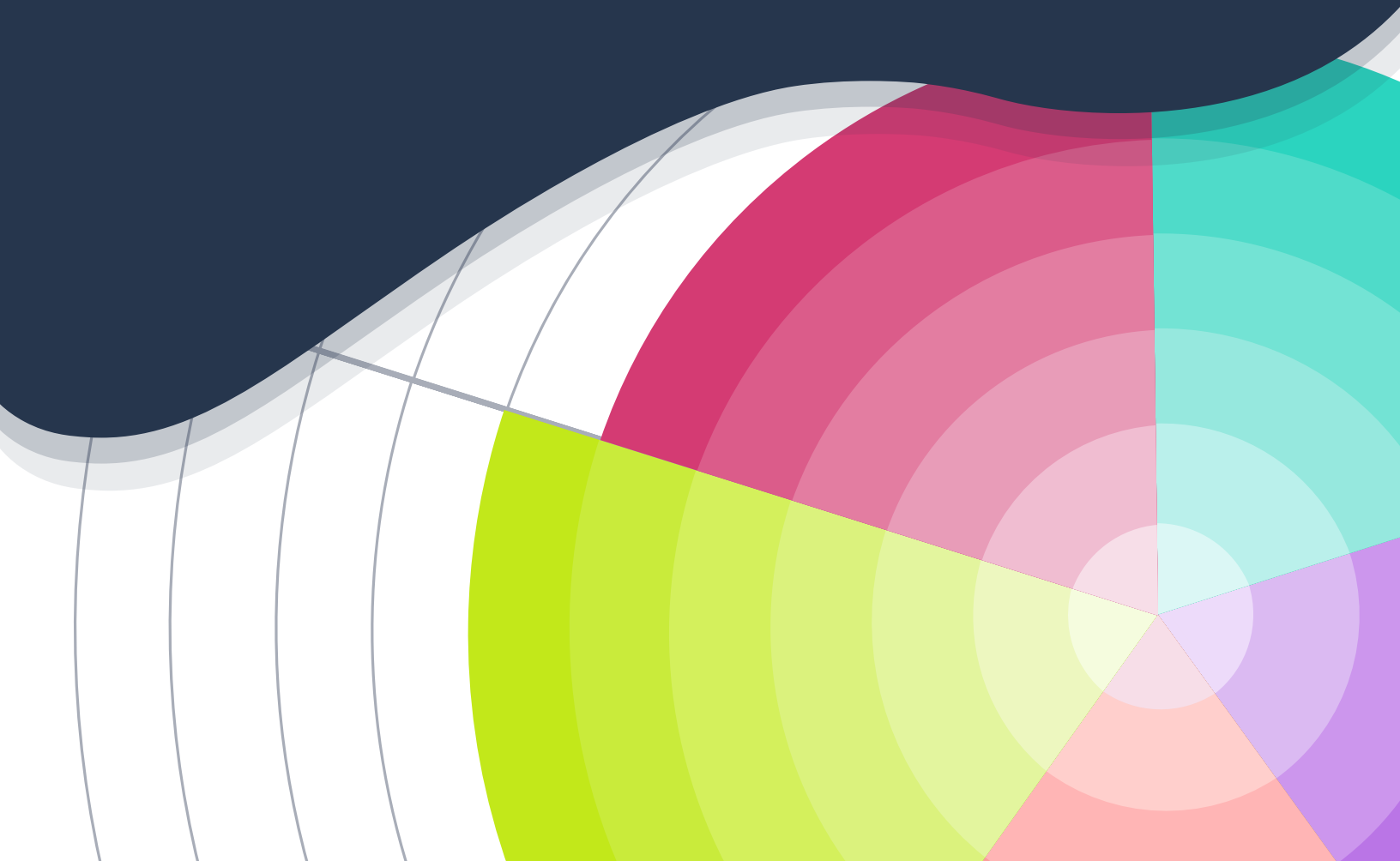




The State of Educational Opportunity in Montana

A Survey of Montana Parents

October 2024



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Dear Friends,

Montana's education ecosystem is rapidly changing, bringing with it both opportunities and challenges. As education leaders chart the course for the future, we believe it's more important than ever to listen to parents. Elevating the voices of parents across our state will inform sound education policy decisions that will help all students reach their full educational potential.

Put simply, parents know their kids best.

To further elevate the voices of parents in discussions about education reform, Frontier Institute partnered with 50CAN and Edge Research on a new survey about the state of education opportunity in Montana. This survey provides a unique window into what parents understand to be the strengths and weaknesses of Montana's education system, and how those views compare to parents across our region and across the country.

The survey is organized into five categories of learning that families tell us are crucial for them and their children: 1) school quality and opportunity, 2) tutoring, summer and mental health, 3) out of school activities, 4) information and engagement, and 5) college and career readiness. A total of 331 parents and guardians of school-aged children in our state were surveyed between July 8 and August 22, 2024 as part of a nationwide research effort that reached more than 20,000 respondents.

Here is what parents told us:



Montana parents have low confidence in their child's school. Parents are generally less satisfied with their local school than the national average. When it comes to college and career readiness, Montana parents have less confidence in their school's ability to prepare their child to succeed compared to the national average.



Montana has low levels of parent engagement in education. Montana trails national averages in parents who review information about school performance or who attend parent organization meetings. This portends a deficit in accountability for school performance and likely contributes to feelings of dissatisfaction.



Low Income Montanans have a higher demand for school choice. If given the choice, 46 percent of low income Montanans would send their children to a different school than the one they currently go to, while only 36 percent of middle- and high-income Montanans feel the same. Despite higher demand for

choice, 41 percent of low-income parents feel they have no choice in what school their child attends. Wealth appears to significantly influence who actually gets to exercise school choice in Montana.



Parents are most satisfied with out-of-school activities which offer a high degree of choice.

Aspects of Montana education earning the highest marks from parents were not school year programs, but out-of-school activities such as afterschool services at church, summer program participation, and sports. These highly rated sectors are all areas in which parents generally do enjoy a high degree of choice for their kids, as opposed to the school sector which has long had nearly no active school choice.

These results reveal an important insight: increasing choice could lead to more parental engagement and satisfaction about Montana education.

A digital copy of this report is available at frontierinstitute.org. Visit our partners at 50can.org to view the nationwide report and access the full data set.

Sincerely,



Kendall Cotton
President & CEO
Frontier Institute

Methodology

Edge Research conducted a nationwide survey of 20,090 U.S. parents and guardians of school-aged children (K-12th grade) in each of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia. **In Montana, 331 parents and guardians of K-12 children were surveyed.** Respondents could take the survey in either English or Spanish, based on their preference. The survey was in the field from July 8 to August 22, 2024.

DATA COLLECTION

The survey used a mixed-mode methodology to reach as many households as possible. First, survey respondents were recruited using online, non-probability samples obtained via national opt-in consumer research panels. These surveys were mobile-optimized (meaning participants can take the survey on a PC or mobile device, which helps reach those who do not have internet access but do have a mobile data plan). In states where Edge Research was not able to collect at least 300 surveys using this method, they obtained supplementary text-to-web interviews.

