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|  | MT | Whitefish | Cathy Kincheloe | Community Choice Schools<br>Commission | 06/20/2025 02:53 PM |
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**Subject:** Community Choice Commission Public Comment 6.23

**Attachments:**

**Comment:** -

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Members of the School Funding Interim Commission,

My name is Cathy Kincheloe, I am the Director of Planning for the Community Choice Schools Commission. As many of you are aware, Community Choice Schools were established in the 2023 legislative session and soon thereafter partially halted in the courts. The Commission is operating under a partial injunction that allows for policy development needed to eventually implement the law. There is no way to determine when there will be a ruling on the case, so the Commission carries on with its work in an effort to prepare the state for access to the Community Choice Schools Act.

The Commission is interested in following the work of the School Funding Interim Commission because, when allowed, Community Choice Schools will be public schools that rely on the state's school funding formula, just as all other traditional public schools do. . As a reminder, the intent of the Community Choice Schools Act is to provide educators with substantial freedom to create new, innovative school options for families and students in exchange for heightened accountability—to the point of potentially closing a Community Choice school if it does not adhere to the goals and terms of its charter contract.

As we heard in the workshop with Dr. Marguerite Roza, best practice in education funding is to allocate funds with a focus on the students— to create a student centered formula . The Commission supports this practice as it is the most impactful at aligning resources with student needs, and, thereby, enhances equity throughout the public system of schools.

I plan to attend your meetings regularly and will be available for questions should they arise during your discussions. Please forgive my absence today, as I had a competing commitment, but I will be online or in-person for the remainder of your meetings.

With great appreciation for your work,

Cathy Kincheloe  
Director of Planning  
Community Choice Schools Commission

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|  | MT | Great Falls | Jamie Marshall | Kids' Education Yes,<br>community group from Great<br>Falls | 06/21/2025 12:30 PM |
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**Subject:** HB153 - Decennial Study Recommendations from Kids' Education Yes (KEY)

**Attachments:**

**Comment:** Dear School Funding Interim Commission Members - On behalf of the Kids' Education Yes (KEY) Steering Committee, a nonpartisan, volunteer-led, community-based advocacy organization in Great Falls, thank you for your leadership in conducting this vital review of Montana's school funding system. We are writing to share observations from our region and offer considerations as you shape the future of education funding across our state. Attached is a letter outlining KEY recommendations related to expanding funding mechanisms specific to technology, school safety and health insurance, as well as encouraging options to begin laying the groundwork for a more adaptive, innovation-ready funding model for years to come. We appreciate all of your commitment and work, and look forward to engaging in ongoing conversations through the Innovation in Excellent and Education Working Group data collection process.

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ATTACHMENT 1](#)



June 13, 2025

To the Members of the Montana School Funding Interim Commission:

On behalf of Kids' Education Yes (KEY), a nonpartisan, community-based advocacy organization led by parents and business leaders in Great Falls, thank you for your leadership in conducting this vital review of Montana's school funding system. We are writing to share observations from our region and offer key recommendations as you shape the future of education funding across our state.

Great Falls is home to Montana's second-largest school district and reflects both the challenges and opportunities embedded in the current funding formula. Our district serves a uniquely diverse student body—including one of Montana's first charter schools, children of military families stationed at Malmstrom Air Force Base, and a significant percentage of Title I and Native American students. While our community strongly supports public education, we face persistent difficulties passing levies due to local tax sensitivities. Like many districts, we rely heavily on a fair and adequate state formula to ensure that all students—regardless of zip code—have the opportunity to reach their full potential, as guaranteed by Article X of the Montana Constitution.

As you consider improvements to the funding model, we urge you to prioritize the following areas:

**1. Technology Infrastructure and School Safety**

When the current formula was enacted, technology and safety were not the foundational elements of school operations they are today. In the modern educational environment, reliable technology is essential for instruction, administration, and student access. Likewise, school safety is no longer situational—it is a permanent, evolving obligation. Relying on local levies to meet these fundamental needs creates inequity between communities that can pass measures and those that cannot. Every Montana student deserves access to a safe, connected, and modern learning environment.

**2. Special Education Funding**

The increasing complexity of student needs and the growing shortage of qualified special education professionals require urgent attention. Current funding mechanisms have not kept pace with the actual cost of delivering mandated services, placing unsustainable pressure on general fund budgets. Without adequate resources, districts are forced to make trade-offs that ultimately impact all learners.



