

MASS Environmental Scan of Current Conditions, Trends, Assumptions about the Future, and Mega Issues 2021-22



MASS Environmental Scan was completed by MASS Strategic Plan Working Group Members: Dr. Greg Dern, Dave Wick, Rick Duncan, Tobin Novasio, Dr. Laurie Barron, Dr. Hannah Nieskens, and Allison Evertz at meetings on 12-17-21, 1-4-22, 1-18-22 and 1-31-22. This is the recommendation to the MASS Board of Directors in February 2022

Key Factor: Demographics

Demographics Current Conditions

- Population shift from Rural to Urban; Growth in few communities
- K-12 population with need for professional mental health counseling
- Fewer Teachers entering the profession
- Greater percentage Montanans entering retirement, smaller workforce
- People are more ideological in political beliefs, not willing to listen or compromise
- Less sense of community
- Negativity towards public education in mass media
- Teleworking and remote learning of students
- Housing crisis
- Gentrification
- Social comparison is increasing intergroup conflict
- Educator and education staff recruitment and retention
- Cyclical change in rural population

Demographics Trends

- Limited school staff makes it difficult to meet requirements placed on schools
- Greater tax burden on a shrinking workforce
- More retirees with limited incomes
- Need for new facilities in growing communities; maintenance on aging facilities in shrinking areas
- Increased travel for rural students
- Challenge to hire bus drivers and substitutes
- Challenge to keep up with hiring competing with other employment areas (especially classified staff)
- Challenge to keep educator salaries competitive across the state/inter-state areas

Demographics Assumptions About the Future

- Schools will continue to be underfunded and failed levies
- Schools will struggle to meet mental health needs of student population
- Consolidation/Unification will be pushed
- Resistance to new or increased property taxes

Demographics Barriers

- Young people don't return to rural communities; no jobs, "brain drain"
- Meeting accreditation standards with fewer qualified teachers and specialists
- Over reliance on property taxes to fund schools
- Workforce shortage in general/competition with other professions
- Difficulties finding contractors to complete projects to maintain facilities

Demographics Mega Issue Questions

1. How do we get our state, especially elderly people and others without children, to value and invest in education?
2. Is there a way to decrease our reliance on property taxes and local levies?
3. How do we create a plan to communicate with community members about the lack of staffing districts are facing?
4. How do we recruit young people into education?
5. How do we maintain our high quality of education in our schools?
6. How do we identify what will attract educators to our rural schools?
7. How do we maintain equity in our schools?

Key Factor: Business/Economic Climate

Business/Economic Climate Current Conditions

- Extractive climate fickle--boom, bust, and now again increasing pressure and fight for employees
- Licensing/regulation is not a smooth or informed process. Red tape, little help, regulations limiting
- No means of equalizing funding (varied taxable valuations and ability to pass mill levy elections) for schools across the state
- Unique problems that a low unemployment rate may cause
- Decrease in state funding as national funding has increased
- Other professions and community members are working from home
- People have more freedom to live in communities regardless of where they work
- Lack of employment in certain areas of the state
- Unpredictable shift in employment - retraining
- Create innovative ways to make public education appealing
- Montana economy is piece-meal without a single major economic focus

Business/Economic Climate Trends

- Hard to predict and often sudden--This "build up" in east is coming on with little fanfare.
- Continued movement away from extractive industry to include grazing of public lands. No realistic direction in sight. Tourism economy is variable.
- We are seeing an uptick in people moving to the area, farmers are starting to sell off their land and houses are going in.
- Expansion of tax credits and vouchers in Montana
- Lack of equity in both permissive and levy elections. Shift of funding onto local taxpayers away from state and federal funding
- Emerging pattern of legislation that competes with public education