SURVEY REPRESENTATIVENESS

As respondents entered the survey, they submitted demographic information, and quotas were set to ensure the sample is proportionately distributed in accordance with the most recent U.S. Census¹ and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)² data on U.S. parents in each state. Quotas functioned by predetermining the number of desired respondents by gender identity, race, ethnicity, child’s grade and grade level in each state. Once the desired number was reached with each quota group, it closed, and additional respondents were turned away. After the survey came out of the field, Edge Research reviewed the data and applied additional weights by income, race/ethnicity, school level, and school type within states.

The following tables provide the demographics of survey respondents in Montana after weighting.

RACE/ETHNICITY							
Hispanic/ Latino of Any Race	White Alone	Black/ African American Alone	Asian Alone	American Indian or Alaska Native Alone	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Alone	Some Other Race Alone	Two or More Races
4%	86%	0.4%	0.9%	6%	–	0.2%	3%

INCOME DISTRIBUTION		
Low Income	Middle Income	High Income
43%	52%	6%

¹ Annual Social and Economic Supplements, United States Census, [Annual Social and Economic Supplements \(census.gov\)](#)
² Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), [Index \(ed.gov\)](#)



SCHOOL LEVEL

K-5th	6th-8th	9th-12th
45%	24%	31%

GRADE OF CHILD

K	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade	5th Grade	6th Grade	7th Grade	8th Grade	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
8%	9%	8%	7%	6%	7%	7%	8%	9%	7%	8%	7%	8%

SCHOOL TYPE

Local or Traditional Public School	Public Magnet School	Public Charter School	Private Independent School	Parochial/ Religious School	Virtual/ Online Public School	Homeschool	Microschool	Other Type of School
78%	0.2%	3%	10%	2%	1%	4%	1%	0.4%

INCOME DEFINITIONS

In the pages that follow, we provide results for low, middle and high-income parents. These income buckets were calculated using the Pew Research Center’s study “The State of the American Middle Class”³ and their category definitions:

- Middle-income households are defined as those with an income that is two-thirds to double that of the U.S. median household income, after being adjusted for household size.
- Lower-income households have incomes less than two-thirds of the median.
- High-income households have incomes that are more than double the median.

Following these definitions, Edge Research adjusted the incomes reported in the survey to reflect a 3-person household using the equivalence scales technique. Pulling from the U.S. Census 2023 Annual Social and Economic Supplements, they used the 3-person household income breaks of \$61,000 to \$183,000 as middle, and values above and below those thresholds as lower and upper income respectively.

DATA QUALITY CONTROL AND STANDARDS

Edge Research employed several practices to ensure data quality. The survey platform used reCAPTCHA to screen for bots. They also applied a third-party tool called Research Defender to screen out known bad actors and respondents with high survey-taking rates. In addition, data was monitored regularly while in the field. Once all responses were collected, they applied additional data cleaning processes, clearing data for cheating, speeding, inattentiveness, and AI-generated responses.

Edge Research follows the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Code of Professional Ethics and Practices⁴ to maintain the highest standards of competence, integrity, accountability, and transparency in public opinion and survey research work.

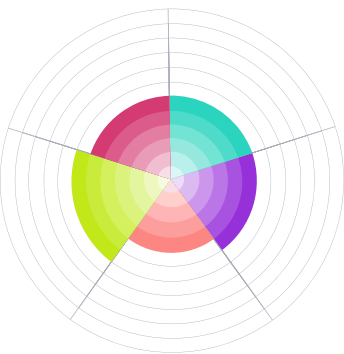
³ Kochhar, Rakesh, “The State of the American Middle Class,” [Pew Research Center](#), 5/31/24

⁴ Code of Professional Ethics and Practices, [American Association For Public Opinion Research \(AAPOR\)](#)

How to Read the Results

One challenge with a survey of this size was how to present the results in an accessible way that doesn't sacrifice the depth of insights. We decided to present the answers in two ways: first with an overview of the results across 15 questions for our state and then with a more in-depth look at how our state compared to all the others states for a few key questions.

OUR STATE SUMMARY



To help make it easier to look at our state's full results at a glance, we present the answers from our parents over two pages. At the top of the first page is the number of parents who participated in the survey.

We also provide a way to view our state's **relative strengths and weaknesses through a circle with five wedges**, one for each of the five categories of the survey: 1) School quality and opportunity (**pink**), 2) Tutoring, summer, and mental health (**green**), 3) Out of school activities (**teal**), 4) Information and engagement (**purple**), and 5) College and career readiness (**orange**).

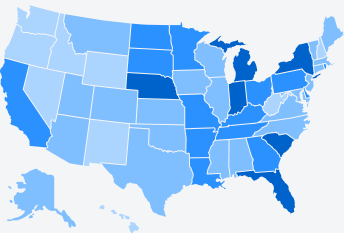
Each of the five categories is made up of three questions. These are presented below each category with **our state's results compared to other states represented by a tier** shown to the right of each question, from low to high. These tiers are scored from 1 (low) to 4 (high) and the scores across the three questions determine how many rows are colored in for the wedge (up to a possible number of 12 rows).

The state results for each question are presented in four circles: low-income, middle and high income, state average and national average. For yes/no questions, the results are presented as the percentage who said yes, rounded to the nearest whole number. For questions about parents' opinions and attitudes, we utilized a Likert scale and **reported out the percentage choosing the highest option**. For example, on question 1, which measures parents' satisfaction with their child's school, we present the percentage who answered that they were "very satisfied." This helps ground the comparison discussion in a high bar for success.



OUR STATE IN CONTEXT

The second section of this report provides the results **for all 50 states plus D.C.**, one question at a time.



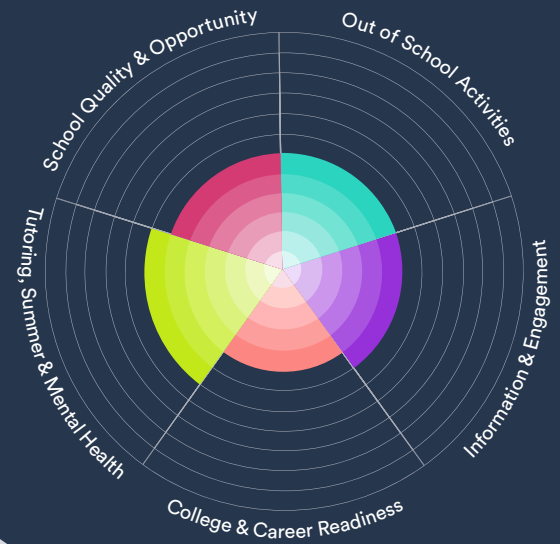
For the **maps**, a key provides the scale for the map and explains the numbers behind each of the four shades of blue. The darkest shade of blue is always the highest numbers and the lightest shade of blue is always the lowest numbers. Our state is outlined in red.

