



The Montana Office Of
Public Instruction

2025-26

Annual Report



opi.mt.gov

Introduction from the Superintendent

Pursuant to [§ 2-12-105, MCA](#), the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) submits this Annual Performance Report to provide an update on the agency’s progress toward the goals and outcomes established in its 2025 Annual Plan. The Annual Plan serves as a roadmap for OPI’s work and connects agency initiatives to the broader mission of supporting Montana’s students, families, educators, and schools.

This report is organized around the nine goals outlined in the 2025 Annual Plan, covering agency operations, student and school supports, academic and career readiness, educator effectiveness, fiscal stewardship, and data modernization. Each section provides an update on actions taken, progress toward identified outcomes, accomplishments during the reporting period, and work that remains ongoing.



Susie Hedalen
Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction

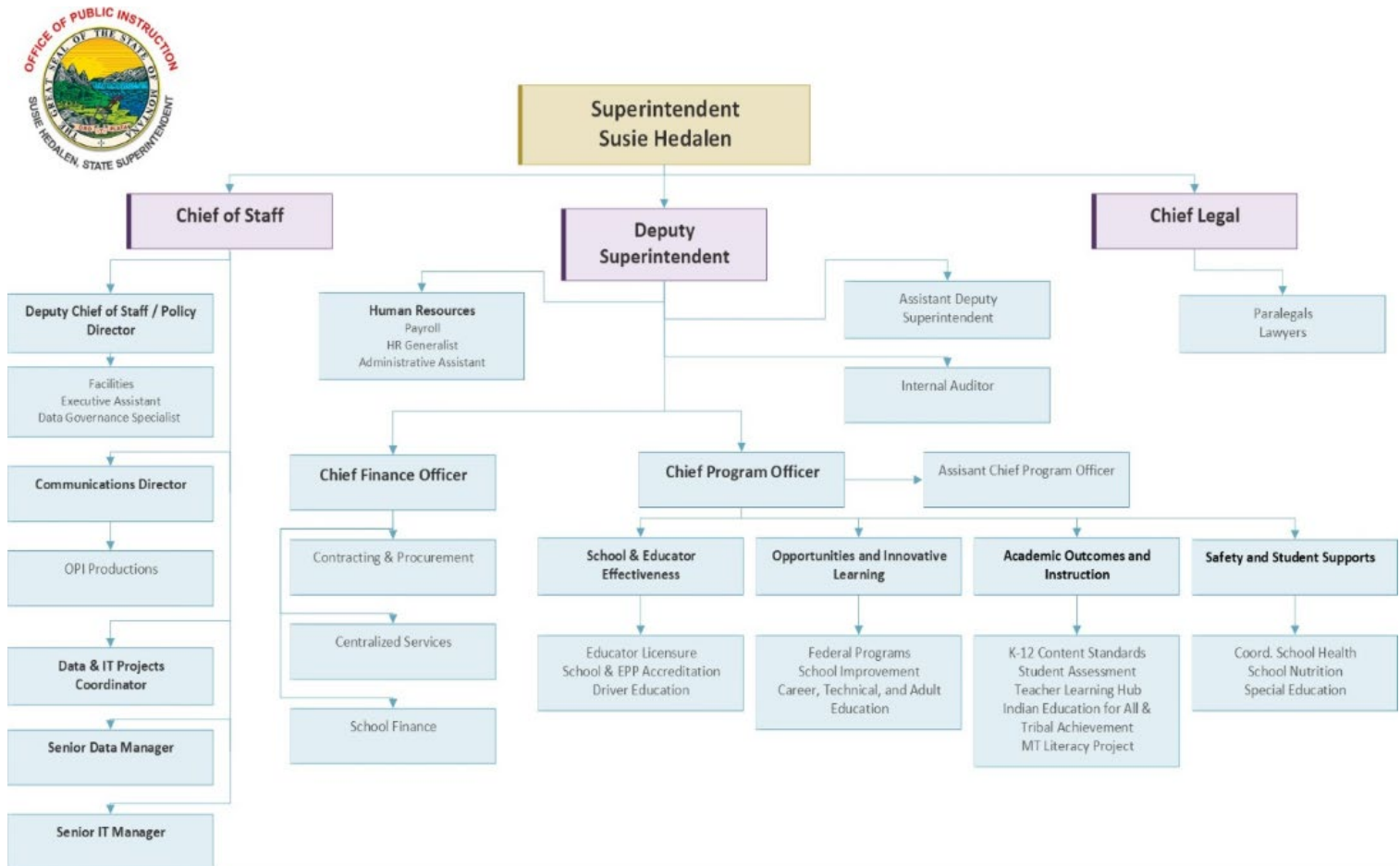
Contents

Agency Structure & Functions:	4
Agency Organization Chart:	4
Functions of Divisions:	4
Superintendent’s Office.....	5
Goal 1:	5
Goal 2:	7
Goal 3:	8
Program Division.....	10
Safety & Student Supports.....	10
Goal 4:	10
Opportunities & Innovative Learning.....	12

Goal 5:	12
Academic Outcomes & Instruction.....	13
Goal 6:	13
School & Educator Effectiveness	15
Goal 7:	15
Finance Division.....	17
Goal 8	17
Information Technology & Data Division	19
Goal 9:	19

Agency Structure & Functions:

Agency Organization Chart:



Functions of Divisions:

- The Program Division** administers state and federal education programs that support student achievement, educator effectiveness, school improvement, student safety and well-being and more. The division provides leadership, technical assistance, and resources in areas including academic standards and instruction, assessment, special education, federal programs, school nutrition, Indian Education for All, career and technical education, educator licensure and preparation, accreditation, professional learning, and college and career readiness.
- The Finance Division** oversees the fiscal and centralized support functions of the agency and provides financial guidance and assistance to Montana schools and districts. Responsibilities include school finance and funding distributions, district

budgeting and financial reporting, agency budgeting and accounting, grants management, contracting and procurement, audit functions, and other centralized services necessary to support OPI operations and ensure responsible stewardship of state and federal resources.

