

PUBLIC COMMENT SFIC

6/17/2026

	MT	Helena	Kendel Wayne	Self	04/20/2026 08:30 AM
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Subject: Gifted/Peak Funding

Comment: I am writing to fully support additional funding for the gifted/Peak program in Montana Schools. My son is in 3rd grade and is completing his first year in the Peak program. The program has provided him with opportunities to grow and learn in a different environment which has challenged his knowledge and skills more than his regular public classroom. While the program has covered a variety of topics, the biggest benefit of the Peak program is that it has made my son excited to learn! A lifelong love of learning is what we all desire for ourselves and our children. Peak has also challenged my son as he is in a classroom with students of varying ages. This allows students to be thought by other students and to teach others as well, showing students we can learn from each other. Peak provides a wonderful foundation and place to grow. Please consider funding/additional funds for Peak so that many student have this opportunity, which benefits our children and the future communities of MT.

	MT	Missoula	David Aronofsky	Self	04/20/2026 07:17 PM
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Subject: Full State Funding of Public Schools and No more Mill Levies

Comment: It is past time for the Montana Legislature to read the Constitution, especially Article X, Section 1, requiring the Legislature, not local property tax payers subjected to nonstop mill levy elections with no guaranteed outcomes, to fund 100 percent of Montana public schools. Nowhere does the Constitution require local property tax money use for public schools; and the current dysfunctional public school finance system, along with the laws allowing it, require change. I have no quarrel with equalization spending for Montana's many school districts because this also falls within constitutional parameters; but equalization should be funded entirely with state revenues on a per pupil spending formula designed to ensure high quality results. I am a legal expert who taught school finance laws and court cases in every state, including Montana, for over 20 years so I know plenty about how to to fund, and not fund, public education. Montana offers among the worst models so fix it.

	MT	MISSOULA	ELGIN SMITH	Self	04/21/2026 11:35 AM
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Subject: School Funding Reform Needed **Attachments:**

Comment: -  [VIEW ATTACHMENT 1](#)

April 21, 2026

School Funding Interim Commission
Montana State Capitol
PO Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Commission Members,

I am a Missoula County resident and property owner writing to urge you to recommend meaningful reform of Montana's K-12 school funding formula to the 2027 Legislature.

I am voting yes on the May 5 MCPS levy because I support our teachers and school staff, and I value a free high-quality public school education being available to all students. But I want to be absolutely clear: that vote is not satisfaction with the system that funds the schools within our great state. It is a stopgap to support our local schools while Helena fails to address the real structural problem.

Here is what I understand to be true:

Montana's school funding formula caps annual growth at 3% per year. Real inflation has run far higher than that for years. As a solution, state politicians in Helena have done nothing. That gap in funding and the actual costs forces districts to either cut programs or go to voters for levies — levies that voters are increasingly rejecting, not because they oppose schools, but because their property tax bills are already rising and they don't understand why the schools keep asking for more.

The answer is that rising property values do not increase school budgets. MCPS levies to a fixed dollar amount, not a mill rate. The windfall from Missoula's real estate boom bypasses the school district entirely. Voters are frustrated at the wrong level of government.

I support the proposal presented to this Commission on April 10, 2026 by the Coalition of Advocates for Montana's Public Schools (CAMPS). Their model—having the state fully fund schools up to a Quality Assurance line rather than requiring local levies to fill the gap—is the right direction. The estimated \$200 million investment is justified given the \$69.9 million already being withheld from schools by the statutory cap.

Montana has a constitutional obligation to provide a “free quality” public education. The current formula does not meet that standard. I urge this Commission to advance recommendations that raise the state's funding floor, reform or eliminate the 3% statutory cap to reflect real inflation, and reduce structural dependency on local voted levies for basic school operations.

Not only is it our constitutional obligation; it is also the right thing to do in order to provide our children the highest quality education we can, and it is imperative for the future of Montana.

