

Panel Discussion – Career and Technical Education

EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE
PAD MCCracken – JUNE 2026

CONTEXT – THE INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION WORKING GROUP

The [2025-2026 School Funding Interim Commission](#) was tasked with not only examining Montana's school funding formula, but first with examining Montana's educational system as a whole and *develop[ing] recommendations, objectives, and an implementation plan... to improve the basic system of free, quality, public elementary and secondary schools*. This work was often referred to as "Phase I" of the Commission's work but was formally the Innovation and Excellence in Education Working Group or IEEWG. The Commission contracted with the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) to facilitate this aspect of the Commission's work, and Janice Case and Matthew Bachand from NCEE presented a [summary](#) of the [IEEWG's final report](#) to the Education Interim Committee on March 16, 2026, highlighting several recommendations for the committee to consider exploring. One of those recommendations was to enhance middle school career and technical education (CTE) opportunities.

MIDDLE SCHOOL CTE REQUIREMENTS AND FUNDING

The academic requirements for junior high schools, middle schools, and 7th and 8th grade programs contained in the accreditation standards of the Board of Public Education include "career and technical education courses or pathways such as agriculture, business education, family and consumer sciences, health occupations and industrial technology education." CTE programs at the high school level have received designated state funding for years, but not until [House Bill No. 357](#) (Tilleman, 2025) has there been a state appropriation specifically for middle grades CTE. The legislature appropriated \$240,000 for fiscal year 2027 and indicated its intention that this be an ongoing appropriation in future sessions. The Office of Public Instruction will be providing an update on the implementation of HB 357 as part of this agenda item.

PANELISTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following individuals will be participating in a panel discussion on middle school CTE:

- Kelan Standley, Bainville Public School, Agriculture Education (Zoom)
- Abe Ewing, Polson Middle School, Industrial Arts (Zoom)
- Greg Cejka, Helena Middle School, Industrial Arts
- Grace Johns, Alumna, Kalispell Middle School, Family and Consumer Sciences
- Matt Jensen, Superintendent, Kalispell Public Schools

The panelists were asked to share the following with the committee to stimulate questions and discussion:

- Describe your middle school CTE program. What aspects are you most proud of?
- Why do you think middle school CTE is important?
- What would most help you and other middle school CTE teachers around the state enhance middle school career and technical education (CTE) opportunities?