

The MONTANA MINUTE

Highlights from the Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development



Strengthening School Behavioral Health Through Early Identification and Local Partnerships

Every student deserves to feel connected, supported, and ready to learn.

Through the Early Identification System (EIS), tiered coaching and evidence-based intervention selection, the Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development partners with rural schools across Montana to strengthen protective factors, support early intervention and equip educators with the tools to help students succeed.

In partnership with school teams, UM coaches help educators use local student and teacher data to identify strengths, understand areas of need and select interventions that fit their context and capacity. Supported by the Intervention Hub and a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, schools gain access to practical strategies, while building sustainable systems to support student well-being over time.

During the 2026-2027 school year, **34 participating EIS schools** completed **9,461 universal screeners**, including **6,134 student self-reports**, providing valuable information to school teams.

Building Sustainable Systems

One of the unique aspects of this work is the focus on long-term sustainability. Rather than implementing a one-time program, schools develop the skills, processes and confidence to use data in ongoing decision-making. Through coaching, intervention planning, and continuous improvement, school teams create systems they can sustain and adapt as student needs change over time.

"We have really been impressed by the support we have received from our UM coach and their team." — MT EIS Liaison

Using Data to Better Support Students

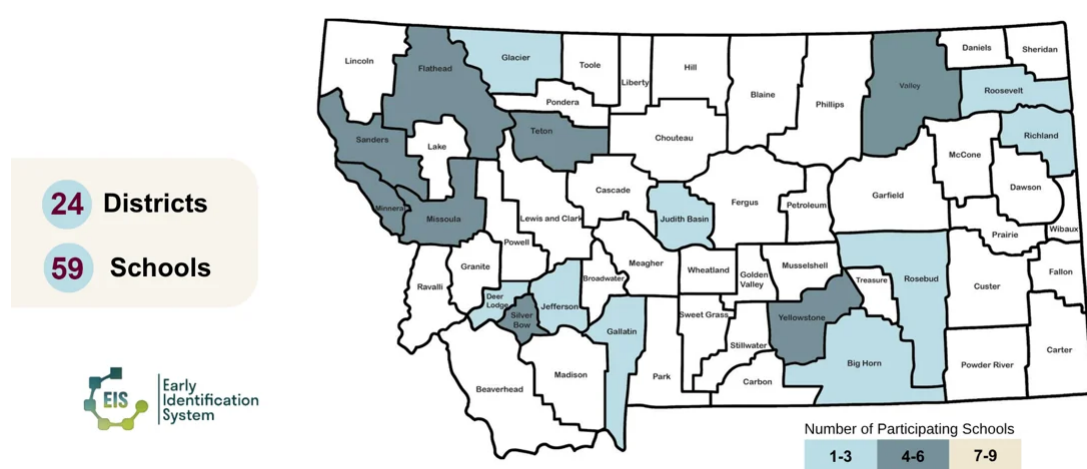
The EIS process helps schools use local data, not only to identify students who may need additional support, but also to understand the strengths, relationships and experiences that contribute to student success.

This approach aligns with the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), providing a framework for schools to transform data into action by strengthening universal (Tier 1), targeted (Tier 2), and intensive individualized (Tier 3) supports. In doing so, they embed protective factors and cultivate environments where every student can belong, grow, and succeed.

"I love that we are using data to make decisions on how to support kids. We have learned not only that students need more Tier 2 and 3 supports but also what Tier 1 strategies can improve our overall school climate." — MT EIS Liaison

Looking Ahead

We are entering Fall 2026 with 56 EIS schools across Montana, and [we are currently welcoming new schools and districts to participate](#) in this work.



To learn more, visit: [Exploring Early Identification System for Montana Schools](#)

Or contact: **Wendy Ekegren**, School Mental Health Program Director,
wendy.ekegren@umt.edu