

July 2025

Collaborative Partner News

The Work-based Learning Collaborative includes 30 partner organizations that cover the gamut of work-based learning from the student, employer, and educator perspectives, as well as direct-service, capacity, and policy levels. We are proud to share highlights of our WBLC partners - state agencies, industry associations, colleges, high schools, and nonprofit organizations. Find the list of the WBLC members [here!](#)



Work-based Learning Collaborative Retreat

Members from across Montana gathered for three days in Billings last month for our annual WBLC retreat. We took the opportunity to connect with one another, learn about the work-based learning landscape in Montana, and solidify a plan for our work in the coming year. We enjoyed team building with Canvas Creek Team Building, touring the Billings Public Schools Career Center, and hearing from many different stakeholders.

We appreciate EdChoice and Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation for making the retreat possible. Thank you to everyone who joined and those who shared insights to inform our work moving forward!



Across the Divide: Supporting Indigenous Student Success

Supporting Indigenous Student Success – Chief Dull Knife College

“If students feel like they belong, they show up”

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions highlighted WBLC member Chief Dull Knife College in a case study on the impact of belonging, meaning, wellbeing and purpose. They asked: What does it mean for a college to truly see its students for who they are? How can college leaders help rural Indigenous students access living wage jobs without asking them to abandon their traditional culture and ways of being in the world? Can a committed core of faculty shift the culture of an institution and weave positive Indigenous identity into the fabric of its educational programs?

Chief Dull Knife College serves the Northern Cheyenne Tribal community in south eastern Montana. Originally founded with a narrow focus on training workers for the local workforce, Chief Dull Knife now serves as a starting point for many who go on to pursue bachelor’s degrees through the Montana University system. As the college makes this shift, leaders are carefully weaving together two distinct forces: an imperative to center traditional Indigenous identity while helping students build skills students need to transfer to a four-year college and access living wage jobs. The college’s new student success course is a microcosm for this work: aiming to help students make meaning of their present, identify and move toward their future purpose and looking to the past to deepen their understanding of where they come from.

[Read the report celebrating Chief Dull Knife College.](#)



Montana Chamber Foundation Awards \$15,000 in Cash and Scholarships to Montana Students

The Montana Chamber Foundation proudly named the 2025 Grand Champion and Runner-Up of The Prospects, Montana's premier youth entrepreneurship competition, following a live pitch showdown on May 19 at Montana State University's Jake Jobs College of Business & Entrepreneurship. This culminating event brought together the first- and second-place winners from the high school categories—New Business, Existing Business, and President's Hustle—for a chance to compete for the coveted Grand Champion title and an additional \$15,000 in cash prizes.

Existing Business Grand Champion – \$5,000 Prize

Good Detailing by Tully Good, Sealy-Swan High School

An existing business offering professional auto detailing services, Good Detailing wowed the judges with its impressive growth strategy, polished branding, and plans for expansion—proving that hustle and execution are a winning combination.

New Business Grand Champion - \$5,000 Prize

Coping Companions by Alexys Reule & Rylee Caldwell, Billings Career Center

This dynamic duo presented a thoughtful new business idea that addresses mental wellness in youth, combining creativity and compassion in a compelling, scalable concept.

"These students embody everything The Prospects stands for: grit, vision, and the courage to bring ideas to life," said Todd O'Hair, Executive Director of the Montana Chamber Foundation. "Their presentations were outstanding, and their potential as future Montana business leaders is limitless."

The final pitch event, emceed by James Easton and Tiana Yates, Montana Chamber Foundation Workforce Development Specialists featured remarks from Brian Gillespie, Dean of the Jake Jobs College of Business & Entrepreneurship who provided a \$1,000 scholarship to any student who chooses to attend Montana State University, and Trevor Huffmaster of the Blackstone LaunchPad. A panel of judges from across Montana's business community provided live feedback and selected the winners.

"This next generation of entrepreneurs isn't waiting for opportunity—they're creating it," said Paul Hopfauf, Chair of the Montana Chamber Foundation. "Each of these students should be incredibly proud of what they've accomplished."

