EXHIBIT 9
DATE March 6, 2015
HB 2

HB 2 Amendment for Special Education Allowable Cost inflationary Adjustment

Tim Miller, March 6, 2015.

I am the Director of the Bitterroot Valley Education Cooperative. The cooperative provides special education and mental health services to students in our member school districts in Ravalli County.

I ask your support to amend HB 2 for an Inflationary adjustment for Special Education Allowable Cost funding (4.12% over the biennium).

Otherwise, this will be the only school district funding source not to receive an inflationary increase.

What are consequences of disallowing the inflationary adjustment for Special Education?

- ✓ **It adversely impacts disabled students and non-disabled students alike.**

  Schools must provide special education to a growing number of students identified with disabilities. The straining of special education resources forces school districts to shift additional dollars from general funds to special education. The state requires school districts to contribute a 25% general fund match for special education dollars. Statewide the average match is 41.3%. Our cooperative member districts' general fund match is 68%.

- ✓ **It disproportionately affects our rural schools.**

  While larger school districts in urban communities may increase mill levy requests by including special education cost increases, smaller districts generally do not or cannot. This is applies to most class C and B school districts and many class A districts. Cooperatives do not have the statutory authority to levy for additional funding.

- ✓ **It amplifies an existing problem with unequal access to appropriate special education services in our rural schools**.

  Equal student access to appropriate special education services is attainable only with adequately funded resources which are essential for recruitment and retention of highly qualified personnel.

Education Cooperatives were created to share resources and personnel among rural school districts.

Cooperatives serve 81% of Montana school districts (43% of all students). They are responsible to provide the bulk of special education services in rural schools and yet they are not adequately funded. Overlooking a crucial inflationary funding increase accelerates unequal access to special education services in rural Montana schools.

Fund the basic education components first.

All standard school district funding sources are scheduled for an inflationary increase with one exception; special education.

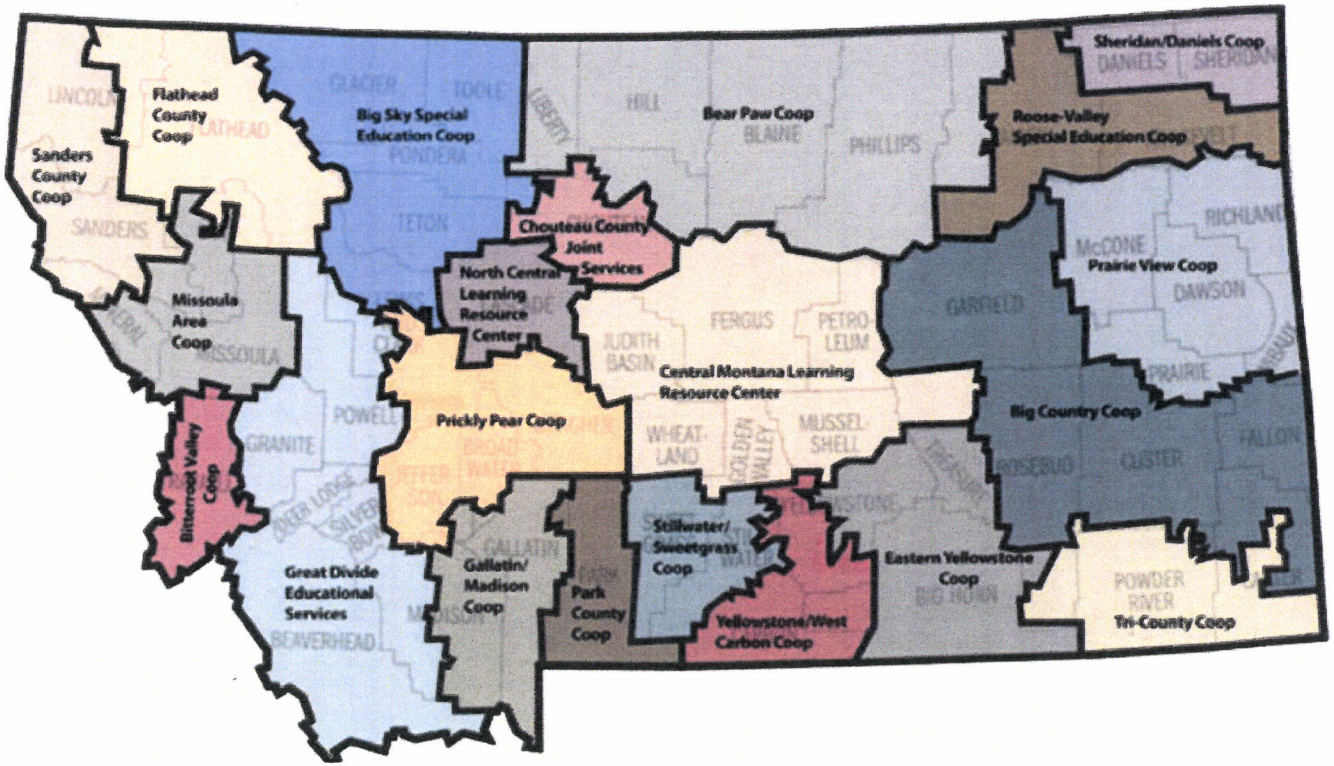
In this session we are debating bills designed to create *new* funding sources for students with special needs (disabilities and other student populations). Yet disallowing a special education inflationary increase is disregarding the traditional and most direct manner to support students with disabilities.

Statement submitted by the Director of the Great Divide Cooperative:

Great Divide Education Services provides special education and related services to schools from Lincoln to Lima (includes seven counties). Staff members drive many miles to provide high quality special education teaching, speech-language, school psychology, and occupational and physical therapy services to special needs students in 26 schools.

For years, a special education teacher, school psychologist, and speech-language pathologist commuted from Helena each day to provide services to Lincoln (140 miles round trip) Philipsburg (180 miles round trip) and points in between. We have a special education teacher who travels from Anaconda to Lima (250 miles round trip), Wisdom, Jackson, Glen, Divide, Wise River, and Garrison.

In order to continue providing these services, at even a minimal level, we need adequate monies that account for ever-increasing costs and demands.

Sincerely,
Silvia Mangen
Director, Great Divide Education Services

Montana Education Cooperatives