Montana School Boards Association

MTSBA 100 YEARS 1926 • 2026

100 YEARS

OF STRONG BOARDS. STRONG SCHOOLS. STRONGER MONTANA.

2027 Session LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

Developing the full potential of each child in every public school through effective school board leadership.

KIDS FIRST • EXCELLENCE • OPPORTUNITY • INNOVATION

A member-directed framework for advocacy before the 2027 Montana Legislature and other bodies affecting the constitutional rights, authorities, and obligations of Montana public education.

Built from MTSBA's member-adopted Principles and Guidelines, Multi-Year Strategic Advocacy Resolution and Gap Analysis Resolution for the 2027 Interim and Legislative Session.

HOLD US ACCOUNTABLE

MTSBA invites its members, partners, policymakers, and the public to hold us accountable to the commitments in this platform.

Our North Star Guiding MTSBA's Advocacy

The platform translates member-adopted direction to a manageable set of public commitments.

OUR ADVOCACY FRAMEWORK

Develop the full potential of and expand opportunity for each child. Pursue excellence and innovation. Recognize proficiency. Empower school boards to lead. Preserve meaningful local supervision and control. Provide adequate resources to allow schools to do the work.

These commitments reflect the direction our members have adopted and the standards against which MTSBA invites its advocacy to be judged.

Kids First

Keep the best interests of children and the full educational potential of each person at the center of advocacy.

Excellence + Opportunity

Support quality education, advanced opportunities, transformational learning, and the conditions that allow every student to thrive.

Innovation + Adaptation

Encourage transformative strategies, innovative teaching, research and development, and the ability to respond to a rapidly changing world.

Empowered School Boards

Preserve meaningful local decision-making and the constitutional supervision and control entrusted to elected trustees.

| MEMBER AUTHORITY Strategic Advocacy Resolution ¶¶1-9; Gap Analysis Resolution strategies 1, 5 and 8; Principles 1-3 and 6.

MEMBER-ADOPTED RESOLUTION

Vision-Based Strategic Advocacy

Executive summary of the Multi-Year Strategic Advocacy Resolution, 2025-2029 Sessions

MTSBA's advocacy begins with a clear purpose: developing the full potential of each child in every public school and ensuring equality of educational opportunity for all children.

The resolution establishes a vision-based strategic advocacy process rather than an approach built around disconnected bills and issues. MTSBA is directed to maintain ongoing strategic dialogue, build internal clarity and consensus, seek alignment with other constitutionally empowered bodies, and pursue transformative strategies that support Montana public schools in fulfilling their constitutional mission.

The work begins with MTSBA members and extends outward. MTSBA engages trustees, administrators, clerks, and teachers; works in full partnership with the Coalition of Advocates for Montana's Public Schools; collaborates with the Legislature, Board of Public Education, Governor, and State Superintendent; and broadens public understanding through community, business, and higher-education outreach.

The resolution also calls for careful, deliberate, and comprehensive analysis; open dialogue; attention to member wants, needs, and preferences; ethical consideration; and mitigation of disadvantage to stakeholders.

THE CONTINUING DISCIPLINE

Most importantly, the process of analyzing and pursuing closure of gaps is a continuing obligation: compare the Article X vision for success with current laws, resources and realities, identify impediments, and develop proposals to close the gaps.

Our advocacy is strategic rather than reactive, collaborative rather than isolated, and consistently measured against the best interests and full educational potential of Montana's children.

| MEMBER AUTHORITY Multi-Year Strategic Advocacy Resolution, 2025-2029 Sessions, ¶¶1-9.

MEMBER-ADOPTED RESOLUTION

2027 Gap Analysis

The Gap Analysis Resolution turns MTSBA's long-term vision into an agenda for action. Its starting point is Article X: equality of educational opportunity and a basic system of free quality schools capable of developing each student's full educational potential.

For 2027, MTSBA commits to a transformative approach grounded in equity, adequacy and innovation. The resolution directs MTSBA to support and positively influence the School Funding Interim Commission and to update and advocate for implementation of the Coalition funding proposal developed in preparation for the 2027 Session.

Funding + Quality

Better balance funding elements; address diverse district needs; target support for at-risk students; preserve Indian Education for All; and advance a unified Quality Assurance model with local voter authority for discretionary enhancements.

Facilities + Tax Balance

Increase state support for building and maintaining school facilities and pursue collaborative approaches that allow schools and residential property taxpayers to thrive.

Innovation + Excellence

Support transformational learning, advanced opportunities, innovative teaching approaches, and research and development for a rapidly changing world.

Shared Authority

Clarify and protect the distinct constitutional roles of the Legislature, Board of Public Education, State Superintendent and elected school boards, including trustees' supervision and control.