Now in its fifth year, The Prospects received 259 submissions from middle and high school students across Montana, awarding \$40,000 in prizes and scholarships in a virtual awards presentation on April 24. This year's program would not be possible without the generous support of Lead Sponsors Stockman Bank and Two Bear Capital, along with Foundational Sponsors BlueCross BlueShield of Montana and Empowered.

Explore Montana's Evolving Tech Careers: Updated CTE Pathways Guide from Montana High Tech Business Alliance

Discover high-paying and high-demand roles projected to grow in Montana over the next decade, key technical and interpersonal skills employers are looking for, and exciting career pathways in the revamped Tech Career Pathways Resource Guide, produced by the Montana Jobs Network and Montana High Tech Business Alliance. Our first wave of updates include Career Technical Education (CTE) pathways in Digital Technology, Financial Services, Management & Entrepreneurship, Sales & Marketing, and Advanced Manufacturing – with more to come.

Looking to level up your career – or help others do the same? The Montana Jobs Network and Montana High Tech Business Alliance have launched a revamped Tech Career Pathways Resource Guide, designed for job seekers, career changers, educators, and students exploring opportunities in Montana's high-growth industries. This guide highlights:

- Common career pathways across 12 key areas of tech
- High-paying, high-demand roles projected to grow in Montana over the next decade
- The technical and interpersonal skills employers are looking for
- Education and training opportunities, linked directly from our free education & training resource guide

Since 2002, The National Career Clusters® Framework has helped educators and industry partners align programs with real-world careers. In fall 2024, Advance CTE released a modernized Framework after two years of national input. Our Montana guide builds on this foundation to connect local learners with meaningful work. [Start learning.](#)

Upcoming Opportunities

Start a Media Mavericks Club

Media Mavericks Clubs exist to engage and amplify teen voices in Montana through media-making projects published to a nationwide audience on the web. Requirements include one Teacher/ Librarian advisor, two youth leaders, a regular meeting location & time, and at least 1 piece of media to submit to the Youth Media Challenge by the end of the school year. Clubs will receive a FREE Welcome Box from Montana PBS with everything you need to make media! [Learn more.](#)



STEM Summer Institute Travel Scholarships Available

The STEM Summer Institute is still accepting applications for travel scholarships, while funds are available! STEM Summer Institute is a one-of-a-kind, Montana-made showcase for STEM integration across all grades and subject areas held in Bozeman July 28-30, 2025. [Learn more about the event and apply for a travel scholarship.](#)

Resilience Rising Event

Resilience Rising, a two-day event focused on ACES, PCES, and HOPE, will take place on July 16–17 at the DoubleTree in Helena. Day one will feature expert-led trainings from across Montana, and day two will offer collaborative planning time for trainers on these topics from across the state to

come together to develop a coordinated statewide approach to further this trauma-informed, resiliency building work. There is no cost to attend! [Register here.](#)

Connect Classrooms to Careers

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) needs volunteer high-tech industry leaders to speak to business & technology educators across Montana to help bring their curriculum up to speed regarding key workforce skills and emerging technologies. The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) is seeking tech industry professionals to speak at its summer professional development trainings for Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers. During one-hour sessions, volunteers will help Business & Technology teachers across Montana bring their curriculum up to speed regarding key skills and technologies.

Want to help connect classroom learning with real-world careers? This is your chance to share workforce trends and skill needs directly with Montana educators. Volunteer to lead a session and help shape how students are prepared for success in high-demand fields.

Dates:

- **Billings:** Thursday, July 31st, Skyview High School, 1775 High Sierra Blvd, Billings, MT 59105
- **Great Falls:** Monday, August 4th, C.M. Russell High School, 228 17th Ave NW, Great Falls, MT 59404
- **Missoula:** Friday, August 8, Missoula College, 1205 E Broadway St, Missoula, MT 59802

Interested individuals should contact Montana High Tech Business Alliance Executive Director, Christina Henderson at director@mthightech.org for more information.

