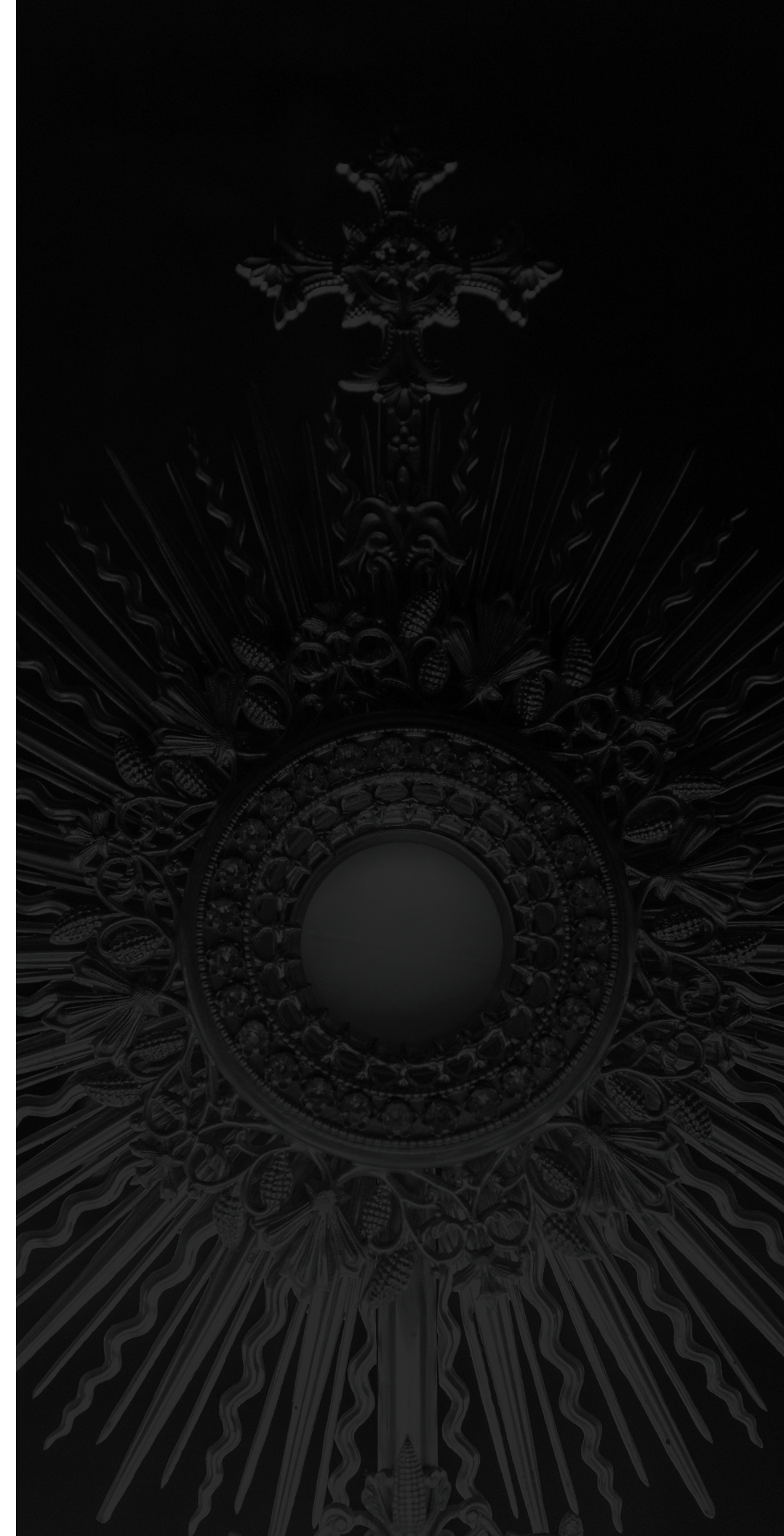


Assess Summary



2026 Master Plan
BILLINGS CATHOLIC SCHOOLS





**Forming
the whole child**

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See Working Appendix Document for full input records

Executive Summary

Key Insights from the Assess Phase

- The data confirms that enrollment growth is not the current driver; instead, facility improvement is essential for Billings Catholic Schools (BCS) to continue thriving.
- The value proposition of BCS—**academic excellence, faith, and family**—remains the strongest differentiator and should guide all decision making. Athletics continues to be meaningful and a potential fundraising avenue, but the highest and best value lies in strengthening student success and the academic experience (health sciences, arts, core learning spaces).
- Stakeholder feedback highlighted the importance of parity between athletics and other extracurriculars, though communication around this balance will be important to avoid divisiveness.
- There is an opportunity to improve communication about what BCS is funding and why—helping the community understand trade offs and priorities.
- The data largely validated information and helped reveal any remaining blind spots, placing BCS in a strong position for next steps.



Executive Summary

Preliminary Recommendations

Primary Focus: Student Success

1. Prioritize improvements at Billings Central, emphasizing learning environments that directly support student success.
** Example: Upgrading science classrooms and hands on learning areas.*

2. Address deficiencies that limit BCS from doing what it does best:
 - Improve spaces that support learning and student well being.
 - Maximize every possible square foot—especially at BCCHS—for instructional and student focused use.
 - Expand program space in high value areas.
** Health Sciences represents a regional opportunity in a growing medical hub.*

3. Consider maintaining athletic facilities at Central to keep fundraising, school spirit, and student experience aligned.
4. Strategic enhancements could still build energy and community support without major expansion.

5. Prioritize safety and security solutions, including creation of a clear, secure main entry and improved campus wide access control.

6. Leverage existing partnerships—and cultivate new ones—to fill gaps capital dollars alone cannot:
 - Performing arts / auditorium access
 - Large gathering spaces
 - Extracurricular, art, and music opportunities

7. Study alternative parking solutions to address one of Central’s most significant barriers:
 - Urban site constraints
 - Adjacent properties and long term parcel strategy

Secondary Focus: Colton Campus Future Planning

1. Develop a Thoughtful Long Term Plan for the Colton Campus
 - a. Even though major construction may not be immediately feasible, BCS should begin shaping a clear, phased vision for the Colton site. This will demonstrate intentionality, provide direction for future investment, and build confidence among stakeholders and donors.
 - b. Develop a phased master plan and site diagram that illustrates potential long term growth and identifies the key facilities envisioned for the campus. Stakeholders want reassurance that BCS is thinking ahead, even if the big projects are years away.
2. Elements to Include in the Colton Plan
 - Parking strategy
 - ECE relocation study and conceptual siting
 - Performing arts / auditorium opportunities
 - Multipurpose activities center
 - Future high school and associated athletics (track, fields, practice facilities)

Context & Objectives

Purpose of Document

This document provides a high-level summary of the Assess Phase of the 2025–2026 Master Planning work that Cushing Terrell is completing for Billings Catholic Schools. The Assess Phase is the first of three phases in our master planning process:

- 1. Assess
- 2. Explore
- 3. Apply



The Assess Phase focuses on evaluating current conditions, identifying needs, and collecting data that will guide the development of design solutions in the upcoming phases. The purpose of this document is to outline the major activities completed to date, highlight key themes and feedback, and note our professional recommendations. This document concludes this phase, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss next steps and confirm whether you would like to proceed into the Explore Phase.



