



Chapter 55

**These are written
Public Comments on the
6 rule revisions coming from
Electives and General Comments
Received May 17th, 18th, 19th**



Written Public Comment
Electives and General Comments
Received May 17th and 18th

As a former school board member and chair for over a decade in a rural school district (Anderson School), I oppose the proposed changes and recommendations by Superintendent Arntzen.

These recommendations are unfair to rural communities, and more importantly, our students who need the librarian and counselor rations maintained.

Many thanks,

Carmen McSpadden

I am writing to comment on the proposed changes in the OPI adjustments to school accreditation requirements. In particular, the proposal that would affect the music teacher positions and replace them with just any 'elective'. For a well-rounded education, students must have experience with music and for many of our Montana schools, elementary school and middle school may be the last opportunity these students have.

Music is necessary for the development of a well-rounded, healthy individual. People are more than just the knowledge they know--we have Google for that. Creativity is a basic human need, as well as one of the things that sets us apart from other creatures. Instead of 'deleting' the music teacher requirement, why not just change the language to reflect that accreditation will not be affected if the district has done, and continues to do, everything they can to hire a qualified music teacher?

I realize the severity of our teacher shortage in Montana. Music teachers are especially affected and many districts have had positions go unfilled for a significant amount of time. The shortage existed in our small schools pre-pandemic, and it's likely to affect the larger districts as well because of skyrocketing living expenses. We need other solutions that don't impact the students and teachers so severely. I suggest finding ways to increase teacher pay so as to keep, and attract, quality teachers in Montana.

Thank you,

Chandra Lind

Orchestra Director

Chief Joseph Middle School

Bozeman Public Schools

My name is Chris Irwin and I'm writing to you as a parent of three boys in the Whitefish public school system. I've recently learned that there may be a proposal in the works to remove the requirement of the arts from mandatory instruction requirements for middle schools across Montana. I would like to express my concern with pursuing such a course of action as I feel it will have a negative effect on Montana children.

I don't want to presume why such a proposal might be under consideration. But I would like to say that I feel arts are a crucial part of education for young people. My wife Jenn (cc'd here) and I have absolutely loved what the middle school band program has done for our kids. Our eldest son is now a freshman in high school and is a very active member of the varsity and jazz bands. This was largely the result of the instruction provided to him in middle school. Our second son is now following that same path as a 7th grader. And we hope our youngest boy will do so as well.

These activities give our kids a creative outlet they can't find elsewhere. Music makes them more rounded people and develops their minds in ways that other subjects do not. The groups they are a part of also provide social interaction and a sense of belonging at a time where it's sorely needed for young people. Band teaches them how to work as a team in ways that math, English, and science cannot.

I believe our society needs all types of people - scholars, athletes, and artists. And I fear that if we restrict the breadth of instruction for our middle school kids, we risk losing some measure of our diversity of interest and perspective culturally.

I don't know what the reality of this situation is exactly but I'm hoping there is still the potential to keep these programs in our schools. If I am misinformed on any of the above please forgive my ignorance. And if you are not the right person to contact in this regard please forward my email as you feel appropriate.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Cheers,
Chris Irwin

Please also encourage the Negotiated Rule Making Committee to preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. We do not want students to lose access to courses due to these changes.

Thank you for your time,

Dana Holland

I am emailing regarding the Negotiated Rule Making Committee meeting tomorrow and some changes proposed by Supt. Arntzen.

I am a teacher at Whitefish Middle School and a mother of future Whitefish students. I ask that you maintain the current language to preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle school students. I also ask that you keep the current language to maintain existing librarian and counselor ratios.

Being a teacher at a middle school, I see the importance of keeping the existing language to assure that ALL of our students receive a quality, well rounded education. Also, especially in today's Covid related school climate, it is critical that our students have access to a counselor when it is needed and that they have access to a librarian to support their research skills that may be lacking due to the challenges over the past 2 years.

Thank you for your time,

Erin Bodman

Public education is under direct attack through the language Superintendent Arntzen has submitted for consideration. This is an attempt to undermine public school educational offerings and slash their already diminishing budgets. Public school teachers are already under considerable burden to provide for students while Ms. Arntzen continues to devalue the system she was elected to protect. I strongly condemn the changes the Superintendent is suggesting and hope that this committee feels the same way.

Evan Lampman

Please, please, please consider not changing the current languages of this proposal. Our students are in crisis mode and need all the love and support they can receive. I beg you to visit schools and notice the relationships our counselors and librarians have with students. As odd as it may seem to some – for a few of our neediest students – the library is their safe space. A quiet spot where they can escape in research and novels. A spot where they aren't judged and can talk with the librarian about what they've read. As we enter an era when mental health crisis's are at an all-time high – how our state could ever consider eliminating this resource is beyond me. Please – please consider the health and mental wellness of kids before you make these decisions. These young people are our future – and we need to take care of them!

Finally – why is music always a threatened cut? For pete's sake. There's so much research about music and brain development. Come on. We must, as a state, find ways to reach ALL students. Music is one of these avenues.

I beg you not to consider these horrible changes that have been proposed. Elise is proving time and time again to not always support public education and what is best for all - but instead promote an agenda of what is best to the elite. Please please do not forgot ALL students today as you consider these changes. We must support Montana students.

Montana is a great state. A place I'm proud to have been born and raised. These proposed changes do not make me proud. I want our future generations to grow up with more opportunities. Not less. Please think with your heart – and consider children.

Thank you

Jen Mooney

I am writing in opposition to Elsie Arntzen's proposed changes to specific elective programs and credit requirements for middle schools in Montana.

This would be a very destructive change to our public education system and the students.

In a time where drug use is skyrocketing with more dangerous drugs and violence and disrespect prevelant in our whole country, to take away opportunities for our middle school students to expand their interests and knowledge base is irresponsible. We need to expose kids to healthier alternatives instead of limiting them.

I am a retired middle and elementary school teacher who taught for 40 years in St. Ignatius. I believe in public education and saw many times how these electives specifically turned students lives around and gave them a reason to be excited about education and the exploration of new ideas.

Please consider denying these changes. These were developed over time thoughtfully and carefully by educators who had the best interests of students in mind.

Sincerely,

John Fleming

St. Ignatius, MT

I implore you to ignore Superintendent Arntzen's latest proposals to gut and eliminate specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools. Students desperately need full access to counseling services; librarians; visual arts; world languages; career education and music classes including band,

orchestra, choir and general music. Their very souls depend upon these resources. Eliminating the current specific ratios for these services from the requirement language unfairly targets rural schools. Cutting arts and humanities programs targets ALL students.

Keep in mind that in high school, ONE music teacher often has 75+ students in one classroom at a time. It takes three other teachers in three other classrooms to hold this number of students. That's three teacher salaries versus one. Bands, orchestras and choirs are all large. The number of teachers required to house the music students multiplies. If you gut middle school music programs, high school programs are affected, and schools are forced to hire multiple teachers to replace the music teachers' student load.

This shouldn't be a funding issue. Do the right thing for our Montana students and keep all elective programs and credit requirements in place. Our children deserve a complete education.

Sincerely,

Julie A. Blakeslee

Please keep our middle school electives and credit requirements. Students need these classes to expand their horizons!

Thank you, Julie Parker, Missoula

I urge you to reject the changes proposed by Elsie Arntzen to our accreditation standards in schools. I am the parent of an elementary aged child and a middle schooler in Livingston, and I have been a teacher in Montana for almost 20 years, 10 of which have been as a high school librarian. I offer the opinions that follow as both a parent and an educator.

Specifically, I object to the following changes:

1. Proposed revision of 10.55.709 School Library Media Services
2. Proposed revision of 10.55.710 School Counseling Staff
3. Proposed revision of 10.55.902 Middle School Elective Offerings

It seems all three revisions above are proposed to give flexibility to rural schools who have trouble filling teaching positions, but rather than helping these districts, it is harming ALL students in ALL districts. There is already a process in place for schools of any size and circumstance to apply for a deviation from accreditation standards. Why must the standards be lowered for all districts instead of allowing those who truly are facing hardships to have each case considered by its own merits?

Students in Montana deserve access to a school library, preferably in each school building, and that library needs to be staffed by a dedicated and trained library professional. Requiring only one certified librarian per school system rather than per school (based on enrollment) will mean that many schools, due to budget constraints or administrative agendas, will cut librarians and access to library services. In this day of information overload and misinformation, students need access to reliable sources and a trained, trusted adult who can curate resources and teach them how to navigate the ever-changing and confusing landscape of information. Of course we also cannot underestimate the power of reading for personal growth and pleasure, and for rural students especially, their school library is the only ready source of reading material and perhaps even computer access. Additionally, librarians are often tasked with managing the proliferation of technology and devices in their schools, a role which has increased exponentially in the past two years. Who will handle and care for all these devices when librarians' jobs have been eliminated?

The same reasoning as above applies to the school counseling staff changes proposed. We need MORE school counselors, not fewer. Rural schools who can't staff adequately can apply for a deviation. Both of my children have benefited greatly from the presence in their schools of trained school counselors, and most people acknowledge the importance of mental health services for our youth. Why would you want to provide LESS support for our students? Our school counselors not only provide emotional counseling to our students, but also academic, as they help students apply for college and scholarships or pursue relevant work experiences or programs.

Lastly, I disagree with proposed changes to 10.55.902 middle school elective offerings. By not specifying that students should receive offerings in music, art, career and technical education, and world languages, no doubt many of our schools will dilute their offerings because it is the easy way out. My middle school daughter is passionate about art and wants to pursue a career in design, and this would not have been fostered without her classes in art and CTE. Our programs at the high school level are only as strong as the interest generated at the middle school. If our students don't get exposed to classes outside the core curriculum, how can we develop and build upon their interests and create excellent programs when they reach the upper grades? There is absolutely no reason to dilute what we are offering. In the post-COVID educational landscape, we need MORE engaging curriculum that is not taking a standardized test or working through curriculum online. When we start to sacrifice the areas that are seen as "extra," whether that is library, counseling, or electives, the whole child, the whole educational system, and the whole COMMUNITY will suffer.

I urge you to reject the proposed changes and keep current staffing and offering ratios in our standards.

Sincerely,

Kate Lende

Park High School

Livingston, Montana

In one of Arntzen's recent newsletters, she calls for a renewed emphasis on math and reading and for basing teaching on evidence-based best practices; yet 20 years of studies show a very strong correlation between student achievement and school libraries staffed by trained librarians. Furthermore, art and music are integral to what we offer at Corvallis. Additionally, just in the past year alone, my 6th graders, as a class, have relied on our two counselors for an unprecedented consistent wave of multiple traumas and losses; this extends beyond the grade level I teach. I cannot imagine more cuts regarding librarians, music and art teachers, and counselors. All the expertise or subjects that bring out the humanity in compulsory education. They are needed.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; for, indeed, that's all who ever have.

Margaret Mead

Kate Naughter

6th Grade Language Arts

Corvallis Middle School

Please accept my comments regarding Superintendent Arntzen's proposed changes to Chapter 55. I am a public Montessori teacher in Helena Public School District. I have two teacher credentials, one from California and one from a MACTE accredited Montessori teacher preparation program.

I grew up in California and attended public schools until leaving for college in Vermont. I never had a designated music teacher, librarian, PE teacher, or counselor at any of my elementary schools. My teachers did the best they could to teach all of these subjects in addition to having no contract prep or lunch, instead doing recess, lunch, and bus duty. I didn't know what I was missing, or what my teacher-mom had to endure, until I raised both of my sons (now ages 21 and 24) here in Montana and became a Montana public school teacher myself.

My boys had such good music instruction in elementary school here in Montana that they now make money in the music industry. The counselors at their middle school helped them get through our family's divorce, which mitigated negative effects on their academic and social/emotional skills. Both of my boys have a deep love of reading which comes from their library teachers throughout their K-12 experience in the Helena Public School system.

Please, I beg you, do not take away these resources from our future Montana students and teachers. As a teacher now, I am able to collaborate across grade levels and subject areas with my music, library, and counseling colleagues. Please don't take that away from me, either.

Thank you for all the work you do on behalf of public education.

Katy Wright, M.Ed, NBCT

Public Montessori Teacher

Smith Elementary, Helena

The arts are practically the only thing certain students come to school for. Please keep the creative process alive in these students. I know if I hadn't had art, woodshop, sewing, cooking....etc., I likely wouldn't have liked school at all. Thank you!

Kimberly Dixon

Middle School Art Teacher for over 35 years.

I'm writing in complete shock and horror at the list of proposed changes Elsie Arntzen is recommending. As a middle school teacher for the last 27 years and librarian for 7, I would like the record to show that I believe these proposals are an attack on public education itself. It shows an utter disregard for the **children** and **teachers** of this state. I'm incredibly sad and disheartened by this news.

I'm also ready to join whatever groups are forming to fight these ridiculous proposals.

Sincerely,

Kim Gange

Kimberly Gange Reid

CFJH Teacher-Librarian

PLEASE maintain preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.

The proposed changes are ludicrous and offer no accountability for the state and school boards to maintain that it can offer a quality education. Students transferring mid year would have no way of keeping up with a random school's decided offerings without some form of continuity throughout the state. Don't let politics get in the way of education and our children because that is what is happening here. Montana cannot be a state where only select few get quality education and the rest fend for themselves. That is what you'd proposing with these changes.

Sincerely,

Kodi Hoffmann

Montana Educator

I would like to go on the record as being vehemently opposed to Superintendent Arntzen's gutting of public education. The changes presented would be catastrophic for the students and teachers in Montana. As a teacher in Columbia Falls for the last twenty-five years, it saddens me to hear that this is even a possibility. One would think the Superintendent of schools would be pro-education, not looking to dismantle it.

With a heavy heart,
Kristy Gange

6th Grade Science

CFJH

Chapter 55 Public please maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements in Middle School. Thank you!!

LaRae McGee

Wow, this idea is a shocker. To help a student become a functioning, well rounded, compassionate person in our society all subjects need to be preserved and valued. I am a choir teacher, and I testify that the students I have are better at academics, emotionally more stable and compassionate, all from being involved and participating in music. I pray that the committee finds wisdom for truth and discovers the priceless value of the subjects being suggested for elimination.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Braun

MS/HS Choir Teacher

It is my understanding that these (below) educational programs are going to be nixed. I would like them to stay the same. Not all students are the general academic student. Their blessed interests and abilities lies in music, art, agriculture, dance, drama. Of these aren't offered it is unfair to expect them to go without expanding and experiencing this part of their makeup.

Middle school students should have English, Language, Social Studies and Science. We are turning out uneducated students. Many deficiencies are noticed when people can't spell, use punctuation or speak or write correctly using the noun, verb, object parts of sentences. This makes these people sound ignorant, when in reality they haven't been taught how to use our language correctly. Social Studies and History needs to be taught. The best part of History is knowing what happened, so we don't make the same mistakes again. Only one year of these curriculum just isn't enough to make a person a conscientious citizen. Please don't short change our students.

Elsie proposes striking the following language and replacing it with "elective offerings." *That means students will lose access to the following programs.*

~~i) visual arts including, but not limited to art history, art criticism, aesthetic perception, and production;~~

~~(ii) music including, but not limited to general, instrumental, and vocal (emphasizing comprehensive music elements, music history, criticism, aesthetic perception, and musical production);~~

~~(iii) career and technical education courses or pathways such as agriculture, business education, family and consumer sciences, health occupations and industrial technology education; and~~

~~(iv) world languages.~~

~~(f) offers as electives to all students exploratory courses such as creative writing, dance, drama, financial education, photography, and leadership.~~

Elsie proposes striking this language altogether:

~~(4) A junior high (grades 7-9) or 7-8 school must offer an educational program, aligned to the program area standards, that enables all students to meet the content standards and content-specific grade-level progressions.~~

~~(a) Instruction in reading literacy and writing literacy shall be incorporated into all required and elective program areas as required in the Montana Common Core Standards, ARM Title 10, chapter 53.~~

~~(b) All students shall complete the following program areas each year:~~

~~(i) English language arts--1 unit;~~

~~(ii) social studies--1 unit;~~

~~iii) mathematics--1 unit;~~

~~(iv) science--1 unit; and~~

~~(v) health enhancement--1/2 unit.~~

~~(c) All students must be allowed to elect from the following program area offerings:~~

~~(i) visual arts--1/2 unit;~~

~~(ii) music--1/2 unit;~~

~~(iii) career and technical education--1/2 unit; and~~

~~(iv) world languages and cultures--1/2 unit.~~

~~(d) A unit is defined as the equivalent of at least 8100 minutes for one school year.~~

Lynette Huvaere

South School Secretary

Please, as the committee looks at recommendations from Arntsen, take into consideration the requests from teachers and retired teachers. We do not want programming to be taken away from students. The state and OPI are looking to dismantle public education. We cannot lose our public schools. The committee must fight to preserve public education for all.

Thank you,

Margie Willhite

Educators across Montana are shocked at the alarming accreditation rule changes being proposed by Superintendent Arntzen and OPI. These changes would drastically change and weaken Montana's public schools and our children will suffer.

If schools are allowed to eliminate libraries, students lose access to books and other meaningful library programs that serve as a hub for many schools.

If schools are allowed to eliminate school counselor positions, students lose access to mental health care at a time when our students need it the most. It will also become more difficult to promote Social Emotional learning without the support of our school counselors. As such, Montana's public schools will be out of compliance with Montana law which requires SEL in our schools.

If schools are allowed to eliminate music programs, students lose opportunities to develop their talents, miss out on the unique brain development that occurs when one is involved in music and lack unique and healthy connections with their classmates and trusted adults.

If schools are allowed to eliminate the visual and industrial arts, students again lose opportunities to develop not only their talents but also potential job skills.

The list goes on! These "elective" classes are key components of a child's education and the development of the whole child will suffer without them.

Bottom line--Montana's constitution requires that we provide a quality education to the children of our state. We must maintain our current accreditation standards in order to meet that constitutional requirement (and potentially avoid litigation). Anything less is a failure to educate our children, a failure to uphold our constitution and a failure to secure our future. At a time when students and teachers...and families...have been through so much because of the pandemic, we cannot continue to kick them when they are down. Please do not approve these rule changes.

Thank you,

Megan Pepe

Whitefish Middle School

7th & 8th Grade History

This seems like a huge change that has been proposed to the middle school curriculum which seems like it would undermine the quality of education students in Montana are currently getting. I don't think this is transformative in any way that would benefit students.

Sincerely, Melaina Ames

Dear Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

I'd like this email to represent my public comment in regards to Superintendent Arntzen's proposal of striking the following language and replacing it with "elective offerings."

~~i) visual arts including, but not limited to art history, art criticism, aesthetic perception, and production;~~

~~(ii) music including, but not limited to general, instrumental, and vocal (emphasizing comprehensive music elements, music history, criticism, aesthetic perception, and musical production);~~

~~(iii) career and technical education courses or pathways such as agriculture, business education, family and consumer sciences, health occupations and industrial technology education; and~~

~~(iv) world languages.~~

~~(f) offers as electives to all students exploratory courses such as creative writing, dance, drama, financial education, photography, and leadership.~~

To summarize, the proposed changes Superintendent Arntzen is proposing would negatively impact all students in our state, but particularly rural students. By eliminating specific language in the accreditation standards, like art and music, overtime students across our state would lose access to those electives and programs.

As a proud mother of four teenagers, one currently in college studying fine arts, I know how negatively his life would have been impacted had he not had access to photography, drawing, pottery, and design classes in high school. These classes set him up to feel successful and provided a safe way for him to express himself in a time in his life full of change and uncertainty. Both his dad and I are grateful for his middle school art experiences and appreciate the positive impact the classes had on him then and continue to have on him today as a college student.

I urge you to DECLINE the proposed changes that would strike specific elective language.

Sincerely,

Melissa Romano

The need for mental health services is greater than the availability for those services. Currently I am responsible for 355 students, and I am spread very thin. It is vital that we get more school counselors in the buildings and more therapists working with schools. Today, I spoke to a parent who has had their child on a waiting list for 8th months to see a therapist with no light at the end of the tunnel. School counselors are not therapist and should not be put in the position of acting as a therapist (see A.6. of the ASCA Ethical standards for school counselors.)

Take care,

Michele Goyette

CR Anderson Grade Middle School Counselor

I am sending comment to you regarding **several changes to school accreditation standards as recommended by the Superintendent of Schools.**

- **Basic Education Program Middle Grades, 10.55.901:** Superintendent Arntzen has made recommendation to eliminate specific programs and credit requirement in middle schools. This recommendation will prevent student access to critical topics and instruction. I ask that you **do not accept her recommendation** as our Montana Middle School students need to have a broad education program to prepare them for successful high school achievement and life success.
- **School Counseling Staff, 10.55.710** Arntzen's recommendation to eliminate counselor/student ratio requirements is absolutely **unacceptable**. We constantly are hearing from across the state about the declining mental health of our students and this is not the time to eliminate requirements that provide support for life skills and counselling. Please **do not support Arntzen's recommendation to eliminate counselor/student ratio requirements**. I also noted that she has eliminated the word "licensed" and replaced it with "endorsed" school counselor. I am not sure how this small change effects our schools, but I believe the effect could be unlicensed school counselors or educators not adequately prepared. Licensed School Counselors are a critical component of insuring adequate training for school counselors. Please **do not accept the recommendation of Arntzen**.
- **Library Media Services, 10.55.709** Again Arntzen's recommends eliminating the ratio between students and library media specialists is not acceptable in Montana. Please **do not support Arntzen's recommendation** to eliminate the FTE ratio of librarians to students. A well trained and licensed Librarian is critical for the intellectual development of the K-12 students in Montana.

Respectfully submitted,

Micki MacGregor

We live in Missoula, which, granted, is not rural; however, having lived in Montana for 60 years, we feel it is essential that EVERY school have access to all programs. We believe strongly that NONE of the programs should be cut.

Feel free to contact us: Betty Dee and Phil Russ

I just read with abject horror the rule changes being proposed by OPI and Mrs Arntzen on "Elective offerings" and Language striking out Jr High educational program offerings.

These changes and strikings are directly aimed at gutting any standards that will help Montana produce well rounded students - and would take years to correct.

It is my opinion that they are I'll considered and unworthy of any real consideration for adoption!

Go back to the drawing board!

Thank you,

I am writing you to comment on the proposed changes to Library Media Services, Assignment of School Counselors, and Graduation Requirements as outlined in the document attached here.

https://docs.google.com/file/d/1ColQwG8F_naFOWfRK82YY-4fWNkmd3_l/edit?filetype=msword
[\[docs.google.com\]](https://docs.google.com)

I'm concerned that the members of the committee don't read enough to know what they'd be doing to **school libraries** if the changes to **Library Services** is adopted. Do you actually think librarians just sit around in the library filing their fingernails? That's what it sound like in your proposed changes. People who actually go to the school library know differently. We know how many hours they have helped each of us who used the school library. Librarians also teach every kid how to find the books they want since they are shelved in a certain order in the library. And don't forget that librarians spend a lot of time assisting students in finding relevant information on-line. .

What makes the Committee think that having one Counselor for every 400 students is too many? Are you kidding? I know several Counselors in four different school systems in the state, who are working their tails off to help keep kids in school and they wish they had more help. The teachers are doing their jobs, trying to teach each kid the subjects that are required. When a kids is too disruptive, the Counselor is asked to assist. And it's not like this request for assistance is rare. It happens all day long. The Counselors also teach certain classes as required by the school curriculum so they have lesson plans just like he teachers, but not as extensive, because they don't teach classes every single day. They are expected to keep the peace in their school and be available to every student for assistance, a shoulder to cry on, a person to help them figure out what is going on at home, a person who can help them make big decisions when they don't have anyone else, etc. It was just a few years ago, that every school in Helena was required to provide a counselor and now it appears that you ae backtracking. Why on earth would you do that when the kids are getting what they need now? **It's unbelievable that you would reduce true Counselor service to the students and teachers.**

Some of the changes in the **Graduation Requirements** must have come from someone who didn't like gym class. I didn't like it either, but my experience is that allowances are made for those who could not participate or who would not participate for certain reasons. It's been pretty simple. At one point, you sound much too flowery and very undecided with your "or an equivalent that meets the district's curriculumstated in the education program". Then you contradict yourselves and totally remove the need for music, art, career preparedness, other languages, and the requirement to be literate when you graduate from high school. How ridiculous is that? I have no problem with making sure Native American culture is taught in school, but you need to consider who will teach it. It should be taught by someone who knows the real history, not someone who follows the old stories of Columbus Day, General Custer, etc. Students need to learn the history of the American Indian from both sides, the good and the bad from both sides.

As you can tell, I am AGAINST most of the proposed changes outlined. I can't picture a school as dry and unimaginative as what you propose. What would you do that to the teachers and students?

Robin M. Nelson

I am writing to you about the vote that is taking place regarding Music Education and the Arts in our schools and the unfortunate possibility of these programs being taken away from our amazing children and jobs from our dedicated teachers.

I truly believe that Music in a child's life encourages critical thinking, motivation and enhances social skills. Also, it teaches students how to work together in a large group and independently. Music and the Arts are

critical as it enhances brain development for our children which will only benefit them for life and strengthen Montanas hard-working standards.

Please consider voting to keep these programs in effects for our students and our teachers. Thank you for your time.

Ruthanne Paulus

Montana Resident

My name is Sara Budt, and I am a public school teacher and parent of a middle school student. The changes Superintendent Arntzen is recommending to elective programs for middle school students is incredibly concerning. It is essential for students to have access to electives of all types to prepare them for high school, college, and life after graduation. There is no positive to students if these changes are made. I hope these changes are not finalized! Students come first, and making these changes shows that is NOT Arntzen's priority.

A concerned parent and teacher,

Sara Budt

comments to the committee asking them to maintain preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.

Dear Ms Loveridge,

Please maintain and preserve the electives and credit requirements for middle school parents.

Sincerrely,

Shirley Azzopardi

In my opinion I believe it will be a critical mistake if we get rid of mandated classes as student will have limited access to elective classes. Students need to be well rounded humans by being able to have access to a variety of classes throughout their entire schooling career. If we get rid of the language and therefore the educational opportunities that already exist, we will be doing a huge disservice to our students and families.

Stephanie Goebel

Physical Wellness Teacher

Helena Middle School

It has been brought to my attention as a parent of 2 elementary age students and as a high school teacher myself, that there are proposed changes in the works that will potentially limit essential school staff including librarians, art, music, and counselors. The language of the proposed changes is deeply concerning to me. While I understand staffing rural schools is challenging at times, the fact of the matter is that Montana has a mental health problem that spans the state and affects all ages. Access to qualified counseling and programs that support positive mental health growth in students such as art, music, and library science are critical for our children. I am strongly against removing the student staff ratio requirement for these essential school positions.

Thank you for your time and attention in this matter,

Steven Sinskichott

Loyola Sacred Heart High School

Missoula, MT

It has come to my attention that yet another blow to our middle school students is at hand. They've already lost two years of regular in-person education, and now it is being recommended that their most loved classes will be excluded.

Please do not allow our elective programs to be gutted! These are the programs that get at-risk kids to school and brighten every student's day! Please keep ALL elective requirements! These should not be stolen from our students for any reason.

Sincerely,

Taylor Clark

Middle School Teacher, CJMS

I am writing today to encourage you and the rest of the Negotiated Rule Making Committee to reject OPI and Superintendent Arntzen's recommended changes to chapter 55 accreditation standards.

My biggest concerns are:

1. School library media changes that will limit student access to libraries and books, as well as remove requirements for needed librarians by changing student ratios.
2. Changes to school counseling that would limit student access to much needed counselors in their schools at a time when they are needed more than ever. These changes seem particularly ill advised with rates of depression, suicide, and mental health issues on the rise.
3. Changes to middle school curriculum; changing the physical and life science to sciences (there is developmental and precursor knowledge reasons for these two sciences being part of the MS curriculum and good research for their placement here).
4. Removing the arts, music, career technical education, and world language from the specific program requirements of middle schools. This will no doubt send the message to school districts looking to save money that these areas can be removed and are not important to the education of Montana middle school students.

Please stand up for students and teachers in our schools!

Tom Cubbage

GFEA President and high school science teacher in Great Falls

You must maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. If the changes that have been proposed go through, many teachers will be out of a job. Kids will lose valuable classes like technology and music classes. There will be no standard across the state and public schools will start to lose

credibility. This is not what the teacher want, nor our union, nor our state. Don't make the wrong decision, preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.

Mr. Ivory

Team D Math Teacher

It is with some alarm that I've looked over Superintendent Arntzen's proposed changes to library, counseling, and middle school accreditation. The Superintendent has written, on the OPI site, that for "Montana schools to offer the highest caliber education, the basics of math and reading must be prioritized." It is hard to imagine anyone arguing the importance of reading and math. That is why proposals that could allow districts to gut library media services seem puzzling at best, especially given the wealth of research that shows a strong positive correlation between vibrant school libraries and high student achievement – especially for disadvantaged students.

The proposed changes to school counseling and middle school curriculum are equally puzzling. Many of our students need considerable counseling support if they are to learn at the high standards we expect, while education in art and music are vital to all humans; what is the point of achieving high reading and math scores if we neglect the creativity and joy that art and music bring?

I hope that the Superintendent will reconsider such drastic and unwarranted changes to programs that have, in the past, been extraordinarily beneficial for all Montanans

Regards,

Vic Mortimer

Teacher-Librarian

Corvallis Middle School

Hello. Please keep necessary access to librarians, counselors, as well as all crucial courses related to life skills and expanded knowledge. These programs are vital to well-rounded student development.

Please provide me with the link for Wednesday's meeting. Thank you for your time.

Yvette Smail

I am an educator at C.R. Anderson MS in Helena. I am deeply concerned by Mrs. Arntzen's accreditation proposals for the board of education regarding counselor and librarian to student ratios. The pandemic has greatly impacted the social emotional health of all students, but MS students seem to be particularly vulnerable. Adolescence is a difficult time without a global pandemic. Reducing counselors and librarians would have astronomical negative impacts on students. Students need mental health supports now more than ever. This attempt to save taxpayer dollars is a disgrace. We do not have enough in state mental health supports as is, so we send our students out of state to facilities where some get abused. The new space at Shodair will be full as soon as it opens.

We need to do better for our MT students. They deserve more. If anything we should REDUCE the ratio to better support our students.

Erin Hunt, NBCT

I am vehemently opposed to the proposed changes. These changes will allow Montana schools to balance their budgets by cutting essential services for students.

By cutting librarians, as a middle school English teacher, my students will suffer by not getting essential research skills, quality book recommendations, and many engaging STEM activities. Literacy will decline. Students will suffer.

By cutting school councilors, we are essentially cutting first responders. I can't tell you how many suicidal ideations have been referred for treatment by our school counselors. They literally save kids' lives. I'm speaking of only of the extremes. There are many, many ways that our councilors make a difference for our students every day. Without them, students will suffer.

By cutting the requirements for specific middle school electives - art, languages, shop, and music, will allow districts to cut these essential learning opportunities. These cuts will cause more suffering for students.

I understand that by making these cuts from the language, does not equate actual cuts in schools -- yet. Once these positions are not required, districts will cut these positions, no question.

The entire point of these proposed changes is to cut essential positions. Students will suffer. Montana academics will decline. We will give future children less opportunities than we were given. That's completely wrong. Do not make these changes.

Jesse Franzen

Middle School English teacher

Hello, and thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes before you.

I will candidly say, as a classroom teacher born and raised in Montana, that Superintendent Arntzen's policies and leadership in general concern me, and these proposed changes are no exception.

Two items in particular that worry me are the proposed changes to the ratio of School Counseling staff to students and School Library Media Services staff to students. I have heard it pointed out that these changes will especially impact rural schools, and that grieves me, as I am the product of a very small school district in north central Montana. And now that I work in one of the largest school districts in the state, I can tell you that we need our library and counseling staff just as desperately as any other district does.

Our librarians provide invaluable services related to supporting students' use of educational technology, sharing expertise in a wide variety of enriching modes (podcasts, poetry competitions, etc.), as well as the more traditional services most people are familiar with.

And I can't imagine that involved, educated Montanans such as yourselves don't know that mental health support is one of the greatest needs for young people these days. In addition to helping students navigate graduation requirements and the transition from high school to college and careers, school counselors provide emergent mental health support and act as connections between school staff members and families when students are in distress.

I ask that you reject any changes to the rules that would lessen the educational and health supports for Montana's school kids. Thank you for your time.

Darci Coffman

Clinton, MT

Under no circumstances should our state ever agree to the proposed changes. These courses and experiences are crucial to a youth's educational experiences. I can't imagine sending my children to schools where none of these things are offered. This must be a hard and absolute no! Nonnegotiable. Our youth come out of Montana well prepared because of our requirements and offerings.

Sincerely,

Paul Masa

I am a Montana educator. I have also lived in Montana for 31 years. Please speak up at the meeting tomorrow and protect all our electives and credit requirements. Watering down our education requirements isn't good for anyone. Students need to take a wide range of electives to become a well-rounded and educated citizen. If we take away social studies electives or general requirements we will have an electorate that is uneducated and does not understand democracy. I fear the watering down of education will lead to charter schools. Please keep our credit requirements and electives strong. This will ensure the future of Montana students is bright as well as help preserve our robust public education system.

Thank you,

M'Kenzie Elsberry

In reading the proposals for Ms. Arntzen's desk for cuts to education, I am ashamed and appalled. Our students have never needed mental health support more than they do right now. To even consider making cuts to school counselors is to demonstrate how out of touch Ms. Arntzen is to our public schools. It is shameful.

Our school librarians are our technology teachers and are responsible for bringing the world outside our school walls to our kids. They are so much more than librarians. They are an integral part of our school community every single day.

To consider taking away electives in middle school is equally appalling. These electives provide opportunities for our kids to discover their talents and passions, to better equip their brains for learning and to motivate students to engage when academic tasks sometimes seem impossible. Once again, I am appalled that our OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION appears to be completely disconnected and uninformed about what is going on within the walls of our schools and classrooms. Continuing to cripple our educators and students will do nothing but further damage an already hurting system. Please stop. Please think about kids 1st. Please quit making this a political issue. Please come into our schools and see all that we do and all that we are fighting for and through every, single day. Montana is better than this!

Jesika Fisher,

Bryant Elementary School (school year)/Jim Darcy (summer only)
SPED case manager/PBS Teacher Summer School Admin

I have 4 children and the last one is graduating 8th grade in just a few weeks. All my children have their unique strengths. One of them is a math whiz. Another child has a learning disability and electives were the only part of his day when he could apply his creativity and feel like he belonged. My current 8th grader loves art more than anything since she was old enough to hold a crayon. She does art at home every minute she can. Taking art classes at school allowed her to discover new mediums and hone her talent with a supportive teacher. She has so many directions to go in the world of art in our current image-driven economy and at such

a tender point in her developing person-hood, she might have believed people that told her that you can't really make money as an artist. Instead, she was exposed to the ways that art thrives in our culture and is finding that there ARE ways to make what she's good at and passionate about a viable choice for how she contributes to the world.

I think it would do a disservice to MT kids to take away the parts of their days that allow them to be creative and expressive at a time where they are developmentally trying to figure out who they are and how they fit into this world. Taking away these important electives would also take away the places where a LOT of kids find safety and are often the one place at school that allows them to feel proud.

A few simple questions for you:

1. Is music important in YOUR life?
2. Do you have any art in your house or office?
3. Have you ever enjoyed a thoughtfully produced movie?
4. Do images on the internet contribute to or take away from what you go there to learn?

The arts are EVERYWHERE but learning how to be a part of the artistic economy just isn't accessible to most kids without offering the arts in public schools.

I hope you'll maintain and preserve the specific electives and credit requirements that exist in MT public middle schools. They are so important for so many people in so many, many ways.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Adrianne Wallace

Bozeman, MT

I must admit, I find myself wondering why Mrs. Arntzen is specifically targeting middle school students? Electives are so important for students at this age. How can they begin exploring potential pathways for HS if they don't experience anything in MS? How can they decide they are interested in farming or welding? Art or science? These elective experiences are critical for students and their families to set them up for success and enjoyment of HS. Again, saving taxpayer dollars at the expense of Montana's MS students is disgraceful.

Erin Hunt, NBCT

Hello -

I am writing as a parent of children enrolled in Montana's public school asking that you maintain specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.

Thank you

Joan Garrett

My name is Stacey Boujoukos; I am in my 18th year as an eighth grade teacher at Chief Joseph Middle School in Bozeman, Montana. Prior to this position, I taught sixth grade for six years in Connecticut. I am writing to you today not only as an educator, but also as a parent of a student entering Belgrade High School in the fall of 2022.

I am writing today to urge you to **REJECT** the proposed changes regarding the following:

- 10:55:709 Library Media Service K-12
- 10.55.710 Assignment of School Counseling Staff
- 10.55.905 Graduation Requirements
- 10.55.901 Basic Education Program: Elementary
- 10.55.902: Basic Education Program: Middle Grades
- 10.55.903 Basic Education Program: Junior High and Grades 7 and 8 Budgeted at High School Rates

The changes outlined to these areas will gut educational programming and availability to much needed resources in our Montana public schools. At present, studies are showing that the mental health of our children is an area of concern that has grown over the course of navigating the pandemic for the last two years. The idea of cutting school counseling staff or removing the minimum number of staff required seems to be in direct opposition to what all experts in the field are suggesting. At present, my school has two full time counselors for approximately 750 students. There are days when they are both unavailable to students due to meetings or they are both teaching in class counseling lessons; on other days they are completing risk assessments and meeting with students but do not have time to see all students who need help. To suggest that an outside entity that a small district can contract with can take the place of an in school counselor who knows the students is insulting. To think that teachers will be able to pick up the slack with fewer counselors or lack of an in school counselor is beyond naïve. Classroom teachers do not have the specialized schooling or training that our school counselors do.

Similarly to removing the minimum number of school counselors, removing the minimum number of certified librarians will have a significant negative impact on students. Teacher librarians do far more than just read books and help students check out books. At a minimum teacher librarians share a love of books and encourage students to develop the lifelong skill of reading daily. They help teach engaging skill lessons in technology, research, and the science of reading. Teacher librarians and classroom teachers work collaboratively using their knowledge to create meaningful projects and research opportunities. We, as classroom teachers, are resourceful and work hard to figure out what our students need and how to meet those needs. However, many of my colleagues and I have found the teacher librarians to be an integral part in meeting student needs. The opportunities for collaborative lessons, research skill lessons, and simply keeping the library open to student access for the entirety of the school day are reasons why removing the minimum number of teacher librarians on staff seems like a backward decision – especially in this era of preparing students for a working world that relies on technology and knowing how to access information.

Finally, in regards to changing the educational programming at the middle school level – to remove the requirement for instruction in the arts, music, and technical programming will do harm to those children who thrive in those areas. At a time when STEAM is being encouraged, why would Montana look to remove technology and engineering, often addressed through elective classes, from educational programming? Do we want our students to fall behind in these areas? Traditionally, these areas have also allowed for initial exploration of concepts that students may have not had any experience with; these experiences can help children determine what they like and don't like and can guide future educational studies in high school and beyond. To suggest that they are not important by removing their required inclusion to programming in middle school seems antithetical to providing our students with a well-rounded education.

I urge you all to **REJECT** the proposed changes to the 10.55 areas up for discussion today. To not do so, would put our Montana students at a disadvantage to their peers in other states.

Sincerely,

Stacey A. Boujoukos

I would like to let you know that I am very much opposed to the proposed accreditation changes for Montana schools. When we live in a state with either the highest or one of the highest suicide rates in this nation, eliminating school counselors and therefore students' access to mental health professionals unthinkable. To have healthy school communities, children need access to counselors. Full time. For every age. In every school.

Furthermore, healthy schools need robust library programs fully staffed by full time librarians. Librarians who teach our state's children to safely navigate the digital world. Librarians who foster the love of good literature and a love of learning. Librarians who show kids that reading simply can be fun.

Please DO NOT make these changes. They are ill-conceived and extremely short-sighted. Such changes ARE NOT in the best interests of the children of Montana. I suggest Mrs. Arntzen rethink this poor plan that will hurt our kids.

Janet M. Rice-Koostra

As you consider the proposal by Superintendent Arntzen to change the ratio recommendations for school counselors and librarians, please also consider the long term impacts.

I have been a classroom teacher for 23 years in various grade levels and in three different states, but 19 of those years have been in Montana. My number one wish for our Montana Public Schools, the heart of our rural communities, for next school year, is to have more counselors in our buildings. This is a significant need. Please talk to teachers, principals, counselors, students, and parents as you consider this proposal. I invite you into my classroom anytime to learn more about the current needs of our students.

I have puzzled over the possible reasoning behind this proposal. I can't figure out who, if anyone, would benefit from this. If we don't financially support the mental health of our students now, we, the taxpayers, will all pay for it later.

Sincerely,

Heather Agostinelli

Missoula, Montana

It makes no sense to me why anyone would remove ANYTHING from our schools, when they are operating with so little. We need to support our children as much as we can, and taking away librarians is not the answer. Our school librarian has instilled a love for reading in my son, and I'm appalled that this is even something I have to spend time sending an email to make my thoughts known. Shame on you for thinking that cutting librarians is the way to save money. I am writing today to oppose the Superintendent's proposed changes to the Chapter 55 ratio of school librarians to students in Montana schools. School librarians help maintain excellence in education for every student. Maintaining the ratio - which has been in place and working for over 30 years - is the wisest decision for our students. While local control in education is a significant issue, school librarians are one position that if eliminated also eliminates a whole department. Please do not let this proposed change to Chapter 55 be a backdoor cut to school libraries across the state. Yours sincerely, Niki Lehnherr

Once again I am urging you to hear my plea to maintain current practice in regards to accreditations. Please relay my opinion that we must maintain specific electives and credit requirements for all middle schools and especially those in rural Montana. Dropping these requirements is another band-aid fix that does not address the problem in a way that supports our students. Please do what is best for our kids. Kendra Veit 2nd grade Malta Elementary School

Please accept this letter as opposition to the recently proposed amendments to Chapter 55. We, as a country and certainly, as a state, are suffering from the greatest mental health crisis in history. Particularly, of our youth. The last decade has shown a 40% increase of depression among high school students and a 44% increase in suicidal behaviors. Currently, schools are already under-resourced in assisting in mental health care and providing positive and adequate support to students. Further, there have been case study after case study of the effectiveness of art and music as a form of mental health therapy, proving the absurdity of not requiring either throughout a child's educational tenure.

It's far past time for the State of Montana to take the mental health of its students seriously. Thanks for considering. Skye Hatten

My name is Stacy Aaberg and I have been an employee with the Conrad School District for 14 years. During my time as a Family Consumer Science Teacher the past ten years I have seen many learning styles come through our community. Three years ago our school system moved away from Personalized Learning as we saw our students falling behind. This system was poorly implemented by its creator and was pushed upon our staff for three years. A majority of our students struggled with this system in place and many were in need of summer school to get caught up. As a school we had major turnover during this time as well and our community suffered. While I see some benefits to a student led system I strongly disagree that this is what is best for every student. In core classes I see this working more efficiently but in your elective courses I find it difficult to implement.

I also find that not specifically listing elective courses for students at the Middle School Level to take will allow some schools to close programs. By doing this we are not reaching many students with the hands-on type of classes that so many students succeed with. Please consider not making these changes at this time. Thank you, Stacy Aaberg

As a middle school Montana educator of 23 years, I am appalled and disheartened by the proposed changes to public education. The elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools, preventing access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses would be a determinant to our students. Our students need full access to quality school libraries with certified librarians to preserve their right to intellectual freedom. Our students, our community and our families, need full access to counselors on campus who provide much needed mental health support. It is clear State Superintendent Arntzen is out of touch regarding the needs of students in Montana. She furthermore does not understand the needs of public education teachers, and the needs of Montana communities. It is apparent Superintendent Arntzen is attempting to dismantle public education as we know it. Why would we EVER want to take apart something in which everyone of us has benefited?! I completely oppose all the proposed education changes by our State Superintendent. I request to do NOT RECOMMEND her ideas move out of committee. Exhausted protecting public education for ALL students - Paula Koch

PLEASE do what ever you can to keep librarians, counselors, all the arts, technical classes, and all the other staff and elective classes for ALL students regardless of their numbers or ratios!!! ALL students deserve those services, skills, and resources in any school, especially the public school system!!!! called both numbers provided for Elsie, but both mailboxes were full and there was no answers.
Sincerely, Kelley Bundt

I write both as a high school English teacher and mother of a current middle school student. Please maintain elective courses for middle school students. As a teacher at an alternative high school in the Kalispell Public Schools district, I see a desperate need every day for students to have opportunities to pursue passions, interests and differentiated ways of learning. Music, art, world languages and career and technical courses are often the areas that keep students coming to school who would otherwise opt out. Exposure to these areas in middle school is crucial to helping students stay engaged in learning and practice core literacy and math skills in their applications to other subjects. Please keep these opportunities as central to the middle school curriculum. Sincerely, Trisha Carlson

As a veteran high school teacher of twenty years and a parent of two children currently in the Bozeman Public School system I was shocked and greatly disappointed to learn of Superintendent Arntzen's proposals to eliminate staffing ratios that would limit students' access to counseling and library services. On an almost daily basis I see first hand the positive effect that our counseling and library services have had at Bozeman High School. In my opinion, scaling back on these crucial services is ill-timed and unwise. Equally troubling is Superintendent Arntzen's recommendation to eliminate specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools, which might possibly prevent student access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other popular and worthwhile courses. These diverse offerings broaden student horizons and should not be diminished under any circumstances.

Superintendent Arntzen's rushed efforts to undermine some of the most important services and elective choices defining public education in Montana is contrary to the goals of a well-rounded and democratic public education system. On behalf of our children, I urge the the appropriate committees advising the Montana Board of Public Education to reject these suggested policy changes at its upcoming meeting.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter,
Sincerely, B. Derek Strahn Social Studies Teacher Bozeman High School

Hello, I am a musician who was educated in the public schools here in Montana. I graduated from Sweet Grass High School in Big Timber in 1967 and went on to graduated from St. Olaf College in 1971. The elective music programs I was able to take in grade school and high school were a great beginning for me to be able to pursue a career as a musician and teacher. PLEASE continue the elective programs for visual arts, music, career and technical ed, and world languages and cultures. These elective programs are of great benefit to the students, the community and our great state.

Thank you. Judy Fjell Singer-Songwriter Judy Fjell

I am writing, as the grandparent of an eight-year-old who is in the public school system in Montana, to express my concern over proposed changes to certain accreditation standards. I strongly oppose eliminating the current ratios for librarians and counselors. If anything, we should be strengthening access to those vital services, not weakening them. I am also opposed to substituting the term "elective offerings" for the more defined offerings in music, world languages, and other important offerings for our children. These suggested changes will only weaken our Montana public education and ultimately hurt our children. A broad education available to all is truly the backbone of our democracy. Thank you for your consideration in this matter. Peggy Tonon Hamilton, MT

Please know that as a woman with a Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education, the daughter of a retired principal, the mother of two sons, one with his Bachelor's Degree and one with his PhD, the grandmother of four grandchildren ages 4, 8, 11 and 13 I am very concerned about your proposal. Children across all ages and of academic goals and aspirations need and deserve a well rounded education, and the highest standards possible. We need to find solutions to the MT teacher solutions without sacrificing children's education and the high standards we now have. Cutting accreditation standards is a very short sighted solution in my opinion as it will only hurt the children our state in the long run. Children need music and the arts, librarians and counselors to help them attain there educational goals. If you spend time in schools you will learn of the great difference they can and do make in students' lives. Please keep our schools great! Thank you, Mary Brutger

I strongly oppose Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations to eliminate integrity and accountability in our public schools by eliminating specific middle school requirements and electives, and eliminating Montana students' access to school librarians and counselors which unfairly would remove these important services from rural schools. Her recommendations on these points would severely degrade Montana schools and the education of all young Montanans, and the Rule Making Committee should reject them all. Thank you, Elizabeth Ann R. Bird, Ph.D

I am writing regarding the changes Superintendent Arntzen is proposing regarding librarians, counselors, and the middle school curriculum requirements. As a teacher and a parent, I can tell you that having access to a librarian and counselors daily is crucial. In addition, each of these roles provides necessary support to students and staff. The librarians in the school teach our kids how the safely access the world through this ever-growing digital age. Without the librarians, students would lack the necessary tools to compete in society's academic and professional areas. The counselors are the student's lifeline to help when life gets overwhelming. As a teacher, I cannot always stop what I am doing to help students process their big emotions. The counselors teach students how to process these emotions at the elementary level and ask for help when needed. These tools are valuable, especially in this day when we are dealing with a mental health crisis that has never been seen before in recent history. However, helping the mental health struggle of our students and families depends on having highly qualified counselors in each school daily. Finally, as a student's parent in Montana, I am concerned about the changes to the middle school curriculum. Students in Montana already struggle to be competitive with other students in the country regarding jobs and colleges. By taking away key factors that help students in middle school build a background to build up to taking classes in high school that will lead to college or trade schools. Waiting until high school to introduce these electives harms our student's ability to be competitive outside of school. The goal of education is to develop students into well-rounded, highly educated adults. Taking away the introduction to multiple different areas, from music to technology to agriculture, does not serve our students. Middle school is a crucial area where students start figuring out what career they want to pursue after graduation. This means that the more exposure we give students in different educational areas, the more focused students will be on graduating, and the better-prepared students will be for life. All I ask is that you please take the time to consider all the sides of this issue before making these suggested changes. While it may seem like a fix to some issues currently, in the long run, these changes will affect every student that is currently in or will be in the school systems of Montana. Thank you for your time. Deborah McNay Helena, Montana

My name is David Cogswell, a high school teacher in Belgrade High School. I am emailing with commentary on the meeting tomorrow and the rule changes that are under consideration. I thoroughly dissent and disagree with the proposed changes that Superintendent Arntzen is putting forward. Removing the language that has been outlined will further dilute and degrade the integrity of the mission of all schools, to provide a robust and meaningful education to the communities that each school serves. Middle Schools are already a fraught and tumultuous setting for students, and the more structure that we can provide the better their education will be.

They are already incapable of being held back due to the failure of a grade. To dilute the language so thoroughly as Superintendent Arntzen suggests would further dissolve the structure and needs of the student population of the middle schools. If possible, I would also like to receive the link to the Zoom meeting for tomorrow at 3:30.

Thank you for your time, David Cogswell

I have just read of Elsie Arntzen's proposed changes to the middle school curriculum regarding non-core classes and am gobsmacked, dumbfounded, and deeply dismayed that such changes would be proposed by our State Superintendent of Education. These suggestions reflect a clear lack of understanding of the ways in which middle school classes prepare students for high school in the more advanced versions of those classes through scaffolding of knowledge, skills, and understanding in those subjects. When high school art teachers have to start from scratch with elements of art, principles of design, basic art skills, and visual/spatial reasoning concepts, high school art students are unable to achieve their full potential and any who hope to pursue art programs in college are at a distinct disadvantage when applying to those university programs. There simply isn't ANY way to have a quality high school band and choir program without the essential musical skills learned in elementary and middle school. Those skills cannot be learned quickly on the fly. All high school music teachers will be at a severe disadvantage to produce the kinds of high quality music programs and performances that I have been privileged to attend at many schools here in Montana.

Concerning middle school classes designed to scaffold learning for high school CTE classes, obviously those students will be underprepared (if at all) and CTE teachers in high school will also be severely challenged to bring students up to speed in just four years without students being receiving appropriate education in middle school. This all feels like an attack on the well-established and long fought for content standards in place in Montana, in all subject areas, which are designed to provide our students with the best possible education and preparation for a highly competitive job market. It also feels like an attack on the non-core portion of our educational system which provides essential real-world application of core subject knowledge, and the powerful context necessary to answer the "Why do I need to learn this?" questions students have been asking since the dawn of time. It is my most fervent hope that these suggested changes will NOT be put in place, for the sake of our students and the future of public education in Montana. With gratitude, Dr. Ceilon Aspensen, BFA Fine Arts, MA Native American Studies, PhD American Studies Full-time High School Art Teacher, Laurel High School, Laurel Montana

I am writing in concern over proposed changes to elective offerings at the middle school level. The proposed changes to middle school accreditation standards that strike the specified electives such as art, music, career and technology, industrial technology, world languages and others should not be altered in this way. By not specifying what electives should be provided to ensure a quality well-rounded education, schools will inevitably cut programs and do the bare minimum and cheapest way to meet the "elective requirements" not because they don't care about the students, but because of the great pressure to educate better while spending less money. That will never be a good reason to negatively impact Montana students' educations. These changes to accreditation standards are an attempt at a bandaid of the bigger problem in which districts are not able to find and retain the teachers needed to provide these courses required by the state. Do not deny Montana students a quality education because of a teaching shortage. Support teachers and support students. Please do not allow these changes to the accreditation standards at any level. Sincerely, Denise Rauch

I'm emailing in response to the Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations to eliminate elective programs at middle schools including but not limited to music, visual arts, career education, and other courses. As a middle school computer science teacher I'm shocked that this is even a conversation! While I mainly handle the computer science section a lot of my content is business education and career education. If middle school students do not have these options, then they have to start taking those courses in high school when they don't

have many electives to choose from as freshman or sophomores. Kids need to be exposed to different career paths at a early age so they can create a pathway that works for them BEFORE they enter high school. Many high schools across the nation are tailored to specific career pathways. CTE is probably leading the way in most schools as CTE is real-world experiences and education that students will need while in high school and out of high school.

Please deliver these comments. Thank Doug Andersen LMS Computer Sciences

I am writing as a concerned parent and as a career educator. I am extremely concerned with the rewriting of the middle school standards. I have been in education long enough to know that when vague wording replaces specific wording it just leaves room for budget cuts. Our public education is the centerfold of our community. We as educators bring up these young men and women to become productive individuals in our communities. I am a high school science teacher and see that one of the proposed changes is to reword the science requirements to just be science. As a highschool teacher I depend upon the foundational learning that happens at the middle school level. This learning builds upon itself. Removing the requirement for middle schoolers to learn physical and life sciences will handicap what can be taught at the highschool level. I hope that Montana State OPI will think long and hard about why these proposed changes are occurring. Godspeed, Jacob Deitz

I would like to vehemently object to the long list of cuts proposed to Middle School offerings by the Montana OPI Superintendent. As an art specialist, I would like to point out that the arts have deep value in any school curriculum. According to research by Americans for the Arts, young people who participate 3 hours per day, 3 days per week in the arts are 4 times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement. They are also 4 times more likely to participate in a math or science fair than children who do not participate. When arts are offered at the middle school level, it results in higher attendance, graduation rates, and test scores, with fewer disciplinary infractions. The same research from Americans for the Arts shows that arts are a link to higher rates of academic achievement, social and emotional development, civic engagement and increased opportunity in general. It seems massively counterproductive to follow through with the numerous cuts to curriculum proposed by Ms. Arntzen. She would make our schools turn into bleak institutions where we ignore access to our treasured American (and world) culture. The arts and all the other valued curricula keep kids engaged. Coming out of a heartbreaking pandemic, this is more critical than ever. To quote William Morris, "I do not want art for a few any more than I want education for a few, or freedom for a few." Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Ogden K-12 Art Specialist

As a special education teacher in middle school, I cannot emphasize enough how important music and electives are in each of these childrens' lives. Please maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. Superintendent Arntzen's proposal is recommending the elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools, preventing student access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses. Please stop this action! Thanks, Jennifer Urbach

Just this morning I was notified of the potential changes that OPI is proposing to the accreditation language in several areas of public education. It also came to my attention that these proposed changes are in direct contradiction to the School Quality Task Force recommendations. The Chapter 55 Negotiated Rule Making Committee was working in a draft language you as the Board of Public Ed. Instead, Elsie Arntsen is doing this without input from either of the committees that have been established to inform the process - and she is out of line with the timing as well. I am very concerned about these changes. I am also concerned about the way they are being proposed and pushed through without time for proper public comment. (We found out this morning, that the meeting is tomorrow, and 15 minutes is scheduled for public comment, during the school day when we

are all busy) My current role is a high school counselor at Capital High in Helena and because that is where my knowledge lies, I am just speaking about the changes to 10.55.710, I am extremely worried that this is a major backward step for Montana kids. With the current YRBS survey data showing 41% of high schoolers are struggling with depression and 1 in 5 kids has SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED SUICIDE in the past year, making changes that allow school districts to have fewer school counselors is not only short-sided, its potentially a recipe for disaster. To quote Elsie Arntsen, "Now is the time to prioritize mental health in our communities and in our schools" (1), and while she was talking about using COVID funding to help keep CSCT services in some schools, She is right, now is the time to prioritize it. And yet this proposal does the opposite. Couple that with the loss of CSCT in many communities (including our high school) school counselors are often the sole mental health provider in the school. You take away the requirement for each school to have one per 400 students and you will find one counselor is not enough to service all the increasing mental health needs of all students. By removing the low bar for school counselor-to-student ratios in Montana, we are effectively doing the opposite of what she advocated for. The American School Counselor Association and the Montana School Counselor Association recommend (based on research) that a 1-250 ratio of counselors to students be the standard, we are already considerably higher in Montana at 1-400, and to remove that in a time where budgets are tight, school counselors (along with librarians and others cuts she is proposing) will be some of the first cut. We can see where this is going. A similar removal of ratios was done in Arizona and it had devastating effects. "Arizona's student-to-counselor ratio is still the worst in the nation, with an average of 905 students for every school counselor." (2) Here at Capital High School, we experienced the unthinkable, a suicide by a student, on our campus. It had, and continues to have, devastating effects amongst our student body. We lost our CSCT team due to the legislature changing the funding formulas and were down to 1 and a half therapists for the whole school. After that horrific event, we had a waiting list of over 25 students for school-based therapy services. We tried to connect kids with therapists in the community and found that they had very little room and usually the best case scenario was 2-6 months before they could start. Because of a lack of in-town providers, we have had to look at different resources. We had so many students having to access therapy via Telehealth (one solution) that we had to redesign our files room as a telehealth room just so kids could see a therapist during the school day. Even with that, there wasn't enough, and so my team of 4 school counselors has done the bulk of the mental health services for the school. We did the best we could, but we also have several other duties (testing, 504 management, academic guidance) that even with a team of 4 we struggled to keep up. For several weeks/months we had students in our offices for 7 periods per day. Our prep work, letters of recommendation, and transcript evaluations all were pushed off to be done at home on our own time. The thought of having to go through all that with fewer counselors is frightening. If you think it is hard to fill counseling positions now, enact this rule change, see the student to counselor ratios continue to creep up, and I can guarantee it will be even worse. The burnout is already high with the constraints in place, if we go the way of Arizona, there is no way it's sustainable. So I would like to ask the board one question? Is Mental Health a priority? If the answer is yes, you must not remove the language that requires adequate coverage of counselors or all students. Thank you for taking the time to read my comment and I would be happy to talk further on the subject.

Sincerely, Jeramie Robinson School Counselor, Med

You don't even have to like education to see Arntzen's proposed policy changes absolutely blasphemous and downright harmful for our MT youth. Any logical person who has spent one hour in a classroom would know that our youth need more counseling, more library access, and more electives. After what our students and educators have gone through in the last 2 years with Covid, this is a logical and healthy decision? No disrespect, but this woman is out of her mind. If I had a crystal ball this looks like we are setting up for a push for charter schools in Montana ala Gianforte style. After 22 years of teaching in Montana, it makes me out of sorts about the possible outcome of this legislative term. These policies must not be supported or overturned or whatever the vernacular is. Our state will soon become a model of what not to do. Unicorns and Rainbows, Jeremy Harder

At a time when misinformation, disinformation and propaganda are running rampant our State Office of Public instruction and Superintendent are recommending eliminating the ratios for the professional staffing that are trained to help our Montana students and teachers sift through all of that and learn to discern truth from fiction. Study after study have reinforced the benefit for students and teachers when they have access to and the services of a professionally trained and certified school library media specialist. Now is not the time to eliminate these positions from our schools. Our culture, our democratic republic and our country will pay the price if we continue down this path.

John York Billings, MT

Please do not allow these recommendations for middle school be approved. Please maintain the specific electives and credit requirements for middle school. This would be detrimental to our kids. Katie Sutherlin Classified union president Stevensville school district #2

Please make it known that as a parent and teacher in the Livingston school district I feel that the proposed changes will reduce the effectiveness of our schools. My concerns as a parent are that by eliminating the explicit language for middle school requirements schools will begin to streamline the content offered to students to mend budget concerns. I also believe that by eliminating the elective language schools will interpret all cultural subjects to be optional and they will slowly be phased out of the public school setting. My concern for this trend, is not invalid. As a public school elementary teacher for the last twenty years I have seen this trend at the elementary level. Art, and world languages have all but been eliminated in the rural schools due to budget constraints. These subjects are not expected to be taught in the general education setting. Due to the nature of standardized testing expectations, these subjects are not scheduled on a daily basis. Having these subjects required in middle and secondary education helps secure exposure to the arts for our students. My child is a middle school 6th grader, having access to visual arts and music classes have helped enrich her school experience. Without these subject areas I am not sure that her enthusiasm for middle school will be the same. I am asking you to not alter the language of school requirements. They benefit the students and school climate across our vast state. Kelley Myer

My name is Kelsi Weaver Martin and I am a member of Bozeman Education Association. I am a music teacher. The changes that our Sup. of Education is proposing is wrong and needs to be stopped. Our world, which means our schools, does not need less of the arts, library/media and counseling services, it needs to remain the same or include more! I have been teaching since 2007 in the state of Montana. I have taught in large districts as well as small. If music accreditation is taken away from state requirements, then we ALL know music and art is the first to go. Schools are always looking for a way to save money. I am a product of that this coming SY 22/23. I am the K-8 music specialist in the states FIRST public charter school and my position is being eliminated because of lack of money in the district.

Keeping our students informed and supported is our job, with the changes that are being proposed, we will not have the states support to be able to do this. Keeping arts, and namely music, as a core content subject is vital to creating non-violent, caring, empathetic community members that value culture and diversity. Sincerely, Kelsi Weaver Martin

I am writing today to oppose the Superintendent's proposed changes to the Chapter 55 ratio of school librarians to students in Montana schools. School librarians help maintain excellence in education for every student. Maintaining the ratio - which has been in place and working for over 30 years - is the wisest decision

for our students. While local control in education is a significant issue, school librarians are one position that if eliminated also eliminates a whole department. Please do not let this proposed change to Chapter 55 be a backdoor cut to school libraries across the state.

Yours sincerely, Kinsey Laib

To whom this may concern, I have been a public school educator in Montana for 16 years. I've been through and survived Reading First and countless other initiatives OPI has mandated for the enhancement of student literacy. It is absurd to propose to do away with ratios meant to protect student success. I value school librarians and counselors. I value arts and music education. Have you not stepped into a classroom recently and see what our youth are having to deal with on a daily basis? Get a grip and keep the ratios. Keeping it real,
Kristen Bogan

Please put our students needs first and do not support the superintendent's proposed recommendations. Sincerely, Kyle Boling 5th grade teacher

I am a retired band teacher. I taught on average 250 students per year in grades 5-12. Many of the students would not been in my class had it not been a required part of the curriculum. These children discovered the intellectual, emotional, creative, and social benefits of arts education. They then continued arts classes through there public education career. Not including the arts in required education for kids in public schools is wrong for kids. They need to be exposed to the arts. Thank You, Larry Lynam, 35 year band teacher in Billings

I can't imagine schools without librarians, counselors, or music in the schools. I highly disagree with this plan to have them removed, and I want my voice heard. Even if we don't have enough students to keep full time librarians, we need to. Kids and staff need them. We have so many kids that need someone to talk to, we need to keep the counselors. Music is just obvious, it needs to be kept for all ages! These programs are paramount in schools. They must be kept! Sincerely, Laura Sytsma

Thank you for your reply-- I sure appreciate it. I want you to know that there are some grave concerns with the proposed changes to state education policy under discussion this week with the NRM committee. You will likely be receiving substantial public input, as these proposed changes would negatively impact arts and music programs statewide. If I am reading this correctly, school districts would no longer be required to offer music or arts classes in elementary or middle schools. Please correct me if I'm misunderstanding the massive policy language I'm seeing crossed out in bright red... The major concern is that each school district will be free to eliminate these programs (and teaching positions) at the local level. Rural school districts will be the first to cut music programs. As budgets get tight in larger districts, they may very well follow suit. The end result is that education in Montana will digress by more than 100 years, heading back to the ancient "three R's" mentality. This is deeply concerning, and such a proposal should NEVER be brought forth to a vote by the board of education.

Speaking specifically on the importance of music in education, based on both research studies conducted over decades and basic common sense, it's important to know that: Test scores, school attendance and graduation

rates will drop in school districts without music programs. Drug and alcohol use among teens will likely increase, as both are proven to decrease with music participation. Music for graduation, Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, sporting events and other community events will no longer happen (the elimination of elementary and middle school music programs means the destruction of high school music programs). Since music teachers typically have larger classes (sometimes 40+ students in one section), additional teachers would need to be hired in order to redistribute students in the school schedule. Music programs are an economic benefit to schools. Most importantly, since the arts help define our culture, there would be a significant loss to our greater society. Additionally, music participation is one of the best forms of social-emotional learning in our schools-- something students need now more than ever. The entertainment industry is one of our country's top exports. Why would we cut that industry off at the knees by eliminating arts education? Music and arts are absolutely VITAL to a well-rounded education, and are protected subjects by the Federal ESSA Act. I would appreciate it if you'd share my thoughts with the NRM committee. I urge the committee to reject this proposal, which lacks common sense and any serious understanding of its potential impact on Montana's kids and communities. Thank you for your time, Mark McCrady Music Educator, Whitefish, MT Former President, Montana Bandmasters Association

You can't allow these recommendations to go through. It will hurt all students in Montana!! Mark Verlanic Elementary Health Enhancement

Please refute the superintendent's suggestions to eliminate a long list of educational requirements and please maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. Education should not be influenced by politics, but by data that support educational areas. As a professor at Missoula College, I can attest that some students arrive under-prepared for college work. DO NOT dummy-down educational requirements. Strengthen and continue to support the work so many have done to have these guidelines. Sincerely, Mary McHugh, Pharm.D., R.Ph. Professor Missoula College University of Montana

It is my understanding that there are broad changes being proposed to the Basic Education Programs in Montana schools. I'm sure you will be receiving other emails from concerned parties, but I would like to implore you to please consider all of the negative effects on schools, teachers, and the community that some of these changes will have. I am especially concerned with the elimination of a long tradition of requiring exposure to music and arts at the grade school level for Montana students. This is an incredibly important avenue creatively, and it's important for you to know that these specifics will be impacted (based on research that I would be happy to provide for you). Here are just a few important facts specifically on the importance of elementary music education: Test scores, school attendance and graduation rates will drop in school districts without music programs. Drug and alcohol use among teens will likely increase. Music for graduation, Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, sporting events and other community events will no longer happen (the elimination of elementary and middle school music programs means the destruction of high school music programs). Since music teachers typically have larger classes (sometimes 40+ students in one section), additional teachers would need to be hired in order to redistribute students in the school schedule. Music programs are an economic benefit. Most importantly, since the arts help define our culture, there would be a significant loss to our greater society, specifically in Montana. Additionally, music participation is one of the best forms of social-emotional learning in our schools-- something students need now more than ever. Additionally, the changes to FTE requirements for positions such as counselors and librarians will have similar negative effect throughout a student's entire school experience, and on society as a whole. Please reach out if you have any questions, or if I can provide any more information. I am extremely concerned about this sweeping change to music education that would cut the beauty of music in our schools to the core. When it comes to political positioning and proposed changes in law, I do not pretend to be well versed, but this is an

area I am very deeply concerned about, and am confident about the negative effect it would have. Thank you,
Matthew King

My name is Maury Cook and I am a 30 year + educator currently working in the Butte School District. I have been presented with the recommendations that our State Superintendent has proposed for elimination from the curriculum requirements in Middle School. I know that the curriculum changes she is proposing will have a devastating effect on our kids here in Montana. Middle school is a critical juncture in the lives of our young people. It is a time for exploration and decision making that will impact the rest of their lives. Eliminating the music, arts and CTE classes especially as these courses are what keeps most of our at risk kids coming to school. These students often struggle in core subject areas but find their niche in the electives we provide. Drama, Art, Music, and CTE, Like cooking classes, are the glue that keeps them coming and listening in the Math, Social Studies and LA. Our Schools are working, and making these sweeping changes makes no sense in today's educational setting. It is a time where counselors, Librarians, and teachers of the arts are needed more than ever. Creativity is the backbone of the American education and these proposals are nothing more than another attempt at undermining public education. We need to invest more, not less, in our Kids. Thank you Maury Cook

I am emailing to make a comment regarding the proposed cuts to the electives requirements for middle school students in Montana. As a former Middle School and High School Art Teacher (BSSD#72) I have observed the importance of "electives" such as art and music for students in this age group. Removing these requirements would be detrimental to student's development and educational experience. Understanding the staffing challenges faced by many schools in Montana, I know that this decision might make it "easier" for school districts. Here is a novel idea, instead of cutting classes, prioritize PAYING TEACHERS A LIVING WAGE to help mitigate these staff shortages. Cutting classes is not a solution to a major problem, it is just another problem. Get it together, Respectfully, Megan Buecking (she/her) *Education and Public Art Director*

I am writing about my concern regarding the proposed changes to the policy for accreditation standards. It appears that music will no longer be a required subject for Montana elementary or middle schools. This would be a tragic cultural loss to all students if this proposal goes into effect. Music training has been proven over and over again to be one of the most beneficial subjects for enhancing brain development in children. It is also a National Core Standard for that very reason. Allowing schools to cut music from the curriculum will not only be detrimental to young minds, but it will mean that Montana Schools will not be aligned with National Standards for Education. Please reconsider this alarming cut to accreditation standards in Montana. Thank you. Nancy McPherson Music Director West Yellowstone School

I am respectfully asking this committee to please maintain and preserve electives and credit requirements for middle schools. Our children deserve the best possible education and eliminating these requirements is not in the best interest of our children.
Thank you, Nancy Warren

Hello, As an art educator of 18 years I am shocked by Arntzen's proposal to strike the following language: ~~i) visual arts including, but not limited to art history, art criticism, aesthetic perception, and production; (ii) music including, but not limited to general, instrumental, and vocal (emphasizing comprehensive music elements, music history, criticism, aesthetic perception, and musical production); (iii) career and technical education courses or pathways such as agriculture, business education, family and consumer sciences, health occupations and industrial technology education; and (iv) world languages. (f) offers as electives to all students~~

~~exploratory courses such as creative writing, dance, drama, financial education, photography, and leadership. Elsie proposes striking this language altogether: (4) A junior high (grades 7-9) or 7-8 school must offer an educational program, aligned to the program area standards, that enables all students to meet the content standards and content-specific grade-level progressions. (a) Instruction in reading literacy and writing literacy shall be incorporated into all required and elective program areas as required in the Montana Common Core Standards, ARM Title 10, chapter 53. (b) All students shall complete the following program areas each year: (i) English language arts--1 unit; (ii) social studies--1 unit; (iii) mathematics--1 unit; (iv) science--1 unit; and (v) health enhancement--1/2 unit. (c) All students must be allowed to elect from the following program area offerings: (i) visual arts--1/2 unit; (ii) music--1/2 unit; (iii) career and technical education--1/2 unit; and (iv) world languages and cultures--1/2 unit. (d) A unit is defined as the equivalent of at least 8100 minutes for one school year.~~ Please oppose this proposal. Please support our school, communities and students by continuing to support and require elective requirements at the middle school level. Specific requirements are important to ensure holistic education for our children. N.M. Whitscarver Art Educator Sentinel High School

Please maintain the current electives and credit requirements for middle schools in Montana. As a high school educator, I see what happens to students who do not meet minimum requirements before coming to high school. They enter already behind their peers and often have to make up credits or retake classes that they fail when they are not adequately prepared. Research shows that access to the arts actually improves brain function and student success in school. If Elsie Arntzen's proposed changes to Chapter 55 go into effect, not only will teachers lose jobs, but students will become less prepared for high school and beyond. It is imperative that students who may not go on to traditional 4 year colleges have access to CTE classes in schools, and early exposure helps them identify areas of interest. Please consider these thoughts when reconsidering the changes to Chapter 55. Noel Osterman Teacher-Librarian C. M. Russell High School

I am emailing about the new purposal made by Ms. Artnzen. We cannot take out art, business, counseling, and industrial arts. The way the world is changing these are the classes that will keep students in school and contributing to society. Please make sure this does not happen. Best regards, Rachael Williams-Reno M.Ed special education Lockwood K-5 behavior specialist

As you review the proposed changes to the credit requirements for middle school and specific electives, PLEASE consider the consequences of changing or removing them. It is of utmost importance that students are exposed to a variety of content in middle school to find their interests and gain knowledge and understanding of the world around them. To remove the electives classes denies students the opportunities to experience things they would in no other way have the chance to see or learn. Also, it is very poor management of any sort to not have standards for expected outcomes. Removing the credit requirements for middle school seems reckless and without direction as well as educationally unsound as there would be no guideline for a standard. Please vote to leave in place the specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. Thank you for your consideration.