Take Flight: A Free Drone-Based STEM Curriculum Designed for Rural Learners

Montana educators are always on the lookout for innovative, accessible, and locally relevant STEM programs—and Take Flight delivers on all three. Developed by CAST (creators of Universal Design for Learning) in collaboration with rural educators across the country, Take Flight is a free, hands-on drone curriculum designed specifically for rural middle school students. The program introduces learners to real-world STEM skills like mapping airspace, writing code, and leading aerial drone missions—all while making clear connections to high-demand careers.

Built for Rural Classrooms—And It's Completely Free - Everything in the Take Flight program—from the curriculum and professional development to instructional videos and student materials—is available at no cost. Schools can use any drone they already have, and if they're starting fresh, a full kit costs just \$2,500 per classroom. Even better, the program is Perkins V-eligible and flexible enough to be embedded into CTE, science, or STEM elective courses.

Career-Connected Learning That Makes an Impact - Montana educators interested in using Take Flight or learning more about professional development opportunities can contact Amanda Bastoni at abastoni@cast.org. Whether you're teaching in a CTE lab, a science classroom, or a makerspace, Take Flight is ready to launch in your school—and help students chart a new course toward high-wage, high-growth careers. [Watch the Take Flight video.](#)



Webinars

From Information to Action: The Future of Work-Based Learning

12 p.m. MT | Wednesday, July 23

[Register Today](#)

Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national nonprofit, is preparing to amplify and accelerate efforts to advance work-based learning across industries and across the country with the introduction of an updated Work-Based Learning

The new, evolved framework is both a road map and an actionable tool for educators, employers, workforce professionals, policymakers, and other stakeholders who want to design, implement, and continually improve work-based learning experiences. It includes six quality indicators that serve as benchmarks to assess the efficacy of programs and features real-world examples of high-quality work-based learning opportunities.

Podcasts to check out

- [College Uncovered: Apprentices of the World, Unite!](#)
- [FutureU Podcast Ep. 193: Building an Apprenticeship System in Indiana: How the Hoosier State is Adapting the Swiss Model](#)



News You Can Use

[Is Going to College Worth It? Ask these 5 questions to make sure it's a good investment for you.](#)

College is ultimately an investment, and “investments, by definition, have an inherent risk to them,” one expert tells MarketWatch.

[Bridging the Middle-Skills Gap](#)

This report examines the projected shortages of middle-skills credentials (certificates and associate’s degrees) that provide pathways to occupations that are high-paying for early-career workers without a bachelor’s degree. Projected shortages present substantial opportunities for people to boost their attainment of credentials that align with high-paying middle-skills occupations across four occupational groups: blue-collar; management; protective services; and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

[Are Micro-Credentials Democratizing K-12 Credentialing?](#)

More states are embracing microcredentials as a form of professional development for teachers that’s self-paced, ideally hands-on, and customizable to the skills they want to build or the subject areas they want to teach. It’s a change that’s happening gradually, and it’s one that experts say can help make professional development more relevant for educators and a tool that districts can use to retain top talent.

[Redesigning Higher Education](#)

At Austin Community College, Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart has turned decision making upside down in order to foster Belonging, Meaning, Wellbeing and Purpose at an institution serving 80,000 students.

[High School Sleuths Search Fish Guts for Clues to Plastics Pollution](#)

Museum program ignites young people’s passion for science careers - “I fell in love with science.” The Science Research Mentoring Program (SRMP) at the American Museum of Natural History gives young people hands-on experience in professional science. The program enrolls roughly 60 high school juniors and seniors each year who collaborate with scientists on a research project throughout the school year.



Questions? Contact:
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Work That Matters

Work-based learning Work-based learning (WBL) is learning about work, at work and is a key component of career-connected learning.

In addition to building employability skills, WBL experiences help students develop **meaning** from their classroom learning and explore **purposeful** career opportunities. Employers who intentionally cultivate **belonging** in the workplace for young workers can gain access to future workforce talent. The Montana Work-Based Learning Collaborative works to promote belonging, meaning, well-being, and purpose for all young Montanans by building capacity for high-quality WBL experiences.

There are components of work-based learning in the K-12 education system, the postsecondary education system, and the public workforce system – but no single entry point for students or employers to access them. Our work to improve coordination among agencies and WBL partners benefits Montana’s emerging workforce and Montana’s businesses.



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