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Montana Association of School Business Officials | Montana Federation of Public Employees | Montana Quality Education Coalition | Montana Rural Education Association | Montana School Boards Association | School Administrators of Montana

Statement Regarding Early Childhood Education to the Education Interim Committee

April 27, 2020

As noted in our January 16, 2020 letter to the Education Interim Committee, the partners of the Montana Public Education Center (MT-PEC), in connection with the K-12 Vision Group, will continue to pursue the implementation of public early childhood education with a dedicated funding formula. MT-PEC supports the establishment of adequately and equitably funded public early childhood education that is locally governed by elected trustees and accredited by the Board of Public Education.

There is no reason to “reinvent the wheel.” Currently, Montana law has already built the foundation we need to provide universal early childhood education through exceptional circumstances (20-5-101) and pending three simple changes in 20-1-101(16), 20-9-311(7), and 20-7-117(2), MCA, as noted below, early childhood education could be made available to all our youth:

20-1-101

(16) "Pupil" means a child who is 5 4 years of age or older on or before September 10 of the year in which the child is to enroll or has been enrolled by special permission of the board of trustees under 20-5-101(3) but who has not yet reached 19 years of age and who is enrolled in a school established and maintained under the laws of the state at public expense. For purposes of calculating the average number belonging pursuant to 20-9-311, the definition of pupil includes a person who has not yet reached 19 years of age by September 10 of the year and is enrolled under 20-5-101(3) in a school established and maintained under the laws of the state at public expense.

20-9-311

~~(7) —The enrollment of preschool pupils, as provided in 20-7-117, may not be included in the ANB calculations.~~

20-7-117

(2) The trustees of an elementary school district may establish and operate a free preschool program for children between the ages of 3 and 5 years. When preschool programs are established, they must be an integral part of the elementary school and must be governed accordingly. ~~Financing of preschool programs may not be supported by money available from state equalization aid.~~

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Our steadfast commitment to public early childhood education is grounded in established research that demonstrates that children enrolled in early childhood education have improved life outcomes and improved academic achievement and social emotional development. Universal, formula-based, transparently governed public early childhood education is a key driver in closing opportunity gaps for students. Access to public early childhood education is an issue of equity and furthers the people's goal in supporting "a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person" as noted in Article X, Section 1 of the Montana Constitution.

MT-PEC will resist public funding of private preschools that are not connected to their communities through transparent and accountable elected school board governance nor supervised and accredited by the Board of Public Education.

MT-PEC is ready and willing to work with policymakers of the legislative and executive branches of state government in drafting language that will ensure high quality public early childhood education for families throughout Montana.

The Montana Public Education Center (MT-PEC) is a coalition of public education advocates focused on fulfilling the guarantee of Article X of the Montana Constitution, "to develop the full educational potential of each person." The MT-PEC coalition consists of Montana Association of School Business Officials (MASBO), Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE), Montana Quality Education Coalition (MQEC), Montana Rural Education Association (MREA), Montana School Boards Association (MTSBA) and School Administrators of Montana (SAM).

The K-12 Vision Group was formed in 2011 and is comprised of teachers, elected trustees, superintendents, principals and school business officials nominated by their peers to develop and annually update a comprehensive vision for the future success of public education in Montana and establishing a clear road map to achieve that vision.

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