

Public Comment
Public Charter School Applications

Bozeman Public Charter Applications

1. Adrianne Wallace

Bozeman, MT

My daughter is part of the **Bridger Charter Academy** and benefits greatly from its approach to education. She is motivated to learn by the somewhat self-paced model. We are grateful for the small community feeling in BCA and hope that it continues to live on.

2. Cora DeSantis

Bozeman, MT

I have a daughter at **BCA** in Bozeman. I'm writing about the success and promise BCA offers children of a different feather. My older children were normal popular kids that did fine socially in school.

My youngest is my humbling child. She has some stumbling blocks despite being brilliant. She has social anxiety, severe depression, and ADHD.

The regular school setting gave her an eating disorder in middle school - her social anxiety was not served well in a typical school setting. BCA has been amazing for her. She's found friends of a different feather where that was always difficult for her prior.

She's got straight A's and the staff works around her (dis)abilities. She loves her teachers. I mean really loves her teachers. And she's found passions that she shares with them. I'm very thankful for this program and what it's done for my child and her disabilities. Please contact me with any questions.

3. Kristina Allison

Bozeman, MT

I am writing to express my gratitude and my unequivocal support for the charter application of **Bridger Charter Academy** at Bozeman High School.

Our son struggled in middle school to "fit the box" of the traditional classroom. His experience as a ninth grader at Bridger Charter Academy has been entirely different. He reports a feeling a support, encouragement, and ultimately success. This is due to the mentoring provided by teachers, the self-pacing, smaller class size and the community feel of the BCA. This has led to higher grades, better attendance and a total absence of disciplinary issues. We view this innovative program as a win-win for students/families and the school; we hope that the Board approves the BCA's application without reservation.

4. Richard Nelson

Bozeman, MT

This letter is a vote of support for the **Bozeman Charter School** (BoCS) and Bridger Charter Academy's applications under HB549.

We have two boys enrolled in this school, in 3rd and 6th grades, and they have been thriving both educationally, and socially.

Our kids love school. Since it is a competency-based model, they are able to move ahead on subjects they have mastered and spend more time on areas that they need help on. The mixed grade model has provided the opportunities to both learn from and teach kids of different ages.

For us the school provides the perfect mix for parents who want to be more involved with their children's day to day education, but still want to be part of the state's wonderful public education program.

One of the areas that we did not think about, but now have come to appreciate, is the diversity of students the Bocs has attracted. The BoCS offers an alternative for parents whose kids struggle in the traditional school setting. At the beginning of the year, we were worried about the presence of students that had different learning "problems", but now we have come to value this. We have seen these kids also thrive under the BoCS model, as a result of direction and help from both their teachers and peers. We think this social lesson is one that will stick with our kids for the rest of their lives and has ended up being one of the most important lessons they might learn.

The local school board, superintendent Casey Betram and his staff have worked together tirelessly to navigate the changing dynamics of COVID and funding over the last several years to keep this program alive, vital and to provide what we consider will be the future educational model for our kids. The teachers we currently have are the best I have ever experienced. I am in awe of the commitment all of these people have had to the education and well being of our children.

We hope you consider both the BoCS and Bridger Charter Academy's applications favorably. In my opinion, they should be used as a model for how to successfully do this for the rest of the state. You could not find a more dedicated group of educators anywhere in the world! Thank you for your consideration.

5. Kristi Dunks
Bozeman, MT

I am writing to express my support for the **Bozeman Charter School** and **Bridger Charter Academy** within the Bozeman School District. I currently have two children enrolled in the Bozeman Charter School where they have attended for the past three years. They have each excelled in this learning environment and the flexibility it offers. The school also provides the opportunity for competency based learning, which has allowed them to excel in those subjects that they grasp quickly and spend additional time in those areas where they need it.

With this alternative model of public education, my children also benefit from the diverse student population that may include those that attend in person each day, those students that they see in-person at expeditions, or others that are online only due to their family work travels, medical needs, or sports. The unique framework provides a public school for anyone to attend based on the pathway that most closely meets their needs while providing extra time for families to spend together throughout the day. This school is a model for the future with the flexibility it offers families based on their work or personal situation, as well as creating the space for students to connect and learn, adapting based on students' locations and needs.

When I think of the Bozeman Charter School, I think of the small one room schoolhouse my dad attended in Rocker, Montana, but transformed for the modern age through technological advancements and the sharp insight of those within the Bozeman Public School District. The walls of the Bozeman Charter School extend from the structure of their physical classrooms into the students' home learning environments and out into the expeditionary adventures they experience each week. We look forward to growing the Bozeman Charter School and supporting continued operation of the Bridger Charter Academy, both which provide alternative learning paths for students within our public schools. Thank you for your work advancing public charter schools in Montana.

6. Brandt Bacha

Bozeman, MT

The **BOCS** program is wonderful. It allows my 4th grader the flexibility to attend to her academics through a hybrid learning schedule. She's able to have more one on one with her teacher and her classmates with the smaller class size.

Keeping my child adjusted and adapted to online programs is always good and will of course be more relevant further into the future. Thank you.

Corvallis Public Charter Applications

1. Joe O'Rourke

Columbia Falls, MT

The following questions and concerns are directed at the Corvallis School District's Applications to establish a new Charter school program as authorized by the new law passed this year that allows for the creation of, Public Charter Schools.

Program Name: **Corvallis Gifted Learning Center:**

1. Where are these 190 students coming from?
2. The applicant suggests using the DIBLES and MAPS "to isolate and select students who can handle the rigor of our K-12 curriculum." This is inconsistent with the law (see section 8). Public charter schools "shall enroll all students who wish to attend unless the number of students exceeds the capacity of the program." They are suggesting they can "cherry pick" their students for this program and "cream the crop" of the best students. Unconscionable.
3. The applicant further clarifies this cherry-picking plan by openly admitting the CGLC is "open to kids identified as high achieving. Each student tested as they enroll... and then placed in CGLC if..." This is not against the law.
4. This is not well thought out on many levels.
 - a. What's the plan if it turns out to be a bad match for the student?
 - b. Can they simply switch back to the normal class?
 - c. How do students get in if they are transferring from another district or state?
 - d. How frequently will they test to place students in the program?
 - e. How exactly are they going to manage offering "traditional in-class and wrap around non-traditional classes...allowing the learning environment to be whatever is best..." This isn't a plan! These children deserve an actual plan.

5. If they don't need any variances to standards to run this program, and if they have proof there is a need for it, then based on their duty stated in the MT Constitution about offering a "quality education" for all learners to reach their "full potential," then Corvallis is simply admitting that they are not currently serving their students' needs and they are not willing to do it unless they are given extra funding. This is a shame.

2. **Joe O'Rourke**

Columbia Falls, MT

The following questions and concerns are directed at the Corvallis School District's Applications to establish a new Charter school program as authorized by the new law passed this year that allows for the creation of "Public Charter Schools".

Program Name: **Corvallis Transformational Learning Center:**

1. The CTLC program does not anticipate needing or requesting any variances, so what is different? If they don't need variances, then they don't need a charter. Plus, doesn't this program already exist?
2. The proposal that they are going to have 218 students each year is unsubstantiated and dubious. Unless, of course, they know this because they are already running this program and receiving Transformational Learning grant money for the state and Advanced Opportunities funding? They seem to be proposing to use funding from three schemes to run a program that is already in place.
3. Why are they requesting funding for a full year in 24/25 school year but not actually "opening" until spring of 25? That's not how this works. The law does not allow for pre-operational funding.
4. Their proof of community support in item #25 shows that this program is already in place. If so, then it's already being funded and they are clearly double dipping if not triple dipping into public money for the same programing for the same students.
5. Based on the applicant's strategic plan it seems pretty clear that all of this is already in place with current funding.

Great Falls Core Elementary Charter

1. **Michelle Kelly**

MSU Northern University Supervisor for Great Falls
Havre, MT

I am writing in support of the proposed **Great Falls CORE Elementary Charter School** and I urge you to approve of its application.

For the past four years, I have been a university professor and student teacher supervisor for MSU Northern. My first semester, I supervised 15 student teachers within the Great Falls Public School system. Every semester following, the number of student teachers I have supervised has dwindled. This semester, I am supervising just two student teachers in Great Falls.

Great Falls Public Schools has a strong reputation of excellence in teaching and learning. My student teachers always connect what they have learned in their undergrad and methods' courses to what they are implementing in the classroom. This is due, in large part, because many of their core teachers are adjunct professors who teach in the GFPS.

The CORE school is a creative plan to solve the teaching crisis in our area. Our children deserve to have an education by learned professionals. What better way than to guide and mentor college bound education students all along the path to a degree? The college students will be able to take their core courses from the very teachers they will be observing and working side-by-side everyday. Intertwining pedagogy and philosophy with real-time implementation will only strengthen the students' knowledge and skills, which in turn will better prepare them for success in their own classrooms. The opportunity for college students to finish a teaching degree in 3 years with less debt will also be a gamechanger for many.

Building the teacher pool, relieving overcrowded classrooms, strengthening professional relationships, involving community, collaborating at all levels of education are just a few of the benefits I predict will happen with the opening of this charter CORE school. Because this idea was conceived with the best interests of our young children in mind, I have no doubt GFPS will be committed to making this school a success. Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to hear your acceptance of this proposal soon.

2. Shannon Taylor
Instructional Coach
Great Falls, MT

I am writing in regard to the **GFPS Core School**. I know that the benefits of this model have already been presented, but I'd like to add my perspective.

