

Montana State Legislature

2011 Session

Exhibit 2

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The original exhibits are on file at the Montana Historical Society and may be viewed there.

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MONTANA PUBLIC VIEWS on K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION

Featuring the 2010 MTSBA and MREA/Zogby Poll of Montana Voters



4th Grade classroom at Broadwater Elementary in Helena Montana





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Jan Cahill

President, MTSBA



Kris Kuehn

President, MREA

Working together for K-12 Public Education

If you want to know the opinions of Montana voters on K-12 public education issues, all you have to do is ask!!! That is exactly what the Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) and the Montana Rural Education Association (MREA) have done. In order to ensure that legislators, trustees, educators, parents and community members have access to information regarding the views of Montana voters on critical issues impacting K-12 public education, MTSBA and MREA took the initiative to gather critical information in preparation for, what will undoubtedly be, one of the most challenging legislative sessions for K-12 public education.

In November of 2010, MTSBA and MREA commissioned Zogby International, a renowned U.S. market research, opinion polling firm to conduct a telephone survey of 700 likely Montana voters. The Poll solicited information on how Montanan's graded their local schools, whether training (professional development) was important for trustees, the imposition of forced consolidation, budgeting priorities at the state level, Montanan's views on increased income taxes or the implementation of a sales tax, whether money intended for schools (i.e., \$81 million in state land revenue from coal leases on Otter Creek and \$30.7 million from the Federal Education Jobs Fund Act Jobs) should go directly to schools or help balance the state's budget, whether those polled were concerned about the decrease in K-12 funding from 51% to 34% since 1991, and Montanan's support for elected officials who support increased funding for K-12 education. This publication is devoted to revealing the results of that Poll.

The Poll revealed overwhelming support for K-12 public schools and prioritization of funding for K-12 public education. Montanans are clear that state funding for schools should be a priority. At a time when Montana is faced with a budget shortfall of approximately \$370 million more than projected revenues over the coming two years, the Poll shows that the general public is standing behind K-12 public education and that decreasing public education funding is not the solution. Instead, likely voters believe that the state needs to invest additional resources in our state's public schools and that K-12 public education needs to remain a priority.

MTSBA and MREA advocate for the interests of public schools and the children served by Montana's public schools every day. MTSBA and MREA know that by collaborating and working together to represent the interests of every public school child in the state of Montana and continually promoting enhanced student achievement, we can develop solutions to ensure Montana's constitutional requirement (Article X, Section 1 of the Montana Constitution) that "the legislature provide a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools" is fulfilled. However, MTSBA and MREA cannot do it alone. Legislators need to be informed about the wants, needs and preferences of Montana voters. Trustees, educators, parents and community members need to be strong advocates for K-12 public education and make their voices heard. Now is not the time for apathy. Get involved and become educated about what matters to those in your communities and rally the troops. We need to be and remain united on education issues that benefit all children.

OVERVIEW

The Montana School Boards Association

The Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) is a statewide association of public school boards whose mission is to encourage and advance public elementary and secondary education through the unique American tradition of local citizen responsibility. Since 1926, MTSBA has been firmly committed to the concept of public education policy being determined by locally elected school board members and has served as the service association for those individuals. MTSBA's membership encompasses virtually all the state's locally elected boards of trustees and provides access to a wide range of services, including seminars, legislative representation, legal assistance, personnel services, superintendent search services, policy development, in-district consulting services, and insurance programs. The association also serves as a liaison between local school boards and various state agencies and organizations.

MTSBA'S CORE IDEOLOGY

Core ideology describes an association's consistent identity that transcends all changes related to its relevant environment. It consists of two elements - core purpose - the association's reason for being - and core values - essential and enduring principles that guide an association. Envisioned future conveys a concrete yet unrealized vision for the association. It consists of a big audacious goal - a clear and compelling catalyst which serves as a focal point for effort - and a vivid description - vibrant and engaging descriptions of what it will be like to achieve the big audacious goal.

