

Montana Board of Public Education

Public Charter School Application

June 2026

PO Box 200601 • Helena, MT 59620-0601 • (406) 444-6576 • www.bpe.mt.gov

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction **3**

Submission Procedures **3**

Public Charter Application Cover Page **4**

Public Charter Application **5**
Executive Summary 5
Academic Program 6
School Governance 6
Business Operations 7
Community Support and Need 8
Not a Local School Board? 8

INTRODUCTION

Title 20, Chapter 6, Part 8, MCA, authorizes the establishment of public charter schools in Montana and tasks the Montana Board of Public Education as the sole entity authorized to enter into public charter contracts with a governing board. There are two types of public charter schools – those operating under an existing local school board and those operating as a new school district under a separate governing board. This Public Charter School Application is for both options.

A public charter school means a public school that has autonomy over decisions including, but not limited to, matters concerning finance, personnel, scheduling, curriculum, and instruction as defined in a public charter contract. Public charter schools are governed by a local school board, or in the case of a governing board other than a local school board, by the governing board of the public charter school district of which the public charter school is a part. Public charter schools are established and operated under the terms of a public charter contract and allow parents to choose to enroll their children. Public charter schools must admit students based on a lottery if more students apply for admission than can be accommodated.

Public charter schools provide a program of education that may include any or all grades from kindergarten through grade 12 and career and technical education programs and operate in pursuit of a specific set of educational objectives as defined in its public charter contract, and must demonstrate a commitment to and robust understanding of personalized and proficiency-based learning.

The evaluation of public charter school applications will focus on whether implementing the proposals in the application will lead to the academic, organizational, and financial performance that are promised in exchange for potential broad flexibility from Montana's education standards. The following criteria and rubric scales will be used to evaluate each application:

- the applicant demonstrates a commitment to create an innovative public charter school (0-10 points)
- the applicant demonstrates a commitment to create a high-performing public charter school (0-10 points)
- the applicant demonstrates a commitment to and robust understanding of personalized and proficiency-based learning (0-10 points)
- the academic program is consistent with a high-quality public charter school (0-1 points)
- the school governance is consistent with a high-quality public charter school (0-1 points)
- the business operations are consistent with a high-quality public charter school (0-1 points)
- the community support and need is consistent with a high-quality public charter school (0-10 points)
- the applicant demonstrates clear and convincing proof of the likelihood of success (0-1 points)
- the applicant can open and operate a successful public charter school (0-1 points)

SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

To facilitate the Montana Board of Public Education's review of public charter school applications, applicants must submit the application to bpe@mt.gov between the dates of October 26-30, 2026, with a deadline of October 30, 2026 at 5PM. All submission materials must be submitted in a single electronic submission. Multiple attachments will not be accepted in the submission. The Board will review the public charter school application, and if determined complete, will facilitate an interview and take public comment on the application. Final approval of the application will take place at the January 2027 Board of Public Education meeting. Please note the timeline on the Board's webpage under the Public Charter School tab.

Please provide a brief, direct response to each question using this application template and limit the application to 26 pages. Any appendices, handbooks, policies, and additional documents will be considered as supporting documentation. Please include links, when possible, and refrain from including lengthier documents.

Please note that submitting a public charter school application does not guarantee approval or that a public charter school contract will be granted. Failure to adhere to any requirements may lead to an incomplete application that is rejected before consideration.

PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION
COVER PAGE

Check One: _X__ New Public Charter under existing local school board ___ New Public Charter District

Name of Public Charter School **Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA)**

Local school district in which the public charter school will be physically located: **Columbia Falls School District #6**

Contact Information for the Governing Board Chair

Contact Person: Dr. Jill Rocksund (**Name**) Board Chairman (**Title**)

Contact Address: 501 Sixth Avenue West Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Telephone Number: 406.892.6550

E-mail Address: j_rocksund@cfmtschools.net

Contact Information for the Person Completing this Application

Contact Person: Cory J. Dziowgo (**Name**) Superintendent (**Title**)

Contact Address: 501 Sixth Avenue West Columbia Falls, MT 59912

Telephone Number: 406.892.6550 ext 1420

E-mail Address: c_dziowgo@cfmtschools.net

Local Board of Trustee Evidence

Check One: _X__ Approved by existing local school board ___ Refused approval by existing local school board

Provide copy of local school board minutes as evidence. ***Please see the meeting agenda from the October 26, 2026 Special Board Meeting where the approval of the Charter Application was on the agenda. Meeting recording can also be found on our website here.***

PUBLIC CHARTER APPLICATION

Name of Public Charter School: Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Provide an executive summary with the general purpose and rationale for the creation of the public charter school, and explain how the proposed public charter school is different from a program that you could operate or are currently operating without the public charter designation.

The Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) is an innovative public charter high school operating under the governance of Columbia Falls School District #6. Designed as a direct response to regional skilled labor shortages in the Flathead Valley, CFTA serves as a premier implementation model of Montana's MT Future Ready Initiative, seamlessly integrating Career and Technical Education (CTE), rigorous academic instruction, stackable Industry-Recognized Credentials (IRCs), and structured Work-Based Learning (WBL). Operating on an optimized four-day instructional week (Monday–Thursday), CFTA reserves Fridays for extended project builds, workplace internships, job shadowing, and personalized academic advancement. CFTA delivers instruction through a personalized, proficiency-based learning model where students master technical and core academic competencies mapped directly to Montana Content Standards.

CFTA functions as a dedicated trades incubator and feeder pipeline. In alignment with shared workforce principles, CFTA is establishing collaborative career pathways with Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC). This initiative connects secondary CTE instruction with FVCC's postsecondary trade programs, allowing students to access dual-enrollment opportunities through Montana's One-Two-Free initiative without duplicating regional capacity. Graduates transition into advanced Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degrees, technical certificates at FVCC, or directly into high-demand trade apprenticeships and employment.

Opening Date: August 2027 Public Charter Term Length: Five Years
Grades to be served: 7-12 (Phased implementation)
Minimum Enrollment Per Year: 41
Planned Enrollment Per Year: 45
Maximum Enrollment Per Year: 90

During the proposed public charter 5-year term, indicate the specific grade-level programs that you plan to serve:
Check all that apply: ___ Elementary Program _X_ Middle Grades Program _X__ High School Program

For each year of the public charter term, estimate the number of students the public charter school plans to serve in each grade:

	Elementary							Middle		High School				
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
Year 1										10	10	10	15	45
Year 2										10	12	13	15	50
Year 3									10	10	15	15	15	65
Year 4								10	10	15	15	15	15	80
Year 5								10	15	15	16	17	17	90

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

See Submission Procedures

1. State the public charter school's mission and vision and describe why this initiative is important to the community it will serve.

Mission: To empower high school students with market-ready trade skills, rigorous academic knowledge, and real-world experience, creating direct pipelines to high-wage workforce entry and postsecondary degrees in alignment with Montana's Future Ready priorities.

Vision: A resilient Montana economy powered by home-grown skilled professionals who graduate with industry certifications, dual college credits, and meaningful community connections.

Community Need & Alignment: CFTA addresses acute regional shortages in construction, electrical, plumbing, and HVAC trades. By serving as an MT Future Ready hub, CFTA expands educational choice and operationalizes the CFSD #6 *Portrait of a Learner*:

- **Engaged:** Applied project-based learning, including community tiny-home builds and active worksite tasks.
- **Prepared:** Stackable IRCs (OSHA-10/30, NCCER Core & Craft levels) combined with dual-enrollment credits articulated with Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC).
- **Empowered:** Proficiency-based progression and individualized learning plans (ILPs) that foster career autonomy and long-term financial stability.

2. Identify the targeted student population and the community the public charter school proposes to serve.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will serve students in grades 7–12 from across the Flathead Valley, including surrounding rural communities. The Academy is designed for students who learn best through applied, hands-on experiences and who aspire to pursue careers in the construction trades or related technical fields. Open enrollment will make the program accessible to all students in the region, regardless of their home district, ensuring that opportunity is not limited by geography.

