JUST THE FACTS
Billings, Montana
The Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. ICW promotes the rigorous educational standards and effective job training systems needed to preserve the strength of America’s greatest economic resource, its workforce.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world’s largest business federation representing the interests of more than 3 million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations.

The National Chamber Foundation, a nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, is dedicated to identifying and fostering public debate on emerging critical issues. We provide business and government leaders with insight and resources to address tomorrow’s challenges.
Are ALL children receiving a high-quality education in Billings, Montana?

Not yet.

According to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), many students are doing well in Montana. In fact, Montana outperforms most states in reading, math, and science. However, entrenched achievement gaps exist across the state as well as in Billings. Statewide, there is a 20-point gap between low-income students and their more affluent peers on fourth grade NAEP reading scores—a gap that has remained constant since 1998. Similarly, the eighth grade math performance gap has not narrowed since 1996.¹ In Billings, proficiency rates for low-income eighth graders lag behind their more affluent peers by 27 points. The fourth grade reading proficiency gap is 15%—nearly twice as many students are not proficient. Only 65% of low-income students graduate from high school within four years.

While the state is moving forward with the implementation of Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments, Montana lags behind most of the nation when it comes to empowering parents with transparent information about schools, school choice, and teacher effectiveness policies. Parents lack a clear rating system for their schools and meaningful choice options, such as charter schools. In fact, Montana is one of the few states in the nation that does not have a law authorizing charter schools. Neither Montana nor Billings has taken steps to improve its teacher effectiveness policies, which currently allows teachers to attain tenure regardless of how well their students are learning. There is a strong effort to increase funding for Billings schools, but funding alone will not close the achievement gaps or increase the number of students graduating college and career ready.
Billings School District #2 at a Glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total enrollment</th>
<th>15,578</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of charter schools</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who receive free or reduced lunch</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>81.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the state received a No Child Left Behind waiver?</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the state a Race to the Top grant recipient?</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How are Billings schools failing the state and the business community?

Montana needs more educated workers to fill high-skill jobs.

- Sixty-three percent of jobs in Montana will require a career certificate or degree by 2020, but only 36% of adults in the state currently have these qualifications.³
- By 2018, the number of STEM jobs in Montana will increase by 17%.⁴
- Of students who enroll full-time in four-year public postsecondary institutions, only 45% graduate in six years.⁵
- On average, a high school graduate in Montana earns $6,684 more each year than a high school dropout. In 2011, approximately 2,900 students did not graduate from high school, equaling lost lifetime earnings of $312 million.⁶
- If half of Montana’s dropouts had managed to graduate, the additional spending and investments by these graduates would be enough to support as many as 100 new jobs and increase the gross state product by as much as $15 million by the time they would reach their career midpoints.⁷

In Billings and statewide, not enough students graduate from high school prepared for college or the workforce.

- Statewide, 82% of all students and only 71% of low-income students graduate from high school in four years. In Billings, 81% of all students and only 65% of low-income students graduate from high school in four years.⁸
- Statewide, only 30% of the class of 2012 achieved a score on the ACT that indicated they are ready for college-level courses.
- Nearly 30% of Montana public high school graduates enroll in at least one remediation course; most require remediation in math. Remediation rates for high school graduates of the Billings School District range from 25%–29%.⁹
- If Montana’s high schools prepared students for college, the state could save as much as $15 million in college remediation costs and lost earnings.¹⁰
Billings High School Graduation Rates, Class of 2012
Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate

![Chart showing graduation rates for different groups in Billings, Montana.]

- In Billings, 27% of low-income fourth graders are below proficient in reading on the MontCAS compared to 12% of their more affluent peers. Fifty-four percent of low-income eighth graders are not proficient in math compared to 27% of their more affluent peers.¹¹
- The Billings School District has been identified for corrective action for the last six years under the state accountability system. Most of the schools in the district did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the 2011–12 school year.

Not enough students attend high-quality schools and meet standards for proficiency in reading and math.

- As Montana prepares to complete the implementation of college- and career-ready standards and aligned assessments, its NAEP scores show that most students are not proficient in reading and math, despite very high passing scores on the Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS).
- Montana faces significant socioeconomic achievement gaps. On the state’s NAEP assessment, 77% of low-income, fourth-grade students are not proficient in reading compared to 55% of their more affluent peers. Forty-eight percent of low-income, eighth-grade students are not proficient in math, compared to 26% of their more affluent peers.


Montana 2011 NAEP and 2012 MontCAS Scores for Billings
Percentage of Students Who are Not Proficient

![Chart showing NAEP and MontCAS scores for Billings in grade 4 and grade 8.]

Billings, Montana

What are Billings and Montana doing to improve schools and prepare students to meet college- and career-ready standards?

Implementing state standards and assessments aligned to college- and career-ready standards.

Montana adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and math in November 2011. The state is on track to implement these standards and aligned assessments by the 2014–15 school year. The state covers the cost of the ACT for every junior to measure college readiness, and has implemented the Graduation Matters initiative to encourage locally designed efforts to prepare more students for college and careers. The United Way coordinates the “Graduation Matters, Billings” initiative.

