

**Equity in Montana's Public Schools:
What We Know,
What We Need to Do**

By

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Part One: What We Know

Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex. – Proposed 27th Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, 1972.

Any woman who lived through the 1970's was touched by the proposed 27th amendment to the United States Constitution. The American Association of University Women supported it on the national and state levels, but in some branches not all members were sure of what the ramifications would be. Still most members worked hard and Montana ratified the amendment. But the votes across states were not there, and this amendment has yet to become part of our federal constitution.

That same year, women in Montana were involved in another great democratic experience—writing and ratifying a new state constitution that included an equal rights clause for education:

Equality of educational opportunity is guaranteed to each person of the state. – Montana Constitution, 1972

As a whole the women of Montana were feeling quite good about what had been accomplished in 1972, and for the next 30 years, turned their attention on making the language in Montana's constitution a reality in all our schools. Branches, the state and association pushed for girls to have more options in schools both in course offerings, success and extra-curricular programs. The federal government finally passed legislation that stated:

No person . . . shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participating in or be denied the benefit of . . . any education program . . .

receiving federal financial assistance. – Women’s Educational Equity Act of 1994

This provided the federal provision that was needed for the issues that AAUW has supported for thirty years to insure Equity in Montana’s Public Schools, so how have we done?

Course Offering and Assessment

With regard to equal opportunity by gender, Montana schools have made significant progress. No classes with the exception of Health and Physical Education are segregated. Girls take mechanical drawing or CAD (Computer Assisted Design), introduction to calculus, and physics. Boys take consumer and family science (what we used to call home economics) and introduction to calculus and physics. Since girls in Montana are taking more science and mathematics how are they doing?

Generally, a state determines how well students are learning in school by scores on assessments. Montana schools currently have data on four national tests and one state assessment. National tests are important measures because they have strong reliability and validity correlations, so they can be considered fairly accurate determinations of how well a student is doing, by what the test measures.

At present the state gives a battery of norm referenced tests from Riverside Publishing Company commonly called the Iowa Tests.¹ The state requires all students in grades four, eight and eleventh grades to take the Reading, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies (and Reference Skills) tests. These tests tend to measure broad, general knowledge. The Iowa Tests results are often figured in National Percentile Rank (NPR), which compares Montana students with students in the national

norm group. If an NPR score is listed at 68% it means that the students scored the same as or better than 68% of the students in the national norm group. All NPR's on the following table are averages which are calculated statistically and not by the simple mathematical process.²

Table One - National Percentile Rank of Montana Students for 2003 Iowa Test Results³

	Read	LA	Math	SS	Sci	Read	LA	Math	SS	Sci	Read	LA	Math	SS	Sci
Grade	4	4	4	4	4	8	8	8	8	8	11	11	11	11	11
All Students	67%	68%	64%	69%	70%	59%	57%	59%	59%	64%	67%	61%	62%	66%	70%
Female	68%	72%	63%	69%	70%	62%	64%	60%	59%	66%	70%	69%	62%	69%	73%
Male	66%	63%	64%	70%	70%	57%	49%	58%	58%	62%	65%	54%	63%	63%	68%
American Indian	44%	46%	41%	47%	48%	37%	38%	36%	41%	43%	42%	46%	40%	44%	46%

From Table One several generalizations can be made. With the exception of the mathematics scores in the fourth grade, the mathematic scores in the eleventh grade, and the social studies score in the fourth grade where there are only one percentile point difference, girls score higher than boys on the Iowa assessments, even in science. Boys, on the other hand, show lower scores in reading and language arts and later, in the grades in science and social studies. American Indian students in Montana scores are significantly lower compared to gender and the overall Montana percentile rankings.

