



## **EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE**

### **69th Montana Legislature**

#### **SENATE MEMBERS**

Daniel Emrich  
Sara Novak  
Matt Regier  
Sue Vinton

#### **HOUSE MEMBERS**

Lee Deming  
Shelly Fyant  
Randyn Gregg  
Linda Reksten  
Melissa Romano

#### **COMMITTEE STAFF**

Pad McCracken - Lead Staff  
Laura Sankey Keip - Legal Staff  
Rebecca Brown - Research Analyst  
Ania Alduenda - Secretary

# **EDUCATION JOINT COMMITTEE**

## **MINUTES LOG**

March 17, 2026  
Room 317 & Zoom  
Helena, Montana

Minutes logs provide an annotation of the time elapsed between the beginning of a meeting and the time at which a topic is presented or discussed, a motion made, or a vote taken. The time designation may be used to locate the referenced discussion in the video. The minutes log is only a guide to the video of the meeting. The official record of the meeting is the video. Minutes logs can be accessed at <https://committees.legmt.gov> and videos can be accessed at <https://media.legmt.gov>.

For more information, please contact:

The Legislative Services Division at 406-444-3064 for policy committees;  
The Legislative Fiscal Division at 406-444-2986 for fiscal committees; or  
The Legislative Audit Division at 406-444-3122 for the Legislative Audit Committee.

#### **EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Rep. Linda Reksten, Presiding Officer (R)  
Sen. Sara Novak, Vice Presiding Officer (D)  
Rep. Lee Deming (R)  
Rep. Shelly Fyant (D)  
Rep. Randyn Gregg (R)  
Sen. Matt Regier (R)  
Rep. Melissa Romano (D)  
Sen. Sue Vinton (R)

#### **EDUCATION INTERIM COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED:**

Sen. Daniel Emrich (R)

#### **EDUCATION INTERIM BUDGET COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Rep. David Bedey, Presiding Officer (R)  
Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy (D)  
Rep. Llew Jones (R)  
Rep. Eric Matthews (D)

#### **EDUCATION INTERIM BUDGET COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED:**

Sen. John Fuller, Vice Presiding Officer (R)  
Rep. Brad Barker (R)  
Rep. Connie Keogh (D)

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Pad McCracken, Lead Staff  
Laura Sankey Keip, Legal Staff  
Rebecca Brown, Research Analyst  
Ania Alduenda, Secretary

**AGENDA** ([Attachment 1](#))

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

**CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL**

08:06:38 Presiding Officer David Bedey called the meeting to order at 8:06 AM. The committee secretary took roll. ([Attachment 3](#))

**OPENING REMARKS**

08:07:51 Presiding Officer David Bedey

**REVIEW AGENDA AND LEG DAYS REMINDER**

08:08:34 Kurt Swimley, Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Fiscal Division (LFD)

**PUBLIC SCHOOL INNOVATION LANDSCAPE AND SPECIFIC PROGRAM UPDATES**

**Recent Legislative Actions**

08:09:09 Presiding Officer David Bedey

08:09:45 Debra Silk, Associate Executive Director and General Counsel, Montana School Board Association (MTSBA)  
[EXHIBIT 1](#)

08:10:18 Pad McCracken, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

**Transformational Learning Phase II Update**

08:22:43 Krystal Smith, Opportunities and Innovative Learning Senior Manager, Office of Public Instruction (OPI)  
[EXHIBIT 2](#)

08:34:31 Rep. Connie Keogh joined the meeting via Zoom.

**Committee Discussion / Questions**

08:35:26 Rep. Lee Deming

08:36:01 Krystal Smith, OPI

08:37:14 Sen. Sue Vinton

08:37:42 Krystal Smith, OPI

08:39:29 Vice Presiding Officer Sara Novak

08:39:48 Krystal Smith, OPI

**Public Charter School Update**

08:41:04 McCall Flynn, Executive Director, Board of Public Education (BPE)  
[EXHIBIT 3](#)

### **Community Choice Schools Commission Update**

08:49:09 Cathy Kincheloe, Director of Planning, Community Choice Schools Commission  
(CCS Commission)  
[EXHIBIT 4](#)