MTSBA'S CORE PURPOSE

"To maximize the potential of every child through school board leadership."

MTSBA'S CORE VALUES

- **Advocacy Focused on Children:** MTSBA will lead advocacy efforts on behalf of our membership to ensure that Montana's system of public education is focused on high student achievement, full development of the potential of all children, and development of the whole child through a system of education that includes music and the arts, healthy habits and early childhood education.
- **Rational, Adequate Funding:** MTSBA commits to funding, at all levels, which is rationally related to standards, mandates, values and all other necessary operational costs.
- **Visionary Leadership:** MTSBA will provide services that strengthen the effectiveness of local school boards as governors of public education. MTSBA will be visionary, dynamic and solution-oriented in all programs and services.
- **Cultural Integrity:** MTSBA commits to the preservation of and education regarding the cultural integrity of our American Indian populations.
- **Commitment to Preserving Local Control:** MTSBA commits to preservation of supervision and control of public schools by elected school boards.

The Montana Rural Education Association

The Montana Rural Education Association is an organization which is concerned about all aspects of the K-12 public education system in rural Montana. The organization is particularly concerned with the following basic educational premises:

- That equality of educational opportunity regardless of their geographic location is a constitutional right of all Montana students;
- That the state must provide a funding system which provides adequate funds for all students in Montana;
- That the "local control" provided to school boards in the Montana Constitution be realized in all aspects of school district proceedings;
- MREA supports the accreditation standards adopted by the Board of Public Education, provided sufficient state funding is available for implementation of the standards;
- MREA is opposed to the "forced consolidation" of school districts. Forced consolidation is legislative, administrative or executive action taken at the state or regional levels that mandates the consolidation of school districts.

MREA'S COMMITMENTS

- MREA is committed to providing all students of Montana equality of educational opportunity. Each person in this state must be offered equal educational opportunity of they are to achieve individual success. MREA is not only committed to educational equality, but just as important, to quality educational experience.
- MREA is committed to work toward an educational funding system that is weighted to reflect the increased cost of educating students in rural areas of Montana, including all aspects of state ANB funding, transportation and capital outlay.
- MREA shall work to ensure that the control and supervision of local school districts remain at the local level.
- MREA realizes that the consolidation of school districts in Montana has been a voluntary and ongoing process, and strongly believes that local communities and school boards are in the best position to evaluate and initiate voluntary consolidation efforts and will only support consolidation on that premise.
- MREA is committed to work with all other educational groups for the betterment of Montana students.
- MREA will insure that effective lobbying efforts are undertaken with the Montana Legislature, the State Board of Public Education, the Office of Public Instruction and all other public or private entities that have an effect on rural education in Montana.
- MREA pledges that its members will receive timely information regarding issues that affect rural education in Montana and will also encourage the participation of member districts in lobbying efforts when appropriate.

POLL HIGHLIGHTS

EDUCATION FUNDING

- Montana voters believe K-12 education funding should be increased.
- A majority of Montana voters support elected officials who support increased funding for K-12 public education.
- Montana voters overwhelmingly chose K-12 education when asked to identify what they believe should be the top priority in the state budget.
- Montana voters disagree with the state's recent decision to use emergency federal education aid to balance the state's budget.
- A great majority of Montana voters believe that revenues from state land leases should go directly to public education and not the state general fund.
- Those polled are concerned that K-12 education spending, as a percent of the state budget, has decreased in the past decade.
- The majority of Montana voters expressed support for possible initiated measures that would deliver increased funding to schools.

EDUCATION QUALITY

When asked to grade schools based on the quality of education students receive, most Montana voters give schools in their community an A or B.

An overwhelming majority of Montana voters believe that school districts should invest in training for their volunteer school board members.

DECISION MAKING

Montana voters overwhelmingly believe local school boards are best positioned to make decisions about when it may be time to consolidate or merge with another school district.

ABOUT THE POLL OF MONTANA VOTERS OVERVIEW

Zogby International was commissioned by MTSBA and MREA to conduct a telephone survey of 700 likely Montana voters. The survey was conducted November 8-9, 2010.

