

# PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION COVER PAGE

Check One:  New Public Charter under Existing Local School Board  New Public Charter

District Name of Public Charter School:

***Connect Academy***

Local school district in which the public charter school will be physically located:

***Missoula County Public Schools District #1***

## **Contact Information for the Governing Board Chair**

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# PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION

Name of Public Charter School: Connect Academy

Provide an executive summary with the general purpose and rationale for the creation of the public charter school.

*MCPS is proposing the Connect Academy Charter School to provide a flexible and innovative virtual 6-12 grade school for Montana residents. By providing an accredited online public school option, students can access a wider range of courses and instructors than may be available at a single traditional school. The online format allows for innovative teaching methods and individualized support for each student. Students will have access to a variety of education pathways including AP, CTE Courses, Work Based Learning opportunities, and credit recovery. This charter has set the goal to be a fully competency based program by year 5.*

Opening Date: August 2024                      Public Charter Term Length: 5 years

Grades to be served: 6-12

Minimum Enrollment Per Year: 72 students

Planned Enrollment Per Year: 72 students

Maximum Enrollment Per Year: 175 students by year 5

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

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
<b>Year 1</b>							10	10	11	10	10	10	11	72
<b>Year 2</b>							15	15	15	15	15	15	15	105
<b>Year 3</b>							20	20	20	20	20	20	20	140
<b>Year 4</b>							25	25	25	25	25	25	25	175
<b>Year 5</b>							25	25	25	25	25	25	25	175

# ACADEMIC PROGRAM

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

Connect Academy, an MCPS Charter School, will be an online school option that serves students in grades 6-12.

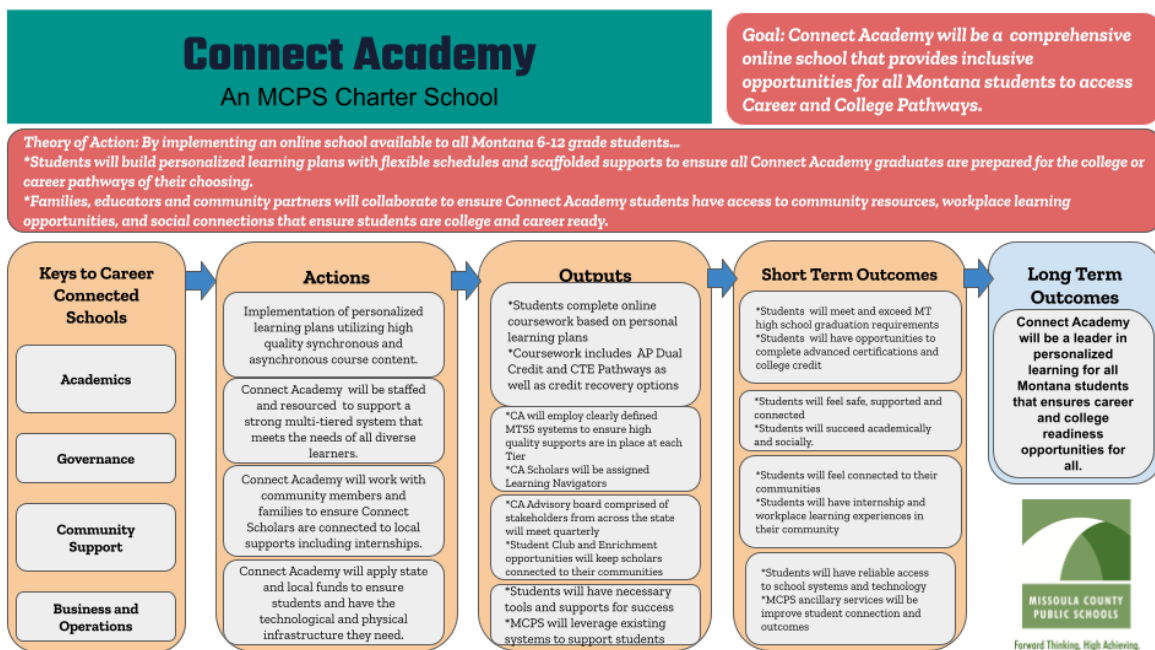
The **Mission** of Connect Academy is to provide a high-quality, personalized online learning experience that empowers students across our state to take ownership of their education so students are prepared for college and career success.

We **envision** a charter school model that immediately leverages technology and sets a 5 year goal to be a leader in competency based learning while delivering an engaging, student-centered education accessible to all learners, regardless of geography or circumstance. Our students will become self-motivated, lifelong learners equipped with interpersonal skills that ensure they reach their full potential.

The Connect Academy will expand access to educational opportunities for students who may be better served through online learning. This expanded access includes:

- Students in remote areas without access to schools with specific academic programs.
- Students unable to attend physical school due to health issues, family responsibilities, etc.
- Students who prefer the flexibility and self-pacing of online learning
- Students looking to supplement or accelerate their studies beyond what is available locally
- Students who have dropped out or fallen behind and want to recover credits and graduate
- Students looking for a proficiency or competency model that will lead to early graduation.

FIGURE 1.0: Connect Academy Logic Model



By providing an accredited online public school option, students can access a wider range of courses and instructors than may be available at a single traditional school. The online format allows for innovative teaching methods and individualized support for each student. Students will have access to a variety of education pathways including AP, CTE Courses, Work Based Learning opportunities, and credit recovery courses.

### **Utilizing Innovation**

The Connect Academy will start year 1 in a traditional class format with time bound instruction and assessment routines that fit in a semester. However, by the end of this five year charter, Connect Academy is committed to being a leader in competency based learning, also known as proficiency based learning, that follows a more flexible schedule.

A competency based model differs from traditional instruction in that students begin a course with clear learning outcomes organized into “competencies.” Students can work through prescribed instructional modules to acquire the skills and content knowledge to master each core competency for a course. Most courses will have 3-8 core competencies that must be mastered within a predetermined time range (often 6-20 weeks). Students progress through the competencies with the guidance of a content area teacher. When a student successfully completes the assessment for each core competency in a course, they will have achieved mastery and receive credit. This will allow students seeking an early graduation or students who have fallen behind but are looking to catch up the option to graduate on their own timeline.

### **Ensuring Flexibility and Serving the Community**

The pandemic revealed stark contrasts in educational opportunity across Montana communities including students in the MCPS attendance area. Since 2020, MCPS has utilized ESSR funds to operate the Missoula Online Academy (MOA) offering both synchronous and asynchronous course options to middle and high school students. This program will now sunset with the end of ESSR funding and it is our goal to rebrand the MOA as the new ***Connect Academy***.

Students and families who have been part of the MOA community have regularly advocated for an online option to continue. The following are quotes in MCPS Public Comment in spring 2023 to our Board of Trustees stating the importance of the MOA to our students and families:

*“We strongly believe the Missoula Online Academy (MOA) is a versatile and valuable asset to the counties (sic) public school portfolio. The academy is an option for students and teachers in difficult circumstances. It's a valuable tool that should be maintained, improved, and invested in.” -MOA Parents*

*“For me, attending school through the MOA significantly reduces my stress. Things as simple as getting ready in the morning are less stressful because I don't have to wake up as early. The environment I am in also greatly improves my mental health because I am in a place I know and am comfortable in.” -MOA Student*

*“I have really loved having the option to do online learning. For me, it's less stressful than in person and I feel like I learn better in this environment. Online learning is also really good for learning how to prioritize and how to be responsible.” -MOA Student*

*“MOA has proved to be invaluable for my family. It is the only support that is available to my daughter. Without this program it would be nearly impossible for my child to obtain an education.” -MOA Parent*

*“We offer a critical learning option for our students, one that, for many, has allowed them to stay in school. Our students deserve the best online learning platform that we can provide.” -MOA Teachers’ Collective Comment*

Online learning options have proven to be an essential for students and families as evidenced by the extensive public comment received by the MCPS School Board. Connect Academy aims to extend the reach of this robust and inclusive learning model to students in communities around our state, regardless of location or life circumstance and to continue to refine and improve the model to achieve a truly personalized, competency based learning model that levels up educational opportunity across Montana. We believe this charter option will increase access to high quality and rigorous learning for students across the state as well as credit recovery opportunities and accelerated pathways that allow each student a personalized path to graduation.

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

This Connect Academy will be open to all students in grades 6-12 who are Montana residents. This innovative charter is designed to create a unique and adaptive learning environment where students across Montana can access courses online, engage in both rigorous synchronous and asynchronous learning, access advanced course opportunities, and complete credit recovery courses.

A thorough review of the public comment to the MCPS Board of Trustees revealed that our MOA serves students who face a variety of barriers preventing them from accessing our brick and mortar, traditional school settings. This includes students with medical issues who require homebound instruction, students lacking adequate transportation or reliable housing, students with legal issues preventing school attendance, students seeking small group and one-on-one support, and students with special needs that struggle in large classroom settings. The public comment also revealed that without this option, many of these students would struggle to graduate.

