



Montana Board of Public Education

Public Charter School Application: Columbia Falls Trades Academy

June 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Submission Procedures	3
Public Charter Application Cover Page.....	4
Public Charter Application	5
Academic Program	5
School Governance.....	6
Business Operations	7
Community Support and Need	8
Not a Local School Board?.....	8

INTRODUCTION

Title 20, Chapter 6, Part 8, MCA, authorizes the establishment of public charter schools in Montana and tasks the Montana Board of Public Education as the sole entity authorized to enter into public charter contracts with a governing board. There are two types of public charter schools – those operating under an existing local school board and those operating as a new school district under a separate governing board. This Public Charter School Application is for both options.

A public charter school means a public school that has autonomy over decisions including, but not limited to, matters concerning finance, personnel, scheduling, curriculum, and instruction as defined in a public charter contract. Public charter schools are governed by a local school board, or in the case of a governing board other than a local school board, by the governing board of the public charter school district of which the public charter school is a part. Public charter schools are established and operated under the terms of a public charter contract and allow parents to choose to enroll their children. Public charter schools must admit students based on a lottery if more students apply for admission than can be accommodated.

Public charter schools provide a program of education that may include any or all grades from kindergarten through grade 12 and vocational education programs and operate in pursuit of a specific set of educational objectives as defined in its public charter contract, and must demonstrate a commitment to and robust understanding of personalized and proficiency-based learning.

The evaluation of your application will focus on whether implementing the proposals in your application will lead to the academic, organizational, and financial performance you are promising in exchange for potential broad flexibility from Montana's education standards. The evaluation will determine whether:

- there is an overall intent to create an innovative public charter school;
- there is an overall intent to create a high-performing public charter school;
- the academic program is consistent with a high-quality public charter school;
- the school governance is consistent with a high-quality public charter school;
- the business operations are consistent with a high-quality public charter school;
- the community support and need is consistent with a high-quality public charter school;
- there is clear and convincing proof of the likelihood of success;
- they can open and operate a successful public charter school; and
- there is a commitment to and robust understanding of personalized and proficiency-based learning.

SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

To facilitate the Montana Board of Public Education's review of public charter school applications, applicants must submit the application to bpe@mt.gov between the dates of October 27-31, 2025, with a deadline of October 31, 2025 at 5PM. All submission materials must be submitted in a single electronic submission. Multiple attachments will not be accepted in the submission. The Board will review the public charter school application, and if determined complete, will facilitate an interview and take public comment on the application. Final approval of the application will take place at the January 2026 Board of Public Education meeting. Please note the timeline on the Board's webpage under the Public Charter School tab.

Please provide a brief, direct response to each question using this application template and limit the application to 26 pages. Any appendices, handbooks, policies, and additional documents will be considered as supporting documentation. Please include links, when possible, and refrain from including lengthier documents.

Please note that submitting a public charter school application does not guarantee approval and that a public charter school contract will be granted. Failure to adhere to any requirements may lead to an incomplete application that is rejected before consideration.

PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION COVER PAGE

Check One: X New Public Charter under existing local school board New Public Charter District

Name of Public Charter School Columbia Falls Trades Academy

Local school district in which the public charter school will be physically located: Columbia Falls SD #6

Contact Information for the Governing Board Chair

Contact Person: Dr. Jill Rocksund Board Chairman
Name Title

Contact Address: 501 Sixth Avenue West Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Telephone Number: 406.892.6550

E-mail Address: j_rocksund@cfmthschools.net

Contact Information for the Person Completing this Application

Contact Person: Cory J. Dziowgo Superintendent
Name Title

Contact Address: 501 Sixth Avenue West Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Telephone Number: 406.892.6550

E-mail Address: c_dziowgo@cfmthschools.net

Local Board of Trustee Evidence

Check One: X Approved by existing local school board Refused approval by existing local school board

Provide copy of local school board minutes as evidence.

Minutes for authorizing the submission of this application is attached to the end of this application.

PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION

Name of Public Charter School: **Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA)**

Provide an executive summary with the general purpose and rationale for the creation of the public charter school, and explain how the proposed public charter school is different from a program that you could operate or are currently operating without the public charter designation.

Executive Summary

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) is a proposed public charter high school program designed to provide Flathead Valley students with a robust, hands-on education in the construction trades. Based at Canyon Elementary in Hungry Horse, MT, this academy will give students the opportunity to gain foundational and advanced skills in framing, plumbing, electrical work, HVAC, finishing, and full tiny home construction.

CFTA will operate on a standard school calendar with a four-day school week, allowing for concentrated instructional time and alignment with local industry schedules. Fridays will be reserved for extended projects, internships, enrichment, and academic catch-up, creating additional flexibility while preserving rigor.

The academy will be built on a proficiency-based learning model, where students progress by demonstrating mastery of both academic and technical skills rather than simply earning seat time. Academic coursework in English, Math, Science, and Social Studies will be delivered through a combination of direct instruction, blended learning platforms, and integration into applied projects. Graduation requirements will follow Columbia Falls School District Board Policy 2410, with modifications that allow work-based learning, industry certifications, and dual-credit coursework to substitute for traditional elective credits.

What sets CFTA apart is the seamless integration of construction-specific curriculum, industry-recognized certifications (such as OSHA and NCCER), and dual-enrollment opportunities through Flathead Valley Community College. Partnerships with local employers will provide students with authentic jobsite experiences, internships, and pathways to immediate employment.

The academy is projected to serve a maximum of 65 students in grades 9–12 at fall enrollment, offering small class sizes and personalized instruction while ensuring financial sustainability. With its focus on proficiency, career readiness, and strong community partnerships, CFTA will graduate students who are engaged in meaningful work, prepared with marketable skills and credentials, and empowered to contribute to their community and local economy.

Opening Date: August 2026

Public Charter Term Length: Five Years (2026-2031)

Grades to be served: 9-12

Minimum Enrollment Per Year: 41 students

Planned Enrollment Per Year: 45 students

Maximum Enrollment Per Year: 65 students

During the proposed public charter 5-year term, indicate the specific grade-level programs that you plan to serve:

Check all that apply: ☐ Elementary Program ☐ Middle Grades Program ☒ High School Program

For each year of the public charter term, estimate the number of students the public charter school plans to serve in each grade:

	Elementary							Middle		High School				Total
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Year 1										10	10	10	15	45
Year 2										10	12	13	15	50
Year 3										10	15	15	15	55
Year 4										15	15	15	15	60
Year 5										15	16	17	17	65

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

See Submission Procedures

1. State the public charter school's mission and vision and describe why this initiative is important to the community it will serve.

The mission of the Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) is to empower high school students with the knowledge, hands-on skills, and real-world experiences necessary to excel in the construction trades and to graduate ready for both the workforce and post-secondary opportunities.

Our vision is a Montana where students leave high school with marketable skills, deep community connections, and the confidence to contribute meaningfully to local industries and the regional economy.

