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SENATE FINANCE AND CLAIMS
COMMIT NO. 1
DATE 4-8-05
38525
Linda McCulloch
Superintendent

**SB 525 Establish Interim Committee to Assess Educational Needs
Senate Finance and Claims
April 8, 2005
Superintendent Linda McCulloch Remarks**

Good afternoon! For the record, I'm Linda McCulloch, Superintendent of Public Instruction for Montana's K-12 schools.

Thank you to President Tester for sponsoring this Committee requested bill.

I commend the Joint Select Committee on Education Funding for the work they have accomplished this session. They have laid a foundation for an interim committee to be successful. The task of developing a new school funding formula is critical to the educational success of our students and is too important to be rushed during a session when you have 1400 bills to consider and other committees to serve on. Taking the funding formula work into the interim when you have more time and fewer distractions is a wise decision. Preparing the work for a projected December Special Session will further ensure success for the process.

I appreciate being named to the interim committee, offering an important perspective as the representative of all public schools in Montana including 146,552 school kids. In addition, Senator Tester's bill acknowledges that a new funding formula must include input from many people, including folks who lead our schools, teach in our schools and are responsible for our schools, as well as the public.

The appropriation set aside in House Bill 2 to fund and staff the committee is crucial to assure that a study is done properly, utilizing best practices in the area of school funding. As Montanans, we invest a lot of tax dollars in our schools. The process of developing a constitutionally valid funding formula warrants the involvement of reputable and reliable outside eyes looking at our process and lending expertise to our work.

It is critical that the committee link the Legislative definition of a quality education to the new funding formula. The formula must contain all aspects of quality education from accreditation standards to Indian Education for All to attracting and retaining educators. The importance of the newly developed funding formula is not just for the near future but for future biennia. The new formula will be the foundation upon which I and future State Superintendents will base our budget requests to ensure a quality education for Montana's K-12 students. For example, if the critical need is for recruitment and retention of educators, budget proposals can reflect a targeted area, such as salaries and benefits, including health insurance.

I look forward to the work of the committee, but mostly I look forward to a school funding system that ensures our students of a quality education. I anticipate that my staff will play a major role in this process. We are ready to assist the committee within our existing resources.

Thank you for your time and efforts today!

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