### 3. Health Insurance Cost Relief (MCA 2-9-212)

Under current statute, most political subdivisions in Montana are allowed to levy permissively to offset health insurance increases—yet public school districts are excluded. This discrepancy puts schools at a disadvantage in managing one of their most volatile and escalating costs. Allowing districts the same permissive levy authority as other local governments would help stabilize budgets and protect classroom investments.

Finally, we encourage the Commission to consider longer-term strategies that **begin laying the groundwork for a more adaptive, innovation-ready funding model**. The educational landscape is evolving rapidly, and Montana's funding system must be capable of supporting future-facing solutions, not just legacy operations.

Thank you again for your commitment to Montana's students, families, and educators. We invite you to consider these recommendations as part of a more modern, equitable, and responsive school funding system for the next decade and beyond. We are willing to be involved in ongoing conversations as opportunities present.

Sincerely,

Kids' Education Yes (KEY) Steering Committee  
Great Falls, Montana

Khangdool

Beth Leatham

Lana Crist

Shirley Kelly

Jamie Marshall

Eric Hinchman

Steve Gettel

Taylor

Tom Callose

Jameson

Heather Lloyd

Donna Decker

Kim Skornogoshi

Gerry Jennings

M. M. M.



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|  | MT | Belgrade | Gary Lusin | Self | 06/21/2025 12:42 PM |
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**Subject:** Written testimony to School Study Commission from Gary Lusin

**Attachments:**

**Comment:** -

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To: School Funding Interim Commission

June 23, 2025

From: Gary Lusin

This is Gary Lusin. I have been on the Bozeman School Board since 2005, have served on the MTSBA Board for 13 years, 8 years on the Dean of EHHD Advisory Council, and I have 4 grandchildren in our public schools. This experience has shaped my thoughts about education today.

I am out of town and may or may not be able to join in the meeting on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, so I am providing written comment.

Relative to the June 23, 2025 Agenda I have the following comments.

1. Confirming the facilitator for the working group and commission I hope NCEE will be the facilitator, and that Janice Case is the facilitator. My experience with NCEE and Janice has been very good and they would be an excellent choice to facilitate meetings about our system of education.
2. **Working Group Road Shows, participants including all key education stakeholders**– I feel it is critical at this time to get as much information from actual teachers, administrators, parents, and students from different size schools and from the different grade bands from all over the state. In addition getting information from the Educator Prep Programs around the state would be very beneficial, as well as including various business leaders.

If it is possible having a process that is structured and organized and which can allow districts from all parts of the state to discuss specific questions identified by the facilitator to begin the process of analyzing our system of education. To be clear, our system is not broken but there are several parts that need review and updating to meet the demands today, and into the future, within in our classrooms and buildings today. These meetings may not need the facilitator to be present but certainly provide specific topics for discussion.

Having broad participation from many key education stakeholders is critical to establish the correct vision and direction we, the people, would like our system to go. Funding a well and high functioning system is essential if we want all our scores and outcomes to be better.

3. **Facilitator** – This is a key component of a successful effort, especially with the short time period this process is occurring. Having the facilitator gather information and develop key questions that can be discussed and addressed, in a consistent manner, and which can be provided to any and all districts or regions that gather to provide input to the Commission. I am confident that teachers, administrators, trustees, parents, students, Educator Prep Program representatives, and business leaders from around the state would be very engaged in such a process and that good meetings could occur in this short time frame.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions. My intent is simply to assure we get good feedback from on the ground individuals that are experiencing our system of education today. That information is essential for all of us to understand how we, the people, can **“establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person”**. And from that we can fund a more productive and innovative system of education.

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|  | MT | Helena | Rob Watson | School Administrators of Montana | 06/23/2025 02:36 PM |
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**Subject:** Priorities for School Administrators of Montana

**Comment:** When considering changes to the formula, SAM would prioritize the following: First, increased funding is needed to recruit and retain qualified teachers and staff, ensuring every student has access to a high-quality education. Second, SAM advocates for a more equitable and adequate school funding formula that reduces reliance on local property taxes and guarantees fair resource distribution across all districts. Third, SAM supports dedicated funding for early childhood education programs, particularly early literacy initiatives, to build a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Fourth, SAM firmly opposes the use of public funds for non-public and homeschool education, emphasizing that only accredited schools should receive taxpayer dollars. Finally, SAM calls for enhanced and sustainable funding for school facilities, instructional equipment, and modern technology to provide safe, effective, and future-ready learning environments for all Montana students. Thanks for considering.