The Connect Academy is an essential public education solution to ensure all Montana students have access to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Many students thrive in our traditional schools, but there are just too many students who need something different. Virtual schools can offer small group breakout rooms, office hours for one-on-one support, personal learning navigators to ensure students are engaged and motivated, and special education support in a flexible and virtual environment.

### **Personalized Learning Plans to Meet Student Needs**

MCPS public comment coalesced around the value of the personalized support and connections the MOA has provided. *Connect Academy* aims to build on these connections by providing students with a personal learning navigator who will collaborate with the student and caregivers to plan and adjust personalized learning plans that consistently meet the academic and behavioral health needs of each student. Upon enrollment, students and caregivers will meet with their learning navigator to set up course schedules and to look ahead to plan personalized paths to graduation. Students will also have at least monthly one-on-one check-ins with their navigator and more frequently if needed to ensure students are connected and supported throughout their educational journey. Students will also have an advisory period in their schedule to provide an additional connection to a caring adult.

Synchronous instructors will also offer office hours, tutoring, and online clubs to ensure every student is connected to the school community, feels safe, and is learning at high levels- all elements that our community has indicated are important in an online learning option.

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

#### **Recruitment**

By the end of the five year charter, the Connect Academy aims to enroll up to 175 students. Student recruitment for Connect Academy will be a comprehensive endeavor that involves engaging with prospective students and their families and utilizing advertising campaigns to highlight the unique educational opportunities and advantages our charter school offers.

MCPS takes pride in our commitment to serving the community and therefore will conduct outreach to prospective families through various channels, such as community events, informative virtual and in person sessions, and partnerships with local and state organizations, all aimed at raising awareness about Connect Academy. In addition to community engagement, we will employ targeted marketing strategies, both online and offline, to reach a wide range of potential students. These efforts are designed to create a diverse and inclusive student body while ensuring that families are well-informed about our educational mission and innovative and personalized curriculum pathways.

#### **Application Process**

The annual application process will be open each spring for Montana residents in grades 6-12. We anticipate open enrollment for up to 72 students in year 1 with hopes to reach an enrollment goal of 175 by year 5.

In year 1, the application process will be open from April 1- May 1, 2023. To apply, interested parents or guardians will submit applications within the specified enrollment period. From May 2-15, 2023, these applications will be carefully reviewed to ensure they meet all eligibility criteria, such as age and state residency requirements. If student enrollment exceeds the annual student capacity, a lottery will be conducted. This process will involve assigning each applicant a unique identification number and using a random selection method, to select students for available slots. Admission or lottery results will then be communicated to parents no later than May 25, 2023, and those who are selected will receive an enrollment offer with instructions on how to proceed with enrollment. Families will need to confirm enrollment by June 1, 2023. For those not selected in the initial lottery, Connect Academy will maintain waitlists as slots become available due to withdrawals or other factors. Throughout the entire process, transparency and adherence to established rules and timelines will be crucial to ensure an equitable and orderly enrollment system. All enrollment policies and timelines will be clearly communicated on the Connect Academy website which will be created within two months of approval of this charter.

Connect Academy will adhere to all state and federal laws in relation to school enrollment including students who qualify for McKinneyVento services and will not discriminate based on race, color, religion, or disability.

### ***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.***

Our middle school program will offer synchronous core courses in ELA, math, science, social studies, world languages and elective options. The high school program will target a wide range of learners with synchronous and asynchronous options; AP coursework, dual and concurrent credit courses; and CTE and workplace learning options connected to each students' community. By the end of this charter, Connect Academy will be a state leader in competency based learning.

## **Curriculum Aligned with Montana’s Academic Standards**

Connect Academy is committed to offering an innovative online curriculum that provides students with unparalleled flexibility and diverse pathways to graduation. We understand that every student is unique, therefore our curriculum options are designed to accommodate their individual needs and aspirations. Each student will regularly meet with their learning navigator to help plan and support instructional pathways that lead to high school graduation.

Using online platforms including synchronous core classes taught by highly qualified Montana educators, asynchronous Montana Digital Academy courses, and APEX Credit Recovery options, students will have the opportunity to explore a wide range of academic subjects. A sample of high school English course options is shown in Figure 2.0 below.

***FIGURE 2.0: Connect Academy High School English Course Offerings***

DESCRIPTION	FORMAT	GRADE	TERM	CREDIT TYPE	PREREQ
<b>REQUIRED COURSES</b>					
ENGLISH 1	Synchronous	9	YEAR	EN	None
ENGLISH 2	Synchronous	10	YEAR	EN	English 1
ENGLISH 3	Synchronous	11	YEAR	EN	English 2
AP Language and Composition	MT Digital Academy	11	YEAR	EN	English 2
ENGLISH 4	Synchronous	12	YEAR	EN	English 3
AP Literature and Composition	MT Digital Academy	12	YEAR	EN	English 3
<b>ENGLISH ELECTIVE COURSES</b>					
CREATIVE WRITING	MT Digital Academy	10-12	SEM	EN	English 1
English 1-4 Credit Recovery Options	APEX	10-12	SEM	EN	

Whether a student's goal is to excel in the arts, explore a career pathway, or pursue a traditional college pathway, our online curriculum will empower students to connect to a personalized and flexible education.

## **Meets the Indian Ed For All Mandate**

MCPS is committed to meeting our Montana Constitutional requirement to provide Indian Education for All educational and cultural experiences for Connect Academy students. Our MCPS Native American Services department will work directly with Connect Academy staff to design and implement lessons that incorporate IEFA standards and content throughout the school year in all courses. The NASS student specialists will also work with the Connect Academy Student Assistance Team to identify and support Native American students who may be

at-risk by arranging regular meetings and helping students and families connect to cultural opportunities in their community. MCPS will also include Indigenous Studies and Access to Indigenous Language courses in our high school course catalog. MCPS' adopted curriculum requires all 6th grade students to participate in Montana History and Tribal Studies as core curriculum.

### **Planning and Preparation**

Connect Academy will align with MCPS professional goal setting systems by utilizing the Danielson Framework for Teaching (2021) and accompanying rubrics as a professional goal setting and reflection tool. This tool will help the Head of School collaborate with synchronous teachers to ensure high quality instruction in all content areas.

MCPS is in the first year of a three year implementation plan based on the lesson design and instructional strategies found in the Teacher Clarity Playbook (Fisher, Fry, & Almadore, 2019). The Teacher Clarity Playbook is based on the Visible Learning research done by Dr. John Hattie which includes meta-analyses of education research to identify teaching practices and conditions that have the biggest impact on student learning. Effect sizes above 0.4 are most likely to have the greatest impact on student learning; Teacher Clarity has an effect size of 0.85 whereas student retention has an effect size of -0.32. By making learning visible to students, students can take charge of their own learning to identify what they are learning (learning intentions), why it is important (relevance), and how they will know they are successful (success criteria and formative assessments).

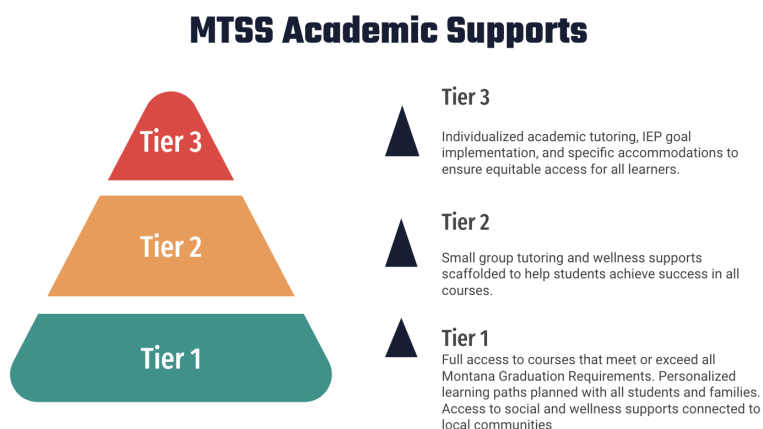
MCPS has used the Montana Content Standards to identify priority standards for each content area. Priority standards guide the skills and content taught to students in a carefully designed scope and sequence. These priority standards also have an accompanying proficiency scale to identify what proficiency looks like for each standard. The MCPS Curriculum Department will support Connect Academy teachers to use high quality, district approved curriculum materials for each synchronous course.

Through an innovative combination of the Danielson Framework and the high impact strategies identified in our Teacher Clarity work, the Connect Academy instructional team will identify clear learning intentions and success criteria for all courses that meet the elements of Danielson Domain 1: *Planning and Preparation*. Using a Teacher Clarity focus with clear rubrics that identify best practices in planning and preparation, Connect Academy teachers will make the learning visible to all stakeholders and this will allow teachers to provide students with actionable feedback for each lesson. By year 5, these learning intentions and success criteria will guide the core competency assessments that define mastery for each course. For elective and asynchronous courses, the MTDA utilizes a similar planning and instructional framework that meets rigorous content standards.