Respectfully,

Elgin Smith
1115 Poplar St
Missoula, MT 59802

	MT	Missoula	David Aronofsky	Self	04/26/2026 03:53 PM
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Subject: Eliminate Mill Levy Elections

Comment: I studied and taught public school finance legal issues in the UM Law School and Education doctoral program for many years. I know the topic well for all US states and Montana. Montana's current public school finance system relying on mill levy elections is an unfunny joke benefitting no one. It is also probably unconstitutional.

Article X, Section 1 of Montana's Constitution requires the state to fund a free quality public education and says nothing about local mill levy election funding. This system irresponsibly delegates the state public school funding mandate to local voter discretion neither recognized nor authorized constitutionally. Every voter mill levy rejection allows the state to ignore this mandate by denying money required for quality schools. It is long past time to get rid of mill levy elections, bite the bullet, and fund our public schools totally with state, not local, dollars. Quality public education requires guaranteed stable funding MIA in Montana.

	MT	Missoula	Jean Woessner	Self	04/27/2026 11:26 AM
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Subject: Reform of Public School Funding

Comment: Dear Commission Members,

I am a Missoula County resident and property owner writing to urge you to recommend meaningful reform of Montana's K-12 school funding formula to the 2027 Legislature. I am voting yes on the May 5 MCPS levy because I support our teachers and school staff. But I want to be clear: that vote is not satisfaction with the system. It is a stopgap while Helena fails to address the structural problem. I support the proposal presented to this Commission on April 10, 2026 by the Coalition of Advocates for Montana's Public Schools (CAMPS). Their model — having the state fully fund schools up to a Quality Assurance line rather than requiring local levies to fill the gap — is the right direction. The estimated \$200 million investment is justified given the \$69.9 million already being withheld from schools by the statutory cap. Montana has a constitutional obligation to provide a “free quality” public education. The current formula does not meet that standard.

	MT	Missoula	Mary Ellen Helmer	Self	04/28/2026 09:41 AM
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Subject: School funding

Comment: People are weary of school levy requests. I know where the lottery money went. I know what happened to the marijuana revenue. I know about the property tax windfall and the prison bills and the 3% cap and the D-rated school buildings. That money needs to go back to the schools.

	MT	Missoula	Marlene Hutchins	Self	04/28/2026 09:30 PM
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Subject: Fix our state budgets and fund the schools.

Comment: Please pay attention to and change the allocation of funds that are supposed to go to our public schools.

I have learned where the lottery money went. I also learned what happened to the marijuana revenue. And the property tax windfall and the prison bills and the 3% cap and the D-rated school buildings.

Montana's constitution requires the state to fund a free quality education — and I'm watching to see whether the 2026 and 2027 Legislature finally means it.

	MT	Missoula	Marlene Hutchins	Self	04/28/2026 09:43 PM
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Subject: Change the inadequate funding for our state public schools

Attachments:

Comment: -

 [VIEW ATTACHMENT 1](#)

School Funding Interim Commission
Montana State Capitol
PO Box 201706
Helena, MT 59620

April 28, 2026

Dear Commission Members,

I am a Missoula County resident and property owner writing to urge you to recommend meaningful reform of Montana's K-12 school funding formula to the 2027 Legislature.

I am voting yes on the May 5 MCPS levy because I support our teachers and school staff. But I want to be clear: that vote is not satisfaction with the system. It is a stopgap while Helena fails to address the structural problem.

Here is what I understand to be true:

Montana's school funding formula caps annual growth at 3% per year. Real inflation has run far higher. That gap forces districts to either cut programs or go to voters for levies — levies that voters are increasingly rejecting, not because they oppose schools, but because their property tax bills are already rising and they don't understand why the schools keep asking for more.

The answer is that rising property values do not increase school budgets. MCPS levies to a fixed dollar amount, not a mill rate. The windfall from Missoula's real estate boom bypasses the school district entirely. Voters are frustrated at the wrong level of government.

I support the proposal presented to this Commission on April 10, 2026 by the Coalition of Advocates for Montana's Public Schools (CAMPS). Their model — having the state fully fund schools up to a Quality Assurance line rather than requiring local levies to fill the gap — is the right direction. The estimated \$200 million investment is justified given the \$69.9 million already being withheld from schools by the statutory cap.