This initiative is essential because it directly responds to a pressing need in the Flathead Valley and across Montana: a shortage of skilled tradespeople in construction, plumbing, electrical, HVAC, and related fields. Employers consistently report challenges in finding workers who are not only technically trained but also job-ready with the professionalism, problem-solving ability, and collaborative skills required on modern worksites. CFTA addresses this challenge by creating a pipeline of well-prepared graduates who can move seamlessly into apprenticeships, employment, or further technical training.

The program also reflects and advances Columbia Falls School District's Portrait of a Learner by ensuring that students are:

- **Engaged** – Students learn in active, project-based environments, building tiny homes and working alongside industry partners. This engagement fosters a sense of purpose and relevance in their education.
- **Prepared** – CFTA equips students with recognized certifications (OSHA-10, NCCER), workplace skills, and dual-enrollment opportunities through Flathead Valley Community College. Students graduate with a resume that demonstrates both academic learning and hands-on competence.
- **Empowered** – Through personalized and proficiency-based learning, students take ownership of their progress, set career goals, and experience the pride of completing tangible projects that have value for their community.

By embedding employability skills such as teamwork, time management, communication, and safety awareness into the daily structure of the program, CFTA ensures students graduate as competent workers and confident citizens. The community benefits not only from a stronger local

workforce but also from the direct impact of student-built projects, such as tiny homes that can be sold or donated to meet community needs.

In short, CFTA represents an investment in both students and the broader Flathead Valley community. It is a school that does not just prepare students for graduation, but for life after high school—creating pathways to economic stability for young people and supporting the long-term vitality of Montana’s workforce.

2. Identify the targeted student population and the community the public charter school proposes to serve.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will serve students in grades 9–12 from across the Flathead Valley, including Columbia Falls, Whitefish, Kalispell, and surrounding rural communities. The Academy is designed for students who learn best through applied, hands-on experiences and who aspire to pursue careers in the construction trades or related technical fields. Open enrollment will make the program accessible to all students in the region, regardless of their home district, ensuring that opportunity is not limited by geography.

The target population includes students who may not see themselves thriving in a purely traditional academic model but who are eager to learn in environments where their education is directly tied to real-world outcomes. At the same time, CFTA is equally valuable for college-bound students seeking practical experience and industry certifications that can provide a strong foundation for further technical training or engineering pathways. By serving a diverse population of students, the program will create classrooms that reflect the wide range of strengths, backgrounds, and goals found across our valley.

The community CFTA serves is one where the construction trades are central to economic stability and growth. Montana continues to face a significant workforce shortage in skilled trades, and the Flathead Valley has experienced rapid growth that has amplified demand for carpenters, electricians, plumbers, HVAC technicians, and general contractors. CFTA will respond to this need by creating a steady pipeline of skilled, credentialed, and work-ready graduates who are able to fill local jobs, remain in their home communities, and contribute immediately to regional development.

3. Describe plans and timelines for student recruitment and enrollment, including lottery procedures.

Recruitment for Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will begin in Spring 2026 to ensure that students, families, and community members have adequate time to understand the program and apply for admission. The recruitment process will use multiple channels to reach students across the Flathead Valley, including Columbia Falls, Whitefish, Kalispell, Bigfork, and surrounding rural communities.

Recruitment Strategies:

- **School Counselor Outreach:** District counselors will be briefed on the program and will receive informational packets to share with students who demonstrate interest in hands-on learning or technical career paths.
- **Community Information Nights:** Open houses will be hosted at Canyon Elementary and Columbia Falls High School, featuring presentations from staff, local employers, and Flathead Valley Community College representatives.
- **Media Campaigns:** The program will be promoted through district newsletters, websites, social media platforms, and local radio and print outlets to ensure broad visibility.
- **Industry Partnerships:** Local businesses and trade associations will be invited to share information about the program with employees and their families, as well as with community members looking for alternative educational opportunities.

- **Career Fairs and Middle School Visits:** Staff will participate in regional career fairs and visit feeder middle schools to spark interest in 9th graders preparing to transition into high school pathways.

Timeline:

- **Spring 2026:** Recruitment campaign launch, community information sessions, and application window opens.
- **Late Spring 2026:** Priority application deadline; early applicants reviewed for eligibility.
- **Summer 2026:** If applications exceed available space, a lottery process will be conducted.
- **Summer 2026:** Students and families notified of acceptance or placement on a waitlist.
- **Summer 2026:** Orientation sessions held, with students introduced to staff, facilities, and expectations.
- **August 2026:** First cohort begins classes.

Lottery Process:

If more applications are received than available seats (maximum 65 students per year as of this application), a fair and transparent lottery will be conducted in compliance with Montana law. Each applicant will be assigned a random number, and a public drawing will be held at the district office. At least one district administrator and one community representative will witness the process to ensure integrity. The drawing will be recorded, and families will be notified in writing within five business days. A waitlist will be created in the order names are drawn, and should openings occur before or during the school year, students from the waitlist will be contacted in sequence.

4. Describe the public charter school's academic program, specifically focusing on why it is innovative in your school district. Include plans to formally assess student achievement on an annual basis.

Academic Model

CFTA will operate on a standard academic calendar with a four-day school week (Monday–Thursday). Fridays will be reserved for extended projects, internships, community partnerships, and individualized academic support. This structure increases efficiency, mirrors local industry schedules, and allows students meaningful time for workforce experiences while maintaining alignment with district calendars.

Instruction will be based on a proficiency-based learning model where students advance by demonstrating mastery of knowledge and skills rather than by seat time alone. Students will show competency through performance-based assessments, industry certifications, project completion, and digital portfolios.

Curriculum and Instructional Design

The curriculum integrates three core elements:

1. **Construction Trades Instruction** – Students will progress through foundational skills (framing, tool safety, math for construction), systems (electrical, plumbing, HVAC), and finishing (cabinetry, drywall, painting). Capstone projects will include the construction of tiny homes and other community-based builds.
2. **Academic Coursework** – Core classes (English, Math, Science, Social Studies) will be delivered through a combination of direct instruction, virtual learning platforms, and integration into applied projects. For example, technical writing may be embedded into documentation of construction processes, and math concepts will be reinforced through project measurement and

budgeting.

3. **Career Readiness and Work-Based Learning** – Students will earn OSHA and NCCER certifications, develop resumes, participate in mock interviews, and engage in internships with local contractors. Fridays will provide flexibility for extended jobsite learning.

Progression of Learning

- **Year 1:** Foundational skills, construction safety, basic framing, and applied construction math.
- **Year 2:** Systems training in electrical, plumbing, and HVAC; introduction to building codes and inspection processes.
- **Year 3:** Finishing skills, leadership in team projects, internships, and capstone projects such as tiny home construction.

Class Size and Structure

In the beginning, CFTA will serve 40–45 students in grades 9–12. Students will be organized into small lab cohorts of 12–15 for hands-on instruction while maintaining larger group experiences for academic coursework and community projects. This ensures safety in lab settings while providing opportunities for collaboration.