I'm a Middle School CTE Teacher here in Browning, Montana. I think the rule changes concerning Music, Career and Technical Education, and other electives being proposed by the Superintendent are a step backward for education if approved. Students are very interested in these topics and I believe they are an important factor in helping children of this age to mature. There are so many things these Electives cultivate and teach the children who take them. In our school we had a team of students placed in a National STEM competition for Robotics and won a visit to the NASA museum and looked at some of the future projects NASA was planning. Students of this age are bored with regular curriculum and need an outlet that will stimulate their creative side. My students are brought on visits to Glacier National Park and taught by the

Rangers about Animal Habitat and some of the effects of human activity. They are given rounded education that not only stimulates their minds but opens them to goals in future careers. We all know that when a goal is set we can focus on what we need to attain that goal. I believe We need to keep these classes to develop mature and focused students.

I am writing in opposition to the Superintendent's plan to eliminate specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools, preventing student access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses. I have worked as a para educator in middle school for the last 7 years. I think that this plan would be detrimental to so many students. Sincerely Sarah Cooper

Why would you want to limit a kid's opportunities at such an important time in their life? Why are you taking away what Montana kids have received for so long? Why are you ruining the education for most Montana kids who can't afford homeschool or the sneaky private school voucher you offer that doesn't cover the whole cost of attending it so it's just a break for the rich kids? Wow, those are not Montana values, those are extreme right wing, out of state views that Most Montanas do not agree with. My 6th grade daughter loves her electives this year, and we as parents are so excited that she got to try art, computers, band and Spanish! Why are you trying to take this away from her? Montana already makes it hard for kids to compete at the collegiate level by not requiring more math, science and world language in high school. Why are you trying to limit Montana Kids now in middle school? Stacey Hargesheimer

Please commit to our youth by maintaining and preserving specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations do not have the best interests of the next generations in mind. Our students deserve to have the choice to explore subject matter that assists them in choosing their high school and higher education paths. Thank you for your time and consideration, Stefanie Leach Elementary Special Education Teacher Chester-Joplin-Inverness Schools

The proposed changes in state required curricula for middle schools are not appropriate for Montana's students. Middle school is a critical time for students to explore new skills that they may not have been introduced to. It is our primary responsibility as Montana citizens to make sure our children are educated in many areas and the proposed changes eliminate those very areas. Please pass on to the committee that this is not acceptable. Sue Furey

The proposed language in many of these standards LOWERS THE CURRENT EXPECTATION. These are not ready to be adopted without a much more lengthy process. The recommended changes to middle school accreditation decimates the current standards. The term "or its equivalent" is so broad and ill-defined that it will create a sub-standard curriculum of "anything goes." The current distinction between a "middle school" functioning with a middle school philosophy is GONE! As a former Accreditation specialist with OPI I understand the extent to which the new standards will erode the quality of education in Montana. I fail to see the need for such radical revisions. Teri Foley Wing Missoula, MT

As a parent of a middle school student, I am extremely upset to see the list of proposed elective and credit requirements that Ms. Arnzten is proposing to eliminate in our middle schools. Eliminating access and requirements to these classes would not only be detrimental to our students, but the future of Montana for generations to come. For years now, I have watched rural school districts struggle to keep up in terms of access to technology and curriculum. If we want to raise successful adults, we need to provide them with the highest standard of education across the board.

Please pass these comments along to the committee. Thank you

To eliminate this vital resource is short-sighted and will be a disservice to the students, teachers, and the community as whole affected by the potential loss of certified librarians. Superintendent Arntzen is also recommending the elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools, preventing student access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses. Again, she calls for a renewed emphasis on math and reading. I question how this will be attained when there are no credit requirements for middle schools in math and language arts. Eliminating elective programs removes opportunities for students to be exposed to subjects they might not otherwise be able to pursue. Often these courses allow for additional growth in creativity, communication, and collaboration, all critical components of a well-rounded individual. I would ask the committee to preserve the requirements for librarians and counselors, as well as elective programs and credit requirements, so that our Montana students are provided with a vibrant and professional education system that puts their needs first; an education system that prioritizes research and evidence-based practice over arbitrary revisions that will not benefit any students; and an education system that provides a foundation for academic and personal success when the needs of the whole child are met.

Lance, K.C. & Kachel, D.E. (2018). Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99 (7), 15-20. Thank you, Tona Iwen Clancy School Librarian K-8 Librarian

I am writing to you because I just learned of Elsie Anrtzen's APPALLING proposed changed to middle school curricula and accreditation standards

I was made aware of some changes at the state level to accreditation standards related to library, music, counseling and art in Montana schools. These rules and ratios for hiring are a necessity to the health and safety of our students. Also, schools with libraries, music programs, and art departments usually perform better in life skills, standardized testing, and feel more connected to their community and school. These regulations need to stay in place, please do not let Elsie Artnzen destroy our schools. Thank you. Willi Prince Music Teacher Corvallis MS/HS

I am writing because I am very concerned about the proposed changes in curriculum that will affect our Music program. It seems that music is no longer going to be a required part of the elementary curriculum. As a music educator with an MMEEd I ask how are elementary students supposed to prepare for music in middle school and high school without any music classes in elementary school? As music educators, we have until the age of 7 for students to learn to feel a steady beat, which means that we need to start as early as possible. Eliminating music from the elementary curriculum will be stating that music is not important, when in fact, it is very important. Music helps students with eye-hand coordination, mathematical thinking, team work, solo work, discipline, personal and school pride, amongst so many other points and skills. Please do not remove music from the curriculum, as it is such a vital part of our daily lives. A very concerned Music Educator, Xiomara Orue

Hello

I received some information that I am hoping is incorrect – it was sent (at seemingly the last minute) indirectly from Amanda Curtis, MFPE. The timing and limited info seem suspect, so please set me straight if this is just misinformation. I'm sure your receiving plenty of contacts from concerned music teachers now. (although apparently the link to your email was incorrect)

If this is legitimate - I was especially concerned about the changes that seem to be proposed for the MS music requirements. If I am reading this correctly, it seems that this would eliminate the requirement to have music in our schools – since HS graduation requires only art, and MS requires only an elective. I understand that we have a shortage of music teachers in our state, but I don't think this is the correct way to approach the problem.

Having previously worked at a district in Oregon that operated without music until high school (only band in MS), I can tell you that the affects of music education are farther reaching than just in music skills. The effects can be felt at all levels and in many subjects.

Thanks for your time

Mike Miller

21 years as music & vocational arts teacher in Montana & Oregon

Currently supporting MT music education

Dear Tristen Loveridge and committee members,

I am writing to you to urge you to preserve the specific electives and credit requirements for Middle Schools for the visual arts, music, career and technical education, world language and other electives. Also, please maintain the school librarian and counselor ratios.

More than ever, our students need access to these elective programs. They are opportunities to develop well-rounded Montanans.

After COVID, schools are seeing more and more mental health problems. Schools need counselors (more than we currently have working in schools) to help these students. Please do not eliminate the ratios that will directly affect the most vulnerable students in Montana. This targets rural schools who already struggle to provide the needed services to students.

Please, please think hard about the decisions you make today that will affect students for years to come. These are vital services that are needed desperately.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Amanda Priquette

5-8 Resource Room Teacher

Manhattan Schools

Tristen,

My name is Chris Irwin and I'm writing to you as a parent of three boys in the Whitefish public school system. I've recently learned that there may be a proposal in the works to remove the requirement of the arts from mandatory instruction requirements for middle schools across Montana. I would like to express my concern with pursuing such a course of action as I feel it will have a negative effect on Montana children.

I don't want to presume why such a proposal might be under consideration. But I would like to say that I feel arts are a crucial part of education for young people. My wife Jenn (cc'd here) and I have absolutely loved what the middle school band program has done for our kids. Our eldest son is now a freshman in high school

and is a very active member of the varsity and jazz bands. This was largely the result of the instruction provided to him in middle school. Our second son is now following that same path as a 7th grader. And we hope our youngest boy will do so as well.

These activities give our kids a creative outlet they can't find elsewhere. Music makes them more rounded people and develops their minds in ways that other subjects do not. The groups they are a part of also provide social interaction and a sense of belonging at a time where it's sorely needed for young people. Band teaches them how to work as a team in ways that math, English, and science cannot.

I believe our society needs all types of people - scholars, athletes, and artists. And I fear that if we restrict the breadth of instruction for our middle school kids, we risk losing some measure of our diversity of interest and perspective culturally.

I don't know what the reality of this situation is exactly but I'm hoping there is still the potential to keep these programs in our schools. If I am misinformed on any of the above please forgive my ignorance. And if you are not the right person to contact in this regard please forward my email as you feel appropriate.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Cheers,
Chris Irwin

Dear Tristen,

As a mother of a daughter who is now a doctor and a wife of a retired high school science and math teacher, it concerns me to learn that music and other electives might be cut from our Montana state primary schools.

Our daughter developed her brain cells far more effectively by learning to play music from an early age and she found joy in the process of playing music during her formative and teenaged years. She met outstanding life long friends in her music classes and her music experience has made her a more well rounded, empathetic and understanding human being.

As a doctor in Residency, she works and studies in the mental health field. She knows how music is essential to mental and emotional health and well being. Scientific studies prove that music is necessary for human beings to positively contribute to society and to experience a full, meaningful and happy life.

Our children are our future. Please share my sentiments with those who have the power to impact this important decision.

Thank you,

Elizabeth Klarich

Hello!

As a successful entrepreneur and producer, had I not had music in my public education I would not be where I am today. I urge you to keep music a course requirement in schools. Removing the requirement is opening the doors for major funding cuts to music and the arts. That's something the vast majority of Montanans don't want to see happen. Please do the right thing.

Erica von Kleist
Grammy-nominated performer and producer

Never in my life as fourth generation Montanan did I think that I'd have to stand up for kids in this state to receive the education they need and deserve. What Elsie Arntzen is proposing and trying to do is eliminate any chance for kids to learn and grow outside the norm. The entire Republican Party seems hell bent on boxing

everyone together and lying to them that it's good for them. It's pathetic how the adults act and how they treat other adults, but attacking our kids, limiting what and how they learn or how they are taken care of at school is pathetic and sad. No one who is in charge of education should be fighting to limit kids experiences. They should be fighting for ways to expand and enhance children's learning experiences! Don't let Elsie and the Republican Party ruin this state even more than they already have by further limiting our kids growth. Absolutely pathetic that this person is our Superintendent of Public Schools.

Collin Brown

Tristen,

I am a retired Middle School Administrator who has MAJOR concerns with Ms. Arntzen's recommended changes to the middle school academic requirements. It appears that her desire is to completely disassemble the Middle School curriculum requirements, as evidenced by the strikeouts.

Under the guidelines of the current academic Montana schools have produced well rounded Middle School students. It is my experience that fine arts motivate many students to continue their education in high school and higher education. Montana's want a well rounded student and adults.

In reviewing her other requested changes, I found her changes, if approved, will gut Montana's education. If these changes are accepted, educators will not be able to provide students with the excellent quality education.

Please feel free to call, text or email me.

Diane Cashell

Hello Tristen,

My name is Jordan Harler and I am a family and consumer sciences teacher for both junior high and high school students in Montana. My class is THE most requested class by all middle school students, which not only shows their interest but also demonstrates that the funding for these courses is going to good use. The classes I teach provide life skills to students such as communication skills, how to cook, laundry, ways to cope with stress, and so many more. These types of lessons are crucial to the development of independence in students. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, fulfilling basic living needs is the base before people are able to sustain any knowledge or form healthy, positive relationships. In addition, from a biological and human development perspective, middle school students are likely to be going through more emotional as well as physical changes, thus requiring them to need high quality counselors and teachers around them to help them navigate these changes.

I do hope you reconsider this ridiculous recommendation, as it will damage the education and development of so many Montana students.

Jordan Harler, MEd, CFCS

She/Her/Hers

Family and Consumer Sciences

Manhattan High School

I am writing in support of keeping music and art classes in the Billings school curriculum. The mind of a child is a precious resource in the community. It can be developed to its fullest human capacity to think, reason and feel. A child needs stimulus that music and art bring to the brain and soul. They flourish and grow with expression and emotion that is found nowhere else in the curriculum.

What strengthens our universal bond is those things in us that transcend the written form. Art and music do that. They are lessons that connect us all.

If you must cut, cut sports budgets. Many children's families can afford to support extra curricular sports.

Hey Tristen,

My old music teacher reached out to me and informed me that the school board was looking at some cuts in elementary music. I just wanted to make my voice heard and say elementary music is important and should be protected. I understand funding is always difficult but I believe our communities are enriched by these programs and reduction of services would be detrimental. Please pass along my support for music in elementary programs. Thank you and have a nice day.

Sincerely,
Johnny Earley

Earley Enterprises LLC, Owner

Hello Tristen,

The State of Montana's School Board idea to cut electives from the accreditation for Elementary and middle schools, is nothing more than the government blatantly deciding that our students do not need the education that students can get in other states. If this idea is finalized it will only confirm that our state functions for nothing more than money, especially with the current decision to withhold Marijuana tax revenue earnings from education.

With the known issues that our children face in the home or should I say a lack of home; the decision to allow school districts to cut the programs is a future crisis waiting to happen. What to be expected is that smaller schools and administration who do not support those programs would cut them. After the initial impact of this ruling, the slow results would occur. As our numbers for teachers and support from ignorant individuals dwindle our state will no longer hold these programs.

Now to the fact of our children and their need for these programs. Some of our children have terrible home lives and other struggles that include but are not limited to: homeless, parentless, missing a parent, abusive parents, parental drug issues(that our state has known problems with), neglect, poor parenting, generational behavior, and mental health issues. These students often struggle in academic classes and social situations. The electives are a place for them to find themselves and save the futures that they have. Cutting this will only cause future problems for these individuals and most likely increase drug use and criminal activity.

Now let's talk about music specifically. I am a general music education teacher that teaches grades 1-5. Although a decision like this probably would not have an immediate impact on me directly, I believe that students everywhere need to have music. Learning music can have positive health effects decades after. As I am sure you have been exposed to just some of these studies. Music continues to come up in studies of its positive health effects.

Not only is music great for the health effects and social effects, music continues to join many other subjects and assist those who only strive in one, to do much better in all academics. Music has the potential to teach Mathematics, English, Foreign Languages, Reading, History, Physical Education, Health, Geology, Agriculture, Geography, Art, and so on. If you can sing it, it is music. Cutting this subject should not be even a topic. Why would anyone that cares about the people of our state, cut or even allow such a valuable asset to be cut?

As stated before, maybe there is money that should be going to schools, children, instead of further taking away opportunities. Please reconsider the topic at hand. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kyle Hubbard

Actually, please vote against all of the Superintendent's proposed changes. These electives are so important for our children! They provide growth and development that only enhances their performance in all core classes.

Bobbi Palagi, retired teacher/librarian

Tristen:

Please back our students and schools by advocating to maintain the specific elective and credit requirements for middle schools, i.e. music, art, library, and counseling. These programs are dire to the education and well being of our students and communities.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Curry

Greetings Committee Members!

My name is Jodi (Majerus) Delaney. I grew up in the Conrad area, got my undergraduate degree at Carroll College, and now I teach in Helena at Broadwater Elementary School. I am a National Board Certified Teacher, have a Masters Degree in Arts Integration for Education (UM), and both primary and intermediate level Montessori certifications (NAMC). I am a board member of the Montana Council for Social Studies, a Teacher Leader in History through the MT Historical Society, a Teacher Leader in the Arts through OPI/MT Arts Council, along with various other committees and organizations. I was recognized as the History Teacher of the Year for MT by the Gilder Lehrman Institute (2013) and the MT Centennial Bell Award Teacher of the Year (2017). I helped with the writing of both the new arts standards and social studies standards, going through the process of adoption and seeing firsthand how MT enacts quality education policy.

Why am I sharing all this information with you? Because even with all those certifications and experience, I cannot think of a single reason in which the proposed changes to the minimum requirements for MT education could possibly benefit our children. I like to think I'm a creative person, and yet I cannot imagine a scenario in which students are anything but harmed by the proposed changes. Staff members attempting to deliver quality instruction and meet the MT standards need all the support that these changes would strike. It would negatively impact the availability of jobs, and unfairly burden our rural communities. None of the proposed changes can be justified through best practices of education. If I've learned nothing else during pandemic schooling, it's that our librarians, counselors, and teachers of non-core subjects are as necessary as the air we breathe. They are the front line on keeping students engaged and challenged by rigorous learning with the supports to be successful. Classroom teachers simply do not have the time, training, or expertise to absorb those duties. They are essential to our schools and no community should be deprived of them.

As you consider the proposed changes, I implore you to see that they are not in the best interest of Montana's children, schools, or communities.

Thank you for your time,

Jodi Delaney

If the information is true, I am opposed to the new rule changes. Vote against them. I am a faithful voter and will be watching!

Please tell Elsie to stop gutting public education.

School counselors play a pivotal role in guiding our youth, especially those that might not have educated parents at home to turn to. Please, please, stop gutting the public education that has allowed our state to thrive.

Elsie Arntzen is doing serious long term damage to our state, and we would all be better off if she resigned.

Riley Kurtz

(Graduated with an education degree in 2014 and fortunately not an educator that has to deal with this trash right now.)

I am emailing to provide support for counseling in the schools. Please do not even consider removing these services for our students. The last few years have been more trying than ever for children and they need all the support we can provide. The size of the school/enrollment should not affect the need for counseling services. ALL schools small and large need services for our students.

Thank you!

Kris Gardner

4th Grade Teacher

DeSmet School

Chair, Board of Trustees

Arlee Schools

NO!!!!!!

No to the OPI proposals

Please tell Ms Arntzen to either take her job seriously or at least to get out in the open her plan to ruin public schools in Montana

Sent from my iPhone

Dear Tristan,

Please, please, please reconsider these new guidelines. Mental health is so very important now more than ever. Our city of Great Falls just lost an 8th grader to suicide.- This Monday night. That in itself speaks to how much MORE counseling our children need.

Along with that goes all the arts and gym. These kids need outlets for their energy. Children are not meant to sit in chairs all day. Their brains need more.

I am very disappointed in the current administration for even considering these cuts. Our children deserve better.

Thank you,

Amy Stewart

Good morning,

My name is Kayla Bethel, and I am a CSCT mental health therapist at Butte High School. I am emailing to state that as a mental health professional within the school system, I do not agree with Elsie Arntzen's plan to cut both curriculum requirements nor removal of school counselors. School counselors are a vital part of a school system, both for curriculum and scholastic needs, as well as mental health support. If we are to remove them from the school systems, who do you plan to have take over the duties and positions? Seeing as we are, year after year, the **highest suicide rate within the country**, and especially because Montana has bragged

about increasing mental health care for those who struggle, how do you feel removing mental health support within the school is going to help this statistic? In addition, if we are to prepare our young people for the real world, with possibilities of going on to higher education or a trade, how does cutting the curriculum requirements support students who need the vital skills they are being taught? I recognize the difficulty of education right now, especially within the last two years of COVID and such, but it is important to listen to the people who are on the frontlines working day after day with these students, especially me who works with students' mental health? I truly hope that you will listen to our dissatisfaction for this plan. Please reach out to me if you have any questions. I would also love to chat with you about how the shift in requirements for CSCT since OPI has taken over has gravely impacted programs, especially with the closure of Altacare across Montana.

Kayla Bethel (Gross), LCPC

CSCT Therapist; Butte High School

NO!!!

Those that take eat well, those that give sleep well.

Hello,

My name is Kristin Ekstrom, and I was a school counselor in Montana for the last 4 years. I worked at a large AA school, where we had 6 counselors for 1,800-2,000 students. With this caseload, we were still working over our contract hours, and inevitably student needs still fell through the cracks.

School counselors do more than change schedules. We advocate, prepare students for life after high school, help with daily conflict, we listen, we support, and so much more. We are often one of the only positive voices in a student's life.

Currently, I am a school counselor in rural New Jersey. I work at a middle school, where my caseload is 144 students. Due to budgeting, I am only a .78 counselor (not quite full-time), and my hours are 8:00am - 2:00pm. Even though these are my designated hours, more often then not I am staying past 2:00 every day to manage student crisis, needs, and peer conflict. With a school this size, I do not do any scheduling, and all of my time is spent face time face students. Even with a small caseload and population, these students still need full time support. They need consistency, and someone who is physically and mentally there with them in the moment.

Students are in a mental health crisis. With covid, social media, worldwide conflict,- there is constant input from their phones and media, and they need supportive adults and mental health support.

I am happy to continue to discuss specific needs and concerns that I am seeing in our students, and why it is imperative to have a full time counselor for all students and an appropriate caseload for counselors, regardless of the population or size of the school.

Please reach out with any questions.

Best,

Kristin Ekstrom

I feel it would be a huge mistake to get rid of school counselors with the many situations students are facing nowadays. I see many students that need the help and assurance a counselor gives them. Please do not

start limiting the amount of counselors. Also, do not limit the amount of school librarians. Thank you for your consideration. Leona Mayo

Dear Superintendent Arntzen,

I'm writing to you out of concern for your proposed changes to School Counseling staff. I have been a school counselor for 6 years. This has been the hardest year so far. Kids are not well. They are stressed, anxious and depressed. I have completed more suicide assessments in the last two months, than I have in the last 6 years combined. And I'm at an elementary school!

I am from a rural community, and was the school counselor in a small rural community for three years. We had a therapist that came to the clinic once a month to meet with adults and children, other than that one day a month, I was the sole source of mental health for the community. My community is the norm for small rural towns. Mental health services in rural Montana are nonexistent, taking away school counselors would be detrimental to the students in those communities. You would be leaving them with nothing.

In my current school, our CSCT program is full, they cannot have any more students on their caseload, our school therapist also has a full caseload. I don't have enough time in my day to meet with all the students who need me, and when parents look for outside therapy, there are few, if any, taking new clients. We are in a mental health crisis, and Montana kids are getting hit hard.

According to the Youth Behavior Risk Survey 42% of kids experienced depression symptoms that lasted over two weeks. and 1 out of 5 seriously contemplated suicide. In addition, during the 12 months before the survey, 10.2% of all Montanan students in grades 9 through 12 had made a suicide attempt and 13.5% of 7 th and 8 th graders. For American Indian students, 17.6% had attempted suicide one or more times in the twelve months before the survey. There is a 380% increase in suicidal ideations for students getting "D"'s compared to "A"'s. Explain how cutting counseling services, and getting rid of the 400:1 ratio would do anything to improve these numbers? If anything, they will climb, and that will be on your conscience.

In summary, our students today need more access to mental health resources than ever before. Instead of cutting these positions, we should be trying to find ways to expand them. I shudder to think of the number of students that would be left without any access to mental health professionals, and the ramifications that would accompany the lack of access. I urge you to think of the well-being of Montana students.

Thank you for your time,

Lyndsey Oraw

School Counselor

To all whom it may concern,

I know you have a very hard job in finding a solution to lack of resources in schools, but I implore you to carefully consider that the arts are paramount to the development of a child's education, well-being, and very humanity. Music is what we turn to most in times of despair, loneliness, fear, celebration, joy. It gives foundation to a desire for learning and community. School is the only place that many children are exposed to the arts, and to diminish that experience would be a detriment to society as a whole. The musical arts, visual arts, and language arts are essential in forming contributing members of society, not just on a local level but on a global one. It gives a means of connecting and communicating that bridges all cultural gaps as well as contributing to lifelong well-being, empathy, healing, and inspiration. It must be a part of school education to assure that all children have the opportunity to grow and develop on every level.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Greetings,

I am a Montana native, a property owner, and a registered nurse. I am on the frontline of the mental health crisis that has only worsened since the onset of the Covid pandemic. I serve children 12-18 who have recently attempted suicide and require hospitalization. I am at the table every day with young Montanans. They tell me of the trauma they are surviving, their fears for the future, and their anguish. They feel underserved and unsupported. They feel hopeless.

The recommendations put forth to be discussed by Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction, Elsie Arntzen would only result in more lost lives, and a worsening future for all Montanans. Our youth need reasons to live, they need connection and guidance, they need art and books and music, they need healthy peers around them.

The Superintendent's recommendations unfairly targets rural students. These are the areas of the state where resources are already fewer and further between. The savings which may be found in the Superintendent's proposal would most certainly translate to higher costs to families, communities, and taxpayers. In the long run. Please do not neglect your duty to foster a future generation Montana can be proud to have raised. Reject the Superintendent's proposal today at 3:30.

Thank you for your time.

Tassia Tkatschenko

Please do not get rid of these necessities for middle school aged children. Specifically mental health. There are more kids than ever now that need access to mental health after this COVID debacle that we all had to go through. I have worked with children with behavioral issues and mental health for the past 17 years, and I have never seen the need as much as it is needed now. And due to COVID/Medicaid cuts to the CSCT programs in our state, we aren't even close to meeting the needs of the children that need us. I feel a mental health crisis is brewing among our kids with the constant changes occurring in our lives due to the COVID BS. We need services in place so that we are here and available when this happens. The kids also need the other outlet classes from the usual boring grind of Math and Reading. They can learn to read in Art History, music, cooking, drama and especially the library. Please keep our Middle Schools as they are as a place for children to explore and get the support they need!

Thank you,

Erin Kjersten,

Dear Tristen Loveridge,

The Supt. of Public Instruction, Elsie Arntzen, is recommending that the Middle School Requirement for PE be eliminated. Please consider this my public comment in advance of:

Chapter 55 - Negotiated Rule Making Committee:

Wednesday, May 18th, 2022

3:30PM - 5:00 PM

This is not in the best interest of Montana's students. I disagree with this recommendation. The best course of action is to maintain or even expand the Health Enhancement requirement for middle school.

The current requirement is 225 minutes/week for a semester. That's probably not enough in terms of the overall health of developing persons.

Additionally please put forth a rule that protects PE and recess. Teachers/school employees shouldn't be allowed to withhold PE or recess as discipline or punishment. The value of unstructured free time is well documented and should also be protected.

Thank you,

Rosalie

I would like to express my disappointment in the recommendations of the Superintendent of Schools to reduce the requirements for counselors and librarians in the public schools of Montana, as well as proposed modifications to electives in middle schools.

As an elementary counselor for over 25 years, I can unequivocally attest to the need for this service in all schools. The current ratio of 400 students to 1 counselor is too high as it is. Mental health issues and at-risk behaviors continue to increase with our students today, and decreasing the availability of counselors in the school will only exacerbate the problem.

In addition, reducing students' access to libraries and fine arts classes will take a toll as well. There has got to be a better way to save money than removing vital services from our schools.

Please do not gut our school services by implementing these recommendations.

Jill Flynn

Hello,

I am writing in support of keeping music and art elective requirements at the primary school level. Losing these requirements would be a great disservice to our youth.

Thank you,

Renee Barker

Hello,

I am sending this email indicating my strong, overwhelming support of the arts in school. Students need more than rote memorization and tests to help them become good members of society. They need to be creative, expressive, collaborative. They need to be challenged and stretched and exposed to many subjects - the world is big, wide and awesome! Elective classes help them achieve these goals.

Additionally, the MT school system should continue to work with CSCT and make sure counselors remain a crucial and intricate part of the educational system. Now more than ever, their roles are vital to allow teachers to lead their classrooms and students, teach behavioral skills, and for support and mentorship. These are difficult times and additional resources must be available to provide guidance and trust for the kids.

Our students need to know that public education is for the public good. They need to feel like they are the future. And we need to treat them as such.

To that end, I think Superintendent Arntzen should resign because it is clear that she has little interest in ensuring public education remains the great equalizer. Her choices and inaction are doing the state, the public school systems, and American success a disservice with her vision.

Respectfully,

Jennie Gruber

Corvallis, MT

Mr Loveridge, and Montana Board of Education:

I write in **fervent opposition** to the proposed changes to the ARM as introduced by Superintendent Arntzen. They go against Montana tradition; they reduce educational effectiveness; they gut meaning from students' educational growth; and they don't make sense for any school system that values public education.

Montana's students are struggling more than they have in decades with mental health problems, family stresses, social abruptions from the Covid years, and academic decline from online schooling. These proposed changes would take away most of the traditional pathways to learn, discover, collaborate, and become good citizens.

School libraries are safe places for kids who struggle in the classroom--as happens frequently for a wide variety of reasons. Libraries are gateways to the world, traditionally critical in rural areas. Where will our students go to learn, study, discover new books and explore their interests? The internet? **It is unacceptable to remove librarians--or libraries--from any school anywhere in Montana.**

School counselors are immeasurably important to every student's educational life, whether they struggle or excel, need support or want to navigate complex college pathways. When my husband died, my daughter's high-school counselor was the only person in the school she trusted to confide in and work with to stay academically active while navigating her grief. I've seen school counselors save lives, prevent teen suicides, steer kids way from dropping out, and navigate stellar college applications. **Reducing counseling services to Montana's kids when they are struggling so profoundly is just wrong.**

I most strongly **object to removing guaranteed access to art, music, theater and physical & life sciences.** Those are the subjects that best prepare students for living in a changing world, for collaborating, for developing their brains and civic skills, and for understanding themselves and their world. In many cases, the arts give excelling students wings and struggling students the expressive power to understand their complicated and developing selves. Art saves lives, reduces suicide, and promotes civic discussion separate from politics. The arts are a critically important part of our economy and society: 18.5% of Montanans make some portion of their living as creatives. It's irresponsible to remove access to the arts from Montana's educational priorities.

And why are we removing physical & life sciences for middle grades? These are the classes that get kids out of their desks to learn about how the planet works. Geography and life science classes transform kids and launch careers. Some of our best teachers teach these subjects. If there is a strong case for removing these classes from Montana's educational curriculum, it has not been made to the public.

In short, these proposed changes abandon children at their most critical stages of development. They reduce Montana's rich educational tradition to

a bare-bones service. And they look to me like a set of rules that gut public education and encourage families toward home schooling.

Please reject the proposed changes to Montana's educational tradition.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Good morning. I am writing to express my concerns and strong opposition to the changes proposed in the rules for Montana Middle School students. For many students, music, the arts and technical courses are where they find a place to belong and grow as individuals and as part of an ensemble in the case of music. Without those special ways to foster creativity, I would be concerned that more Middle School students, who are already facing unprecedented challenges after two years of a pandemic, would be lost in that critical period leading to high school.

While English and math are indeed important to their adult lives, the skills learned in band, choir, art class and "shop" will be with them their entire lives.

I have seen the power of the arts to enliven and enrich all three of my grown children and would hate to think my youngest daughter would miss any of the opportunities they enjoyed. Please reject the proposed changes to the Middle School rules.

Sincerely, Dan Hollow,

Please do not lessen the mental health and arts requirements for all schools. If you MUST allow some schools not to follow minimum requirements, put in some type of waiver. To decrease these programs is detrimental to our children. My children have long graduated but there are many neighborhood children and upcoming grandchildren that need a FULL education.

It is the MOST important thing we can provide for our youth...our future.

Yes, food and health care rank right up there but education helps solve those issues.

Do ALL YOU CAN to preserve high standards.

Roxanne Roehl

To Whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my opposition to the recommended changes to ARMs 10.55.709, 10.55.710, 10.55.901, 10.55.902, 10.55.904, and 10.55.905.

As a public school teacher, I am deeply discouraged by Superintendent Arntzen's recommended changes to the School Accreditation Standards. Eliminating required ratios for school counselors in Montana will reduce access to mental health services for our most vulnerable students. According to the OPI's own Youth Risk Behavior Survey data, one in five high school students seriously considered attempting suicide in 2021 and one in ten made a suicide attempt. Young people in Montana are in a mental health crisis. Now is not the time to restrict access to services that are so desperately needed.

In addition, I believe that the changes that are being recommended for librarians and middle school elective requirements will only serve to lower the quality of education in our state. Studies have consistently shown that there is a positive correlation between high-quality library programs and student achievement. Electives offer students options to seek out interests and give them avenues for choice. I would argue that these courses are just as important as core classes. It is important to, at the very least, maintain the current language and standards for the good of all students.

Sincerely,

Hello Tristen. My name is Dusty Molyneaux, and I am the Music and Art Supervisor for the Great Falls Public Schools.

To the Members of the Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

Please add my name and my concerns with the elimination of language specific to music and visual art instruction for Middle School curriculum in the current proposal for Chapter 55 NRM. In my 28 year career I have seen the value that the Arts bring to ALL schools, and how necessary they are for a complete and well rounded education for our students.

I have managed the MHSA District 6 Music Festival for the last 10 years, and I have seen firsthand how music programs in Class C-Class AA enrich the lives of students and their communities. The skills taught in music classes transfer to all areas of life, and students learn independent thinking skills as well as how to work together for the common good. I can say the same thing for Visual Arts classes in the many shows and exhibitions I have worked with in Great Falls as well—the kids hunger for these kinds of opportunities on a daily basis taught by professional Arts educators.

If program language is not specific for these kinds of classes, the results will be devastating to small communities. These kinds of programs and experiences can't wait for high school to develop—the skills are too complex and diverse to wait that long to have true growth and sequence for proper development. The Arts *can* be and *should* be taught to ALL students.

In fact there is language in ESSA that pertains to that: “A well rounded education means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, **ARTS**, history, geography, computer science, **MUSIC**, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject determined by the State or local educational agency”

Please keep Montana schools vibrant by continuing to require a comprehensive education that **INCLUDES THE ARTS** at the Middle School.

Thank you for your time in serving on this committee for the students of Montana.

The changes disproportionately effect rural schools.

The access to counseling services is essential for some students.

If the FTE changes are enacted this will cause a drop in the access to services.

The CO-OPs are a great tool, with fewer counselors the travel time between student visits will result in fewer services less time with students . Rural Schools have a very difficult time recruiting teachers as it is a .5 FTE in any subject will

deter qualified candidates from applying to serve rural schools.

Ones zip code should Not determine the level of education you can achieve in this state

Thank You for your consideration

Trudy Skari

Tristen,

My name is Jenell Logan and I am a Health Enhancement teacher in the Monforton School District. I am writing to express my concern over Superintendent Arntzen's plan to recommend the removal of the requirement for PE in Middle School.

This would be a huge disservice to our students, as this is such a pivotal time in their development. Students this age are learning how to take care for themselves and making decisions regarding their health that have the potential to impact the rest of their lives. It is our responsibility to ensure that they are equipped with the necessary information and means to do so properly. There are countless studies that show the positive effects of physical activity in relation to the learning environment. Effects that correlate to mental, emotional, and social health as well. These are all areas that we as health educators help our students navigate.

I would ask Superintendent Arntzen to reconsider her stance on this issue and instead think about the countless Montana children who will struggle with their health as a result of this recommendation. Montana children who will one day become Montana adults. The impact of this recommendation, if successful, will be detrimental to our communities and echo through generations.

Let's continue to move forward with our stance on health, not backwards.

Thank you,

Jenell Logan

Dear Mr. Loveridge,

As a high school language arts teacher, I am alarmed by Ms. Artzen's proposed changes to the elective and credit requirements for middle schools. Students must be guaranteed a comprehensive, equitable education at all grade-levels. To do that, we must have standards and opportunities for all students. Without these requirements, students in Dutton and students in Dillon could receive very different educations, even though they all live in the state of Montana.

If the committee were to approve Ms. Artzen's short-sighted plan, by the time students reach high school, they may not have the requisite skills to succeed in high school. If they cannot succeed in high school, their choices beyond high school will be severely limited. To succeed in today's complex world, students need *more* education, not *less*.

This is a bad idea. Please do not approve Ms. Artzen's proposed changes. It will stunt our students, their potential, and ultimately, our society. We must uphold and maintain rigorous and equitable standards for all.

Thank you,

Katy Paynich, English Teacher

Hi,

I am writing to state my disdain for the proposals by Superintendent Elsie Arntzen on librarians, counselors, and electives as well as cutting credits. Please do not enact these changes. So many students need loving and trained counselors in these always changing and crazy times. We need librarians who are specialists in their field in all schools in Montana. Students need electives and opportunities to take more advanced readings,

math, and science in junior high/middle school. By offering a variety of electives and more opportunities for academic advancement, students are able to pursue interests beyond the basics and are also learning to be more diverse in the competitive and ever changing job market of their future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Paula W Foster

Hello Tristen,

I received the email from Jane Shawn about the change in the language for elective classes in middle school. Please share my thoughts with the committee please. These elective classes help create an environment in our schools that helps make learning fun for our kids. Many of these classes give kids an opportunity to have fun with hands-on learning and provide the skills that will help them be successful later in life and some skills that will help them right now.

I teach a Health class at HMS that provides kids the opportunities to learn how to cook and prepare meals for themselves. In this class, I also expose them to a weight room where they can learn how to safely, and correctly get a workout in so they can start to fall in love with movement and pushing their bodies so they can live healthier lifestyles as they get older. Not to mention the many health topics we cover to help them in their everyday lives. This year I was blown away as we started our puberty unit with the number of kids that have not been through that discussion in their lives, leading me to believe that if there isn't an opportunity in schools they may never learn these important topics. The number of kids that knew they are supposed to eat healthily, but they couldn't tell you why. Many of my students had no idea they could get a job and earn some money starting at the age of 14, or how to build a resume to hand to a potential employer to help land a job. Changing the language would open up the doors to potentially cutting many important courses our kids need such as this one.

This is just one subject in the schools where kids are learning valuable skills. Every class is giving students a variety of different lifelong skills that they never knew about. Along with peaking the interest of many students that may not even like school, but tolerate it and attend all their classes just because of their passion for a music, art or shop class.

I strongly believe that changing the language of the different programs is a huge mistake, that will end up affecting everyone in a very negative way. Thank you for reading this and passing it on.

Have a great day,

Brayden Nicholson

To Whom It May Concern,

I am horrified at the proposed changes for the School Library Media and School counseling staff requirements for middle school. I am a middle school teacher and parent of a child in middle school. Removing the ratio of students to teacher librarians and counselors could drastically reduce the offerings to our children. For many students, libraries are a safe space where they can enjoy something outside of the core classroom. School counseling should be something we are investing more in, not taking away. The current ratio of one full time counselor for 400 students is already too high. The mental health of our children should be at the top of our list

of things to invest in. If the ratio is to be changed, it should be one counselor to a maximum of 250-300 students.

Along with the libraries and counselors, striking the current language for middle school requirements could open the door to drastic reductions of class offerings due to districts cutting costs. The electives are the first thing to go when cutting costs, it should be the exact opposite. These classes are worth fighting for. If the language is removed this gives an open license to stop offering some of the classes and services our students need the most.

In addition to counseling, libraries and electives it saddens me that striking the requirement for a PE/Health class, or any other core class, is even thought to be a good idea. Health education and physical education sets our students up for a lifetime of activity and can lead to healthy lifestyles. To strike any of the core content areas from requirements would be a disservice to every student in Montana.

While some will say it is just a language change and students will still get these classes, it opens the door for some districts to make drastic cuts to their offerings. If we don't protect our language and requirements, how are we guaranteeing our students the best education possible? Montana's children deserve better.

We must invest in our schools, our children and our communities. Taking away ratios and language is not the answer. We must protect what we have and fight for more.

Thank you for your time.

Talia Martin

Parent and Public School Teacher

Good Evening,

My name is Rebecca Croghan. I am a teacher in the Belgrade School District. I am writing to ask that the committee preserves the current electives and credit requirements for middle school. The Every Student Succeeds Act encodes that students have access to a "well-rounded education." According to ESSA, a well-rounded education is defined as: "courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience."

By removing the credit requirements, school districts will not have to provide these opportunities for our students in junior high. This limits our students' ability to access a well-rounded education.

Please ensure our students maintain the ability to access these important courses at the junior high level.

Thank you,

Rebecca Croghan

Hello Tristen,

The following is submitted as written public comment to the Chapter 55 Negotiated Rule Making Committee Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, May 18th at 3:30 pm.

Dear Negotiated Rule Making Committee Members,

I write to you today as a proud product of the Montana Public Schools. I attended K-12 in Billings, went on to receive two degrees from the University of Montana, and now teach in the public schools of Helena. I am pleased to see that specifically Civics or Government within Social Studies as well as Financial Literacy have been added to the high school requirements. However, I have concerns regarding a few of the other areas.

Especially after what our communities have endured over the past two years, I feel reducing the requirements for counseling staff listed in 10.55.710 would be a grave mistake. It is no secret that students and teachers are struggling. Having counselors in our schools is critical now more than ever. I understand that your proposed amendment still requires counseling staff but removing the student to staff ratio takes the concrete expectations out of the rule and makes it too easy for districts to not provide enough of the critical counseling staff our schools desperately need. If a change is going to be made here I urge it should be in the other direction towards closer alignment of the National Counselors Association recommendation of 250 students to 1 counselor.

Regarding middle grades (10.55.902), I am frustrated to see such dramatic cuts to the expectations for elective offerings. While I see that elective offerings are still listed as a group, once again the specific guidelines are removed. The removal of required arts curriculum is of particular concern to me. The Every Student Succeeds Act passed in December of 2015 states that all students are entitled to a well-rounded education and goes on to specifically cite music, art, technology and foreign languages as part of that education. By removing the specific directives from our state requirements we are opening the door to reducing student access to these critical content areas. When I was in middle school at Castle Rock in Billings, my family went through 3 years of serious medical emergencies and the resulting recovery periods. These family traumas combined with the typical challenges of my pre-teen and early teenage years caused tremendous struggle for me. What got me out of bed and to school every day during this time? Band. Music became everything to me – motivation to go to school, a source of community and friendship, and an emotional outlet when I needed it most. And that doesn't even get into all the developmental and cognitive benefits of music. Every single Montana student deserves to have these same opportunities and opening the door to districts cutting them is simply unacceptable. I urge you to maintain our high expectations of middle school curriculum as these are incredibly critical years for student development and they deserve the very best we have to offer.

In regard to 10.55.709 and the striking of ratio requirements for endorsed library media specialists, I believe this change will be a serious detriment to our students. Our library media specialists fill a crucial role in Montana schools, especially as our world moves to a technology driven society and it becomes even more crucial students learn about appropriate online behavior and develop their abilities to find reputable sources of information.

In closing, I strongly urge you to vote against the entirety of Superintendent Arntzen's recommended changes except the civics/government and financial literacy graduation requirements. Montana students and families deserve public schools that offer them the very best we can, and these recommendations seriously undermine the strength of our schools and in turn the strength of our communities. Montana deserves better.

Sincerely,

Nicole Evans

Dear Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

My heart was heavy as I read through the changes Superintendent Elsie Arntzen is recommending for school accreditation standards. When I first started teaching 22 years ago, I was doing it because I loved teaching. Over the years, my passion for teaching remains, and my belief in the importance of public education has intensified. Public Education is a place where all students regardless of socio-economic status can learn, grow, and thrive. The past year I have realized that yes, public education needs to be addressed but limiting

student's access to the arts, music, literature, physical education, and social and emotional learning is completely contradictory to what I thought needed to happen. I did not agree with many of the changes Superintendent Arntzen recommended, but the one that is closest to my heart pertains to the School Counselor position.

I am a school counselor at Target Range School District. Depression and anxiety has become more prevalent in our youth over the past 5 years, families are struggling financially, and substance use and abuse is on the rise. Daily I must prioritize the needs of my students in order to assess who needs the most support at this time. Daily I must decide which student I will meet with based on their needs and resources. Many students that have asked to visit with me must wait days and sometimes weeks because of the imminent needs of their classmates. Students want a safe space to share their thoughts, troubles, and successes. Students want to a safe space to navigate appropriate ways to respond to the challenges they face. Students want support as they assess the skills and tools they have and will need to be successful adults. School counselors provide this space.

Mental Health resources are limited within our communities. It seems obviously grotesque to me that I feel like I need to mention that Montana has one of the highest suicide rates in the country. I have provided many families with referrals for outside support from a therapist. For some of my students, outside supports are unavailable due to resources, time, and transportation needs. For other students, months on a waiting list has become the expected. It is essential that our students have access to a school counselor.

I strongly encourage that there is a change in the ratio of students to school counselor to the National Recommendation of 250:1.

I ask that the Negotiated Rule Making Committee disregard the changes that Superintendent Elsie Arntzen is recommending. How public education moves forward needs to be a discussion that involves parents, students, school administrators and the greater Montana community.

Sincerely,

Michal Farley

Parent

School Counselor

May 17, 2022

Dear Mr. Loveridge,

Please be informed I am totally against all of the changes proposed for middle school requirements by Ms. Arntzen. As a former teacher of elementary and middle school students I have witnessed how these programs have turned students onto education, given students a way to deal with trauma in their lives, and broadened their horizons as they try to find a path in which they can excel.

By taking away these requirements we are not addressing the whole child. Is this not why we offer a public education with a sampling of curriculum for all? Without these offerings many students will not be in a financial setting to afford private lessons or experience many creative avenues. School libraries are an essential part of every educational institute. Many students live miles from town and would have less access to not only written material but technology resources.

As both an educator and a parent, I beg you do not take away what it has taken our communities years to develop.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Lynch

Negotiating Committee Rules Making Members,

Please reconsider not revising counselors, librarians and music educators out of education. These people provide an outlet for so many students today. As a parent, I cannot imagine my kids going through school without a librarian, counselor, art or music teacher. These individuals have helped shape my children into who they are today. Cutting programs and educators is NOT the answer. Thank you for your consideration.

Lynn Mason

What are they proposing to replace these with? Is it just going to be an open language situation now? So anything goes? Or is she trying to get these things out of school?

These are credits that are required, so is she saying these things are no longer required? Is that going to make it so it's up to the school to decide? Which would be fine for some schools, others might think music or art isn't important, and no longer required, so why get into the budget hiring teachers of the arts when it's no longer required?

So then, students get art.... where? You know that a love of music or art often comes from a teacher. And the science with a link between music and scholastic performance is a lot more solid than other studies I've seen.

So is this some totally aloof gargoyle deciding for everyone what's best when she has no idea what's good for education? Is this giving, "freedom," to the schools to slash budgets for the arts leaving a slew of teachers without a job and even more students without a proper teacher to teach them the arts? Did we vote on this?

Elected officials, it would be great if you'd just stop, "helping," us. At this point I believe the office of public instruction is doing more harm than good.

Care about kids? Stop helping. And punch yourself in the face.

Mike Wolfe, veterane teacher of the arts and a public school employee stuck in a broken system with idiots running it.

Do better

Michael Wolfe

I have been a public-school teacher in Montana for the past 36 years. I am very concerned about the proposed changes for the middle school curriculum, as proposed by our Superintendent of Public Instruction. This is a very bad idea. These programs are very important and needed. I strongly urge you to keep our middle school programs intact.

Thank you,

Patty O'Neill

To all parties concerned:

The purposed cuts to Montana curriculum and its governing language represent a critical error in judgement by those elected to ensure children in Montana have access to quality education. Amputating state

educational standards in this manner also demonstrates a lack of requisite knowledge necessary for of the office. Even as a concept, it brings to light a grossly apathetic mindset towards the needs of Montana students, whose education is the responsibility of OPI and The Secretary of Public instruction.

Let me clarify that this is not a subjective opinion dismissible as a political difference- this situation has far more real and severe consequences.

I Hold a Masters Degree in curriculum and Instructional Design, meaning curriculum and its effect in schools is my field of expertise, and the purpose of this email is to define with abject reality what Mrs. Arntzen's proposed mutation of Montana's educational standards is, and what it's result will be:

The proposed Cuts will make our states education system resemble a FAST-FOOD business model where quality is disregarded in favor of simplicity. This proposal is a systematic destruction of our public schools ability to provide students with an education of value. It will also radically harm chances of future success and potential employability for Montana kids and so greatly limit opportunity's for students in Montana Classrooms that to call it public education would require serious liberties with the definition of "Education".

As a teacher, and as an individual who has lived in Montana for my entire life, attended Montana Public Schools and graduated from a Montana University to work in a Montana Public School I cant reach any rational or logical reason behind what Mrs. Arntzen has proposed.

There is no shred of evidence which remotely suggests that this preposterous idea will have even a minimal benefit to Montana's Public schools. In contrast, every single piece of research that exists points toward not only the benefits of the programs which Mrs. Arntzen wishes to strip from Montana schools, but their absolute necessity in Quality education. The gravity of that fact cannot be overstated and it cannot be shielded by political spin. What that determines is this: Support for Mrs. Arntzen's proposed obliteration of school curriculum is a declaration of negligent disregard for Montana students fully aware of the consequences to those student's.

Elected officials and the committees who advise them bare the burden of responsibility to serve the citizens, which include the children who attend our schools. To even consider implementing the changes Mrs. Arntzen has purposed is not only blatantly unethical, but considering her oath of office it borders on criminal. This is not a conversation about why it is good or helpful for students to have access to elective classes like music, CTE, art, and so fourth. This is a conversation about integrity, or at the bare minimum the duty of office. It is apparent that not one piece of educational research was used to inform these proposals, it is also clear that the future success and employability of Montana students was not a priority.

This issue shows highlights the disconnect between Mrs. Arntzen and Montana's, parents, teachers and schoolboard members who regardless of political affiliations or belief systems work and fight daily for Montana's kids. My hope is that this will urge you to follow in their example and do the best you can for the students of our state. Don't rob them of opportunity's, don't limit the kids who are entitled to the best quality education we can provide them. Step back and recognize that Montana's Secretary of Education is more than a seat on the land board but is responsible for the future of Montana's students and should be held accountable to that fact. We have pride in our schools, our communities and our kids because we can offer them curriculum which ignites creativity and fosters innovation while building real-world skills, what I'm imploring is that you share in that pride with us.

Thank you-

River Newman, Butte School District

The proposals by the Superintendent of Schools is NOT beneficial to the students and to Montana citizens. These appear to be a giant leap bac in progress. Our students deserve better. Please let the committee know that Montana citizens are watching and want to be informed.

Thanks you

Sandy Snow

formerly a teacher and still a parent and concerned citizen

Superintendent Artnzen's proposed changes are as baffling as they are egregious. These changes essentially gut the high standards we have for middle school education in this state. The term "elective offerings" is about as vague as it gets, and leaves one to wonder exactly what now constitutes an elective? Underwater basket weaving, perhaps?

The language she proposes to eliminate altogether encompasses the bare minimum we must offer in elective areas that are a huge reason why many students come to school, music, art, culinary arts, etc.

I understand that these areas are increasingly difficult to staff and fund, but eliminating them entirely in favor of "elective offerings" is beyond comprehension. When situations are difficult, Montanans don't just avoid them entirely. We figure out how to best meet needs- and ignoring those needs is unconscionable.

Why the distinction between middle school and junior high students? As I read it, middle school students will still receive reading and writing instruction across the curriculum but junior high students will not?

A library is widely regarded as a physical space, especially a school library. To strike the language specifying that books and other library materials must be housed in a central location opens the door to a school library being repurposed and the materials suddenly located on carts or wherever there is a vacant shelf. This is not hyperbole. This is not false news. This happens all the time in schools across the country when school libraries are deemed unnecessary. Many districts have realized eliminating libraries and librarians is a mistake and reinstated them. If there isn't an actual, physical school library, the need for a certified librarian mysteriously disappears with the books. Combined with the proposed changes to librarian ratios already discussed, this assault on libraries, which is disguised as easing burdens on school districts, must be denied. Now more than ever, our children need school libraries. It is baffling to me that someone charged with providing the best education possible is willing to deny essential services and curriculum that would ensure a well educated population for years to come.

This is a misguided attempt to ease burdens on schools districts. There are better ways to address the issues our state faces. Sticking our heads in the sand is not our best course of action. The end result of going down this rabbit hole will be new generations of Montanans not only lacking in basic knowledge, but also lacking in appreciation of the things that make life worth living.

Shelley O'Rourke

co-chair School Library Division, MLA

I write to urge the committee to preserve the language that specifies electives at the middle school level. These classes provide foundational skills that students need to succeed at higher levels as well as opportunities to explore subject matter of their choosing. Eliminating the language that lays out these options is

a bad idea and one that I oppose as both a teacher and a parent in the Helena School District. Please do not eliminate the current elective language.

Thank you,

Rebecca Leaphart

Please preserve the current specific electives and credit requirements program for middle schoolers.
Amber Conger

To whom it may concern,

I would like to go on the record as being vehemently opposed to Superintendent Arntzen's gutting of public education. The changes presented would be catastrophic for the students and teachers in Montana. As a teacher in Columbia Falls for the last twenty-five years, it saddens me to hear that this is even a possibility. One would think the Superintendent of schools would be pro-education, not looking to dismantle it.

With a heavy heart,
Kristy Gange

6th Grade Science

CFJH

To Whom It May Concern,

As a middle school Montana educator of 20 years, I am appalled and disheartened by the proposed changes to public education. The elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools, preventing access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses would be a determinant to our students. Our students need full access to quality school libraries with certified librarians to preserve their right to intellectual freedom. Our students, and their families, need full access to counselors on campus who provide much needed mental health support.

It is clear State Superintendent Arntzen is out of touch regarding the needs of students, the needs of public education teachers, and the needs of Montana communities. It is apparent Superintendent Arntzen is attempting to dismantle public education as we know it.

I strongly oppose all the proposed education changes by our State Superintendent.

Disheartened,

Leslie DiMaio

7th grade ELA teacher

Columbia Falls, MT

Good Heavens!

I am appalled at Superintendent Elsie Arntzen's terrible gutting of elective, librarians, and counseling staff from our public schools. At this time in history it is more important than ever to give students real connectivity and

connection in schools. Electives provide real brain food for students and give them a reason to come to school. It is in these ways students form relationships with adults and fellow students alike.

Moreover counselors and librarians! Kids need literacy training. Learning to read means enjoyment of reading and selection of their own topics. Counselors provide support, advice and in many instances recognize social issues like hunger and neglect. We must not allow this striking of accreditation standards from our schools. This is an abhorrent attack on the integrity of schools and will affect students for years to come.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Pfaff

Dear Mr. Loveridge,

I have two children in the public school system and feel very strongly that the changes proposed by Superintendent Arntzen are not in the best interest of Montana students. If these changes are implemented it will be very hard to ever get the FTE's back. Librarians, music and art teachers and School counselors (!!) play a vital role in the culture of the school. Yes, we have a teacher shortage but it won't last forever. Cutting school counselors is like telling kids with struggles to take a hike, and those are the kids that need the most. The research on Art/Music and Counselling for students speaks for itself.

Elective classes and the opportunity to try out different subjects keep kids excited and are often a highlight of my kids day.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sarah Annarella

To whom it may concern:

Please consider putting a stop to the potential changes to library/media and counseling services in our schools. If you don't think these services are necessary then you've never been inside a school and seen how they are able to run effectively AND efficiently every single day.

I work in a low income area with many other battles for kids to fight, including families with divorced parents and drugs/alcohol addictions. Schools are the only "safe" place for many students! And the resources should be there to make it the safest place for them.

A classroom teacher has so many tasks before them each day aside from also managing social, emotional, and mental dilemmas. They are one person.

The recommended change to library services is equally as disturbing. Some kids do not ever see a book at home, let alone be taught how to use and respect them. If they have no resources to read a book at home I can guarantee they also don't have the resources to get to a county library (if there is even one open in a town close enough for them to get to). Libraries are under appreciated and funded as well.

Please respect these resources in public schools and the important role they play in so many students' lives. Thank you for your time.

Brittany Fritz

A concerned 3rd grade teacher and mother of 3

Dear Negotiated Rule Making Committee Members,

I am writing regarding the changes the Superintendent Artze is making regarding librarians, counselors, and the middle school curriculum requirements. As a teacher and a parent, I can tell you that having access to a librarian and counselors daily is crucial. In addition, each of these roles provides necessary support to students and staff.

The librarians in the school teach our kids how to safely access the world through this ever-growing digital age. Without the librarians, students would lack the necessary tools to compete in society's academic and professional areas.

The counselors are the student's lifeline to help when life gets overwhelming. As a teacher, I cannot always stop what I am doing to help students process their big emotions. The counselors teach students how to process these emotions at the elementary level and ask for help when needed. These tools are valuable, especially in this day when we are dealing with a mental health crisis that has never been seen before in recent history. However, helping the mental health struggle of our students and families depends on having highly qualified counselors in each school daily.

Finally, as a student's parent in Montana, I am concerned about the changes to the middle school curriculum. Students in Montana already struggle to be competitive with other students in the country regarding jobs and colleges. By taking away key factors that help students in middle school build a background to build up to taking classes in high school that will lead to college or trade schools. Waiting until high school to introduce these electives harms our student's ability to be competitive outside of school. The goal of education is to develop students into well-rounded, highly educated adults. Taking away the introduction to multiple different areas, from music to technology to agriculture, does not serve our students. Middle school is a crucial area where students start figuring out what career they want to pursue after graduation. This means that the more exposure we give students in different educational areas, the more focused students will be on graduating, and the better-prepared students will be for life.

All I ask is that you please take the time to consider all the sides of this issue before making these suggested changes. While it may seem like a fix to some issues currently, in the long run, these changes will affect every student that is currently in or will be in the school systems of Montana. Thank you for your time.

Deborah McNay
Helena, Montana

I am writing to ask that you vote to maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. I am a parent and teacher in Butte, Montana. Many of the programs that will be cut are programs many families value and low-income families rely on to motivate students to stay in school, live healthy lifestyles, create positive self-image and self-esteem, build community awareness, and teach empathy. Many studies have been conducted evaluating the value of art in education and the importance of exposure at an early age. Most students who do not study art or music in Middle School and Elementary school will unlikely participate in these activities in high school. Students who are involved in the arts are likely to have better grades in school and better attendance. Please do not leave Montana schools behind.

Thank you,

Elena Giono

I have been an educator for 37 years. As a teacher you learn about teaching the more you do it. I cannot believe that cutting electives would even be considered. We as teachers see the results of activities and

electives in such positive ways. Personally I have two children now that have careers in areas that were inspired by the electives in their middle schools. Students excel at school when they can have electives in their schedules and sometimes it is the only reason for them to stay motivated or even come to school.

I have also observed the damage that occurs to our children and students when politics play the education game. Do not let this crazy idea pass. Arntzen's ideas are all motivated by her political ideals. And in her own words, do not let our middle schoolers get run over by her "proverbial school bus."

Tim Garrett

Helena Schools

Dear Tristen and the Montana Board of Education,

My name is Retta Leaphart and I am a parent in the Helena School District. I oppose the proposed changes to the accreditation standard that would eliminate the existing ratios for counselors and librarians and I also oppose cutting language that assures access to arts and elective programming in the middle schools.

If anything, we should be expanding students' access to counseling, libraries and the arts in public school settings. During the time that students were learning online, we saw a decline in mental health, socialization, and communication skills, which can all be improved through the programs Arntzen is proposing to cut.

This feels like a blatant attempt to limit students' exposure to social emotional learning that can be life saving for LGBTQIA students in particular.

Not only are these programs vital for the growth of our students' social and communication skills, but multiple studies have proven that involvement in the arts at school leads to improved academic performance and school culture. A quote from just one of these studies: "We find that a substantial increase in arts educational experiences has remarkable impacts on students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes. Relative to students assigned to the control group, treatment school students experienced a 3.6 percentage point reduction in disciplinary infractions, an improvement of 13 percent of a standard deviation in standardized writing scores, and an increase of 8 percent of a standard deviation in their compassion for others."

(<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2019/02/12/new-evidence-of-the-benefits-of-arts-education/> [brookings.edu])

As a parent, I am deeply concerned to see my own children's access to these vital pieces of their education in jeopardy. As a Montanan, I am embarrassed that this has been proposed and is being considered.

Do not proceed with these changes. Preserve the current electives and credit requirements for middle schools, and maintain the current ratios for counselors and librarians.

Retta

Please maintain current elective requirements for middle school. For many students these are the classes that set them up for the future. Not only that but students need to shine in these areas so that they feel success as a student. It is the love of these subjects areas that motivate students to be happy at school and come each day. Protect public education!

Sincerely,

Shannon Powers

I was reading about changes being proposed and I am very concerned. I will state that I know longer have children in school but I do have grandchildren in various schools in Montana and these changes, if implemented, could be devastating to them. The thought of losing music and art program takes many students out of things that keep them involved in school. Not all kids (a majority) are not athletic. In reading these proposals none of them mention football or basketball or other sports looking at any changes. Don't take me wrong, sports are important but should not have a higher priority than our children's education. Do you realize the educational aspects of music? It includes math, reading, art, leadership, teamwork, listening. It is also been proven that the music (band and choir) as well as welding, shop, ceramics, drawing, financial classes, etc open doors for students for their future. These also reduce truancy, dropouts, and other issues. With the issues that arise with the bullying and technology being used to bully, attack, demean, etc why get rid of positive things for our youth. Also reducing the requirements that students need to complete prior to graduation is such a bad idea. Kids are already graduating with substandard education and you are looking at reducing it even more. I had a daughter who graduated in the top of her class and her reading, writing, spelling and grammar skills were awful and yet she came home with 90-100% on all her homework and as parents were told she was excelling. Then find out because she was so quiet, well behaved, pleasant happy student she was given A and B and always passed. Do I take some blame for that? Yes but I also blame her teachers a lot. So let's reduce the expectations even further by lessening the expectations from the students. BTW, through hours of hard work and a mom, brother-in-law, boyfriend now husband helping her with her reading and writing skills she is a teacher here in Montana and she loves teaching.

I also realize teachers are being dealt issues that should be addressed at home but sadly that doesn't happen the way I believe it should which places even more onto the shoulders of the teachers. Saying all this, taking away school counselors, school librarians and reducing expectations of students doesn't solve problems, it just adds more to the teachers plates than what has been directed for them to do and expected of them. No wonder teachers are quitting constantly.

Thank you for reading my ramblings.

Respectfully
Cynthia Ward

To whom who it may concern,

Cutting credits in the education system in the long run will cause many issues within our state education system. By cutting these classes there will be higher dropout rates because students do not have classes that they can take to find something they enjoy in their lives. Not every student enjoys reading, writing and mathematics; the electives are a time for a student to find something they can enjoy outside of these classes. For the students that do enjoy the main core of education this can provide them a chance to think outside of the discipline that they enjoy and think about "how can I do what I love in another discipline."

Further, cutting the number and qualifications of counselors in the education system will not the students because there will not be someone they can talk to about their lives, advice, or troubles at home in private settings. If they are not qualified, it could make things worse for the student and cause even more problems in their lives if the wrong thing is said during their struggles. Moreover, by cutting the counselors and shifting to the online offering, students are not provided a safe place - the student's school may be the safe place for the student to talk to someone about at home issues.

Thank You For Time

Geoffrey Foster

Dear Mr. Loveridge:

I am writing because I was appalled to learn about Superintendent Arntzen's proposed recommendations that will gut our high quality, strong Montana public education system. I am stunned to learn that she is proposing

to take away these basic learning components that will educate our children and our future workforce. She is clearly not following the tenets of her office nor the goals of our state and parents to support our students and to provide a good quality education. As a native Montanan who grew up and received a high quality education in a rural town, I strongly oppose Superintendent Arntzen's attempt to rob our children of a productive and educated future.

I ask that you reject this proposal and I request that Superintendent Arntzen do the job she was elected to do and support our teachers, students and Montana Constituents. Her proposals take away precious and finite resources of staff time and energy and state taxpayer dollars.

Sincerely,

Carol and Brad Evanger

This is a bad idea and hurts students. Students deserve the opportunity to be well rounded individuals and limiting their access is harmful.

Best,

Olivia Bedford

We can't agree to this. Our counselor serves our students individually, small group, and in large classes. She holds 6 week long lunch bunches where certain kids needing help with certain skills gather and they work on coping strategies, relationship building, leadership skills.... etc

Our librarians who are already stretched over multiple schools can't keep up on the demand of students and books if we remove the ratio.

I vote against changing the current wording.

Erin Sutherland-Evans

To: Chapter 55 – Negotiated Rule Making Committee and Montana Board of Public Education

It has come to my attention that our state superintendent is in the process of making recommendations to the Montana Board of Public Education which will effectively reduce and/or eliminate librarians, counseling staff, and specific elective programs and credit requirements in elementary/middle schools/high schools.

This is disturbing news to hear as our librarians and play an important role in our school district.

Libraries and Librarians at all levels assist with technology support and teach important library content that plays a critical role in the success of students in later grades. Removing the FTE requirement based on the number of students would reduce student access and learning opportunities. It appears that a single librarian and possibly a single library would be sufficient to serve multiple schools in a district which would not be in the best interest of students

As the mental health of students is showing an alarming decline in the nation, and with

Montana being a state with one of the highest suicide rates in the nation, which should be adding counseling services in our schools rather than limiting them. By removing the requirements for counselors in each school we are again failing to make our student's mental health and educational success a priority.

The elimination of the requirement for students to be able to choose from all of the program offerings which include visual art, music, career and technical education, and world languages and cultures would be a travesty to the education of our students. Students need to be able to experience classes in each of these areas. The proposed changes would allow districts to offer fewer electives, eliminating programs which give students opportunities to experience new things, develop new skills, take risks, and to enjoy their school experience through subjects they want to learn.

The recommendations of Superintendent Arntzen to the Montana Board of Public Education which will effectively reduce and/or eliminate librarians, counseling staff, and specific elective programs and credit requirements in elementary/middle schools/high schools are not in the best interest of educating students to become well rounded and lifelong learners.

Sincerely,

James Hogan

Helena School District #1 Educator

To Superintendent Arntzen and the Negotiated Rule Making Committee

Dear Committee members,

This letter concerns the proposed cuts to elective programs in Montana middle schools, which I strongly oppose.

My husband and I were both born and raised in Montana. Recently, we moved back so that my husband could practice medicine in his home state. We have always been proud Montanans, and the K-12 education we received here served us well professionally and laid the foundation for a lifelong appreciation of arts and culture.

I was shocked to learn that Superintendent Arntzen is proposing sweeping cuts to middle school elective programs and credit requirements. Given the scope, the cuts will impact virtually every child in Montana public schools. To give two examples, art classes are vital outlets for struggling children and help equip kids with problem solving skills for successful careers in architecture, design, the humanities etc. World languages give our children a competitive edge in an increasingly globalized society. In short, you are taking opportunities and knowledge away from children.

I am saddened to see our public schools under attack. As a mom, I want the best for my child, and the best is not a gutted education system. On a broader note, I see US students continue to slip in international academic rankings, and it is frankly unpatriotic for our leaders to condone sub-par education.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

May Schlotzhauer

I am writing to support the importance for qualified faculty and programs in libraries, art and music. As a student, parent, and teacher, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of these programs and qualified instructors. As a young student and all through my school experiences I relied on the librarians to help me with my academic success and encourage a great love of reading and learning. I participated in music programs throughout my school years and worked with both the art and music programs to supplement my teaching of English in high school.

Many times I have seen students rely on the librarian for additional help in their academic subjects and research. Sometimes, it is only the joy and support a student gets from her music or art class teacher that keeps them in school.

Please vote to support these programs.

Beverly Williams

It is with other disbelief that I read about Elsie Arntzen's short-sighted proposal to do away with electives for music. This proposal has absolutely no rational validity. Music has been proven time and time again to aid students in all other areas of learning. In addition the large numbers of students in school groups actually save money for school districts.

What this is really about is small school districts no longer being able to attract teachers. The solution is not to penalize students who take part in valuable programs, but rather begin discussion on consolidating small schools; so more teachers can be attracted to those jobs. The move that Arntzen proposes is simplistic, panders to small districts who cannot compete for teachers and penalizes students for taking part in an activity that keeps them in school, promotes life long learning in all areas and develops the skill of learning and working in groups which is so valuable in today's private sector.

I urge you to strike down this ridiculous proposal and look for other ways to remedy the situation for small school districts.

Rob Wells

Former Music Supervisor Billings Public Schools

To whom it may concern,

It has been brought to my attention that the music programs offered by Bozeman School District for the elementary and middle schools could be in jeopardy. I would just like to let you know how much these programs have helped my children. We moved into the Bozeman School District 5 years ago and started my oldest on the violin. She went through 5th grade orchestra at Whittier, CJ's orchestras and made Honors Orchestra in the 7th grade. We have been so impressed by Bozeman's music programs. Really this is something they excel at. I have never seen such an excellent music program. It would be a shame to cancel any part of this. My middle one is about to complete her 5th grade year of orchestra and is excited about middle school orchestra and my youngest just started on her viola and is so looking forward to next year to start in an orchestra. These programs have been such a blessing to our family and you have an amazingly

talented music staff. As a mental health professional in the community I have to say that you are teaching much needed coping skills through music. It is also an amazing way to express emotions which adds to the students mental wellness. The mental health of our kids was stretched thin through the Covid lockdowns and added protections are needed at this time not less. If I can put a word in for the school counselors more are needed, not less. Thank you for your time.

Jenn Westenskow

Mr. Loveridge:

I am writing today to ask you to support and maintain electives and credit requirements for middle schools. I have been a teacher and coach in the Kalispell School District #5 for 21 years and I have two children who are in middle school and highschool. The importance of programs such as art, music, technology education, theatre, world language, building trades and others are critical to a well rounded and progressive education. In addition to the previous items, keeping courses such as English Language Arts, social studies, health enhancement, science and others are vital to a middle school student's academic day regardless of which career path they may choose in the future.

Thank you for your time and your service.

Sincerely,

Buck Measure

I am writing to you to beg you not to cut any middle school language regarding student electives and required credits. Our students need exposure to as many programs as possible and thus includes the vocational arts, and opportunities to the visual and performing arts. These experiences make the whole child and are crucial programs to development of our children. PLEASE do the right thing and do not cut these crucial programs in our schools.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Wasson, mom and educator

As a parent, a Montana taxpayer and former state legislature, I strongly object to the proposed changes regarding elimination of specific electives. Middle School students in Montana need and deserve these important specific electives....they can be instrumental in spurring creativity, critical thinking and for many students, will be their only exposure to some of these topics. . Not every family has the resources to provide their children a more diverse education, to take music lessons, or to enhance their understanding of literature.. During my 16 years in the legislature we had a bipartisan saying...if it is not broken, then don't fix it. I urge you to NOT adopt these changes. My children were fortunate to have an excellent public school education in Billings. Both went on to successful professional careers and also attended Ivy League colleges. Both would agree that many of the electives that are included in these rules (and should not be removed) helped them along the way....and that these are often only available to students who attend expensive private schools.

We should be proud of our public schools. Stop trying to destroy them

Kim Gillan, Red Lodge, MT

Good evening,

Please know that as Montana educators we are beyond exhausted. The past two years have demanded incredible amounts of increased labor and energy. We should not have to now explain to our state leaders that it is irresponsible to propose changes that will negatively impact student access to libraries and counselors (or any other important services, courses, or programs.) Superintendent Arntzen's proposed changes are not a solution --- they are a consequence of the exact issues we elect her to address. We need to be able to trust that those above us will work to find answers that ultimately serve our staff and students.

-Jaclyn Vosler

Good afternoon,

My name is Amber Barnes and I am a mother of 2 kids in the East Helena School District. I read the suggestions made by Elsie Arntzen and I am disturbed and angry. There are so many things absolutely wrong with her suggestions.

1) Mental Health Counselors are one of the first lines of defense for students who are in potential danger of abuse and/or neglect, and suicide. The rates of both are still staggering for Montana and we need to give more support to our Mental Health counselors, not take it away. The fact that this is targeting rural communities is discrimination and feels like a punishment for communities who already have very few resources. Please make a good decision for our children who are still in crisis, not one by an uninformed person who has no business being superintendent of Montana schools. Montana is near the top in all the wrong ways in our nation especially with suicide rates and cutting down on Mental Health resources would make that worse. Changing the language as suggested will make it harder for schools to find good Mental Health Counselors where we already have too few.

2) For the library media consultant, again changing the language not only will make it difficult for smaller schools to get the staff that they need, but it also unfairly discriminates against those rural communities. Our kids need to have more access to these resources not less. This is especially important for kids who don't have a community library and the school is the only one they have access to.

