

Starting a Graduation Matters Montana Initiative in Your Town

A Toolkit for **Community Leaders, Business Owners, Educators, Families** and **Students**

Superintendent Denise Juneau has set an expectation for every child in Montana to graduate from high school. In today's global economy, a quality education is the key to economic prosperity for our young people. More than 1,500 Montana students drop out of school each year.

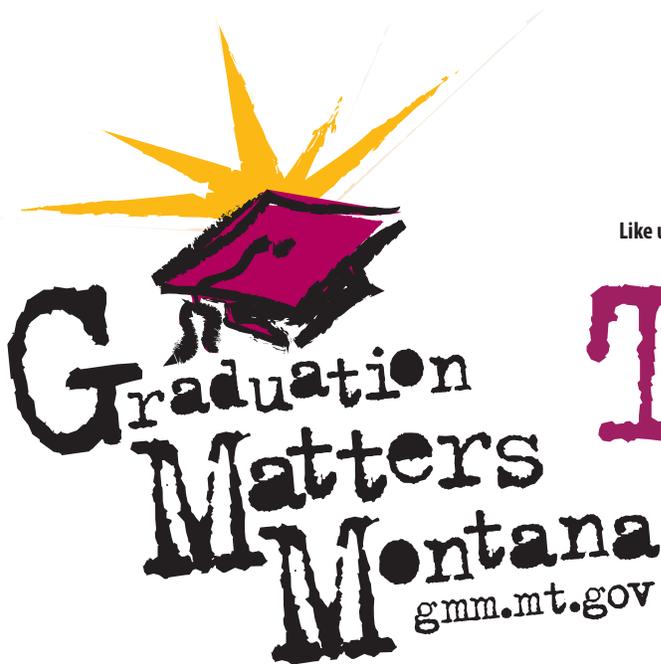
We can do better.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT **YOU** CAN DO,
PLEASE VISIT THE **GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA** WEBSITE:

<http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>



2015 Edition



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Letter from Superintendent Denise Juneau

When I took office in 2009, more than 2,400 Montana students dropped out of high school each year. Understanding the potential consequences for individuals, communities and our state, I made dropout prevention a priority of the Office of Public Instruction. I took on the challenge to improve Montana's graduation rate and to ensure that every student graduates from high school ready for college and career.

Since the launch of Graduation Matters Montana, the statewide dropout rate has been on the decline, and the graduation rate has gone up. Montana's high school dropout rate has decreased from 5 percent in 2009 to 3.7 percent in 2014, and the graduation rate has increased from 80.7 percent in 2009 to 85.4 percent in 2014. This is the highest the graduation rate has been in Montana since the OPI began calculating the graduation rate in 2000. In 2013, only 16 states in the nation had graduation rates of 85 percent or above. The credit for this improvement belongs to the school leaders, teachers, community members, parents and students who have put in the work at the local level to make a difference in the lives of hundreds of students who may not have made it to graduation without their efforts.

To support local Graduation Matters initiative, I have raised over \$1.2 million in private funding to grant directly to these initiatives. The Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation helped establish the GMM Challenge Fund with an initial donation of \$450,000. In 2014, they renewed their commitment to Graduation Matters by giving another \$450,000 donation. Other foundations and businesses have generously contributed to Graduation Matters Montana: Student Assistance Foundation, State Farm Insurance, Steele Reese Foundation, First Interstate Bank Foundation, BNSF Foundation, Northwestern Energy, Optimum Cable, Applied Materials, AT&T, IBM, MEA-MFT, DA Davidson, and the Going to the Sun Rally Foundation.

Montanans have a lot to be proud of when it comes to our public education system. Montana's public schools have the flexibility to adapt to the needs of their communities, the small class sizes necessary for individualized instruction, and strong family and community engagement to support student success.

Thank you for the work you do to make sure that every Montana student graduates from high school and can look forward to a brighter future.

Best Regards,



Denise Juneau, Superintendent of Public Instruction



The effects of dropping out are damaging to our state. High school dropouts make up 75% of incarcerated men and women. Tens of millions of dollars are spent each year in supportive services and remediation for adults who do not have a high school diploma. If the male high school graduation rate increased by just 5%, Montana's economy would see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of \$19.6M each year.

Source: Alliance for Excellent Education, www.all4ed.org

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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. More than 1,500 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.

Fifty-three 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. Over 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 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 nine 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. The ACT is a national college admissions test. 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.

Thanks to the grant, every public high school junior in Montana can take the ACT at no cost to them or their families. Over 28,000 students have taken advantage of this opportunity that is offered once a year in April.

College Application Week is another partnership between the Office of Public Instruction and the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education that helps build the bridge from high school to college. Each fall, Montana high schools, two- year, four-year, and tribal colleges participate in College Application Week. For this one week, participating colleges defer or waive their application fees to encourage low-income and first generation college-going seniors to apply to their programs. In the past two years, more than 4,500 seniors completed applications during College Application Week.

During the 2015 Legislative Session, Superintendent Juneau advocated 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 pass the "Bully Free Montana Act". The "Bully Free Montana Act" is now law; the other two policies continue to be critical to all students graduating. Superintendent Juneau also supported 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, over 10,000 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.



Montana's Graduation and Dropout Rates Four-Year Comparison

In 2010, Superintendent Juneau launched Graduation Matters Montana, an effort to ensure Montana students graduate from high school prepared for college and careers. Superintendent Juneau also set a goal to cut Montana's dropout rate in half by 2016. In order to reach the goal of a 2.55% dropout rate, communities have joined Superintendent Juneau's statewide effort by creating locally-designed Graduation Matters initiatives in their communities. More than 75% of high school students in our state are currently attending a school with a Graduation Matters initiative.

	Dropouts	H.S. Dropout Rate	Graduation Rate	Completion Rate
2008-2009	2,423	5.1%	80.7%	81.7%
2009-2010	2,010	4.3%	80.2%	82.0%
2010-2011	1,975	4.3%	82.2%*	82.2%
2011-2012	1,841	4.1%	83.9%	83.7%
2012-2013	1,500	3.6%	84.4%	84.2%
2013-2014	1,539	3.7%	85.4%	85.0%

What do the numbers mean?

Dropout Rate: Counts students who were enrolled in school on the date of the previous year's October enrollment count or at some time during the previous school year and were not enrolled on the date of the current school year October count.

Completion Rate: Counts students who complete the high school graduation requirements of a school district, including early graduates, during the previous school year, or complete the high school graduation requirements of a school district at the end of summer prior to the current school year.

Graduation Rate: Counts students who complete a district's graduation requirements in four years or less from the time an individual enrolled in the 9th grade, or has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) allowing for more than four years to graduate.

***Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate:** The four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class. From the beginning of 9th grade, students who are entering that grade for the first time form a cohort that is subsequently "adjusted" by adding any students who transfer into the cohort later during the 9th grade and the next three years and subtracting any students who transfer out, emigrate to another country, or die during that same period.

For information about the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate that became the state's new measurement of graduation rates in 2011, go to:

<http://www.opi.mt.gov/PDF/gradmatters/Frequently-Asked-Questions-FINAL.pdf>

For more information about Graduation Matters Montana go to: <http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>

Facts and Figures You Can Use

Over 1,500 students in Montana did not graduate in 2014.

What is at stake?¹

- Dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to be in poor health, living in poverty, on public assistance and single parents to children who also drop out of high school.
- Dropouts are eight times more likely to be in jail or in prison than high school graduates.
- Dropouts are four times less likely to volunteer than college graduates, are twice as less likely to vote or participate in community projects, and represent only 3 percent of actively engaged citizens in the United States today.
- In addition, workers who did not graduate from high school are two times more likely to be unemployed than those with a high school diploma.
- A high school degree is worth about \$569,000.²

How does not addressing Montana's dropout rate impact our economy?

