



Budget & Education Working Group

Group E: Programs & Curriculum June Meeting Summary

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

Narrative:

The group emphasized the need for dedicated state funding for afterschool programs and discuss the challenges of navigating federal and state requirements for funding for after-school programs and childcare. The conversation also touches on the increase in severity and number of services needed for special education students. The group also focused better support for unfunded mandates, specifically regarding funding for gifted and talented programs. The group referred to the lack of funding for special education, including shortages of OT and PT providers, untrained staff, and difficulties with the funding formula. The group considered increasing funding for special education services and improving teacher salaries to attract and retain educators.

They group discussed the issue of school district consolidation in Montana due to the large number of school districts and schools compared to the population, as well as the possibility of sharing resources between school districts. The group emphasized the need to prioritize funding and look at where the money goes in the state, as well as the idea of assigning a per student cost to different parts of the budget and creating a minimum number of students for funding to prevent abuse of the system.

Discussion Points:

- Teacher Retention & Recruitment
 - Raise base pay for entering teachers.
 - Discussed proposals tying funding to quality teacher payments and less focus on ANB. The ANB does not reflect the teachers needed for the classroom.
 - Important to message to community and how changes prioritize the students' education.
 - Base funding on the needed classrooms: Guardrails needed for very small schools.
 - Teacher Licensure:
 - Current reforms are aligning to neighboring states. Can it be made easier for licensure reciprocity for other states?
- Unfunded mandates:
 - What can the state do address the unfunded mandates: gifted & talented, special needs.
 - Direct the Decennial study to investigate specific areas, look into the unfunded and underfunded mandates at the state level.
- Afterschool programs: There is not consistent and designated funding for afterschool programs from the state.
- Schools being creative under financial strain
 - Pod model being used in some schools. Can help integrate newer teachers.
- Special Education

- Special education funding does not cover the cost of the special education professional let alone the paraprofessional to support the students.
 - Challenge to provide required services when the schools cannot financially meet the needs.
 - Greater difficulty retaining special education teachers.
- Consolidation
 - Look how neighboring states consolidated- south Dakota Wyoming
 - Consider how neighboring school could consolidate resources, administration, buildings...
 - Collaborative efforts, such as shared teachers or specialized services
- Building Fund
 - Wyoming: the state funds building projects. Schools apply and projects are approved and funded by the state.
- Revenue
 - How can we capture more tourist dollars? Resort tax...
 - Sales tax: consider a sales tax on certain items.
 - Return ability for localities to raise resort tax or other taxes for education purposes.
- Allow communities to go above max budget caps.