Context & Objectives

Project Goals & Guiding Principles

BCS Master Planning Steering Committee

- Andrew McDonald (Primary Contact)
- Mac McCann
- Nolan Trafton
- Colter Bethurem
- Adam Liberty
- Amy Reger
- Ron Yates
- Bobby Beers
- Michelle Trafton
- Christine Harris
- Joanna Brailer
- Joe Sylvester

To establish clear goals and guiding principles for the master planning process, we distributed a survey to the BCS Master Planning Steering Committee.

Participants were asked two key questions:

- Looking ahead to the future of Billings Catholic Schools and the upcoming master planning process, what do you see as the top five challenges that need to be addressed?***
This included challenges related to individual buildings as well as the overall school system.
- What do you see as the top five opportunities for improvement or growth through master planning for Billings Catholic Schools?***
Committee members reflected on both specific facility needs and broader organizational opportunities.

Their collective responses provided the foundation for defining the core goals and guiding principles that will shape the master plan moving forward.

BCS Master Plan Guiding Principles

- † Staying true to the **Catholic Mission** and strengthening the Catholic presence in Billings
- † Billings Catholic Schools Mission of **Faith, Family Spirit, and Academic Excellence**; a whole student education with STREAM
- † **Transparency** of strategic goals and resource use to stakeholders (students, parents, administration, parish and donors)
- † **Achievability and Realism** to build donor confidence and eliminate reactionary decision making
- † Demonstrating strong **stewardship** of existing resources and property
- † Staying **competitive** in the local market of private faith-based schools

BCS Master Plan Goals

- **Show a clear vision** of the future of Billings Catholic Schools to all stakeholders
- **Incorporate feedback** from stakeholders through visioning sessions and community survey
- **Extend the life and use** of the existing buildings at SFC and BCCHS
- Aim to provide an environment that **attracts and retains** future students, parents, and faculty
- **Prioritize student advancement and development** over enrollment or campus growth
- **Strengthen the pipeline** for students from ECE, to SFC, to BCCHS
- **Promote** all extracurricular activities equally
- **Align the quality of environment** to the quality of education (modernize technology, optimize space use, enhance material aesthetics)
- Consider **budget, fundraising potential, existing building and site constraints**
- **Be Flexible & Sustainable:** Adapt and plan for changes in enrollment, technology, pedagogy, and funding; while considering long-term trends in donations, building conditions, and regional growth.
- **Phased execution** to ensure deliberate and well-ordered progression
- **Create a Living Document:** the Master Plan will be a resource that can be easily adapted over time to represent current BCS priorities and plans of action

Assess Process & Key Findings

Community Survey

Purpose

The survey invited parents, students, staff, and parish/community members to share their perspectives, ensuring community voices directly inform the BCS Master Plan.

Process

Cushing Terrell developed both the survey website and the accompanying questionnaire. Each audience group received targeted questions aligned with the goals established during the kickoff meeting with the BCS Master Planning Steering Committee.

Survey Question Categories	What It Measures	Goals It Supports
1. Educational Experience & Student Development	Modern learning needs, pipeline, academic/student support	Student development, pipeline, pedagogy + tech updates
2. Facilities, Campus Functionality & Learning Environments	Building conditions, space adequacy, modernization needs	Extend building life, align environment + education, feasibility
3. Identity, Differentiators, Attraction & Retention	What keeps families/staff, what should be amplified, perception of future vision	Attract/retain, clear future vision
4. Programs, Extracurriculars & Activity Support	Balance of sports & extracurriculars, facility adequacy, program needs	Equally promote both, strengthen opportunities

Website:

Link shared by BCS (Email distribution, school newsletters, social media)

Posters with QR Code:

Hard copies printed and posted through the schools and associated community



education with *Purpose*

Key Insights

Overall Response Summary: A strong and diverse set of feedback was collected, with **72 total** detailed responses received across 4 groups, providing a meaningful dataset.

Parents — 54 responses

Parents praise the faith-based environment, small class sizes, and community feel, while expressing concerns about Central's aging facilities, safety, parking, elective limitations, and an imbalance favoring athletics over other programs. Many also call for improved discipline consistency and more support for arts, music, and academic pathways.

Teachers — 6 responses

Teachers value the faith-centered mission and community but note challenges related to low compensation, inconsistent discipline, workload pressures, space constraints, and a perceived emphasis on athletics. Many highlight the need for a new or redesigned high school building and more support for non-athletic extracurriculars.

Students — 7 responses

Students describe a close community and strong sports culture but voice concerns about outdated facilities, inconsistent teacher behavior, peer behavior issues, limited elective choices, and the need for improved bathrooms, more clubs, and better support for arts and music.

Parish/Community Members — 5 responses

Parish and community members appreciate BCS's tradition, music programs, and values but raise concerns about deteriorating facilities—particularly at BCCHS—along with safety, lack of an auditorium, and perceived weakening of Catholic identity. Many advocate for investment in a new high school and stronger alignment with core Catholic mission.



Assess Process & Key Findings

I. Safety, security, and modernization are needed.

BCCHS is consistently described as outdated, uncomfortable, and unsafe, with concerns about HVAC/AC, aging infrastructure, crowded hallways, unsecured entrances, and safety risks in the surrounding downtown environment.

II. A faith-forward identity requires dignified spaces for worship and performance.

Respondents want strengthened Catholic identity supported by a proper venue for all-school Mass, worship, and the arts—such as an auditorium or stage—rather than relying on gyms.

III. Commons, dining, and student-life spaces are insufficient.

Students need more welcoming, functional spaces for lunch, gathering, clubs, and study, while teachers request quiet zones and meeting spaces large enough for growing groups.

IV. Arts, music, and activities require true parity with athletics.

There is a strong desire for an auditorium, upgraded band/art/drama spaces, and equitable support for nonathletic programs, especially since many arts spaces are currently inadequate or located in basement areas.

V. Academic breadth, electives, and scheduling flexibility to expand.

Families and students want more dual-credit/AP options, additional world languages, CTE/STREAM/shop classes, engineering/robotics, and pathways like FFA—along with schedules that don't force students to choose between music and career-prep classes.

VI. Parking, site circulation, and pickup/drop-off remain consistent pain points.

Concerns include limited and unsafe student parking near BCCHS and congested, stressful pickup/dropoff conditions at SFC.

VII. Storage, furnishings, and room sizing—especially at SFC—require redesign.

K–4 classrooms lack sufficient storage and flexible furnishings, middle-school lockers are too small or limited, and some rooms lack enough desks and chairs due to enrollment growth. Narrow hallways also add to behavioral and supervision challenges.

