

July 22, 2009

Mr. Dan Villa, Education Policy Advisor for Governor Schweitzer
State of Montana
Helena, Montana

Dear Mr. Villa:

Congratulations on your new appointment as the Education Policy Advisor for Governor Schweitzer. Also, we extend our thank you to Jan Lombardi, your predecessor for all her work for education in Montana, especially her efforts on Indian education.

We would like to introduce the Montana Indian Education Association to you and share our recommendations in your work as Governor Schweitzer's Educational Policy Advisor.

The Montana Indian Education Association is a statewide educational organization that has had a presence in Montana for 28 years. Our primary role is advocacy for Indian education representing both on and off reservation education issues. Our membership includes teachers, administrators, state leadership, tribal leadership, parents and students. We have worked well with the Schweitzer administration in the past 5 years in improving the quality of education for American Indians in Montana and look forward to your advocacy for Indian Education as well.

As you are aware through your work as a state legislator, almost all of Montana's American Indian students attend public schools in Montana (about 97%). They make up 11.6% of the total K-12 school population. So, your work in providing a quality education for all students of Montana and helping students find success in the classrooms is of vital importance to American Indian students.

There have been a number of positive efforts under the Schweitzer Administration for Indian Education including funding for Indian Education for All, Closing the Achievement Gap for Indian Students, At Risk Students, and Tribal Colleges. In fact, Montana has taken a very visible leadership role in the nation in terms of Indian education and is serving as a model for other states. But, the challenges continue. Many of these challenges need your attention at the policy and budget level.

Following are a number of concerns and issues we would like to bring to your attention and encourage you to include in your policy work for the interim as well as in your planning for the 2011 session.

1. MIEA Resolutions: Attached are a number of MIEA Resolutions passed at our recent conference for your review and consideration. There are a few that pertain to federal legislation such as NCLB, funding Tribal Education Departments, etc. that we are including for your advocacy when you work with our Congressional Delegation or other federal officials.

2. National Common Core Standards: Montana is one of the states who have agreed to work toward the Common Core Standards proposed by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. There are concerns expressed by the National Indian Education Association, the Tribal Education National Assembly and the National Congress of American Indians on these standards. The Montana Indian Education Association agrees with these national Indian Education organizations. Also, we are concerned on the impact of these standards on Indian Education for All, on the efforts for closing the achievement gap, and of course on assessment strategies.

The National Indian Education Association is serving as the key point of contact on this issue and we recommend that you review their concerns as Montana moves forward on these standards. We have included their position paper on these standards.

3. Race to the Top Grants: As a part of the National Common Core Standards, we understand that there are Race to the Top grant funds available. Please keep MIEA informed on these grants and we would be happy to provide input into any planning.

4. Distance Learning and Broadband to Reservations: As you implement the new Distance Learning and Broadband in Montana, it is important to include the American Indian communities in your discussions. The Distance Learning can be a possibly strategy to help with credit recovery and increasing the graduation rate if it meets the needs of American Indian students.

5. Reporting and accountability on the use of ARRA Funds: A large portion of the ARRA Funds were allocated for educational services for our schools. We are interested in the accountability of these funds in relation to services for American Indian students both on and off reservation and look forward to these reports.

6. GAIN Council: If you serve as a member of the GAIN Council for the Governor's Office, please feel free to ask for our recommendations on any issues pertinent to Indian education.

7 Indian Education for All K-12: Funding to schools for the implementation of Indian Education for All was first made available in 2005 for the first time. Since then the funding level per student has decreased from \$67.00 per student per school year in 2005 to \$20.40 per student per school year in 2009. The current level of funding is not acceptable and we need to increase this. We were not successful in 2009 to increase the funding to schools for Indian Education for All. We hope we can count on your support and advocacy to increase this level of funding in the 2011 session.

8. Indian Education for All Higher Education: The constitutional promise of 1972 For Indian Education for All is for all our state's educational systems, including our university system. It is important that the university system take stronger steps to implement Indian education for all in all its units.

9. Closing the Achievement Gap for Indian students: We have far too many Indian children failing in our public schools. This results in only 50-60% of our Indian students completing high school. We encourage you to support efforts to close the achievement gap and increase the high school graduation rate of American Indians to an equitable level with their non-Indian peers as one of our priorities. Funding has been provided by the state to Close the Achievement Gap for American Indian students since 2005 at \$200.00 per Indian student. This funding needs to continue.

10. At Risk Funding: We must restore the \$10.0 million in funding that was deleted in the state budget in the 2009 session for at risk students. Many of the students who benefitted were American Indian students and students in poverty in our state's public schools. The definition of a quality education includes at risk students and is very specific about including funding for at risk students - 20-9-309, 20-9-328.

11. Accountability: We need to insure that funding being used by our public schools for Indian Education for all, Closing the Achievement Gap, and At Risk is meeting the needs of the purpose and students it was intended for. Reports as outlined in statute (20-9-328 and 20-9-329) will be due on or before Sept. 15, 2010, on the impact of these funds on achievement.

12. Urban Indian Education: The challenges facing American Indian education is not only on our 7 reservations – these challenges extend to our urban schools as well. We need to insure that our policy and resources for closing the achievement gap and increasing the graduation rate reach these students as well.

13. Tribal College Non-Beneficiary Funding: The 2009 Legislature funded our tribal colleges at approximately \$3,000 per non-beneficiary FTE. This meets the legislation that was passed in 2007, but half of this funding is one-time-only. The Tribal Colleges have had to come to the legislature every session to seek additional funding for the non-beneficiary students who attend their colleges. We need to work to include the \$3,025 authorized by statute for tribal college non-beneficiary into the on-going budget of the Board of Regents.

14. Revitalization of Tribal Languages in Montana: We need to develop strategies to support the revitalization of Native (American Indian) languages in Montana. Montana's Class 7 Teacher Certification has been a wonderful effort to helping with this, but this is limited and we still find that our native languages are being lost at an alarming rate.

We have included a number of items in this packet for your review and files. If you need further information, Mr. Villa, please let us know. We look forward to your response and working with you to improve the quality and achievement of Indian students in Montana.

Sincerely,

Montana Indian Education Association Board of Directors