

2026-2027



THE MONTANA OFFICE
OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

ANNUAL PLAN

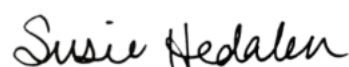
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Introduction from the Superintendent

In accordance with House Bill 692 (2025) and Section 2-12-104, MCA, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) is pleased to present our Annual Plan for the 2026–27 year. This plan provides an overview of the work underway across the agency, establishes our priorities and goals for the coming year, and identifies measurable outcomes that will help guide our service to Montana’s students, families, educators, and schools.

The Annual Plan provides a framework for connecting the day-to-day work of OPI’s divisions with our broader mission of preparing every Montana student for success in school, work, and life. In 2026–27, our priorities continue to focus on increasing academic achievement, expanding opportunities for students to prepare for college and careers, supporting safe and effective learning environments, and ensuring Montana’s teachers and schools have the tools and resources they need to succeed.

As we begin another school year, we are encouraged by the work taking place in schools and communities across our state. OPI remains committed to accountability, transparency, and collaboration as we build on our progress and work alongside Montana’s educators, families, and communities to strengthen educational opportunities for every student.



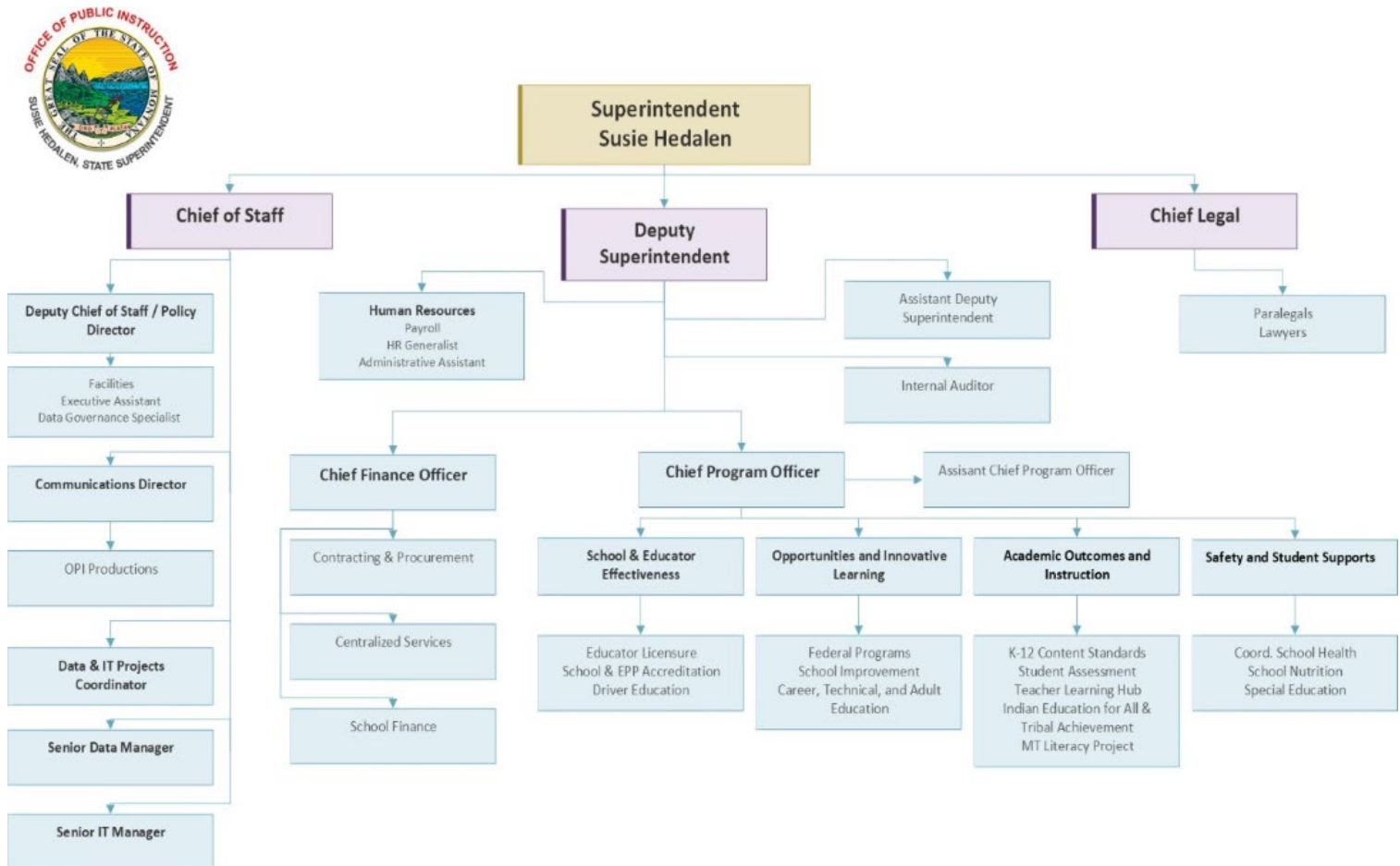
Susie Hedalen
Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction

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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: Maintain Transparency, Accountability, and Cross-Agency Alignment

Actions:

- Maintain and continuously improve internal policies, procedures, and administrative rules by reviewing priority areas throughout the year and updating them as needed to improve clarity, consistency, efficiency, and public transparency.
- Maintain alignment between executive oversight, division work plans, and performance measures and the Superintendent's Strategic Initiatives through regular leadership review of annual goals, progress, and measurable outcomes.
- Strengthen regular communication and coordination with the Department of Administration (DOA) and the Office of Budget and Program Planning (OBPP) on agency operations, budgeting, fiscal management, procurement, human resources, information technology, and other shared administrative priorities. Identify and address issues earlier through consistent communication and clearly defined agency contacts and responsibilities.

- Continue coordination with the Board of Public Education, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, Montana University System, and other state agencies and education partners through regular meetings, joint initiatives, and information sharing to support consistent education policy and implementation.
- Improve coordination with DOA, OBPP, and agency divisions on budget development, legislative proposals, fiscal impacts, reporting requirements, and implementation planning.

Outcomes:

- Division work plans and annual priorities will demonstrate clear alignment with the Superintendent's Strategic Initiatives, with progress reviewed by agency leadership throughout the year.
- Regular coordination with DOA and OBPP results in earlier identification and resolution of budget, administrative, procurement, personnel, and operational issues.
- OPI maintains regular communication with key state and education partners and documents significant joint initiatives, decisions, and implementation responsibilities.
- Priority internal policies, procedures, and administrative rules are reviewed and updated as necessary during the annual plan period.
- Policymakers, education partners, and the public have clearer information regarding OPI priorities, agency operations, funding, and major policy decisions.

Goal 2: Strengthen Leadership, Management Capacity, and Training Opportunities

Actions:

- Implement project management dashboards for major agency initiatives to provide leadership with consistent information on project status, timelines, responsible staff, deliverables, risks, and upcoming milestones.
- Establish quarterly manager meetings to strengthen communication across divisions, share agency priorities and operational updates, identify common challenges, and improve consistency in management practices.
- Provide ongoing professional development for managers and supervisors, including short training courses incorporated into manager meetings on topics such as performance management, employee development, communication, project management, hiring, conflict resolution, and agency procedures.
- Formalize cross-training procedures for key agency functions by identifying essential responsibilities and processes that require cross-divisional or within-division knowledge sharing.

- Continue developing and maintaining desk manuals for agency positions, including key responsibilities, recurring deadlines, procedures, important contacts, and cross-training expectations. Managers will periodically review manuals to ensure they remain current and useful.
- Create development and cross-training opportunities for staff interested in growing into additional responsibilities or future leadership roles, including job shadowing, participation in special projects, mentorship, and exposure to functions outside their primary responsibilities.

Outcomes:

- Major agency projects are tracked through standardized dashboards, with project status and significant risks regularly reviewed by agency leadership.
- Quarterly manager meetings are held throughout the year, with targeted management training or professional development incorporated into each meeting.
- Managers and supervisors demonstrate greater consistency in agency procedures, employee management, project oversight, and communication across divisions.
- Divisions identify critical functions and establish cross-trained backup staff for priority responsibilities.
- Desk manuals are maintained and updated for agency positions, with documented procedures and cross-training information incorporated where appropriate.
- More employees participate in cross-training, special projects, job shadowing, or other professional development opportunities that prepare them for increased responsibilities and future advancement.
- OPI increases institutional knowledge and continuity by reducing reliance on individual employees for critical processes and ensuring essential responsibilities are documented and understood by multiple staff members.

Goal 3: Strengthen Communication and Engagement with Parents and Montana Communities

Actions:

- Expand direct communication with parents and families by developing regular, accessible information about statewide education initiatives, student opportunities, academic resources, school programs, and ways families can engage in their children's education.
- Increase outreach to Montanans who are not directly connected to the education system, including community organizations, employers, civic groups, and other partners, to increase understanding of OPI programs, education outcomes, and the opportunities and challenges facing Montana schools.
- Use OPI's website, newsletters, social media, public events, and other communication channels to provide timely and understandable information about

the status of education in Montana and highlight successful students, educators, schools, and communities.

