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## Education Interim Committee

67th Montana Legislature

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PAD MCCRACKEN, Lead Staff  
LAURA SANKEY KEIP, Staff Attorney  
TBD, Secretary

TO: Education Interim Committee  
FROM: Pad McCracken, Committee Staff  
RE: Transformational Learning  
DATE: January 19, 2022

You discussed the transformational learning program established in HB 351 (2019) at your joint meeting with the Education Interim Budget Committee (EIBC) in September 2021 and indicated a desire to continue your examination over the interim. Materials provided to you at that meeting were:

- a [handout](#) with the appropriation and expenditure history and applicable statutes;
- a [staff memo](#) I prepared with some background and analysis of the program; and
- [slides](#) with information about the program prepared by the Office of Public Instruction (OPI).

The application window for FY 23 (the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the 8-year program) closed on January 10, 2022, and I will ask OPI to provide information at your January 24-25 meeting about the number of applicants and use of the new lottery system to select those applicants.

The annual appropriation for transformational learning is calculated as 50% of the quality educator payment (\$1,736 in FY 23) multiplied by 10% of the number of quality educators in the preceding year (1,242 in FY 22). The FY 23 appropriation is \$2,155,760. This amount will *likely* increase slightly as the QE payment increases with inflationary adjustments in coming years and the number of quality educators remains fairly stable. Let's just call this a \$2 million annual investment in educational innovation.

Based on a review of the annual reports required under the program, my September memo questioned the innovational bang the state is receiving for this buck and pointed to three possible reasons for this:

1. the nonselective nature of the grant awarding process;
2. the lack of meaningful front- or back-end accountability; and
3. the lack of a cohort model in which pioneering districts work and learn together (and blaze a trail for others to follow).

At your November meeting, you indicated that you would like to look at the *challenges and opportunities* related to the current transformational learning program. I will offer some thoughts to stimulate this conversation and trust that others will weigh in as well.

One immense challenge has been the pandemic; as I mentioned in the earlier memo, schools have been struggling to keep their doors open and staff and students healthy and learning—circumstances that have made it difficult if not impossible to embark on educational redesign. That said, the challenges of the pandemic have illuminated the need for redesign, and the federal government has provided a significant amount of money to states and schools. Perhaps as we emerge from the pandemic a rare opportunity for reinvention will be available.<sup>1</sup>

The opportunity exists to improve the current transformational learning program with some attention to concern #3 above, and OPI's presentation in September included the plan to "provide personalized support for districts with collaborative opportunities." Challenges related to concerns #1 and #2 would remain, but the committee may want to engage with OPI further to learn more about this plan and whether any statutory changes and/or funding support would enable OPI to make the most of this opportunity.

You also have the opportunity to recommend through a committee bill that the 2023 Legislature revise the transformational learning program at the halfway mark of its existence in a manner that addresses one or more of the above concerns. I can provide the committee with a bill draft to use a starting point if you'd like. The challenge with this approach is the need to either discontinue the current program (leaving some districts currently receiving or in line to receive funds without funding) or fund the existing program *and* the new program.

Another opportunity would be to invite some outside expertise to weigh in on the best ways to foster educational innovation. You are already planning this to some degree by following up on the presentation made to the MARA Committee in late November by the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Center on Education and the Economy. I have reached out to both organizations about presenting at your next planned joint session with the EIBC on March 15. This opportunity could be enhanced by including (at the March or a subsequent meeting) organizations that have been enlisted by other states to assist in educational redesign and specifically innovation focused on student-centered learning. Three organizations that come to mind are KnowledgeWorks, the Aurora Institute, and Education Reimagined.

I also listed in my September memo four states that have made admirable progress in this arena. In 2015 Idaho enacted legislation to incubate a mastery-based approach to education, and I have arranged for Aaron McKinnon, Idaho's Mastery-Based Education Coordinator, to share some thoughts with you at your January 24-25 meeting. Additional opportunities to explore this topic could involve hearing from one or more of the other states.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.ncsl.org/research/education/reimagining-education-in-a-post-pandemic-world-magazine2021.aspx>