Another assessment measure for Montana students is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Often called the Nation's Report Card, it is the only assessment that federal government has developed. It is given to a statistically significant sample of students in each state at the fourth and eighth grades. Until recently the assessment was voluntary for states, but since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, all states are required to participate, at least, in the mathematics and reading assessments. The NAEP tests, rather than being a measure of general knowledge, are based on National Standards and so are considered more difficult to achieve a score of Basic, Proficient or Advanced.⁴

Table Two - Montana NAEP Achievement Level Scores by Gender On Most Recent Assessments⁵

Key: MF=MT Female MM=MT Male N=Nat'l MAI=MT American Indian
M4+B=Math, 4th Grade, Basic and Above
S4+B=Science, etc. R4+B=Reading, etc. W4+B=Writing, etc

From this table, it is clear that Montana’s boys and girls perform better than their national peers on the NAEP assessments. According to NAEP’s “Snapshot Reports” there was no significant difference between Montana’s boys and girls scores in mathematics at either the fourth or eighth grades.⁶ This is not true with regard to reading and writing, where girls out perform boys. Although, data was not available for Montana’s American Indian students for the science and writing assessments, it is clear that this group does not perform as well as the national group or the general groups of boys and girls in Montana.

We can see the specifics of NAEP from the above table but how do Montana students generally compare with the rest of the country? According to the Office of Public Instruction:

Eighth grade Montana students were second in the nation in mathematics and science, third in reading and ninth in writing.

Fourth grade Montana students were second in the nation in reading and fourth in mathematics.

There are two other tests that are usually cited as state indicators of achievement. They are given to a significant number of high school students, but they are limited to those who plan to attend higher education after graduation. The Montana University System requires all entering freshman to have taken the American College Test (ACT) test, and for 2003, 52 percent of Montana graduates took the examination.⁷ This college qualifying examination is scored on a scale of 1-36, with 36 as the highest possible score for each subject tested. The four subjects tested are English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning. The results for Montana students for the graduating class of 2003 are as follows:

Table Three - Results of Montana ACT Assessment 2003⁸
(National Scores are in parentheses)

	English	Mathematics	Reading	Science	Composite
Female	21.2 (20.7)	21.0 (20.1)	22.5 (21.4)	21.3 (20.4)	21.6 (20.8)
Male	20.2 (19.8)	22.0 (21.2)	22.1 (21.0)	22.2 (21.3)	22.2 (21.0)
American Indian	18.2	18.7	20.0	20.4	19.5

Clearly scores for Montana boys and girls taking the ACT are very close and are above national averages. However, scores for Montana’s American Indian students who take the test are below the state and national averages.

Students who are considering going to institutions of higher education outside of Montana typically take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). This examination is scored on an 800-point scale for each of two subject areas: verbal and mathematics. The Montana results are as follows:

Table Four - Results of Montana SAT Assessment 2003⁹
(National Scores are in parentheses)

	Mathematics	Verbal
Female	529 (503)	536 (503)
Male	559 (537)	541 (512)
American Indian	465	485

In this one assessment the boys do outscore the girls in the mathematics and verbal parts, however, the difference on the verbal section of the test is not significant between Montana girls and boys. The National Center for Educational Statistics points out that American Indians students have shown a 6-point gain on the verbal portion of the SAT in the last 10 years.¹⁰ However, one disheartening bit of information for Montana, from this year of giving the SAT, was that fewer American Indian students were taking the test than in years past.¹¹

A fifth assessment has been given for the past three years in Montana and that is the Montana/ACT Writing Assessment. This is an assessment that has been developed by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education as a possible placement examination for freshman entrance into the Montana University System. The 2003 data clearly confirms what the other assessments sited here have stated: Montana girls are out performing Montana boys in writing and American Indian students are significantly behind in their scores.¹²

K-12 Special Programs

What else do we know about our students who are currently in K-12 public education in Montana? To get a fuller picture we turn to data from a variety of programs.

