



Superintendent Denise Juneau believes we need to set an expectation that every Montana student will graduate from high school. In order for our young people to compete in the 21st Century global economy, a high school diploma is key. Nearly 2,000 Montana students drop out of school each year. We can do better.

What is Graduation Matters Montana?

Superintendent Juneau launched a statewide effort in the spring of 2010 to ensure Montana's public schools graduate more students prepared for college and careers.

Local Graduation Matters Initiatives

Superintendent Juneau supports the implementation of locally-designed Graduation Matters initiatives that engage schools, communities, businesses and families in a focused effort to increase the number of students who graduate prepared for college and careers.

Thirty-three communities have joined Graduation Matters, including all AA schools, smaller, more rural schools, and schools on or near our state's Indian Reservations. Seventy percent of high school students attend a Graduation Matters school, and nearly 8,500 students have taken the pledge to graduate.

In March of 2012, the Office of Public Instruction received a three-year grant from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation for \$450,000 to allow more communities to work to lower their dropout rates. Communities that applied for the challenge fund received up to \$10,000 to implement successful dropout prevention strategies. This year, twenty five communities received the challenge fund to assist them in achieving higher goals, and if these communities are successful in reaching their goals, Graduation Matters will be able to cut the statewide dropout rate in half by 2014.

Student-Centered Policies

Oftentimes, adults plan and discuss educational policy, but rarely talk to the people who will be most directly affected by those plans and discussions: the students. To include student ideas and voices in state-level policies, Superintendent Juneau created the Superintendent's Student Advisory Board.

Twice each year, forty students gather to discuss ways to improve educational opportunities for all students, raise the graduation rate and encourage more students to pursue education and training after graduation. The Student Advisory Board consistently reports that they seek relevant coursework and real-world experiences, clear and consistent rules, a positive school climate and meaningful relationships at their schools. There have now been four Student Advisory Board Summits. To see reports from each Summit, visit our website: graduationmatters.mt.gov.



Objectives of Graduation Matters Montana:

1. Increase the rate of Montana students graduating from high school college- and career-ready.
2. Establish a support network between schools, businesses and community organizations for student success.
3. Create school-based and community-based opportunities for student success.

Policy Changes

Superintendent Juneau proposed covering the cost of the **ACT for every high school junior** in the Office of Public Instruction's budget at the 2011 Legislature. Funding to cover the cost of the ACT for every junior has been secured through a seven-year grant under the Commissioner of Higher Education's GEAR UP program. This partnership between OPI and OCHE will provide a complete picture of how well our K-12 public education system is preparing all students for life after high school and provide every Montana junior the opportunity to assess their college-readiness. The 2012-2013 school year was the first year of every Montana junior taking the ACT.

Superintendent Juneau recommended the Board of Public Education approve **more rigorous English and math standards**. The new English and math standards adopted by the Board of Public Education are higher and clearer than Montana's previous standards and will prepare our students for college and to compete in today's global economy. She also convened a task force to review Montana's **accreditation** standards to make them more performance-based and to provide school districts needed flexibility to focus on results.

During the 2013 Legislative Session, Superintendent Juneau championed Graduation Matters Montana bills to **raise the legal dropout age** to "age 18 or upon graduation," to provide schools with funding to **educate 19-year-old students**, to increase funding for **career and technical education student organizations (CTSOs)** and for the **Montana Digital Academy**. Funding requests for CTSOs and the Montana Digital Academy were successful, and thousands of students will reap the benefits from these expanded services. Superintendent Juneau will continue to support legislation and administrative policies that set high expectations for students, provide career exploration opportunities, and create safe learning environments.

Relevant Coursework and Career Preparation

In Montana, all high school students take at least one career and technical education course, and over half take three or more. Discussions with students make it clear they desire classes that relate to real-world experiences, career preparation and include hands-on learning. Superintendent Juneau supports the expansion of **Big Sky Pathways**, a partnership with the Montana University System that links students to career coursework paths so they earn college credits and explore careers while they are in high school.



Workforce projections by the U.S. Department of Labor show that by 2018, nine of the 10 fastest-growing occupations that require at least a bachelor's degree will also require significant scientific or mathematical training. Superintendent Juneau is convening education stakeholders and business partners to create a pipeline for students to be prepared for careers in **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math** through OPI's statewide STEM initiative.

Business and Community Partnerships

Montana employers want an educated and innovative workforce, and schools understand they need to develop new strategies to achieve the goal of preparing educated, work-ready graduates. Superintendent Juneau and local Graduation Matters initiatives are working with statewide and local business partners to engage business and community leaders who are committed to helping students graduate prepared for college and careers and to ensuring Montana communities thrive in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. To assist in these efforts, the OPI has developed a business and school partnership toolkit which can be found on the Graduation Matters website.

I Pledge to Graduate Campaign

Research shows that students are more likely to reach a goal if they identify their own motivations when committing to meet it. Superintendent Juneau, in partnership with local school districts and the Student Advisory Board, launched an "I Pledge to Graduate" initiative in the 2011-2012 school year. Since then, nearly 8,500 students have taken the pledge.

Students pledge to a significant adult that they will graduate and identify specific reasons why graduation is important to them. This high-profile campaign focuses statewide attention on Graduation Matters Montana, engages community and business partners, involves social networking and highlights student voices and ideas.

For more information on Graduation Matters Montana email graduationmatters@mt.gov or call 406-444-5643.

Graduation Matters Montana