3) The language change suggestions around the requirements for elementary, middle school and high school are dangerous and unhealthy for our kids. Kids need all the disciplines, not only to make them more well rounded, but also because they teach them empathy something we need more of not less. The changes suggested come from a lack of education, and where the impact will be seen is in our kids mental health. For some of our kids, they struggle with science and math already. If the arts, both visual and performing are taken away, they don't stand a chance. The research that is out there shows that kids who have a well rounded education, thrive both educationally and socially. There is no good reason for these changes and they will put undue stress on our kids and our teachers.

Please vote against these changes. They come from a lack of understanding about our kids and the teachers who work with them every day.

Thank you,

Amber Barnes

Please do not implement the changes the Superintendent has suggested on librarian and counseling language, and middle school electives/credits. These would be detrimental to student learning and happiness, and I do not believe we should be taking from our students.

As a teacher in Billings, my students are always excited for their time in library because she creates fun, hands on, real life projects with them. When she was pulled into two schools for a year, these projects were not possible because of the workload she had at multiple schools. Our kids value their

time with her and they learn so much that we do not have time for in the classroom. Taking that time away by adjusting the language would be hurting their education.

At a time when mental health struggles (especially in Montana) are soaring, the thought of cutting counselors is terrifying. We should be bringing more counselors in and lowering our ratios, not limiting the amount of time they can see a child by overfilling their plate.

On the same topic, cutting certain electives and changing credits required is not the right path for our students. Our kids need choice in their school day and an opportunity to express themselves. There are also courses they should all be taking and cutting that language is detrimental for their learning and our society.

Thank you for your consideration!

Zoie Hanley

Please do not allow Jr. High and High School elective credits to be cut.

Christine Leipheimer

Please maintain the special electives and credit requirement language for middle schools. My daughter has thrived with the arts and the specific requirements are needed for continuous education. The Superintendent's decisions to change the language are not good for our students.

Erica Shea

As a 30 year Montana resident, my four children attended Bozeman Public Schools. Our oldest daughter teaches, is a principal cellist with a symphony and a Fulbright scholar.

Our oldest son is in the medical field as a physician assistant and recently helped in the research for the covid vaccine.

Our next son is a lawyer in Philadelphia. (He knows Montana is still the best place but)

Our youngest daughter is a published author, six figure income.

Why do I tell you this?

They went through the accredited public school system. All participated in the music and arts from elementary through high school. They participated in All State and AllNorth West. The standards for education didn't read "opportunity to meet" which could mean "or substitute something else here, whatever you can figure out."

As a retired school counselor in the state of Montana, reducing the time a counselor is in the school or having more students in your perview will not result in better outcomes.

Please reconsider the proposed new guidelines.

I understand that staffing is a serious concern, especially in rural Montana, as well as in over priced housing areas in Montana. The choice usually comes down to equitable salaries or reduced standards. Do you really want to choose reduced standards? Montana won't be the last best place if that's your decision. But it could be in the last place for education if you choose reduced standards.

Thanks for your consideration,

To: Superintendent Arntzen and the Negotiated Rule Making Committee

Dear Committee members, I am writing to express my support for elective classes in the visual arts and creative fields in the Montana school system. In my 30+ years of experience as an educator, these electives encourage and promote intellectual achievement across the curriculum. Electives are the support team for reading, math, and science. Nurturing creative thinking and the humanities gives our students an advantage in every professional field. The community of Bozeman as well as other towns in Montana are steeped in artistic traditions that foster tourism, community involvement, and citizenship. Events and venues such as Sweet Pea, Intermountain Opera, the Museum of the Rockies, and the Bozeman Art Museum generate substantial tourist revenue, provide employment, and establishes community connections.

Please do not gut the elective humanities in our schools in this culturally rich State of Montana. The future generations of Montana school children should have every advantage.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Mary Ann Kelly

Hello,

With the increase in student suicides across the state I feel it would be detrimental to not require school counselors in every school, in abundance.

As well as school librarians to help nurture children's love for reading and how is one supposed to learn on their own if they are unable to or not sufficient in reading?

School electives are what enrich the lives of so many and help kids find passion within life.

By taking these things away, we are ruining the future of these kids which will someday be running this country. So, in turn, we are ruining our own future.

Please do not take these necessary things out of schools.

Best regards,

Mackenzie Sampson

Ms. Loveridge,

As a Special Education teacher in Montana for the past ten years, I have seen how much my students rely on their counselors for advice, help during a crisis, support for obtaining their credits to meet graduation requirements and so much more. The anxiety created by the Covid-19 pandemic has increased the need for counselors even more. I have students with depression and I know for a fact that seeing their counselor has prevented them from committing suicide. Reducing the number of counselors per student would be extremely detrimental to our students. Obviously, our superintendent of public instruction does not have our students' best interest in mind if she is proposing cutting counselors.

Our librarians are also a vital part of our schools. Students spend before school, lunch and after school in the library. Students go there when they need reference materials and help with research projects, essays and assignments. They are not always prepared to do this research on their own so the librarians are a wonderful help and resource. My students also read a lot of books. Practice makes perfect so the more they read, the better they will read. This will help them to become productive citizens who contribute to the economy of the state of Montana.

Reducing services to students is the worst thing that adults can do to our children.

After 42 years of teaching, I am retiring this year. I am depending on the students to maintain our quality way of life as they enter the workforce and contribute to our economy in the state of Montana.

Sincerely,

Ginny Erickson

Virginia (Ginny) Erickson

Good morning-

I'm reaching out to express my displeasure with the conversation regarding the elimination of staffing ratios in schools and the standard of credentials from our educators. While I understand that there are staffing shortages and issues facing Montana's education system, I believe it requires a more nuanced approach than the simple axing of the standards we've been lucky enough to have enforced in our state. As for the elimination of arts programs - this is a non-starter. Fund the arts! Preserve a high level of education and availability of resources (certified librarians - I can't believe this is even a discussion!) that Montana has been lucky enough to enjoy. Please, talk to teachers, hear what their needs are, don't slash their already small resources.

Thank you for your consideration-

Dawn Anderson

Butte, MT

To all it may concern:

Superintendent Elsie Arntzen's recommended changes of ratios for librarians, counselors, and elimination of electives is extremely detrimental to our students in public schools. Students need this exposure and enrichment for many reasons.

Regarding librarians, we know the importance of reading and how beneficial it is for students. It is the foundation of word recognition and vocabulary, which enhances students' reading, writing, and speaking. We need strong leaders in these positions to help foster relationships and encourage student engagement with books. Student love getting their hands on new books every week. The skills taught are irreplaceable and transcend their lives. Librarians also help foster skills, including but not limited to critical thinking, analysis, research, organization, technology, and gathering of necessary resources (online and otherwise) for academia and beyond.

Secondly, students and teachers are in need of more emotional and mental health support in classrooms. We are seeing an influx of students with higher needs, and some students are not getting into programs they need as it stands. The enhanced and continued support of counselors is paramount to those students' success. If anything, we could use more support. Not less! Their time and knowledge is incomparable and irreplaceable!

Giving students elective options is such an incredible experience for these students. It helps with decision making and provides experiences that they might not get later in life. We are creating well-rounded, open-minded, creative, and unique individuals by providing a variety of experiences and opportunities to learn an array of topics, both academic and artistic in nature.

Approving these proposals (as presented by Ms. Arnzten) would be harmful to our students and a slap in the face to our hard working educators. Education should be and needs to be student-focused. We need to do what is best for them! Cutting necessary, wanted, and incredible programs and specials would be horrible for the longevity, personal and academic development, and interest of our learners. Further, it would ruin the rapport with students, families, educators, and members of the Helena community.

In the academic climate of the last two years, this can be an opportunity to show that our students are our number one priority, and as proposed, that opportunity would be lost.

Thanks for your time.

Raniece Richardson

Hello MT Board of Education,

My name is Abby Holm. I am a Montana native who graduated from Hellgate High School and I a mom of a 10 year old fifth grader at Smith School in Helena. Public education is a core value of mine and I have been privileged and blessed to experience the exceptional work of our educators and local schools both as a student myself and for my daughter. The education that the Montana public school system provides has always valued our students as unique individual members of society and ensured their needs as individuals are addressed, through counseling, opportunity for diverse learning and activities, and supportive dedicated staff who can give them the attention they deserve. Without established student to counselor ratios and clear guidelines for broad curriculum expectations, children will be more at risk and fall through the cracks. My daughter is just one example of this. She struggled her first few years at Smith and library was the one class she really enjoyed. She had the opportunity to connect with the librarian and could, within the shelves of books, experience a space where she felt relaxed, comfortable and safe to learn and explore. She is now ready to move onto middle school and has blossomed into a curious learner who loves most subjects. However, I hate to think what her path toward middle school would have looked like without her access to the library and the librarian who welcomed her into that space.

I feel lucky to call Montana home because we have always valued our schools and public education, both in urban and rural communities. Our state succeeds when our kids thrive. My experience has shown me that kids thrive when we ensure access and resources are available to all of our kiddos. I am asking you to oppose OPI Superintendent Artzen's recommendations for removing the specific program requirements in areas such as music, visual art, world languages, etc., that you oppose the removal of core curriculum components, that you oppose the removal of the requirements for library media services, and you oppose the removal of school counseling staff requirements.

Thank you for your time,
Abby Holm
Helena, MT

May 18th, 2022

Attn: Elsie Arntzen, and the Montana Board of Public Education

I am writing with deep concern about Mrs. Arntzen's recommendation to eliminate the specific elective programs and credit requirements for our middle school students. By preventing access to music, visual arts, career and technical education students will not learn valuable skills that help with self management, problem solving, critical thinking, and idea development.

As a visual arts educator in Montana, I have seen the positive impact that these programs offer our students, especially during the past several years with the pandemic. Now more than ever it is imperative that students retain access to these types of programs to ensure that their development is well rounded during this period of their lives. Middle school is a tough time, and I have seen first hand how giving students the opportunity to express themselves creatively has enhanced their understanding of the world.

It is imperative that these credit requirements remain intact, because the arts not only give students the technical skills necessary to create resolved pieces, but also leads to massive gains in their ability to approach problems, and develop numerous solution through the creative process, and their development and understanding of the Studio Habits of Mind. By learning to develop original ideas Additionally, students who study visual arts learn and develop their fine motor skills, language skills, social skills, decision-making, risk-taking, and inventiveness. Additionally, there are positive macro level results in our society, as developing an appreciation for the arts can and will lead to lifelong involvement with the arts. This lifelong involvement leads to higher levels of civic engagement and social tolerance, which is very much needed in today's world.

Please do not consider Mrs. Arntzen's proposal, as it will be detrimental to the development, social-emotional status, and the lifelong engagement with the arts to Montana's children.

Sincerely,

DJ Soikkeli

Visual Arts Educator at Big Sky School District #72

Hello,

As a concerned state citizen, I am submitting a public comment regarding proposed changes by Superintendent Arntzen. I am strongly opposed to changes such as eliminating counselors and school librarian ratios, cutting middle school elective requirements, and changing graduation requirements.

Reducing access to counseling resources during a pandemic and when students are increasingly experiencing mental health issues is not acceptable. School counselors are often the only access students have to mental health support. School counselors are seeing an increased caseload and need among students for support. The ratio should remain within accreditation standards.

Preserving electives and credit requirements in middle schools is also crucial. Electives are important as a vehicle for student choice and as a connection and support to core classes. Moreover, Montana cannot afford to gut accreditation standards.

All proposed changes should be rejected by the committee.

Thank you,
Annie Kilgour

As a teacher who has taught in almost every level school available in our great state, I plead for you to not accept the proposed changes from Superintendent Arntzen regarding 10.55.709 and 10.55.710. The changes limit our students (at all sized schools) to resources that impact their learning as well as social, emotional, and physical well being.

Wendy Tyree

Skyview High School

Technology Integration Specialist

Dear Members of the Negotiated Rulemaking Committee,

I urge you to keep all required minimums for counselors, librarians, and elective opportunities. Removing these required minimums will open the door for schools to cut these **essential services** to our Montana students. The Montana Constitution provides for the development of the full educational potential of each person -- and I argue that cutting these essential services would threaten our students' ability to meet their full educational potential.

Please see my detailed comments below.

Comments on proposed changes to 10.55.709

I am writing to urge the Negotiated Rulemaking Committee to **keep** established school counselor and school librarian ratios and reject the recent proposal to remove these ratios. Those ratios are set in place to ensure that every child in Montana has a reasonable chance of being served by a counselor or librarian. Without minimum requirements, a large school district (like District 2 in Billings, which serves over 16,800 students) could hire ONE counselor and ONE librarian if they so choose. A high school like Senior High School in Billings (enrollment close to 2000 students) could choose to employ only one single librarian and one single counselor -- abhorrent ratios that would guarantee our students are underserved.

Comments on proposed changes to 10.55.905

I disagree with the proposal to strike #4 from the list, which would allow a student to graduate from high school in less than four years if they met their school's graduation requirements. If a student meets graduation requirements, they should be allowed to graduate earlier. This is an unnecessary change.

Comments on proposed changes to 10.55.902

I urge this committee to keep established minimums for elective offerings. These ensure that schools are providing our students with a well-rounded education. All students deserve access to visual arts, music, language, financial education, etc., as well as a curriculum that focuses on their social-emotional development. If minimums are removed, schools can elect to NOT provide these services to our students. Our students deserve access to these courses and it is dangerous to remove a school's requirement to provide these.

Thank you.

Virginia Duke

Billings, Montana

Dear Mr. Loveridge and members of the committee,

I am writing to strongly urge you to reject the proposed changes to Montana school accreditation standards for Library Media Services, School Counsellor Staff, Basic Education Programs for Elementary/Middle/High School, and Graduation Requirements. Superintendent Arntzen's proposed changes could have the disastrous and immediate effect of Montana's students losing critical access to broadband internet services, digital media training, counselling services, and even a diversity of educational and career opportunities.

School librarian services are at the heart--often literally--of Montana's schools. These critical staff maintain and curate diverse and stimulating literature for students and staff; they maintain and manage computer access for schools and students; they provide training on research, resource use, and professional writing. In rural areas, schools and school libraries often provide the *only* reliable internet service availability for students and families. Under the proposed new accreditation standards, even a large district of thousands of students could be in compliance by hiring only a *single* Library Media Specialist. Small rural districts already have options under the existing standards to contract services or utilize a consortium or multi-district agreement if hiring dedicated Library staff is not feasible. Please reject the changes to Librarian FTE requirements.

At a time when student mental health and resiliency is in crisis, offering districts the option to reduce their dedicated School Counselling staff is a critical mistake. In 2021, Montana ranked 4th highest in adolescent suicide rates, at 27.2 per 100,000. The national average was 11.2 per 100K. School Counselors often provide the first means of detection when students are in crisis, and the first resources for life-saving help. Removing the per-student ratio requirements is a dangerous mistake. Again, smaller districts already have options for contracting services or multi-district agreements. Please reject the changes to Counselling Staff requirements.

Finally, I am dismayed at the proposed eliminations from Middle and High School program offering requirements. Removing the requirements for programs to provide a balance of offerings to students can only translate into lost opportunities for students to pursue lifelong participation or even careers in art, music, and other technical fields. Even if students do not plan on pursuing careers in these fields, these classes are often a welcome haven for struggling students and sometimes provide the only reasons students remain engaged in school. Music and the Arts are central to schools' sense of community. Under the proposed changes, a district could decide to completely eliminate entire programs if it is in their financial interest to do so. Please reject the changes to Program Requirements.

There is very little merit to the proposed changes. The only changes that seem remotely positive are 1) the inclusion of language to recognize the "distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians", which aligns with IEFA law; and 2) to replace outdated references to "Common Core Standards" with current "Montana Content Standards." Everything else is destructive and dangerous to the quality and equity of public education across our state. I am not sure what narrative Arntzen and her office are using to describe the need for these proposed changes; I imagine it has something to do with providing help to districts that are struggling financially or with difficulties in hiring amid a national teacher workforce shortage. I for one will call it as I see it: this is an attempt to undermine the quality of public education standards, so that later the finger can be pointed to "failing public schools" and garner support for unconstitutional use of public funds for private for-profit or parochial schools. Please reject these dangerous and unreasonable changes to accreditation, and protect the quality of education and education access in Montana.

Thank you,
- Carson Yahvah (he/him/his)

Reject Arntzen's recommendation

Marty Kloker

Good Morning,

My name is Cindy Galbavy and I am Montana CTE Teacher. Please stop these cuts to our counselors, and all the electives for our middle schools. We are coming out of a very hard time and we need counselors in every school to help students. Montana doesn't have enough mental health services and now you are wanting to cut more services. Please rethink these cuts.

Our students need electives to survive middle school. They need art, music, and CTE. Students need to know how to be creative in their lives. We need them to learn about the trades in middle school so when they come to high school they can start to figure out their trade and their passion.

Superintendent Arntzen spoke about how important Education is and the support she wanted to give CTE when East Helena was building their new schools and now she wants to cut CTE in the middle schools? This is not right so please reconsider these actions.

Please stop and think about all the students that will not find themselves in middle school without electives. Please stop and think about the mental health of all our students in Education. We need counselors, we need all our elective teachers to help form amazing students and young teens.

Sincerely,

Cindy Galbavy

Proud CTE Teacher for 21 years

Greetings Committee,

I am emailing you to strongly encourage you to say no to the recommendations in front of you to change accreditation standards for public school library media specialists and public school counselors. We must value student opportunities, experiences, and mental health. We are saying no to what is best for students by changing these accreditation standards.

Alissa Gray

Fourth Grade Teacher

Arrowhead Elementary

To Whom It May Concern,

I urge you NOT to change the accreditation standards that Elsie Arntzen has proposed. These changes could cripple an already precarious system of support for students.

Both Librarians and Counseling staff play an integral role in a student's life. There are already far too few counselors, both in our schools and in private settings, for our students to access. Children across Montana are already on lengthy waiting lists to be seen by counselors. This change would increase the waiting time or, more than likely, completely exclude many students from ever having the chance to meet with a counselor. Our students, every single one, deserve access to counselors!

Librarians are not just for keeping the books in order and helping kids find a good read. Librarians of today play a far greater role in the safety and growth of our children than they ever have before. Librarians create a safe and welcoming place for all students by providing activities and space for extra-curricular

gatherings. Librarians teach our children about technology safety, how to gather information, and to think critically about information. They are an integral part of any classroom teacher's weekly lessons! They provide resources to our teachers, beyond books. Things like technology, science kits, really whatever the classroom teachers need to do their job, the librarian is the person to know!

I urge you to find a better solution for meeting the needs of our rural schools without taking away critical resources of all students and teachers.

What would you want for your child?

Respectfully,

Rhiannon Annie Tague

Helena, Montana

Good day to you. As a former Montana public school teacher who has spent 40 years in a classroom, I have read and reread this proposed document with grave concerns. Getting rid of specific and exacting language and replacing it with vague language which is open to interpretation is a problem. This document recommends elimination of elective programs and credit requirements. This will prevent students' ability to access music, visual arts, career education to name a few classes. This document could result in possible reductions in counselors and librarians.

Please maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle and high school students. I urge the Board of Public Education to vote NO on this vague and ambiguous document. In my opinion, acceptance and implementation of this document will hurt, not help our students.

Thank you,

Teri G Flemming

To Whom It May Concern,

I urge you NOT to change the accreditation standards that Elsie Arntzen has proposed. These changes could cripple an already precarious system of support for students.

Both Librarians and Counseling staff play an integral role in a student's life. There are already far too few counselors, both in our schools and in private settings, for our students to access. Children across Montana are already on lengthy waiting lists to be seen by counselors. This change would increase the waiting time or, more than likely, completely exclude many students from ever having the chance to meet with a counselor. Our students, every single one, deserve access to counselors!

Librarians are not just for keeping the books in order and helping kids find a good read. Librarians of today play a far greater role in the safety and growth of our children than they ever have before. Librarians create a safe and welcoming place for all students by providing activities and space for extra-curricular gatherings. Librarians teach our children about technology safety, how to gather information, and to think critically about information. They are an integral part of any classroom teacher's weekly lessons! They provide resources to our teachers, beyond books. Things like technology, science kits, really whatever the classroom teachers need to do their job, the librarian is the person to know!

I urge you to find a better solution for meeting the needs of our rural schools without taking away critical resources of all students and teachers.

What would you want for your child?

Respectfully,

Rhiannon Annie Tague

Helena, Montana

Hello,

My name is Mike Telling and I am a public high school science teacher. I am greatly opposed to the changes to our state's requirements for middle school curriculum. When I first read these recommendations, I thought it had to be a joke. Why does our state superintendent want to lower the quality of public education??

Sincerely,
Mike Telling
Dillon, MT

I currently am a high school Spanish teacher in Billings and have also taught at the middle school level. I'm coming my 20th year of teaching. These cuts to electives in middle schools, counselors and librarians is just plain BAD.

It's not what's best for kids!

Kids need electives for they are as vital as their core classes. It is the one or two choices they get to make that are based on what they'd like to learn and thrive in.

2nd cuts to libraries and counselors is insanity

Our libraries are a wealth of knowledge and those that run them create a safe space for kids and spark interests in reading. Our counselors are life blood to our buildings especially if we are to teach the whole child. They help with the social emotional aspect for our students and help them with their goals after high school.

Please help keep and maintain the integrity of our schools. Today more than ever before we must continue to push for teaching the whole child and their social emotional needs and free choice.

Thank you for your time.

Teresa Mountains

2022 HS Golden Apple teacher of the year

2022 MALT Outstanding contributions

2029-2021- MALT teacher of the year

This comment is for those on the Negotiated Rule Making Committee.

My name is Sara Bermingham and I am a fifth grade teacher in Missoula. Working in a large district with plenty of funding, you may think that these changes to requirements for counselors, librarians, and electives would not affect me and my students, but that is not the case. Our school, as with every district, only adheres to the minimum requirements because they have to. If these requirements are removed, there is no reason that these programs will continue to benefit students, because districts can save money by not hiring more qualified educators and counselors.

First and foremost, the idea that you would consider reducing the number of counselors students have access to is inconceivable. I could tell you the stories from my students; the child who cries every day, the three students who have lost parents this year due to Covid and the opioid epidemic, the child with no home living in a woman's shelter. Those are just a few students in my small class, struggling already with the one counselor that we have to serve 400. Working in public education for the past 9 years, I have never seen a greater need for mental health services in schools. If anything, we need more counselors and more support for students and families.

Second, the library. Our district already skates along the minimum of the rules by having paraprofessionals running half of the libraries in our district. Not only does this take away valuable instruction on resource evaluation from students, but it also increases the workload for those certified librarians we do have. In a field that is already sparse, burning out our staff will not improve our schools.

Finally, electives provide middle school students, one of our most vulnerable populations of students, with necessary outlets to express themselves and learn skills that are outside of college readiness. In a world where college is all but required, these students need the ability to learn other skills that may allow them to pursue their dreams. They are also a vital part of the scheduling for classroom teachers, who would not get prep time without elective classes.

I hope that you will consider rejecting these recommendations from State Superintendent Arntzen.

Sincerely,

Sara Bermingham

Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

I take this moment to urge you to keep the Middle School health enhancement standards the same as they currently stand. Student health and wellness are essential to learning in ALL subject matter. Tremendous amounts of research exists detailing how our bodies movement corresponds to how our brain develops.

It would be a big mistake to eliminate or even shorten the amounts of time we spend on health enhancement at the Middle School level.

Respectfully,

Mike Burk

SHAPE Montana TOY 2014

SHAPE America NW Dist TOY 2014

Hello,

I am writing you asking that you maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.

Lissy Boar

Hello,

I have just recently learned that there is a motion to no longer make music education required in younger school classes.

As a parent in a Montana school district, I find this idea very disturbing.

I do not know of any other school subject matter that teaches the kids hands on physics, math, history, teamwork, regular practice, public performance and many other life long skills.

I am not a musician myself and miss it terribly, if my kids had not been required to take up an instrument they would have never discovered the satisfaction of having mastered a difficult skill.

Band and the other music groups are a great way to connect and make friends.

I understand that most of the kids will never become musicians but the skills learned along the way will last them a lifetime.

I beg you to please do the right thing and not remove a key component of a well rounded education.

Thank you

JB

Dear OPI and Montana Board of Public Education.

Just Tuesday of this week I was notified of the potential changes that OPI is proposing to the accreditation language in several areas of public education.

It also came to my attention that these proposed changes are in direct contradiction to the School Quality Task Force recommendations. The Chapter 55 Negotiated Rule Making Committee was working on drafting new language for you the Board of Public Ed. Instead, Elsie Arntsen is doing this without input from either of the committees that have been established to inform the process - and she is out of line with the timing as well. I am very concerned about these changes. I am also concerned about the way they are being proposed and pushed through without time for proper public comment. (I found out about this Tuesday morning, that the meeting is today Wednesday the 18th, and that there is only 15 minutes is scheduled for public comment, during the school day when we are all busy)

In my current role as an elementary school counselor at Kessler Elementary in Helena and because that is where my knowledge lies, I am just speaking about the changes to 10.55.710, I am extremely worried that this is a major backward step for Montana kids.

We know that students Kindergarten on up are all struggling with depression, anxiety, etc. and that the ratio of students now 1 in 5 have SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED SUICIDE in the past year, making changes that allow school districts to have fewer school counselors is not only short-sided, its potentially a recipe for disaster. The younger students are very much struggling and without support to properly work through all the BIG feelings they are turning to unsafe and self harming behaviors more frequently. I have seen this as young as 5 years old.

To quote Elsie Arntsen, "**Now is the time to prioritize mental health in our communities and in our schools**" (1), and while she was talking about using COVID funding to help keep CSCT services in some schools, She is right, only in fact that now is the time to prioritize mental health in our schools and communities. And yet this proposal does the opposite. Coupled with the loss of CSCT in many communities (including our area high schools, middle schools, and many elementary schools) school counselors are often the sole mental health provider(s) in the school. If you take away the requirement for each school to have one per 400 students and you will find one counselor is not enough to service all the increasing mental health needs of all students.

By removing the low bar for school counselor-to-student ratios in Montana, we are effectively doing the opposite of what she has advocated for. The American School Counselor Association and the Montana School Counselor Association recommend (based on research) that a 1-250 ratio of counselors to students be the standard, we are already considerably higher in Montana at 1-400, and to remove that in a time where budgets are tight, school counselors (along with librarians and others removed ratios she is proposing) we will be some of the first cut then all mental health support will be gone and students & staff will have zero support when it is currently a major priority in all areas of Montana.

We can see where this is going. A similar removal of ratios was done in Arizona and it had devastating effects. "Arizona's student-to-counselor ratio is still the worst in the nation, with an average of 905 students for every school counselor." (2)

In my position I have watched our students suffer at the loss of other students by suicide &/or a family member and it has had devastating effects amongst our student body. When something like this happens and or an event such as divorce, loss of a friend, family member etc. I try to support the student, family, and teacher as outside therapists in our community is not really an option in our area. We tried to connect kids with therapists in the community and found that they had very little room. Because of a lack of in-town providers, we have many students having to access therapy via Telehealth (one solution) but that is only one option that many students when they get home may not remember to get on if there is not adult at home. Along with not only supporting students and staff through times of high stress I am also responsible for 504 case management, academic guidance, 30 minute lessons once a week for all of my classrooms, small groups for support, reactive behavior support when a student is escalated, parent phone calls, behavior tracking for our entire school, supporting when the principal is out, supporting staff when they are in need, etc. Many weekends I spend working on lesson prep, 504 prep, etc. The thought of having students go through school with fewer counselors is frightening. If you think it is hard to fill counseling positions now, enact this rule change, see the student to counselor ratios continue to creep up, and I can guarantee it will be even worse. The burnout is already high with the constraints in place, if we go the way of Arizona, there is no way it's sustainable.

So I would like to ask the board one question? Is Mental Health a priority? If the answer is yes, you must not remove the language that requires adequate coverage of counselors or all students.

Thank you for taking the time to read my comment and I would be happy to talk further on the subject.

You can reach me at 406-439-7122 (cell) 406-324-1700 (office)

micahmn@gmail.com or mkemper@helenaschools.org

Sincerely,

Micah Kemper

School Counselor, MEd

It has come to the taxpayer's and citizens of Montana's attention that Superintendent Arntzen has recommended cutting access to mental health for children in our schools.

The facts are school shootings, social media bullying and family neglect are not going away any time soon, if not increasing at alarming rates. Our children not only need access but in fact should have the opposite of the recommendation with more access and more funding for not only counseling, but music, arts and after school programs.

I appreciate your time and consideration, and truly hope you hear the pleas coming from a mother of a child who has benefited greatly from the counseling and access to mental health in our school system, but even so deserves more.

Thank you,
Jessi McCloud
Belgrade, Montana 59714

I was an educator in Montana schools for 31 years at a variety of grade levels. After retirement I substitute for 14 years, again at various grade levels in Kalispell and Whitefish schools specializing in music, library and art classes.

I cannot urge you strongly enough to maintain librarian and counselor ratios. These services are so critical and important for our students.

As well, please maintain the special electives and credible requirements for middle schools. Our Montana students deserve the very best our educational system can offer, Sincerely, Vallina Ostrem

Tristin,

I am an elementary health enhancement teacher in Billings, MT. I just found out this morning that a recommendation from the Superintendent of Public Instruction is being considered today at the Negotiated Rule Making Committee meeting. This recommendation is for the elimination of the PE requirement from the middle schools. I don't understand the motivation and reasoning for the elimination of something so important as physical activity. Physical education is such a crucial part of the student's day. I have seen the happiness, fun, and physical exhaustion that comes from kids participating in PE on a daily basis. Eliminating this requirement in middle schools would mean students would only increase their time sitting in a chair even more than it is now. And for those students who are not involved in sports, they may not get any physical activity at all during the school week. With all the research that has been done on the benefits of exercise, not only on the body but on mental health, I really hope that this requirement is kept in the middle schools. We need to do what is in the best interests of the students in our schools.

Below is some information I have copied from the CDC website regarding physical education and exercise at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/physical-education.htm> [cdc.gov]

Physical education is the foundation of a Comprehensive School Physical Activity Program.^{1, 2} It is an academic subject characterized by a planned, sequential K–12 curriculum (course of study) that is based on the national standards for physical education.^{2–4} Physical education provides cognitive content and instruction designed to develop motor skills, knowledge, and behaviors for physical activity and physical fitness.^{2–4} Supporting schools to establish physical education daily can provide students with the ability and confidence to be physically active for a lifetime.^{2–4}

There are many benefits of physical education in schools. When students get physical education, they can⁵⁻⁷:

- Increase their level of physical activity.
- Improve their grades and standardized test scores.
- Stay on-task in the classroom.

Increased time spent in physical education does not negatively affect students' academic achievement.

Thank you,

Tristen Loveridge,

I'm writing to advocate for the continuation of PE in middle school. With rising obesity rates on the rise, health issues, and a lack of mobility, this will only worsen the health of Montanans. It is imperative that physical education stays implemented in middle school, high school and elementary. Below I've listed some reasons why this is important.

- Students that participate in quality PE are taught life skills that they can use for the rest of their lives, such as motor skills, self-confidence, goal setting, fitness awareness, and so on.
- Healthcare Cost Savings - Physical education is true healthcare and prevention.
- Every youngster is conditioned to live a healthy life through physical education.
- Adults who participated in PE are twice as likely to be active later in life. Children who participate in PE are three to four times more likely to be active outside of school.
- Developing habits and conditioning early in life is far easier than "teaching an old dog new tricks." Let us condition activity into every child's resource, which they may then employ indefinitely. Healthy habits should begin as a child and develop into habits as they get older.
- Active children are better pupils overall. There is compelling evidence to support this research. Fitness = Improved Academics!

Kelly Norris

I implore you to ignore Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations to eliminate specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools. I have taught middle school for 34 years and can unequivocally say that music, visual arts, world languages, and all the technical ed classes are **necessary** for kids to explore and enhance their learning opportunities.

You do a huge disservice to every student when you reduce access to librarians and counseling staff.

I do not support this superintendent. She is damaging Montana education. Please ignore her recommendations.

Thank you.

Deb Hunt

Science Teacher

Kalispell Middle School

Kalispell, MT

Please maintain and preserve electives and credit requirements for elementary students in Montana. These programs are essential to a well rounded education.

Jesse Hoffmann

Committee Members:

I am 100% against the proposed changes to education. Removal of those components will have a huge negative impact on our society now and in the future.

I'm employed by a smaller district in Montana and have been a certified teacher for 21 years. We need more mental health/counselors in schools, especially now. When I first read this, I literally thought it had to be a joke- there was no way this was legitimately being thought about. Clearly, it's proposed and being discussed by people that are so far removed from the 'trenches'.

This should NOT be about politics- it should ALWAYS be about kids!

Clearly, currently, this appears to be more about putting focus on what a small group of adults want and not what is actually needed.

I urge you to go to a classroom and see what's really going on. Don't walk through the halls and spend 5 minutes- maybe go as far as being a sub for a day. Really dip your feet in the water so you make sure you have a deeper understanding. Talk to current teachers. Spend time at recess and see the lack of social skills. Come into a classroom and see that it's not as much as closing math and reading gaps as it is developing social skills and building up our future- especially after the shutdown and its aftermath.

All of my students need a full development- sciences, physical education/health, music, art...they aren't fluff- they are essentials and life lines for many students. They allow students to fully develop and become productive members of our future and society.

We don't need less of anything proposed... except politics- we NEED more of the proposed removed subjects and services to develop a whole child.

You are welcome to come to my classroom and see first-hand what kind of impact this decision could have. Please don't vote without actually talking with those of us that are working with this precious commodity.

Sincerely,

Aimee Erickson

Professional Educator

Ms. Loveridge, Would you please pass along my email to the superintendent of instruction Arntzen

Hello Superintendent Arntzen,

I would like to begin by saying...you probably won't read this or even get this email but I have to try.

I am currently a music teacher who teaches K-8 general music and band at a small school. My fellow teachers work hard to provide everything for our students. With this in mind, we were alerted of your upcoming proposals or changes in wording. After I read your proposals, I saw several alarming items on your upcoming agenda and beg you to reconsider what you are proposing. If you choose to change these programs that you are suggesting to electives only, you are creating a possible shift in our states' culture and future. These programs instill deep values and connections in today's youth. If you choose to change these programs to electives only then you are opening up the possibility that these programs will be cut out of schools and thus removing the access to these programs by the students. You will be "killing" the arts essentially in Montana. Along with this proposal I noticed you are also wanting to remove the counselor to student ratio quota? Why would you do that in light of the fact that Montana has one of the highest suicide rates in the

United States?? Do you not care about the students? Do you not understand what the current environment of the public school is? Do you not understand that by proposing such ideologies that you will push more educators out of education? I could go on and on about how bad of an idea these proposals all are but I would like to site different studies when doing so and I was just now alerted of your agenda. I plead with you, reconsider. Do more research. Ask the educators and parents for direction.

Respectfully,

Deana Austria, MSED

K-8 Music and Band Instructor

To whom it may concern,

I am writing out of grave concern for the sweeping changes Superintendent Arntzen is attempting to make to accreditation standards for our state. Once again, the job of a Superintendent of Public Education is to provide "vision, advocacy, support and leadership for schools and communities to ensure that all students meet today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities." These changes show Superintendent Arntzen, once again, cannot meet the mission which it is her sworn duty to uphold.

The first change proposed is a change to school counseling staff. Coming out of a pandemic, students are struggling with their mental health. Rather than support those needs the proposed change actually eliminates the current ratio potentially eliminating all school counseling positions. This change must be rejected.

The next change eliminates the ratio for school library media services. Librarians provide a necessary curriculum showing students research and citation skills, help select quality reading materials, and support teachers and students with technology needs. According to the Superintendent, a central library is unnecessary to education and librarians as well. Again, this change should be rejected.

Finally, the Superintendent is making sweeping changes to the requirements for middle school education as well as the specific requirements for music, foreign languages, career and technical education and other exploratory courses. Please reject these changes as well.

These changes are taking a wrecking ball to current standards and programs in our state. It is clear Superintendent Arntzen does not understand her role, nor does she care to learn how to make public schools stronger for students. These are all vital services as well as descriptors of programs that keep students engaged. They must remain in our public school system.

Sincerely,

Erna Smeets

Bozeman

Dear Ms. Loveridge,

Please do not weaken the accreditation standards for school librarians and mental health professionals. It is clear our country is suffering a huge mental health crisis and Montana leads the nation in suicide. School counselors provide essential services which ultimately can save lives. These changes do not benefit students and as a parent, I'm deeply concerned.

Thank you,

Dr. Rachael Waller

Dear Mr. Loveridge:

I am very concerned about proposed changes to the Chapter 55 education policy that would drop the requirement to offer music and art classes at the elementary and middle school level. If this change is proposed as a cost savings, those savings would only be short term, as there are multiple studies that show participation in the arts increases test scores, school attendance and graduation rates. The arts also help students deal with anxiety and reduce drug use, both of which are more important than ever.

Montana has a proud history of recognizing the importance of the arts and music education. Here in Whitefish, the VFW is thankful to have the High School band march with them on Memorial Day, and our thriving theater and music venues add a considerable draw for visitors who contribute so much to the local economy.

Music and arts are vital to a well rounded education.

Thank you,

Pamela Barberis

To whom it may concern,

My name is Alexis Bowdish and I am a middle school music teacher. While looking through superintendent Arntzen's proposal, I believe it is foolish to cut elective programs. From my experience, music and other electives can be the class that keeps kids interested in school. The skills that are learned in electives are just as important as the skills students learn in their core classes.

Please consider this when making your votes.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Alexis Bowdish

Hello, I'm a parent of a Stevensville MT child. I have read the proposed changes to the public education program. Frankly, I'm appalled. Drastically reducing counseling, library resources, and programs in the science and arts category will only do harm. Many children in the public education sector need a support system and need outlets of self expression outside the home. I am a native Montanan and am a product of the public school system. When I look at these proposed changes it makes me sick. There were students I went to class with that barely made it through if it weren't for a counselor. Other students knew the library was their safe place. Personally, the arts had teachers and like minded students that made me feel welcomed where no other courses did. Had it not been for the arts and sciences I would not have gone to college, received a bachelor's, and gained access to a wonderful career. I want my son to have a good education and future in the state. If these changes become permanent, I don't see a future here. Montana will not only be further behind in education, but will also turn out students struggling emotionally. Please take these comments into account and don't make the proposed changes to our public education.

Thank you for your time-

Erin S.

Dear Committee Members,

Please retain the current specific electives and credit requirements for middle school. Music, visual arts, world languages and more are essential for all of Montana's students. These classes are the reason many students enjoy school.

Please retain the current ratio requirements for counselors. According to the Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey, depression is at a 30 year high. Students need adequate access to school counselors and increasing a counselor's case load is a recipe for burnout, which will negatively impact Montana's children.

Please retain the current ratio requirements for teacher librarians. Literacy researcher and educator, Kylene Beers says, "Dear policy maker, are you listening? Want to improve how students score on a reading test? Well, first make sure they love to read. The rest will be easier. Not easy. But certainly easier.". School librarians are essential in helping students love to read. We aren't doing Montana's kids any favors by reducing librarians.

Thank you,

Whitney Hamand

Third Generation Montana Public School Educator

Bozeman, MT

To whom it may concern,

I am writing out of grave concern for the sweeping changes Superintendent Arntzen is attempting to make to accreditation standards for our state. It seems that reducing the library staff is a way for censorship to take hold. As a new mother and a daughter of a librarian, I am very alarmed at what I am seeing and what is happening with our public education. What Superintendent Arntzen is proposing will negatively affect children. Librarians provide a necessary curriculum showing students research and citation skills, help select quality reading materials, and support teachers and students with technology needs. According to the Superintendent, a central library is unnecessary to education and librarians as well. Again, this change should be rejected.

The other changes cutting counseling for students seems very strange and alarming based on our current state of the country. With the pandemic, school shootings, and high suicide rates, I cannot imagine why these programs would be cut or changed in the proposed way. I can only see the negative affects this would have on our public education. Please reject this change.

Finally, the Superintendent is making sweeping changes to the requirements for middle school education as well as the specific requirements for music, foreign languages, career and technical education and other exploratory courses. Please reject these changes as well. As a musician, artist, and successful book editor and author, I would not be where I am today without these supportive programs. These changes would hinder Montana's youth.

These changes are taking a wrecking ball to current standards and programs in our state. These are all vital services as well as descriptors of programs that keep students engaged. They must remain in our public school system.

Sincerely,

Gwendolyn Nix

Missoula, Montana

Hi,

After reviewing proposed changes to 10.5.5709, I want to voice my stand that the FTE hour per student requirements remain intact. Without those guidelines, there is no guarantee that librarian services and libraries in schools will be continuously updated. Librarians in our district provide weekly skills lessons that benefit all children in our schools. Vital, vital, vital.

10.55.710--Please continue the recommended FTE per student for school counselors. With the increasing numbers of students who come to school with tremendous emotional and behavioral needs, our districts cannot afford to NOT have enough counselling services for our kids.

10.55.901--Please keep the fine arts requirements in middle school. Can you imagine life without music or art???? Middle school students have the opportunity to gain a good foundation in music. Having been married to a music teacher, I know of a number of high school students who have gone on to graduate from college with music degrees during the past 30 years from our town including two of my own children. I know that their musical opportunities through the school music programs helped them develop their talents and thus prepare them for their future careers.

Please reconsider those recommendations.

Brooke Loveridge

5/17/2022

Dear Chapter 55-Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

Montana Board of Public Education,

I implore you to reject Superintendent Arntzen's latest proposals to gut and eliminate specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools. Students desperately need full access to counseling services; librarians; visual arts; world languages; career education and music classes including band, orchestra, choir and general music. Their very souls depend upon these resources. Eliminating the current specific ratios for these services from the requirement language unfairly targets rural schools. Cutting arts and humanities programs negatively affects ALL students.

Keep in mind that in high school, ONE music teacher often has 75+ students in one classroom at a time. It takes three other teachers in three other classrooms to hold this number of students. That's three teacher salaries versus one. Bands, orchestras and choirs are all large. The number of teachers required to house the music students multiplies. If you gut middle school music programs, high school programs are affected, and schools are forced to hire multiple teachers to replace the music teachers' student load.

This shouldn't be a funding issue. Do the right thing for our Montana students and keep all elective programs and credit requirements in place. Our children deserve a complete education.

Sincerely,



Julie A. Blakeslee

Hello Tristen,

My name is Rachel Bright and I am a teacher at Radley Elementary School in East Helena. I am also the mother of a 6th grade son, and a 9th grade daughter. I am writing to ask that the committee strongly not follow Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations where she is attempting to eliminate specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. These electives are so incredibly important for so many students, and to even consider eliminating them is absolutely ridiculous.

I also strongly encourage the committee to not follow her proposal changing librarian and counselor requirements. I am in complete awe that I'm even writing this, as when I heard about these proposals they seemed fictional. The work librarians do for schools and students is extremely beneficial, and should not be reduced. The thought of counselors being reduced is hands down one of the worst ideas and would be extremely harmful to the children in our public schools who absolutely need these services.

Thank you for sharing this information with the committee, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rachel Bright

Good afternoon,

I am writing because I am very concerned about the proposed changes in curriculum that will affect our Music program. It seems that music is no longer going to be a required part of the elementary curriculum. As a music educator with an MMEd I ask how are elementary students supposed to prepare for music in middle school and high school without any music classes in elementary school? As music educators, we have until the age of 7 for students to learn to feel a steady beat, which means that we need to start as early as possible.

Eliminating music from the elementary curriculum will be stating that music is not important, when in fact, it is very important. Music helps students with eye-hand coordination, mathematical thinking, team work, solo work, discipline, personal and school pride, amongst so many other points and skills.

Please do not remove music from the curriculum, as it is such a vital part of our daily lives.

A very concerned Music Educator,

Xiomara Orue

My name is Hannah Telling; I'm a high school English teacher, and I am emailing in regards Superintendent Arntzen's recommendation to eliminate specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools. **I am asking the Negotiated Rule Making Committee to maintain and preserve the current, specific elective and credit requirements for middle schools.**

As a proud born and raised Montana public education student, and now teacher, I can confidently attest that middle school is a crucial time period for students' academic, social, and emotional growth. Middle school builds the foundation for students to find success at the high school and post high school levels. We need to support our students, and we can do that through maintaining and preserving the current, specific elective and credit requirements for middle schools.

Sincerely,

Hannah Telling

My name is Steve McCormick, and I am a teacher librarian in Bozeman, Montana. I work at one of the elementary schools in the district. In Bozeman, and around the state, teacher librarians provide instruction to students, help students find reading materials, and help students grow in their academic studies. Libraries are no longer just for students to check out books. In my library alone, we work on reading skills, finding reading materials that students want to read, practice research skills with print and online materials, practice and learn valuable computer skills, evaluate websites for quality and usefulness, do the basics of coding, and introduce robotics. There is much more to libraries than just checking out books.

The presence of a certified school librarian raises student achievement in reading and writing. We can convince reluctant readers to open a book and read something that they will enjoy. School librarians also serve as partners to teachers; collaboration with classrooms has become a crucial part of the teacher librarian's job. Many teacher librarians also fill multiple roles within their schools, doing things such as running clubs, reading groups, and contributing to duties around the school community. These same things are true for school counselors and middle school elective classes. All these areas contribute to well rounded students and help with the mental health of our students. While this letter focuses mostly on the role of the school librarian, the proposed rules for counselors and middle school electives should be considered and addressed as well.

Literacy is a major focus of the Bozeman schools; I would speculate that the same focus is universal across the state of Montana. The proposed changes to school libraries as set out in the proposed rules will hurt student achievement in the state of Montana. Student reading achievement increases when the students have a robust selection of books to check out. Many reluctant or low-level readers increase their reading skills by finding books they want to read. School librarians also teach essential skills for navigating the digital world. I ask that you carefully consider the role that school librarians have in maintaining the high quality of Montana's public schools. Please remember that school librarians play a crucial role in their school communities. These proposed changes would take most of these things away from our students. Please reject the changes proposed to library media staffing, counseling, and middle school electives in the proposed rules. Thank you for your consideration.

Steve McCormick

I am writing regarding the committee's consideration of changes in middle school programs. I am writing based on 44 years of teaching experience and advanced studies that granted me an earned doctorate in educational leadership at the University of Montana. Before you make changes, please consider the research on the role of electives, and their significance in the mental growth of students. It has been proven that students who study art and music are brainier and have greater success in academic subjects. Art, for example, is the sole study that cultivates creativity. Art enhances visual competence, sorely needed in our world of screens, icons, and visual effects. Electives offer a break from the rigors of purely academic studies, and have helped save many a student. Electives are the elixir that help make the medicine go down. The current concern about the mental health of students points to the need for electives and for their essential role in the lives of students. Please give serious consideration to all aspects before making a decision that will affect students and make it harder for them to succeed and to stay in school. Thank you, Sincerely, Dr. Nancy Zadra Missoula

Having read Superintendent Arntzen's proposed changes, I would like to emphatically and wholeheartedly ask the Montana Board of Public Education to dismiss her recommendations. Supt Arntzen's recommendations would gut music, art, world languages, and library instruction for students across the state, particularly students in rural districts who already have extremely limited access to those resources. These are content areas that are not merely enriching to students, but in fact *sustaining*. These classes and subject areas engage students

in ways that math and reading simply do not. Access to these classes and instruction help students become well-rounded humans with a better understanding of their own social, emotional, and cultural well-being. These are the classes that keep kids, particularly at-risk kids, coming to school each day. To reduce, dilute, or eliminate any of them is a huge disservice to Montana students and families today and for years to come.

Superintendent Arntzen's proposed changes to school counseling ratios would also be extremely detrimental to Montana students and families. School counselors already had high caseloads before the pandemic, which has exacerbated the need for mental health support for students of all ages. By eliminating this ratio, individual students will not receive the support and care that they critically need. This lack of support often ripples outward, becoming increased behavior problems in the classroom (which classroom teachers have neither the training nor time to support properly) and decreased performance for the entire class. I have seen first hand how the behavior of just one struggling, dysregulated student can negatively impact the learning environment for them and all of their classmates. To decrease or eliminate access to mental health professionals within the school setting, especially at a time when more students are in crisis than ever before, is a cruel suggestion and counterproductive to the goal of quality public education.

These proposed staffing and curricular changes would undermine public education in Montana in so many ways. Please, for the sake of our students, for the sake of our citizens, and for the sake of the reputation of the State of Montana, do not adopt these suggested changes. Montana students, families, and communities deserve much better.

Signed,

Sarah Dramstad

K-5 Music Educator

Helena, MT

I'm very concerned about the proposed changes to our education system by the Superintendent of Public Schools. Our kids deserve a rich education experience, complete with arts, music, and many other elective opportunities. Our school district here in Billings has worked very hard to give the kids a lot of chances that I never had growing up, and I feel like if we gut all these programs now, our kids and our communities are going to suffer.

We are also a state with one of the highest suicide rates in the country right now, and the very idea that we should start cutting school counselors, is nothing short of negligent and irresponsible. Our public school systems here in Montana, are exceptional as they are, I wouldn't recommend changing a thing.

We owe our kids the chance to become the next Beethoven, just as much as we owe them the chance to become the next Einstein. I sincerely hope that your board will make the right decision and insure that our students can get a well rounded education.

Sincerely,

Scott N. Proctor

Network Engineer

Billings Public Schools

I am a Montana parent who is concerned about the proposed elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools. Cutting these programs will only keep Montana students from reaching

their full potential and it isn't fair that any time there is a proposal to eliminate programs, it's the arts that seem to get the axe first. These programs are just as important as math, science, history, etc. If Superintendent Arntzen really cared for Montana students, she wouldn't propose the elimination of programs that help kids gain confidence in themselves and find a love and appreciation for the arts. I encourage the committee to vote against her proposal and keep these programs in our schools. Our students deserve better!

Heather Marquez

I have read the proposed changes for councilors, librarians and electives. I speak from experience as a librarian in a MT public school system for many years. If we need changes, we need more certified employees in all of the above mentioned fields. With the current standards, our students are already short changed in these fields. The proposed changes are NOT okay. Please do not give students less. They are entitled to more services.

What do other states similar to Montana provide? Please consider the needs of all of our students. There is already a heavy burden on the professionals in these areas.

We do not need a mass exodus of our valued professionals in these areas.

Thank you for considering the points I have made. Please make the right decision.

Sincerely,

Susan Hageman

Retired K-12 Librarian/Teacher

I do not understand why Superintendent Arntzen has proposed completely striking language that requires and protects our middle school students' access to a healthy variety of course offerings. However, I am terrified about what it portends for our students and for the state of public education in Montana in general. This weakens our education system. It risks our students, who are already more geographically isolated from the diverse offerings in arts, languages, music, and career and technical education opportunities their peers in more densely-populated portions of our nation, being unable to experience these enriching and vital areas of study and exploration. Consider the studies that show that a well-rounded education in the arts and technical fields actually increases student comprehension in "core subject areas." Consider that many students who already struggle in those "core subjects" find solace, belonging, and excellence in fields such as music, languages, the arts, and career and technical education. Consider the long-term health of our state economy and our communities. Well-rounded education produces well-rounded children who go on to foster well-rounded and healthier communities. I am utterly baffled by the superintendent's recommendations and I hope you will see reason and reject her suggestions. Please protect our middle school curricula! Please protect our state's public education system!

Respectfully,

Brittany Alberson Miller

First, the proposed changes for the School Library Media and School counseling staff requirements for middle school must not happen. I am a middle school teacher and parent who has had children in our Montana Public schools. Removing the ratio of students to teacher librarians and counselors could drastically reduce the offerings to our children. For many students, libraries are a safe space where they can enjoy something outside of the core classroom. School counseling should be something we are investing more in, not taking

away. The current ratio of one full time counselor for 400 students is already too high. The mental health of our children should be at the top of our list of things to invest in. If the ratio is to be changed, it should be one counselor to a maximum of 250-300 students.

Second, striking the current language for middle school requirements could open the door to drastic reductions of class offerings due to districts cutting costs. The electives are usually the first classes to go when cutting costs, it should be the exact opposite. For some students, electives are the only reasons they come to school. These classes are worth fighting for. If the language is removed from the school accreditation standards there will be an open license to stop offering some of the classes and services our students need the most.

Third, it saddens me that striking the requirement for a PE/Health class, or any other core class, is even thought to be a good idea. Health education and physical education sets our students up for a lifetime of activity and can lead to healthy lifestyles. To strike any of the core content areas from requirements would be a disservice to every student in Montana.

While some will say the language is only a change in the school accreditation standards and students will still get these classes, it opens the door for some districts to make drastic cuts to their offerings to students. If we do not protect our language and requirements, how are we guaranteeing our students the best education possible? Montana's children deserve better.

We must invest in our schools, our children, and our communities. Taking away ratios and language is not the answer. We must protect what we have and fight for more.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jennifer Schmidt

Middle School Teacher and Parent

Across the state, middle school students are able to try new experiences and expand their horizons by taking a variety of electives. In my own years as a tween and teen, I remember learning how to polish rocks in order to create jewelry, cook tasty meals and clean up (we washed the utensils first, which I still do, camping), and try my hand at another language. Although I am a Spanish and English teacher today, I took German in 7th grade as well as typing. I learned how to type so well that I made extra spending money typing up documents and papers for others through high school. My own child today thrives at her middle school, and much of the reason for that goes beyond "Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic."

Please do what you can to keep the standards that we currently have in place. Many students are interested in developing new skills. Part of that process needs to be trying a variety of subjects without fear of failure, and middle school is the perfect time to do that. Natural aptitudes are discovered. Lifelong skills are ingrained. And who knows what sorts of foundations are being laid.

It is a time to be opening doors. Not closing them.

Sincerely,

Romy LeClaire Loran

Spanish and English Teacher

Kalispell, MT

I am writing to tell you that I completely disagree with the changes proposed by Superintendent Arntzen. As a parent of 4 children in the school system, two of which are in middle school, I cannot stress enough the importance of school counselors. Just this week, a middle school boy tragically took his own life. This alone shows that we need more mental health support in the school system, not less. I am also opposed to cutting librarians and changing the required curriculum and only offering music, foreign language and art classes as electives. I want my children to have a well rounded and broad education. These changes will greatly strain our school system and disadvantage our children. Please reconsider these changes.

Sincerely,

Jessica Yeagley

I am a parent of Montana students and a former teacher/administrator in Montana. I strongly urge the OPI not to reduce the requirements for academics standards for middle school electives and specials. These courses are protected by the Montana constitution as they serve to fulfill the requirement of providing a guaranteed comprehensive education for all students. Taking away the requirements for Montana schools to ensure these courses violates the Montana constitution and will be challenged by subsequent lawsuits. All students deserve a high quality and comprehensive education, these actions by the OPI hinder that legal requirement from being honored. The diminished language being recommended by the OPI strips assurances needed for schools to implement programming. This language will further amplify the disparity that exists in rural and urban school districts thus compromising assurances of high-quality education in all communities throughout the state, thus amplifying income disparities that exist from community to community. The generic language "or equivalent" does not provide school choice rather it compromises constitutional guarantees by eroding quality standards of accreditation.

Sincerely,

Ryder Delaloye

2261 Cedar Ln

Whitefish MT

Good day to you. As a former Montana public school teacher who has spent 40 years in a classroom, I have read and reread this proposed document with grave concerns. Getting rid of specific and exacting language and replacing it with vague language which is open to interpretation is a problem. This document recommends elimination of elective programs and credit requirements. This will prevent students' ability to access music, visual arts, career education to name a few classes. This document could result in possible reductions in counselors and librarians.

Please maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle and high school students. I urge the Board of Public Education to vote NO on this vague and ambiguous document. In my opinion, acceptance and implementation of this document will hurt, not help our students.

Thank you,

Teri G Flemming

I am writing in response to Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations to remove courses in music, visual and fine arts, career and technical education, and foreign language from the required course credit requirements in

middle school. I am asking that these drastic changes, along with those recommended to reduce school-based library and counseling staff, be reconsidered as their implications would be tragic to students.

I am a parent of two middle school aged children in Helena as well as a public school teacher. In a time when the mental and emotional health of children and teens is of urgent and utmost concern we need to be doing everything we can to keep kids engaged in school and life. These "elective" classes are often the only reason that students want to be at school and often develop a love of learning within them. They are also often areas that students find areas of personal success and skill that motivates them. I fully believe that removal of these courses, course requirements, and in-house library and counseling support would have a direct detrimental effect on our students' mental health, learning, and graduation rates.

As a teacher, I have many concerns about the potential of losing our building counselors and librarians. Those two support people are 100% essential for the educational and mental health support of my students. I rely on them daily as they are often the people that have relationships with my students and help them through urgent and acute problems as well as daily check and connect relationship-building with students. As a teacher they provide an immense amount of support to me and the standards I am teaching my class.

Please reconsider these proposed changes and preserve these essential parts of middle school education.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Helseth

Please vote against Supt. Arntzen's recommendations to strike specific elective and credit requirements from middle school curricula in Montana. Requiring specific electives gives students a well-rounded educational experience that will serve them in college, vocational, and trade schools. I am currently a teacher in Bozeman Public Schools and see the value of requiring specific types of electives. I formerly taught at a small school in Ryegate, Montana, where students were still required to have a variety of electives. Students' school schedules were vastly enriched by the variety of experiences that they would not otherwise have accessed. Our music program, for example, helped bring the community together for its biannual concerts. Eliminating required electives and music would make it far more difficult for students to gain college readiness.

This change in curricula may trim budgets in the short run, but it would deny students in rural areas, especially, the chance to broaden their horizons.

Respectfully,

Logan Aytes

I would like to communicate my concerns about Superintendent Arntzen's proposed changes to our accreditation standards to the Negotiated Rule Making Committee that will meet today.

As an elective educator in a middle school in the state of Montana, I am concerned with Ms. Arntzen replacing specific elective requirements with the broad and generic term "electives". In our globally connected world, it is critical that students have the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of subjects within the elective category. As a rural state, it is not uncommon for our students to have limited access and exposure to critical subjects that contribute to building engaged, global citizens. By removing the specific language that outlines the variety of electives students must be exposed to, we are creating the opportunity for schools to have limited, narrow elective offerings that hinder our students' education. In a rural state like ours, this guaranteed curriculum is of utmost importance. Our students must understand life outside of this state. World Languages, Music, Art, etc. all provide windows into the world that students otherwise may never have. If we are not requiring schools to provide specific offerings, we are lowering our standards and communicating that in

Montana, we are okay with students having a limited education. I grew up in a rural area with limited elective offerings and, now as a teacher in a building with a robust set of elective offerings, I see so clearly what I missed out on as a student. Equally, these elective courses are often what keep students excited about and interested in school. Our elective offerings are by far some of our most well-loved classes in our school, because they offer a different learning opportunity for students that is exciting, engaging, and hands-on in a way other classes may not be. I ask this committee to please consider that with the changes in the proposed language of our accreditation standards, we are giving schools the opportunity to lower their standards of education at the middle years level. Why would we ever consider moving backwards in educating our students? Why would we ever rob them of the opportunity to find joy in learning a wide variety of subjects outside of the core classes?

Additionally, I am concerned with the proposed changes to school's requirements for librarian and counselor staff. Librarians and counselors provide incredibly important services in our buildings; by removing student to librarian and counselor ratios, you are allowing schools to overwork undervalued employees and create shortages of services that are absolutely critical to student well being and learning. Why would we ever consider allowing less staffing in the counseling departments of schools when our youth are currently experiencing higher rates of depression and deteriorated mental health than any other time? It is an absolute disservice to our students to consider allowing higher counselor to student ratios.

While I would assume that Ms. Arntzen's proposed changes have the intention of giving schools extra flexibility in the face of challenging staffing shortages, they really just provide schools the opportunity to short change our students. Perhaps if we are struggling with staffing, we should be considering how to continue to create positive school environments where teachers are well compensated for their hard work and feel valued for what they do and offer to the citizens of this beautiful state.

Thank you for your time,

Naomi Delaloye

Middle School World Language Teacher

I am writing out of grave concern for the sweeping changes Superintendent Arntzen is attempting to make to accreditation standards for our state. Once again, the job of a Superintendent of Public Education is to provide "vision, advocacy, support and leadership for schools and communities to ensure that all students meet today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities." These changes show Superintendent Arntzen, once again, cannot meet the mission which it is her sworn duty to uphold.

The first change proposed is a change to school counseling staff. Coming out of a pandemic, students are struggling with their mental health. Rather than support those needs the proposed change actually eliminates the current ratio potentially eliminating all school counseling positions. This change must be rejected.

The next change eliminates the ratio for school library media services. Librarians provide a necessary curriculum showing students research and citation skills, help select quality reading materials, and support teachers and students with technology needs. According to the Superintendent, a central library is unnecessary to education and librarians as well. Again, this change should be rejected.

Finally, the Superintendent is making sweeping changes to the requirements for middle school education as well as the specific requirements for music, foreign languages, career and technical education and other exploratory courses. Please reject these changes as well.

These changes are taking a wrecking ball to current standards and programs in our state. It is clear Superintendent Arntzen does not understand her role, nor does she care to learn how to make public schools

stronger for students. These are all vital services as well as descriptors of programs that keep students engaged. They must remain in our public school system.

Sincerely,

Judith G T Carey

Stevensville, Montana

I am unable to join the Zoom commenting period this afternoon, so I am writing to you to voice my concerns.

As a 25 year veteran high school teacher in Montana schools, I feel strongly about many proposed changes to staffing, curriculum, and graduation requirements. There are some dangerous precedents being suggested here, and ones that do not take into account student learning needs or the interdisciplinary nature of school counselors.

First, we have a literacy achievement gap across the state. And while classroom teachers, in all content areas, are responsible for developing reading skills and a passion for reading, librarians are an essential component of that learning process. Librarians are literacy specialists and support classroom teachers, at all grade levels. Reducing the ratio of librarians to students would result in a widening of that achievement gap. Libraries are often the technology hub of a school as well, and reducing the librarian/student ratio will limit access students have to technology and instruction in essential digital citizenship. These skills are tied to critical thinking and the essential process of thinking as an individual. Our responsibility is not only to foster college and career readiness but to develop students into engaged and responsible citizens of our state and nation.

Second, counselors provide so many resources for students. They schedule students in appropriate classes and help design graduation plans; they help with the college application process and write numerous letters of recommendation; they provide emotional support for students and work and facilitate students getting outside help if they need it. Already students struggle to arrange meetings with their counselors because their student caseloads are so high. Additionally, given all the recent research that has been conducted on mental health among young people in the U.S. (and this predates the Covid pandemic), it is folly to reduce the resources we have currently. They are already inadequate - why make it worse? And teachers are already so busy, K-12, that to expect them to take on the counseling role they are not trained for is irresponsible. Removing these resources does not mean student needs will disappear, it simply means they will not be addressed, and that too is irresponsible.

Third, instead of limiting curriculum requirements in response to teacher shortages in parts of the state, let's create incentives for young teachers to work in these communities. Teaching core classes AND electives is a serious incentive for teachers. And electives often are the classes that keep students in school - all you need to do is interview students across the state and you will find that the core curriculum must be complemented by electives to make school engaging. Art, music, languages and technical classes provide breadth and depth to student learning. And, the proposed changes undermine the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which requires a 'well-rounded' education, specifically including arts and music.

These are obviously topics I am very passionate about. Education has been my devoted avocation for over two decades. I am not only a teacher, but a parent of two high school students, so I am thinking from two perspectives as I respond. We need to find better solutions to the teacher shortage problem than simply trimming learning opportunities for students. Young families have been flocking to Montana, in part because of our solid public education system. Let's make sure our new residents and our multigenerational Montana families continue to thrive in our public schools.

Sincerely,

As a fifth generation Montanan from a long line of artists and educators, I would very much like to attend today's meeting and possibly make a comment.

I am certified k-12 art and teach at SKC. I would be interested in the dialogue and the direction of our state's curriculum.

Thank you for considering,

Suzanne

Suzanne Shope Ed. D.

Thank you for this opportunity to weigh in on my concerns about the proposals in changes to staffing and accreditation standards for librarians/literacy experts and music and arts specialists.

I **object** to these proposed changes for many reasons, three of which are summarized here.

1. Suicide and mental health disorders are at an all-time high. Cutting access to trained counselors is dangerous. Teachers are not trained for this work.

2. For Montana students to have a shot at higher education and career opportunities, they need to have access to a well-rounded curriculum. Arts and Music are essential disciplines. Historically, [research](http://research.acdavisbands.com) [\[acdavisbands.com\]](http://research.acdavisbands.com) bears out that music majors are admitted to medical schools in higher numbers than biochemistry majors. The discipline required to master an instrument fosters the skills needed to succeed in challenging careers requiring coordination, intelligence, planning and multi-tasking. I, for one, have a PhD in Pharmacology (studying under a Nobel Laureate) and am a professional musician. I am not unique in that my musical training allowed me to succeed in science and vice-versa. The Bozeman School District has an outstanding record of academic achievement in college and beyond; not coincidentally, it has a superior arts and music program.

3. Literacy is essential to a functioning democracy. A citizenry that cannot adequately read and write, cannot adequately make decisions essential to their family's well-being. Cutting services of librarians and literacy experts does much more damage than reducing reading and writing scores. It increases the likelihood that citizens fall prey to despots and false prophets.

There are many educators and leaders across Montana who are eager to help Montana find solutions to challenges facing our educational system. **Thank you for being willing to meet with them to consider solutions that would not endanger our youth and future generations in the manner reflected in these proposed changes.**

Warm regards,

Lori Rosolowsky, PhD

This message comes to you in regards to Superintendent Arntzen's recommended changes to the language and requirements for middle school electives. I respectfully but STRONGLY oppose these rule changes for all Montana students and districts. As a retired Supervisor of Fine Arts for the Bozeman Public Schools, I have personally been involved as an advocates for arts and elective education in Montana for over 40 years. During my tenure in Bozeman (1988-2002) I had immediate responsibility for the writing and revision of the Fine Arts

Standards for Montana and the training of elective teachers as to their implementation. Since returning to the state I was tasked with the same responsibilities with the latest revision. I strongly disagree that the proposed language without specific recommendation or requirements will be detrimental to thousands of elective teachers, but will negatively impact district decisions regarding elective offerings and funding of these valuable programs. This will lead to negative impact on all students in Montana schools. I have many questions regarding these proposed changes:

- What research data was the basis for these language and requirement changes?
- Why does the high number of enrollments in elective courses statewide not mandate the specific language remain as has stood for several decades?
- How do you reconcile the middle school philosophy the state espouses to in regard to middle school choice and exposure to causes of study in the arts/language/career and technical education?
- Was there an advertised request for community input before these changes were drafted, rather than released only days before this scheduled discussion?
- Is this an educationally sound proposal or one aimed at lack of funding for Montana schools?

I send these questions and concerns as a 45 year veteran arts administrator, a parent, concerned community member and a grandparent. I urge you to revisit this issue after receiving community input before you make decisions that will ultimately

negatively impact thousands of arts/elective teachers, districts that need and deserve strong and informed leadership, and all students in Montana.

Barbara Good

Bozeman, Montana

I just heard about the possible changes.

Please remember the serious mental illness epidemic in America.

Montana is not immune.

Our students are dealing with so much.

For many of them, music, art, reading, or even just having someone to talk to makes all the difference in the world. Please keep the requirement in our middle schools to give these kids the outlets/opportunities they desperately need.

School districts short on funds will drop the things that are not required.

Kay Adams

Business Teacher

Manhattan High School

Eliminating Middle school requirements for any program in the Middle Schools is not just a bad idea, it is a terrible idea. Why would we dilute the educational opportunities for a group of students that desperately need the quality education guaranteed by the State Constitution. Please vote against the recommendation.

Joel Christiaens

Manhattan High School

Please do not consider the Superintendent's recommendation to eliminate middle school requirements for elective programs. Middle school aged children are trying to find themselves and need many opportunities and support to do so. If these programs are removed, Montana students will be at an extreme disadvantage over others when entering high school and becoming adults. Parents are busy trying to make a living and do not have the time or money to find these opportunities for their children.

Thank you for your time,

Kate Davis

1st Grade

Manhattan Elementary

It is easy to look at things on paper to make decisions, but the reality is the people on the ground and the outcomes really tell the message.

Changing these standards will negatively affect our small school districts and ultimately will hurt our students. The basis of any of these decisions should be based on whether it will help or hurt our students. There is adequate research that supports the current status, and this should be a good enough reason to drop this proposal.

thank you for your time,

Matt Johnson

Big Sky High School

Business Teacher

Head Football Coach

I see that a change is being proposed to the MT state education requirements removing the distinguishment between "elective offerings". I believe that it is vitally important to list what those elective offerings are, as they have been listed up 'til now. Many of these elective courses require essential scaffolding which is built during the middle school years. To not offer courses like music in middle school will quickly erode those high school level courses due to lack of scaffolding. Beyond this, many students stay in school simply to attend those elective courses that they so look forward to. Given a survey of MT students, I would wager that most students' favorite classes are their elective courses. If offering a wide range of electives keeps students in school, this means that those electives actually encourage more students to be in class for their core subjects as well!

I urge you to keep the current language in the accreditation standards regarding the elective courses so that Montana Schools will be encouraged to maintain their high standard of learning within those courses. I fear that the proposed change in language will allow schools to become lax and begin cutting arts and other elective courses, which will then have a negative impact on core classes as well.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Amber Greymorning

Victor K-12 Music

I voice my strong opposition to many of the proposed changes OPI has recommended for school libraries, counseling, and elective courses.

As a middle school teacher and parent, all of the changes proposed in these three areas are unacceptable.

The changes will result in cuts or complete loss of many important programs. At a time when our country is reeling from the effects of COVID pandemic, cutting counseling programs is counter productive.

Our librarians are the backbone of our schools, and often the acting media specialists for our schools. Cutting technology experts along with limiting students' access to reading is also counter productive.

Lastly, as a Family Consumer Science teacher, the proposed cuts to middle school electives are completely unfounded. Our students' access to arts, music, and electives broadens their perspectives in critical ways. As we move toward career ready education, eliminating electives is a step backward.

We need forward-thinking leadership at the state level. Unfortunately, the proposals referenced above would leave our future--our students-- behind.

Please work toward the very best possible options for Montana's students rather than slashing their opportunities as recommended by OPI's misguided leadership.

Sincerely,

Carol Zimmer

I'm writing to urge you to reject Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations. Dropping ratio requirements for school counselors and librarians and eliminating specific elective programs in middle schools is bad for our children.

I have a young daughter in Kalispell's public schools and she has experienced some mental health concerns since the onset of the pandemic.

We have relied on the school counselor to help her manage these concerns. She has also benefitted from the school library, bringing home books she discovered at school with the help of the school librarian.

Most concerning, however, has been the recent spike in local teen suicides. Our community is talking about the desperate need to increase youth access to counselors and threatening to reduce such access is incredibly short-sighted and detrimental to the health of our kids. For the health of my daughter and the teens at risk of suicide in our community, I urge you to keep the ratio requirements.

Furthermore, research shows that students do better in school when exposed to elective programs such as music and art. This activates different parts of their brain and helps them discover life-long talents and interests. A good, well-rounded education includes access to music, arts and other academic programs above and beyond reading, writing and STEM. Please retain these elective programs.

Thank you.

Ryan Hunter

Kalispell, MT

I have reviewed the proposed changes to ARM.

The only thing that was not a terrible idea was to add a comment recognizing the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians. Everything else in this document is aimed at undermining the education of our students. Altering the requirements for ratios of Library Science educators is a horrible idea that will remove access to these individuals in our most vulnerable populations. Removing requirements for music and visual arts and technical school electives means that these classes will be unavailable to the majority, and frankly, we NEED these classes to help round the education of our students.

The removal of Science and Math requirements is an abomination that makes sure our students will have difficulty accessing higher education or even knowing about our world. If anything those requirements should be strengthened, not weakened, which is the opposite of what this document proposes.

The removal of Common Core from our standards ensures that students coming from outside our area will not be able to integrate into our schools, and that our students transferring out will be unable to meet their education challenges. It also ensures that our students will be behind the curve when applying to higher education institutions as they will not meet national standards.

Frankly, I am deeply disappointed with the committee's work on this document. These changes are not designed to help our students meet their educational challenges. These changes are designed to strip them of resources they will NEED.

I urge you to strip most of your changes and start over.

Carrie Jones

I am writing regarding the NRM Superintendent Recommendations that would no longer require music and I assume the arts to be required subjects in Montana elementary or middle schools.