The target population includes students who may not see themselves thriving in a purely traditional academic model but who are eager to learn in environments where their education is directly tied to real-world outcomes. At the same time, CFTA is equally valuable for college-bound students seeking practical experience and industry certifications that can provide a strong foundation for further technical training or engineering pathways. By serving a diverse population of students, the program will create classrooms that reflect the wide range of strengths, backgrounds, and goals found across our valley.

The community CFTA serves is one where the construction trades are central to economic stability and growth. Montana continues to face a significant workforce shortage in skilled trades, and the Flathead Valley has experienced rapid growth that has amplified demand for carpenters, electricians, plumbers, HVAC technicians, and general contractors. CFTA will respond to this need by creating a steady pipeline of skilled, credentialed, and work-ready graduates who are able to fill local jobs, remain in their home communities, and contribute immediately to regional development.

3. Describe plans and timelines for student recruitment and enrollment, including lottery procedures.

Recruitment for Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will begin in Spring 2027 to ensure that students, families, and community members have adequate time to understand the program and apply for admission. The recruitment process will use multiple channels to reach students across the Flathead Valley, including surrounding rural communities.

Recruitment Strategies:

- **School Counselor Outreach:** District counselors will be briefed on the program and will receive informational packets to share with students who demonstrate interest in hands-on learning or technical career paths.
- **Community Information Nights:** Open houses will be hosted at Canyon Elementary and Columbia Falls High School, featuring presentations from staff and local employers.
- **Media Campaigns:** The program will be promoted through district newsletters, websites, social media platforms, and local radio and print outlets to ensure broad visibility.
- **Industry Partnerships:** Local businesses and trade associations will be invited to share information about the program with employees and their families, as well as with community members looking for alternative educational opportunities.
- **Career Fairs and Middle School Visits:** Staff will participate in regional career fairs and visit feeder middle schools to spark interest in 9th graders preparing to transition into high school pathways.

Timeline:

- **Spring 2027:** Recruitment campaign launch, community information sessions, and application window opens.
- **Late Spring 2027:** Priority application deadline; early applicants reviewed for eligibility.
- **Summer 2027:** If applications exceed available space, a lottery process will be conducted.
- **Summer 2027:** Students and families notified of acceptance or placement on a waitlist.
- **Summer 2027:** Orientation sessions held, with students introduced to staff, facilities, and expectations.
- **August 2027:** First cohort begins classes.

Lottery Process:

If more applications are received than available seats, a fair and transparent lottery will be conducted in compliance with Montana law. Each applicant will be assigned a random number, and a public drawing will be held at the district office. At least one district administrator and one community representative will witness the process to ensure integrity. The drawing will be recorded, and families will be notified in writing within five business days. A waitlist will be created in the order names are drawn, and should openings occur before or during the school year, students from the waitlist will be contacted in sequence.

4. Describe the public charter school's academic program, specifically focusing on why it is innovative in your school district. Include plans to formally assess student achievement on an annual basis.

Academic Model & Curriculum: Core academic disciplines are contextualized within trade applications:

- **Applied Mathematics:** Contextualized geometry and algebra applied to structural framing, load-bearing calculations, electrical circuitry (Ohm's Law), and material estimating.
- **Technical Literacy & Communication:** Applied English focusing on code reading, technical specification writing, safety documentation, and project proposal presentations.
- **Physical Sciences:** Applied physics and chemistry covering material science, thermal dynamics in HVAC, structural load, and environmental efficiency.

FVCC Postsecondary Pathway Alignment: CFTA embraces shared principles of dual enrollment and workforce development with Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC). CFTA is engaging in structured dialogue with FVCC leadership to establish aligned dual-credit pathways in trade math, safety, and technical fundamentals via Montana's *One-Two-Free* initiative. These collaborative pathways build upon established

programs and avoid capacity duplication, providing clear articulation toward FVCC AAS degrees and certificates in Construction Technology, Industrial Trades, and related fields.

Annual Student Achievement & Assessment Plan: CFTA employs a comprehensive multi-tiered assessment framework:

- **Statewide Standardized Testing:** Mandatory participation in state-mandated annual assessments (Smarter Balanced/ACT) to evaluate core academic proficiency.
- **Industry Credentialing Testing:** Standardized written and performance-based module examinations via the NCCER National Registry and OSHA-10/30 safety assessments.
- **MT Future Ready WBL Evaluation:** Structured workplace performance rubrics evaluated jointly by CFTA instructors and industry workplace mentors on Fridays.
- **Annual Portfolio Defense:** Capstone defense of digital learning portfolios evaluated by an expert panel of CFTA staff, postsecondary partners, and local trade advisory members.

5. Describe any variances to existing standards that the public charter school requires to enhance educational opportunities.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy will maintain compliance with Board of Public Education accreditation standards. To support cost-effective operational scaling during initial growth years, CFTA will utilize shared district personnel for library media, administration, and counseling services. If enrollment growth necessitates formal variances under ARM 10.55.604 (e.g., library media specialist FTE ratio), CFTA will submit appropriate variance requests to the Board of Public Education, ensuring students maintain uninterrupted access to comprehensive counseling, research, and administrative supports.

6. Describe the instructional design, including the type of learning environment, class size and structure, curriculum overview, and teaching methods.

The instructional design of Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) is built around a small, personalized learning environment that emphasizes project-based, hands-on instruction, supported by integrated academic coursework. The program is intentionally structured to mirror the workplace while maintaining the support and flexibility of a public high school.

Learning Environment

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will provide students with a professional, hands-on learning environment modeled after real-world construction sites. Instruction will take place in a purpose-built trades facility at Canyon Elementary in Hungry Horse, MT, outfitted with framing bays, plumbing and electrical trainers, HVAC equipment, and finishing stations. The environment will emphasize both safety and authenticity, with students expected to meet the same standards of punctuality, teamwork, and accountability that they would encounter on a jobsite. The first year of the program may have to be hosted onsite at Columbia Falls High School while funding and planning are secured. The current Glacier Parks Cabin program would serve as the classroom and building site.

Class Size and Structure

CFTA will serve 41–65 students in grades 9–12 as the school builds enrollment and facilities (grades 7 and 8 will be added in the later years). Instruction will be organized into lab cohorts of around 12–15 students to ensure safety and individualized attention in construction settings. Academic coursework will take place in larger groups or through blended platforms, with a dedicated Virtual Learning Coordinator and core subject instructors providing support. This structure balances small, hands-on learning with access to broad academic resources.

Schedule

- **Four-Day School Week (Mon–Thurs):** Students engage in academic coursework and construction lab blocks during the standard school week.
- **Fridays:** Reserved for extended projects, internships, academic tutoring, or make-up work, offering flexibility and deeper engagement opportunities.
- **Block Structure:** Two extended 2–3 hour blocks each day, one focused on construction labs and the other on academics, with time built in for advisory and career readiness.

Curriculum Overview
The instructional program integrates:

1. **Construction Trades Curriculum** – NCCER-aligned modules covering safety, tool use, framing, plumbing, electrical, HVAC, and finishing. Capstone projects include the construction of tiny homes and community build projects. Long term goal for the academy would be to become a NCCER Accredited High School Program.
2. **Academic Coursework** – Delivered through blended learning platforms and direct instruction, integrated with construction projects (e.g., geometry applied to framing, science through energy efficiency studies, English through technical writing and presentations).
3. **Career Readiness** – Students will earn OSHA and NCCER certifications, build digital portfolios, participate in mock interviews, and complete internships with local employers.

Teaching Methods

- **Project-Based Learning:** Hands-on construction projects are the foundation of learning, requiring students to apply academic knowledge in meaningful ways.
- **Direct Instruction:** Instructors provide essential safety and technical training before students demonstrate skills in the lab.
- **Blended and Virtual Learning:** Online platforms deliver core academics, supported by in-person tutoring and application in projects.
- **Work-Based Learning:** Partnerships with local businesses allow students to engage in internships, job shadows, and community projects.
- **Proficiency-Based Advancement:** Students progress when they demonstrate mastery, not by time spent in class. This includes technical skill assessments, academic benchmarks, and portfolio demonstrations.
- **Work-Based Learning Tiers (MT Future Ready):** Progression from job shadowing (Grades 7–9) to industry internships and apprenticeships (Grades 10–12).