MONTANA



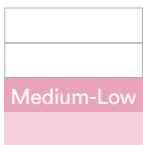
Surveyed July 8-August 22, 2024

Sample size (N) = 331 parents and guardians



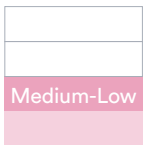
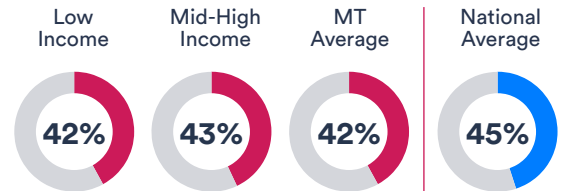
SCHOOL QUALITY AND OPPORTUNITY

State Tier



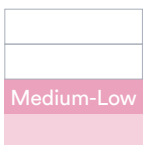
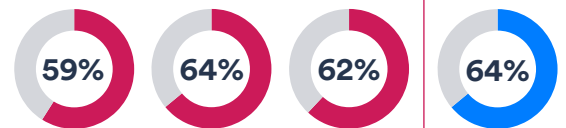
School Satisfaction

Percentage answering they are very satisfied with their child's school



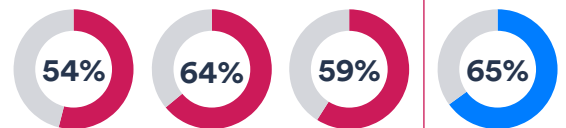
Would Make the Same Choice

Percentage answering that they would send their child to the school they go to today



Feel They Have a Choice

Percentage answering they feel like they have a choice in what school their child attends



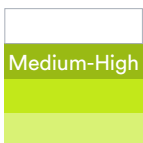
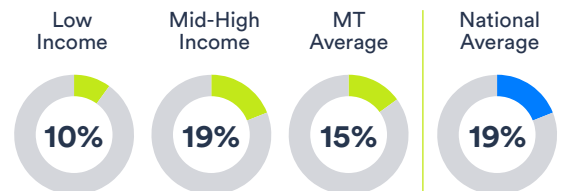
TUTORING, SUMMER AND MENTAL HEALTH

State Tier



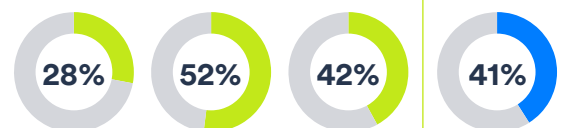
Tutoring Participation

Percentage of children who have received academic tutoring in this past school year



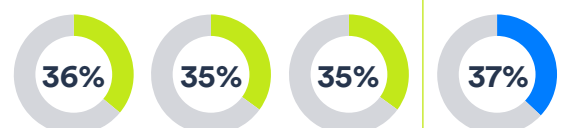
Summer Program Participation

Percentage of children who participated in a supervised summer program

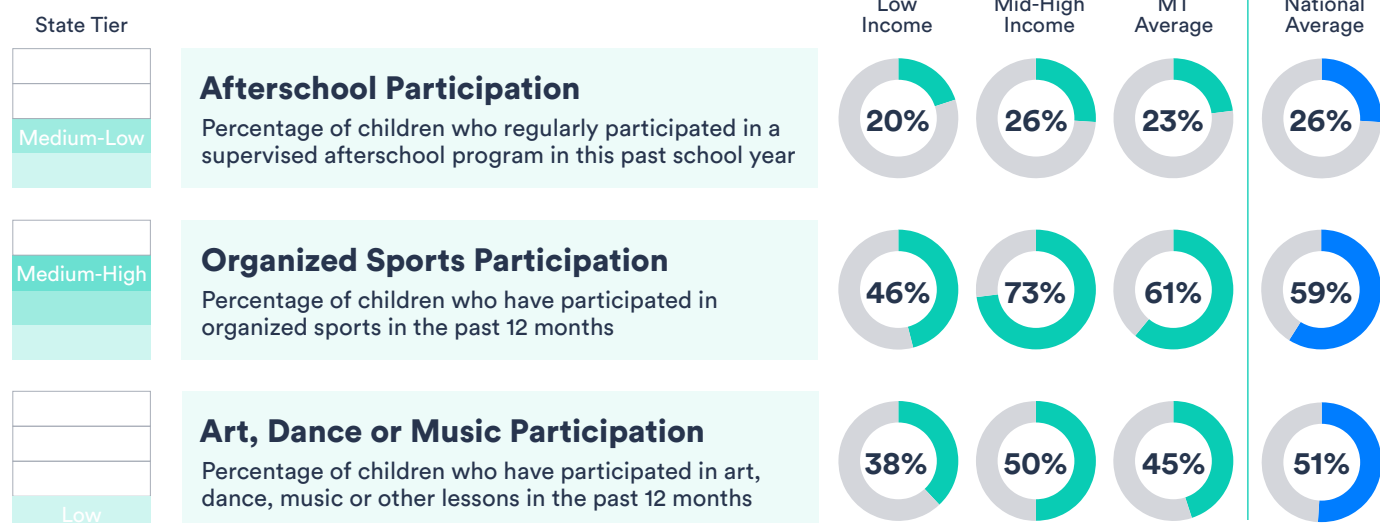


Mental Health Satisfaction

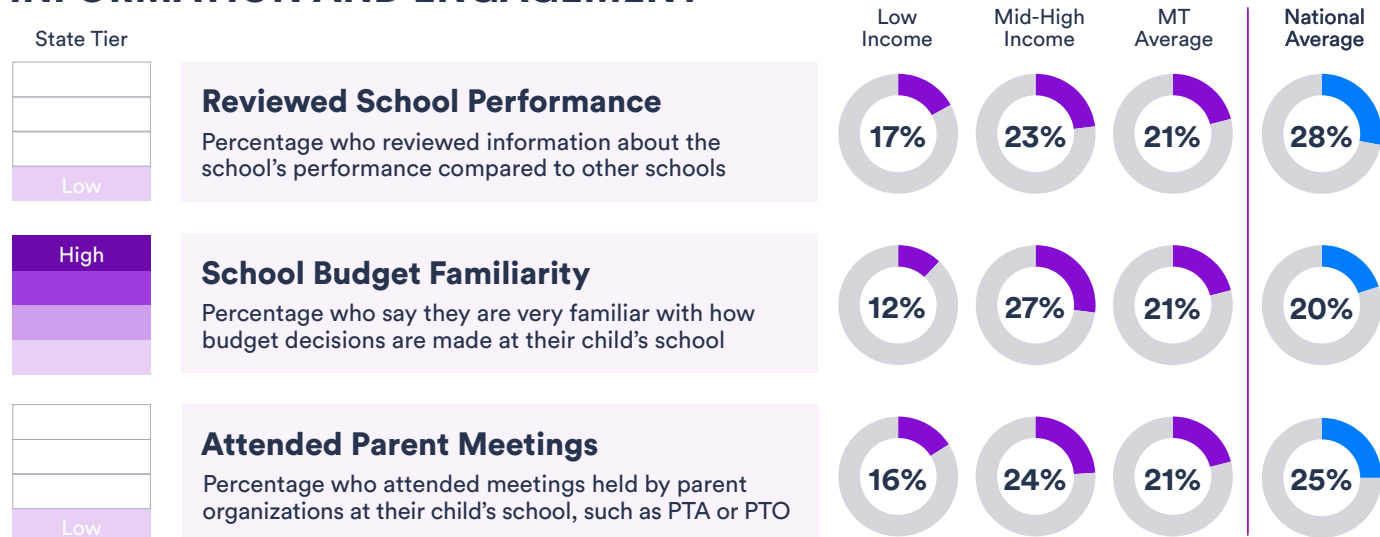
Percentage answering they are very satisfied with how the school supports their child's mental health needs