- Nearly 80% of male inmates and 75% of female inmates at the Montana State Prison are high school dropouts.³
- It is estimated that 30 million of 46.8 million job openings in 2018 (about 64%) will require education and training beyond high school.
- Current economic projections show that 62% of all jobs in Montana will require some postsecondary training beyond high school in 2018.⁵
- Montana would save more than \$29.8 million in health care costs over the lifetime of each class of dropouts.⁶
- If Montana were able to cut the dropout rate in half, the state would gain \$12 million more a year in increased earnings and \$21 million more in home sales.
- Almost 30% of Montana's high school dropouts meet the federal definition of low-income, which is twice the rate of high school graduates.
- Montana's high school graduates on average earn 22% more than high school dropouts after controlling for differences in age, gender and race. Those with some college earn 27% more and those with a bachelor's degree or higher earn 66% more.⁸
- High school dropouts earn \$9,200 less per year than high school graduates and about one million dollars less over a lifetime than college graduates.
- The economy of Montana would see a combination of crime-reduction savings and additional revenue of about \$19.6 million each year if the male high school graduation rate increased by just 5 percent.
- Each prevented dropout will result in an estimated \$32,402 in benefits to the state over that individual's lifetime. By permanently cutting the dropout rate in half, each class of new high school graduates will yield over \$32 million in direct gross economic benefits to the state. By completely eliminating dropouts, the state stands to save \$65 million annually.¹⁰

It is critical that we graduate students that are positive active participants in our communities and contributors to our society

¹ The Alliance for Excellent Education, <http://www.all4ed.org> via America's Promise Grad Nation Toolkit ² The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (2010). *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018*. ³ Montana Department of Corrections 2009 Biennial Report ⁴ The Alliance for Excellent Education, <http://www.all4ed.org> ⁵ The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (2010). ⁶ Ibid. ⁷ The Alliance for Excellent Education, <http://www.all4ed.org> ⁸ Springer, D. A. (2010). *Montana's High School Dropouts: Examining the Fiscal Consequences*. Indianapolis: The Foundation for Educational Choice. ⁹ The Alliance for Excellent Education, <http://www.all4ed.org> ¹⁰ Ibid.

Checklist for Launching a Graduation Matters Initiative in Your Town

Step 1: Start your own Graduation Matters Team

- Make sure your GMM team is comprised of students, educators, parents and community members.
- Convene your first GMM meeting! Begin to identify goals that are specific to your community.

Step 2: Know your Data

- Contact OPI for data specific to your district or school.
- Use the data tables included in this toolkit to develop your school's three-year dropout snapshot, college-going and remediation rates, and how you compare statewide.
- Review this information with your GMM team and discuss.

Step 3: Implement Specific Research-Based Strategies

- Learn about what programs your district already has in place for dropout prevention.
- Identify what your community is already doing and prioritize next steps using the comprehensive community solutions table to take an inventory of "what is."
- Implement new strategies that work to lower the dropout rate and increase college and-career-readiness.

Step 4: Build Support and Keep the Community Informed and Involved

- Set goals for your GMM team and hold meetings regularly.
- Raise public awareness of your community's GMM plan.
- Plan an "*I Pledge to Graduate*" event and invite the media.
- Celebrate!



What YOU Can Do— Students

GET INVOLVED IN GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA

1 TAKE THE PLEDGE TO GRADUATE AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO JOIN YOU

2 STAY ON THE RIGHT TRACK

- Know the graduation requirements for your school as well as the requirements for college or career training.
- Do your homework, study hard and don't miss school.
- Advocate for your right to a quality education.
- If you have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan, participate in the meetings where the plan is developed. If you are not invited to the meeting, ask to attend.

3 GET INVOLVED

- Participate in extracurricular activities at school or through a youth organization in your community.
- Volunteer, get an internship or find a part-time job that gives you skills that will benefit you in the workplace or college.
- Participate in the I Pledge to Graduate campaign at your school or start one if your school doesn't have one.
- Join a Career and Technical Student Organization.

4 PREPARE FOR THE FUTURE

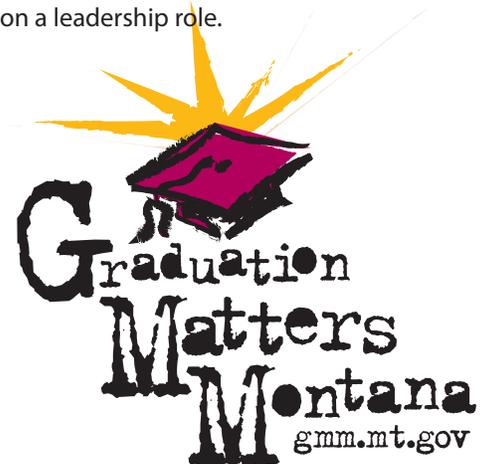
- Challenge yourself academically and plan out your future.
- Talk to your school counselor and family about your goals for college or career training.
- Find a mentor who can help you plan for your future.
- Take advantage of college preparation and career readiness resources and opportunities.
- Create a Big Sky Pathway.

5 MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- Support your peers to make healthy and safe choices.
- Participate in service learning.
- Consider tutoring or mentoring a peer or younger student.
- Be kind and treat others with respect.
- Take on a leadership role.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT **YOU** CAN DO, PLEASE VISIT THE **GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA** WEBSITE.

graduationmatters.mt.gov





What YOU Can Do— Families

GET INVOLVED IN GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA

1 ENCOURAGE THE STUDENTS IN YOUR FAMILY TO TAKE THE PLEDGE TO GRADUATE

2 START OR JOIN COORDINATED GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA EFFORTS

- Create or join a task force of local businesses, parents, caregivers, students and community leaders to focus on graduation.

3 PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

- Talk with your student about the credit requirements for a high school diploma and their plans for after graduation.
- Have them explore career and college options and collect as much information as possible. Prepare to apply for college financial aid assistance.

4 GET INVOLVED IN THEIR EDUCATION

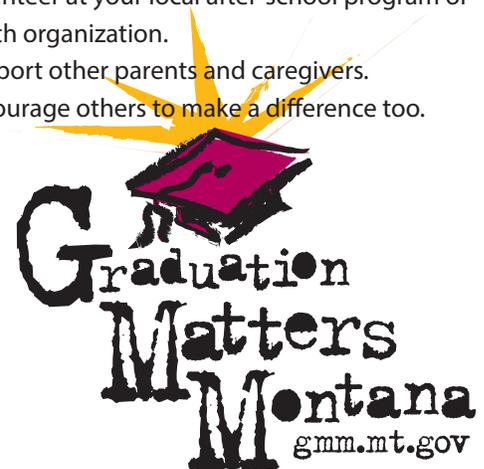
- Ask your students about their homework and talk to their teachers.
- Volunteer in their classrooms or school.
- Start or join a parent-teacher organization (e.g. PTA).
- Attend their school events and get to know their teachers, coaches, mentors and friends.
- Help kickstart a Family Friendly Walkthrough.
- If your student has special needs, advocate for him or her to spend as much time as possible with peers in a traditional classroom setting.

