



MONTANA QUALITY EDUCATION COALITION

AN INTERIM MISSION STATEMENT AND STRATEGIC PLAN

**A PROPOSAL FOR A
REVIVAL OF STRATEGIC FOCUS FOR MQEC**

**SUBMITTED FOR CONSIDERATION OF
MONTANA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF MQEC

August 24, 2009

Overview

The Montana Quality Education Coalition (MQEC) has fought for the interests of children in our public schools since its inception in 2001. We have had our share of victories and defeats over the years, but have not yet enjoyed the kind of widespread support for quality education that we need in order help ensure the success of children educated in our public schools.

With the decision of Judge Sherlock not to intervene in the state's continued progress toward achievement of compliance with his original order, MQEC has found itself at a crossroads. The MQEC Board of Directors has used this proverbial fork in the road as an opportunity for self-analysis and to challenge itself – to refocus, to do better, to be better and to expand its mission to help improve the quality of Montana schools and the communities that support them. Accomplishing this mission will require the cooperation and input of a broad and diverse group of Montanans.

We are driven by the recognition that MQEC must become one of the key voices for quality education for kids in Montana, soliciting input from, listening to and engaging local communities to support efforts that will secure the future of our children and of Montana.

We recognize that our work is not done, in fact that it may never be done. MQEC's leadership views the process of advocacy as an ongoing process that will remain the focus of MQEC as long as it exists. Our adoption of a tentative plan for your review is a means of providing you an affirmation of our current intent and planned direction as outlined in the information below. We anticipate substantial changes to this document based on what you and others interested in the Coalition have to say. Once finalized, we intend to use the plan as our guiding document, with updates as we go to ensure that we remain focused on the best interests of children in our public schools and the communities in which our schools operate.

We ask that you carefully review our tentative conclusions and provide us your feedback. Please email your comments to Mark Lambrecht (marklambrecht@bresnan.net).

Thank you for helping set the course for the future of MQEC!

PART I: A PROPOSED MISSION STATEMENT AND STRATEGIC PLAN DESIGNED TO CHANGE PERCEPTIONS AND ENSURE THE SUCCESS OF CHILDREN IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

MQEC will become recognized as a voice and a forum for quality education advocacy in Montana, listening to, learning from, and engaging local communities to *take* action on behalf of the future of students in Montana and the communities in which they live.

LISTENING, LEARNING, ADVOCATING:

- MQEC will support all those who advocate for educating the whole child, for every child, and will build a coalition of support among Montana citizens to provide the needed resources and support.
- MQEC will listen to the opinions of others and incorporate those opinions into the basis of its advocacy when in the best interests of children. We will listen to and talk with school districts, parents, students, alumni, seniors and grandparents, educators and trustees, home school advocates, Democrats and Republicans, clergy, business leaders, legislators, and others across the state. We will share our mission, but will also listen to and learn from what others have to say, refining and improving our mission to reflect what we have heard in pursuit of improvements in our capacity for advocacy on behalf of children.
- MQEC recognizes that the best outcomes for our children will result from the creating of a vibrant economy, including meaningful job opportunities.
- MQEC will seek to understand and help solve economic challenges affecting families and others in Montana.

- MQEC will work with others to develop a broader understanding of common interests in creating economic viability and quality educational opportunities for the children of our state.
- MQEC will support the creation of job opportunities for all students educated in Montana.
- MQEC will work to break down the barriers of misinformation and misunderstanding so that all Montanans may work together to improve the collective quality of life.