### **MTSS Systems to Support All**

#### **Learners**

Multi Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) (Figure 3.0) braided the strong research base of Response to Intervention systems (RTI Effect Size=1.29) with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS Effect Size= 0.62) to implement a comprehensive academic and behavioral tiered system that is designed to be responsive and meet the needs of students and families. Clear MTSS systems are essential for identifying and addressing





students' academic strengths, deficiencies and/or weaknesses so as to encourage constant student growth and achievement.

MTSS systems require regular data analysis protocols and feedback systems that enable educators to tailor instruction, design interventions, identify areas for curriculum enhancement, and track student learning. As part of the MTSS system, Connect Academy will convene a Student Assistance Team (SAT) that meets at least twice per month to review progress monitoring data in order to quickly identify students in need of support beyond Tier 1 and to ensure behavioral and academic interventions at Tiers 2-3 are meeting student needs.

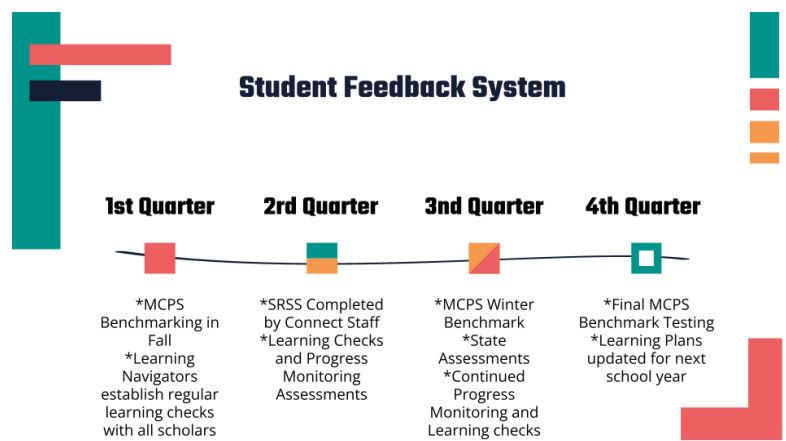
**Comprehensive Assessment Systems**

A comprehensive assessment system, an essential component of a MTSS, ensures transparency, accountability, and equality. MCPS is committed to maintaining a robust and formal assessment system that ensures academic excellence and continuous improvement across all districts including our new charter district.

The Connect Academy system will integrate a variety of assessment methods, including Tier 1 benchmark assessments administered 3 times per year; formative and summative assessments throughout course work; required standardized testing including the NAEP, MAST, and ACT; performance-based assessments; and, portfolio evaluations in place of summative course assessments. In addition to Tier 1 assessments, diagnostic assessment tools are included in the system to ensure Tier 2 and 3 interventions are matched to student need and are administered in 3-6 week cycles to ensure students are not tracked into a group but flexibly grouped to receive intervention and/or enrichment that is skill based, flexible, and responsive.

*FIGURE 4.0: Student Feedback System*

The Connect Academy formal assessment system (benchmarking, progress monitoring, and summative assessments) will align with MCPS systems. Our screening system will include ELA and Math screening tools at least three times per year as well as regular progress monitoring and diagnostic assessment tools aligned to MCPS assessment systems. MCPS Schools currently use the STAR assessment system for benchmarking and progress monitoring and a number of Tier 2-3 diagnostic and computer assisted learning tools for both ELA and Math interventions and progress monitoring.



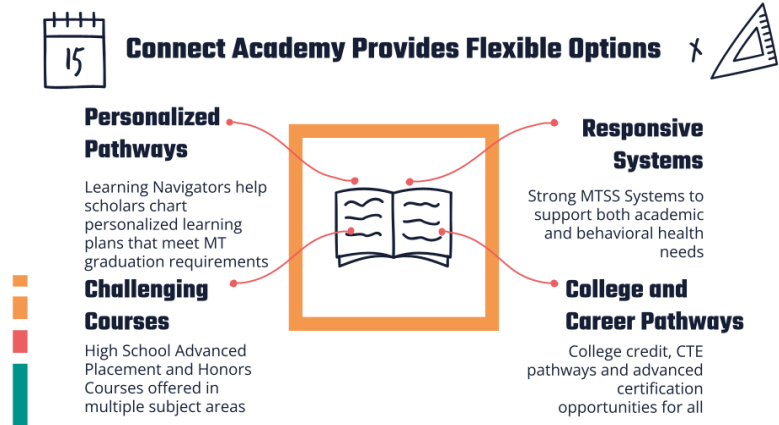
In fall 2023, MCPS is engaging in an assessment review to ensure our assessment systems are predictive of student success, aligned to Montana Content Standards, drive instructional planning, and provide actionable and useful feedback to students, teachers, and caregivers. The review will include planning specific to the MCPS Charter School Assessment systems with the hopes to share resources across MCPS systems to leverage lower costs, share professional development, and provide for comparative data analysis across districts. Teachers, school leaders, and community members including caregivers will be invited to participate; we will also do specific outreach to include potential Charter families for input. By spring 2024, MCPS will complete a 5-year assessment system implementation plan for all MCPS districts.

## A Commitment to Innovation and Flexibility

FIGURE 5.0: Flexible Options

With a commitment to personalized learning pathways, responsive MTSS systems, challenging and diverse course offerings, and college and career pathways, Connect Academy intends to be a leader in both virtual learning and competency based education.

In the first two years, the course design will follow a traditional semester design with synchronous and asynchronous course offerings, but by year 5, MCPS intends for most course offerings to be competency based.



### Personalized Pathways

Connect Academy students will be connected with a learning navigator who will work with students to identify personalized pathways and schedules to help students graduate college and career ready. Both synchronous and asynchronous courses will be available and students will be able to choose a class schedule that fits their life circumstances.

### Challenging Courses

Connect Academy will provide a diverse catalog of courses and electives for students including access to AP and dual credit courses in high school. CTE courses, workplace learning, and internships will be options for student learning pathways. Middle school electives will allow students to choose from a variety of courses to expose students to pathways that will be available in high school courses.

### Responsive Systems

Connect Academy will implement a strong MTSS system to ensure both academic and behavioral health needs are quickly identified and responsive supports are initiated in a flexible and timely fashion. In addition to academic support, Connect Academy will work with community providers across Montana to ensure students are connected to the health and wellness resources in their communities. The MCPS Families in Transition Liaison will meet regularly with the Connect Academy Student Assistance Team to ensure students in transition always have the resources they need to succeed in school.

Special education services will be provided synchronously by a licensed special educator and students with IEP's will have synchronous access to MCPS related service providers such as speech and OT. As part of the MTSS system, students who are not responding to tiered interventions can be referred by the Connect Academy SAT team for a possible special education evaluation.

### College and Career Pathways

Connect Academy students will have access to numerous College and Career opportunities. Asynchronous CTE courses will be offered through MT Digital Academy. Dual and Concurrent credit courses will be finalized upon approval of the charter and will likely be offered as both synchronous and asynchronous courses. Learning

navigators will work with high school students to identify credit bearing work-based learning and internship opportunities in their local communities.

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

The Connect Academy may seek the following variances from traditional public school standards to better facilitate online learning:

- Flexibility in teacher certification requirements - To recruit highly qualified content area experts to fill the Connect Academy certified positions, variances may be sought for alternate or provisional certification routes to licensure. This is especially true for hiring special education teachers which has proven to be a challenge since the pandemic.
- In years 1-2, Connect Academy may need variances to seat time requirements. However, as part of the 5 year plan to implement a competency based, aka proficiency based, learning system, Connect Academy will be in line with MCPS Board Policy 1906, which states the “Board of Trustees authorizes proficiency-based ANB calculation in situations when a student demonstrates proficiency in a course area as determined by the Board of Trustees using district assessments consistent with the School District’s adopted Plan of Action, or other measures approved by the Board of Trustees during the course of the current year.”
- Modified compulsory attendance ages - Online schools may seek to serve students below or above standard ages, like early college learners or homeschool students seeking supplemental courses.
- Librarians: Our online academy will rely more on digital learning resources, ebooks, databases, and online literacy tools. These can be managed by teachers rather than requiring a dedicated librarian role.
- Flexibility in start/end dates - Online learning enables year-round instruction versus standard calendars. Variances to permit flexible scheduling may be sought to allow for flexible, asynchronous and synchronous course offerings .
- Reporting requirement adjustments - Modifications may be sought for things like class size, hours, and transportation requirements not applicable to online models.

Any variances sought for Connect Academy would aim to enhance the online charter schools' ability to provide innovative and flexible education models while ensuring accountability to state and local policies and laws.

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

Connect Academy plans to be a leader in competency based education. The sections below detail our starting point as well as the long term vision for the Academy.

**Learning Environment**

The Connect Academy will initiate years 1- 2 with asynchronous and synchronous course options that mirror the MCPS school calendar. Students will work with their learning navigator to design their personalized learning pathway with classes offered in a fall and spring semester calendar.

In years 3-5, Connect Academy aspires to provide flexibly scheduled (possibly year round) asynchronous and synchronous competency based course options that allow students to graduate early or to catch up if they have fallen behind. Competency based learning systems are thoughtfully designed courses which organize student learning into clear learning intentions and success criteria for 3-8 core competencies per course. Students can work

at their own pace in competency based courses and often have multiple means to demonstrate mastery. According to John Hattie’s research, mastery based competency learning systems have an effect size of 0.57.

