

BIGFORK AND MQEC?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT MEMBERSHIP IN THE MONTANA QUALITY EDUCATION COALITION



Montana Quality Education Coalition

The Importance of a Continued, Unified Voice of Support for Quality Education in Montana’s K-12 Public Schools...

Why should a Montana school district be a member of MQEC as many school districts have school board members, administrators, business managers, and staff personnel who already belong to MTSBA, MASBO, SAM, MREA, and/or MFPE? Why isn’t membership in these groups enough representation?

Individual school district members from across the state (large-small, east-west) create the true essence of MQEC. All MQEC member school districts share authority at the discussion, negotiation, and decision-making “table”. Individual school district MQEC membership is the way to ensure a state-level collective voice in K-12 education advocacy efforts. In 2001, MQEC was created by Montana school districts and by state education organizations to be the legal recourse for challenging issues surrounding Montana K-12 funding. To this day, that is exactly what MQEC does and no other state education organization can even begin to duplicate what MQEC can do. Without belonging to MQEC, a Montana school district, such as Bigfork, would be one step removed from the collective decisions made by other member school districts and by state education organizations when it comes to discussions on how best to position K-12 education to aggressively advocate for continued state support through the allocation of funding resources. MQEC membership provides each member school district the avenue for its views on state education funding issues to be presented to the legislature and the court system, if necessary. That is why MQEC membership is important for Montana school districts.

Specifically, why should Bigfork be a member of MQEC?

The Montana Quality Education Coalition (MQEC) has fought for the interests of children in Montana’s public schools since its inception in 2001, including Bigfork. To me, as the new Executive Director of MQEC, your students are just as important as any other school district’s students. I truly believe that the importance of MQEC’s continued existence today and into the future cannot be overstated. Although other key groups such as MTSBA, MFPE, SAM, MREA, and MASBO (which are all members of MQEC) do a great job of public-school advocacy in their own right, MQEC serves as the needed interagency support conduit that has the ability to help Bigfork by taking stands on behalf of the “Vikings/Valkyries” and other Montana public schools that cannot be taken as effectively by each group alone. MQEC has historically been the “tip of the spear” in accepting the responsibility for protecting the language contained in Article X of the Montana Constitution. That effort has made and continues to make a positive difference in funding Montana’s public schools. There is no dispute that MQEC has been the vehicle to effectively focus legislative and judicial attention on state support for adequate financial resources to support quality education opportunities for Montana’s public-school students, (including Bigfork students). MQEC is positioned to be in a constant state of readiness to pursue solutions in whatever venue required, whether that be before the Montana Legislature, the Montana Court system, or through engagement of the public to support Bigfork. That is why it was important for Bigfork to be a member of MQEC.

What can MQEC do differently than other education associations?

MQEC is a 501(c)(4) organization allowing the coalition the opportunity to invest in support of legislative issues, legal issues, and political matters. The other associations are, for the most part, 501(c)(3) organizations that do not have as much freedom in the expenditure of funds on legislation, legal, or political matters as does a 501(c)(4) like MQEC. MQEC is important because it is positioned to support the school related constitutional issues (i.e., school funding issues including protecting the inflationary adjustment provision of the K-12 funding formula) in the legislature and in the courts. If protecting Montana's public schools, (including Bigfork) comes down to a court challenge involving the Montana's Constitution, and specifically Article X, MQEC is the organization that is best positioned to take the lead in protecting Bigfork's students and the Bigfork community pursuant to Article X of the Montana Constitution.

Why does it cost money for a school district to join?

For MQEC to advocate for improved school funding and program support requires a great deal of networking, lobbying, and legal efforts – unfortunately, all of which costs money. Dues from just the state level education member-organizations (i.e., MFPE, MTSBA, SAM, MASBO, and MREA) brings in approximately \$20,000 per year and all of these groups provide additional in-kind support throughout the year. However, these amounts and contributions are not sufficient to operate MQEC and cover related operational expenses. It is through individual school district membership, like Bigfork School District membership, that MQEC covers the rest of its expenses of operation. Thus, it is critical that MQEC have financial support from Montana's school districts – districts, such as Bigfork, which have directly benefited from MQEC's efforts, in order to continue its good work into the future.

Do school districts, similar to Bigfork, belong to MQEC?

Last fiscal year, FY22, over twenty-five Montana school districts, similar in size and MQEC membership dues structure as Bigfork, joined MQEC. I anticipate that number to remain consistent or be higher for FY23 given the legislative session that is just around the corner. Over ninety (90) school districts, in total, joined MQEC last year, with dues ranging from \$4,000.00 per school district down to \$25.00 per school district based on annual general fund expenditures. As you know, Bigfork sits at an annual membership dues structure of \$2,500.00. I would be grateful if the Bigfork School District would consider joining with MQEC in continuing the effort to support Montana's public K-12 education system. MQEC will take the lead on protecting the needed state funding that allows local school districts, like the Bigfork School District, to fulfill its constitutional obligation to “develop the full educational potential of each person” (Article X, Section #1).

As you know, all major state level education organizations (1) Montana School Boards Association; (2) Montana Federation of Public Employees; (3) School Administrators of Montana; (4) Montana Rural Education Association; and (5) the Montana Association of School Business Officials have re-joined MQEC for the 2022/2023 school year. Thank you for considering joining with those education organizations and supporting the Montana Quality Education Coalition (MQEC). There is no question that MQEC needs Bigfork as a member school district, especially given the upcoming legislative session that may prove to be one of the most pivotal legislative sessions in recent memory for Montana's K-12 public education system.

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