The resolution also directs MTSBA to collaborate with partners, engage and equip members, use knowledge-based decision-making, expand public awareness, champion legislative action, and protect previous progress.

THE RESOLUTION'S FINAL CHARGE

Unlock the full potential of each child through effective school board leadership, ensuring that Montana's public schools are empowered to serve as the cornerstone of opportunity and excellence for all children of Montana.

| **MEMBER AUTHORITY** Gap Analysis Resolution for 2027 Interim and 2027 Legislative Session.

2027 PLATFORM COMMITMENTS

Expanding educational opportunity and removing unnecessary barriers that prevent students from accessing rigorous, innovative, and personalized learning opportunities suited to their needs, interests and potential. We focus on outcomes rather than outputs, proficiency rather than seat time, measuring success not by the activities we undertake, but by whether those activities meaningfully advance the best interests of children.

Modernizing laws, regulations, funding structures and educational practices so that schools have the freedom to adapt to changing student needs, expectations of families, emerging technologies, new instructional models, and expanded learning opportunities while maintaining appropriate standards for quality and accountability.

MTSBA supports educational systems that recognize demonstrated proficiency, achievement and successful learning, while maintaining rigorous, and equitable academic standards.

These commitments establish the direction of travel without predetermining the mechanics of every future proposal. MTSBA will evaluate particular legislation through careful analysis, open dialogue, member direction, and the interaction of all applicable platform commitments.

| MEMBER AUTHORITY Strategic Advocacy Resolution ¶¶1, 2, 7 and 9; Gap Analysis Resolution strategy 1 and the final resolved clause; Principles 1, 3 and 6.

2027 PLATFORM COMMITMENTS

School Board Leadership: Authority + Accountability

Local control is strongest when elected trustees lead, understand the issues before them, and use their authority to advance opportunity for students.

MTSBA supports strong, meaningful local supervision and control exercised by elected trustees as educational leaders—using local authority to expand opportunity, encourage innovation, respond to student needs and hold district administration accountable for carrying out the board's direction, and the opportunities authorized by law.

MTSBA supports a constitutional balance in which the Legislature and the Board of Public Education establish appropriate statewide expectations, while elected local trustees retain meaningful authority, and responsibility for determining how those expectations are implemented.

Accountability is built into the delivery of education through the supervision and control of locally elected school boards. Measurement informs accountability, but it does not create it. Trustees are directly accountable to the communities, families, and students they serve, and are ultimately measured by the outcomes achieved for students.

Local supervision and control should carry both authority and accountability: trustees should have meaningful discretion to lead, innovate and respond to students, together with responsibility for ensuring that district policies, and practices faithfully implement state law and board direction.

This is not a claim that every local decision is beyond review. It is a commitment to the constitutional structure our members have directed MTSBA to protect: distinct roles, meaningful trustee supervision and control, and fidelity by every constitutionally empowered body to the rights and guarantees of Article X.

| MEMBER AUTHORITY Principle 2; Gap Analysis Resolution strategy 8 and final resolved clause; Strategic Advocacy Resolution ¶¶2 and 4.

2027 FUNDING PRIORITY

Coalition Funding Proposal / CAMPS

MTSBA members have directed the Association to update and advocate for implementation of the funding proposal developed by the Coalition of Advocates for Montana's Public Schools in preparation for, throughout, and beyond the 2027 Session.

The proposal is not presented as an isolated funding adjustment. The member directive identifies the features that must remain at the center of the work:

- Better balance funding elements to ensure the cornerstones of quality and address disproportionate emphasis on per-pupil funding constructs.
- Reflect the diverse needs of rural and isolated schools, urban centers, American Indian communities, and districts with differing characteristics.
- Support preservation of the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indian Peoples and Tribes.
- Target funding to meet the needs of at-risk students, including students affected by poverty, disabilities and other challenges, to close opportunity and performance gaps.
- Support a unified "Quality Assurance" funding model that guarantees adequate resources for all districts, complemented by local voter authority for discretionary funding enhancements to foster innovation.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Adequacy establishes the capacity for quality. Local authority beyond that foundation preserves room for innovation, excellence and community choice.

MTSBA will pursue this work in partnership with the Coalition, while using the legislative and other processes to advance adequacy, equity and innovation.

| MEMBER AUTHORITY Gap Analysis Resolution, resolved clauses 1-3 and strategy 2; Principles 1 and 3.

2027 FUNDING PRIORITY

Adequacy, Equity, Student Need and Facilities

Quality requires resources that are stable, equitable, responsive to student need, and sufficient for the physical environments in which learning occurs.

Adequate + Rational

Advocate for funding that empowers districts to meaningfully provide an education meeting the standards of the basic system of free quality schools.