Assessment
Students will be evaluated through:

- Standards-based assessments in core subjects.
- Proficiency checks for technical skills.
- Industry credential exams (OSHA, NCCER).
- Digital portfolios documenting mastery and growth.
- Public exhibitions of learning (trade nights, parent showcases, and project completions).

7. Describe plans for identifying and successfully serving students with disabilities, students who are English Language Learners, students who are academically challenged, and gifted students, including compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) is committed to ensuring that every student has equitable access to its programs and that all services comply with federal and state laws, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with

Disabilities Act (ADA), and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. The Academy will partner with Columbia Falls School District #6 student services to provide specialized support, ensuring students with diverse learning needs can fully participate in both academic and technical components of the program.

Students with Disabilities:

- **Identification & Services:** Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 Plans will continue to receive the services outlined in their plans, delivered in collaboration with the district's special education staff. The Program Director and instructors will work closely with the district's Special Education Coordinator to ensure compliance, accommodations, and modifications are integrated into both the academic and trades curriculum.
- **Accessibility in Labs:** Construction labs and facilities will be designed to meet ADA requirements, ensuring safe access to tools, workstations, and materials. Adaptive equipment will be provided as needed.
- **Instructional Support:** Instructors will receive training on differentiated instruction in technical settings, enabling them to support students with varying physical, cognitive, and emotional needs.

English Language Learners (ELLs):

- **Identification:** Students will be identified through district intake procedures and language proficiency assessments.
- **Support:** Services will be coordinated with the district's ELL program, ensuring students receive targeted language development while participating fully in hands-on projects. Visual supports, bilingual resources, and language-friendly instructional practices will be incorporated into construction and safety training.
- **Integration:** Because trades education is highly visual and kinesthetic, it offers natural opportunities for ELL students to engage in meaningful learning while developing English proficiency.

Academically Challenged Students:

- **Targeted Support:** Students who struggle academically will receive structured interventions through the district's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).
- **Credit Recovery Opportunities:** The four-day school week allows students additional time to access materials and learning, ensuring success in the program.

Gifted and Advanced Students:

- **Acceleration:** Gifted students will be able to accelerate their progress through proficiency-based assessments, potentially completing certifications earlier and moving into advanced dual-credit coursework with Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC).
- **Leadership Opportunities:** Students who demonstrate mastery may take on leadership roles within build teams, mentoring peers, managing aspects of the tiny home project, or representing the program at community events.

Compliance and Oversight:

All services will be regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with federal and state law. Documentation of accommodations, modifications, and support services will be maintained by the Program Director and shared with the district's student services team. Instructors will receive annual training in IDEA, ADA, 504 compliance, and culturally responsive practices.

8. Describe student discipline policies, including those for special education students.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will adopt and implement the student discipline policies of Columbia Falls School District #6, ensuring consistency across the district while tailoring procedures to the unique environment of a construction-focused school. The goal of discipline at CFTA is to maintain a safe,

respectful, and productive learning environment that reflects both the expectations of the workplace and the legal protections afforded to students.

Core Principles:

- **Safety First:** Because construction training involves tools, machinery, and physical labor, adherence to safety rules is non-negotiable. Discipline will emphasize immediate correction of unsafe behaviors, reinforcement of proper safety practices, and removal from lab activities if necessary to protect students and staff.
- **Restorative Practices:** Discipline will focus on repairing harm, building accountability, and restoring relationships, rather than relying solely on punitive measures. Students will be encouraged to reflect on their actions and develop strategies for improvement.
- **Consistency and Fairness:** All students will be held to the same high expectations for behavior, with consistent application of rules across academic and technical environments.
- **Workplace Readiness:** Expectations will mirror professional jobsite standards, including punctuality, teamwork, respect for supervisors and peers, and care for tools and materials.

Procedures for General Education Students:

- Minor infractions (e.g., tardiness, inappropriate language) will be addressed through verbal warnings, reflection assignments, or restorative conversations.
- Repeated or serious infractions (e.g., insubordination, disrespect, misuse of tools) may result in removal from the lab for the day, parent contact, or formal referrals to the Program Director.
- Severe violations (e.g., fighting, possession of prohibited items, endangerment of others) will follow district-level disciplinary processes, including possible suspension or expulsion.

Procedures for Special Education Students:

- Discipline of students with disabilities will fully comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504, and district policies.
- Any disciplinary actions will consider the student's IEP or 504 Plan, ensuring appropriate accommodations and supports are provided.
- Manifestation Determination Reviews (MDRs) will be conducted as required if a disciplinary action could result in a change of placement.
- Collaboration with the district's special education team will ensure equitable treatment and compliance with federal law.

Positive Behavior Supports:

To reduce the need for discipline, CFTA will integrate proactive supports such as:

- Explicit instruction in behavioral expectations aligned with workplace norms.
- Recognition of positive behaviors and contributions to team projects.

Embedded social-emotional learning strategies to promote conflict resolution, stress management, and resilience.

9. Describe how the public charter school will demonstrate a commitment to and robust understanding of personalized and proficiency-based learning.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) is built on the principle that students learn best when they advance through demonstrated mastery of skills and knowledge rather than seat time. The Academy's proficiency-based model ensures that each student's education is both personalized and aligned to real-world standards of success in the construction industry and beyond.

Proficiency-Based Learning

- **Mastery over Time:** Students move forward once they can demonstrate mastery of academic and technical standards through assessments, projects, and certifications. For example, proficiency in applied mathematics may be demonstrated through accurate measurement and budgeting for a framing project, while literacy skills may be shown through technical documentation or presentations.
- **Multiple Pathways to Demonstrate Learning:** Students can show proficiency through hands-on projects, written assessments, oral presentations, and performance-based tasks, ensuring flexibility for different learning styles.
- **Authentic Assessment:** Learning is evaluated in ways that reflect the workplace—from building structures that meet code to presenting project budgets to community partners.

Personalized Learning

- **Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs):** Each student develops an ILP that sets personal goals, tracks certifications, and maps pathways toward post-secondary training or direct entry into the workforce. These plans are revisited quarterly with staff and families.
- **Flexible Scheduling:** The four-day week with dedicated Fridays allows students to focus on areas where they need additional time, acceleration, or enrichment.
- **Digital Portfolios:** Students curate evidence of their learning and growth, including project photos, certifications, reflections, and feedback from industry mentors. These portfolios serve both as graduation evidence and as a tool for employment or college applications.
- **Advisory and Mentorship:** Each student is paired with a mentor teacher who provides consistent guidance, helping students set goals, reflect on progress, and plan for the future.

Integration of Academics and Trades

Academic coursework is not isolated but integrated into projects. Math concepts are reinforced through construction budgeting, science through energy efficiency and materials studies, and English through technical writing and project presentations. This integration makes academics more relevant and engaging, while still ensuring students meet Montana content standards.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

See Submission Procedures

10. Describe the public charter school's organizational chart that clearly presents the proposed organizational structure, including lines of authority and reporting between the governing board, staff, related bodies such as advisory bodies or parent and teacher councils, and external organizations that will play a role in managing the public charter school.

CFTA will be governed by the Columbia Falls School District #6 Board of Trustees. The Superintendent provides oversight, while a Program Director manages daily operations. Staff report to the Program Director, and district-level departments (business, student services, food service, transportation) provide operational support.

Organizational Structure:

- **Board of Trustees** → Provides charter oversight, approves policy, and monitors performance.
- **Superintendent** → Serves as liaison between board and program; evaluates leadership and ensures accountability.
- **Program Director** → Manages day-to-day operations, supervises staff, oversees curriculum, and coordinates partnerships.
- **Trades Instructor(s)** → Deliver technical instruction and supervise lab/worksite safety.

- **Support Staff** → Includes special education liaisons, administrative assistant (shared), and district-provided services.

Advisory Council (non-governing) → Composed of parents, students, and community/industry representatives, meeting quarterly to provide feedback.

