Program by the Board of Public Education.

TRANSFORMING THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Legislative efforts in this arena were focused on improving recruitment and retention of educators amidst a nationwide concern of a teacher shortage.

HB 117 was proposed with the support of the Teachers' Retirement System and enhances the ability and desirability for retired teachers to return to teaching for a limited number of years.

HB 332 provides a \$40 million incentive for school districts to come together to form a large health trust in order to lower the costs of providing employee health benefits.

HB 403 revises the licensure fee structure for teachers to more closely align with those of other professions.

HB 588 enhances the TEACH Act which provides an incentive for school districts to increase teacher starting salaries.

HB 833 establishes and provides funding for a teacher residency program.

SB 70 was requested by the Education Interim Committee and opens up eligibility for the Quality Educator Loan Assistance Program to teachers in rural and special schools regardless of a teacher's content area.

¹ While this summary is focused on legislative efforts, it should be acknowledged that the other constitutional entities have also been busy moving the needle. Particularly noteworthy is the work of the Office of Public Instruction and Board of Public Education, and numerous partners, in revising the following chapters in Title 10 of the Administrative Rules of Montana: Chapter 55 – Standards of Accreditation, Chapter 57 – Teacher Licensure, and Chapter 58 – Professional Educator Preparation Program Standards.

SB 373 creates an alternative teacher credentialing pathway that does not require completion of a traditional teacher preparation program.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

CTE has been an ongoing focus of the Legislature for over a decade.

HB 257 provides enhancements to the Advanced Opportunity program which provides school districts with supplemental CTE funding and with funding to reduce out-of-pocket costs of students and their families in pursuing a host of opportunities "designed to advance each qualifying pupil's opportunity for postsecondary career and educational success."

HB 382 increases state support and accountability for Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) such as FFA, DECA, and SkillsUSA.

HB 458 authorizes high schools to utilize career coaches to support students in exploring postsecondary career options.

HB 949 creates an Education and Workforce Data Governing Board empowered to create policy for the sharing of education and workforce data between the Office of Public Instruction, the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, and the Department of Labor and Industry.

SB 444 improves access to work-based learning opportunities for students by clarifying certain labor laws.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

For the first time, Montana enacted policy providing for the targeted and voluntary education of 4-year-olds through public schools.

HB 352 establishes and provides funding for early literacy interventions. The interventions include a home-based program, a school-based program, and a summer "jumpstart" program. All are voluntary.