



Education Interim Committee

66th Montana Legislature

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BRI NORDHAGEN, Secretary

TO: Education Interim Committee
FROM: Pad McCracken, Staff
RE: HJ 56 Bullying and Student Well-Being: Summary of work and possibilities for findings and recommendations
DATE: August 1, 2020

The 2019 Legislature approved, and the Legislative Council assigned to the Education Interim Committee [House Joint Resolution No. 56](#), requesting an interim study of bullying. The committee broadened the focus on HJ 56 to encompass student well-being more generally.

This memo might serve as something of an outline of your final report. Please review and reflect on our work related to HJ 56 and be prepared to discuss the possible findings and recommendations I've prepared for you to consider. I'll be looking for direction from the committee on the findings and recommendations - what's missing, what needs to be removed, clarified, etc.

Summary of the committee's work and links to materials related to HJ 56

June 2019

- reviewed the resolution
- received stakeholder and public input
- discussed and determined to broaden focus to student well-being generally and to highlight successful interventions to reduce bullying, build resilience, and support student mental health

September 2019

- reviewed [recent legislation related to student well-being](#)
- reviewed [data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\)](#)
- learned about the [Multi-Tier Systems of Support framework](#)
- heard from schools implementing [PAX - Good Behavior Game](#)
- visited with students representing the Executive Board of the Montana Association of Student Councils about student well-being

November 2019 (in Bozeman)

- presentation from the Center for Mental Health Research and Recovery about the [YAM \(Youth Aware of Mental Health\) program](#) in schools ([handout](#))
- heard from Bozeman Public Schools about their [trauma-informed approach](#)

January 2020

- learned about OPI [efforts to assess school climate](#) as part of Montana's ESSA plan

May 2020

- hosted a panel discussion with students, teachers, counselors, and administrators about student well-being amidst COVID-19 and school closure
- learned about [school nutrition generally](#) and school breakfast [models](#) and [impacts of utilizing the "Breakfast After the Bell" model](#) *

June 2020

- looked at [eliminating reduced-price co-payments](#) for school meals (requested bill draft) *
- learned about [Handle With Care programs](#) (requested bill draft) *

* The school nutrition and Handle With Care agenda items weren't explicitly undertaken as part of the HJ 56 study, but could be viewed under the umbrella of student well-being and included in your report.

Possible findings and recommendations for the committee to consider

1. While bullying remains a concern, data from the YRBS suggests that anti-bullying efforts have made a difference in Montana.
 - a. Schools are encouraged to continue efforts to eliminate bullying, establish and maintain healthy school climates, and build resilience in students
 - b. State and local education policymakers should regularly monitor all available data related to bullying
2. Data from the YRBS and testimony from students, teachers, school counselors, and school administrators suggests that student mental health is a growing concern. The pandemic, school closures, and strains on families will likely exacerbate this problem.
 - a. As Montana continues to weather the pandemic and as we recover, the mental health needs of students need to be prioritized; school districts should consider initiatives such as a trauma-informed approach
 - b. State agencies and other organizations that support schools in implementing research-based programs that build resilience and support student mental health like PAX and YAM are encouraged to continue their good work
 - c. Policymakers should examine ways of strengthening school counselors' ability to serve the mental health needs of students (the counselor - pupil ratio in Montana's accreditation standards was mentioned as a potential policy lever)

- d. Elements of education that contribute to unhealthy stress for students should be examined and modified to reduce stress whenever possible (excessive testing is an element mentioned by students and teachers who provided input to the committee)
 - e. The legislature should clearly authorize Handle With Care programs so that teachers and school personnel are made aware when a student may have experienced a traumatic event
3. Student well-being depends on basic needs being met.
- a. The legislature should eliminate reduced-price co-payments for school meals, thereby reducing a barrier for low-income students to access nutritious school meals, increasing the number of low-income students participating in school nutrition programs, and leveraging federal support