

Montana Public  
Education Center  
MT-PEC  
Issue Spotlight

School Choice in Montana  
Well-Protected, Freely Exercised

February 14, 2017

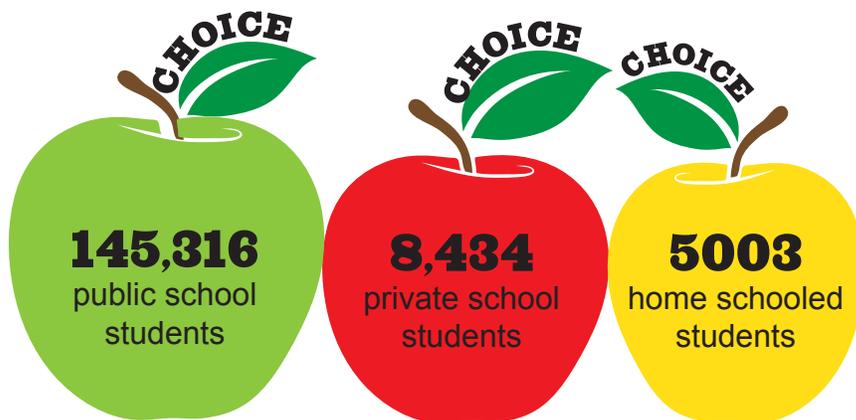


## Public School Choices Abound

The choice of public education is the gateway to a range of additional options within our public schools. The right of parents to choose among public school offerings is as well established and available as the right to choose alternatives to the public schools and includes the right to choose the school district and school in most instances, usually with no tuition.

Once enrolled in the public school of choice, children and families have an abundance of additional opportunities to further customize each child's learning. Choices include a wide variety of curriculum options for different career pathways, advanced placement courses, dual credit courses, part-time enrollment, and availability of distance learning through the Montana Digital Academy.

**Over 90% of Montana Families choose public education for their children!**



### Montana Public and Private Schools by the Numbers\*

- 821 public schools are operating in virtually every community in Montana, each is governed by a volunteer board, subject to popular election in each community. These schools serve as centers of innovation and excellence for 145,316 Montana children.
- Approximately 133 private schools are operating in Montana, and over two-thirds are religiously affiliated. There are 8,434 students enrolled in non-public schools.
- 5,003 children educated at home.

\* Facts about Montana Education 2016, and 2016-17 Directory of Montana Schools, OPI

## The Promise of Accountability Between Voters and Public Schools

When it comes to public schools, voters have numerous assurances that their taxes are being spent to benefit children, too numerous, in fact, to specify them all in the format of this issue spotlight. These “promises of accountability,” which are embedded in our Constitution and the laws passed by the Legislature, ensure that any school receiving public funds will:

**Accept and provide a quality education to every resident child** seeking enrollment while ensuring equality of educational opportunity for all;

**Comply with the open meeting and public records laws** and will solicit and incorporate public input into their decisions;

**Be governed by locally-elected trustees** who may be unelected if voters don't like what is happening in their public schools;

**Provide accredited instruction** through highly-qualified staff who must be licensed and endorsed according to law;

**Assess their performance** using several standardized measures and widely report and otherwise make results of such assessment available to the public; and

**Be nonsectarian** and otherwise free from discrimination on account of sex, race, creed, religion, political beliefs or national origin.