Without this requirement, many students would have no exposure to either music or the arts. For many young people, this is the one area where they can experience accomplishment and learn a means of self-expression. These subjects develop young brains in areas that impact all other subjects. As a former language arts teacher for 36 years, I observed the influence of music and art on success in the English classroom, on confidence, and on a positive attitude toward school. These subjects introduce students to life-long skills and appreciation to the arts that will influence and enrich their lives into adulthood.

The mission of education is to educate the whole child---or it should be. I have observed firsthand foreign schools where the arts are celebrated. Students develop a joy of learning that extends beyond the music or art classroom. Do not restrict the development of our children.

Please, for the sake of all students, continue the requirement to teach music and the arts to all Montana students.

Sincerely,

Kathleen C. Agnew

I am writing out of grave concern for the sweeping changes Superintendent Arntzen is attempting to make to accreditation standards for our state. Once again, the job of a Superintendent of Public Education is to provide "vision, advocacy, support and leadership for schools and communities to

ensure that all students meet today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities." These changes show Superintendent Arntzen, once again, cannot meet the mission which it is her sworn duty to uphold.

The first change proposed is a change to school counseling staff. Coming out of a pandemic, students are struggling with their mental health. Rather than support those needs the proposed change actually eliminates the current ratio potentially eliminating all school counseling positions. This change must be rejected.

The next change eliminates the ratio for school library media services. Librarians provide a necessary curriculum showing students research and citation skills, help select quality reading materials, and support teachers and students with technology needs. According to the Superintendent, a central library is unnecessary to education and librarians as well. Again, this change should be rejected.

Finally, the Superintendent is making sweeping changes to the requirements for middle school education as well as the specific requirements for music, foreign languages, career and technical education and other exploratory courses. Please reject these changes as well.

These changes are taking a wrecking ball to current standards and programs in our state. It is clear Superintendent Arntzen does not understand her role, nor does she care to learn how to make public schools stronger for students. These are all vital services as well as descriptors of programs that keep students engaged. They must remain in our public school system.

Sincerely, Shannon K. Thomas. Helena, Montana

Am I to understand that there is a motion afoot to not make music classes mandatory in the younger school classes in Montana?

As a parent of 3 kids going to school in Montana, I think that is a very bad idea. In my school district growing up we had a very bad music program and looking back I sorely miss not being able to play an instrument. I love how music is a skill that can accompany you through your entire life, being able to play a musical instrument makes you a more rounded, pleasant, versatile individual.

I think robbing our kids of a musical education is robbing them of a key life skill they can acquire and nurture from an early age. Even if most students don't go on to become

accomplished musicians, exposing them to music is a key component of a well-rounded education.

Please, do not shortchange our future generations by making music supposedly less important than other subjects. They need to be exposed to music and discover the joy of making music. Thank you for your time.

Jim Bungener

Please see below for my comment for the meeting. Thank you for your time.

As an educator who has taught in public, private and university level education, I feel incredibly strongly that gutting the counseling, library and elective programs in the Montana State School system would be a grave mistake. The opportunities that electives and library services provide and the support system counseling provides cannot be underestimated. The students that will suffer from

these cuts are the students that the public education system has the greatest responsibility to help. Our most vulnerable students are the ones that often lack access to the support and opportunities provided by our public school system. My 3-year-old twins will be ok, because we are privileged enough to have time and resources at our disposal, but many kids will not be ok. It is our responsibility to take care of those kids - that is our job, that is on us - why would we choose as a school system to take opportunities AWAY from those that need them the most?

Dr. Joanna Berg, Clancy, MT

I am a 26 year Montana educator. The past 20 years I have been a high school counselor. I have been disgusted by Elsie Arntzen as the Superintendent of schools in Montana. Her most recent recommendations, stated below, are one of the poorest proposals yet, for our Montana students. Our Montana students deserve better. If these proposals are passed it would be detrimental to our students mental health and academic success. Please do not allow these recommendations to go through.

Jann Whiting

This week, Superintendent Elsie Arntzen recommended sweeping changes to school accreditation standards.

Review Superintendent Arntzen's Recommendations [docs.google.com] and you'll see that they gut many of the current accreditation standards.

Here's a summary of just two of the proposed changes.

1. School Library Media Services, 10.55.709 currently specify that the school library is housed in a central location and specifies staffing ratios based on student enrollment, guaranteeing that Montana students have access to a school librarian.

Supt. Arntzen's recommendation eliminates the ratio, eliminating Montana students' access to school librarians. This recommendation unfairly targets rural students.

2. School Counseling Staff, 10.55.710 currently requires a minimum equivalent of one full-time counselor for each 400 K-8 student and a minimum of one full-time counselor for each 400 high school students with this ratio to be prorated. School districts with fewer than 126 students may employ or contract or use a consortium, multidistrict agreement, or interlocal cooperative to secure counseling services. Supt. Arntzen's recommendation eliminates the ratio, eliminating Montana students' access to school counselors. This recommendation unfairly targets rural students.

Jann Whiting. Columbus High School Counselor

I just sent a comment and forgot to sign my name so I'll repeat the comment and I'll sign my name.

I feel when is extremely important that we have counseling available at all levels. In case Ms. Arntson hasn't Read The news lately, there have been many attempted suicides and suicides. Please do not cut any funds from the counseling or the library.

Patricia Molloy

Comments to the committee on middle school electives: Please maintain current elective choices for middle school students. Students NEED art, music, and other electives to grow and appreciate the love of learning.

Francy Moll. 1st Grade Teacher

Good morning! I am emailing this morning asking to keep the elective and credit requirements for junior high. For so many students, electives are where they find their niche in school. These classes are so important if we want to keep kids in school when they go to high school. Please do not gut them.

Anne Calhoun

I am a high school visual arts educator in Bozeman. I have been teaching fine arts for the past 17 years. I hold an MAE in Integrated Arts Education and have committed my professional career to the visual arts both as an artist and as an educator.

I am emailing in regards to the proposed changes by Superintendent Arntzen to elective offerings at the middle school level. These changes will be detrimental to programming and curriculum development. Arts programming has had strong success for college and career ready students. We need to maintain scaffolded curriculum to enable students to pursue careers in the creative field. These electives are the foundation for the essential principles to be expanded upon as students enter into high schools. Elective offerings in the high schools need a strong foundation to continue the curriculum.

I have so many talking points as it relates to this proposed change. The school day needs to include diversity in what is being offered. Student engagement is tied directly to their well being. Creative thinking is critical to academics as well as today's economy. Successful college and career individuals need to be able to think critically and apply creative problem solving skills. Art is not simply an "extra" experience in a student's day, it is a part of the learning process.

The mere fact that I need to email over my morning coffee before I start my day is a testament to the backwards thinking as it relates to the proposed changes to Montana's arts programming. Please vote these changes down.

Sincerely, Patrick Hoffman

Please do not change the ratio of students to school counselors. I've taught in rural and urban public schools in Montana and Alaska for the past 31 years and have seen the positive impact counselors have on students' lives.

The counseling provided to students gives them the tools to use to navigate so many of the challenges students face: depression, anxiety, grief, friendship issues, academic struggles, and

health issues. When these problems are not addressed, students are usually unable to focus on academics and so fall further behind in school.

Removing access to certified school counselors would negatively impact students' success across our state. Please continue to require the current ratio of students to school counselors.

Sincerely, Niki Keuch

I write as a parent of two high school public school students to say that I do not support the sweeping changes proposed by State Superintendent Arntzen to eliminate staffing ratios for professional mental health counselors and librarians in schools.

I also do not support the recommendations for removing requirements for offerings in schools to be replaced with generic elective offerings. Schools ought to be required to provide a variety of art, music, and career/tech offerings to students to ensure a well-rounded and complete educational experience. These classes may very well be the only things that keep some kids coming to school and I do not support the removal of this language. Removal will likely result in the offerings being removed in favor of a small number of cheap offerings, which is unacceptable. Further, I do not support removal of the language about required program areas of study as these also speak to required course areas that schools must offer and without them there will be less overall offerings in schools.

These proposals would substantially weaken educational standards and the quality of education for all students, which is unacceptable. If the intent is putting students first, these recommendations appear to be gutting the school system requirements. I am concerned and disheartened to see these recommendations and wholeheartedly

encourage the Committee to reject these recommendations altogether.

Thank you, Moriah Bucy

As a school counselor, I can assure you that the time we are given in our schools is less than the American School Counseling Association recommends and is far from enough time. Our state has high rates of depression and anxiety and is a leader in awful suicide rates. Mental health care is scarcely available and cutting school counselor will only make this problem worse.

Also,

1 The loss of endorsed literacy experts in each school (librarians) would result in lower reading and writing scores which is counterproductive to stated goals.

2 Changing requirements such as music and art for elementary and middle school students runs counter to the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which requires a 'well-rounded' education, specifically including arts and music. Every elementary and middle school student should have access to these subjects in school.

3 Yes, we have a severe teacher shortage in Montana--especially rural Montana. But cutting requirements for accreditation is another way of saying what specialist teachers offer doesn't matter to a student's education.

4 Once FTE (teacher positions) is eradicated from school accreditation requirements the FTE will never come back again.

5 Why would we gut student's access to counseling? Especially now when student well-being is such a wide-spread and pressing need? Teachers are not trained counselors.

6 College and career readiness is not just a 'nice' thing that schools offer through reading, writing math and science (the four things that would remain required for accreditation if the changes go through). College and career readiness involves all the variety of learning that leads to a successful life.

7 Elective courses keep students in schools thus improving graduation rates.

8 We need to find solutions to the teacher shortage that don't sacrifice a student's learning opportunities.

Charlotte Dickson

As a counselor in Montana, I am offended to even have to write an email about this issue. We shouldn't be asking ourselves how to cut counseling services, but instead how to implement more services in the schools. We are in a mental health crisis in our state! Outpatient therapists are swamped with clients and there aren't enough spaces to go around to meet the needs of the kids (if they can afford therapy). We have students who have been on waitlists for 3-4 months and call weekly to see if they can get in. We also have families who are severely struggling and do not have the time or money to attend therapy. School Counselors are the only mental health services these students and families get. If you take that away, you are adding to the already extremely large problem.

In our community we have 500+ homeless students, students at the elementary level using drugs and alcohol, students being removed from their parents weekly/monthly, students being neglected and abused, teens constantly on the news for running away, teens involved in drugs and alcohol, teens who work and go to school so they know where their next meal is coming from. What happens to these students when you take these services away from them? What happens when staff can't call on us to help these students with their needs? What happens when parents decide to stop reaching out for help? It is truly a shame to even be having this discussion, you do need to do better so we can do better! I invite all of you to walk in our footsteps for a week and see what we are going through and dealing with. Our kids need help, and they deserve help. They are too young to speak for themselves, so we need to speak for them! We as a community need to do better!

I am writing this letter in opposition to Superintendent Artnzen's recommendation to eliminate the School Counselor to student ratio. I strongly believe that the Counselor to Student ratio should remain in the accreditation standards to ensure that Montana's youth receive the mental health support they so desperately need. In the last two years I have seen a significant increase in our students' mental health challenges, including an increase in suicidality, depression, and anxiety as well as the resulting school truancy and poor academic achievement that occurs from these difficulties. Currently the national recommendation for School Counselor to student ratio is 250:1. Montana recommends 400:1. At my school, we serve around 1800 students. Counselors are often called out of meetings, groups, and class lessons to address crisis response at my school, this has been on the rise over the

last decade without a change in our student to counselor ratios. We recently lost our comprehensive mental health teams that served our most challenging students due to state budget cuts. The American Counselor Association, American Psychological Association, National Association of School Psychologists, and the American School Counselor Association all advocate for increased mental health services in our schools. We would be going backwards, instead of meeting the needs of our students and staff. Eliminating the ratio would eliminate access to mental health, especially for rural areas.

Sincerely, Lindi Kurschner

I strongly oppose any reduction in student access to school counselors. I taught several years in a class C district and 34 years at Billings West High School. For some years I served as the advisor for the Gay-Straight Alliance. I currently volunteer helping kids

read in an elementary school. Uncountable times in my almost 40 years, counselors provided crucial services in preventing suicides, helping with overwhelming trauma, and working with students who had no hope. Mental Health is an important component for student success and so important now after the disruptions caused by the SARS CoV 2 virus.

After listening to Supt. Arntzen encourage SD2 to keep Emily Pennington in school to now advocate for reduced services seems the height of hypocrisy. Ms. Arntzen is accumulating a record of undermining school districts, and thus parents and students with her stances; with pandemic decisions, then 19-year-olds in schools even after she voted against funding years ago, and now decreasing requirements for ratios of counselors to students.

I strongly encourage the committee to reject Supt. Arntzen's ill-conceived proposal. Support access to counselors as an important adjunct to healthy classrooms, students, and families; please don't jeopardize the health of schools, with this reduction in ratios—a decision that will be especially detrimental in rural districts.

Sincerely, Bruce H. Wendt, Ph.D.

I would like to submit the following for public comment.

My name is Whitney Hodges, and I am a first grade teacher in Laurel, Montana. I am writing today to ask you to please maintain and preserve the election requirements for middle schools. The proposed changes will be detrimental to our students. Suggesting "elective offerings" instead of listing the electives out leaves it open for schools to cut back on their offerings. Some of these classes are where students shine and feel most like themselves. Electives are important for a student to figure out what they like and have a place they feel comfortable to express themselves. Requiring electives ensures we have well rounded students. Please consider keeping the election requirements for middle schools the same. Whitney Hodges "We Expect Success Together"

I am shocked and disgusted by the recently revealed proposal attributed to Elsie Artzen, that would gut our already pathetically inadequate services to Montana's public-school children. This woman is unfit to serve and is proving herself a threat to already at-risk kids. The Republican plan to decimate public schools is transparently obvious to us. Arntzen is a mouthpiece, a puppet without the capacity

to independently assess the demands made by her masters. Her appointment to a position of power is a travesty; our kids must be protected from the willful destruction of a modern, science-based public-school education provided in a safe and nurturing environment.

I am asking the rule making committee to please step back from the extremists currently in power and circle up to protect our kids. Please, reject these proposed changes and

contribute to providing Montana's school kids the resources and safety they require to thrive.

Thank you. Nan Dunne Byington

I am writing to urge the committee to preserve the middle school elective credits. The suggested edits by Ms. Arntzen are very concerning to me regarding MS electives as well as the edits to librarian and counseling requirements. Our state youth are struggling on so many levels with much exacerbated by the pandemic. Reducing their access to meaningful artistic electives that can be the best part of their day, reducing access to school counselors who are there to support them in school, and reducing access to librarians that provide that media link engaging our students with what they're interested in is a massive step backwards. We can't afford more steps back for our children.

I have a child who is recommended for summer school due to kindergarten loss during the pandemic. I have students that I coordinate care with the counselors to keep their foot in the school door. I see a 5th grader that is often in trouble and from a rough home whose librarian found her just the right book that finally sparked an interest in reading. I have a niece that's an artist and her art has exploded in MS with exposure and guidance from her art teachers. She has gained confidence in her abilities and is realizing that art could be a career for her. I have a parent tell me their student only comes to school to work on their art projects. These are a few examples of why MS elective requirements, school counselors, and librarians are critical to the welfare of our youth.

In the school, we are striving for ways to meet the mental health needs of our kids as well as learning gaps from the pandemic. Let's start by maintaining these standards at the minimum.

Sincerely, Emily Rodway

I am writing to express my concern about the potential changes that Elsie Arntzen is recommending. Physical Education must continue to be a requirement for Middle School students. PE is an opportunity for many students to learn about the benefits of physical activity as well as other important health topics such as goal setting and stress management. PE is a very critical part of my/our students day where they can have a healthy break from the mostly stationary setting of a classroom. Please continue to have Physical Education a requirement for all middle schools.

Thank you.

Adam Behrendt. Monforton Middle School Physical Education Teacher

Regarding the proposed changes to our schools. Taking away our Libraries, Music and Art classes... I'm asking that these changes be taken off the table completely. The proposed replacements for

these vital parts of our children's education are ridiculous! Completely uncalled for and waste of all our time.

Our children, my children, need this time in Art, Music and Library. They are important! For so many students these classes are the best part of the day.

We aren't idiots. We will not allow you to change and conform our children to 'what you think is best.'
Becky Campbell

My name is Isaac Marshall, I am a graduate of Capital High School in Helena, MT, currently admitted to the Skaggs School of Pharmacy at the University of Montana. I had the immeasurable benefit of receiving an education in music during my time as a middle school and high school student. The advantages that I enjoyed in having these opportunities made available to me are significant in their magnitude and widespread in their applications with regard to my education and life outside of school. These impacts are multifaceted, bearing fruit which encompasses many examples such as: physiologically enhanced brain function, construction of social capital, and opportunity for involvement with extra-curricular opportunities. I believe with utmost resolve that the contributions made to me by these fine arts programs have been decisive in the advantages they have given me and the advantages that they can continue to give other students. The current proposals to diminish these benefits to current and future students of Montana is extremely concerning and is counterproductive to the preparation of these students for their futures as productive Montanans.

Sincerely, Isaac Marshall

I just found out OPI is considering changing the way librarians are staffed along with the awful plan to reduce counselors. Both of these positions are incredibly important to schools in MT. Please do not change accreditation standards. Kids will suffer. But maybe that is Elsie's plan?

Julie Hippler

I would like to add my voice and experience to the protests of eliminating the student counselor ratio. I am a school counselor at CR Anderson Middle School. Prior to that I was a clinical therapist for over 30 years. As I approach retirement I am appalled at the direction of the Montana Office of Public Instruction and it's director in the efforts to cripple our fine institutions of learning in Montana. Far from eliminating the student counselor ratio we need to reduce that number to 1 to 250 students. The psychological, emotional, and mental health issues our children are dealing with today are many and pose a significant threat to the overall well-being of our student population. Please, let us not continue the rampage and neglect of our precious students, teachers, and our schools.

Sincerely, Ron J Silvers. Counselor C R Anderson Middle School Helena, MT

Please maintain the current ratios for librarians and counselors. Our students benefit from their knowledge, expertise and dedication to our students.

Dayna McClure. Polson, MT

I am writing today to oppose the Superintendent's proposed changes to the Chapter 55 ratio of school librarians to students in Montana schools. School librarians help maintain excellence in education for every student. Maintaining the ratio - which has been in place and working for over 30 years - is the wisest decision for our students. While local control in education is a significant issue, school librarians are one position that if eliminated also eliminates a whole department. Please do not let this proposed change to Chapter 55 be a backdoor cut to school libraries across the state.

Our school is currently struggling with lack of library support and our students are the ones suffering. Libraries are the centers of our schools and not having proper staffing for library support not only impacts students but staff as well. With the pandemic, our students and staff need more support than ever.

Yours sincerely, Debra Westrom

I am writing today to oppose the Superintendent's proposed changes to the Chapter 55 ratio of school librarians and counselors to students in Montana schools.

This would be detrimental to our students. I see on a daily basis our school counselor's importance in our school whether it be contacting local organizations to get shoes for a student in need, giving support to students who are struggling with friendships, as well as providing career advice to young minds. They are an integral part of our school in so many ways.

As a school librarian, I cannot imagine students and staff having access to a certified librarian. We are more than "keeper of the books." School Librarians collaborate with teachers enhancing student instruction and provide lessons to students to help them be critical thinkers in a world where they are bombarded with information.

I encourage everyone on the Committee to spend some time with their school librarians and counselors to see the impact they have on their school.

Rochelle Brower. Teacher Librarian

Please ask the committee for them to maintain the Health Enhancement requirement for middle schools.

Thanks, Scott Hagel

Hello Tristen. My name is Dusty Molyneaux, and I am the Music and Art Supervisor for the Great Falls Public Schools.

Please add my name and my concerns with the elimination of language specific to music and visual art instruction for Middle School curriculum in the current proposal for Chapter 55 NRM. In my 28 year career I have seen the value that the Arts bring to ALL schools, and how necessary they are for a complete and well-rounded education for our students.

I have managed the MHSA District 6 Music Festival for the last 10 years, and I have seen first hand how music programs in Class C-Class AA enrich the lives of students and their communities. The skills taught in music classes transfer to all areas of life, and students learn independent thinking skills as well as how to work together for the common good. I can say the same thing for Visual Arts classes in the many shows and exhibitions I have worked with in Great Falls as well—the kids hunger for these kinds of opportunities on a daily basis taught by professional Arts educators.

If program language is not specific for these kinds of classes, the results will be devastating to small communities. These kinds of programs and experiences can't wait for high school to develop—the skills are too complex and diverse to wait that long to have true growth and sequence for proper development. The Arts can be and should be taught to ALL students.

In fact there is language in ESSA that pertains to that: “A well rounded education means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, ARTS, history, geography, computer science, MUSIC, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject determined by the State or local educational agency”

Please keep Montana schools vibrant by continuing to require a comprehensive education that INCLUDES THE ARTS at the Middle School. Thank you for your time in serving on this committee for the students of Montana.

Dusty Molyneaux

I am totally against Ms Arntzen proposed changes to Montana's accreditation standards! I believe there is a strong reason why many Superintendents had a no confidence for her earlier this year. I want what is best for our students.

Students are struggling coming out of the pandemic with their mental health, this state needs to provide counseling along with a great education. I've worked in mental health for 32 years and know the importance of help, we can provide mental health counseling for the young students or perhaps later we can pay for institutionalization or crime later. This change must be rejected.

Eliminating school libraries would lesson students research and citation skills and decrease teachers and students' technologies. This change must also be eliminated.

The changes to the requirements for middle school education will not allow our children to have a well-rounded education. Perhaps she should study the benefits of the subject she is attempting to stop.

Let's make our public schools stronger to students.

Sincerely. Deborah Davis

As an adult with Adhd, I can remember gym class being very beneficial to help burn off some of the pent-up energy, helping my focus later on. With the obesity rates climbing and the prevalence of weight related health issues in America skyrocketing eliminating PE in schools will only further these issues.

Thank you, Lindy Rueb

I have taught HPE in Billings Public Schools for 22 years. I have been at several title schools and am now at Medicine Crow Middle School. I am writing with HUGE concern of the removal of PE in the middle schools. As a core curricular subject we had our program cut two years ago and lost our "intensity" program. That was a PE class that was high intensity and very competitive; basically a "honors PE class for the kids that want more". We, for the last two years, have seen a huge decline in student mental, social, and physical well being. It is scientifically proven what exercise does for the body and mind and to even consider not having it is beyond troubling. I personally have two daughters 14, and 16 years old that are very physically active and take advanced PE courses and play multiple sports. They both maintain a 4.0+ average in school and are grateful for opportunity to better their health. If nothing else take a look at the population of America and the severe obesity rates, and massive health problems that Americans face today. I do believe they are scientifically showing at the moment also how kids who were confined during COVID are showing massive spikes in depression and self-harm.

Please reconsider this and think of the long-term harm that this will do to kids in the future. As a strong conservative I believe this is a very bad choice for the future of our kids.

Kennan Pfeiflek

I am a public elementary teacher and mother of two children. I am extremely concerned with Ms. Arntzen's proposals to cut elective offerings and credit requirements for our middle school students. I am shocked that we would want to cut educational opportunities for our children and reduce their opportunities for knowledge and growth. Why are we dumbing down our youth by reducing educational expectations and opportunities?

I am in support of maintaining the current requirements and expectations. Our students need instruction, choices, and learning opportunities in all areas including English language arts, social studies, mathematics, science, health, visual arts, music, world cultures, language arts, and technology. Let's give our youth a chance to be well-educated, civically responsible, and work-force competitive adults. Let's keep high expectations for learning and education and support the future of Montana's youth.

Sincerely, Janna McBride

I am totally stunned that Elsie Arntzen is proposing to eliminate electives for music. I have proudly been a teacher in Montana for 32 years, and I can attest to you that music is an invaluable asset to schools. Not only does it save districts money by having a large number of students covered by a single teacher, it also saves many students from dropping out of school. Electives are what keep many, many students coming to school; they are the lifeblood for those that are not interested in just the 3 R's of reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic.

I sympathize with the smaller school districts that have a difficult time hiring teachers for specialized curriculums. For those schools, the solution is in consolidation of smaller schools, and pooling their

resources and staff. It makes no sense to punish the larger districts that are able to hire personnel for their electives, by eliminating those electives for everyone. These electives teach life skills and develop abilities that can be enjoyed throughout the students' lives. They teach collaboration and teamwork, skills that are so valuable for their future.

Please, eliminate this proposal that punishes the larger school district populations, and find other solutions to help the small districts.

Scott Corey. Coordinator of Music and Art

I am writing today to oppose the Superintendent's proposed changes to the Chapter 55 ratio of school librarians to students in Montana schools. School librarians help maintain excellence in education for every student. Maintaining the ratio - which has been in place and working for over 30 years - is the wisest decision for our students. While local control in education is a significant issue, school librarians are one position that if eliminated also eliminates a whole department. Please do not let this proposed change to Chapter 55 be a backdoor cut to school libraries across the state.

Yours sincerely, Cassandra Cranston

I am writing today to oppose the Superintendent's proposed changes to the Chapter 55 ratio of school librarians to students in Montana schools. School librarians help maintain excellence in education for every student. Maintaining the ratio - which has been in place and working for over 30 years - is the wisest decision for our students. While local control in education is a significant issue, school librarians are one position that if

eliminated also eliminates a whole department. Please do not let this proposed change to Chapter 55 be a backdoor cut to school libraries across the state.

Yours sincerely, Kathi Hoyt

Hello - being the wife of a former teacher, the mother of two teachers, a sister and sister-in-law to two siblings and their spouses who were teachers, and others in my family, please do not vote for the recommendations Elsie Arntzen is proposing. I feel this would be going backwards in education. We can't afford that to happen. Thank you for your consideration.

Karen Graham. Chester, MT

Absolutely do not make these changeit would be VERY detrimental to rural schools, including Granite County!

Diana Young

I am extremely concerned about and opposed to the proposed changes to education in the state of Montana. Changes to arts/music education and proposals for library changes are a terrible idea.

These are so important to the children in our schools and the society we should want to create that to call it shortsighted doesn't nearly cover it. It's either stupid or nefarious. If it's a cost concern raising taxes would be a legitimate solution. All of our children in the state deserve a first class education.
Kim Caplan. Whitefish, Montana

I have come to learn there are two particularly concerning proposed changes to service offered in public school affecting School Library Media Services, and School Counseling Services. It is my understanding that Superintendent Arntzen is recommending eliminating the staff ratio to students, reducing Montana students' access to school counselors. This recommendation unfairly targets rural students. More than ever, school counselors and teachers are trying to help support an unprecedented number of students struggling with increased mental health needs.

I am the Director of Bitterroot CASA, Inc. (Court Appointed Special Advocates) in Ravalli County. We are a rural county with limited resources for children and families. Our schools depend on these critical important school counseling services as we have limited access to outside mental health resources. Nearly 10% of children in our county do not have health insurance, 47% qualify for free or reduced priced lunch, and 23% of children live in poverty. Montana exceeds the National Average for adult use of alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse creating insecurity in their homes. 68% of children live in a household with both parents working and due to the distance travelled to work and the distance between homes- isolation is a risk factor in regard to child well-being. Our children need more services and more caring adults in their lives, not less.

Rural schools are the heart and life blood in our communities, schools are the village raising our children and we need more caring adults, not less. Our Library and Media Services supports Ravalli County's 95% graduation rate. We lack extracurricular

activities, we lack resources and opportunities to engage children outside of school. We need our libraries fully staffed and resourced to engage children in learning and their exploration of the world.

Please, do not cut school counseling or school library services. The long term out comes of these cuts will negatively affect the social and economic well-being of our communities.

Allison Dunne. Executive Director

Hi Tristen. I have been a school counselor in Montana for 24 years. I am currently working at Kalispell Middle School with School District 5. I have 372 7th grade students in my caseload. Through my duties I also serve their 30 teachers, as well as the student's parents.

Last year, when I was 6th grade counselor, I had 1 student attempt suicide 3x whom received inpatient treatment for the first attempt. This school year, the same student made an attempt on campus, which impacted 6 students who found them on the floor of the bathroom, as well as their many classmates and teachers who acted quickly and intervened. I have been working hard, losing sleep trying to support these students and my colleagues.

In the first 14 weeks of school, I had 7 students receive in patient treatment for severe suicidality, most of them made attempts. On average, during the first 5 months of school I was completing Safety Risk Screenings with 3-5 students a week. Most of my students at the time were 12 years old, some

are now 13. When a person struggles with suicidal thoughts and receives treatment, research shows that the thoughts just don't go away. Typically, it takes consistent follow through using a Safety Plan, asking the necessary questions to determine risk while receiving medicinal and therapy provided by trained clinical therapists. Sadly, funding for our community mental health services continues to be cut by the legislatures. Most of our local clinical therapists are not accepting new clients or have "waitlists". This means that the schools, ie, school counselors, are often responsible for trying to serve these students struggling with life threatening issue of suicide ideation.

Our school district has been in the middle of a suicide cluster this year. Our state has been in the top 5 for suicide the past 40 years. We have worked diligently to try to follow the recommended best practices in suicide prevention and response and yet here we are, scrambling to do whatever we can to try and save the lives of young people. Sadly, our efforts seemed to have failed a dozen of our students, recent graduates, and their parents this year. We are haunted by these stories, by our shortcomings, our what if scenarios. Even a very special school counseling colleague took their own life 2 years ago. Our teachers, parents, and community are struggling with secondary trauma from these deaths. Survivors of Suicide Loss are eight times more at risk of suicide ideation.

I cannot believe our state superintendent, OPI, and members of this committee are considering cutting qualifications for school counselors and eliminating ratios. It takes highly trained and skilled school counselors to fulfill the responsibilities of our jobs. We really do save lives. Please do not increase our school counselor student ratios or eliminate qualifications.

Sincerely, Susan Sherman, MA. School Counselor.

I am a 2nd grade teacher at Whittier Elementary School in Butte, Montana. We have 350 students in our k-6 school. We have only one counselor to service all of these students. Granted all the students in our school do not need individual services, but our counselor is very prevalent in our school. The students know that they can go to her for any of their needs. Our counselor services a great number of our students in our school meeting with them individually as well as groups. She presents every classroom in our school a program called Classroom Guidance. It teaches students skills to cope with problems they encounter whether in school or outside of school.

She also does a program that we call character club. This program teaches students that it is perfectly fine to be you and not like someone else!

The bottom line is that every single student in our building is touched by our counselor either directly or indirectly.

We desperately NEED our counselor in our building for everyday occurrences.

This day and age it is so important for students to have someone to turn to when they are at school. For so many students, school is their safe space. Our counselor is able to confirm that by being so involved in their lives, ensuring them that they are safe at school, and even making home visits when needed.

Our school counselor is currently in the process of meeting with individual students and setting up services for the summer. So many students are anticipating unsafe environments at home when they are off of school for the summer. Please keep our students in mind and do what is best for them! WE NEED COUNSELORS IN SCHOOL!!!!!!

Thank you! Amie Henningsen.

I'm writing in response to the proposed changes to the Montana Standards, specifically the elimination of elective programs and credit requirements in middle school.

As a fine arts teacher, I see the creative process daily. Art provides a constructive outlet for many students who struggle with more traditional courses. Art provides creative thinking across the curriculum and enhances the learning of all students.

We must continue to challenge our students in all areas and subject matter. The list of learning opportunities and brain development enhanced by elective and specifically fine

arts is extensive including visual-spatial reasoning, problem solving, creative thinking, hands-on learning. Thank you for your consideration.

Ms. Leslie Donahue.

As a middle school teacher I am asking that specific elective programs and credit requirements be kept in the middle schools as this is greatly beneficial for our students.

Katie Hudgins. 6th Grade Math.

Taking away professionals and classes in Montana schools that directly affect students is counterproductive to educational goals. Please figure out a way to protect all education positions that directly impact students.

Bridget Woolbaugh, LCPC. School Counselor.

I am writing about the suggested policy changes regarding school counselors, librarians, and electives. Please do not take Ms. Arntzen's recommendations. As a first grade teacher in a title school in Billings I see first hand how counselors and librarians support and nurture the growth of students. With all of the challenges of the last few years, we need them now more than ever. If anything, we need more of them- not less! As a parent of a middle schooler I see how her electives play a crucial role in providing a well rounded experience in her education and motivating her to participate at school.

Thank you for your time and consideration, Sara Kane. First grade teacher- Washington Elementary School.

I am alarmed at the amount of emails and phone calls I have been receiving from educators around the state yesterday and today.

As I understand it, MFPE pushed out proposals from Superintendent Arntzen to all unions. In these proposals there was missing/different information from our last session May 5th. I don't quite know

what happened from our last meeting and the proposals we discussed on the 4.21.22 Conceptual Memorandum. As I remember back to that meeting, we bounced back and forth from another Conceptual Memorandum and worked from both at different times. I see there is an April 4 version which is on the Chapter 55 Landing Page, and an April 21 one that we worked from last meeting, and there should be a newer version with our recommendations from our May 5 meeting. Maybe this is where the problem persists?

Here are the major concerns I see we need to discuss on Thursday and hopefully can be discussed at both the Negotiated Rule Making Committee and Task Force:

1) Counseling – The 300:1 proposal was unanimously voted on to move forward the NRMCM. That was not listed anywhere in what was pushed out by Superintendent’s First

Proposal (found on Chapter 55 Landing Page), nor was it listed on the latest version we worked from April 21 Conception model. Please correct me if I am wrong by the way.

2) Library Media Specialist – The proposal from the Superintendent has redlined all the requirements for a library media specialist. The way it is proposed states, “Each school system shall must provide library media and information services aligned with the content standards in ARM 10.53.1201 through a licensed and endorsed library media specialist or contracting with a licensed and endorsed school library media specialist; or utilizing a consortium, multidistrict agreement, interlocal cooperative, or any other cooperative method that is authorized to secure these services.”

a. In essence, an entire district only needs to provide one licensed media specialist as long as they meet the content standards. This was not our intent from our Task Force conversations.

b. Again, correct me if I am wrong.

3) Middle School Requirement Changes

a. The way the middle school proposal now reads from the Superintendent’s proposal could eliminate all electives if not required. Here is what was proposed from the Superintendent, “At a minimum, the following program areas, are required of all students yearly: (i) English language arts; (ii) mathematics; (iii) physical and life sciences sciences; (iv) social studies; and (v) health enhancement., and (vi) elective offerings.”

b. Our intent was to have a list of minimal electives that school board members could chose from to offer in the schools, not eliminate them entirely. With the way it reads now, all those elective teachers could be eliminated in worst case scenario.

4) High School Requirement Changes

a. In the Superintendent’s proposal, “... 1/2 unit of economic and financial literacy included within the 3 units of social studies or the 2 units of career and technical education.”

b. This was only included in the last meeting, but we didn’t move this forward from my understanding and many of us felt it was already in Chapter 55 in other areas. This could create a financial burden for districts. In my own opinion, I would prioritize counselor support in our schools over Financial literacy.

c. Again, maybe I am remembering incorrectly.

Please correct me if I am wrong. I have fielded many questions and emails. I have told people to email Tristen for public comment. I am worried about the messaging as it is not the same as the Task Force's recent May 5 discussions. Thoughts?

Thanks, Jon Konen.

I have attached comments in opposition to the proposed Chapter 55 accreditation standards and would request that you please forward my comments to the committee. Thank you for your assistance.

Daniel T. Farr, Ed.D. DTF Educational Consulting. Helena, Montana.

I am writing this letter in opposition to Superintendent Arntzen's recommendation to eliminate the School Counselor to student ratio. I strongly believe that the Counselor to Student ratio should remain in the accreditation standards to ensure that Montana's youth receive the mental health support they so desperately need. In the last two years I have seen a significant increase in our students' mental health challenges, including an increase in suicidality, depression, and anxiety as well as the resulting school truancy and poor academic achievement that occurs from these difficulties. Currently the national recommendation for School Counselor to student ratio is 250:1. Montana recommends 400:1. School counselors are often called out of meetings, groups, and class lessons to address crisis response at school; this has been on the rise over the last decade without a change in our student to counselor ratios. We recently lost our comprehensive mental health teams that served our most challenging students due to state budget cuts. The American Counselor Association, American Psychological Association, National Association of School Psychologists, and the American School Counselor Association all advocate for increased mental health services in our schools. We would be going backwards, instead of meeting the needs of our students and staff. Eliminating the ratio would eliminate access to mental health, especially for rural areas.

Sincerely, Josie Hayes-Johnson, LCPC.

As a long-time classroom teacher and librarian, it is a nightmare to watch Elsie Arntzen convincing the board of public education to minimize certification requirements for educators and ratios of specialists to support kids and curriculum.

Teachers don't move to or from Montana because of the certification requirements. If this is Arntzen's stated goal, it's a smokescreen. People choosing careers no longer pick teaching because of the eroding of respect for the profession, the dismal salaries over the span of the career.

Rural schools are especially penalized by the proposed changes. Let's figure out a way to have the best education for Montana children, rather than the expedient but least effective solution.

Kind regards, Tava Smathers.

I am looking at the proposed changes to Montana ARM 10.55.709 and 10.55.710. The plan appears to be to roll back all progress made in Montana schools in the past century because we don't want to

pay for education anymore. We are sacrificing our children on the altar of tax cuts. As you may have guessed already, I am opposed to this. However, I am swimming against the tide. I trust that tide will reverse again someday, but I feel sorry for the Montana kids who will spend the next ten years getting the best education the 19th Century has to offer.

Bill Freese.

I was recently made aware of Elsie Arntzen's proposed recommendations for Montana students and teachers. As a Child and Family Therapist with over 15 years' experience in child development and Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Carroll College, I am writing to ask the committee to reject Ms. Arntzen's proposed changes as they would significantly impair children's development.

Children develop in stages throughout their childhood and even into their adulthood. Children do not possess the language and processing skills of adults and benefit most from use of metaphor such as those used in stories. Without access to librarians, who also maintain extensive knowledge of child development and who cultivate library collections to best meet children's developmental needs based on this knowledge, children will lose significant opportunities for growth and development which could impede their learning overall.

Research into children's different learning strategies clearly identifies several ways in which children acquire and retain information. One critical way children apply skills and cement knowledge is through hands on learning in chosen electives. Limiting a child's access to elective education, specifically electives in the arts, may delay a child's ability to apply other learning concepts and may ultimately impede their success throughout their lifespan. The skills learned in electives like visual arts, music, technical education and languages prepare students for immediate employment once graduated. Limiting access to these electives could ultimately impact our already depleted workforce.

Finally, children from all walks of life attend school. Children who come from homes or environments in which they experience consistent trauma are not prepared to learn. There is extensive research behind the inability to access the frontal cortex, where most learning is acquired and maintained, when experiencing ongoing trauma. These students' ability to access an appropriately staffed school counselor who can help them return to a safe mental and physical state is the difference between success and failing out of school before age 16. School counselors not only meet the needs of individual students, but they also provide critical lessons on social and emotional development to whole classrooms. Science and research have consistently found early social and emotional learning in grades K-8 can significantly improve personal outcomes for students as well as improved testing and outcomes for schools. Without access to appropriate social and emotional learning, often provided solely by school counselors, schools may fall behind national benchmarks and experience even further reductions in financial support.

I understand the education field has experienced significant challenges over the past years but limiting children's access to places and people who help them feel safe and seen within their education is not the answer to problems OPI is facing. Please reject Superintendent Arntzen's proposed changes and support the appropriate, healthy development of all children.

Warm regards, Kristina L. Dukart, LCSW RPT.

OPI has brought forth dangerous policy suggestions what will only disenfranchise and fail more of our students. These policy suggestions will not help public education.

These changes were brought forth to intentionally destroy the public education system in Montana.

1. Reducing the amount of electives that a school may offer will lead to more students not wanting to come to school. So many middle school and high school students depend on art, music, theatre, industrial arts to keep them engaged in school. Right now we need to be training our students for industrial trades and showing them how many options the world holds for professions in the arts.
2. Mental health has never been more important and more critical to support than it is now. Schools with 800 students currently have 3 school counselors to handle the many issues our students experience in a given day. To propose one counselor for 7,000 students is an atrocity and negligent on OPI's part. This clearly shows that OPI does not want to support Montana's children.
3. Curriculums that no longer detail specific math and science courses, just any science class will do. Again, this provides no exposure and experience for middle school and high school students to be exposed to a wide array of knowledge and background. Trying to decide what to do after high school is already hard enough for our youth, but to intentionally reduce their exposure for fear that they might become "educated" only sets up our students for failure and the failure of Montana's economy. We have to provide Montana children with an education so that they become an educated and skilled workforce in our state.
4. One librarian per district and eliminating library's from schools. Ask the question why is this being proposed? It has nothing to do with budgets or that libraries are irrelevant to education now that everything is on computers. This has everything to do with control. Libraries in our school system teach students how to research, how to explore facts and become critical thinkers. Libraries in our school system contain books which students read on down time, they provide a space where students can do their homework, meet for study groups and learn skills they need for life.

OPI needs to consider the long term consequences for our state 10-20 years down the road.

Of the 4 items I have mentioned above, there are many more "updates and recommendations" OPI is being presented with. You must ask yourself the question ask to why these are being recommended. It is not to benefit and bolster Montana's education system. It will do the opposite and in turn harm Montana's economy more than Covid-19 did.

As a Montana taxpayer I am urging you to NOT pass any of these recommendations.

Thank you! Nicole Riebe.

I appreciate that you are collecting comments to be presented at the meeting today. Mine are as follows:

I am writing to comment about Superintendent Elsie Arntzen's recommendations for school accreditation. I write this as both an educator and as a parent. I would like to begin by addressing the proposed changes to fine arts. My daughter is currently a senior in high school. She has attended Helena Public Schools her entire academic career from K-12. In the fall, she will be attending the Jacobs School of Music at the University of Indiana Bloomington. As you may or may not know, this is quite a prestigious program with an acceptance rate of only 22%. In addition, my daughter auditioned

for and was accepted into the Helena Symphony Chorale this past fall at the age of seventeen. These accomplishments would simply not have been possible without the stellar music education that she has received at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in the Helena Public Schools. Her music teachers have mentored her not only in the development of her voice, but also helped her build the confidence necessary to perform at an advanced level. Their role in her life has made her dream of becoming a vocal performer in opera a reality. Please consider that she is just ONE student who wouldn't have accomplished what she has if Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations are approved. ONE student whose seemingly impossible dream was made possible because of the music education she has received. Additionally, vocal performance is but one element of the fine arts that Superintendent Arntzen would see eliminated. As educators, our goal is to do what is best for kids. How in any way do Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations align with that? Clearly, they don't.

Equally appalling are Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations regarding counseling services. To say that the past few years have been especially difficult for students is an understatement. If anything, students need more support, not less. Our school counselors play an integral role in the lives of our students. The relationships they build and maintain are crucial to students' well-being. For many students, the brightest part of their day is being able to check in with their counselor and feel that they are important and cared about.

The changes COVID brought about have had a lasting effect on our students. One of many of our school counselor's responsibilities is to provide students with opportunities for social and emotional learning. These are critical in helping students navigate relationships with their friends, family, and teachers. So again, I'd like to ask Superintendent Arntzen, is that what is best for students?

Lastly, I would like to address the recommended changes that will affect school librarians. Research shows that the reading scores in schools that have full-time librarians were consistently better for students in all grade levels and the proportion of advanced reading scores grew from elementary, to middle, to high school. That can't be discounted. The benefits associated with good library programs are particularly significant for our most vulnerable and at-risk students. Where is the logic in eliminating library programs? The answer is there isn't.

If our goal is to truly do what is best for kids, none of what Superintendent Arntzen is proposing makes any sense. It is baffling to me that she would make these recommendations, particularly being a former educator herself.

Respectfully, Christy Heun.

A reduction in the number of counselors at a time when more students than ever need help is a very ill-timed proposal. Keep in mind OPI and education in general is a "Students First" endeavor. Please vote against reducing the number of counselors and librarians in our schools.

Thank you, Richard Brosseau.

The proposal to cut student access to counseling services is not a good idea at this particular time with all that is going on in our world. Students are in even greater need. It will penalize rural districts even more because of their lower population. Please vote against this proposal.

Dale and Jeanne Godfrey. Lewistown, Montana.

These changes are outrageous in our opinion! All students need unlimited access to literature, music, art and mental health services! We are from a long line of educators. These proposals prove Elsie Arntzen is an anti-educator! She is against public education, yet she wants the taxpayers to pay for her private schools! How she ever became the Head of the OPI is beyond us!

Sincerely, Nancy Robertson and Sally Lynam.

NO. Jill Waldbillig, K-12 Music.

This is such a horrible idea. Has she even been to a small school so she has the understanding that the students that attend small schools have the same needs as any other? NO NO NO.

Thank you, Sonja Verlanic.

As a mother of a daughter who is now a doctor and a wife of a retired high school science and math teacher, it concerns me to learn that music and other electives might be cut from our Montana state primary schools.

Our daughter developed her brain cells far more effectively by learning to play music from an early age and she found joy in the process of playing music during her formative and teenaged years. She met outstanding lifelong friends in her music classes and her music experience has made her a more well-rounded, empathetic and understanding human being.

As a doctor in Residency, she works and studies in the mental health field. She knows how music is essential to mental and emotional health and well being. Scientific studies prove that music is necessary for human beings to positively contribute to society and to experience a full, meaningful and happy life.

Our children are our future. Please share my sentiments with those who have the power to impact this important decision.

Thank you, Elizabeth Klarich.

I am responding to the Negotiated Rule-making Committee concerning maintaining the Health Enhancement requirement for middle schools. I am a teacher of ten years and currently teach 4th grade. I know the concerns of our students' dropping grades in school and concerns about the knowledge they are lacking. I am very concerned with their future and the future of our country. I do not feel taking Health Enhancement Classes or PE from our school's curriculum will be of any benefit whatsoever. Our students' health is already at risk because of unhealthy eating habits, alcohol and drug abuse, and the lack of exercise, which are often related to obesity. It is also a proven fact that students need to get up and move around to get their blood flowing back into their heads for learning

to happen. We cannot require a student to sit at a desk/table for 7.5 hours a day trying to cram in and understand difficult information. The brain cannot function that way.

If you are truly looking for answers on how to better educate our students, we need to look at behavioral issues in the classroom. For the past three years, I have struggled as a teacher being able to teach a small class when a few of those student's bully, distract, disrespect, and act out for attention without the help of administration, parents, or rules in the school that would stop the behaviors that stops my other students from learning. This has become a serious and increasing problem throughout our schools across the nation. I recently read a poll that was taken of 56% of the teachers in the State of Montana who are looking for other jobs outside of the education system because of these very reasons. This only increases the concerns I have for the education of the future. Students who act out are usually students who need more movement and change in the classroom. I am part of the Shape Montana 150 program in which we create an additional 150 minutes of movement in my classroom. I have found it to be the best benefit to both my academics as well as behaviors in the class.

My students often ask for more movement to wake up their brains as they easily get tired, zone out, or get distracted when sitting too long. Please consider how the student's feel throughout the day when making this important decision.

Cammy Shaw, 4th-grade teacher.

The reduction of mental health services is **EXTREMELY DETRIMENTAL** in our district!

I work in the ED self-contained room at Chief Joseph Elementary School in Great Falls, Montana.

Our students absolutely need mental health services daily. The amount of trauma and severe diagnoses these students have is beyond our level of expertise as GFPS staff to help them heal. We **NEED** multiple CSCT and Therapists on board just for our students here at Chief Joseph. Cutting them down to 1:400 is absolutely ridiculous.

If anyone would want to come and sit in our room for a day to see the severity and needs of our therapists and other staff, then maybe they would understand why everyone is against this!

Please don't pass this! Think of our students! They need our support more now than ever!

If anything, we need **MORE** mental health support.

Jakki Baroch.

My name is Merryn Poole, and I was highly alarmed to learn that this board was even considering removing education standards and mental health aid/safe spaces for Montana students. I am firmly against removing our counselors, librarians, and elective/graduation requirements for public education around the state of Montana.

Many students need a safe space to go during the day, and many school counselors provide services to schools outside of mental health aid, such as scheduling courses for students. Music education and foreign language classes have had a pronounced effect on me, and they bring me far more happiness and relief from my average day at school than you could imagine. They have also been

scientifically proven to improve your intelligence, overall happiness, and overall functionality of your brain.

Therefore, I strongly encourage Superintendent Elsie Arntzen and the Negotiated Rule Making Committee to preserve our access to counselors and librarians, and to preserve our current elective and graduation requirements.

We do not need to hinder student education based on the state they were born in. Do not allow this vote to pass.

Sincerely, Merryn.

My name is Paul Bruce, and I am a music educator/title one teacher at Deer Park School just outside of Columbia Falls Montana. You have probably never heard of our little school, but we are a campus that was established well over 100 years ago in the year 1886. Since its conception, Deer Park School has proudly offered numerous classes that strive to increase the engagement of our students. These are not reading classes, math classes or science classes. These are special classes such as Spanish a foreign language, art a class of visual self-expression, music a class of self-expression through singing, or playing an instrument, drama a class of developing a voice, and many, many more.

We able to offer these classes because we have administration and a school board that, like many other school boards and administrations, supports any and all decisions made by the Montana Office of Public Instruction. So, I ask for a reconsideration on the proposed changes to the specials and electives offering in middle and elementary schools. It is what's best for the students and their engagement in schools. If schools are not required to offer it, they may not offer it, and this makes engaging students impossible.

Thank you! Paul Bruce. Deer Park School Music/Band.

I am writing to you to ask you to please reject the changes being made to library and counseling accreditation standards for Montana K-12 schools. Please do not reduce the amount of FTE required for these positions in our schools. Many of our rural communities do not have libraries or mental health services. If you remove these from the schools, no one in those communities will have access to these services. I realize that it can be difficult to find people to fill these positions in today's hiring climate. The job market will level out, but once these positions are eliminated, they will never come back. This is a short-sighted solution that will harm our Montana families for years to come. Thank you for considering my input.

Christy Wolgamot.

By taking our librarians and counselors away, you are creating more work for teachers. Teachers are quitting at alarming rates and one of the biggest reasons is that we are unable to meet the expectations that are currently in place. By adding more, you will be creating another mess.

Our librarian teaches curriculum, helps students with projects, and instills the love of reading which is so important for students to be successful in continuing their education.

Teachers are exhausted in dealing with student behaviors. Each year, behaviors seem to be getting worse and our school counselor helps these children. She also teaches social and emotional issues that are pertinent to each grade level. This helps them be successful in relations in and out of school and to achieve higher academically. The emotional needs of the child need to be met before they are able to learn!

Please do NOT take away these student and teacher resources.

Sincerely, A tired teacher.

Please maintain the counselor and librarian standards for all public schools. This is a dangerous precedent. Our children need adults to stand up and maintain the integrity of public education. They deserve the best we can give them.

Montana must problem solve in ways that will benefit children. And this move by the State Superintendent will harm public education and that will negatively impact kids.

Please do the right thing.

Kathy Dungan.

I write to you as a member of a small-town school district where I have had the great fortune to teach Art, Ceramics, Art History, and Graphic Arts k-12 for the last 13 years. I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to offer enrichment to my students. I am also painfully aware that not every school district is as fortunate. However, under the current system every school district, regardless of size or funding situation, is still required to provide our youth with the opportunity to engage in some form of visual, musical, or vocational arts.

While we grow along with the current socio-political climate, it is important not to lose important skills along the way. As we proceed in an ever-changing world where future generations will have to adapt to changes much quicker than ours; the need for programs like visual, musical, and vocational arts will become more prevalent. These programs teach more than basic knowledge about the arts but enable youth to learn how to apply creative and adaptive thinking while using the core skills they are taught.

I am afraid, as are many of my colleagues, that the following language strike cuts a little too deeply into the stability of such a needed foundation. Specifically, the following.

10.55.902 BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM: MIDDLE GRADES

The elimination of all the well-defined programs like art and music to be replaced with ((vi) elective offerings) is entirely too vague. I would therefore humbly request that the language in question be amended to read something more concrete, such as the following.

((vi) elective offerings to include a minimum of one, but not limited to Visual Arts, Music, and Career and Technical Education.

I am not an expert in legal interpretation but something like this would ensure the great programs that we created and nurtured over the years don't accidentally fall through the cracks as we navigate in our ever-changing world.

I know your time is valuable, and you will receive many letters like this one, so I would like to thank you for your time and attention.

PS: If it is at all possible to get a link to the meeting today at 3:30 today I would be grateful. J. Zeltner.

This short letter is in request from a Montana parent of two & a long-term educator in higher ed to please maintain the art/music requirements for all Montana children in public schools K-8. As an English professor who teaches both graduate and undergraduate coursework, I consistently observe that increased critical thinking skills and increased sense of culture and expression occurs because of the art/music requirements that students are exposed to at younger ages. The arts prepare students, even those not college-bound after 12th grade, for the complexity of life and some of the joys of life. This opportunity should not be taken away or made elective for our Montana public school students in my personal experience as a mother of two who are in Montana public schools now & in my professional experience as an educator.

Thanks for including my comments in decisions around this proposed change to our Montana curriculum requirements. Montana parents and professional educators, like myself, should be instrumental to making these decisions.

Sabine Brigitte, MFA. Associate Professor of English.

According to the CDC in 2018 the obesity prevalence in the USA was 42%. Currently, students here in Kalispell get Physical Education every day at the Middle School! This is incredibly important for our youth. Physical Education is the only class that actively prevents health issues and disease. Maintain the Health Enhancement requirements. I am requesting the link for public comment.

Jesse Johnson, MA LPES.

This is to show my support for maintaining credit requirements and for electives for middle schools in Montana. Please do not replace the current regulations with broad, unclear language.

Thank you, Julie Vasquez.

Mr. Loveridge,

I am writing in regards to the proposition of eliminating electives and credit requirements for middle schools. Not only as a teacher but as a parent of a middle schooler and one that will soon be this is a travesty and would be a devastating hit to students of that age. Students of this age need these types of classes to grow and explore at this tender age. They are susceptible to all types of outside negative influences and having these positive and self esteem boosting classes help them develop as individuals. Many of the classes that are being proposed to be cut help students grow in many ways other classes can't such as art, music and health enhancement. They stimulate the brain and allow

the artistic side of the brain to be engaged. As educators it is embarrassing that you would even consider the idea of cutting these classes when you should know all too well how impactful these classes are. Please start stepping up for students and teachers and working for them and not the political agenda. Please work to keep these classes in school!

A.B.

Amanda Brown

Dear Montana Board of Public Education,

Today is the second to last Tuesday of the school year, a school year that marks the end of my 29th year of teaching, 20 of those in Montana. I started today greeting all of our elementary and junior high students at the front door, feeling grateful for knowing who needed their bicycle tire pumped before school is out, who is going with a noncustodial parent and needs care throughout the day, who needs to check in with our superintendent because parents have been fighting - again - and she is worried about where she will go to school next year. I reminded a 5th grader to take her medicine before the field trip. I danced with one because the weather was phenomenal. And I inspected a kinder's new sandals. Oh how I love my job and, most importantly, my students!

I am invested in this community where I am teaching the children of former students. I have held many of my students as babies, watched them graduate with tears, and find myself peers when we see each other at the grocery store. I have buried several students and continue to feel their loss. My three children attend(ed) public school. One is in high school, one just graduated from MSU Bozeman in a technical field, and one is in graduate school. My husband, who is a judge, and his siblings, parents, and grandparents are all locally publicly educated. My world is filled with learning and it is unfathomable that a major source of learning may be deemed non-essential.

The quality of life for all of our students extends beyond the classroom as they become parents, neighbors, voters, even colleagues. And their experiences as students help shape them into quality Montanans. The framework we give them in public education should be such that they are prepared for life beyond our doors. As educators, we are responsible for honoring that framework and ensuring it is strong. Those requirements are the nuts and bolts of a well-rounded education and reflect best practice. We weaken our students, their futures, and our communities by deleting courses and highly qualified staff that open doors of knowledge in the arts, agriculture, family consumer science, business, cultural language, and other electives. We weaken our educational system when we remove the expectation via wording that says our young citizens deserve these opportunities.

Electives are one of the most powerful offerings in the Montana public school framework. They pull together the "core" knowledge in a relevant and life-long way. Preserving the wording and requiring electives is a show of true strength on behalf of our children. Please, do not remove the wording that assures our students their educational due.

Sincerely,

Amy J. Kraft

Good morning, Tristen.

I am writing concerning what looks like the proposed changes to OPI's accreditation standards and how it affects music offerings. In 2015, the U.S. Senate added music as a "core subject" with its ESEA and ECAA (Every Child Achieves Act). How can Montana ignore a federal act? By taking music out of the listings in 10.55.901 and 10.55.902, there is no longer a guarantee that students will have the opportunity to receive musical instruction. The benefits of music to a child's development, to our society and to our future are too numerous to list and I'm certain you've already heard much of it. The national research is out there and I would hate to see Montana fall into one of the states that does not stand behind that research. In a time when our world is so incredibly divided and youth struggle to find connection and a forward looking path, we need music now more than ever. Please do everything in your power to not allow this change to happen to our standards.

Thank you for your time,

Amy Smart

Hey,

In my opinion I believe it will be a critical mistake if we get rid of mandated classes as student will have limited access to elective classes. Students need to be well rounded humans by being able to have access to a variety of classes throughout their entire schooling career. If we get rid of the language and therefore the educational opportunities that already exist, we will be doing a huge disservice to our students and families.

Anthony Hogan

Hi Tristen,

I am writing in regards to some of the OPI Accreditation Language changes that are being proposed tomorrow. The 3 that concern me as an educator and tax payer are the following:

10.55.902- Basic Education Program: Middle Grades:

-striking all of the language for the programs such as: visual arts, music, career and technical training, world languages, and other electives including exploratory courses such as creative writing, drama, dance, financial education, photography and leadership.

-This language cannot be eliminated. If we eliminate this language those programs, which are so terribly important no longer have a leg to stand on. We CANNOT allow them to be lumped together and referred to as "Elective Offerings".

10.55.709- Library Media Services K-12

10.55.710- Assignment of School Counseling Staff

-the language changes in both have the potential to make it unfair to students, staff in smaller rural districts.

Please consider the importance of these changes before they moved for approval. Thank you for your time, I appreciate it.

Dear Tristan Loveridge, I am writing to urge you and your committee to please maintain current standards for middle school electives. These offerings are essential for a well-rounded educational experience for all students and especially for those students for whom the general education curriculum is not their area of strength. We already have huge mental health challenges among our students; this will only exacerbate the problem if they cannot find support from a diversity of offerings at school. Thank you for your consideration and support of all Montana children.

Sincerely, Brenda Moen

May 17, 2022

To the Montana Accreditation Process Negotiated Rule Making Committee:

I am writing to voice my concerns over the proposed changes to the Montana Teacher Licensure requirements under 10.57.301. I have been a K-12 teacher-librarian for 14 years and have worked in libraries for 21 years. I hold a Master's in Library and Information Science and a Bachelor's in Secondary Education with an English focus. The proposed change suggests that, after two years of teaching, a new teacher will have enough qualifications, experience, and background knowledge to be able to be endorsed in a specialized field simply by successfully passing the PRAXIS. This diminishes the integrity of qualified professionals who have taken specific classes and invested numerous hours to be experts in their fields. Studying and passing a test does not make one an expert. Certainly, the standardized testing done throughout the nation has proven that test-taking and actual learning are two very different abilities. I have taken PRAXIS exams for my Secondary Education degree, and my Library Science degree. I can assure members of the ARM 55 Committee that the PRAXIS exams do not have any bearing on whether or not one will be able to teach or do the work required in that subject area. The coursework, mentoring, and years of experience are necessary. The experience and expertise specialized teachers and school librarians have cannot be replicated by studying and passing a test. School librarians do not only teach. They also run a library from top to bottom. That is a skill they cannot learn from their time teaching other subjects. It is a very different skill set only acquired through time, experience, and mentorship from an experienced librarian. A person's ability to teach has nothing to do with this half of the job.

In addition, the proposals for 10.55.709 will only exacerbate the problem. These proposed cuts will directly affect the quality of education students receive. If we want to provide the best education for students, we must have qualified educators who are available in each school and can meet the needs of their student population. For libraries specifically, a qualified and effective school librarian must possess a wide range of skills:

- Collaborate with teachers to provide lessons on information literacy
- Technology leaders, and provide professional development to staff on technology
- Develop the collection to meet the needs of staff and students

- Curate and organize resources such as databases, ebooks, audiobooks, and print sources as well as teach students how to navigate them
- Promote reading for learning, personal growth, and enjoyment while meeting the diverse needs and interests of all readers
- Understand and operate the library management software
- Manage the budget
- Manage the library space to create an inviting environment
- Encourage critical thinking to create a community of lifelong learners

By eliminating the requirement for each school to have a certified librarian and even a dedicated library space, Montana students will be at a major disadvantage when entering the workforce.

Our nation is suffering from its inability to decipher misinformation and disinformation from fact. Librarians are experts in this subject matter and teach this essential skill to students. By lifting the requirement for a librarian-to-student ratio, you are creating the possibility that librarians cannot meet the needs of their students, who will then continue the problem of a society full of uncritical thinkers.

Additionally, by no longer requiring a centralized library in each school, students will have less access to reading material, which encourages and supports lifelong reading and learning. This will most dramatically affect students in rural and low-income areas who may not have access to a public library.

Do not weaken the requirements for educators and librarians – this will cause lasting impacts on the quality of education Montana’s students receive as well as irreparable damage to the librarian profession. It only puts a bandaid on a much deeper problem. Instead of asking yourselves how we can lower the standards for our schools, ask yourselves why the problem of a qualified educator shortage exists in the first place. Why don’t teachers apply for positions at rural schools? Lowering the standards does not fix the systemic problems.

Sincerely,

Brianna Lipke

Superintendent Artnzen's proposed changes to the State of Montana K-12 accreditation standards represents a watering down of expectations from students, teachers, and districts across our state. Particularly, the removal of the 20 credit requirement in place of localized requirements would render a Montana high school diploma unequal. Rather than have a shared agreement about our standards for graduation we would have diplomas from Highwood meaning something different than from Helena. Our students have endured two years of disrupted teaching. Our schools need more community support and a reaffirmation of our standards, not a watering down. Please reject this proposal.

Respectfully,

Caitlin Chiller

I am writing to comment on the proposed changes in the OPI adjustments to school accreditation requirements. In particular, the proposal that would affect the music teacher positions and replace them with just any 'elective'. For a well-rounded education, students must have experience with music and for many of our Montana schools, elementary school and middle school may be the last opportunity these students have. Music is necessary for the development of a well-rounded, healthy individual. People are more than just the knowledge they know--we have Google for that. Creativity is a basic human need, as well as one of the things that sets us apart from other creatures. Instead of 'deleting' the music teacher requirement, why not just change the language to reflect that accreditation will not be affected if the district has done, and continues to do, everything they can to hire a qualified music teacher? I realize the severity of our teacher shortage in Montana. Music teachers are especially affected and many districts have had positions go unfilled for a significant amount of time. The shortage existed in our small schools pre-pandemic, and it's likely to affect the larger districts as well because of skyrocketing living expenses. We need other solutions that don't impact the students and teachers so severely. I suggest finding ways to increase teacher pay so as to keep, and attract, quality teachers in Montana. Thank you, Chandra Lind Orchestra Director Chief Joseph Middle School

Bozeman Public Schools

Our teachers are in full-blown burnout as it is, and now this??? Montana should already be ashamed by the recent NBC news story about being 50th in the nation for starting pay for teachers. Now we want to add to that shame? How is it good IN ANY WAY for our kids to have LESS access to BOOKS and MENTAL HEALTH CARE?????

Please do not let this happen.

Thank you, Christina Garton - 4th grade teacher

My name is Clary Loisel and I just retired from the University of Montana as a Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies. I am writing to ask you to please do all you can to maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.

Superintendents Arntzen's proposals are not conducive to educating our future leaders.

Many thanks,

Clary Loisel

Dear members,

I recently read about Superintendent Arntzen's proposal to remove many of the elective requirements in middle school. I would urge the committee to maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.

I started teaching over 40 years ago, and I have seen these electives be important to students. My own daughter thrived in middle school because she had the opportunities these electives gave her. Especially as we come out of the pandemic, we need to revive and enhance our curriculum

for students, not dumb it down by removing opportunities for them. Please keep these requirements in the rules for middle school. Thanks for your work and consideration of my opinions. I know many, if not most teachers and parents have similar opinion about this.

Sincerely, Dave Severson

I'm writing to express my concerns regarding superintendent-proposed changes to 10.55.709 and 10.55.710 in the rules governing school accreditation standards. The proposed changes would reduce access to educational services particularly for rural students in Montana, causing a disadvantage for smaller communities. Please reject the proposed changes.

Thanks for your consideration!

Emma Hunter RN

These changes she is asking for are ridiculous. The courses these kids take are to open their minds to the endless possibilities ahead of them. Please just keep all her changes the way they were before she got her hands on them. Please be there to protect our children. Give them the tools they need to make healthy decisions of their life paths

Comments to the committee asking them to maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. Reducing the electives that get those hard to reach children through the school day is a step backwards. The love of the arts, music, life skills classes like cooking or world to work are classes that can be the starting point to get students more interested in math, science, and Ela classes. These classes give real world examples for the classes students don't see the point in taking. Taking those electives away is a huge mistake that shouldn't even be a discussion.

Sincerely, Jasmine Johnson

As an educator with years of experience I am shocked at the proposal of doing away with fundamental classes that enrich middle schoolers to become whole people. It is a vital time in their lives where they are reading to learn instead of learning to read, and these classes provide them with the content and background they need for reach themselves for the world beyond. They need as much exposure as possible at that age and middle school is where they get to explore their interests and know the wealth of options that can exist academically- art, music, and career exploration are all vital to this. Please do not remove these requirements from the state curriculum! I urge you to think of the long term consequences this would have.

Jeanette Price Columbia Falls, Montana

I was dismayed to learn of Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations to eliminate staffing ratios that would limit students' access to counseling and library services. At a time when we're facing the biggest youth mental health crisis in modern history, the last thing we need is to reduce the number of people who can help our kids most. Counseling and library services are already stretched thin, and

they do some of the most important work in our schools. Our counselors and librarians also provide scheduling and technology services, welcome students who have nowhere else to go at lunch, and support teachers in our efforts to make sure our students' academic AND emotional needs are met. Those needs are inseparable. Arntzen's efforts to undermine some of the most important services in our schools is bad for kids. I urge the Negotiated Rule Making Committee to maintain current counseling and library ratios.

Thank you,

Jennie Tranel

I am writing concerning what looks like the proposed changes to OPI's accreditation standards and how it affects music offerings. In 2015, the U.S. Senate added music as a "core subject" with its ESEA and ECAA (Every Child Achieves Act). How can Montana ignore a federal act? By taking music out of the listings in 10.55.901 and 10.55.902, there is no longer a guarantee that students will have the opportunity to receive musical instruction. The benefits of music to a child's development, to our society and to our future are too numerous to list and I'm certain you've already heard much of it. The national research is out there and I would hate to see Montana fall into one of the states that does not stand behind that research. In a time when our world is so incredibly divided and youth struggle to find connection and a forward looking path, we need music now more than ever. Please do everything in your power to not allow this change to happen to our standards. Thank you for your time,

Jennifer KirbyBand Director, Florence-Carlton Schools

Once again, I urge you to ignore Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations regarding accreditation standards. She is completely out-of-touch with what students need. Montana has an outstanding PUBLIC school system, which she seems to be trying to demolish. Please maintain the standards for elective offerings and credit requirements that currently exist.

Judy Byrne, retired educator Great Falls

I am writing to you with my concerns regarding the suggested changes to Middle school requirements made in the [Superintendent Arntzen's Recommendations \[click.ngpvan.com\]](http://click.ngpvan.com) document. There are hundreds of reasons not to get rid of required CTE in the Middle School, but a major impact of the elimination of CTE would be on the Highschool funding through Federal Perkins V. We have worked extremely hard to have career pathways in accordance with the Perkins grant. I would hate to eliminate a requirement and then have the consequence of potentially losing an enormous Federal grant. I am not sure the recommendations are taking the whole system into consideration. Again this is just one of many reasons that not requiring CTE in Middle school is a huge mistake. I request a link to Wednesday's meeting to give live public comment.

Thank you so much,

Kasey Dirnberger Career Technical Education Coordinator

Please pass on my comments to the committee with respect to school accreditation standards.

I am a high school teacher in Eureka. I am endorsed to teach 5-12 English, 5-12 Healthcare Professions, and I am licensed as K-12 Principal. Overall, I see a shift toward more flexible pathways and an approach to standards-based or proficiency-based education, and, at least at the middle school level, removing the need to have a specific number of minutes allocated to a given subject. I do not inherently oppose this change. I see a requirement for Civics education at the high school level and I support this change. I see specific mention of IEFA, and I support this addition. I oppose the change that drops a requirement for music, arts, CTE, and world languages/cultures. Just generally requiring electives is likely insufficient. Schools should be required to find a way to meet these specific requirements for music, art, CTE, and world language. I oppose the change that drops the ratio requirements for school counselors and librarians. Dropping this ratio requirement will almost definitely lead to harm to students as schools balance budgets by cutting these crucial positions. These positions ARE crucial to student well-being and need to be treated as such in the accreditation standards.

Thank you for your consideration, Latimer Hoke M.Ed

Is it my imagination or has Superintendent Arntzen totally wiped out all guidelines pertaining to middle school curricular offerings? Will a district be free to offer any kind of instructional area it pleases? Surely there have to be guidelines as middle school students enter high school, they will be expected to have a baseline of knowledge preparing them for the advanced work required by high schools. It appears to me that the suggested changes amount to a dumbing down of Montana's entire education system. Superintendent Arntzen has never been shy about her support for private schools. Is this part of a plan to weaken Montana public schools and drive students to attend private schools? I would like to know the rationale behind these sweeping changes to Montana's accreditation standards.

Sincerely, Lynn Allison

Please do not follow Supt. Arntzen recommendations. These will hurt students across Montana, especially rural students.

Mark Verlanic Elementary

Why are electives offered in a school system? We want all students to excel in their creative endeavors! Art and music provide many areas for creativity and unique expression. An abbreviated schedule does not challenge the curious mind. As a former art teacher, I helped many students to see the importance of creative experience and responsibility to graduate! There is hardly a person who is imminently qualified to abruptly change our educational system.

Mike Kosorok

What are they proposing to replace these with? Is it just going to be an open language situation now? So anything goes? Or is she trying to get these things out of school?

These are credits that are required, so is she saying these things are no longer required? Is that going to make it so it's up to the school to decide? Which would be fine for some schools, others might think music or art isn't important, and no longer required, so why get into the budget hiring teachers of the arts when it's no longer required?

So then, students get art.... where? You know that a love of music or art often comes from a teacher. And the science with a link between music and scholastic performance is a lot more solid than other studies I've seen.

So is this some totally aloof gargoyle deciding for everyone what's best when she has no idea what's good for education? Is this giving, "freedom," to the schools to slash budgets for the arts leaving a slew of teachers without a job and even more students without a proper teacher to teach them the arts? Did we vote on this?

Elected officials, it would be great if you'd just stop, "helping," us. At this point I believe the office of public instruction is doing more harm than good.

Care about kids? Stop helping. And punch yourself in the face.

Mike Wolfe, veterane teacher of the arts and a public school employee stuck in a broken system with idiots running it.

I have been a public-school teacher in Montana for the past 36 years. I am very concerned about the proposed changes for the middle school curriculum, as proposed by our Superintendent of Public Instruction. This is a very bad idea. These programs are very important and needed. I strongly urge you to keep our middle school programs intact.

Thank you,

Patty O'Neill

To all parties concerned:

The purposed cuts to Montana curriculum and its governing language represent a critical error in judgement by those elected to ensure children in Montana have access to quality education. Amputating state educational standards in this manner also demonstrates a lack of requisite knowledge necessary for of the office. Even as a concept, it brings to light a grossly apathetic mindset towards the needs of Montana students, whose education is the responsibility of OPI and The Secretary of Public instruction.

Let me clarify that this is not a subjective opinion dismissible as a political difference- this situation has far more real and severe consequences.

I Hold a Masters Degree in curriculum and Instructional Design, meaning curriculum and its effect in schools is my field of expertise, and the purpose of this email is to define with abject reality what Mrs. Arntzen's proposed mutation of Montana's educational standards is, and what it's result will be:

The proposed Cuts will make our states education system resemble a FAST-FOOD business model where quality is disregarded in favor of simplicity. This proposal is a systematic destruction of our public schools ability to provide students with an education of value. It will also radically harm

chances of future success and potential employability for Montana kids and so greatly limit opportunity's for students in Montana Classrooms that to call it public education would require serious liberties with the definition of "Education".