- **The Information Technology and Data Division** provides the technology, systems, and data infrastructure that support OPI programs, schools, districts, policymakers, and the public. The division manages agency technology services and applications, statewide education data collection and reporting, data governance and analysis, and key systems. The division also supports data requests, research, public reporting, system modernization, and the secure and effective use of education data.
- **The Superintendent's Office** provides executive leadership and direction for the agency and oversees OPI's administration and strategic priorities. The office includes executive leadership, agency operations, communications and public engagement, legislative and policy affairs, and legal services. The Superintendent's Office also coordinates work across divisions, supports relationships with the Legislature and other state and education partners, oversees agency administrators, and ensures OPI's work remains aligned with the Superintendent's priorities and responsibilities under state and federal law.

Superintendent's Office

Goal 1: Modernize agency structure and operations to improve effectiveness, accountability, and service delivery.

Actions: Complete a comprehensive Remote & Office Workplace Study (ROWS) to assess how agency structure, staffing models, and physical workspace support collaboration, fiscal responsibility, and responsiveness to schools. Implement an internal reorganization aligned to agency priorities, division functions, and strategic initiatives. This work includes:

- Establishing a committee of OPI staff with the appropriate finance, HR, technology, and facilities experience.
- Inventorying workspace and resources in the 1227 and 1300 buildings.
- Determining potential office space needs and availability outside of Helena.
- Reviewing telework agreements and policies.
- Reviewing jobs codes for appropriate alignment with workstations and telework agreements.
- Existing and needed workstation resources such as technology, equipment, and furniture.

Outcomes:

- Completion of the ROWS and implementation of recommended structural improvements.
- Updated telework agreements and clarified expectations for agency staff.
- Improved internal coordination and responsiveness to schools and stakeholders.

Status: Achieved

OPI completed the comprehensive Remote & Office Workplace Study (ROWS) and implemented structural, policy, and operational changes identified through the review. The work focused on ensuring agency staffing, workplace policies, technology resources, and physical office space better support collaboration, accountability, fiscal responsibility, and service to Montana schools. This directly addressed the Annual Plan's goal of completing the ROWS study and implementing recommended structural improvements.

