

FOSTER CARE DATA EXCHANGE POLICIES AND PRACTICES: Montana



Students in foster care¹

2,745



Graduation rate²

68% students in foster care
87% all students



Academic achievement³

Meeting or exceeding academic standard

Students in

foster care

All students

English/language arts

20%

46%

Mathematics

13%

34%

Data Exchange at a Glance

Formal agreement⁴ established between SEA and CWA:
Yes, in 2022

Frequency of data exchange:
Monthly

Direction of exchange⁵:
Bidirectional between SEA and CWA and from SEA to LEAs



Data categories shared:
Demographic, education, and welfare service information

Data Exchange Process

Montana’s data-sharing agreement is between the Office of Public Instruction as the State educational agency (SEA) and the Department of Public Health and Human Services as the child welfare agency (CWA). The data-sharing agreement was created in 2005 to qualify students in foster care for free and reduced-price lunch under the National School Lunch Program. The SEA data privacy and security committee, whose members include legal counsel, were integral to the development of the data-sharing agreement.

The data exchange occurs once a month and takes about 0.375 full-time equivalents (FTEs) of SEA staff and 0.125 FTEs of CWA staff to complete during the academic year. The exchange process occurs as follows:



The CWA prepares the data. The CWA Program Bureau Supervisor generates a dataset of children in the foster care system, which includes the date each child entered the foster care system. The CWA dataset is then saved on a secure server for distribution.



The SEA and CWA exchange data. The SEA Common Core Data Coordinator downloads the data and removes records for children under the age of three and personally identifiable information for the remaining records. The SEA Title & School Support Analyst then searches the SEA Student Information System (SIS) for each child in the CWA dataset and manually enters the CWA data for any search hits. The analyst then adds the SEA data to the CWA dataset for matched children. Finally, the SEA Federal Grants Coordinator shares the SEA data files with the CWA Program Bureau Supervisor and holds a meeting with all four staff members to review the findings.



The SEA shares data with local educational agencies (LEAs). Once the data is inputted into the SEA SIS, the LEAs can pull a report from the SIS that identifies which students within their district are in the foster care system.

Drivers of Success

Some key facilitators that support the implementation of Montana’s data-sharing agreement include:

1. Staff participating in the data exchange have fully embraced the idea that data can improve outcomes for children in foster care and see it as integral to their job responsibilities. The staff participating in the data exchange have also been in their positions for years, which has allowed them to develop a strong working relationship.
2. Montana uses a common file transfer protocol that allows staff in both agencies to securely send and receive datasets to facilitate the exchange.
3. The dataset shared by CWA includes detailed information on students in foster care.

Future Opportunities

Several opportunities related to the implementation of the data-sharing agreement include:

1. Encouraging all LEAs to participate in the SEA SIS, which instantaneously updates data on students versus only a few times per year.
2. Collaborating with the Tribal Child Welfare System to collect accurate data on tribal children who are in the foster care system.

Notes

¹ Total students in foster care in the 2020-2021 school year, available at <https://gems.opi.mt.gov/student-data>.

² Graduation rates for the 2020-2021 school year, available at <https://www.umt.edu/ces/conferences/can/documents/why-education-stability-matters-to-students-in-foster-care.pdf>.

³ 2020-21 school year data for all grades, available in “click here for more detail about Student Achievement” at <https://gemsapi.olap.opi.mt.gov/report?reporturl=A91C8BAA-7E51-4633-9E5B-EC3C33D18847>.

⁴ A MOU or other formal agreement. Download the latest version of the Montana MOU at <https://opi.mt.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EFzeUTP9zA0%3d&portalid=182>.

⁵ Data in the exchange can flow from one agency to another or be bidirectional.

Additional Information

Data provided by the CWA to the SEA:

- type of placement
- start date
- end date
- school district contact information

Data provided by the SEA to the CWA:

- age
- grade
- county
- comparison of enrollments to homeless data
- enrollment status and history
- information from any Best Interest Determination meetings
- mode of transportation for the student
- disciplinary history

FOR MORE INFORMATION about students in foster care, please visit:

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education:

<https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/students-foster-care/>

Montana Department of Public Instruction:

<https://opi.mt.gov/Neglected-Delinquent-Youth-Foster-Care-Families-Students>

General Foster Care Information

<https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Academic-Success/Title-Other-Federal-Programs/Neglected-Delinquent-or-At-Risk-Youth/Foster-Care/Foster-Care-General-Foster-Care-Information>

Growth and Enhancement of Montana Students Interactive Dashboards:

<https://gems.opi.mt.gov/student-data>

Students in Foster Care Toolkit Guidance for LEAs and CWAs:

<https://opi.mt.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=tIKOyPwo3Kg%3d&portalid=182>

The State snapshot is developed based on publicly available information and information provided by the State.