In person and virtual work based learning and internship opportunities will also be coordinated in students’ local communities to ensure meaningful experiences are available regardless of the physical location. Additional features of a virtual learning system provide these opportunities for a flexible learning environment:

- Use of virtual platforms that support interactive learning tools like video conferencing, discussion boards, document sharing, and more. Connect Academy will likely use Google Education systems such as Google Classroom and Google Meet in Year 1-2 but will explore a more comprehensive system such as Canvas as we transition to a competency based system in years 3-5.
- Synchronous and asynchronous course content will be accessible 24/7 via student logins.
- All students will be provided a Chromebook and hot spot if needed for accessing courses. Students will have access to the MCPS Tech Help for technical assistance.
- Physical resources and learning kits will be mailed to students to facilitate hands-on learning.

### **Class Size and Structure**

We anticipate synchronous class sizes will be at or below state accreditation levels (28-32 students). Asynchronous courses will likely have additional seats (30-40 seats) available as students will work and submit course work at their own pace within the course timeline.

Virtual learning systems have an advantage over traditional settings because technology provides more opportunities for small group and individualized learning, virtual break out rooms, virtual office hours, and one-on-one virtual meetings. Competency based systems are further personalized and responsive to student needs and allow for more individualized conferencing with the instructor.

All classes will use structured lesson design informed by the Teacher Clarity Playbook. This includes designing all lessons with clear learning intentions and success criteria that are visible to students. Throughout the units of learning, students should be able to answer the questions,

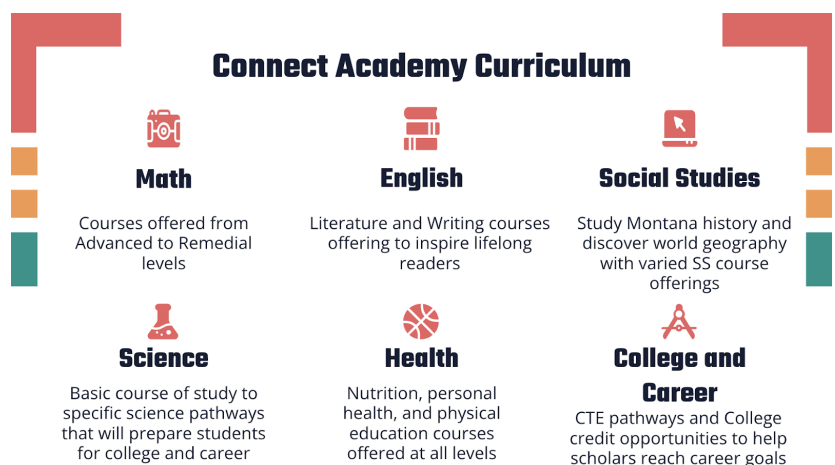
- What am I learning? (ES= 0.48)
- Why am I learning this? (ES= 0.46)
- How will I know I am successful? (ES= 0.68)

This approach to lesson design and implementation is often referred to as “visible learning” because it makes learning visible to students and allows students to take ownership of their own success. It is further designed to facilitate the development and implementation of competency based learning systems.

### **Connect Curriculum**

*Figure 6.0: Connect Academy Course Offerings*

The Connect Academy curriculum will align with state and/or national content standards across all subjects. Courses will be guided by MCPS priority standards in each content area and high quality curriculum materials will be provided to facilitate learning.



At the middle school level, all core classes will be offered synchronously following a 7 period schedule. Elective courses will be offered both synchronously and asynchronously. A sample schedule is below:

- ❖ Period 1: 8:00-8:50: Advisory (lead by Learning Navigators)
- ❖ Period 2: 9:00-9:50: ELA
- ❖ Period 3: 10:00-10:50: Math
- ❖ Period 4: 11:00-11:50: Science
- ❖ Period 5: 11:50-1:00 Lunch
- ❖ Period 6: 1:00-1:50 Social Studies
- ❖ Period 7: 2:00-2:50 Elective Option (Changes Quarterly)
- ❖ Open Office Hours for all courses: 3:00-4:00

Middle School core courses will include ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies. Electives will include world languages, engineering, media, health and PE, and digital art. In years 1-2, all core classes will follow a semester system aligned to the MCPS calendar; electives will change quarterly. In years 3-5, we will transition to a competency based system which will likely integrate courses in ELA and Social Studies and Science and Math to make content more hands-on, interactive, and meaningful to students. This will also allow us to increase elective offerings so students can explore multiple CTE pathways before selecting high school courses. Synchronous courses will use the MCPS approved curriculum materials listed below.

- ELA: Engage New York
- Math: Carnegie Learning
- Science: Amplify Science
- Social Studies: Montana Historical Society materials for Montana History and IEFA, TCI world History and US History

At the high school level, a diverse set of courses will be provided from remedial and credit recovery options to AP and dual credit opportunities. A variety of CTE courses will be offered and workplace learning opportunities and internships will be coordinated so students feel ready to choose their college or career pathway upon graduation. Course outlines and materials for asynchronous courses will be provided by our online service providers including Montana Digital Academy and APEX learning. Synchronous courses will use the MCPS approved curriculum materials listed below.

- ELA: Engage New York
- Math: Carnegie Learning
- Science: Houghton Mifflin Science Dimensions
- Social Studies: TCI Human Geography, MacGruder's American Government

### **Teaching Methods**

MCPS has been operating the Missoula Online Academy since 2020 and therefore has experience offering virtual instruction to students in K-12. We have found success with synchronous instructional models that provide opportunities for a balance of teacher direct instruction, class discussion, breakout groups for cooperative learning, and independent work time with immediate access to the teacher; this design is often referred to as Gradual Release of Responsibility. We plan to continue this approach to ensure that our classrooms demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Student-centered approach tailored to different learning styles.
- Teachers serve as guides and facilitators who provide individual guidance.
- Focus on developing student independence, self-motivation, and time management through flexible pacing.

- Use of data and learning analytics to personalize instruction and interventions.
- Ongoing parent/teacher communication and support through virtual conferences, monthly class newsletters and a weekly Connect Academy newsletter sent to all students and caregivers.

***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.***

Connect Academy will meet all state and federal legal requirements for student services including serving students with disabilities, English language learners, and students with diverse learning needs. As part of the MCPS school system, the Connect Academy will have access to a wide range of experts and support services for students. MCPS currently provides district level support for special education students, English language learners, gifted education, Native American Student Services, Curriculum and Assessment, and Tier 2-3 Interventions; these important services will be extended to the Connect Academy.

Including district level support, the Connect Academy will employ or contract to provide the following staff:

- Certified Teachers for Core Courses
- Certified special education teacher
- ELL teachers and/or tutors as needed
- School Counselor
- Head of School to oversee compliance with laws and regulations and ensure services are provided to students and families
- Access to school Health Services including access to school nursing and contracted social workers

MCPS is also committed to providing all Connect Academy employees ongoing, job-embedded professional development in online instructional methods, high impact instruction, and competency based learning. This PD approach will include opportunities for CA teachers to access district level instructional coaching staff to engage in student-centered coaching cycles throughout the school year.

In addition to providing staffing and PD to support diverse student needs, MCPS will ensure the Connect Academy has the following structural supports and policies:

- Strong MTSS systems with a Student Assistance Team that screens and identifies students with disabilities upon enrollment and throughout the school year. Conduct thorough evaluations and convene IEP teams to determine eligibility services and accommodations.
- Modifications and assistive technology for students with disabilities per their IEPs. Examples: extended time, text-to-speech, speech-to-text, closed captioning.
- Qualified ELL teachers/tutors for small group and 1-on-1 instruction. Monitor progress with annual WIDA assessment.
- Tiered interventions like tutoring, remedial courses, behavior improvement plans, counseling, and progress monitoring.
- Enrichment programs, accelerated course options, and dual enrollment opportunities.
- Online curriculum and instruction that is accessible and compliant with ADA, IDEA, ESSA, and other applicable laws.
- Communication with families in their primary language. Providing interpreters and translated materials as necessary.
- Document all evaluation and service procedures. Maintain detailed student records demonstrating legal compliance.

- Engage oversight from MCPS district leadership and participate in MCPS independent audits to ensure adherence to laws and regulations.

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

Connect Academy's discipline policy is designed to maintain a safe and respectful virtual learning environment for all students. We recognize that some students may require additional support and accommodations, and our learning platform reflects a commitment to flexible and restorative practices. Disciplinary measures are always administered with an individualized and compassionate approach, taking into account the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and any related considerations. We prioritize proactive strategies with the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Systems (PBIS) embedded in MTSS Tiered systems to ensure all students receive personalized behavior and social learning plans as needed.

In July- August 2024, Connect Academy staff will build a behavior matrix that will identify major and minor infractions and will develop an online referral system to alert administrative and counseling staff to trends. The matrix will identify a progressive discipline policy and restorative practices clear to all stakeholders. Restorative practices will be employed to help students understand the impact of their actions while fostering a sense of responsibility and accountability.

