



Budget & Education Working Group

Group G: School Budgeting July Meeting Summary

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

Narrative:

In July the group explored the potential implications of shifting school funding towards teachers' salaries, acknowledging the potential benefits of attracting and retaining staff but also the challenges of deeper cuts elsewhere when budget crunches occur. They discussed the challenges faced by urban and rural schools and the importance of respecting community preferences in education and the potential benefits of consolidating districts for sharing administrative burdens. They acknowledged the need for a conversation about the potential impact of annexing smaller schools into larger districts and the importance of understanding the potential impacts. The discussion also addressed unfunded and underfunded mandates in education, such as English Language Learners, Gifted and Talented, and the need for a deeper analysis of these mandates. They discussed mental health services, technology, and addressing behavioral issues in schools. The conversation also explores housing shortages and the cost of living.

Discussion Points:

- Reforms should not pit rural or smaller schools against larger more urban schools.
- Shifting model to focus on needed teachers rather than a student count driven model
 - Pro: State carries a higher burden; Ageing state, less school-aged kids, less growth in schools.
 - Con: During budget crunches or recessions in the future. A teacher-based funding system could cause greater teacher cuts if budget savings need to be found in the future.
 - Have to find a balance between weighing a student-based and teacher-based funding.
- Simplified vs Responsive Funding
 - Four different funding formulas, for AA, A, B, and C.
 - Cost of living and expenses
- Recruitment issues
 - Cost of living in areas like Bozeman
 - Desirability of more rural areas with less services
 - Not just a salary issue.
 - How can the community assist in recruiting and provide support for teachers that may be relocating to a more rural area.
 - Recruitment issues go beyond teachers. Other positions are hard to fill.
- How can districts assist each other more?
 - Teacher support and mentorship between schools and districts.
- Consolidation

- Annexation of school districts: Depending on districts it could save taxpayer dollars or allow for increased teacher salary.
 - Some positions may be lost, but these may also be positions that have been hard to fill for the district.
 - One size doesn't fit all.
- Must address community concerns during consolidation discussion
 - Community transparency and buy-in.
 - Conversation needs to be had to review the possibilities.
- Administrative cost
 - Can the state serve a more centralized role that would remove administrative burdens from schools.
 - Central office positions: important services and cost savings for schools available.
- Per-pupil funding
 - Community expects certain services, but those are often the first to get cut: PE, music, art, gifted & talented...
 - Technology or safety services. All schools and all students need these services, what is the cost per-pupil for technology?
 - Reading proficiency per pupil allocations.
- Housing
 - Cost of housing makes it hard to recruit teachers and other school support employees.
 - Short term vacation rentals
 - Incentives like tax breaks for rentals to teachers.
 - High taxes for short term rentals or out of state residents.