

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE  
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS  
LT. GOVERNOR

May 18, 2023

The Honorable Jason Ellsworth  
President of the Senate  
State Capitol  
Helena, MT 59620

The Honorable Matt Regier  
Speaker of the House  
State Capitol  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear President Ellsworth and Speaker Regier:

The State of Montana is committed to expanding education options for families and flexibility for local schools so that each student can achieve their full, outstanding potential in the setting that best serves their individual needs. Like you and other legislators, I support locally-driven efforts to expand education opportunities for families. Together, we made tremendous progress on this front during the 2023 legislative session.

Current law requires a 1,000-student threshold for a single elementary district to expand into a K-12 district, and allows elementary districts, with local community support, to coordinate in creating a combined K-12 district. Furthermore, current law charts a clear course for creating new K-12 districts.

House Bill 707 changes current law to allow multiple, independent elementary districts to coordinate to meet a 1,000-student threshold to initiate the creation of a new high school district. Unlike current law, House Bill 707 allows each of the elementary districts to remain independent and feed into a newly created high school district. This point was discussed in the hearing for House Bill 707 in the Senate Finance and Claims Committee.

No matter how well intentioned, House Bill 707 will lead to the creation of unnecessary, uncoordinated districts which will effectively expand education bureaucracy, creates inefficiencies in education delivery, and increases the tax burden on state and local taxpayers.

Therefore, in accordance with the power vested in me as Governor by the Constitution and the laws of the State of Montana, I hereby veto House Bill 707: "AN ACT GENERALLY REVISING THE REQUIREMENTS FOR CREATION OF A NEW HIGH SCHOOL

DISTRICT; AUTHORIZING MULTIPLE ADJACENT ELEMENTARY DISTRICTS WITH AT LEAST 1,000 COMBINED ANB TO CONTRACT FOR THE FORMATION OF A NEW HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT ON APPROVAL OF THE ELECTORS OF EACH OF THE ELEMENTARY DISTRICTS; PROVIDING FOR THE PASSAGE OF A BOND TO BUILD OR OUTFIT A HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING; PROVIDING PROCEDURES TO ESTABLISH A BUDGET AND PROVIDE THE FUNDING OF THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT; DELAYING THE CONSTRUCTION OF APPROVED HIGH SCHOOL FACILITIES UNTIL JULY 1, 2025; REQUIRING THE FORMER HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT TO PROVIDE INSTRUCTION FOR A TRANSITION PERIOD; CLARIFYING RESPONSIBILITIES AND REQUIREMENTS THROUGH THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING A NEW HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT; AMENDING SECTIONS 20-6-104, 20-9-366, 20-9-439, AND 20-9-502, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN IMMEDIATE EFFECTIVE DATE.”

I remain confident current law addresses the needs of local communities and maintains efficient, locally-driven efforts to expand education opportunities, without imposing new costly burdens and bureaucratic inefficiencies on taxpayers.

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte  
Governor

Enclosure

cc: Legislative Services Division  
Christi Jacobsen, Secretary of State