



EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE 67th Montana Legislature

SENATE MEMBERS

Edith (Edie) McClafferty
Shannon O'Brien
Daniel Salomon
Russel (Russ) Tempel

HOUSE MEMBERS

Fred Anderson
Moffie Funk
Ed Hill
Sara Novak
Linda Reksten
Tyson Running Wolf

COMMITTEE STAFF

Pad McCracken - Research Analyst
Fong Hom - Secretary
Laura Sankey - Attorney

MINUTES LOG

January 24, 2022
Room 102/Zoom
Helena, Montana

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MEMBERS PRESENT:

Sen. Edith (Edie) McClafferty, Chair (D)
Rep. Fred Anderson, Vice Chair (R)
Rep. Moffie Funk (D)
Rep. Ed Hill (R)
Rep. Sara Novak (D)
Sen. Shannon O'Brien (D)
Rep. Linda Reksten (R)
Sen. Daniel Salomon (R)
Sen. Russel (Russ) Tempel (R)

MEMBERS EXCUSED:

Rep. Tyson Running Wolf (D)

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

Pad McCracken, Research Analyst
Fong Hom, Secretary
Jameson Walker, Attorney

AGENDA ([Attachment 1](#))

VISITORS' LIST ([Attachment 2](#))

COMMITTEE ACTION

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

14:35:48 Sen. Edith (Edie) McClafferty called the meeting to order at 2:35 PM. The committee secretary took roll.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

14:37:39 Pad McCracken, Research Analyst, reviewed the agenda.

HOUSE JOINT 47 STUDY: Educational Programs for the Incarcerated

Debrief site visit to Helena Prerelease

14:38:48 Sen. McClafferty asked for comment regarding the visit to Helena Prerelease.

14:39:00 Rep. Funk commented on Helena Prerelease's work and its program.

14:40:14 Rep. Reksten suggested Helena Prerelease publish their positive data to show the public the work it's doing.

14:41:34 Sen. Tempel mentioned the program's ability to encourage work ethic in prerelease centers.

14:42:06 Rep. Novak stated her agreement with the committee on the work that Helena Prerelease is doing. She also commented on the increased HiSET completion at Deer Lodge.

Educational Programs at Crossroads Correctional Center

14:43:39 Pete Bludworth, Warden of Crossroads Correctional Center, gave a presentation on the work being conducted at Crossroads Correctional Center. Warden Bludworth mentioned the employees of the Education Department and their shared objective of fulfilling the facility's mission statement. ([Exhibit 1](#))

Committee Questions/Discussion

14:59:38 Rep. Funk asked Warden Bludworth whether the HiSETs are certified through OPI and what the HiSET graduation percentage is at Crossroads.

15:00:24 Warden Bludworth responded to Rep. Funk by stating that HiSETs are certified through OPI. Warden Bludworth also gave the number of HiSET class attendees, which is dependent on classroom availability. He followed by stating that the graduation percentage has increased in the last two years.

15:01:44 Sen. McClafferty asked Warden Bludworth how many inmates are at the prison and what is their average education level. Sen. McClafferty asked if the inmates have the option of either going to work or attending HiSET classes, or if they are required to attend classes before working.

15:02:12 Warden Bludworth responded to Sen. McClafferty by stating that an average of 80% of inmates received the HiSET prior to incarceration. Warden Bludworth continued by stating that inmates are not required to attend classes before they participate in vocational programs.

- 15:04:09 Sen. McClafferty asked Warden Bludworth if there is a wait list for some vocational programs.
- 15:04:24 Warden Bludworth responded to Sen. McClafferty by stating that for some programs there is a wait list, but it is not extensive.
- 15:05:04 Sen. McClafferty asked Warden Bludworth if he could get information on the future success of expanding vocational programs at Crossroads.
- 15:05:05 Rep. Reksten asked Warden Bludworth if he could provide information on the size of the vocational facilities and some of the needs that they have there.
- 15:05:59 Warden Bludworth answered Rep. Funk by stating that staffing is always needed as well as partners who are able to provide expertise for certain vocations.

Updates on programs at Montana Women's Prison

- 15:07:44 Cynthia Wolken, Deputy Director for Montana's Women's Prison, and Marisa Britton-Bostwick, Education Director for Montana Correctional Enterprises, presented an update on the Montana Women's Prison. ([Exhibit 2](#))