As a teacher, and as an individual who has lived in Montana for my entire life, attended Montana Public Schools and graduated from a Montana University to work in a Montana Public School I cant reach any rational or logical reason behind what Mrs. Arntzen has proposed.

There is no shred of evidence which remotely suggests that this preposterous idea will have even a minimal benefit to Montana's Public schools. In contrast, every single piece of research that exists points toward not only the benefits of the programs which Mrs. Arntzen wishes to strip from Montana schools, but their absolute necessity in Quality education. The gravity of that fact cannot be overstated and it cannot be shielded by political spin. What that determines is this: Support for Mrs. Arntzen's proposed obliteration of school curriculum is a declaration of negligent disregard for Montana students fully aware of the consequences to those student's.

Elected officials and the committees who advise them bare the burden of responsibility to serve the citizens, which include the children who attend our schools. To even consider implementing the changes Mrs. Arntzen has purposed is not only blatantly unethical, but considering her oath of office it borders on criminal. This is not a conversation about why it is good or helpful for students to have access to elective classes like music, CTE, art, and so fourth. This is a conversation about integrity, or at the bare minimum the duty of office. It is apparent that not one piece of educational research was used to inform these proposals, it is also clear that the future success and employability of Montana students was not a priority.

This issue shows highlights the disconnect between Mrs. Arntzen and Montana's, parents, teachers and schoolboard members who regardless of political affiliations or belief systems work and fight daily for Montana's kids. My hope is that this will urge you to follow in their example and do the best you can for the students of our state. Don't rob them of opportunity's, don't limit the kids who are entitled to the best quality education we can provide them. Step back and recognize that Montana's Secretary of Education is more than a seat on the land board but is responsible for the future of Montana's students and should be held accountable to that fact. We have pride in our schools, our communities and our kids because we can offer them curriculum which ignites creativity and fosters innovation while building real-world skills, what I'm imploring is that you share in that pride with us.

Thank you-

River Newman, Butte School District

The proposals by the Superintendent of Schools is NOT beneficial to the students and to Montana citizens. These appear to be a giant leap bac in progress. Our students deserve better. Please let the committee know that Montana citizens are watching and want to be informed.

Thanks you

Sandy Snow formerly a teacher and still a parent and concerned citizen

Superintendent Artnzen's proposed changes are as baffling as they are egregious. These changes essentially gut the high standards we have for middle school education in this state. The term "elective offerings" is about as vague as it gets, and leaves one to wonder exactly what now constitutes an elective? Underwater basket weaving, perhaps?

The language she proposes to eliminate altogether encompasses the bare minimum we must offer in elective areas that are a huge reason why many students come to school, music, art, culinary arts, etc.

I understand that these areas are increasingly difficult to staff and fund, but eliminating them entirely in favor of "elective offerings" is beyond comprehension. When situations are difficult, Montanans don't just avoid them entirely. We figure out how to best meet needs- and ignoring those needs is unconscionable.

Why the distinction between middle school and junior high students? As I read it, middle school students will still receive reading and writing instruction across the curriculum but junior high students will not?

A library is widely regarded as a physical space, especially a school library. To strike the language specifying that books and other library materials must be housed in a central location opens the door to a school library being repurposed and the materials suddenly located on carts or wherever there is a vacant shelf. This is not hyperbole. This is not false news. This happens all the time in schools across the country when school libraries are deemed unnecessary. Many districts have realized eliminating libraries and librarians is a mistake and reinstated them. If there isn't an actual, physical school library, the need for a certified librarian mysteriously disappears with the books. Combined with the proposed changes to librarian ratios already discussed, this assault on libraries, which is disguised as easing burdens on school districts, must be denied. Now more than ever, our children need school libraries. It is baffling to me that someone charged with providing the best education possible is willing to deny essential services and curriculum that would ensure a well educated population for years to come.

This is a misguided attempt to ease burdens on schools districts. There are better ways to address the issues our state faces. Sticking our heads in the sand is not our best course of action. The end result of going down this rabbit hole will be new generations of Montanans not only lacking in basic knowledge, but also lacking in appreciation of the things that make life worth living.

Shelley O'Rourke

co-chair School Library Division, MLA

To Superintendent Arntzen and Negotiated Committee members:

With regard to the proposed changes for accreditation standards across Montana, I implore the Committee to reject the dismissal of so many important facets of public education.

Slashing middle school electives such as band and orchestra, foreign languages and industrial technology leave a gaping hole in fostering a well-balanced education that exposes students to many different aspects of the world and work. If students are not encouraged to try new and different things

while in middle school, most will not suddenly feel the urge to, let's say, pick up a trumpet as a freshman in high school. Those middle school years are so important in helping students to find their passions that I am dismayed at the idea of stripping their opportunities to a bare minimum.

This is analogous to when Helena Schools got rid of middle school sports for a time...the results were detrimental to our high school programs and more importantly, devastating for our low-income students. When parents can't afford to put their kids in club and travel sports teams, those kiddos have no chance to find and hone their skills. The exact same impact will be seen if middle school orchestra is not available. Only the students with parents who can afford to buy or rent musical instruments for their children will even have an opportunity to find that joy in playing a violin for example.

PLEASE don't widen the chasm between those who have and those who do not even wider.

As for the staffing requirements for counselors in this time of mental illness crises, I can only ask what data was considered in putting forward these changes as good practice. This proposal boggles the mind.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I ask you have a long-term vision as you ponder the ramifications of these proposed changes.

Julie Ladd

31 years in teaching in MT and a proud product of Helena Public Schools.

To Whom it may concern,

In my professional opinion, I strongly believe it will be a critical mistake if we get rid of mandated classes and change this language, as students will have limited access to elective classes. Students need to be well-rounded humans by being able to have access to a variety of classes throughout their entire schooling career. If we get rid of the language, and therefore the educational opportunities that already exist, we will be doing a huge disservice to our students and families. Please consider this when making your decision.

Best,

Kahlee Dalton

Health Enhancement K-12

Helena Middle School

Dear Educational Rule Making Committee

I am rather concerned about Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations regarding middle school electives and credit requirements. The elimination of these requirements could prevent student access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses. If schools are not required to provide such courses for their students the resulting curriculum could result in an educational program for many students that is not well rounded and would not prepare them to be our future leaders.

I request that you do not approve the elimination of the requirement of courses for arts, music, career,, technical education courses and others such as agriculture, business, family & consumer science, health, industrial education, world languages and student electives. Also the required number of units of these and core subjects should not be eliminated.

Creatively yours,
Heather Geiger

The recommendations for middle school curriculum and elective changes are designed to downgrade Montana schools.

The only benefit I can foresee is keeping put of state people with children from moving to Montana.
Sincerely
Valerie Cox

Hi Tristen,

I am writing to voice concerns over the move to eliminate various electives for middle school students in Montana. As a high school English teacher, I witness on a daily basis how poorly prepared many students are for high school, and dumbing things down even more is not going to do anyone any favors.

If anything goes and electives and standards are cut, what will there be to accomplish or to learn? This is not a wise direction to go in and will only work to further disadvantage students in a state that already faces a lot of educational disadvantages.

Kind regards,

Jeri Walker

English Teacher

Thompson Falls High School

Please maintain & preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.

Kristin Basinger (CHS)

Dear Ms. Loveridge:

The proposed changes to Montana's school accreditation standards are significant. I do not agree with these recommendations and wish to weigh in on these ideas before rule changes are voted on by the Montana Board of Public Education.

RE: School Library Media Services

Right now, students in MT, regardless of school size, are guaranteed access to a school librarian. **This recommendation unfairly targets rural students. I do not agree with, nor do I support, this recommendation.**

RE: School Counseling Staff

10.55.710 currently requires a minimum equivalent of one fulltime counselor for each 400 K-8 students and a minimum of one fulltime counselor for each 400 high school students with this ration prorated. Arntzen's recommendations eliminates the ration, thus eliminating students' access to school counselors. **This recommendation unfairly targets rural students. I do not agree with, nor do I support, this recommendation.**

Other Course/Program Elimination

I do not agree with, nor do I support, the elimination of the programs and/or courses Arntzen has recommended in 10.55.902 for middle school students. To be fully educated, critical thinkers and positive leaders, Montana students must continue to study English language arts; social studies; mathematics; the sciences; health enhancement; visual arts; music; career and technical education; and world languages and cultures.

Please share my views with the Montana Board of Public Education.

Thank you,

Stephanie Lindsay, PhD
Assistant Teaching Professor

Director, Leadership Fellows Certificate Program
Education Department

Montana State University

I write to you (again) to express my utter dismay about the recent revisions to the elective programs and credit requirements that Ms. Arntzen has suggested. A quick reading of the most basic revisions is enough to make me wonder what will be left of the curriculum if this continues. I can appreciate that budget shortfalls may instigate careful consideration of our spending, but these proposals are more akin to amputation than dieting. If we remove the substance that she has suggested, we essentially remove the human elements that fuel the very human endeavor that we call education. Our institution will become a carcass with little soul. The basic building blocks of learning function as a slate on which our fundamental human passions can be created. If we take away the arts, music, languages, and other fine arts, we essentially reduce the value of life that we are supposed to be instilling in future generations. Please find a humane way of adjusting financial shortfalls. Could it be that we need to fight harder for funding from the top, rather than amputating spending on the bottom?

Thank you for your concern,

Matthieu Oppedahl (He/Him/His)

1st Grade Teacher
Jefferson Elementary

Hello,

My name is Jake Lile, and I am an English teacher from Bozeman High School. I would like to express that I am NOT in support of Superintendent Arntzen's proposed eliminations of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools, and I am equally unsupportive of eliminating Montana school requirements for visual arts, music, CTE, and world languages.

If we take away those FTE requirements, I know that money will disappear from our already under-funded schools. Please thoughtfully consider rejecting these revisions, in favor of maintaining high standards for students and our Montana schools. I firmly believe we will all be better for it.

Yours in education,

~Jake Lile

Tristen,

Superintendent Arntzen's agenda for dismantling the educational system in Montana is frightening.

Taking away access to electives, library resources, and counseling resources signals to me her total lack of understanding of what we as educators do day in and day out. Students are not robots. They need and crave engagement, compassion, hands-on learning, and the resources to do it. Please do not cut these essential classes and programming that make for well-rounded world citizens. As an art teacher, I want you to know that I don't just teach crafts. I teach real-life skills like critical thinking, problem-solving, risk-taking, learning through experience, empathy, and understanding of the world around us. I am a safe space for students to learn, explore, and make themselves heard! Mine is not an "agenda" as a public educator but the mindset of a person who works with students every day and can very clearly see their needs to survive in the world we've created for them.

Do better!!!

Kimberly Cook

Capital High School
Fine Arts Department

Dear Mr. Loveridge,

As a high school language arts teacher, I am alarmed by Ms. Artzen's proposed changes to the elective and credit requirements for middle schools. Students must be guaranteed a comprehensive, equitable education at all grade-levels. To do that, we must have standards and opportunities for all

students. Without these requirements, students in Dutton and students in Dillon could receive very different educations, even though they all live in the state of Montana.

If the committee were to approve Ms. Artzen's short-sighted plan, by the time students reach high school, they may not have the requisite skills to succeed in high school. If they cannot succeed in high school, their choices beyond high school will be severely limited. To succeed in today's complex world, students need *more* education, not *less*.

This is a bad idea. Please do not approve Ms. Artzen's proposed changes. It will stunt our students, their potential, and ultimately, our society. We must uphold and maintain rigorous and equitable standards for all.

Thank you,

Katy Paynich, English Teacher

Hi,

I am writing to state my disdain for the proposals by Superintendent Elsie Arntzen on librarians, counselors, and electives as well as cutting credits. Please do not enact these changes. So many students need loving and trained counselors in these always changing and crazy times. We need librarians who are specialists in their field in all schools in Montana. Students need electives and opportunities to take more advanced readings, math, and science in junior high/middle school. By offering a variety of electives and more opportunities for academic advancement, students are able to pursue interests beyond the basics and are also learning to be more diverse in the competitive and ever changing job market of their future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Paula W Foster

Hello Tristen,

I received the email from Jane Shawn about the change in the language for elective classes in middle school. Please share my thoughts with the committee please. These elective classes help create an environment in our schools that helps make learning fun for our kids. Many of these classes give kids an opportunity to have fun with hands-on learning and provide the skills that will help them be successful later in life and some skills that will help them right now.

I teach a Health class at HMS that provides kids the opportunities to learn how to cook and prepare meals for themselves. In this class, I also expose them to a weight room where they can learn how to safely, and correctly get a workout in so they can start to fall in love with movement and pushing their bodies so they can live healthier lifestyles as they get older. Not to mention the many health topics we cover to help them in their everyday lives. This year I was blown away as we started our puberty unit with the number of kids that have not been through that discussion in their lives, leading me to believe that if there isn't an opportunity in schools they may never learn these important topics. The number of kids that knew they are supposed to eat healthily, but they couldn't tell you why. Many of my students had no idea they could get a job and earn some money starting at the age of 14, or how

to build a resume to hand to a potential employer to help land a job. Changing the language would open up the doors to potentially cutting many important courses our kids need such as this one.

This is just one subject in the schools where kids are learning valuable skills. Every class is giving students a variety of different lifelong skills that they never knew about. Along with peaking the interest of many students that may not even like school, but tolerate it and attend all their classes just because of their passion for a music, art or shop class.

I strongly believe that changing the language of the different programs is a huge mistake, that will end up affecting everyone in a very negative way. Thank you for reading this and passing it on.

Have a great day,

Brayden Nicholson

To Whom It May Concern,

I am horrified at the proposed changes for the School Library Media and School counseling staff requirements for middle school. I am a middle school teacher and parent of a child in middle school. Removing the ratio of students to teacher librarians and counselors could drastically reduce the offerings to our children. For many students, libraries are a safe space where they can enjoy something outside of the core classroom. School counseling should be something we are investing more in, not taking away. The current ratio of one full time counselor for 400 students is already too high. The mental health of our children should be at the top of our list of things to invest in. If the ratio is to be changed, it should be one counselor to a maximum of 250-300 students.

Along with the libraries and counselors, striking the current language for middle school requirements could open the door to drastic reductions of class offerings due to districts cutting costs. The electives are the first thing to go when cutting costs, it should be the exact opposite. These classes are worth fighting for. If the language is removed this gives an open license to stop offering some of the classes and services our students need the most.

In addition to counseling, libraries and electives it saddens me that striking the requirement for a PE/Health class, or any other core class, is even thought to be a good idea. Health education and physical education sets our students up for a lifetime of activity and can lead to healthy lifestyles. To strike any of the core content areas from requirements would be a disservice to every student in Montana.

While some will say it is just a language change and students will still get these classes, it opens the door for some districts to make drastic cuts to their offerings. If we don't protect our language and requirements, how are we guaranteeing our students the best education possible? Montana's children deserve better.

We must invest in our schools, our children and our communities. Taking away ratios and language is not the answer. We must protect what we have and fight for more.

Thank you for your time.

Talia Martin

Good Evening,

My name is Rebecca Croghan. I am a teacher in the Belgrade School District. I am writing to ask that the committee preserves the current electives and credit requirements for middle school. The Every Student Succeeds Act encodes that students have access to a "well-rounded education." According to ESSA, a well-rounded education is defined as: "courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, geography, computer science, music, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject, as determined by the State or local educational agency, with the purpose of providing all students access to an enriched curriculum and educational experience."

By removing the credit requirements, school districts will not have to provide these opportunities for our students in junior high. This limits our students' ability to access a well-rounded education.

Please ensure our students maintain the ability to access these important courses at the junior high level.

Thank you,

Rebecca Croghan

Hello Tristen,

The following is submitted as written public comment to the Chapter 55 Negotiated Rule Making Committee Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, May 18th at 3:30 pm.

Dear Negotiated Rule Making Committee Members,

I write to you today as a proud product of the Montana Public Schools. I attended K-12 in Billings, went on to receive two degrees from the University of Montana, and now teach in the public schools of Helena. I am pleased to see that specifically Civics or Government within Social Studies as well as Financial Literacy have been added to the high school requirements. However, I have concerns regarding a few of the other areas.

Especially after what our communities have endured over the past two years, I feel reducing the requirements for counseling staff listed in 10.55.710 would be a grave mistake. It is no secret that students and teachers are struggling. Having counselors in our schools is critical now more than ever. I understand that your proposed amendment still requires counseling staff but removing the student to staff ratio takes the concrete expectations out of the rule and makes it too easy for districts to not provide enough of the critical counseling staff our schools desperately need. If a change is going to be made here I urge it should be in the other direction towards closer alignment of the National Counselors Association recommendation of 250 students to 1 counselor.

Regarding middle grades (10.55.902), I am frustrated to see such dramatic cuts to the expectations for elective offerings. While I see that elective offerings are still listed as a group, once again the specific guidelines are removed. The removal of required arts curriculum is of particular concern to

me. The Every Student Succeeds Act passed in December of 2015 states that all students are entitled to a well-rounded education and goes on to specifically cite music, art, technology and foreign languages as part of that education. By removing the specific directives from our state requirements we are opening the door to reducing student access to these critical content areas. When I was in middle school at Castle Rock in Billings, my family went through 3 years of serious medical emergencies and the resulting recovery periods. These family traumas combined with the typical challenges of my pre-teen and early teenage years caused tremendous struggle for me. What got me out of bed and to school every day during this time? Band. Music became everything to me – motivation to go to school, a source of community and friendship, and an emotional outlet when I needed it most. And that doesn't even get into all the developmental and cognitive benefits of music. Every single Montana student deserves to have these same opportunities and opening the door to districts cutting them is simply unacceptable. I urge you to maintain our high expectations of middle school curriculum as these are incredibly critical years for student development and they deserve the very best we have to offer.

In regard to 10.55.709 and the striking of ratio requirements for endorsed library media specialists, I believe this change will be a serious detriment to our students. Our library media specialists fill a crucial role in Montana schools, especially as our world moves to a technology driven society and it becomes even more crucial students learn about appropriate online behavior and develop their abilities to find reputable sources of information.

In closing, I strongly urge you to vote against the entirety of Superintendent Arntzen's recommended changes except the civics/government and financial literacy graduation requirements. Montana students and families deserve public schools that offer them the very best we can, and these recommendations seriously undermine the strength of our schools and in turn the strength of our communities. Montana deserves better.

Sincerely,

Nicole Evans

Dear Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

My heart was heavy as I read through the changes Superintendent Elsie Arntzen is recommending for school accreditation standards. When I first started teaching 22 years ago, I was doing it because I loved teaching. Over the years, my passion for teaching remains, and my belief in the importance of public education has intensified. Public Education is a place where all students regardless of socio-economic status can learn, grow, and thrive. The past year I have realized that yes, public education needs to be addressed but limiting student's access to the arts, music, literature, physical education, and social and emotional learning is completely contradictory to what I thought needed to happen. I did not agree with many of the changes Superintendent Arntzen recommended, but the one that is closest to my heart pertains to the School Counselor position.

I am a school counselor at Target Range School District. Depression and anxiety has become more prevalent in our youth over the past 5 years, families are struggling financially, and substance use and abuse is on the rise. Daily I must prioritize the needs of my students in order to assess who needs the most support at this time. Daily I must decide which student I will meet with based on their needs and resources. Many students that have asked to visit with me must wait days and sometimes

weeks because of the imminent needs of their classmates. Students want a safe space to share their thoughts, troubles, and successes. Students want to a safe space to navigate appropriate ways to respond to the challenges they face. Students want support as they assess the skills and tools they have and will need to be successful adults. School counselors provide this space.

Mental Health resources are limited within our communities. It seems obviously grotesque to me that I feel like I need to mention that Montana has one of the highest suicide rates in the country. I have provided many families with referrals for outside support from a therapist. For some of my students, outside supports are unavailable due to resources, time, and transportation needs. For other students, months on a waiting list has become the expected. It is essential that our students have access to a school counselor.

I strongly encourage that there is a change in the ratio of students to school counselor to the National Recommendation of 250:1.

I ask that the Negotiated Rule Making Committee disregard the changes that Superintendent Elsie Arntzen is recommending. How public education moves forward needs to be a discussion that involves parents, students, school administrators and the greater Montana community.

Sincerely,

Michal Farley

Parent

School Counselor

May 17, 2022

Dear Mr. Loveridge,

Please be informed I am totally against all of the changes proposed for middle school requirements by Ms. Arntzen. As a former teacher of elementary and middle school students I have witnessed how these programs have turned students onto education, given students a way to deal with trauma in their lives, and broadened their horizons as they try to find a path in which they can excel.

By taking away these requirements we are not addressing the whole child. Is this not why we offer a public education with a sampling of curriculum for all? Without these offerings many students will not be in a financial setting to afford private lessons or experience many creative avenues. School libraries are an essential part of every educational institute. Many students live miles from town and would have less access to not only written material but technology resources.

As both an educator and a parent, I beg you do not take away what it has taken our communities years to develop.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Lynch

Negotiating Committee Rules Making Members,

Please reconsider not revising counselors, librarians and music educators out of education. These people provide an outlet for so many students today. As a parent, I cannot imagine my kids going through school without a librarian, counselor, art or music teacher. These individuals have helped shape my children into who they are today. Cutting programs and educators is NOT the answer. Thank you for your consideration.

Lynn Mason

I have been a public-school teacher in Montana for the past 36 years. I am very concerned about the proposed changes for the middle school curriculum, as proposed by our Superintendent of Public Instruction. This is a very bad idea. These programs are very important and needed. I strongly urge you to keep our middle school programs intact.

Thank you,

Patty O'Neill

The proposals by the Superintendent of Schools is NOT beneficial to the students and to Montana citizens. These appear to be a giant leap bac in progress. Our students deserve better. Please let the committee know that Montana citizens are watching and want to be informed.

Thanks you

Sandy Snow

formerly a teacher and still a parent and concerned citizen

Superintendent Artnzen's proposed changes are as baffling as they are egregious. These changes essentially gut the high standards we have for middle school education in this state. The term "elective offerings" is about as vague as it gets, and leaves one to wonder exactly what now constitutes an elective? Underwater basket weaving, perhaps?

The language she proposes to eliminate altogether encompasses the bare minimum we must offer in elective areas that are a huge reason why many students come to school, music, art, culinary arts, etc.

I understand that these areas are increasingly difficult to staff and fund, but eliminating them entirely in favor of "elective offerings" is beyond comprehension. When situations are difficult, Montanans don't just avoid them entirely. We figure out how to best meet needs- and ignoring those needs is unconscionable.

Why the distinction between middle school and junior high students? As I read it, middle school students will still receive reading and writing instruction across the curriculum but junior high students will not?

A library is widely regarded as a physical space, especially a school library. To strike the language specifying that books and other library materials must be housed in a central location opens the door to a school library being repurposed and the materials suddenly located on carts or wherever there is

a vacant shelf. This is not hyperbole. This is not false news. This happens all the time in schools across the country when school libraries are deemed unnecessary. Many districts have realized eliminating libraries and librarians is a mistake and reinstated them. If there isn't an actual, physical school library, the need for a certified librarian mysteriously disappears with the books. Combined with the proposed changes to librarian ratios already discussed, this assault on libraries, which is disguised as easing burdens on school districts, must be denied. Now more than ever, our children need school libraries. It is baffling to me that someone charged with providing the best education possible is willing to deny essential services and curriculum that would ensure a well educated population for years to come.

This is a misguided attempt to ease burdens on schools districts. There are better ways to address the issues our state faces. Sticking our heads in the sand is not our best course of action. The end result of going down this rabbit hole will be new generations of Montanans not only lacking in basic knowledge, but also lacking in appreciation of the things that make life worth living.

Shelley O'Rourke

co-chair School Library Division, MLA

I write to urge the committee to preserve the language that specifies electives at the middle school level. These classes provide foundational skills that students need to succeed at higher levels as well as opportunities to explore subject matter of their choosing. Eliminating the language that lays out these options is a bad idea and one that I oppose as both a teacher and a parent in the Helena School District. Please do not eliminate the current elective language.

Thank you,

Rebecca Leaphart

Please preserve the current specific electives and credit requirements program for middle schoolers.
Amber Conger

To whom it may concern,

I would like to go on the record as being vehemently opposed to Superintendent Arntzen's gutting of public education. The changes presented would be catastrophic for the students and teachers in Montana. As a teacher in Columbia Falls for the last twenty-five years, it saddens me to hear that this is even a possibility. One would think the Superintendent of schools would be pro-education, not looking to dismantle it.

With a heavy heart,
Kristy Gange

6th Grade Science

CFJH

To Whom It May Concern,

As a middle school Montana educator of 20 years, I am appalled and disheartened by the proposed changes to public education. The elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools, preventing access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses would be a determinant to our students. Our students need full access to quality school libraries with certified librarians to preserve their right to intellectual freedom. Our students, and their families, need full access to counselors on campus who provide much needed mental health support.

It is clear State Superintendent Arntzen is out of touch regarding the needs of students, the needs of public education teachers, and the needs of Montana communities. It is apparent Superintendent Arntzen is attempting to dismantle public education as we know it.

I strongly oppose all the proposed education changes by our State Superintendent.

Disheartened,

Leslie DiMaio

7th grade ELA teacher

Columbia Falls, MT

Good Heavens!

I am appalled at Superintendent Elsie Arntzen's terrible gutting of elective, librarians, and counseling staff from our public schools. At this time in history it is more important than ever to give students real connectivity and connection in schools. Electives provide real brain food for students and give them a reason to come to school. It is in these ways students form relationships with adults and fellow students alike.

Moreover counselors and librarians! Kids need literacy training. Learning to read means enjoyment of reading and selection of their own topics. Counselors provide support, advice and in many instances recognize social issues like hunger and neglect. We must not allow this striking of accreditation standards from our schools. This is an abhorrent attack on the integrity of schools and will affect students for years to come.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Pfaff

Dear Mr. Loveridge,

I have two children in the public school system and feel very strongly that the changes proposed by Superintendent Arntzen are not in the best interest of Montana students. If these changes are implemented it will be very hard to ever get the FTE's back. Librarians, music and art teachers and School counselors (!!) play a vital role in the culture of the school. Yes, we have a teacher shortage but it won't last forever. Cutting school counselors is like telling kids with struggles to take a hike, and

those are the kids that need the most. The research on Art/Music and Counselling for students speaks for itself.

Elective classes and the opportunity to try out different subjects keep kids excited and are often a highlight of my kids day.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sarah Annarella

To whom it may concern:

Please consider putting a stop to the potential changes to library/media and counseling services in our schools.

If you don't think these services are necessary then you've never been inside a school and seen how they are able to run effectively AND efficiently every single day.

I work in a low income area with many other battles for kids to fight, including families with divorced parents and drugs/alcohol addictions. Schools are the only "safe" place for many students! And the resources should be there to make it the safest place for them.

A classroom teacher has so many tasks before them each day aside from also managing social, emotional, and mental dilemmas. They are one person.

The recommended change to library services is equally as disturbing. Some kids do not ever see a book at home, let alone be taught how to use and respect them. If they have no resources to read a book at home I can guarantee they also don't have the resources to get to a county library (if there is even one open in a town close enough for them to get to). Libraries are under appreciated and funded as well.

Please respect these resources in public schools and the important role they play in so many students' lives.

Thank you for your time.

Brittany Fritz

A concerned 3rd grade teacher and mother of 3

Dear Negotiated Rule Making Committee Members,

I am writing regarding the changes the Superintendent Artze is making regarding librarians, counselors, and the middle school curriculum requirements. As a teacher and a parent, I can tell you that having access to a librarian and counselors daily is crucial. In addition, each of these roles provides necessary support to students and staff.

The librarians in the school teach our kids how to safely access the world through this ever-growing digital age. Without the librarians, students would lack the necessary tools to compete in society's academic and professional areas.

The counselors are the student's lifeline to help when life gets overwhelming. As a teacher, I cannot always stop what I am doing to help students process their big emotions. The counselors teach students how to process these emotions at the elementary level and ask for help when needed.

These tools are valuable, especially in this day when we are dealing with a mental health crisis that has never been seen before in recent history. However, helping the mental health struggle of our students and families depends on having highly qualified counselors in each school daily.

Finally, as a student's parent in Montana, I am concerned about the changes to the middle school curriculum. Students in Montana already struggle to be competitive with other students in the country regarding jobs and colleges. By taking away key factors that help students in middle school build a background to build up to taking classes in high school that will lead to college or trade schools. Waiting until high school to introduce these electives harms our student's ability to be competitive outside of school. The goal of education is to develop students into well-rounded, highly educated adults. Taking away the introduction to multiple different areas, from music to technology to agriculture, does not serve our students. Middle school is a crucial area where students start figuring out what career they want to pursue after graduation. This means that the more exposure we give students in different educational areas, the more focused students will be on graduating, and the better-prepared students will be for life.

All I ask is that you please take the time to consider all the sides of this issue before making these suggested changes. While it may seem like a fix to some issues currently, in the long run, these changes will affect every student that is currently in or will be in the school systems of Montana. Thank you for your time.

Deborah McNay
Helena, Montana

I am writing to ask that you vote to maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. I am a parent and teacher in Butte, Montana. Many of the programs that will be cut are programs many families value and low-income families rely on to motivate students to stay in school, live healthy lifestyles, create positive self-image and self-esteem, build community awareness, and teach empathy. Many studies have been conducted evaluating the value of art in education and the importance of exposure at an early age. Most students who do not study art or music in Middle School and Elementary school will unlikely participate in these activities in high school. Students who are involved in the arts are likely to have better grades in school and better attendance. Please do not leave Montana schools behind.

Thank you,
Elena Giono

I have been an educator for 37 years. As a teacher you learn about teaching the more you do it. I cannot believe that cutting electives would even be considered. We as teachers see the results of activities and electives in such positive ways. Personally I have two children now that have careers in areas that were inspired by the electives in their middle schools. Students excel at school when they can have electives in their schedules and sometimes it is the only reason for them to stay motivated or even come to school.

I have also observed the damage that occurs to our children and students when politics play the education game. Do not let this crazy idea pass. Arntzen's ideas are all motivated by her political ideals. And in her own words, do not let our middle schoolers get run over by her "proverbial school bus."

Tim Garrett

Helena Schools

Dear Tristen and the Montana Board of Education,

My name is Retta Leaphart and I am a parent in the Helena School District. I oppose the proposed changes to the accreditation standard that would eliminate the existing ratios for counselors and librarians and I also oppose cutting language that assures access to arts and elective programming in the middle schools.

If anything, we should be expanding students' access to counseling, libraries and the arts in public school settings. During the time that students were learning online, we saw a decline in mental health, socialization, and communication skills, which can all be improved through the programs Arntzen is proposing to cut.

This feels like a blatant attempt to limit students' exposure to social emotional learning that can be life saving for LGBTQIA students in particular.

Not only are these programs vital for the growth of our students' social and communication skills, but multiple studies have proven that involvement in the arts at school leads to improved academic performance and school culture. A quote from just one of these studies: "We find that a substantial increase in arts educational experiences has remarkable impacts on students' academic, social, and emotional outcomes. Relative to students assigned to the control group, treatment school students experienced a 3.6 percentage point reduction in disciplinary infractions, an improvement of 13 percent of a standard deviation in standardized writing scores, and an increase of 8 percent of a standard deviation in their compassion for others." (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2019/02/12/new-evidence-of-the-benefits-of-arts-education/> [brookings.edu])

As a parent, I am deeply concerned to see my own children's access to these vital pieces of their education in jeopardy. As a Montanan, I am embarrassed that this has been proposed and is being considered.

Do not proceed with these changes. Preserve the current electives and credit requirements for middle schools, and maintain the current ratios for counselors and librarians.

Retta

Please maintain current elective requirements for middle school. For many students these are the classes that set them up for the future. Not only that but students need to shine in these areas so that they feel success as a student. It is the love of these subjects areas that motivate students to be happy at school and come each day. Protect public education!

Sincerely,

Shannon Powers



Written Public Comment
Electives and General Comments
Received May 19th

Elsie, I heard that you are recommending the elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools, preventing student access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses. This is a terrible idea and should be thrown out immediately.

Going after the arts, school counselors, and librarians.
What possible good will come from this?

A teacher of the arts, and someone that wants the best for our students in Montana,

Mike Wolfe

Good morning! I am emailing this morning asking to keep the elective and credit requirements for junior high. For so many students, electives are where they find their niche in school. These classes are so important if we want to keep kids in school when they go to high school. Please do not gut them.

Anne Calhoun

asking them to maintain preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.

Ann Calhoun

Supt. Elsie Arntzen,

Hope you are doing good. I am so glad you are in the position you are in. I am still teaching elementary health enhancement here in Billings. This is my 25th year!!

I was troubled this morning when I received an email from a fellow member of the professional organization in Montana that I have been a part of for decades. The email had to do with a meeting that is supposed to take place today to look at the recommendations you have made regarding eliminating the PE requirement in middle schools. I couldn't believe what I was reading. How could this be? How could this be in the best interests of the students' needs? I sent an email this morning to Tristen Loveridge, your Executive Assistant regarding this. Below I have copied what I sent him which also includes some information from the CDC website regarding Physical Education and the benefits of exercise. I sure hope you have a few minutes to read what I wrote to him.

In the midst of everything that has happened in the last couple years, the last thing we need to do is decrease the amount of physical activity. I would appreciate an explanation on why you are recommending this. What is behind it? It just doesn't make any sense. Maybe all this will be discussed in the meeting today, but

unfortunately I can't attend it. Hopefully, my email to Tristen will be part of the public comments on this matter.

Thank you for your time,

Jeffrey Goudy, Billings, MT

Dear Jessica and Elsie:

The attached link was forwarded to me by a Bozeman parent and after reading the changes, I was shocked and extremely disappointed that something like this is being submitted. Apparently there is a comment period ending this evening. Below are my comments.

Libraries should be something special for students. Petra has a centralized library in one location with tables, chairs, etc. Why is this being eliminated? A library should be recognized as a gathering of resources for all students to enjoy. The content of the library should be transparent to all parents.

Licensed endorsed media specialist. Credentials and political beliefs should be available for parents for transparency purposes. Endorsed by whom?

"A consortium, multidistrict agreement, interlocal cooperative". Multi District agreement and interlocal cooperative means that one organization has control over all of the schools and students who do not share certain political beliefs will be discriminated against. These types of agreements are not considered fair to parents and students because it causes a situation where certain individuals are making decisions on behalf of all parents and students and those certain individuals are not elected officials. This language needs to be deleted.

Any other cooperative that is authorized....this should be removed. Another lever of government that restricts every school from doing what the parents want and what is best for the children.

Assignment of School Counseling Staff. I would like to see transparency and parental rights secured. A parent should be able to meet with the counselor and know exactly what is being discussed with the counselor. A parent should have the ability to opt in or out of counseling for their child.

Graduation requirements. Would like to know what their justification is for adding the additional language. It is straight forward in the original requirement. Providing all students with the opportunity to meet...is a given. I would object to the changes in its entirety and leave the language as originally stated. A "Students may demonstrate achievements through a flexible system of pupil-centered learning" sounds like different wording for CRT. I would ask specifically what this means. The original language is straight forward.

"or an equivalent that meets the district's curriculum and assessment requirements, which are aligned with the content standards stated in the education program". Who determines what the equivalent that meets the district's curriculum and assessment requirements is? Was this added because students who are failing in school/education will be allowed to graduate without skills? This is disturbing. Why are they not changing the language to say that students must be proficient....

Basic Education Program - All levels. DELETE NEW LANGUAGE IN ITS ENTIRETY. In my opinion, the addition of this language violates parental rights and civil rights. It is one thing to educate students about American History and the Indian Nations, however, this is nothing short of racism.

I am not sure why the overall changes are being made. I would object to the majority, if not all, of the changes. I would suggest to every parent that they retain an attorney to discuss their parental rights and civil rights as it relates to these changes.

Tristen,

Please consider the below a statement that I wish to be sent to the **Negotiated Rule Making Committee** regarding Supt. Arntzen's recommended changes that the committee will consider at their meeting today, May 18:

Thank you for the opportunity to send in this statement to you. The content of this statement is my personal opinion and does not necessarily reflect the views of my employer.

With all due respect, I believe the proposed changes regarding "Basic Education Programs: Middle Grades," specifically the striking of language related to specific electives, is not the right course of action. As a music educator, I would like to speak specifically to the removal of music. I believe the removal of music from this list removes the opportunity for students to experience music through courses related to instrumental, vocal, and general music offerings. Let me provide a personal anecdote: music was an avenue for me as a middle schooler to express myself when I had a difficult time expressing myself and fitting in through other classes. It also allowed me to interact with a teacher who still serves as a mentor to me today. These positive musical experiences and positive interactions with this mentor continued into high school and sent me on the path that I am on today: serving as a music educator within the state of Montana. Montana has some rich music traditions throughout its cities, large and small. Recently I heard about two wonderful music educators who built a music program in Miles City. Their passion affected several young people for several decades who still speak of the positive influence of those teachers. I hear similar stories of music educators who build and maintain wonderful music programs across our great state, and this no doubt has had a positive influence upon the students who take part in those programs. Elimination of music from the language in the school accreditation standards jeopardizes the continuation of these stories. Instead of striking this language, let's look for avenues to keep these music programs thriving, including increasing teacher pay and incentives to keep our best and brightest teachers within our state. Too many leave our state for better pay and benefits. Let's incentivize these teachers to stay here in the state of Montana, and that includes teachers in all of these areas, including the arts, technical and career education, world languages and other electives.

Thank you.

-Mike

I am writing to you on behalf of the Agriculture Educators of Montana. Please do not move forward with the Chapter 55 proposed revisions. In today's post covid schools, students need a strong support system which includes a licensed counselor available to them at their school. Montana is one of the leading states in suicide rates. The Montana education system should be looking for ways to support our students' mental and emotional health, not making it more difficult to access these professionals.

Additionally, the Agriculture Teachers of Montana do not support the change in language to the graduation requirements. Students should be required to take State recognized classes including; Career and Technical Education, Art, Math, Social Studies, Science and English, "equivalent" classes do not suffice!

Please do not support the proposed changes to Chapter 55. Do not lower the bar for student achievement in public schools in Montana.

Kristy Rothe
President- Montana Association of Agriculture Educators
Big Sky High School - Agriculture Education

Dear Montana Board of Education,

As a former student of music education, a parent of two elementary middle school students, and a music education professional, I am writing on behalf of the current conversation to cut funding for music/art and other electives from elementary and middle schools.

Music has been a constant in my life. It has gotten me through childhood trauma to having a purpose in my adult life. I realize playing music isn't for everyone. But music appreciation is for every human. Along with reading, writing, and arithmetic, music has been a part of the healthy human being for centuries as stated by Plato and Aristotle. Some students thrive in math or reading, some science or history, and some art and music. Why would you take this opportunity away from our children?

We can't have great high school and university music programs without building on the foundations set in elementary and middle school. Learning starts with the youngest of children. Students find belonging in music classes and ensembles. They work **together** to present their end-of-quarter programs. There are so few options aside from music and sports where students must operate as a group to produce a final product. I could go on for pages regarding the benefits of music, arts, and sports education. The bottom line is if we cut elective funding, **students will lose out on great opportunities that make them feel they belong in our society.** Please keep music and other electives at the primary and middle school levels

Thank you,

Deidre Corson

Executive Director

(she/her@nten.org)

North Valley Music School

Hi,

I am writing to state my disdain for your proposals on librarians, counselors, and electives as well as cutting credits. Please do not enact these changes. So many students need loving and trained counselors in these always changing and crazy times. We need librarians who are specialists in their field in all schools in Montana. Students need electives and opportunities to take more advanced readings, math, and science in junior high/middle school. By offering a variety of electives and more opportunities for academic advancement, students are able to pursue interests beyond the basics and are also learning to be more diverse in the competitive and ever changing job market of their future. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Paula W Foster

May 18th, 2022

Attn: Elsie Arntzen, and the Montana Board of Public Education

I am writing with deep concern about Mrs. Arntzen's recommendation to eliminate the specific elective programs and credit requirements for our middle school students. By preventing access to music, visual arts, career and technical education students will not learn valuable skills that help with self management, problem solving, critical thinking, and idea development.

As a visual arts educator in Montana, I have seen the positive impact that these programs offer our students, especially during the past several years with the pandemic. Now more than ever it is imperative that students retain access to these types of programs to ensure that their development is well rounded during this period of their lives. Middle school is a tough time, and I have seen first hand how giving students the opportunity to express themselves creatively has enhanced their understanding of the world.

It is imperative that these credit requirements remain intact, because the arts not only give students the technical skills necessary to create resolved pieces, but also leads to massive gains in their ability to approach problems, and develop numerous solution through the creative process, and their development and understanding of the Studio Habits of Mind. By learning to develop original ideas

Additionally, students who study visual arts learn and develop their fine motor skills, language skills, social skills, decision-making, risk-taking, and inventiveness.

Additionally, there are positive macro level results in our society, as developing an appreciation for the arts can and will lead to lifelong involvement with the arts. This lifelong involvement leads to higher levels of civic engagement and social tolerance, which is very much needed in today's world.

Please do not consider Mrs. Arntzen's proposal, as it will be detrimental to the development, social-emotional status, and the lifelong engagement with the arts to Montana's children.

Sincerely,
DJ Soikkeli
Visual Arts Educator at Big Sky School District #72

Dear Committee members,
I urge you to maintain the student ratios in school library media services and school counseling staff in the current rule and not accept the proposed changes by Superintendent Arntzen.

Counselors and librarians are crucial to our students' success. I have two children. One who graduated MSU last December with honors and one who will graduate from Polson High School as valedictorian this Spring. Their success would not be possible without the support from the librarians and counselors in their schools.

Montana has one of the highest suicide rates in the nation. Changing the required ratio of counselors to students will mean additional deaths.

Librarians are a crucial resource for all of our children as are libraries in schools.

Thank you for your service and your consideration.
Sincerely,
Rosemary Hickey

As a Registered voter, and by no means happy with either party at this point, I would ask for your immediate resignation. Based on your latest proposal to get rid of several key programs within our public schools, you have lost all of your mind at this point. Get off your political line items and actually think about the students, not your political parties agenda. You can be voted out. And after this latest move you should be voted out. Have a nice day.
Ryan Albertson

what in god's name are you thinking?????? Don't be a dope. This is not how Montanans roll. Do the right thing.

Keith Bruski

Hello,
I am writing to express my concern on the proposed amendments by the Montana Superintendent Elsie Arntzen. These changes would be unfair to students and schools. Kids deserve better than this. Physical Education, Counseling, Visual Arts, Music and Library Media are essential to creating well rounded human beings and oftentimes those are the subjects students look forward to coming to school for. Not only are these topics enjoyable for students but also benefit students' education. Music Education has been proved to improve test scores and brain function. Physical education gives students ownership over their health which

they will carry with them throughout their lives. These subjects should absolutely be required in schools. The idea that students wouldn't need a full time counselor is counter productive. As a K-8 educator I see daily how much students benefit from counseling services and I know it would take a huge toll on our students to have that position be anything but full time.

Sage Gustafson
Lolo School
K-8 Music

I have been a teacher for eight years, have a Masters of Arts in Literacy Education, and am a current Literacy Interventionist at a rural school that would be deeply and adversely affected by these proposed changes.

Student literacy is improved by access to libraries and qualified, licensed librarians. Social Emotional Learning can be a huge barrier to academic growth and students need access to counselors the entire school day, especially with the ongoing COVID pandemic.
I am AGAINST the proposed changes.

Meghan Flanary
Philipsburg School District
Literacy Interventionist
School Garden Coordinator

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Ally Seneczko, I am the education attorney at Disability Rights Montana. Disability Rights Montana's education unit works with students with disabilities in the public school system. Too often, our Montana students fall through the cracks due to lack of resources in the schools. I am writing you regarding Superintendent Arntzen's proposed recommendations. A number of the proposed recommendations are seriously concerning.

Specifically, we strongly oppose the extensive striking of language and requirements under ARM 10.55.902. The elimination of requirements addressing a child's unique nature by focusing on intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development will be hugely detrimental to our most vulnerable students. Eliminating this requirement will result in a complete failure to the vast number of children in Montana who learn differently than their peers, are atypical or neurodivergent, or who have experienced trauma, among other things. These children have equal rights to a free appropriate public education. Further, the focus on a child's unique nature takes into account the different cultural, familial, and socioeconomic backgrounds that each child brings to the classroom and to their learning.

Additionally, the elimination of specific requirements for programs in the arts, music, career and technical education, and other creative realms will result in a significant loss of opportunities for all students. These electives are essential and beneficial for a child's development. Elective courses benefit children academically, socially, and behaviorally. The research available on the detriments of eliminating these programs is extensive. Further, the elimination of a minimum requirement for assignment of school counseling staff under ARM 10.55.710 based on the student enrollment will almost certainly lead to poor outcomes for students with mental health needs in larger school systems. Montana K-12 students in recent years have faced significant losses of their peers to suicide. Now, more than ever, the OPI should be increasing funding and requirements for additional counseling services for our students, not decreasing them. The OPI should prioritize the provision of school counseling programs with the resources and support necessary to support our students.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this comment.
Sincerely,

Ally Seneczko
Staff Attorney
Education Unit
Disability Rights Montana

Good afternoon,

I am writing to express my opposition to the recommended changes to ARMs 10.55.709, 10.55.710, 10.55.901, 10.55.902, 10.55.904, and 10.55.905 that will be discussed on May 18th by OPI's Chapter 55 Negotiated Rule Making Committee.

I am the mother of a kindergartener and 3rd grader at Jefferson Elementary in Helena. Raising children is a daunting task at the best of times, and knowing that we have easy access to school counselors and similar in-school resources is a game-changer for overwhelmed parents. Removing a guarantee of these critical services through schools will ultimately, damage the welfare of all our communities. I also urge you to consider that there are so many families in our communities that lack the means or volition to seek care for their children facing mental health challenges. To so many of those children, their school may be the only resource that they will ever have access to.

As to the other changes, including eliminating requirements for employee librarians and slashing elective requirements for middle school students, I strongly feel that these changes will lower the quality and breadth of education in our state--particularly in low income and tribal areas. Please maintain the current policies and standards for the good of all students.

Furthermore, I can not emphasize enough what a difference personal instruction from a librarian has made in both my children's lives. They have developed a love of books and reading, largely due to the encouragement and enthusiasm shown by their librarian. I strongly believe that this growth is not something that a database or computer system can accomplish.

Please reconsider these proposed changes!

Ginny Emery
Wandering Albatross Photography

Hello!

I'm a kindergarten teacher in Helena, have been for two years. I've been in education, both public and private for 18 years.

I JUST learned of the changes to the wording of the education plans for elementary yesterday.

That in itself infuriates me --- why are teachers just now being informed? And it was from a colleague, nothing else. I'm appalled that the opinion of educators has not been taken into consideration on these matters. If we are being represented by someone or being led by someone, wouldn't the voice matter? Wouldn't the person leading us/representing the voice of educators want to hear our thoughts? Completely bogus and a slap to our profession. If we are not respected, then we have a serious issue.

Most importantly, teachers have been on the front lines the last two years. If nothing else, we all know that our children NEED the arts and electives and physical movement, mental health, social media studies & information, and SO MUCH MORE THAN READING AND MATH. We are trying to make our tiny humans well rounded, informed, innovative and caring citizens of our world. By removing/lessening the opportunities they have such as library media and by taking away our precious counselors, you are committing complete negligence for the needs of our children. I am appalled and in shock that this is even a consideration.

PLEASE DO NOT lessen any of those areas -- in fact, PLEASE do:

- daily PE for ALL K-12!!!!
- 1 counselor for every 100 students in every school (if not a smaller ratio!)
- daily access to music/arts/literature/library studies

Please, please make sure these scary changes do not happen.

Kyla Uribe

Dear Tristen,

Thank you for taking my written comment on the changes the OPI of Montana is proposing to the School Library Accreditation standards.

The harm these changes would cause throughout Montana would be staggering. In many cases, the school library is the only library a child may be introduced to in their life. The benefits of early literacy for school children fosters lifelong learning. Our world is better for the ability its citizens have for learning, understanding and acting to better that world for all people.

We are quickly emerging into a digital age where our children will be expected to be able to access online resources in order to fully live their lives, apply to college, to jobs, access information important to them. Without the guidance of librarianship at the formative phase of life, the comfort and competence with technology is lost. Not all online resources are reliable or true. Discernment is not instinctual, it must be taught and best taught by professional information specialists, school librarians.

We as a society expect more and more from schoolroom teachers. School Librarian-Teachers and the lessons they impart are of vast support to classroom teachers. Our students, our future citizens benefit from caring adults in their lives who can ensure their freedom to read what they want to read, participate in their country as fits their conscience. One must wonder if the underlying motive is to make it easier to homogenize the American school experience by limiting experience and access to resources and caring professionals, teacher and librarians, who continually encourage young minds to open rather than close.

Thanks for the opportunity to comments

Sincerely,

Brenda B Cooper

Bozeman MT 59715

I voted for increased funding for Primary and Secondary schools in this spring's election. I did so to support ALL existing programs and requirements. I STRONGLY OPPOSE any and all efforts by the Superintendent and the Board of Education to gut programs that continue to be an important mainstay of public education. The proposed cuts would undermine the quality of public education and create lasting negative consequences for all our children. Please do not support any agenda that seeks to dismantle the foundations of our public system of education. Thank you.

Ken McLean

Helena, MT 59601

Dear Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

I am writing to express my concern over Superintendent Arntzen's recommended changes to school accreditation standards.

School Counseling School counselors are needed now more than any time in our history. Students still have the usual difficulties of growing up, but video games, social media, and the continuing effects of the pandemic have intensified those issues. To not require a ratio of counselors to students is ensuring students will not receive the support they need to be successful in school and beyond. With The current ratio as is, our counselors' schedules are already full, often with a waitlist for group or individual student support times. If anything, the ratio needs to stay in place and have fewer students to counselors! I am extremely worried for the mental health of our students and the coping strategies they will develop on their own.

Library Media Services Like counselors, librarians are essential to student learning. They not only have a vast knowledge of books to recommend to students to encourage a love of reading, but they often teach essential research and computer skills. I also do not understand the purpose of changing the wording to get rid of a "central location" for the library. Libraries are houses of stories and information that should be easily accessible to all students.

Basic Education Program: Middle Grades This whole section is being gutted of important standards to address the learning of these students. The proposed changes seem to eradicate the need for many arts and humanities topics. Without requiring these topics, students will miss crucial information that adds to their background knowledge (a top predictor of reading success). They also miss out on the critical thinking that comes from studying the arts and how it has affected society and vice versa. It seems we're limiting students' access to knowledge, something very much needed in a democracy. There is still a need to specify "physical and life sciences" rather than just "sciences" to ensure all students are learning those concepts.

It seems as though these changes are using the veil of rural schools to make sweeping changes that will limit students' access to information and opportunities. These changes do not fix the overall difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff. They cause another problem of education being a patchwork of what students know and are able to do across the state. It cuts access to opportunities students may only get in schools. I urge you to vote against these changes and use your voice to renounce Superintendent Arntzen's ideas.

Sincerely,
Jessica Hartman, M.Ed.
3rd grade teacher

Dear Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

I hope you are having a wonderful Wednesday.

First, I wanted to thank you so much for all you do for our Montana youth.

As a parent and involved community member, I need to express my concern about the proposed elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools. The access to the arts is important to the success of Montana's students. The arts ignite learning. They have the power to spark the imagination, ignite innovation through creativity, and excite and transform learning. From a research study from Americans for the Arts, we know that the arts have substantial benefits, including:

Low-income students who are are highly engaged in the arts are 2X more likely to graduate college than their peers with no arts education.

Students involved in art programs are 4X more likely to be recognized for academic achievement.

Students in the arts outperform their non-art peers by 91 points on the SAT.

Arts learning fosters 21st Century Skills that lead to successful adults, including communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.

The arts are also vital to our social and emotional health. Therefore, the arts are critical to schools as we learn to adapt to our world. Through art activities, we become more self-aware, gain self-confidence and

perseverance. As we emerge from the trauma of these last couple years, we turn to the arts to process and understand, express emotions, grieve, share and connect to each other, and heal. Now, more than ever, it is imperative that the arts are at the core of education.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Sienna Solberg
Missoula, MT

To members of the Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

As a teacher and a parent, I am also in opposition to Superintendent Arntzen's recommendation to eliminate specific electives in middle school and replace our rich and varied elective requirements with the vague language of "elective offerings". I fear that this will lead to a loss of programs. My three children attended Kalispell Middle School over the course of nine years, and I know for a fact that the only reason they kept going to school most days was because of their electives. They participated in band, orchestra, robotics, engineering, sewing, cooking, and language classes that deeply enriched their lives, contributed directly to their attaining college scholarships, and enhanced their learning far beyond the core subjects. The school's focus on electives AND core is what made it a great school for my children, and set them up for success in high school and beyond.

We need to continue to preserve the specific accreditation language that keeps our middle school elective programs functioning and funded, not let these programs be gutted by vague language.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kara Basko
Kalispell, MT 59901

Good afternoon. As current and retired educators, we are horrified about the changes that are being proposed by our current Superintendent of Public Instruction. The vital services that will be eliminated will drastically change the landscape of public education in Montana moving forward. The job of Superintendent of Public Instruction is to provide "vision, advocacy, support and leadership for schools and communities to ensure that all students – let me re-state that – ALL STUDENTS meet today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities." The proposed changes do not and cannot meet this mission.

Eliminating or reducing counseling staff is a bad idea. There's no other way to state it. Rather than supporting students' academic and mental health needs, this change will potentially eliminate all school counseling positions. This change needs to be rejected.

According to Superintendent Arntsen, a central library and librarians are unnecessary to education. That is simply rubbish. The role of the library and librarians is essential in the life of a student. Librarians provide necessary curriculum (research and researching skills), teacher support and student support, as well as ever-changing technology skills. Again, this proposed change absolutely needs to be rejected.

Thirdly, making sweeping changes to middle school education requirements is short-sighted and just plain wrong. Any changes to the science curriculum that sweeps taking care of our planet under the rug is abhorrent. Getting rid of or severely limiting requirements for music, foreign language, career and technical education defies logic. All these disciplines are essential to a well-rounded, well-educated student. Please reject these proposed changes.

All these proposed changes take a wrecking ball to current education standards in our state. It is clear that Superintendent Arntsen doesn't understand her role as Superintendent of PUBLIC Instruction. These changes will not make our public schools stronger. In fact, they will weaken our public school system in Montana. This office continues to under-mind public education in Montana, not uphold it. Is that the over-reaching goal? If so, that is beyond reprehensible.

We reject these proposed changes in the strongest possible language. Please vote NO on all these ill-conceived proposals.

Respectfully,
Jan Van Hook, Retired Teacher
Russ Van Hook, Retired Teacher and Administrator
Carol Waniata, Teacher
Dale Waniata, Retired Teacher

Hello,

I have worked in the schools for over twenty years and am absolutely opposed to Superintendent Arntzen's Proposed changes to school accreditation standards.

Allowing schools to go without librarians and counselors would take us back many, many years. Schools educate the whole child striving to create adult citizens who contribute in a positive way to our society. As a School Counselor, I hit the ground running everyday. My plate is always full and from the many comments, emails, and phone calls I receive of appreciation, I very much see the absolute need for counselors.

Librarians feed our teachers and students with resources on every subject. They inspire and create readers among our children and NO ONE can deny the importance of reading.

Thank you and please do not accept Superintendent Arntzen's proposals.

Deb Burfeind

Dear Chapter 55 Negotiated Rulemaking Committee,

I am writing this letter in OPPOSITION to Superintendent Arntzen's recommendation to eliminate the School Counselor to student ratio.

The school counselor to student ratio should remain in the accreditation standards to ensure that Montana's youth receive the mental health support they so desperately need. In the last two years I have seen a significant increase in our students' mental health challenges, including an increase in suicidality, depression, and anxiety as well as the resulting school truancy and poor academic achievement that occurs from these difficulties. The national recommendation (per the American School Counselor Association) for school counselor to student ratio is 250:1, while Montana recommends 400:1.

I have worked as a school counselor for the past 13 years, previously in a middle school (for 4 years) and now in a high school (for the past 9 years). In my current position, I serve 350+ students. I am often called out of meetings, groups, and class lessons to address crisis response at my school, this has been on the rise over the last decade without a change in our student to counselor ratios. We recently lost our comprehensive mental health teams that served our most challenging students due to state budget cuts.

In my experience, the general public does not realize how much schools have changed over the past 20 years. As a result, the role and training requirements of the school counselor has also evolved. Degrees in

"Guidance Counseling" no longer exist. SCHOOL COUNSELOR is the modern terminology and with it comes very extensive specialized training that requires an average 55 credits in the areas of human growth and development, psychology, individual counseling, group counseling, crisis counseling, career counseling, research methods, medications, etc. to best meet the needs of 21st century schools and students.

Today, school counselors don't "just build schedules." Instead, we strive to provide comprehensive services in following three domains:

Academic Development-build schedules; review credit status and graduation progress; create credit recovery plans; serve on 504 and IEP teams

Career Development-classroom lessons on learning styles, interest inventories, and career exploration; post-secondary college and career planning; assistance with applications to jobs, schools, apprenticeships, and scholarships; financial aid workshops; and parent nights

Social Emotional Development-classroom lessons; provide suicide education, prevention and intervention services; short-term individual counseling, group counseling; grief support; treat assessments

With my current caseload of 350+, I struggle to provide these services to all my students. Removing the minimum ratio of 400:1 would make it impossible for me and my colleagues to provide these necessary services to our Montana students.

We've all experienced the collective trauma caused by COVID. Cutting back school counseling services (especially now) is absolutely reckless and I'm afraid would have deadly consequences. Instead, please consider INCREASING school counseling services, to meet the needs of our students and communities!

Thank you for your time,
Jamie Bawden, School Counselor
Helena, MT 59601

Dear Ms. Loveridge:

I grew up in a very remote and rural part of Montana on our families cattle ranch and had to board out during the school year starting at the age of 6 in order to attend school. Over the years, while I was very thankful for the education that I received, I became aware traveling throughout the United States and the world that due to budget constraints, and the lack of encouragement from the state of Montana, many times new and advanced educational opportunities were not offered at our school. My saving grace was our school library. We had but one librarian and volunteers like myself during the school day who helped students explore and research. I know the value of having someone there who can help any student take full advantage of the resources that a school has to offer.

As I understand it the changes that Superintendent of Public Instruction Arntzen is proposing would in effect become a sort of "One Size" fits all for the state accreditation standards. I oppose this change and urge it not to be made as it will have a serious effect in the long term on Montana's ability to compete in the world economy. Our world is moving at far faster speeds in innovation, research, communication, etc. and our students in public schools need all the tools and support that they can get if they are going to compete in this changing environment. This is a very short sighted recommendation.

I urge you to recommend strongly that this policy change not take place.

Respectfully;
Jack Nickels
Montana Land Real Estate Professionals, LLC

Tristen and MT Board of Public Education,

I am asking you and your committee to maintain the Health Enhancement requirements for middle school. The middle school years can be hard on students of this age with bodies changing/puberty, friends, changing schools, and much more. Students thrive in a physical environment mentally, physically, and socially. This is also an important time to establish healthy lifestyle choices provided by PE/HE teachers who teach, role model, and build relationships with these students. With an increase in phone usage with teenagers they are also getting mixed messages about health topics such as sex, their bodies, and social norm expectations. Health teachers teach them to learn to communicate, learn boundaries, and make healthier choices at such an important time in their life and other influences.

The relationships I have built with the 100's of students I have taught go well beyond just middle school. These students come back over and over again to thank me for supporting them, helping them find love in being physically active, teaching them how to work with others, taking care of themselves, and the relationships I have built.

Removing HE from middle school would not help our future students of Montana.

Sincerely,
Lynette Overman

Hi I just wanted to introduce myself, I am Michelle Peterson, a Health Enhancement Teacher in Montana and the Executive Director of SHAPE Montana. I would like to share my concerns about the possible recommendation to eliminate Health Enhancement in our middle schools. I currently teach at a title school and many of my students either are in a single parent, no parent, and even in group homes. The teaching topics I cover range from social, mental, emotional and physical care. Without these topics being taught in our Health Enhancement Programs our students will have gaps in their growth that could be detrimental for their future success. I hope you strongly take a look at how important Health and Physical Education is for the future of our students.

Sincerely,
Michelle Peterson
GFPS Health Enhancement Teacher
SHAPE Montana
Executive Director

TO: Tristen Loveridge; Negotiated Rule Making Committee

FROM: Kristin Harney, Montana State University, Associate Professor of Music Education

I am writing to strongly urge you to reject Supt. Arntzen's recommendations regarding Montana accreditation standards.

As a teacher educator, my primary focus is the preparation of future music teachers and arts teachers. We realize there is a shortage of teachers in Montana, especially in rural Montana, but cutting ratios for school librarians, school counselors and eliminating specific elective programs and credit requirements in the middle schools will be detrimental to music, visual arts, career education programs, and ultimately to the students of Montana schools. We are looking for creative ways to address the teacher shortage in music and the arts, but cannot support "fixing" the shortage by effectively eliminating programs. Please work together with all stakeholders (including the MSU and Department of Education and the School of Music) to find ways to address the teacher shortage without sacrificing our students' arts education.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kristin Harney
Kristin Harney, DMA
School of Music
Montana State University-Bozeman

MY KIDDO BENEFITED GREATLY FROM MUSIC AT A YOUNG AGE

THANK YOU

Joan

Joan Vetter Ehrenberg
Whitefish, Montana 59937

We need these classes in middle school and elementary!
Thank you.
Lisa Matovich Brooke

Hi,

I am writing to urge you to please keep music and arts in the elementary and middle schools of Montana. These are so important to our kids education!

Thank you!
Jenny Scherer

To Whom It May Concern,

This week, Superintendent Elsie Arntzen recommended sweeping changes to school accreditation standards. I do not agree with these proposed changes. As a mental health counselor I understand how important it is to support student's mental health through school counselors. All these changes hurt rural students and students who are most vulnerable. Please **maintain the librarian and counselor ratios and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.**

Sincerely,
Erica Sandiland
Missoula County resident and parent of 2 children attending public school in Missoula

Dear Member of the Montana Board of Public Education,
I am writing as a parent of two children in the Helena School District and licensed clinical psychologist to oppose the following recommended superintendent changes to Chapter 55. My specific concerns are as follows:

10.55.709: The elimination of ratio requirements regarding librarians will impact student's access to library services that are a critical part of their learning. Librarians provide valuable instruction for lifelong learning such as effective research and critical thinking as well as internet safety skills to help students safely navigate our modern digital world. Ratio elimination in this section will negatively impact students' access to this critical part of their education.

10.55.710: The elimination of ratio requirements regarding school counselors is unthinkable given the well-known mental health crisis we are experiencing in our state. This crisis includes the alarming statistic that

almost half of the deaths of people aged 10-17 in our state are due to suicide. Not only do school counselors help our high-schoolers explore post-graduate education and career choices, they head up substance abuse and bully prevention efforts at all levels. They provide on-site support for students experiencing all sorts of difficulties such as experiencing the death of a parent, conflict management with their peers, and crisis support for experiencing a mental health difficulty. Often, school counselors are instrumental in helping a student and their family access formal mental health support in their community. This role has become even more important since OPI's disastrous decision to essentially end funding for CSCT programs across the state as the mental health effects of a pandemic were just being felt. The proposal to remove these ratio requirements is cruel, unconscionable and evidence of the superintendent's complete lack of concern for student well-being and safety.

10.55.905/901/902/904: The new proposed language "provides all students with the opportunity to meet" replaces language that previously ensured all students would be provided with an education that was appropriate to them. While on the surface, this appears to be a slight change, this language sets the stage for all students with any sort of learning challenge to be marginalized and their educational needs to be ignored in the public school setting. I wholly oppose this language change.

10.55.902: The elimination of almost all of the curriculum requirements in parts 2,3 and 4 of this section ignores the developmental needs of students at this age and reduces the curriculum of the middle grades to purely academic. Opportunities to move their bodies, engage in tactile activities and be creative are not only necessary ingredients to human development, these opportunities increase students' abilities to absorb information and learn in their more academic core classes. You cannot have effective education without considering and caring for the developmental needs of your students. Thank you for your service to our state and its children.

Patrick Van Wyk, PhD
Helena Psychotherapy, PLLC
Helena, MT 59601

Hello Ms. Loveridge,
I am writing to you to beg that you do not pass the changes being proposed to middle schoolers.

As the mother of a near 13 yo girl who will be entering 7th grade next year, I see first hand the vulnerability this age child has.

There are so many pressures on them with social media and TV. They are going through so many changes that having counselors at school to talk with (parents are sometimes not who they feel they can go to) is of the utmost importance .

I also feel cutting elective classes is absolutely the wrong thing to do. To go from elementary schools to middle school is a major shock. To have classes they can feel a bit less stressed in and stimulate their minds in another way is priceless.

Please take this into consideration and vote against cuts to the middle school children.

Sincerely,
Erin Leber
Butte MT

Hi,

This is Jamie Dwyer. My children attend HMS and Jefferson elementary school in Helena. I received paperwork describing Supt Arntzen's recommendations on cutting accreditation standards. I am strongly opposed to these rule changes. I think it's ridiculous to get rid of these requirements. The library media

services and counseling are very important!! These teenage children are so emotional as they go through puberty and figure themselves out as young people, I think access to counseling is a requirement for their mental health and for their safety.

And I strongly disagree with scratching off all the electives as requirements. They make our students better people and more well rounded with their education. One of my children is very art focused and she would be crushed if art classes are no longer available or supported.

Please don't support cutting these requirements!

Sincerely,
Jamie Dwyer

I am emailing you to request that you preserve the visual arts, music, career and technical education courses, world languages, and other programs and credit requirements for middle schools in Montana. I have two children in the Missoula County Public School system who will be entering middle school in the coming years and I believe these program requirements are vital to my children's development and education. These programs will give our children the imaginations and skills that the Montana economy and community needs for the future. Please maintain the language requiring these programs for our middle schoolers. A well rounded citizen is a healthy citizen and that's what we need in Montana.

Sincerely,
Sarah Fangsrud (mother to a Kindergartener and 3rd grader at Paxson Elementary School)

Hi Tristen,

It is my understanding that there are broad changes being proposed to the Basic Education Programs in Montana schools. I'm sure you will be receiving other emails from concerned parties, but I would like to implore you to please consider all of the negative effects on schools, teachers, and the community that some of these changes will have.

I am especially concerned with the elimination of a long tradition of requiring exposure to music and arts at the grade school level for Montana students. My son will be entering Kindergarten in Montana in just two short years. I want him to have a vital experience with the arts as a foundation to his human experience. Cutting this out would not only limit his life, but thousands of other Montana children's lives.

This is an incredibly important avenue creatively, and it's important for you to know that these specifics will be impacted (based on research that I would be happy to provide for you). Here are just a few important facts specifically on the importance of elementary music education:

- Test scores, school attendance and graduation rates will drop in school districts without music programs.
- Drug and alcohol use among teens will likely increase.
- Music for graduation, Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, sporting events and other community events will no longer happen (the elimination of elementary and middle school music programs means the destruction of high school music programs).
- Since music teachers typically have larger classes (sometimes 40+ students in one section), additional teachers would need to be hired in order to redistribute students in the school schedule. Music programs are an economic benefit.
- Most importantly, since the arts help define our culture, there would be a significant loss to our greater society, specifically in Montana. Additionally, music participation is one of the best forms of social-emotional learning in our schools-- something students need now more than ever.

Additionally, the changes to FTE requirements for positions such as counselors and librarians will have similar negative effect throughout a student's entire school experience, and on society as a whole.

I've taught in multiple districts. Every school I've taught in was incredibly impacted by the librarian. They've always provided a positive culture and atmosphere for students to participate in, and contributed to many students love of reading and literacy skills.

Please reach out if you have any questions, or if I can provide any more information. I am extremely concerned about this sweeping change to music education that would cut the beauty of music in our schools to the core. When it comes to political positioning and proposed changes in law, I do not pretend to be well versed, but this is an area I am very deeply concerned about, and am confident about the negative effect it would have.

Thank you,
Caitlin Cantrell

Dear Montana Office of Instruction,
I urge you to please REJECT Superintendent Elsie Arntzen's "blood bath" of proposed cuts to accreditation standards.

I echo the sentiments shared by the president of the Bozeman Teachers Association:

The loss of endorsed literacy experts in each school (librarians) would result in lower reading and writing scores which is counterproductive to stated goals.

Changing requirements such as music and art for elementary and middle school students runs counter to the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which requires a 'well-rounded' education, specifically including arts and music. Every elementary and middle school student should have access to these subjects in school. Yes, we have a severe teacher shortage in Montana--especially rural Montana. But cutting requirements for accreditation is another way of saying what specialist teachers offer doesn't matter to a student's education.

Once FTE (teacher positions) is eradicated from school accreditation requirements the FTE will never come back again.

Why would we gut student's access to counseling? Especially now when student well-being is such a widespread and pressing need? Teachers are not trained counselors.

College and career readiness is not just a 'nice' thing that schools offer through reading, writing math and science (the four things that would remain required for accreditation if the changes go through). College and career readiness involves all the variety of learning that leads to a successful life.

Elective courses keep students in schools thus improving graduation rates.

We need to find solutions to the teacher shortage that don't sacrifice a student's learning opportunities.

Sincerely,
Cheri Ladd LeCain

As a former OPI employee, I strongly oppose the changes to the language being discussed this afternoon at the Negotiated Rulemaking Committee meeting.

The superintendent serves as head of the Montana Office of Public Instruction, whose mission statement is to **provide "vision, advocacy, support and leadership for schools and communities to ensure that all students meet today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities."**

As we are coming out of a pandemic, students may actually be needing more access to counselors, not less. School counselors should be available to all students regardless of school size. This change should be rejected.

The changes Superintendent Arntzen is making to middle school should also be rejected. Music, foreign languages, technical and career education courses are important. They are an essential part of a well-rounded education, and are important for students' social and emotional well being. This proposed change should be rejected.

Librarians provide necessary curriculum for research, help select reading material and help students and teachers with technology needs. I can't imagine why anyone would want to reduce access to this tremendous resource for students and teachers. Please reject these proposed changes.

Thank you,
Betsy Hall Nordell

Elsie Arntzen's proposal needs to be looked at for what it takes away from our future children's development. It presents as a lessening of the Quality and effective educational avenues for individual students needs. Please do not support this going backwards movement, we should be offering more ways to learn, not less!
Kelly Baraby

Hi Tristen,
My name is Jan Jarvie and I strongly disagree with the changes being proposed for our students especially in the area of electives. Arts and music are essential for students to succeed. Being able to read is considered a second language. Art is a form of self-expression.

My husband and I have 3 daughters - all with teaching degrees. We know the value of art and music. Children need a well rounded education and these changes DO NOT PROVIDE IT.

Please do not vote these horrible new policies in. You will be doing a great disservice to the children of Montana and our future leaders.

Jan Jarvie
Florence, MT 59833

Today I received information regarding Superintendent Arntzen's plan to change middle school requirements.

Please consider this note as a request to preserve and maintain specific elective and credit requirements for middle schools.

As a parent I am not interested in dumbing down school requirements. Rather, I believe and support even more opportunities for our young people to experience and learn different ways to think critically. Without a healthy foundation to build upon we will continue to America's youth fall behind.
Tim Dwyer

Do not accept Elsie's proposals. They are ludicrous and they undermine education . She was a horrible teacher when she was employed as such, she didn't support public education when she was a legislator, and now undermining everything else.

Darlene Newstrom

Hello,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the recommended changes to ARMs 10.55.709, 10.55.710, 10.55.901, 10.55.902, 10.55.904, and 10.55.905 that will be discussed on May 18th by OPI's Chapter 55 Negotiated Rule Making Committee.

I am an arts professional who grew up in the Montana public school system. Public investments in music education in Montana, especially in underserved rural areas, that have set my path in motion date back several generations. My great-grandfather taught public school music in Hysham, Montana, which served my grandmother and mother in their youth. They, in turn, inspired my passion for music.

Further, our award-winning music program in Bozeman public schools launched me into a successful career as a cellist and choir director. I earned a PhD in music and now direct the choral music program at Carroll College and serve as Director of Worship and Music at St. Paul's United Methodist Church. My career is my deepest joy and passion, and without public school music, a gaping hole would have been left in my life. Without equitable investment in the arts, passionate and capable young people, especially in rural areas, will miss important opportunities to cultivate skills that enliven their hearts and last a lifetime.