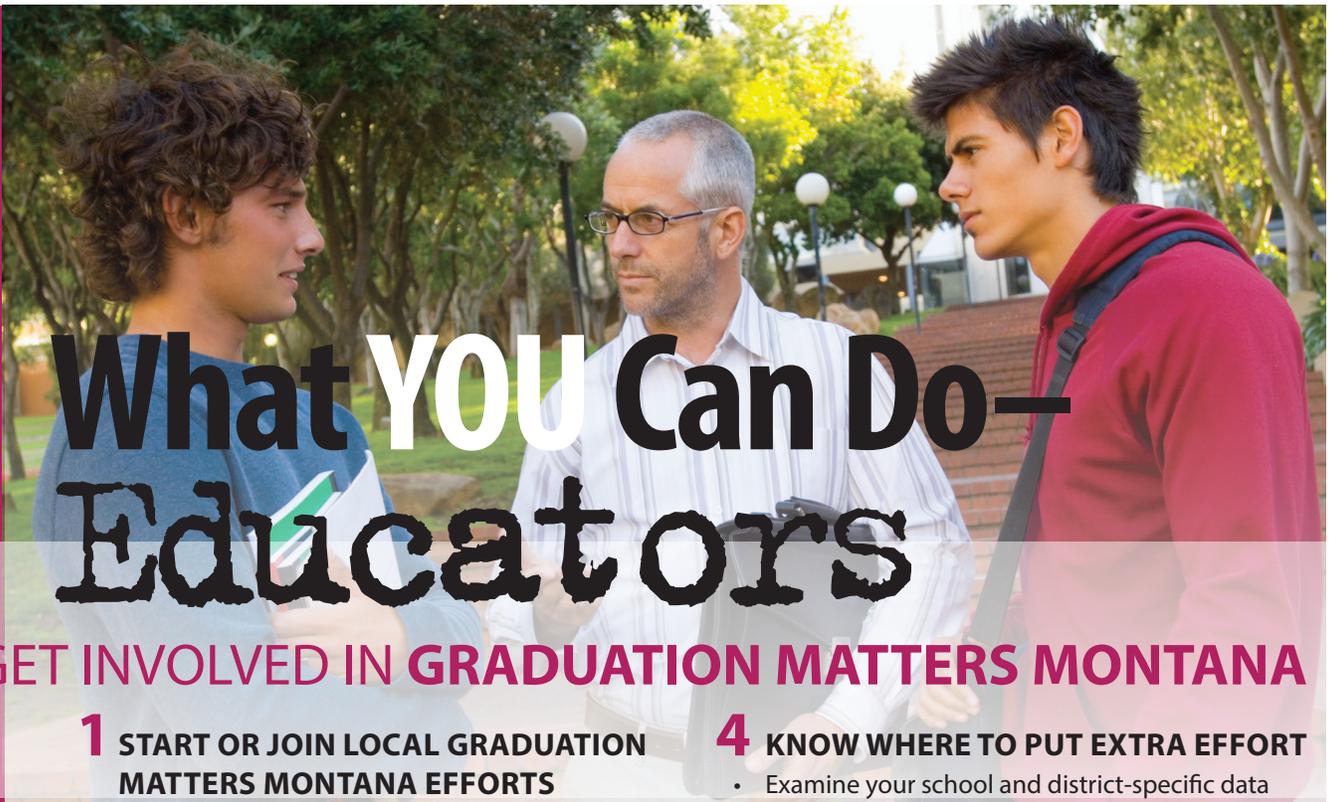
5 MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- Volunteer at your local after-school program or youth organization.
- Support other parents and caregivers.
- Encourage others to make a difference too.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT **YOU** CAN DO, PLEASE VISIT THE **GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA** WEBSITE.

graduationmatters.mt.gov





What YOU Can Do— Educators

GET INVOLVED IN GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA

1 START OR JOIN LOCAL GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA EFFORTS

- Create or join a task force of local businesses, parents, caregivers, students and community leaders to focus on graduation.

2 IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE STUDENTS AT-RISK OF DROPPING OUT

- Institute an early warning system using indicators such as attendance, behavior and credit deficiency.
- Help kids understand the financial impact of dropping out.
- Make sure every student has one caring adult in their life.
- Support the development of Big Sky Pathways.

3 CREATE A CULTURE OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS

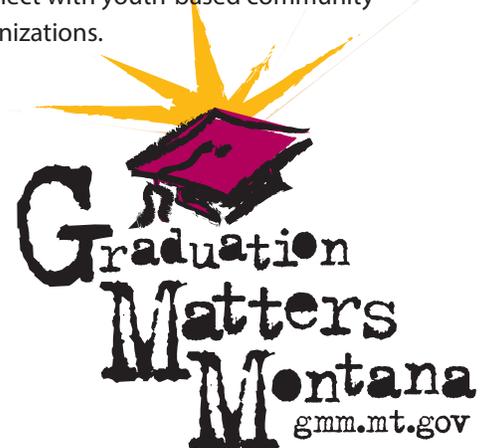
- Set the goal of a 100% graduation rate.
- Launch an I PLEDGE TO GRADUATE campaign in your school.
- Incorporate college and career planning into classroom curriculum, provide scholarship and loan information and organize college tours and career fairs.
- Utilize MCIS in your classroom.

4 KNOW WHERE TO PUT EXTRA EFFORT

- Examine your school and district-specific data related to dropout rates, risky behaviors and school climate.
- Identify and change policies that may prevent students from staying in school.
- Invite in student voices – engage diverse perspectives on school climate and barriers to reaching graduation.
- Become active in cross-curriculum units with CTE.

5 OPEN YOUR DOORS TO THE COMMUNITY

- Promote volunteer opportunities that engage families and community partners at your school.
- Be an advisor to a student group and incorporate service-learning activities into your curriculum.
- Connect with youth-based community organizations.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT **YOU** CAN DO, PLEASE VISIT THE **GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA** WEBSITE. graduationmatters.mt.gov

What YOU Can Do— Communities/ Businesses

GET INVOLVED IN GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA

1 START OR JOIN LOCAL GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA EFFORTS

- Create or join a taskforce of local businesses, parents, caregivers, students and community leaders to focus on graduation and other service or civic organizations.
- Encourage your Chamber of Commerce to take an active role in supporting K-12 education.
- Display Graduation Matters Montana materials in your workplace.
- Utilize the [Business Toolkit](#) on the OPI GMM website.

2 INVEST YOUR TIME AND RESOURCES

- Volunteer time to a local school district's Graduation Matters Montana efforts.
- Offer student discounts or set up scholarships for students graduating from high school or receiving their high school equivalency diploma.
- Adopt a local classroom or school.
- Fund a classroom project of interest to your business or community group.
- Join a Career and Technical Education Advisory Council.

3 PROMOTE SCHOOL & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Connect employees with volunteer opportunities at local schools.
- Establish a workplace mentoring program for local youth.
- Run a book or supplies drive for a local school.

4 PROVIDE CAREER READINESS OPPORTUNITIES

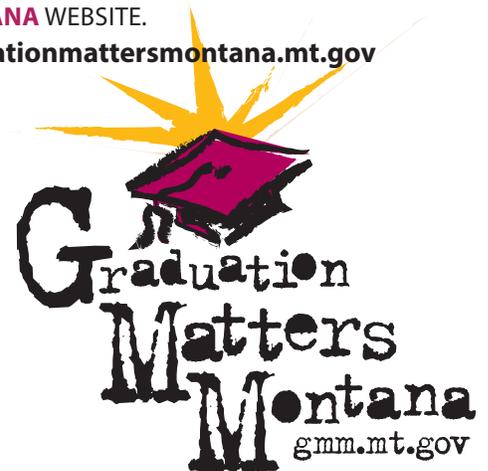
- Offer internships, externships or job shadowing.
- Collaborate with teachers and career counselors to create service-learning and other real world learning opportunities.
- Participate in a career fair or host an industry field trip.
- Ensure that job experience opportunities are available for all students, including students with disabilities.

5 SHARE YOUR STORY WITH US

- If you're engaged in partnerships with your local school, tell us how your work is helping your community, your workplace and students.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT **YOU** CAN DO, PLEASE VISIT THE **GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA** WEBSITE.

graduationmattersmontana.mt.gov



How to Launch a Graduation Matters Initiative in Your Community

There are four basic steps to becoming a Graduation Matters Montana school. Please feel free to use this basic GMM Plan Template to work with your GMM Team on the design and implementation of your community's GMM Plan.