VIII. Consistent standards, discipline, and communication are needed system-wide.

Parents, teachers, and students describe inconsistent rule enforcement, unclear expectations, and uneven follow-through—particularly around behavior, dress code, and hallway conduct.

IX. Small-school community and faith culture remain BCS's strongest differentiators.

Families consistently cite being known by name, strong relationships, shared values, and weekly worship as reasons they choose and stay at BCS despite facility challenges. They greatly value and are attracted to the small school community.

X. Teacher experience depends on support, compensation, and capacity.

Teachers value the mission-driven culture but express concern about compensation, workload, uneven support, and the lack of resources for academic and faith-formation programs; many want support for clubs and academic activities to match that of athletics.

COMMUNITY SURVEY
TOP 10 Key Insights



Assess Process & Key Findings

SFC Facility Assessment (Pre K/K Wing)

Purpose

A site walk was conducted with BCS leadership and members of the Cushing Terrell multidisciplinary team to support master planning efforts for Billings Catholic Schools. The team evaluated existing conditions at St. Francis Catholic (SFC) School and assessed the suitability of potential locations for a future PreK/Kindergarten wing. Areas of focus included structural capacity, site access, interior condition, and day-to-day operational needs. Findings from this assessment will inform planning strategies, conceptual options, and high-level considerations for future expansion.

Process

On January 21, 2026, BCS leadership and the Cushing Terrell team met onsite at SFC to review goals for the assessment, walk the facilities, and reconvene for a findings discussion.

Participants:

Billings Catholic Schools

Mac McCann — Facilities Director

Debra Hayes — Principal, SFC Grades K–4

Jim Stanton — Principal, SFC Grades 5–8

Michelle Trafton — Director, Early Childhood Education

Joanna Brailer — Director of IT

Cushing Terrell Team

Valerie Meier — Project Manager

Michael Behm — Design Professional

Ronda Carlson — Architect

Cole Moller — Structural Engineer

Maggie Hardt — Interior Designer

Key Insights

- A dedicated PreK/Kindergarten wing cannot be accommodated within the existing SFC building due to the programmatic needs unique to Early Childhood Education (ECE). Required elements—including a dedicated cafeteria/warming kitchen, gym/multipurpose space, playground, administrative area, mechanical/IT systems, and a separate drop-off/entry—are not supported by the current building capacity or layout.
- ECE operational hours and daycare functions differ from the K–8 program, making shared circulation, shared amenities, or a blended building layout impractical and potentially unsafe for young learners.
- Existing SFC facilities—including the cafeteria, gym, IT rooms, mechanical systems, and administrative areas—are already undersized for current K–8 enrollment and cannot support an additional 175+ ECE students.
- A major buried east–west utility line is located approximately 115 feet south of the SFC building. Relocating or building over this line would be cost-prohibitive, limiting viable expansion zones.
- Constructing directly south of SFC (between the building and the utility line) would require a long, narrow footprint that reduces playground space, obstructs key sight-lines, and recreates existing circulation challenges.
- A 7-foot grade change between the track and the main school level adds complexity and cost to any addition in that area.
- Conclusion: Based on program requirements and site constraints, the most feasible and cost-responsible solution is a standalone ECE facility located south of the buried utility line. This facility should include its own drop-off loop, parking, mechanical/IT systems, ten classrooms with dedicated restrooms, and an independent, age-appropriate playground.

Assess Process & Key Findings

Regional Growth & Enrollment Analysis

Purpose

The purpose of the Regional Growth and Enrollment analysis is to provide a data-driven context for long-range planning for Billings Catholic Schools, connecting state and regional demographic trends to local enrollment patterns and competitive educational dynamics with the public schools. The analysis is intended to inform strategic decisions around growth, facilities, and enrollment sustainability using evidence-based planning rather than anecdotal assumptions so that Billings Catholic Schools continues to provide exceptional Catholic education emphasizing formation in faith, family spirit, and academic excellence in a changing regional context.

Process

The process for this analysis evaluates long-term demographic realities, assesses local economic capacity, benchmarks educational performance, and analyzes internal enrollment health. It begins with a macro-level population analysis using Montana statewide demographic data to identify long-term trends, specifically with the aim of understanding population trends as they relate to families and youth. The study then narrows focus to the county level to evaluate demographics, population projections, labor market conditions, wages and income, job counts and growth, and major employers in Yellowstone County.

At the community and school level, a comparison of education system performance benchmarks has been made between School District 2 and Billings Catholic Schools to create a competitive and contextual benchmark against which Billings Catholic Schools, specifically Billings Central Catholic High School can be evaluated. The process includes

forward-looking projections for School District 2 high school enrollment and anticipated bond elections, signaling how public system growth and capital investment may influence competitive dynamics and future planning decisions.

The internal Billings Catholic Schools specific data examines:

- Recruitment, graduation, and retention over multiple years
- Long-term enrollment trends
- Enrollment breakdowns

These education outcome indicators for comparison include:

- State graduation rates
- Public school district (SD2) characteristics
- High school performance and ACT comparisons

Key Insights

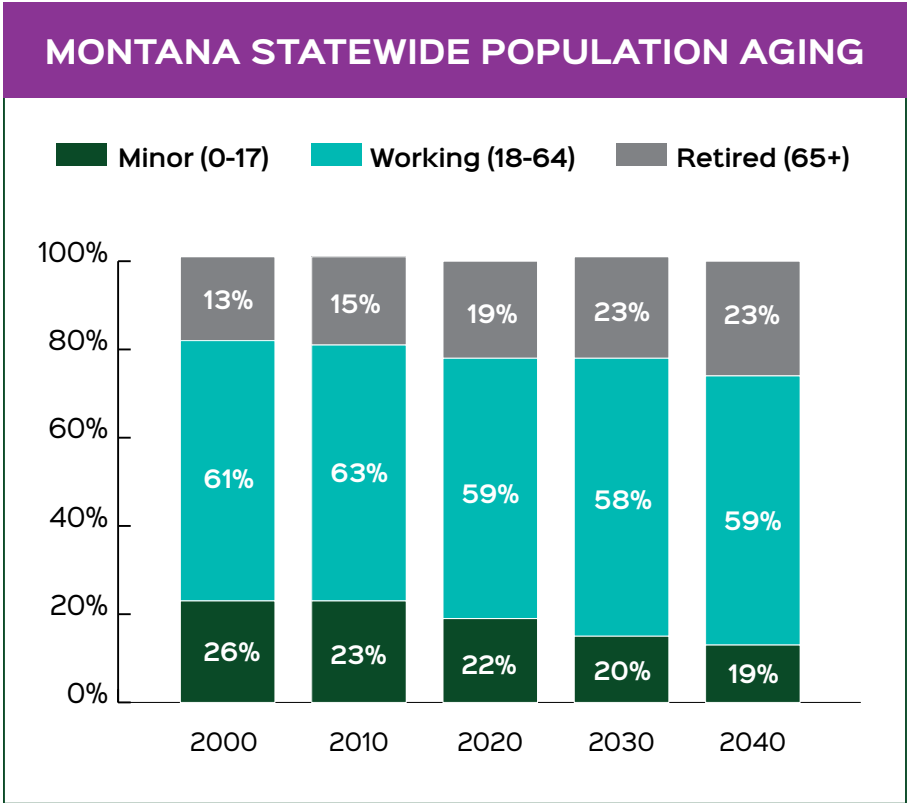
Internal enrollment, recruitment, retention, and longterm trend data suggest that future vitality will depend on clear mission identity, value differentiation, and intentional relationship-building with families, rather than population growth alone. To ensure a sustainable and vibrant Catholic education for future generations, Billings Catholic Schools will need to plan wisely, steward resources faithfully, and lead with clarity of mission.