MARGIN OF ERROR

The margin is +/- 3.8 percentage points. Margins of error are higher for sub-groups. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest percent. Please note that totals may not sum up to 100% due to rounding.

QUESTIONS

The survey featured 27 questions, including demographic questions, which were developed jointly by MTSBA/MREA and Zogby International. For questions with several possible answers, response options were rotated.

SAMPLE

Participants were randomly drawn from telephone CDs of a national listed sample.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

AFFILIATION

- 34% Republican
- 30% Democratic
- 36% Independent

AGE GROUP

- 18-24: 10.2%
- 25-34: 16.3%
- 35-54: 35.1%
- 55-69: 25.5%
- 70+: 1.6%

COMMUNITY SIZE

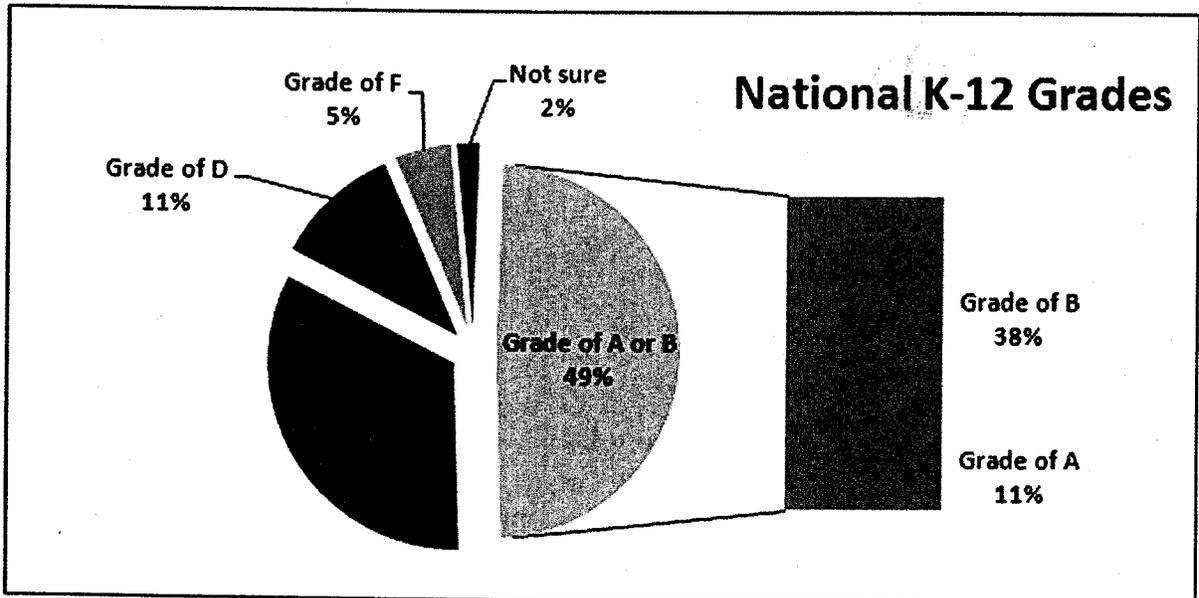
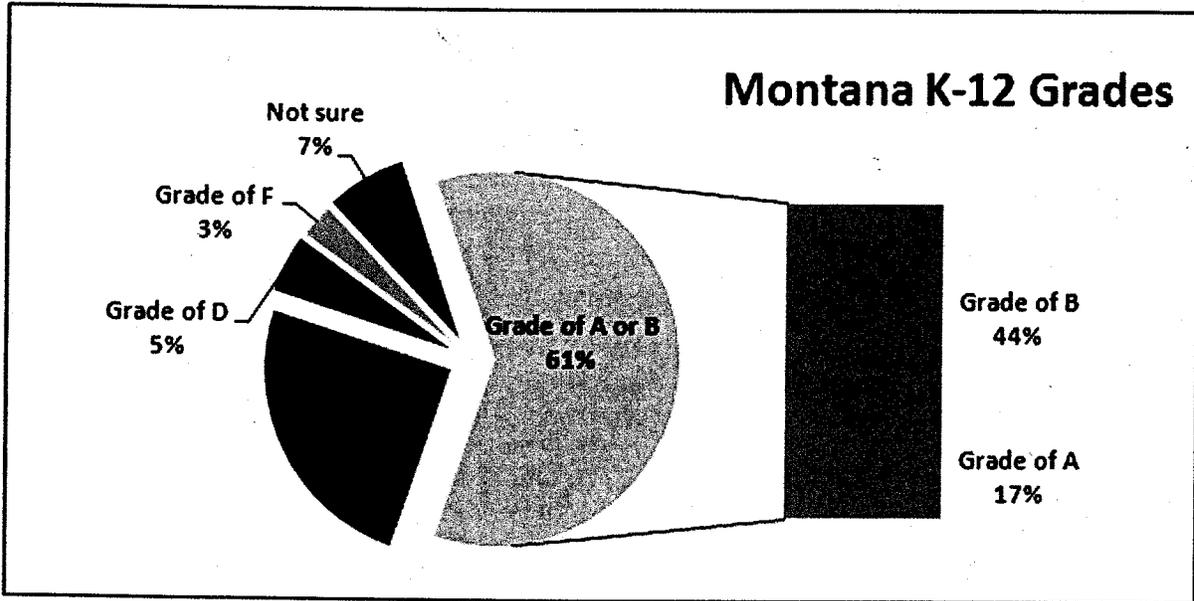
- 24.1% 50,000 or more
- 15.0% 25,001 to 50,000
- 6.1% 12,001 to 25,000
- 10.2% 6,500 to 12,000
- 38.4% 6,499 or less