STEP 1: Start your own Graduation Matters Team

Ensuring every student graduates from high school college and/or career-ready is a task the entire community can participate in, from school-based efforts, to community organizations working with districts to strengthen student supports, to local businesses participating in career preparation and mentoring supports. See Appendix A for sample letters of an invitation to join the team. At the school level, see if an existing school-based team (MBI, School Improvement, District Leadership Team, etc.) can be tapped to form the nucleus of the school's GMM effort. Some ideas of stakeholders include:

School Board Representative(s) _____

District Superintendent _____

High School Principal(s) _____

School Counselor(s) _____

Teacher(s) _____

Parent(s) _____

Student(s) _____

Local Community Foundation Representative(s) _____

Local Business Owner(s) _____

Local Community Leader (s) (Elected, Informal, etc) _____

Local Community-Based and/or Non-Profit Organization (s) _____

Local Service Organization(s) _____

Local Tribal Leader(s) _____

Other(s) _____

A Note on Student Voice

Central to the GMM strategy is development of a deeper understanding of why students drop out and why they are not actively engaged in their education. Including student voices in your GMM plan from the very beginning provides a distinct perspective from young people on learning, teaching and school systems. Providing opportunities for students to authentically engage in the shaping of their education is vital to the success of your GMM plan. When we engage students as educational decision-makers, we are actively teaching young people responsibility for their education and engaging them in making choices in areas ranging from what affects them personally to what affects an entire student body to what affects the entire school system. Their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults. Within this toolkit you will find many examples of how students can actively participate in their local GMM.

What a GMM Team Looks Like:

1. United Way leaders have convened Graduation Matters Great Falls and Graduation Matters Greater Gallatin. They are also integral to Graduation Matters Missoula and Graduation Matters Billings.
2. Graduation Matters Stevensville has 20+ community and business leaders on their team.
3. Graduation Matters Miles City has partnered with Miles City Community College to form the local GMM team.
4. Graduation Matters Libby includes community members in their 20's as leaders of their local initiative.
5. Graduation Matters Billings' leadership team is co-coordinated by the United Way, Education Foundation and school district.
6. Graduation Matters Hardin has several students on their team.

Who to Invite:

- Businesses that employ young people
- Government officials, including the juvenile justice and youth court
- Health and human services, including doctors and psychologists
- Family advocate organizations, like Parents Let's Unite for Kids and the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

The OPI has recruited the following statewide GMM partners:

- State Farm Insurance
- AT&T
- Local Montana United Way Chapters
- Student Assistance Foundation
- IBM
- First Interstate Bank
- Montana Federal Credit Union Network
- BNSF
- Applied Materials

Be sure to invite representatives from your local branches to participate in your GMM team.

Convening the Team

See the appendices for helpful community meeting tools and a list of helpful online resources. At the first GMM meeting you should: (1) share information about GMM as a statewide effort of locally designed, locally implemented efforts; (2) share data about your local community's dropout challenge; (3) build in time for participants to talk in small groups about what is working and what more can be done to address the challenges; and (4) identify next steps: designate a key point of contact in the school who will work with external partners; identify what additional information the team needs to move forward with planning; and designate a regular meeting time and place.

Having someone to facilitate meetings can help to create a team environment in which people are bringing their best to the table, so it is worthwhile to think through who you would like to have as your GMM facilitator. One does not need to be a professional facilitator to help to establish a trusting and productive team environment. Oftentimes there are individuals in the school or in the community who can be asked to play the role. The GMM website has helpful resources for facilitating effective meetings.

STEP 2: Know your Data

The second step of launching a GMM initiative is to look at your data to better understand who is dropping out of high school, why they may be dropping out, and what more your GMM team can do to best address the challenge.

This section will guide you through gathering numerical data (how many students drop out, etc.) and provides you resources for qualitative data (what is the experience of students who are not on the path to graduation.) When gathering this data, try to identify trends: are students with disabilities or American Indian students disproportionately dropping out? Are more students dropping out in their sophomore or junior year when they have turned 16 years old? If the answer is yes, what more does your GMM team need to know to better understand opportunities to support these students' success?

Once you have gathered this information, be prepared to share this information with your GMM team, the media and families in order to generate momentum for your efforts to develop strategies that best meet your specific needs.

The following table will help you gather your numerical data. You can access this data on OPI's Growth and Enhancement of Montana's Students (GEMS) website (<http://gemstest.opitest.mt.gov/StudentCharacteristics/Pages/GMMDropoutCompletionSnapshot.aspx>) or by contacting Andy Boehm, Dropout Data Information Coordinator, at (406) 444-0375 or aboehm@mt.gov. GMM also seeks to build successful high school to college and career transitions. School districts can obtain their college-going and readiness rates by visiting GEMS on the Office of Public Instruction website: <http://gems.opi.mt.gov/Pages/Default.aspx>.

Our School's Three-Year Snapshot of High School Dropout Rates

	2011-2012		2012-2013		2013-2014	
	Dropout count	Dropout rate	Dropout count	Dropout rate	Dropout count	Dropout rate
School						
District						
Students with Disabilities						
American Indian Students						
Montana	1,744	4.1%	1,500	3.6%	1,539	3.7%

GMM also seeks to build successful high school to college and career transitions. School districts can obtain their college-going and readiness rates by visiting GEMS on the Office of Public Instruction website: <http://gems.opi.mt.gov/Pages/Default.aspx>.

Our School's College-Going and Remediation Rates

	2011-2012		2012-2013		2013-2014	
	College-going	Remediation	College-going	Remediation	College-going	Remediation
Our School						
Our District						
Montana ¹¹	40.0%	30.0%	41.0%	29.0%	39.0%	26.0%

What other data do you have that will help the school and community get a better understanding of who drops out and why for the local school district? Review the following list, and check what data you already have.

Source	Key data findings	Date of data	What does it tell you?
Student Voice™ (formally My Voice Survey)			
Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey			
School surveys (include MBI data if available)			
Focus group results from students who dropped out and/or family members			
Perkins Indicators			
Other			

Once you've gathered available data, be prepared to sit with your GMM Team to discuss:

- (1) What is the scope of the dropout problem? What trends do we see in students once they graduate?
- (2) Which populations of students are at high risk of dropping out? Which are not going on to further training upon graduation?
- (3) Why do individual students drop out? When are students most at risk of dropping out?
- (4) What more do you need to/want to know to fully understand why students drop out and when?
- (5) What key insights do you derive from looking at your data, and how is that influencing the focus of your GMM plan?

Here are some other resources to help you get a complete picture of your students' needs:

Student Voice™ Aspirations Survey

Student Voice™ Aspirations Survey analyzes the perceptions of young people in grades six through twelve to provide educators with detailed student data that can be used to improve teaching and learning as well as school climate. Surveys are also available for grades three through five, staff, and parents. All surveys are provided electronically at no cost to Montana schools. Schools who have participated in this program receive access to school-level data. For further information about how to use the *Student Voice™ Aspirations Survey*, contact Steve York at the OPI: (406) 444-4434, syork@mt.gov

The Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

The *Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)*, administered every other year by the OPI, assists educators and health professionals in determining the prevalence of health-risk behaviors as self-reported by Montana youth. Schools receive local data; the state maintains state-level data only. For further information about the *Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, contact Susan Court at the OPI: (406) 444-3178, scourt@mt.gov.

Graduation Matters Hardin Student Survey

Once the GMM team looks at the numbers, they may want to know more about why students are dropping out or have become disengaged. The Graduation Matters Hardin team worked with a group of students to develop and administer a survey to students who had recently dropped out. The survey results gave the GMM Hardin team critical insight into their plan.

DPHHS Prevention Needs Assessment

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) conducts the Prevention Needs Assessment Community Student Survey (PNA) every other year. More than 20,000 students participated in 2010. Because trends over time are very important in prevention planning, this report contains the results of the past three survey administrations. The PNA Survey is conducted by DPHHS Addictive and Mental Disorders Division, Chemical Dependency Bureau: <http://prevention.mt.gov/pna/>.

Teen Pregnancy Numbers and Rates

Parenthood is a leading cause of school dropout among teen girls. Thirty percent of teen girls who have dropped out of high school cited pregnancy or parenthood as a key reason.¹² Only 40 percent of teen moms finish high school, and less than 2 percent of teen mothers (those who have a baby before age 18) finish college by age 30. A useful report is Teen Pregnancy Rates in Montana- County Data, Pregnancy numbers and rates by county. <http://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/publichealth/documents/WMH/2014%20Teen%20Birth%20and%20Pregnancy%20Report%20Final.pdf>

STEP 3: Implement Specific Research-Based Strategies

Most school districts and communities have programs in place to support students graduating from high school college- and career-ready. The key is to efficiently communicate to non-educators what current work is being done at the school and to strategize what more can be done through community partnerships based on what's working locally and elsewhere in Montana to address the dropout problem.