Committee Questions/Discussion

- 15:19:44 Rep. Reksten asked Dep. Wolken about the \$36 million being asked for the expansion of the women's facility.
- 15:20:25 Dep. Wolken responded to Rep. Reksten by stating that the DLR is working on an updated report that will contain the information surrounding the requested funds.
- 15:21:30 Rep. Reksten suggested that Dep. Wolken plan for realistic figures for funding.
- 15:22:31 Rep. Anderson asked Dep. Wolken if the prison had considered using an abandoned facility in Hardin to include in their expansion.
- 15:23:00 Dep. Wolken responded to Rep. Anderson by stating multiple reasons why the facility in Harden had not been included in their plan.
- 15:23:52 Sen. O'Brien commented on Ms. Britton-Bostwick's ingenuity in finding resources. Sen. O'Brien followed her statement by asking Dep. Wolken if they had considered buying property that was less centrally located.
- 15:25:54 Dep. Wolken responded to Sen. O'Brien by stating that the proposed new building would be on the existing property so they would not have to purchase new land to build.
- 15:27:04 Rep. Novak asked Ms. Britton-Bostwick about Title I funds.
- 15:27:33 Ms. Britton-Bostwick responded to Rep. Novak by stating that her agency has always applied for Title I funds and always received them for the Montana State Prison. However, to her knowledge, this is the first time the Montana Women's Prison has applied for and received the funds.
- 15:28:16 Rep. Funk asked Dep. Wolken about the proposed list of vocational programs that would come with the new facilities. Rep. Funk continued her question by asking what the Committee could do.
- 15:30:19 Dep. Wolken responded to Rep. Funk by stating that the Committee is doing what they can by asking the right questions. Dep. Wolken continued by stating that she intended to get more concrete information to the Committee at a later date in order to continue the process.

Other state agency roles in education programs for the incarcerated

- 15:32:12 Gayle Butler, with Montana Correctional Enterprises for the Department of Corrections, gave introductions for those presenting.

- 15:33:12 Brock Tessman, Deputy Commissioner of Higher Education for the Montana University System, gave a presentation on the partnership between the Montana University System and the Department of Corrections.
- 15:37:10 Sarah Swanson, Director of Strategic Engagement for the Governor and Commissioner at the Montana Department of Labor, gave a presentation on the Department of Labor's work with the Job Service Montana Team and Montana State Prisons to provide employment for formerly incarcerated individuals.
- 15:39:33 Katie Madsen, Director of Adult Education at the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and HiSET State Administrator, gave a presentation on the OPI's work with the Montana Department of Corrections, Montana State Prison, and Montana Women's Prison.
- 15:43:47 Supt. Elsie Arntzen gave a presentation on the OPI's work with Montana Women's Prison and the proposed curriculum for the women in the facility. She mentioned a few challenges that the OPI and the prison are facing.

Committee Questions/Discussion

- 15:45:28 Rep. Hill asked Ms. Swanson to send digital notes to Mr. McCracken.
- 15:45:50 Ms. Butler requested to follow-up on statistics given on the male population in the Montana State Prison.

ROBOTICS AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- 15:48:03 Mr. McCracken requested to introduce Coach Chuck Merja, from Redneck Robotics in Sun River, who worked with Emily Evans, the student presenter from Montana State University.
- 15:49:03 Ms. Evans gave a presentation on the STEM opportunities available for elementary and high school students, and how those type of opportunities benefited her collegiate career.
- 15:53:25 Mr. McCracken requested for Coach Merja to explain the presentations that will occur in the rotunda.

Robotics Demonstration

- 16:40:53 Reconvene at 16:41.

Panel Discussion

- 16:42:27 Coach Merja gave a presentation on the members of Redneck Robotics and some of the work that they've done. He also introduced three students from his organization: Zack Heller, Kathleen Cook, and Lucas Hall.

Committee Questions/Discussion

- 16:47:06 Rep. Reksten asked Mr. Heller how the legislature can create more opportunities for kids.
- 16:50:33 Sen. Tempel asked if any of the students were going into surgery with the robots once they graduate school.
- 16:51:40 Rep. Hill asked Coach Merja if there is a website available for kids to learn more about his organization.
- 16:53:34 Mr. McCracken introduced Mr. Reynolds' classroom.
- 16:54:01 Mr. Reynolds shared the work his program, "Fusion," is focused on, and introduced some of his students to the committee.
- 17:00:38 Rep. Funk gave a comment on the ideal way to grow the program.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- 17:02:17 Jane Lee Hamman, Board of Public Education
- 17:03:12 McCall Flynn, Board of Public Education
- 17:03:51 Robyn Mathison, Fairfield High School
- 17:05:30 Coach Merja, in response to Ms. Hamman's comment.
- 17:07:08 Rep. Reksten asked the committee if gifted and talented funds could be redirected towards robotics.
- 17:07:42 Mr. McCracken answered Rep. Reksten with information about the bill that was passed regarding gifted and talented funds.
- 17:08:44 Rep. Reksten asked Mr. McCracken if there was any money attached to that bill.
- 17:09:06 Rep. Reksten suggested that, if there were funds attached to the gifted and talented bill, the legislature could repurpose those funds for robotics.
- 17:09:30 Rep. Anderson commented on Rep. Reksten's idea of repurposing funds, stating that the gifted and talented funds are controlled locally and not by the legislature.
- 17:10:01 Sen. Salomon commented on gifted and talented funds.
- 17:10:43 Mr. Walker gave the name of the bill that was passed regarding gifted and talented funds, stating it as SB 109 that amended 20-7-902.
- 17:11:00 Sen. O'Brien asked Sen. McClafferty and Mr. McCracken if the next meeting was a joint meeting with the Education Interim Budget Committee. She followed by suggesting that the committees talk about different types of funding.
- 17:11:44 Coach Merja commented on funding for programs like his.
- 17:15:11 Mr. Reynolds commented on the funding that came from Gear-Up that created his program.

REVIEW TUESDAY AGENDA

- 17:17:05 Mr. McCracken reviewed the next day's agenda.

RECESS

17:17:44

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment: 17:18:41