Key Accomplishments:

- Telework and workplace policies: OPI updated and fully implemented telework policies, including a requirement that employees located near an OPI office work in the office a minimum of two days per week. Telework agreements for 100% of staff were reviewed, updated, and renewed to provide clearer and more consistent expectations.
- Travel policies: Agency travel policies and procedures were reviewed, updated, and fully implemented alongside the broader workplace policy changes.
- Position and staffing alignment: Job codes and position descriptions were reviewed and updated, with particular focus on Information Technology and Data positions to better align positions with agency needs, responsibilities, and workplace expectations.
- Technology and resource management: OPI completed an updated inventory of computers and other technology resources and implemented a new policy for technology resource management and tracking, strengthening accountability for agency assets.
- Office space modernization: OPI completed a comprehensive update of office layouts and floor plans to better align physical workspace with the agency's updated organizational structure. As a result of the workplace changes, more OPI employees are regularly working from agency offices.
- Responsiveness and coordination: OPI also established new mechanisms to gather feedback and identify needs from schools, educators, and communities, including a new website portal. While feedback regarding improved responsiveness is currently anecdotal, OPI has received positive feedback indicating that coordination and responsiveness have improved significantly. OPI will continue tracking feedback to better measure these improvements over time.

Together, these changes fulfilled the primary objectives of the ROWS initiative by modernizing workplace expectations, improving management of agency resources, aligning staffing and physical space with OPI's organizational structure, and strengthening coordination across the agency.

Goal 2: Strengthen transparency, accountability, and cross-agency alignment

Actions:

- Review and modernize internal policies, procedures, and administrative rules to improve clarity, consistency, and public transparency.
- Align executive oversight, division work plans, and performance measures with the Superintendent's Strategic Initiatives.
- Strengthen coordination with the Board of Public Education, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, Montana University System, and other state agencies to ensure coherent education policy and implementation.

Outcomes:

- Clear alignment between strategic priorities, annual plan goals, and division-level initiatives.
- Reduced duplication of effort across agencies and improved policy coherence.
- Improved transparency for policymakers and the public regarding agency operations and decision-making.

Status: **Substantially Achieved**

OPI has strengthened alignment both within the agency and across Montana's education system by connecting the Superintendent's strategic priorities to division and unit-level work and increasing coordination with the Board of Public Education (BPE), Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE), Montana University System (MUS), and other state partners. These efforts have created clearer accountability for agency priorities while improving coordination on initiatives that span K–12, postsecondary education, and workforce readiness.

Key Accomplishments:

- **Internal Strategic Alignment:** OPI aligned the Superintendent's strategic initiatives and Annual Plan with individual division and unit goals. Teams can more clearly connect their work, projects, and performance measures to agency-wide priorities, while executive leadership has greater visibility into progress and accountability across divisions.
- **Alignment with the Board of Public Education:** OPI worked closely with BPE to identify areas where the agencies' respective goals and initiatives overlap and to improve coordination of policy and implementation. This includes joint work to strengthen tribal consultation and role of Montana Advisory Council Indian

Education (MACIE), modernize accreditation and intensive assistance, creating clearer expectations and a stronger support structure for schools.

- K–12 and Postsecondary Alignment: OPI’s strategic priorities around college, career, and life readiness closely align with the work of OCHE and MUS. OPI has continued collaboration around dual credit, career pathways, CTE, work-based learning, and stronger connections between high school coursework and postsecondary expectations.
- Future Ready and Workforce Alignment: Through implementation of the STARS Act and Montana Future Ready initiatives, OPI has worked with OCHE, MUS, the Department of Labor and Industry, and other partners to better connect K–12 education with postsecondary education, credentials, work-based learning, and Montana workforce needs.
- Improved Transparency and Accountability: By establishing clearer connections between strategic initiatives, Annual Plan goals, and division-level work, OPI has strengthened its ability to communicate agency priorities and progress to policymakers, schools, and the public and to identify areas where cross-agency coordination can reduce duplication.

Together, these efforts have established a clearer line of alignment from statewide education priorities to agency goals, division and unit work, and cross-agency initiatives, strengthening accountability while supporting more coordinated education policy and implementation across Montana.

Goal 3: Improve communication and support for schools and communities

Actions:

- Expand and modernize agency communications, including newsletters, guidance documents, and digital resources.
- Increase engagement with educators, school leaders, families, and community partners through statewide meetings and listening sessions.
- Use feedback from the field to inform Program Division priorities and resource development.