Research shows that students are more likely to graduate ready for college and a career if they are academically and socially integrated into school life.¹³

Students who are academically integrated into school life:

- Are aware of their own academic strengths and have identified areas where they can be successful and excel.
- Are actively engaged in relevant experiences that build upon their strengths and provide a well-rounded education.
- Share responsibility for their learning with teachers (both are aware of the progress the student is making and the learning experience is adapted accordingly.)
- Understand what the academic expectations are at their school to graduate.
- Are actively preparing for and pursuing career and college opportunities.

Students who are socially integrated into school life:

- Have a strong sense of belonging to school life that results in positive behaviors and choices through involvement in one or more social groups or through connections to one or more caring adults.
- Are influenced by adults in the school who know them and are empathetic to their challenges (e.g., the adults know their names, engage in conversations, notice when they are absent or troubled, know a student's background).
- Have a voice in appropriate school administrative decision-making and feel welcome to engage in these activities.
- Participate in extracurricular activities.

Increasing Students' Sense of Belonging

Each fall, the Montana Behavioral Initiative (MBI) Youth Days are held at five locations across the state, bringing middle and high school students together to focus on building a sense of belonging in the school and local community. Students and school leaders participate in activities designed to engage everyone in a school team. These teams then participate in a service project during Youth Days and develop a plan for a service leadership project in their home community. This active engagement dramatically increases student sense of belonging and engagement in school and community. For more information, contact Susan Bailey Anderson at (406) 444-2046 or sbanderson@mt.gov.

Comprehensive Community Solutions – Take Inventory of “What Is”

Once the GMM team has identified its primary areas of interest in expansion or exploration, identify next steps in terms of research, resources and key partnerships that will be needed to implement the plan. The following inventory is modified from America’s Promise Grad Nation Guidebook. It is a comprehensive inventory to analyze the school district’s use of many of the most effective research-based strategies that school districts across the nation are employing to lower their dropout rates. The “Community Partnership Opportunity” column can be used by the GMM team to identify what community programs are in place/can be created to support the school’s efforts.

ACADEMIC Integration	In Place	Not in Place	In Place & Needs Work	Community Partnership Opportunity
1. School policies do not unintentionally “encourage” students to drop out				
1a. School attendance policies identify and respond to students who are absent or tardy				
1b. The school uses an early warning system to identify students at risk of dropping out				
1c. Students who are credit deficient are identified early on & supported in credit recovery efforts				
1d. Transition plans are developed in early grades for students with disabilities.				
1e. Identify other policies to share				
2. The school offers a college and career-ready curriculum				
2a. The school is incorporating the Montana Common Core standards and STEM into its curricula				
2b. All high school students have taken the Montana Career Information Systems survey or similar tool to identify career interests				
2c. The school provides college-level, dual enrollment and Advanced Placement courses to all students				
2d. The school has transitional support systems to help students cross successfully into college and careers				
2e. Students are able to receive credit for internships, job shadowing and other career experiences				
2f. Local businesses regularly work with the school on career-oriented curriculum, including participating in Big Sky Pathways and on-site job opportunities for students				
2g. The school supports student involvement in Career and Technical Student Organizations				
2h. Service-learning and other hands-on instruction is incorporated into curricula				
2i. Identify other initiatives/policies to share				

SOCIAL Integration	In Place	Not in Place	In Place & Needs Work	Community Partnership Opportunity
3. The school has a multi-tiered dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery system				
3a. The school has a system for making sure all students are on-time with credits				
3b. The school has a MT Behavioral Initiative team that encourages a positive support and recognition system				
3c. The school has a transitional support system to help students cross from middle grades into high school				
3d. Identify other interventions to share				
4. The school employs effective student support systems				
4a. The school has Response to Intervention or another system to target support for students' differing needs				
4b. School supports are supplemented by the work of community adults as mentors and tutors				
4c. School supports are supplemented by the work of community organizations who help families meet their basic needs				
4d. The school is organized into smaller academies and teams within a larger school				
4e. The school has active engagement of parents and the community, such as teacher home visits				
4f. Parents and community members have conducted a Family Friendly Walkthrough				
4g. The school has adequate staff- and teacher-to-student ratios to address the needs of the most struggling students				
4h. Identify other supports to share				

There are several research-based strategies and best practices that schools are using to meet their GMM goals. Below are a few great strategies to review with your GMM team.

Know Your School Policies

Review policies related to attendance, retaining and promoting students, grading and how or when it is recommended to a student to obtain his or her high school equivalency diploma or attend an alternative school. What flexibility can be put in place for a student who must work a full time job? Or a student with more than ten absences because she is raising a newborn? Or a student who struggles with reading or math? Examine your school policies and offer alternatives to help students in these types of situations remain in school and obtain their diploma. Great Falls and Missoula schools changed their attendance policies so that students are not penalized for missing school days and increased their focus on getting students to school and supporting student success.

Focus on Your Attendance Data

Graduation Matters Missoula's early successes in the first year of their initiative came from weekly tracking of unaccounted-for students. Each week, schools were required to submit a list of students who were no longer in attendance. Counselors and principals then worked to contact the students, track their whereabouts and encourage them to return to school if they had dropped out. Bringing parents and guardians into efforts to get kids to school can be key to improving attendance. A national organization, Attendance Works, has family-focused flyers and other communication strategies to engage families in the school's efforts. Visit Attendance Works at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/>.

Track Student Credit Deficiencies

Research shows that many Montana students who drop out are behind in their course credits and feel they are too far behind to graduate on time. Often students realize this credit deficiency before the school does. Many GMM teams are tracking student credit accumulation as early as freshman and sophomore years of high school and developing early interventions to support more students to stay on track to graduate. For example, GMM Kalispell helped 225 students recover credit through a "Christmas Catch Up" program and summer school. GMM Hardin worked with 21 seniors in the spring of 2012 to help them recover lost credits, and all 21 students graduated. They used their 2013 Challenge Funds to run a similar program in the 2014 spring semester.

Improve Middle School to High School Transitions

Research tells us that students who do not adjust academically and socially during their freshman year are more likely to drop out of school. Several GMM communities are focusing attention on middle school students and helping incoming freshman successfully transition to high school. GMM Stevensville, Polson, Miles City, Laurel and Bozeman are increasing focus on their freshman orientation programs to improve students'

Graduation Matters Browning used 2013 GMM Challenge Funds to establish a curriculum to certify all school staff and participating parent volunteers and community members as "drop out specialists," trained to work with students to help them stay in school. The school district has a commitment from the school board to sustain the program and ensure every new school employee takes the eight-hour certification.

Year 1: I Pledge to Graduate

- Graduation Matters Great Falls launched their *I Pledge to Graduate* campaign at both high schools, resulting in over 1,300 signed pledge cards.
- GM Libby and GM Whitefish had their high school seniors talk to elementary students, who then took the pledge and were photographed in graduation caps and gowns.
- Graduation Matters St. Ignatius held their annual school-community gathering under the theme Graduation Matters. As part of their gathering all students, kindergarten through high school, took the *Pledge to Graduate* and were entered to win prizes such as bikes and toys.

school connectedness and sense of belonging. GMM Kalispell runs a freshman academy to create a more personalized and supportive environment for incoming freshman and has committed to have every eighth grader take the Pledge to Graduate. GMM Missoula is using its GMM Challenge Funds to work with fifth and sixth grade students to create a positive school climate, decrease bullying and to build their social resiliency.

Build Personal Connections with Students at Risk of Dropping Out

Many GMM teams are creating innovative strategies to increase relational supports for student success. GMM Miles City launched a peer-to-peer tutoring program with 2012 GMM Challenge Funds to assist freshman and sophomore students who are struggling in core subject areas. The school designated a room for the tutoring lab, and local businesses donated furniture to make the space more inviting. GMM Bozeman has a longstanding partnership with a local community organization called Thrive, which recruits, trains and places 600 community members in the Bozeman school district.