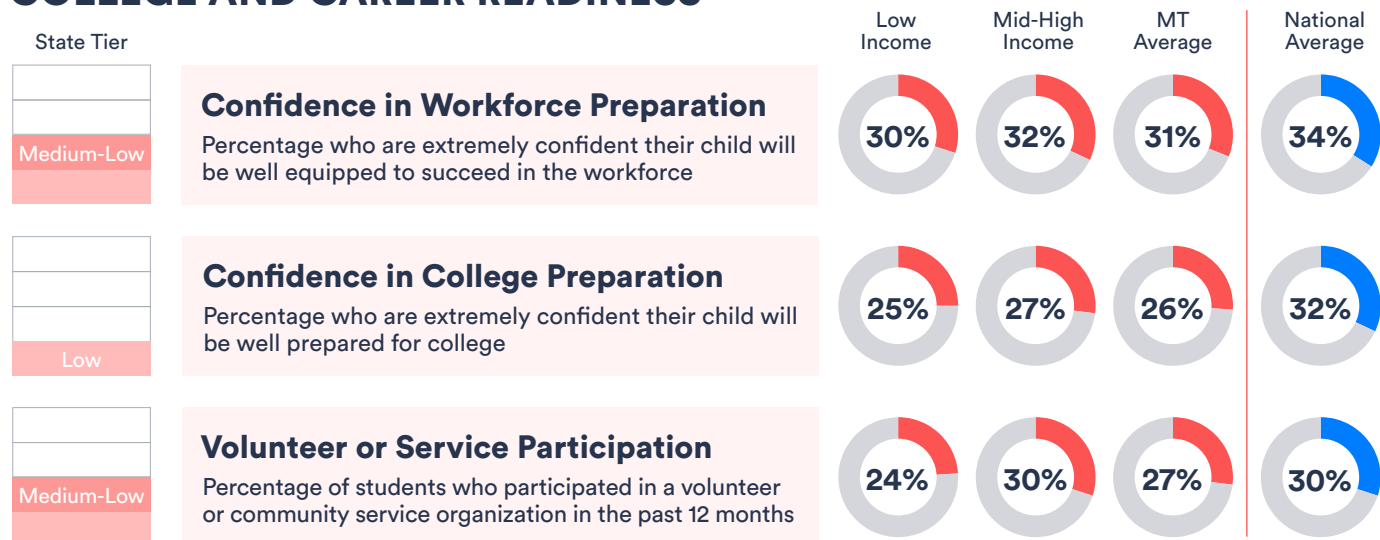
OUT OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES



INFORMATION AND ENGAGEMENT



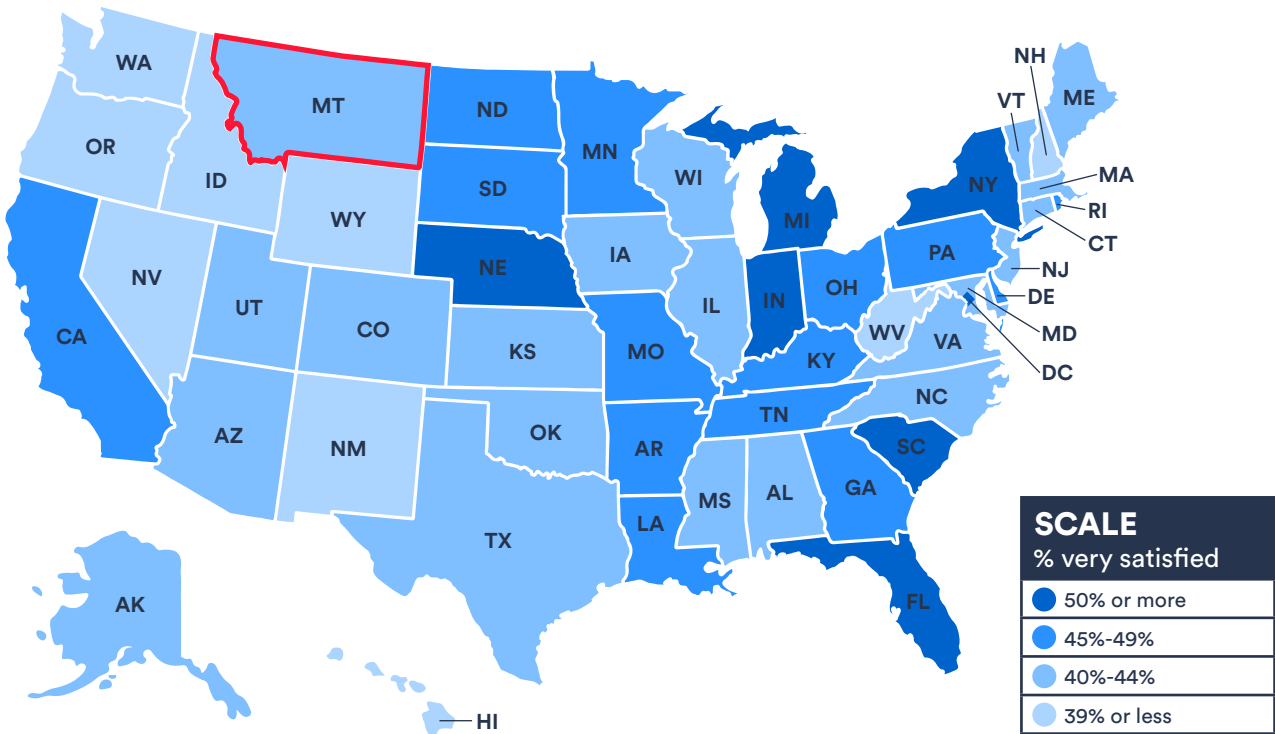
COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS



Montana in Context: A 50-State Perspective

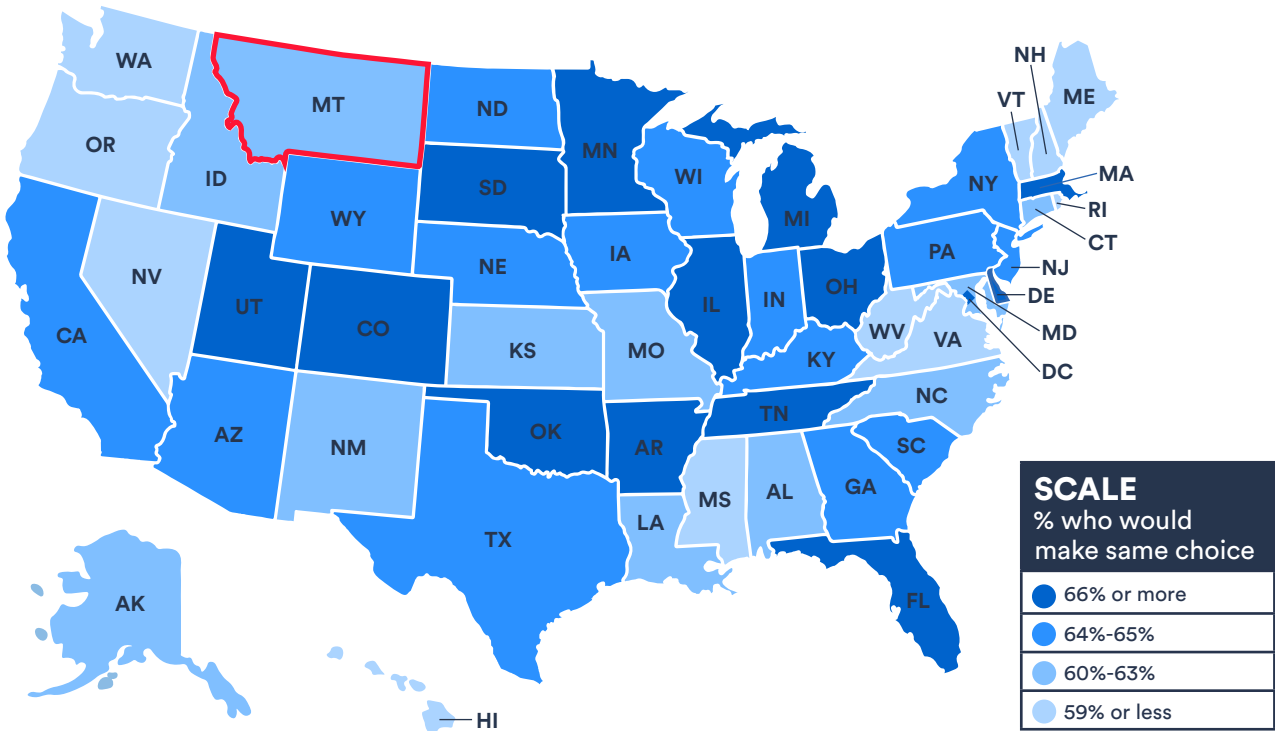
SCHOOL SATISFACTION BY STATE

Percentage answering they are very satisfied with their child's school



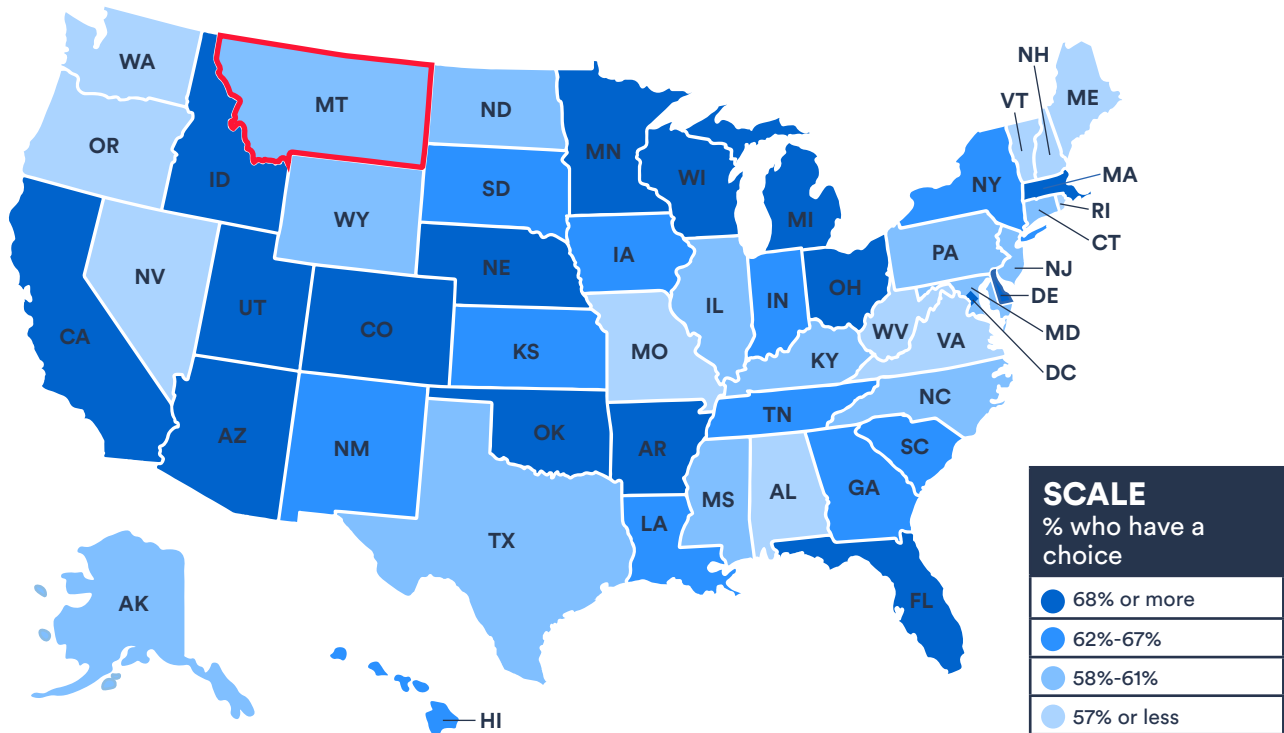
WOULD MAKE THE SAME CHOICE BY STATE

Percentage answering that if they could send their child to any school, they would send their child to the school they go to today



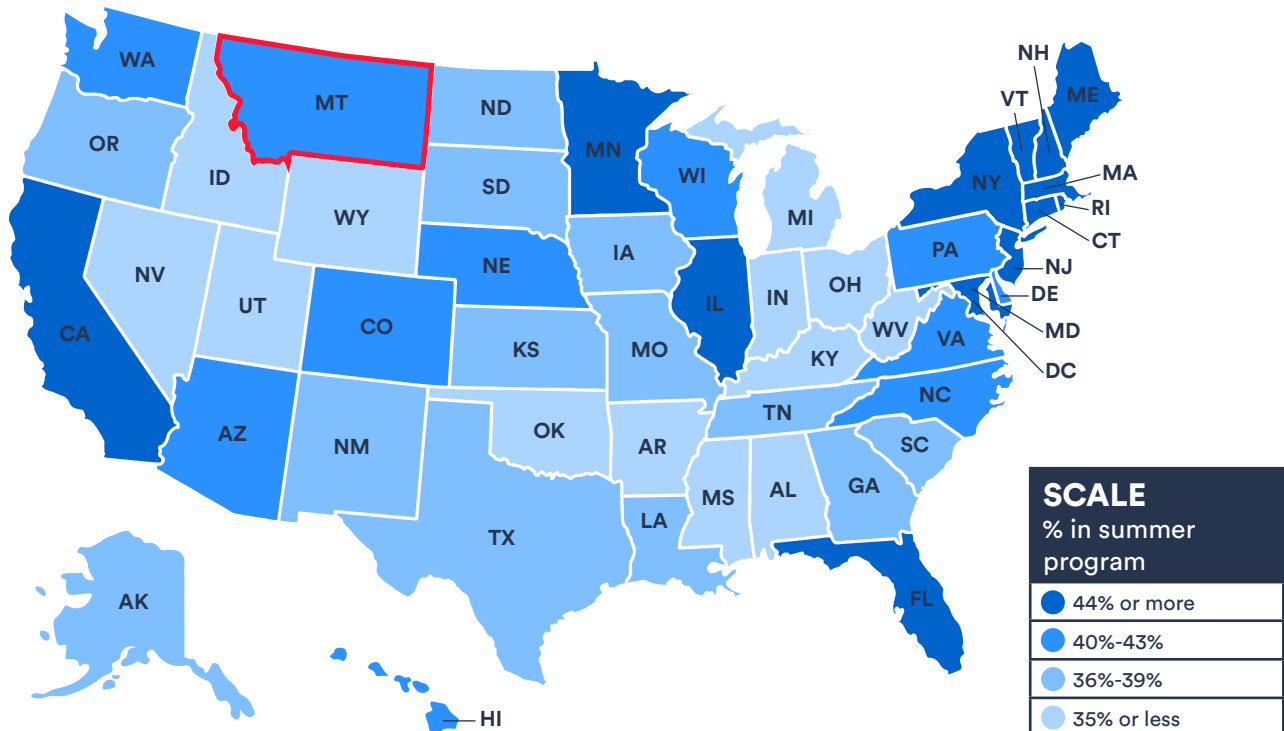
FEEL THEY HAVE A CHOICE BY STATE

Percentage answering they feel like they have a choice in what school their child attends



