



PO BOX 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706
(406) 444-3064
FAX (406) 444-3036

Education Interim Committee

69th Montana Legislature

SENATE MEMBERS

DANIEL EMRICH
SARA NOVAK – Vice Chair
MATT REGIER
SUE VINTON

HOUSE MEMBERS

LEE DEMING
SHELLY FYANT
RANDYN GREGG
LINDA REKSTEN - Chair
MELISSA ROMANO

COMMITTEE STAFF

PAD MCCRACKEN, Lead Staff
LAURA SANKEY KEIP, Staff Attorney
BECCA BROWN, Staff
ANIA ALDUENDA, Secretary

TO: Education Interim Committee
FROM: Pad McCracken, Committee Staff
RE: HJ 53 Study of School Safety: PD 07 and possible findings and recommendations for final report
DATE: June 12, 2026

Based on committee discussion in March, staff worked with the Montana Safe Schools Center on developing a provisional bill draft, PD 07, aimed at implementing several of the recommendations that the Center shared with you in March. Foundational to all of those recommendations is the statutory establishment of a Montana Safe Schools Center to act as a school safety resource clearinghouse and training/technical assistance center to support school efforts.

In soliciting input from the Office of Public Instruction and education stakeholder groups, it became clear that Montana schools need flexible support tailored to the wider-ranging needs of schools more than one-size-fits-all prescriptions and mandates. But also made clear, through the survey conducted by the Center, is the need for greater coordination and increased guidance for school safety efforts. As this committee saw on our visit to Hellgate Elementary in Missoula last November, doing a top-notch job with school safety is a huge effort. Not every administrator can be an expert in all things school safety, yet there is no more important priority than keeping children and the adults who work with them safe in our schools.

Staff will provide a brief overview of PD 07, then turn it over to Nancy and Tina from the Center to provide a more detailed walk-through.

Montana Digital Academy statutes as a template

As mentioned in March, we used the establishment statutes for the Montana Digital Academy as a template for the new sections in PD 07. Some background on the origin of the Digital Academy might be helpful. In 2004, the Montana School Boards Association and Montana Rural Education Association partnered to create the Montana Schools e-Learning Consortium, leveraging technology to enhance educational opportunities for students across the state. In 2008, the School of Education at the University of Montana took on an administrative role for the Consortium. In 2009, the Legislature created what was originally called the Montana Virtual Academy through [House Bill No. 459](#) (Grinde).

Possible Findings and Recs for EDIC HJ 53 Final Report

Like most interim study resolutions, HJ 53 included the Legislature's direction to provide a final report:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the final results of the study, including any findings, conclusions, comments, or recommendations of the appropriate committee, be reported to the 70th Legislature.

While staff can provide a summary of the committee's work on HJ 53, any findings and recommendations need to be articulated and ultimately approved by the committee. Findings can be thought of as statements of what the committee has learned as a result of the study and recommendations as actions that spring from those learnings; those can take the form of recommended legislation.

The following are several DRAFT findings and recommendations the committee could consider including in its final report. The recommendations are all operationalized in PD 07.

- The creation of a school safety resource clearinghouse and training/technical assistance center would enhance the safety and security of Montana schools.
 - Statutorily establish the Montana Safe Schools Center
- Montana schools and districts will benefit from guidance and support regarding school safety more than from prescriptive mandates and rigid accountability.
 - Ensure the Montana Safe Schools Center is established as a voluntary resource for schools
- The Ten Essential Actions to Improve School Safety provide a high-quality framework for enhancing school safety.
 - Utilize the Ten Essential Actions in describing the Montana Safe Schools Center's duties and responsibilities in providing voluntary support to Montana schools, including maintaining a statewide "tip line" that allows for the anonymous reporting of indicators of self-harm or violence
- Montana's statutes on school safety and emergency preparedness would benefit from updates to terminology.
 - Update various sections of Title 20, chapter 1, part 4, to replace "disaster" with "emergency" and define "emergency"

Please consider how you would suggest modifying or adding to the above list. It is intended to be a starting point for the committee's consideration.

Recap of the Committee's work on HJ 53 (taken from the committee work plan)

September 2025 meeting:

familiarization with the Ten Essential Actions and how these recommendations align with existing Montana statutes and funding mechanisms related to school safety followed by a panel discussion with some of the stakeholders listed in the resolution on ways Montana might improve the adoption of the Ten Essential Actions

November 2025 meeting:

the contemplated committee meeting in Missoula would allow the committee to visit the Montana Safe Schools Center on the UM campus and/or visit a school in the Missoula area that has emphasized the Ten Essential Actions to learn about the effort involved and the impacts; the Center will provide results of a survey of current implementation of the Ten Essential Actions in Montana schools (if completed) [the survey extended through March 2026; the committee visited Hellgate Elementary School District, along with members of the Board of Public Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, OPI staff, and others]

March 2026 meeting:

the Center will provide a review of best practices for implementing the "Ten Essential Actions" and improving cross-agency collaboration and coordination in supporting school safety, including examples from other states; the Center could provide draft recommendations for the committee's consideration
committee staff will work with the Center to orchestrate a panel discussion regarding human trafficking, MMIP, and efforts to address [done in a January Zoom-only meeting]

June 2026 meeting:

based on committee direction in March, staff will work with the Center on potential legislation for the committee's review and/or other draft recommendations to be included in the committee's HJ 53 final report

September 2026 meeting:

based on committee direction in June, staff will work with the Center to revise recommendations and prepare the committee's HJ 53 final report for the committee's review, modification, and approval