OUR COMMITMENT TO AND SUPPORT OF THE MISSION - WALKING THE WALK:

- MQEC is prepared to accept the necessary reforms to the way that it does business, even if it disrupts existing structures upon which MQEC relies.
- MQEC is prepared to expand its involvement in measuring and pursuing the well being of children in and out of public education.
- MQEC is prepared to intervene in issues that affect the well being of children that occur outside of public education; including poverty, wellness, health, and parental responsibility.
- MQEC recognizes and supports other key governmental programs that serve the interest of children.
- MQEC supports efforts to influence and promote parental behavior that serves the interests of kids.
- MQEC is prepared to serve as a watchdog against misuse of children in the name of politics. MQEC is willing to expose and talk forcefully and effectively in defense of children when it happens.
- MQEC is prepared to consider mergers of joint efforts in pursuit of its goals, including, but not limited to, mutual efforts with the Learning First Alliance.
- MQEC supports efforts to reduce costs at schools by increasing energy efficiency and by implementing new technologies.
- MQEC supports the deployment of new technologies and strategies that improve educational opportunities for students.

Part II: What We Hope To Accomplish – A Vivid Description of Our 5-10 Year Envisioned Future

1. We have a reliable, predictable funding system that funds schools adequately allowing districts to have a first class education for all students. A system that supports long and short range planning to optimize resources and provide long-term stability. *We have* safe buildings that are conducive to teaching and learning.
2. The community will be active and involved in the schools and youth will learn in the community. Children are devoted to community service. Students no longer dropout of school. Students volunteer for community service, because they want to serve and be part of the greater community.
3. Students will thrive in a robust educational setting that is adaptive and responsive to diverse learners. Students and staff will relish coming to school. Children have a full range of experiences, both curricula and co- curricular.
4. Older students have some freedom to pursue their own interests. We are very close to individualized instruction, particularly for those students who need extra attention on particular subjects or have social issues that may impair their ability to learn.
5. Students are proficient. Children learning in our system will possess important skills to successfully compete. Specifically, they will possess critical thinking skills, communication, analytical, interpersonal, personal and social responsibilities.
6. Students are self-actualized. Adequate resources and support will assure students have the opportunity to reach their potential allowing for greater choices throughout their lifetimes.
7. Students have their aspirations met. All children are prepared to pursue their choice of career and are able to compete in a global economy.
8. We will find the key to helping those who have the greatest needs, those in the lower social economics strata who live in a dysfunctional world. A system and community that strives to understand and act upon the constellation of issues that affect children, such as substandard housing.
9. Teachers have all the support they need in order to be able to create learning experiences that thoroughly engage their students. Schools have highly trained staffs, a complete curriculum with appropriate materials, and effective teaching, leading to high levels of learning.

10. We recognize and focus on recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers, who will be successful. The system would be good enough so that people would be encouraged to be educators. Teachers would feel good about their profession and would encourage their students to become educators. They would and do encourage their own children to become educators. Our best and brightest students would see the value in choosing education as a career.

Our Students Will Be:

1. Actively involved in the community and value education. The kids have, through the learning process made available to them, realized a meaningful and hopeful place for themselves with their community and beyond. They begin to realize the part they play within society and the changes they may have to face to make life better for all.
2. Our students are competent, confident learners ready for life after graduation. Students continue to value learning as adults, and in turn give back to the schools by serving as volunteers, serving on committees, etc.
3. Successful, well educated for post-secondary educational opportunities and the workplace. Our students are highly prepared to continue to generate quality in transition to the experience of post-K- 12 learning and work throughout their lifetimes.
4. Self-actualized, brimming with self-confidence, proficient with respect to local, state, national and international measurements. Our students are wise, critical thinkers motivated to be self-learners. They are self-promoters, respectful with interpersonal skills.
5. Safe and drug free.

Our Communities Will Be:

1. Proud of the students accomplishments. Our communities are proud of the kids in our schools and recognize what a great job our schools and staff do at every level.
2. Aware and involved with the educational process that is turning out a majority of well balanced, young people, with a desire to continue to improve and make the system the best it can be. Our communities are supportive because they see students actively engaged in community service.
3. Aware that to educate every child to their intellectual potential we must come together and address the constellation of factors that affect the lives of families; adequate housing, need, care.
4. Full of well educated folks that have the ability to problem solve. They will be able to solve complex problems because the school system has produced high-quality thinkers.
5. Joyful places to live. Our communities will value diversity. They will embrace and value all types of people.

