

9-15-2021

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from the interim of the 66th Legislature. On September 8-9 in Casper, I attended the meeting of the Joint Education Committee. We continued our discussion of K-3 literacy and funding of community colleges.

K-3 literacy is critical to a child's success throughout life. A long-term study by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found nationally that students who were not proficient in reading by the end of third grade were four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. In fact, 88 percent of students who failed to earn a high school diploma were struggling readers in third grade. According to documents we received, these struggling students also generally fail to receive the assistance they need to catch up.

The committee reviewed a bill that would narrow the number of screeners and assessments for reading. The reason for limiting the number of these instruments is to assure greater consistency and to ensure students who need to be identified are in fact identified by these instruments. The bill also requires literacy centered professional development for elementary school teachers, to ensure all elementary teachers have the expertise to teach or recognize literacy challenged students. The committee will take action on this bill at our next meeting.

The committee also received testimony from the University of Wyoming on how it is beefing up literacy training in their elementary school teacher preparation program. UW is increasing the number of hours of literacy/reading training that beginning teachers receive, and they are developing a literacy-based professional development program for existing teachers. I came away impressed with UW's renewed effort on literacy training for new teachers, hopeful that it translates into teachers who are better prepared to teach reading to struggling readers.

Community Colleges are the backbone of Wyoming's workforce development, including welding, instrumentation, Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), and nursing programs. As state budgets have been cut, how does Wyoming maintain a quality post-secondary education for its citizens? Wyoming has been awarded over \$1 billion through the American Recovery Plan Act. Can we utilize some of that money to help fund our community colleges? The Joint Education Committee is examining two endowment programs utilizing ARPA money to help support

students and the community colleges. One endowment would be for \$100M, and the earnings from the endowment would be split among all colleges' block grant. The other endowment would fund an adult scholarship program for adults who are at least 24 years of age. Currently, the Wyoming Hathaway Scholarship primarily funds students as they graduate from high school. Adults find little financial aid to help them find a new career. I like endowments because they can establish and maintain sustainable programs from the earnings on investments, while protecting the principal, or invested funds. We will continue to work these bills during the next meeting.

Thanks

Albert