Like every state, Montana has a significant special education program in its public schools. Students with disabilities are identified by teachers and parents, diagnosed as to their specific problems, and provided special assistance as determined by a committee of educators and the parents. Special education is a very broad term and can mean anything from speech therapy to Attention Deficit Disorder to severe emotional or learning problems. Students are served special education and related services between the ages of 3 and 21. For the 2002-2003 school year there were 19,269 students served by this program in Montana. These numbers include students in public schools, publicly funded schools, residential treatment facilities, private and home schools.¹³ According to Pat Reichert, Data Research Manager in the OPI Special Education Division:

There are 12,891 boys, 6,378 girls and 2,832 American Indians students with disabilities reported on December 1, 2002.

It is amazing to see that boys outnumber girls two to one in the need for special education services.

Another familiar program in public schools is Title I. This program is federally funded and schools are identified by poverty status to be eligible to offer a program. Sometimes considered an external factor, most educators know that students who live in poverty have problems that seem to be related to school success. In Montana, the overall poverty rate from the last census is 14.6 percent, but the rate for Montana citizens under eighteen is 18.4 percent.¹⁴ However, poverty rate for children ages five to seventeen (school age) varies greatly from community to community and the impact on schools is significant.

The federal government has recognized poverty's impact on student learning and it is the first criterion for a school to have a Title I program. Title I provides additional funds to a school for remediation of children in reading/language arts and mathematics who are shown to be performing two or more years below grade level. Once the school is selected, the program may be school-wide (SWP) or targeted to specific students (TAS).¹⁵ Services are also provided to students in private schools who may need them. To see exactly which students are in these programs see Table Five below.

Table Five – Title I Montana Participants¹⁶

	TAS		SWP		All	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Total Male	Total Female
A.I	891	825	5434	4949	6325	5774
White	8209	6688	6100	5631	14,309	12,319

Table Five clearly shows that there are more boys in this federal remedial program, but the startling data here are the 12,099 American Indian students. Since there were only 16,324 American Indian students in the K-12 schools in 2002-2003 this number represents 74 percent of all the American Indian students who were in Title I programs. On the other hand, the number of white students in this program represents about 21 percent of the total. It also can be noted that there are more boys, both American Indian and white, in the program than girls. And where are those boys? According to OPI Title I data, they are in the reading/language arts remedial programs.¹⁷

Looking on the brighter side of special programs, Montana high schools now offer a variety of Advanced Placement (AP) courses. These allow students who wish more challenging course work to take one or several advanced courses, to pass an examination at the end of the semester, and to receive college credit as well as high school credit for their work. Many courses are offered on site at the larger high schools in the state, but recently the Office of Public Instruction has had a special grant to provide these courses on-line to smaller high schools, especially those where their students qualify for Title I because of high poverty. In Montana in the 2002-2003 school year the figures for taking the AP assessments break down as follows:

Table Six – Advanced Placement Examinations Given in Montana in 2002-2003¹⁸

Ethnicity	Male	Female
AI	8	23
White	1147	1315

From this Advanced Placement table, it can be seen that the white girls are outnumbering the boys in taking AP classes, but the numbers for both American Indian girls and boys in this program are very small.

At-Risk

When examining equity issues for K-12 education, there are two other factors that need to be considered. The first is At-Risk behaviors of high school students. Montana has been collecting these data of students by the Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey and analyzing them for well over a decade. The survey is given to students in grades seven through twelve whose school districts have agreed to have their students participate. The results:

. . . assist educators and health professionals in determining the prevalence of health-risk behaviors as self-reported by Montana youth. - Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey

To see how things look from this perspective, the following table is presented of sampled behaviors.

Table Seven - Selected Responses to the Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey¹⁹

YRBS Data Percent of students who	Males	Females	A.I on Reservations*	A.I. Urban*
Were in a physical fight in the past 12 months	14	6	41	41
Actually attempted suicide in the past 12 months	10	7	15	19
Are “current” smokers	23	22	52	32
Are “current” smokeless tobacco users	20	5	21	18
Are “current” alcohol users	50	49	49	51
Are “current” Marijuana users	26	20	47	26
Are currently sexually active	31	29	44	34

From Table Seven, it is clear that American Indian students, both on reservations and in urban school districts (our large towns), do exhibit more at-risk behaviors than their white counterparts. Although, it is interesting to note how similar in percentage alcohol use is for all our high school students.

