

Good afternoon Committee Members, Chairman Facey;

My name is Carole Jones. I am Vice Chair of the Conrad School Board, a Director for MTSBA, and the Chair of the B School Caucus.

I get nervous speaking in these situations, so, to make sure that I stayed on topic, I wrote out my remarks. There are 31 High Schools, 22 K-12 schools, and 53 elementary schools that fit into the 120-399 student population range to be classified B. These Districts are controlled by a locally elected board of 3-7 Trustees.

Some of you may have served as a Trustee so can relate to the challenges of being on the frontline representing both taxpayers and parents, while working to make wise decisions that enhance student achievement and opportunity. The demand for education resources always exceeds supply. There are numerous competing programs that have validity, with the local community strongly vested in offering differing viewpoints as to the best choices.

Do we invest in adding an advanced statistics class to help prepare for college? Should we expand our industrial arts program? Are we providing opportunity for the gifted and talented? What about alternative options for our more at risk population? Are we effectively evaluating and improving the performance of our Administration and teachers? What curriculum should we adopt that aligns with the desires of our local demographics while meeting the standards set by the Board of Public Education? Trustees expect a high standard and high accountability, yet we also focus on not defining a "one size fits all" environment that would not be viable for students or parents who simply do not perform well in such a setting. We are not a business model that can select amongst students. We strive to create the best possible outcomes for all students. With limited resources, how do we to provide opportunity for all students, from the remedial to the gifted? These decisions keep trustees up at night.

Research shows what works. **We know that the more individualized the opportunity for each child the better the possible outcome.** We also know that our taxpayers can afford to invest only so much, so we must maximize individualized opportunity while being very frugal. We try to use factual data and proven best practices as a basis for decisions and policies. We work to ensure that the data we collect is only for this purpose, and kept very secure. It is a herculean task. I am proud how well our schools measure up, 2nd in the country last year, 3rd this year as measured by the NAEP.

SB 175 helped in many ways beyond funding. For the first time, local trustees were authorized to make decisions between the money silos; we could choose to spend less on buses, and retain more dollars in the education general fund. For the first time, minutes of seat time were directly uncoupled from accreditation. What does this mean? Let me give a local example: A gifted freshman girl took a dual credit (college credit) biology class via digital academy that covered, in 1 semester, the equivalent of our 180 day high school biology class. Previous to SB 175 this would not have satisfied the accreditation seat time rules, but today it does, and thus her individual education opportunity is enhanced. On the opposite end of the spectrum, we are looking to use "flexible time" to start an alternative school in an old locker room for some of our more at-risk population.

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Exhibit 3

We also leveraged the enhanced financial flexibility in SB175 to create a stipend system directed at empowering staff. We developed District wide, building specific, and individual stipend opportunities to encourage even more focus on individualized student achievement. The majority of our staff stepped up, and we are seeing positive results. We leveraged this process to help select and implement the curriculum for meeting the new school accreditation standards. SB175's enhanced local flexibility and funding made this possible. At this point, not all schools fully understand the gain in local control and flexibility in SB175, so we are just starting to see the positive possibilities.

On accreditation standards: Conrad, like most schools, is used to adopting, and then locally setting curriculum to meet BOPE standards. The current Common Core standards are not much different than what we already had, so we are well on the way. Higher standards in Math and English are not as much of a concern for us as are ever-changing requirements. In fact, **the real concern now is that the standard will suddenly shift just as we get fully invested in implementation.** As to testing, we already use an adaptive format called MAPS, so do not envision the adaptive Smarter Balance testing to be much different. That said, we did invest in adding some more key technology.

Accreditation standards are but one challenge: Our coaches, often volunteer, now need 8-10 hours of MHSA training. Our staff has to spend time in bullying training. Our lunch room has increased caloric and content rules. OPI has ever increasing demands for data that seems unrelated to our primary charge of increasing student opportunity, and we often get back reports that are not real-time or in a usable format. Conrad, while a larger B, still struggles, as do most rural agricultural areas, with a declining student population. An advanced math class in Conrad may have only 5 students, so we do not have economy of scale, thus it is increasingly expensive to provide classroom opportunity. We struggle to offer a starting wage that is attractive to young teachers, especially those that have student loans. We lose teachers to bigger systems that pay better. We are often unable to be competitive when recruiting quality Administrators, even though we know 1 principal impacts the quality of 20 teachers. And infrastructure maintenance is sometimes held to the band aid level. And the list rolls on..

Trustees know a good education is not, nor ever will be, just about money. The decision litmus test for most is increasing student opportunity. Yet we must have enough resources to keep being successful.

