

Montana Council on Educational Opportunity for Children

April 29, 2014 Meeting Minutes

Loy Elementary School, 501 57th Street North, Great Falls, MT

Attendance

Board Members: State Superintendent Denise Juneau, Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Harold Stearns, Master Sergeant Benjamin Aylward, Major Renea Dorvall, Superintendent of Great Falls Public Schools Tammy Lacey, Representative Jean Price

Board Members Absent: Senator Ed Buttrey

OPI Staff: Madalyn Quinlan, Amy Kruse

Invited guests: Mark Beckman, Executive Director(Montana High School Association), Siobahn Gilmartin (Office of Senator Tester); Bonnie Keller (Office of Senator Walsh), Cari Kent (Office of Congressman Daines), Cheryl Ulmer (Office of Senator Tester), Principal Teresa Sprague (Loy Elementary); Assistant Superintendent Ruth Uecker (Great Falls Public Schools); Ben White (Loy Elementary)

Call to order: State Superintendent Juneau called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m.

Welcome and Introductions: Members of the Council and the public introduced themselves.

Motion: *Jean Price moved to adopt the minutes of the January 31, 2014 meeting. Tammy Lacey seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.*

Principal Sprague welcomed the Council and the public to the school. She then discussed the unique challenges of the school with its 93% enrollment of military children. Due to their high population of military students, Loy Elementary School is the only elementary school in the state with a Junior Student-to-Student Program. The Student-to-Student Program, available in part because of a Department of Defense grant, helps transition a student and their family into a new school. When a new family comes to Loy, often at the lunch hour, Loy 6th graders give the student a tour and fill him or her in on important information, such as recesses, lunch, etc. while the parents are filling out paperwork. North Middle School also has the Student to Student Program which gives the students leadership skills and training opportunities.

Principal Sprague explained that the three-year Department of Defense grant ends at the end of this school year. This grant, which the district named TROOPS (Transitional Resource Opportunities Offered to Parents and Students), has allowed the school to focus on transitional supports, including filling positions with highly trained staff to build sustainability once the grant is over. Principal Sprague introduced Ben White who was hired as a Student Support Specialist. He supports the military students

of Loy though academic interventions as well as emotional support. Mr. White stated that the grant was approximately \$650,000.

Tour of Loy Elementary: Principal Sprague and six Loy 6th graders then took the members and the public on a tour of the school. The tour returned at 2:00 p.m.

There was discussion about the positive atmosphere of the school, abundant evidence of learning, and the close knit, family-like feel of the school. The highlight of the tour for many was the Purple Up! Day notes around the school, where students wrote what it was like to be in a military family. Ms. Ulmer discussed a previous Military Appreciation Day at the school that was meaningful to all in attendance. Principal Sprague discussed the importance of the Department of Defense's support of Common Core, allowing common language and standards wherever the families move.

There was further discussion about the demographics of Loy Elementary.

- Mr. Beckman asked what the average length of stay is for the Loy families. Principal Sprague and Master Sergeant Aylward both agreed 2-4 years is the average stay of military families in Great Falls.
- State Superintendent Juneau asked about the percentage of Malmstrom that is families. Ms. Kent responded that 2/3 of the air force base is families.
- 93 % of students at Loy Elementary are from active military families
- 5 of the 55 teachers are military spouses, 1 is a veteran. Superintendent Lacey said the Great Falls School District does not shy away from hiring military-connected teachers as they gain more from their perspective than they lose from their possible short terms.

State Superintendent Juneau presented the recent article in the Great Falls Tribune titled, "Us military brats don't have it bad." Principal Sprague read the article out loud. General Stearns suggested the article be used for future educational purposes.

Military Culture – Impacts on families and children – BG (Ret.) Harold Stearns

BG (Ret.) Harold Stearns gave a presentation on military culture and how it affects families and children. His presentations covered:

- Battle terrain vs. human terrain.
- Immense pride of the military, i.e. once a marine, always a marine creed.
- Unforgettable experience of the military – often the highlight of their life
- Military language – the valley of the acronym
- Military language changes over time
- Military time
- Range of veterans – WWII to Afghanistan
- All volunteer army. OEF/OIF veterans. Less casualties, possibly greater stress.
- Difficult to know who the enemy is now.
- Mental transition of going to war.
- Sources of stress – leaving family, stress of climate and living environment
- Books suggested for further reading: War by Sebastian Junger; Once a Warrior, Always a Warrior by Charles Hoge; and Invisible Wounds of War

Montana High School Association – Eligibility issues facing military children – Mr. Beckman

Mr. Beckman discussed the role of MHSAA, to protect fair competition between schools as well as within schools and ensure safety.

- Due to the mobility of military families, the MHSAA can get involved with transfer issues. Waivers can be given for military children if they need to be absent or are transferring during a competitive season.
- Timing issues are particularly challenging with military students. No transfer play is allowed during the post season.
- The 15 day transcript rule can also be waived for military families.
- Students going to basic training also presents challenges. MHSAA has a long standing partnership with the National Guard. Students going to basic training now have to attend the early training held in the summer so they don't miss the first days of fall sports training. Lt. General Greg Olsen is now in charge of that and Colonel Mora could be involved as well. Major Dorvall said she would look into talking to those to about the basic training issue.
- Major Dorvall asked about academic all state and whether it is determined by MHSAA. Mr. Beckman explained that the all-state awards are given by the Montana Coaching Association. Montana All Team, however, is a collaboration between MHSAA and the Montana National Guard.

Ms. Quinlan asked Mr. Beckman what the Council can do to help with the issues he sees in regards to military children and eligibility. Mr. Beckman said that education is the key component. The Council can help educate school administrators so they can be more understanding. Athletic directors could also be recipients of education on this matter.