### **Committee Discussion / Questions**

08:56:01 Sen. Sue Vinton  
08:56:24 Cathy Kincheloe, CCS Commission  
08:59:12 Rep. Lee Deming  
08:59:24 Cathy Kincheloe, CCS Commission  
09:02:04 Presiding Officer David Bedey  
09:02:29 Cathy Kincheloe, CCS Commission  
09:03:13 Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy  
09:03:29 Cathy Kincheloe, CCS Commission  
09:10:03 Sen. Matt Regier  
09:10:19 Cathy Kincheloe, CCS Commission  
09:11:45 Presiding Officer David Bedey

### **Education Innovation Tax Credit Update**

09:12:21 Jennifer Hicks, Withholding Compliance Unit Manager, Department of Revenue  
(DOR)  
[EXHIBIT 5](#)  
[EXHIBIT 6](#)

### **Committee Discussion / Questions**

09:16:18 Rep. Llew Jones  
09:16:44 Jennifer Hicks, DOR  
09:17:08 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
09:17:22 Jennifer Hicks, DOR  
09:17:47 Sen. Sue Vinton  
09:18:42 Presiding Officer David Bedey  
  
09:19:00 **Recessed**  
09:31:19 **Reconvened**

### **OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (OPI) DATA MODERNIZATION UPDATES**

09:31:44 Katie Bloodgood, Deputy Chief of Staff and Policy Director, OPI  
[EXHIBIT 7](#)  
[EXHIBIT 8](#)  
[EXHIBIT 9](#)  
09:32:04 Anna Hoerner, Business Analyst, OPI  
(See Exhibit 8)  
09:32:09 Lucas Rowsey, IT & Data Special Projects Coordinator, OPI  
(See Exhibit 7)  
09:32:16 Eli Dean, Senior Data Operations Manager, OPI

**Committee Discussion / Questions**

09:40:41 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
09:41:08 Eli Dean, OPI  
09:41:39 Presiding Officer David Bedey  
09:42:06 Anna Hoerner, OPI  
09:43:14 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
09:43:21 Lucas Rowsey, OPI  
09:44:47 Katie Bloodgood, OPI  
09:46:01 Rep. Lee Deming  
09:46:28 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
09:47:13 Katie Bloodgood, OPI  
09:48:05 Vice Presiding Officer Sara Novak  
09:49:53 Eli Dean, OPI  
09:52:52 Presiding Officer David Bedey

**THE STUDENT AND TEACHER ADVANCEMENT FOR RESULTS AND SUCCESS ACT (STARS) HOUSE BILL 252**

**Implementation Update and Future Ready Data Reporting**

09:54:01 Shannon Boswell, Career, Technical, and Adult Education Director, Office of Public Instruction (OPI)  
[EXHIBIT 10](#)  
09:56:16 Nicole Thuotte, EDUCATE Unit Manager, OPI  
(See Exhibit 10)

**Committee Discussion / Questions**

10:03:39 Presiding Officer David Bedey  
10:04:14 Nicole Thuotte, OPI  
10:06:24 Eli Dean, Senior Data Operations Manager, OPI  
10:07:19 Vice Presiding Officer Sara Novak  
10:08:16 Nicole Thuotte, OPI  
10:09:22 Presiding Officer David Bedey  
10:09:29 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
10:09:46 Shannon Boswell, OPI  
10:10:42 Nicole Thuotte, OPI

**THE MONTANA ALIGNED TO STANDARDS THROUGH-YEAR (MAST) RESULTS TO TEACHERS TO INFORM INSTRUCTION**

10:11:32 Susie Hedalen, Superintendent, Office of Public Instruction (OPI)  
10:20:06 Cedar Rose, State Assessment Director, OPI  
[EXHIBIT 11](#)  
[EXHIBIT 12](#)

