

Senate Education and Cultural Resources Committee

March 6, 2013

HB182

Revise Legislative Goals for Public Schools

Testimony of Dr. David F. Bedey

SENATE EDUCATION

EXHIBIT NO. 2

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BILL NO. HB182

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, my name is David Bedey. I am here to speak in support of House Bill 182, legislation that seeks to revise goals the legislature has envisioned for Montana's public schools.

My experience in educational matters includes service as a professor of physics at the United States Military Academy at West Point, where I taught, led an academic department, supervised the implementation of pedagogic reforms, conducted scientific research, and participated in senior-level, academy-wide governance in the areas of curriculum development, educational program assessment, and budgeting. Since late 2008, I have served on the Board of Trustees of the Hamilton School District and am currently its chairman.

Today, I am not appearing before your committee as a representative of the Hamilton School District. Rather, I am expressing my informed opinion as a Montana citizen who shares your commitment to provide our children an excellent education.

I wish to draw your attention to three of the revisions in this bill.

First, placing the development of literacy and numeracy at the head of the list is significant and is to my mind altogether appropriate. This is so for two reasons. The first is entirely practical: literacy and numeracy are arguably the most important attributes that our high school graduates can bring to the workplace or to the college classroom. The second is that the process of developing competence in reading, writing, and mathematics (the language of science) plays an indispensable role in the development of a child's mind by creating the capacity for abstract and logical thinking, which in turn is necessary for mastering knowledge in other subject areas.

Second, adding "strategic" reasoning to "critical" and "creative" reasoning goes well beyond semantics. Critical thinking, which is sometimes referred to as "metacognition," is about

## **HB182 (Testimony of Dr. David F. Bedey)**

understanding one's own thinking and discerning one's own biases. Creative thinking is about allowing oneself to consider options or points of view that are outside the norm. Strategic thinking involves the ability to set future goals and to formulate realistic plans for attaining these goals. A critical, creative, strategic thinker is a well rounded thinker. This should be encouraged in all of our students.

And third, gaining an in-depth understanding of the American political, social, and economic systems is a prerequisite for effective citizenship. To make sense of the heated political debates that are an enduring feature of a free and open society, a citizen must understand the genesis of America's political institutions and the free market system, regardless of his or her political beliefs. For in the absence of a mutually understood civic vocabulary, political discourse descends into an incoherent exchange of emotional appeals, clichés, and prevarications. Montana's public schools must provide our students a common foundation for evaluating political arguments and for developing their own informed positions on the crucial issues facing our nation.

I know that you often find yourselves preoccupied with school financing. So do I, albeit at the school-district level rather than the state level. We all have a duty to be fiscally responsible when it comes to the stewardship of taxpayer dollars. But educational goals matter. For no matter how elegant our system for school funding might be, all will likely be for naught in the absence of well-conceived goals that guide the how schools funds ought to be expended.

I urge this committee to support House Bill 182.

Thank you.