Assessment and Graduation Pathways

Students will graduate under Columbia Falls School District Board Policy 2410 with modifications that allow CTE coursework, industry certifications, and work-based learning to count toward elective and graduation requirements. Assessments will include:

- Standards-based academic evaluations
- Proficiency checks for trade skills
- Industry credential testing (OSHA-10, NCCER modules)
- Portfolio reviews and public exhibitions of learning

5. Describe any variances to existing standards that the public charter school requires to enhance educational opportunities.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy will focus on providing a positive and productive educational setting and any variances to the existing standards will be addressed accordingly. We anticipate needing a variance to the library media specialist, administrative personnel, and counselor standards as the school builds their enrollment. Students will still have access to these resources and a majority of these will be shared with other district resources. *If there is a need for a variance (after all other options have been exhausted), the variance will be secured and students will be supported along the way.*

6. Describe the instructional design, including the type of learning environment, class size and structure, curriculum overview, and teaching methods.

The instructional design of Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) is built around a small, personalized learning environment that emphasizes project-based, hands-on instruction, supported by integrated academic coursework. The program is intentionally structured to mirror the workplace while maintaining the support and flexibility of a public high school.

Learning Environment

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will provide students with a professional, hands-on learning environment modeled after real-world construction sites. Instruction will take place in a purpose-built trades facility at Canyon Elementary in Hungry Horse, MT, outfitted with framing

bays, plumbing and electrical trainers, HVAC equipment, and finishing stations. The environment will emphasize both safety and authenticity, with students expected to meet the same standards of punctuality, teamwork, and accountability that they would encounter on a jobsite. The first year of the program may have to be hosted onsite at Columbia Falls High School while funding and planning are secured. The current Glacier Parks Cabin program would serve as the classroom and building site.

Class Size and Structure

CFTA will serve 41–65 students in grades 9–12 as the school builds enrollment and facilities. Instruction will be organized into lab cohorts of around 12–15 students to ensure safety and individualized attention in construction settings. Academic coursework will take place in larger groups or through blended platforms, with a dedicated Virtual Learning Coordinator and core subject instructors providing support. This structure balances small, hands-on learning with access to broad academic resources.

Schedule

- **Four-Day School Week (Mon–Thurs):** Students engage in academic coursework and construction lab blocks during the standard school week.
- **Fridays:** Reserved for extended projects, internships, academic tutoring, or make-up work, offering flexibility and deeper engagement opportunities.
- **Block Structure:** Two extended 2–3 hour blocks each day, one focused on construction labs and the other on academics, with time built in for advisory and career readiness.

Curriculum Overview

The instructional program integrates:

1. [Construction Trades Curriculum](#) – [NCCER-aligned modules](#) covering safety, tool use, framing, plumbing, electrical, HVAC, and finishing. Capstone projects include the construction of tiny homes and community build projects. Long term goal for the academy would be to become a [NCCER Accredited High School Program](#).
2. **Academic Coursework** – Delivered through blended learning platforms and direct instruction, integrated with construction projects (e.g., geometry applied to framing, science through energy efficiency studies, English through technical writing and presentations).
3. **Career Readiness** – Students will earn OSHA and NCCER certifications, build digital portfolios, participate in mock interviews, and complete internships with local employers.

Teaching Methods

- **Project-Based Learning:** Hands-on construction projects are the foundation of learning, requiring students to apply academic knowledge in meaningful ways.
- **Direct Instruction:** Instructors provide essential safety and technical training before students demonstrate skills in the lab.
- **Blended and Virtual Learning:** Online platforms deliver core academics, supported by in-person tutoring and application in projects.
- **Work-Based Learning:** Partnerships with local businesses allow students to engage in internships, job shadows, and community projects.
- **Proficiency-Based Advancement:** Students progress when they demonstrate mastery, not by time spent in class. This includes technical skill assessments, academic benchmarks, and portfolio demonstrations.

Assessment

Students will be evaluated through:

- Standards-based assessments in core subjects.
- Proficiency checks for technical skills.
- Industry credential exams (OSHA, NCCER).
- Digital portfolios documenting mastery and growth.
- Public exhibitions of learning (trade nights, parent showcases, and project completions).

7. Describe plans for identifying and successfully serving students with disabilities, students who are English Language Learners, students who are academically challenged, and gifted students, including compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) is committed to ensuring that every student has equitable access to its programs and that all services comply with federal and state laws, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. The Academy will partner with Columbia Falls School District #6 student services to provide specialized support, ensuring students with diverse learning needs can fully participate in both academic and technical components of the program.

Students with Disabilities:

- **Identification & Services:** Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 Plans will continue to receive the services outlined in their plans, delivered in collaboration with the district's special education staff. The Program Director and instructors will work closely with the district's Special Education Coordinator to ensure compliance, accommodations, and modifications are integrated into both the academic and trades curriculum.
- **Accessibility in Labs:** Construction labs and facilities will be designed to meet ADA requirements, ensuring safe access to tools, workstations, and materials. Adaptive equipment will be provided as needed.
- **Instructional Support:** Instructors will receive training on differentiated instruction in technical settings, enabling them to support students with varying physical, cognitive, and emotional needs.

English Language Learners (ELLs):

- **Identification:** Students will be identified through district intake procedures and language proficiency assessments.
- **Support:** Services will be coordinated with the district's ELL program, ensuring students receive targeted language development while participating fully in hands-on projects. Visual supports, bilingual resources, and language-friendly instructional practices will be incorporated into construction and safety training.
- **Integration:** Because trades education is highly visual and kinesthetic, it offers natural opportunities for ELL students to engage in meaningful learning while developing English proficiency.

Academically Challenged Students:

- **Targeted Support:** Students who struggle academically will receive structured interventions through the district's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).
- **Credit Recovery Opportunities:** The four-day school week allows students additional time to access materials and learning, ensuring success in the program.

Gifted and Advanced Students:

- **Acceleration:** Gifted students will be able to accelerate their progress through proficiency-based assessments, potentially completing certifications earlier and moving into advanced dual-credit coursework with Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC).
- **Leadership Opportunities:** Students who demonstrate mastery may take on leadership roles within build teams, mentoring peers, managing aspects of the tiny home project, or representing the program at community events.

Compliance and Oversight:

All services will be regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with federal and state law. Documentation of accommodations, modifications, and support services will be maintained by the Program Director and shared with the district's student services team. Instructors will receive annual training in IDEA, ADA, 504 compliance, and culturally responsive practices.

8. Describe student discipline policies, including those for special education students.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will adopt and implement the student discipline policies of Columbia Falls School District #6, ensuring consistency across the district while tailoring procedures to the unique environment of a construction-focused school. The goal of discipline at CFTA is to maintain a safe, respectful, and productive learning environment that reflects both the expectations of the workplace and the legal protections afforded to students.