A summary of Connect Academy policies is below:

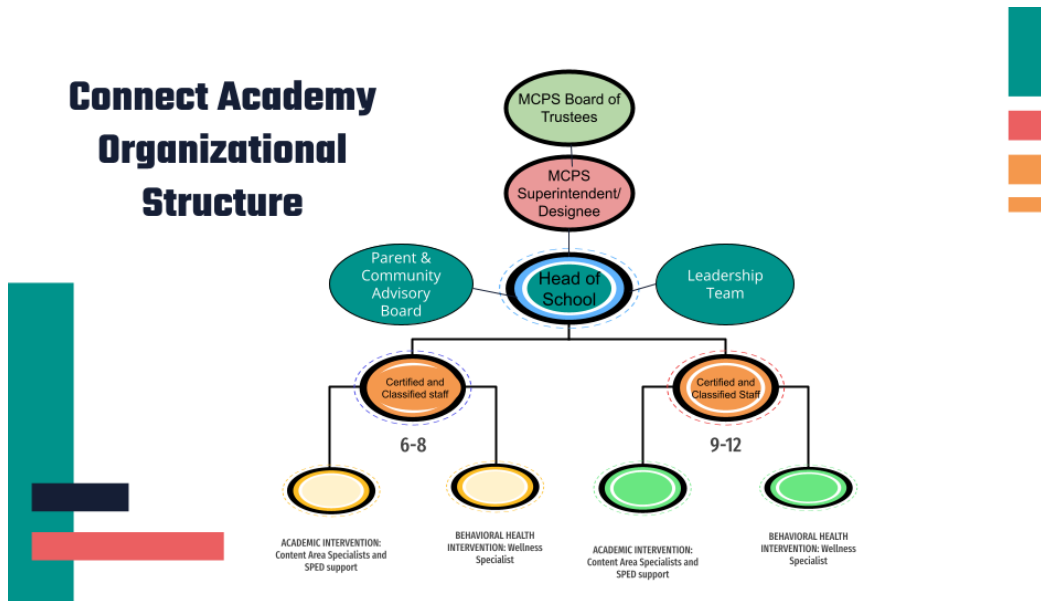
- Clear codes of conduct prohibiting cheating, cyberbullying, harassment, etc. Policies should delineate prohibited behaviors and consequences.
- Behavioral expectations communicated in student/parent handbooks. Students agree to codes of conduct upon enrollment.
- Teachers will be empowered to enforce netiquette and appropriate online behavior during live sessions and will be given the ability to mute or temporarily remove disruptive students.
- Special education students will have added protections and will be assured due process under IDEA before extended suspensions or expulsions.
- IEP teams will be included in discipline decisions to ensure policies account for disabilities and provide alternate means of correction.
- Connect Academy will comply with FERPA regarding student disciplinary records and data.

Clear policies, ongoing communication with staff/students/parents, and close coordination with IEP teams will help ensure discipline policies meet the needs of all students in an online environment.

# SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

9. 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.

Figure 7.0: Connect Academy Organizational Structure



The Connect Academy will be governed by the MCPS Board of Trustees. Daily operations will be managed by the Head of School who will be supervised by the MCPS Superintendent or his designee. The Head of School will supervise and evaluate the following staff:

- Content Area Specialists/ Learning Navigators
- Special education staff
- Counselor
- Paraprofessionals

The Head of School will convene both a Parent and Community Advisory Committee and a School Leadership Committee by October 2024. Both Committees will meet at least quarterly and will provide feedback and guidance to the Head of School. These committees will also participate in an annual Comprehensive Needs Assessment that will guide the goal setting process for the Connect Academy.

Business and operations will be managed by the current MCPS leadership team and will continue to be supervised by the MCPS superintendent. Human Resources services and support will be provided by the MCPS HR department and curriculum and instructional support will be provided by the MCPS Academic and Community Services Department.



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

The MCPS Board of Trustees will be the governing body of the Connect Academy. This board is subject to Montana state law and trustees are elected in May elections for three year terms. The MCPS Board of Trustees meets at least twice monthly and all meeting agendas are posted at least 48 hours in advance. All MCPS Board meetings are subject to open meeting laws and are televised by MCAT. The board has ultimate authority to set budgets, approve policy, and approve recommendations for hiring and firing staff.

**11. Provide a staffing chart for the public charter school’s first year and a staffing plan for the term of the public charter school.**

The staffing plan below anticipates 72 students in year 1. MCPS anticipates an increase in enrollment to reach a maximum of 175 students in years 4-5 which will increase the number of content area specialists at each level.

<b>Position</b>	<b>FTE Year 1-2</b>	<b>FTE Year 3-5</b>
Head of School	1.0	1.0
Middle School Content Specialists/Learning Navigators	2.0	3.0-4.0
High School Content Specialists/ Learning Navigators	2.0	3.0-4.0
MS/HS Counselor	1.0	1.0
Special Education Teacher	1.0	1.0
Paraprofessional Support	0	1.0
Secretarial/ Attendance Support	1.0	1.0
<b>Total Anticipated FTE</b>	<b>8 total</b>	<b>Up to 13 FTE</b>

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

<b>Applicant: Missoula County Public Schools</b>		<b>Project Title: Connect Academy Charter School Application</b>
<b>Connect Academy Start Up Plan</b>		
<b>1.0: Student Enrollment Goals</b>		
<p><b>Goal 1.1:</b> By March 1, 2024, the Connect Academy will finalize course catalogs and projected FTE.  <b>Goal 1.2:</b> By April 1, 2024, the Connect Academy will open the enrollment process.  <b>Goal 1.3:</b> By August 15, 2024, Connect Academy students will have course schedules and at least one meeting scheduled with their personal learning navigator</p>		
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Action/ Responsible</b>	<b>Timeframe: Milestones / Deliverables</b>
<b>Planning and Implementation</b>	<p><b>Responsible:</b>  MCSP Assistant Superintendents/  Head of School (HOS)</p>	<p><b><i>Finalize Course Catalogs</i></b></p> <hr/> <p><b>February 2024:</b> Finalize course catalog for middle and high school courses.  <b>Spring 2024:</b> HOS works with technology department to input courses into Infinite campus and create course selection forms for middle and high school students  <b>July -August 2024:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● HOS ensures all Connect Academy students have an appointment scheduled with their personal learning navigator.</li> <li>● Students select courses</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Enroll Students</i></b></p> <hr/> <p><b>March-April 2024:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● HOS works with assistant superintendents to develop enrollment process and procedures.</li> <li>● HOS works with the MCPS Communications staff to advertise this new statewide educational opportunity.</li> </ul> <p><b>April 1, 2024:</b> Enrollment Opens  <b>May 1, 2024:</b> Enrollment Closes  <b>May 2-15 2024:</b> Application review and enrollment lottery if applications exceed enrollment cap.  <b>May 25, 2024:</b> Families notified of enrollment decision including those on the waitlist  <b>June 1, 2024:</b> Families accept enrollment  <b>June 5, 2024:</b> Waitlist students notified if space is available</p> <p><b><i>Ongoing</i></b></p> <hr/> <p>MCPS Cabinet meets weekly to review progress toward charter goals and to make suggestions for continued improvement.</p>

		<i>Deliverables: Quarterly agendas and minutes, staffing plans, advertisements for job openings</i>
	<p>Communication Plan</p> <p><b>Responsible:</b> Head of School, Assistant Superintendents</p>	<p><b>January 2024:</b> Build and launch Connect Academy website.  <b>Feb-March 2024:</b> Build excitement for the launch- hold informative virtual and in person meetings, share social media advertisements, engage in radio and tv advertising  <b>April-May 2024:</b> Share enrollment packets and information statewide.  <b>June 1, 2024:</b> Notify families through email</p> <p><i>Deliverables: Public notices of meetings, copies of advertisements, updated website</i></p>

**2.0: Staffing Goals**

**Goal 2.1:** By June 2024, all Connect Academy certified staff will be hired.  
**Goal 2.2:** June 2024-August 2024, MCPS will provide professional development and instructional coaching to help teachers design instruction.  
**Goal 2.3:** By August 20, 2024, all Connect Academy certified staff will be hired

