



Montana Safe Schools Center History

The Montana Safe Schools Center (MSSC) grew out of a now defunct organization called the Institute for Educational Research and Service (IERS) (1957-2018). IERS included the Montana Safe Schools Center, the National Native Children's Trauma Center and Co-Teach inclusive pre-school. Both the Montana Safe Schools Center and the National Native Children's Trauma Center are still housed at the University of Montana within the College of Education.

In seeing the need for school safety support across Montana, approval was gained from the Montana's Board of Regents in 2005 to be a recognized Center at the University of Montana. Funding was obtained from the U.S. Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) to support the Center's creation. The original focus was on childhood trauma, victimization, suicide prevention, threat assessment, behavioral health and bullying.

Between 2005 and 2016 MSSC created relationships with the Office of Public Instruction, Department of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Work expanded into trauma informed schools with a focus on youth suicide.

Between 2017 and 2019 the Montana Safe Schools Center did not have a dedicated director nor funding to support school safety work. Unfortunately, as a result of the 2018 Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting the federal government established on March 28, 2018 the STOP School Violence Act and its corresponding federal grant funding. The MSSC applied for and was awarded in 2019 one of the first STOP School Violence grants.

Between 2019 and today the Montana Safe Schools Center has stayed true to providing training and technical assistance around youth suicide prevention, threat assessment and bullying but has expanded its reach to include tip line, site assessment, emergency operations planning and tele-mental health.

Why a State Funded School Safety Center

The Montana Safe Schools Center is fundamentally about keeping students, staff, and families safe whether in classrooms, at events, or during emergencies.

Montana is one of the few states without a unified, coordinated approach to supporting school safety and lacks a designated state system that provides schools with comprehensive guidance and support. The level of safety support a school can provide often depends on local capacity. Some schools have access to training, planning support, and coordinated response systems, others do not.

State appropriations ensure that safety is not dependent on where a child lives or the resources of a local district, but is a consistent, statewide priority.

A statewide Montana Safe Schools Center ensures:

- Every student is protected by the same high standard of safety
- All staff are trained in consistent, evidence-based safety practices
- Every family can trust their school is prepared

Keeping students safe requires more than responding effectively during a crisis it requires creating conditions that prevent crises from occurring in the first place.

Comprehensive approach to school safety includes:

- Early identification of risks,
- Strong prevention and intervention practices
- Positive school climates
- Student well-being support
- Coordinated emergency preparedness

Designating a state center allows for coordination of a statewide approach that helps ensure that prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts are aligned across all schools, strengthening the capacity of educators, supporting collaboration with community partners, and providing families with confidence that every school is equipped to protect and support students every day.

This is more than systems, plans, or compliance it is a commitment to protecting students, building a lasting culture of safety throughout our schools, equipping staff to implement effective safety practices with confidence, and reassuring families that their children are learning in a safe and secure environment every day.

The Montana Safe Schools Center is about one thing above all else keeping students, staff, and families safe. State appropriations ensure that safety is consistent, coordinated, and available in every community, not just those with the most resources. This investment protects lives, strengthens schools, and gives Montana families the confidence that their children are safe when they walk through the school doors.

Budget Justification

Salary and Wages \$315,580

Total cost for salary includes 100% FTE for the Montana Safe Schools Center Director, Assistant Director, Training and Technical Assistant Specialist, School Support Liaison, VAST Interns, Supervision for VAST interns.

Benefits and Insurance \$147,816

The University of Montana provides benefits for employees classified as Letter of Appointment and adjunct faculty at 31.5%, and student employees at 2.9%. Insurance coverage for state employees includes \$1,080 a month per employee for a 12-month fiscal cycle.

Travel \$20,000

The Montana Safe School Center averages 30 trips a year of in-state travel to conduct school safety trainings, presentation, site visits, and REMS site assessment. Trips can include one day or up to four days and include 1-3 staff members. Travel includes meal per diem, rental car, gas and hotel at the state government rate.

Supplies \$11,500

Supplies and minor equipment include postage, paper and printing supplies, and computers.

Contracts \$364,200

Montana Safe Schools Center contact with Sprigeo Inc for tip line services, JEM & R for data evaluation and utilizes electronic medical record software for tracking tele-mental health records.

Other Costs \$4,400

Other costs associated with the Center include trainings materials, website, conference fees, and Adobe license.

Total cost \$863,496