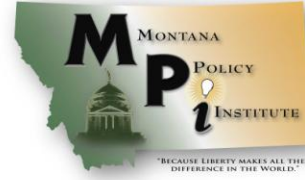


Contact: Carl Graham
President
Phone 406.600.1139

Montana Policy Institute
67 W Kagy Blvd Ste. B
Bozeman, MT 59715
info@montanapolicy.org



Press Release

Bozeman Nonprofit Announces School Financial Transparency Web Site

Today the Montana Policy Institute unveiled a comprehensive web site containing school financial data from across the state. The site, www.schoolsopenmt.org, provides historical revenue and spending information for every school district in the state, and allows Montanans to compare district revenue, spending, staffing, performance, and other measures across any five districts and with state averages.

The site's goal, according to MPI president Carl Graham, is to provide citizens, opinion leaders, and lawmakers with a user friendly and comprehensive source of information on school revenues and spending from around the state. The site contains easy to use search tools and graphics that translate raw data from official but difficult to navigate sources into usable and understandable information. "The goal isn't to pass judgment or change any minds" according to Graham. "We want to raise the level of debate about school spending by providing taxpayers with as much information as possible. Once they see the data they can decide for themselves what the numbers for their district mean."

The site guides users through historical revenue and spending levels across a variety of categories, including salaries, administrative costs, and more. They can also compare revenues and spending categories along with achievement scores across five school districts of their choice along with state averages. All of the data was gleaned from official state sources over a six month period by scouring government web sites. But not all of MPI's collection efforts were successful.

For Immediate Release

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“We also wanted detailed district level spending so that we could see more than just how much was spent and actually provide taxpayers with a view of what their dollars were spent on” said Graham. Unfortunately, nearly 45% of all districts did not respond to MPI’s data requests. Another 45% or more responded that MPI could copy the documents in district offices or pay to have them copied and mailed – a challenging task with over 400 state school districts but within their rights under current law. And of the remaining districts fewer than 10% provided any usable data at all. The results of these requests are also at www.schoolsopenmt.org so that people can see how – or if – their district responded to data requests.