Divestment in the arts undermines Montana's national reputation and competitive edge in providing quality public education. I am the mother to two young children who will enter Montana's public school system soon. Arts opportunities are crucial to their holistic education, and will be a factor in determining whether our family of hardworking professionals remain in the state or relocate.

Furthermore, a rule change impacting access to mental health professionals will impact the most vulnerable students attending the schools in our state with the least resources. Youth with suicidal ideation, Severe Emotional Disturbance and other complex behavioral health needs will suffer when schools are no longer to have counselors on site or maintain what are already paltry levels of service and staffing. Please reconsider.

In addition, the rules eliminating requirements for employee librarians and gutting elective requirements for middle school students will lower the quality and breadth of education in our state-particularly in low income and tribal areas. Please maintain the current language and standards for the good of all students.

Sincerely,
Maren Marchesini
Helena, MT 59601

We are opposed to the changes proposed to the standards for grades 7-9. Superintendent Arntzen appears to be intent on lowering the standards for our very fine Montana schools. Our sons benefited from their education in Montana schools, and it is more important than ever now to ensure all young people are prepared to be good and productive citizens.

Maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools.

**Kind Regards.
Mike and Phyllis Wells
Bozeman, MT**

Members of the Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

I am writing to express my concerns of the proposed changes Superintendent Arntzen has recently proposed. Specifically, the changes that have been proposed to change school library media services, school counseling staff, and the elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools.

I am in disbelief that our leadership is in favor of eliminating such **crucial** positions for our Montana kids. As a teacher and mom of 3 future public school children, this is disheartening and the exact opposite direction we should be heading for the future of our kids. We need to teach the whole child and invest in our kids and programs that promote growth, opportunities, and **mental health support**. A strong educational system promotes a healthy, thriving community and these proposals are incredibly disheartening. Our STUDENTS should be our NUMBER ONE priority. What a poor message that has been sent to our Montana educators, students, and families. We can do better than this.

I strongly urge you to vote against Supt. Arntzen recommendations. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Danni Ford
2nd Grade Teacher
Warren Elementary

Good afternoon,

My name is Elliot Cross. I am a music educator in Laurel, MT and the Secretary/Treasurer for the Montana Bandmasters Association. I was alerted to the proposed changes to the MT graduation/credit requirements for elective classes in Montana yesterday morning. I am concerned that this proposed change has been made without consideration for the short and long term impacts it would have for public education in Montana. It shows a lack of understanding of the nuances and complexities within a public education system.

Striking the language for specific electives is a detriment to our students. If we want to develop well-rounded individuals we must keep specific requirements in place to maintain a high level of rigor and diversity of knowledge. By marginalizing electives as being "all the same" you would be implying anything that is not math, history, and STEM is the same. I've even noticed that in the striking of language specifically targeting different types of sciences. Are all sciences the same? Are all electives the same? The answer is NO. Because this is the case, students should be required to have knowledge of the specific subsets within a broadfield education. To reduce all electives down to a student having understanding in all fields if they take one subject is ridiculous.

Moreover, is Montana planning on taking on and changing the established credit requirements of national high education systems? Currently, in Montana, a student in public school gains enough basic knowledge to be successful in a college setting, in order to complete their general education requirements. If we "simplify" k-12 education to make it more palatable to certain groups we will be causing a ripple in the future education of Montana students going into post secondary education, including trade programs. This will be reflected in lower employment statewide (higher unemployment), higher levels of poverty, lower life expectancies, lower taxable values on homes, a greater burden on fewer high income homeowners/landowners and lower available monies for public schools.

These suggested changes don't benefit any public school and to say it would help rural schools is a lie. Montana already provides plenty of options for schools that cannot find a teacher for each specialist subject. Infact, k-5 schools don't even have to have a highly qualified teacher to teach the arts. I broadfield k-5 licence qualifies a teacher to teach general music and art. At the upper level you need to find one teacher that can teach one of the subjects that falls into each elective category. Schools don't need to hire an art, photography, and music teacher because the credit requirements are already built to cover a situation where you might not be able to fill a position. This is an attempt to fix a problem that already has a way to fix the problem.

The only way to get around the issue of not having elective teachers, librarians and counselors would be to legislate more funds to schools so the schools can pay faculty and staff an appropriate wage and change the perception of teachers in Montana and the United States. Teachers are looked at as underpaid overqualified babysitters that don't make enough money to pay student loan debt and afford to live in a modern society. Change these items and you will solve the lack of educators in Montana. We would have more applicants than we would know what to do with.

Justin Elliot Cross
Band Director
Laurel Public School

Dear Tristen,
I am a recently retired middle school teacher and I am compelled to write to you concerning changes Ms Arntzen is proposing for middle schools. Counseling and mental health staff are extremely important for middle schoolers, especially after these Covid years. As I am sure you are aware, this age group needs guidance, structure and support to navigate through today's world. Doing away with these services would be a great disservice. I would think you would also take into consideration the high suicide rate in Montana before you would take away these necessary services.

Electives, music, art, family and consumer courses are of vital importance to the developing young adults. These courses as well as the trades often reach those students who are searching for their path.

As you consider the vote on these changes please keep in mind that these cuts would further disintegrate the basics of public education in our state.

Sarah Walton

Dear Tristan,
I am standing next to one of Montana's public school participants (a student in one of Montana's public schools – one Harrison Walker). I just learned of the changes that Supt. Arntzen wishes to incorporate into the accreditation standards for Montana's public school system. I asked him to take a look at the proposed changes and comment. As a current student he said that the changes to accreditation standards would reflect a near complete deconstruction of liberal arts education as we understand it to be. I happened to fully agree with him. These alterations do more than to suggest that Montana's public school age students don't deserve an education that stimulates their creativity, mathematical/logical reasoning & ability to think hypothetically (in essence to think and dream about their futures).

I am being short as I don't have much time to write just today – is this really how the thinking is at the state level for the students of Montana? Are urge you to convey to the committee that this is nothing more than a dumbing-down of our young people. If anything should be happening leadership should be finding ways to strengthen standards so our young people can actually compete in the economy of the future. I think that none of those proposed changes should be adopted.

Thank you for your time & consideration.

Sincerely,
Benedict Kirby – DMA
Instructor – UM Tuba & Euphium Studio [youtube.com]
Director – UM Tuba and Euphonium Consort
School of Music [umt.edu]
University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812

Dear Tristen Loveridge,

I am adamantly opposed to the proposed changes to MT Chapter 55 education policy. This is an absolute mistake. All of my children have been involved with music and band. They have gone on to do music in college. My youngest is currently working hard for her goal to obtain a scholarship for college in her instrument. By making these changes effective, you are virtually eliminating the possibility of students, especially in rural settings where funding would be hit hardest, to be able to achieve these dreams. Music and art are cornerstones to society. They foster intelligence, cooperation and creativity in children. They make a student well rounded and more competitive for college admissions. They allow for a place for some students to feel like they belong and are accepted and appreciated. We already have mental health issues in our student population here in Montana. Do you really want to take that away from them?

Libraries are the same way- they foster creativity and a place to belong. My child is also in the readers club and reads constantly. She would not be the reader she is today if not for the gentle guidance of our elementary and middle school librarians. They have allowed her to form book clubs and given her reading suggestions and allowed her to help choose new books to purchase for the library. She has fostered friendships and pride over her interactions with librarians. Please do not take this away from kids, it is a huge mistake. Librarians are often the best parts of our school. They know and care about every child and can help the ones who need extra attention in reading as well as being a valuable resource for those that need to have something more challenging than what is offered in the classroom. I volunteered at our middle school library helping to run a creative crafts program during recess once a week. The kids that came there to participate all wanted a safe space to belong. Again, are you going to take that away from them? That would be shameful. Music, art, and libraries all are critical to a child's development and learning, especially in the younger years. I can't see that these proposed changes would benefit anyone- indeed they would harm the future interests of our children. Please do not allow these proposed changes to pass.

Sincerely,
Christine Abel

Dear Mr. Loveridge:

I am very concerned about proposed changes to the Chapter 55 education policy that would drop the requirement to offer music and art classes at the elementary and middle school level. If this change is proposed as a cost savings, those savings would only be short term, as there are multiple studies that show participation in the arts increases test scores, school attendance and graduation rates. The arts also help students deal with anxiety and reduce drug use by offering up an alternative to idle time while creating a sense of belonging for those students who do not gravitate towards team sports. As a health care provider, the rising levels of anxiety and depression in our youth beginning at age 7 is extremely concerning to me. I have seen firsthand in my clinic the benefits of music to the psyche of our youth.

Montana has a proud history of recognizing the importance of the arts and music education. Here in Whitefish, the VFW is thankful to have the High School band march with them on Memorial Day, and our thriving theater and music venues add a considerable draw for visitors who contribute so much to the local economy.

Music and arts are vital to a well rounded education. Please reconsider eliminating access to the arts for our youth.

Thank you,
Erin Boedeker

To Tristan Loveridge,

I am opposed to the changes proposed for ch.55 of the education policy. Music and arts education have been shown to have major benefits to developing kids and encouraging a creative mindset. In addition these classes and the libraries have always provided a special place for students to express themselves. Please reconsider these changes and help keep those programs alive. Thank you for your time, Scott Abel

Dear Tristen Loveridge:

I am very concerned about proposed changes to the Chapter 55 education policy that would drop the requirement to offer music and art classes at the elementary and middle school level. If this change is proposed as a cost savings, those savings would only be short term, as there are multiple studies that show participation in the arts increases test scores, school attendance and graduation rates. The arts also help students deal with anxiety and reduce drug use, both of which are more important than ever.

Montana has a proud history of recognizing the importance of the arts and music education. Here in Whitefish, the VFW is thankful to have the High School band march with them on Memorial Day, and our thriving theater and music venues add a considerable draw for visitors who contribute so much to the local economy.

Music and arts are vital to a well rounded education.

Sincerely,
Kirsten & Reid Sabin
Whitefish, MT

Hello.

I'm opposed to any changes that will reduce student's access to music, arts, world languages, technical instruction and anything else Elsie Arntzen has proposed. We can do better and need to do better than just a hack job proposed by ArnTzen.

Thanks for your consideration.
Please stay positive and hopeful.

Michelle Risho
Bozeman, MT 59715

Sir: I am writing to voice my adamant opposition to Supt Arntzen's proposed changes to school accreditation standards that is scheduled to go before the Negotiated Rule Making Committee this afternoon (May 18, 2022) at 3:30.

I strongly believe the changes as proposed would have vast negative impacts to our already struggling public schools and all school children in the State of Montana.

I urge the committee to vote AGAINST these outrageous changes!!

Respectfully...Trudy Whitmore Fort Shaw Montana

As a Montana resident and taxpayer with grandchildren enrolled in the public school system in the State, I must strongly object to the changes superintendent Arntzen has proposed to the accreditation standards. There is no reason I can imagine that denying our future residents of as complete and comprehensive an education as possible can be advantageous. Attempting to reduce the budget at the expense of our childrens' future possibilities, in fact, makes me wonder how she ever got that job.

Bob Bender
Helena

I have been a teacher for eight years, have a Masters of Arts in Literacy Education, and am a current Literacy Interventionist at a rural school that would be deeply and adversely affected by these proposed changes. Student literacy is improved by access to libraries and qualified, licensed librarians. Social Emotional Learning can be a huge barrier to academic growth and students need access to counselors the entire school day, especially with the ongoing COVID pandemic.

I am AGAINST these proposed changes that would negatively affect our Montana students.

Meghan Flanary

Dear Montana Office of Public Instruction,
We urge you to reject the proposed cuts to accreditation standards. We agree with the statements provided by the Bozeman Teachers Association president:
The loss of endorsed literacy experts in each school (librarians) would result in lower reading and writing scores which is counterproductive to stated goals.

Changing requirements such as music and art for elementary and middle school students runs counter to the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which requires a 'well-rounded' education, specifically including arts and music. Every elementary and middle school student should have access to these subjects in school.

Yes, we have a severe teacher shortage in Montana--especially rural Montana. But cutting requirements for accreditation is another way of saying what specialist teachers offer doesn't matter to a student's education.

Once FTE (teacher positions) is eradicated from school accreditation requirements the FTE will never come back again.

Why would we gut student's access to counseling? Especially now when student well-being is such a widespread and pressing need? Teachers are not trained counselors.
College and career readiness is not just a 'nice' thing that schools offer through reading, writing math and science (the four things that would remain required for accreditation if the changes go through). College and career readiness involves all the variety of learning that leads to a successful life.

Elective courses keep students in schools thus improving graduation rates.
We need to find solutions to the teacher shortage that don't sacrifice a student's learning opportunities.

Sincerely,
Maia Thielen
Bozeman Symphony Society

Dear Members of the Negotiating Rule Committee,
This morning, I read excerpts of State Superintendent Superintendent Arntzen's proposed cuts to Montana's school accreditation standards and I am appalled. It is clear that Ms. Arntzen didn't run for State Superintendent out of concern for Montana's kids but in order to gut our public school system!

I strongly object to the proposed elimination of requirements for the ratio of school counselors to students. School counselors were overworked and overwhelmed before the pandemic and the 400-to-1 ratio is far too high given the increased need. Arntzen's elimination of this standard clearly targets lower income rural schools. I have spoken to counselors in areas such as Twin Bridges and Sheridan and there are more kids who need help than can be served by existing counseling ratios. Every time there is a school shooting, politicians like Arntzen say it's a mental health problem. But then they cut resources precisely where they are

most needed. Please don't allow this to happen to Montana public schools. I urge you to maintain the current requirements for school counselors.

I also object to the proposed elimination of requirements for school librarians. Again, this is an issue that will hurt rural schools the most. Our kids need qualified, well-trained librarians to support their endeavors to learn more about themselves and the world. Every accredited school in Montana needs a librarian to support both kids and teachers.

Furthermore, Ms. Arntzen's proposal strikes through education requirements in science, literacy, technical education, math, social studies, music, arts, health and world languages. Why bother having public schools at all!! Of course, this is Ms. Arntzen's objective. Please do not let this happen. Montana's public school curriculum needs to be strengthened, not gutted.

Please do not support these cuts to Montana's public education accreditation requirements.

With my regards,
Debra McNeill

As a father of a school aged child and a former educator myself, I can attest to the harm that budget cuts do, not only to educational programs but to the students.

I fear we have reached a point in this country (and this state) where education is becoming undervalued at an alarming rate.

I couldn't object more strongly with the proposed alterations. In fact, I can't even believe it's on the table.

Aaron M. Bender

Good evening,
"Reading, writin' & 'rithmetic" do not and EDUCATION make. A well-rounded curriculum includes more than just the basics in this day & age. I remind you of "My Fair Lady," where the premise was that communication skills defined one's social status. As a current day example in Montana: my husband is an Emeritus Professor of Chemical Engineering of Montana State University. He has been specifically told by his former engineering students who have risen in corporate America that Professor Shaffer's "Ten Vocabulary Words for Extra Credit" on engineering exams were...wait for it...the most IMPORTANT and useful part of their engineering education.

Eliminate liberal arts at the peril of Montana education to prepare students for success. Education begins early. Do not handicap our Montana kids for their future.

Respectfully,
Judy Shaffer
Bozeman, MT

Dear Chapter 55 - Negotiated Rulemaking Committee,
I am writing this letter in opposition to Superintendent Arntzen's recommendation to eliminate the School Counselor to student ratio. I strongly believe that the Counselor to Student ratio should remain in the accreditation standards to ensure that Montana's youth receive the mental health support they so desperately need.

In the last two years we have seen a significant increase in Montana Tech students' mental health challenges, including an increase in suicidality, depression, and anxiety. And this is with high school counseling at its current, already substandard levels. Currently the national recommendation for School Counselor to student ratio is 250:1. Montana recommends 400:1. The American Counselor Association, American Psychological Association, National Association of School Psychologists, and the American School Counselor Association all advocate for increased mental health services in our schools. We would be going backwards, instead of meeting the needs of our students and staff. Eliminating the ratio would eliminate access to mental health, especially for rural areas.

These changes would also impact Montana college enrollment as a school counselor's guidance are in many cases a student's *only* avenue toward pursuing higher education. Thank you for your time and attention to this!

Sincerely,

BEN MALOUF

Director of Admissions

To whom it may concern, but especially to Superintendent Elsie Arntzen:

Some of the proposed rule changes in the requirements for school districts are unacceptable. I realize as well as every MT citizen who doesn't live under a media rock, that the funding for public schools is never enough and is in need of restructuring.

HOWEVER, releasing school districts from the obligation to provide counselors for their students is just not a good idea. With the current rise in mental health related issues, the last thing that we should do is deny kids a resource in their schools. This will also be burdensome to teachers and other school administrators who will have to "take up the slack". One might argue that there is currently less mental health staff than needed in the average (especially small and rural) school district. Let's not make this worse

AND SECONDLY, to eliminate music and art programs at the grade school level is ludicrous and should not be allowed. In an era where children's social thinking as well as their critical decision making is identified as being worse than in the past, music and art are known to foster those skills. While many students will likely not continue music or art into their older years, what they learn from it is invaluable. **For those who do pursue music and art, only those with the financial means to start early (as they do in athletics) will have the skills required to make it in upper level music programs.**

Please see fit to seek alternatives to these cuts or, better yet remain FOCUSED on changing the PUBLIC SCHOOL funding formula to one that is fair and equitable for ALL of the PUBLIC SCHOOL districts in the great state of Montana.

Thank you
Kristy Foss

To whom it may concern:

I realize the Montana education funding system is in need of change; however, some of the rule changes proposed by Montana State Superintendent of Instruction are unacceptable.

The two rule changes that I speak of affect the provision of 1) counseling services and 2) arts/music in our schools. Cutting these programs in any such way is like a taking a step backward and will cause harm to the social emotional and educational growth of our students. These changes will reduce the quality and equity of Montana's education system, bringing wide spread consequences to Montana's reputation and economic stability.

I urge you to look at readily available research to assist you in making intelligent, responsible and forward-thinking decisions. One such statistic regarding counseling in schools: **More than 1 in 3 high school students had experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in 2019**, a 40 percent increase since 2009. In 2019, approximately 1 in 6 youth reported making a suicide plan in the past year, a 44% increase since 2009. -<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/mental-health/index.htm> [cdc.gov]

Can we afford to cut counseling in our schools? If you care about the youth of today, your answer should be a resounding “NO!” Counseling must be available and considered a vital component of elementary through high school educational programs.

Speaking to music and arts in our schools, here are just a few of the multitude of statistics available to rules/policy makers:

Regarding music: “Schools that have music programs have significantly higher graduation rates than do those without music programs (90.2 percent as compared to 72.9 percent). In addition, those that rate their programs as “excellent or very good” have an even higher graduation rate (90.9 percent). Harris Interactive Inc. (2006). Understanding the Linkages Between Music Education and Educational Outcomes.

“ - <https://nafme.org/advocacy/what-to-know/all-research/> [nafme.org]

Regarding arts: “Relative to students assigned to the control group (those without arts education), treatment school (those provided with arts education) students experienced a 3.6 percentage point reduction in disciplinary infractions, an improvement of 13 percent of a standard deviation in standardized writing scores, and an increase of 8 percent of a standard deviation in their compassion for others. -

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2019/02/12/new-evidence-of-the-benefits-of-arts-education/amp/> [brookings.edu]

Arts and music clearly benefit students’ education and create schools that provide outcomes that make us all proud and enthusiastic to support. Arts and music must be offered in all educational programs.

I urge you to seek fair and equitable changes that result in a stronger statewide education system – not one that is detrimental to students and subpar.

Respectfully,

Nancy Rice

Parent, speech language pathologist and concerned state citizen
Billings, MT 59102

Dear Member of the Montana Board of Public Education,

I am writing as a parent and licensed clinical social worker to oppose the following recommended superintendent changes to Chapter 55. My specific concerns are as follows:

10.55.709: The elimination of ratio requirements regarding librarians will impact student’s access to library services that are a critical part of their learning. Librarians provide valuable instruction for lifelong learning such as effective research and critical thinking as well as internet safety skills to help students safely navigate our modern digital world. Ratio elimination in this section will negatively impact students’ access to this critical part of their education.

10.55.710: The elimination of ratio requirements regarding school counselors is unthinkable given the well-known mental health crisis we are experiencing in our state. This crisis includes the alarming statistic that almost half of the deaths of people aged 10-17 in our state are due to suicide. Not only do school counselors help our high-schoolers explore post-graduate education and career choices, they head up substance abuse and bully prevention efforts at all levels. They provide on-site support for students experiencing all sorts of difficulties such as experiencing the death of a parent, conflict management with their peers, and crisis support for experiencing a mental health difficulty. Often, school counselors are instrumental in helping a student and their family access formal mental health support in their community. This role has become even more important since OPI’s disastrous decision to essentially end funding for CSCT programs across the state as the mental health effects of a pandemic were just being felt. The proposal to remove these ratio requirements

is cruel, unconscionable and evidence of the superintendent's complete lack of concern for student well-being and safety.

10.55.905/901/902/904: The new proposed language "provides all students with the opportunity to meet" replaces language that previously ensured all students would be provided with an education that was appropriate to them. While on the surface, this appears to be a slight change, this language sets the stage for all students with any sort of learning challenge to be marginalized and their educational needs to be ignored in the public school setting. I wholly oppose this language change.

10.55.902: The elimination of almost all of the curriculum requirements in parts 2,3 and 4 of this section ignores the developmental needs of students at this age and reduces the curriculum of the middle grades to purely academic. Opportunities to move their bodies, engage in tactile activities and be creative are not only necessary ingredients to human development, these opportunities increase students' abilities to absorb information and learn in their more academic core classes. You cannot have effective education without considering and caring for the developmental needs of your students.

Thank you for your service to our state and its children.

Joelle Johnson, LCSW, LAC
East Helena

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Katie Hall. I am a professional country musician and voice teacher. I am writing in response to the proposal to remove music as an elective in elementary and middle schools at the state level in Montana.

I had training in piano, guitar, flute and voice all throughout my primary school years as well as college. I began piano lessons at age 6, flute at 11, voice at 14 and guitar at 17. I also went on to major in Vocal Performance in college and continued my piano education there as well.

I can say through personal experience that having music at a young age helped shape who I am today. I have always loved music. And I was blessed to have had the opportunities to experience instruments and singing as a child to see if it was something that I wanted to continue with.

I also continue to have great relationships with my elementary and high school music teachers to this day. Music is shown to help with cognitive function, hand eye coordination and counting skills and without these teachers showing me what music can do for both your mind and your soul, I would not be where I am today.

Many children also develop interests at an early age that they take into adulthood. And by removing music as an elective in those primary years, you are taking away something that they can enjoy for the rest of their lives. Even if it is just as a hobby.

I want to say thank you for taking the time to read this message and I strongly encourage you to vote no on this proposal. Please don't take away many children's only exposure to this wonderful thing called music.

Sincerely,
Katie Hall

Tristen,

Please consider the below a statement that I wish to be sent to the **Negotiated Rule Making Committee** regarding Supt. Arntzen's recommended changes that the committee will consider at their meeting today, May 18:

Thank you for the opportunity to send in this statement to you. The content of this statement is my personal opinion and does not necessarily reflect the views of my employer.

With all due respect, I believe the proposed changes regarding "Basic Education Programs: Middle Grades," specifically the striking of language related to specific electives, is not the right course of action. As a music

educator, I would like to speak specifically to the removal of music. I believe the removal of music from this list removes the opportunity for students to experience music through courses related to instrumental, vocal, and general music offerings. Let me provide a personal anecdote: music was an avenue for me as a middle schooler to express myself when I had a difficult time expressing myself and fitting in through other classes. It also allowed me to interact with a teacher who still serves as a mentor to me today. These positive musical experiences and positive interactions with this mentor continued into high school and sent me on the path that I am on today: serving as a music educator within the state of Montana. Montana has some rich music traditions throughout its cities, large and small. Recently I heard about two wonderful music educators who built a music program in Miles City. Their passion affected several young people for several decades who still speak of the positive influence of those teachers. I hear similar stories of music educators who build and maintain wonderful music programs across our great state, and this no doubt has had a positive influence upon the students who take part in those programs. Elimination of music from the language in the school accreditation standards jeopardizes the continuation of these stories. Instead of striking this language, let's look for avenues to keep these music programs thriving, including increasing teacher pay and incentives to keep our best and brightest teachers within our state. Too many leave our state for better pay and benefits. Let's incentivize these teachers to stay here in the state of Montana, and that includes teachers in all of these areas, including the arts, technical and career education, world languages and other electives.

Thank you.

-Mike

Michael John Ruybalid, Ph.D.

Good afternoon! My social media feeds have been flooded with scary information about proposed funding cuts to MT public school programs. As usual, arts programs at the elementary/middle school level are in danger of funding and I can't believe Montana would ever support a choice like this. I am a private music educator that received my foundation in the arts during my time in public school. I have a Master's degree in vocal/opera studies and thrive in my field with enthusiastic students of all ages that get their base passion in their public school programs. When I was a K-8 student I couldn't dream of affording private lessons to enrich my life with the arts so every foundation I had was in public school. It was my one true talent and gave me a friend base and reason to have pride in myself.

I now have a student that will begin Kindergarten this fall with an IEP related to Autism Spectrum. He is brilliant and I can't comprehend his unique mind not having access to arts and therapy services within his program. I could write so much more but with limited time I just plead with you to side with educators, parents, and anyone that loves children and each individual's ability to thrive in school.

Thank you!

Angela Dailey

Hello,

My name is Samantha May and I am from Joplin, Montana. I am pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in psychology with sociology and human and family development minors, in order to later attend graduate school for school counseling. I am a born and raised Hi-Line girl, and plan to return to the area when I finish my schooling to be a school counselor. I know the importance of having someone support students, especially (when in many areas) the school counselor is the only mental health professional. In fact, Montana has ranked in the top five for suicide rates in the nation for the past thirty years. On the Hi-Line there have been many suicides, most of which have hit close to home, so I am determined to make a change.

There is a crucial need for counselors across the state, notably in small-towns, and I have seen first-hand the need for these roles to be filled by qualified and positive leaders. In our small, three-town community, many tragedies happened within just a few years. This includes our Superintendent murdering his wife and dying by suicide, which caused our school to be on lockdown for hours, an awful crash that resulted in the loss of an amazing young girl who attended our school, and the Amtrak derailment near my hometown. The lack of mental health supporters, along with the stigma that comes with it, causes many people to struggle to cope

and grieve about what was happening. These events were extremely hard for so many students in our community and I wish there was more support they could have received. Our school counselor was crucial to our well-being and our ability to return to school. I want to be a school counselor, not just for students. I know that returning home I will be support for so many on the hi-line, but in order for that to work, the system must be in place that would support a person like me being in the schools.

I spent many hours in my counselor's office in both elementary and high school. I would go to her office every morning in the first grade, so I could face the anxiety of going to class. Later in high school, I spent hours with her for many regular teen reasons, but also for some deeper help. She was the teacher that students went to get advice from, talk about their personal problems, or just be around because we knew she was a safe. I want to be that type of counselor; for the next generation of kids. Everything she did was for her students, and she treated them as though they were her own children.

Mental health is a huge part of educational concerns and when students already lack access to these professionals in school. It's awful to think it will be even more difficult if this is implemented. Rural schools are hurting just as much as the larger communities. You are taking away some of the great things about growing up in a small town if they are denied access to programs like library, music, school counseling, and other opportunities. Elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements prevents student from experiencing great culture and learning skills. They need exposure to many programs, so they can discover who they are and what they are passionate about. Students need choice and support in school, and this would be robbing them of it. For many students, the school counselor is the only support they have access to or an afford, and it makes me sick to lose this.

Thank you,
Samantha May

I'm concerned about the impact that covid has left in our Montana school administration and system including teachers and students. It seems that across the state there are major cuts. I'm experiencing this top down hard in my own home community in Missoula where my children go to school. Good Programs are being diminished and teachers are burnt out, feeling the pressure. I'm concerned- we are not investing in our future generations, education for all matters. I'm concerned that the

> Superintendent of Public Instruction Elsie Arntzen is proposing sweeping changes to school accreditation standards. Among her suggestions are the elimination of ratio rules for school librarians and school counselors - in short, Montana students will no longer have guaranteed access to either. She is also proposing the elimination of specific elective programs in middle schools, preventing student access to music, visual arts, and career education, among others.

Thank you
Jenni Rohrbach

Hello,

I am adamantly opposed to the recommended changes by NRM to ARM 10.55.709, 10.55.710, 10.55.901, 10.55.902, 10.55.904, and 10.55.905. Please do not make such drastic changes which compromise Montana's rural schools, which make up 74% of Montana schools and 95% of our districts. Do better.

Thank you,
Maddy Mason
Philipsburg, MT

I have been a teacher for eight years, have a Masters of Arts in Literacy Education, and am a current Literacy Interventionist at a rural school that would be deeply and adversely affected by these proposed changes. Student literacy is improved by access to libraries and qualified, licensed librarians. Social Emotional Learning can be a huge barrier to academic growth and students need access to counselors the entire school day, especially with the ongoing COVID pandemic.

I am AGAINST these proposed changes that would negatively affect our Montana students.
Meghan Flanary

The proposed changes set forth by Ms. Artzen would irrevocably harm Montana students. Rural schools will be massively impacted by these changes and NOT in a positive manner. Making library services and the arts more difficult to offer to students will stifle many who depend on those particular classes as creative and emotional outlets. We want to encourage creativity and independent thought. That is what access to books and the arts accomplishes.

I certainly hope I am wrong in assuming the motivation behind these changes. Because it seems as if Ms. Artzen wants to dumb down our society by blinding and gagging our students, making available to Montana students educational opportunities only SHE deems worthy and important in a glaringly partisan manner. These changes are dangerous and SHOULD NOT be approved.

Meredith McDonald
Philipsburg, MT

Please maintain and preserve specific electives

Sally Richardson

Tristen,

Please do not adopt the new changes to the accreditation standards. They drastically limit counseling, library, and music among other things. Our kids deserve an outstanding school system and we need to keep our current standards in place to ensure all students receive the most out of their schools.

Thank you

Nathan Wilcox

Teacher in Bozeman schools

10th year teaching in Montana

Dear Mr. Loveridge and Committee Members:

I am writing to ask that you maintain specific electives and credit requirements for Montana students. Music and Art are not expendable, and to degrade these and other subjects further is indefensible. As an educator herself, I am quite surprised at Mrs. Arntzen's recommendations. Please

read: <https://www.savethemusic.org/resources/national-standards-for-music-education/> [savethemusic.org]

Thank you for your time,

Rita Wells

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Isaac Marshall, I am a graduate of Capital High School in Helena, MT, currently admitted to the Skaggs School of Pharmacy at the University of Montana. I had the immeasurable benefit of receiving an education in music during my time as a middle school and high school student. The advantages that I enjoyed in having these opportunities made available to me are significant in their magnitude and widespread in their applications with regard to my education and life outside of school. These impacts are multifaceted, bearing fruit which encompasses many examples such as: physiologically enhanced brain function, construction of social capital, and opportunity for involvement with extra-curricular opportunities. I believe with utmost resolve that the contributions made to me by these fine arts programs have been decisive in the advantages they have given me and the advantages that they can continue to give other students. The current proposals to diminish

these benefits to current and future students of Montana is extremely concerning and is counterproductive to the preparation of these students for their futures as productive Montanans.

Sincerely,
Isaac Marshall

Dear Members of the Negotiated Rulemaking Committee,

My name is Chelsea Quiñones, and I am currently an Elementary Music Teacher at Morning Star Elementary in Bozeman, Montana. While I teach in a large school district now, I also taught K-12 music and middle school math in rural Saco, Montana, and have taught 6-8th grade choir at Chief Joseph Middle School in Bozeman. I have two major concerns with the recommendations Elsie is making to school accreditation standards.

First, our schools and our children need both librarians, and counselors. They need them now, more than ever before. Getting rid of the required ratio would have a negative impact on all Montana schools. In my current elementary school position, our librarian teaches just under the ratio limit of students, and she is already overwhelmed and overworked. Our counselors are working round the clock to manage our students' current needs. Getting rid of the ratio could increase their job duties exponentially, or could eliminate their position and livelihood altogether.

Counseling services are crucial in rural schools like Saco, where there are few supports "in town" and kids and families rely on the schools for students' mental well-being. In a state with a high suicide rate like Montana, we have to do better for our kids.

Secondly, Elsie is recommending the elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools.

This is of great concern, because our kids deserve a well rounded education, no matter if they are in a class of 2 or a class of 30. I remember how hard it was to hire a shop teacher in Saco after the teacher retired - I also know how hard it was to hire a replacement music teacher for me when I moved to Bozeman. But, they were able to do it, and those kids deserve to have quality educators teaching them the variety of elective subjects that are currently in the accreditation standards.

As a music educator, this proposed change hits hard, because it could also affect my family directly. Sure, it could put me (and my music teacher husband) out of a job. But my bigger concern is that my two sons, ages 2 months old and 3 years old, might not have access to music classes in school. Maybe they won't share our interest in music, but with these changes they might not even have a choice to pursue it. They also might not get to take a class in family consumer sciences, world languages, or the visual arts, which would be devastating. Kids need a reason to go to school, and most of the time the class they are looking forward to isn't math or english.

I urge you to not vote for these changes to the accreditation standards. We have to put the children, our future, first.

Thank you for your time,
Chelsea Quiñones
K-4 General Music & 5th Grade Band Director
Morning Star Elementary School, BSD7

Dear Mrs. Loveridge,

I am writing to you today to urge you to NOT move forward with the proposed cuts to the ratios of library media specialists and school counselors. I believe this would harm our Montana students by taking away much needed and utilized services.

I realize that funding our public education system is extremely difficult, but I urge you to look elsewhere to make cuts.

Sincerely,
Sydney DeBusk
Billings, MT 59102

I have just learned of proposed rules changes that will impact the education of Montana's middle school students. Arts and career exploration classes should be required for these young people as they move from the creative support classrooms of elementary school toward adulthood. As a mom, I have seen the benefits firsthand.

Many students who lack confidence in academic subjects discover their strengths in the band room or culinary classes. At a time when social media offers too many opportunities for bullying and anxiety, these kinds of classes offer an outlet and an alternative to kids. A child with a clarinet to practice or a paintbrush or whisk in their hand may put down their phone for a while.

These endeavors should not be optional for schools. Please do not change the rules to make them elective only.

Molly Stockdale
Missoula 59803

I would like to express my appreciation for the work our Health enhancement educators do on a daily basis for our middle school population. I am a parent of a middle school student in Great Falls and an educator at an elementary school. Health and Physical education is an integral part of the overall education of all students. Middle school is an important time for kids to explore all the activities that they will continue to do later on in life. Health education during these years of school is paramount to their knowledge and success of being a healthy human in high school and beyond. Removing this requirement from the middle school would be a great detriment to the overall education of students in all communities. We would be failing in our duties as parents and educators to not expose them to all the learning opportunities and information provided by health enhancement teachers. I urge you to consider keeping the middle school requirements for Health Enhancement in schools.

Thank you for your time.
Ty Moore,
Parent and Educator of Middle School Students.

Hello

I am writing to register my alarm at Supt. Arntzen's suggestion that Middle School PE requirements be cut or done away with.

I can not stress enough how negatively this would effect our Montana students. Not only will kids not get the activity they need to maintain health, the health life lessons learned are important and necessary to a well rounded education as stated in ESSA.

I was a 35 year Health & Physical Education teacher and have spent my life advocating and teaching about the necessity of Health & Physical Education. I have spent my career helping to bring quality HPE professional development to teachers in Montana.

With all we know about how activity and movement stimulate brain activity it's a shame that Montana is considering this action.

I suggest a read of the book SPARK by Dr. John Ratey from Harvard to understand fully the connection between physical health, mental health and academic health. HPE is the best health insurance we have.

Please don't let this happen, not only will it hurt kids but it will take jobs away from teachers and Montana can not afford to lose anymore teachers than we do already.

Respectfully
Nancy Stock

Tristen,
I'm reaching out to share my thoughts on Supt. Arntzen's latest recommendations to strike the much needed language from the specified elective programs for MT middle schools. Replacing guidelines for schools to follow with simply "elective offerings" is a complete blunder and will only diminish elective choices for middle schoolers that help to broaden the understanding of our collective culture. Again, Elsie is pandering to the vocal but minority voice who are attempting every angle to privatize public education.

I ask that you vote to maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for Montana Middle Schools.

Thank you,
Rob Reynolds
Citizen, Life-long-learner, Parent of MT graduate and Educator

Hey!

I understand you are considering a proposal that will cut funding for mental health services (and library access) for the youth in North Dakota school systems.

Can you answer this? Why?

Many children receive stability and access to books at school. It's their resource for guidance, grounding, counseling ... and the forgotten intention of education.

Stable children mature into stable adults. Unstable youth cannot.

Please reconsider your move to remove this access for our deserving youth.
CJ Merrill

Dear Members of the Negotiated Rule Making Committee,
I am writing to you in dismay and incredible disappointment upon seeing the recommendations that Superintendent of Public Instruction Arntzen is proposing. As a licensed Music Teacher in the state of Montana, it is appalling to see the disregard our Superintendent gives to the well being of Montana's students.

I especially take issue with the proposed striking of the requirement of offering arts in the middle grades. I am currently a Middle School Band and Choir teacher at Monforton Middle School and have ~75% of the student body enrolled in music classes. Our school also offers quality programs in the visual arts, library and technology, Spanish, and health enhancement in addition to our CORE curriculum. These specialists, like myself, provide opportunities for students to find success and passion in areas that Arntzen is proposing to allow to be cut.

We all know that schools face budget shortfalls, and finding programs to cut has been the way to remedy this in so many unfortunate occasions. With our current accreditation requirements, programs like music must at least be offered to students. This is an overwhelmingly beneficial requirement placed upon schools. For instance, at MSU Bozeman, hundreds of thousands of dollars in scholarships and tuition waivers are offered to students for their musical performance skill each year. For many students, like myself, college would have otherwise been inaccessible without these funds. Allowing schools to drop music at the middle school level will

make it significantly harder for students to try out band, choir, and orchestra, in addition to the myriad of other performing arts classes that are offered that can lead students to developing a passion. Additionally, this will harm students with limited family and/or financial support because they will be unable to seek out these opportunities independent from the school they attend.

This development does not simply stop at students having fun. It leads students to new career opportunities and college scholarships. Classes like the performing arts can also be the reason students continue attending school when their CORE classes may push them away. Students find ways to express themselves in a healthy way through music. Additionally, striking the middle school credit requirements will harm students with limited family and/or financial support because they will be unable to seek out these opportunities independent from the school they attend.

Allowing the Superintendent's recommendation to proceed will be detrimental to not only Montana's music students, but all students benefiting from being exposed to a variety of different classes. Simply offering "electives" does not do our students justice. "Electives" that I've seen in middle school include cribbage and coloring. These classes do not provide the depth of learning that Montana students deserve. Furthermore, there are Montana and National Standards that teachers are meeting on a daily basis to ensure our students are prepared just as other students are across the country.

Please DO NOT accept Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations as what is best for Montana's students. Please preserve the current credit requirements in our middle schools so that our students can have those opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible to so many.

Thank you for your consideration in this extremely important matter,
Joseph Quinones
Monforton Middle School Band/Choir Director
Monforton School District #27
Bozeman, MT

Superintendent Artzen,

It is vital that this committee strives to maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools that you intend to strike out. This purposed action is not in the best efforts of our students and directly affects their well being in our educational setting.

The actions of this committee show a complete disregard to our public education system. It is evident that this move is being made to undermine the public education system by removing electives and enticing the idea of private education, which has been a goal of this administration from the start.

Our students deserve the best we can offer, and this is far from it. The families and good people of our state deserve better. The educators and school staff deserve better.

We expect more from your department and the people involved in this process. Remember the most important part of education is our children and this class doesn't but have this well being in mind.

Respectfully,
Tyson Reiter
Helena Middle School

To Whom It May Concern:

"What is best for kids?" That is the question I try to remember to pose to myself when making decisions in my home and in my classroom. It is my hope that the people in charge of public education in the state of Montana are also keeping that question in their minds as they make major decisions for our schools.

"What is easiest for school districts who are facing teacher shortages and tight budgets?" is not the question I want our state to ever be focused upon.

"What is best for kids?" Every parent, educator, and state official working in conjunction with education should be considering that question at all times.

What is NOT best for kids is taking away standards of accreditation that work to guarantee equal access to a well-balanced education for EVERY student in Montana (middle schoolers access to foreign language, music, etc...) - not just those students who are fortunate enough to live in urban areas. What is NOT best for kids is allowing wiggle-room to districts in terms of contracting out to cooperatives the mental health services our students so desperately need. What is NOT best for kids is taking away minimum standards of education in order to align with the political opinions of any individual involved in policy-making.

What IS best for kids is finding ways to help struggling districts without allowing them to do what is *easiest*. Are our districts in Montana struggling to maintain the current accommodation standards? Yes, absolutely they are, and it continues to get worse. Does removing most of those standards of education make it **better** for the students? No, it absolutely does not.

What is easiest is not always what is right.

The current requirements were put in place for a reason - to ensure that all of our Montana students are given a quality, well-balanced, education. These new standards have the potential to lessen the quality of education for many of Montana's kids.

I will leave you with a true story. Years ago I taught in a tiny rural district (less than 100 students K-12 at the time). That district, like many in Montana, had a difficult time maintaining a full staff. They had a full-time counselor for the school (as was required for accreditation). One of my students was struggling. He was considering suicide. The school counselor helped him, but we had to call in the co-op school psychologist to help him further. How many *counties* did the co-op school psych serve at that time? THREE. Counties. Thank goodness we had a counselor! But, if we use the new model as-written that same district would have been able to make the tough but *easier* decision of using cooperative counseling services. What could have happened to my student then?

"What is best for kids?" Not this.

Sara Croghan

General Music/Band/Choir Teacher

Whittier Elementary

Bozeman, MT

I would like the committee to know I am opposed to Sup. Elsie Arntzens recommendations to the current accreditation standards.

Changes made to the school library media services and School Counseling staff will greatly impact rural and reservation schools. They have the least amount of resources available this could eliminate much needed services.

I am also opposing the elimination of elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools. Preventing access to fine arts can have some detrimental effects to our rural communities.

Her views do not represent me as an educator nor as a Montanan.

Thank you

Dear Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

As both a teacher and parent in the Bozeman School District, I urge you to maintain middle school electives and credit requirements as they are. Electives give students some choice in an otherwise tightly proscribed school curriculum, and these choices are often the students' greatest passions, the courses that allow them to enjoy school, or in some cases to stay in school at all. Art, music and world languages aren't simply "extras". We know from research that in addition to their importance in students' brain development, these disciplines also enhance learning in the core subjects. Please do not support Superintendent Arntzen's bad recommendations that will prevent students' access to some of the very programs they need most.

Respectfully,
Jennie Tranel

Dear Board of Public Education and Superintendent Arntzen,

I am writing to express my concern with the Superintendent's proposed changes to Montana school accreditation requirements. Certified, professional school librarians and counselors provide critical services in our schools, and reducing the required staffing ratios would be incredibly detrimental to students. Over time, it would do immense harm to public education in Montana.

As a certified school librarian myself, I believe strongly in the importance of library services and see firsthand the difference school librarians make in our communities. Librarians play an essential role in literacy education, as we help students find books and materials they connect with in order to become enthusiastic readers. We teach students how to research and find information responsibly and independently. We encourage collaboration, spark curiosity, and help students to find and keep joy in learning. In states where certified librarian requirements have been reduced or eliminated the way the Superintendent's current proposal would do, library programs have been stripped to barebones, and services have been slashed. Not coincidentally, reading scores have also tanked, and students have suffered irreparable harm.

Please reject the current proposal, and keep librarian and counselor ratios intact. Our students in Montana deserve quality public education, and that includes access to professional librarians and counselors.

Alice Asleson
Librarian, Billings Senior High School
MLIS

Dear Ms. Loveridge,

I am writing to you as a concerned parent and community member of Whitefish.

I've read through the proposed changes to the minimum FTE requirements and although much of it looks like simplifying verbiage with "or an equivalent that meets the district's curriculum and assessment requirements, which are aligned with the content standards stated in the education program" which seems to be a way to give the schools a little more leeway of which I can accept.

However, the part about taking out almost all of 10.55.902 is horrifying! If you do away with mandating music and arts in the middle schools you begin the breakdown of a very important part of our culture and the social/emotional welfare of our students!

I am sure are already aware, but let me remind you of what an important role the arts play in educating our children

- Test scores, school attendance, and graduation rates will drop in school districts without music programs.
- Drug and alcohol use among teens will likely increase
- Music for graduation, Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, sporting events, parades, and other community events will no longer happen
- The elimination of elementary and middle school music programs means the destruction of high school music programs because there will be no students who know how to play
- Music programs are an economic benefit to the community and the schools.
- Participating in art activities can be linked to increased civic engagement and greater social tolerance (something highly necessary in today's world!), so teaching students these skills early can improve the likelihood of continued participation in arts activities down the road
- Most importantly, since the arts help define our culture, there would be a significant loss to our greater society. Additionally, music participation is one of the best forms of social-emotional learning and confidence building in our schools-- something students need now more than ever

I speak as a former teacher, a parent of a band student, and a community member, involved with the Band Boosters, and I am asking that you not give over all the controls to the local school districts as they will most likely cut the programs that are most important for our children's social and emotional well being in favor of just the strict core classes due to funding. So many students will slip through the cracks and be lost to us. We can't put all the students in 1 box as we are not all the same.

School is for exploring all the possibilities that their future holds, let's continue to make that the most important part of education.

Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions. Thank you!
In God We Trust, so Allow a Miraculous Day!
Grace and Peace, June Olsen

To all it may concern:

Superintendent Elsie Arntzen's recommended changes of ratios for librarians, counselors, and elimination of electives is extremely detrimental to our students in public schools. Students need this exposure and enrichment for many reasons.

Regarding librarians, we know the importance of reading and how beneficial it is for students. It is the foundation of word recognition and vocabulary, which enhances students' reading, writing, and speaking. We need strong leaders in these positions to help foster relationships and encourage student engagement with books. Student love getting their hands on new books every week. The skills taught are irreplaceable and transcend their lives. Librarians also help foster skills, including but not limited to critical thinking, analysis, research, organization, technology, and gathering of necessary resources (online and otherwise) for academia and beyond.

Secondly, students and teachers are in need of more emotional and mental health support in classrooms. We are seeing an influx of students with higher needs, and some students are not getting into programs they need as it stands. The enhanced and continued support of counselors is paramount to those students' success. If anything, we could use more support. Not less! Their time and knowledge is incomparable and irreplaceable!

Giving students elective options is such an incredible experience for these students. It helps with decision making and provides experiences that they might not get later in life. We are creating well-rounded, open-minded, creative, and unique individuals by providing a variety of experiences and opportunities to learn an array of topics, both academic and artistic in nature.

Approving these proposals (as presented by Ms. Arntzen) would be harmful to our students and a slap in the face to our hard working educators. Education should be and needs to be student-focused. We need to do

what is best for them! Cutting necessary, wanted, and incredible programs and specials would be horrible for the longevity, personal and academic development, and interest of our learners. Further, it would ruin the rapport with students, families, educators, and members of the Helena community.

In the academic climate of the last two years, this can be an opportunity to show that our students are our number one priority, and as proposed, that opportunity would be lost.

Lisa Tucker

Dear Ms. Loveridge,

I strongly recommend that the current counselor and librarian ratios be maintained, rather than decreased, as Superintendent Arntzen has put forth in a suggested revision of school accreditation standards. This is a horrible time to decrease these important services to our schools. We are, hopefully, just coming out of a global pandemic with two accompanying years of dissension, loss, uncertainty, and anxiety.

Students are aware of mass shootings in churches, grocery stores, and at concerts. These populate our news media too frequently. They are also aware of mass shootings in schools (think Columbine High School, Sandy Hook Elementary School, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, to name a few). It has been necessary to teach students lockdown procedures. Students have seen their teachers learn how to protect them and even disarm shooters if needed. In our schools lockdowns occur whenever threats have been received or detected. Can you imagine the fear that must exist when students are hiding in their classrooms, not knowing if the threat is real or not?

Results from the 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey for Montana indicate 41% of students had felt so sad or hopeless that they stopped doing usual activities (a measure indicative of depression), 22% had considered suicide, 18% had made a specific plan, and 10 had attempted suicide with 32% of those attempts resulting in injury or overdose, requiring medical attention. And what about the remaining kids in the student body, when one of their classmates completes a suicide?

Families have been heavily stressed over the past several years and the stressors are not going away soon. I haven't even mentioned droughts and fires in our rural state. Students experience, on many levels, the ramifications of these many stresses.

Please do not decrease the ratio of school counselors and librarians. This essentially pulls the safety rug out from under our students, and their concerned families, when they need support the most.

Thank you,

Patricia Holkup, PhD, RN. Missoula, MT.

Hello, my name is Sara Parr and I am a Montana Retired Teacher who supports keeping music and all other electives in our primary (actually, ALL) school systems around the state. And I support having credited librarians in charge of all the libraries in our schools. PLEASE do not cut these very important programs! Thank you, Sara Parr

Hello again!

I emailed you earlier about losing counselors in our schools. I am now hearing that she's also proposing cutting music, arts, tech Ed, and more.

This can not happen. Absolutely can not happen.

I would like to know what we can do about this situation to solve it before it gets any worse.

Please email me and I appreciate your help.

Thanks,
Kathy Waldorf

These new proposals are ridiculous! You are ridiculous! I understand that this is a way to eliminate programs in schools and to slowly chip away at public education. You know, public education, the organization you head, but don't believe in! I also understand that now the legislature will cut funding for programs like library, music, and counseling, as they aren't required in certain school formats. Shame on you! Isn't there even a touch of morality in you? Do the right thing! Give our students the right to have programs like these. Many of them depend on these programs. Obviously, they can't depend on you. You are worthless and I have given up any hope that you will ever do the right thing!

Tyler Harris (just another disappointed and angry teacher)

Hello,
Please find my public comment on Chapter 55 below.

Hello, my name is Justine Cohen and I am a recent graduate of the University of Montana and a Montana resident. As a new school counselor, I am urging you to reconsider the proposed changes for statewide expectations and requirements for mental health services in schools. School counselors are a necessary position in schools and should be required. The need for school counselors is not a new need, as before the pandemic the field was expected to grow to meet the needs of students. According to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), Montana's student-to-counselor ratio during the 2020-21 school year was 291 to 1. This is very close to ASCA's recommended ratio of 250, and far lower than the current ratio in place statewide. Using this data, it seems Montana is able to support school counselors more than other states where the present ratio is much higher, such as our neighbor Idaho that has a reported ratio of 493, or Arizona with a ratio of 716. I graduated this spring, and I was excited to begin working in a school doing such an important job.

Unfortunately, I have felt let down by Montana's withering support of educators, especially when it comes to mental health services in schools. The pandemic has shown a rise in behavioral problems, higher youth suicide rates, and abundant mental health problems in our state's youth. I am frustrated that instead of funding the crucial positions of school counselors, changes to Chapter 55 as proposed by Supt. Arntzen would eliminate the ratio, thus eliminating our students' right to access necessary services in their schools. I spent a year in a rural school that was overflowing with students, and still they only had one school counselor for 400+ students. The amount of work for this one counselor could have, and should have, been divided amongst two or more counselors. Montana's school counselors are being set up to fail, to stretch themselves too thin, to burn out, and to walk away from the profession. We are extremely hardworking individuals who are passionate about supporting students in Montana. However, I fear that without the state's support, Montana's students will suffer the most from your actions. Please consider how this will impact students' overall access: To health, to education, to prosperity, to college, to a future. As for me, I had no choice but to look out of state for a school counseling position due to the severe lack of opportunities in Montana. I worry for my cohort, and cohorts to come, and what opportunities for employment will be for them, if the proposed changes are put into place. Please consider the recent bill passed in Washington State: Comprehensive School Counseling Programs, SSB 5030. This bill follows the national recommendations and requirements for comprehensive school counseling programs and asks that schools follow the national ratio recommendations as well. Washington's public schools are benefitting from listening to their professional organizations like ASCA and WSCA. I urge you to listen to MSCA, Montana School Counselor Association, throughout this process. They are an excellent group who could advocate for the needs of counselors throughout the state. Thank you for your time, and I urge you to please reconsider.

Justine Cohen

Masters in Counselor Education, Class of 2022
University of Montana

Dear Ms. Tristen:

I am strongly opposed to Superintendent Arntzen's proposed changes to electives in the public school system. My son went through the public school system in District 7, and he is a more well-rounded person because of the classes he took beyond the basics.

If Montana's children are to be competitive and at their best in all aspects of life, including employment, they need more than the very basics in today's world, and they have for quite some time. Let's not take Montana and its school children backwards.

Thank you,
Judy Staigmiller
Bozeman MT

A national agenda is not a good fit for Montana. I taught high school English for 30 years. Librarians were essential to turning nonreaders into passionate readers. I would walk a kid to the library and the librarian, student and I would talk about what the student felt passionate about. The librarian would walk around the room, pull books off the shelf that were at the reading level and interest level perfect for the young person. Sometimes I'd have to pull the book away from the student during class time because he or she couldn't tear themselves away. I've seen that transformation many times because of available librarians.

We need counselors. Once a student mentioned suicide in a journal assignment for class. I told the counselor who could act quickly. She contacted the parent and arrangements were made that saved this student from a dangerous situation. I know Governor Gianforte has made commitments to strengthen our young people's mental health services. This starts with adequate staffing in our schools.

Middle school is a vulnerable time for our students. Our schools have made major investments in music, art and physical education to help students in this awkward age group grow and thrive. Eliminating requirements for special classes will make this vulnerable group more prone to mental health issues, therefore, slowing their growth.

Please don't push national standards to hurt education on Montana.
Patricia Kelly

1. Oppose eliminating the number of student requirements for counselors in 10.55.710 and would encourage reducing the ratio so the ratio is smaller allowing more students to be served. Social, emotional health of our children has never been more critical than now.
2. Oppose eliminating in section 10.55.902 item 3c as career awareness and lifelong learning should and must be a priority in grades K-12 and should be addressed in Chapter 55 so we do not lose the emphasis on career awareness. In order to empower students to become career ready, businesses and the community must invest in career awareness programs to provide younger students with exposure to jobs that align with their interests and aptitudes.
3. Oppose eliminating in section 10.55.903 the requirements in section c. Items such as career and technical education would be left up to the local agency for various interpretations. There is a great need to have students selecting pathways and having career and technical education options allow students to If nothing else to begin their career path. Today, more than ever, employers want to hire entry-level employees who can hit the ground running. This is where career and technical education (CTE) comes in. CTE prepares students for the world of work by introducing them to workplace competencies in a real-world, applied context. I would suggest under section (3) adding career and technical education after (v) health sciences.

4. Support adding ½ unit of economic and financial literacy in 10.55.904. Financial literacy is critical for all students. Financial literacy encompasses just about every aspect of a person's life. It allows an individual to understand and maximize whatever level of income they earn. It helps people transform their lives.

Thanks for your consideration of my comments.

Mark Branger

Montana ACTE, Executive Director
Worden, MT 59088

Ms Arntzen, I have to say that I am disgusted at reading the last few days the direction you are going on mental health, librarian numbers and particularly getting rid of standards at the middle school level.

As an educator for nearly 30 years in Helena I see all these moves as a way to eviscerate public education in Montana. That seems to be your agenda and as a former educator I find your action shameful. You say you will work toward more mental health for students in Montana, but your track record does not indicate you are willing to step up for public education.

Please if you have any feelings for students in Montana do NOT follow the course you are on. Please don't let your decisions be governed by Political gains. DO NOT GUT OUR PUBLIC EDUCATION, THIS IS THE ONLY THING HOLDING THINGS TOGETHER IN MONTANA!!!!!!

Sincerely

John Miller

Retired teacher

Dear Tristen and to whom else it may concern,

I am writing in regards to the current proposal as a mother of two school aged children and as a former elementary school teacher. I am deeply concerned about the proposed changes for school requirements as it relates to Music Education, Counseling, Fine Arts, and Library services. At a time when students have larger rates of anxiety and depression than ever before, this seems counterproductive and even dangerous. These are vital educational opportunities that every student in our state needs. Please consider carefully before eliminating them as mandates. Leaving it up to the prerogative of the individual school district is dangerous.

Thank you.

Rebecca Christ

Concerning curriculum requirements for music in Elementary and Middle Schools:

Removing music from Elementary and Middle School required curriculum would be a devastating blow to the overall success of our education system. Starting with the well-known fact that music makes you smarter, which has been proven in testing program statistics and development of our students.

As a music educator for 37 years and supporter of the arts for an additional 10 years, I can attest to the successful influence of music on our children's lives in numerous ways, from better thinking skills, better teamwork, better attitudes, and an enhanced feeling of belonging to the school system and to a highly worthwhile endeavor. I have students who remind me and thank me often.

To remove music from those early years of the curriculum would lead to a severe decrease in the quality of high school programs and many would be non-existent. If some schools, mainly the smaller ones, were not required to provide these essential programs, they would drop them. That would be like dropping math at that level and expecting the high schools to still produce students to engineering schools or medical schools or trade schools that need those skills.

On another level, something that matters to many is their athletic programs. This decision would eliminate those pep bands that so many communities consider of high importance to their existence.

The music programs we have also give a great sense of accomplishment and belonging to those many students, who are not necessarily athletically gifted, in very positive and extremely long-term and often life-time endeavors, whether they are professional or just hobbyists.

To remove the curriculum requirement for music would be a tragedy to many, as it is a major factor in many students' reasons to enjoy and be a part of something special in their school. The lessons of music are irreplaceable to a well-rounded education opportunity.

Keep music in our schools at the forefront. Rather than diminish music education's very important role, let's enhance it.

John Novotny

Big Timber, Mt.

I have been a school counselor in Montana for 24 years. I am currently working at Kalispell Middle School with School District 5. I have 372 7th grade students in my caseload. Through my duties I also serve their 30 teacher, as well as the student's parents. I am opposed to the proposed changes of 10.55.710 for multiple reasons.

Last year, when I was 6th grade counselor, I had an 11 year old student attempt suicide three times whom received inpatient treatment for their first attempt. This school year, the same student made an attempt on campus, which impacted six students who found them on the floor of the bathroom, as well as their many classmates and teachers who acted quickly and intervened. School counselors worked hard, and lost sleep trying to support students and colleagues impacted by this attempt.

In the first 14 weeks of school I had 7 students receive in patient treatment for severe suicidality, most of them made attempts. On average, during the first 5 months of school I was completing Safety/Threat Risk Screenings with 3-5 students a week. Safety/Threat risk screenings assess for risk of self harm, suicidality and homicidality. Most of my students at the time were 12 years old, some are now 13. When a person struggles with suicidal thoughts and receives treatment, research shows that the thoughts just don't go away. Typically it takes consistent follow through using Safety Plans, continued screening when necessary (asking the necessary questions to determine risk), along with medicinal and therapeutic interventions provided by trained clinical therapists. Sadly, funding for our community mental health services continue to be cut by the legislatures, thus rarely do these young people and parents receive the clinical support they need. Most of our local clinical therapists are not accepting new clients, or have "waitlists". This means that the schools, ie, school counselors, are often responsible for trying to serve these students struggling with life threatening suicide ideation.

Our school district has been in the middle of a suicide cluster this year. Our state has been in the top 5 for suicide the past 40 years. Our suicide rate is twice the national average. We (SD5 administrators, school counselors, and teachers) have worked diligently to try to follow the recommended best practices in suicide prevention and response and yet here we are, scrambling to do whatever we can to try and save the lives of young people. Sadly, our efforts have failed a dozen of our students, recent graduates, who completed suicide. Their parents, friends, family are struggling with grief and are now known as Suicide Loss Survivors. We are haunted by these stories, by our shortcomings, our "what if" scenarios. j2 years ago a very special school counseling colleague took their own life. Our teachers, parents, and community are struggling with secondary trauma from these deaths. Survivors of Suicide Loss are 3.8 times more at risk of attempting suicide ([Suicidology.org](https://suicidology.org) [suicidology.org], American Association of Suicidologists).

I cannot believe our state superintendent, OPI staff, and others are considering cutting qualifications for school counselors and eliminating ratios. It takes highly trained and skilled school counselors to fulfill the responsibilities of our jobs. We really do save lives. Instead of increasing school counselor student ratios or eliminating qualifications, please increase funding to programs that follow best practices, reduce our case loads and commit to licensing highly skilled, trained school counselors. Hi Tristen. I have been a school

counselor in Montana for 24 years. I am currently working at Kalispell Middle School with School District 5. I have 372 7th grade students in my caseload. Through my duties I also serve their 30 teacher, as well as the student's parents.

Last year, when I was 6th grade counselor, I had 1 student attempt suicide 3x whom received inpatient treatment for the first attempt. This school year, the same student made an attempt on campus, which impacted 6 students who found them on the floor of the bathroom, as well as their many classmates and teachers who acted quickly and intervened. I have been working hard, losing sleep trying to support these students and my colleagues.

In the first 14 weeks of school I had 7 students receive in patient treatment for severe suicidality, most of them made attempts. On average, during the first 5 months of school I was completing Safety Risk Screenings with 3-5 students a week. Most of my students at the time were 12 years old, some are now 13. When a person struggles with suicidal thoughts and receives treatment, research shows that the thoughts just don't go away. Typically it takes consistent follow through using a Safety Plan, asking the necessary questions to determine risk while receiving medicinal and therapy provided by trained clinical therapists. Sadly, funding for our community mental health services continue to be cut by the legislatures. Most of our local clinical therapists are not accepting new clients, or have "waitlists". This means that the schools, ie, school counselors, are often responsible for trying to serve these students struggling with life threatening issue of suicide ideation.

Our school district has been in the middle of a suicide cluster this year. Our state has been in the top 5 for suicide the past 40 years. We have worked diligently to try to follow the recommended best practices in suicide prevention and response and yet here we are, scrambling to do whatever we can to try and save the lives of young people. Sadly, our efforts seemed to have failed a dozen of our students, recent graduates, and their parents this year. We are haunted by these stories, by our shortcomings, our what if scenarios. Even a very special school counseling colleague took their own life 2 years ago. Our teachers, parents, and community are struggling with secondary trauma from these deaths. Survivors of Suicide Loss are eight times more at risk of suicide ideation.

I cannot believe our state superintendent, OPI, and possibly members of this committee are considering cutting qualifications for school counselors and eliminating ratios. Please do not increase our school counselor student ratios or eliminate qualifications. It takes highly trained and skilled school counselors to fulfill the responsibilities of our jobs. We really do save lives.

Sincerely,
Susan Sherman, MA
School Counselor, Parent, Concerned Citizen
Kalispell Middle School
Kalispell, MT

While I agree that math, reading and science are core studies that should be required statewide, I oppose tasking the local school boards with the final decision of whether to include music and art and foreign language as electives only. I do not understand why they should not be included as part of required curriculum statewide.

I would have loved to learn and use the language of music and all its related skill building and self confidence benefits in my early elementary years. I did not know a "note" as more than a hieroglyphic until I was in college. Shameful. Music is like learning a foreign language, which I did actually have the opportunity of learning. It has served me well many years in understanding word origins, pronunciation, communication and vocabulary. These kind of studies are brain food. They enlarge our general knowledge. Also, they can set a student on a career path.

It seems that these proposals could make it much harder on the small rural schools to include a broad curriculum for their students. Certainly "local control" is a benefit but it seems that statewide standards should cover a broader scope of educational basics.

Dana Rooney

I voice my strong opposition to many of the proposed changes OPI has recommended for school libraries, counseling, and elective courses.

As a middle school teacher and parent, all of the changes proposed in these three areas are unacceptable. From where did these proposed changes come? My understanding is that the Task Force recommended NONE of the proposed changes.

If implemented, these changes will result in cuts or complete loss of many important programs. At a time when Montana is reeling from the effects of COVID pandemic, increased depression and suicide, cutting counseling programs is unfathomable. INCREASING programs would make sense if we truly care about our students and want Montana's statistics to reflect a safe state for student mental well-being.

Our librarians are the backbone of our schools, and the acting media specialists for our schools. Cutting technology experts along with limiting students' and teachers' access to media training and updated reading materials is also counter productive.

Lastly, as a Family Consumer Science teacher, the proposed cuts to middle school electives are completely unfounded. Our students' access to arts, music, and electives broadens their perspectives in critical ways. As we move toward career ready education, eliminating electives is a step backward.

We need forward-thinking leadership at the state level. Unfortunately, the proposals referenced above would leave our future--our students-- behind.

Please work toward the very best possible options for Montana's students rather than slashing their opportunities as recommended by OPI's misguided leadership.

Sincerely,

Carol Zimmer

Greetings -

I have had the opportunity to review Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations for changes to Chapter 55. In summary, I find the recommendations for library media services, school counseling services, and the middle school basic education programming short-sighted and very concerning.

It is my understanding those changes are driven by recruitment and retention challenges in rural Montana. The solution to water-down or eliminate requirements for tough to recruit areas is the wrong solution. What if the response to challenges associated with healthcare recruitment and retention in rural Montana were to just get rid of rural healthcare? At a time when we are experiencing unprecedented challenges with student mental health, very clearly articulated in the Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey Summary Report, the watering down of counseling standards is beyond alarming and simply reckless.

Recruitment and retention issues are best addressed head on by looking at salaries and benefits, affordable housing, higher-ed pipeline, childcare costs, and other specific barriers that school districts face in Montana as they try to recruit and retain a high-quality educational staff. Watering down the public school system and the education afforded to all children moves us in the wrong direction, and is contrary to the Constitutional mandate via Article X, Section 1.

It is also my understanding that the recommendations brought forward by Superintendent Arntzen look very different from the recommendations from the Chapter 55 Task Force, which was tasked with providing the Superintendent recommendations. That is concerning and I strongly urge the committee to look at both the recommendations from the Superintendent and the recommendations from the Chapter 55 Task Force.

I am in support of the graduation requirement change to include economics or financial literacy for all students. That seems like a meaningful step that will support students and the economy in the future. I am also supportive of the inclusion of IEFA in the standards.

Thanks for the opportunity to provide public comment.
Casey Bertram, Superintendent
Bozeman Public Schools

I disagree with watering down the standards recommended by the committee for political purposes. These are knowledgeable professionals who deserve to be heard. Counselors, librarians and art and music instructors are very important to our students.

Hi Tristen,

I wanted to write to be able to voice concern about Superintendent Artzen's proposed changes about elective offerings and changes to counselor and librarian ratios for public comment to the Board of Public Education.

I am currently a high school teacher in Billings and mother of children in our public schools. While I understand that the intent is to make changes with rural schools in mind, issuing these broad changes to any school is detrimental. After the spring of 2020, our students have been in more of a mental health crisis than ever before. Cutting resources and access to counselors is not the answer. ASCA (the American School Counselors Association) standards for counseling ratios actually recommends 250 students per counselor and we are already above that. Same with librarians - these are the resource experts in our school and keep track of our library books. It is not feasible to make the ratios larger in any size of district which could result in cutting librarians and let our students' access to resources fall by the wayside.

Finally, making changes for elective offerings in middle schools by striking out all the specifics makes schooling in Montana unfair. Students across all districts should have the same opportunities and be held to the same standards for credits in middle schools.

I hope today that you are open to hearing from the parents and particularly the experts in the classroom - teachers.

Thank you for your time,
Brooke Taylor
Sincerely,
Kristofer Olsen

To Members of the Negotiated Rule Making Committee:

As a graduate of Havre High School, an educator, teacher educator and a parent, I am writing with serious concerns about the recently released recommendations to Chapter 55. My primary concern is that these were only released within days of your meeting today. These are fundamental and transformational changes to our state's education system but in an entirely devastating manner. If this organization or the board of public education were invested in the input of members of the Montana educational community, releasing such recommendations one week before this meeting today (although I was only made aware of them on Monday), this would not be the way to do so. If the intention is to circumvent public comment and accept the

recommendations to move forward a particular approach to educational services that is dangerously limited, this would be the way to accomplish that task.

As we still coming to terms with the effects on our children's mental health because of a pandemic, the recommendation to eliminate any wording of capacity suggestions for media specialists AND school counselors appears to be the worst possible action moving forward (with the exception of removing all of these services entirely – that may be the ulterior motive and one that is shortsighted and confusing).

The gutting of the specific requirements in music, visual arts, career and technical education, world languages and cultures is, to me, as an interdisciplinary scholar, a fundamental misunderstanding of how the human brain works. Without context, which we may get at the meeting today, it appears that the recommendations are a full scale submission to our challenges in finding qualified teachers in these areas by no longer requiring that districts provide this instruction. By removing any requirements at the middle school level, it is only a matter of time before these would be removed at the high school level. Opportunities in these areas are what introduces students to possibilities for future study; if they don't have those opportunities, they will not be able to pursue them at higher levels and the programs will be phased out. If that is the intention of these recommendations, as a musician and supporter of the arts, world languages and cultures and career and technical education, I am offended and frustrated that someone in such a position would suggest that these fields are merely "electives" to be defined by whatever entity is in control. As a mathematics educator, I see the benefits of all other disciplines as they work together to create meaningful educational experiences for all students. If I were asked for my recommendations, I would advocate for a deeper understanding and appreciation of the possibility of how fields work together, especially those fields that are often relegated to the realm of "elective" status.

I strongly suggest that you maintain the current language for middle schools in Montana for my own children and my neighbors' children. We need our students to experience the arts, world languages and cultures, and career and technical education. We need our students to be able to interact with professionals in the media center and with professionals when they are facing mental health challenges. We can do much better for our students than these recommendations allow.

Sincerely,
Dr. Kristofer Olsen
Bozeman, MT

I am writing to state my opposition to Supt Arntzen's proposed recommendations to change state accreditation standards to no longer require 1 student counselor per 400 students. I am completely appalled that our states superintendent would even propose this, although not surprised at all. I completely lack confidence in this women to make any decisions that actually help our students and staff. This is NOT the time to take away our QUALIFIED and necessary mental health and support services for OUR children. Elsie's proposal is bad for students, bad for teachers and bad for schools!

Thank you for your time,
Leah Braun

Dear Committee Members,
As you consider the recommendations made by Ms. Arntzen today, please endeavor to preserve all current Library, Counseling, and Fine Arts staffing/class requirements in Montana's public schools. Reducing the staffing and educational requirements in the areas that are the very foundation of the human experience will not serve our communities now or in the future.

Though I understand the hardship that comes with budgetary constraints and the staffing struggles faced by rural communities, we must continue to prioritize access to a balanced education. It is our job to nurture our

students--to allow them to build lives of care, curiosity, enrichment, productivity, and a strong sense of community.

The foundation of those skills come in Library services and classes taught by folks with degrees in Library Science, Social/Emotional care provided by skilled counselors, comprehensive Music and Fine Arts Education provided by professional music and fine arts educators, and Wellness Education taught by specialists who care for the whole student . Please maintain current standards and, when possible, continue to grow support for Library staff, Counseling staff, The Arts, and Physical/Emotional Wellness.

If we are to keep the next generation of young adults in the state of Montana, please allow them to teach, live, and raise families in Montana communities that are robust and filled with educational opportunities and excellence.

Respectfully,
Emily Brand

To the members of the committee:

The proposed rule changes appear to have no purpose beyond undermining public education.

Striking the elective requirements for middle schools is unconscionable and destroys the idea of schools creating well-rounded students who are college and/or career ready. Every teacher (and most, if not all, parents) know a student who gets themselves out the door to school, not for their math or English class, but for art, music, foreign languages, creative writing, or another elective. Why on earth would anyone willingly remove a motivator for students to continue their education rather than drop out?

Striking the counselor-to-student ratio serves only to remove support for the mental health of students. Experts agree that the pandemic has exacerbated a mental health crisis in children and young adults. Why on earth would anyone choose to give schools permission to reduce access to mental health supports provided by highly-qualified counselors?

Striking the librarian-to-student ratio attacks the heart of schools. The teacher-librarian does so much more than inventory and reshelve books. They provide support and resources to colleagues in their building. They provide a place where students can explore both their imagination and the world around them. They provide instruction to students in finding and exploring new information, broadening perspectives, and learning more about personal interests. Why on earth would anyone allow schools to limit access to information?

As I ask why, the only answer I can find is "to undermine public education in the state of Montana." None of these proposed changes have students in mind. I ask you to consider what is best for students in our state and refuse to make these changes.

Abby Nyhof

To the Rule Making Committee,

I am writing as a concerned parent and educator, objecting to changes the Superintendent of Public Education is proposing to a number of essential school programs.

