

Branch County High School Figured Illegal

"It is, therefore, my opinion that the board of trustees of a county high school does not have the authority to establish a branch of the county high school in another town or city in the county."

Forrest H. Anderson, attorney general of Montana, rendered that opinion in response to a query by County Atty. Harold J. Pineseault, on the possibility that a branch of Missoula County High School could be established at the Seeley Lake community, in the north end of the county.

Residents of the Seeley area had complained that their children were riding some 120 miles daily to and from school and some alleged that this was the longest roundtrip mileage traveled by any school children in the United States.

The attorney general, while denying the possibility of a branch high school, stated that "... there is authorization for the establishment of a district high school by any school district which follows the procedures and meets the qualifications" of the law.

K.W.BERgen
650 N.Davis
Helena, Mont.

Dear Mr. Bergen,

Your name came to me from Mrs. A. Bartron over a year ago when she told me about your work on getting a high school for Gardiner as a branch attendance or high school in Park county.

Our situation strikes such a parallel to the Park county deal that it made us feel sure that it would be successful here in Missoula County. but it wasn't. The Attorney General gave the Trustees of MCHS his opinion that it would not be legal for them to build a high school in any other place than Missoula, quoting a law of 1899 that the people had voted and designated Missoula as location for the county high school.

With our low tax base and all the surrounding Federal and State property it would impossible for us to raise any amount nearly adequate for building purposes. The major number of our students attending would be from this, Seeley, area and Swan Valley. The Swans' situation is much the same as our own-we are both being discriminated against by the large government holdings in our areas.

As I understand it present laws make it impossible for us to get the Federal 25% money earmarked for a school in our area. It is now broken down to the counties from which it originates. If we could retain a good portion of this we could well afford the High school we need. Each year our Forestl district here contributes nearly \$40,000 on this 25% fund.

We may not have a necessary number of Federal connected but we certainly do have enough Federal affected.

We aren't quite sure which way to turn now, The Atty. Gen. suggests that we could form a HS District. As I mentioned before Seeley Lake and Swan Valley have the Student potential and no tax base.

I am writing to you in the hope that you might be able to suggest some course of action for us.

Your reply will be appreciated -

Sincerely,
B.I.Wold.

STATE OF



MONTANA

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
HELENA, MONTANA

OFFICE OF COORDINATOR

April 19, 1961

Mr. E. I. Wold
Box 84
Seeley Lake, Montana

My dear Mr. Wold:

I am very interested in your letter in regard to your high school problem. I am not informed in regard to your situation and for that reason I am not in the position to advise you at great length.

It would seem that your first task would be a complete survey of the number of pupils interested in high school in your community. The size of the school must be determined before a high school could be justified. The second step in your program would be to enlist the support and cooperation of the County High School Board in your project.

The big problem would be to provide a suitable school building. At Gardiner, the building was provided through the elementary school district and some additional funds through the Public Law which provides special funds for education within the National Parks. Since that time the Gardiner schools have obtained some Public Law 815 funds for an addition to their high school building.

We note your comments in regard to Forestry funds available for education purposes in Montana. The situation in regard to the use of this type of federal reimbursement to education is extremely bad. The situation should be corrected by legislative action. The use of this money at the present time in the school budget has only one type of influence. It reduces the amount of state equalization to the schools.

Your problem is extremely complicated under Montana law and it should be studied on the federal level as well as on the state level. Some time when I am passing through Missoula, I will stop and visit with Mrs. Bartron and discuss this problem.

Very truly yours,

K. W. Bergan
K. W. Bergan, Coordinator
Indian Affairs

KWB:fb

October 17, 1962

Mr. B. I. Wold
Box 84
Seeley Lake, Montana

Dear Mr. Wold:

Thank you for your letter of October 15.

The board of trustees has never lost interest in the problem of the high school students from the Seeley Lake area. However, we have become convinced that there is no solution except legislation. Mr. Deschamps and Mrs. Browman have ^{given} the problem especial attention. You will remember that last year at the School Board Association convention, Mr. Deschamps urged the association to study the question of remedial legislation.

Mrs. Browman is entitled to the credit of working out the form of the proposed legislation. Her proposal met with the unanimous approval of the trustees and she was elected delegate to this year's convention. There she was successful in securing the adoption of her resolution by the convention. It is her understanding that the association will provide for the drafting of the bill and for getting sponsors to introduce it in the legislature. However, we shall have to follow up to make certain that this is not neglected.

I shall try to keep you informed of any significant developments. You and others in your community may wish, at the appropriate time, to write or otherwise get in touch with our legislators urging support of this legislation. The board will welcome any suggestions you may have. This certainly is a matter on which we should work together.

Very sincerely,


John B. Taylor, President
Board of Trustees, M.C.H.S.

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