STATEWIDE DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Source Data:
Montana’s Changing Demographics: 2024 Update, Jan. 2024,
Joshua Poulette, Molly DelCurto, Alice Hecht, Sam Schaefer

Statewide data indicates a gradual decline in Montana’s youth population through 2040 and the demand for the provision K-12 education relative to other services will slow or decline.

- Future enrollment growth cannot be assumed and must be intentionally cultivated through outreach and family engagement in a changing demographic environment.



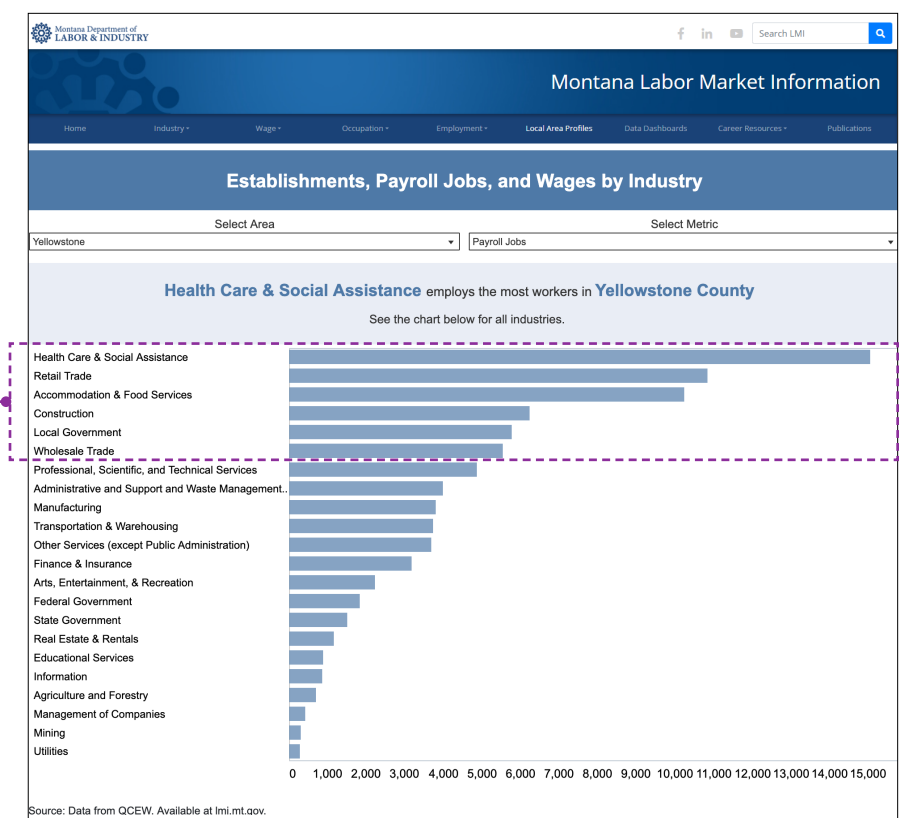
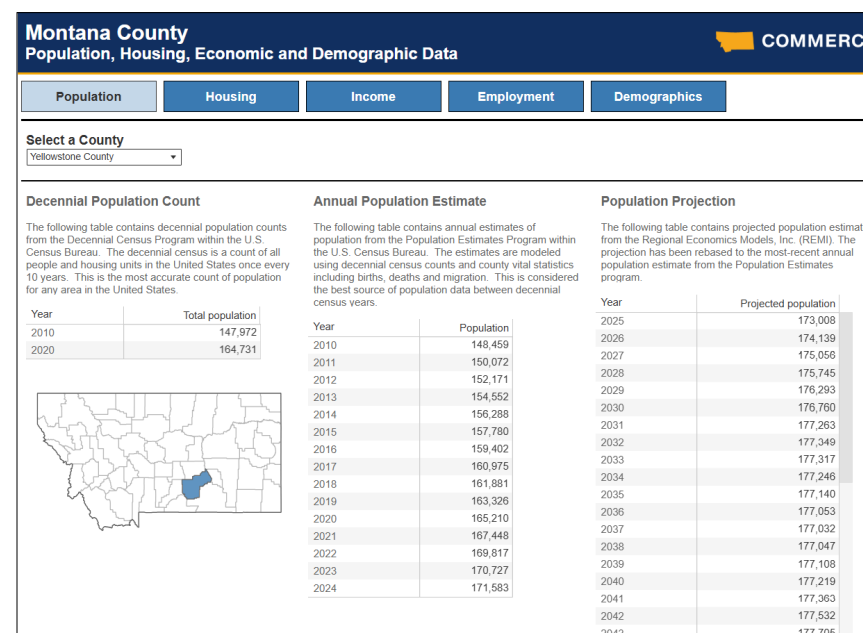
Assess Process & Key Findings

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY ANALYSIS

Source Data:

Montana Department of Commerce website <https://commerce.mt.gov/>,
Montana County Population, Housing, Economic and Demographic Data;
Big Sky Economic Development Economic Impact , Q1 2025

- Population growth is not expected to be a source of future enrollments in Billings Catholic Schools. The “market” of potential students in the County is approximately 42,000 kids. Across each demographic (under 5 years, ages 5-9, 10-14, and 15-19) the population is consistent, and the growth rate is consistent at an average of 6.3% per group.
- Career Technical Education connections to the healthcare, retail, hospitality, business & finance, and engineering industries represent career pathways opportunities to students.
- Yellowstone County’s relative economic strength is demonstrated through population trends, employment growth, and major employers, offering local opportunity even amid broader demographic challenges. The county’s economic strength provides relative resilience and can offset broader statewide youth population decline.
- Employment trends may affect family formation within Billings, and a family’s ability to make private school choice decisions.