I disagree with the Library Media Service K-12 changes. I disagree with the changes to the assignment of school counseling staff.

I disagree with the proposal that "students may demonstrate achievement through a flexible system of pupil-centered learning". This is vague and needs more explanation. I do not support the removal of the graduation requirements that are being proposed.

I agree we need to continue educating our students about the unique cultural heritage of American Indians and support the Indian Education for All Standards.

I do not agree with the proposed changes to Middle School Grade education programs. Eliminating electives in our rural state puts us behind the rest of the country. We need to keep recognizing the unique social emotional needs of all students, in particular middle and high school students, especially with our states high suicide rate. To not support with counselors and the social emotional needs of Montana's students put them at risk.

Building Social Emotional Skills, Creative and Critical Thinking Skills and Career Awareness supports life long learners and the Superintendent is looking to eliminate these skills. I disagree with her proposal.

The proposals in Chapter 55 Negotiated Rules will hurt my children and the students I teach.

Sincerely,
Chelsea Segrest

Good Morning,
It was brought to my attention that Superintendent Arntzen is recommending the elimination of the health enhancement requirement for middle school students. As a parent and a health enhancement teacher, this is disappointing to see.

The CDC recommends 60 minutes of physical activity daily for teens, and one way to promote this in schools is through daily physical education courses. As a teacher, the majority of my students are non-athletes. For many of them, their entire exposure to goal-setting, fitness, and health-promotion come from my class. My goal is to reach EVERY student and help them find ways they would like to stay active and fit for life.

Our country has an obesity problem. Over half of the top 10 causes of death for adults in the US can thank obesity as a comorbidity factor. Eliminating a required course that promotes exercise seems to exacerbate that problem. Tobacco companies have marketed effectively for decades targeting youth, and we see the results of that. Eliminating health enhancement requirements for middle school students (taking away opportunity for exercise) is akin to marketing for obesity.

Rather than reduce our investment into student and community health, we should be discussing expansion of health-promoting programs. I'm disappointed at the recommendation to eliminate health enhancement requirements, and optimistic the committee will consider the cons of such a proposal, and see and show they value wellness and promoting physical activity for kids.

Sincerely,
Joel Ahles

Hello Tristen,
If possible please relay my comments below to the NRM committee meeting this afternoon. Thanks, Gary

Dear Chapter 55 Negotiated Rule Making Committee,
I am not speaking for the Chapter 55 Task Force but as a member of the Task Force that spent considerable time and energy reviewing all the standards and making recommendations I, personally, offer the following comments for your consideration. Based on the information I have received and reviewed in the last 24 hours I respectfully ask that you pause on any vote on the recommendations you have received from the Superintendent. What I am reading as her recommendations is significantly different than what the Chapter 55 Task Force has been studying, discussing, and evaluating as we make our recommendations. These are very important standards so I ask that you seriously review the recommendations that the Task Force has considered to see the

significant differences that exist between the Task Force recommendations and the Superintendents recommendations. I have not heard of any rationale from the Superintendent as to why she made the recommendations she did. Therefore, I respectfully ask that all of us involved in this re-visit the standards and make sure we are putting standards in place that can improve the quality of public education in our schools and as they are seriously needed at this time and into the future.

Thank you, Gary Lusin

5/18/2022

To The Board of Public Education for the State of Montana:

The PTA of Hawthorne Elementary in Missoula, MT, stands against the Montana Superintendent of Public Instructions, Elsie Arntzen, recommendations to student access to School Librarians, School Counselors, Health and Physical Education, as well as other academic subject areas such as Music and Art. In her own words, “for Montana schools to offer the highest caliber education, the basics of math and reading must be prioritized.” If nothing else, The No Child Left Behind Act, a well-intentioned law, already shows us this is not good for the children it aims to help, nor is it good for our communities. Studies show focusing on reading and mathematics, which results in ignoring art, social studies, physical education, and other academic subject areas, also ignores character development preparation to become active citizens as well as other broader educational goals. Also, test scores often tell us how well students were prepared to take certain kinds of tests, which does not always translate into usable skills or other desired educational outcomes. In fact, based on the federal government’s own tests, there is little evidence that the No Child Left Behind Act that Arntzen’s recommendations mimic, has spurred significant, lasting improvements in academic outcomes. It has, however, likely put a damper on innovation. (McCluskey, N., Feb 9, 2015, Has no Child Left Behind Worked? Cato Institute)

Included in her recommendations are proposed changes eliminating Montana students’ access to school Librarians and Counselors. Knowing especially in our rural areas that mental health resources are severely lacking, and the need is at an all-time high, I would think Superintendent Arntzen would follow the research that shows the significant effect school Library use and the availability of Counselors has on students’ academic achievement. Schools that only focus on mathematics and reading are missing the importance of promoting and supporting student wellness with the individual mental, physical, and social health problems students have been struggling with.

A growing body of research has shown that access to strong library programs, of which the librarian is the heart, is positively correlated to proficiency in academic standards, better standardized test scores, and increased graduation rates (Gretes, 2013; Scholastic, 2016). Benefits of librarian and library access have shown to be the strongest for the most vulnerable and at-risk student learners, including students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities. In 2020, 14.5% of Montana children lived consistently below the poverty line. These are exactly the students who need regular access to libraries and librarians to further a love of learning and academic growth. Why is the Superintendent of Public Instruction seeking to further harm the population her department is charged to protect?

- School libraries offer a safe and nurturing climate during the day, as well as before and after school. They are often the only place open to all students, where a school librarian can support them across grade levels and subject matter.
- School librarians connect other educators to current trends and resources for teaching and learning. They are essential partners for all teachers, providing print and digital materials that meet diverse needs and offering opportunities to deepen student learning.
- School library programs foster critical thinking, providing students with the skills they need to analyze, form, and communicate ideas in compelling ways.

- Strong school library programs instill confidence in reading, which is fundamental to learning, personal growth, and enjoyment.

(The State of America's Libraries Report, The American Library Association)

All these reasons provide evidence of the importance of continuing to have access to Librarians in all Montana schools.

In addition, School Counselors work to create a school culture of success for all students. They assist students in applying academic achievement strategies, teach them social emotional management skills for use in interpersonal relationships, and meet with students to help plan postsecondary options for education and life. The school counselor wears many hats in a school setting, including social and emotional educator, academic adviser, conflict mediator, wellness coach, mental health therapist, student champion, educational collaborator, and family liaison. During the stress of the pandemic, counselors have been needed in even more ways, for not only students, but parents and staff members, as well. These professionals have been at the center of problem solving for all the issues created by the pandemic - access to technology, support for the emotional needs of students and families, assistance with basic needs for families. What Superintendent Arntzen is proposing will have far-reaching negative impacts for not only our students, but our communities at large. Which staff member will take the place of the school counselor in safeguarding the mental, emotional and physical welfare of students, conducting check-in calls, arranging for families in need to receive basic necessities, responding to attendance issues and working to resolve barriers to attendance, reassured stressed-out parents, providing mental health referrals for students in crisis, providing moral supports to teachers, administrators, and staff, and providing support for children who are struggling with various personal and school-related issues? School counselors fill all these roles daily and removing student access to these important advocates is reprehensible.

Further, to address the recommendation of eliminating Physical Education in middle school, which will most negatively impact lower-income households, according to The State of Childhood Obesity, in Montana, 10% of youth ages 10 to 17 have obesity and 11.5% of adolescents in Montana are obese. Health and Physical Education classes have the potential to reach most of the student population by engaging them in sufficiently intense physical activity to confer health benefits, while also developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enable lifetime habitual physical activity. In a state where 29.5% of adults have hypertension related to obesity, and 7.6% of adults have developed diabetes secondary to obesity, one would reason that having more opportunities for children to learn the importance of physical activity would be in our best interest. However, Superintendent Arntzen proposes cutting out students' access to these important classes. HPE classes directly answer the questions "Am I able?" and "Is it worth it?" from our students. "Am I able?" encapsulates how individuals feel and think about their abilities in the physical domain, and includes perceived competence, self-efficacy, and physical self-worth. "Is it worth it?" addresses the cost-benefit assessment of participating, similar conceptually to the effort-benefit ratio. Students who answer "yes" to both questions are more likely to lead active lifestyles and engage in regular physical activity. Where in their lives are they most likely to develop the skills to answer these questions? We answer that they develop these skills in Health and Physical Education with their HPE Specialist Teacher. Superintendent Arntzen would like to cut access to classes that will impact the overall health of our students for no less than a lifetime.

Lastly, the same goes for Music, Art, and other subjects Ms. Arntzen labels as "electives," placing them at risk of cutting from the local curriculum. Research and evidence abound that illustrate the benefits of art and music which are key to student development. Researchers from the Johns Hopkins University School of Education argue that "instruction becomes more effective when educators integrate creative activities and make them central to academic development. Across disciplines, including STEM, there's room to reimagine classes with a strong emphasis on drawing, painting, playing music, performing drama, and other creative pursuits. Encouraging students to use their imagination can help them actively engage with new concepts and discover connections between ideas as well as provide advantages for their social and emotional well-being." (The Importance of Art Education in the Classroom, Aug 1, 2021)

We would like to encourage the Board of Public Education to carefully consider the evidence above as well as research the plethora of documented studies that speak to the importance of not following Ms. Arntzen's recommendations. Why would the Superintendent of Public Education want to take these important services away from our students in the State of Montana when one can easily show the negative impacts of such decision-making with a few moments of research? Please vote against Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations.

Sincerely,

The PTA of Hawthorne Elementary School

Renee Labrie-Shanks

Geneva Liimatta

Megan Meyers

Summer Nelson

Hawthorne Elementary School

Dear members of the Montana Board of Public Education:

I write to urge you to maintain requirements for Montana elementary and middle schools to provide music/arts curricula for their students. It is a documented fact that education in these disciplines not only provides students with skills that apply directly to those particular endeavors, but also nurtures the kind of creative, imaginative thinking, and interpersonal communication abilities that are applicable and even essential to virtually every field of business and commerce. I know from personal experience that even if a student of the arts never practices his/her particular area of study in the public arena after graduation, the creative thinking, expertise and self-confidence gained from study will serve them well in whatever career they eventually pursue. Music/arts programs are too often the first victims of budget cuts and I urge you not to allow Montana school districts the possibility of depriving our students of the opportunity to gain the vast benefits of participating in arts education.

Thank you,

David Ackroyd

Whitefish, MT

Sent from my iPhone

Negotiating Rulemaking Committee,

I find Supt. Elsie Arntzen's recommended accreditation changes appalling. To lessen the ratio of counselors and librarians to students in public schools is unacceptable. Changing the ability of students to have access to them shows a terrible lack of support. To lessen the support of any student, especially those in rural areas by removing any who are concerned about the well being of our children is inviting disaster. There are many people who have had the direction of their life changed by a chance encounter with a recommended book or a caring word or sentence from a teacher.

Gayle Whitaker

To lower staffing ratios of librarians and counselors will only reduce available help for all Montana students. Our state needs to work toward finding ways to meet the current standards for all schools. Don't lower the bar for our schools.

Ellen Eschler

Dear Mr Loveridge,

Please count me as another who is vehemently opposed to Ms Arntzen's proposed changes to accreditation standards. In a state with one of the consistently HIGHEST rates of teen suicide in the country, reducing

access to school counselors is not only bad policy, but immoral and dangerous. A child of mine reached out to a school counselor in a time of personal crisis and we don't know what would have happened if there wasn't an available counselor. I would guess I am not the only parent with this experience. Reducing access to libraries is an absurd concept as well. Many Montana children learn life long reading, comprehension, and digital utilization skills necessary for successful integration into a well educated and tech savvy workforce. Classroom teachers are already overburdened and will be unable to adequately address these critical needs in a way that a trained and certified librarian will. It seems that we continue to try and make teaching as unappealing as possible. We will be in a place very soon where we will no longer be able to recruit or maintain our wonderfully skilled teachers. Music and other arts offer an outlet for a great many young people to learn, express themselves, and find community in a time where it can be tough to find a place to fit in. Limiting access to these services is cruel, short sighted and unfair. I would ask the committee to please reconsider these changes proposed by Ms. Arntzen.

To the State of Montana Negotiated Rule Making Committee,
I have read over the proposed changes recommended by Elsie Artzen and am in total dismay as to why these are considered recommendations. We pay taxes to our state to ensure that there is adequate staffing and appropriate activities and reading materials for our students to be competitive in the job market. I see nowhere in our state budget where there's a statewide education budget issue.

I am a retired Montana English teacher and currently am a substitute in the Helena School District. I have taught in both urban and rural district, and am a parent of three graduates from Montana schools. Here are my major concerns:

In the area of library and media specialists:

The current use of media in schools is in need of an upgrade—not a loosening of adult guidance and supervision. We pay taxes to ensure that our teachers are given opportunity to expand their talents and interests into the areas of media specialty. I currently know of several teachers who are working on computers that are 10 plus years old. They accommodate. I knew Montana was able to fair better than other states during the pandemic because there were online programs already in place to address assignments, testing and curriculum standards. Why is this being reduced?

The School Counseling Staff:

I have witnessed first hand the lack of effectiveness of consortiums in the rural setting. I had a student who was suicidal and had an unsafe living condition in her home. The consortium lacked resources at that time to address fully the needs of this and other students like her. In the changes recommended, this will only get worse. At what point is it that we value lives of children at the same rate and passion as the unborn?

Under graduation requirements:

What is the definition of “or an equivalent” address? This lack of clarity is exactly what is wrong under the current administration of Elsie Artzen. If we lower the expectations on graduation requirements, we will become one of the lowest performing state's in the union. The word “equivalent” opens the door to so many modifications and is most concerning regarding the influx of private schools. I have worked in charter schools in two states (Minnesota and Arizona). What I found is that the accountability to these start-ups is difficult, expensive and costs students years of their education. I have had students arrive in high school after being in a private and/or charter school as a Freshman and have no rudimentary skills for writing a paragraph, much less reading a chart or a map to having a basic understanding of physics.

Middle grades:

Why are physical and life sciences eliminated from the middle grades? If we are to compete in the global setting, these areas of study are significant.

More concerning is the elimination of music, world cultures, arts, drama and financial education. Again, we are creating a setting where Montana students will not have the basic foundations to compete nationally and globally. I have also witnessed first hand that students who are involved in the classes of art and music—and

the sciences—are self-disciplined and respectful. It comes with the discipline required to complete these intellectual tasks.

Basic education High school:

Again, the failure to understand the building blocks of education are evident in this recommendation. Students are to have 2 units of art, economic and financial literacy, 1/2 unit of government. But they will not have the foundations currently in the middle school curriculum. Specifically Montana history.

The language throughout is also vague and lacks clarity: "Opportunity to meet" is the repeating phrase that introduces these changes. How is that defined? How will that be measured? What are the measurable outcomes of this criteria?

It is well documented that students who have engaged in music—band, choir and orchestra—in their middle and high school curricula perform better in school. These activities also create a community environment in the school.

Please consider these concerns when reducing these recommendations.

Thank you,
Joanne Gores

Greetings Tristen,

A quick note, as I know you're meeting shortly to voice concern for the proposed school funding changes.

There are so many issues and things to address. As time is short I will express concern over decreasing school counselors, especially at this tenuous, post pandemic world. Our Kids need counselors!

Music and other electives. Two of My kids have/do attend Bozeman public schools. The middle school electives keep the kids interested, engaged and well-rounded (in accordance with the (2015 Every student Succeeds Act). Our kids are varied and need varied options and opportunities.

Please revisit these budget changes. The world is a hard place for our kids. Taking their librarians, counselors, elective courses will not serve their best interests.

Thank you for your time and efforts in behalf of our kids.

Sincerely,
Amy Madsen, Bozeman

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to support music and art in the schools. If one looks at the research, there is ample proof that music and art build young minds. They make kids smarter. I know this for a fact and can cite the impact on my own life. Do not make the mistake of depriving our children of these incredibly important disciplines.

My children are grown and I want the best education for my grandchildren. I pay outrageous amounts of taxes and I want my tax money to go toward the best investment for the future of our country - EDUCATION.

Please support education with my tax money.

Thank you,
Susan DeCamp

Dear Tristen and Montana Board of Education Members,

Please keep the current requirement for Music/Arts and other electives in our Montana elementary and middle schools.

I served as an educator for 31 years at the elementary school level. We all know how vital the basics are in a school curriculum and equally vital are the music/arts and other elective programs.

The challenge is to educate, expand and inspire human beings. Just as it "takes an entire village" to do this it also takes much more than reading, writing, math and science.

Please keep the requirement for these programs in place and help insure the brightest future for our kids and communities.

Thank you,

Roxanne Warne

Strongly disagree with what I have seen. Our public schools should not be gutted at this time or ever! e maule

Hi Tristen,

It is my understanding that there are broad changes being proposed to the Basic Education Programs in Montana schools. I'm sure you will be receiving other emails from concerned parties, but I would like to implore you to please consider all of the negative effects on schools, teachers, and the community that some of these changes will have.

I am especially concerned with the elimination of a long tradition of requiring exposure to music and arts at the grade school level for Montana students. This is an incredibly important avenue creatively, and it's important for you to know that these specifics will be impacted (based on research that I would be happy to provide for you). Here are just a few important facts specifically on the importance of elementary music education:

- Test scores, school attendance and graduation rates will drop in school districts without music programs.
- Drug and alcohol use among teens will likely increase.
- Music for graduation, Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, sporting events and other community events will no longer happen (the elimination of elementary and middle school music programs means the destruction of high school music programs).
- Since music teachers typically have larger classes (sometimes 40+ students in one section), additional teachers would need to be hired in order to redistribute students in the school schedule. Music programs are an economic benefit.
- Most importantly, since the arts help define our culture, there would be a significant loss to our greater society, specifically in Montana. Additionally, music participation is one of the best forms of social-emotional learning in our schools-- something students need now more than ever. Indeed, in our community just last night we participated in a guest panel presentation, collaborating with North Valley Music School and Nate Chute Foundation (Mental health awareness and suicide awareness and prevention) entitled Music and Mental Health - a vital connection.

Additionally, the changes to FTE requirements for positions such as counselors and librarians will have similar negative effects throughout a student's entire school experience, and on society as a whole.

Please reach out if you have any questions, or if I can provide any more information. I am extremely concerned about this sweeping change to music education that would cut the beauty of music in our schools to the core. When it comes to political positioning and proposed changes in law, I do not pretend to be well versed, but this is an area I am very deeply concerned about, and am confident about the negative effect it would have.

Thank you,

Jenanne Solberg

To Whom it May Concern,

It is with grave concern that I send an email in response to OPI's new proposed changes to the school requirements. It has become blatantly clear that the people making these proposals have either lost touch with the needs of the students or are willfully making decisions that will negatively impact students without regard for their wellbeing.

It is in solidarity with my colleagues that I would like to highlight some of the most egregious problems in the proposal. Please note that in no way is this a comprehensive list of issues however we have been denied adequate time to respond to every outrageous proposal so I will highlight the following.

- Mental Health of Students. According to the World Population Review, Montana is third in the country for suicides. As recently as March of 2022 Billings MT was reporting that in a recently survey "The survey, made up of 98 questions for students in grades 7-12 and released last fall, revealed that 41.4 percent of high school students reported feeling depressed almost every day for at least two straight weeks. That's an all-time high, especially for women who self-reported at 52.6 percent."

Yet the proposal reduces or allows for the elimination of staff related to mental health support for students. Teachers are experiencing more behavioral issues than ever before and these students need support from trained professionals. The only way to ensure students have successful futures is to provide early intervention and support, which you have decided to deny our students. Offering a "contract" option is an unstable and inconsistent solution and students need the consistency of a counselor they know and trust year after year. By removing the requirements OPI is sending the message that mental health support professionals are not valued employees in our districts.

- Library. It would appear that there is a severe disconnect between the people making the proposals and the role of Librarian. We put a huge amount of responsibility on the librarians to be experts and educate in many areas, including internet safety and responsible research. School library programs foster critical thinking, providing students with the skills they need to analyze, form and communicate ideas in compelling ways. Schools with librarians consistently have higher reading scores in all grade levels and have fewer Below Basic scores. These correlations cannot be explained away by teacher qualifications, pupil ratios, school funding, or student demographics.
- Electives. By removing the requirement of an elective you negatively impact a child's education. There are countless articles, studies, and doctorate thesis focused on the impact art, music, and PE have on a student's emotional and academic growth. More than ever our students need an outlet of expression while they navigate these challenging times. Beyond the emotional outlet music and art aid in all academic areas and are used in a co-curriculum to help aid learning. By writing a proposal that eliminates these requirements it is obvious that the writers do not understand the importance and have gone out of their way to remain uneducated on the benefits.

- Here are some quotes from students in the Helena School District:
 - "I love music, I love to sing. I love my music teacher"
 - "Library is the best because we read books and learn about different things. I learn about grammar and other things"
 - "We should keep music because people like the calming flow of sounds, like me!"
 - "I'm a third grader and in my opinion Library ROCKS! I like getting to read"
 - "3 reasons to not get rid of PE. 1. It's good for you. 2. Some people like it. 3. Exercise"
 - "I like music because it is calming to me and gives me contentment and joy. Music gives me joy and happiness."
 - "I like art because it can help you become a good artist and help your writing"
 - "Library is the best for kids because creativity in books is great for kids. Kids need to read if they want to have the ability to do important things in the future"
 - "I like art because it makes you have good ideas and it makes you creative"

Our students deserve to have access to professionals to teach them these subjects. Simply “integrating the subjects” into a standard classroom puts the responsibility on the teacher to be an expert in fields that others dedicate their whole lives to. There is no way a classroom teacher can successfully integrate these subjects because it is simply too much for one person alone. That is why we work in a system of collaboration for education. At this time OPI is looking for an easy solution to a complicated problem and hoping no one will notice as they try to take the easy way out. Our students, our teachers, and Montana deserve better than a copout solution.

It is with great concern that I will end by saying everything I have written here is widely known information and common sense. If the people creating this proposal do not understand the implications of their actions that it is no longer appropriate for them to retain their positions and should resign their roles to allow more qualified professionals to manage this job.

Jocelyn Bjornstad

I am writing to file extreme opposition to all Supt Arntzen’s proposed changes. Eliminating library, arts, and middle school electives, as proposed, do not align with dignified, rich, educational opportunities for MT children and youth. Rather, these proposed changes indicate that our Supt does not support nor understand the full education children need and deserve. Eliminating these rich resources and electives that help prepare our children/youth for future educational success, careers, and healthy living is absurd. There is no research basis for these changes. Also, it feels ridiculous to write to OPI with such a message: ridiculous because the “leader” is so out of touch and clearly, not an advocate for education, teachers, or public wellness. Finally, let’s talk about wellness and mental health. We know people are struggling. We know our kids and youth need healthy outlets, safe role models, and counselors. We should be finding ways to invigorate every program mentioned in these changes and add mental health professionals to schools.

I write to you as a MT citizen, mother of two public school children, and educator. Today’s agenda is embarrassing: a slap in the face to our kids and our teacher, librarians, and counselors. Supt Arntzen should be ashamed of herself and needs to be stopped. Listen to the MT communities and citizens. Do not be a part of destroying public schools in MT.

Thank you,
Allison Wynhoff Olsen

Please do not take away access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses from our middle schoolers. It is essential to maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools, it helps them grow and develop into well-rounded humans!

Hello Tristen. My name is Amy Schendel, and I am currently a High School choir teacher in Billings. I currently serve as President of the Montana Music Educators Association and will start a new job in the fall as the Fine Arts Supervisor in Billings.

To the Members of the Negotiated Rule Making Committee,

Please add my name and my concerns with the elimination of language specific to music and visual art instruction for Middle School curriculum in the current proposal for Chapter 55 NRM. In my career I have seen the value that the Arts bring to ALL schools, and how necessary they are for a complete and well rounded education for our students.

The skills taught in music and arts classes transfer to all areas of life, and students learn independent thinking skills as well as how to work together for the common good. While I understand that there are large problems (budget shortfalls and a shortage of qualified teachers) in many, if not all of our districts, I don't think this is the solution. In fact, I'm worried this "solution" will actually create greater problems in the long run. While small districts might gain more flexibility in their offerings, any district might choose to make cuts based on their value system and numerous programs will be affected.

If program language is not specific for these kinds of classes, the results will be devastating to small communities. These kinds of programs and experiences can't wait until high school to develop—the skills are too complex and diverse to wait that long to have true growth and sequence for proper development. The Arts *can* be and *should* be taught to ALL students.

In fact there is language in ESSA that pertains to that: “A well rounded education means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as English, reading or language arts, writing, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, **ARTS**, history, geography, computer science, **MUSIC**, career and technical education, health, physical education, and any other subject determined by the State or local educational agency”

Please keep Montana schools vibrant by continuing to require a comprehensive education that INCLUDES THE ARTS at the Middle School.

Thank you for your time in serving on this committee for the students of Montana.

Amy Schendel (she/her)

To the Negotiated Rulemaking Committee,
I would like to express opposition to Elsie Arntzen's proposed changes to school accreditation.

The proposal of removing the following programs and curricular offerings is a poor choice for our students:

-Librarians and access to libraries and media -Elective offerings specifically in music, arts, international languages, and career and technical education -School Counseling Services

The students need a well rounded education and also need access to information, counseling services, and elective courses. Our young students in elementary school and middle school need these offerings in their school day to help motivate them and support them. The staff that provide these course offerings and support services are critical to providing a rich education for our students.

As a parent, educator, and Montana citizen I urge you to reject Elsie Arntzen's proposed changes that would gut our schools of critical services and opportunities.

Thank you very much for acting on behalf of our students and voting to support their current education system.
Sincerely,
Charles Eric Hanson

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Thank you very much for acting on behalf of our students and voting to support their current education system.
Sincerely,
Charles Eric Hanson

I am writing to express my frustration, disapproval, and anger over Elsie Artzen's proposed changes to counselor and library student to staff ratio.

I am a public school teacher who is drowning in extra workload and expectation in my job at West Valley School in Kalispell, MT as a second grade teacher.

Our school librarians and Counselors need extra help, not more workload. It is because of specialists, school counselors and school based mental health programs that teachers can sustain.

If you expect more of them, we are all going to break, burnout and leave the profession.

I hope these recommendations do not go through. Anyone who spends any amount of time in a public school can see that this is not what is best for children or the adults tasked to care, teach, feed, and support them.

Thank you for your time,
Kate Wilson

Dear Negotiated Rulemaking Committee,
Superintendent Arntzen's recommended changes to school accreditation standards, particularly the elimination of functional staffing ratios for school counselors in Montana public schools, is not only concerning but completely out of touch with the current increase in youth mental health and the overall mental health crisis occurring in the country. Eliminating the ratios ensures Montana youth will have decreased access to school counselors as well as potentially overwhelm counselor caseloads, thus guaranteeing the needs of students are not met. The outcome of these changes is terrifying. Montana ranks third in the country in death by suicide and twice as many as the national average for children ages 10-17. These proposed changes decrease the safety of students and increase the potential for burnout by counselors.

Additionally the recommended changes to licensed and endorsed library media specialists are also problematic. Library services have been greatly expanded to include a variety of necessary services vital to the growth of students. By disregarding ratios for these services, again, the needs of students will not be met and library media specialists will be overwhelmed. Moving out of a pandemic, when the needs of students have drastically increased, why would Montana choose to decrease services to students and increase workload for those that are dedicated to providing these vital tools?

Today Superintendent Arntzen sat at the Montana Board of Regents (BOR) meeting and discussed how heartfelt she is about the mental health of students, and while I appreciate there are potential difficulties meeting demand, especially in smaller communities, her solution does nothing but continue to perpetuate the

issue. Superintendent Arntzen should be tasked to find a solution that does not further negatively impact the provider shortage and therefore the students that need help the most. Perhaps before considering moving forward with changes to the requirements she should explore other opportunities, including working with the Montana Department of Health and Human Services regarding their youth mental health initiatives that were also discussed at the BOR meeting today by the Governor's designee.

The current ratios do not meet the American School Counselors Association recommendations, so why would the solution be to move further away from these recommendations considering the significant mental health challenges Montana already faces? Please do not support proposals that are to the detriment of our children. Thank you.

Amy Berry

These new proposed retrograde curricular standards for the middle grades appear designed to wipe out decades of progress in American education. The curricular standards currently in place have evolved out of an enlightened understanding of the needs of the whole child and the demands of citizenship in a modern democracy. This understanding is derived from the works of scholars and experts in the fields of curriculum, educational psychology and other related disciplines, and none of the curricular components derived from this understanding should be discounted as superfluous fluff or somehow agenda-driven. This undue focus on the three Rs would be a giant step backwards.

I offer the following observation concerning Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations concerning the elimination of specific elective programs and middle school credit requirements:

These new proposed retrograde curricular standards for the middle grades appear designed to wipe out decades of progress in American education. The curricular standards currently in place have evolved out of an enlightened understanding of the needs of the whole child and the demands of citizenship in a modern democracy. This understanding is derived from the works of scholars and experts in the fields of curriculum, educational psychology and other related disciplines, and none of the curricular components derived from this understanding should be discounted as superfluous fluff or somehow agenda-driven. This undue focus on the three Rs would be a giant step backwards.

Bob Waters

Greetings:

As a 35 year science teacher in Manhattan, MT., I encourage you NOT to change any of the rules regarding middle school electives. Those electives are important for us to maintain a high quality education in the state.

Walt Woolbaugh

Dear Superintendent Arntzen,

First, I would like to say thank you for all that you do for the schools in Montana and specifically, Bozeman School District. As a graduate of Bozeman High School myself ('93), I am grateful and fortunate to have received my education here in Bozeman. I feel even more fortunate that both of my daughters have been students in the school district since kindergarten. They are now in 8th and 11th grade. We have had nothing but positive experiences at every grade level but perhaps one of the MOST positive experiences has been their involvement in the district orchestra/music program. When they both started in 5th grade, they had little to no music experience. In fact, nobody in our family has any extensive music background or plays an instrument. Their choice to join the orchestra was purely out of curiosity and

inspiration from the amazing music teachers in this school district as well as the access to the fine art electives.

My daughters are still playing strong today and, without a doubt, plan to continue as long as possible. Of course, as a parent, I always support and encourage their choice, but again, they have chosen to continue out of true interest, access and encouragement from the program and staff. Each year I realize how lucky they are to have the music program. The music skills they have obtained are obvious but what most don't realize, is the life skills they have gained as committed students to the fine arts program. Both girls are developing into confident, strong, kind and committed young women. As a direct result of their time in orchestra, they have realized the importance of commitment, time management and have acquired other countless essential life skills such as communication, attention and memory just to name a few. It is obvious that their achievements in other subjects have been directly influenced by the skills they have learned in orchestra. Their involvement and experiences in orchestra, from class time to concerts, has shaped who they have become today allowing them both to become well rounded individuals! I am confident that their continued music commitment will provide endless positive opportunities in their education, careers and beyond.

I can assure you that many other parents would say the same, which is why I have to share my deep concern and opposition to the recent proposal to change and cut Montana accreditation standards, especially in regards to requirements and access to fine arts in schools. I, like many others, feel the recommendations are unrealistic and short-sighted, putting the current fine arts programs at great risk for degradation and compromise. It would be a tragedy and would directly affect our students both current and future. Therefore, I respectfully urge you to reconsider the proposal as it relates to fine art electives and allow more time to discuss the issues at hand. I truly believe a more effective and long-term solution is possible.

Thank you,

Vanessa Stevens

Dear Committee Members,

My husband and I are completely opposed to the changes that Superintendent Arntzen has proposed. These changes will lower the high standards to which all of our Montana children aspire and deserve. Once standards for teachers are cut, they will be difficult to reinstate. Lowering the bar is rarely the answer to a hiring problem. It creates other problems with staffing right down the line.

Montana has a very high suicide rate (One of the worst in the nation, as all of you well know.), and levels of mental distress and illnesses as a result of two years of Covid are at an all time high among our children - especially teens. Why would we cut out the school positions that could identify and provide help to many of these students? It makes no sense to us.

In addition, libraries are the center of reading and learning for many students, and they depend on qualified and dedicated librarians. A well run library is crucial to keeping children engaged in reading. Literacy is crucial to success in life. Music, art and elective courses are another way that children and teens remain engaged and active in schools. These teaching positions should not be eliminated, nor the curriculum requirements downgraded to "save money."

We agree that it is a difficult time to hire teachers, and counselors. But, as at state, we must remain optimistic and creative in the ways we use budgets (and, yes, taxes) to be able to afford the education that all of our

Montana children long for and deserve. Potential teachers looking at a state with reduced requirements and expectations for students will not be excited to come to help prepare our children for the future.

We urge you to vote no on all of these changes. Our children are, quite literally, in your hands. Thank you.
Very sincerely,
Nancy and Doug Schrank

School librarians are important to our elementary and secondary school students. Please don't tamper with reducing the number of librarians available to students by changing the existing ratio.

The Covid Epidemic has already caused students' reading skill level to test well below acceptable standards. Substandard reading skills will diminish educational and vocational opportunities for these substandard readers throughout their lives. Please do not exacerbate this existing problem by reducing the number of librarians available to our students in this extraordinary time throughout our educational systems.

Thank you in advance for your assistance!

I am not in favor of the proposed changes to curriculum and hope that you will maintain and preserve the electives and credit requirements. Eliminating or making them less available or required is NOT the way to go. I am disappointed that we have to write to Ms Artzen to keep what we have.

As a licensed educator and school board trustee in the state of Montana I respectfully ask that you preserve specific electives and maintain credit requirements for middle school students. I am the parent of one middle school student and have two children still in elementary school. I have taught high school for more than 20 years and having the current policies in place helps with successful transition to high school. Thank you for your consideration. Julie Kreiman Bigfork

I am writing with this letter because I am concerned about the new proposed changes to the curricula that were recommended by the state superintendent. I feel like these proposed changes do not meet what Arntzen calls for in a recent newsletter as far as "a renewed emphasis on math and reading and for basing teaching on evidence-based best practices". For a renewed emphasis we can not get rid of or hinder our schools libraries and the librarians. Not only that by making all the cuts that are proposed to the middle school would greatly affect the students mental state and not be a benefit to members of our society. The cuts would take away many resources that are now available to the parents and community members. It saddens me as a parent to know that my soon to be son might not have the resources that can be provided to him through the school and I as a parent cannot provide! Please read the proposal carefully and take the students' wellbeing into consideration. Our children (in Montana) do not have access to many resources and we cannot take these away from them! Mary Herbert

It is my understanding that there are broad changes being proposed to the Basic Education Programs in Montana schools. I'm sure you will be receiving other emails from concerned parties, but I would like to implore you to please consider all of the negative effects on schools, teachers, and the community that some of these changes will have. I am especially concerned with the elimination of a long tradition of requiring exposure to music and arts at the grade school level for Montana students. This is an incredibly important avenue creatively, and it's important for you to know that these specifics will be impacted (based on research that I would be happy to provide for you). Here are just a few important facts specifically on the importance of elementary music education: -Test scores, school attendance and graduation rates will drop in school districts without music programs. -Drug and alcohol use among teens will likely increase. -Music for graduation, Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, sporting events and other community events will no longer happen (the elimination of elementary and middle school music programs means the destruction of high school music

programs).-Since music teachers typically have larger classes (sometimes 40+ students in one section), additional teachers would need to be hired in order to redistribute students in the school schedule. Music programs are an economic benefit. -Most importantly, since the arts help define our culture, there would be a significant loss to our greater society, specifically in Montana. Additionally, music participation is one of the best forms of social-emotional learning in our schools-- something students need now more than ever. Additionally, the changes to FTE requirements for positions such as counselors and librarians will have similar negative effect throughout a student's entire school experience, and on society as a whole. Please reach out if you have any questions, or if I can provide any more information. I am extremely concerned about this sweeping change to music education that would cut the beauty of music in our schools to the core. When it comes to political positioning and proposed changes in law, I do not pretend to be well versed, but this is an area I am very deeply concerned about, and am confident about the negative effect it would have. Thank you, Ben Caudill

I am writing because I want to express my utmost concern for the recommended changes that are being considered today. As a teacher I have seen first hand how students learn and grow in a wide variety of classrooms. So many of our students thrive in classes like art, music, library, industrial arts, and health enhancement. They need a broad education where they can build on these skills. The language proposed today means that our Montana students lose access to so many opportunities. For many of our students these classes are where they shine and grow. As advocates for our students we can not allow changes that eliminate and take away opportunity for our youth. The fact that the proposed changes also grossly reduce access to school counselors is disheartening. As a state with such a high rate of suicide, reducing school counseling staff directly impacts students access to mental and emotional support, something that so many of our youth need. I am Montana born and raised and grew up in public education. I am so grateful for the BROAD education that I received. I was able to learn a musical instrument in middle school. I was taught how to cook and sew and paint and draw. My librarian taught me the joys of reading books, and my PE teacher instilled a love of being healthy and active. These are all invaluable skills that helped me become a well rounded individual and inspired me to become a teacher. I truly value public education and the access to ALL kinds of educational opportunities it provides. I want this for not only my children but all Montana public school students.

Please do not approve the proposed changes. Do not eliminate educational opportunities for our students. They deserve better. Courtney Carroll Mercer

Again please keep electives and credit requirements in place

I am opposed to the changes proposed for ch.55 of the education policy. Music and arts education have been shown to have major benefits to developing kids and encouraging a creative mindset. In addition these classes and the libraries have always provided a special place for students to express themselves. Please reconsider these changes and help keep those programs alive. Thank you for your time, Katie Sako Kalispell, mt

As a high school counselor for sixteen years and a classroom teacher for years prior, I have never experienced more teens contending with mental/emotional health issues. The reasons for this condition are varied, but need to be addressed in order for the next generation to develop into productive contributing members of society. Sadly, funding for our community mental health services continue to be cut by the legislatures. Most of our local clinical therapists are not accepting new clients, or have long "waitlists". This means schools, particularly school counselors, are often responsible for trying to serve these students struggling with life threatening issue of suicide ideation, brought on by depression. When a person struggles with suicidal thoughts and receives treatment, research shows that the thoughts just don't go away. Typically it takes consistent follow through using a Safety Plan, asking the necessary questions to determine risk while receiving medical and counseling therapy provided by trained clinical therapists. School counselors don't have enough time to see these struggling students often enough to make a marked difference in their depressive state, because they are spread too thin with large student to counselor ratios. Increasing these ratios will only hurt,

even eliminate the little access most students have for any means of mental health service. School counselors do it all! We support students to do their best in school, which means focusing on all facets of an individual, their social, emotional, mental and academic aspects. This requires time to get to know our students and develop trusting relationships where they feel comfortable discussing problems affecting all elements of their lives in order to work toward solutions. With greater counselor to student ratios this becomes exceedingly difficult or impossible. This year, we have experienced the need for lower school counselor to student ratio than ever before, because our school district has been in the middle of a suicide cluster this year. Our state has been in the top five for suicides per capita the past forty years. We have worked diligently to try to follow the recommended best practices in suicide prevention and response and yet here we are, scrambling to do whatever we can to try and save the lives of young people. Sadly, our efforts seemed to have failed a dozen of our students, recent graduates, and their parents this year. We are haunted by these stories, by our shortcomings, our what if scenarios. Even a very special school counseling colleague took their own life two years ago. Our teachers, parents, and community are struggling with secondary trauma from these deaths. Survivors of Suicide Loss are eight times more at risk of suicide ideation. Therefore, we need more school counselors, not fewer! I cannot believe our state superintendent, OPI, and members of this committee are considering cutting qualifications for school counselors and eliminating ratios. It takes highly trained and skilled school counselors to fulfill the responsibilities of our jobs. We really do save lives. Please do not increase our school counselor student ratios or eliminate qualifications. Sincerely, Michael Sherman, MS, MA Flathead High School Counselor Kalispell, MT

I am opposed to the changes proposed for ch.55 of the education policy. Music and arts education have been shown to have major benefits to developing kids and encouraging a creative mindset. In addition these classes and the libraries have always provided a special place for students to express themselves. Please reconsider these changes and help keep those programs alive. Thank you for your time, Connor Abel

I am opposed to the changes proposed for ch.55 of the education policy. Music and arts education have been shown to have major benefits to developing kids and encouraging a creative mindset. In addition these classes and the libraries have always provided a special place for students to express themselves. Please reconsider these changes and help keep those programs alive. Thank you for your time, Kevin

I am writing to implore you to not change these elective classes as they are absolutely necessary to the development of young minds. Subjects like music, art, I'll help to craft a more complete young mind. The loss of these subjects would be devastation as far as expressive nature of our young children. Please keep these things as there key to sell much more development than just the core subjects. Thank you.

10.55.905 GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

As regards (4), I believe that a student who is able to fulfill the requirements to graduate, should be allowed to graduate regardless of their time of enrollment. While I also acknowledge that the public education system may have a duty to be mindful of emotional and behavioral maturity of a student, the measure of such things may be beyond both the scope and concern of the educational system.

10.55.902 BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM: MIDDLE GRADES

I believe the removal of nearly all of these thoughtful, intrapersonal, interconnected considerations, is again a seemingly strategic attempt to degrade the effectiveness of the public education system - its design, delivery, and impact. (3e) Additionally, the almost total obliteration of electives such as visual arts, music, career and technical education, world languages, writing, dance, drama, finance, photography, and leadership would be a great detriment to the critical thinking, emotional development, and empathy of our students - and dare I say, some their dreams. The creativity and culture of both our state and country would suffer. (4b) I cannot fathom the removal of basic and invaluable offerings such as these. This seems the most blatant attack on public education. What is happening?! She surely seems to be wanting to lower the bar across the board here. I was always taught that we should always be raising the bar as educators - for ourselves, for our students, and for

the system. Here [system.here], she again seems at odds with all of that. I urge your reconsideration of these items. And perhaps Mrs. Arntzen's ability and desire to serve in the best interests of the public education system in Montana. Her past actions and present proposals seem to indicate otherwise.

David Overturf B.F.A. Drama (University of Montana - 95) B.S. Education (MSU - Billings - 96)

Please do not implement Supt. Arntzen's suggested changes to middle school curriculum. These changes would be only harmful to children! The ultimate goal seems to be an attempt to undermine our public school system; I can only assume for the purpose of promoting private and charter schools. As Montana's current Superintendent of Public Instruction, I am horrified at Ms. Arntzen's demonstrated lack of concern for the children and youth of our state. Julie Ludington Stevensville

I have received notice concerning changing the accreditation standards for middle schools in Montana. While I understand the staffing challenges and budget concerns, a pertinent metaphor for these changes is "throwing the baby out with the bath water." 1) Music programs are not frivolous. Children who learn music are developing their physical brains and their intellect. Learning to read music is like learning a foreign language. The musical notes, key signatures and tempo markings are all contained in the logic of music. It is also like learning another science as the musical conventions and symbols are equivalent to mathematical conventions and symbols. Music programs are a proven method for keeping children and young adults in school. Eliminating these and other art programs is counter to the idea of providing a well rounded education. 2) Eliminating librarians is also counterproductive. Without these literacy specialists, we will see lower reading and writing scores. This is not the stated goal of our education system at all. 3) Eliminating school counselors is a dangerous idea. Adolescent children are often emotional, confused, and full of self doubt. Trained counselors can help those kids. The result is few class disruptions, a better teaching environment and children who can have their emotional growth pair with their intellectual growth. Gutting students' access to counseling is a bad idea especially when we live in this high stress, post-Covid world. I do understand that there are budget concerns and there are teacher shortages in Montana. However, I believe that these changes dumb down our kids. The Montana Office of Public Instruction should be looking for ways to enhance the education of Montanans. These changes are not geared toward better education and finer schools. Quite the opposite, they are obvious and calculated methods to undermine our public education programs. Trying to fix teacher shortages by providing a substandard education kills the goose that lays the golden eggs. Or as I said above, we are throwing the baby out with the bathwater. There is one more question that I have: How much notice did the Department give for public comment? It seems like this came out of nowhere. Sincerely, Doug Badenoch

This is not ok. Students need activity. They need us to promote healthy living. Some students don't get any other activity other than what is provided in Public Education. I use Heart Rate monitors in my class so the students can have an immediate response to how they feel and can relate it to the activity they are doing. Please don't cut this valuable class for our youth. Erin Evans Health Enhancement

I am sending you this letter to tell you that I strongly object to the language that has been struck by Elise Arntzen in preparation for today's NRM Committee Meeting. I have been an educator for 19 years and I can testify stripping down the current language with no specifications or protections greatly jeopardizes the integrity of our entire educational system in Montana. Striking the language takes away from educating the whole child. Striking the language will take away quality education and services from children. Striking the language will put children at an academic and civic disadvantage. Please support and maintain our fine art, music, and career readiness electives, maintain our student ratios for our librarians and counseling services, and clearly define credit requirements to ensure that every Montana student has access to the education and services they deserve. Please note my strong objection to these baseless changes and feel free to reach out if you have any further questions. Sadly, I cannot attend tonight's meeting as I am a track & field coach at HMS and we have our first track meet at 3:30 pm. Please accept this letter as the objection I would have made in person were I able. Thank you for your time, Lori Smith

As teachers in our local schools, we feel it is necessary to impart caution in your plan to change, minimize or eliminate any academic programs from the curriculum. This includes any art, library, music, and other elective adjustments you may be considering. As a unified staff, we strive daily to help our students meet academic goals set by the government. Each class, at every level, helps them to achieve to the best of their ability. To minimize class requirements would break the chain of academic progression interrupting their success and further impacting the academic gaps that they may have. In addition, the extracurricular classes that are offered allow students to expand their skills including critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, and classes like shop help keep our rural students in schools and interested, moreover these types, of course, provide them with life skills that they will use in their career paths. It is also experienced here, that these classes help students redirect their energy so that returning to the core subjects is more fluid, and brings about greater academic understanding because of the time in creative classes. Elective classes including art and music, also offer a therapeutic environment to stimulate creativity which allows students to break the chain of depression. In conclusion, please reconsider making any academic or elective adjustments to the state requirements. Our students deserve as many opportunities as can possibly be offered. Thank you for your time.

Kathleen Hughes, DEA Acting President Dodson Public Schools

I am deeply disappointed by the proposed changes to the accreditation standards. These changes are happening too quickly, without the opportunity for teachers to weigh in. Reading through these changes, it appears they will vastly change the quality of education for our students. Please consider giving more time and thought to these changes. As an educator, I think much more research and trouble-shooting needs to be done. Please consider voting no on these proposed changes.

Blessings, Angie Langeliers Will James Choir and General Music

As we look to create learners and creative thinkers it is imperative that we continue to not only offer elective programs but maintain the requirements for specific electives. Middle school is a time for students to be exposed to new modalities, ways of learning, and subject matter. Taking away the requirements would mean that students will not all equally benefit from this exposure. Removing pathways to electives and subjects in public school will widen the gaps between our most and least advantaged students. Maintaining credit for the electives means that all students must be exposed to some new subjects. It creates an environment where they can learn about subjects they did not even know could be studied. This creates passion for learning and opens the world to children as they move forward towards High School, college or work, and beyond. I hope that you will maintain our Middle School elective credit system and respect the passions and learning of all of our students. Thank you, Miriam Richmond

I would like to voice my disapproval of the proposed changes that would eliminate specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools. I urge the committee to stand up to Superintendent Arntzen's changes and speak on behalf of the parents of Montana children. I have two children in the Missoula school district who both love these important programs and whose overall success, not just in school but in life in general, will be bolstered by these programs. Please do not let Superintendent Arntzen destroy our well-rounded curriculum that strives to accommodate all students' interests and learning styles. Thank you, Marcy Ballman Missoula

I am Hunter Grimes, a recent graduate of the University of Montana and alumna of Whitefish High School and Whitefish Middle School. I would like to voice my opposition to the proposed changes recommended by the Superintendent in regards to changing the requirements for specific electives like art, music, career education, world languages, etc. As someone who has benefited greatly from the inclusion of these programs in my educational experience, I believe that dropping the requirement for specific elective offerings at the state level

would be a mistake with huge repercussions. While I understand that the intent is to give individual school districts more freedom on what electives to offer, with budget cuts affecting all levels of education, many districts may forgo supporting essential programs like music. In my experience, music was the single greatest factor in determining my success in middle school and preparation for high school. I moved to Montana at the beginning of middle school and the one thing that helped me connect to my new community was being involved in band. Without music programs at my middle school, it would have been a struggle to adjust to a new environment, which would be true whether you're moving to Montana from out of state or from one city to the next. Additionally, music classes taught me more than just how to play an instrument. From music you learn respect, organization, time management, commitment, and hard work. You learn about history, language, and other cultures, with my own experiences including learning the history and culture of jazz and Latin music. In my opinion, no other class at the middle school level can teach all of those life skills both in and out of the classroom. Removing music at the middle school level would leave students unprepared for both high school and college. Music classes were a constant part of my high school schedule, something I could rely on, and helped me to balance out a schedule full of rigorous science courses. Success in music programs is one way that students can stand out in college applications, especially for prestigious universities. But if Montana students are only beginning to learn an instrument in high school, they will be behind the rest of the nation and unable to compete against students from other states. Additionally, it would require more teachers/classes to have students just beginning to learn an instrument in high school because they could not be in the same class as junior/senior students who had been learning for years. Students learn valuable foundations at the middle school level that are essential to their success in high school programs and beyond. Without the preparations in middle school, high school bands would be unable to play for community events like Veteran's Day or school events such as graduation. Overall, high school programs would be severely impacted by the changes proposed by this committee. I credit my experience in middle school band, which helped me to develop into a more rounded student, for the success I've had today. After continuing music into high school, I chose to attend the University of Montana and received a scholarship to be in the Grizzly Marching Band. This is one way I was able to afford my college education, and would not have been possible without the foundations provided by middle school and high school programs. Additionally, my continued involvement in music, despite not being a music major, allowed me to interact with a diverse group of students and feel more connected to the University of Montana community. Music also gave me an outlet and helped me to succeed within my major, Microbiology and Pre-medicine studies. Recently the University of Montana highlighted by journey in science and music as a way to encourage more students to stay involved in activities outside of their majors: <https://www.umt.edu/news/2022/05/051322band.php> [umt.edu] Music classes aren't just for students hoping to go into careers in music, they're for the preparation and success of all students. That preparation must start at the middle school level to make Montana students successful when compared to other states. I hope you will reconsider the proposed changes to the requirements of offerings for middle schools in Montana at the state level. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or would like to discuss the matter further. Hunter Grimes University of Montana

I am writing as a concerned parent with two kids currently enrolled at Jefferson Elementary in Helena, Montana. After having read the proposed changes by Superintendent of Public Instruction Elsie Arntzen, I am shocked to see how pared down options would become regarding the elective programs such as foreign languages, arts, music, theatre etc. The elective programs may be deemed by some as excessive or unnecessary however I feel they are imperative in order to provide young learners with a balanced and well-rounded education. Furthermore, I am disappointed with respect to the proposed elimination of ratio standards for school counselors and librarians. Our kids deserve access and opportunity to literary diversity and modern technologies. Removing the ratio standards for librarians reduces access to learning tools which are essential in an educational setting. In the modern era we supposedly live in, kids ought to have reasonable access to professional counseling services in our public schools as well. With intolerance, cyber-bullying and unfortunately teen suicides on the rise, I feel it is unconscionable to limit these resources to our children. In closing, I urge Superintendent Arntzen to re-evaluate these proposed changes and consider the future of our children. They will have a tough battle ahead of them as it is. Let's not limit their possibilities right out of the gate! Adam Bender

I'm writing you asking that the committee please maintain and preserve certain credit and elective requirements in middle schools. As a citizen of Montana, and now a professional musician, who grew up within the public school system in the 90s and early 00s, I cannot emphasize enough the impact that the general music program in my elementary school, and the music elective offerings/requirements in middle school and high school had on the trajectory of my professional life. I subsequently went on to get a doctorate in music performance and now teach- passing on my deep philosophy that music MUST be a part of every young child's overall education and that this must happen within the accessible public school system. How heartbreaking to see proposed changes leaving these programs on the chopping block for school districts all across Montana whose budgets would not allow for an optional elective to be included. I am seeing in real time the effects removing the arts from the education of our people is doing to our communities. It is devastating. Thank you for your time and your service,
Zo Manfredi, D.M.A. Teaching Artist of Violin and Viola

I have been an elementary and middle school Health and PE teacher for 10 years, and am an adjunct professor at Montana State University for the College of Education, Health Enhancement Department. The childhood obesity epidemic continues, and affects 14.4 million children and teens ages 2-19 (2018)¹. The sedentary lifestyle we lead is worse than ever, and even in the active community of Livingston, children are entranced by TV and video games. Between the ages of 11-14 children spend an average of 9 hours in front of a screen daily, 5 of which are watching TV². During COVID children were put into a situation no one should be in; kids could no longer socialize with their friends or participate in team sports, therefore removing opportunity for the development of conflict resolution skills, teamwork, and developing a love for sports and movement. This was an enormous problem... and now we are considering taking that away by choice?? To become well-adjusted, healthy adults, we need children to develop confidence for, and an intrinsic passion for movement, and they need to know how to play/work well with others. As a professional, I argue these are two of the key components of Physical Education. In addition to those skills, regular physical activity will help children have healthy bodies over the lifespan. During the middle school pubescent years specifically, regular exercise improves academic scores, self-confidence, lowers depression, and increases self-efficacy in athletics, among others. The current requirement for 1 semester of 225 minutes per week is a bare minimum for what middle school students need. Middle School Health is a class that should absolutely be required for all students. At the point in kids' lives when they are experimenting with friendships, sex, drugs, and any form of independence they can, we cannot turn our back on them. In teens between the ages of 15-19, 42-44% of them reported to have engaged in sex³. Eighty two percent of parents reported they have talked to their child about topics related to sexuality, and only 60% have discussed birth control⁴. Teens are sexually active earlier than we like to think, and a large percentage of them are not learning how to postpone sex or avoid pregnancy. As an elementary PE teacher I can tell you that fewer than 25% of my students understand what healthy nutrition is, how it healthy & unhealthy foods affects our bodies, and what healthy choices look like. Mental health is at an all-time low for teens, and they need resources on how to optimize their mental health and get help when needed. It is our job as Health Educators to teach students how to make healthy decisions for their bodies. We would never throw a sailor into a boat without teaching them how to sail. How can we expect children to grow into healthy adults if we don't teach them strategies for being healthy? I fear for the long-term consequences of a decision to remove Health and PE from required curriculum. We need to put kids first. The negative effects of removing these opportunities from our curriculum are massive and beyond what we can predict. Please, help our kids grow into healthy adults. Sincerely, Emily Raymond P.E. Teacher

I'm emailing to reject Superintendent Elsie Arntzen's recommendations to eliminate specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools. Please maintain and preserve the current electives and credit requirements for middle schools. Thank you, Anne LaCroix

Removing music from Elementary and Middle School required curriculum would be a devastating blow to the overall success of our education system. Starting with the well-known fact that music makes you smarter,

which has been proven in testing program statistics and development of our students. As a music educator for 37 years and supporter of the arts for an additional 10 years, I can attest to the successful influence of music on our children's lives in numerous ways, from better thinking skills, better teamwork, better attitudes, and an enhanced feeling of belonging to the school system and to a highly worthwhile endeavor. I have students who remind me and thank me often. To remove music from those early years of the curriculum would lead to a severe decrease in the quality of high school programs and many would be non-existent. If some schools, mainly the smaller ones, were not required to provide these essential programs, they would drop them. That would be like dropping math at that level and expecting the high schools to still produce students to engineering schools or medical schools or trade schools that need those skills. On another level, something that matters to many is their athletic programs. This decision would eliminate those pep bands that so many communities consider of high importance to their existence. The music programs we have also give a great sense of accomplishment and belonging to those students who are not necessarily athletically gifted in very positive and extremely long-term and often life-time endeavors, whether they are professional or just hobbyists. To remove the curriculum requirement for music would be a tragedy to many, as it is a major factor in many students' reasons to enjoy and be a part of something special in their school. The lessons of music are irreplaceable to a well-rounded education opportunity. Keep music in our schools at the forefront. Rather than diminish music education's very important role, let's enhance it. John Novotny Big Timber, Mt.

My name is Wendy Monson. I have five children who range in age from 28 to 12 who have graduated and currently attend Bozeman schools. We are an academic family, involved in music and athletics, and all the electives we have been offered! We have lived in Bozeman for 30 years, so we have seen many changes take place with both administration and curriculum changes. I have been greatly involved and interested in many of the changes. Some have been good, others not so good. I also sing with, and am the educational outreach Director with Intermountain Opera Bozeman. I don't know if the powers that be are aware of what incredible music programs we have in the Bozeman school district and surrounding areas. I regularly bring in opera singers with IOB from around the nation, and Europe into the top high school chamber choir, the seventh grade classrooms, and we have an annual fifth grade program at the Willson auditorium. Many times the seventh grade choirs and High School Choir's will sing for our guest artists, many who perform for Intermountain Opera Bozeman during the off-season of their Metropolitan Opera contract. They are ALWAYS impressed with the caliber of our teachers and youth. This is timely and apparent, most recently with Bozeman high schools sweeping first place trophies in the Anaheim music competition one month ago, also being the top qualifying choir for Carnegie Hall next year. I know our wonderful administrators have issues they need to address, especially with our teacher shortage and budget issues. Our Bozeman community rose up with compelling, overflowing attendance at our school board meeting just last month, protesting changes and cuts that were proposed, which would negatively cut and impact the music and arts programs we have here in Bozeman. I have many issues with Elsie's proposed changes that would negatively impact the music and arts programs here in Bozeman, which would have a domino effect in many areas. I will probably forward you the letter I wrote to our school board last month addressing this particular issue.

School librarians are essential workers. We can't make cuts there. I don't understand the addition about American Indian culture? Why specifically point that out in the mission statement of education? That's too political and should not be addressed at this educational level in the school mission statement, but continue to be incorporated as it always has been in the classroom per curriculum content.

I echo all of Tammy Phillippi's concerns, I'm sure you received her email as well. PLEASE do not make these cuts to the access our students should have to our music and arts programs. The Bozeman community made this clear at the last board meeting. Please do not take these changes up at a state level. This will have a severe negative impact on our students academically, socially, emotionally, etc. Wish I had more time to be specific, but I understand this is a timely matter. Thank you so much for your consideration! Wendy Monson

As someone born and raised in Butte, Montana, I am very disappointed to hear about the changes possibly being made to our schools' elective programs. My sister was killed by a drunk driver when I was a junior in high school. The only thing that got me through school during that difficult time was my art and photography classes. I feel so lucky and blessed to have been able to have a safe outlet as a teenager struggling with grief and loss at such a young age. It is my hope that you will not make these changes. There are so many kids with difficult home lives and it is my hope that students will have these electives to help get them through the day. Please feel free to reach out and contact me if you'd like. Thank you for your consideration Jenna McCarthy

Superintendent Arntzen is recommending the elimination of elective programs in middle school. Music, Visual arts, career education and other electives balance out the academic program especially needed for young pre-teen and teens. My granddaughter is enrolled in all of the core subjects, which includes upper level math. She does well in all of them. But as a 12 yr.-old sixth grader, she likes and excels in music and art as well. It's a balance that has made entering first year of middle school less chaotic and more positive. This is to ask that the Negotiated Rule Making Committee maintain and preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schoolers in Montana.

Thank you. Yvonne Hauwiller Bozeman, MT

I am writing to submit a public comment to the Negotiated Rule Making Committee as it considers the proposal made by Superintendent Arntzen with regard to elective offerings in Montana middle schools. I encourage the committee to reject this proposal in favor of maintaining specific elective requirements in Montana middle schools. My son has been part of the Montana elementary school system since kindergarten, and is currently in 4th grade. While he is nervous about moving into middle school after next year, the one thing that excites him is the opportunity for music and other cultural elective offerings. The statewide commitment to the humanities, languages, and career/technical education was a major factor in our choice to raise our family in Montana--and as the median age in Montana is already the highest in the west and ever increasing, and Montana high schools graduate fewer and fewer students per cohort, attracting families to the state is a major consideration in educational regulation as we work to support our graying population. While I understand that more rural and under-funded schools frequently do not have the resources to comply with the rule as currently written, more subtle changes can be made to allow flexibility based on size and budget, rather than imposing yet another blanket rule in the opposite direction. Thank you for the opportunity to comment--Audrey Elias Missoula, MT

Please preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. I wholeheartedly disagree with the language changes proposed by Supt. Arntzen that would eliminate specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools and prevent student access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses. Also, I would like a link to the upcoming meeting for public comment. Thank you, Katrina Weckenbrock

I am writing to you today to please ask that you keep the elective classes and staff for the middle school. Those things are all so amazing for our students!! Thank you for your time! Jenn Smith

What? What?? No electives, librarians or counselors?? What??? This is ridiculous. I mean asinine. The state has lost its ever-lovin' mind. Find a way! Electives were the fun part of getting into Jr High from grade school (yes, I'm old and will have grandkids in the system). Librarians are a fundamental resource person for teachers AND students and help everything stay interesting and honest. COUNSELORS?? WTH?? Belgrade, Montana resident

I am writing to ask you to maintain the specific elective and credit requirements for middle schools. As an educator and parent, I believe that music, art, and library are important electives in our Montana schools. I

also value the guidance counselor positions in middle schools. Thank you for this consideration, Christine Miller

It has recently come to my attention that the Montana Superintendent of Public Instruction is recommending elimination of PE requirements at the Middle School level. Please maintain the Health Enhancement requirement for middle schools. My daughter is a 7th grader. This age is at great risk for developing mental health issues, weight issues, stress, etc. Physical activity is a huge tool that helps reduce all of these things. Some kids' only option to get exercise is at school. School has become an uninviting place for some children. There is so much focus on academics that PE, music and art programs are constantly under attack. Our children need these programs. Not every kid is academically inclined and our children need these programs to be well rounded. I am not sure what the reasoning is behind this proposal, but you are way off of what our children need to succeed and flourish in life. Respectfully submitted, Sonya Wyman Emigrant MT

Our rural state ranks 48th in education already, and now we are looking at degrading ourselves further by recommending the elimination of specific elective programs and credit requirements in middle schools by preventing student access to music, visual arts, career education, and many other courses. We must maintain these specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. How can we abandon and ignore the passion and growth of young minds at such a vulnerable stage of development? Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations to forgo counselors etc. is a total disconnect with what's going on in the world today. Mental Health trumps all cards when it comes to wellness and success. And School to Work jobs??? They are the backbone of our nation. I don't imagine the governor would like the sounds of that with his promotion of the Trades industry. I have been an educator for 41 years, and I am so disappointed in this stance by Elsie Arntzen to minimize the value of electives, and choice, with the classes that our young people wish to take. Please do not consider these recommendations! Sincerely, Denise Struznik Butte High School Librarian

Nationally, 40% of youth are overweight or obese and 70% do not meet nationally guidelines for physical activity. Children in K-12 schools have shorter life expectancies than their parents (first time in modern day United States this has happened) due to diseases related to poor nutrition and lack of physical activity. The largest decline in physical activity occurs during puberty (i.e., middle school). Physical Education is a mechanism for helping students achieve health enhancing levels of physical activity. Removing PE from MS in Montana is putting your students at increased health risks. Vote for PE. Thank you, Cate Egan

Currently, there's a proposal to remove the requirement at the state level for elementary and middle schools to offer specific electives including music. This would leave it up to individual districts to decide which electives, if any, to provide and support. As we know with budget cuts at all levels of education, it's likely that a change in rules at the state level would result in the loss of music programs locally. We can't have great high school and university music programs without building on the foundations set in elementary and middle school. Please do not remove the requirement to offer specific electives for elementary and middle schools. Thank you. Mary Kay Haney

As a parent of a graduating senior, I am horrified at the thought of not having all the music classes available to the next classes coming up, that my son was able to take during his jr. high and high school years. Music kept him engaged and interested. Without music and the arts, reading writing and arithmetic are core but not always engaging. The caliber of music teachers is amazing and if they were forced to go to part time, I know our school district would lose them and that would be a huge hole to our community and our schools. Please reconsider the curriculum choices you are suggesting. Music is an essential part of some children's public school experience. By introducing them at an early age to music and art, it makes them appreciate and understand the world a bit better. Thank you, Lisa Calaway Whitefish MT.

I am a retired Montana Math and Science teacher, as well as a tennis coach, with 30 years devoted to Billings public schools. I also coached at Billings Central, a parochial school. Additionally, I am personally the beneficiary of 12 years of School District #2 education as is my daughter, Carissa, whose graduation from medical school I just attended this month of May. I could not be more opposed to the short-sighted notion of axing the requirement to offer music/art at the primary and middle school levels.

Students should have a variety of opportunities presented to them that can lead to a love of school and learning versus the polar opposite. I did not personally teach at the primary level, but I did witness over and over again at the high school level that those kids involved with music were typically stand-outs in many ways. The self-discipline required to learn an instrument and to be a part of a performance (Team Work!) group bodes well for future successes in life. I credit learning music from a young age as more instrumental than any other subject area in my daughter's success. That is a math-science guy's honest evaluation! Yours truly, David Klarich

As a mother of a daughter who is now a doctor and a wife of a retired high school science and math teacher, it concerns me to learn that music and other electives might be cut from our Montana state primary schools. Our daughter developed her brain cells far more effectively by learning to play music from an early age and she found joy in the process of playing music during her formative and teenaged years. She met outstanding life long friends in her music classes and her music experience has made her a more well rounded, empathetic and understanding human being. As a doctor in Residency, she works and studies in the mental health field. She knows how music is essential to mental and emotional health and well being. Scientific studies prove that music is necessary for human beings and society to experience a full, meaningful and happy life. Our children are our future. Please share my sentiments with those who have the power to impact this important decision. Thank you, Elizabeth Klarich

Health Enhancement (PE) should be a requirement for middle school. Physical education is one of the most integral aspects of middle school education, as well as elementary and high school. The physical benefits are obvious but the mental and emotional values of PE are unmatched. Exercise improves mental health by reducing anxiety, depression, and negative mood. In turn, physical education can improve self-esteem and cognitive function, traits that especially our middle schoolers lack in today's society. Health Enhancement (PE) should undoubtedly be a requirement of middle school education. Kijrsten Mercer, RN BSN School Nurse / Safety Coordinator

It has come to our attention that you are recommending that the Middle School Requirement for PE be eliminated. As you know the current requirement is 225 minutes/week for a semester. This is not in the best interest of Montana students. The physical education and health professionals in Montana are dedicated and provide high-quality, equitable standards-based Health and Physical Education. The pandemic serves to remind us of the necessity and significance of Health and Physical Education to daily, core curriculum instruction. Healthy students are students who are able to learn. Empowering all students with the skills needed to make healthy choices for themselves, their families and communities will help move us forward and ensure learning continues. Healthy students are students with strength of mind and body. Health and Physical Educators are committed to mitigating the health impacts of the pandemic - stress, depression, anxiety, trauma and isolation. To eliminate one or both of these disciplines would not serve the health of students. We ask you to provide and make progressive steps towards ensuring optimal student health in these times. We believe that all disciplines compliment one another and that all are vital to educating the whole child. Focusing on the social and emotional health of students should be the priority and physical education and health lessons can and do include instruction in mindfulness; mediation and yoga; stress management; resiliency, courage and grit; self-awareness, and self-management; on-line safety and digital citizenship; and conflict resolution. We ask you to maintain the Health Enhancement requirement for middle schools and ask you to focus your efforts on providing resources for educators and families across Montana as well as supporting Health and Physical Education during this pandemic. My best, Maria Melchionda

I am writing in support of keeping Health Enhancement education in middle school. This age group needs the opportunity to MOVE throughout their day. Movement organizes the brain and provides a healthy outlet for students. As a matter of fact, I would propose we consider improving our Health Enhancement education by offering more outdoor field trips and exercise opportunities. Kelly Arterburn

My name is Rob Luft and I teach PE and Health at Lewis & Clark Middle School in Billings Montana. I just recently heard that there might be a chance that middle school PE could be eliminated from our schools. I have been a middle school teacher for 23 years. When I started teaching in Billings we had 5 PE teachers to cover all of our 7th and 8th grade PE classes. This also included the self contained special education kids. We saw all of our kids every day. Over the course of my teaching career in Billings we have been eliminating PE for these kids and I can really tell the difference. We are now down to 3 teachers covering all grades. We now have 6-8 grades at our school. We run an A/B day schedule so that we can accommodate all of our students. We each teach around 220 students with half coming to our classes on A day and the other coming on B day. So basically we have cut our class time from one year to one semester. Our kids have become less and less active over my career. Many do nothing outside of school and when they come to PE class, this might be the only time they get some movement and raise their heart rate. I am not sure why the subject of eliminating middle school PE has come up but if we do anything it should be to mandate that there is more PE for these kids. Many hate to exercise because of various reasons so if we take PE out of the schools, we will have generations of people who will not have any physical activity in their lives. The elementary kids in Billings only get 30 minutes per week of PE. Nowhere near the number of minutes (60 per day) that the CDC recommends for kids 6-17 years old. It is my hope that you seriously disregard this elimination of PE so that our kids can have a chance at being healthy.

I would like to express my concerns regarding the health enhancement program in Montana middle schools. It is a proven fact that students that are more active perform better than those who are inactive. Also activity improves mental health! The state of mental health in our schools has deteriorated over the years. It will be a total travesty to remove physical education from the curriculum. Please do not allow this to happen!! Kelly Duneman Health Enhancement Teacher

I am writing to voice my support for music, library, and other electives in the school system; especially in middle school. I can not express my disappointment to you if these are removed from school. I expect more from our leaders, and especially those in charge of our children's future. Thank you for your time Megan Wight

This is not the time to narrow the options for our children. School is the place to learn all the subjects and how to be critical thinkers. Art, music, and electives are imperative. Please maintain these electives in middle schools Rebecca ballantyne

Please keep important electives, including art and music, in required elementary and middle school curriculums statewide. These electives are important for students to receive a well-rounded education. Music in particular is related to mathematics, and as such, should continue to be a required curriculum offering. In addition, the inclusion of activities such as art, which encourage creative expression, is critical to students' ability to process the world around them, especially in these difficult times.

It is also important that there is continuity between districts in our highly mobile society. Parents should be able to count on a basic level of consistency in curriculum, including art, music and physical education, should their families need to move between districts. Please leave these important programs within the required curriculum in our elementary and middle schools. Thank you, Marilyn Nelson

I am writing to express my deep regret that OPI would propose eliminating middle school electives and critical professional positions that support both parents and teachers. After the pandemic, we need MORE COUNSELORS and LIBRARIANS, and students need more opportunities to explore their interests at earlier grades than ever before. The electives that my boys took in middle school kick started a life-time interest in music, STEM and culinary arts. This is a time to step forward and support students and teachers and say NO to OPI. Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Best, Susan Byorth

I am writing in opposition to the proposal to remove music and art electives as mandatory in elementary and middle schools. These subjects are as critical to child development as reading, writing, and physical education and local schools should not have the option to offer them up during budget cuts. Save the arts in schools! Thank you, Carissa Welsh

Good morning. I am writing today to strongly encourage the state to continue to support music and arts curricula in elementary schools across Montana. As a college professor, married to a high school teacher, with three children who have attended or do attend public schools in Montana, I see it as crucial to introduce students to the arts at an early age. If this proposal is adopted, individual schools and districts will be able to choose which electives they offer. In today's budgetary landscape, many schools will face pressure to eliminate curricular options that are viewed by the public as "not crucial" to public education. But those of us that work in education understand that elective courses like music and art are not optional for many students. These subjects not only enhance the standard "three Rs" of education, they serve as supports to students who struggle in school. Whether those struggles are due to learning disabilities, neurodiversity or other factors, the arts encourage young children to be excited about school and they learn tools in those electives that help them succeed in other areas of their education. I speak from experience. As the parent of a neurodiverse child, who has had an IEP since he was 8, I know that the arts made all of the difference in his education. He will be attending the University of Montana in the fall, as a freshman Art major. Two years ago, I wasn't sure he'd complete high school, let alone go away to college. His passions are art and music. Without those courses, he would have hated school. In fact, it has really only been this year, when he has had the opportunity to take college courses through the University Connections program, that he discovered that art and music are legitimate disciplines with future opportunities. Had he not had the opportunity to develop his art and musical talents in elementary school, he would never have pursued these interests. The arts are central to education.