Adequate + Equitable

Enable local boards to ensure students have access to essential programs and services.

Students with Greater Need

Target funding for students affected by poverty, disabilities and other challenges in order to close opportunity and performance gaps.

Indian Education for All

Support adequate funding and statewide commitment to Indian Education for All and preservation of the rich and unique cultural heritage of American Indian Peoples and Tribes.

Facilities are part of the same quality obligation. The Gap Analysis directs increased state support for building and maintaining school facilities and calls for an update to the most recent statewide school facilities study.

The resolution also calls for a more equitable and stable funding environment in which public schools and residential property taxpayers can thrive, including exploration of alternatives to the over-reliance on local variable property taxes to fund public schools.

| MEMBER AUTHORITY Principles 1, 3 and 4; Gap Analysis Resolution resolved clauses 2-4.

HOW WE ADVOCATE

Knowledge, Collaboration and Accountability

MTSBA's members have established several keystones to guide the Association's work — defining not only the outcomes we seek, but the principles that should govern how we pursue them.

Knowledge-Based Decisions

Careful, deliberate and comprehensive analysis; open dialogue before deliberation; attention to member wants, needs and preferences; ethical consideration; and mitigation of disadvantage.

Collaboration

Full partnership with the Coalition, engagement through the K-12 Vision Project, and pursuit of common goals with constitutionally empowered state leaders.

Public Engagement

Broaden awareness through community dialogue and outreach to business, higher education and other community leaders.

Protect Progress

Safeguard institutional knowledge and the significant improvements achieved through prior advocacy while continuing to build toward the Article X vision.

A PRACTICAL ACCOUNTABILITY TEST

Does our work on this legislation reasonably advance one or more of those member-authorized objectives without conflicting with another?

That question allows MTSBA to engage productively and nimbly in the details of legislation — remaining flexible about the means while staying firmly anchored to the outcome we seek.

| MEMBER AUTHORITY Strategic Advocacy Resolution ¶¶4-9; Gap Analysis Resolution strategies 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7; Principle 6.

OUR PUBLIC PROMISE

Hold MTSBA Accountable

MTSBA's members have told us to put kids first, pursue innovation and excellence, expand opportunities for students, and protect meaningful school board leadership.

Our job at this table is to help design legislation that accomplishes those things together.

We invite trustees, legislators, educators, families, partners, and the public to ask whether our advocacy:

- keeps the full potential and best interests of children at the center;
- expands opportunity and supports excellence and innovation;
- advances adequate, equitable and rational support for quality public schools;
- respects the constitutional structure of shared authority and meaningful local supervision and control;
- reflects careful analysis, open dialogue and the direction of our members; and
- protects progress while remaining willing to adapt laws and practices when change will better serve students.

Accountability is not a slogan.

It is the discipline of measuring MTSBA's positions, partnerships and conduct against the principles and direction its members have adopted.

| MEMBER AUTHORITY Strategic Advocacy Resolution ¶7; Gap Analysis Resolution strategies 5, 7 and 8; Principles and Guidelines.

One North Star.
Multiple Responsibilities.

Funding, innovation, governance and opportunity are not separate missions. They are different responsibilities in service of the same constitutional purpose.

NORTH STAR

Developing the full potential of each child in every public school through effective school board leadership.

For Students

Opportunity, excellence, demonstrated learning, innovative approaches and the resources needed to succeed.

For School Boards

Meaningful supervision and control, local decision-making, responsibility for leadership, and capacity to serve every student.

For State Leaders

A constitutional partnership that provides appropriate statewide expectations, adequate and equitable resources, and respect for the distinct roles assigned by Article X.

For MTSBA

Strategic, collaborative, knowledge-based advocacy that closes gaps, protects progress and remains accountable to member-adopted direction.

The 2027 Legislative Platform is therefore both an agenda and a standard of conduct. It identifies the outcomes MTSBA will pursue and the principles that will govern how the Association works with members, partners, policymakers, and the public to achieve them.

OUR MEASURE

Opportunity and excellence for the children of Montana.

| MEMBER AUTHORITY Multi-Year Strategic Advocacy Resolution; Gap Analysis Resolution for 2027; MTSBA Principles and Guidelines.

Executing the Plan

MTSBA Advocacy Team



LANCE MELTON
Executive Director
lmelton@mtsba.org
(406) 439-2180



DEBRA SILK
Associate Executive Director/General Counsel
dsilk@mtsba.org
(406) 439-3520



LINDSAY FORD
Grassroots Advocacy Coordinator
lford@mtsba.org
(406) 240-6686



SHAWN BUBB
Director of Insurance Services
sbubb@mtsba.org
(406) 439-7958

MTSBA Board of Directors



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Region 5



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