

Augusta Public Schools

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SENATE EDUCATION

EXHIBIT NO. 2

DATE 3-14-05

~~NUMBER~~ Discussion

March 11, 2005

Dear Sub Committee:

I would like the legislature to look at small school funding from a different perspective. Many small schools are very rural in nature and often are somewhat isolated. Consolidation is not always a good option due to the distances required to bus students to school. Some students are on the bus two hours each day. Consolidation with our closer towns would likely double the time students spend on a bus.

The current funding formula relies heavily on student numbers or "Annual Number Belonging". This format does not work for small schools. We can't put 20 students in each class; therefore we cannot operate as efficiently as larger schools.

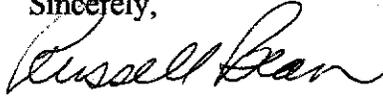
I would like to see the state fund classroom units based on at least \$40,000 per classroom. The average teacher in Montana, according to MEA figures for 2005, makes \$38,485. The average Class "C" teacher makes \$31,225, according to the Class "C" Survey 2004-2005, completed by the Montana Rural Education Center at the University of Montana - Western. This \$40,000 would cover slightly higher than the average teacher's salary and employer costs that Class "C" schools currently expend, but it would not make us competitive with the larger schools. We only hope to close that gap so that we can attract and retain high quality teachers. This idea may also be applicable to Class "B" schools, especially those with declining enrollments.

Small schools do not need full time elective area teachers. These positions are prorated based on the percentage of "full time equivalent" needed to meet the "Accreditation Standards". Other base costs are included in my sample-spread sheet such as administrative, counseling, library, maintenance, supplies, utilities, insurances, Special Education, and the lunch program. Please refer to the attached spreadsheets. I have included several spreadsheet samples to show how different "Classroom Unit Costs" would affect a general fund budget. I then tried to consider how we might simplify the process. I included samples of how we might take basic employee costs; take approximately 30% of that total employee cost to cover "other costs". If we take the employee cost, other costs and health insurance; add them together we have adequately funded small schools.

I realize I have given you a lot to think about and my cost estimates certainly need more research as to how they affect other small schools, but it has potential to work. Under the current funding format, we will loose funding for both the high school and elementary

district, potentially \$73,000. This would obviously be a devastating cut to our small school. Please consider funding small schools based on actual costs necessary to meet the accreditation standards. Help us keep our high quality/high performing schools in our communities. I certainly understand that some school consolidations make sense; some do not. The students of rural Montana deserve the opportunity to have an excellent education in their home community. I want you also to understand that I don't claim to speak for all small schools; I only want to present some possibilities. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Russell Bean".

Russell Bean
Superintendent
Augusta Public Schools