Outcomes:

- Improved clarity and consistency of agency communications.
- Increased awareness of OPI guidance, programs, and expectations.
- Stronger alignment between agency support and school-identified needs.
- Develop a revamped newsletter and communications plan for schools
- Launch a new website with updates resources

Status: **Substantially Achieved**

OPI significantly expanded and modernized its communication with schools, policymakers, families, and communities during the reporting period. The agency

established more consistent communication channels, launched a redesigned website, increased in-person engagement with school leaders, and strengthened collaboration with education organizations to ensure guidance is both accessible and responsive to needs identified in the field. The agency will continue measuring engagement and feedback while updating website resources and refining communications based on the needs identified by Montana schools and communities.

Key Accomplishments:

- **Relaunched School Communications:** OPI established a more consistent communication schedule for schools, including a weekly administrator newsletter providing timely agency updates and a monthly statewide newsletter (The Current) highlighting broader OPI programs, resources, deadlines, and opportunities.
- **Restored Legislative Communications:** OPI relaunched its legislator newsletter (The Headwaters) to provide lawmakers with regular updates on agency initiatives, implementation activities, resources, and issues affecting Montana schools.
- **Launched a New OPI Website:** In June 2026, OPI launched a redesigned agency website with an enhanced search function and improved navigation to make information and resources easier to locate.
- **Created New Feedback Tools:** The redesigned website includes navigation and feedback tools that allow users to provide input on their experience and identify information or resources that are difficult to locate. OPI is using this feedback to continue improving website organization and effectiveness.
- **Improved Access to Guidance and Resources:** OPI increased efforts to make agency guidance more visible and accessible through newsletters, the website, and direct communication with schools. Work remains ongoing to review and update older website content and ensure resources across OPI program areas are current and easy to locate.
- **Developed Guidance with School Partners:** OPI increased collaboration with statewide education organizations when developing and communicating guidance. For example, OPI worked with the Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) on implementation materials related to HB 745 and background-check requirements, including guidance and scenario-based resources designed to help districts understand how the new requirements apply in practice.
- **Expanded In-Person Engagement:** OPI increased its presence in communities across Montana, including attending 70 of 72 regional MASS meetings in person and increasing agency participation at meetings, conferences, and other education events throughout the state. These opportunities allow OPI to provide information directly while hearing from school leaders about implementation challenges and emerging needs.
- **Established a Continuous Feedback Approach:** Feedback received through regional meetings, statewide events, direct school communication, and the new website portal is increasingly being used to identify where additional guidance, technical assistance, or resources are needed.

Program Division

Safety & Student Supports

Goal 4: Create safe schools and healthy students through prevention, preparedness, and strong partnerships.

Actions:

- Develop and publish statewide frameworks and guidance to support:
- Cell phone-free school environments that reduce classroom disruptions and support student well-being.
- Responsible and ethical use of artificial intelligence in educational settings.
- Online safety, digital citizenship, and protection from exploitation.
- Expand child abuse and human trafficking prevention efforts through collaboration with public health agencies, law enforcement, and community partners.
- Strengthen educator licensure expectations and reporting requirements related to student safety.
- Provide high-quality training materials for educators, families, and community members who work with children.
- Improve school safety infrastructure guidance, including emergency operations planning, threat assessment processes, and extracurricular activity safety.

Outcomes:

- Publication of statewide guidance documents and toolkits for school safety and student wellness.
- Increased adoption of best practices for emergency preparedness and student protection.
- Improved access to training resources for schools and communities.

***Status:* Major Progress Achieved**

OPI delivered new statewide resources and training directly aligned with Goal 4, including Montana's K–12 AI guidance, the Superintendent's School Safety Bootcamp, updated emergency response resources, expanded student-protection training, and new school safety supports. Together, these efforts give schools clearer guidance and practical tools to prevent threats, prepare for emergencies, protect students, and create safer learning environments.

Key Accomplishments:

- Released statewide AI guidance for schools: OPI partnered with the Montana Digital Academy's Frontier Learning Lab to release the Montana Artificial Intelligence in K–12 Education Guidelines, providing districts with a statewide framework for the safe, ethical, and responsible use of AI, including guidance on privacy, security, transparency, academic integrity, AI literacy, and local policy development.
- Safe School Center Coordination: Continued and strengthened OPI's partnership with the Safe School Center including funding and supporting the Jeremy Bullock Safe Schools Summit and other training events.
- Launched the Superintendent's School Safety Bootcamp: Created a focused school safety training opportunity bringing together school leaders and safety partners to strengthen preparedness around emergency response, threat assessment, prevention, student protection, and school safety planning.
- Strengthened human trafficking and child exploitation prevention: Expanded partnerships and resources with law enforcement, public health, and community organizations to increase awareness of human trafficking, child sexual abuse, online exploitation, mandatory reporting, and prevention.
- Expanded safety training for educators: Increased access to training through the Teacher Learning Hub, including updating resources on child trafficking, sexual abuse prevention, mandatory reporting, suicide prevention, student wellness, and other school safety topics.
- Provided statewide background check guidance: Partnered with the Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) to provide districts with guidance and implementation resources for HB 745, helping schools establish Student Protection Policies and understand fingerprint-based background check requirements for employees, contractors, volunteers, and others who may have unsupervised contact with students.
- School Safety Grant Opportunities: OPI continues to provide grant opportunities supporting high-quality school safety professional development. This year, 19 schools across Montana received grants to strengthen training in areas including bullying, hazards & emergency plans, policies and protocols on violence, safety technology such as cameras and door lock procedures, illegal substance use and trends and effective procedures, youth suicide awareness and prevention, and conducting drills in coordination with local community first responders.
- Collaboration with School Counselor Association: Worked with the association regarding implementation of mentorships with school counselors and best practices documents.

Opportunities & Innovative Learning

Goal 5: Ensure every student has the opportunity to graduate college, career, and life ready.

Actions:

- Expand Career & Technical Education (CTE) opportunities by:
 - Increasing middle school exposure to career exploration and technical learning.
 - Expanding high-quality work-based learning (WBL) opportunities in high school.
 - Strengthening career and technical student organizations as leadership and skill-building pathways.
- Integrate CTE and WBL more meaningfully into accountability and reporting systems.
- Develop clear implementation guides for CTE and WBL to support educators, families, and private-sector partners.
- Expand public-private partnerships that align education with workforce needs.
- Increase intentional dual-credit opportunities and strengthen collaboration with the Montana University System.
- Promote FAFSA completion, financial literacy, and early career and degree-path planning.

Outcomes:

- Increased student participation in CTE, WBL, and dual-credit programs.
- Improved alignment between secondary education, postsecondary expectations, and workforce needs.
- Stronger indicators of postsecondary readiness among graduating students.

Status: Major Progress Achieved

OPI made significant progress connecting students with college, career, and workforce pathways by expanding career exploration, reducing barriers to dual credit, implementing Future Ready incentives, and strengthening statewide partnerships. This work also established better data systems to measure the credentials, credits, and career experiences students earn before graduation. With new statewide Future Ready and dual-credit reporting systems in place, Montana has established a stronger foundation for measuring growth in CTE, WBL, dual credit, credentials, and other postsecondary-ready outcomes in future years.

Key Accomplishments:

- Reduced barriers to dual credit: OPI worked with the Board of Public Education and Montana University System to address educator licensure barriers, including Class 8 licensure requirements. New flexibility allows qualified

instructors employed by MUS or other institutionally accredited postsecondary institutions to teach dual-credit courses without obtaining a traditional Montana educator license.

- Launched Future Ready reporting: Districts can now report qualifying outcomes for students in grades 9–12, including dual and concurrent credit, transcribed credit, industry-recognized credentials (IRCs), and other Future Ready measures. OPI also developed validation reports and district training to improve reporting accuracy.
- Improved measurement of career readiness: Future Ready reporting now brings dual credit, concurrent credit, industry recognized credentials, work-based learning, and other postsecondary achievements into a more coordinated statewide reporting framework. Inventoried workforce development programs.
- Expanded career exploration through Level All: More than 5,700 accounts were established, including 3,687 student users. 29 districts launched the platform, with another 125 districts preparing to participate, substantially expanding access to career exploration, financial literacy, and postsecondary planning resources.
- Promoted FAFSA completion: OPI incorporated FAFSA education and completion into its Level All partnership, including a statewide FAFSA competition designed to increase student participation and awareness of financial-aid opportunities. Supported the joint Board of Education and Board of Regents resolution on FAFSA completion.
- Expanded Career and Technical Student Organization participation: Statewide CTSO membership reached a three-year high of 14,072 students in FY26, a 24.8% increase from FY25. Each CTSO established annual SMART goals focused on membership growth and retention, student leadership, community and business engagement, and workforce experience. All but one CTSO also met the \$20,000 minimum matching funds threshold for performance funding eligibility.
- Established statewide dual-credit reporting: OPI implemented a new annual collection of dual-credit instructors and courses offered to Montana public school students, improving the state’s ability to measure access and identify opportunities for future expansion.
- Expanded professional development for CTE educators: Launched the Montana CTE Best Practices Professional Development Series, combining six virtual sessions and an in-person statewide conference to provide practical training in lesson planning, classroom management, assessment, lab safety, curriculum alignment, dual enrollment, AI, Perkins funding, and career pathways. The series also creates opportunities for CTE educators to collaborate with peers and earn OPI Renewal Units.