- Develop new opportunities to recognize and celebrate Montana schools and students through statewide recognition programs that encourage community involvement and showcase educational excellence.
- Continue gathering feedback from parents, schools, and community partners to identify communication needs and improve the accessibility and usefulness of OPI information and resources.

Outcomes:

- Parents and families have increased access to timely OPI information, demonstrated through growth in parent newsletter subscribers, distribution, and engagement throughout the 2026–27 school year.
 - OPI reaches a broader audience beyond traditional education stakeholders, demonstrated by increased engagement with community organizations, employers, civic groups, parents, and other community partners.
 - Montana schools have a new statewide opportunity for recognition and celebration of excellence, with the first recognition cycle completed during the 2026–27 school year and participation tracked to establish a baseline for future growth.
 - More Montana schools and communities demonstrate support for military-connected students and families, as measured by increased participation in MIC3 and Purple Star initiatives compared with the prior school year.
 - Students from across Montana have increased opportunities to engage with OPI and showcase their talents, with participation in the statewide student art competition representing multiple grade levels and geographic regions.
 - OPI has measurable data on the effectiveness of its parent and community communications, allowing the agency to identify areas of growth and establish outreach priorities for the following year.
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Program Division

Safety & Student Supports

Goal 4: Strengthen Safe Schools and Support Healthy Students Through Prevention, Preparedness, Training, and Partnerships

Actions:

- Continue providing and updating statewide guidance and resources related to school safety, student well-being, online safety, digital citizenship, responsible technology use, emergency preparedness, and student protection.

- Strengthen coordination with the Montana Digital Academy to regularly review and update statewide artificial intelligence guidance and resources for schools, educators, students, and families as technology and best practices continue to evolve.
- Expand access to school safety professional development by sponsoring training opportunities and increasing the availability of school safety courses and resources through OPI's Teacher Learning Hub.
- Increase access to threat and risk assessment training for teachers, administrators, and other school personnel to improve schools' ability to identify, assess, and appropriately respond to potential safety concerns.
- Continue partnerships with Montana's Safe Schools Center and other school safety partners to expand best-practice resources, professional development, consultation, and technical assistance available to schools.
- Increase direct technical assistance to schools on emergency preparedness, including the development, review, and improvement of emergency operations plans and related safety procedures.
- Strengthen coordination with the Montana Department of Justice and other partners on child exploitation, human trafficking, and missing children, including regular information sharing and coordination related to the state's missing children information and resources.
- Continue supporting prevention and student well-being initiatives through resources and partnerships addressing issues identified through statewide student data, including the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).

Outcomes:

- Improved indicators of student safety and well-being, with progress evaluated using statewide Youth Risk Behavior Survey results and other available student safety and wellness measures over time.
- Schools and educators have access to current statewide artificial intelligence guidance, with OPI and the Montana Digital Academy providing updated guidance twice annually to reflect emerging technology, risks, opportunities, and best practices.
- More Montana educators are prepared to identify and respond to potential threats, demonstrated by an increase in the number of teachers, administrators, and school personnel completing threat and risk assessment training compared with the prior year.
- School safety professional development is more accessible statewide, demonstrated by increased availability and participation in school safety training and resources through the Teacher Learning Hub and OPI-sponsored professional development.
- More Montana schools receive direct assistance with emergency preparedness and emergency operations planning than in the prior year, with the number of schools receiving technical assistance tracked annually.

- Schools have increased access to best practices and technical assistance through OPI and its Safe Schools Center partnerships, with participation in trainings, consultations, and other assistance tracked throughout the year.
 - Coordination between OPI and the Montana Department of Justice on missing and exploited children is consistent and timely, with information for the missing children database reviewed and updated on a weekly basis and regular coordination maintained between the agencies.
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Opportunities & Innovative Learning

Goal 5: Strengthen Pathways for Every Student to Graduate College, Career, and Life Ready

Actions:

- Continue strengthening Career and Technical Education (CTE) and career exploration opportunities across grade levels, including increased middle school exposure to careers, technical education, and pathways available in high school and beyond.
- Expand access to high-quality work-based learning (WBL) by supporting schools in developing partnerships with employers and providing students with meaningful opportunities to connect classroom learning with Montana careers and industries.
- Strengthen implementation of the Future Ready program by providing districts with guidance, technical assistance, professional development, and resources that support successful local implementation and increased participation.
- Increase professional development for teachers, CTE educators, school counselors, administrators, and superintendents focused on CTE, WBL, career pathways, dual credit, Future Ready, and other college and career readiness opportunities.
- Review CTE reporting and administrative requirements and work with schools, policymakers, and other partners to identify unnecessary or duplicative requirements that can be streamlined while maintaining necessary accountability for state and federal funding.
- Continue strengthening public-private partnerships with employers, industry organizations, foundations, workforce partners, and community organizations to expand student opportunities and leverage resources outside of state funding.
- Pursue public and private grant opportunities that support CTE, work-based learning, career exploration, educator professional development, and other college and career readiness initiatives.
- Continue strengthening dual-credit opportunities and coordination with the Montana University System and other postsecondary partners to improve student access to college-level coursework and support transitions from high school to postsecondary education.