Montana has a constitutional obligation to provide a "free quality" public education. The current formula does not meet that standard. I urge this Commission to advance recommendations that raise the state's funding floor, reform or eliminate the 3% statutory cap to reflect real inflation, and reduce structural dependency on local voted levies for basic school operations.

Respectfully,
Marlene Hutchins

1500 Khanabad Dr, Missoula, 59802
marleni.nardini@gmail.com

	MT	Missoula	Laura Fox	Self	04/29/2026 08:52 PM
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Subject: Funding Education

Comment: I know where the lottery money went as well as marijuana revenue. Same w/tax windfalls & prison bills. Also know about the 3% cap & D-rated school buildings. Instead of monies going towards education, you placed in general fund.
Montana's constitution requires free quality education TO BE FUNDED..
I'm waiting to see whether the 2027 legislature finally follows the constitution.

	MT	Helena	Shelley Turner	Montana Association of School Business Officials	06/10/2026 11:23 AM
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Subject: My apologies that I will not be able to attend.

Comment: Hello Members of the Committee,

My apologies that I will be unable to attend the upcoming meeting next week. The MASBO Summer Conference has been scheduled for a number of years and is located in Billings on the same week. I would be happy to have any of you attend any of our summer conference sessions if you are able to find your way to Billings anytime Monday through Thursday. Please let me know if you would like to join us and I'll make it happen. In the meantime, please let me know if you have any questions and I will be happy to share with you what I can.

	MT	Bozeman	Melissa Tovaas	School Services of Montana	06/11/2026 11:00 AM
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Subject: School-based Mental Health (Free Care Rule reversal - Medicaid)

Attachments:

Comment: -

 [VIEW ATTACHMENT 1](#)



School Services of Montana
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(406) 272-0073, (406) 272-0021

June 11, 2026

Montana School Funding Interim Commission (SFIC)
1301 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59601

RE: Support for reversal of Free Care rule (to increase school-based services)

Dear Members of the Commission:

On behalf of School Services of Montana (SSoM), we are writing to express our strong support of reversing the Free Care rule, which aims to increase mental health supports and services to students through schools by expanding Medicaid-reimbursement eligibility to any Medicaid-eligible student, instead of only the students on an IEP with a medical disability type.

As an organization dedicated to strengthening Montana schools and communities by serving as trusted partners in building capacity through professional learning, evidence-based guidance, and expanded access to resources, we see firsthand the challenges this legislation addresses. Every day, our team works with school districts across Montana, including districts of varying size and demographics. We understand that mental health is a priority in Montana's schools and communities, and we believe this legislation is a necessary step toward a practical solution.

Our organization, along with our national partner, RELAY, Inc., is uniquely positioned to help achieve its goals. SSoM has been successfully providing Medicaid billing assistance to Montana schools since 2014, including:

- Partnering with school districts to assist them with implementing SSoM's HIPPA-compliant, cloud-based Relay Medicaid Billing program, including ongoing training.
- Submitting eligible claims for psychological and social work services along with other direct care services included in a student's IEP for students with Medicaid through the online Relay Medicaid billing program.
- Coordinating with school districts and state-level agencies like OPI/DPHHS to help districts understand the rules, get set up for electronic billing, and confirm forms are correct for billing compliance.
- Tracking of Medicaid eligibility of students and help for school administrators to track claim details for budgeting purposes.

With Medicaid reimbursement expansion to any Medicaid-eligible student, SSoM would partner with RELAY, Inc., DPHHS, and the Office of Public Instruction, to identify any adjustments needed to the

School Services of Montana
PO Box 3193, Bozeman, MT 59772
www.mt-schools.org



software to assist school districts with this process. SSoM would recommend piloting with a few districts of different sizes to evaluate workflow needs and capacity before a statewide implementation. The Relay Medicaid billing program would need minimal changes to allow school districts to bill for mental health services to Medicaid-eligible students that are not participating in a district's IEP program.

