

Memorandum

To: HB 754 MUS 2- Year Commission
From: John A. Mercer, member in temporary exile
Date: September 16, 2019

Greetings Members, Staff & All Interested Parties,

It's an honor to serve on this Commission. Please accept my apologies for missing this important first meeting. I will be able to stream it, so I'll be following along. If possible, I ask that you consider the thoughts below as you establish our work plan.

1. As we review the current structure, and potential changes, we should ask:
 - a. Is governance as close to the student and educators as possible?
 - b. Is governance independent, flexible and responsive to the rapidly changing market place?
 - c. Does the structure promote a stable and secure financial foundation?
2. Invite each Community College, K-12 District, Tribal College, MUS 2-year college, MSU and UM, if they wish, to provide by 12/31/19 a one-page description or outline of how they believe Montana should structure 2-yr education.
3. Explore further integrating trades education from the 2-yr colleges into the K-12 system for the expanding population that does not go beyond high school, while increasing opportunities for dual enrollment in the vocational trades for those who ultimately attend 2-yr colleges in those disciplines.

4. Determine if there exists a “Truth in Education” web site that shows both the economic and social values of various levels and types of education. Many families and students are unaware of how much some non 4-yr degree jobs pay (and how little some 4-yr degrees pay), as well as the penalty paid for not getting a postsecondary education.
5. Examine the merits of an independent Community College system that moves 2-yr education governance closer to the communities.
6. Consider suggesting an amendment to the Montana Constitution, Article X, §9 as it relates to the Board of Education, which would eliminate the Board of Regents and the Board of Public Ed from membership. The revised Board could have a smaller independent and balanced membership. An independent and energized Board of Education would have more time and independence to exercise its constitutional obligation of being “responsible for long-range planning, and for coordinating and evaluating policies and programs for the state’s educational systems.”
7. No doubt during our discussion of structure and governance, we will encounter how funding drives many decisions. Since education funding is mostly outside our charge, we should consider asking the Governor to create a balanced commission to study the various funding models for K thru Post-Doctoral outside of Montana, including fresh ideas that may percolate from inside Montana, compare those to our current model, and then make appropriate recommendations.