I am in my 19th year as a teacher with GFPS and this is my 5th and final year as an Instructional Coach who is getting ready to transition back into the classroom. In the coaching role, a large portion of my time is spent supporting teachers that are new to GFPS and/or new to teaching. A major takeaway that I've had during this time is the wide range of levels of preparation teachers have received prior to entering the classroom. The amount of success they experience with their students both academically and behaviorally is directly tied to the training they've received, and we have already lost some of the teachers who we may have been able to save if they had opportunities and time to build their understanding of all of the skills teaching requires. I can't think of a better way to provide this training than to give future teachers opportunities to work with actual students in a GFPS school setting.

The teacher shortage can be felt throughout our district, and it impacts everyone. I'm passionate about public education and the opportunities it provides for kids, regardless of background. I am proud to be a GFPS teacher and to teach in a district that has high standards for staff and students. As fewer people are getting into the profession and the pool of potential teachers is dwindling, the standard seems to be getting lowered with each passing year. The goal of our district is "All students engaged in learning today...for life tomorrow", and we owe it to our students to have every opportunity to learn and grow to fulfill their hopes and dreams. I feel a renewed sense of hope about the future of public education with the possibilities provided by the Core School. Thank you for your time. I'm happy to discuss this further if needed.

3. Shannon Guilfoyle, Principal
Great Falls, MT

Thank you for taking the time to consider public comments re: **GFPS's charter application**. Of the many benefits this opportunity would bring to our community, I'm most excited about the opportunity for GFPS to branch out to the broader university system to bring real-life lab learning experiences for

pre-service teachers. Teacher attrition rates raise dramatically after a teacher's 3rd year in the field - fully degreed and dropping out - only to discover that teaching is WAY more than standing in front of students to impart knowledge. A lab experience negates these chances and allows master teachers to work along side pre-service teachers to work through these challenges. The bonds that are created between teachers and their pre-service students often last years past a student's degree date, thereby preventing teacher attrition and bringing stability to our community's educational foundation.

4. **Laura Crist**

Helena, MT

I am writing as a parent of four children in the **Great Falls Public School District** to express my approval and enthusiasm for the proposed CORE charter school.

I appreciate the thoughtful approach that GFPS has taken to find creative and helpful ways to have charter and public schools work together. I am enthusiastic about the teacher and student teacher model to help produce high-quality educators for our community and state. The students and families will benefit from the flexibility in curriculum approaches as well as the increased adult to child ratios. I would encourage the state to move in any direction possible to reduce classroom sizes in all schools.

I would encourage you to approve this well thought-out, innovative and personalized approach to charter education that fits the needs of the families in Great Falls. The efforts to provide a neighborhood charter school that represents the true demographics of our community will help provide helpful data and learning approaches for all students. I am excited to see what the future of education looks like in our community.

5. **Jamie Marshall**

Great Falls, MT

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment regarding the proposed **CORE Charter School** through the Great Falls Public Schools District. I am writing to share my strong support for this innovative model that has great potential to positively influence children, families, teachers, and our community.

I have resided in Great Falls, Montana for almost 14 years. My husband and I are small business owners and have three children currently attending school in the Great Falls Public Schools district. I have had the opportunity to volunteer in classrooms and with our elementary school PTA for the past nine years. I am grateful to also serve on several local non-profit boards, all committed to the health, education and safety of our community and its children. In my professional life, I have nearly 20 years of experience in the fields of social work and public health, with particular emphasis in educational advocacy and community organizing.

Since learning of the potential for this CORE concept in Great Falls, I have attended a series of meetings and presentations to learn more of the details, anticipated implementation, and future impact. I am very impressed with the thoughtful approach the district has taken to develop this concept, and particularly with the partnerships in place already to bring it to fruition. The multipronged approach for the CORE school is likely to enhance not only educational opportunities for students in and out of the classroom, but simultaneously provide expanded training opportunities for future teachers and addresses the teacher shortages that have been increasing in recent years.

I have been impressed with the intentional approach the district has taken to selecting a school within Great Falls to implement this model that mirrors the true demographics of our community. This is not a school that will cater to any one specific group or area – it will be open and responsive in a true community model that meets the needs of students from differing backgrounds and learning styles. I see great hope for how this model can help to increase further partnership with both the community and families in expanding opportunities.

Great Falls is not unique in the ever-expanding demands to find creative solutions to expanded needs of students and families, tightening budgets and ever increasing dynamics of how to appropriately meet all of the learning styles of students in classrooms. I believe this CORE school concept is a timely and needed option in Great Falls to open doors to new ideas and options for families and teachers, as well as provide a potential model and catalyst for future innovation in other aspects of the district. I strongly support this model and appreciate your consideration of supporting this charter approach.

6. Charlene Ammons, Instructional Coach

Great Falls, MT

I am writing in support of the Great Falls Public Schools' charter application for the **GFPS CORE School**. As a teacher, an instructional coach, and a former adjunct professor for MSU-Northern's undergraduate Education program, I am extremely enthusiastic about the potential of this endeavor.

There are several aspects of the CORE School approach that I anticipate having tremendous positive impact on our world of education. First is the impact on preservice teacher preparation and education and resulting retention. It is a known fact nation-wide that teacher retention is at a critical stage and much of that is related to the daunting demands of a classroom with many new teachers under-prepared. In my tenure as an adjunct professor, I was able to more intensely work with my college students through both my classroom experience with and my integral knowledge of district curriculum and pedagogy to best prepare preservice teachers for stepping into a GFPS classroom. Along with my colleagues who also served as adjunct professors, our relationships with these preservice teachers continued forward when they joined GFPS as new teachers and we as their instructional coaches. Many of our principals will attest to the fact that this model repeatedly proved these new teachers were by far the most prepared and adept at stepping into a GFPS classroom than other first year teachers. This is a similar model being proposed in the GFPS CORE School framework.

In addition, the impact on students can also be improved dramatically. Because there is also a nation-wide teacher shortage, many districts, to include GFPS, have had to resort to emergency licensure and placing preservice teachers who technically are student teachers, as teachers of record in classrooms. While some of these emergency placements have been selected based on individuals showing great potential, they are still operating at a deficit in their learning curve, and students often pay the price through a lack of classroom management skills and a lack of content pedagogical knowledge. Students deserve to have master teachers guiding new teachers, so student learning is always moving forward and not negatively impacted. The model proposed in GFPS CORE School offers students the benefits of having both a master teacher and an additional developing teacher to maximize support of student learning.

Lastly, I am incredibly excited for our master teachers to have opportunities to pass on their wealth of knowledge and well-honed expertise. This is a chance to value their well-earned mastery of the classroom, which in turn not only benefits new teachers and students, but also builds incentive to continue in education. The proposed innovations of collaborative leadership and open classrooms offer

teachers an environment that is often missing in the traditional school setting, leaving many veteran teachers feeling isolated, disheartened, and discouraged when faced with difficult student behaviors and demanding curriculum and challenging cultural circumstances. This ultimately addresses the retention issue at hand with at least one possible motivation and reminder to our veteran teachers that they truly matter, and their insights and struggles are to be shared.

Thank you for your sincere and thoughtful consideration of the charter application from Great Falls Public Schools currently before you. I am hopeful that you will confidently and wholeheartedly endorse this application with your approval.

7. Sharon Patton-Griffin, EdD
Great Falls, MT

Please accept the **Great Falls Public Charter School** proposal. This Charter proposal is an example of the type of charter school that will protect our public school system and inject new ideas and opportunities into that system to invigorate it. Say YES to the Great Falls Public Charter School proposal.

Helena Public Charter Applications

1. Rick Hays
Helena, MT

I'm excited about the prospect of the **Helena School District's alternative learning charter school** and ask you to support its funding.

I've been involved in various aspects of education most of my life and have been a volunteer at one of the neighborhood elementary schools in Helena for the past six years. Because of my interest and activity, I seem to encounter several discussions about schools. One of the common topics over the years has involved the alternative high school, Project for Alternative Learning (PAL).

PAL has an enrollment of about 70 students this year but unfortunately has a waiting list of many more students. Based on various inquiries I've received over the years, many other families don't even try to enroll their students because of the extensive waiting list.

The two high schools in Helena are excellent but like most schools are limited in their resources to address every type of student that enters. That's the magic, or perhaps the miracle of PAL. It reaches those students who have other interests, learning styles, and aptitudes than the traditional high school offers.

The prospect of eventually offering the PAL curriculum to 120 or more students in the coming years seems to be the ideal purpose of your charter school offering. I hope you'll give this proposal your support.

2. Nicole Gleason

Helena, MT

I am writing to you as a parent to express my strong support for the **Helena Public School District's Project for Alternative Learning Charter School** application. A Project for Alternative Learning Charter School would provide my other children the opportunity to attend school in-person in a small, personalized learning environment, providing my students the flexibility and educational experiences they would benefit from.

Additionally, Project for Alternative Learning Charter School would provide me, as the parent, an avenue to obtain high quality educational services. This is an educational opportunity our community, school district, and most importantly, our students need access to.

I currently have a student that is set to graduate from Project for Alternative Learning and I couldn't be more amazed and blessed with the opportunity my child was given. Project for Alternative Learning has completely changed her outlook on life and has been the supporting school family she needed all along in order to help her succeed. Project for Alternative Learning was my daughter's "life saver" and I sincerely hope that other students in the future get the opportunity to attend a school such as Project for Alternative Learning to help them grow and be their potential in life. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

3. Matt Carey, Principal

Helena, MT

I am writing in strong support for the approval of the **Project for Alternative Learning Charter School** in Helena, MT. This program will offer students throughout the district, and neighboring regions, an opportunity to reimagine their educational experience and support students on a direct and individual basis. The charter school will be a key resource for students, families, and the community for years to come. The partnerships between the school and a variety of stakeholders will focus on one primary goal – to serve students and help prepare them to be college or career ready.