**Committee Discussion / Questions**

10:43:44 Rep. Melissa Romano

10:44:26 Cedar Rose, OPI  
 10:45:35 Rep. Connie Keogh left the meeting via Zoom.  
 10:52:06 Vice Presiding Officer Sara Novak  
 10:52:31 Cedar Rose, OPI  
 10:57:35 Rep. Eric Matthews  
 10:58:29 Cedar Rose, OPI  
 10:58:55 Supt. Susie Hedalen, OPI  
 11:03:31 Marie Judisch, Senior Manager, Teaching and Learning Department, OPI  
 11:04:51 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
 11:05:00 Cedar Rose, OPI  
 11:05:56 Marie Judisch, OPI  
 11:08:41 Presiding Officer David Bedey  
 11:09:52 Cedar Rose, OPI  
 11:10:15 Anna Hoerner, Business Analyst, OPI  
 11:14:11 Rep. Melissa Romano  
 11:14:52 Cedar Rose, OPI  
 11:15:49 Presiding Officer David Bedey

**OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (OPI) ED-FLEX WAIVER APPLICATION OVERVIEW / UPDATE**

11:16:18 Dr. Julie Murgel, Chief Program Officer, OPI  
[EXHIBIT 13](#)  
 11:16:34 Zach Hawkins, Title I and Federal Programs Director, OPI  
 11:33:12 Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy left the meeting via Zoom.

**Committee Discussion / Questions**

11:33:54 Rep. Eric Matthews  
 11:34:49 Zach Hawkins, OPI  
 11:35:56 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
 11:36:22 Dr. Julie Murgel, OPI

**FEDERAL POLICY / FUNDING UPDATES & IMPACTS**

11:36:56 Austin Reid, Federal Affairs Advisor, National Conference on State Legislatures (NCSL)  
[EXHIBIT 14](#)

**Committee Discussion / Questions**

11:51:07 Rep. Shelly Fyant  
 11:51:28 Austin Reid, NCSL  
 11:52:31 Presiding Officer David Bedey

## **PUBLIC COMMENT ON ANY OTHER TOPIC WITHIN THE COMMITTEE'S JURISDICTION**

### **Written Public Comment ([Attachment 4](#))**

11:52:56 Rob Watson, Executive Director, School Administrators of Montana

11:58:56 Pad McCracken, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division  
(See Attachment 4)

11:59:26 **Recessed**

13:02:48 **Reconvened**

## **STRATEGIC STAFFING INITIATIVES**

13:03:04 Molly Gold, Education Program Project Manager, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)  
[EXHIBIT 15](#)

### **Committee Discussion / Questions**

13:24:12 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten

13:25:01 Molly Gold, NCSL

13:27:13 Rep. Melissa Romano

13:28:08 Molly Gold, NCSL

13:29:49 Rep. Connie Keogh

13:30:29 Molly Gold, NCSL

13:31:49 Sen. Sue Vinton

13:32:11 Presiding Officer David Bedey

13:35:06 Molly Gold, NCSL

13:38:56 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten

13:39:38 Molly Gold, NCSL

13:40:02 Sen. Matt Regier returned to the meeting.

13:40:37 Rep. Eric Matthews

## **MONTANA DIGITAL ACADEMY (MTDA) FRONTIER LEARNING LAB UPDATE**

13:42:29 Jason Neiffer, Executive Director, MTDA

[EXHIBIT 16](#)

[EXHIBIT 17](#)

[EXHIBIT 18](#)

13:42:44 Mike Agostinelli, Assistant Director, MTDA

13:42:54 Caitlin Byers, Director, Frontier Learning Lab, MTDA

### **Committee Discussion / Questions**

14:09:18 Rep. Connie Keogh

14:09:43 Caitlin Byers, MTDA

14:10:30 Rep. Eric Matthews

14:10:47 Presiding Officer David Bedey

**ARTICLE X, SECTION 1(2) PRESERVING AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURAL INTEGRITY  
Taking Stock of Current Efforts**

14:13:48 Pad McCracken, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

[EXHIBIT 19](#)

[EXHIBIT 20](#)

[EXHIBIT 21](#)

[EXHIBIT 22](#)

**Overview of Indian Education for All (IEFA) Resources**

14:22:11 Michael Jetty, Indian Education Specialist, Office of Public Instruction (OPI)

[EXHIBIT 23](#)

**IEFA Panel Discussion**

14:28:42 Pad McCracken, LSD

14:30:09 Jordann Lankford-Forster, IEFA Instructional Coach, Great Falls Public Schools & Chairperson, Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education (MACIE)

14:31:44 Mandy Smoker Broaddus, Project Leader, Education Northwest & Member, National Advisory Council on Indian Education (NACIE)