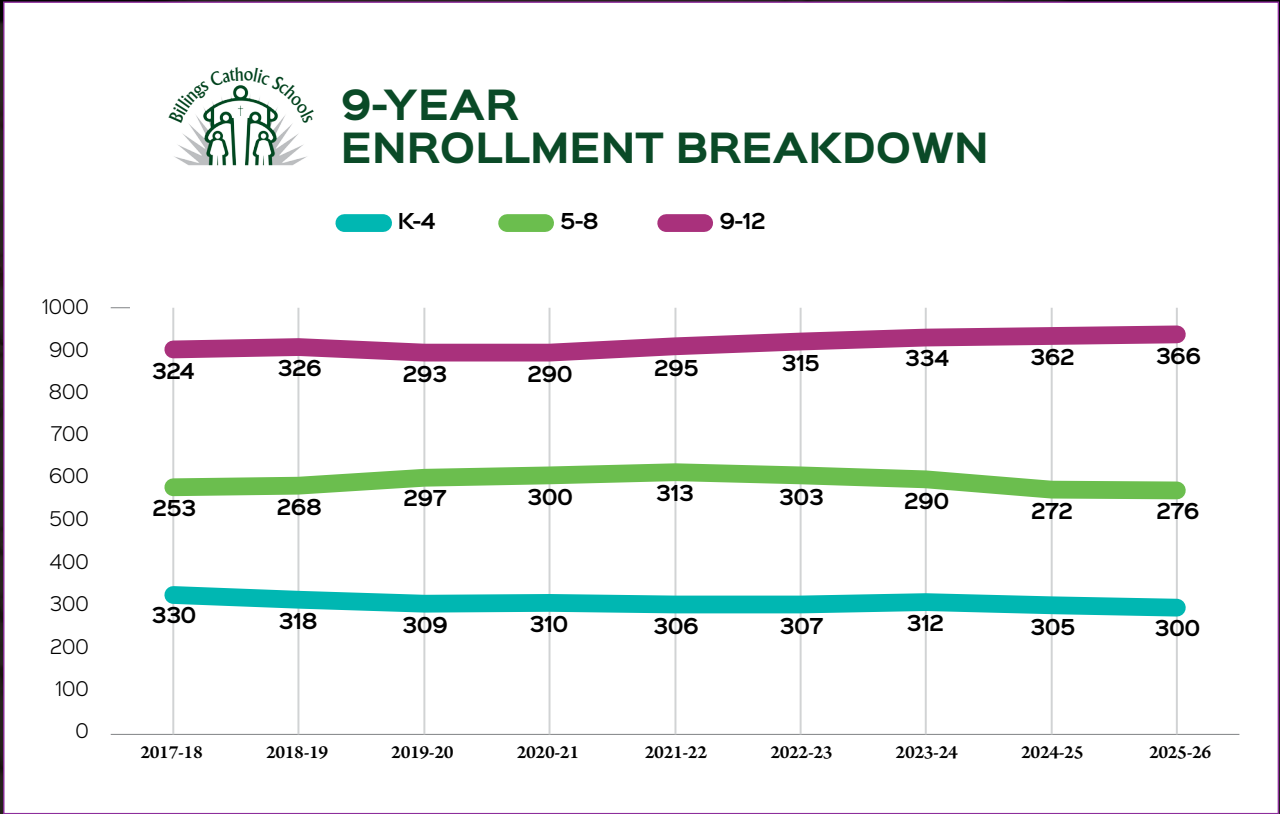
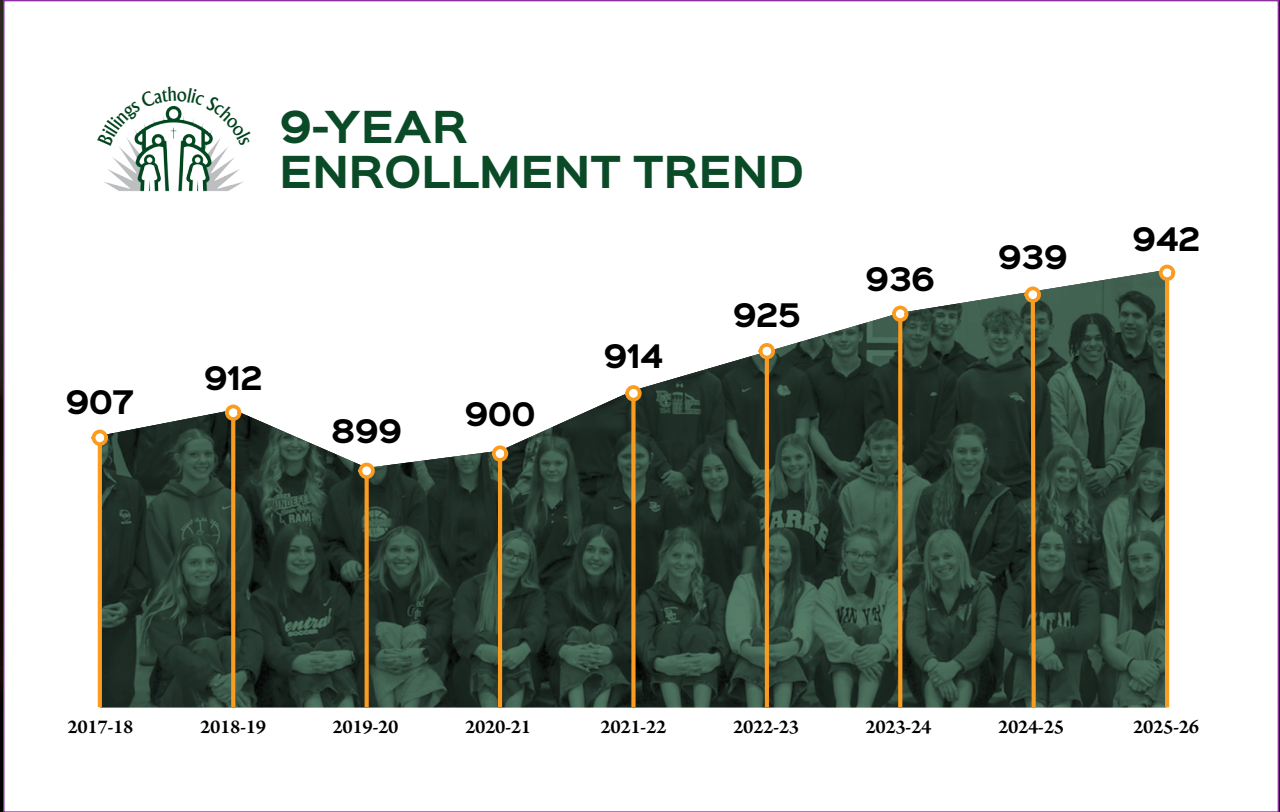
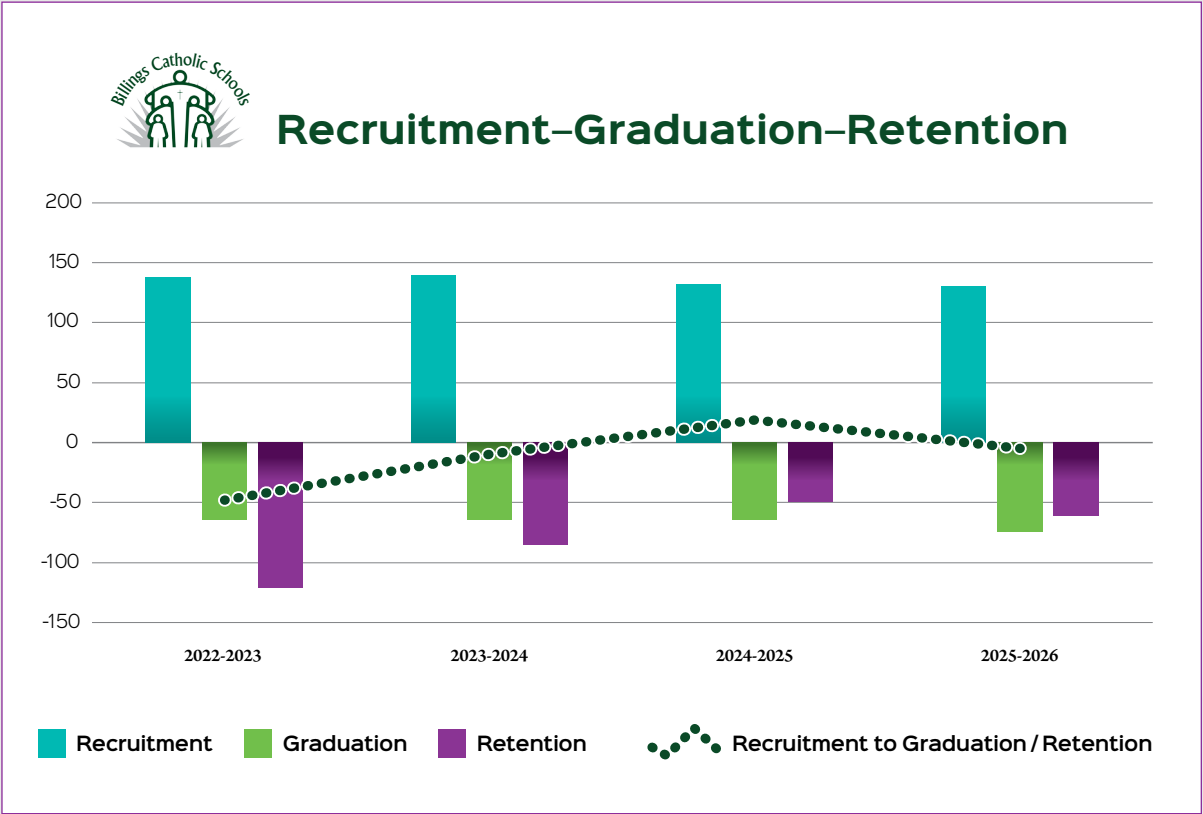
TOP 5 LABOR MARKETS | YELLOWSTONE COUNTY, MT