Core Principles:

- **Safety First:** Because construction training involves tools, machinery, and physical labor, adherence to safety rules is non-negotiable. Discipline will emphasize immediate correction of unsafe behaviors, reinforcement of proper safety practices, and removal from lab activities if necessary to protect students and staff.
- **Restorative Practices:** Discipline will focus on repairing harm, building accountability, and restoring relationships, rather than relying solely on punitive measures. Students will be encouraged to reflect on their actions and develop strategies for improvement.
- **Consistency and Fairness:** All students will be held to the same high expectations for behavior, with consistent application of rules across academic and technical environments.
- **Workplace Readiness:** Expectations will mirror professional jobsite standards, including punctuality, teamwork, respect for supervisors and peers, and care for tools and materials.

Procedures for General Education Students:

- Minor infractions (e.g., tardiness, inappropriate language) will be addressed through verbal warnings, reflection assignments, or restorative conversations.
- Repeated or serious infractions (e.g., insubordination, disrespect, misuse of tools) may result in removal from the lab for the day, parent contact, or formal referrals to the Program Director.
- Severe violations (e.g., fighting, possession of prohibited items, endangerment of others) will follow district-level disciplinary processes, including possible suspension or expulsion.

Procedures for Special Education Students:

- Discipline of students with disabilities will fully comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504, and district policies.
- Any disciplinary actions will consider the student's IEP or 504 Plan, ensuring appropriate accommodations and supports are provided.
- Manifestation Determination Reviews (MDRs) will be conducted as required if a disciplinary action could result in a change of placement.
- Collaboration with the district's special education team will ensure equitable treatment and compliance with federal law.

Positive Behavior Supports:

To reduce the need for discipline, CFTA will integrate proactive supports such as:

- Explicit instruction in behavioral expectations aligned with workplace norms.
- Recognition of positive behaviors and contributions to team projects.
- Embedded social-emotional learning strategies to promote conflict resolution, stress management, and resilience.

9. Describe how the public charter school will demonstrate a commitment to and robust understanding of personalized and proficiency-based learning.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) is built on the principle that students learn best when they advance through demonstrated mastery of skills and knowledge rather than seat time. The Academy's proficiency-based model ensures that each student's education is both personalized and aligned to real-world standards of success in the construction industry and beyond.

Proficiency-Based Learning

- **Mastery over Time:** Students move forward once they can demonstrate mastery of academic and technical standards through assessments, projects, and certifications. For example, proficiency in applied mathematics may be demonstrated through accurate measurement and budgeting for a framing project, while literacy skills may be shown through technical documentation or presentations.
- **Multiple Pathways to Demonstrate Learning:** Students can show proficiency through hands-on projects, written assessments, oral presentations, and performance-based tasks, ensuring flexibility for different learning styles.
- **Authentic Assessment:** Learning is evaluated in ways that reflect the workplace — from building structures that meet code to presenting project budgets to community partners.

Personalized Learning

- **Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs):** Each student develops an ILP that sets personal goals, tracks certifications, and maps pathways toward post-secondary training or direct entry into the workforce. These plans are revisited quarterly with staff and families.
- **Flexible Scheduling:** The four-day week with dedicated Fridays allows students to focus on areas where they need additional time, acceleration, or enrichment.
- **Digital Portfolios:** Students curate evidence of their learning and growth, including project photos, certifications, reflections, and feedback from industry mentors. These portfolios serve both as graduation evidence and as a tool for employment or college applications.
- **Advisory and Mentorship:** Each student is paired with a mentor teacher who provides consistent guidance, helping students set goals, reflect on progress, and plan for the future.

Integration of Academics and Trades

Academic coursework is not isolated but integrated into projects. Math concepts are reinforced through construction budgeting, science through energy efficiency and materials studies, and English through technical writing and project presentations. This integration makes academics more relevant and engaging, while still ensuring students meet Montana content standards.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

See Submission Procedures

10. Describe the public charter school's organizational chart that clearly presents the proposed organizational structure, including lines of authority and reporting between the governing board, staff, related bodies such as advisory bodies or parent and teacher councils, and external organizations that will play a role in managing the public charter school.

CFTA will be governed by the Columbia Falls School District #6 Board of Trustees. The Superintendent provides oversight, while a Program Director manages daily operations. Staff report to the Program Director, and district-level departments (business, student services, food service, transportation) provide operational support.

Organizational Structure:

- **Board of Trustees** → Provides charter oversight, approves policy, and monitors performance.
- **Superintendent** → Serves as liaison between board and program; evaluates leadership and ensures accountability.
- **Program Director** → Manages day-to-day operations, supervises staff, oversees curriculum, and coordinates partnerships.
- **Trades Instructor(s)** → Deliver technical instruction and supervise lab/worksite safety.
- **Support Staff** → Includes special education liaisons, administrative assistant (shared), and district-provided services.

Advisory Council (non-governing) → Composed of parents, students, and community/industry representatives, meeting quarterly to provide feedback.

11. Describe the roles and responsibilities of the governing board, the proposed leadership management team, and other entities shown in the organizational chart.

- **Board of Trustees:** Oversight of charter compliance, approval of budget and staffing, policy adoption, and accountability monitoring.
- **Superintendent:** Provides leadership oversight, reports to the board on progress, supervises the Program Director, and manages contracts and partnerships.
- **Program Director:** Oversees all school functions including curriculum implementation, safety, student discipline, staff evaluation, community outreach, and program development.
- **Trades Instructor(s):** Deliver NCCER and OSHA-aligned construction training, supervise lab/shop, evaluate student proficiency, and mentor student project teams.
- **District Departments:** Provide services including HR, payroll, special education compliance, and facility maintenance.
- **Advisory Council:** Offers community and parent input, ensures program relevance, and helps connect students with industry opportunities.

12. Provide a staffing chart for the public charter school's first year and a staffing plan for the term of the public charter school.

Year 1 Staffing (Projected Enrollment: 41–45 students, grades 9–12)

- **Program Director (0.5 FTE):** Oversees daily operations, supervises staff, manages industry partnerships, and ensures fidelity to the proficiency-based model.
- **Business Manager (0.2 FTE):** Oversees the financial operations of the program including budgeting and expenditures; financial reporting as required
- **Trades Instructors (2.0 FTE):** Deliver NCCER- and OSHA-aligned construction training across core areas (framing, systems, finishing) while supervising lab projects and ensuring safety. With two instructors, students can be divided into smaller lab cohorts of 12–15 to maintain safety and individualized instruction.
- **Academic Instructor (1.0 FTE):** Provides direct instruction in core subjects (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies), integrates academic standards into applied projects, and coordinates with virtual learning platforms.
- **Counselor (0.2 FTE, shared):** Provides student support with both career planning and education
- **Library Media Specialist (0.2 FTE, shared):** Provides necessary research and academic support for students
- **Special Education/ELL Support (0.2 FTE, shared):** Ensures accommodations, modifications, and interventions are implemented for students with IEPs, 504 Plans, or ELL needs in collaboration with the district's student services team.
- **Secretary (0.5 FTE, shared):** Provides clerical, scheduling, and communications support.
- **Custodian (0.5 FTE, shared):** Cleans and maintains the classrooms for the program.
- **Food Service (0.3 FTE, shared):** Provide high quality meals for students and staff.