The charter school would help students prepare for life after high school through a multitude of experiences while in school. These kinds of experiences would be intentionally part of their curriculum to help guide them towards being productive citizens and members of the community. Career surveys, practice with soft skills, job shadows and internships, public speaking, help with organization and time management would all be among the variety of skills and experiences our students would benefit from. Our goal in education is to help propel students into the next phase of their life and the Project for Alternative Learning Charter School will continue the mission of student betterment. Thank you for reading my comments and I look forward to the decision of the Board.

4. Laura Funk

Helena, MT

I am writing in full support of the **Helena Project for Alternative Learning Academy** and the **Helena Mount Ascension Charter School**.

Currently, I work as a school-based mental health therapist at both the Project for Alternative Learning (PAL) and Capital High School. Prior to this position, I worked as a school counselor at Capital High and saw firsthand the immense need for alternative educational settings for various high school students. Since beginning to work at PAL, my deep appreciation for this school has only grown. PAL truly saves

lives. As a therapist to many of the students now enrolled, I have a privileged view of the challenges these students face on a daily basis, and the often difficult and painful upbringings so many have had. I am also fortunate enough to see the impact this school has on their sense of wellbeing, their confidence, and their desire and ability to engage productively in their community. I'm humbled by obstacles these students overcome and eternally grateful they are given the support they deserve in this academic setting. I urge you to vote in favor of the Helena Project for Alternative Learning Academy charter school application.

Additionally, in both my roles, as therapist and counselor, at Capital High School I have seen the numerous reasons a student may need an alternative learning approach. For some students, being physically present in their middle or high school setting is unsafe due to mental or physical health conditions. Often, with adequate support, students are able to transition back into their regular educational setting. However, the time lost during these periods can lead to insurmountable gaps in their education which severely impact their ability to graduate. Allowing students the option of tailoring their educational needs through partial or fully remote learning, allows them to remain or get back on track to graduate. I am in full support of the Helena Mount Ascension Charter School, and hope you choose to vote in favor of this charter school application as well.

Kalispell Public Charter Applications

1. Kendra Espinoza Kalispell, MT

I wish to submit concerns and comments that I have regarding the applications for the new charter schools proposed for the Kalispell area.

Regarding the **Kalispell Community Partnerships Charters**, I feel these are a waste of taxpayer money.

1. I don't know of any K-5th grade students who are even beginning to think about career choices at that age, so to say that these students will be job shadowing, is absurd.
2. They want to start a "school within a school" to try and entice back the students that they lost to homeschooling, but they haven't even explored whether there is parental or student interest in such a program? Apparently that happens in December. They would somehow win back these 27 students plus somehow add another 130 to make the program work? Doesn't seem feasible to me.
3. The administration of this program seems like a logistical nightmare, with some students attending the regular school program and others going different places or not even being on campus at all. Who will keep track of all these little ones?
4. In addition, they want to reduce class time and reduce the number of days per week that students are actually in attendance and yet somehow they expect to rank among the top schools in their region? How? There's no indication in the application of what they intend to use for curriculum so if they plan on using the same curriculum for reading, writing and arithmetic, how will that help improve the student's learning? If they intend to use a new curriculum, why keep it solely for the charter school students and not use it for the regular program, thereby improving the learning of everyone?
5. What about teachers? Have they identified the additional teachers they'll need? What if they can't find any? Are there currently teacher openings in the district now? How will they account for the financial deficit they will incur by hiring additional teachers but not bringing in sufficient funds to cover all their expenses? How do they expect to adequately educate and manage 158 students in each

program with half a principal, half a counselor and only one teacher for each of the three major classes?

6. On the schedule, what is with the yellow block? Why do they have lunch for an hour and 45 minutes? Is this just free time? Yet they expect to teach all of Math, Science and Social Studies in an hour and a half and all of Reading, Art and Writing also in an hour and a half? What is SOARing Citizenship and how is that staffed and attended? Why is there so much time allotted to specials each week? What kinds of specials are these? What about transportation for all these specials and job shadowing? Who pays for that?
7. The whole application itself seems very vague to me - very little in the way of detail and they fail to address a large majority of the questions that are asked on the application. For example, question #2 asks them to identify the targeted student population and the community they propose to serve. They fail to answer this in their response. In their answer to question # 6, how are they defining "at risk" students? And what do they mean by saying that K-3 students need a strong network of support services to help master the academic and career content? For Kindergarten through 3rd grade?
8. Why did they separate the program for K-3 and 3-5 and create two separate charters? That seems like double dipping to me, in that they are trying to get funds for two separate programs. And why the overlap at 3rd grade? The two applications are identical, including the schedule in the 3-5 application, that is identical to the one in the K-3 application.
9. Their answers to questions 19 and 20 on the application basically say that this is not a separate program from the regular current school program as far as budget goes, so why the request for additional funding?
10. On their Operating Budget Worksheet, it says the number of students is 71 yet the first page of the application says the minimum is 158. Why the discrepancy?

This application seems like this was thrown together in the hopes of bringing in more money to an already failing school district. Is this program supposed to magically somehow turn out smarter children, within the same schools already in existence, when it can't already help the students it has, because it creates some new wildcard program that demands more money? I urge you NOT to approve this application.

Thank you for your time in reviewing my letter and I ask that you **not** approve funding for these programs mentioned above, as it will put an undue burden on the taxpayers here in our valley, without improving the education levels of the students we currently serve. We already contribute a very large sum of money on our property taxes for public education and the additional funds required to support these programs would make it nearly unbearable.

2. Chuck Territo

After review of **Kalispell Community Partnership Charter K-3**. Here are some concerns.

Has any research been done as to parental interest before turning the application ?

As submitted only 3 teachers, half a principal and half a counselor for 158 students ??

27 students lost to homeschooling preferring flexibility but somehow they are going to return and add an additional 75 ?

--So by reducing class time and days of the week in attendance . The educational scores are going to rank among the top schools in the region ?

Why would a charter be requested for K-3 then 3-5 ? Seems to be double dipping .

--This application seems to be identical to K-3

It seems like the Charter application process is being abused. These seem to be some real concerns .

3. Kendra Espinoza Kalispell, MT

I wish to submit concerns and comments that I have regarding the applications for the new charter schools proposed for the Kalispell area.

Regarding the **PACE Academy 10-12**, this program is already in place and operating, as is evidenced by their answers in several questions on the application.

1. There is no need to suddenly create a separate charter to run the same program that is already in existence. And how can they run a new program without a principal, since they are only required to have a quarter of a principal for enrollment under 175 and half a principal for enrollment between 175 and 250 (question #5)? It's evident they don't 'need' a new principal for such a program because the program already operates under their current structure. And what is meant by them saying, in question #5, that "these accreditation thresholds might not be met? Is that because the program they are proposing is no different than the one currently running? Students already take courses through the Baccalaureate program and the running start program at the college and are already offered flexibility in learning. No need to have a separate charter that brings in more revenue for a program that is no different than what is currently in operation.
2. It appears in their response to question #5, 10.55.905 Demonstration of Achievement, that competency and outcomes would not be governed by standardized measures but by subjective "department-created competencies and proficiency scales." Does that not go outside of their current standard? If we are trying to prepare students for the real world, how does that help them to rise above when we don't expect more of them?

Thank you for your time in reviewing my letter and I ask that you **not** approve funding for these programs mentioned above, as it will put an undue burden on the taxpayers here in our valley, without improving the education levels of the students we currently serve. We already contribute a very large sum of money on our property taxes for public education and the additional funds required to support these programs would make it nearly unbearable.

4. Judy Territo

After reviewing the proposed **Kalispell Pace Academy**, I have numerous questions & concerns which I have discussed below.

1. There is a program already in place via Transformation Learning. This appears to be double-dipping. All of this is already in place under their current structure.
2. Variance to Standards:
 - a) They are required to have 1/4 of a FTE Principal for a population under 175 and 1/2 of a FTE Principal for a population under 250. The school is saying they "may not be able to do this." They are already doing it under the current structure so the school knows they don't need a leader.
 - b) Pace Academy wants a variance for 10.55.905 for achievement: "The flexible design of courses in the Flathead PACE Academy align with Montana ARM 10.55.905, adopted in July of 2023, where "students may demonstrate achievement through a flexible system of pupil-centered learning." With department-created competencies and proficiency scales, credit is awarded based on students demonstrating competency." So, in other words: competency/outcomes not by standardized measures but by subjective "department-created" competencies. Not the deal with a charter: Section 9(1) "performance framework that clearly sets forth the academic and

operational performance indicators, measures, and metrics” + a) student academic proficiency and b) student academic growth. Thank you very much for your review of the issues above.

5. Kendra Espinoza

Kalispell, MT

I wish to submit concerns and comments that I have regarding the applications for the new charter schools proposed for the Kalispell area.

Regarding **Rising Wolf Charter School**, it seems it would be difficult to administer such a program within the same school structure they are currently running the regular programs. Again, they are wanting to operate a "school within a school" and get additional funding for a program that is not very well thought out.

1. What if a student wants to stay in one class for 3 periods but there is no teacher for all three periods, or other groups of students are coming in and out?
2. Who would administer this program, if they don't need any additional principal or teachers to run the program? Their application states that they will rely on an existing principal and existing teachers for the exact same students they would normally be serving.
3. This type of program requires a lot of thought and planning to make it work and I don't see it working well within the current school setting. Logistically, it would create too much confusion and could potentially leave students to fall through the cracks, both socially and academically. This is a potentially good program, if it were run as a separate school in a separate building, but not within a school that is already running a separate program.