Allowing schools to request reimbursement for all Medicaid-eligible students would generate an increase in annual revenue for schools. In turn, this revenue could be used in a number of ways to support students. For example, schools could hire professionals that are able to provide student behavioral health services to any student that needs the support. With predictable reimbursement revenue, these professionals could be employed by the school system rather than a 3rd party provider. Having a school employee fulfill this need means that the program will be designed locally to meet the unique needs of the students within that community. As we have seen in other states who have taken this step, this would allow sustainable, predictable funding going forward to provide this type of support in all schools.

We welcome the opportunity to sit down with you or your staff to discuss how we can act as a resource as this issue moves forward. Thank you for your leadership and for your continued dedication to Montana's schools, youth, and communities.

Sincerely,

Lisa Waterman

Lisa Waterman
Medicaid Billing Manager
School Services of Montana

Melissa Tovaas

Melissa Tovaas
Executive Director
School Services of Montana

	MT	Corvallis	Pamela Van Sant	Self	06/12/2026 04:34 PM
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Subject: SFIC written comment for June meeting

Attachments:

Comment: Written comment describes effects of the diminished funding for 2026-2027 SY on HSD#3 ESPs/Classified hourly employees. It also offers possibilities to generate additional funds for education.

 [VIEW](#)
[ATTACHMENT 1](#)

School Funding Interim Commission
(SFIC)
Chair Dave Bedey
Vice Chair Eric Matthews
Committee Members
1301 East 6th Avenue
PO Box 201706
Helena MT 59620-1706

Dear Mr. Bedey and Committee Members,

I apologized if today's correspondence doesn't fit into any of the topics you will be covering in this month's meeting agenda.

Once again, I will reintroduce myself to you.

I am Pamela Van Sant. I am a library media paraprofessional at Hamilton High School. I have been employed by Hamilton School District #3 for twenty years.

I am one of seventy-two ESPs (classified staff), never in those twenty years has the ESP (classified) staff experienced a payroll freeze.

Our hourly wage rate will be same for school years 2025-2026, 2026-2027 and 2027-2028!

The freeze is the result of HSD#3's 2026-2027 school funding being \$226,199.00 less than what Montana allocated to the district for the previous school year, 2025-2026.

Employees whose budgets were previously stressed, due to working and being paid for only ten months per year, are now in panic mode. Most employees currently work two jobs during the school year in order to balance their budgets. During the two month summer break, many have a summer job and seek other sources to provide for themselves and their family.

When school restarts in August, we have no idea if our trained co-workers will be returning to HSD#3 or not. Was that good bye in June temporary or final? Did their summer job pay more with better benefits and much less stress? Will there be someone new who'll need to be trained or do we absorb additional work functions for no additional wages? Is there a way for summer pay to be funded so some stress can be eliminated from ten-month employees?

The funding formula used thirty years ago, no longer works in today's environment.

Property owners are finding an average of 55% to 60% of their total property taxes go to education. They are asking legislature for relief.

When schools try to pass levies, the majority of levies fail showing tax payers are hurting also.

Schools need to be funded at 95% or 100% rate.

Funding sources need to be creative. Perhaps one to five percent from many sources will help education and not place funding shortages on other state departments.

Are lumber sales, board foot of lumber taxes still available?

Schools have to provide transportation. Can fuel taxes or vehicle registration be tapped?

Can "Sin Taxes" on alcohol products, tobacco & vaping products along with marijuana products and gambling /lottery be tapped?

School funding is a major concern for everyone, especially the ESPs (classified staff) who keep our schools clean, running efficiently, working one on one with students and making sure students receive nutritious meals.

Unfortunately, any shortages seem to effect ESPs before administration and teachers.

We need your wisdom and help in solving the school funding issues.

Respectfully,

Pamela Van Sant

Pamela Van Sant

600 Gray Fox Lane
Corvallis MT 59828
(406) 363-5944
Pamelavinmt@gmail.com

▼	MT	Missoula	Courtney Kircos	Self	06/14/2026 11:50 AM
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Subject: Funding Our Schools Is Not An Option It Must Be Done

Comment: Hello,

I've been in education for ten years, all under the current funding formula. Every year I've entered summer with a dread of the question "how am I going to pay my bills?". The easy statements for some members on your committee would be to save for summer, we know it's coming. But how do I save when my paycheck is \$600 or less? On average an para in Montana makes \$18,000. How do they save on wages under the poverty line? Another would be take another job, but why do I have to work multiple jobs just to pay my bills? Shouldn't our state invest in its citizens? I remember a Montana that used to do that. Fund our schools to show the state you value the people who call this state home. We are quickly being priced not only out of our community but the state we call home. Let's show the state and the rest of the country that we (Montana) see value in our education system and those that work there.