GMM Columbia Falls and Stevensville trains school staff to meet with students once a week to help establish learning and career goals and to teach proper study skills.

Strive to be Inclusive in GMM Efforts

Throughout Montana, there are student groups who disproportionately drop out of school. This can include students with disabilities, American Indian students, and students living in poverty. In order to increase graduation rates in a district, GMM teams need to be sure that activities and interventions include strategies that meaningfully motivate and engage all students to stay in school. Research shows that students with disabilities have no more trouble finding employment after leaving school than other students, but that they often lack the professional skills needed to stick with long-term employment.¹⁴ For guidance on supporting students with disabilities, contact the OPI Special Education Division at 406-444-5661. For guidance on supporting American Indian students, contact Mandy Broadus at 406-444-3013. For guidance on supporting students living in poverty, contact Heather Denny at 406-444-2036.

Provide Positive Support and Recognition

Recognition and support are essential for gaining long-lasting involvement from community leaders and business owners. Additionally, teachers, parents, administrators and school staff deserve to be supported and recognized for their past efforts to lower the dropout rate and their on-going efforts to establish and promote a Graduation Matters initiative in your town. If your school has a Montana Behavior Initiative team, consult them for strategies to create positive school climate and support systems.

Engage Family and Community

Educators agree that families must be involved in their student's education. Home and school partnerships are critical to the success of students and educators alike. In fact, especially for American Indian students, "the factor most correlated with higher achievement was the school's effort to engage parents, families and communities in the school, outweighing even school leadership, teacher quality and curriculum."¹⁵

"I now feel like it's partly my responsibility to ask a student why they're not in school if I see them downtown during the school day."

Graduation Matters Missoula community member

Vocational Rehabilitation in Missoula

In Missoula, the high school district worked to establish a partnership with the Department of Public Health and Human Services to place a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor in the school district. This partnership facilitated the post-school transition planning for students with disabilities, increased the connections between the school district and local business, and resulted in improved outcomes for students. This model is now expanding to more communities across Montana.

¹⁴ The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 8 Years After High School. A Report From the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, National Center for Special Education Research, U.S. Department of Education: http://www.nlts2.org/reports/2011_09_02/nlts2_report_2011_09_02_complete.pdf

A great way to start a conversation about the “friendliness” of your school is through a Family Friendly Walkthrough. In a Family Friendly Walkthrough, a team of parents, community members and school personnel uses an easy-to-follow worksheet to review the physical environment of the school, school-wide policies and practices, and communication between school and home. A sample worksheet for a Family Friendly Walkthrough can be found at <http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/GradMatters/12SummerSummit/FFWTVermont.pdf>.

Implement an Early Warning System

An Early Warning System uses available data that the school collects, including grades, attendance, student background, student age, and other data points to determine when a student is at risk for dropping out. Early Warning System results can then be run and utilized at any time during the school year to determine students that may need additional monitoring or intervention. Both school and student level results are available to assist educators. The EWS is now available in the secure version of GEMS. For more information, contact Eric Meredith at (406) 444-3642 or emeredith@mt.gov.

Provide Career and Technical Education, Experiential and Service-Learning Options

In Montana, students who take at least three Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes are more likely to graduate than students who take fewer than three CTE classes. Students who participate in Career and Technical student organizations are also more likely to graduate. Experiential learning activities provide students with additional avenues to experience success and compelling reasons to come to school. Service-learning, alternative high schools, experiential education programs, and career and technical education-focused curriculum have all been credited with keeping students in school who otherwise would have dropped out.

STEP 4: Build Public Support and Keep the Community Informed and Involved

A critical component of a local Graduation Matters initiative is regular communication within your community about the initiative. GMM is built on a belief that everyone has a role to play in keeping students engaged and committed to graduating, and community members need to know about the initiative and the opportunities to participate in order to join in. Current GMM initiatives have discovered the value of broadly communicating their GMM message and expectations.

The OPI can provide you with GMM posters, Toolkits, I Pledge to Graduate cards, GMM wristbands and other materials to help you get the word out about your initiative. Contact us at graduationmatters@mt.gov if you would like GMM materials.

Partnering with Local Businesses:

- Graduation Matters Stevensville requested 75 Graduation Matters posters to distribute to local businesses who then displayed them in their store windows.
- A Graduation Matters Miles City student team member came up with the idea to include an effort to break the Guinness Book of World Records for continuous thumb wrestling chain at a kick-off event that included 500 lunches donated by Wal-Mart and beverages donated by Blue Rock Distributing for attendees.
- Graduation Matters Havre enlisted the help of their Chamber of Commerce to distribute a community survey on the dropout challenge in their community.
- Graduation Matters Billings has recruited the Billings Gazette as part of their Graduation Matters Billings steering committee.
- Graduation Matters Anaconda launched a GMM Leadership Academy based on a model developed by the Havre Chamber of Commerce and Havre Public Schools. Thirty high school students participated in a semester-long leadership development program that was designed and managed by the local Rotary Club and participating business partners.

¹⁵ *Striving To Achieve: Helping Native American Students Succeed. National Caucus of Native American State Legislators. National Conference of State Legislatures: Washington, DC. Presented at GMM Summit 2012.*

See the Appendix for a sample press conference invitation, a sample media advisory and a sample letter to the editor. Use this basic timeline template, or create one of your own, to plan your communications effort. Make sure regular efforts exist to engage the local media and community organizations so the momentum continues to build for your good work.

Helpful considerations when planning regular communications include having your GMM team:

- (1) Identify spokespeople for the local GMM effort; consider school leadership, community leadership, student leadership.
- (2) Create a list of key media outlets and reporters, including print, radio and television, if appropriate or needed.
- (3) Create a list of civic organizations and a meeting calendar to ensure someone presents an update on the GMM work regularly.

“One of the exciting aspects in Havre becoming a Graduation Matters district is that, as our students travel across the state, they will see a recurring theme displayed in store windows, on billboards and various reader boards. Each participating school district may put their own brand of uniqueness into local efforts but the core of the message remains true.”

Andy Carlson, Superintendent of Havre Public School.

Communication Activity	1 st Quarter	2 nd Quarter	3 rd Quarter	4 th Quarter
(Ex: GMM launch, I Pledge event, or present to local Rotary Club)				

Ideas for Raising Public Awareness of Your Efforts

We ask that Graduation Matters communities use the Graduation Matters Montana logo to assist in portraying a unified statewide effort at raising the dropout rate. The OPI will create and provide communities with a personalized GMM logo including the name of your community. Please email graduationmatters@mt.gov to have the logo customized for your community. Other ways that you can raise public awareness of your efforts include:

- Hold a press conference for the official launch of your Graduation Matters or I Pledge to Graduate campaign and invite media, dignitaries and local stakeholders, including Superintendent Denise Juneau. Make sure your speakers represent the wide range of support you have for your initiative.
- Sit down with your newspaper’s editorial board to share your goals for Graduation Matters and explain how you’re going to get there. Consider updating them annually or bi-annually about your progress.
- Did your school increase its graduation rate this year? Did your school decrease the number of students who are credit deficient? Did your school start a new mentoring or tutoring program? Share your good news in a press release or a call to your local paper. Let them know what you are doing to impact the lives of students in your community.
- Collect stories of success and share them with the Superintendent’s Office at the OPI, which will continually feature the work of local communities on the statewide website and in media outreach. Share pictures of your kickoff events and your initiative goals so the OPI can highlight the great work of Montana schools and communities.

