

The Onslaught of Paperwork and Reporting from OPI



The Greatest Challenge Facing Montana's Rural Schools Since the "Forced Consolidation" Efforts of the 1980's

This fall MREA conducted a state-wide survey of our membership which confirmed the results of a previous member survey....The dramatic increase in recent years of paperwork and reporting required by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Office of Public Instruction has risen to the level of a crisis for Montana's Small and Rural Schools.

The paperwork and reporting requirements being issued by OPI have now risen to the level where these repetitive and duplicative demands for information are threatening the very quality of instruction and supervision offered in our rural schools across this state. Rural administrators are spending hours a day on their computers filling out data demands from OPI instead of providing instructional leadership. Many in MREA now see this issue as just as serious as the issues surrounding "forced consolidation" that were championed by our state association decades ago.

These requirements appear to completely disregard the requirements of state law....Consider the following language included in 20-7-104 (b) as a result of the successful passage of SB 175 sponsored by Senator Llew Jones:

20-7-104(6) ***The superintendent of public instruction shall continually work*** in consultation with the K-12 data task force provided for in 20-7-105 to analyze the best options for a statewide data system that will best enhance the ability of school districts to use data for the purposes identified in this section. Emphasis must be placed on developing or purchasing and customizing a statewide data system that promotes and preserves community ownership and local control and that incorporates innovative technologies available in the marketplace that may be in use and that are successfully working in other states. ***The office of public instruction and the K-12 data task force shall collaborate to enhance the statewide data system to support:***

(a) the needs of school districts in using data to improve instruction and student performance;

(b) ***the collection of data from schools through a process that provides for automated conversion of data from systems already in use by school districts or the office of public instruction and that resolves the repetition of data entry and redundancy of data requested that has been characteristic of the data system in the past and that otherwise reduces the diversion of district staff time away from instruction and supervision;***

(c) increased use of data from the centralized system by various functions within the office of public instruction; and

(d) transparency in reporting to schools, school districts, communities, and the public.

It is dumbfounding that the K-12 data task force organized by OPI as referenced above has only met ONE TIME during the current biennium since this legislation was passed!

All of this comes after over 5 years of effort by MREA to facilitate and participate in meetings and discussions using every conceivable form of communication (letters, emails and even informal visits with OPI officials over coffee!)

One Example from dozens.....

One recent example out of the many issues causing tremendous problems and outright stealing time from the much more important responsibilities of instruction and supervision at the local level is the TEAMS data collection process. The TEAMS reporting requires a convoluted data export from Infinite Campus into a format to be opened in Excel, tweaked and edited, saved in yet a different format, then uploaded to OPI. After this process, the data can then be analyzed for the inevitable errors. Schools were told that the data would all be pre-loaded from last year's efforts! Furthermore, districts were strongly encouraged to purchase Infinite Campus many years ago with the promise that it would result in the seamless transition of data to OPI-this obviously has not happened. Even worse, OPI's TEAMS system is continually down for maintenance and programming issues.....

In the absence of strong leadership from the State Superintendent many of our members are beginning to voice concern that there may be no reason or motivation for OPI staff to address the impact of these problems at the local level. One superintendent put it very simply.... ***"It is much easier for OPI's staff to simply crank out more reports and forms (many requiring the same tired old information) and then sit back and let local schools deal with the avalanche of paperwork, than it is to develop innovative computer programs and technology that would "crosswalk" the data from one report to the next."***

Possible Solution?.....

Appointment of a "DATA CZAR" to Handle the Crisis!

Many of the paperwork/reporting challenges facing Montana schools are an obvious result of the "right hand at OPI not knowing what the left hand is doing" and what appears to be a disturbing pattern of "organizational dysfunction and confusion" when it comes to these reporting requirements.

MREA has repeatedly suggested that the time has come for the State Superintendent and OPI to appoint a "Czar" that could begin to coordinate reporting requirements and eliminate the nauseating duplication of reporting THE SAME information over and over in a myriad of formats and forms.

Last Resort....The 2015 Legislature?

MREA is working with a number of key legislators in developing a response to these concerns that can be brought before the upcoming 2015 state legislature.

A Final Note and A Discouraging Look Back.....

Yet Another Reason to Take Action During the Upcoming 2015 Legislative Session!

Over four years ago on January 18, 2010 MREA and MTSBA Co-Sponsored a Summit Discussion entitled **"Managing Paperwork Challenges Facing Montana Schools"**. School leaders (both Trustees and Administrators) took the time to come from across Montana to share their concerns with Deputy Superintendent Dennis Parman and Chief of Staff Madalyn Quinlan.