CHILDREN UNDER AGE 17

- 64% do not have children under age 18 living at home
- 36% have children under age 18 living at home

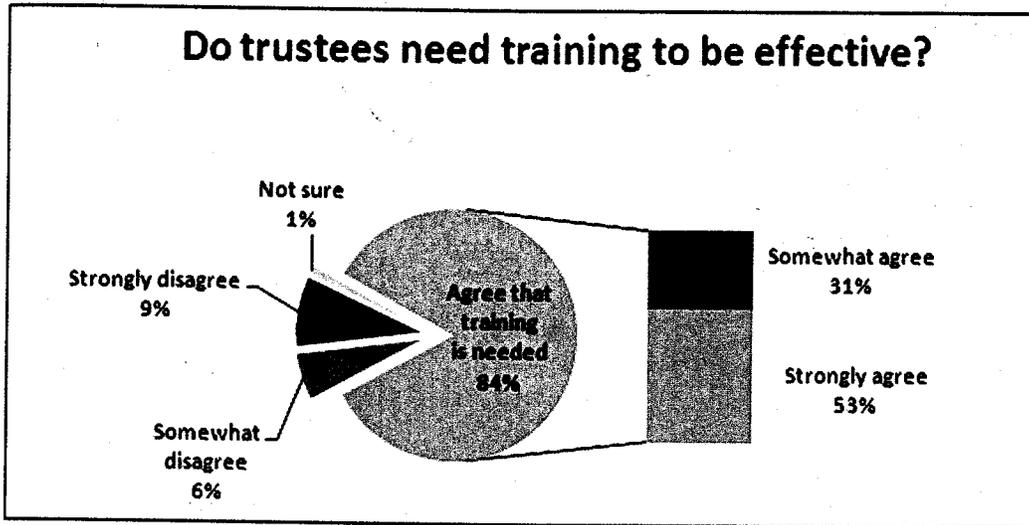
EDUCATION QUALITY

POLL QUESTION 1: If you had to give a letter grade to the K-12 public schools in your community based on the quality of education children enrolled are receiving, would you give them an A, B, C, D, or F?



