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New Congressional Health Care Plan – A Devastating Blow to Montana’s Public Schools & Students

Today, as every day, teachers called the names of more than 140,000 students, as they took attendance in Montana’s 821 public schools. For the thousands of children who file into our classrooms, school is more than a place to learn. In-school programs and practices ensure children across the state stay healthy, well fed, safe, and enriched.

However, recent efforts by Congress to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act could severely alter our public schools’ ability to foster all students’ development. In Montana, roughly \$55 million in Medicaid funding flows into our schools, and more than \$35 million of that is federal funding. State and federal Medicaid dollars fund critical in-school programs and services for our young students. While Medicaid spending on school-based health services is a small part of Medicaid spending, it plays a significant role in our schools. The current plan to repeal ACA also includes devastating cuts to federal Medicaid funds, and in-school services could be one of the first items on the chopping block.

Superintendents know that Medicaid dollars are critical for making sure students have resources, health care, and developmental screenings that will help them thrive. These funds are an essential component of the funding for students with disabilities. In Montana, nearly 16,000 students, or more than 1 in 10 students overall, have special education needs.

Because Medicaid is traditionally spent on high-cost services such as occupational and physical therapy, nursing, and specialized equipment like wheelchairs and power scooters, cuts to Medicaid would mean schools will have an even more difficult time providing a free and appropriate public education for all students.

Medicaid also helps defray costs of health-related services that our schools provide to students. This includes programs that monitor the needs of children with asthma and diabetes and in-school clinics that provide dental care to Medicaid-eligible children. These programs are critical to ensuring our students are healthy and ready to learn.

Medicaid reimbursements ensure a school district can provide students with the services they need, and it also goes a long way toward helping district meet their budgetary needs, without further shifting those costs to local taxpayers.

Taking away Medicaid funding will result in cost shifting, diminished services, and the potential of additional litigation as schools are unable to meet the needs of the children who come to us every day expecting the best possible services.

The ripple effects of Congressional plans to slash Medicaid funding would harm special education students, low-income families, and the hardworking staff in our public schools. And that’s not to mention the estimated 24 million Americans who would lose coverage under this new plan.

Montana’s students and our public schools deserve better. If we want our schools to continue doing everything they can to make sure every student succeeds, we must demand that Congress abandon the idea of making structural changes to Medicaid and cutting the funding to states and our schools. Healthy kids make better students, and better students have better success in life.