✓ Common Core State Standards in reading and math. The state will begin implementing standards in the classrooms in the 2013–14 school year.
✓ Assessments aligned to CCSS. Montana is a governing state in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Coalition (SBAC) and plans to transition to the SBAC assessment by the 2014–15 school year.

What to Watch:

? Staying the course. Will Montana and each individual district maintain its commitment to the timeline for implementing CCSS and the SBAC assessments?
? Will increased standards and assessments lead to improved college and career readiness? As a result of increased expectations, will more students graduate ready to attain postsecondary credentials to meet the demands of the labor market?

Holding all schools accountable for meeting state standards.

Montana has a statewide accountability system that measures AYP and identifies Title I schools and districts that need improvement, corrective action, or restructuring, as required by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

✓ High-achievement goals. Montana has set annual measurable objectives (AMOs) under NCLB. The AMOs will reach 100% for the 2013–14 school year.
✓ Accountability for all students. Montana measures AYP based on all student subgroups, and all student groups must meet the same annual measurable objective.
✓ Consequences for low-performing schools and districts. Montana identifies schools and districts for corrective actions and interventions. The most struggling schools are designated “Schools of Promise” and receive funds under the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) program.
✓ High school accountability. Montana does not have an accountability system specifically designed for high schools.

? Transparent school and district grading reports. Montana does not have a grading system for schools apart from its NCLB report card on AYP. The state offers district and school reports about AYP ratings from an easily navigable website. The Billings School District makes annual school report cards available on its website.

What to Watch:

? School grading system. Will the legislature enact legislation to create an A–F grading system for schools in Montana?
? The lowest achieving schools need to get better! Too many students are in poorly performing schools.
Improving teacher effectiveness.

Fostering an effective teaching workforce does not appear to be a policy priority in Montana. The state leaves all teacher evaluation and compensation decision making to its districts and does not outline any requirements for how teacher and principal performance should be evaluated in meaningful ways, including factoring student growth and achievement and using evaluations of educator performance to make professional development, personnel placement, layoff, tenure, and compensation decisions.

In the Billings School District, once teachers receive tenure they are evaluated once every three years. Student achievement and academic growth do not play a role in teacher evaluations. The Billings School District personnel policies and collective bargaining agreement with teachers only specifies that evaluation results be placed in a teacher’s personnel file. There are no consequences for teachers who are found to be ineffective in the classroom and no articulated uses for teacher evaluation results.

- **Annual evaluations.** Billings School District requires that non-tenured teachers are evaluated twice a year for the first three years before they can earn tenure. Once a teacher receives tenure (which is virtually automatic) they are evaluated once every three years.¹⁴

- **Evaluations based on student achievement.** Billings School District does not specify that teacher performance should be tied, to any extent, based on student growth or achievement.

- **Tenure Decisions.** Teacher tenure decisions are made virtually automatically and are not required to include student achievement or teacher evaluation results.

- **Pay for performance.** Billings School District does not provide incentives or compensation for teachers based on their effectiveness in the classroom or their willingness to take on challenging assignments.¹⁵

- **Factoring performance into personnel decisions.** In Billings School District, decisions about teacher layoffs, when they are necessary, are based on seniority rather than on teacher effectiveness.¹⁶

- **Dismissal for ineffectiveness in the classroom.** Ineffectiveness in the classroom is not grounds for dismissing a teacher in Montana.¹⁷

**What to Watch:**

- Will Montana or the Billings School District take steps to reform teacher effectiveness policies?
Billings, Montana

What options are available for parents who want something better for their child?

**School choice, charter schools, and online learning.**

Montana lacks options for students looking to attend better performing schools. While the state does allow open enrollment and inter-district choice, the recent effort to pass a charter school law failed in the state legislature.

- **Charter school law.** Montana is one of eight states that do not have a charter school law.
- **Parent trigger.** Montana does not have a law that allows parents to convert a low-performing school to a charter school.
- **Public school choice.** Montana has open enrollment and interdistrict choice.
- **Private school vouchers and tax credits.** Montana does not offer private school scholarships. Legislation has been introduced to create tax credits for private school tuition and for education savings accounts for special needs students. Both bills are still under consideration by the legislature.
- **Online Learning.** The Montana Digital Academy (MTDA) provides educational opportunities to students in Montana, including home school students and students in rural areas. MTDA offers core courses, credit recovery, Advanced Placement courses, and dual enrollment. The MTDA is providing classes to 3,500 students enrolled in 5,500 courses annually.

How are state education leaders selected?

**State education governance in Billings, Montana.**

The Superintendent of Billings Public Schools is Terry Nelsen Bouck. Seven school board members govern the school district. Board elections take place on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in May of each year.

For more information about the work of the Billings School Board and Superintendent, see: http://www.billingschools.org/domain/106.

How to get involved:

**Contact the Billings Chamber of Commerce:**

www.billingschamber.com/

What to Watch:

- Will the legislature pass legislation on charters, tax credits, and education savings accounts?
Endnotes


13 Ibid.


Billings, Montana

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