How Legislators Will Describe MQEC In 5-10 Years If We Deal With The Situation Successfully

1. MQEC is the voice of our communities, helping to define and promote quality education for all children. MQEC is the respected voice of advocacy for public education and students. Here is a group that has clearly articulated a K-12 educational vision for Montana. An organization that puts the needs of children first and accomplished the goal of improving educational opportunity for Montana's children. Know and understand the many and varied types of students and their potential.
2. We know that MQEC's position is reflective of a consensus of the Education Community. We don't generally get any surprises from MQEC, as they formulate their positions openly and distribute them widely and do so only after consulting and otherwise working with the other key stakeholders who are likely to weigh in on the issues facing K-12 public education.
3. MQEC is one of the best education advocacy groups in the state when it comes to soliciting and incorporating feedback from local community members when formulating their action plans.
4. MQEC is a respected group, advocating for the honest needs of students, parents and communities who propose workable solutions. MQEC is a partner in working to secure resources to improve Montana's economic future. The Legislature views MQEC as a partner in assisting in adequately funding schools

through different sources (natural resources, sales tax, restructure the tax system) so that the burden is not left to the local taxpayers.

5. MQEC is appreciated for its input on what is needed to best provide a quality education for all. Legislators value the involvement and advocacy of MQEC. They seek input from MQEC to assure quality education for all students. MQEC keeps us from becoming complacent about education.
6. MQEC's positions sometimes differ or conflict with those advocated by other education organizations. However, they consistently present arguments for their position based on facts and treat other advocates and legislators with respect.
7. MQEC listens, acts, and finds answers.

How The Local Communities Will Describe MQEC In 5-10 Years If We Deal With The Situation Successfully

1. The community realizes and respects that MQEC has helped all kids within the local system gain a positive and productive public education by working in a constructive positive manner with all necessary entities. Child centered *focus* that helped to improve educational opportunities for Montana's children. We are so pleased at the quality of educational opportunities that the students here in X district now have thanks to the hard work of MQEC along with legislature and our local district!
2. The community is involved with MQEC. Community members actively participate in MQEC. We recognize MQEC readily as an advocate not an adversary. *MQEC is an organization that is communicating and partnering with key players.*
3. MQEC has really helped our local school district in clearly explaining the challenges they face in educating the children of our community. Through their involvement, we feel like we have a much more complete and accurate picture of what is happening in our local schools and that our input has been incorporated into reform initiatives of the district to better serve the children of our community.
4. We count on MQEC for reliable data, identification of trends affecting the success of our public schools and for a willingness to engage the entire community in a discussion about success for our children. We also appreciate MQEC's efforts to keep us specifically informed about the voting patterns of our legislators.
5. MQEC is credible, trustworthy, relevant, respectful and informed on all legislature matters and issues related to resource needs and have an understanding of their challenges and limitations. This is a group that has clear vision of how to make sure that the Montana constitution is upheld concerning education.
6. MQEC has made significant positive impacts for our schools, through providing checklists that helped us express to our legislature what we want them to support. Thanks! With your efforts, MQEC, we are finally turning the corner on adequate funding.

PART III: A STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM: THE COMMUNITIES' PERCEPTIONS OF MQEC AND PUBLIC EDUCATION THAT NEED TO BE CHANGED IN ORDER FOR MQEC TO SUCCEED IN ITS MISSION

1. MQEC is basically run by "Helena" based interests. MQEC is ready to litigate, and is seeking quality education for all kids. It is Helena versus the other areas.
2. They are using taxpayer dollars to sue the state. How can you take taxpayers money to sue the people's government? Why are taxpayer dollars being used to sue the state? Why not use those funds to work with the legislature?
3. They are a black hole, always asking for money. They are not accountable. It is all about the money. They always want more money. They are unrealistic in these tight economic times. MQEC and education are self-serving. All they want is more money in their pockets.
4. Education cost too much. Much of the costs are not necessary. "Too much fluff."
5. We did not have that then, why is it necessary now? Other people's kids are not important to me.
6. They are not successful, only bad things get press. What do schools need more money for? You're not doing anything new or innovative! You're still boring kids, not engaging them. We need trained workers to fill jobs; schools are not providing adequate or relevant education. You protect incompetence.