Thank you for your time in reviewing my letter and I ask that you **not** approve funding for these programs mentioned above, as it will put an undue burden on the taxpayers here in our valley, without improving the education levels of the students we currently serve. We already contribute a very large sum of money on our property taxes for public education and the additional funds required to support these programs would make it nearly unbearable.

6. Judy Territo

Please review the numerous questions and concerns regarding the **Kalispell Rising Wolf Charter**.

1. Why hasn't the Advisory Board been chosen yet? Their resumes should have been included in their application. Build a board first, apply for a charter second in order to have true transparency. Plus, choosing the board does not seem to have made the Start-Up
2. No new principal is needed as the current principal has time for both? What does he/she do with down-time now, assuming he/she has time to add on being leader of this charter school? How exactly can "existing teachers" manage a schedule of a long block in the morning and/or afternoon while simultaneously keeping up with the 7-period for non-charter students? What's the impact on those teachers because though the applicant mentions hiring new staff it simultaneously relies on "existing teachers" and an unwillingness to be specific in its plans and instead rely on "application approval" before polling its current teachers to explore interest. They should line up their plan fully, then apply for a charter.
3. Though the Rising Wolf Academy charter proposal of offering classes based on the X1 format seems viable, the application is thin and not well thought out. There is no clear proposal as to how the additional money from an extra budget unit will be used since the application states the charter will rely on an existing principal and existing teachers for the exact same students they would normally

be serving. No new leadership, board, superintendent, nor principal, means nothing will be different.

Thank you so much for your review of the Kalispell Rising Wolf Charter.

Missoula Public Charter Applications

1. Vanessa Gibson

Missoula, MT

I am writing in support of the online MCPS Charter School application. I have been a high school counselor in the Missoula area for 18 years and I can testify to how students' needs have changed in the last decade. Students are struggling with coming into our building and meeting the expectations of attendance and self-regulation. Our current online school, **Missoula Online Academy** has allowed students access to education in a way that we would've lost those students without it. I've had a number of students that MOA has been able to re-engage with in school and they have found success. Without an online option these students would have stopped attending school as soon as they could. I am in full support of an online Charter School that can fill this need in our community and fearful of what will come without it.

2. A'ine Franczyk

Missoula, MT

The **Missoula Online Academy** has been an excellent option to support families and help them find a pathway to earn a high school diploma. An educational experience is as unique as the individual and we need alternative (online) options for students. Each student has specific needs and the better we can meet their needs the more likely they are to earn a diploma. Allowing for an online experience works better for some families. This could be due to illnesses, mental health concerns, substance abuse, bullying, and or social concerns. Please, support the MCPS Charter school application and make sure there is lots of space for students who need it. We need to be able to serve many students. If space is limited and it requires a great deal of resources this is not the best use of State money.

3. Carrie Brooks

Missoula, MT

I wanted to say a few words about the **MCPS Online academy Charter School** and how much it has made a difference in our lives. My son has emotional problems that prevent him from going to a campus school. MCPS Online Academy has been extremely helpful and flexible with him to help him get the education he needs. I can't tell you how much this has meant to us. Ms. Kolzak has been very supportive and accommodating to his specific challenges and it has meant the world to us. I want to say thank you to her and the entire staff for being wonderful. This school fills a gap that is absolutely needed in today's world.

4. Fran Aytes
Missoula, MT

We wanted to give our support for funding **Missoula Online School** through the new Public Charter School process. As social workers at Provident St. Patrick Hospital in the Adolescent Partial Hospitalization Program in Missoula, we work with adolescents who have a mental health issues. Many of these clients need an educational placement that is flexible. Since Covid, there has been in even greater number of clients who have not been able to successfully return to in person school. Missoula online school has been a great resource for our clients, and MOA has been great in collaborating with us on the students that we share.

Park City Montana Connections Academy

1. Carolyn Hall, Superintendent
Polson, MT

I was fortunate to have been able to listen to the proposals and questions during the BPE Nov. 30 meeting pertaining to Public Charter School proposals (HB 549.) The proposals were varied, creative, and surprisingly well-planned considering the amount of time from the bill's approval to this presentation. I was very impressed and proud of our school districts and their work on these proposals.

There was only one applicant that caused me concern, that was **Montana Connections Academy from Park City**. If I understood all that I was hearing, this program will actually be a for profit online charter operated by Pearson. I don't believe that's what this bill was supposed to support.

As a County Superintendent of three rural schools in Lake County: Upper West Shore; Valley View; and Swan Lake-Salmon, I know that it is imperative that we guard every dollar that we receive because enrollment doesn't fund that many dollars. I also know that a charter such as this could have an adverse effect on the per-pupil funds that there would be for our little brick and mortar schools, that try to spend every dollar twice.

There are ample opportunities for online programs and services, that each district must decide upon using and whether they can fund their usage. Our small rural districts do not need to be in competition for dollars with a mega corporation like Pearson.

I would appreciate you looking at these circumstances closer if they truly are for the use of public charter dollars for an online, for-profit corporation of programs. Thank you for your consideration.

2. Elizabeth Halverson

Opposing the for-profit charter **Montana Connections Academy**. Please do not allocate public money for this for-profit, out of state, unaccountable, unregulated corporation. These "charters" harm rural schools which depend on per-pupil funding. Other states have seen their rural schools shrink to 4-day weeks. MT has already seen this along with consolidation or closure of rural schools.

Thank you for working and advocating for public funds to be dedicated to PUBLIC EDUCATION that serves all students, is accountable, has standards, and complies with curricular, staffing, and other standards to ensure our children's development and education.

3. Venus Dodson

Cut Bank, MT

As a retired educator and lifelong Montanan, no public school should ever be for profit. **The Park City charter** is just that.

Growing up on the Blackfeet Reservation attending Browning and Cut Bank School and attending both MSU and UM, I cannot stress how important a free, appropriate, public education is to all the residents of our state. Stop for profit education from further ruining education in Montana.

4. Barry Chandler

Janet Haarvig

Please deny the pending application of the “[Montana Connections Academy, \[click.mlsend.com\]](http://click.mlsend.com)”

5. Cheri Bergeron

Please oppose the inclusion of the **Montana Connections academy**. This is an online, for-profit charter operated by Pearson. This will send our public tax dollars out of state and will have an adverse effect on rural schools in Montana. This school cannot serve pupils with disabilities or special education students. Please oppose this school.

6. Emilie Maule

I am writing to this board in opposition to the application recently submitted by the **Montana Connections Academy**. This private online for-profit charter takes money from public schools of all sizes but is especially harmful to smaller, rural communities! It cannot offer direct appropriate special education services to any students who need those programs. Are our schools to become for-profit, at the expense of all of our public education schools? Students in all of our communities can access the Montana Digital Academy for online programs. Please do not consider this application to be deserving of approval!

7. Stephen Goheen

Corvallis, MT

I would like the board to consider my public comments regarding Park City’s “**Montana Connections Academy**” application.

What concerns me most is that the company that will run their program is an online, for-profit charter. We should not be diverting our scarce public-school dollars to an out of state operation that has a profit motive. School districts, especially smaller ones, desperately need funding to keep their current operations running. If you bleed them dry, they will have a very hard time existing at all.

8. Dana West

I urge you to recognize the difference between good charter school and an out-of-state entity trying to profit off hard earned Montana tax dollars. **MT Connections Academy** is a farce and is not connected to Park City schools in any true sense. Don't allow well intentioned legislation to backfire on us.

9. Glenda Bradshaw

Helena, MT

I am writing to object to the application for public charter by **Montana Connections Academy**, Park City. My points:

- It is really an online, for-profit charter operated through Pearson as a private “Education Management Organization (EMO)”.
- It is a for-profit institution.
- Public tax dollars would be going to an out-of-state, private corporation, which is not the intention of HB 549.
- This program cannot serve students with ALL types of disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration.

10. Tammy Dalling

Please oppose the **Montana Connections Academy Charter**.

- This charter operates as an EMO, which is a for-profit institution. This means that public tax dollars would be going to an out-of-state, private corporation, which is not the intention of HB 549.
- This will have an adverse effect on all communities, especially smaller, rural Montana schools, where the loss of per-pupil funds can be particularly detrimental. As a teacher at Gardiner Public Schools, we absolutely cannot afford to lose any more students. Our school is already suffering from record low enrollment and have had almost half of our staff cut in the last 5 years.
- Per-pupil funding will go from a school that would use it for brick/mortar services to one without these overhead costs for an online student. Students in all communities already have ample access to expanded services through the Montana Digital Academy that can be facilitated through their home districts. Again, this will have a terrible impact on local rural schools who are already struggling to remain operational.
- This program cannot serve students with ALL types of disabilities. Can students come to campus for speech therapy or OT as needed if they qualify for those services?

11. Anita Beach

Whitefish, MT

The Park City **Montana Connections Academy** is not appropriate for compliance with HB 549. This type of virtual education is not an appropriate choice. It takes money away from brick-and-mortar schools, and worse, because of its out of state connections, it diverts Montana taxpayer education moneys out of state. This Academy is a part of an out of state FOR PROFIT organization. Loss of Montana public education funds to that corporation is bad for Montana. This Academy application should NOT be approved.

12. Elle Ruis

Kalispell, MT

I am writing to urge you to reject the Park City "**Montana Connections Academy**" as a Charter School. It claims to be operating through the Park City school district, but is really an online, for-profit charter operated through Pearson as a private "Education Management Organization (EMO)."

