

**FACT SHEET REGARDING SB 419—SEN. DON RYAN  
Revising the Moratorium on New School Districts by  
Expanding an Elementary District into a K-12 District**

**About Ophir School District:**

Ophir School District is located in Gallatin County equidistance between Bozeman and West Yellowstone. It was established as a school district in 1912. Students in Ophir School District consider themselves to be residents of the unincorporated town of Big Sky, a wholly separate community from Bozeman.

Currently, 133 students attend this K-8 school.

Ophir has experienced a 10% annualized growth rate over the past three years.

Pre-school enrollment of more than 40 students indicates continuing growth rates.

The Ophir School Board is beginning plans for a 3<sup>rd</sup> phase expansion plan.

Ophir students enjoy the advantage of their unique location through affiliations with institutions such as Expedition Yellowstone. Part of the Ophir education is experiential learning: operating a weather station, conducting field studies of elk habitat, engaging in service learning, and restoring a homesteader cabin.

Ophir is extraordinarily well supported by the Big Sky Community. It is the only Montana elementary school district with its own endowment (over 600,000 dollars under full board control).

Ophir School District has never experienced a defeated levy.

**Facts about the Bozeman - Ophir Relationship:**

Graduates of Ophir reside in the Bozeman High School District.

OSD students comprise approximately 2% of the Bozeman School District; however, the Ophir School District contributes 11.9% of the taxable value of Bozeman School District.

OSD high school students have a two and one half hour round trip bus ride on Highway 191 - consistently ranked by the Department of Transportation as one of the top three most dangerous stretches of road in Montana. If you have driven Hwy. 191, you know by the white crosses how dangerous the Gallatin Canyon road is.

Current Bozeman High School expansion plans do not address the concerns of the rural districts: the BHS Expansion Team has recently decided not to build a second school, but rather to rebuild one larger school on the existing site. This decision does not speak to

the needs of the growing communities west of town (Monforton, Gallatin Gateway, Big Sky).

Most OSD students reside some distance from the highway and leave home at 6:30am, arriving home at 5pm.

Big Sky students taking the bus arrive after first period has ended, which frequently reduces their AP course selection and prohibits extracurricular participation, and no bus service is available for students who want to participate in extracurricular activities.

**Disruption to family and community:**

Nearly 25% of families' purchase or rent second homes in Bozeman to avoid the commute. Families with children in Ophir are split or reverse commute back to Big Sky.

Less than 60% of Ophir students graduate from BHS. The remainder find graduation alternatives, such as private schools or GED.

**What SB 419 does to address these community concerns:**

1. It allows a K-8 district to expand into a high school district under certain conditions:
  - a. The nearest elementary school building is located at a distance of at least 40 miles from the nearest accessible high school;
  - b. The trip from the nearest elementary school building to the nearest accessible high school is 60 minutes or more over the shortest passable route;
  - c. Periodically during the school year, the condition of the road makes it impractical to attend the nearest accessible high school; and
  - d. The newly created K-12 district will enroll at least 50 high school students within 3 years after the effective date of the creation of the new district.
2. The district may request to create a district in one of two ways:
  - a. The electors may present a petition to the county superintendent that conforms to Section 20-6-105(1) - 60% of electors; contiguous territory not within 3 miles of an operating school; or
  - b. The trustees of an existing elementary district pass a resolution as outlined in 20-6-105(6) and requests the county superintendent to allow the electors of the district to propose a high school district solely for the purpose of expanding the elementary district into a K-12 district.
3. If the petition is valid, county superintendent holds a hearing pursuant to 20-6-105(6) and must make decision within 30 days to grant or deny the petition which requests extension of the existing school district.

4. If resolution passed by the trustees of the elementary district and if the superintendent receives a resolution consenting to the creation of the HS district from which the property will be transferred, an election is then ordered.
5. If the expansion is approved by the electors of the elementary district or by the petition, the superintendent orders the creation of the HS district.
6. The district then is then transitioned into the HS district and has three years to build a high school.

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