



October 15, 2021

Dear Montana School Board Leaders:

There is not a day that goes by where your leadership skills are not put to the test. I want you to know that I believe leadership matters today more than ever, and that you have my gratitude and respect for putting the many needs of our children first. Your daunting challenges are recognized every day, along with your compassionate courage.

Let's talk about courage for a moment.

It takes courage to stand up, often alone, for that which preserves the integrity of our state and national Constitutions. The "us versus them" mentality has never been the way that Montana has functioned. Montanans have great pride and courage in standing for deeply held values that work for the well being and success of our Montana students.

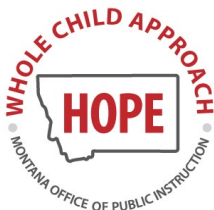
Today, we must find the courage to reject any group that would blatantly label our nation's parents as "domestic terrorists" for asserting the most fundamental right of our Constitution: the freedom of speech and the right to be heard by those elected to represent them. Most recently, the U.S. Department of Justice has acted upon the National School Boards Association (NSBA) allegation that our parents are "domestic terrorists" and the severe penalties that can be imposed. I have linked the letter I received last night for you to read and ponder: Is this what Montanans believe?

I am challenging each of you, including the Montana School Boards Association, to denounce any association with NSBA. I am further challenging each of you to publicly denounce NSBA at your next school board meeting and tell our Montana parents that none of our school districts support this federal overreach. Not one penny of Montana taxpayer dollars should go to support organizations that would treat our free citizens in such a way.

Yes, it takes courage to stand up. But if not us, if not now, then who? When?

As the State Superintendent, I wrote to President Joe Biden last week, urging respect for local control and acknowledgement of the rights of Montana parents to choose what is best for their children and their family. I know that each of you recognize that parents bear the responsibility and rights to make these choices -- not us, not the government, not any association.

Our state Constitution clearly supports local control, but not at the expense of our parents and their children. We have a long history of embracing liberty and local control by parents as constituents of those elected and employed to serve our children. That said, I want to be clear: I respect the rule of law and our law enforcement officials. But laws shouldn't be used to have a chilling effect on our freedom of speech. The



weight of the federal government should not come down on parents who express their views, or make them afraid to do so.

Now, more than ever, we need unified support of our students and parental rights. Anything less falls short of the Montana way. Join me in choosing courage and speaking out against federal arrogance so we can ensure that a flourishing environment of local control is not crushed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elsie Arntzen". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Elsie Arntzen  
State Superintendent  
Montana Office of Public Instruction