Academic Outcomes & Instruction

Goal 6: Improve academic outcomes in core subjects through strong instruction, accountability, and educator support.

Actions:

- Strengthen early literacy interventions and partnerships to ensure students read on grade level by the end of grade 3.
- Increase family engagement and flexible learning options to support literacy development.
- Improve math proficiency by:
 - Collaborating with the Montana University System to align high school math pathways with college readiness.
 - Expanding technical and applied math options aligned to CTE pathways.
- Promote adoption and effective use of high-quality instructional materials and aligned professional development.
- Continue to modernize assessment, accountability, and accreditation systems to focus on meaningful student outcomes.
- Provide targeted supports for low-performing student groups.
- Strengthen enforcement of content standards to reinforce focus on core academic subjects and reduce instructional distractions.

Outcomes:

- Improved early literacy and math proficiency trends statewide.
- Increased educator capacity to deliver high-quality, standards-aligned instruction.
- More effective accountability systems that support continuous improvement.

Status: Major Progress Achieved

OPI established stronger statewide infrastructure for improving academic outcomes by pairing new mathematics standards and instructional tools, early literacy and numeracy interventions, targeted student supports, expanded educator professional development, and modernized accountability and public reporting. These efforts provide educators with clearer standards and instructional resources while giving schools, families, and policymakers better information to identify needs and measure improvement.

Key Accomplishments:

- Strengthened early literacy and numeracy supports: Continued implementation of Early Targeted Intervention programs for Montana’s youngest learners, including classroom- and home-based interventions, educator training, assessment and data support, and early numeracy guidance. Demand for the Waterford home-based early learning program reached capacity for the 2025–26 school year, with a waitlist established to reallocate unused licenses.
- Created a statewide Math Skill Map: Launched a new Montana-specific instructional tool covering grades 4 through Algebra I, with additional foundational elementary skills. The map breaks Montana’s math standards into individual skills and shows educators the prerequisite and subsequent skills needed to identify learning gaps and provide targeted instruction. Each skill is

also connected to instructional resources for teachers.

- Provided targeted support for struggling students: Expanded professional development around Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and Data-Based Individualization, giving educators additional tools to use student data to identify learning gaps, adjust interventions, and provide increasingly intensive support to students who need it.
 - Connected assessment with classroom instruction: Continued implementation of the Montana Alternative Student Testing (MAST) model while expanding educator support around standards-aligned and data-informed instruction, including a MAST ELA and Math Teacher Leader Cohort for grades 3–8 educators.
 - Updated school accountability standards: Worked with the Board of Public Education to modernize Montana’s accreditation and accountability approach with a stronger focus on student achievement and meaningful outcomes, while better aligning accountability, accreditation, and improvement supports.
 - Strengthened support for Comprehensive schools: Redesigned the accountability and improvement process for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools, using needs assessments, measurable improvement goals, progress monitoring, and targeted OPI support to focus accountability on sustained academic improvement.
 - Increased transparency around academic outcomes: Launched a new statewide Public School Report Card platform, making state-, district-, and school-level performance information easier for families, educators, policymakers, and the public to access and understand.
 - Launched the Montana High-Impact Tutoring Project to expand early literacy support, particularly in rural schools, providing students in grades 1–3 with individualized, evidence-based tutoring while strengthening educator training in the Science of Reading and data-driven instruction. Students receive tutoring three times per week for 30 minutes, using individualized learning plans based on ongoing student data to target foundational skills and comprehension. Educators in participating schools will receive professional learning in evidence-based reading instruction, including the Science of Reading, to support effective core instruction and a multi-tiered system of supports.
-

School & Educator Effectiveness

Goal 7: Strengthen educator preparation, effectiveness, and system coherence.