The two charts above compare how Montana voters graded the schools in their local communities versus the national PDK Poll. Montana schools are graded higher by their local communities than the national average (1). A plurality of Montana voters (61%) say they would give K-12 public schools in their community a letter grade of better than average based on the quality of education children enrolled are receiving. A large portion (17%) gave their school a grade of A, while only 3% of Montana's would give their local school a failing grade.

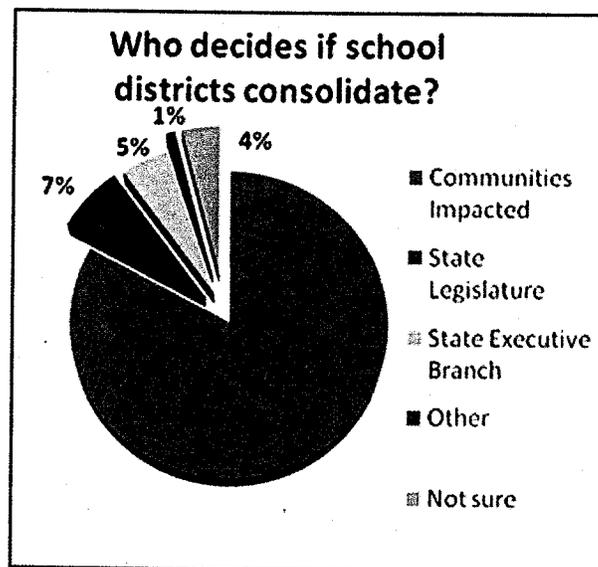
POLL QUESTION 2: Please tell us if you agree or disagree with the following statement: "School districts should invest in training school board members to become more effective in their positions."



A strong majority (84%) of people polled said they agree with the statement: "School districts should invest in training school board members to become more effective in their positions". A majority of those (53%) say they strongly agree with the statement. A small percentage (15%) disagree that public schools should invest in training for their volunteer school board members.

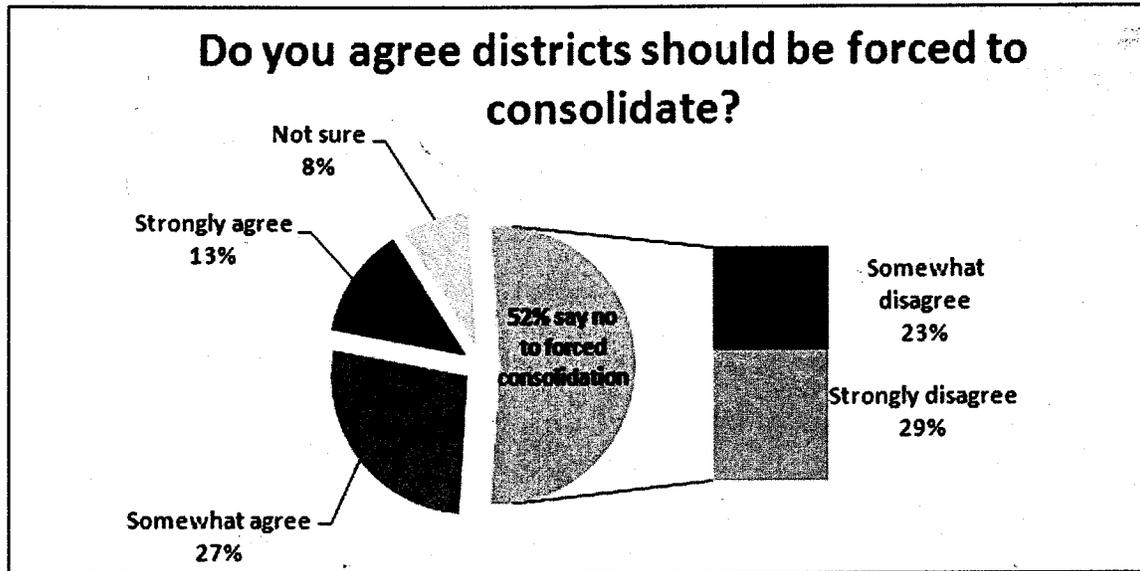
CONSOLIDATION

POLL QUESTION 3: Which of the following do you think should be most responsible for deciding whether school districts should merge or consolidate?