14:34:46 Matt Bell, Language and Culture Specialist, OPI

14:37:08 Dr. Brooke Beaverheart Gondara, Director, Indian Education for All Unit and Tribal Student Achievement Unit, OPI

14:41:46 Yancey Beston, Board Chair, Frazer School District & Board of Directors and Vice Chair, Montana School Board Association (MTSBA) & Member, MACIE

**Committee Discussion / Questions**

14:45:31 Rep. Eric Matthews

14:45:58 Michael Jetty, OPI

14:47:52 Dr. Brooke Beaverheart Gondara, OPI

14:49:12 Rep. Connie Keogh

14:49:39 Jason Neiffer, Executive Director, Montana Digital Academy (MTDA)

14:51:54 Presiding Officer David Bedey

14:52:07 Matt Bell, OPI

14:53:14 Rep. Shelly Fyant

14:59:53 Matt Bell, OPI

15:01:48 Jordann Lankford-Forster, MACIE

15:02:54 Michael Jetty, OPI

15:06:36 Matt Bell, OPI

[EXHIBIT 24](#)

15:07:41 Rep. Terry Nelson, State-Tribal Relations Interim Committee Member

15:07:58 Matt Bell, OPI

15:09:02 Dr. Brooke Beaverheart Gondara, OPI

15:10:19 Mandy Smoker Broaddus, NACIE

15:11:09 Rep. Shelly Fyant

15:12:41 Dr. Brooke Beaverheart Gondara, OPI

[EXHIBIT 25](#)

15:13:44 Presiding Officer David Bedey  
15:15:01 Dr. Brooke Beaverheart Gondara, OPI  
15:15:45 Michael Jetty, OPI  
[EXHIBIT 26](#)  
15:18:08 Jordann Lankford-Forster, MACIE  
15:20:53 Matt Bell, OPI

#### **HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 53 SCHOOL SAFETY STUDY UPDATE**

15:22:59 Pad McCracken, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)  
[EXHIBIT 27](#)  
15:23:03 Rep. Lee Deming left the meeting.

#### **Committee Discussion / Questions**

15:24:43 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
15:28:52 Rep. Connie Keogh  
15:31:01 Sen. Sue Vinton

#### **OUT-OF-DISTRICT ATTENDANCE REPORT ANALYSIS**

15:39:43 Pad McCracken, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)  
15:40:07 Kate Johnson, Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Fiscal Division (LFD)  
[EXHIBIT 28](#)

#### **Committee Discussion / Questions**

15:52:03 Vice Presiding Officer Sara Novak  
15:52:31 Pad McCracken, LSD  
15:53:14 Rep. Connie Keogh  
15:53:53 Presiding Officer David Bedey

#### **SCHOOL FUNDING DASHBOARD UPDATES**

15:56:01 Julia Pattin, Fiscal Analyst, Legislative Fiscal Division (LFD)  
[EXHIBIT 29](#)

#### **Committee Discussion / Questions**

16:02:57 Presiding Officer David Bedey  
16:03:06 Julia Pattin, LFD

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT ON ANY OTHER TOPIC WITHIN THE COMMITTEE'S JURISDICTION**

16:03:56 Cassie Wick, Public Policy and Grassroots Advocacy Coordinator, Ability  
Montana  
[EXHIBIT 30](#)  
16:05:43 Sarah Froehlke, Policy Analyst, ZerotoFive Montana  
16:07:22 Jenny Murnane Butcher, Deputy Director, Montanans Organized for Education

#### **COMMITTEE WORK SESSION**

16:09:09 Presiding Officer David Bedey

16:09:36 Sen. Matt Regier  
16:10:36 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
16:14:14 Vice Presiding Officer Sara Novak  
16:16:28 Sen. Sue Vinton  
16:17:09 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
16:17:42 Pad McCracken, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)  
16:21:08 Rep. Shelly Fyant  
16:21:37 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten  
16:23:29 Sen. Sue Vinton  
16:26:30 Presiding Officer David Bedey  
16:27:23 The Education Interim Budget Committee is recessed until March 18, 2026.  
16:27:26 Presiding Officer Linda Reksten

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Adjournment: 16:27:38