

Spring 2019 MASS School Size Caucus Discussion Compilation – March 19, 2019

Caucus Leaders

- AA/A Schools - Facilitated by *Randy Cline, Frenchtown*
- B Schools - Facilitated by *Justin Barnes, Anaconda*
- C Schools - Facilitated by *Mike Ehinger, Noxon*
- K-8 Schools - Facilitated by *Corey Austin, Target Range*
- Native American School Leaders - Facilitated by *Jim Baldwin, Arlee*

K-8 Schools

Native American Schools

C Schools

B Schools

AA/A Schools

1. Legislative Concerns:

- JH- Seems like Special Education inflation will be on hold until the end of the session. If any funds are allotted, those funds seem minimal at this time.
- NS- Special Ed is competing with other compelling interests
- TS- Special Ed OTO funding was overlooked last session
- TS- Clinton is 26% special ed identified. Two CSCT teams. Other school special ed, mental health, and other ratios are all over the map.
- Discussion on permissive levy from Tuition Fund. Trustees are very cautious to tap those dollars, but it's increasingly necessary to do so.
- NS- Recently changed their process for identification to ensure all interventions are being explored prior to testing. Noted comment from yesterday regarding 'over identification' of special ed students.
- Folks noted that there's always a turnover in CSCT positions.
- CA- Who or which administrator sits in on IEP meetings?
- TS- designates special education teacher as his 'designee'
- LB- principals sit in on the IEP meetings, but also has a special ed director on staff who helps, and she helps out when things get tricky.
- Tobin and Ron shared on working through starting a new high school. Hiring and completing all of the pieces that are all in place for most of us. Create the culture. It is a unique experience. Concern of teacher shortage and that Lockwood and East Helena will attract from other districts. Numbers of applicants for the positions.
 - Impact of HB 159 (Inflation funding bill) passing by the end of February and preparation of preliminary school district budgets?
- Good to have it, wish it was more substantial
- Is it going to be fully funded?

- Frenchtown saw a little increase in A&B. First time in four years that 3 year growth. Sydney realized a slight increase. Missoula realized a wash considering GTB increase and potential to run levy. Necessary to run levy. Permissive levy. Columbia Falls is battling the permissive levy and general fund levy. It is very difficult for messaging. Seat belt discussion has begun. Messaging, Messaging. Messaging.
 - Thoughts about the bills in the other 10% for reaching SAM advocacy goals?
- Need more done to help with teacher salaries; While the CTE is nice, more is needed especially with regard to increase teacher salaries
- Quality Educator funds, need to get to districts and general feeling that colleges are filling the pipe line to get us quality applicants
 - Other?
- School Based Mental Health services?
- Everyone should employ a therapist.
- Recruitment and retention of a therapist is a problem because private sector pays more than schools.

2. Recruitment and Retention:

- CA- How's this going? Has one retirement this year and no more on the horizon for a long time.
- Folks generally noted that most of us around the table have an advantage for recruitment since we're fairly near population centers.
- MSU Northern has only 15 students in their educational program at present. 15!
- More challenging finding paraprofessionals across the board. Too many other job opportunities that pay better.
- TS- noted that he has resorted to hiring parents which can cause riffs in the ranks.
- SS- starting salary at Lone Rock is \$23k. Has several teachers that drive 40 minutes to work there.
- LB- How many districts start at a cell other than BAO-1? Mixed results. More frequently it's a start at the base cell. Those that don't have folks stay at the increased cell until they 'catch up' to the matrix. DO warned to not use an artificial start AND move folks steps during their first years
- Always a big concern in all schools. All of us felt the biggest concern was when teachers jump close to the start of a school year. Big concern on finding music, science, math and special education. Longevity is of concern as some have used Native American Schools as a stepping stone to other schools. Because we are on Native American Schools we have to pay more to keep people and be creative. A big discussion on how many years we were allowed to bring in and although some boards gave the administration flexibility, at time unions we not as flexible.
 - Are you finding it difficult to hire staff for 2019-20?
- Competing against the Dakota's for teachers puts us on an uneven financial grounds - they are starting at \$45k or higher
- Millennials are more free agents, not as loyal to a given employer