Business/Economic Climate Assumptions About the Future

- Traditional industries (agriculture in east) will continue with their cycles but provide stability to economy and schools
- As long as extractive industry continues to become more cost effective, boom and bust cycles and the problems that creates for schools will continue--schools will have to be prepared and nimble to adjust to sudden changes in business climate
- We aren't seeing a great deal of job growth as it pertains to industry. We do have plenty of jobs for laborers, construction, etc... We are also a tourist-heavy area, which creates tertiary jobs for folks who work in the hospitality field
- We will continue to grow at about the same rate we are currently, about 5% each year. We will continue to take in more of a transient population, as we are building more multi family housing units
- Education marketplace changing and schools will need to develop strategies to meet the current needs of education
- Will take 3-5 years for the current business/economic changes to stay in place - time to see what shakes out
- Assumption of impacts as the result of drought

Business/Economic Climate Barriers

- In Montana, housing
- We are seeing the tax bills being protested. Is tax structure helping/hurting business expansion?
- Lack of workers
- Lack of revenue at the state level to invest in infrastructure, which discourages outside investment in economy
- Over regulation in certain economic sectors limits ability to generate revenue
- We continue to ask local taxpayers to fund the schools with permissive levies. Possible new allowing a permissive levy for health benefits for staff
- More flexibility with transportation funding
- School district taxes
- Lack of understanding of school funding formula amongst leaders in the administration and legislature
- Politicization - multi-faceted - to attack public schools from a social values point of view

Business/Economic Climate Mega Issue Questions

1. How should the education community influence input into taxation issues?
2. How do permissive levies impact local taxpayers?
3. How do we influence policy making?
4. How do we anticipate and adapt to changes in the marketplace?
5. How do we plan for supplanting state funds for federal funds when the ESSER funding is dissipated?
6. How do we keep public money funding public schools?
7. How do we continue to provide quality affordable healthcare benefits to employees?
8. Are the tax credits that are currently in law going to create inequities across the state of Montana?

Key Factor: Legislation/Regulation

Legislation/Regulation Current Conditions

- School Safety Concerns
- Expand School safety concerns to include health concerns, including mental health issues

- Changes in education policy tend to undermine public education
- Recent attacks on local control
- Federal and state move to usurp local control of items under the responsibility of the school district
- Increased funding through private contributions (HB 279 tax credit) may impact the funding for public schools from the public. Creates an unstable revenue stream that is not equitably distributed
- Tax credit donations reduce the tax base that is available to fund public schools

Legislation/Regulation Trends

- Less support of public education; funds to private schools
- Passing laws without funding them, allows legislators to support something without really committing funds to it.
- Transfer of funding burden from state to local district taxes.
- ESSER funding is encouraged to supplant local and state funding
- Polarization in national politics
- Move to further the federal effort to privatize with public funds
- Understaffing, transition, (experienced employees leaving), and lack of effective communication at OPI are creating a void of technical assistance to ensure schools have consistent and reliable advice and services to operate public schools in their community

Legislation/Regulation Assumptions About the Future

- There will be a trend toward funds following students (Title I, to private schools, etc.)
- There will be a movement to allow teachers or those with concealed carry permits to carry firearms in school settings
- A move toward charter/private schools
- Creating specific target areas to form charter/private schools, e.g. special education
- The possibility of school board elections being partisan that can impact legislation

Legislation/Regulation Barriers

- Funding
- Public dollars to private schools
- Complicated funding formula allows for greater obfuscation about funding and sources
- Need to create, maintain, and sustain collaborative partnership with OPI
- Increased politicization of school issues

Legislation/Regulation Mega Issue Questions

1. How does the education community continue to advocate for increased and equitable funding in public schools?
2. How do we keep public dollars for public schools and not shift to private schools?
3. How do we balance the funding burden between federal, state and local tax bases?
4. How do we influence legislation that would address the challenge of social media rumors that are disruptive to education?
5. How do we work to build relationships with political leaders to support our public schools and the value our public schools provide to the community?
6. How will school districts retain local control that is in the process of being replaced by federal and/or state mandates?