7. Schools are failing. They cannot even teach the three R's anymore. The needs of today's increasingly diverse students are not the same as yesterdays. The inability to make AYP is not necessarily a sign of a failing school.
8. Schools are not hurting for money; they seem to get everything done. They are out of step with community financial needs. Cutting personnel and programs is acceptable in bad economic times. We should consolidate the number of school districts. Investment in education is "the biggest bang for the buck."
9. The community supports education; however, there is a lack of knowledge about education and the needs of students. We need better knowledge of the students who are attending school and the many programs.
10. The community has a lack of understanding of MQEC and our purpose. I am not aware of MQEC. That is your job. Most community members are unaware of MQEC mission. They are not focused on the needs of students. Local communities don't understand what MQEC mission or vision is.
11. The community associates us with the lawsuit and school funding. The organization's run by MQEC (MEA, MFT etc.) And lawyers!
12. All we (MQEC) want is money. We, the legislature, are an ATM. It is all about money. MQEC is just another lobbying group that is using taxpayer's dollars to further their cause and agenda. Millions have been given to schools in the last two legislative sessions, and it is still not enough.
13. Schools need to learn to live within their means. They are a black hole. They are noncompetitive, a monopoly. Large schools have plenty, small schools need more.
14. MQEC does not understand the plight of the average Montana's citizen. There are too many administrators. It is all about the adults.
15. They can never be satisfied. They will never be happy. Schools have enough; in fact they will never get enough funding. They over inflate the need for money for education. They have unrealistic expectations. We need to change the stigma of MQEC, that all we want is more, more, more, no matter what they give, it won't be enough!
16. Schools are of poor quality; charter schools and all private schools are the way to go. Student populations are homogenous. Education is detrimental to the child: they are better off with parents and home, schools, etc. If it was good enough for me, "back in the day," it is good enough for these kids.
17. Legislators do not trust or value MQEC. They do not believe we are educating for quality schools. One educational group doesn't agree with another on what we need or want.
18. We don't want MQEC, MFT, BPE, and OPI controlling education. We (legislature) are not in an MQEC. We give money to the local districts and they spend as they want. Taxpayers first. We will support education as best we can.
19. Legislators need to better understand the needs of students to prepare them for successful after graduation. The legislators need to understand what a quality education is. (Do we have that vision?)
20. What do we have to do to keep MQEC and educational groups from taking us back to court?
21. That MQEC is truly for kids and we're not kidding. The money goes to teachers and administrators, not kids. Many don't realize that we need to prepare students for their future, not our past! We need not to be afraid to talk to MQEC partners.
22. By working together we can design a preferred future educational system that will better prepare our future workers. Workforce.
23. In the governor's words, we're all just a bunch of "educrats."

THE WORST POSSIBLE OUTCOMES IF WE ARE UNABLE TO CHANGE THESE PERCEPTIONS

1. Funding for Montana's public education system will be insufficient to support quality education for its students.
2. Montana will be unable to recruit and retain quality educators.
3. Montana's students will fall behind those from other states and will fail to acquire the educational and social skills necessary to participate in their communities and compete for jobs.
4. Montana's communities will continue to suffer from poverty and other social issues with little hope for change from new generations.

PART IV: INITIAL PROPOSED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN OUR PRESENT REALITY AND OUR DESIRED FUTURE

Define a process for effectively sharing the new mission and focus, a strategy that creates a greater passion, and non-confrontational public presence.