Five-Year Staffing Plan

Staff (FTE)	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Director	0.5	0.6	1.0	1.0	1.0
Business Manager	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Instructor	3.0	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.0
Counselor	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Library Media Specialist	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Special Ed Teacher	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.5
Paraprofessional	2.0	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.0
Secretary	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Custodian	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Food Service	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Total FTE	7.6	7.7	8.7	10.4	10.4

Professional Development

All staff will participate in ongoing professional learning that includes:

- NCCER certification and recertification.
- OSHA safety updates and industry standards training.
- Workshops on proficiency-based education, personalized learning, and digital portfolio development.
- Collaboration with Flathead Valley Community College faculty and local industry professionals to ensure curriculum relevance.

13. Detail the public charter school startup plan, identifying tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals.

Launching the Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will require a structured, phased approach to ensure facilities, staffing, curriculum, and partnerships are fully in place to support an inaugural cohort of 45+ students in the fall of 2026. This timeline assumes BPE approval in Winter 2026, creating a compressed 6-month startup window.

Task	Timeline	Responsible Party
Charter Application Development and Submission	Fall 2025	Superintendent, District Leadership
Approval by Montana Board of Public Education	Winter 2026	BPE
Facilities Design and Planning (construction of new trades building at Canyon site)	Spring 2026	Superintendent, Facilities Director, Architects
Secure Startup Funding (district capital, state/federal grants, industry donations)	Spring 2026	Superintendent, District Leadership
Hire Program Director	Spring 2026	Superintendent
Develop Curriculum (NCCER alignment, academic integration, proficiency framework)	Spring–Summer 2026	Program Director, Instructors
Recruit Trades Instructors and Academic Instructor	Spring 2026	Program Director
Hire Support Staff	Summer 2026	Program Director
Establish Industry Partnerships (internship agreements, donations, advisory council setup)	Spring–Summer 2026	Program Director, Superintendent
Launch Marketing and Recruitment Campaign (outreach to parents, counselors, feeder schools)	Spring 2026	Program Director, Communications Office
Student Applications, Lottery (if necessary), and Enrollment	Spring–Summer 2026	District Office, Program Director

Staff Professional Development (proficiency-based learning, safety certifications)	Summer 2026	Program Director, District PD Team
Facility Completion and Equipment Installation	Summer 2026	Facilities Director, Trades Instructors
Student Orientation (ILPs, safety training, introduction to model)	August 2026	Full CFTA Staff
First Day of Classes	Late August 2026	All Staff

Key Considerations for Startup

- **Facilities:** The construction of a purpose-built trades facility is critical. Early design and funding commitments will ensure the new space is ready by Summer 2027.
- **Recruitment:** Scaling to 41–65 students requires strong communication with counselors across the Flathead Valley, clear messaging to parents, and community support for open enrollment.
- **Staffing:** Hiring a Program Director early is essential to allow adequate time for curriculum development, industry partnerships, and recruitment.
- **Proficiency Implementation:** Staff will require training in proficiency-based education and portfolio assessment to ensure consistent practice across the program.

14. Describe the plans for recruiting and developing school leadership and staff.

CFTA will recruit leaders and instructors with both industry experience and a passion for student-centered teaching. Recruitment will target trade unions, FVCC faculty, professional networks, and job postings across Montana.

Professional development will include:

- NCCER certification training for instructors.
- OSHA safety updates.
- Participation in Montana ACTE (Career and Technical Education) conferences.
- Ongoing mentorship from FVCC faculty and local industry professionals.

Alignment with Portrait of a Learner:

- **Engaged:** Staff are trained to use project-based, hands-on teaching methods that engage students in meaningful work.
- **Prepared:** Professional development ensures staff model current industry practices, so students receive the most up-to-date and relevant training.
- **Empowered:** Staff are encouraged to innovate, collaborate, and design personalized pathways for students, empowering learners to reach their potential.

15. Describe the proposed leadership and teacher employment policies, including performance evaluation plans.

All staff will be employees of Columbia Falls School District #6 and subject to district employment policies. Evaluations will follow the district’s framework based on the Marzano model, with additional emphasis on:

- Student proficiency in technical competencies.

- Industry credential attainment rates.
- Student engagement and safety compliance.

16. State the proposed governing bylaws.

As CFTA is governed by the existing Columbia Falls School District Board of Trustees, no separate bylaws are required. The Academy will operate under district policies and procedures. However, an Advisory Council composed of parents, students, and industry representatives will provide feedback and ensure programming continues to align with both community workforce needs and the district's Portrait of a Learner goals.

17. Explain any partnerships or contractual relationships central to the operations and mission of the public charter school.

Partnerships with FVCC, local contractors, trade associations, and suppliers are central to CFTA's mission. These partners will provide dual-credit opportunities, mentorship, job shadows, internships, materials, and sponsorships.

Please see the enclosed letters of support from local industries.

18. Provide the proposed calendar and sample daily schedule.

School Calendar

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will follow a standard academic calendar that aligns with Columbia Falls School District #6, ensuring consistency for families with students across multiple schools. CFTA will operate on a four-day instructional week (Monday–Thursday), with Fridays reserved for flexible learning. This design supports proficiency-based education by giving students structured time to demonstrate mastery, engage in extended projects, and participate in internships or community learning opportunities.

- **Instructional Days:** 144 (Monday–Thursday)
- **Flexible Learning Days:** Up to 36 Fridays for internships, service learning, academic support, or enrichment
- **Start/End Dates:** Late August – early June (aligned to district calendar)
- **Breaks and Holidays:** Consistent with Columbia Falls School District #6 schedule

Sample Daily Schedule (Monday–Thursday)

- **8:00 – 9:15 | Academic Block 1** (Math, Science, or integrated coursework)
- **9:15 – 11:45 | Construction Lab Block 1** (Safety, framing, systems, HVAC, project work)
- **11:45 – 12:15 | Lunch**
- **12:15 – 1:30 | Academic Block 2** (English, Social Studies, virtual coursework *if applicable*, project-based academics)
- **1:30 – 3:30 | Construction Lab Block 2** (Capstone projects, finishing, applied technical instruction)
- **3:30 – 3:45 | Advisory/Reflection** (Portfolio updates, ILP check-ins, career readiness activities)

Sample Friday Schedule (Flexible Learning Day)

- **Proficiency Demonstrations:** Students complete assessments, update portfolios, and show evidence of mastery in academic or technical areas.
- **Extended Projects:** Extra build time for large-scale projects such as tiny homes, community service builds, or competitions (e.g., SkillsUSA).
- **Internships & Job Shadows:** Students engage with local contractors, trade unions, or FVCC to gain authentic work experience.
- **Academic Support & Recovery:** Targeted tutoring, small group support, or additional time for students needing intervention to stay on track.
- **Career Readiness Activities:** Resume development, guest speakers, jobsite safety workshops, or site visits.

