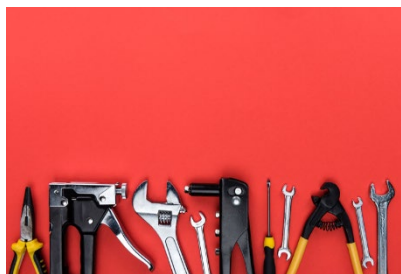


TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: WHAT'S IN MONTANA'S TOOLBOX?

EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE
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Like many states, Montana has been struggling with recruiting and then retaining teachers (and other school personnel) for a number of years. The pandemic exacerbated the problem. The Montana Legislature has enacted several programs over the years to try and address the problem. This short brief provides a basic inventory of the existing programs.

TEACHER RESIDENCY

The 2023 Legislature enacted [HB 833](#) (Barker) to create a teacher residency program administered by the Office of Public Instruction (OPI). The program mirrors an existing program started by OPI using federal ESSER dollars. It involves a partnership between school districts and professional educator preparation programs to provide tuition support, housing, a stipend, and mentorship for students willing to complete their teacher preparation program through a year-long, practice-based learning experience. The program hopes to have 70 teachers placed in FY 25 and eventually build to 120 teachers. The hope is that teachers in the residency program will be better prepared for the classroom and more likely to remain in the profession, and especially in rural schools. (\$2 million appropriation in FY 25; not yet codified in the MCA)

HB 332 AND A POTENTIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT HEALTH INSURANCE TRUST

Employee benefits can be a factor in both recruitment and retention and the Montana Legislature has debated how to address school employee health benefits for two decades. The 2023 Legislature enacted [HB 332](#) (Bedey) to provide a \$40 million incentive for school districts to come together and form a large health insurance trust to lower costs and provide better and more consistent benefits among districts. (Not yet codified; see [summary document](#) for more info)

TEACH ACT - INCREASING STARTING SALARIES

The 2021 Legislature enacted this program that provides incentives for school districts to increase starting teacher salaries. Montana ranks at or near the bottom each year in starting teacher pay among the states. Roughly 100 school districts are benefitting from the program, generating additional Quality Educator Payments (\$3,500) on behalf of 500 early career teachers. (Cost of \$1.8 million in FY 24 through the funding formula; see [20-9-324, MCA](#) for more details)

GROW YOUR OWN

The 2021 Legislature enacted this program to strengthen the teacher workforce pipeline in rural Montana through partnerships between high schools and postsecondary institutions to provide dual credit opportunities, place-based teacher prep, and scholarships. (There was no appropriation for this program for the 2025 biennium; the program terminates June 30, 2027; see [20-4-601, MCA](#) for more details)

QUALITY EDUCATOR LOAN ASSISTANCE

This program was enacted during the Special Session of May 2007 but has been tweaked several times in recent sessions. This program provides \$3,000, \$4,000, and \$5,000 loan assistance payments in the first three years of a teacher's career if that teacher teaches in an "impacted school" (see sidebar) and has a student loan. In the 2023 Session, [SB 70](#) (O'Brien) streamlined the eligibility requirements to allow any teacher in an impacted school regardless of content area. In FY 23, this program provided a total of \$420K to 111 teachers. (The program was not funded during the 2019 biennium. Through contingency language in HB 2, the appropriation for this program is \$603K in FY 24 and \$666K in FY 25; see [Title 20, chapter 4, part 5, MCA](#) for more details)

STIPENDS FOR NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATIONS

This program provides stipends for teachers who have earned certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, a rigorous, multi-year process. The program has been in existence since 2001 but was modified significantly in 2017 to change from a one-time stipend to an annual stipend. The stipend ranges from \$500 to \$2,500 depending on whether the school is a high-poverty school or an "impacted school" (see sidebar) and on how much of a matching stipend the employing school district provides.

Approximately 200 Montana teachers benefit from this program which is seen as a retention tool for high-performing teachers. (\$180K/year appropriation in HB 2; see [20-4-134, MCA](#) for more details)

MENTORSHIP AND INDUCTION

While not a legislative enactment, mentorship and induction programs for new teachers are viewed as an important retention tool and are a requirement placed on school districts through the Standards of Accreditation adopted by the Board of Public Education. These requirements were recently revised to emphasize mentorship strategies that are research-based. (See [ARM 10.55.723](#) for more details)

The loan assistance and NBC stipend programs utilize the term "impacted school" in targeting eligibility or providing additional funding. Impacted school is defined at 20-4-502, MCA, as:

- (a) a special education cooperative;
- (b) the Montana school for the deaf and blind, as described in 20-8-101;
- (c) the Montana youth challenge program, as established in 10-1-1401;
- (d) a correctional facility, as defined in 41-5-103;
- (e) a public school located on an Indian reservation; and
- (f) a public school that, driving at a reasonable speed for the road surface, is located more than 20 minutes from a Montana city with a population greater than 15,000 based on the most recent federal decennial census.