Thank you for your time,

Courtney Kircos

	MT	Helena	Rick Hays	Self	06/16/2026 08:16 AM
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Subject: Critical need to address inflation and facilities

Attachments:

Comment: I believe I mistakenly submitted my testimony seeking to participate in the meeting on Thursday morning. I only want to submit my testimony for the committee's review and consideration. I will not be participating in the Zoom meeting.

 [VIEW ATTACHMENT 1](#)

Public Comment to the Montana School Funding Interim Commission
Rick Hays, Helena

Chair and members of the Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments. My name is Rick Hays. I am a retiree and a longtime volunteer in Helena Public Schools. For ten years, I volunteered at Hawthorne Elementary School, and the past two years, I've volunteered in a more limited way at Broadwater Elementary. I worked with students, supported teachers, and saw every day how much that school meant to the students and their families it served.

Today, Hawthorne is closed.

The closure of Hawthorne was not the result of a lack of community support or dedicated educators. It was the result of years of financial pressures that local districts across Montana are facing. Deferred maintenance accumulated, costs continued to rise, and the resources available to the district could no longer keep pace.

I also served on Helena's Budget Consensus Committee during the district's recent effort to identify millions of dollars in budget reductions. That experience gave me a front-row seat to the challenging financial realities facing Montana schools.

What I learned is that local districts are being squeezed by forces largely beyond their control. These challenges are not primarily about waste, mismanagement, or a lack of effort. The people involved in that process worked diligently and thoughtfully. Every proposed cut represented a real program, service, position, or opportunity for students. There were no easy answers.

The cost of operating schools has risen dramatically. Like your personal budgets - utilities cost more; insurance costs more; transportation costs more; construction and maintenance cost more; recruiting and retaining staff costs more; food and lunches cost more. Yet the funding system has struggled to keep pace with those realities.

The result is that districts spend more time trying to manage financial shortfalls and less time focusing on students.

I would encourage this Commission to focus on two areas in particular: **inflation and facilities funding**.

First, Montana's funding formula must do a better job of accounting for inflation. Schools purchase many of the same goods and services as every other employer and property owner in the state, and they are facing the same cost pressures. When inflation rises faster than funding adjustments, districts effectively experience budget cuts even if state funding technically increases.

Over time, those gaps compound. Districts are forced to delay maintenance, postpone purchases, leave positions unfilled, reduce programming, or ask local taxpayers to make up the difference through levies. That is not a sustainable way to fund public education.

Second, Montana must have a more realistic approach to facilities funding.

School buildings are not optional. They are the infrastructure that makes education possible. Yet too often, districts are forced to defer maintenance because there is simply not enough funding available to keep pace with aging facilities and rising construction costs.

Deferred maintenance does not save money—it postpones costs until they become much larger and much harder to address.

In Helena, we saw the consequences of that reality. Hawthorne's closure was not the result of a single decision or a single year of budget pressure. It was the result of years of accumulated financial strain. Across Montana, other communities are facing similar challenges with aging buildings and limited resources.

I believe Montana should explore ways to provide more stable and predictable support for school facilities so districts are not forced to choose between maintaining buildings and supporting educational programs.

As you continue this review, I hope you remember that school funding is not just about formulas and spreadsheets. It is about whether communities can maintain the schools they already have. It is about whether students have safe, functional learning environments. And it is about whether future generations will have the same opportunities that previous generations enjoyed.

The decisions you make and the recommendations you develop will shape Montana schools for years to come. I encourage you to ensure that any updated funding system reflects the actual costs schools face today, particularly when it comes to inflation and maintaining critical facilities that serve our students and communities.

Thank you for your time and your work.

Rick Hays

Helena, Montana