

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS
LT. GOVERNOR

June 12, 2025

The Honorable Brandon Ler
Speaker of the House
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

The Honorable Matt Regier
President of the Senate
State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Speaker Ler and President Regier:

Our communities and Montana's economy depend on a strong, skilled workforce, and to empower our workforce, we must equip students with the tools they need to succeed. Over the last four-plus years, we've delivered on our shared, bipartisan mission of strengthening Montana's workforce and expanding opportunities for students to prepare them for their future. We've made great strides together to transform the delivery of K-12 education in Montana to help students reach their full, outstanding potential, support educators, and engage employers and job creators to meet their workforce needs.

House Bill 861 appropriates \$1.85 million per year from the state's general fund to the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) for a K-12 digital toolkit. The toolkit aims to provide statewide access to instructional materials, including career and technical resources, as well as workforce development materials.

While I agree with the intent of House Bill 861, the bill is unnecessary by duplicating existing programs, as OPI indicates. DLI, OPI, and the Montana Digital Academy already deliver on the bill's aims. The state procuring a new digital learning platform, as intended under House Bill 861, will duplicate existing systems. Through existing contracts, OPI, DLI, and the Digital Academy can provide many of the services envisioned under House Bill 861 without a new, ongoing expense to Montana taxpayers.

By way of background, the Legislature in 2009 created the Digital Academy, which is specifically designed to provide unique, online educational opportunities for Montana's students and schools. Part of the Montana University System and governed by a board comprised of leaders and partners in public education, the Digital Academy opens the doors to greater opportunity to students through programming and resources available statewide to local K-12 schools, including to home-schooled students. The Digital Academy allows a student, whose school may not offer calculus, physics, or indigenous language courses, for example, to take those courses remotely. The Digital Academy delivers comprehensive digital education services through three primary programs: the Distance Learning Program, the Digital Academy Clearinghouse, and EdReady Montana.

First, the Distance Learning Program offers a robust catalog of over 120 complete online courses, led by certified instructors, that include career and technical education (CTE), dual credit, Advanced Placement, and specialized electives.

Second, the Digital Academy Clearinghouse, which the Legislature established through House Bill 749 in 2023, curates over 150 digital courses and educational tools. One of the Digital Academy Clearinghouse's primary focuses is CTE, providing partnerships with Montana employers and aligning public and private resources to meet workforce readiness goals.

Third, EdReady Montana supports proficiency-based learning in math and English. Used across the state's K-12 schools and institutions of higher education, EdReady Montana bolsters pathway-to-placement readiness, remediation, and acceleration in math and English.

All three of these programs are digitally available to every school district in Montana, with growth opportunities available to industry through the Digital Academy Clearinghouse.

Additionally, current programs at OPI and DLI offer students, schools, and employers digitally accessible curriculum supplements and assistance. Though OPI testified in support of House Bill 861, the Superintendent's office has assured me the bill is unnecessary, as much of the curriculum contemplated for distribution under the bill, including CTE, Indian Education for All, and core subject matter, is available through OPI, specifically on its Teaching & Learning, Education Innovation, and Education & Engagement website.

DLI also provides a comprehensive online system, the Montana Career Information System (MCIS), which offers career, education, and labor market information in one easy-to-use tool. DLI also offers Workforce Services Division programs specifically aimed at enhancing work-based learning opportunities in Montana.

While well-intentioned and while I continue to support expanding educational opportunities for Montana students, House Bill 861 unnecessarily duplicates resources already available to students, educators, schools, and employers.

Therefore, in accordance with the power vested in me as Governor by the Constitution and the laws of the State of Montana, I hereby veto House Bill 861: "AN ACT APPROPRIATING MONEY TO PROVIDE STATEWIDE ACCESS TO A K-12 DIGITAL TOOLKIT; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE."

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte
Governor

Enclosure

cc: Legislative Services Division
Christi Jacobsen, Secretary of State