- Present at city council, county commission, tribal council, chamber of commerce, Rotary and other community, civic and business-related organizational meetings to share information about your Graduation Matters initiative and reach out to other leaders in the community. We strongly recommend having a student present with you.
- Business members in Great Falls pledged to support all students, including those they employ and the parents of students in their community. This pledge included a promise to take time to work with high school students on their resumes, partner with teachers to provide job shadowing, allow business leaders to be involved as parents and provide discounts to students and more. To support the business community involvement, the Great Falls Tribune has agreed to highlight a GMM business partner every other month.
- Enlist students as spokespeople for this work. Empowering students to engage in your Graduation Matters campaign is an opportunity for their leadership development and tells the story of your community from the perspective of those most affected by your efforts. Graduation Matters Kalispell created videos with their students about Graduation Matters Kalispell that are played during their daily announcements at the middle school and high school. Graduation Matters Laurel, Great Falls and Lewistown have also created videos. To view the great work of these students, check out <http://graduationmatters.mt.gov/media.html>.
- Ask business and community partners to display the Graduation Matters logo in their windows, link to it on their website, “like” it on Facebook, feature your efforts on their signage/message boards and write about their efforts to partner with your school in newsletters and other communications.
- Communicate with parents via newsletters, articles in the newspaper, by visiting community organizations, or partnering with local employers. Share the message of the importance of education and how critical it is for all children to attend and engage in school.
- Submit letters to the editor or op-eds throughout your initiative to inform and engage the community in your efforts. Ask students, parents, business partners, tribal elders and community leaders to write letters to the editor in support of Graduation Matters.
- Keep the community informed about your progress with regular press releases, school website updates, newsletter articles, community events, etc. Don’t forget to celebrate your successes and share the news of your good work with the community and media!

Beyond the Launch:

Use the excitement of a launch to energize and build your local GMM team. Often in the planning and doing of a launch, new GMM team members can be recruited to join our effort. Keep up the momentum! Work through the four steps of GMM to prioritize the activities of your local GMM initiative, and continue to communicate and update the community.

Appendices

Appendix A: Start Your Own Graduation Matters Team

- Sample Letter of Invitation to Join
- Sample Business Pledge
- Business Partner Resource Questionnaire
- Partner Agreement
- Home School Coordinator/Graduation Coach Job Description

Appendix B: Know Your Data

- Additional Data Resources and Tools

Appendix C: Implement Specific Research-Based Strategies

- Online Resources for Ways to Initiate Service Learning, Alternative, Experiential and Career Technical Education Options in your Community

Appendix D: Build Support and Keep the Community Informed and Involved

- Volunteer Ideas for Families and Community Members at Your Town's High School
- Sample Press Conference Invitation to Community Leaders
- Sample Media Advisory for Graduation Matters Launch
- Sample Letter to the Editor
- Have Letter to the Editor
- Have Graduation Survey
- Hardin Middle School Writing Assignment

Appendix A: Start your own GMM Team

Sample Letter of Invitation to Join Graduation Matters

[DATE]

Dear [NAME],

Graduation Matters Montana is coming to [YOUR TOWN], and we want you to join in the effort! Launched by Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau, Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN] is a multi-pronged, coordinated effort of businesses, educators, parents, students and community members from every sector working to reach the goal of a 100% graduation rate. We are seeking a variety of individuals of all ages, professions and interests.

Graduation Matters is a long-term, community initiative to ensure more students graduate ready for college and careers. With the belief that everyone in our community can play a role in helping kids stay and succeed in school, we seek to form a partnership between [YOUR TOWN] Public Schools and the [YOUR TOWN] community. We recognize many in the community have worked for some time to keep students in school and address the reasons students drop out. This effort is a broad-based effort and looks to rally every sector of the community to work together to encourage students to stay in school and help them succeed.

Your involvement in Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN] will be the difference that supports students staying in school and the overall well-being of the community. Give me a call or e-mail to let me know if you are interested in hearing more about how you can help. Thank you for taking the time to consider supporting this community-wide effort.

For further information on Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN], contact [CONTACT PERSON] at [PHONE #], from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday – Friday or visit the Graduation Matters Montana website at www.graduationmatters.mt.gov.

Sincerely,

[CONTACT PERSON] _____

[TITLE] _____

[ORGANIZATION] _____

[PHONE] _____

[EMAIL] _____



Sample Business Pledge
GRADUATION MATTERS GREAT FALLS
Business Best Practices

AS AN EMPLOYER IN OUR COMMUNITY WE PLEDGE TO...

SUPPORT STUDENT EMPLOYEES: Schedule student employees work hours to allow them time to study, participate in extra-curricular activities and succeed in their academic responsibilities. Get a copy of the school calendar here: <http://calendar.gfps.k12.mt.us/> OR...

- ✦ Consider rewarding student employees for getting good grades or excellent attendance.
- ✦ Contribute to a fund to help students with graduation expenses such as announcements or a cap and gown.
- ✦ Send notes or messages of encouragement to your student employees regarding their performance in school.

BE A GREAT BOSS: Talk to your student employees about the value of education. Ask about their progress at school. OR...

- ✦ Encourage your students to attend school regularly and graduate on time.
- ✦ Invest time to mentor or assign a mentor to your student employees and help keep them on track to graduate.

AS A BUSINESS MEMBER IN OUR COMMUNITY WE PLEDGE TO...

TAKE TIME: Help a high school student create a resume and practice interview skills. Invite students to job shadow you or your employees. Call the School-to Work Coordinator at 268-6606. OR...

- ✦ Take part in a school job fair. Interested? Call Pathway Advisors at 268-6338.

CONNECT: Collaborate with teachers and career counselors to create real-world learning opportunities. Contact Great Falls Public Schools Career and Technical Education Facilitator at 268-6024 for more information. OR...

- ✦ Let a teacher job shadow you to help shape the curriculum and help teachers stay current in their field.
- ✦ Allow a class to tour your business and spark students to learn about your industry.
- ✦ Team up with 5 other small businesses in your neighborhood to provide similar opportunities offered by larger corporations in our community.

LEND YOUR VOICE: Create a culture of pride in Great Falls schools. Allow employees time off to attend parent-teacher conferences or their child's Christmas program. OR...

- ✦ Display Graduation Matters posters in your workplace. Call United Way at 727-3400.
- ✦ Praise students' academic achievements on your reader board and acknowledge school activities and events in company emails or newsletters.

INVEST: Give student customers prizes or discounts for academic achievements, improvements or good attendance. OR...

- ✦ Buy a musical instrument, technical equipment or sports gear to encourage extra-curricular activities among those that may not be able to afford it.
- ✦ Create scholarships for student employees, employees' children or students who overcame struggles.

Take the Pledge

A commitment for all employers in our community.

_____ pledges our commitment to support all students, including those we employ and the parents of students in our community. We advocate for education and champion high school graduation.

Signature

Business Email

Printed Name

Date

Business Partner Resource Questionnaire

The following Business Partner Resources Questionnaire is adapted from the GMM Business toolkit. It can help any business that is interested in partnering with a local Graduation Matters Montana initiative. This Business Partner Resource Questionnaire is designed to help generate ideas of what expertise businesses can offer and what types of partnering would be a good fit for their business.

- What kind of training or expertise do our employees have that could be shared with the school?

Computers	Creative writing
Crafts and hobbies	Construction
Athletic coaching	Engineering
Safety, Health issues	Mentoring
Public speaking	Internships
Graphic Arts, Printing	Job preparation
Photography	Business site visits

- Are we willing to provide release time from work for employees to take part in school activities?
- What resources are available for providing incentive awards?
- What resources are available for providing career awareness programs?
- Are we interested in working on or co-sponsoring community service projects?
- Would we sponsor a student club or athletic team?
- Do we have employees who are willing to make presentations to students about their profession?
- Are we able to teach mini-courses?
- Would we be willing to develop a recognition program for outstanding students or staff members?
- What can the school do to assist us? What are our needs?

Start your own GMM Team Partner Agreement

TO: State Superintendent Denise Juneau, Graduation Matters Montana (GMM)
Fax: (406)444-2893

FROM:

DATE:

RE: Becoming a Graduation Matters Montana Partner

Graduation Matters Montana is a statewide effort to ensure Montana's public schools graduate more students prepared for college and careers. Each year, more than 1,800 Montana students drop out of high school. Working together, we can do better.

The three objectives of Graduation Matters Montana are:

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.*

We appreciate your interest in becoming a partner in Graduation Matters Montana and look forward to working with you on behalf of Montana's children. Please complete this document and return it to the OPI at the fax number indicated above.