Reasons why this proposal should be rejected:

- This charter operates as an EMO, which is a for-profit institution. This means that public tax dollars would be going to an out-of-state, private corporation, which is not the intention of HB 549.
- This will have an adverse effect on all communities, especially smaller, rural Montana schools, where the loss of per-pupil funds can be particularly detrimental. (Great if you can name YOUR community specifically).
- Per-pupil funding will go from a school that would use it for brick/mortar services to one without these overhead costs for an online student. Students in all communities already have ample access to expanded services through the Montana Digital Academy that can be facilitated through their home districts.
- This program cannot serve students with ALL types of disabilities. Can students come to campus for speech therapy or OT as needed if they qualify for those services?

Thanks for your consideration.

13. Melissa Tassano

Before moving to Montana my kids were enrolled in **connections academy** after trying out many charter school options. This school changed my kids whole lives! We have yet to find a program like it since moving. I fully support their application!

14. Kim McLees

I am excited to see this email from Victor Wills from Pearson Schools for the application for **Montana Connections Academy**. I believe there is a need for better choices for families and their students regarding education in Montana. I am a Montana teacher, but I am transitioning to Arizona within the next two weeks. This move allows me to utilize my teaching degree for a greater purpose and also opens the door for my high school daughter to finish high school with more options. School has been SUCH a struggle for her, and Montana public schools have really let her down. Thank you for fighting for Montana students. I fully support this application.

15. Careylyn Hill

Kalispell, MT

Please pay extra careful attention to the charter school, **Montana Connections Academy**. Contrary to its name, it is an out-of-state charter school operated through Pearson for profit. We do not want Montana education dollars to leave the state. Thank you for your time.

16. Rick Hays

Helena, MT

I'm writing in regard to your applications for charter schools. I applaud your efforts with one exception, **Montana Connections Academy**.

- 1) I don't know why the state of Montana should fund an educational program outside of our state, particularly one that is for-profit.
- 2) I don't understand why we'd fund a digital program when we offer an excellent digital academy already and have for several years now.
- 3) Considering the enthusiastic response to this charter school option from school districts across the state, it seems we should be prudent where we fund programs and ensure they are locally produced and monitored.

We should not be funding the Montana Connections Academy.

17. Lisa Schuma, LCPC

Helena, MT

I would like to express my support for **Connections Academy for Montana** as a public school option. As a former educator in a public high school, I know that different students and their families have different needs, and as a mother of four children I also understand that each child has different strengths, weaknesses, and needs academically as well.

Having a true, full-time digital alternative to public school would be a huge benefit to so many students and families in our state! When I investigated digital alternatives for one of my children who would have greatly benefited from that option, all that was available was Montana Digital Academy which was not (and I believe still is not, but please correct me if I'm wrong!) available as a full-time option. Connections Academy and a few other online schools were available at significant additional cost which at the time we determined we could not afford. In retrospect, it might have been better had we done so.

I am now a Clinical Mental Health Counselor, and I regularly work with adults who have not graduated from high school. Pursuing a Hi-Set/GED sounds simple, but actually can be an insurmountable barrier for some of my clients who already face socio-economic and mental/emotional difficulties. In turn, never graduating continues to create a wall between those clients and the new and different life they wish to achieve. I believe a true, public, full-time virtual school would help a significant number of students to graduate who might otherwise simply drop out of our schools entirely.

Having investigated available alternatives and spoken with parents in other states where Connections Academy is a public school option, I know they provide a complete, high quality educational product for students for whom online school is the best choice. Is a high quality in-person experience the best thing for most kids? Yes, I believe it is. But for those who need something different, it's time it was available in our state.

While I will be traveling and unable to attend the Zoom meeting to voice my support, I just wanted to let you know I fully support their application!

Thanks for considering my input.

18. Michael Sherman, Counselor

Kalispell, MT

Please oppose the charter school application for the **Montana Connections Academy**. As a public high school counselor in Kalispell, MT, I am philosophically opposed to an out-of-state, for profit, private corporation receiving public tax funds. This is not the intent of the law - HB 549! Public tax dollars should be used for the good of a community and obtainable for any student. NOT the bottom line of a private institution seeking to profit from public money. Furthermore, this arrangement is very unlikely to provide a quality education, because of its focus on making money instead of augmenting the academic understanding of students. Pupils being pulled from public schools to this for profit institution will decrease the funds received by their public school and will cause a degradation of the education their public school can offer. This effect will be especially pronounced in smaller, rural schools, which serve as the "backbone" of many Montana communities. Online courses are already offered to any public education student in Montana via the Montana Digital Academy. Therefore, the Montana Connections Academy will be essentially a duplicate service siphoning public funds away from public schools.

As a high school teacher for five years and school counselor for 18 years, I know students gain so much more from in person public education. For those who struggle to attend in person, our public school system has devised alternative and innovative opportunities to meet these special needs and will continue to expand their offerings with our own version of charter school programs - the other 24 applications submitted. Please fund these efforts instead, so public funds stay with the public and academics are accessible to all with a wider variety of accommodations available for students.

19. Marybeth Toney Clark

Missoula, MT

Honestly, I am not a big fan of charter schools in general but schools that appear to be set up for the main purpose of syphoning off Montana school funds to an out of state corporation seems especially questionable.

Please do not approve the application for the **Park City Montana Connections Academy** [\[click.mlsend.com\]](http://click.mlsend.com) It does not uphold the spirit of HB 549. Montana is not a rich state and can not afford to allow needed school monies to go out of state.

20. Sas Weber

Belgrade, MT

I am writing to express my concern about the **Montana Connections Academy**. This is an online, for-profit charter operated as a private EMO. Public tax dollars would be going to an out-of-state private corporation. That is not the intent of HB549 as I understand it.

I believe this will have an adverse effect on all communities, especially smaller, rural Montana schools, where the loss of per-pupil funds can be particularly detrimental.

I am in the rural district of Springhill School. Were MCA allowed to operate in Montana, per-pupil funding would leave Springhill, a vital brick and mortar school, to enrich a private company/school without such overhead costs.

Students in all communities already have ample access to expanded services through the Montana Digital Academy, rendering the addition of MCA superfluous. Their application seems to be an effort of an out-of-state entity to take our tax dollars.

Montana Connection Academy is unnecessary and costly to all of us, and I am opposed to the granting of their application.

21. Ashlie Fleming

As you prepare to discuss the Public Charter Applications on Thursday, I feel it important to express my concern for one of those applicants. **The Park City Montana Connections Academy** is my concern for these reasons:

- This charter operates as an EMO, which is a for-profit institution. This means that public tax dollars would be going to an out-of-state, private corporation, which is not the intention of HB 549.
- This will have an adverse effect on all communities, especially smaller, rural Montana schools, where the loss of per-pupil funds can be particularly detrimental. (Great if you can name YOUR community specifically).
- Per-pupil funding will go from a school that would use it for brick/mortar services to one without these overhead costs for an online student. Students in all communities already have ample access to expanded services through the Montana Digital Academy that can be facilitated through their home districts.
- This program cannot serve students with ALL types of disabilities. Can students come to campus for speech therapy or OT as needed if they qualify for those services?

As a public school teacher in Montana, I am vested in the students of Montana and making sure that ALL students needs are met with the funding from this state. An out of state and for profit online school is NOT the best use of Montana funds.

22. Britten Postma

Thank you for allowing me to send public comment about the meeting reviewing public school charters. There is one charter that is very concerning to me- **Montana Connections Academy**. It is an online, for-profit charter operated by an education management organization. I do not want my tax dollars to go to an out of state private corporation! The loss of per-pupil funding going to this EMO instead of our rural public schools would be heartbreaking.

Thank you so much for taking the time to consider what's best for ALL of our Montana students.

23. Andrea Egge

Hello I would lie to show my support for the **Montana Connections Academy** application. I would also like to attend via zoom if possible.

24. Kristine Ellis

Please do not approve the **Montana Connections Academy** application. As a senior citizen living on a fixed income, I do not want any Montana stax dollars going to for-profit private out-of-state corporations.

25. Gordon Levin

Helena, MT

Park City Schools has proposed to host an on-line virtual Charter School to be made available to all Montana Students.

My read of the proposed application is that this Charter School proposal would not provide a unique learning environment, but rather is very similar to the Montana Digital Academy. The proposed plan is to replace the Public School Montana Digital Academy with a private for profit business that would be paid for by my tax dollars. No Thank You.

If the vision for the **Montana Connections Academy** was to offer a true alternative to the Montana Digital Academy, it should be executed as a not for profit, with all teachers living in Montana. There is no assurance that that the teachers will be from and living in our communities.

The Montana Connections Academy discusses that each student will have an assigned Learning Coach, a parent, family member, or trusted adult to provide in person help the student. Is this reliance on the at home learning coach really just the same thing as home schooling? Will actual teachers get to know the children and provide instruction on a daily basis?

I am not seeing how providing Pearson Schools with a business model in Montana is beneficial to the Montana Public and deserving of public funds.

26. Bob Funk

No to **Montana Connections Academy**. I don't want my tax dollars going to an out-of-state, private corporation. Support the Montana digital academy. Thanks for your service to Montana.

27. Kerry Krebill

Clancy, MT

I wish to write in opposition to the application for the **Park City "Montana Connections Academy."** Public funds should not be used to fund an online private, for-profit, out-of-state business. Bravo to the other applicants for their innovative ideas for diversifying educational opportunities in our local communities.

28. Sharon Patton-Griffin, EdD

Great Falls, MT

Please deny the **Park City Montana Connections Academy**. It is an example of a nonpublic school created, staffed, and run by a private, for-profit educational business. This is exactly what will pollute the purpose of the MT Charter School law.

Say NO to the Park City Montana Connections Academy Charter School proposal. Thank you.