Healthcare & Social Assistance
Retail Trade
Accommodation & Food Services
Construction
Local Government

BILLINGS CATHOLIC SCHOOLS ENROLLMENT TRENDS

Source Data: Billings Catholic Schools

Enrollment in Billings Catholic Schools has remained relatively flat over the last 5 years and has not kept pace with population growth in Yellowstone County over the same period. This fact indicates that recruitment and total enrollment is a function of optimized capacity and available resources, not population in the community. It also suggests that the potential may exist to recruit more students if school capacity increased.

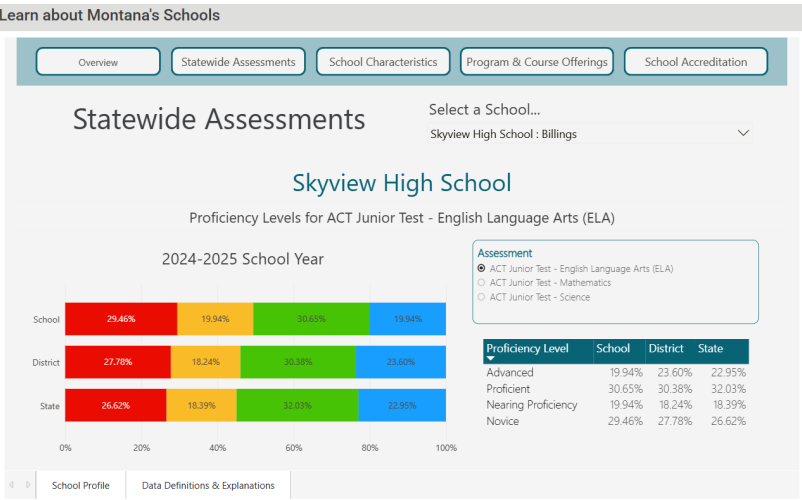
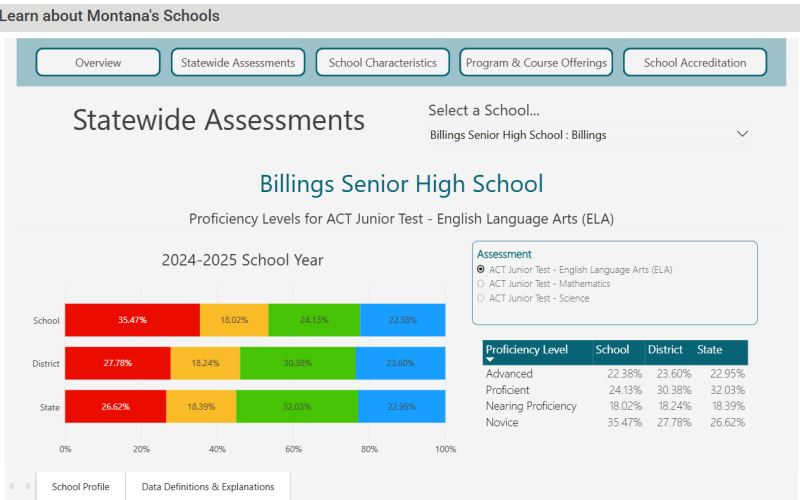
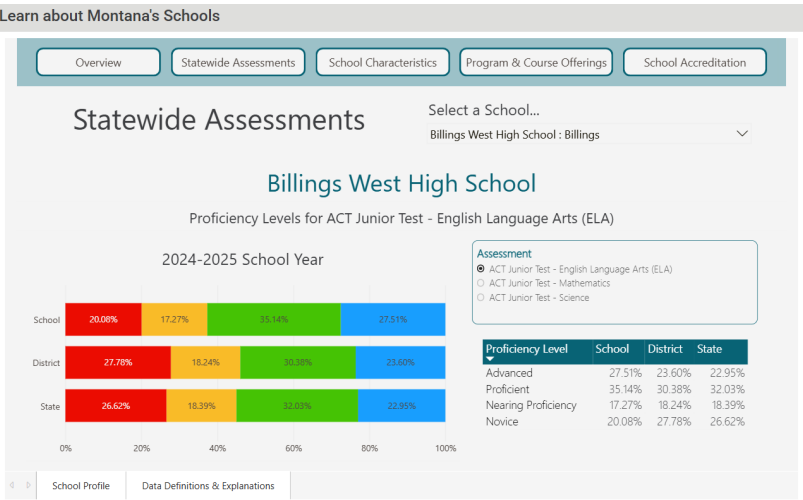