With regard to students who are sexually active, how is that manifested in pregnancies? According to Bruce Swartz at the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services:

Native American mothers were more likely to deliver as teenagers than whites; more than five (5.38) times as likely to deliver before the age

of 15, more than three (3.07) times as likely between the ages of 15 and 17, and twice (2.00) as likely between 18 and 19 years of age.

The good news is that:

Montana's teen pregnancy rate dropped 32.6% from 1981 to 20000, more than twice the national rate of decline over the same time period. - Department of Public Health and Human Services

The bad news, according to Stacey Anderson, DPHHS teen pregnancy prevention coordinator is:

That although the state saw a decline in the rates of teen pregnancy and teen birth, the state and national rates are still among the highest in the developed world - Billings Gazette

There were 1736 teen births in Montana in 2002, the last year for which we have data.²⁰

Activities

To look at state assessments, special programs and populations, still ignores one important area where Montana women have been interested in obtaining equity and that is high school activities. For years the Montana High School Association had as its slogan:

Activities, the other half of education!

Whether or not this is really true, many high school students do participate in MHSA sanctioned activities each year. When AAUW began looking at equity issues, girls had to be content to cheer on the sports teams or to participate in only a few activities. Their participation was limited to golf, tennis, music, and speech and drama. This generation of teenage girls takes for granted that they can participate in school-sponsored teams of soccer, basketball, volleyball and track, as well as extra curricular music and speech and drama activities.

Table Seven - MHSA Sanctioned Sports Participation by Gender²¹

Sport	No. of Girls	No. of Boys
Football	-	6,868
Basketball	3,661	4,345
Track & Field	3,027	4,182
Volleyball	3,979	-
Cross Country	1,067	1,002
Wrestling	-	2,013
Tennis	1,183	920
Golf	762	1,727
Softball	1,254	-
Soccer	988	352
Swimming	298	190

Football is still king for the boys, but when the numbers are added together, there are more students in basketball (8006) and track and field (7,209). Volleyball is the sport of choice by Montana's high school girls. No ethnicity data were available.

Drop Out and Graduation Rates

According to the Montana Statewide Dropout Report 2001-02 (the latest report for which the state has compiled the data) only 4.2% of our students dropped out from Montana schools in grades seven through twelve. Of that number 57 percent are males and 43 percent are females.²² The report goes on to state:

On average American Indian students drop out of grades 7 and 8 at a rate more than 12 times that of white students.

On average American Indian students drop out of high school at a rate more than three times that of white students.

Staffing

To get a better understanding of the schools we need to know more about the faculty and administration. Staff members in the school are often considered role models for the students. According to the Office of Public Instruction's District and School Staffing Survey for the 2002-2003 school year there has been some progress in gender balance.

Table Eight – FTE District and School Staff²³

Position	A.I. Male	A.I. Females	White Males	White Females	Total
District Superintendents	3.9	1.25	117	14.8	140
Assistant Superintendents		.75	6	-	6.75
Activities Coordinators	1	-	3.34	.125	6.75
Curriculum Coordinators	-	1	9.9	15.8	27.7
Program Coordinators	3.5	6.7	45	61.7	117.7
Special Education Directors	-	1.9	5.7	12.3	20.7
Principals	8.1	7	254	127	403
Assistant Principals	-	3	53.7	26.3	84
Elementary Teachers	36	149	1,234.5	5,363.9	6,936.8
Secondary Teachers	26.2	29.3	1,635.9	1,627.4	3,425.5
Guidance Counselors	2	13.5	139.4	252.9	421.5
Library/Media	1.9	2.1	37.5	309.8	357.3

Specialists					
School Psychologists	.75	-	4.8	8.8	14.4
Paraprofessionals	25.5	123.1	93.3	1,404.7	1,730.6