## Privatization Advocates are Seeking to Break the Promise of Accountability to Voters

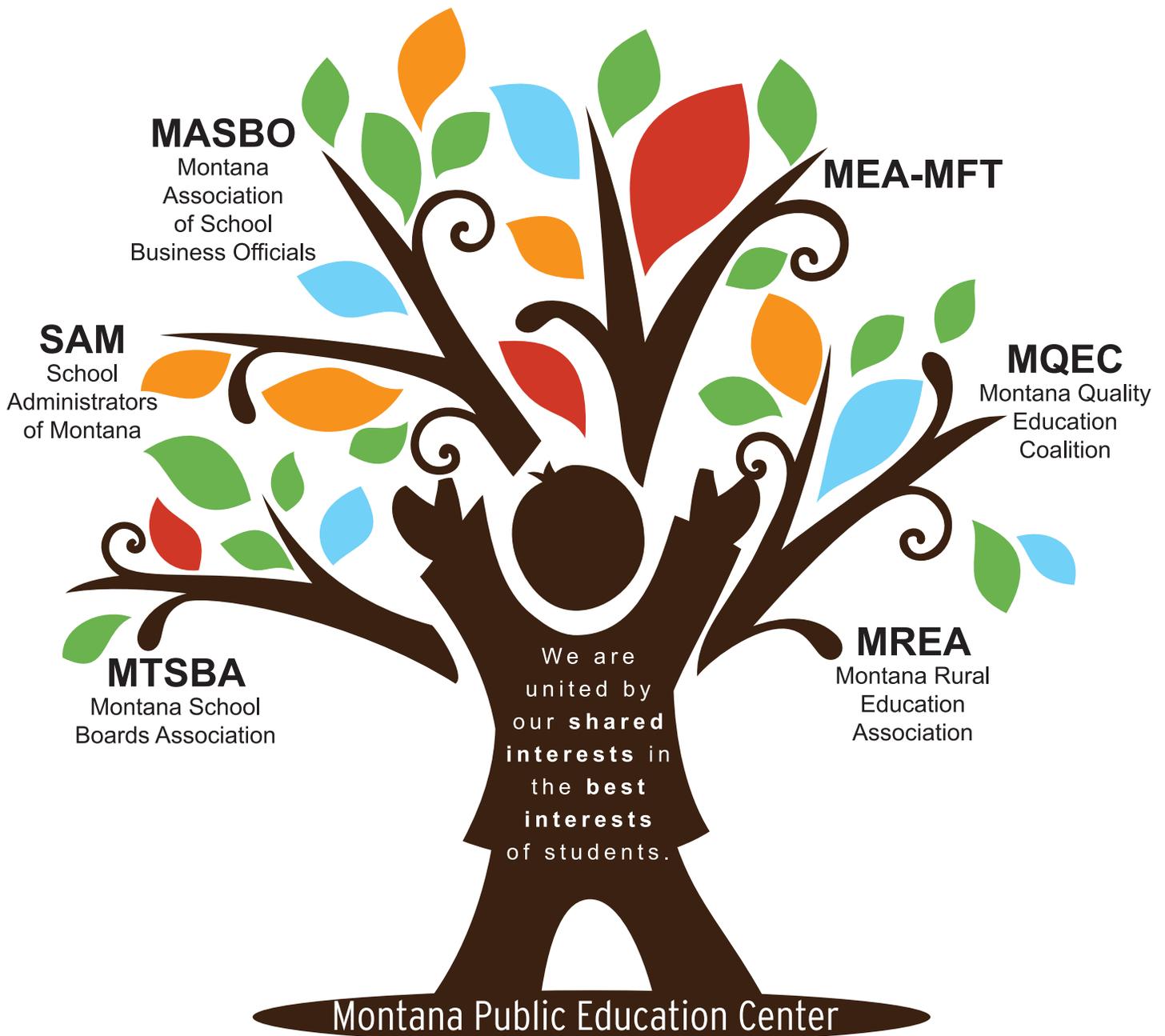
Privatization advocates are seeking an “escape clause” from the promises of accountability, to allow them to receive and spend tax benefits on education that is exempt from all of the accountability measures by which Montana's public schools abide over the years.

The proposals are usually advanced with a corresponding claim of pursuing “choice” and “competition” with no sense of irony regarding the fact that 1.) Choice already exists and 2.) Competition is hardly fair when you have “loaded the deck” by imposing a myriad of rules on public schools while providing a blanket exemption from the same rules for the private schools who would benefit from such proposals.



Montana families are freely exercising school choice under current law without interference. Most (over 90%) Montana's families choose and trust Montana's public schools to serve their children effectively, efficiently, and transparently and our public schools earn that trust every day. Let's not jeopardize our success by experimenting with unproven proposals that drain resources away from the children educated in Montana's public schools.

**Public education works in Montana. Let's keep it that way!**



Learn more at [mt-pec.org](http://mt-pec.org)