General Public Comments

1. Chip Lindenlaub

One of the problems with the Public Charter Schools Act is that the handful of legislators who pushed this bill through attempted to redefine the term “public charter school.” In 45 other states, public charter schools are new, innovative, and creative schools operated outside of the education establishment but under the general supervision of the Board of Public Education. Relief from some of the rules allows the charters to innovate, outperform, and meet the needs of students who desire something different or better. Because the “charters” created by HB549 are subject to the exact same laws, rules, policies, and bureaucracy which govern every traditional public school in Montana, and they fall under the exact same education establishment, they do not meet the definition of a charter school. In fact, the most accurate description would be that they are additional traditional public schools with, potentially, a different curriculum. The best feature of true charter schools is that they are the only public schools that shall be closed if they fail to meet the standards they commit to meet in the charters which they sign.

Now, unfortunately the already overburdened Board of Public Education, tasked with resolving this quagmire, is placed in the position of deciding which applications are legitimate innovations that don’t already exist in the traditional school and which newly created schools will truly be of the “highest academic quality,” as the new law requires. I will focus on two questions, primarily. Does the program already exist and how will the academic standards be measured? Although many of the applications suffer the same or similar problems, to illustrate my point, I have selected three examples: PACE Academy in Kalispell, Corvallis Distance Learning Charter, and Frenchtown’s Bronc Fast Track Public Charter School.

While I salute the Kalispell School District for its attempt to allow students to learn at their own pace, I ask the Board of Public Education, do the following excerpts from the PACE Academy application make the PACE Academy sound like the new, innovative, and creative school that the authors of HB549 intended to create?

1. It is a “School within a School.”
2. “We follow Kalispell Public Schools adopted curriculum.”
3. “Initial Staff will be recruited from current Flathead High School Staff.”
4. “The location of the school inside of Flathead High School is an area with 4 classrooms...”
5. We “received funding through the Transformational Learning Grant Program.”

From my perspective, these quotes demonstrate that this does not qualify as a new, creative, innovative school. As a matter of fact, it sounds like an existing program in search of additional funding which the school district’s taxpayers denied through their recent rejection of a levy increase. Just a few months ago, one school board member was quoted in the Flathead Beacon as saying that the district could use this bill to obtain funding that they did not receive when their proposed school levy was rejected. I should add, rejected by the same citizens whose students, presumably, would benefit the most from the program.

Do the following quotes meet the law’s requirement for a “framework that clearly sets forth the academic and operational performance indicators, measures, and metrics”, especially if they are given a seat time waiver?

6. “Our assessment system embraces student involvement in assessment and learning, and it goes beyond the traditional percentage-based grading system seen in most public schools.”
7. “...Students may demonstrate achievement through a flexible system of pupil-centered learning.” With department-created competencies and proficiency scales, credit is awarded based on students demonstrating competency.”
8. “On a case by case basis, a student’s academic program may warrant waiving of some graduation requirements.”

Page 3 of the Board of Public Education’s Sept. 27, 2023 letter to applicants states: “The proposed public charter school is of the highest academic quality.” And, “The proposed public charter school will provide an educational opportunity to students that they would not otherwise receive at the traditional school they are zoned to attend.” This application does not meet the law’s standard for clear academic and operational performance indicators, measures, and metrics. And, it appears to me that the program is already available at the traditional school. Therefore, this application should not be approved.

The Corvallis Distance Learning Charter School application states, “In the past two months we have enrolled 114 students that were separated from our school community and are now benefiting from a distance learning platform that will be the foundation of our Distance Learning Charter.” Since the Distance Learning School is already operating and staffed, one wonders why the Corvallis School District is applying for charter school status under the Public Charter Schools Act. Once again, The Board of Public Education instruction letter attached to the beginning of the application requires that the “public charter school will provide an educational opportunity to students that they would not otherwise receive at the traditional school they are zoned to attend.” Additionally, the applicant “does not anticipate needing or requesting any variances.” If so, then how is the charter program different from the traditional school? Clearly, the Distance Learning Program is already open to students in the Corvallis School District which should disqualify it from consideration as a public charter school.

According to the application, “The instructional design is almost entirely online.” Furthermore, “Because CDLC is almost entirely online and remote, transportation, food services are not required for these students.” Continuing from the Corvallis application, “The assessment process happens weekly when the on-line teacher reviews each student’s work and assigns a grade for each class. They promise additional testing but is that realistic when curriculum providers include, “Montana Digital Academy (MDA), [Harmony.edu \[harmony.edu\]](https://harmony.edu), and other independent curriculum platforms including but not limited to Edmentum, Edgenuity and BYU”? Potentially, CDLC will have six, or more, different learning platforms used by 171 students who proceed at their own pace and time. Even if only one additional test per month is administered over a nine month period multiplied by six curriculums, 54 different tests per subject would be required. If each family chooses “their own route and curriculum, will the students have a core knowledge base for the next teacher to build upon? The flexibility looks great on paper but I think that with a complicated program like this, it will be impossible for the BPE to measure the standards and determine if they are of the “highest academic quality,” as required by law. This is especially important since BPE will now be responsible for overseeing and closing the school should it fail to meet the high academic quality standard in the future. Therefore, the application should be denied.

The Frenchtown School District’s Bronc Fast Track Public Charter School aims to “bridge the gap between high school and post-secondary education by offering students the opportunity to earn college credits during their high school years.” It sounds like a great idea and I think they should find a way to implement the program without making it a public charter school. The application reads, “Students will be selected based on GPA, attendance, and behavior.” The enrollment section of the the Public charter

Schools Act reads, “A public charter school must be open to any student residing in the state.” I’m not an attorney but I’m relatively certain that this violates the law and probably Montana’s Constitution. If approved by the BPE, it would be the first charter school in the United States (that I’m aware of) that was allowed to “cherry pick” their students based on their GPA, attendance, and behavior. For this reason, sadly, the application should be denied.

Many of the applicants seek to create a school within a school. Some of the programs are already operational and staffed, with variances approved, so one wonders why they would go through the process of applying to be a charter school. Quite simply, I believe they want the funding. Using the measurement of academic standards proposed in the application, the Board of Public education will be responsible for deciding, now and in the future, whether or not each school meets the “highest academic quality” standard written in the law. Finally, the law states that the Board shall “only approve charters whose promise of improved educational outcomes outweighs potential increased costs to state and local taxpayers.”

In my opinion, this is what happens when politicians bastardize a system which in dozens of other state’s legitimate charter schools successfully complement traditional public schools and the educational outcomes of all students are improved.

Thank you for what you do everyday to improve the education of all students in Montana! Thank you for your time and consideration.

2. Bill and Sarah Towle

We believe that the legislative purpose was to encourage Public Schools to form and govern the Charter schools and those who truly conform with these objectives should be approved. Those who allow private for profit groups, whether in-state or out-of-state, to operate the Charter school should be denied.

3. Roger Sherman

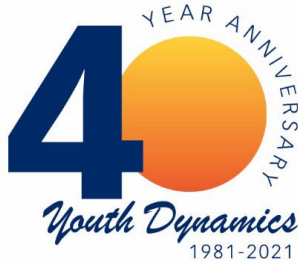
Whitefish, MT

These schools operate as EMOs which are for profite. This means that public funds will go out of state to private corporations which is not the intention of HB 546.

4. P. Hatfield

Victor, MT

As long as NO Charter school, or Religious School gets PUBLIC funding..
They can operate... just not with my money~



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Empowering **Youth & Families**
for a **Brighter Tomorrow**

December 4, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

RE: Jefferson County High School (JCHS) District application for charter school designation

For the past 15 years, JCHS District, has been a partner with Youth Dynamics in delivering the educational part of Day Treatment to children cared for on the Alternative Youth Adventures campus in Boulder. We are dependent on JCHS to support educational services for children that otherwise would not be available to treat and heal their trauma induced mental illness.

Over the years both JCHS and Jefferson County Elementary School (JCES) have provided nurturing individualized educational plans and pacing so our children can recover and stay on track with educational competencies in core curriculum. The core curriculum is critical to future success. In addition to the core subjects, math, science, English and social studies, our students will benefit from broader offerings through the charter school program.

In addition to the multitude of learning modalities, reading/writing, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic, our kids benefit from a larger selection of course work including, music, art, physical education, and the various topics presented in career and technical education (CTE). A charter school designation along with accompanying supportive resources will allow the delivery of an increased variety of opportunities through elective course work. Those elective courses will significantly impact the coping mechanisms necessary to overcoming mental illness related to trauma.

Youth dynamics is in full support of JCHS application for charter school designation. Youth Dynamics, as an active partner with the charter school program at JCHS, together we will make a greater impact not only on our kids' academic achievement, but more importantly the mental illness each of the Severe Emotional Diagnosed (SED) children are experiencing. Please do not hesitate to call me for follow-up conversations in your selection process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dennis Sulser'.

Dennis Sulser, Ed. D.
CEO Youth Dynamics, Inc.



1200 Westwood Drive, Hamilton, MT 59840
(406) 363-2211 • bitterroothealth.org

November 28, 2023

McCall Flynn, Executive Director
Board of Public Education
46 N Last Chance Gulch, Suite 2B
PO Box 200601
Helena, MT 59620

Re: In Support of Hamilton School District Public Charter School Application

Dear Executive Director Flynn:

This letter memorializes Bitterroot Health's ("BH") support of Hamilton School District's ("HSD") application for approval of a public charter school to be called the Bitterroot Polytechnical Center ("BPC"). BPC is intended to improve student and community outcomes by providing a transformational learning and proficiency-based program through which students may achieve their educational and career goals, while also providing community employers with access to a previously unavailable population of skilled, work-force ready potential employees.