It is clear that we still have an imbalance amongst American Indian and white females in the generally perceived leadership roles—superintendents and principals—in Montana’s schools. It is, also, clear that women have moved into leadership roles of curriculum coordinators and program coordinators. In one superintendent area women are and historically have outnumbered the men. There are 41 women and only 15 men who are county superintendents of schools.²⁴ With regard to the teaching staff, women far out number the men at the elementary level, but at the secondary level the numbers are very close. Women definitely out number the men in the specialized areas of counselors, library/media specialists, and school psychologists. They, also, vastly out number the men in the lowest paying positions in the schools as paraprofessionals or teachers aids. While the chart clearly shows that American Indians are moving into Montana’s educator ranks, they are still not represented in sufficient numbers to reflect the student body.

College Going Rates and Attendant Problems

The Montana Office of Public Instruction has recently compiled a new report on the 2003 high school graduates regarding their college going rates. The report shows first of all that 10,650 students graduated from all Montana public high schools. Of these, 5503 or 53 percent enrolled in Montana colleges, but only about six percent of American Indians students went on to Montana colleges, and about 14 percent of students from low income homes started college in Montana last fall.²⁵ These data do not reflect high school graduates who have gone out of state to attend college or graduates who go on to instate private or tribal colleges. Unfortunately, these data are not broken down by gender. However, the University of Montana reported that 53 percent of its students are female and 47 percent are male.²⁶

Of those who went on to the University of Montana the cost per semester for tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies totaled \$3,677.²⁷ This is according to an article by Patia Stephens, published in the Spring 2004 issue of *The Montanan*. The article goes on to explain that part of this high cost is that the state of Montana allocated only 12.4 percent of its budget to higher education and expected families to bear 44.5 percent of the cost for higher education.²⁸ [See the chart below.]



% of State Budget Allocated
to Higher Education

Montana: 12.1
North Carolina: 17.1

% of Family Contribution
to College Costs

Montana: 44.5
North Carolina: 21.5

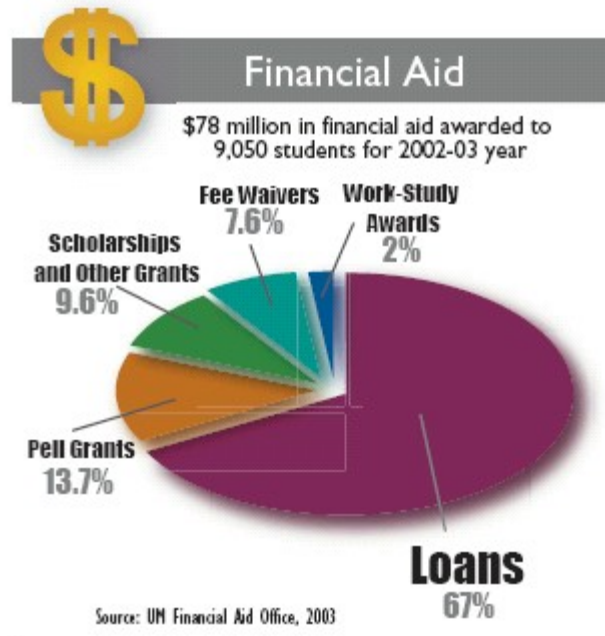
Sources: National Information Center for
Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, 2002,
N.C. General Assembly, Fiscal Research Division, 2003
and Montana State Budget 2002-03

The contrast between Montana's efforts and North Carolina's are quite startling.

If by chance, a family or student doesn't have the money saved, what is a student to do? In past generations students often worked part time. In fact in 1965 according to the Mortenson Research Seminar on Public Policy, a student could work 19 hours a week to pay for attendance at a public, four-year college, but in 2003 a student would have to work 50 hours a week, not much time for classes and studying.²⁹ The problem, according to UM Financial Aid Director, Mick Hanson, is:

If the federal minimum wage had kept pace with UM tuition, [the] minimum wage would be \$22.87 an hour instead of the current \$5.15.