- 2 years ago MSU-Boz had enough educators graduate to cover our needs and most left the state or didn't enter teaching
- Some schools are bringing in soon to be grads to spend time in the school to see what the lifestyle is like; coming out of MSU
- Some recruit on the basis that small schools are a great place to learn to teach, ask them to stick for 2-3 years
- Frenchtown has seen a significant decrease in applicants. Still get 10-12. 34 applications for 30 openings in Great Falls. 10 years ago that would have been 150+. National collaborative in Missoula for recruiting teachers. Hired 4 principals with 129 applicants in Missoula. Varies greatly. Lewistown had 13 apps for 3 elementary positions. Hired an industrial arts and FCS teacher. Needing a Special Education teacher. Stevensville has had 1 app for IA and 1 for business. Lucky versus having the opportunity to hire. Missoula has had to change their CBA so that they can have openings concurrent with time grads are looking. Frenchtown is looking to retired folks for people. Eric Feaver spoke to higher wages at base. Salaries are not the only decision. OPI is working with districts. Certification process is strict, but has made movement. Praxis is the concern. Provisional license to give a year for Praxis. Changing the quality educator payment to include emergency licensure. This might help offset training costs.
 - What are you observing in staff longevity/turnover year to year?
- Did not fill 2 positions last year (sped and counselor); having 7 staff leaving this year. Used a mentor who flew in 2x a month & digital for Q&A
- Still having licensing issues from qualified, out of state folks - still too many hurdles, even with the flexibility we thought was built in
 - Reflection after the fact - In light of Tammy Lacey's comments, this problem may be a local issue for a couple schools that aren't fully informed
- Have heard that even the larger schools have seen a sizeable decline in apps
- Housing is an issue; some schools have housing (some limit it to 5 years then they have to move out); some offer a housing stipend; about 75% of the room offered school housing
- Some paying for teacher lunch
- One district is hiring Filipinos and have other emergency licenses; can use this for 4 years if appropriate (then if they still don't have license, even though they can get tenure, they can be fired with cause for not having a license)
 - Other?
- Feel this could be the single biggest threat to schools.
- One school has had 4 open positions that it hasn't been able to fill.
- Base salary low compared to other states.
- Is there a way to make base salaries more equitable between schools.
- Smaller schools could not sustain a statewide salary matrix.
- Ideas to create another revenue stream for schools.
- Retention is hard in some schools because teachers can move to other districts and make more.
- There isn't enough people with teaching degrees.

- Incentives for choosing a career in teaching
- Urban vs Rural
- Would like to see more cooperation between OPI and Universities to help people earn teaching degrees.
- Teachers moving away to other states because they pay more.
- Sometime feel like you might retain a bad teacher because you know that you might not be able to fill the position.
- Alternate path to certification. Grow your own within the school.
- Needs to me more communication between Universities and schools.
- Need more flexibility to place teacher in open positions without them having to get an additional degree.
- Has there been thoughts about consolidating more schools. Should there be legislation that addresses this? Research shows there is no cost savings in consolidating.
- Need to find new revenue source to fund schools.
- Believe this area is in a crisis.
- SM- only admin on his site. Has a tough time justifying to taxpayers precisely why they might need another administrator.

3. Implementation Challenges:

- What challenges/opportunities are you facing while working to implement your district goals?
 - Push back from Unions
 - Hard to implement when you have a lot of turnover. This has an impact on curriculum
 - Push back from employees to buy into change.
 - Culture of districts makes it hard to implement change.
 - Money. Ambitious goals are difficult to attain when dollars are strapped. East Helena is in strategic planning process with MTSBA. Administrative staff has been together for 12 years. Great Falls both graduation rates and dropout rates turned the wrong way for the first time in many years. Cut 89 staff in four years. It is coming home to roost. Columbia Falls is concerned about the mental health status of staff. Challenge of difficult students.

4. Health Insurance:

- What challenges/opportunities are you facing in combating health care costs in your district?
 - LB- NWMASS is already preparing healthcare legislation for 2021. Noted that many of her staff is taking the HDHP in her district and the perception is that staff then doesn't take care of themselves.
 - CA- Is everyone keeping a multi-tier plan? TR and Evergreen have two different, four-tier plans for certified/classified.
 - Many do this. \$550, \$675, percentages,
 - TS- noted how difficult it is to break into the state healthcare plan.

- LB- NWMASS is even considering opening their own clinic and hiring a doctor.
- JH- Noted MCPS has a very flush self-funded insurance pool. How difficult is it to get into that? CA suggested it's pure numbers, implying that none of us can afford the upfront cost.
- DO- the big unknown is what the upfront cost really is. Would be in favor of heavy upfront costs if long term savings can be demonstrated.
- CA- are new employees more concerned about benefits or the paycheck? TS- more salary. NS- salary. SM- half and half.
- Most of us have heard our rates were not going to face a huge jump, but all of us knew how big a burden families faced with the district paying only a single policy. Having HRA cards was presented to the group as a way of lowering rates and having a higher deductible. Our biggest concern was for young families and the higher cost when most of our young teachers are making less than veterans.
- MUST doesn't pool rates, it's school specific and thus leads to sizeable localized impacts - seems that the pool needs to initiate on the school side via an insurance co-op, not from MUST
- For the Healthcare bill that was tabled, it had a fiscal note attached. What if that note was dropped, just to get the rest of it in law?
- Health Insurance is a major issue
- Seems the law may state that co-ops for insurance are locally based, not state-wide; details a bit unclear
- Try to shop around
- Would a state plan help reduce costs?
- Why can we not gain traction in joining a pool with all state employees?
- Frenchtown is self-funded. Insurance trust board sets rates. They go up every year. Pay a higher percentage of insurance rate. Missoula the employees manage the insurance group. Many questions regarding the rates at different districts from East Helena. Clinics have been built in the new schools in Great Falls. They are staffed four days a week and can bill. Frenchtown added a high deductible plan. HSA is a popular option. Stevensville averted a crisis by moving to HSA. Salary is less take home due to cost of insurance. Perception.