They develop different parts of the brain and encourage the kind of well-rounded citizens we need to cultivate in this state and in the nation. If a message comes from the state that these curricula are optional, it will negatively affect the students of Montana. Thank you for your consideration, Joy Honea

I'm sorry to shout, but it is extremely important that we keep music and art electives as a mandatory component of elementary and middle schools. The fact that the state is even considering cutting these makes me extremely sad for our future. Not only for the chances that these children will miss, but for the chances we all may miss with the lack of a foundation for arts in the education of our youngest. Please don't let that happen. Ashley Dodd Gallatin County resident

I'm writing to insist that we keep music/arts in elementary and middle schools! We can't have great high school and university music programs without building on the foundations set in elementary and middle school. I benefited greatly from my elementary and middle school orchestra experiences, even though I didn't continue to play much longer after that. Those programs are vital to so many! Do not change the rule! Hayley Kemmick Attorney

Currently, there's a proposal to remove the requirement at the state level for elementary and middle schools to offer specific electives including music. This would leave it up to individual districts to decide which electives, if any, to provide and support. As we know with budget cuts at all levels of education, it's likely that a change in rules at the state level would result in the loss of music programs locally. We can't have great high school and university music programs without building on the foundations set in elementary and middle school. Please keep music in our elementary, middle and high schools. Studies show how important these modalities are, let's not leave our Montana kids in the dark ages. Thank you, Kristen & Nathan Blanding

I received very disturbing news last night that you are recommending the elimination of the required physical education minutes at the middle school level for the children of Montana. I am not sure why this proposal is even being presented. There is overwhelming research that our nation's youth are overweight and obesity is directly linked to the lack of physical activity in their daily life (National PA Plan, 2018). There is also evidence that physical activity helps battle the increasing mental health issues facing our children today (Hillman, et al., 2014). Lastly, the CDC (2021) and the Society of Health and Physical Educators recommends a minimum of 150 minutes a week of physical education for elementary school students, Montana does not even require that, and 225 minutes a week for middle and high school students, why would you take away an Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) core curriculum class? (Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) states, "The term 'well-rounded education' means courses, activities, and programming in subjects such as ... health, physical education ..." (S. 1177-298 Sec. 4108). Structured physical education is also listed as a program that supports safe and healthy students (S. 1177-178. Sec. 4108). As stated above, physical education is considered a core subject in the ESSA Act. Besides being a core curriculum class, why are you ignoring the mounds of data that connects physical activity to increasing academic scores and lowering mental health issues.

I have attached two articles regarding this matter. Healthier students are better learners: A missing link in school reforms to close the achievement gap (Basch, C.E., 2011) The association between school-based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance: A systematic review of the literature (Rasberry, C.N, Lee, S.M., Robin, L., Laris, B.A., Russell, L.A., Coyle, K.K., & Nihiser, J.A. (2011) Also, The American Heart Association (AHA, 2015) has a position paper titled Increasing and Improving Physical Education and Physical Activity in Schools: Benefits for Children's Health and Educational Outcomes states that "Physical education in the nation's schools is an important part of a student's comprehensive, well-rounded education program and a means of positively affecting lifelong health and well-being. The American Heart Association, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, and the American Diabetes Association will continue to support standards-based, robust, more frequent physical education and physical activity in schools. By addressing physical education across the country — the educational component, accountability, as well as the amount of activity and time spent — policymakers,

decision makers, and teachers will maximize children's potential for a lifetime of physical activity, health, and wellness."

Physical Education teachers so much more than physical activity. In PE class students are learning to be active but they are also learning how to get along with others, how to build confidence, to set and reach a goal, how to make friends. I would have thought the lessons we learned during the Covid-19 shut down would have shown us the importance of physical education. I am writing to show my support for physical education and to request this ridiculous proposal of eliminating the required minutes of middle school physical education be voted down. The physical harm it would do to our students may be irreversible, but it will also have a mental and physical effect on our student as well as the educators in Montana. If you are looking for the best possible education and opportunities for the students, teacher and families of Montana, this would be the exact opposite of the best. Please considering removing this recommendation from the meeting. Karie Lee Orendorff, PhD Assistant Professor, Program Director of Health Enhancement

I'm not entirely sure at what point Montana educators overhead decided that the arts weren't enriching for our children but I'm writing to share with you my own opinions. I realize that the education system is merely in place because we're required to have one, but to assume that the arts aren't imperative for children is completely asinine. I was in fact a student of Elsie Arntzen in 6th grade. I can tell you from a students perspective, and now from a parents perspective that her view of what school should be is completely wrong. Elsie doesn't care about our children, she's only ever cared about one thing her pocketbook. While studies showing the benefit of arts to children in k-12 are limited I can share with you the following. It's quite obvious that schools that are failing NCLB are also failing their children in this department as well because they're too busy focusing on getting test scores up, instead of worrying about children's actual well being. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2019/02/12/new-evidence-of-the-benefits-of-arts-education/> [brookings.edu] The emotional toll that standardized testing takes on our children is already too much and now you want to take away the small barely there joys away from their educational experience. That's awful

It has come to my attention that Superintendent of Public Instruction, Elsie Arntzen is recommending that the Middle School requirement for physical education be eliminated. I am writing to you from the east coast, from Connecticut, to speak up against this ridiculous idea. To eliminate a vital part of a student's wellness during the school day would contribute to the already low social and emotional well-being of students. The physical education curriculum is considered a core subject in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and mountains of research suggest that physical activity and movement during the course of a student's day contributes to increased test scores, increased academic learning, lowers depression, anxiety and depression and lowers absenteeism (Basch, C.E. (2011), Bradley, B.J., & Greene, A.C. (2017), Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), (2019). Rasberry, C.N, Lee, S.M., Robin, L., Laris, B.A., Russell, L.A., Coyle, K.K., & Nihiser, J.A. (2011)). The many benefits of a student participating in physical education are outlined in the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's 2013 publication "A Guide for Developing Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs". The benefits of the physical education curriculum can be found everywhere. Research has also been conducted to show that a simple increase in recess time has suggested to increase academic learning (CDC, 2010) and those school districts that cut or lowered their time allotted for recess and physical education suffered a decrease in standardized test scores. As schoolteachers across the world work twice as hard to increase the mental and physical health of children so that we can help students get back to the business of learning and being happy, I am outraged by the thought of cutting physical education at the middle school level in Montana. Please feel free to contact me directly for more information regarding why our students' mental and physical health should always be of everyone's first concern. In good health, Amy Gagnon, Ed.D Past President CTAHPERD

I am currently a high school health enhancement teacher in Livingston, Montana. I am 100% AGAINST the removal of PE requirements for middle school students (or any aged students, for that matter). Physical education is more than just playing games,

especially in middle school. These teachers use this time to help teach students how to exercise and enjoy it. During this time, teenage bodies are growing and changing so much. Middle school students need this time for physical activity, as well as health classes that help teach them about their bodies, hormones, stress, mental health and many other important topics. I believe that removing requirements for middle school PE would be extremely detrimental to, not only overall physical health, but mental health as well. I have seen first hand how physical activity during the school day can relieve stress and anxiety. PE is also essential for being able to introduce students to lifetime healthy activities, such as skiing, cross country skiing, bike riding, and others. It has been proven time and time again that physical activity only has positive effects on students. University of Rochester Medical Center cites that daily physical activity for teenagers, not only promotes healthy body weight, but also improves self-image, reduces high blood pressure, releases tension, improves sleep, reduces stress, and reduces anxiety and depression (University of Rochester Medical Center, n.d.). The CDC recommends 1 hour of physical activity daily for kids ages 6-17. It has been shown that kids with a higher level of fitness not only reap the benefits physically, but also have improved academic performances and memory. Participating in regular physical activity as a child and teenager increases the likelihood that those habits will be carried into adulthood, thus lessening the chances of serious health conditions, such as heart disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). For a growing number of students, the physical activity that they participate in during their required PE class is the ONLY physical activity they participate in each day. When students reach middle school, they are no longer participating in planned recess times, so a PE class during the day may truly be the only time they are moving around. As stated above, this physical activity transfers to the classrooms in a positive way. Removing this requirement from our middle school population will only hurt the overall physical health, mental health and academic achievements of our students. We have already lowered the pe credit requirement for high school to just 1 credit over 4 years, let's not continue to lower this standard in our middle schools as well. I urge you to deny this recommendation and continue to strive to keep our Montana kids healthy by giving them an avenue to learn, explore, and develop and love for healthy lifestyles. Sincerely, Megan Burns Park High Health Enhancement Teacher

I am writing today as the Executive Director of Alberta Bair Theater in Billings. I have personally witnessed the magic that arts education brings to students through school music programs with my own children, and performances, master classes and other education opportunities here at the theater. Growing future audiences requires children to have experience and education in the arts. When students make music themselves, they understand a symphony concert, vocal ensemble, small instrumental ensembles. They know what it takes to work together to create a musical product. When students study literature and theater, they have a different level of respect for theater in their communities and beyond. I ask that you disregard Superintendent of Public Instruction, Elsie Arntzen's latest proposals to cut music and humanities education in Montana schools, as well as counseling services, etc. Students need these now more than ever. After more than two years of little social contact with others, the arts are a way to increase communication, teamwork, focus, and intense learning. Research shows the vast benefits of arts education to children's learning and mental health. Mental health of children in Montana is in a critical state. Rural as well as large districts need more counseling services available in schools, not less. Cutting access to the programs and services for middle schoolers will negatively affect students for the rest of their lives. There is a larger picture to consider- humanities education creates better humans. Sincerely, Jan Dietrich

I would like to urge you to please postpone the vote for diminishing the role of Fine Arts director, combining that pivotal role with vice principal of Whittier Elementary, and vice principal of Hawthorne Elementary. This is a hasty decision that will not benefit either elementary school and will greatly diminish the DFA and our current excellent fine arts programs. It will spread thin the duties of each job, consequently lowering the capabilities to perform each position to the standard needed. My name is Wendy Monson. I am first and foremost a mother

of 5 wonderful children, all who have and are currently highly involved with many of the wonderful fine arts music programs here in the Bozeman school district. I have been performing with Intermountain Opera Bozeman for over 25 years, as well as volunteering with IOB for over 15 years as the educational outreach director with Bozeman schools. I work with guest artists who perform all over the world, bringing their talents to our Bozeman 5th graders, 7th graders, and top high school choirs. I have watched our music programs grow and develop over the years through not only my own children's participation but also my work specifically with the choir teachers, under the supervision of the DFA, as we collaborate together with our professional opera guest artists. Through the years, our opera guest artists who come into the classrooms have all commented and been impressed with the excellent music programs we have here in Bozeman. My very good friend Darrell Babidge, who is currently the head of the vocal department at the renowned Julliard School of Music in New York is one of these guest artists. Many others are on the Metropolitan Opera roster, as well as other brilliant visiting college music professors, writers, conductors, and directors. Bozeman has developed a superior and successful music program in many ways, leading our state and competing with other national programs. However, our music programs have succeeded largely because of the top down organization, beginning with the Fine Arts Director. This is a key, pivotal role in supporting, and increasing the expertise of our music teachers. The specific knowledge and education needed for this position is MUCH different than the qualities needed for the vice principal roles. The responsibilities are many, and varied, but extremely specific to the needs of a successful Fine Arts Program. Our program here in Bozeman is what other programs in the state attain to achieve. I understand that some of the concerns of our school district are heavy, and need to be addressed. We all want what is best for our children. Diminishing the role of our Director of Fine Arts is not the answer. Music specifically uses brain functions that enhance the ability to succeed in other academic areas. The plentiful data for this is rich. The musicians that come through the High School programs tend to have a very high GPA. To illustrate this correlation, at the end of year concerts, our music faculty at BHS have their high academic achievers (seniors) stand and be recognized. A large percentage of our seniors, as I have observed over the years, have been recognized as some of the highest academic achievers in their grade. This is a direct correlation with our successful, superior music program being a foundational tool to close the achievement gap of our students. We should recognize this and honor and support our music faculty for facilitating and encouraging the recognition of both academic and fine arts achievements. This is only one example of how successful music programs are a key contributing factor to the high academic achievements in Bozeman schools. As a matter of fact, THIS is a main factor for my children being involved in music programs in Bozeman. My 4th child is a junior at BHS. ALL of my 4 kids who have graduated high school or are currently a student have had over a 3.85 cumulative GPA. (my youngest is still in middle school, achieving high scores as well!) My second daughter just graduated with a music degree from BYU, being taught and inspired through her elementary and high school years here in Bozeman. I attribute this to them being able to excel through our music programs throughout the years, developing hardworking homework and practice strategies, and wiring their brain to work in ways they wouldn't otherwise. I am not alone in this! Many families move to Bozeman just for their music programs. I have so much more I'd like to write. Let it suffice to say, I am so incredibly grateful for how much work all of you put in to navigating our education programs here in Bozeman. Just the last few years issues has us all so extremely exhausted, and I applaud you for managing these covid challenges well, among other things. I have the utmost respect for all of you and I know there are a myriad of issues you are wading through, and trying to gather information to make the best decisions for our children. I wanted you to know that we have some of the top, most dedicated, talented, caring, and hardworking music teachers here in Bozeman. They are all deeply discouraged by this quick proposal that would be the sure decline of all that they have worked to build here. All of my music friends, parents, and acquaintances I have spoken with this past week are strongly concerned about the many ways this proposal will negatively affect our teachers, students, and community. Our music teachers and parent community have some excellent ideas to propose ways to help solve some of the issues at hand, if you would allow time to collaborate. They are a most creative and committed group. It would be wise to take more time to address these issues together. I strongly urge you to place this proposition on hold, and let us all come to the table together to find a better solution that will not diminish our level of excellence we have attained in our fine arts programs. I am confident that if you do this a new solution will be found that will lift everyone. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions, or if I can be of assistance in brainstorming solutions at the table. Thank you again for all you do. Respectfully, Wendy Monson

With this letter Advocates for Arts Education (A4ART) urges this committee to maintain support for robust mandates governing the offering of visual arts education for all students at the middle school level in Montana. We do not support Superintendent, Elsie Arntzen's plan to remove language specifying minimum requirements in units for visual arts instruction. We believe that visual arts should be available to each and every student in Montana. A4ART, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization in Montana, believes that complete education for every child includes equal access to the visual arts. Visual arts have existed throughout all stages of civilization and in every region of the world as a way to communicate and express essential ideas. Research shows that a sustained visual arts education teaches our children vital life skills such as engaged learning, problem solving, critical thinking, innovation, historical and cultural perspective and the joy of creation. As community members, committed residents of the state of Montana, parents and business people, we know that an arts education engages and reinforces cohesive communities; take away education in the humanities and you take away quality of life, a healthy economy, tourism and the retention of our young population. Within schools research shows an arts education engages student, helps retain at-risk student populations and reinforces learning in all other subjects. The arts is a life-line for many students. The existing mandates make Montana schools some of the best!

By eliminating a the majority of rule 10.55.902, Artnzen is removing any expectation of student success. The Office of Public Instruction's concrete goal of "enabeling" a student to "meet the content standards and content-specific grade-level learning progressions" is now being revised as merely an "opportunity." We believe that our school system should be aiming much higher! We urge you to slow down and reconsider this misdirected proposal. Respectfully,, Marianne Filloux

In its most basic definition, a high school diploma is a rubber stamp certifying that a student passed X number of courses in specific subject allocations with at least 60% success. Other than competing for scholarships and college admissions, after high school, no one cares about the content of a high school education, just that you got the diploma. Furthermore, as soon as you have a post-secondary semester of college under your belt, the high school diploma is completely irrelevant for the rest of your life. The only time it comes up is on an application or government form: Highest Education Level Completed? Enter checkmark in box next to "some college".

In regards to 10.55.602.13(a) "College Credit Only" and 10.55.602.13(b) "Dual Credit" the only real difference between these two designations is whether or not the instructor has a Montana secondary school teaching certificate and subject endorsement. Why should that matter? By virtue of being employed to teach a course in an accredited college/university/trade school, that institution certifies that the subject is being covered by a competent teacher/professional in that field. A student mature enough to enroll in a college course is not concerned that a professor may not have the "classroom management", "educational psychology" or "student teaching" backgrounds that come with secondary school licensure. Likewise, they accept the risk that a college course may be slightly (or greatly) colored by the opinions and potential political leanings of the instructor. Let's be honest, teachers' opinions can surface in high school classrooms too. At its core, this is an educational CHOICE. ANY course completed with a passing grade from an accredited post-secondary institution should be accepted for high school graduation credit in Montana regardless of the teaching certificate status of the instructor. Direct equivalent course credit should be granted where appropriate and subject elective credit where there is a correlation to meet Montana high school graduation requirements. For example, if a student were to take Chemistry 105 at FVCC "Explorations in Chemistry" (a 4 credit lab science) and passes that course, it should meet 1.0 of the credits required in lab science for high school graduation. If a student took Theater 102 "Intro to Theater Design", it would be an English/Language Arts elective. Machining 101 "Intro to the Manufacturing Process" would meet a Vocational requirement, etc. The enrolled Montana high school student put in the work, and it should be recognized and accepted. After all, we just want them to be well-rounded and at least 60% successful in order to "graduate". Why hold back students capable of more? The current definitions as they stand are anti-school choice and reduce opportunities for "gifted and talented" and non-traditional students. Who does this benefit? Maybe the teachers' union by restricting "for credit" education to only certified teachers? Is there a monopoly on qualifying shared knowledge? I'm not sure when this policy changed, but it wasn't always so. I took advantage of Running Start at FVCC when I was in high school and my courses were accepted for credit at Flathead High School. I took 6 total college credits which

satisfied 2.0 credits toward high school graduation requirements. Both of these courses were taught at FVCC and one of these courses was taught by a teacher without a high school teaching license. Having these requirements met allowed me to take additional courses at the high school in which I had an interest but would otherwise not have had room in my schedule to take. I also had the opportunity to graduate early, which I chose not to do. This flexibility enhanced my education and mental health and kept me engaged and challenged.

I was dismayed to learn when my daughter started high school, that this was no longer an option. She is gifted, a graduating senior next month, and despite the policy has completed 26 college credits from FVCC and UM on top of a full course load at Glacier High School. Only 6 college credits were counted on her high school transcript due to this policy for a total of 1.0 equivalent high school credit. Only ONE, because those 2 courses were taught by licensed high school teachers and the rest were not. Her goal was to reduce the overall cost of her college education by taking advantage of the free and reduced cost of credits in the Running Start program. Imagine how much more enriched this advanced student's experience could've been had her college English Comp, Theater, Graphic Design, American Government, etc., courses been accepted for high school credit. In the last 4 years, she took all of these courses twice, both at Glacier High and FVCC. Why? There is no legitimate argument why college-level courses shouldn't be counted toward meeting that "rubber stamp" of a well-rounded education. You might argue that my daughter should've taken AP courses and sat AP exams for college credit. She was only able to take one AP course based on her other interests and available room in her high school schedule compared to course offering times. AP and IB aren't the answer for every student for a multitude of reasons. If she were in a private or homeschool environment and transferred to a public school, her coursework and knowledge would be equivalently accepted as "requirement met", provided there is documentation. Why not college coursework? We need to be more flexible. So often in public policymaking, we base rules on what is average or common. What falls outside of the box is rarely considered. In this case, it is very easy to enhance the education of advanced and non-traditional high school students. We are failing to meet the needs of these students. I would ask you to consider striking the definition in 13(a) completely and make "Dual Credit" 13(b) the standard in the state of Montana. It's more inclusive of learning styles and abilities and promotes educational choice. Krista Nunnally Kalispell, MT

Removing these requirements puts public education at risk, and public access to fair and equal public education across the state in both rural and urban areas. Once they are removed, it will be harder for our students to be well rounded members of our society. Also, this move feels like it is motivated to allow smaller private schools to be accredited. Stripping the state of requirements to allow private schools to be accredited and this not the way for them to meet state standards. They should be held accountable to the current standards. Therefore I urge the Montana Board of Public Education to vote "NO" on all of the current requirements that the State Superintendent has recommended. She does not have the state in her best interest. Thanks, Adam Burke

I'm writing in support our of schools offering Health Enhancement at all grade levels in our public schools. We must not lose this important tool for meaningful and well rounded education to our students. Thank you, Rachael Mintkeski

I am coming to you today as a concerned parent of 2 middle school aged children next year. Electives bring my children joy and further their education in such a creative and wonderful way. Do not remove elective offerings for our children. Creativity is a vital part of a child's life and some may not have those opportunities outside of the home. Let children find passions and interests through school in every avenue. Offer children more rewarding and fulfilling educations by allowing these classes in our community. Our children need more support more than ever before. We need more services and support for our children. Michelle Nowels

As a former teacher who has a graduate degree with a Liberal Arts education, I request that all Arts Education remain as an integral part of both Elementary and Highschool curriculum. To allow districts to decide is a dumbing down of Montana's Educational opportunities. Roger Sherman Whitefish Montana

As an educator and a parent, I feel it is of the utmost importance to keep electives in Middle Schools in Montana. There is absolutely no reason children should miss out on these opportunities because the political parties can't get it together. After COVID, students are so behind in so many areas, mostly socialization. KEEP IT IN THE SCHOOLS. It is bad enough we don't get paid well and our communities will not pass Levies, but we still teach...FOR THE KIDS! Please keep these electives in the schools to help create well rounded Montana kids. Donna Cantalupo Manhattan School

To the school board and whom it may concern: It is imperative that we maintain electives that allow students access school counselors, libraries, middle school science, arts and language programs. Please tell Superintendent Arntzen to support our public schools — not harm them! Drs. Emily McNeilly and Robert Maher

Please speak up for students and teachers against the radical new changes proposed by Arntzen regarding school counselors, middle school specific electives, and access to libraries. In this time of high need and high stress we need students, teachers, and programs to be supported not attacked. Students will be worse off with each one of the proposed changes. Students first... not budget first. Lynette Elliott 3rd Grade Teacher Thompson Falls Elementary

Please let the committee know that I think Superintendent Arntzen is going way too far in trying to narrow the educational opportunities for Montana Middle Schools ! This is going way beyond banning books which kids can get outside of schools. The small rural schools need to have standards. I urge her to maintain and preserve the specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools in Montana. We need a SMART Montana not a dumbed down state . Joan Montagne

It was brought to my attention today that the Negotiated Rule Making Committee will be meeting to consider taking away middle school requirements involving electives such as visual arts, music, technical education, world languages, etc.. I would like to ask and encourage you to maintain the current elective and credit requirements for middle school in Montana. We have many students who may not excel at traditional subjects but find their niche in these electives, which then helps them with the core subjects. These electives also serve to help turn our students into well rounded young people as they move into high school and the world. The reality in this world is that no one is ever "just" a mathematician, "just" a scientist, "just" a construction worker. Their life goes beyond these, to their interests, weekend hobbies, etc. Middle school is often where these are introduced. Our high school programs are going to suffer greatly as well, if these are not offered in middle school. Unfortunately, many times we only see the dollar signs, also reality, instead of the well being of our students. Perhaps our creativity is going to be stretched to the limits in these coming days in order to be able to continue to offer electives and other services that strengthen our students as individuals, but I would sure rather be in that boat, then just creating a square cookie cutter shape of each student. I appreciate your thought and consideration of this topic and the work you do. Thank you for your time. Desiree Van Zee Manhattan Public Schools

Thank you for taking the time to read this email. It is my great hope that Middle School Elective requirements will remain in effect and that every Middle School Student in the state of Montana will have access to these programs (art, music, technology, library, counseling, etc.) It is within these elective programs that students are often able to discover and explore their passions. These programs help students build upon the academic

areas of language arts, math, science, and history. By removing these programs we will be putting our Montana Middle School students at an educational disadvantage compared to other students around our country. I understand the difficulty in filling these positions in Montana's rural areas, but I would hope that we could find an alternative and not take away the requirement all together. Again, thank you for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. Sincerely, Sarah Hendrickson

As a retired high school English teacher, I am very very concerned about the possibility of eliminating middle school requirements for elective programs. Middle school is a chance for these children to be able to explore new areas of learning as well as the required areas. We want our children to have these chances to expand their areas of interest. Doing away with these electives makes no sense. We want our children to be hungry for learning. Narrowing their offerings and opportunities will only make school a drudgery. We need the visual arts, music, technical education, and world languages as avenues for explorations. We need school counselors; depression is on the rise with our youth; we need these counselors to be there to listen and to be a helping hand as they negotiate their teenage years and society. We need librarians and libraries. Often a librarian can direct students to authors or topics that they will want to read. Keep these middle school electives; keep the school counselors; keep the librarians. We should not be going backwards with the schooling for our youth. They are our future.
Sincerely, Roxanne M Hoblitt

Hi. Me again. I learned today that in addition to letting schools decide how few librarians and counselors they need, we are also going to let electives become a free-for-all. As a mother of a middle school student, I absolutely DO NOT support eliminating specific electives like art and music and business education. These courses allow middle school students a chance to explore their interests so they can really use their high school courses to their advantage I preparing for their future. Changing the wording here opens it up to literally ANYTHING being an elective. Schools already have some leeway with this, but if they don't have to provide these basic electives, then our students across the state will be at a disadvantage if they attend a school that drops these programs while other students in Montana attend schools that have built amazing programs in these specific electives. Our schools need these standard offerings to level the playing field for all Montana children. The educated citizens of Montana are aware that these changes in wording serve to dismantle public education and foster the growth of charter schools. We are not okay with this!

As a Montana middle school teacher, I know first hand the importance of our specials and counselors for our students. Allowing the opportunity for cuts for these positions is concerning. Please do not allow this. Sincerely, Jill Steinle

I'm just writing in hoping to help keep and preserve electives in the middle school. My daughter will be in middle school next year and these electives are very important to her as she loves being an artist.

My name is Jay Owens and I teach middle school P.E at lolo school. I am emailing you to state the importance of my class and the positive experience my students get from middle school health and P.E. It is a proven fact that students need movement to excel in school. Staying physically active has been proven to; increase academic performance, build social and emotional skills, increase self esteem and confidence, and give students an outlet. I know for some of my students that this is one of the only reasons that they show up to school in the first place. Without a kinesthetic environment during the course of the day I know that students' interest in school will diminish. As a teacher I pride myself on providing a safe environment to exercise during the day and learn a multitude of lifelong fitness activities. I also teach health lessons year round based on our state's standards. I want to give my students the tools necessary to live long, healthy, and happy lives. Without middle school p.e it would put strain on the students, staff, and fellow teachers. Please consider my email as an example of why we need Middle school health and physical education courses. It's not for me, it's for the students. Thank you

Please help us keep kids healthy. We need P.E. programs in schools. Jared VanVleet Noxon Schools

I am writing to ask that you maintain the current specific elective and credit requirements for middle school. Offering those credits are critical to helping our students develop into well rounded individuals. Especially in this day and age, to change any of the counselor positions (unless increasing) is ridiculous and a grave concern to me as a parent of 2 middle school students and as a teacher. I am asking to not approve the new requirements. Thank you for your consideration, Sara Vaccaro

Public schools are the lifeblood of this state and for our kids. Why would we limit access? Please, please don't change the requirements. We need to preserve specific electives and credit requirements for middle schools. For the love of God and children.
Erika Peterman

As a former student of music education, a parent of two elementary middle school students, and a music education professional, I am writing on behalf of the current conversation to cut funding for music/art and other electives from elementary and middle schools. Music has been a constant in my life. It has gotten me through childhood trauma to having a purpose in my adult life. I realize playing music isn't for everyone. But music appreciation is for every human. Along with reading, writing, and arithmetic, music has been a part of the healthy human being for centuries as stated by Plato and Aristotle. Some students thrive in math or reading, some science or history, and some art and music. Why would you take this opportunity away from our children? We can't have great high school and university music programs without building on the foundations set in elementary and middle school. Learning starts with the youngest of children. Students find belonging in music classes and ensembles. They work together to present their end-of-quarter programs. There are so few options aside from music and sports where students must operate as a group to produce a final product. I could go on for pages regarding the benefits of music, arts, and sports education. The bottom line is if we cut elective funding, students will lose out on great opportunities that make them feel they belong in our society. Please keep music and other electives at the primary and middle school levels Thank you, Deidre Corson

As a student at the university getting a certification in K-12 music I find this incredibly offensive. As a bonafide born and raised Montanan and as a Musician I can't believe y'all would try and be rid of a fundamental form of art, and expression on top of paying teachers the worst in all 50 states. Montana state legislators should be ashamed. Grow a backbone or your kids won't be smart in 20 years. Sincerely, Johnathn fossen An upset student who doesn't understand your political gain with this decision.

I am a retired Montana Math and Science teacher, as well as a tennis coach, with 30 years devoted to Billings public schools. I also coached at Billings Central, a parochial school. Additionally, I am personally the beneficiary of 12 years of School District #2 education as is my daughter, Carissa, whose graduation from medical school I just attended this month of May. I could not be more opposed to the short-sighted notion of axing the requirement to offer music/art at the primary and middle school levels. Students should have a variety of opportunities presented to them that can lead to a love of school and learning versus the polar opposite. I did not personally teach at the primary level, but I did witness over and over again at the high school level that those kids involved with music were typically stand-outs in many ways. The self-discipline required to learn an instrument and to be a part of a performance (Team Work!) group bodes well for future successes in life. I credit learning music from a young age as more instrumental than any other subject area in my daughter's success. That is a math-science guy's honest evaluation! Yours truly,
David Klarich

Please advocate for keeping music in elementary and middle school. There are numerous studies confirming that music helps with math and science grades, reasoning, attention, and creativity. Removing it from curriculum will only hurt, not help. That would be detrimental to education in so many ways. Please, please keep music in their lives. There are other places budgets can be trimmed. This isn't one of them, in my opinion. Thank you for your time. Katie Morgan

Music curriculum is vital for our young kids... helps their whole well being , and such a great introduction to music appreciation and possibly a career! Hope they are not dropped. Sara Johnson Kalispell

What is going on with the OPI? We need more music/arts/counseling in our schools right now, not less. Kids who don't want to spend time in classrooms and are reeling from the stress in the world around them need expressive arts, something to connect them to school and counselors to help them through. Lorinne Burke Billings, MT

I am a retired Choral teacher living in Billings who has taught for 30 years in Montana schools. I wish to convey my concern over hearing of possible cuts to music in the Middle School Curriculum. The research has been there for many years now concerning the positive effects of music study for boosting learning outcomes in almost every other discipline. Also, studying the arts is one of the few ways that our children can "exercise" their emotional state of being by discovering the beauty that exists in our world through the arts.. Without instruction in the arts and music, our youth will miss having experiences which help make well-rounded, happy and capable member of society. Please don't allow this to happen in our state. Respectfully, John Haughey

Please do not drop the requirement for elementary music. This is a subject for all students not just the brains and athletics. Music is one of the best subjects to teach emotion and compassion. When so many were in isolation due to Covid. Many were drawn to playing/singing to music. Music is a foundation to humanity. Thank you, Joni Bell

I am writing in an effort to please reconsider removing music and art requirements from elementary and middle school. I cannot imagine not nurturing and fostering the creative side of our young children in Montana. This would be such a disservice to our youth. Please consider keeping requirements in the school! Also, I urge you to please keep librarians. I am a family medicine physician who promotes reading as early as to 6 month olds as it increases developmental milestones and literacy. We work so hard to promote reading and teaching our children to learn to read, cutting back or removing librarians would only hinder that. I foresee decreased test scores in reading and language arts as a result. Also, it saddens me to even think of cutting back school counselors as they are instrumental in engaging with our underachieving students, our students with poor social situations, or those just going through a rough time. They are the glue in keeping those kids engaged with school and providing a nurturing environment, at least during the school day. I cannot even imagine what our schools would look like without these professionals. Thank you for your time in reading and I do please ask that you consider NOT cutting back OR removing these instrumental services from our education system. Thank you, Janice Fordham, MD

I am writing you today with concern over the possibility of losing our music programs that are so vital to the development and success of many students. I am Ploor you to consider the damage that will be done to a great portion of our student body and society should funding be taken away for these vitally important programs, that nurture and develop our youth. Please do not dismantle what is beautiful in our world. You are in your position to protect the education of our children. Respectfully, Peggy Rued

The Cooper Institute was founded in 1970 by Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, the “Father of Aerobics,” as a nonprofit organization with a simple vision to prove that exercise is medicine. For 50 years, through research, The Cooper Institute has established the benefits of regular physical activity and the links between fitness and the prevention of many chronic diseases. We know that active, fit kids do better in the classroom and on the field. The evidence continues to mount showing the positive effect of physical activity on the whole child. However, today’s children face an uncertain future - one that includes the possibility of not outliving their parents. Now more than ever, we should encourage and preserve programs such as Health and Physical Education in our public schools. As the country navigates through the pandemic, and our children return to our schools, the recommendation by the Negotiated Rule Making Committee to remove health and physical education requirements in all Montana middle schools is ill advised. The Montana Office of Public Instruction 2019 Behavioral Youth Risk Survey shows a positive association between physical activity-related behaviors and academic achievement. This means students who do not engage in physical activity-related behaviors receive lower grades than their classmates who do engage in physical activity-related behaviors. This data clearly identifies the need to preserve existing physical education and health requirements, and we encourage the members of the Negotiated Rule Making Committee to preserve the existing physical education and health requirements. The data clearly demonstrates, students that are physically active, perform better academically. Currently, there are no physical education requirements in Montana elementary schools and 67% of Montana high-school students do not attend a physical education class at all during an average school week. This removal of middle-school physical education requirement would result in students not having any physical education and health requirements throughout their academic careers, which will result in increased obesity and chronic disease rates within the children of Montana.

I am writing to protest Superintendent Arntzen’s outrageous and poorly conceived proposals to eliminate specific electives and credit requirements in our schools. By eliminating student’s access to the arts, career education and other programs these proposals strike at the heart of education. The purpose of education is to help our students have a full life, not to just get by. Coughing this as a necessary cost reduction is at best an excuse. Our educational leaders should be fighting for revenue increases from public and private sources rather than resorting to cost cutting as the only answer. This will be extraordinarily difficult, but it is essential. This is what leaders do. It is what society requires. If this is the best that Superintendent Arntzen can come up with she should step aside and let a true leader take charge. We demand someone who champions the fullest of public education for our young, supports our teachers and staff members and never gives in to expediency. Respectfully submitted,
G. Russell Bell, PhD

I am writing today to ask you to support and maintain electives and credit requirements for middle schools. I have been a teacher and coach in the West Valley School District #1 for 23 years and I have two children who are in middle school and highschool. The importance of programs such as art, music, technology education, theatre, world language, building trades and others are critical to a well rounded and progressive education. In addition to the previous items, keeping courses such as English Language Arts, social studies, health enhancement, science and others are vital to a middle school student's academic day regardless of which career path they may choose in the future. Thank you for your time and your service. Sincerely, Tara Measure

Regarding today's vote, it is critical to keep the existing middle school requirements for elective programs, school counselors, and librarians. PLEASE vote against the Superintendent's recommendation to eliminate the specific elective and credit requirements for middle schools. As a public high school teacher and parent, I observe the value in having these various programs at the middle school level. Many elective offerings would not be successful at the high school level, if not for the foundation the middle school programs create in introducing students to valuable subjects. Allowing schools to eliminate these programs would potentially lead to inequity in education for students across the state. Thank you, Marisa Stewart Mathematics Instructor

The arts are what make us better humans! they are a vital part of elementary education. The opportunity to be creative engages young minds and retains interest in school. Without school music programs my children would be lost today. Please support music and Art in schools for all ages! - Gin Bowland , mother of two young musicians

I'm writing to urge you to keep the classes available to students who need them now, "post-covid," more than ever. These classes allow them to both learn and express themselves, and they have a lot to express beyond the requirements of their academic classes. They have always needed counselors as well for personal, family, social, and both physical and mental health resources. Academics build the brain. These other classes enable the rest of each child to flourish. Don't let our kids and community down by cancelling them. Respectfully, Kay Roseen,

I write as a parent of a middle-school and a high school student to ask that you please decline Superintendent Arntzen's recommended elimination of certain elective programs and credit requirements in schools. Now more than ever, elementary and middle schoolers need the social and emotional skills gained from variety in their learning. A variety of teachers and subjects for learning keeps students interested in school and creates more chances to engage their rapidly developing minds--this is particularly critical for middle school, when the peer environment can be so difficult and the academic challenge of high school looms. Elementary and middle school [students with more arts learning \[brookings.edu\]](https://www.brookings.edu/press-releases/2019/09/19-students-with-more-arts-learning/) "were more likely to agree that school work is enjoyable, makes them think about things in new ways, and that their school offers programs, classes, and activities that keep them interested in school." Stronger college aspirations took root in students, a large-scale 2019 study by the Brookings Institution found, and they tended to "draw upon works of art as a means for empathizing with others." Dropout rates and behavior problems declined in students who participated in arts programs.

Students' school engagement and performance in core subjects and also improved with arts learning. A study of 31,331 students, 81 percent of whom received free or reduced lunch, found that "[students with exposure to an arts elective in middle school \[psycnet.apa.org\]](https://www.psycnet.apa.org/record/2020-09-01) subsequently had significantly higher GPAs and math and reading scores, and decreased odds of school suspension, compared to students not exposed to the arts." This [study published in Nov.2020 \[gmu.edu\]](https://www.gmu.edu/stories/2020/11/study-published-in-nov-2020) followed a large and diverse sample of preschool children up until they completed sixth, seventh and eighth grade.

Thank you for working to find a solution to Montana's teacher shortage that doesn't sacrifice our children's learning opportunities or their mental health. Please keep school accreditation requirements that maintain library / media specialists, mental health counseling, arts education and electives critical to our children's career and college readiness. Sincerely, Marilyn Guggenheim

I am writing to voice my absolute disagreement with the wording and apparent intent of the Superintendent Accreditation recommendations, which essentially eliminates MUSIC and ART from accreditation, which then allows schools across Montana to eliminate said programs. I VEHEMENTLY oppose this document and its over-reaching attack on our music/arts programs, many that are flourishing and recognized throughout the northwest and even nationally. This document, were it to be approved, would devastate the music opportunities throughout Montana. Keep in mind, in addition to the wholesome, in depth music education aspects that are currently thriving and enriching kids throughout the state, that could potentially then eliminate all PEP BAND from all athletic events across the state. This recommendation is extremely shallow in its perspective and terribly short-sighted as to what students need and should have access to in their public education in Montana. Please share my disagreement to this proposed list of changes with the board that meets to decide such things.

Mr. Kelly Berdahl

I've read with dismay Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations for proposal changes to electives and credit requirements for middle schools. Her recommendations would gut the very idea of a well rounded education

and should be disregarded as backward and archaic thinking. Our children deserve an education that includes music, the visual arts, career education, world languages. Please do not allow these misguided recommendations to become reality, our children and the world they will create with a well rounded education is vitally important to us all. Thank you, Chris Crumal

The proposal to cut the requirements for middle school PE in the State of Montana would not be in the best interest of our students. Want lower stress? Want higher test scores in Math and Science? Want to help fight childhood obesity? Middle School PE is part of the solution to these goals. I think it would be wise for the committee to watch this short Ted Talks on the topic of Physical

Education. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V81cO8xyMal> [youtube.com]

If this is a way to save money, there are plenty of other places to look or even to raise additional funds to keep up with our budget demands. Do not cut quality education from our students to save a few bucks because in the long run it will actually cost us more.

Sincerely, Ben Hahn

My name is Peggy Leverton, and I'm a Middle school Art teacher; I have spent my entire working life advocating for the importance of the arts, and as a parent, I can attest to how some student show little if any motivation in the sacred four core academic classes of math, science, English (aka "language arts") or Social Studies, but the Art classes: music drama, visual arts are their lifeline. Sadly, these subjects are often ignored, not counted, etc. Numerous studies have been conducted to show the economic impact and importance of the arts in a student's education as well; more than I can cite here. Please use your position to support the Arts in our public schools and to advocate for their importance. Thank you for your time, Sincerely, Peggy Leverton,

This is in regards to my grave concerns over Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations to delete major portions of the Accreditation Standards which include elective programs and credit requirements for our middle school and junior high schools in Montana. For many years Montana has worked to make sure that all schools in Montana were requiring the same programs. This was to insure that all students would have the same opportunities and exposures regardless of school size or budgets. The failure to give specific direction and guidance to administrators and school boards will undermine the ability of all students in Montana to acquire equal quality education regardless of school size or location in Montana. Please reject the sweeping changes and the weakening of Montana's Accreditation Standard! Keep our Montana public schools strong! Respectfully, Karin Stanford Retired Public School Teacher

I am appalled to read that many elective courses could be eliminated in our schools. Music, physical education, art, world languages plus other courses are important learning courses for young people. They should be part of every child's education. When I was growing up in Scotland I had a full and varied education which has held me in good stead the rest of my life. Children here deserve a good, well rounded education. Sincerely, Jennifer Haukebo

My upbringing in Montana brings me a tremendous amount of pride. While my friends may be quick to laugh about my oh so ardent love for the state, there are few things about which I am more passionate than the merits of the state of Montana. From its people, to its geography, to its culture, Montana holds a unique place in my heart. I owe much to the state of Montana, but perhaps the area to which I owe the most is to Montana's education system. Growing up in Montana and receiving my elementary, high school, and university education from state institutions, I was blessed with both tremendous attention from my teachers (due in large part to the smaller class size than one might find in other states) and with exposure to a truly broad and varied set of curriculum. This well-roundedness, shall we call it, has allowed me to excel in a variety of areas, including creative thinking, problem-solving, written and oral communication, and other skill sets that have served me well in my professional life. I attribute much of this to the arts, music, writing, and physical education classes

that I took during my K-12 years. While I did not go to the fancy private schools attended by some of my colleagues, my education was just as rich and varied. This education granted me access to scholarships, university opportunities, and ultimately, jobs. I was frankly shocked (and then quickly appalled) to learn today that there are conversations ongoing to remove Montana standards that require K-12 schools to provide arts, music, physical education, and other core curriculum. Low standards is something that I have never attributed to Montana, whether its people or its culture, and certainly NOT to its education. Removing these requirements will, without doubt, drop the standards of education in Montana schools and directly, negatively impact Montana's students. With certainty, these changes will have a knock-on effect, making it more difficult for students to develop a diverse set of skills and interests (something frequently assessed in college admissions requirements). This will further disadvantage Montana's children when competing against out-of-state students for scholarships, college entry, and ultimately, jobs. High paying jobs for Montana residents are critical to protecting Montana's economy (and for allowing Montanans to afford basic necessities like housing). As a (hopefully) future mother, who plans to enroll her children in the Montana school system, this cannot stand. Please reconsider these proposed changes. For the good of Montana's students, its economy, and its industry, we cannot compromise our standards in our public school system. Sincerely, Robin Gustafson

As a mother, grandmother and retired educator as well as taxpayer, I cannot express my disappointment that the benefits of music and art education for young children and middle school youth are being undervalued and the importance of the arts to a well rounded public education dismissed by Montana's governing body. That the Office of Public Instruction in Montana would even consider such a change is appalling and I am writing in opposition to allowing local school boards the right to cut art and music programs in public primary and middle schools thereby depriving Montana's children and youth of the enrichment, cultural, therapeutic and documented educational opportunities these programs provide. I know from personal experience how vital art and music education are to young children with developmental disabilities and this is yet another reason art and music are essential to a child's development. I support art and music education in Montana public schools for all ages starting at pre-school. I expect a response to my request. Sincerely, Ruth Ackroyd

Here are the kinds of things student will be deprived of should the Montana Board of Education accept Superintendent Arntzen's misguided proposals to eliminate such programs from public schools. I cite the article " 10 Lessons Arts Teach" by Elliot Eisner* published by the National Arts Education Association." Please read every word! The arts teach children to make good judgments about qualitative relationships. Unlike much of the curriculum in which correct answers and rules prevail, in the arts, it is judgment rather than rules that prevail. The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions have more than one answer. The arts celebrate multiple perspectives. One of their largest lessons is that there are many ways to see the world. The arts teach children that in complex forms of problem solving purposes are seldom fixed, but change with circumstance and opportunity. Learning in the arts requires the ability and the willingness to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of the work as it unfolds. The arts make vivid the fact that neither words in their literal form nor numbers exhaust what we can know. The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition. The arts teach students that small differences can have large effects. The arts traffic in subtleties. The arts teach students to think through and within a material. All forms of art employ some means through which images become real. The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said. When children are invited to disclose what a work of art helps them feel, they must reach into their poetic capacities to find the words that will do the job. The arts enable us to have experience we can have from no other source and through such experience to discover the range and variety of what we are capable of feeling. The arts position in the school curriculum symbolizes to the young what adults believe is important. Now tell me. Do we not demand this for our children? Do not abandon what we have. Enhance it. Respectfully submitted, G. Russell Bell, PhD

Electives

Hello - being the wife of a former teacher, the mother of two teachers, a sister and sister-in-law to two siblings and their spouses who were teachers, and others in my family, please do not vote for the recommendations

Elsie Arntzen is proposing. I feel this would be going backwards in education. We can't afford that to happen. Thank you for your consideration. Karen Graham. Chester, MT Absolutely do not make these changeit would be VERY detrimental to rural schools, including Granite County! Diana Young I am extremely concerned about and opposed to the proposed changes to education in the state of Montana. Changes to arts/music education and proposals for library changes are a terrible idea. These are so important to the children in our schools and the society we should want to create that to call it shortsighted doesn't nearly cover it. It's either stupid or nefarious. If it's a cost concern raising taxes would be a legitimate solution. All of our children in the state deserve a first class education. Kim Caplan. Whitefish, Montana I have come to learn there are two particularly concerning proposed changes to service offered in public school affecting School Library Media Services, and School Counseling Services. It is my understanding that Superintendent Arntzen is recommending eliminating the staff ratio to students, reducing Montana students' access to school counselors. This recommendation unfairly targets rural students. More than ever, school counselors and teachers are trying to help support an unprecedented number of students struggling with increased mental health needs. I am the Director of Bitterroot CASA, Inc. (Court Appointed Special Advocates) in Ravalli County. We are a rural county with limited resources for children and families. Our schools depend on these critical important school counseling services as we have limited access to outside mental health resources. Nearly 10% of children in our county do not have health insurance, 47% qualify for free or reduced priced lunch, and 23% of children live in poverty. Montana exceeds the National Average for adult use of alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse creating insecurity in their homes. 68% of children live in a household with both parents working and due to the distance travelled to work and the distance between homes- isolation is a risk factor in regard to child well-being. Our children need moreservices and more caring adults in their lives, not less. Rural schools are the heart and life blood in our communities, schools are the village raising our children and we need more caring adults, not less. Our Library and Media Services supports Ravalli County's 95% graduation rate. We lack extracurricular activities, we lack resources and opportunities to engage children outside of school. We need our libraries fully staffed and resourced to engage children in learning and their exploration of the world. Please, do not cut school counseling or school library services. The long term out comes of these cuts will negatively affect the social and economic well-being of our communities. Allison Dunne. Executive Director Hi Tristen. I have been a school counselor in Montana for 24 years. I am currently working at Kalispell Middle School with School District 5. I have 372 7th grade students in my caseload. Through my duties I also serve their 30 teachers, as well as the student's parents. Last year, when I was 6th grade counselor, I had 1 student attempt suicide 3x whom received inpatient treatment for the first attempt. This school year, the same student made an attempt on campus, which impacted 6 students who found them on the floor of the bathroom, as well as their many classmates and teachers who acted quickly and intervened. I have been working hard, losing sleep trying to support these students and my colleagues. In the first 14 weeks of school, I had 7 students receive in patient treatment for severe suicidality, most of them made attempts. On average, during the first 5 months of school I was completing Safety Risk Screenings with 3-5 students a week. Most of my students at the time were 12 years old, some are now 13. When a person struggles with suicidal thoughts and receives treatment, research shows that the thoughts just don't go away. Typically, it takes consistent follow through using a Safety Plan, asking the necessary questions to determine risk while receiving medicinal and therapy provided by trained clinical therapists. Sadly, funding for our community mental health services continues to be cut by the legislatures. Most of our local clinical therapists are not accepting new clients or have "waitlists". This means that the schools, ie, school counselors, are often responsible for trying to serve these students struggling with life threatening issue of suicide ideation. Our school district has been in the middle of a suicide cluster this year. Our state has been in the top 5 for suicide the past 40 years. We have worked diligently to try to follow the recommended best practices in suicide prevention and response and yet here we are, scrambling to do whatever we can to try and save the lives of young people. Sadly, our efforts seemed to have failed a dozen of our students, recent graduates, and their parents this year. We are haunted by these stories, by our shortcomings, our what if scenarios. Even a very special school counseling colleague took their own life 2 years ago. Our teachers, parents, and community are struggling with secondary trauma from these deaths. Survivors of Suicide Loss are eight times more at risk of suicide ideation. I cannot believe our state superintendent, OPI, and members of this committee are considering cutting qualifications for school counselors and eliminating ratios. It takes highly trained and skilled school counselors to fulfill the responsibilities of our jobs. We really do save lives. Please do not increase our school counselor student ratios or eliminate qualifications. Sincerely, Susan Sherman, MA. School Counselor.

I am a 2nd grade teacher at Whittier Elementary School in Butte, Montana. We have 350 students in our k-6 school. We have only one counselor to service all of these students. Granted all the students in our school do not need individual services, but our counselor is very prevalent in our school. The students know that they can go to her for any of their needs. Our counselor services a great number of our students in our school meeting with them individually as well as groups. She presents every classroom in our school a program called Classroom Guidance. It teaches students skills to cope with problems they encounter whether in school or outside of school. She also does a program that we call character club. This program teaches students that it is perfectly fine to be you and not like someone else! The bottom line is that every single student in our building is touched by our counselor either directly or indirectly. We desperately NEED our counselor in our building for everyday occurrences. This day and age it is so important for students to have someone to turn to when they are at school. For so many students, school is their safe space. Our counselor is able to confirm that by being so involved in their lives, ensuring them that they are safe at school, and even making home visits when needed. Our school counselor is currently in the process of meeting with individual students and setting up services for the summer. So many students are anticipating unsafe environments at home when they are off of school for the summer. Please keep our students in mind and do what is best for them! **WE NEED COUNSELORS IN SCHOOL!!!!!!** Thank you! Amie Henningsen. I'm writing in response to the proposed changes to the Montana Standards, specifically the elimination of elective programs and credit requirements in middle school. As a fine arts teacher, I see the creative process daily. Art provides a constructive outlet for many students who struggle with more traditional courses. Art provides creative thinking across the curriculum and enhances the learning of all students. We must continue to challenge our students in all areas and subject matter. The list of learning opportunities and brain development enhanced by elective and specifically fine arts is extensive including visual-spatial reasoning, problem solving, creative thinking, hands-on learning. Thank you for your consideration. Ms. Leslie Donahue.

As a middle school teacher I am asking that specific elective programs and credit requirements be kept in the middle schools as this is greatly beneficial for our students. Katie Hudgins. 6th Grade Math. Taking away professionals and classes in Montana schools that directly affect students is counterproductive to educational goals. Please figure out a way to protect all education positions that directly impact students. Bridget Woolbaugh, LCPC. School Counselor. I am writing about the suggested policy changes regarding school counselors, librarians, and electives. Please do not take Ms. Arntzen's recommendations. As a first grade teacher in a title school in Billings I see first hand how counselors and librarians support and nurture the growth of students. With all of the challenges of the last few years, we need them now more than ever. If anything, we need more of them- not less! As a parent of a middle schooler I see how her electives play a crucial role in providing a well rounded experience in her education and motivating her to participate at school. Thank you for your time and consideration, Sara Kane. First grade teacher- Washington Elementary School. I am alarmed at the amount of emails and phone calls I have been receiving from educators around the state yesterday and today. As I understand it, MFPE pushed out proposals from Superintendent Arntzen to all unions. In these proposals there was missing/different information from our last session May 5th. I don't quite know what happened from our last meeting and the proposals we discussed on the 4.21.22 Conceptual Memorandum. As I remember back to that meeting, we bounced back and forth from another Conceptual Memorandum and worked from both at different times. I see there is an April 4 version which is on the Chapter 55 Landing Page, and an April 21 one that we worked from last meeting, and there should be a newer version with our recommendations from our May 5 meeting. Maybe this is where the problem persists? Here are the major concerns I see we need to discuss on Thursday and hopefully can be discussed at both the Negotiated Rule Making Committee and Task Force: 1) Counseling – The 300:1 proposal was unanimously voted on to move forward the NRMC. That was not listed anywhere in what was pushed out by Superintendent's First Proposal (found on Chapter 55 Landing Page), nor was it listed on the latest version we worked from April 21 Conception model. Please correct me if I am wrong by the way.

2) Library Media Specialist – The proposal from the Superintendent has redlined all the requirements for a library media specialist. The way it is proposed states, "Each school system shall must provide library media and information services aligned with the content standards in ARM 10.53.1201 through a licensed and endorsed library media specialist or contracting with a licensed and endorsed school library media specialist; or utilizing a consortium, multidistrict agreement, interlocal cooperative, or any other cooperative method that is

authorized to secure these services.” a. In essence, an entire district only needs to provide one licensed media specialist as long as they meet the content standards. This was not our intent from our Task Force conversations. b. Again, correct me if I am wrong. 3) Middle School Requirement Changes a. The way the middle school proposal now reads from the Superintendent’s proposal could eliminate all electives if not required. Here is what was proposed from the Superintendent, “At a minimum, the following program areas, are required of all students yearly: (i) English language arts; (ii) mathematics; (iii) physical and life sciences sciences; (iv) social studies; and (v) health enhancement., and (vi) elective offerings.” b. Our intent was to have a list of minimal electives that school board members could chose from to offer in the schools, not eliminate them entirely. With the way it reads now, all those elective teachers could be eliminated in worst case scenario. 4) High School Requirement Changes a. In the Superintendent’s proposal, “...1/2 unit of economic and financial literacy included within the 3 units of social studies or the 2 units of career and technical education.” b. This was only included in the last meeting, but we didn’t move this forward from my understanding and many of us felt it was already in Chapter 55 in other areas. This could create a financial burden for districts. In my own opinion, I would prioritize counselor support in our schools over Financial literacy. c. Again, maybe I am remembering incorrectly. Please correct me if I am wrong. I have fielded many questions and emails. I have told people to email Tristen for public comment. I am worried about the messaging as it is not the same as the Task Force’s recent May 5 discussions. Thoughts? Thanks, Jon Konen.

I have attached comments in opposition to the proposed Chapter 55 accreditation standards and would request that you please forward my comments to the committee. Thank you for your assistance. Daniel T. Farr, Ed.D. DTF Educational Consulting. Helena, Montana. I am writing this letter in opposition to Superintendent Arntzen’s recommendation to eliminate the School Counselor to student ratio. I strongly believe that the Counselor to Student ratio should remain in the accreditation standards to ensure that Montana’s youth receive the mental health support they so desperately need. In the last two years I have seen a significant increase in our students’ mental health challenges, including an increase in suicidality, depression, and anxiety as well as the resulting school truancy and poor academic achievement that occurs from these difficulties. Currently the national recommendation for School Counselor to student ratio is 250:1. Montana recommends 400:1. School counselors are often called out of meetings, groups, and class lessons to address crisis response at school; this has been on the rise over the last decade without a change in our student to counselor ratios. We recently lost our comprehensive mental health teams that served our most challenging students due to state budget cuts. The American Counselor Association, American Psychological Association, National Association of School Psychologists, and the American School Counselor Association all advocate for increased mental health services in our schools. We would be going backwards, instead of meeting the needs of our students and staff. Eliminating the ratio would eliminate access to mental health, especially for rural areas. Sincerely, Josie Hayes-Johnson, LCPC. As a long-time classroom teacher and librarian, it is a nightmare to watch Elsie Arntzen convincing the board of public education to minimize certification requirements for educators and ratios of specialists to support kids and curriculum. Teachers don’t move to or from Montana because of the certification requirements. If this is Arntzen’s stated goal, it’s a smokescreen. People choosing careers no longer pick teaching because of the eroding of respect for the profession, the dismal salaries over the span of the career.

Rural schools are especially penalized by the proposed changes. Let’s figure out a way to have the best education for Montana children, rather than the expedient but least effective solution. Kind regards, Tava Smathers. I am looking at the proposed changes to Montana ARM 10.55.709 and 10.55.710. The plan appears to be to roll back all progress made in Montana schools in the past century because we don’t want to pay for education anymore. We are sacrificing our children on the altar of tax cuts. As you may have guessed already, I am opposed to this. However, I am swimming against the tide. I trust that tide will reverse again someday, but I feel sorry for the Montana kids who will spend the next ten years getting the best education the 19th Century has to offer. Bill Freese. I was recently made aware of Elsie Arntzen’s proposed recommendations for Montana students and teachers. As a Child and Family Therapist with over 15 years’ experience in child development and Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Carroll College, I am writing to ask the committee to reject Ms. Arntzen’s proposed changes as they would significantly impair children’s development. Children develop in stages throughout their childhood and even into their adulthood. Children do not possess the language and processing skills of adults and benefit most from use of metaphor such as those used in stories. Without

access to librarians, who also maintain extensive knowledge of child development and who cultivate library collections to best meet children's developmental needs based on this knowledge, children will lose significant opportunities for growth and development which could impede their learning overall. Research into children's different learning strategies clearly identifies several ways in which children acquire and retain information. One critical way children apply skills and cement knowledge is through hands on learning in chosen electives. Limiting a child's access to elective education, specifically electives in the arts, may delay a child's ability to apply other learning concepts and may ultimately impede their success throughout their lifespan. The skills learned in electives like visual arts, music, technical education and languages prepare students for immediate employment once graduated. Limiting access to these electives could ultimately impact our already depleted workforce. Finally, children from all walks of life attend school. Children who come from homes or environments in which they experience consistent trauma are not prepared to learn. There is extensive research behind the inability to access the frontal cortex, where most learning is acquired and maintained, when experiencing ongoing trauma. These students' ability to access an appropriately staffed school counselor who can help them return to a safe mental and physical state is the difference between success and failing out of school before age 16. School counselors not only meet the needs of individual students, but they also provide critical lessons on social and emotional development to whole classrooms. Science and research have consistently found early social and emotional learning in grades K-8 can significantly improve personal outcomes for students as well as improved testing and outcomes for schools. Without access to appropriate social and emotional learning, often provided solely by school counselors, schools may fall behind national benchmarks and experience even further reductions in financial support. I understand the education field has experienced significant challenges over the past years but limiting children's access to places and people who help them feel safe and seen within their education is not the answer to problems OPI is facing. Please reject Superintendent Arntzen's proposed changes and support the appropriate, healthy development of all children. Warm regards, Kristina L. Dukart, LCSW RPT.

OPI has brought forth dangerous policy suggestions what will only disenfranchise and fail more of our students. These policy suggestions will not help public education. These changes were brought forth to intentionally destroy the public education system in Montana. 1. Reducing the amount of electives that a school may offer will lead to more students not wanting to come to school. So many middle school and high school students depend on art, music, theatre, industrial arts to keep them engaged in school. Right now we need to be training our students for industrial trades and showing them how many options the world holds for professions in the arts. 2. Mental health has never been more important and more critical to support than it is now. Schools with 800 students currently have 3 school counselors to handle the many issues our students experience in a given day. To propose one counselor for 7,000 students is an atrocity and negligent on OPI's part. This clearly shows that OPI does not want to support Montana's children. 3. Curriculums that no longer detail specific math and science courses, just any science class will do. Again, this provides no exposure and experience for middle school and high school students to be exposed to a wide array of knowledge and background. Trying to decide what to do after high school is already hard enough for our youth, but to intentionally reduce their exposure for fear that they might become "educated" only sets up our students for failure and the failure of Montana's economy. We have to provide Montana children with an education so that they become an educated and skilled workforce in our state. 4. One librarian per district and eliminating library's from schools. Ask the question why is this being proposed? It has nothing to do with budgets or that libraries are irrelevant to education now that everything is on computers. This has everything to do with control. Libraries in our school system teach students how to research, how to explore facts and become critical thinkers. Libraries in our school system contain books which students read on down time, they provide a space where students can do their homework, meet for study groups and learn skills they need for life. OPI needs to consider the long term consequences for our state 10-20 years down the road. Of the 4 items I have mentioned above, there are many more "updates and recommendations" OPI is being presented with. You must ask yourself the question ask to why these are being recommended. It is not to benefit and bolster Montana's education system. It will do the opposite and in turn harm Montana's economy more than Covid-19 did. As a Montana taxpayer I am urging you to NOT pass any of these recommendations. Thank you! Nicole Riebe. I appreciate that you are collecting comments to be presented at the meeting today. Mine are as follows: I am writing to comment about Superintendent Elsie Arntzen's recommendations for

school accreditation. I write this as both an educator and as a parent. I would like to begin by addressing the proposed changes to fine arts. My daughter is currently a senior in high school. She has attended Helena Public Schools her entire academic career from K-12. In the fall, she will be attending the Jacobs School of Music at the University of Indiana Bloomington. As you may or may not know, this is quite a prestigious program with an acceptance rate of only 22%.

In addition, my daughter auditioned for and was accepted into the Helena Symphony Chorale this past fall at the age of seventeen. These accomplishments would simply not have been possible without the stellar music education that she has received at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in the Helena Public Schools. Her music teachers have mentored her not only in the development of her voice, but also helped her build the confidence necessary to perform at an advanced level. Their role in her life has made her dream of becoming a vocal performer in opera a reality. Please consider that she is just ONE student who wouldn't have accomplished what she has if Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations are approved. ONE student whose seemingly impossible dream was made possible because of the music education she has received.

Additionally, vocal performance is but one element of the fine arts that Superintendent Arntzen would see eliminated. As educators, our goal is to do what is best for kids. How in any way do Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations align with that? Clearly, they don't.

Equally appalling are Superintendent Arntzen's recommendations regarding counseling services. To say that the past few years have been especially difficult for students is an understatement. If anything, students need more support, not less. Our school counselors play an integral role in the lives of our students. The relationships they build and maintain are crucial to students' well-being. For many students, the brightest part of their day is being able to check in with their counselor and feel that they are important and cared about. The changes COVID brought about have had a lasting effect on our students. One of many of our school counselor's responsibilities is to provide students with opportunities for social and emotional learning. These are critical in helping students navigate relationships with their friends, family, and teachers. So again, I'd like to ask Superintendent Arntzen, is that what is best for students? Lastly, I would like to address the recommended changes that will affect school librarians. Research shows that the reading scores in schools that have full-time librarians were consistently better for students in all grade levels and the proportion of advanced reading scores grew from elementary, to middle, to high school. That can't be discounted. The benefits associated with good library programs are particularly significant for our most vulnerable and at-risk students. Where is the logic in eliminating library programs? The answer is there isn't. If our goal is to truly do what is best for kids, none of what Superintendent Arntzen is proposing makes any sense. It is baffling to me that she would make these recommendations, particularly being a former educator herself. Respectfully, Christy Heun. A reduction in the number of counselors at a time when more students than ever need help is a very ill- timed proposal. Keep in mind OPI and education in general is a "Students First" endeavor. Please vote against reducing the number of counselors and librarians in our schools. Thank you, Richard Brosseau. The proposal to cut student access to counseling services is not a good idea at this particular time with all that is going on in our world. Students are in even greater need. It will penalize rural districts even more because of their lower population. Please vote against this proposal. Dale and Jeanne Godfrey. Lewistown, Montana. These changes are outrageous in our opinion! All students need unlimited access to literature, music, art and mental health services! We are from a long line of educators. These proposals prove Elsie Arntzen is an anti-educator! She is against public education, yet she wants the taxpayers to pay for her private schools! How she ever became the Head of the OPI is beyond us! Sincerely, Nancy Robertson and Sally Lynam. NO. Jill Waldbillig, K-12 Music. This is such a horrible idea. Has she even been to a small school so she has the understanding that the students that attend small schools have the same needs as any other? NO NO NO. Thank you, Sonja Verlanic.

As a mother of a daughter who is now a doctor and a wife of a retired high school science and math teacher, it concerns me to learn that music and other electives might be cut from our Montana state primary schools. Our daughter developed her brain cells far more effectively by learning to play music from an early age and she found joy in the process of playing music during her formative and teenaged years. She met outstanding lifelong friends in her music classes and her music experience has made her a more well-rounded, empathetic and understanding human being. As a doctor in Residency, she works and studies in the mental health field. She knows how music is essential to mental and emotional health and well being. Scientific studies prove that

music is necessary for human beings to positively contribute to society and to experience a full, meaningful and happy life. Our children are our future. Please share my sentiments with those who have the power to impact this important decision. Thank you, Elizabeth Klarich. I am responding to the Negotiated Rule-making Committee concerning maintaining the Health Enhancement requirement for middle schools. I am a teacher of ten years and currently teach 4th grade. I know the concerns of our students' dropping grades in school and concerns about the knowledge they are lacking. I am very concerned with their future and the future of our country. I do not feel taking Health Enhancement Classes or PE from our school's curriculum will be of any benefit whatsoever. Our students' health is already at risk because of unhealthy eating habits, alcohol and drug abuse, and the lack of exercise, which are often related to obesity. It is also a proven fact that students need to get up and move around to get their blood flowing back into their heads for learning to happen. We cannot require a student to sit at a desk/table for 7.5 hours a day trying to cram in and understand difficult information. The brain cannot function that way. If you are truly looking for answers on how to better educate our students, we need to look at behavioral issues in the classroom. For the past three years, I have struggled as a teacher being able to teach a small class when a few of those student's bully, distract, disrespect, and act out for attention without the help of administration, parents, or rules in the school that would stop the behaviors that stops my other students from learning. This has become a serious and increasing problem throughout our schools across the nation. I recently read a poll that was taken of 56% of the teachers in the State of Montana who are looking for other jobs outside of the education system because of these very reasons. This only increases the concerns I have for the education of the future. Students who act out are usually students who need more movement and change in the classroom. I am part of the Shape Montana 150 program in which we create an additional 150 minutes of movement in my classroom. I have found it to be the best benefit to both my academics as well as behaviors in the class.

My students often ask for more movement to wake up their brains as they easily get tired, zone out, or get distracted when sitting too long. Please consider how the student's feel throughout the day when making this important decision. Cammy Shaw, 4th-grade teacher. The reduction of mental health services is **EXTREMELY DETRIMENTAL** in our district! I work in the ED self-contained room at Chief Joseph Elementary School in Great Falls, Montana. Our students absolutely need mental health services daily. The amount of trauma and severe diagnoses these students have is beyond our level of expertise as GFPS staff to help them heal. We **NEED** multiple CSCT and Therapists on board just for our students here at Chief Joseph. Cutting them down to 1:400 is absolutely ridiculous. If anyone would want to come and sit in our room for a day to see the severity and needs of our therapists and other staff, then maybe they would understand why everyone is against this! Please don't pass this! Think of our students! They need our support more now than ever! If anything, we need **MORE** mental health support. Jakki Baroch. My name is Merryn Poole, and I was highly alarmed to learn that this board was even considering removing education standards and mental health aid/safe spaces for Montana students. I am firmly against removing our counselors, librarians, and elective/graduation requirements for public education around the state of Montana. Many students need a safe space to go during the day, and many school counselors provide services to schools outside of mental health aid, such as scheduling courses for students. Music education and foreign language classes have had a pronounced effect on me, and they bring me far more happiness and relief from my average day at school than you could imagine. They have also been scientifically proven to improve your intelligence, overall happiness, and overall functionality of your brain. Therefore, I strongly encourage Superintendent Elsie Arntzen and the Negotiated Rule Making Committee to preserve our access to counselors and librarians, and to preserve our current elective and graduation requirements. We do not need to hinder student education based on the state they were born in. Do not allow this vote to pass. Sincerely, Merryn.

My name is Paul Bruce, and I am a music educator/title one teacher at Deer Park School just outside of Columbia Falls Montana. You have probably never heard of our little school, but we are a campus that was established well over 100 years ago in the year 1886. Since its conception, Deer Park School has proudly offered numerous classes that strive to increase the engagement of our students. These are not reading classes, math classes or science classes. These are special classes such as Spanish a foreign language, art a class of visual self-expression, music a class of self-expression through singing, or playing an instrument, drama a class of developing a voice, and many, many more. We able to offer these classes because we have administration and a school board that, like many other school boards and administrations, supports any and

all decisions made by the Montana Office of Public Instruction. So, I ask for a reconsideration on the proposed changes to the specials and electives offering in middle and elementary schools. It is what's best for the students and their engagement in schools. If schools are not required to offer it, they may not offer it, and this makes engaging students impossible. Thank you! Paul Bruce. Deer Park School Music/Band. I am writing to you to ask you to please reject the changes being made to library and counseling accreditation standards for Montana K-12 schools. Please do not reduce the amount of FTE required for these positions in our schools. Many of our rural communities do not have libraries or mental health services. If you remove these from the schools, no one in those communities will have access to these services. I realize that it can be difficult to find people to fill these positions in today's hiring climate. The job market will level out, but once these positions are eliminated, they will never come back. This is a short-sighted solution that will harm our Montana families for years to come. Thank you for considering my input. Christy Wolgamot. By taking our librarians and counselors away, you are creating more work for teachers. Teachers are quitting at alarming rates and one of the biggest reasons is that we are unable to meet the expectations that are currently in place. By adding more, you will be creating another mess. Our librarian teaches curriculum, helps students with projects, and instills the love of reading which is so important for students to be successful in continuing their education. Teachers are exhausted in dealing with student behaviors. Each year, behaviors seem to be getting worse and our school counselor helps these children. She also teaches social and emotional issues that are pertinent to each grade level. This helps them be successful in relations in and out of school and to achieve higher academically. The emotional needs of the child need to be met before they are able to learn!

Please do NOT take away these student and teacher resources. Sincerely, A tired teacher. Please maintain the counselor and librarian standards for all public schools. This is a dangerous precedent. Our children need adults to stand up and maintain the integrity of public education. They deserve the best we can give them. Montana must problem solve in ways that will benefit children. And this move by the State Superintendent will harm public education and that will negatively impact kids. Please do the right thing. Kathy Dungan. I write to you as a member of a small-town school district where I have had the great fortune to teach Art, Ceramics, Art History, and Graphic Arts k-12 for the last 13 years. I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to offer enrichment to my students. I am also painfully aware that not every school district is as fortunate. However, under the current system every school district, regardless of size or funding situation, is still required to provide our youth with the opportunity to engage in some form of visual, musical, or vocational arts. While we grow along with the current socio-political climate, it is important not to lose important skills along the way. As we proceed in an ever-changing world where future generations will have to adapt to changes much quicker than ours; the need for programs like visual, musical, and vocational arts will become more prevalent. These programs teach more than basic knowledge about the arts but enable youth to learn how to apply creative and adaptive thinking while using the core skills they are taught. I am afraid, as are many of my colleagues, that the following language strike cuts a little too deeply into the stability of such a needed foundation. Specifically, the following. 10.55.902 BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM: MIDDLE GRADES The elimination of all the well-defined programs like art and music to be replaced with ((vi) elective offerings) is entirely too vague. I would therefore humbly request that the language in question be amended to read something more concrete, such as the following. (vi) elective offerings to include a minimum of one, but not limited to Visual Arts, Music, and Career and Technical Education. I am not an expert in legal interpretation but something like this would ensure the great programs that we created and nurtured over the years don't accidentally fall through the cracks as we navigate in our ever-changing world.

I know your time is valuable, and you will receive many letters like this one, so I would like to thank you for your time and attention. PS: If it is at all possible to get a link to the meeting today at 3:30 today I would be grateful. J. Zeltner. This short letter is in request from a Montana parent of two & a long-term educator in higher ed to please maintain the art/music requirements for all Montana children in public schools K-8. As an English professor who teaches both graduate and undergraduate coursework, I consistently observe that increased critical thinking skills and increased sense of culture and expression occurs because of the art/music requirements that students are exposed to at younger ages. The arts prepare students, even those not college-bound after 12th grade, for the complexity of life and some of the joys of life. This opportunity should not be

taken away or made elective for our Montana public school students in my personal experience as a mother of two who are in Montana public schools now & in my professional experience as an educator. Thanks for including my comments in decisions around this proposed change to our Montana curriculum requirements. Montana parents and professional educators, like myself, should be instrumental to making these decisions. Sabine Brigitte, MFA. Associate Professor of English. According to the CDC in 2018 the obesity prevalence in the USA was 42%. Currently, students here in Kalispell get Physical Education every day at the Middle School! This is incredibly important for our youth. Physical Education is the only class that actively prevents health issues and disease. Maintain the Health Enhancement requirements. I am requesting the link for public comment. Jesse Johnson, MA LPES. This is to show my support for maintaining credit requirements and for electives for middle schools in Montana. Please do not replace the current regulations with broad, unclear language. Thank you, Julie Vasquez.