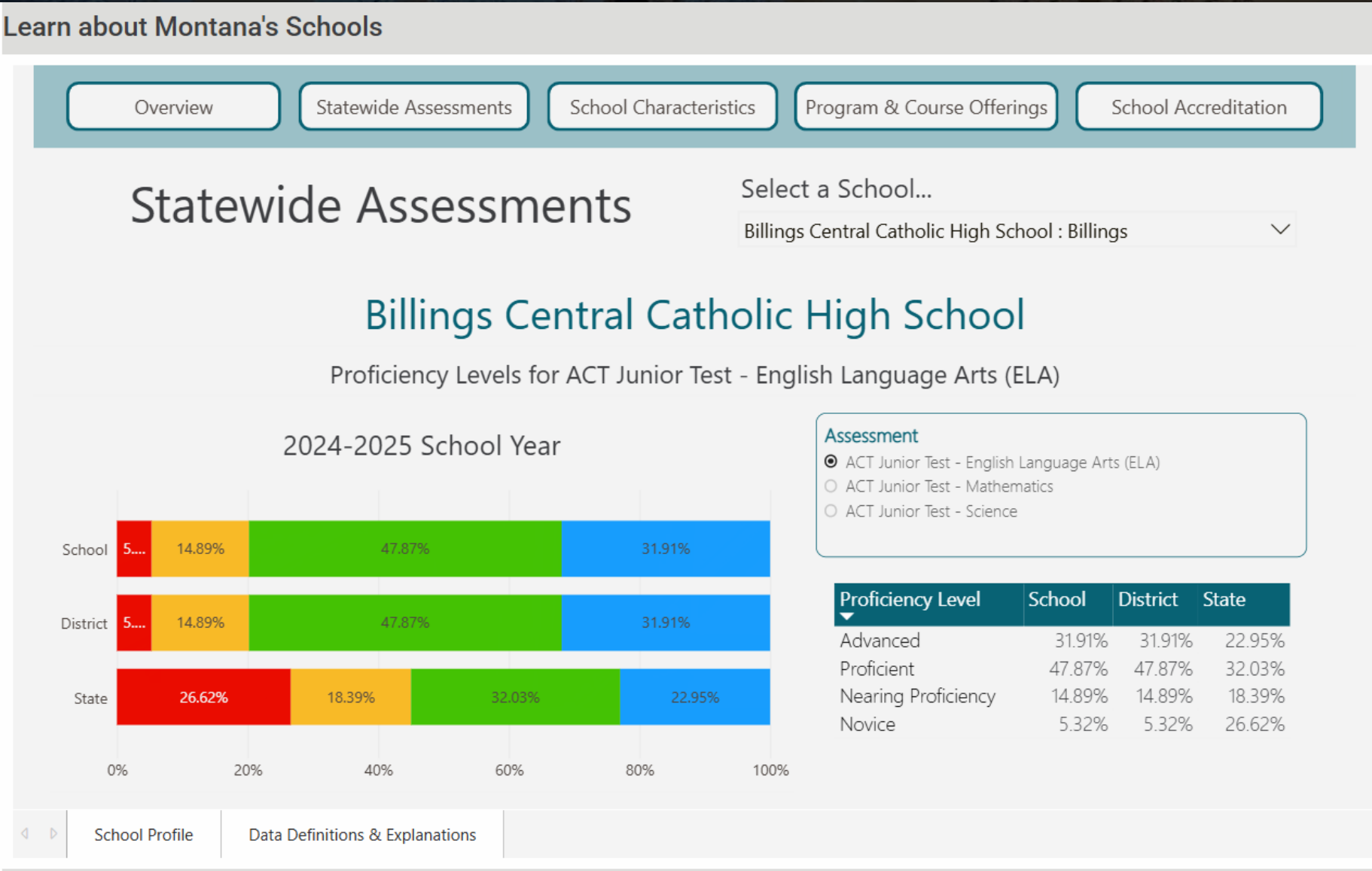
Assess Process & Key Findings

EDUCATION PERFORMANCE & COMPARISONS

Source Data:
Montana Office of Public Instruction, Growth and Enhancement of Montana Students – GEMS Data Warehouse website <https://gems.opi.mt.gov/>

- Billings Catholic Schools has approximately 3% of the “market share” of all school-aged kids in the County.
- The public schools offer more opportunities for economically disadvantaged students and students “on the fringes” in programs like those to English Learners, Free Reduced Lunches, etc.
- **Academic excellence** is evident by the level of **college-readiness** in Billings Central Catholic High School students. They out-achieve other high school students in Billings and across the State.
- School District 2 bond planning and emphasis on creating early career pathways for high school students through Career Technical Education highlights an active and competitive public-school environment that will influence family choice.





Assess Process & Key Findings



Visioning Session

Purpose

The Visioning Session provided an interactive, invite-only forum for BCS to bring together a diverse group of key stakeholders—including staff, young alumni, parish members, donors, parents, retired educators, and other engaged community members—to help shape the future direction of Billings Catholic Schools. Led by the Cushing Terrell team, the workshop created a structured environment for participants to share insights and set priorities that support the Assess Phase, ensuring the right information is in place to guide design solutions in the next phase.

Process

Andrew McDonald, with support from BCS leadership, invited a select group of stakeholders to BCCHS for a two-hour Visioning Session hosted by Cushing Terrell. Seven Cushing Terrell team members facilitated the workshop, several with personal ties to BCS.

1. The session opened with a prayer by Bishop Jeffrey Flemming, followed by a presentation covering foundational information, planning goals, key parameters, high-level cost context, and regional demographic trends. Participants then divided into small groups of 6–8 and rotated through three workshop stations, spending 10–15 minutes at each:

Station 1: **BCS Mission**

Station 2: **Existing Learning Environments**

Station 3: **Vision for the Future**

2. Each station was intentionally designed to gather specific insights needed for the Master Plan, and the small-group format encouraged active participation. After completing all rotations, attendees reconvened for a group debrief. Cushing Terrell facilitators summarized major themes from each station, followed by a brief discussion with participants before closing the session.

Key Insights

Workstation 1: BCS Mission (Academic Excellence + Faith & Family Spirit)

1. Strong academic outcomes and college readiness remain core strengths.
2. The small-school culture—where students are known, supported, and involved—continues to be highly valued.
3. Catholic identity is essential: Mass, prayer, chapel, religious art, and clergy presence should remain central in future facilities.
4. Spaces should clearly communicate “this is a Catholic school” through mission-aligned design and branding.
5. A warm, welcoming, and safe environment is a top priority across all stakeholders.
6. Flexible learning, hands-on projects, and small-group instruction are important components of academic success.
7. Opportunities for growth include more CTE/STEM pathways, expanded foreign language offerings, and increased experiential learning.
8. Larger gathering spaces are needed for Mass, assemblies, performances, and community events.
9. Parking limitations and lack of event space continue to restrict community activities.



