



April 5, 2019

MQEC is the “Constitutional Guardian” of Article X of the Montana State Constitution, working for public school students and their communities.

We advocate for, pursue, and defend the need for adequate and equitable funding to provide quality education for each of Montana’s public school students.

Dear Matt,

The MQEC Board of Directors would like to thank Bigfork Public Schools for your membership this year, and we invite you to renew membership for the 2019-2020 school year. MQEC is a collaborative effort of the entire education community, providing the vital advocacy function of holding the state accountable to the guarantees of the Montana Constitution:

- *The legislature shall provide a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools (Article X, Sec 1).*
- *The legislature, counties, cities, towns, school districts, and public corporations shall not make any direct or indirect appropriation or payment from any public fund or monies, or any grant of lands or other property for any sectarian purpose or to aid any church, school, academy, seminary, college, university, or other literary or scientific institution, controlled in whole or in part by any church, sect, or denomination (Article X, Section 6).*
- *The supervision and control of schools in each school district shall be vested in a board of trustees to be elected as provided by law (Article X, Section 8).*
- *There is a board of public education to exercise general supervision over the public school system and such other public educational institutions as may be assigned by law (Article X, Section 9).*
- *No appropriation shall be made for religious, charitable, industrial, educational, or benevolent purposes to any private individual, private association, or private corporation not under control of the state (Article V, Section 11(a)).*

These constitutional guarantees are challenged in each legislative session, and the education community has turned to the courts for relief when necessary. In the 1980s, these actions addressed equity issues (Lobel decision, 1989). Since MQEC’s inception in 2002 and through the support of our membership, we have worked with the education community to pursue adequacy (Sherlock decisions, 2004; 2008) and to maintain equity in state funding. In 2011, the education community through MQEC returned to court and successfully restored statutory inflation increases for the 2011-2012 biennium.

In December 2018 the Montana Supreme Court affirmed MQEC’s position that tax credits for donations to sectarian schools is unconstitutional. This decision capped our three year effort to challenge the channeling of public tax dollars to sectarian schools following the passage of SB 410 in the 2015 legislative session. MQEC’s actions have been and remain critical to public education funding. In this instance, if we did not successfully defend the constitutional prohibition of aid to sectarian schools, this could have opened the door for additional mechanisms that direct public funds to private educational purposes – any of which would be harmful to public education funding.

In addition to serving as the “constitutional guardian” for education-related bills, MQEC’s activities during the 2019 legislative session have focused on restoring funds that were suspended in the 2017 session, establishing statewide aid to improve teacher recruitment and retention, adding the automatic inflationary adjustment to special education funding, adjusting the distribution of special education funding to provide relief to cooperatives, and supporting new funding streams for early childhood education. To date, we have moved positively in several areas including application of inflation to the existing funding formula (signed by the Governor in February), ensuring the return of the Data for Achievement payment, continued expansion of GTB aid, and restoration of funding for facility maintenance. With several weeks of the legislative session remaining, MQEC will continue our collaborative work with the education community to secure constitutionally sound and positive outcomes for Montana’s K-12 public schools.

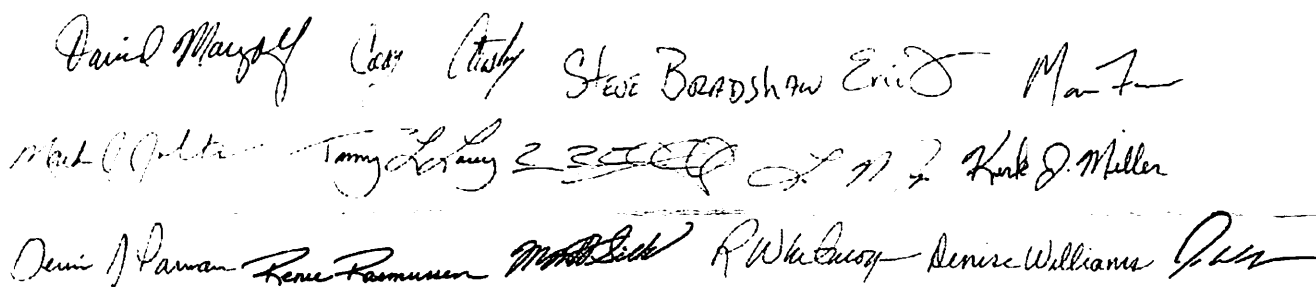
As described in the attached datasheet, the education community and MQEC have been effective in protecting the interests of public education. The gains from our 2004 litigation continue to multiply, and today each school district in Montana receives significantly more funding per pupil than we would have seen without intervention of the courts – a difference of \$1,074 per pupil in the 2018 school year. ***Just think how different your district budget decisions would be without these additional dollars.***

The educational community has worked successfully together over the past several years, finding substantial areas of common ground and presenting a united front in our lobbying efforts. MQEC’s voice is an essential component of that solidarity. Your MQEC membership is important to our continued and collective success in providing quality public education for each child in Montana. Please consider supporting our efforts this year. Simply put, you make what we do possible.

If you have any questions about membership please contact our Executive Director, Dianne Burke, at 406-449-4594 or at dburke@mqec.org.

