

**MONTANA PUBLIC SCHOOL RENEWAL COMMISSION MEETING
MONTANA STATE CAPITOL
ROOM 303
LT. GOVERNOR OHS, PRESIDING
SEPTEMBER 8, 2004
9:00 A.M.**

Participating: Carter Christiansen, John McNeil, Steve Johnson, Scott Seilstad, Kirk Miller, Steve Gibson, Darrell Rud, Holly Raser, Mike Nicosia, Norma Bixby, Linda McCulloch, Peggy Trenko, Keith Allen, Bruce Messinger, Jules Waber, Don Ryan, Cathy Day, Eric Feaver, Tonia Bloom, Ron LaFerriere, Robert Murray, and Mary Whittinghill.

Recorder: Suzan Hopkins

The meeting was convened at 9:16 a.m.

The minutes from the August 16, 2004 meeting were discussed. There were no changes to the minutes.

Report: Modern Funding System

At the last meeting a group was convened to research this topic. Don Ryan spoke on behalf of this group regarding the school funding formula. He felt that we need to address changes in the school funding formula regarding fairness and adequacy to present to the legislature. He distributed a document titled, Wyoming School Boards Association, School Based Funding Model. He suggested we use a system that is based on education relevant factors, utilizing Wyoming's model, and replace Montana's numbers. This would alleviate hiring someone to come up with a model. Bruce Messinger stated that he was familiar with the process utilized in Wyoming to determine the cost of education. spoke in favor of this document. This proposal was put together in 2002 and was put in front of the legislature. Eric Feaver suggested that the motion not reference the Wyoming model specifically but that this model is an example of one that should be examined. Holly Raser suggested that factors that should be addressed are the unique needs of schools (fixed costs, building costs, classroom units, and student units). Needs based formula was suggested but no consensus was reached at the previous meeting. Bruce Messinger distributed a document addressing the school funding formula citing the following needs:

- An education that meets all standards and laws that govern the operation of public schools. This includes but is not limited to the Board of Public Education's accreditation standards, which constitute the foundation upon which a quality education is to be built;
- An education that meets the unique needs of all children, which includes at-risk, special needs, limited English proficient, and gifted and talented students; and
- That all districts are able to attract and retain quality educations.

He feels this statement is compatible with Don Ryan's proposal. Mary Whittinghill expressed concerns that the accreditation standards might not be adequate as they stand to define a quality education. Norma Bixby feels we should add to the motion language addressing the research of other states' models.

Kirk Miller pointed out that the accreditation standards on October 13, 2003 were one of the first items placed before the commission. It was the consensus then that the standards were in fact the basis upon which quality shall be built.

Tonia Bloom emphasized that the school districts around the state are in strong support of the importance and need for the accreditation standards; however there is room for modifications for the sake of efficiency.

Cathy Day stated that wording in the proposal should include meeting the needs of all the children, to include at-risk, special needs, limited English proficient, and gifted and talented students.

Darrell Rud stated that about 1/3 of our schools do not meet the standards, pointing out that there is work to be done.

Steve Gibson states that there needs to be some word changes.

Ron LaFerriere feels we need to look at other states' models, but he is in favor of the full statement proposed by Bruce Messinger.

Don Ryan is opposed to bullet number three, feels it is an afterthought, and should be part of the first sentence.

Tonia Bloom feels we can incorporate Don Ryan's proposal with Bruce Messinger's proposal.

Bruce Messinger stated that the accreditation standards ~~are what drive~~ guide what the school districts must do. He also suggested that the last bullet should include a change of the word *are* to the word *be*, changing the statement to read, "***that all districts be able to attract and retain quality educators***". He also feels that a resolution should come first and a funding formula will come from this resolution.

Kirk Miller stands in favor of the process that defines our accreditation standards. He addressed Mary Whittinghill's concerns that the BPE could adopt something that is outside of what the schools want regarding accreditation standards, stating that this process would not likely be against what the schools wants as it is a highly public process.