Strategies	Action/ Responsible	Timeframe: Milestones / Deliverables
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<b>Planning and Implementation</b>	<p>MCPS Human Resources staff will work with Assistant Superintendents and Connect Academy leadership to hire a highly qualified staff.</p> <p><b>Responsible:</b> MCSP Assistant Superintendents/ Head of School (HOS)</p>	<p><b>Hire Head of School</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>January 2024:</b> Advertise for Head of School: A certified and licensed K-12 Administrator to oversee the Connect Academy  <b>February 2024:</b> Superintendent and designees recommend a candidate for HOS to the MCPS Board of Trustees  <b>Spring 2024:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● HOS works with HR to advertise and hire all certified teaching positions</li> <li>● HOS works with assistant superintendents to advertise for and complete the student enrollment process.</li> <li>● HOS works with the technology department to ensure all virtual class platforms are prepared and courses are identified in Infinite Campus</li> <li>● HOS works with Academic and Community Schools Department to outline course objectives and content for all Connect Academy courses</li> </ul> <p><b>Summer 2024:</b> HOS works with the Academic and Community Services Department to ensure Connect Academy staff receive at least 12 hours of PIR to prepare for instruction.  <b>August 15, 2024:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● HOS ensures all students have technology and materials needed to start school and ensures all students have had or scheduled at least one meeting with their learning Navigator.</li> <li>● HOS ensures all students can access their schedule in Infinite Campus</li> </ul>
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		<p><b><i>Hire Certified Staff</i></b></p> <hr/> <p><b>March-April 2024:</b> HR advertises and recruits applicants for all CA certified positions  <b>June 1, 2024:</b> HOA works with assistant superintendents and HR to fill all certified positions  <b>Summer 2024:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All certified staff receive at least 12 hours of professional development to prepare for instruction.</li> <li>• HOA convenes the CA Student Assistance Team to begin reviewing student enrollment information to ensure all students have the academic and social supports they need to start the school year.</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Ongoing</i></b></p> <hr/> <p>MCPS Cabinet meets weekly to review progress toward charter goals and to make suggestions for continued improvement.</p> <p><i>Deliverables: Quarterly agendas and minutes, staffing plans, advertisements for job openings</i></p>
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**3.0: Governance Goals**

**Goal 3.1:** January 2024, Connect Academy Charter application approved by Montana Board of Public Education.

**Goal 3.2:** February 2024: MCPS Board of Trustees approves Connect Academy Charter and accompanying variances.

**Goal 2.2:** March -July 2024: MCPS purchases equipment, materials, and supplies for Connect Academy operations.

**Goal I 2.3:** By August 1, 2024 Connect Academy parent and student handbook complete.

Strategies	Action/ Responsible	Timeframe: Milestones / Deliverables
<p><b>Planning and Implementation</b></p>	<p>MCPS Human Resources staff will work with Assistant Superintendents and Connect Academy leadership to hire a highly qualified staff.</p> <p><b>Responsible:</b> MCSP Assistant Superintendents/</p>	<p><b><i>Gain Approvals</i></b></p> <hr/> <p><b>January 2024:</b> Connect Academy approved by Montana Board of Public Education  <b>February 2024:</b> MCPS Board of Trustees approves Connect Academy Charter with accompanying variances  <b>Spring 2024:</b> MCPS leadership team identifies contractors and service providers for Connect Academy infrastructure and ensures all privacy policies and data sharing practices are Board and State approved and meet all FERPA guidelines.</p> <p><b><i>Policies and Handbooks</i></b></p> <hr/> <p><b>March-July 2024:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HOS works with MCPS teams and Connect Academy stakeholders to develop and compile a comprehensive</li> </ul>

	<p>Head of School (HOS)</p>	<p>Connect Academy Student and Caregiver Handbook that at minimum includes academic requirements, grading policies, progressive discipline policies, codes of conduct, attendance policies, MTSS intervention systems, important contact info, school calendar and daily schedules.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HOS works with MCPS Leadership Team to write appendices for Connect Academy staff handbook to include at a minimum daily schedule, professional goal setting and observation systems, professional development expectations, and virtual duty schedules.</li> <li>• HOS works with MCPS District Crisis Team to plan and implement a Connect Academy Crisis team and clear crisis plan to include threat and suicide assessment protocols.</li> </ul> <p><b>August 1, 2024: Handbooks are distributed</b></p> <p><i>Ongoing</i></p> <hr/> <p><i>Deliverables: Final Handbook, Crisis Plan, Suicide and Threat Assessment Protocols</i></p>
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**13. Describe the plans for recruiting and developing school leadership and staff.**

MCPS will advertise for staff using the MCPS website. We also hold spring job fairs and post positions on Indeed. Candidates are screened or all applicants are interviewed. Once interviews are completed, the successful candidate is offered a job pending Board approval and a background check.

All newly hired teachers participate in a 3-day new teacher orientation program each August and all first year teachers are assigned a mentor teacher who meets with them at least monthly. Classified employees are provided onboarding and orientation specific to their position.

Ongoing, job embedded professional development opportunities are provided throughout the school year. MCPS also provides access to district instructional coaches for student centered coaching cycles that help staff improve planning and preparation and instructional delivery.

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

MCPS certified teachers fall under the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). Within this document is a prescribed program for supervision and evaluation including goal conferences (fall and spring), pre-observation meetings, observations, post-observations meetings and a summative evaluation. Administrators are evaluated by their supervisors annually. Administrators and teachers set professional goals each fall with their direct supervisor. During this goal setting meeting, the supervisor confirms the evaluation schedule for the current school year and works with the staff member to schedule observations and follow up meetings. MCPS utilizes the Danielson Framework for Teaching to identify the goal setting domains and actionable steps for improvement. All

non-tenured staff and tenured teachers in year 3 of the evaluation cycle will participate in a formal evaluation process which includes 3 formal observations and a final summative evaluation presented to the staff member before March 1 for non tenured staff and May 1 for tenured staff.

MCPS classified employee evaluation falls under the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). In addition to annual evaluations, probationary employees receive a verbal conference within 3 months of hire and a formal written evaluation within the 6 month period.

### **Head of School**

MCPS will aim to recruit a certified administrator with at least 3 years of leadership experience for the Head of School position. We anticipate filling this position by March 2024 so this individual can begin the hiring and planning processes and oversee the spring enrollment period. Once staffing is confirmed, the Head of School will be empowered to convene a school leadership team to begin working on the MTSS systems, student handbooks, and course schedules.

The Head of School will be evaluated by the MCPS Superintendent or Assistant Superintendents. Staff, student, and caregiver climate surveys will be conducted annually to provide actionable feedback for the administrator. The HOS will also be required to report at least annually to district leadership regarding academic outcomes and progress towards competency based courses.

The timeline of evaluation will mirror the certified teacher schedule with professional goal setting in the fall, at least three formal observations with follow up meetings, and a summative evaluation in the spring of each school year. The summative evaluations will identify strengths and areas for improvement. The HOS will be expected to use the summative assessment to drive professional goal setting in subsequent years.

### ***15. State the proposed governing bylaws.***

Connect Academy will be governed by all MCPS Board of Trustees policies and procedures. Policies and procedures can be found at the MCPS website ([mcpsmt.org](http://mcpsmt.org)).

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

Creating a statewide charter school will require the Connect Academy team to reach beyond the Missoula Community to build academic, CTE and health partnerships that will support our diverse student body. Learning navigators will be tasked with outreach and relationship building in the communities of the students on their caseload. Partnership Health has indicated their support for the new Connect Academy; a letter of support will be attached to our application.

### ***17. Provide the proposed calendar and sample daily schedule.***

In years 1-2, Connect Academy will align with the MCPS Board of Trustees approved High School Calendar. In Years 3-5, following research and recommendations by a CA scheduling committee that involve all stakeholders, Connect Academy will propose to the MCPS Board a more flexible calendar that accommodates a competency based learning model.

A sample MCPS School calendar can be found on the MCPS website (<https://www.mcpsmt.org/Page/1979>).

### **Sample Middle School Daily Schedule**

*\*Most courses offered synchronously*

- ❖ Period 1: 8:00-8:50: Advisory (lead by Learning Navigators)
- ❖ Period 2: 9:00-9:50: ELA
- ❖ Period 3: 10:00-10:50: Math
- ❖ Period 4: 11:00-11:50: Science
- ❖ Period 5: 11:50-1:00 Lunch
- ❖ Period 6: 1:00-1:50 Social Studies
- ❖ Period 7: 2:00-2:50 Elective Option (Changes Quarterly)
- ❖ Open Office Hours for all courses: 3:00-4:00

**Sample High School Daily Schedule**

*\*Combination of synchronous and asynchronous courses*

- ❖ Period 1: 8:00-8:50: M,W,F Advisory (lead by Learning Navigators), T/TH Academic Intervention
- ❖ Period 2: 9:00-9:50: Synchronous ELA
- ❖ Period 3: 10:00-10:50: Off
- ❖ Period 4: 11:00-11:50: Science or Social Studies
- ❖ Period 5: 11:50-1:00 Lunch
- ❖ Period 6: 1:00-1:50 Elective Option
- ❖ Period 7: 2:00-2:50 Work Based Learning or Internship
- ❖ Open Office Hours for all courses: 3:00-4:00
- ❖ Asynchronous Course: AP Statistics

# BUSINESS OPERATIONS

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

### **Transportation**

Transportation for students attending Connect Academy will not be necessary as students are not physically present at a centralized building. Connect Academy will maintain a physical location at the MCPS District office campus to house administration and essential services. Connect Academy will work with McKinney Vento and Neglected and Delinquent grants to provide gas cards to students who need support accessing brick and mortar services such as school health services.