Outcomes:

- Increased student and district participation in college and career readiness opportunities, including CTE, work-based learning, dual credit, Future Ready, industry credentials, and career exploration.
 - Expanded professional development and partnerships among educators, superintendents, postsecondary institutions, employers, and workforce partners to strengthen career pathways and student opportunities.
 - Reduced unnecessary CTE administrative and reporting burdens, including recommendations to the Legislature that allow schools to focus more resources on student instruction, advising, and program development.
 - Increased public and private resources supporting college and career readiness, including grant funding and partnerships that expand CTE, work-based learning, Future Ready, and related opportunities.
 - Improved student readiness for education, employment, or training after graduation, measured through available indicators such as CTE completion, dual credit, work-based learning, industry credentials, and postsecondary enrollment.
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Academic Outcomes & Instruction

Goal 6: Increase Student Proficiency Through Strong Instruction, High-Quality Materials, and Meaningful Professional Development

Actions:

- Continue strengthening early literacy, mathematics, and early intervention programs by providing schools and educators with evidence-based resources, professional development, assessment information, and targeted support focused on improving student proficiency.
- Strengthen support for the selection and implementation of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) by developing a publicly available crosswalk of reviewed curriculum materials showing alignment with Montana content standards, including Indian Education for All (IEFA), and identifying areas where supplemental resources may be necessary to fully meet state standards.
- Continue modernizing Montana's assessment, accreditation, and accountability systems to provide schools, families, policymakers, and the public with meaningful measures of student achievement and school performance.
- Strengthen coordination with the Montana University System to better align K-12 academic expectations with postsecondary readiness and identify opportunities to reduce the number of Montana students requiring remedial coursework upon entering college.
- Continue providing targeted support and professional development to schools and educators based on student achievement data, identified academic needs, and opportunities to strengthen standards-aligned instruction.

Outcomes:

- Increase statewide reading and mathematics proficiency by 2 percentage points, as demonstrated through applicable statewide assessments and program measures, including MAST, ACT, early literacy assessments, and early intervention program results.
 - Schools and school boards have clearer information to support local curriculum decisions, with a publicly available HQIM crosswalk identifying alignment with Montana content standards and IEFA requirements, as well as areas where supplemental instructional resources may be needed.
 - Montana's accreditation and accountability measures better reflect student outcomes and school performance, with updated measures and recommendations developed and advanced during the 2026–27 year..
 - Improved alignment between K–12 and postsecondary education reduces the need for college remediation, with OPI and the Montana University System establishing baseline remediation data and identifying measurable opportunities for improvement.
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School & Educator Effectiveness

Goal 7: Strengthen School and Educator Effectiveness Through Meaningful Accountability, Targeted Support, and Professional Development

Actions:

- Continue modernizing Montana's accreditation and accountability systems to better reflect student outcomes, recognize the unique needs of Montana schools, reduce unnecessary administrative requirements, and provide meaningful information to schools, families, and policymakers.
- Develop recommendations for a rural school accreditation approach that recognizes the staffing, enrollment, geographic, and operational realities of Montana's small and rural schools while maintaining strong academic expectations and accountability for student outcomes.
- Further strengthen OPI's Intensive Assistance and school improvement supports by providing targeted technical assistance, evidence-based interventions, professional development, and regular progress monitoring to help identified schools address deficiencies and return to successful accreditation status.
- Strengthen the connection between assessment and classroom instruction by engaging educators and education leaders in reviewing how statewide assessment results can be more effectively used to identify student needs, guide instructional strategies, and improve academic outcomes.
- Expand and regularly update evidence-based professional development through the Teacher Learning Hub, prioritizing courses aligned with identified student needs,

effective instructional practices, school improvement, and statewide education priorities.