Actions:

- Review and strengthen educator licensure and preparation expectations to ensure alignment with classroom needs.

- Improve accreditation and oversight of educator preparation programs.
- Expand access to meaningful professional development through the Teacher Learning Hub.
- Support schools identified for improvement with targeted, evidence-based interventions.

Outcomes:

- Improved alignment between educator preparation, licensure, and classroom practice.
- Increased access to relevant, high-quality professional development.
- Improved outcomes in schools receiving targeted supports.

Status: Major Progress Achieved

OPI created a more coherent system connecting educator licensure, professional development, standards, and classroom practice. The new provider approval system establishes stronger quality controls for professional learning, while the modernized Teacher Learning Hub and statewide professional learning resources expand educators' access to relevant, high-quality training regardless of location.

Key Accomplishments:

- Launched a new Professional Development Unit Provider System: OPI redesigned the approval process for organizations and individuals providing professional development to Montana educators. The new system strengthens provider vetting and requires professional learning to demonstrate alignment with Montana Administrative Rules, P–12 education, and expectations for high-quality, job-embedded professional learning.
- Created stronger accountability for professional development: The new system separately identifies and approves hosts and instructors, providing greater transparency over both who is offering professional development and who is delivering it. Approval is based on the quality and alignment of the professional learning, rather than simply the provider name.
- Modernized the Teacher Learning Hub: Relaunched the Learning Hub to provide educators statewide with free online courses, addressing barriers of cost, distance, and time while providing professional learning across core academics, special education, mental health, instructional strategies, school administration, and other areas.
- Modernized professional development and licensure tracking: Integrated the Teacher Learning Hub and Professional Development Unit Provider (PDUP) system with TeachMT licensure system. This allows educators to more easily access professional development, automatically track earned professional development units, and maintain their records in the same system used for educator licensure and renewal.
- Better aligned professional development with classroom practice: OPI

expanded standards-based professional learning, including regional support for implementation of new Math and ELA standards and teacher cohorts connecting Montana standards, classroom instruction, and assessment.

- Continued modernizing educator licensure: Worked with the Board of Public Education to address licensure barriers and create greater flexibility where appropriate, while maintaining standards for educator quality and classroom readiness. In 2026, this included implementation of the new Class 9 Special Education Technician license.
 - Expanded statewide educator professional development: OPI's Summer Institute brought together more than 700 attendees over four days for practical professional learning in core academic subjects, literacy, mental health, Indian Education for All, school safety, AI, and other priority areas, while also convening the MAST Teacher Leader Cohort and Montana Reads Grant Literacy Leadership Network.
-

Finance Division

Goal 8: Improve fiscal transparency, consistency, and support for local schools while strengthening stewardship of public education funds.

Actions:

- Enhance and standardize budget tools, templates, and written guidance for school districts to improve clarity and consistency in budget development, amendments, and reporting.
- Provide targeted training and technical assistance for school clerks, business officials, administrators, and trustees, with particular support for new personnel and districts identified as needing improvement.
- Standardize budget review processes to ensure consistent application of statutory requirements across districts while maintaining local control over spending decisions.
- Strengthen internal fiscal workflows related to requisitions, payments, reimbursements, travel, and contracts to reduce processing delays and improve service to schools and vendors.
- Utilize audit findings, compliance reviews, and fiscal trend analysis to identify systemic issues and inform improvements to guidance, training, and internal controls.
- Improve coordination between finance staff and program divisions to ensure fiscal requirements are clearly aligned with programmatic expectations and timelines.
- Increase transparency around school finance processes and timelines through improved communication and publicly available resources.

Outcomes:

- Improved understanding among districts of budget requirements, timelines, and fiscal expectations.
- Reduced delays and compliance issues in school finance submissions.
- More consistent and predictable budget review and approval processes statewide.
- Improved internal efficiency and responsiveness within the agency's fiscal operations.
- Stronger stewardship of public education funds and increased confidence in school finance oversight by policymakers and the public.

Status: Partially Achieved

OPI strengthened school finance support by improving guidance and internal processes, increasing direct training for district personnel, and working toward greater consistency and predictability in fiscal administration.