Sincerely,

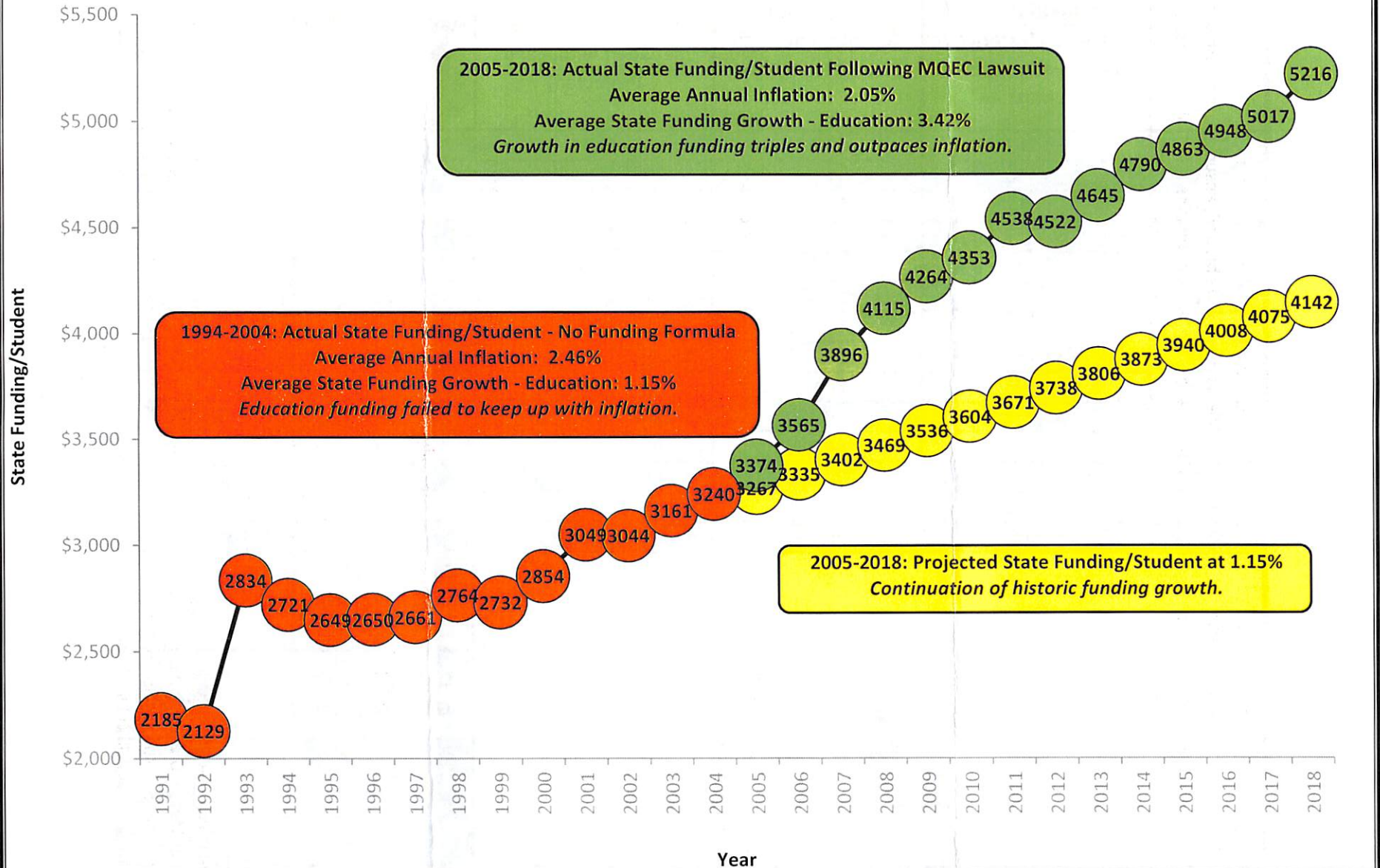
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The Value of MQEC: \$1,074/student in 2017-2018



Statewide Funding Increase 2005-2018

Fiscal Year	Projected State Contribution/pupil based on historical trends (yellow line on chart)	Actual State Contribution/pupil (green line on chart)	Funding Attributed to MQEC Efforts (Difference between Actual and Projected)	Statewide student enrollment	Statewide increased funding
2005	\$3,267	\$3,374	\$107	147,652	\$15,754,217
2006	\$3,335	\$3,565	\$230	148,899	\$34,294,712
2007	\$3,402	\$3,896	\$495	147,019	\$72,705,211
2008	\$3,469	\$4,115	\$646	150,157	\$97,035,017
2009	\$3,536	\$4,264	\$728	149,748	\$108,958,293
2010	\$3,604	\$4,353	\$750	148,865	\$111,577,779
2011	\$3,671	\$4,538	\$866	147,965	\$128,200,290
2012	\$3,738	\$4,522	\$784	147,525	\$115,593,652
2013	\$3,806	\$4,645	\$840	147,705	\$124,021,476
2014	\$3,873	\$4,790	\$917	148,567	\$136,246,611
2015	\$3,940	\$4,863	\$922	149,410	\$137,786,862
2016	\$4,008	\$4,948	\$940	150,187	\$141,176,168
2017	\$4,075	\$5,017	\$942	151,433	\$142,649,886
2018	\$4,142	\$5,216	\$1,074	152,221	\$163,485,354
				Cumulative Per-Pupil Increase in Funding	\$1,529,485,528
				Quality Schools Grant Program	\$63,036,219
				Cumulative Per-Pupil Increase in Funding + QSGP: 2005-2018	\$1,592,521,747