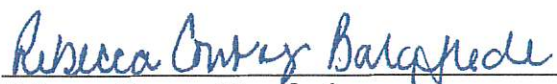
Currently, BH lacks a sufficiently skilled local workforce to consistently meet its staffing needs. This challenge has been exacerbated by inflation and the Bitterroot Valley's housing shortage. In response to these conditions, BH is invested in developing a skilled local workforce through long term partnerships with Bitterroot Valley school districts. HSD's proposed BPC would provide an ideal framework through which students can gain valuable certifications that would improve BH's ability to hire employees from a workforce that possesses the skill and knowledge required by the healthcare industry. To that end, BH is engaged in continuing its conversation with HSD concerning the creation of flexible, enhanced opportunities for students and an improved BH employee pool through BPC.

Simply put, BPC has the potential to substantially improve student outcomes while positively benefiting BH, one of the area's most impactful community employers. For these reasons, BH fully supports HSD's application for approval of a public charter school.

Very Truly Yours,



John Bishop
Chief Executive Officer



Rebecca Conroy Bargfrede
Chief Transformational Officer
Corp. Compliance & HIPAA Privacy Officer

December 18, 2023

To: The Montana Board of Public Education at bpe@mt.gov

Dear Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing to you as a parent to express my strong support for the Helena Public School District's **Mount Ascension Learning Academy Charter School** application. Mount Ascension would provide my student the opportunity to attend school in-person part-time, virtually part-time, or **virtually full-time**, providing her the flexibility and educational experiences she would benefit from. Additionally, Mount Ascension would provide me, as the parent, an avenue to obtain high quality educational services for my student. This is an educational opportunity our community, school district, and most importantly, our students need access to.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

Dana Meldrum

School Counselor at Capital High School

100 Valley Drive

406.324.2491

HELENA HIGH SCHOOL

1300 Billings Avenue

Helena, MT 59601-3981

December 18, 2023

<https://www.hhs.helenaschools.org>



To: The Montana Board of Public Education at bpe@mt.gov

Dear Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing to you as a high school principal to express my strong support for the Helena Public School District's **Mount Ascension Learning Academy Charter School** application. Mount Ascension would provide our student (s) the opportunity to attend school in-person part-time, virtually part-time, or virtually full-time, providing my student with the flexibility and educational experiences they would benefit from. Additionally, Mount Ascension would provide me, as the principal an avenue to obtain high quality educational services for my student(s). This is an educational opportunity our community, school district, and most importantly, our students need access to.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

Steve Thennis

Principal

Helena High School

1300 Billings Ave.

Helena, Montana 59601

406-324-2202

January 3rd, 2024

To: Montana Board of Public Education

Dear Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing to you as a parent of Liam Aagenes, to express my strong support for the Helena Public School District's Project for Alternative Learning Charter School application.

My son has been a student at pal since 2020 and is now a senior at PAL. Since 3rd grade it became apparent to me that my son learned differently than other kids. He enjoyed things like math and science and really did not enjoy the normal school process. However, we kept pushing through the normal school programs and tried our best to be supportive. Once he hit middle school, I noticed a very abrupt change in my son's emotional stability and his extreme dislike for school. Freshman year of high school at Helena High School, he failed miserably due to COVID outbreak and learning being completed at home. It was then that PAL was recommended to me by a counselor at Helena High School. Over the last 3 years, I have watched my son's attitude toward school completely change. He went from hating school to loving it and never wanting to miss a day. He loves all of his teachers and really enjoys the atmosphere and classes offered. He is challenged and constantly learning something new at PAL. I believe my son would not be graduating high school this year if had not been for PAL and all of the educator's encouragement and time.

PAL is a wonderful learning environment and encourages kids in a completely different way to learn. I highly recommend them for this designation.

Sincerely,

Rachel Aagenes
Parent of Liam Aagenes, Student at PAL
1940 Seve Ave, Apt B
Helena, MT 59602
406-431-0368

December 20th 2023

To: The Montana Board of Public Education at bpe@mt.gov

Dear Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing to you as a parent to express my strong support for the Helena Public School District's **Project for Alternative Learning Charter School** application. A Project for Alternative Learning Charter School would provide my student the opportunity to attend school in-person in a small, personalized learning environment, providing my student the flexibility and educational experiences they would benefit from. Additionally, Project for Alternative Learning Charter School would provide me, as the parent an avenue to obtain high quality educational services. This is an educational opportunity our community, school district, and most importantly, our students need access to.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

Jessy and Brandon Beardslee

821 Hialeah Crt Apt A

Helena, MT 59601

406-570-4213

January 18th, 2024

Dear Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing to express my support, both as a member of the community and as a member of last year's Leadership Helena class, for the Charter School application submitted by the Helena Public School District's Project for Alternate Learning (PAL). At Leadership Helena, I have worked closely with the staff and have met many of the students at PAL. Through these interactions, I have seen the massive impact PAL has on their students both inside and outside the classroom.

1. The Social/Emotional Growth of PAL Students: Talking to the students at PAL, I have had the opportunity to learn about the positive impact the school and the staff have. PAL creates a welcoming community for students who are disengaged and isolated at HHS or CHS, providing a safe environment for students to grow both socially and emotionally.
2. The Educational Success of PAL Students: Many PAL students also are at risk of dropping out of our normal public-school systems. PAL creates a flexible educational experience that is more tailored to each student and their goals, allowing students to learn in a way that suits their needs. These academic considerations push students to do their best, engage in class, and graduate!
3. The Future of PAL Students: PAL organized a meet/greet with Leadership Helena, where the students enthusiastically engaged with our Leadership Helena class, asking questions about how we are involved in the community, what they could do after they graduate, and the different career paths they could go down. With all of the resources and tools provided by PAL, students are motivated to plan for their future, whether they are making plans to attend college or enter the workforce.

In conclusion, PAL is an important educational opportunity that directly benefits our students and our community. I urge the board to consider these benefits and PAL's Charter School application. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Isabelle Brus

Production Estimating Coordinator

Dick Anderson Construction

(406) 564-3039

December 18, 2023

To: The Montana Board of Public Education

Dear Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing to you as a parent to express my strong support for the Helena Public School District's **Project for Alternative Learning Charter School** application. A Project for Alternative Learning Charter School is providing my daughter the opportunity to attend school in-person in a small, personalized learning environment, providing my daughter the flexibility and educational experiences that she is greatly benefiting from. Additionally, Project for Alternative Learning Charter School would provide me, as a parent, with an avenue to obtain high quality educational services. This is an educational opportunity our community, school district, and most importantly, our students need access to.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,



Dani McDonald

1502 Boston Rd.

Helena, MT 59602

406-465-4454



PUREVIEW | Health
Center

1930 9th Ave, Helena, MT 59601 | 406.457.0000 | PureViewHealthCenter.org

December 18, 2023

To: The Montana Board of Public Education at bpe@mt.gov

Dear Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing to you as a community partner, that provides services to students within the Helena School District, to express my strong support for the Helena Public School District's **Project for Alternative Learning Charter School** application. A Project for Alternative Learning Charter School would provide the students we serve the opportunity to attend school in-person in a small, personalized learning environment, providing students the flexibility and educational experiences they would benefit from. The students we serve often require special needs and benefit from smaller, personalized, flexible environments for them to become successful and reach their goals. I have watched students that we serve grow and succeed while attending Project Alternative Learning. A Project for Alternative Learning Charter School would allow this to continue, as well as provide future students we serve the avenue to obtain high quality educational services. This is an educational opportunity our community, school district, and most importantly, our students need access to.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

Holly Mook, SWLC, LAC
School-based Behavioral Health Program Manager
PureView Health Center
1930 9th Avenue
Helena, MT 59601
406-457-0000



PUREVIEW | Health
Center

<https://pureviewhealthcenter.org/>

December 18, 2023

To: The Montana Board of Public Education at bpe@mt.gov

Dear Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing to you as a community partner to express my strong support for the Helena Public School District's **Project for Alternative Learning Charter School** application. A Project for Alternative Learning Charter School would provide students the opportunity to attend school in-person in a small, personalized learning environment, providing students the flexibility and educational experiences they would benefit from. Additionally, Project for Alternative Learning Charter School would provide the community an avenue to obtain high quality educational services. This is an educational opportunity our community, school district, and most importantly, our students need access to.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

Justin Murgel
Chief Executive Officer
630 N Last Chance Gulch, Ste 2300
Helena MT 59601
Phone: 406-500-2050



Micah Hill, Superintendent
Missoula County Public Schools
909 South Ave. West
Missoula, MT 59801
(406) 728-2400

January 15, 2024

Dear Board of Public Education:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of Missoula County Public Schools I am writing in response to the recent charter school application review process and recommendations that were posted on the Board of Public Education Agenda Packet. As a person whose position requires continual evaluation of programs and staff, I understand that giving an objective score to subjective criteria is challenging. Given the composite score for the Missoula Connect Academy, I believe this charter school warrants further consideration.

The Missoula Connect Academy received average scores of 5.5 on the application checklist and 3.25 on the criteria responses. Specifically, the Connect Academy application provides for an innovative and high-performing charter school – not a program. I noticed that compared to the other application we submitted, the TEACH Academy scored 4 out of 4 for governance, but the Connect Academy scored 3 out of 4 with a nearly identical governance structure. We believe we have clearly demonstrated the ability to operate a successful charter school, as evidenced by strong governance, academic, and operational plans. Additionally, the Connect Academy fills a need in our community for more progressive, non-traditional school options that promote real-world skills.

We wonder if the placement or underscored application reflects the fact that we stated in our application that the Connect Academy would be available to students statewide, and that this may be an area of concern. Our rationale for including that statement in the application is based off the language in HB 549, Section 8, Enrollment (1) (A) that states: **A public charter school must be open to any student residing in the state.** Our intent in providing this charter school was to serve the students and families of our district but did not think we could exclude students who were not residents of the district based on the language of HB 549.