Key Accomplishments:

- Expanded in-person fiscal training statewide: OPI finance staff traveled across Montana to provide direct training to school clerks, business officials, administrators, and other district personnel, with particular attention to helping new staff understand Montana's new school finance requirements.
 - Increased virtual training and technical assistance: Expanded virtual training opportunities so districts can access fiscal guidance regardless of location, while continuing individualized technical assistance for districts with specific questions.
 - Strengthened written guidance and resources: Continued updating budget instructions, templates, timelines, and other school finance resources to make requirements clearer and help districts submit complete and accurate information.
 - Improved internal fiscal processes: Strengthened workflows and internal controls related to payments, reimbursements, requisitions, travel, contracts, and other fiscal activities, with a focus on improving processing times, accountability, and service. Implemented a new procurement and approval system and implemented new travel system.
 - Strengthened internal coordination: Increased coordination between OPI finance staff and program teams so that program requirements, funding expectations, deadlines, and fiscal guidance are better aligned before information is communicated to districts.
-

Information Technology & Data Division

Goal 9: Advance transparency, innovation, and accountability through modern data systems that directly support schools in monitoring and improving student growth. The division’s work focuses on modernizing systems, reducing administrative burden, and transforming data into tools that support instructional decision-making and student success.

Actions:

- Modernize core data systems to improve reliability, security, and usability while reducing duplicative and manual reporting requirements for schools.
- Align and integrate major agency platforms—including the OPI website, statewide student information systems, Teacher Learning Hub, Teach Montana, and professional development and licensure systems—to ensure consistent data flow and reduce redundancy.
- Improve data dashboards and reporting tools that allow schools and districts to:
 - Monitor student growth and academic progress over time.
 - Identify trends and gaps for specific student groups.
 - Support early intervention and targeted instructional strategies.
- Expand statewide data analytics capacity to move beyond compliance reporting toward meaningful insights that inform instruction, resource allocation, and policy decisions.
- Strengthen data governance, data quality standards, and validation processes to ensure information used by schools and policymakers is accurate and comparable.
- Partner with the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, Montana University System, and other agencies to improve longitudinal data analysis, including transitions from K–12 to postsecondary education and workforce pathways.
- Provide guidance and training to schools and districts on effective use of data tools to support continuous improvement and student growth monitoring.

Outcomes:

- Reduced reporting burden for schools through streamlined, automated data collection processes.
- Increased availability of clear, timely, and user-friendly data tools that support school-level decision-making.
- Improved ability for schools to monitor student growth, evaluate interventions, and address achievement gaps.
- Stronger alignment between K–12 data, postsecondary readiness indicators, and workforce outcomes.
- Greater transparency and confidence in education data used for accountability, planning, and legislative oversight.

Status: Partially Achieved

OPI moved data modernization from planning into implementation while strengthening the systems surrounding data quality, governance, transparency, and district support. Automated validations across nearly all major collections, improved district certification, new public reporting tools, and continued development of integrated data systems have established a stronger foundation for reducing reporting burden and providing schools with more timely, accurate, and useful information.

Key Accomplishments:

- Strengthened statewide data governance: Implemented a new Data Governance Program and committee structure, increasing accountability, transparency, and cross-agency coordination around how education data is collected, managed, validated, and used.
- Reduced reporting burden and improved data quality: Implemented a new Infinite Campus data certification process in spring 2026 and expanded automated validation checks to nearly all major data collections, helping districts identify errors earlier and reducing manual follow-up.
- Advanced statewide data modernization: Continued implementation of PowerSchool Connected Intelligence and Analytics & Insights, including pilot work with Great Falls and Kalispell, provisioning for Bigfork, and development and successful testing of an Infinite Campus data extract with Columbia Falls.
- Expanded public access to education data: Launched a new Federal Report Card platform in July 2026, providing more accessible state-, district-, school-, and student subgroup performance information while maintaining required student privacy protections.
- Improved tools for student growth and intervention: Continued development of MTSS and assessment dashboards and templates designed to help schools monitor student performance, identify trends, evaluate interventions, and make more informed instructional decisions.
- Strengthened data quality and consistency: Expanded agency-wide validation processes, documentation, and data-quality standards to improve the reliability and comparability of information used for accountability, funding, planning, and legislative reporting.
- Expanded district training and support: Increased remote and in-person training opportunities to help district staff navigate state reporting requirements, improve data quality, and effectively use OPI data systems and tools.