Instructional Flexibility for Proficiency-Based Learning

The calendar and schedule provide multiple pathways for students to demonstrate mastery:

- Extended lab blocks allow students to complete hands-on projects tied to proficiency targets.
- Fridays create intentional space for students to pursue personalized goals, catch up in areas of need, or accelerate in areas of strength.
- Advisory sessions ensure ILPs are revisited regularly, making student ownership of learning central to the program.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

See Submission Procedures

19. Describe plans for providing transportation, food service, and all other significant operational or ancillary services.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will operate under the umbrella of Columbia Falls School District #6, ensuring that students receive equitable access to all operational and ancillary services available across the district. By sharing district resources, CFTA can focus on delivering its specialized construction trades program while maintaining efficiency, safety, and compliance.

Transportation

CFTA students will have access to the district's existing transportation system. Shuttle services will connect Columbia Falls High School and other central locations to the Canyon Elementary campus in Hungry Horse. This ensures accessibility for the full projected enrollment of 41–45 students, including those from outside Columbia Falls who enroll under open enrollment policies. Transportation schedules will align with the four-day instructional week and will be adjusted for students participating in Friday internships or community-based learning.

Food Service

Meals will be provided through the Columbia Falls School District's food service program. Breakfast and lunch will be prepared at the district's central kitchen and delivered daily to the CFTA campus. Students will have access to the same nutritional standards, free and reduced-price meal programs, and meal account systems as all other CFSD students. This approach ensures consistency, equity, and compliance with state and federal guidelines.

Student Services

Students enrolled at CFTA will continue to have access to a full range of district services, including:

- **Special Education and 504 Supports:** Delivered in collaboration with CFSD's student services department to ensure compliance with IDEA, ADA, and Section 504.
- **Counseling Services:** Academic, social-emotional, and career counseling provided by district staff in partnership with CFTA's Student Success Coordinator.
- **Technology Support:** District-issued devices and connectivity support for virtual coursework and portfolio development.
- **Health Services:** Nursing staff and health protocols coordinated through the district's existing services.

Facilities and Operations

Custodial, groundskeeping, and maintenance services for the CFTA facility will be provided by the district's facilities department. Business operations, payroll, human resources, and risk management will also be managed centrally by Columbia Falls School District #6.

20. Describe cocurricular and extracurricular programs and how the programs will be funded and delivered.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will ensure that students have access to the full range of co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities offered through Columbia Falls School District #6, while also developing unique enrichment activities that align with its focus on construction trades and career readiness.

District-Wide Access

- **Athletics and Activities:** CFTA students will be eligible to participate in all Montana High School Association (MHSA)-sanctioned athletics and activities through Columbia Falls High School. Transportation schedules will be designed to allow students to attend practices, competitions, and performances.
- **Clubs and Organizations:** Students may join academic clubs, student government, and other interest-based organizations provided at Columbia Falls High School. This ensures equitable access to experiences that build leadership, teamwork, and school pride.
- **Performing and Visual Arts:** Students will retain access to district-provided opportunities in music, theater, and art, either through co-enrollment or after-school programming.

Trades-Specific Enrichment Opportunities

- **SkillsUSA Chapter:** CFTA will establish a SkillsUSA chapter to provide students with opportunities to showcase their technical skills, leadership, and teamwork at regional and national competitions.
- **Community Build Projects:** Students will contribute to local service projects, such as constructing small structures for community organizations or assisting in Habitat for Humanity builds, reinforcing the civic-mindedness embedded in the Portrait of a Learner.
- **Industry Showcases and Trade Nights:** CFTA will host semi-annual exhibitions where students present completed projects, demonstrate skills, and engage with parents, employers, and the wider community.
- **Career Field Trips and Guest Speakers:** Regular visits to job sites, trade expos, and apprenticeship programs will broaden student exposure to post-graduation opportunities.

By combining district-wide extracurricular access with trades-focused enrichment, CFTA ensures its students benefit from a holistic high school experience while building career-specific skills and community connections.

21. Describe the proposed financial plan and policies, including financial controls and audit requirements.

The Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will operate under the governance and financial oversight of the Columbia Falls School District #6 Board of Trustees. As such, CFTA will follow all established district financial policies, internal controls, and audit procedures, ensuring full transparency, accountability, and compliance with state law.

Financial Plan Overview

- **Funding Sources:**
 - **State Per-Pupil Allocations:** CFTA will receive state funding on a per-pupil basis, consistent with Montana’s funding formula for charter schools.
 - **Federal and State Grants:** The program will pursue Career and Technical Education (CTE) grants, Perkins funding, and Workforce Development funds to support trades-related equipment and certification costs.
 - **Local and Industry Contributions:** Partnerships with local businesses will include in-kind donations of tools, equipment, and materials. Philanthropic support and local foundations may also provide supplemental funding.
 - **District Support:** Shared services such as transportation, food service, business office operations, and student services will be provided through Columbia Falls School District, creating efficiencies and cost savings.
- **Major Expenses:**
 - **Facility Development:** Construction of a dedicated trades building on the Canyon Elementary campus.
 - **Staffing:** Salaries and benefits for 7-8 FTE instructional and support staff in Year 1, scaling as needed.
 - **Instructional Resources:** NCCER-aligned curriculum, OSHA certification costs, and technology for blended learning.
 - **Equipment and Materials:** Industry-standard tools, safety gear, and building materials for student projects.

Financial Controls

- **Budget Development:** Annual budgets will be developed by the Program Director in collaboration with the Superintendent and District Business Manager, then approved by the Board of Trustees.
- **Internal Controls:** The district’s existing controls — including segregation of duties, purchase order systems, and expenditure approvals — will be applied to CFTA.
- **Monitoring and Reporting:** Monthly financial reports will be provided to the Board of Trustees, ensuring ongoing oversight and corrective action if needed.
- **Student Activity Accounts:** Managed under district policy to ensure transparency in handling funds related to student projects, SkillsUSA, and community service activities.

Audits

- **Annual Audit:** CFTA’s finances will be included in the district’s annual independent financial audit conducted by a certified public accountant, as required by Montana law.
- **State Reporting:** All required reports will be filed with the Montana Office of Public Instruction and the Board of Public Education.

This financial plan provides a sustainable and accountable framework that ensures CFTA can fulfill its mission while maintaining alignment with district standards and state requirements.

22. Describe the insurance coverage that will be obtained.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will be fully covered under the insurance policies and risk management protocols of Columbia Falls School District #6. By operating under the governance of the existing school board, CFTA will benefit from the district's established insurance coverage, internal controls, and compliance procedures.

23. Describe the startup and five-year budgets with clearly stated assumptions.

Budget	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Personnel Salaries and Benefits: Director, Teacher, Paraprofessionals, Counselor, Support Staff	\$548,180	\$561,322	\$661,521	\$763,457	\$763,457
Technology: Software, Computers, Online Curriculum, etc.	\$15,000	\$30,000	\$15,000	\$6,000	\$6,000
Educational & Classroom Supplies: Textbooks, Assessments, Vocational Materials, etc.	\$40,000	\$35,000	\$33,000	\$20,000	\$22,000
Miscellaneous: Field Trips, Classroom Equipment & Furniture, Staff Development, etc.	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$17,000	\$17,000
Maintenance & Operations: Utilities, Repair, New Build, Custodial	\$40,000	\$65,000	\$40,000	\$11,000	\$50,000
Total Expenditures	\$688,180	\$736,322	\$794,521	\$817,457	\$858,457

The advantage of the location of this CFTA is that it will be utilizing an existing campus. The Canyon Elementary School has been closed for approximately 10 years but the building has been recently brought up to standard. The building is a great community space and it would benefit from consistent usage.

