

## Education Policy Agenda Kalispell Chamber of Commerce

The Kalispell Chamber of Commerce has long-recognized the critical role of quality education and workforce investment in keeping Kalispell business competitive. In a knowledge-based, global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a well-educated workforce is the key to innovation, economic development, and community prosperity. Educators, business, and government at all levels must do better. The growing skills shortage evident today and the clear demographic trends require us to raise the involvement of the Chamber to a much higher level of engagement.

We believe that the following initiatives are needed:

### ***MORE INNOVATION AND BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT***

***Federal, state, and district leaders must implement innovative educational practices and school models and***

The economic environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is rapidly changing. New technologies emerge constantly, bringing with them the demand for new skills, and our education system needs to keep up with the rapid pace of change. Montana needs to experiment more with new approaches to help schools and students improve academic performance. Innovation is especially needed when it comes to tackling tough problems like high school dropout rates. Business can help identify economic, social, and technological trends which will help students learn and succeed.

Educational policymakers must:

- Implement innovative education models such as Career Clusters, early enrollment in college-level courses for credit, youth apprenticeship and internships, and online learning. So long as these institutions and programs are held accountable for academic results, giving them maximum flexibility to try new ideas would most likely yield fresh approaches that, when successful, could be replicated elsewhere.
- Support policies that facilitate the transfer of academic credits within the Montana education system, particularly between 2-year and 4-year public institutions. These policies will empower students in their roles as consumers.

### ***BETTER DATA***

***State and local policymakers must improve data collection – then use that data to make better educational decisions.***

Too often, teachers and administrators do not receive the results of student assessments until it is too late to identify student needs and to create and implement individualized improvement plans. In some cases, crucial data are simply unavailable. School districts and community colleges, for instance, do not have data on the performance of their graduates in Montana's universities.

Montana must:

- Develop statewide data systems that offer timely and accurate collection, analysis, and use of high-quality longitudinal data to track student achievement and teacher effectiveness. These data systems should include unique and privacy-protected student identifiers to track individual students or teachers across classrooms and schools.
- Ensure there is a common definition of graduation rate.
- Provide funding to districts to train teachers on the use of data and to differentiate instruction for students who are not yet proficient and for those who are more advanced.
- Collect, process, and return data to educators and administrators in time for them to use it to benefit their students, schools, and parents.

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