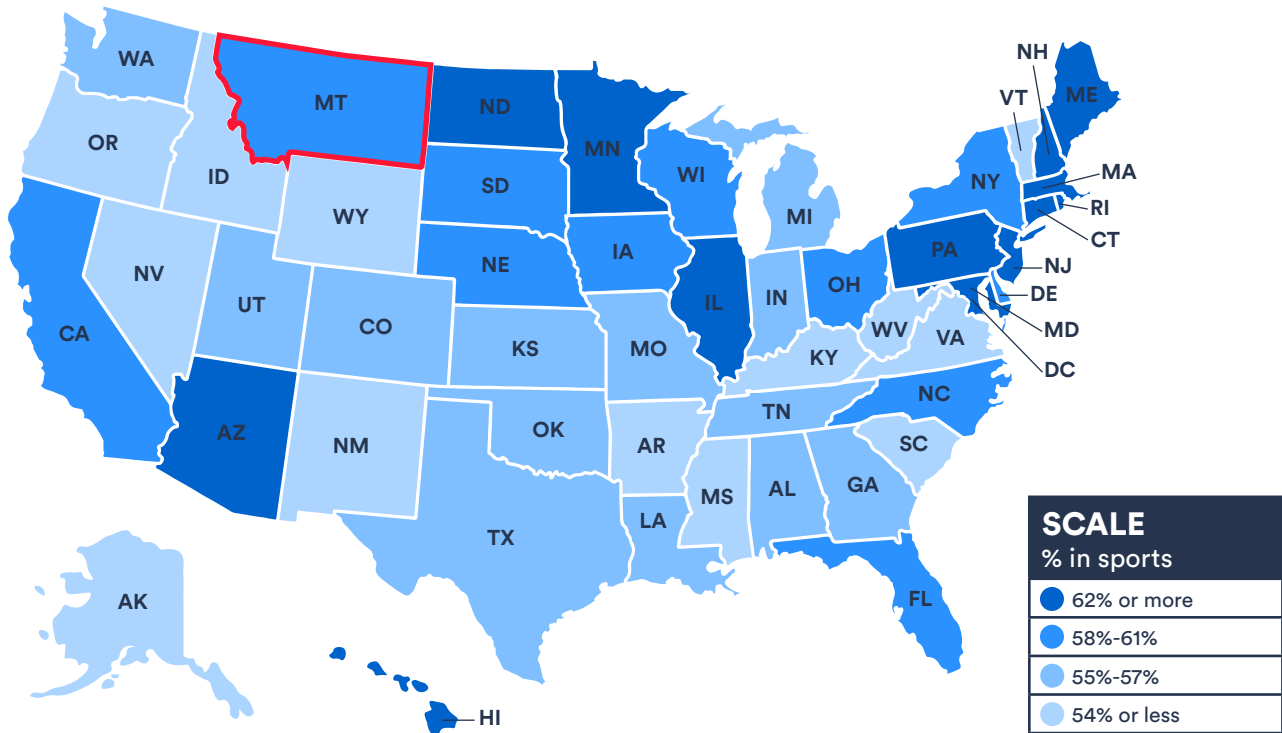
SUMMER PROGRAM PARTICIPATION BY STATE

Percentage of children who participated in a supervised summer program



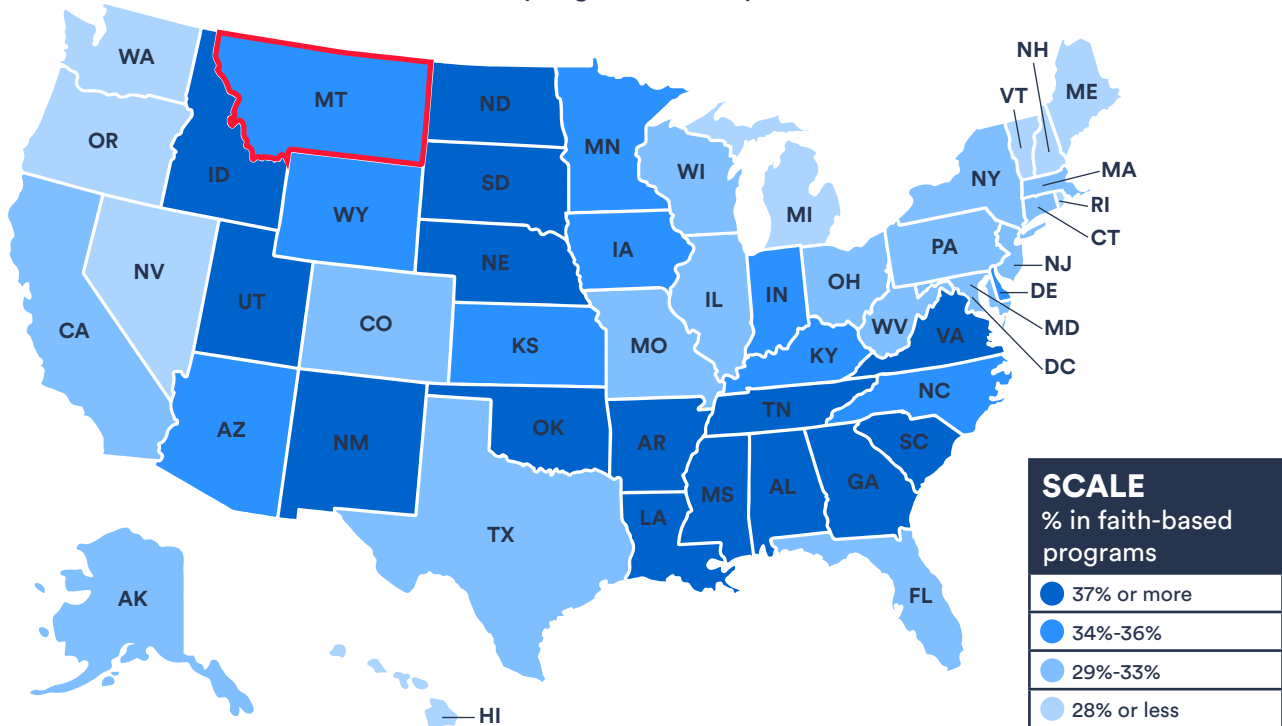
ORGANIZED SPORTS PARTICIPATION BY STATE

Percentage of children who have participated in organized sports in the past 12 months