Linda McCulloch expressed her concerns about getting too specific regarding other states' models, as we haven't had time to research other states' models. She also suggested that bullet two should include the needs of American Indian students.

Eric Feaver pointed out that Valley Christian School **chose** not to meet accreditation standards, whereas other schools were not able to meet these standards due to issues beyond their control.

Norma Bixby, Steve Gibson, and Eric Feaver stressed that stronger language in bullet number two is important. (**must** meet the unique needs.....)

Messinger, Ryan, Raser, and Whittinghill will collectively craft a consensus document addressing all of the above issues and concerns, presenting it before the commission later during the meeting.**

Motion: Recommendation to study school funding formula based on educationally relevant factors, rather than the funds that are available.

Statements of Consensus Discussion

Kirk Miller addressed the document distributed, which was compiled using statements that reached majority or unanimous consensus since its inception. Two items he wished to add:

- Statement regarding accreditation standards (October 13, 2003) being the foundation on which a quality education will be built.
- The vision statement (January 12, 2004) which was re-crafted and reached consensus. This statement reads, **“The Montana K-12 Public School Renewal Commission will research and provide recommendations regarding the provision of a basic system of free, quality elementary and secondary schools.”**

Tonia Bloom agreed to add the above statements to the proposed document. She also pointed out there were statements left out. It was agreed that we go through each statement and make sure each person’s vote is correct. Kirk Miller emphasized that we not go over the statements as this has already been done and voted on.

Eric Feaver showed concern that the wording of each consensus statement reads, “the renewal commission supports.....” in order to have consistent language throughout the report.

Full Day Kindergarten

Mary Whittinghill feels that this statement was not voted on but it was rather one person’s comment. It was agreed to delete the first concept. Steve Gibson felt that the concept of full day kindergarten should include the words, “**voluntary** full day kindergarten”.

Gifted and Talented

Cathy Day pointed out a grammatical error, “The Commission supports (replacing support) legislation....”

Special Education

No changes

Educator Recruitment and Retention

No changes

Summer Opportunities and Extended School Opportunities

Tonia Bloom suggested that the headings, “Summer Opportunities and Extended School Opportunities” should be deleted but keep the two separate statements as is.

Eric Feaver strongly objected to the word “private” as referring to partnerships being kept in these statements, as previously noted in this document.

Pupil Instruction Related Days

Concept should be Professional Development as pointed out by Ron LaFerriere.

The sentence should read, “without reducing the minimum aggregate hours of pupil instruction required by law, encourage greater flexibility in the school calendar and time (days/hours) requirements **to** encourage local school districts to provide expanded professional development opportunities”. Holly Raser brought this suggestion forth.

Cultural Education

It was suggested by Darrell Rud to change the language in the last paragraph to state, “**These partnerships** will provide educational.....”

Kirk Miller stressed that these statements have reached unanimous consensus and the language should not be changed as it could alter the meaning of the statements.

It was agreed to leave the statement as is.

Quality Infrastructure

No changes

Full Day Kindergarten

Steve Gibson suggested that the statement should include the word “voluntary”.

Remove Barriers to Consolidation

Tonia Bloom suggested a change to item number five under no change in state statute to read as follows, **“Montana statute allows consolidations and annexation to occur with or without the assumption of bonded indebtedness by the newly formed a district as a whole. School boards decide between the two options prior to putting a proposition to a vote and that decision is reflected in the ballot language. Both the working group and the Commission as a whole engaged in extensive discussion of the merits of creating a single policy for bonded indebtedness, as opposed to leaving both options in law. There was no consensus on changing the law to create a uniform process and it was decided that the availability of two options allows school districts to respond more effectively to local circumstances. The Commission recommends no change to state law with regards to bonded indebtedness.”**

Number 8 under areas of the law that is clarified should read as follows: **“Tenure protection and hiring preferences for employees of districts that elect to combine through the process of unification should be the same as those for employees of districts that join by consolidation or annexation. Statute should be amended to reflect this.”**

Item number 1 under no change in state statute (is the re-worked number 5) should read, **“Bargaining of a new collective bargaining agreement should be left to management and labor in a newly combined district under applicable labor laws and under the guidance to the Board of Personnel Appeals. The Commission does not believe any legislation is necessary in this area.”**

Regionalization of School Services

Scott Seilstad suggested that the language on the statement should read, **“The Commission strongly views....”**

Revenue and Taxation Modernization

This statement should reflect that the School Renewal Commission recommends this statement.