While the Connect Academy may not have the highest scores, it meets or exceeds expectations across all major criteria. I believe the school has tremendous potential to provide an exceptional education model for students. Approving the Connect Academy would allow more families access to high-quality charter schools.

In summary, I recommend the Board consider approval of the Missoula Connect Academy based on the criteria provided. MCPS has the capacity to open and operate a successful charter school that fills a need in the local community. This application deserves the opportunity to open its doors to students seeking an innovative education.

Thank you for your consideration. I welcome the chance to discuss this application and my recommendation further.

Sincerely,

Micah Hill
Superintendent, Missoula County Public Schools

Matt Davidson
Superintendent

Maryanne Bischoff
District Secretary

307-548-2254



Richard Parker
Business Manager

Bret Savage
Bookkeeper

Fax: 307-548-7610

January 5, 2024

Dear Chairman Tharp and Members of the Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing to you in support of the application for Montana Connections Academy.

Big Horn County School District #1, located in North West Wyoming, has partnered with Connections Academy by Pearson to sponsor Wyoming Connections Academy since the 2011-12 school year, and we are currently working towards extending our partnership for another five years.

In my time as the Superintendent at Big Horn #1, I have been able to witness firsthand the partnership between our district and Connections Academy by Pearson. This partnership has provided benefits to the students and schools in Big Horn #1 and to students across Wyoming. While virtual education is not the answer for all students, for those who choose to utilize the virtual option, it is a tremendous benefit. It accommodates students and families who need an alternative to the traditional school approach for a variety of reasons.

Among the things that I have learned from our partnership with Connections Academy, one that stands out is their dedication to the students that they are serving. Parents of students who enroll at Wyoming Connections Academy are also very happy with the results that this partnership provides. 96% of the parents are satisfied with the helpfulness of their child's teachers, 97% agree that they have more involvement in their child's education, and 95% say that their child is making good progress in school.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the application for Montana Connections Academy. I believe that its approval could benefit the students of Montana.

Sincerely,

Matthew Davidson
Superintendent

Cc: Dan Grabowska, Superintendent Park City Schools



MONTANA STATE SENATE

Senator Forrest J. Mandeville
Senate District 29

DURING THE SESSION
State Capitol Building
PO Box 200500
Helena MT 59620-0500
Phone: (406) 444-4800
Web: leg.mt.gov

HOME ADDRESS
PO Box 337
Columbus, MT 59019
Phone: (406) 690-1933
Forrest.Mandeville@legmt.gov
forrestmandeville@gmail.com

November 30, 2023

Board of Public Education
State of Montana
PO Box 200601
Helena, Montana 59620-0601

Dear Members of the Board of Public Education –

We are members of the Montana Legislature who supported education innovation in the 68th Session by voting for legislation that authorizes the creation of charter schools in our state. This is a long overdue development, and something we should be proud of and celebrate. Our goal in supporting these bills was not to simply create charter schools for the sake of checking a box. Our intent was to bring real innovation into the classroom to benefit the students of Montana. They are our primary focus in this discussion.

To that end, we are supportive of the creation of a statewide online charter school as submitted by the Park City School District and partnered with a 20-year expert in online learning. Students need to be met where they are on their educational journey, and quite literally for some that means at their homes. For a variety of reasons, whether health, behavioral, or merely choice, some students learn most effectively in an online setting. It is important that any statewide virtual school not merely be the equivalent of any current offering in the state of Montana, but be unique, distinct, and feature courses and an individualized path that challenges students to reach personal excellence.

HB 549 specifically makes clear that enrollment is “open to any student residing in the state,” and that a “public charter school shall enroll all students who wish to attend the school unless the number of students exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building” (Sec. 8 (1)(a) and (e)). We believe this makes the Park City application uniquely likely to succeed, as the district’s application reported 800 organic requests for information on a statewide virtual school in the last five years from Montana families, and 82 statements of support from 21 counties for this specific proposal.

We urge you to support this kind of forward-thinking innovation that will benefit our Montana students and truly embody the spirit of the charter school legislation the Legislature passed.

MONTANA STATE SENATE

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Senator Forrest Mandeville (SD-29)

Senator Ken Bogner (SD-19)

Senator Greg Hertz (SD-6)

Senator Tom McGillvray (SD-23)

Senator Daniel Zolnikov (SD-22)

Representative Larry Brewster (HD-44)

Representative Ed Buttrey (HD-21)

Representative Sherry Essmann (HD-52)

Representative Llew Jones (HD-18)

Representative Scot Kerns (HD-23)

Representative Rhonda Knudsen (HD-34)

Representative Terry Moore (HD-54)

Representative Sue Vinton (HD-56)

Representative Mike Yakawich (HD-51)

Representative Katie Zolnikov (HD-45)

January 3, 2024

Chairman Tharp and Members of the Montana Board of Public Education,

I would like to commend and support the state of Montana with its efforts to expand options for school choice. Upon hearing about the Board of Public Education's process for reviewing charter school applications, I would like to provide additional information on virtual education in Idaho, and specifically the application submitted by Park City Schools for Montana Connections Academy.

The Idaho Public Charter School Commission (IPCSC) has long recognized the unique population that virtual schools serve in the education system. The first virtual charter school in Idaho opened in 2002, and there are currently eight virtual or blended charter schools serving the students of Idaho. Inspire Connections Academy opened in the 2005-2006 school year. Since that time, the school has been in good standing with the IPCSC. Their charter has been continuously renewed, including a renewal last Fall that will continue until 2028. Their academic performance metrics have shown that they compare favorably to students in Idaho on a statewide level in English/Language Arts, Math and Science, with their performance often exceeding the statewide proficiency numbers in English/Language Arts.

Idaho's total student population for the beginning of the 2023-24 school year was approximately 313,000. Today Inspire Connections Academy serves over 1,300 Idaho students. Inspire serves students from every county, with the exception of Camas and Clark, Idaho's two least populated counties. A comparison of Inspire's student population against the counties where their students reside shows that Inspire Connections Academy does not disproportionately draw from rural counties. Rather, their student population percentage by county tracks closely to that of the overall population of Idaho.

From the perspective of the IPCSC, the benefits of charter schools partnering with an education service provider (ESP) are many, but specifically they provide schools with financial support and stability, office support services, and expertise in implementing charter school law and policy. In the case of Inspire Connections Academy, their ESP, Connections Academy by Pearson, has served its board and students in the state of Idaho in a manner that support program growth, student achievement, and alternative options for their student demographics. Additionally, the parents of

Inspire Connections Academy students report that they are highly satisfied with their program, their curriculum, their teachers.

Based on our nearly 20-year experience working with the Inspire Connections Academy Board, and our observations of their board governance, student academic data, and survey data, a virtual charter school in Montana supported by Connections Academy would serve a wide range of student demographics, locations, and learning styles and provide them with a positive learning experience.

Please contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jacob Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jacob" and last name "Smith" clearly distinguishable.

Jacob Smith
Director
Idaho Public Charter School Commission



Scio School District 95-C

38875 N.W. First Avenue
Scio, Oregon 97374

"Youth In Pursuit of Excellence"

1/3/2024

To: Chairman Tharp and Members of the Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing to you in support of the application for Montana Connections Academy. Scio School District, a small rural school district in Northwestern Oregon, has been an authorizer of a virtual charter for many years. We chose to become an authorizer of statewide virtual charter schools because we wanted to find a way to foster innovation in Oregon while also providing a benefit to the students of our district. We were the first district in Oregon to sponsor a virtual charter and are so proud of the difference that we have made in the lives of Oregon children. As Superintendent I expressed our interest in, only sponsoring only the best online charter school in the state and that was their desire as well. From the Board of Willamette Connections Academy to the support staff I have been impressed with their desire to give students the best experience they possibly could.

We learned very quickly that our state system served the majority but there were students that needed something else. We became a resource for small districts that did not have the capacity for medically fragile students, students with parents that had to be in different parts of the state for long periods of time and students that needed to have a more flexible schedule because of their pursuits of music and athletics.

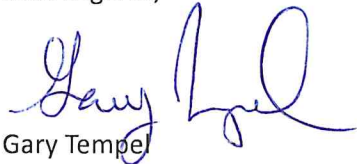
Scio School District has sponsored one of the two Connections Academy schools in Oregon since 2005 and is the current authorizer of Willamette Connections Academy. Of the many things that we have learned in the time that we have been an authorizer, one key is that partnering with a high-quality provider cannot be understated. In that regard, I cannot overstate how positive our relationship with Connections Academy by Pearson has been. Of the many ESP's that serve virtual schools, we firmly believe that they are the best partner and provide a high-quality option for parents and students. While Connections Academy by Pearson serves both Oregon Connections Academy and Willamette Connections Academy, they are ultimately Oregon schools that meet Oregon's standards and serves the best interests of Oregon's students. The school consists of Oregon based teachers, trained in online pedagogy, and ensure that Oregon students are served regardless of where they live in the state. Over the years, we have been pleased by the communication, the academic success, and the overall partnership.

During COVID our students had to go from Brick-and-Mortar schools to online education. Even with the extensive background that I had in online education from working with our partners, we were not able to even come close to the job they were doing educating their students.

I would be happy to talk with you more on how online education works for us and our state.

Thank you for your consideration and focus on options for students!

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Gary Tempel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Gary" and last name "Tempel" clearly distinguishable.

Gary Tempel

Retired Scio Superintendent

Currently Director of Charter School for Scio School District

Cc: Dan Grabowska, Superintendent Park City Schools