Key Factor: Technology/Science

Technology/Science Current Conditions

- Lack of Bandwidth limiting technology
- Network Capabilities
- Computer Science Principles - Coding
- Google Applications
- Online learning/courses/dual enrollment
- 1:1 Student Technology
- 3D Printing Capability
- CNC (milling using technology) Accessibility
- Coding Curriculum
- Remote learning/Virtual classroom
- Ways districts provide access for students to learn from home - internet and devices

Technology/Science Trends

- Artificial Intelligence
- Credentialing
- Open source
- Advantages/disadvantages of social networking
- Companies taking over technology - leasing of equipment to schools

Technology/Science Assumptions About the Future

- Increased use of Technology
- STEM/STEAM focus
- Personal Learning Options
- Data science focus

Technology/Science Barriers

- Security issues
- Bandwidth in rural areas
- Cell service lacking in some areas of the state
- Equity issues - socioeconomic and geographical - not everyone has access to the same resources
- Putting technology in front of students does not always have value, enhance their lives, and create transferable skills

Technology/Science Mega Issue Questions

1. How can we secure more funding from the state for technology in schools?
2. How do schools continue to maintain and update technology equipment when federal funding that allowed this has dissipated?
3. How are schools going to work with Social Media influence on the operation of schools?
4. How do we continue to work with leadership (state policy makers) to view technology as a requirement and fund it appropriately under the system of funding?
5. How do we provide professional development for staff so that students see the value of technology and science in their lives and create transferable skills?

Key Factor: Politics/Social Values

Politics/Social Values Current Conditions

- Divisive political climate at both state and federal levels
- Push for public funding of private education -- “school choice” -- at both state and federal level
- Significant change in federal tax structure
- IDEA remains with minimal funding from federal level
- School board input into curriculum is being influenced by minority public and social media opinion
- Demands from the public for information on materials purchased by the school district with public funds

Politics/Social Values Trends

- Divisiveness and polarization continue to be a concern
- Continuing awareness of Title IX, ADA and IDEA requirements
- Medicaid funding cut; Title programs funding cut
- Shift of state tax burden for public education to local communities
- Students with significant behavioral and mental wellness issues in the classroom continue to rise
- A move toward charter/private schools
- School violence continues to occur at an alarming rate
- Loss of veteran educators - moving out of state due to retirement system structure, result of the pandemic and political atmosphere
- Engaged group/continued voice at the national level with AASA
- Increased need and decreased resources for mental health support for students
- Decreased or lack of understanding of benefits for SEL programs

Politics/Social Values Assumptions About the Future

- Schools’ liability for responding to discriminatory behaviors, diversity issues, and complete Title IX investigations will continue
- Tax burden will continue to shift to local communities
- IDEA funding will not increase; Medicaid funding will continue to decrease; students with significant emotional and behavioral needs will continue to need more support that costs local communities more \$
- Someone or some organization will file a lawsuit about equity of school funding for reconsideration of the school funding formula
- Mental health, push back against social emotional learning
- Push for partisan school board elections
- Prevention of school violence will continue to be a concern
- Continued politicization of school issues will continue to be a challenge
- Privacy and cybersecurity will continue to be included in our thinking about student safety

Politics/Social Values Barriers

- Divisiveness of two party system in current conditions
- Unwillingness of both parties to come together to solve problems
- Concern about attrition of superintendency and lack of qualified candidates coming through the pipeline

Politics/Social Values Mega Issue Questions

1. How do we work across party lines to effectively fund public schools in Montana?
2. How can we impart the values of kindness and respect for all?
3. How do we avoid micromanagement by minority factions of the public to influence school board decisions?
4. How do we address the mental health needs of our students and school team?
5. How do we address the loss of veteran educators/encourage the next generation of educators resulting from the current political atmosphere?
6. How do we maintain an engaged group and continue to have a voice at the national level?
7. How do we address the eroding public confidence that is impacting our ability to recruit, train, and retain quality staff?
8. What can schools do to prevent school violence?