



*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.*

## What is Graduation Matters Montana?

Superintendent Juneau launched a statewide effort in the spring of 2010 to raise the graduation rate and improve college and workforce readiness.

## 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 the workforce.

Forty-eight communities have joined Graduation Matters, including all of our largest schools, small rural schools, and 11 schools on or near our state's Indian Reservations. Seventy-five percent of high school students attend a Graduation Matters school, and more than 10,000 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, the Washington Foundation renewed its commitment to Graduation Matters with an additional \$450,000 grant. This brings the total amount raised for local Graduation Matters efforts to more than \$1.2 million.

## Student-Centered Policies

Oftentimes, adults plan and discuss education policy, but rarely talk to 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, more than 30 high school students from rural and urban communities 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. To see reports from each Summit, visit our website: <http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>.

## Policy Changes

Funding to cover the cost of the **ACT for every public school 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.



In November 2014, 138 high schools participated in **College Application Week**, raising awareness about postsecondary education opportunities and coaching students and families through the college application process. All public, private and tribal college waived or deferred application fees that week. The combined efforts resulted in more than 3,000 applications submitted to Montana colleges and universities.

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.

Superintendent Juneau is championing bills to raise the legal dropout age to "age 18 or upon graduation," to provide schools with funding to educate 19-year-old students, and to create an anti-bullying law. She is also seeking funds to provide funding for teachers to receive training to teach Advanced Placement (AP) courses, support school turnaround efforts, and for the Montana Digital Academy. 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

Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses prepare students for a wide range of career opportunities. Students who take three or more CTE courses have a graduation rate of 96 percent. 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.



Additionally, Superintendent Juneau has partnered with the Commissioner of Higher Education and Governor Bullock to promote **dual credit opportunities**. In just two years, the number of high school students taking dual enrollment courses has nearly doubled.

### 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.

**For more information on Graduation Matters Montana** email [graduationmatters@mt.gov](mailto:graduationmatters@mt.gov) or call 406-444-5643.