5. School Safety:

- We discussed who was next in the media, and how media was less than fair when times of controversy. We all agreed having a resource office was a strong defense for safety of all. Discussion on how much to share with media and press, and parents.
- SB307 is helping
- Not in favor of metal detectors
- Added and SRO. Feel that has helped with potential problems.
- Added more cameras. Will add more.
- Try to be proactive. Talk to students and let them know it is important for them to speak up.
- Changing locking mechanisms. Transitioned to swiping cards.

- What is your district proactively doing to protect students and staff?
- Mandt training for staff with Dale Kimmett
- School safety - police chief, etc; doing crime prevention through environmental design; doing ALICE training w/ school admin's becoming trainers; solid building security; cost for 70 people with ALICE is \$1600/year
- Another school does student ALICE training, uses RAPTOR for visitor badges (2 schools caught a sexual predator and called in police); \$1500/year after initial equipment purchase
- Camera's outside and inside
- Training all students in 1st aid and cpr
- NRA Shield training - building security assessment (sponsored by MT highway patrol); has a former police negotiator train staff on how to de-escalate situations
- Reflex/Protect system is being looked at; some sort of canister based gel (tear gas base) that is sprayed at intruder
- Using fire extinguishers or wasp spray creates insurance liabilities for mis-using a product designed for other purposes
- Frenchtown follows up on student threats. Address and involve students. More acute and safety plans in place. Counties are not cooperating with SRO programs. Most districts pay 9/12.
 - What resources would help you be proactive and implement safety measures?
 - Other?

6. Mental Health - Special Education - At-Risk

- What are some challenges/opportunities that your district faces in serving students with special needs, mental health issues, or other at-risk populations?
- Increasing needs
- Dealing with a level of needs that just don't belong in k-12 education - kids that go through the entire system, including specialized boarding schools and then they run out of Medicaid and end up back in school; we don't have resources for kids in the state; can't find an aide that is willing to work with them;
- Aren't enough therapists in the state to meet the need; if CSCT is written into IEPs, you're on the hook to provide services even if the local program closes
- Cuts to DPHHS also impact schools
- Inclusion model isn't safe in all cases; sometimes schools use a 2 aide on 1 student; sometimes these kids are educated off site
- Special ED -
- Financial difficulty for schools to service these high needs, high expense kids
- Schools are over qualifying students. Perception of some difficult to convince legislators.
 - Other?
- Need more money to hire needed staff.
- Increased one on one aides. More and more staff being added.
- Getting parents to cooperate is sometimes a problem.

- Using Skype as a tool to link up with therapists.

7. General Discussion Topics and highlights

- CA- Anyone have principals asking for additional job descriptions or definitions?
- LB- Has the best principal evaluation in the state. CA has used it for the past three years.
- TS- parts of principal salary are paid by after school grant, and literacy grant. Not sure what'll happen when those sources dry up.
- CA- Looking for some ideas for respite for principals, without it appearing like a dictation from the top.
- NS- Noted that small tokens seem to go a long way.
- CA- Assistant principal does discipline, AD, and other duties K-8.
- JH- At Campbell County, they had someone talk about stress. A great portion of the takeaway was to 'get out and get active.'
- JH- Suggests having a day when the local principals might get together, do an activity or activities (hike the M, take a walk, whatever!) with a handful of talking points.
- LB- pays for the whole NBC testing- initial cost only. Additionally gives a stipend for NBC.
- We all agreed the State needed to help more. Jason from St. Ignatius shared how they passed a building project.
- Closing Remarks: By far the most productive session I have chaired during my tenure!
- **After the fact Reflection** - we weren't especially solution focused. This session certainly highlighted problem points. The biggest points to emphasize were as follows:
 - The challenge of mental health issues that K12 is not well equipped to handle
 - Teacher salary and housing; our challenge in competing with neighboring states and larger districts in state
 - Health care costs; possibly creating state wide pool to reduce costs
 - Questions about percentage increases - Missoula 1 to 1.5. The request was 4. Great Falls was 2. Budget presentation. .5 maybe a 1.