11. Describe the roles and responsibilities of the governing board, the proposed leadership management team, and other entities shown in the organizational chart.
    - **Board of Trustees:** Oversight of charter compliance, approval of budget and staffing, policy adoption, and accountability monitoring.
    - **Superintendent:** Provides leadership oversight, reports to the board on progress, supervises the Program Director, and manages contracts and partnerships.
    - **Program Director:** Oversees all school functions including curriculum implementation, safety, student discipline, staff evaluation, community outreach, and program development.
    - **Trades Instructor(s):** Deliver NCCER and OSHA-aligned construction training, supervise lab/shop, evaluate student proficiency, and mentor student project teams.
    - **District Departments:** Provide services including HR, payroll, special education compliance, and facility maintenance.
    - **Advisory Council:** Offers community and parent input, ensures program relevance, and helps connect students with industry opportunities.

12. Provide a staffing chart for the public charter school's first year and a staffing plan for the term of the public charter school.

Year 1 Staffing (Projected Enrollment: 41–45 students, grades 9–12)

- **Program Director (0.3 FTE):** Oversees daily operations, supervises staff, manages industry partnerships, and ensures fidelity to the proficiency-based model.
- **Business Manager (0.05 FTE)**: Oversees the financial operations of the program including budgeting and expenditures; financial reporting as required
- **Academic & Trades Instructors (1.5 FTE):** Deliver NCCER- and OSHA-aligned construction training across core areas (framing, systems, finishing) while supervising lab projects and ensuring safety. With these instructors, students can be divided into smaller lab cohorts of 12–15 to maintain safety and individualized instruction. In the academic classes, instructors will provide direct instruction in core subjects (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies), integrates academic standards into applied projects, and coordinates with virtual learning platforms.
- **Counselor (0.1 FTE, shared**): Provides student support with both career planning and education.
- **Library Media Specialist (0.1 FTE, shared):** Provides necessary research and academic support for students
- **Special Education/ELL Support (0.1 FTE, shared):** Ensures accommodations, modifications, and interventions are implemented for students with IEPs, 504 Plans, or ELL needs in collaboration with the district's student services team.
- **Secretary (0.25 FTE, shared):** Provides clerical, scheduling, and communications support.
- **Custodian (0.25 FTE, shared):** Cleans and maintains the classrooms for the program.
- **Food Service (0.15 FTE, shared):** Provide high quality meals for students and staff.

Five-Year Staffing Plan

Staff (FTE)	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Director	0.3	0.6	1.0	1.0	1.0
Business Manager	0.05	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Instructor	1.5	3.0	3.5	5.0	6.0
Counselor	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.5
Library Media Specialist	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Special Ed Teacher	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.8	1.0
Paraprofessional	0.8	2.0	2.0	3.0	3.5
Secretary	0.25	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.8
Custodian	0.25	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.8
Food Service	0.15	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Total FTE	**3.3**	**7.7**	**8.7**	**11.8**	**14.2**

Professional Development

All staff will participate in ongoing professional learning that includes:

- NCCER certification and recertification.
- OSHA safety updates and industry standards training.
- Workshops on proficiency-based education, personalized learning, and digital portfolio development.

13. Detail the public charter school startup plan, identifying tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals.

Launching the Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will require a structured, phased approach to ensure facilities, staffing, curriculum, and partnerships are fully in place to support an inaugural cohort of 45+ students in the fall of 2027. This timeline assumes BPE approval in Winter 2027, creating a compressed 6-month startup window.

Task	Timeline	Responsible Party
Charter Application Development and Submission	Fall 2026	Superintendent, District Leadership
Approval by Montana Board of Public Education	Winter 2027	BPE
Facilities Design and Planning (construction of new trades building at Canyon site)	Spring 2027	Superintendent, Facilities Director, Architects
Secure Startup Funding (district capital, state/federal grants, industry donations)	Spring 2027	Superintendent, District Leadership
Hire Program Director	Spring 2027	Superintendent
Develop Curriculum (NCCER alignment, academic integration, proficiency framework)	Spring–Summer 2027	Program Director, Instructors

Recruit Trades Instructors and Academic Instructor	Spring 2027	Program Director
Hire Support Staff	Summer 2027	Program Director
Establish Industry Partnerships (internship agreements, donations, advisory council setup)	Spring–Summer 2027	Program Director, Superintendent
Launch Marketing and Recruitment Campaign (outreach to parents, counselors, feeder schools)	Spring 2027	Program Director, Communications Office
Student Applications, Lottery (if necessary), and Enrollment	Spring–Summer 2027	District Office, Program Director
Staff Professional Development (proficiency-based learning, safety certifications)	Summer 2027	Program Director, District PD Team
Facility Completion and Equipment Installation	Summer 2027 & Summer 2028 for New Building	Facilities Director, Trades Instructors
Student Orientation (ILPs, safety training, introduction to model)	August 2027	Full CFTA Staff
First Day of Classes	Late August 2027	All Staff

Key Considerations for Startup

- **Facilities:** The construction of a purpose-built trades facility is critical. Early design and funding commitments will ensure the new space is ready by Summer 2028.
- **Recruitment:** Scaling to 41–90 students requires strong communication with counselors across the Flathead Valley, clear messaging to parents, and community support for open enrollment.
- **Staffing:** Hiring a Program Director early is essential to allow adequate time for curriculum development, industry partnerships, and recruitment.

Proficiency Implementation: Staff will require training in proficiency-based education and portfolio assessment to ensure consistent practice across the program.

14. Describe the plans for recruiting and developing school leadership and staff.

CFTA will recruit leaders and instructors with both industry experience and a passion for student-centered teaching. Recruitment will target trade unions, professional networks, and job postings across Montana.

Professional development will include:

- NCCER certification training for instructors.
- OSHA safety updates.
- Participation in Montana ACTE (Career and Technical Education) conferences.

Alignment with Portrait of a Learner:

- **Engaged:** Staff are trained to use project-based, hands-on teaching methods that engage students in meaningful work.

- **Prepared:** Professional development ensures staff model current industry practices, so students receive the most up-to-date and relevant training.
- **Empowered:** Staff are encouraged to innovate, collaborate, and design personalized pathways for students, empowering learners to reach their potential.

15. Describe the proposed leadership and teacher employment policies, including performance evaluation plans.
All staff will be employees of Columbia Falls School District #6 and subject to district employment policies. Evaluations will follow the district's framework based on the Marzano model, with additional emphasis on:

- Student proficiency in technical competencies.
- Industry credential attainment rates.
- Student engagement and safety compliance.

16. State the proposed governing bylaws.
As CFTA is governed by the existing Columbia Falls School District Board of Trustees, no separate bylaws are required. The Academy will operate under district policies and procedures. However, an Advisory Council composed of parents, students, and industry representatives will provide feedback and ensure programming continues to align with both community workforce needs and the district's Portrait of a Learner goals.

17. Explain any partnerships or contractual relationships central to the operations and mission of the public charter school.

Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) Collaborative Partnership: CFTA is committed to partnering with Flathead Valley Community College to build smooth secondary-to-postsecondary transitions that respond to regional workforce needs without duplicating existing educational capacity. As detailed in the attached letter of support from FVCC President Dr. Jane Karas, CFTA and FVCC share core principles around dual enrollment and career pathways. Joint planning will focus on:

1. **Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Exploration:** Aligning CFTA secondary coursework with FVCC introductory trade requirements, enabling qualified students to earn tuition-free credits via Montana's *One-Two-Free* program.
2. **Career Pathway Articulation:** Mapping CFTA's NCCER modules and technical training into FVCC certificate and Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree programs in Industrial Trades.
3. **Collaborative Resource & Faculty Dialogue:** Engaging FVCC faculty in advisory discussions and guest presentations to ensure CFTA instruction reflects postsecondary standards.

MT Future Ready Industry Compacts: CFTA partners with regional general contractors, trade unions, and suppliers (e.g., Flathead Building Association) through formal Work-Based Learning Compacts. These compacts guarantee student internship placements, job-shadowing, equipment donations, and direct-interview privileges for graduating seniors.

18. Provide the proposed calendar and sample daily schedule.

School Calendar

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will follow a standard academic calendar that aligns with Columbia Falls School District #6, ensuring consistency for families with students across multiple schools. CFTA will operate on a four-day instructional week (Monday–Thursday), with Fridays reserved for flexible learning. This design supports proficiency-based education by giving students structured time to demonstrate mastery, engage in extended projects, and participate in internships or community learning opportunities.

