

Montana K-12 Public School Renewal Commission

Findings and Recommendations

Report to

The Education and Local Government Interim Committee

September 15, 2004

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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.

HB House Bill 736, passed by the Fifty-third Montana Legislative Assembly, established a Montana K-12 Public School Renewal Commission to propose changes and new provisions regarding the several components of K-12 public education in Montana, including the revenue available for public education, the structure of school district governance, the methods of funding public education, and the roles of state and federal governments in public education.

The twenty-eight members of the Commission held twelve meetings between July 2003 and September 2004, and are submitting this report of commission findings and recommendations to the Education and Local Government Interim Committee on September 15, 2004. A full report will be published by December 2004.

1.

Concept: Accreditation Standards

Statement: The Commission agrees that the Montana Accreditation Standards are the foundation upon which a Montana quality education should be built.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: October 13, 2003

2a.

Concept: Flexibility

Statement: The Commission recommends greater flexibility in the school calendar and time (days/hours) requirements. The Commission also supports encouraging local school districts to provide expanded learning opportunities addressing the unique learning needs of all students by flexing time and resources.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

2b.

Concept: Pupil Instruction Related Days

Statement: The Commission recommends greater flexibility in the school calendar and time (hours/days) requirements, without reducing the minimum aggregate hours of pupil instruction required by law, to allow local school districts to provide expanded professional development opportunities.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

3.

Concept: Regionalization of School Services

Statement: The Commission strongly recommends an intensive study of regional Education Service Agencies (ESA) as a key component in restructuring and renewing public education in Montana. Through hours of deliberate discussion, research, and analysis of ESAs in other states, working group members determined that intensive study of this issue is warranted, as the potential benefits of an effective ESA system include:

- enhanced opportunities for students and educators;
- more streamlined and effective partnerships between state and local education governance;
- significant cost savings;
- greater accountability, communication, and coordination between local school districts.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

4a.

Concept: Remove Statutory Barriers to Consolidation

Statement: The Commission recommends that statutes be clarified to eliminate barriers to voluntary consolidation of school districts. Eight specific recommendations were identified. The Commission recommends no change in state statute in five specific areas.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

4b.

Concept: Remove Financial Barriers to Consolidation

Statement: The Commission recommends that tax inequities between school districts be addressed and that any new funding formula avoid building in disincentives to consolidation. The Commission believes that some structural features of the current funding system and the current taxation system create disincentives to consolidation when such consolidation might otherwise make sense. These structural features include:

- the fact that the basic entitlement is the same for districts of every size;
- the fact that the taxable valuations available to support schools vary widely from district to district

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

5.

Concept: Educator Recruitment and Retention

Statement: The Commission supports statewide school district employee insurance pooling with state incentives for participation.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: July 19, 2004

6.

Concept: Gifted and Talented

Statement: The Commission supports legislation which would restore the position of Gifted and Talented Specialist in the Office of Public Instruction with an appropriate budget for an advisory council, professional development, liaison activities with post-secondary teacher preparation programs, and other outreach services.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: July 19, 2004

7.

Concept: Special Education

Statement: The Commission supports legislation which would begin to “phase in” increased state support for Special Education for such programs as services for “high cost” students with disabilities, preschool services, extended school year services, and professional development activities. Increased state support for special education should be provided in a balanced manner with the goal of offsetting local expenditures for special education.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: July 19, 2004

8.

Concept: Finance

Statement: The Commission recommends 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.
- Educational services that directly address the unique needs of all children, which includes at-risk, special needs, cultural differences, limited English proficient, and gifted and talented students.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: September 8, 2004

9.

Concept: Revenue and Taxation Modernization

Statement: The Commission recommends the following revenue and taxation revisions to support school funding:

- a. Implementation of a statewide equalization plan with an emphasis on homeowner equity and uniform property taxation.
- b. Funding the base budget using statewide equalization.
- c. Using **equalized funding** to fund 80-100% (maximized) budget.

- d. Using a balanced taxation approach that includes existing statewide taxes such as property taxes, income taxes, and natural resource taxes and also considers new revenue such as a general statewide sales tax to be used as a **mechanism for equalization.**
- e. Using a balanced taxation approach that includes existing statewide taxes such as property taxes, income taxes, and natural resource taxes and also considers new revenue such as a general statewide sales tax to be used as a **mechanism for funding quality public schools.**

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

10.

Concept: Full Day Kindergarten

Statement: The Commission strongly supports the benefits of expanding kindergarten services to improve student learning and achievement and supports the Montana Legislature providing the statutory and budgetary flexibility to school districts so they can offer additional kindergarten services for all students. School districts should receive state funding proportionate to the level of service they provide for kindergarten students ranging from half time to full time programming.

Vote: Majority Consensus (dissenting votes recorded)

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

11.

Concept: Cultural Education

Statement: The Commission supports state-funded Indian Education for All curriculums and polices/rules developed through partnerships led by the Office of Public Instruction, Board of Public Education, and legislature including Indian educators, tribes, and others. These partnerships will develop and implement:

- Policies/rules that support and insure that all schools provide the necessary guidance to the school instructional staff and programs to include culturally appropriate instruction for students.
- Professional development for all school personnel to insure they are adequately prepared to provide instruction and supportive services for all students, including Indian students.
- Curriculum development and supportive instructional resources necessary to meet state accreditation guidelines as well as local district standards to integrate culturally appropriate American/Montana Indian Lessons in all curricular areas in grades K-12 for all students.
- Assessments standards that incorporate measurements for the achievement of all students and are tied to the goals of Indian Education for All.

These partnerships will provide educational opportunities to eliminate the wide disparity in educational achievement that exists between the American Indian students in Montana's Public Schools and their non-Indian peers as clearly documented by educational achievement research and data.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

12.

Concept: Flexibility

Statement: The Commission supports state facilitated public/private partnerships for locally based summer programs and extended school programs for identified students.

Vote: Majority Consensus (dissenting vote recorded)

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004

13.

Concept: Quality Infrastructure

Statement: The Commission recognizes that adequate infrastructure, in the form of physical plant and equipment, is a key component of a quality educational system.

Overcrowded, substandard and inappropriate facilities negatively impact the learning environment. Although the Renewal Commission did not have the time or resources to explore in detail the infrastructure needs of Montana schools, the Commission recognizes:

- The importance of quality infrastructure;
- The unequal resources available to individual school districts to meet their infrastructure needs.

Vote: Consensus

Date of Vote: August 16, 2004