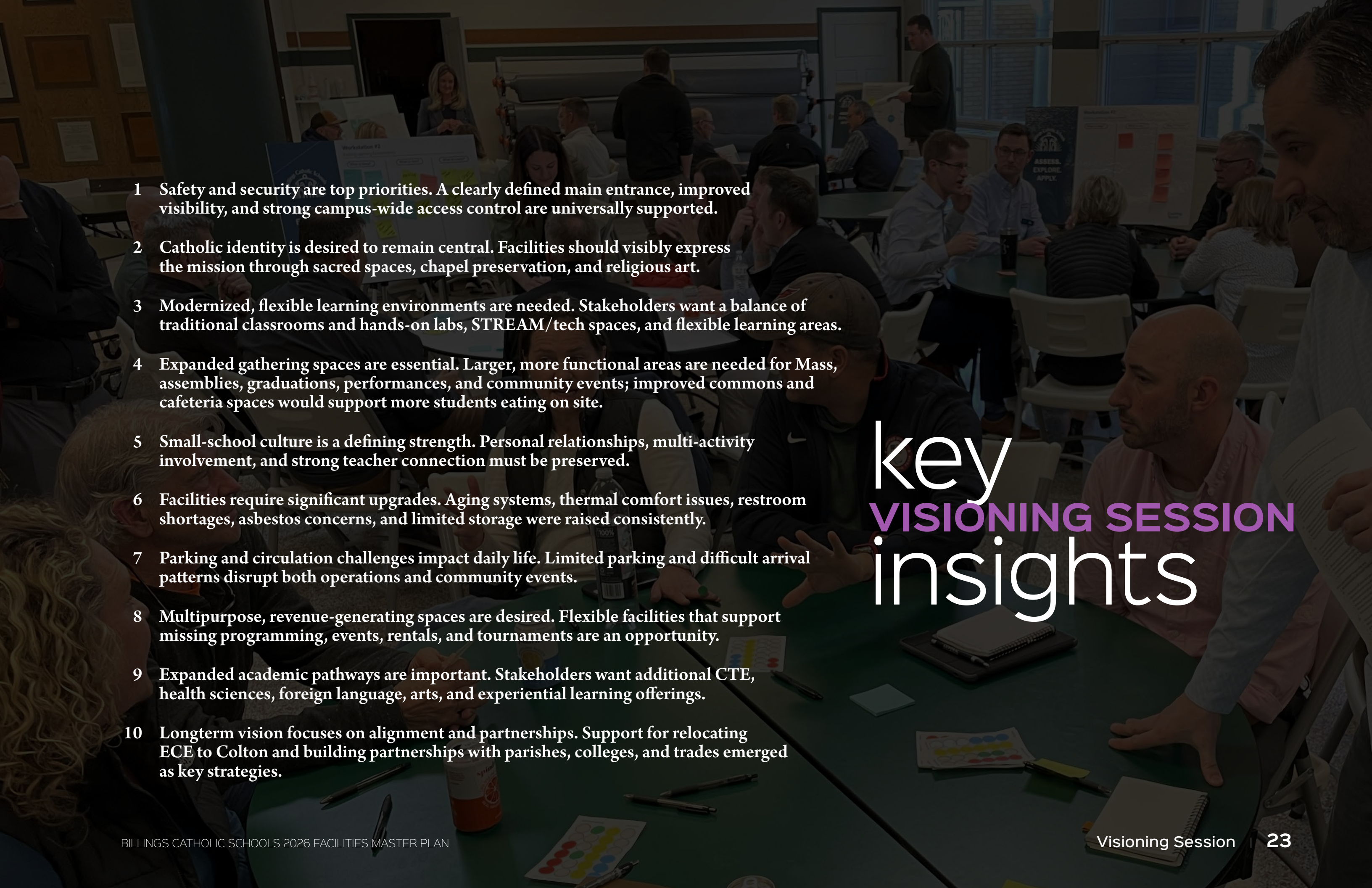
Assess Process & Key Findings

Workstation 2: Existing Learning Environments (BCCHS Focus)

1. Stakeholders appreciate traditional learning environments, natural light, and open hallways.
2. The chapel and other faith-based spaces are central and should be preserved.
3. Major facility concerns include asbestos, aging infrastructure, inadequate restrooms, poor thermal comfort, limited parking, and a confusing entry sequence.
4. The cafeteria, gym, art rooms, music spaces, and storage areas are undersized and need upgrades.
5. There is strong demand for improved safety and a more secure, clearly defined main entry.
6. Modern learning spaces—STREAM labs, tech/shop areas, flexible classrooms, and a digital library—are needed to complement traditional instruction.
7. A dedicated auditorium or fine arts center is broadly supported for performances, Mass, and school-wide events.

Workstation 3: Vision for the Future (Colton Campus + Community Partnerships)

1. There is strong interest in multipurpose, revenue-generating facilities—spaces suitable for events, tournaments, performances, and rentals.
2. Top needs identified: community gathering space, athletic center, performing arts facilities, and indoor courts.
3. A new high school is a longer-term vision—not financially feasible now—but community spaces, indoor sports courts, CTE and maker spaces, and flexible multi-use areas are seen as near-term priorities.
4. Stakeholders supported relocating ECE to the Colton site to improve longterm campus alignment.
5. Flexible, dual-use spaces are essential for sustainability and program growth.
6. Expansion of CTE, health sciences, and maker-space opportunities is desired and seen as an important future direction.
7. Strengthening partnerships with parishes, colleges, trades, and community organizations will help support programming needs and longterm vision.

- 
- 1 Safety and security are top priorities. A clearly defined main entrance, improved visibility, and strong campus-wide access control are universally supported.
 - 2 Catholic identity is desired to remain central. Facilities should visibly express the mission through sacred spaces, chapel preservation, and religious art.
 - 3 Modernized, flexible learning environments are needed. Stakeholders want a balance of traditional classrooms and hands-on labs, STREAM/tech spaces, and flexible learning areas.
 - 4 Expanded gathering spaces are essential. Larger, more functional areas are needed for Mass, assemblies, graduations, performances, and community events; improved commons and cafeteria spaces would support more students eating on site.
 - 5 Small-school culture is a defining strength. Personal relationships, multi-activity involvement, and strong teacher connection must be preserved.
 - 6 Facilities require significant upgrades. Aging systems, thermal comfort issues, restroom shortages, asbestos concerns, and limited storage were raised consistently.
 - 7 Parking and circulation challenges impact daily life. Limited parking and difficult arrival patterns disrupt both operations and community events.
 - 8 Multipurpose, revenue-generating spaces are desired. Flexible facilities that support missing programming, events, rentals, and tournaments are an opportunity.
 - 9 Expanded academic pathways are important. Stakeholders want additional CTE, health sciences, foreign language, arts, and experiential learning offerings.
 - 10 Longterm vision focuses on alignment and partnerships. Support for relocating ECE to Colton and building partnerships with parishes, colleges, and trades emerged as key strategies.

key VISIONING SESSION insights



PRODUCED IN
THE STATE OF MONTANA FOR:
BILLINGS CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
BILLINGS, MONTANA
DIOCESE OF GREAT FALLS - BILLINGS

CUSHING TERRELL 2026