- Connect with trustees, especially those who were not seated when MQEC was formed.
- Finding ways to get the community to gather, including kids, and legislators, in order to articulate a vision for education and Montana. Then follow through, turn it into actions.
- Organize discussions in each community about how to achieve the mission.

Distribute a monthly newsletter highlighting issues important to MQEC and education advocates. The newsletter needs to be distributed to key stakeholders, legislators, agency officials and the Governor's Office. The newsletter should include information about social and economic indicators affecting public education, success stories about particular school districts, schools or educators and other information that promotes MQEC's mission.

Hold community conversations around Montana to develop and maintain the strategic plan and to develop legislation for the 2011 Montana Legislative Session.

The MQEC should immediately engage the members of the Education and Local Government Interim Committee to discuss potential opportunities for a committee bill to address K-12 funding.

MQEC staff, directors and members should schedule visits with key legislators in their districts to discuss the organization and its mission. These visits, which could coincide with community conversations, would also help MQEC understand some of the issues unique to legislative districts around the state.

Somehow start a communication network within the committee to include more folks at the table; students, seniors, business leaders, etc.

- Develop by-laws for the organization that develops an inclusive structure and processes for polling member organizations, entities and even individuals in the process of making decisions.
- Change the makeup of the board to include more "stakeholders", members who are not "professional educators" or "Educational Association executives." The composition of the board *is such that the community will see themselves.*
- MQEC Members would include business, teachers, legislators, students, clergy, etc.
- Include OPI and the governor's office

Schedule "Regional (locally delivered) meetings" with representatives from key stakeholders to listen to the available community. (Past, present, future stakeholders)

- A gathering similar to this with key leaders of Democrats and Republicans,
- A general membership meeting, formatted for listening and sharing the information.

Encourage communication on the common ground that must exist to a continued effort. Communicate, communicate, communicate! (Listen and learn)

- Offer listening sessions around the state; and by everyone; (schedule attendance to determine if more are needed.) Distribute results to all stakeholders, i.e. err on the side of inclusiveness.
- Have community conversations versus presentations.
- *Sponsor* listening sessions.
- Finding ways for real listening.
- Listen and when posed with a question responded by saying... "Here is what I heard you say."
- Ask these groups if there should be a new name for MQEC among other questions.

Listen to ideas and share ideas about the status of public education, where we are all the way to where we need and want to be and to continue the process to improve and make changes as the need arises.

- Meet with homeschool parents in an effort to understand why they made the decision to take their children out of public education. Listen.

Turn the coalition into an entity that helps work out the differences between those who would influence the quest for adequate school funding, thereby creating a united and consistent voice on behalf of Montana's children.

- Get key legislators together with MQEC and others to identify their concerns and put together a process to, once and for all, validate or eliminate those concerns.
- Work with individual groups, such as senior citizens, to help assure they have "safety" as we move forward to secure adequate school funding.
- Reestablish a positive relationship with MQEC and MREA and ensure the continuity of positive relationships with other key education advocacy groups, including but not limited to MEA-MFT, MTSBA, MASBO, MIEA and SAM.

Repair relationships with the governor.

Look for opportunities for MQEC to support economic development.

- Economic improvement across the board.
- The Montana state board of administrators can host committees on economics, etc.
- Enhance career field operations among college, districts and businesses towards common purpose.

Create meaningful ways for school districts to share their skills and facilities with the community; e.g. family gym, focused elder and student conversations, joint grant opportunities.

- Consider generational differences.

Establish MQEC chapters in every school community: trustee, administration, teacher, community member, students, alumni and others. Develop local chapters co-facilitated by a board chair, superintendent, and union president.

- Bring the various entities together that are impacted by quality schools, including parents, students, alumni, seniors and grandparents, educators and trustees, home school advocates, Democrats and Republicans, clergy, business leaders, legislators, and others.