There would need to be some infrastructure provided to ensure that year-round building could take place so teaching and learning could continue during the winter months. The new trades building would be placed where the existing playground and open fields are currently placed. We would maximize the use of our space to attempt to keep our costs down. The new building would hopefully secure some partnerships with local builders and manufacturers to decrease those costs even more.

24. Describe the startup and first year cash flow projections with clearly stated assumptions.

Projected Enrollment	ANB	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
45	\$8,317	\$374,265				
50	\$8,317		\$415,850			
55	\$8,317			\$457,435		
60	\$8,317				\$499,020	
65	\$8,317					\$540,605
Basic Entitlement		\$364,401	\$364,401	\$364,401	\$364,401	\$364,401
Total Estimated Revenues		\$738,666	\$780,251	\$821,836	\$863,421	\$905,006

25. Describe anticipated fundraising contributions and evidence, if applicable.

Initial in-kind support and pledged donations from local builders, hardware suppliers, and FVCC. A formal campaign will be launched in 2026 with a goal of \$250,000 in funds over three years. There has been growing chatter about this opportunity for our students. The concept is really gaining traction and the letters of support that are included in this application are proof of these future partnerships. Please see the letters of support at the end of this application

26. Describe the facilities plan, including backup or contingency plans.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will be established through a phased facilities plan that allows for immediate program launch, long-term expansion, and flexibility based on enrollment trends. The district's goal is to provide a purpose-built, industry-standard learning environment while maintaining fiscal responsibility and adaptability to student demand.

Phase I – Initial Facility (August 2026 Opening)

During its inaugural year, CFTA will operate on the Columbia Falls High School campus, utilizing existing classroom and shop spaces to deliver instruction in construction trades, core academics, and safety training. This approach provides immediate access to essential infrastructure such as technology, labs, and utilities while minimizing startup costs.

Phase II – Permanent Facility at Canyon Elementary (Target Opening: Fall 2027)

CFTA's long-term home will be a dedicated construction trades facility built on the Canyon Elementary campus in Hungry Horse, Montana. This location offers space for growth and community visibility, aligning with the district's vision of revitalizing the site as a center for innovation and workforce readiness.

Contingency Plan

If enrollment trends or funding conditions require adjustments, CFTA may remain permanently housed at Columbia Falls High School after its pilot year. In that case:

- Existing spaces will be modified and reconfigured to expand the CTE area and accommodate the additional student population.
- Upgrades to electrical, ventilation, and storage systems will ensure compliance with industry training requirements.

- Portable or modular classroom units may be added to maintain small class sizes and lab safety standards.

This dual-path plan provides flexibility for the district to scale responsibly based on enrollment, performance, and community support while maintaining program quality and access.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND NEED

See Submission Procedures

27. Describe the specific evidence of significant community support.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) has strong backing from community members, industry leaders, educators, and families who recognize the urgent need for a skilled workforce in the Flathead Valley. This support demonstrates the Academy's alignment with regional priorities and underscores its importance as a bridge between education and career readiness.

Industry and Business Support:

Local contractors, builders' associations, and trade unions have consistently identified workforce shortages as one of the most pressing challenges facing northwest Montana. Letters of support from employers, such as construction firms, HVAC companies, and electrical contractors, emphasize their eagerness to host interns, provide mentorship, and consider graduates for employment. Material suppliers and home improvement retailers have also expressed interest in donating supplies and equipment.

Higher Education Support:

Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) will have the ability to partner with CFTA through dual-credit courses, faculty collaboration, and career pathway alignment. This partnership ensures students can seamlessly transition into certificate or degree programs if they wish to pursue additional training. We have an outstanding relationship with the college already and we do not foresee this changing with the addition of a trades charter school.

Parent and Family Support:

Families across the district have expressed a desire for programs that prepare students for meaningful careers without requiring all graduates to pursue four-year degrees. Parent surveys and listening sessions highlighted a strong demand for applied learning, career readiness, and alternative pathways to success. The establishment of a Parent and Industry Advisory Council formalizes that support and creates an ongoing feedback loop.

Educator and District Support:

Columbia Falls School District #6 teachers, counselors, and administrators have identified CFTA as an important addition to the district's offerings, especially for students whose strengths and interests are best expressed through applied learning. Staff across the district have expressed enthusiasm for referring students to this program.

Student Support:

High school students have shown strong interest in opportunities to work with their hands, earn certifications, and build projects of lasting value. Informal feedback from students has confirmed that many would be eager to enroll in a program that leads directly to career opportunities.

28. Describe the opportunities and expectations for parent involvement.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) recognizes that parent and family engagement is essential to student success, particularly in a program that connects school, career, and community. Parents will be welcomed as active partners in both the educational process and the broader vision of preparing students for the workforce.

Advisory Council Participation:

CFTA will establish a **Parent and Industry Advisory Council** that meets quarterly. Parents serving on this council will provide input on curriculum relevance, project planning, and community engagement strategies. Their perspectives will help ensure the Academy remains responsive to student needs and industry trends.

Showcases and Exhibitions:

Parents will be encouraged to attend and participate in student showcase events, including project exhibitions, trade nights, and community open houses. These events give parents the opportunity to celebrate student accomplishments, provide feedback, and see first-hand the skills their children are developing.

Portfolio Reviews:

Each trimester, students will present elements of their digital portfolios to parents, teachers, and community members. Parents will be invited to review progress, discuss student goals, and provide input that strengthens both academic and career readiness.

Volunteering and Mentorship:

Parents with experience in the trades or related fields will be encouraged to volunteer as guest speakers, project mentors, or advisors for student builds. This involvement brings real-world expertise into the classroom while allowing parents to actively contribute to the program's success.

Ongoing Communication:

Parents will receive regular updates through newsletters, parent portals, and direct communication with staff. Clear expectations will be established that parents play an active role in supporting student attendance, academic progress, and workplace readiness habits such as punctuality, safety, and teamwork.

NOT AN EXISTING LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD? COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION

See Submission Procedures

1. Provide specific evidence that the applicant has sought from the local school board the creation of a school or program of the located school district serving the mission and vision of the proposed public charter school.
2. Provide specific evidence that the local school board declined to create the school or program and declined to submit a proposal for the creation of a public charter school to the Board of Public Education.
3. Provide a legal description of the property of the existing school district from which the boundaries of the public charter school district are proposed to be formed.

4. Share background information on the initial governing board members and, if identified, the proposed school leadership and management team.