- **Instructional Days:** 144 (Monday–Thursday)

- **Flexible Learning Days:** Up to 36 Fridays for internships, service learning, academic support, or enrichment
- **Start/End Dates:** Late August – early June (aligned to district calendar)
- **Breaks and Holidays:** Consistent with Columbia Falls School District #6 schedule

Sample Daily Schedule (Monday–Thursday)

- **8:00 – 9:15 | Academic Block 1** (Math, Science, or integrated coursework)
- **9:15 – 11:45 | Academic Block 2** (English, Social Studies, virtual coursework *if applicable*, project-based academics)
- **11:45 – 12:15 | Lunch**
- **12:15 – 1:30 | Construction Lab Block 1** (Safety, framing, systems, HVAC, project work)
- **1:30 – 3:30 | Construction Lab Block 2** (Capstone projects, finishing, applied technical instruction)
- **3:30 – 3:45 | Advisory/Reflection** (Portfolio updates, ILP check-ins, career readiness activities)

Sample Friday Schedule (Flexible Learning Day)

- **Proficiency Demonstrations:** Students complete assessments, update portfolios, and show evidence of mastery in academic or technical areas.
- **Extended Projects:** Extra build time for large-scale projects such as tiny homes, community service builds, or competitions (e.g., SkillsUSA).
- **Internships & Job Shadows:** Students engage with local contractors, trade unions, or other business partners to gain authentic work experience.
- **Academic Support & Recovery:** Targeted tutoring, small group support, or additional time for students needing intervention to stay on track.
- **Career Readiness Activities:** Resume development, guest speakers, jobsite safety workshops, or site visits.

Instructional Flexibility for Proficiency-Based Learning
The calendar and schedule provide multiple pathways for students to demonstrate mastery:

- Extended lab blocks allow students to complete hands-on projects tied to proficiency targets.
- Fridays create intentional space for students to pursue personalized goals, catch up in areas of need, or accelerate in areas of strength.
- Advisory sessions ensure ILPs are revisited regularly, making student ownership of learning central to the program.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

See Submission Procedures

19. Describe plans for providing transportation, food service, and all other significant operational or ancillary services.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will operate under the umbrella of Columbia Falls School District #6, ensuring that students receive equitable access to all operational and ancillary services available across the district. By sharing district resources, CFTA can focus on delivering its specialized construction trades program while maintaining efficiency, safety, and compliance.

Transportation
CFTA students will have access to the district's existing transportation system. Shuttle services will connect

Columbia Falls High School and other central locations to the Canyon Elementary campus in Hungry Horse. This ensures accessibility for the full projected enrollment of 41–45 students, including those from outside Columbia Falls who enroll under open enrollment policies. Transportation schedules will align with the four-day instructional week and will be adjusted for students participating in Friday internships or community-based learning.

Food Service
Meals will be provided through the Columbia Falls School District's food service program. Breakfast and lunch will be prepared at the district's central kitchen and delivered daily to the CFTA campus. Students will have access to the same nutritional standards, free and reduced-price meal programs, and meal account systems as all other CFSD students. This approach ensures consistency, equity, and compliance with state and federal guidelines.

Student Services
Students enrolled at CFTA will continue to have access to a full range of district services, including:

- **Special Education and 504 Supports:** Delivered in collaboration with CFSD's student services department to ensure compliance with IDEA, ADA, and Section 504.
- **Counseling Services:** Academic, social-emotional, and career counseling provided by district staff in partnership with CFTA's Student Success Coordinator.
- **Technology Support:** District-issued devices and connectivity support for virtual coursework and portfolio development.
- **Health Services:** Nursing staff and health protocols coordinated through the district's existing services.

Facilities and Operations
Custodial, groundskeeping, and maintenance services for the CFTA facility will be provided by the district's facilities department. Business operations, payroll, human resources, and risk management will also be managed centrally by Columbia Falls School District #6.

20. Describe cocurricular and extracurricular programs and how the programs will be funded and delivered.
Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will ensure that students have access to the full range of co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities offered through Columbia Falls School District #6, while also developing unique enrichment activities that align with its focus on construction trades and career readiness.

District-Wide Access

- **Athletics and Activities:** CFTA students will be eligible to participate in all Montana High School Association (MHSA)-sanctioned athletics and activities through Columbia Falls High School. Transportation schedules will be designed to allow students to attend practices, competitions, and performances.
- **Clubs and Organizations:** Students may join academic clubs, student government, and other interest-based organizations provided at Columbia Falls High School. This ensures equitable access to experiences that build leadership, teamwork, and school pride.
- **Performing and Visual Arts:** Students will retain access to district-provided opportunities in music, theater, and art, either through co-enrollment or after-school programming.

Trades-Specific Enrichment Opportunities

- **SkillsUSA Chapter:** CFTA will establish a SkillsUSA chapter to provide students with opportunities to showcase their technical skills, leadership, and teamwork at regional and national competitions.
- **Community Build Projects:** Students will contribute to local service projects, such as constructing small structures for community organizations or assisting in Habitat for Humanity builds, reinforcing the civic-mindedness embedded in the Portrait of a Learner.

- **Industry Showcases and Trade Nights:** CFTA will host semi-annual exhibitions where students present completed projects, demonstrate skills, and engage with parents, employers, and the wider community.
- **Career Field Trips and Guest Speakers**: Regular visits to job sites, trade expos, and apprenticeship programs will broaden student exposure to post-graduation opportunities.

By combining district-wide extracurricular access with trades-focused enrichment, CFTA ensures its students benefit from a holistic high school experience while building career-specific skills and community connections

21. Describe the proposed financial plan and policies, including financial controls and audit requirements.
The Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will operate under the governance and financial oversight of the Columbia Falls School District #6 Board of Trustees. As such, CFTA will follow all established district financial policies, internal controls, and audit procedures, ensuring full transparency, accountability, and compliance with state law.

Financial Plan Overview

- **Funding Sources:**
    - **State Per-Pupil Allocations:** CFTA will receive state funding on a per-pupil basis, consistent with Montana's funding formula for charter schools.
    - **Federal and State Grants:** The program will pursue Career and Technical Education (CTE) grants, Perkins funding, and Workforce Development funds to support trades-related equipment and certification costs.
    - **MT Future Ready Payments and MT Advanced Opportunities Grant:** These programs will provide additional funding for the program and allow for a robust learning experience with little to no impact on families.
    - **Local and Industry Contributions:** Partnerships with local businesses will include in-kind donations of tools, equipment, and materials. Philanthropic support and local foundations may also provide supplemental funding.
    - **District Support:** Shared services such as transportation, food service, business office operations, and student services will be provided through Columbia Falls School District, creating efficiencies and cost savings.

- **Major Expenses:**
    - **Facility Development:** Construction of a dedicated trades building on the Canyon Elementary campus.
    - **Staffing:** Salaries and benefits for 7-8 FTE instructional and support staff in Year 1, scaling as needed.
    - **Instructional Resources:** NCCER-aligned curriculum, OSHA certification costs, and technology for blended learning.
    - **Equipment and Materials:** Industry-standard tools, safety gear, and building materials for student projects.

Financial Controls

- **Budget Development:** Annual budgets will be developed by the Program Director in collaboration with the Superintendent and District Business Manager, then approved by the Board of Trustees.
- **Internal Controls:** The district's existing controls — including segregation of duties, purchase order systems, and expenditure approvals — will be applied to CFTA.
- **Monitoring and Reporting:** Monthly financial reports will be provided to the Board of Trustees, ensuring ongoing oversight and corrective action if needed.
- **Student Activity Accounts:** Managed under district policy to ensure transparency in handling funds related to student projects, SkillsUSA, and community service activities.

Audits

- **Annual Audit:** CFTA's finances will be included in the district's annual independent financial audit conducted by a certified public accountant, as required by Montana law.
- **State Reporting:** All required reports will be filed with the Montana Office of Public Instruction and the Board of Public Education.