### **Access to Technology**

Connect Academy will provide access to Chromebooks and wireless hotspots for all students enrolled. MCPS has an efficient Technology Department with the capacity to oversee access for this charter school. Connect Academy will ensure that all students have access to the necessary technology and internet connectivity and will work with staff and caregivers to address potential disparities in digital access within the community.

### **Family Resource Services**

MCPS will leverage the district Family Resource Liaison to guarantee support services and supplies are readily available to all Connect Academy students. MCPS provides families with access to clothing, backpacks, school supplies, food and gas cards, headphones, and winter gear as needed. Our district liaison can also assist caregivers with access to supports such as housing and medical services.

### **Health and Nutrition**

Students who participate in the Connect Academy will have access to a Grab and Go meal pickup (breakfast and lunch in one bag) at each of our MCPS school sites. We will also work with community partners across the state including local food banks to provide meal access for students outside the Missoula community. Meal prices, including free and reduced price options, will apply. Students who choose to participate will also be offered EmPower Packs (nutrition support for weekends) each Friday when they pick up their Grab and Go meal; similar partnerships will be sought in communities around the state to ensure students have access to nutritious meals on both school days and weekends.

TEACH Academy will be added to the MCPS nursing schedule and health services will be provided as needed. MCPS also collaborates with Partnership Health Center (PHC) to provide school based health services in Lowell Elementary and Willard Alternative High School and is in the initiation phase of health services at CS Porter Middle School and Franklin Elementary. According to the Montana Healthcare Foundation, "Providing health services in school settings helps kids miss less school and supports better academic outcomes." MCPS will work with PHC to extend school based health services to our charter schools.

## ***19. Describe co curricular and extracurricular programs and how the programs will be funded and delivered.***

Connect Academy will offer student led clubs for students to identify topics that interest them. Virtual space will be allowed for these clubs to exist during the lunch block. Content specialists will also have the option to lead



school clubs. Any school initiated or supported clubs will require parent permission for students to participate. These clubs may be in addition to school hours however they will not have an allocated budget at this time.

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

Financial support of the online charter school would follow the same funding structure as the school district's general fund. The budget for the school district's general fund is based upon a formula found in state law. The calculation of funding under the school funding formula depends primarily upon enrollment. Likewise, funding for the online charter school will be tied to online charter school enrollment. MCPS has been operating an online academy since Covid-19 disrupted in person instruction. Based upon that experience, we anticipate sufficient enrollment to sustain operation of the online charter school as we anticipate a minimum of 72 students - over 40 high school students and over 40 middle school students. This level of enrollment would support the staffing and operational expenses of the online charter school. District reserves and one time only funding sources would cover operational expenditures of the online charter school until state payments are received and local taxes levied.

District financial management practices, including district policies and procedures, would control operation of the online charter school. MCPS has policies and procedures that address how purchases are made to ensure appropriate approvals and separation of duties. District policies controlling financial management are readily available on the district website at [www.mcpsmt.org](http://www.mcpsmt.org). Hiring practices would ensure compliance with state and federal law as staff are hired to support operations of the online charter school. Specific procedures and practices would ensure that transactions of the charter school follow accounting principles and standards. The operations of the online charter school will be included within the MCPS single audit and testing of internal controls. MCPS financial audits through FY21 are available on the district website, and demonstrate a track record of positive audit opinions.

**21. Describe the insurance coverage that will be obtained.**

The insurance plans and programs that support MCPS will likewise apply to online charter school operations and staff as follows:

- General Liability Insurance. MCPS participates in the MSPLIP pooled insurance program for general liability insurance. Participation in GL coverage would be covered through indirect cost payments. MCPS general liability insurance would apply to online charter school operations in the following categories, as applicable, outlined below:
  - Property Coverage
  - General Liability and Auto Coverage
  - Cyber Coverage
  - School Board Liability
- Unemployment Insurance. MCPS participates in the MSUIP, a pooled insurance program for schools. MCPS would carry unemployment insurance through MSUIP for staff of the online charter school. Unemployment Insurance for staff of the online charter school would be covered through the retirement fund like staff of MCPS.

Workers Compensation Insurance. MCPS participates in the MSGIA plan for workers compensation insurance. This plan is also a pooled insurance plan for schools. Workers compensation insurance would be paid for by the funds realized in support of the online charter school

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

As reflected in 5 year projections, attached as Exhibits 1-2, the minimum student enrollment in the online charter school will provide sufficient budget to support initial operations. The 5 year projections are based upon a modest enrollment increase in students, despite our expectation that enrollment will grow 175 students by year 5. During the first year of the online charter school, we estimate state and local funding totaling just over \$1m with operational expenses of less than \$900k. Assuming modest inflationary increases of 3% to the funding components and expenditures, it is anticipated that funding would continue to support operations with minimal

deficits. Minimal increases in enrollment would offset these deficits. Modest increases in enrollment would more than offset any deficit and allow for the hiring of additional staff to support operations.

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

As reflected above, initial operations are estimated to provide a surplus of just over \$120k on operations of close to \$1.1m. Until state and local funds are realized, MCPS reserves and one time only funds will sustain operations. Once online charter school expenses are realized, expenditures will be adjusted to the charter school funding sources. The small surplus in the initial year of operations will be preserved to the extent possible, to support larger purchases and sustain operations during fluctuations in enrollment.

**24. Describe anticipated fundraising contributions and evidence, if applicable.**

None are anticipated at this time.

**25. Describe the facilities plan, including backup or contingency plans.**

Not applicable for online charter school operations. MCPS conference rooms and office space is available for online charter school if necessary.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND NEED

### ***26. Describe the specific evidence of significant community support.***

Missoula County Public schools established the Missoula Online Academy (MOA) in 2020, in response to the community's urgent need to initiate distance learning. Although many students have returned to in-person instruction, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the need for, and benefit to, robust online learning options.

Online learning options have proven to be essential for students and families as evidenced by the extensive public comment received by the MCPS School Board. Students and families who have been part of the MOA community have regularly advocated for this online option to continue. As referenced earlier in the application, public comment has indicated the importance of the MOA to our students and families. Included comments expressed appreciation from parents for the versatility of the online school and its value to the district's portfolio. Parents also highlighted that, for some students, online learning is the only viable option for academic opportunity given their personal circumstances. Students expressed the mental health benefits of the online program and how online learning builds responsibility and promotes accountability. In addition, MOA teachers described the online school as critical for meeting the needs of students who do not thrive in a traditional academic setting.

### ***27. Describe the opportunities and expectations for parent involvement.***

Connect Academy will continue to emphasize MCPS's commitment to involving parents in the educational process, which can attract families who value active participation in their child's journey. Parents and guardians are encouraged to maintain regular communication with their student's teacher(s) and school administrators to stay informed about their child's progress and any school updates. Parents and guardians are expected to attend parent/teacher conferences, and need assessment meetings, and read all school newsletters. MCPS will encourage parents to actively engage their students to participate in school activities and events whether in person or virtual. Connect Academy will offer a parent workshop at the beginning of each semester to ensure parents and guardians receive education in online learning best practices, digital safety, and supporting students at home.

In year 1, Connect Academy will convene an advisory board composed of school stakeholders including parents and caregivers. This board will meet at least quarterly to ensure families are involved in goal setting and action planning for the Connect Academy. Parents will also be encouraged to form a Parent-Teacher Organization to further support school engagement and enrichment.

**Exhibit A: Annual Operating Budget and Start Up**

Annual Operating Budget Worksheet				
DESCRIPTION	ASSUMPTIONS	AMOUNT	NUMBER	TOTAL
General	Assume a \$670,000 annual operating budget (all figures have been rounded for simplicity)	\$670,000	1	\$670,000.00
Number of Students	A total of at least 72 students 6th-12th grade. 72 is the minimum enrollment needed to “break even,” however, this charter school can accommodate up to 600 with the assumed staffing levels detailed below.	72	72	72
High School	At least 41 high school students	41	41	41
Middle School	At least 21 7th and 8th grade students	21	21	21
Elementary School	At least 10 6th grade students	10	10	10
Facility square footage	This is an online charter school and does not require a facility to house students. However, office space will be available for teaching staff and classroom space will be available for student support. These spaces are already available at existing MCPS sites.	N/A	0	0
Student teacher ratio	Student teacher ratios will be governed by the accreditation rules of Montana - not to exceed 30 students per period for a maximum of 5 periods per teacher	1	150	150
Average teacher salary	The average teacher salary at MCPS is approximately \$68,000	\$68,000	1	\$68,000.00
<b>REVENUES</b>				
High School Basic entitlement \$343,483 Middle School Basic entitlement \$114,493	Assuming we meet our minimum enrollments of at least 41 high school students and 21 middle school students the charter school would be eligible for basic entitlement			
High School	High School Basic entitlement is	\$343,483	1	\$343,483.00

