

MTSBA Connect

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[Lance Melton](#)

Members,

With the 2023 Legislative Session in the books, we have much upon which to reflect, even more to learn regarding the new opportunities for funding, collaboration and innovation created in law, and some additional work ahead as we work together to ensure the success of each child in every public school in Montana. Despite a few bumps and bruises along the way, we successfully protected and advanced our members' interests in serving children in meaningful ways. We will have time to analyze and get into greater details, but my running top 10 list as of this moment would include the following:

1. Inflation passed early in the session. The passage of HB 15 this session marks a full decade in which the Legislature has passed inflation for education first rather than last, which had been the practice before we helped convert to a new norm after passage of SB 175 in the 2013 Session. Despite this now happening for a decade, we must never take it for granted. For 150 years prior to 2015, this never happened. Let's make sure to encourage and thank legislators for this new way of doing business.
2. One time funding of over \$113 million for Montana's public schools and their taxpayers through passage of HB 332 (Health Trust) and HB 321 (School Facilities Trust). We have some work to do together to claim the \$40 million initial reserve for a statewide but locally controlled school health trust, but the funds committed under HB 332 are within our reach if we collaborate effectively.
3. The passage of Targeted Intervention under HB 352, which provides 1.25 ANB for students struggling to read proficiently starting at the age of 4 and continuing through the third grade.
4. Passage of charter school legislation under HB 549 that will ensure accountability, elected school board governance and new funding opportunities for our members interested in using charter schools as the focal point of innovation efforts.
5. Protection of the revenue generating capacity of and implementation of greater transparency regarding what and how the 95 mills fund our public schools under HB 587, with a focus on use of those funds to keep local taxes down through adjustments to the formulas for guaranteed tax base aid in general funds, countywide retirement levies, building funds and building reserve funds.

6. A 60% increase in funding for advanced opportunities under HB 257. At \$4 million per year, plus the \$2 million in base CTE funding, there are more resources for CTE than ever before and more opportunities to guide students to a variety of successful futures.
7. A 250% increase in the innovative educational programming tax credit, including new authority to use those donated funds for capital projects and equipment that foster innovation.
8. A \$1 million per year increase in funding for the Montana Digital Academy to create a nationwide clearinghouse of digital learning opportunities for pupils in our public schools.
9. Addressing recruitment and retention of quality educators through expanded access to working retirees (HB 117), enhancements in the TEACH Act (HB 588), easing the rules for use of the teacher loan repayment program (SB 70), alternative teacher licensure (SB 373) and funding for a teacher residency program (HB 833).
10. Preservation of our members' interests by defeating and amending several proposals throughout the session (we will provide a detailed list for further discussion as we go along).

The next step in the process directly involves and requires a commitment by each of our members, to learn more about these changes, to identify which of them you want to implement in your district and to work together to build toward our future success in the 2025 Legislature and beyond.

Thank you for your effective advocacy throughout the session. Your collaboration and advocacy echoed throughout the halls of the Capitol in the 2023 Legislative Session and fueled joint efforts by each of the organizations partnering in the Coalition of Advocates for Montana's Public Schools. Thanks also to Shelley Turner (MASBO), Doug Reisig (MQEC), Dennis Parman (MREA), Rob Watson (SAM) and the advocacy team at MTSBA, especially Emily Dean, our Director of Advocacy and Debra Silk, our Associate Executive Director and Jule Walker, our Field Services Specialist. Finally, thanks to the MTSBA Officers and the members of our Legislative Advocacy Committee, who met throughout the session, often on a moment's notice, and provided critical guidance and support at pivotal times during this session.

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