



June 17, 2020

Dear Superintendent Arntzen,

We are writing to notify you that the Flex2020 Task Force that you initiated to assist in developing K-12 public schools re-opening guidelines for the 2020-2021 school year concluded on June 10, 2020. Specifically, the Flex2020 Task Force focused on the internal and external flexibilities that schools will need to serve students in this new environment as a result of COVID-19.

Three virtual sessions and intersession work was conducted with 33 representatives that included school district leadership, the Board of Public Education, Montana School Boards Association, School Administrators of Montana, Montana Quality Education Coalition, legislators, legislative services, former school board members and Office of Public Instruction (OPI) staff. The task force members worked within in five subgroups to prioritize and build consensus on recommendations, which are outlined below.

The subgroups topics included:

- A. Strengthening existing policy flexibility
- B. Evaluating progress and impact of state graduation, credit, funding, licensure and accreditation policies
- C. Maximizing flexibilities in assessment, accountability and reporting systems
- D. Fostering and supporting local innovation
- E. Leveraging federal flexibilities and resources

The **final recommendations** from the Task Force for your immediate consideration and rapid response are as follows:

- Provide a holistic current flexibility cross walk guidance document.
- Produce a one-page summary of the flexibilities available in licensure.
- Lead efforts to eliminate aggregate hours.
- Request the development of flexibility within the accreditation variances of standards and review board process.
- Develop guidance to accommodate teachers in a high-risk health category with regards to in-person, blended, and remote learning models.
- Leverage policy and funding to get technology to students.
- Pursue an enhanced partnership with MT Digital Academy to support remote learning.
- Expand the Transformational Learning Bill for remote and blended learning models.
- Support legislative considerations or a waiver process that empowers Districts to design their own Innovative paradigm/model that fits their community needs; bundles local, state, and federal flexibilities; and provides time for school communities to plan, implement and evaluate the new paradigm.
- Leverage federal telecommunications funding and assistance programs, like E-Rate, to get devices and internet access for students.
- Develop and seek federal waivers for:
 - Standardized assessment requirements for 2020-2021 schoolyear;
 - Report card provisions;
 - Funding flexibility for Title I, Part A to address eligibility and carry-over; and
 - Funding Flexibility for Nutrition.
- Develop and pursue an addendum to the Montana Consolidated State Plan under Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) to use local assessments to measure and report student academic growth rather than Federal Mandated/State Mandated Testing.
- Draft and seek amendments to the Montana Consolidated State Plan under ESSA for:

- Entrance and exit criteria for CSI/TSI/ATSI schools that address the disruption to the system and holds schools harmless, while providing time for the stakeholders to restore and improve the accountability system for 2020-2021 and beyond; and
- The accountability system fifth State Flex Indicator to eliminate attendance factors.

Thank you for this opportunity to develop recommendations for existing and potential new flexibilities the OPI and schools will need to serve students in this new environment. We look forward to ongoing collaboration with you and the staff at the OPI.

In Partnership,

The Montana FLEX2020 Task Force Members