Carter Christiansen voiced his concerns at having natural resource taxes being included as an existing statewide tax.

Kirk Miller again reiterated that making an editorial change would change the meaning of this statement.

*Madalyn Quinlan replaced Linda McCulloch at the meeting following lunch.

**The group consisting of Mary Whittinghill, Don Ryan and Bruce Messinger presented a new draft of the finance plan that was presented under the funding formula item. The new language reads:

The School Renewal Commission believes that all districts must receive adequate funding to cover the costs of operating and maintaining quality public elementary and secondary schools. This includes funding adequate to assure the following:

- An education that meets all standards and laws that govern the operation of public schools. This includes but is not limited to the Board of Public Education's accreditation standards, which constitute the foundation upon which a quality education is to be built;
- That all districts are able to attract and retain quality educators; and
- Educational services that directly address the unique needs of all children, which includes at-risk, special needs, cultural differences, limited English proficient, and gifted & talented students.

This statement reached unanimous consensus.

Kirk Miller also presented the statement that was agreed upon at the October 13, 2003 meeting regarding the accreditation standards being the foundation upon which a quality education shall be built. The exact language was being researched and will be distributed during the meeting.

This language distributed states, **“The Montana Accreditation Standards are the foundation upon which a Montana quality education shall be built.”**

Review Charge of Commission

Kirk Miller reviewed the document summarizing the charge of the Renewal Commission, prepared by Steve Meloy. He reminded the Commission that the funding for this project totaled \$45,000, even though \$80,000 was contemplated for this review.

This Commission began on July 11, 2003 and has met eleven times, with the concluding meeting being on September 8, 2004.

Final Report Discussion

The funding for the last meeting and the final report will come out of the Board of Public Education's budget. The person who will prepare this report is Dori Nielson. The expectation and the timeline of this report will be discussed and presented to Dori Nielson.

Bruce Messinger offered an opinion on the format of the final report, stating it should be concise and clear in order for peers to be able to understand.

Tonia Bloom reiterated that the report should be understandable and easy to read, but also have a functional bibliography with useable documents.

Ron LaFerriere advised that a press release be distributed in order to properly summarize the working of this Commission.

Four issues that need to be addressed in the final document (Kirk Miller)

1. Few pages that encapsulate the summary of the Commission,
2. Statements of consensus and reasoning behind them,
3. Research used to develop the concepts, and
4. Bibliography of all the documents used by the Commission.

Comments from Commission Members

Karl Ohs wished to thank all of the Commission members for their diligence and hard work on these issues.

Don Ryan thanked the Lt. Governor for chairing the commission and his leadership. He also thanked Kris Goss for his partnership and contributions. He wished the commission could have gone a little further. He also feels this is something that can be built on in the next few years.

Holly Raser expressed her appreciation for all of the work of the Commission members and the leadership offered by the Lt. Governor. She urged the members to contact their legislators to support these issues in favor of the children of Montana. She also expressed her frustration with not being able to go as far with these issues as she wanted.

Cathy Day expressed how important it is to participate civically before these issues get to the legislature; we should engage in these issues long before they get to the session.

Tonia Bloom echoed what had been said prior, including the fact that some strong principles and recommendations have come out of this assemblage.

Robert Murray thanked the members for sharing their knowledge with him, as one of the younger members of the commission. He introduced, Bertha ??? as a school board member of 20 years.

Kirk Miller appreciated all the effort of each of the Commission members.

Public Comment

No public comment at this time.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:14 p.m.