This financial plan provides a sustainable and accountable framework that ensures CFTA can fulfill its mission while maintaining alignment with district standards and state requirements.

22. Describe the insurance coverage that will be obtained.
Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will be fully covered under the insurance policies and risk management protocols of Columbia Falls School District #6. By operating under the governance of the existing school board, CFTA will benefit from the district's established insurance coverage, internal controls, and compliance procedures.

23. Describe the startup and five-year budgets with clearly stated assumptions.

Budget	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Personnel Salaries and Benefits: Director, Teacher, Paraprofessionals, Counselor, Support Staff	$257,629	$552,082	$651,081	$864,409	$1,022,235
Technology: Software, Computers, Online Curriculum, etc.	$13,000	$30,000	$13,000	$25,000	$9,500
Educational & Classroom Supplies: Textbooks, Assessments, Vocational Materials, etc.	$31,000	$35,000	$31,000	$25,000	$22,000
Miscellaneous: Field Trips, Classroom Equipment & Furniture, Staff Development, etc.	$31,000	$45,000	$45,000	$17,000	$17,000
Maintenance & Operations: Utilities, Repair, New Build, Custodial	$32,000	$76,500	$40,000	$95,000	$80,000
Total Expenditures	$364,629	$738,582	$780,081	$1,026,409	$1,150,735

The advantage of the location of this CFTA is that it will be utilizing an existing campus. The Canyon Elementary School has been closed for approximately 10 years but the building has been in use by various entities. These uses include but are not limited to: Greater Valley Health Care operates a clinic out of the building, host to numerous community events, long-term lease agreements with the gym (soccer club) and outbuildings (Food Bank). The district has kept the building in good repair during this time. The District also needed to use the building as a temporary high school setting during a water event that forced us to displace some high school classrooms during the first semester of 2024-2025, so the building is ready for student and staff occupancy.

There would need to be some infrastructure provided to ensure that four-season building could take place so teaching and learning could continue during the winter months. The new trades building would be placed where the existing playground and open fields are currently placed. We would maximize the use of our space to attempt to keep our costs down. The new building would hopefully secure some partnerships with local builders and manufacturers to decrease those costs even more. School funding sources will also need to be used if these partnerships do not provide all of the necessary funding to complete these structures.

24. Describe the startup and first-year cash flow projections with clearly stated assumptions.

Projected Enrollment	ANB	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
45	$8,317					
50	$8,317		$374,265			
65	$8,317			$415,850		
80	$8,317				$540,605	
90	$8,317					$665,360
HS Basic Entitlement		$364,401	$364,401	$364,401	$364,401	$364,401
JH Basic Entitlement					$121,466	$121,466
Total Estimated Revenues		$364,401	$738,666	$780,251	$1,026,472	$1,151,227

25. Describe anticipated fundraising contributions and evidence, if applicable.

CFTA has established a structured Capital and Equipment Campaign managed by district leadership and the Advisory Council. Rather than relying on uncommitted operational fundraising:

- **In-Kind Material Commitments:** Local lumberyards, electrical suppliers, and mechanical contractors will have the opportunity to pledge annual building materials and equipment donations to support the tiny-home build projects.
- **Project Cost Recovery:** Student-built tiny homes and structures are sold at auction upon completion, recycling capital directly back into the CFTA trade materials budget for subsequent school years.
- **Grant & Foundation Pipeline:** Active grant applications are pledged through regional workforce development foundations and Montana industry associations.

26. Describe the facilities plan, including backup or contingency plans.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) will be established through a phased facilities plan that allows for immediate program launch, long-term expansion, and flexibility based on enrollment trends. The district's goal is to provide a purpose-built, industry-standard learning environment while maintaining fiscal responsibility and adaptability to student demand.

Phase I – Initial Facility (August 2027 Opening)
During its inaugural year, CFTA will operate on the Columbia Falls High School campus, utilizing existing classroom and shop spaces to deliver instruction in construction trades, core academics, and safety training. This approach provides immediate access to essential infrastructure such as technology, labs, and utilities while minimizing startup costs.

Phase II – Permanent Facility at Canyon Elementary (Target Opening: Fall 2028)
CFTA's long-term home will be a dedicated construction trades facility built on the Canyon Elementary campus in Hungry Horse, Montana. This location offers space for growth and community visibility, aligning with the district's vision of revitalizing the site as a center for innovation and workforce readiness.

Contingency Plan

If enrollment trends or funding conditions require adjustments, CFTA may remain permanently housed at Columbia Falls High School after its pilot year. In that case:

- Existing spaces will be modified and reconfigured to expand the CTE area and accommodate the additional student population.
- Upgrades to electrical, ventilation, and storage systems will ensure compliance with industry training requirements.
- Portable or modular classroom units may be added to maintain small class sizes and lab safety standards.

This dual-path plan provides flexibility for the district to scale responsibly based on enrollment, performance, and community support while maintaining program quality and access.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND NEED

See Submission Procedures

27. Describe the specific evidence of significant community support.

Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) has strong backing from community members, industry leaders, educators, and families who recognize the urgent need for a skilled workforce in the Flathead Valley. This support demonstrates the Academy's alignment with regional priorities and underscores its importance as a bridge between education and career readiness.

Industry and Business Support:
Local contractors, builders' associations, and trade unions have consistently identified workforce shortages as one of the most pressing challenges facing northwest Montana. Letters of support from employers, such as construction firms, HVAC companies, and electrical contractors, emphasize their eagerness to host interns, provide mentorship, and consider graduates for employment. Material suppliers and home improvement retailers have also expressed interest in donating supplies and equipment.

Higher Education Support:
Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) supports efforts to expand meaningful educational opportunities and strengthen career pathways for regional students. As expressed in the attached support letter from FVCC President Dr. Jane Karas, FVCC embraces shared principles of dual enrollment and career pathways. CFTA looks forward to ongoing dialogue with FVCC to explore articulated pathways, dual-enrollment opportunities, and curricular alignment that maximize public benefit without duplicating existing programs.

Parent and Family Support:
Families across the district have expressed a desire for programs that prepare students for meaningful careers without requiring all graduates to pursue four-year degrees. Parent surveys and listening sessions highlighted a strong demand for applied learning, career readiness, and alternative pathways to success. The establishment of a Parent and Industry Advisory Council formalizes that support and creates an ongoing feedback loop.

Educator and District Support:
Columbia Falls School District #6 teachers, counselors, and administrators have identified CFTA as an important addition to the district's offerings, especially for students whose strengths and interests are best expressed through applied learning. Staff across the district have expressed enthusiasm for referring students to this program.

Student Support:
High school students have shown strong interest in opportunities to work with their hands, earn

certifications, and build projects of lasting value. Informal feedback from students has confirmed that many would be eager to enroll in a program that leads directly to career opportunities.

28. Describe the opportunities and expectations for parent involvement.
    Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) recognizes that parent and family engagement is essential to student success, particularly in a program that connects school, career, and community. Parents will be welcomed as active partners in both the educational process and the broader vision of preparing students for the workforce.

    Advisory Council Participation:
    CFTA will establish a **Parent and Industry Advisory Council** that meets quarterly. Parents serving on this council will provide input on curriculum relevance, project planning, and community engagement strategies. Their perspectives will help ensure the Academy remains responsive to student needs and industry trends.

    Showcases and Exhibitions:
    Parents will be encouraged to attend and participate in student showcase events, including project exhibitions, trade nights, and community open houses. These events give parents the opportunity to celebrate student accomplishments, provide feedback, and see first-hand the skills their children are developing.

    Portfolio Reviews:
    Each semester, students will present elements of their digital portfolios to parents, teachers, and community members. Parents will be invited to review progress, discuss student goals, and provide input that strengthens both academic and career readiness.

    Volunteering and Mentorship:
    Parents with experience in the trades or related fields will be encouraged to volunteer as guest speakers, project mentors, or advisors for student builds. This involvement brings real-world expertise into the classroom while allowing parents to actively contribute to the program's success.

Ongoing Communication:
Parents will receive regular updates through newsletters, parent portals, and direct communication with staff. Clear expectations will be established that parents play an active role in supporting student attendance, academic progress, and workplace readiness habits such as punctuality, safety, and teamwork.

