



Quality Schools Interim Committee

59th Montana Legislature

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Dear Members of the Quality Schools Interim Committee:

The present paper seeks to provide some guidance in crafting a distribution mechanism for at-risk students as provided in SB 152.

The example of other states

Currently, 41 states provide additional resources to districts serving at-risk students. The distribution mechanism varies widely across states, though resources are most often delivered in the form of a weight to the basic student entitlement, or through a grant to qualifying districts. Though there is significant variation in how other states define “at-risk,” the present paper summarizes each state’s *response* to their at-risk population, however defined.

Figure 1 summarizes the entitlement weights applied by various states.

Figure 1. At-risk Youth Resource Distribution Weights by State

National Center for Education Statistics, 2003.

State	At-Risk Weight
Colorado	1.225*
Connecticut	1.25
Kansas	1.08
Kentucky	1.15
Louisiana	1.17
Maryland	1.25
Michigan	1.115
Mississippi	1.05
Nebraska	1.175*
New Hampshire	1.75*
New Mexico	1.015
Oregon	1.25
Texas	1.2
Vermont	1.25
Average	1.209285714

The notations for Colorado, Nebraska, and New Hampshire indicate that the actual weight varies (from 1.15 to 1.30 in Colorado; from 1.05 to 1.30 in Nebraska; and from 1.50 to 2.00 in New Hampshire) depending on the concentration of poverty within a given district. In those

instances, averages of the states' variations were used to compute the average weight.

Concentration of poverty has been demonstrated to factor significantly in predicting student outcomes. When poor students are isolated from their wealthier peers and the quality of instruction that tends to follow them, achievement often lags.

Other states deliver resources via granting authority, administered by their state department of education. Figure 2 summarizes the size of those awards per-student in 2001.

Figure 2. Award Amounts for At-Risk Youth by State

Education Commission of the States, 2001.

State	At-risk award
California	149.47
Florida	614.68
Georgia	111.89
Massachusetts	73.49
Missouri	1003
New York	732.38
North Carolina	430.52
Ohio	568.56
Washington	196.21
Wisconsin	297.83
Average	417.803

In some instances, the grants are awarded by default. Simply by meeting eligibility criteria, a district receives additional assistance. In other instances, grants are competitive, with each district placing forward a plan to ameliorate the achievement and performance of their at-risk student populations.

Desired Policy Features

Based on the findings of the QSIC's consultants, staff reports, and the comments of committee members, it seemed that any at-risk awards ought demonstrate the following features:

- Accountability;
- Sustainability;
- Flexibility; and
- Assurance of delivery.

Policy Options

Members of the committee might consider the following questions in order to craft a distribution mechanism capable of maximizing performance among each desired feature.

1. Does the committee prefer a weight to the basic student entitlement or granting

authority for the Office of Public Instruction? Perhaps a blending of the two?

A weight to the basic entitlement assures that each school with at-risk students receives additional money, but it offers little accountability to policy-makers. Grants can be administered with “strings attached,” allowing for greater accountability. But because grants require administrative oversight and a high level of district organization and savvy, underperforming districts would be most in peril of losing the money they need.

2. Does the committee prefer a long term commitment to meeting the needs of at-risk students?

Granting authority elicits complaints that the funding is not dependable. We have ways of drafting the legislation to ensure long-term viability.

3. Does the committee prefer a graduated benefit, recognizing the increased challenges associated with schools in regions of concentrated poverty?

Costs

Costs will vary based on the level of authority the committee determines, though we can certainly provide numbers given certain sets of assumptions.