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Education Interim Committee  
65th Montana Legislature

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June 28, 2018

Montana Board of Public Education  
Certification Standards and Practices Advisory Council  
Montana Council of Deans of Education  
Superintendent of Public Instruction Arntzen

Dear Education Partners,

Over the course of the past two interims, both the 2015-2016 School Funding Interim Commission and the 2017-2018 Education Interim Committee have heard testimony regarding, and examined the state of, gifted and talented education in Montana. This letter formally expresses the questions and concerns of the current Education Interim Committee in two areas:

**1) Are teachers adequately prepared to identify and serve gifted and talented students?**

The committee understands and appreciates the breadth of preparation required of candidates for teacher licensure in Montana and is grateful for your work in this area. However, in testimony provided to the committee, we discern a lack of consistency in the amount of preparation required of teachers in serving gifted and talented students and a lack of agreement about whether that preparation should focus on classroom differentiation or specialized programs. It is likely that in the great variety of Montana school districts, teachers need to be prepared for both approaches, but regardless of district approach, it is the teachers who will be of paramount importance in identifying and serving our high-ability/high-potential students.

**2) Are districts being held accountable for providing educational programs for gifted and talented students?**

Montana's Standards of Accreditation at [ARM 10.55.804](#) require that all districts "provide educational services to gifted and talented students." Yet in testimony to the committee, we learned that a significant number of districts report identifying no gifted and talented students despite reporting through the accreditation process having programs to serve gifted and talented students. It appears that Montana either has extremely anomalous distribution of


gifted and talented students or a less than rigorous accountability system for ensuring that the standards of accreditation regarding gifted and talented education are met. We suspect the latter.

\* \* \*

The committee acknowledges the Legislature's responsibility to fund the basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools that includes educational programs to provide for students with special needs such as gifted and talented children (pursuant to Article X, section 1(3), of the Montana Constitution and 20-9-309, MCA) and plans to continue its conversation about how best to meet this responsibility. In doing so, the committee would appreciate your response to the above questions and concerns that are within your purview. Please provide a written response by August 26, 2018, and, if possible, send a representative to discuss these issues with the committee at our September 12-13 meeting in Helena. We appreciate the multiple entities with constitutional, statutory, and practical roles to play in ensuring all Montana students an equal opportunity to develop their individual potentials and desire to work effectively and together with all of you to accomplish this goal.

Sincerely,

  
Sen. Edie McClafferty, Presiding Officer

  
Rep. Fred Anderson, Vice Presiding Officer

Provide written response and coordinate your appearance at our September meeting with our committee staff, Pad McCracken. You can reach him at 406-444-3595 or [padmccracken@mt.gov](mailto:padmccracken@mt.gov) or

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