Outcomes:

- A majority of schools entering Intensive Assistance successfully exit the process within three years, demonstrating sustained progress in addressing identified accreditation and school improvement needs.
 - Proposed accreditation approach responsive to the needs of rural schools, providing policymakers and education partners with recommendations that recognize Montana's unique rural education environment while maintaining academic expectations.
 - Assessment results are more effectively used to improve classroom instruction, with a statewide assessment task force established to develop recommendations for helping schools and educators use assessment data to identify areas of student weakness, adjust instructional strategies, and target interventions.
 - Educators have substantially greater access to evidence-based professional development, with the number of evidence-based courses available through the Teacher Learning Hub doubled and existing priority courses reviewed and updated during the 2026–27 year.
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Finance Division

Goal 8: Strengthen Fiscal Operations, Transparency, and Support for Montana Schools

Actions:

- Continue modernizing and streamlining fiscal and accounting processes and technology to reduce manual processes, improve accuracy and efficiency, and provide more timely service to schools, vendors, and agency programs.
- Strengthen coordination with the Office of Budget and Program Planning (OBPP) and Department of Administration (DOA) through regular communication on budgeting, accounting, procurement, contracts, fiscal operations, and other shared responsibilities.
- Complete a reassessment of Finance Division staffing and operational needs, including reviewing and updating job descriptions, roles, responsibilities, workflows, and cross-training needs to ensure staff resources are appropriately aligned with agency responsibilities.
- Strengthen partnerships with external organizations, including the Montana Association of School Business Officials (MASBO), to expand training, professional

development, guidance, and technical assistance for school district clerks, business administrators, finance staff, and other personnel responsible for school finance.

- Continue improving school finance guidance, tools, and internal review processes using district feedback, audit findings, compliance reviews, and fiscal trends to increase consistency, reduce unnecessary administrative burden, and identify opportunities for process improvement.

Outcomes:

- More efficient and timely fiscal operations, demonstrated by reduced processing times, fewer manual processes, and increased use of modernized fiscal and accounting tools.
- Improved coordination with OBPP and DOA, resulting in earlier identification and resolution of budget, accounting, procurement, and other fiscal issues.
- Finance Division staffing and responsibilities are better aligned with agency needs, with updated job descriptions, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and cross-training incorporated into critical fiscal functions.
- School district finance personnel have increased access to training and technical assistance, demonstrated through expanded participation in OPI and partner-supported professional development for clerks, business administrators, and finance staff.
- Improved consistency and understanding of school finance requirements statewide, demonstrated by fewer recurring reporting and compliance issues and more timely and accurate district submissions.
- Greater transparency and stewardship of public education funds, with policymakers, schools, and the public having clearer and more accessible information about school finance processes, requirements, and use of public resources.

Information Technology & Data Division

Goal 9: Continue advancing OPI's data modernization efforts by connecting more districts to modern data tools, reducing technology debt and administrative burden, improving the timeliness and quality of data, and increasing the use of information to support student outcomes, program decisions, and responsible allocation of resources.

Actions:

- Advance implementation of OPI's data modernization project by expanding district connections to statewide data and analytics tools, improving dashboard functionality, and incorporating feedback from participating schools and districts to make tools more useful for local decision-making.
- Continue modernizing and integrating core agency data systems while identifying opportunities to phase out legacy applications, reduce technology debt, eliminate duplicative processes, and automate data collection and reporting where possible.
- Increase the practical use of data and analytics internally and externally by providing agency programs, schools, districts, policymakers, and partners with timely information that supports program evaluation, student interventions, resource allocation, financial decisions, and policy development.
- Strengthen data governance, quality, and collection processes by improving validation procedures, clarifying data ownership and responsibilities, and maintaining an updated and accessible statewide data collection calendar for schools and districts.
- Improve management of internal and external data requests by strengthening tracking, establishing clearer workflows and responsibilities, and using request data to identify recurring information needs that can be addressed through dashboards or other self-service resources.
- Continue providing training and technical assistance to districts on the effective use of dashboards, analytics, and other OPI data tools to support student growth, identify achievement gaps, evaluate interventions, and inform local planning.

Outcomes:

- More Montana districts are directly connected to OPI's modernized data and analytics tools, with increased district participation and dashboard usage compared with the prior year.
- Data dashboards provide greater value to schools and districts, demonstrated through increased usage and expanded application of data for student growth monitoring, interventions, program planning, and resource decisions.
- Reduced agency technology debt and reliance on legacy systems, with identified outdated applications phased out, consolidated, or replaced as modernization work progresses.
- Faster and more transparent completion of data requests, with requests consistently tracked and average response and completion times reduced compared with the prior year.
- Increased use of data in agency and external decision-making, with data and analytics more consistently incorporated into program evaluation, financial and resource decisions, legislative reporting, and policy development.
- More predictable and efficient data collection for schools and districts, supported by an updated statewide data collection calendar, clearer timelines, and improved coordination of agency data requests.