Ms. Quinlan asked for additional comments and questions.

- General Stearns asked Mr. Beckman if he would now go to the council for help. Mr. Beckman answered, "Absolutely."
- Superintendent Lacey explained that not a lot of issues arise.
- There are 179 high schools. 103 of the schools have 119 students or less which makes them Class C schools. 80% of our students attend 20% of our schools, stated State Superintendent Juneau. Mr. Beckman discussed successful co-ops between schools.

Potential resources that the state council could develop or review – Superintendent Lacey

- Superintendent Tammy Lacey discussed the recent Purple Up! Day on April 15 to commemorate military families in the community. Superintendent Lacey explained the color purple represents all of the military branches put together. MT Air National Guard was the sponsor this year but Superintendent Lacey suggested the Council as a potential sponsor for the next year.
- Superintendent Lacey presented the Guide for Parents, School officials and Public Administrators and suggested this brochure be sent from the Council to all school administrators. The Guide is easy to obtain from MIC3 (Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission).

- Superintendent Lacey suggested the Council develop an additional brochure to explain the process on solutions for school districts and parents when they come to an impasse for answers. This brochure could be a companion piece to the brochure from MEIC3.

General Stearns asked Superintendent Lacey about Malmstrom's effects on the district. Superintendent Lacey stated that the schools seem to figure it out and Major Dorvall commented she has not heard any complaints about the district, saying "Montana takes care of its own."

Major Dorvall discussed behavioral health issues such as withdrawing and anger but Malmstrom does reach out calls every month. Help with finances and counseling for the family are part of the services offered by the military. Ms. Ulmer discussed the gap between counseling assistance with the reserve units. Due to the nature of their service, the reserve units are not always as reachable. State Superintendent Juneau reiterated the importance of mental health services to all. Ms. Ulmer suggested a travelling counseling team. Mr. White stated there is currently a one year contract for counselors but that does not allow for continuity which is vital when counseling an individual.

Major Dorvall discussed the importance of the Yellow Ribbon Program, stating "It is a phenomenal program – one of the best things we've done." The Yellow Ribbon Program presents the families with resources to get them through the deployment by building relationships, discussing what to expect when they come home, healthy sleeping and driving habits, etc. Ms. Ulmer said that the Yellow Ribbon program came about after a suicide in Montana.

State Superintendent Juneau commented that she wants to focus on mental health support, i.e. counselors having the ability to text message rural patients. Ms. Gilmartin stated that Great Falls feels like a pocket of warmth and support but education needs to be done elsewhere. Ms. Kent asked if teachers get special training on how to handle all the student movement due to military life. Superintendent Lacey replied that processes are in place, not necessarily training (i.e. professional learning time.) The turnover at largely military family schools such as Loy is also seen at low-income schools such as Longfellow and Whittier. Students go in and out of those schools. Military children generally don't return once they leave. State Superintendent Juneau commented on the great work done by the Great Falls School District with the transitions. Superintendent Lacey says it does present other challenges, such as with data. Looking at test scores, it is hard to determine where the results are coming from when kids move around with such frequency. She would like to see how a growth model data analysis would look.

Identifying and tracking students of military families –Ms. Quinlan

Ms. Quinlan said four new enrollment codes have been established for military-connected students in the statewide student information system. Infinite Campus is the vendor who will put these codes in place. Representative Price worked with the Office of Public Instruction on these new data fields. Ms. Quinlan said that if a student is identified as military-connected at any point in the school year that status will remain in place all year. Superintendent Lacey asked about how a Kindergartener would be marked and remarked that new enrollment forms will need to be revised by school districts once these new identifiers are in place.

Ms. Gilmartin asked what the data will be used for and Ms. Quinlan replied: the tracking of on time graduation, enrollment and eligibility. Ms. Ulmer questioned if the data could be used to acquire grants. State Superintendent Juneau stated that the data will help us understand issues and assess where student support is needed. Superintendent Lacey said data can be used to measure effectiveness.

Report to the Education and Local Government Interim Committee on June 16-17 – Ms. Quinlan

Ms. Quinlan reminded Superintendent Lacey that the Great Falls School District is required to report to the Education and Local Government Interim Committee on June 16-17. Ms. Quinlan said the Office of Public Instruction can get the report started.

Model School District Policy – State Superintendent Juneau

There is no national policy. Helena School District has a policy that the Council could use as a starting point. State Superintendent Juneau asked the council to bring suggestions for a model policy. Mr. Beckman suggested Joe Brott at MTSBA be contacted.

State Superintendent Juneau mentioned that during the last meeting there was discussion about the benefit of having representation on the Council from MHSA.

***Motion:** Representative Price moved to appoint Mr. Beckman to the Council. Superintendent Lacey seconded the motion. Vote yes 4-0. Major Dorvall and Master Sergeant Aylward abstained.*

Next steps:

- General Stearns will talk to Kirk Miller about the Council making a presentation to the school administrators at their fall conference.
- The Office of Public Instruction will continue to work with Infinite Campus on updating the codes showing military connectedness in the statewide student information system
- The Office of Public Instruction will notify administrators when the updated codes are ready, as enrollment forms will need updating
- Members of the Council are to bring ideas for a model policy to the next meeting. Mr. Beckman will talk to Joe Brott at MTSBA.
- Major Dorvall will bring examples of the positive impact of the Yellow Ribbon program.
- The Office of Public Instruction will get the report started that is required to provide information on the Compact to the Legislature on June 16-17, according to page 20 of SB203.

Meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Next meeting will be in Helena in August or September and will focus on the developing of a model school district policy for military children. A presentation of Fort Harrison's programs for military-connected children and families will also be part of the agenda. The date is yet to be determined.