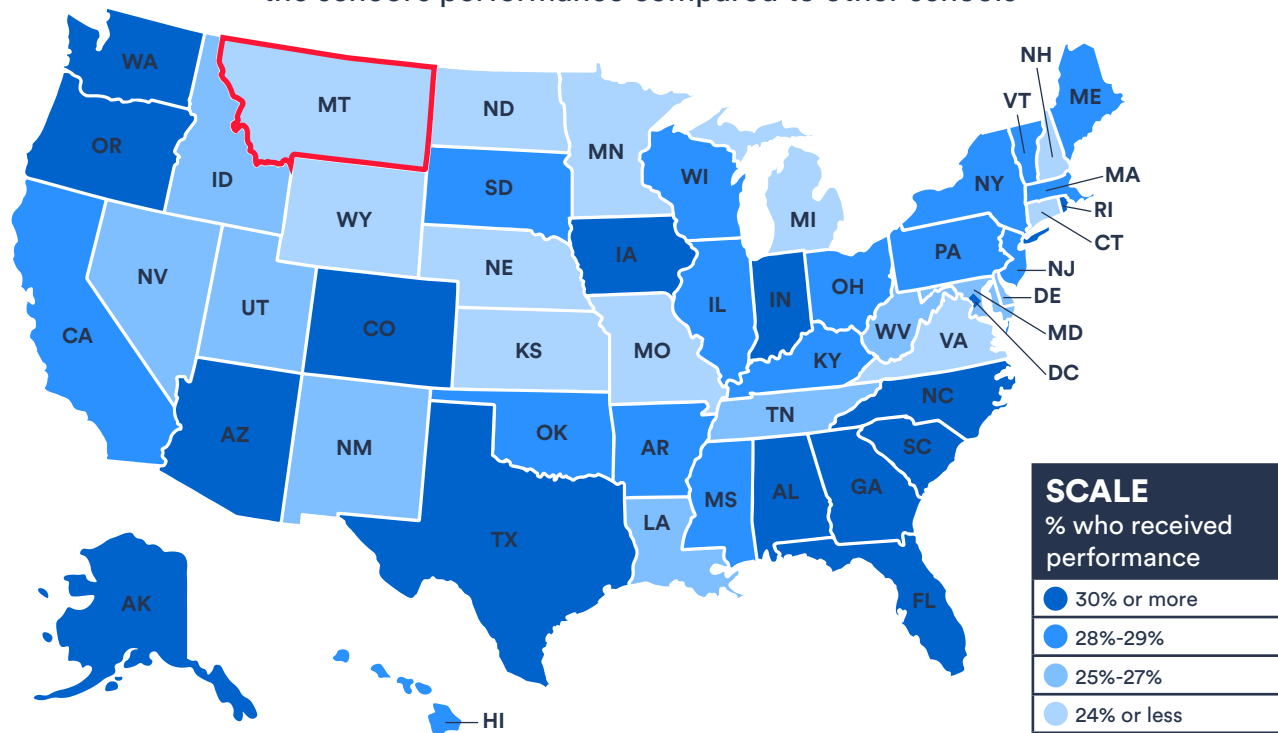
FAITH-BASED PROGRAM PARTICIPATION BY STATE

Percentage of children who have participated in religious instruction, youth group or faith-based program in the past 12 months



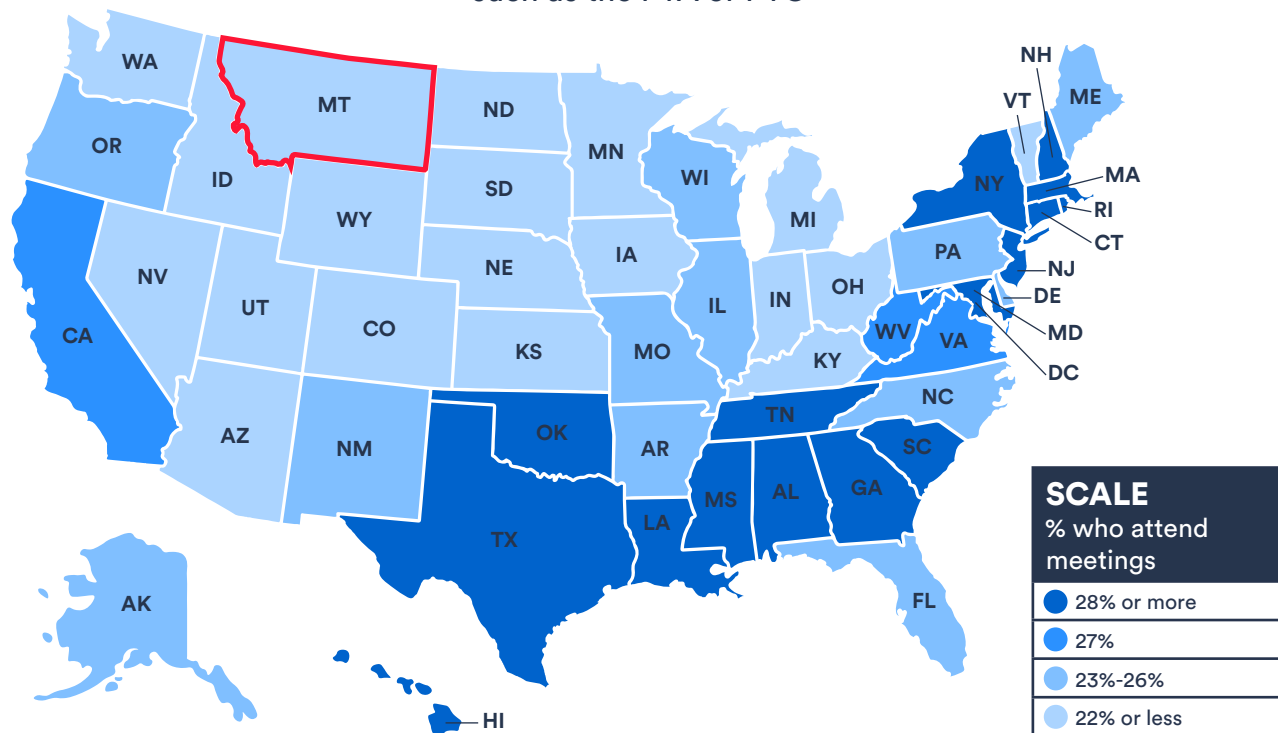
REVIEWED SCHOOL PERFORMANCE BY STATE

Percentage who in the most recent school year reviewed information about the school's performance compared to other schools



