



## Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee

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### 61st Montana Legislature

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June 16, 2010

Steve Meloy, Executive Secretary  
Board of Public Education  
PO Box 200601  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Mr. Meloy:

As part of an ongoing study of issues related to health care, the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee has spent part of the past year reviewing efforts related to promoting good public health. Members have been particularly interested in childhood health promotion. Young people who adopt healthy lifestyles early on are much more likely to avoid the health care problems — and costs — that can occur later in life if they have chosen sedentary lifestyles and poor diets.

The committee strongly believes that schools provide one of the best forums for teaching lifelong skills in making wise and healthy choices about food and exercise. Health, physical education, and consumer science classes all offer opportunities for students to learn about the importance of healthy lifestyles and gain the lifetime skills they'll need to maintain good health.

The presentations we've heard as part of our Senate Joint Resolution 35 study of health care have included discussion of the need for schools to:

- increase opportunities for students to make healthy choices, through such means as improving the nutritional value of school-provided meals, providing ongoing education in nutrition, setting nutritional standards for items sold in vending machines, and creating school wellness and health committees that could direct a coordinated approach to nutrition, health, and physical activity issues for schools;
- include physical activity as part of the school day and maintain physical education classes from kindergarten through high school; and
- include school nurses on staff to provide important screening and prevention services.

Our committee recognizes the importance of local control for Montana school districts. However, because the Board of Public Education exercises general supervision over Montana schools and sets accreditation standards, we wanted the Board members to be aware of our interest in this issue. We hope the Board will take steps to encourage — through accreditation standards or other measures — the types of activities that will promote good health and nutrition as a way to improve the overall health of this and future generations of schoolchildren.

Our members also recognize that many school districts must balance numerous competing needs as they work within budgets that often cannot meet all the requests they face. However, we believe an investment in promoting a healthy lifestyle for children is likely to reap substantial long-term benefits for both the students themselves and society as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rep. Diane Sands  
Presiding Officer

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