- WHEREAS, MTSBA HAS JOINED WITH OTHER EDUCATION GROUPS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS AS MEMBERS IN THE MONTANA QUALITY EDUCATION COALITION; AND
- WHEREAS, MONTANA'S SYSTEM OF FUNDING FOR K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAS BEEN DECLARED UNCONSTITUTIONAL IN A DISTRICT COURT DECISION; AND
- WHEREAS, THE FINDING OF THE DISTRICT COURT THAT THE CURRENT STATE FUNDING SYSTEM VIOLATES ARTICLE X, SECTION 1(2) OF THE MONTANA CONSTITUTION WITH RESPECT TO THE STATE'S OBLIGATION TO RECOGNIZE AND PRESERVE THE DISTINCT AND UNIQUE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF AMERICAN INDIANS HAS NOT BEEN APPEALED BY THE STATE.

BE IT RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS:

- That MTSBA promote passage of legislation to provide adequate funding for a quality education in Montana's public schools based upon educationally relevant factors, including the actual cost of providing programs;
- That MTSBA refer to and rely upon the findings of the school funding adequacy study and subsequent study by MQEC, court decisions, and the K-12 Public School Renewal Commission to guide its efforts in this regard;
- That, at a minimum, the legislation provide some means of addressing the historical shortfall in state funding of public education during the 1990's and provide a reliable means to ensure adequate funding in the future; and
- That, MTSBA supports initiatives of the Montana Public School Renewal Commission and others to address the court-recognized deficiencies in funding and upholding the constitutional mandate to recognize and preserve the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indian.

Pursuant to the resolution above, MTSBA has coordinated its efforts with those of MQEC, and we fully support both the short term relief and long term goals of MQEC. I will leave it to Jack Copps to fully articulate those plans, but they are encompassed in existing bill draft requests and they will be introduced for this Committee's consideration.

We believe that there are several bills in the 2005 Legislative Session that could be used to address all or part of our efforts, including but certainly not limited to:

- House Bill 125 and LC 1451 (Representative Raser), providing for an increase in the schedules for schools
- House Bill 111 (Representative Branae), providing for a per-educator entitlement
- House Bill 224 (Representative Facey), statewide health insurance plan
- House Bill 309-311 and LC 1554-1555 (Representative Glaser), all seeking to address and provide for a remedy to the court decision in one way or another
- LC 28 (Senator Cooney, Requester), providing for MQEC's short term relief efforts
- LC 844 (Representative Gallik), providing for a quality schools task force to study the basic system of free quality schools

- Senate Bill 152 (Senator Ryan), defining the basic system of free quality schools
- Senate Bill 177 (Senator Ryan), providing for an increase in the schedules for schools
- Senate Bill 170 (Senator Mangan), providing for flexibility in the school day
- Senate Bill 224 (Senator Laslovich), providing for off-site learning opportunities
- Senate Bill 13 (Senator Laible), providing for off-site learning opportunities
- LC 2325 (Senate Education Committee), providing for a study of education funding

Our hope is to assist the House Select Committee in taking a leadership role in crafting a solution to the Court's order on school funding adequacy. There are certainly a wealth of bill draft requests that could form the basis of a solution if coordinated and passed together. We offer our assistance to the Committee in addressing this key issue facing the Montana Legislature and in providing you with the perspective of the elected leaders who govern, supervise and control education in each community in the state.

We appreciate each of your efforts on behalf of Montana's school-aged children, and thank you for the opportunity to present this information.