

Independent Record

Montana Constitution mandates equity in education

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The Montana Board of Education has revised its Ethical Standards for Teachers, which it does every five years. The word equity was included in the revision, pertaining to a teacher's recognition of the need for equity in education.

Equity in education is different from equality. A good example of that is the school funding formula. Back in the 1980s small rural schools were not adequately funded because they didn't have the tax base to raise the necessary money. A series of lawsuits were filed, resulting in greater funding for those districts. The basis of the suits was Article X of the Montana Constitution, which requires the legislature to distribute the State's share of education funding in an equitable manner. That does not mean in an equal manner. Billings Public Schools obviously needs more money than Whitehall.

Equity applies to other areas of education as well. Students come in all types, with their strengths and weaknesses, each with their unique needs. Equity means that each student gets what he or she needs to succeed, and I was ethically responsible as their teacher, for helping them get that.

Gianforte's angst about equity could come from ignorance of what is going on in public education. He is, after all, a supporter of private schools. The concept is deeply embedded in the system. Eliminating one word in an unofficial document put out by an obscure subcommittee will make no difference.

So why the concern over a word that represents a concept that can only be good for public education? There is a national discussion about equity vs equality, being driven by right wing think tanks like the Cato Institute. Their thesis is that every child should have an equal start in schooling, but not the extra resources to actually succeed. This seems to satisfy their desire to promote their agenda, which is every man for himself. Gianforte is aligned with that ideology.

Equity in education is not only good for Montana, but it is also mandated in the State Constitution. Let's move forward with equity and let Gianforte sweat it out with his ideology bound buddies.