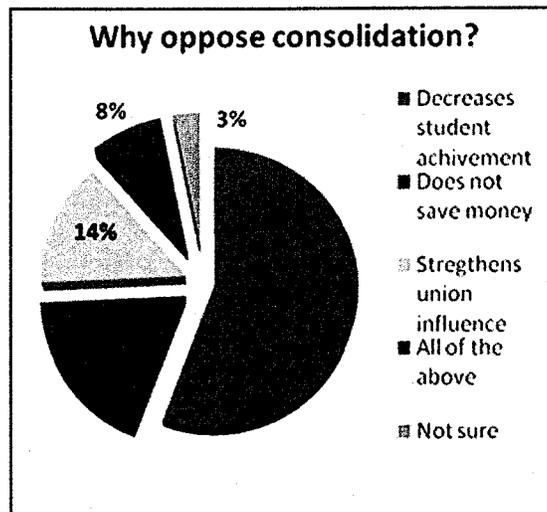
An overwhelming majority of likely voters in Montana (82%) believe that the communities impacted by consolidation should be the most responsible for deciding whether school districts should merge or consolidate, while just 12% say that either the state legislature or executive branch should be responsible for such decisions.

POLL QUESTION 4: Do you agree or disagree that some Montana public school districts should be forced to consolidate?



Over half of Montana voters (52%) say that Montana public school districts should not be forced to consolidate. Of those that do not believe that Montana public school districts should be forced to consolidate a large majority (29%) of the respondents say they strongly disagree with the concept of forced consolidation.

POLL QUESTION 5: Which of the following would make you most likely to oppose forced consolidation?



Montana voters (72%) oppose forced consolidation upon learning that it either decreases student achievement or that it does not save money. 14% said they would oppose forced consolidation if it strengthened union influence in public schools.

Montana School Consolidation - Fictions and Facts:

- Fiction: There are 417 school districts, each operating separately in Montana.
 - Fact: Many of those 417 districts operate jointly with another. For example, Columbia Falls has a high school and elementary district, but operate with ~~one~~ superintendent and board, which create a school system. There are 298 school systems in Montana.
- Fiction: There are too many administrators in Montana.
 - Fact: In 2009, there were 109 full time superintendents in Montana. Public education in Montana had 16.5 FTE (Teacher, Library staff, counselor and no educator licensed staff) employees for every 1 administrator (Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Principal and Assistant Principal). The employee-to-executive/manager ratio for Public Administration (e.g. state and local government) is 3.5-to-1. (2)
- Fiction: Children will get a better education through consolidation.
 - Fact: The research actually proves that smaller school settings help narrow the achievement gap and lead to higher academic achievement. Not only is consolidation likely to lead to increased costs and lower academic achievement, forced consolidation is fundamentally at odds with the Montana Constitution, which vests supervision and control of education in each district in the elected board of trustees.

Additional facts about consolidation:

- The argument that consolidation saves money is based upon the premise of economies of scale.
 - Analysis shows that cost savings from massive school and district consolidation have not been realized. There is no evidence that consolidation of schools will result in reduced expenses. (3) Bigger is not always better for reducing costs.
- Students in larger schools tend to be more disconnected.
 - In large schools, the sense of belonging and cohesiveness is diminished which often requires special programs to address dropouts and discipline. (3) Bigger is not always better in engaging children in the school day.
- Small schools in high-poverty communities produced higher student achievement.
 - Compared to larger consolidated buildings, small schools produce better results. Poverty exerts a larger detrimental effect in large schools in large districts. (3) Bigger is not always better in increasing student achievement.
- Loss of local control is important when considering consolidation.
 - As districts and schools become larger, those who make decisions affecting the local communities become more removed from those most affected. (3) Bigger is not always better in community engagement and development.