Basic Entitlement	\$343,483 assuming we have at least 41 students enrolled			
Middle School Basic Entitlement	Middle School Basic entitlement is \$114,493 assuming we have at least 21 students enrolled	\$114,493	1	\$114,493.00
State ANB formula earnings High School	Assuming \$7634 per high school student - but this could change based on enrollments and degradation in the formula	\$7,634	41	\$312,994.00
State ANB formula earnings Middle School	Assuming \$7634 per middle school student - but this could change based on enrollments and degradation in the formula	\$7,634	21	\$160,314.00
State ANB formula earnings Elementary School	Assuming \$5962 per 6th grade school student - but this could change based on enrollments and degradation in the formula	\$5,962	10	\$59,620.00
Quality Educator Payment	This assumes a quality educator payment for each certified staff member	\$3,673	6	\$22,038.00
Data for Achievement	Per ANB (74.36) is the ANB count and not the actual enrollment	\$23.58	74.36	\$1,753.41
At Risk Payment	Per student count and not the actual enrollment	\$28.88	75	\$2,166.00
Indian Education For All	Per ANB (74.36) is the ANB count and not the actual enrollment	\$24.63	74.36	\$1,831.49
American Indian Achievement Gap	\$242 per Native American Student but we won't know how many Native American students we will have	\$242	0	\$0.00
Applicable State Grants	Assuming we receive any state grant funding, the charter school will receive an equitable share on a per pupil basis	\$0	72	\$0.00
Applicable Federal Grants	Assuming we receive any federal Title or IDEA funding, the charter school will receive an equitable share on a per pupil basis	\$0	72	\$0.00
Local Tax Revenue	Assuming MCPS continues to pass ovebase levies the charter school will be funded at 100% of maximum allowed budget	30%	72	\$0.00
Grants and Fundraising	No grants or additional fundraising are anticipated in year one.	\$0	0	\$0.00
Total Revenue				\$1,018,692.90

EXPENDITURES				
<b>PERSONNEL</b>				
Head of School	\$103,000 (prorated at .34 FTE) = \$34,000	\$103,000	1	\$103,000.00
Counselor	1 counselor for guidance and college and career readiness	\$68,000	1	\$68,000.00
Teachers	4 content area teachers + 1 special education teacher at average salary \$ 68,000	\$68,000	5	\$340,000.00
Para Professionals	None needed at this time	\$0	0	\$0.00
Clerical	One secretary	\$37,000	1	\$37,000.00
Nurse	None needed at this time	\$0	0	\$0.00
Custodial	Considered as part of our indirect costs	\$0	0	\$0.00
Fringe Benefits	17% of total salary expenditures	\$548,000	17%	\$93,160.00
Health Benefits	\$673 a month x 12 Months	\$8,076	7	\$56,532.00
Other	Assuming cell phones, mileage, travel reimbursement = \$1000 per person	\$1,000	7	\$7,000.00
Total Personnel			7	\$704,692.00
<b>INSTRUCTION</b>				
Textbooks	Assume \$250 per student	\$250	72	\$18,000
Online curriculum	Assume 6 courses per student at \$150 per course on a variety of platforms to meet student needs	\$900	72	\$64,800
Classroom Paper and Supplies	Assume \$30 per student	\$30	72	\$2,160
Computers	Assume \$500 per student	\$500	72	\$36,000
Software	Assume \$100 per student	\$100	72	\$7,200
Field Trips		\$0	72	\$0
Instructional Equipment	Staff laptops \$800 each	\$800	7	\$5,600
Library and Media	Included in textbooks, online curriculum, supplies	\$0	0	\$0
Student Assessment	Assume \$50 per student	\$50	72	\$3,600
Classroom Furniture	Assume no furniture needed	\$0	0	\$0
Athletic Equipment	Assume no athletic equipment needed	\$0	0	\$0

Music Equipment	Assume no music equipment needed	\$0	0	\$0
Other	Hotspots, Internet Connectivity - assume \$70 per student average	\$70	72	\$5,040
Total Instruction				\$142,400
<b>SERVICES AND SUPPLIES</b>				
Office Supplies	\$250 per FTE	\$500	7	\$3,500.00
Office Furniture	No additional furniture needed	\$0	0	\$0.00
Book Keeping and Audit	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	\$0		\$0.00
Payroll Services	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	\$0		\$0.00
Banking Fees	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	\$0		\$0.00
Legal Services	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	\$0		\$0.00
Liability and Property Insurance	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	\$0		\$0.00
Staff Development	\$1000 per teacher	\$1,000	7	\$7,000.00
Travel	\$150 per teacher	\$150	7	\$1,050.00
Internet	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	See indirect cost rate below		
Food Service	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	See indirect cost rate below		
Transportation	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	See indirect cost rate below		
Health Supplies	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	See indirect cost rate below		
Pest Control	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	See indirect cost rate below		
Janitorial Supplies	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	See indirect		

		cost rate below		
Waste Disposal	Included in indirect cost rate calculated at 2.67% of our revenue	See indirect cost rate below		
Indirect Costs	Estimated Revenue \$1,098,195 x 2.67% = \$29,321	\$1,018,674	2.97%	\$30,254.63
Total Services and Supplies				\$41,804.63
<b>FACILITIES</b>				
Rent/Lease/Mortgage	MCPS will not need to budget for facilities for the online charter school	N/A		
Maintenance & Repair	MCPS will not need to budget for facilities for the online charter school	N/A		
Gas/ Electric	MCPS will not need to budget for facilities for the online charter school	N/A		
Phone	MCPS will not need to budget for facilities for the online charter school	N/A		
Fire & Security	MCPS will not need to budget for facilities for the online charter school	N/A		
Total Facilities				\$0.00
Total Revenue				\$1,018,692.90
Total Expenditures				\$888,896.63
Surplus (Deficit)				\$129,796.27



*Exhibit B: 5 Year Projections*

<b>MCPS - Online Charter School</b>					
<b>Five Year Projections</b>					
<b>FY25 - FY30</b>					
	<b>FY25</b>	<b>FY26</b>	<b>FY27</b>	<b>FY28</b>	<b>FY29</b>
ANB Based Upon Increase of 5 HS Students Per Yr	74.57	79.57	84.57	89.57	94.57
<b>Estimated Budget</b>	\$ 1,006,987	\$ 1,076,899	\$ 1,150,099	\$ 1,226,721	\$ 1,306,906
Prior Year Budget	\$ -	\$ 1,006,987	\$ 1,076,899	\$ 1,150,099	\$ 1,226,721
<b>Start Up FY25 &amp; Est. Increase Thereafter</b>	\$ 1,006,987	\$ 69,911	\$ 73,200	\$ 76,623	\$ 80,185
<b>Salary &amp; Benefit Projections (3% increase each year):</b>					
Certified Staff	\$ (408,000)	\$ (12,240)	\$ (12,607)	\$ (12,985)	\$ (13,375)
Administrative Staff	\$ (103,000)	\$ (3,090)	\$ (3,183)	\$ (3,278)	\$ (3,377)
Support Staff	\$ (37,000)	\$ (1,110)	\$ (1,143)	\$ (1,178)	\$ (1,213)
Benefits	\$ (155,012)	\$ (4,650)	\$ (4,790)	\$ (4,934)	\$ (5,082)
<b>Total Salary and Benefit Cost/Increases</b>	\$ (703,012)	\$ (21,090)	\$ (21,723)	\$ (22,375)	\$ (23,046)
<b>Other Obligations:</b>					
Instructional Materials/Technology	\$ (142,400)	\$ (4,272)	\$ (4,400)	\$ (4,532)	\$ (4,668)
Services and Supplies	\$ (38,749)	\$ (1,162)	\$ (1,197)	\$ (1,233)	\$ (1,270)
<b>Total Other Costs/Increases</b>	\$ (181,149)	\$ (5,434)	\$ (5,598)	\$ (5,765)	\$ (5,938)
<b>Anticipated Balance</b>	\$ 122,826	\$ 43,387	\$ 45,879	\$ 48,482	\$ 51,200



Board of Public Education  
46 N Last Chance Gulch, Suite 2B  
PO Box 200601, Helena, MT 59620  
October 23, 2023

Dear Board of Public Education,

I am writing in strong support of the application from Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS) for the proposed charter school, Connect Academy. We are confident in MCPS leadership's ability establish and operate this innovative virtual school.

Partnership Health Center's mission is "To promote optimal health and wellbeing for all through comprehensive, patient-focused, accessible and equitable care." Over the past 8 years, Partnership Health Center has collaborated closely with leadership from MCPS to expand health services in priority schools and to eliminate health access barriers for students and their families. In this time, we have found MCPS leadership to be excellent partners and innovators.

The Connect Academy represents a flexible approach for 6th-12th grade students to have access to educational pathways that fit with their individualized needs, such as expanding course options, providing acceleration opportunities, or providing opportunities for credit recovery. The online format allows for innovative teaching methods and individualized support for each student.

We are enthusiastically in support of this proposal. Accepting this application will enable MCPS to develop an online academy in the Missoula community that is tailored to the unique needs of families and will improve the lives, health, and educational outcomes of MCPS students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lara Salazar".

06B29E6EFD3BDF77018DBF2CFE66505B

readysign

Lara Salazar  
Chief Executive Officer  
Partnership Health Center  
401 Railroad St. W  
Missoula, MT 59802



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*Healthy People, Strong Communities*

