

The Northwest Sampler - Montana

Location

Monforton Elementary
6001 Monforton School Road
Bozeman, MT 51798

Contact

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Grade span: K-8

Monforton School is located in a rural, bedroom community of Bozeman with a highly diverse socioeconomic makeup. For funding purposes, Monforton is three schools—a K-2, three through six, and seven through eight. However, in all other respects it is run as a single K-8 elementary school with 215 students in two adjacent buildings, one for K-2 and one for three through eight. All teachers are certified elementary teachers with many holding master's degrees. The district hires elementary-certified staff both for scheduling flexibility and because it prefers the "whole child" approach such teachers bring with them. The staff of 17 meets weekly as a K-8 staff and works as a team on all decisions about curriculum and procedures. The school does not ring class period bells. The schedule is flexible, with teachers often extending or shortening classes.

At the beginning and middle of the school year each teacher meets with the teacher at the next grade level. They confer about the strengths and weaknesses of the class that has just progressed and about particular students.

Monforton's K-5 grades are taught in a self-contained setting. **The teachers work together to plan activities and thematic units.** Monforton's middle school grades, six through eight, are semi-departmentalized. Each of the three middle grades' teachers is assigned to both a grade level and a subject area—social studies, mathematics, or science. At grade level they teach reading, writing, English, keyboarding, spelling, and study hall. Students are taught music, P.E., and library skills by specialists. Some ability grouping is done in reading and math. (Qualifying eighth-graders have the opportunity to take algebra.)

The older children are held to different requirements and have different consequences than the younger ones. They are expected to be leaders in the school, to exhibit responsible behaviors, and to take care of the younger children. They know they will be held accountable if they pick on a younger student. The sixth-through eighth-graders are accountable for completing their work and turning it in on time. Every Friday they receive a slip telling them if all their work is in. If it is not, they must complete it by Monday at 3:15. If students continue to neglect their work, they lose privileges, receive tutoring, and their parents are called every day.

The principal feels this system of keeping track of students and their work, though it requires much effort, works well. Students don't fall through the cracks and they meet with a great deal of success and support.

Monforton has many cross-age activities. Second- and fifth-grade book buddies write and illustrate books together, sit together at assemblies, and do research projects in the library. Eighth-graders work with first- and second-graders on the computer. In addition, a Big Brother-Big Sister program matches honor students at Bozeman High School with at-risk children at Monforton. The high school students visit Monforton twice a week for an hour each time, and once a month the Monforton students venture to the high school to meet with their mentors. **The mentors assist their mentees with school assignments, eat lunch with them, play with them on the playground, and call them at home once a week just to visit. Group activities are held throughout the summer months.**

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The principal would like to do more activities with the high school that would ease the transition to this institution of 1,700 students. This spring, the high school is implementing a "shadowing" program for all rural eighth-graders. Eighth-grade students will be matched with a high school student for one full day. They will attend classes together, have lunch together, and meet the following fall for a welcome to the new school and new year.

Observed Outcomes

- The local high school finds Monforton students as well or **better prepared than others, especially in technology and writing**
- A survey of graduates from the past 10 years found former students highly satisfied with the caring atmosphere and academic preparation at Monforton
- **Test scores are always above the state averages**

Keys to Success

- **The school is run as a partnership with parents, community, and staff**
- **The school has low staff turnover;** the principal attributes this to teachers' high degree of autonomy in curriculum planning and other areas, and to good salaries