

From: [Waterman, Michael](#)
To: [Manzella, Theresa](#); [Lee, Marc](#); [Kortum, Kelly](#); [Strand, Peter](#); [Power, Rebecca](#)
Subject: SAVA Interim Committee - School Election Timelines
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Chair Manzella, Vice Chair Lee, Bozeman Area Committee Members, and Ms. Power:

Thank you for your service on the SAVA Interim Committee. I recently learned of a proposal to move the school election timeline to accommodate a potential shift in Montana's presidential primary. Changing school election timelines has historically been quite tricky, but I'm writing to offer a possible solution for the committee's consideration—one that may help create the flexibility needed to adjust election timing while also addressing some of the challenges of the current system.

The issue with moving the school election dates generally comes down to having solid budget numbers from which schools can set levy election amounts. Here's a high-level look at the [school election cycle](#) that I think shows the current challenges:

- December (145 days before the election) - Trustees must call for General Fund elections. Note that at that time, only one of the two semiannual enrollment counts has been completed and no budget information is available for the ensuing year.
- February - our 'spring' enrollment count date, the second and final enrollment count of the year
- March 1 - OPI releases ensuing year budget limits and levy information
- Late March (40 days before the election) - Ballot amounts are finalized
- May - Regular School Election Day

As you can see, the current system creates many challenges: it requires schools to call for elections before any firm budget numbers are known, it creates a compressed timeline for OPI to do their work, and it gives schools a few short weeks to make their final levy decisions.

My proposal is straightforward: base school funding on the October enrollment count alone, rather than an average of October and February counts.

This change could bring several benefits:

- It creates margin for OPI to finalize and verify their calculations,
- It gets the resulting budget numbers to schools much earlier (possibly even in time for the December call for election!),
- It gives school administrators and boards time to make thoughtful decisions before finalizing ballot amounts, and
- It positions the whole system to be able to move the school election date up, if that's indeed the goal of the committee.

Removing a count also reduces the workload for schools and OPI--a win, I believe, for everyone involved.

In the interest of transparency, I do anticipate this change would carry a cost to the state. Spring enrollment counts are typically lower than fall counts—particularly at the high school

level—so relying solely on October data would likely increase calculated enrollment and, in turn, school funding requirements. While increased funding is not the intent of this suggestion, it's obviously something to keep in mind should you choose to consider this concept.

Thank you again for your service to the committee and the state. Please let me know if you have questions or need additional information.

Mike Waterman
Executive Director of Business & Operations
Bozeman Public Schools
406-522-6097