



**Trailblazer Award: Graduation Matters Missoula**

*Presented by Mike Halligan, Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation*

Graduation Matters Missoula is the recipient of the Trailblazer Award for their leadership role in confronting a challenge within their school district by using a collaborative model of schools, students, families, community, and businesses working together to support student success. Their model inspired the statewide initiative, Graduation Matters Montana. With a graduation rate of 88.3%, the Missoula School District has a graduation rate nearly four percent greater than the statewide average and continues to set a goal of reaching a 100% graduation rate. Their dropout rate has fallen from 4.7 percent in 2009 to 2.8 percent in 2013. In addition, their work to improve educational outcomes for American Indian students has resulted in a 82.8% percent graduation rate in 2013, up from 56 percent in 2007.

Through innovative efforts including International Baccalaureate, STEM, career academies, dual language immersion programs, professional learning communities, and capstone projects, Graduation Matters Missoula has established standards creating a 21st Century model for education. Graduation Matters Missoula is an inspirational example of the power of communities coming together to support a quality public education system and a bright economic future for our state.

**Community Champions Award: United Ways of Montana**

*Presented by Dr. Tammy Lacey, Great Falls Superintendent and Dr. Alex Apostle, Missoula Superintendent*

The United Ways of Montana are recipients of the Community Champions Award for their leadership role in supporting and often taking the lead in implementing the goals of local Graduation Matters initiatives. United Way affiliates understand that education is the cornerstone of individual and community success. Through their partnerships with local school districts, United Ways of Montana are building a network of non-profit, business and community allies throughout the state who will ensure the future success of Montana students.

The efforts of local United Ways have allowed GMM initiatives to share resources, knowledge, and regional vantage points. From early childhood, to afterschool programming, mentoring, and literacy programs, United Ways are working to improve the educational outcomes of Montana children at every step of their lives. Working together, the United Ways of Montana and Graduation Matters Montana will ensure our students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need to be economically successful.

### **Seventh Generation Award: Graduation Matters Rocky Boy**

*Presented by Sapphire Carter, 2012 Valedictorian of Rocky Boy High School, former member of Supt. Juneau's Student Advisory Board*

Graduation Matters Rocky Boy is the recipient of the Seventh Generation Award for their steady progress in improving graduation rates for American Indian students. Rocky Boy's graduation rate has increased by double-digits, from 52.5% to 66% over three years. The American Indian dropout rate has fallen from 12.1% to 10.8%. Rocky Boy's FAFSA completion rate rose 15 percent in one year, climbing from 28 percent to 43 percent, and 76 percent of this year's seniors submitted at least one college application during College Application Week. Graduation Matters Rocky Boy is working hard to prepare its graduates for college and the workforce by increasing dual enrollment opportunities, job shadowing, and access to financial aid for college.

Graduation Matters Rocky Boy has worked as a team to put advancement opportunities in place for their students. The school district is raising the bar in the classroom and putting a heavy emphasis on financial literacy to prepare students for life after high school. Rocky Boy participates in the Montana GEAR UP program, and that partnership is opening up dual enrollment opportunities and supporting student's aspirations to continue their education after high school. Partnerships with local businesses have resulted in new scholarship opportunities for graduates, and a new program has been implemented to help students prepare for the ACT. Graduation Matters Rocky Boy is a great example of taking on a significant challenge and doing the hard work and collaboration necessary to make the future brighter for the next generation.

### **Engaging Student Voice Award: Graduation Matters Great Falls**

*Presented by Karlee Simonson, CMR Junior Class President, member of GM Great Falls Executive Committee*

Graduation Matters Great Falls is the recipient of the Engaging Student Voice Award for their efforts to engage students in the policy and program development of Graduation Matters Great Falls. Their commitment to student voice is evident through efforts to include students from elementary through high school. Graduation Matters Great Falls organizes its local initiative into "Four Quadrants," one of which is student voice. Several formalized structures have been developed to ensure student voice is included, including: the Graduation Matters Great Falls Elementary Advisory Board, made up of students in grades five and six; a 50-member Student Forum that meets quarterly and represents every grade from each middle school and high school in the district; student representation on the GM Great Falls Executive Committee, and nominating and engaging student representatives from Superintendent Juneau's Student Advisory Board.

Graduation Matters Great Falls is not only engaging student voices, they are also asking students what they can do to take action to reduce the barriers students face to making it to graduation day. By creating formalized structures and leadership opportunities for youth in their community, GM Great Falls is demonstrating their commitment to putting students at the center of their decision-making. Over the past three years, Great Falls' dropout rate has decreased from 4.2% to 3.7% and their graduation rate has increased from 75.9% to 79.6%. Graduation Matters Great Falls will undoubtedly continue to see graduation rates increase as they amplify the voices of their number one stakeholders, their students.

### **Raising Aspirations Award: Graduation Matters Anaconda**

*Presented by Dr. Tom Darnell, Anaconda Superintendent*

Graduation Matters Anaconda is the recipient of the Raising Aspirations Award for their efforts to graduate Anaconda students prepared for college and the workforce. This year, 79% of Anaconda seniors applied for college during College Application Week, working with Student Assistance Foundation led to a three percent increase in the FAFSA completion rate, and the number of students taking dual enrollment courses has grown by 10% in one year.

Graduation Matters Anaconda has changed their advising model, pairing students up with an academic advisor beginning at the elementary level and continuing through middle school and high school. They have launched an innovative Career Clusters program that allows students to explore and prepare for careers. Through both their Career Clusters program and a partnership with Anaconda Rotary Club's Leadership Academy, Graduation Matters Anaconda is creating strong partnerships between their schools and the community. Through all of these efforts, Graduation Matters Anaconda is preparing students for college and beyond, raising aspirations and providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills to achieve their dreams.

### **Shining Star Award: Graduation Matters Belgrade**

*Presented by the Honorable Michele Snowberger, Belgrade City Court Judge*

Graduation Matters Belgrade is the recipient of the Shining Star award for the overall impact of their local efforts to increase Belgrade's graduation rate, decrease the dropout rate and improve college preparedness. Over the past three years, Belgrade has steadily raised their graduation rate by nearly seven percent, from 77.3% in 2011 to 84.1% in 2013. At the same time, their dropout rate decreased from 4.7% to 3.7%. FAFSA completion rose from 34% in 2012 to 40% in 2013, and ACT scores remain above the state average. Belgrade set their sights on a culture of increased rigor and expectations and backed it up with a team-driven effort.

Belgrade has increased the number of AP courses and dual enrollment classes, opened a student-led writing center, implemented the RTI (Response to Intervention) framework, and supplied tutors for literacy and math. Graduation Matters Belgrade has also put an emphasis on social and emotional supports, focusing on middle school and high school transitions, attendance, student-faculty connections, and access to mental health services. Belgrade has alternative schools for both middle and high school, is working closely with the Montana Digital Academy for credit recovery, and is participating in the HiSET Options program. GM Belgrade has developed effective partnerships with Student Assistance Foundation, Gallatin College Program, Greater Gallatin Graduation Matters and Career Transitions. Graduation Matters Belgrade is a shining example of creating a school and community commitment to graduating every student prepared to take the next steps in their lives.