NOT AN EXISTING LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD? COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION

See Submission Procedures

1. Provide specific evidence that the applicant has sought from the local school board the creation of a school or program of the located school district serving the mission and vision of the proposed public charter school.

2. Provide specific evidence that the local school board declined to create the school or program and declined to submit a proposal for the creation of a public charter school to the Board of Public Education.

3. Provide a legal description of the property of the existing school district from which the boundaries of the public charter school district are proposed to be formed.

4. Share background information on the initial governing board members and, if identified, the proposed school leadership and management team.

Questions? Contact bpe@mt.gov

Flathead Valley Community College
777 Grandview Drive, Kalispell, MT 59901

Via Email

October 29, 2026

Dear Board of Public Education Members:

This letter is based on the general vision statement that was shared with Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC) staff on October 12, 2026. Flathead Valley Community College has not been given the opportunity to review the full proposal submitted by SD#6. FVCC supports efforts to expand meaningful educational opportunities for students, strengthen strategic pathways between secondary and postsecondary education, and prepare learners to meet the workforce needs of our region. Initiatives that build upon and strengthen established programs, respond to demonstrated workforce needs, and address unmet educational opportunities without duplicating existing capacity offer the greatest potential to expand student access and maximize the public benefit of educational investments.

FVCC offers robust courses in trades programs including heavy equipment operations, machining, welding, building trades, plumbing, electrical, firearms technology and HVAC. Flathead and Lincoln County high school dual enrollment students are enrolled in many of these courses. Numerous high school students have achieved college certificates, AA and AS degrees prior to high school graduation, because of FVCC's strong dual enrollment partnerships with school districts.

This letter reflects FVCC's support for the shared principles of dual enrollment and career pathways. We appreciate the opportunity for future dialogue with School District #6 to expand existing and explore new articulated pathways, curricular alignment, dual-enrollment opportunities, and other collaborative initiatives that do not duplicate existing programs.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Jane A. Karas, Ph.D.
President

DON
CHEVROLET SUBARU
www.donk.com
CHRYSLER DODGE Jeep RAM

September 24, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Don "K" Whitefish, we are pleased to express our strong support for the authorization and development of the Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) as a public charter high school.

We believe hands-on trade education is an important investment in the future of our community and the Flathead Valley workforce. Providing students with opportunities to gain practical skills and meaningful exposure to local industries will help prepare them for successful careers while also strengthening the talent pipeline for area employers.

Don "K" Whitefish would be glad to participate in the Columbia Falls Trades Academy's work-based learning and hiring pathways. We would be willing to provide students with job-shadowing opportunities and internship experiences, giving them an opportunity to see firsthand what a career in the automotive field can look like and to develop practical workplace skills.

We would also be pleased to provide financial assistance to support tools and equipment for automotive-related educational activities at the academy. In addition, we would be able to donate engines and/or automotive parts that could be used by students for hands-on training, instruction, and skill development.

We look forward to the opportunity to work with the Columbia Falls School District #6 and the Columbia Falls Trades Academy as the program develops. We believe partnerships between local businesses and education are essential to providing students with meaningful career opportunities and helping meet the workforce needs of our region.

Please accept this letter as our formal expression of support for the Columbia Falls Trades Academy and its efforts to provide students with practical, career-focused education.

Sincerely,

Erika Larsen

Don "K" Whitefish
Erika Larsen/HR Manager
Don "K" Whitefish
406-862-2571
Erika@donk.com

Rugged Ridge Contracting

208 Columbia Mountain Dr., Unit E · Columbia Falls, MT 59912 · 406-885-0923 · admin@rrcmt.pro

October 26, 2026

Montana Board of Public Education
P.O. Box 200601
Helena, MT 59620-0601

cc: Cory J. Dziowgo, Superintendent, Columbia Falls School District #6
(c_dziowgo@cfmtschools.net)

RE: Letter of Support and Partnership Commitment for the Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA)

Dear Members of the Montana Board of Public Education,

On behalf of Rugged Ridge Contracting, I am writing to state our full support for the authorization of the Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) as a public charter high school. We are prepared to back that support with formal, documented commitments to work-based learning and hiring pathways for CFTA students, as outlined below.

Rugged Ridge Contracting has served the Flathead Valley as a residential and commercial contractor for four years. We specialize in exterior remodels and outdoor living, including siding, windows, doors, patio covers, awnings, patio enclosure systems, and ice dam prevention and removal. We also build additions and complete full remodels. Like many local employers, we feel the shortage of skilled tradespeople every season. Within the last year alone, we have had three to four open positions in experienced carpentry and management that each took more than three months to fill. In fact, we have had to hire all of our current staff from out of state.

The workers we need most are young people who already live here, want to stay here, and have hands-on training before they arrive on a job site. CFTA is built to produce exactly that workforce. A school that pairs academic learning with real job-site experience gives local students a direct route into careers that pay well, and gives local employers a reliable pipeline of talent we would otherwise have to recruit from out of state.

To give the Board the clear and documented evidence it requested, Rugged Ridge Contracting makes the following commitments to CFTA, beginning with the school's first year of operation and continuing for a minimum of three school years:

1. **Student internships.** We will host two CFTA student interns each semester in carpentry and in each of our specialty service areas. Each intern will be paired with an experienced employee mentor and will work a minimum of eight hours per week. Internships will be either unpaid and credit-bearing or paid, in accordance with CFTA policy.

2. **Friday project sites.** We will make one to two active job sites available each semester for CFTA's Friday project-based learning, with on-site supervision by a qualified employee and compliance with all required safety training.
3. **Hiring pathway.** We anticipate hiring one to two CFTA graduates per year, subject to business conditions, and will sponsor registered apprenticeships or support licensing hours for those hires.
4. **Coordination.** Tallon Taylor, our Hiring Manager, will serve as our point of contact for CFTA and will work with District staff on scheduling, student placement, and progress reporting.

These commitments are made in good faith and are contingent on CFTA receiving authorization from the Board of Public Education.

A partnership between local industry and Columbia Falls School District #6 is a high-value return on investment for Montana taxpayers. Public dollars are paired with private resources: real job sites, experienced mentors, and paid positions waiting at graduation. Students leave CFTA with skills, references, and a job offer in hand rather than debt, and they build careers in the communities that educated them. Employers gain a steady, locally trained workforce, which strengthens the Flathead Valley economy for decades.

We respectfully urge the Board to approve CFTA's application. Rugged Ridge Contracting is ready to stand alongside Columbia Falls students from their first day on a job site to their first day as our employees. Please contact us at 406-885-0923 or admin@rrcmt.pro with any questions about our commitments.

Sincerely,

Stefanie Taylor

Stefanie Taylor
Office Manager
Rugged Ridge Contracting

KALISPELL
AUTO GROUP
TOYOTA

October 16, 2026
Montana Board of Public Education
Re: Support for Columbia Falls Trades Academy

Dear Members of the Board:

On behalf of Kalispell Auto Group, I am writing to express our full support for the authorization of the Columbia Falls Trades Academy as a public charter high school.

Here at Kalispell Toyota, Kalispell Ford, and Kalispell Volkswagen, we understand the importance of developing skilled automotive professionals here in the Flathead Valley. Quality trade education gives students practical skills and meaningful career opportunities while helping local employers meet their workforce needs.

To support this effort, Kalispell Auto Group is willing to commit to the following:

- Student internships: We will partner with the Academy to host multiple student interns at our Toyota, Ford, and/or Volkswagen dealerships. We will coordinate with program leadership to establish placements, schedules, supervision, and learning objectives that provide meaningful, hands-on exposure to the automotive industry.
- Discounted and/or complimentary parts and tools: We will support the automotive program by providing parts and tools at discounted rates and/or on a complimentary basis. We will work with instructors to identify useful items that align with the curriculum and classroom needs and determine the appropriate support for each.

Although we have not yet determined what a direct financial contribution could look like, our commitment to these internships and parts and tool support stands independently of any future funding decision.