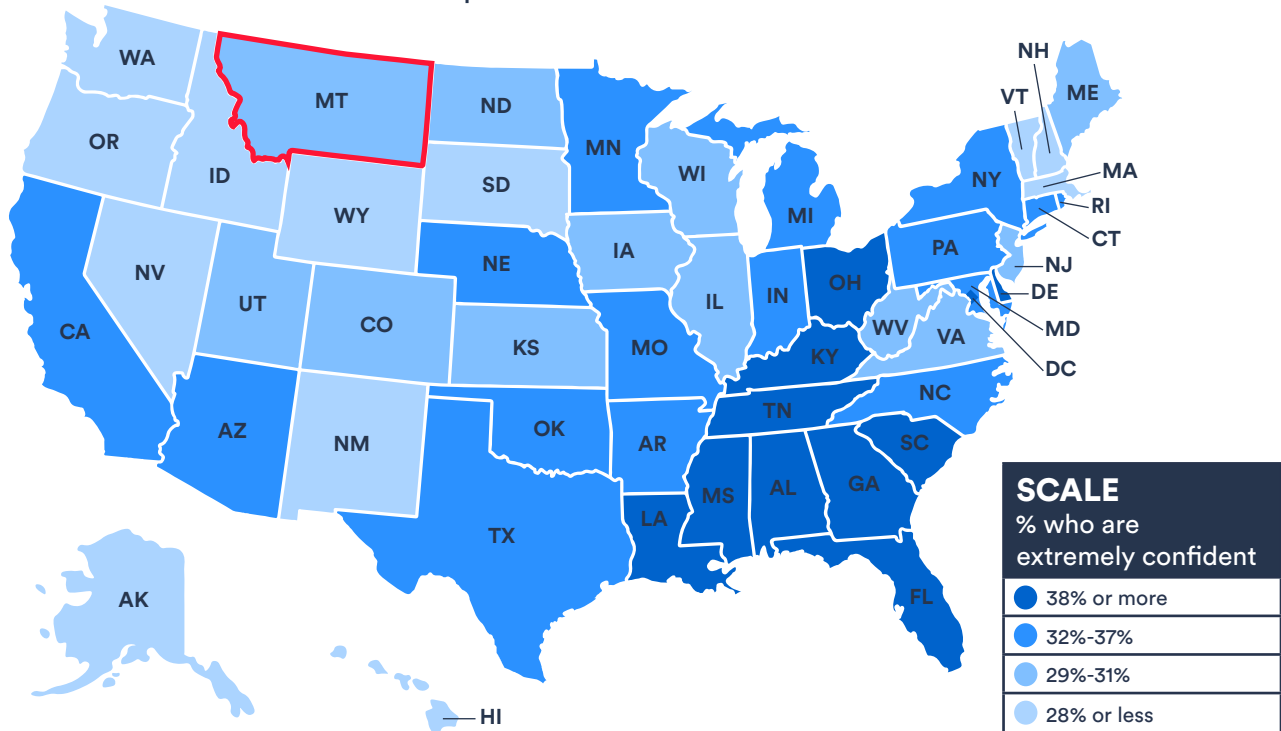
ATTENDED PARENT MEETINGS BY STATE

Percentage who attended meetings held by parent organizations at their child's school, such as the PTA or PTO



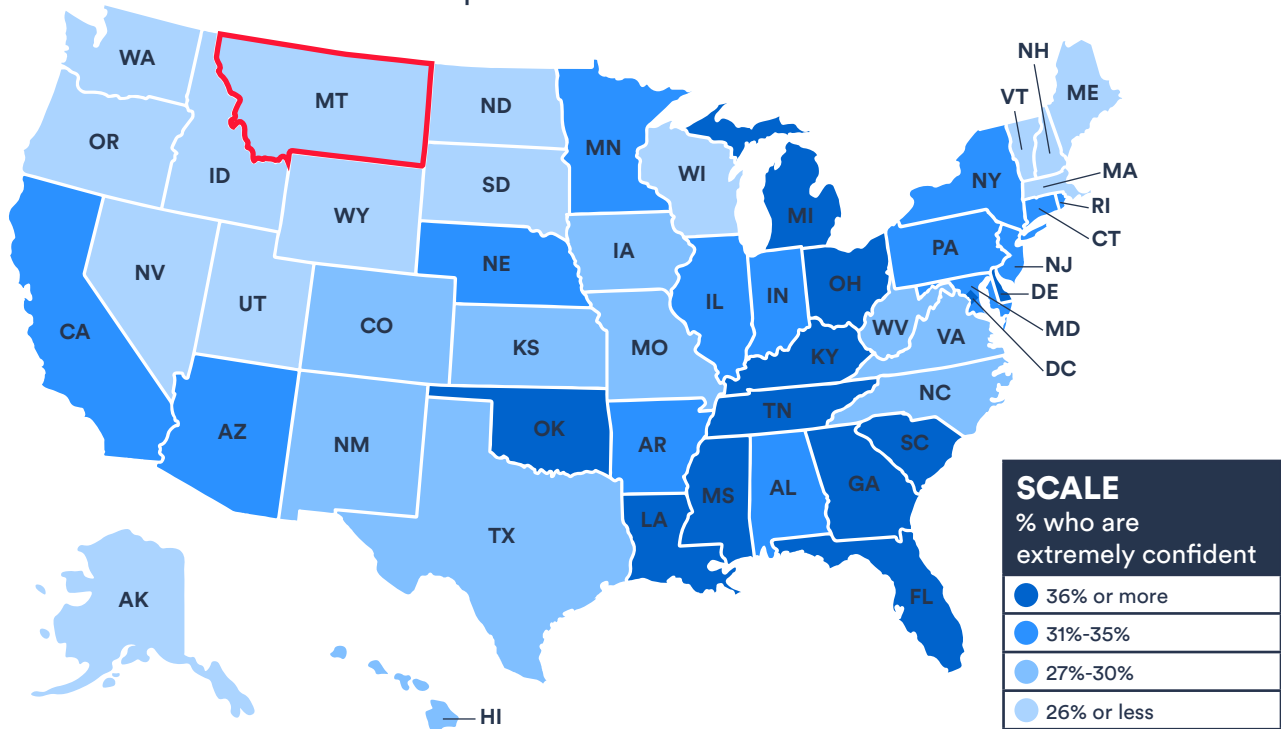
CONFIDENCE IN WORKFORCE PREPARATION BY STATE

Percentage who are extremely confident their child will be equipped with the knowledge, skills and competencies to succeed in the workforce



CONFIDENCE IN COLLEGE PREPARATION BY STATE

Percentage who are extremely confident their child will be equipped with the knowledge, skills and competencies to succeed in the workforce



ABOUT FRONTIER INSTITUTE

Founded in 2020, **The Frontier Institute**'s mission is to keep the spirit of the western frontier alive with sound public policy and educational programs that ensure today's pioneers are free to build, create, and innovate for years to come.

ABOUT 50CAN

50CAN is an education advocacy organization focused on building the dynamic, student-centered education system of the future so that all kids, regardless of address, receive a high quality education. At the center of this work is our support for local education advocates who together have secured more than 250 transformative policy wins since our founding in 2011. This advocacy work is complemented by fellowships to spark and amplify the voices of changemakers, support for educational entrepreneurs as they build proof points of a better tomorrow, and efforts to help elected leaders better serve the public through a deeper understanding of education policy.

ABOUT EDGE RESEARCH

Edge Research tells data-driven stories that make our clients' programs, products, and brands successful. One of Edge's key verticals is education, which ranges from early childhood development, to K-12 and postsecondary education, to lifelong learning. We work for dozens of foundations, advocacy organizations, curriculum providers, associations, districts, schools and universities. Edge is constantly in the field talking to parents, students, teachers, administrators, and other education decision makers – getting the pulse on the issues that matter most.

