

Basic Philosophy

The Education Task Force supports a business and education partnership that will prepare today's students and adult learners for the workplace. The business community is the primary consumer and beneficiary of K-20 education, both public and private. A partnership between business and education is vital in order to align academic needs with the practical needs that translate into value for the business community.

We encourage an education system that is connected to the community.

We encourage business involvement in all aspects of public education, including businesses partnering with education entities as part of the learning process.

We support a School Board that understands the impact their decisions have on the business community.

We encourage the school board to look at adding a provision for drug testing for all participants participating in any extracurricular activity.

We support the current Graduation Matters program or any other program which will reduce the dropout rate.

We support continued funding for innovation and improvement efforts related to education that assist the Billings community in attracting new business and training the existing workforce to solve specific business needs.

We expect area graduates to show proficiency in reading, writing, and functional math, as well as consumer education, critical thinking and foundational business skills. We strongly support the STEM (Science, Technology, Education and Mathematics)

We expect a workforce that is well-prepared to meet business needs, whether that is by college bound students meeting university demands or the non-college bound students achieving a proficient level of technical skill.

We support the need to educate and maintain a well-qualified pool of labor for current business operations, as well as new business development.

We support adult learning and training programs that assist with training the existing work force to expand their skill set.

We encourage and support economic development efforts of the University system, private or public, in coordination with private industry and other government entities.

We recognize and support the education community for the education and nurturing they provide to their students. Their work elevates our entire community and communities around Montana and our country.

Specific Issues

School District 2 Facilities

In order to support a growing 21st Century economy, it is crucial that Billings have a first-rate public school system. Therefore, the Chamber supports strategic, cost effective investment in the infrastructure that supports public education, including proactive maintenance and revitalization of existing facilities and continuous long-range planning. The business community needs to be involved in helping the school district define, prioritize and implement its priorities.

Education Primary/Secondary Funding

The Chamber supports quality primary and secondary education that is adequately funded and delivered efficiently. We welcome improvements in the budgeting process, fiscal accountability, and the quality and presentation of discretionary bond issues and mill levies. In addition, the Chamber encourages public-private partnership with the School District.

Consolidation of Districts/Superintendent of Schools Role

The Chamber supports investigating the consolidation of school districts on a statewide level and re-examining the role of the County Superintendent of Schools.

School Attendance Areas

The Chamber supports frequent review and adjustment of the school boundaries. The Chamber also recognizes that individual school boundaries have not been addressed for a number of years. Because of the fluidity of the student population in Billings, boundaries should be readjusted as needed to alleviate overcrowding and busing while balancing class sizes among individual schools. Emphasis must be placed on neighborhood schools rather than busing, assuming cost factors are relatively equal over the long term.

Magnet Schools

The Chamber supports the concept of magnet middle and high schools, which offer specialized curriculum, ~~highly-trained~~ well-prepared teachers and innovative instruction. A great example of a magnet school is our own Career Center.

Dual Credits

The Chamber continues to support the dual credit program where students can attend college classes at MSUBillings, City College at Montana State University Billings, or Rocky Mountain College and receive both high school and college credit. This program has the potential to alleviate over-crowding in the high schools and increase attendance at MSUBillings, City College at Montana State University Billings, and Rocky Mountain College.

Project Lead The Way

Project Lead The Way is the nation's leading provider of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs. Through world-class K-12 curriculum, high-quality teacher professional development, and outstanding partnerships, PLTW is helping students develop the skills needed to succeed in the global economy. The Chamber supports implementation of programs that promote preparing students for a global economy.

Business to School Ambassadors/Partners in Education

The Chamber supports business to education ambassadors/partners in education program. Business ambassadors/partners would be assigned to each school principal and to all administrative personnel. This program helps the individual school staffs understand educational support by the business community and promotes interaction between business and education.

Financial Advice

The Chamber should be an integral partner regarding financial information and value judgments that become part of the school budget. We support the goals of all levels of education for numerous reasons and want to assist with delivering these services in a manner that is efficient and represents fiscal responsibility to the taxpayer. The Chamber will help to evaluate the financial information and promote understanding of the values underlying budgets of various educational institutions.

School Board Elections

The Billings Chamber supports well-qualified school board members. The current policy of electing from single-member districts presents challenges in finding well-qualified candidates for the school board. Representing specific districts has been shown to have a divisive effect on the individual board members and district-wide issues do not receive adequate consideration. When the district elected board members at-large, there were many contested races, and candidates had to develop a platform on which they ran and take that message to the general electorate. We support returning to at-large elections.

School Board Committees

The Billings Chamber encourages the school district to reinstate the various committees, including but not limited to Facilities, Long Range Planning, Employee Benefits and Budgeting For Results, that were in existence prior to 2011. A committee structure, made up of the business community in particular, is an educational system for potential board member candidates, as well as a means for communication between the district and the business community.

Work Readiness Credential

The Billings Chamber believes that a skills profile and assessment that measures the proficiency of entry level workers should be a testing mechanism that is performed while the individual is still in school. The testing should measure the individuals basic and soft skills and testing should include:

1. Situational judgment
2. Oral language
3. Read with understanding
4. Use math to solve problems

When individuals successfully complete the assessment they receive a National Work Readiness Credential as a confirmation that they have the skills to add value on the frontline in entry level workplaces.

Non-Traditional Educational opportunities

The Billings Chamber knows education does not begin or end with the traditional “school day”. We support the efforts of community-based organizations engaged in public/private partnerships, which provide school-age children with a continuum of support designed keep students in school and bridge the gap between the classroom and the work force. In addition to the daily support designed to meet students basic physical, emotional and academic needs, these organizations provide intentional programs designed to expose students to the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), and activities which will create enthusiasm and assist students with developing goals and planning to secure employment in a STEM related career.

Post Secondary Education Faculty/Funding

The Chamber supports a quality system of higher education. To ensure academic excellence, the Chamber supports the development of any mechanism that will enable the universities to attract and retain outstanding faculty. The Chamber supports expanding incentives.

Post Secondary Education Interface with Healthcare

The Chamber supports the need to strengthen the stature of higher education in Billings through collaboration with our local healthcare industry and business community.

- **Bioscience Research and Development**
There is great potential in local economic development involving bioscience research and development. Collaboration between the healthcare industry with Rocky Mountain College, City College at Montana State University Billings and Montana State University Billings is particularly essential to success in this area.
- **Workforce Needs and Shortages**
There are many shortages right now in the field of nursing, and ancillary healthcare. Higher education is critical in providing education, training, and opportunities for degree advancement.
- **Higher-education collaboration**
Collaboration between Montana’s higher education institutions and businesses will benefit consumers of healthcare services, our local economy and employees. Strengthening the stature of higher education in Billings will assist the healthcare industry in recruiting and retaining physicians and other healthcare professionals.

Post Secondary Education Interface with Business

The Chamber encourages the continuation and expansion of dialogue and cooperative ventures between higher education and private businesses that address workforce training needs and shortages ~~and promote~~ while promoting partnerships for business opportunities.

Post Secondary Education Transfer Credit Applicability

The Chamber recommends that the Montana University system assure sustainability of the Transferability Initiative that has been accomplished and is in effect.

Post Secondary Education Facilities

The Chamber supports continuation of a formal long-range capital building plan for the University system. Montana State University-Billings is an integral part of our community and investment in its infrastructure is critical to its continuation. We support the acquisition of additional land where needed to ensure orderly long term growth.

Six-mill Post Secondary Education Statewide Funding

Until a better alternative is found, the Chamber supports funding of the six-mill levy for higher education.