Questions? Contact bpe@mt.gov

REGULAR MEETING

SEPTEMBER 8, 2025

PAGE 4

Unofficial

MOTION TO APPROVE
POLICY #8111 ON 2ND
OF 3 READINGS

Motion by Upton, second by Heupel, to approve Policy 8111 – Transportation of Students with Disabilities on the second of three readings.

Public comment was requested and there was none.

Passed 6-0.

MOTION TO APPROVE
SCHOOL BASED
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
CENTER AGREEMENT
BETWEEN LOGAN
HEALTH AND SD#6

Motion by Mumby, second by Heupel, to approve the School Based Behavioral Health Center Agreement between Logan Health and School District #6.

Mr. Zuffelato mentioned that the square footage was changed, which reduced the lease rental revenue to be paid to the District.

Public comment was requested and Community Member Joe O'Roake asked the Board if this is a space rental agreement and is there a discussion on services available to School District students? Chair Rocksund mentioned that the District rents the facility to Logan Health and they provide Mental Health Services from an out-patient clinic billed to either Medicaid or private insurances.

Passed 6-0.

MOTION TO AUTHOR-
IZE ADMINISTRATION
TO APPLY FOR AP-
PROVAL OF A TRADES-
ORIENTED CHARTER
SCHOOL WITH BOARD
OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Motion by Mumby, second by Pacheco, to authorize and direct the administration to apply for approval of a trades-oriented charter school with the Board of Public Education. The application shall be aligned with the District's integrated strategic action plan and the Portrait of a Learner framework.

Superintendent Dziowgo mentioned that this opportunity will provide needs to students so they are more empowered and prepared for the trades industry. The charter school enrollment is anticipated to be approximately Forty students. October is the deadline for the application to OPI and approval is January 2026. The District's anticipated start date is August 2027. The Charter School will continue to utilize the District's resources for Special Education needs, 504 plans, and the Gifted/Talented program.

Public comment was requested and Community Member Joe O'Roake asked if this is authorized under the bill passed in the last state legislature session, and his understanding is that it needs to have state approval? Chair Rocksund answered that the approval in January 2026 is meeting the requirements.

Passed 6-0.

PERSONNEL:

Personnel:

The Board acknowledged the following resignations previously accepted by the Superintendent: Amber Little – High School Paraeducator; Thomas Walker – Ruder Paraeducator; Koahl Deshazer – Junior High Paraeducator; Zachary Baker – Junior High Custodian; Christopher Harvey – Bus Driver; Elton Kauffman – Bus Driver; Emily Houston – High School Paraeducator; Shannon Freiheit – High School Paraeducator; Niels Getts – High School Assistant Tennis Coach

MOTION TO APPROVE
RECOMMENDATION
TO TERMINATE WITH-
OUT CAUSE

Motion by Mumby, second by Hill, to approve the termination of Brandon Christensen, District Mechanic, without cause during the probationary period.

Passed 6-0.



October 22, 2025

Dear Mr. Dziowgo,

The Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC) has worked with the manufacturers of Montana for almost 30 years and have watched Flathead County become the #1 county in Montana with respect to the number of manufacturers. Flathead County now has 903 manufacturing companies.

As a trusted advisor to many of these manufacturers, we know, firsthand, that most of these companies struggle to find qualified employees. Many of these employers are looking for high school graduates that have hands-on skills, soft skills, the ability to learn and the ability to work as part of a team.

MMEC is highly supportive of the Columbia Falls Trades Academy and we believe it would be a welcome addition to the existing efforts to provide a skilled workforce to the 903 manufacturing companies in Flathead County and the surrounding area.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Paddy Fleming
Center Director
Montana Manufacturing Extension Center
pfleming@montana.edu
www.montana.edu/mmec
406-249-9178

October 22, 2025

To the Esteemed Members of the State Office of Public Instruction,

And the Columbia Falls School District 6 Board of Trustees,

Subject: Letter of Strong Support for the Columbia Falls Trade Academy Charter School

On behalf of Nomad GCS, a longtime employer in the Flathead Valley specializing in designing and manufacturing Connected Mobile Operations Centers, we are writing to express our unequivocal and enthusiastic support for the proposed Columbia Falls Trade Academy Public Charter School.

As local manufacturers, we face a critical and growing shortage of skilled labor in welding, electrical, automotive paint, and advanced manufacturing. We strongly acknowledge that a sustainable path forward is by investing directly in our students to build a robust local workforce. The creation of the Trade Academy is an economic imperative that directly addresses our workforce pipeline needs and secures the future prosperity of our beautiful Flathead Valley.

We are already familiar with the exceptional foundational work within District 6. We specifically commend the outstanding welding program and the dedication of the work-based learning staff, who have successfully connected us with students for externships and potential hires. This history of high-quality instruction provides a solid operational bedrock for this new charter school. We are excited by the potential to create direct pathways to professional externship and apprenticeship programs with our business. Crucially, the charter model provides the valuable opportunity to offer direct and ongoing feedback for the curriculum, ensuring the skills taught are immediately relevant to industry standards.

This vital collaboration, along with the community-benefiting projects (such as student-built tiny homes) and the boost from the \$320,000 state funding, will significantly strengthen our local workforce and provide careers for graduates. Nomad GCS strongly urges the State Office of Public Instruction to approve the Columbia Falls Trade Academy application, as it represents a vital investment in our students, our economy, and our community's future.

Sincerely,



Clay Binford

Chief of People + Development / Founder





October 28, 2025

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of our teams at Morrison-Maierle and Northwest Mechanical Contractors, we are pleased to express our strong endorsement of the Columbia Falls Trades Academy. Our organizations have long served the Flathead Valley through building and infrastructure projects, and we believe this new educational opportunity represents a powerful step toward securing a resilient and skilled local workforce.

There is a need for talented electricians, plumbers, HVAC technicians, and system specialists in Northwest Montana. As the demand for construction continues to grow, too many businesses struggle to fill essential skilled labor positions. The Columbia Falls Trades Academy would help bridge this gap by introducing students to practical building sciences early in their education and equipping them with hands-on knowledge that supports immediate entry into apprenticeship programs upon graduation. This approach offers students a respected pathway into lifelong careers that provide financial strength, personal fulfillment, and stability right here at home.

Strengthening career opportunities for local youth strengthens the entire community. Graduates of the Academy will have the opportunity to enter the workforce quickly and contribute to the economic vitality of Columbia Falls and the surrounding region. Many students who learn and train here ultimately choose to stay here, raising families, purchasing homes, and investing directly back into the Flathead Valley. The school would support this growth by empowering students who may not be pursuing traditional four-year university degrees to develop valuable skills that are critical to the success of our local industries.

We fully support the establishment of the Columbia Falls Trades Academy and stand confident that it will positively impact students, businesses, and the community at large. Thank you for helping establish an educational opportunity that strengthens Columbia Falls and elevates the future of the Flathead Valley.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Samuel J. Kuhlin'.

Samuel J Kuhlin, PE
skuhlin@m-m.net
(406) 751-5855

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Jim Schmeusser'.

Jim Schmeusser
jims@nwpmt.com
(406) 393-2150