As you ponder funding and education policy decisions, please consider this. The term "cost per student" is often bandied about, inferring that public schools are not efficient or flexible. The "cost per student" in the B schools can be higher than in larger population schools, both in and out of state. But I challenge you to compare Montana schools, and the B on "**cost per graduate**". **The B schools have approximately a 95% graduation rate**, and, on a cost per graduate basis, have impressive performance. Montana schools, especially some of the smaller, outperform the majority of the nation, and are competitive on world scales. The flexibility of local Trustee control over approximately 415 Districts, with most schools allowing full tuition free transfer of students, are key factors in this success. Our model is not perfect, thus we always look to improve, but, at number 3 in the country, Montana schools do well. Going forward, **I would ask that you continue the wisdom of investing in Montana students.**

Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with you;

StateFY Level	2014 (Multiple Items)	Sum of Grad Rate
Row Labels	Sum of HS Drop 11-12 SY	
Arlee H S	3.77%	96.23%
Bainville K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Baker K-12 Schools	5.60%	94.40%
Big Sky School K-12	0.00%	100.00%
Bigfork H S	1.93%	98.07%
Bridger K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Chinook H S	0.00%	100.00%
Colstrip H S	1.49%	98.51%
Columbus H S	1.85%	98.15%
Conrad H S	1.60%	98.40%
Cut Bank H S	3.77%	96.23%
Dawson H S	6.43%	93.57%
Ennis K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Fairfield H S	0.00%	100.00%
Florence-Carlton K-12 Schls	1.98%	98.02%
Forsyth H S	2.48%	97.52%
Glasgow K-12 Schools	4.12%	95.88%
Harlem H S	0.00%	100.00%
Hays-Lodge Pole K-12 Schls	0.00%	100.00%
Heart Butte K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Hot Springs K-12	0.00%	100.00%
Huntley Project K-12 Schools	1.29%	98.71%
Jefferson H S	3.77%	96.23%
Joliet H S	0.00%	100.00%
Lame Deer H S	0.78%	99.22%
Lincoln County H S	3.77%	96.23%
Malta K-12 Schools	2.25%	97.75%
Manhattan High School	3.60%	96.40%
Philipsburg K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Plains H S	1.49%	98.51%
Plentywood K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Poplar H S	13.13%	86.87%
Powell County H S	2.36%	97.64%
Red Lodge H S	0.00%	100.00%
Rocky Boy H S	0.78%	99.22%
Ronan H S	0.78%	99.22%
Roundup High School	1.27%	98.73%
Scobey K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Shelby H S	2.53%	97.47%
Shepherd H S	0.78%	99.22%
St Ignatius K-12 Schools	3.77%	96.23%
St Regis K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Sunburst K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Superior K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Sweet Grass County H S	0.00%	100.00%
Thompson Falls H S	1.49%	98.51%
Three Forks H S	4.90%	95.10%
Townsend K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
Troy H S	3.77%	96.23%
Twin Bridges K-12 Schools	0.00%	100.00%
West Yellowstone K-12	0.00%	100.00%
Whitehall H S	3.77%	96.23%
Wolf Point H S	8.86%	91.14%
Grand Total	100.19%	5199.81%
Average B School.	2.57	97.43%

State	Value	0	50%	100%
Iowa	89%			
Nebraska	88%			
Texas	88%			
Vermont	88%			
Wisconsin	88%			
North Dakota	87%			
Tennessee	87%			
Indiana	86%			
Missouri	86%			
New Hampshire	86%			
New Jersey	86%			
Connecticut	85%			
Kansas	85%			
Maine	85%			
Massachusetts	85%			
Arkansas	84%			
Maryland	84%			
Montana	84%			
Pennsylvania	84%			
South Dakota	83%			
Virginia	83%			
Hawaii	82%			
Illinois	82%			
Ohio	81%			
Delaware	80%			
North Carolina	80%			
Utah	80%			
West Virginia	79%			
Wyoming	79%			
California	78%			
Minnesota	78%			
New York	77%			
Rhode Island	77%			
Washington	77%			
Arizona	76%			
Michigan	76%			
Alabama	75%			
Colorado	75%			
Florida	75%			
Mississippi	75%			
South Carolina	75%			
Louisiana	72%			
Alaska	70%			
Georgia	70%			
New Mexico	70%			
Oregon	68%			
Nevada	63%			
District of Columbia	59%			
National	-			
Idaho	-			
Kentucky	-			
Oklahoma	-			
Puerto Rico	-			