The alternatives for a prospective college student are a variety of financial aid sources. According to the UM Financial Aid Office, in 2003 the figures broke down as follows:



Kay Unger, a UM faculty member is concerned because many students graduate from college:

. . .with an enormous indebtedness...\$50,000 or \$60,000 student loan dept. It's like coming out of college with a mortgage.

Conclusions

This research had examined many factors having to do with equity in Montana Schools: State Assessments, Special Education, Title I, Advanced Placement Examinations, At-Risk Behaviors, Activities, Staffing, Drop Out and Graduation Rates, and College Going Rates and Problems. There is much in this report that shows that, in fact, we have succeeded in many of our original goals. Girls are taking science and mathematics courses and doing as well or better on the state assessments than boys. Girls have gotten involved in sports to a significant degree, although in Montana, football (for boys only) is still king. Girls are taking more Advanced Placement Courses than boys and are enrolled in greater numbers in institutions of higher education in Montana than boys.

Boys, on the other hand, are not doing as well in reading and writing assessments as their female counterparts. They are more likely to be in special education and Title I programs. They are also more likely to exhibit at risk behaviors and drop out of school.

The American Indian students are clearly struggling in our public schools by any of the measures examined in this report.

And then there is teen pregnancy. There is wonderful news of the dropping rate in Montana, but it is disheartening to hear that the numbers are still higher than most of the developed world.

Finally, when a Montana student succeeds in public education, it is clear that the financial hurdles of higher education are daunting.

Part Two: What We Need to Do

First of all, we should not minimize our successes. To paraphrase the old advertisement slogan:

We've come along ways,

Baby!

Girls have more opportunities in school and are taking advantage of them. This is a real tribute to the membership in AAUW who has worked for more than three decades on these issues. We should not forget this hard work and we should be ever vigilant to see that it continues.

Now, however, we must re-examine old ideas and stereotypes. Equity must mean supporting all children to learn. In addition to the subsection from the Montana Constitution quoted at the beginning of this research, there is another from Article X of the Montana Constitution. It states:

It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person

Too long have we neglected boys' problems in reading and writing. This is not to suggest that the public schools have. They have clearly identified the problem, but just as it took special studies to determine why girls weren't learning mathematics and science, so it may take special studies to determine why boys are not doing well in the humanities, why they have language problems, and if that is leading to the drop out and college rate differences.

Finally, all citizens in Montana must address the problems of the American Indian children. In that same section of the Montana Constitution, which addresses opportunity and quality, there is another subsection that addresses the issue of American Indians:

The state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity.

Perhaps, the reason it is in the education section of the constitution is that there was an expectation by the framers of the document that the schools address it. Schools are trying, but resources to support this issue are small or next to none. All Montana students must understand that there is a “distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians” and that it is the responsibility of current and future generations to “the preservation of their cultural integrity.” As activists, Montana AAUW must set examples by modeling this behavior. We can no longer support some parts of our state constitution and give lip service to others.

For those students who graduate from high school ready to continue their education, then AAUW has another challenge based on findings in this report. And that is to support the state paying a greater share of the cost for students who enroll in units of our university system. Traditionally, AAUW has supported the budget for higher education, but armed with new knowledge, hopefully there can be more sophisticated rationale for increased funding.

This researcher would be remiss if she didn't remind the reader that any study is only a beginning and that further research on more specific parts of these problems need to be brought to branch and state programs. Awareness of current programs that are in our schools and are addressing these issues should be examined. Possible research to develop new strategies to solve these problems also needs to be done. AAUW members should keep in mind an AAUW slogan this researcher first heard in the early 1970s:

*Study without action is futile,
But action without study is fatal!*

Hopefully, this research will be the first step to a new commitment by Montana AAUW to “Equity in Montana’s Public Schools” for all our children: girls, boys, rich, poor, white and American Indian.

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