We see this as an opportunity to build a lasting partnership between local education and industry. Connecting classroom instruction with workplace experience can help students graduate with marketable skills, give employers access to emerging talent, and provide a strong return on public investment by preparing young people for careers in their own community.

Kalispell Auto Group fully supports this type of program, and we look forward to working with Columbia Falls School District #6 to help make it successful. We respectfully encourage the Board to approve the Columbia Falls Trades Academy.

Sincerely,

Mark Oehrtman
Kalispell Auto Group
Kalispell Toyota | Kalispell Ford | Kalispell Volkswagen

Mark Oehrtman
General Manager
Kalispell Toyota
2845 U.S. 93 South
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 755-6060
Direct: (406) 756-5606
mark.oehrtman@kaltoy.com
www.kalispelltoyota.com

PRESIDENT'S AWARD TOYOTA
2021
President's Award

President's Award 11 Year Recipient

Cory Dziowgo <c_dziowgo@cfmtschools.net>

Partnering to Build the Flathead Valley's Future Workforce | Columbia Falls Trades Academy

Niki Paradise <niki@acutechworks.com>
To: Cory Dziowgo <c_dziowgo@cfmtschools.net>

Mon, Oct 12, 2026 at 11:20 AM

Caution! This message was sent from outside your organization.

Allow sender | Block sender | Report

Dear Members of the Montana Board of Public Education,

On behalf of Acutech Metalworks, we are pleased to express our strong support for the Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA) and its mission to provide students with hands-on education and career opportunities in the skilled trades.

As a local metal fabrication and manufacturing company, we understand firsthand the importance of developing a skilled workforce here in Flathead Valley. Finding qualified welders, fabricators, and other tradespeople continues to be a challenge for businesses like ours, making programs that introduce students to these careers more important than ever.

Acutech Metalworks has already established a successful partnership with Columbia Falls High School through welding apprenticeship opportunities. These apprenticeships have provided students with valuable hands-on experience in a working fabrication shop and, in some cases, have led directly to full-time employment with our company following graduation. We have also supported the school's welding program through steel donations, helping provide students with the materials needed to develop their skills.

We are committed to continuing this partnership by offering welding apprenticeship opportunities and donating steel materials to support hands-on instruction, consistent with our operational capacity and the needs of the program. We believe these contributions provide students with meaningful experience while helping build a stronger local workforce.

The Columbia Falls Trades Academy represents an opportunity to expand the success of partnerships like ours. By connecting classroom instruction with real-world industry experience, students can graduate with practical skills, a better understanding of career opportunities, and a pathway toward long-term employment without having to leave their community.

We strongly encourage the Board of Public Education to approve the Columbia Falls Trades Academy. Acutech Metalworks is proud to support local students, invest in the next generation of skilled tradespeople, and continue working alongside Columbia Falls School District #6 to strengthen the future of our community.

Sincerely,

Acutech Metalworks
Niki Paradise
3816 MT Highway 40
Columbia Falls, MT 59912

406-897-1042
www.acutechworks.com

Niki Paradise
Acutech Metalworks
Office: 406-892-4030
Direct Line: 406-897-1042

From: Cory Dziowgo <c_dziowgo@cfmtschools.net>
Sent: Thursday, October 1, 2026 3:27 PM
Subject: Partnering to Build the Flathead Valley's Future Workforce | Columbia Falls Trades Academy

You don't often get email from c_dziowgo@cfmtschools.net. Learn why this is important

[Quoted text hidden]

October 12, 2026

RE: Letter of Support – Columbia Falls Trades Academy

Dear Members of the Montana Board of Public Education,

On behalf of the Flathead Building Association (FBA) and our more than 500 member businesses, I am pleased to express our strong support for the establishment of the Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA).

One of the greatest challenges facing the construction industry in the Flathead Valley is the ongoing shortage of skilled workers. As our communities continue to grow, the demand for qualified professionals in construction and related trades continues to increase. Developing a strong local workforce is essential to meeting our region's housing needs and supporting a healthy, sustainable economy.

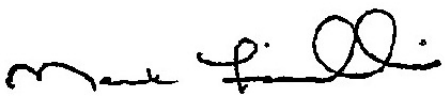
The Columbia Falls Trades Academy represents an important opportunity to introduce students to rewarding, high-demand careers through hands-on education and real-world experience. By connecting classroom learning with practical skills and industry partnerships, CFTA will provide students with valuable career pathways while helping local employers develop the next generation of skilled workers.

Workforce development and career education are important priorities for the Flathead Building Association. We recognize the value of connecting students with industry professionals and providing opportunities to explore careers in construction and the skilled trades. We look forward to working with CFTA to identify opportunities for our member businesses to participate through mentorship, career exploration, job-site visits, and other industry partnerships.

We commend Columbia Falls School District #6 for its leadership and vision in developing this innovative educational opportunity. The Columbia Falls Trades Academy has the potential to make a lasting impact on students, local businesses, and the economic future of the Flathead Valley.

The Flathead Building Association strongly supports the authorization of the Columbia Falls Trades Academy and looks forward to helping build connections between education and industry that will benefit our community for years to come.

Sincerely,



Mark Freidline
Executive Officer
Flathead Building Association
406-752-2422
director@buildingflathead.com
www.buildingflathead.com

Montana Heritage Home Builders
"Building One Dream At A Time"

Montana Board of Public Education,

My name is Nicolas Ream. I graduated from Columbia Falls High School in 2016 with an Honors Diploma and High Honors. I earned an Associate of Arts, Summa Cum Laude; a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration – Management and Entrepreneurship, Summa Cum Laude, University Scholar; and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration – Marketing, Summa Cum Laude, University Scholar, from the University of Montana in 2020. In 2022, I earned a Master of Science in Real Estate and the Built Environment from the University of Denver as a Daniels Scholar. I am the Chief Experience Officer and Executive Vice President of Montana Heritage Home Builders, Inc., a high-end luxury, high-performance, full-service, design/build custom home building, remodeling, light-commercial construction, and real estate development company. Montana Heritage Home Builders was founded in Columbia Falls in 1997. I am a proud member of the Board of Directors of the Columbia Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, where I serve as Chair of the Economic Development Committee. I also serve on the Board of Directors of the Columbia Falls Community Foundation. I serve on the Leadership Council of the National Association of Home Builders and have served on the boards of the Flathead Building Association and the Montana Building Industry Association. I currently serve as the Vice Chair of the National Association of Home Builders Education Committee, the Chair of the National Association of Home Builders National Sales and Marketing Council, and the Chair of the Montana Building Industry Association Membership, Education, and Research Committee.

In August 2025, there were 188,000 open construction positions. In July 2026, that number grew to 326,000 open construction positions. I have had several conversations with the Superintendent of Columbia Falls SD #6, Cory Dziowgo, about the potential for the Columbia Falls Trades Academy (CFTA). Adding the Columbia Falls Trades Academy would greatly benefit the community and the industry by helping achieve housing affordability and create high-paying jobs. One impact on housing affordability is the shortage of the skilled workforce. I would be honored to work with the Columbia Falls Trades Academy to help it succeed and connect it with resources from the Home Builders Institute and the National Association of Home Builders. I am an Approved Instructor through the National Association of Home Builders and would love to be involved with this Academy.

Montana Heritage Home Builders
"Building One Dream At A Time"

The construction industry offers excellent opportunities for career development, and the Columbia Falls Trades Academy will expand students' opportunities to succeed.

I am honored to support the establishment of the Columbia Falls Trades Academy. The future is bright! Thank you for considering my letter of support for the Columbia Falls Trades Academy. The Academy is essential to the workforce needs of our company, our community, and the Flathead Valley economy. This program will provide a high-value return on investment for Montana taxpayers and help our local youth pursue high-paying careers.

Sincerely,

Nicolas R. Ream

Nicolas R. Ream, MS REBE, CMBP, CMRP, CAPS, CGA, CGB, CGP, CGR, CSP, GMB, Master CGP, Master CSP, CGSP, NGBS Green Pro, LEED® Green Associate™, WWYW CERTIFIED®
Chief Experience Officer | Executive Vice President
Montana Heritage Home Builders, Inc.
nicolas@montanaheritagehomebuilders.com
(406) 250-4918