Budget & Education Working Group

Group C: Rural, Population, & Culture
June Meeting Summary

Below are notes from comments made by the Budget & Education Working Group members.

Narrative:

In June the group discussed various issues related to education, revenue, and housing in rural areas of Montana. Additionally, they considered challenges faced by teachers in rural schools, including excessive responsibilities and the support needed for students with behavioral issues. The members also explored ways to increase teachers' salaries and attract them to rural areas. Solutions included building housing for teachers, offering tax incentives, and sharing school administrators or teachers to reduce overhead costs. The conversation also highlighted the importance of community involvement and mentorship programs in supporting schools and retaining teachers in rural areas. Members discussed their experience with successful family engagement initiatives in school districts and advocated for more such initiatives, suggesting the use of volunteers and grants as potential funding sources.

Discussion Points:

- Funding sources for school
  - Marijuana tax revenue could be better directed toward education funding. With such a large increase of revenue.
  - Public trust land revenue for schools
- Teach Retention
  - Workplace environment
    - Schools remove programs that teachers find beneficial during budget crunches
    - Need to look beyond salary to make sure teachers have support and resources needed to be successful.
  - Extra responsibility on top of classroom duties add to the stress. More incentives or stipends for extra responsibilities.
  - Discussed tying more using to quality teacher incentive vs ANB count. This can help address varying enrollment numbers in smaller schools.
  - Sign on bonuses.
    - Oklahoma utilizes sign on bonuses for new teachers. Higher bonus for those moving from out of state with teacher licenses.
  - Strengthening mentorship in rural schools and between rural schools.
- Behavioral issues with students
  - Behavioral challenges arising in varying student population.
  - Support for paraprofessional
  - Behavioral problems effecting other students in classroom due to lack of safe space to move students having episodes or problems.
  - How to handle student who disrupt classroom when support isn't there.
- Community Engagement

- Lack of respect from students, administration, fellow teachers, and community demoralizes teachers.
  - Parental disengagement – how to engage families and communities more.
- Educate community on the needs of the school, student, and educators. Rebuild supportive relationship between school districts.
- Grant pilot program for parent and community engagement.
- Leverage volunteers from the community. Leverage businesses in the district to help fund events or projects- not a legislative fix.

- Sharing resources between districts
  - Can we utilize specialized teachers or certain resources between smaller school districts?
  - Class C school make not have much access to music or art teachers, can split days between schools.
  - Share administrative burden or administrative employees for smaller school districts: superintendents.
- Consolidation
  - Although it can be a very sensitive topic, a genuine analysis into school district consolidation should be looked at.
  - Montana has more school districts for population than other states.
- Cost of Living
  - Housing
    - Teacher housing pilot program.
    - Combination of taxing short term or second home – or a tax rebate for those who rent to teachers (police, firefighters).
      - Some areas do not have rental housing opportunities.
  - Inflation rate has increased the cost of living for teachers.
- Overhead costs
  - Deferred maintenance for older school buildings. Improvements now cost more.
    - Hard to find contractor to perform work in more rural areas. Increases costs.
  - Pay for support employees: janitorial and cafeteria staff.