Graduation Matters Montana Partnership Commitment

_____ (organization name) shares the belief that if schools, communities, businesses and families work together, we can increase the number of Montana students who graduate prepared for college and careers.

We believe this will be accomplished by working across sectors at the local level, by developing and implementing research-based strategies and by sharing what works with other communities in the state.

Our programs and services can have an impact on the following Graduation Matters indicators and/or the ultimate goals of increased high school graduation and post-secondary education (select all that apply):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preschool enrollment | <input type="checkbox"/> Fourth grade reading scores |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eighth grade math and science scores | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth service participation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Out-of-school time participation | <input type="checkbox"/> Successful promotion from 9th grade |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adoption of Common Core Standards for college and career readiness | <input type="checkbox"/> High school graduation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring middle school & high school students | <input type="checkbox"/> Min. two years post-secondary education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Career and Technical Student Organization Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Career exploration & preparation |

_ Our programs and services can have an impact on Graduation Matters Montana in other ways (please describe below):

Each partner brings unique assets to the work of GMM; all partners agree to:

- Promote and support Graduation Matters Montana and the I Pledge to Graduate initiative
- Identify a single staff member to serve as the main point of contact
- Publicize GMM initiatives and opportunities to network
- Activate networks as appropriate on relevant issues

Each partner benefits from GMM in various ways; all partners are:

- Invited to periodic partner networking meetings, webinars and technical assistance calls;
- Recipients of monthly partner updates and periodic interest-area alerts;
- Connected with a member of the GMM staff, who will serve as the organization’s primary point of contact at the OPI; and
- Listed on graduationmatters.mt.gov and in GMM-related reports.

We’d like to join Graduation Matters Montana as a partner and pledge to work with other partners to achieve these shared goals.

CEO/President/Executive Director (signature) _____ Date _____

Director Name and Title (please print) _____

CEO/President/Executive Director E-mail _____

The Graduation Matters Montana Partnership Commitment and the GMM goals have been presented to and approved by our Board of Directors (optional, please initial). _____

The following person will serve as our primary point of contact with GMM:

Point of Contact Name and Title (please print) _____

Point of Contact Phone Number Point of Contact E-mail Address _____

Mailing Address 1 _____

Mailing Address 2 _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Web Address: _____

**Ronan School District #30
Ronan/Pablo Schools**

**Home School Coordinator/Graduation Coach
(Grades 9 - 12)**

Job Goals:

To identify and resolve problems which might arise from conflicts, student concerns and/or family dynamics; to support students in learning social and academic skills that will contribute to the fulfillment of their potential for academic and emotional growth.

Qualifications:

- An elementary or secondary school teacher's certificate valid in the state of Montana; or
- A bachelor's degree in the field of sociology, social work, or psychology, or an emphasis in each of these areas, regardless of major; at least 15 semester hours of college credit from an accredited institution in related fields in education.
- Possess a current, valid Montana Driver's license;
- Possess a clean, safe-operating, insured vehicle used in your employment with the district.

Performance Responsibilities:

- Presents a positive image of the school to the parents, and conveys to them the school's genuine concern with the education, growth and development of each child.
- Acts on referrals from principals, counselors and teachers.
- Is in communication with the principal.
- Works within the school system and abides by the rules and policies as established by the board of trustees.
- Provides direct services to at-risk students from grades pre - 12.
- Facilitates parental involvement for the purpose of supporting the home - school relationship.
 - Keeps and maintains a daily log of activities for his/her supervisor.
 - May be required to fill in as substitute teacher as determined by supervisor.
 - Teach and promote social skills as needed.
- Work with outside agencies such as Department of Human Resource Development (DHRD), Youth Court, and Department of Family Services (DFS).
- Assists principal with reporting requirements and data collection.
- Perform other duties as assigned.

Reports to: Building Principal

Supervises: Students

Authority: Students; makes judgments regarding student safety, documents and reports, in writing, to proper authorities any suspicions of child abuse or neglect; makes recommendations to teachers regarding

Appendix B: Know Your Data

Below, we have provided tools that the OPI finds particularly useful:

Montana K-12 Data:

Graduation Matters Montana's new data warehouse is called Growth and Enhancement of Montana Students (GEMS). This website allows easy access to education data for members of the public and allows users to create reports and comparisons. To access GEMS and collect information about your community, go to: <http://gems.opi.mt.gov>.

Montana College-Going Trends:

As GMM continues to work to increase graduation rates, it also attempts to build successful high school to college and career transitions. To access GEMS and collect information about your community, go to: <http://gems.opi.mt.gov>.

College Financial Aid Data:

Student-level FAFSA completion information is available to school district personnel. For more information, contact Brett Carter at bcarter2@mt.gov or 406-444-2080.

Appendix C: Implement Specific Research-Based Strategies

Below we've provided online resources for ways to initiate service learning, alternative, experiential and career and technical education options in your community.

21st Century Learning in Montana

Montana Digital Academy (MTDA) (<http://montanadigitalacademy.org/>)

The Montana Digital Academy provides unique educational opportunities to Montana students and schools. The MTDA offers basic core classes that students may need to make up, challenging Advanced Placement classes and elective courses that may not be available in local schools. The MTDA allows students to learn whenever they want and at their own pace, enabling more students to graduate on time.

Montana Common Core Standards (<http://opi.mt.gov/Curriculum/MontCAS/GetReady.php>)

On November 4, 2011, Montana adopted new, higher standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Montana educators joined together to examine the Common Core State Standards. They determined the standards emphasized what students should know and be able to accomplish at every grade level and prepared students to be college and career ready upon graduation from high school.

Career Exploration

Big Sky Pathways (http://opi.mt.gov/programs/CTAE/CTE.html#gpm1_1)

Montana has over 500 approved Career and Technical Education programs and over 800 certified teachers in Agriculture, Business, Marketing, Family and Consumer Sciences, Industrial Technology, and Health Sciences. For ideas and resources, contact T.J. Eyer, Career and Technical Education Director at the OPI: (406) 444-7915, teyer@mt.gov.

Career and Technical Education (<http://opi.mt.gov/programs/CTAE/CTE.html>)

These courses provide students with life and employment skills to make them highly desirable employees in today's modern workforce. Skills learned in K-12 Career and Technical Education courses prepare students to go directly into the workforce or to continue their education with a much higher degree of focus and direction for their career goals.

Jobs for Montana's Graduates (JMG) (<http://wsd.dli.mt.gov/jmg/jmg.asp>)

JMG is a school-to-career program positively affecting over 11,000 Montana students. JMG's mission is to keep young people in school through graduation and provide work-based learning experiences that will lead to career advancement opportunities. Ninety-five percent of students who participate in Jobs for Montana's Graduates programs graduate from high school.

Montana Career Information System (MCIS)

(<https://mtcis.intocareers.org/materials/portal/home.html>)

MCIS works in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Employment & Training Administration to develop labor market information about Montana and the United States that businesses, educators, government agencies, researchers, students and others find useful. They provide career development tools and information for everyone from elementary school students to Montana seniors.

Supporting Students with Disabilities

Montana Office of Public Instruction (<http://opi.mt.gov/Programs/SpecialEd/Index.html>) The Division of Special Education has the responsibility to assure that children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Division staff provide training, technical assistance and monitor special

education services provided by public schools and state-operated programs. The Division is also responsible for managing the flow of state and federal dollars for special education programs.

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) (<http://cast.org/>)

CAST is a nonprofit research and development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all students.

Parent's Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK) (<http://www.pluk.org/>)

Contact PLUK to advocate for students with disabilities and ensure that persons with disabilities are engaged in their communities, have access to high quality educational, medical and rehabilitation services.

Digital Stories

Montana students are fighting stigma and raising awareness on mental illness. Check out Mari's digital story at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2l-bt3L_aE and Kelsey's digital story, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl9eo6yHCl>.

National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) (<http://www.nami.org/>)

Visit NAMI's website for more information on mental illness and what you can do to support children with mental illnesses.

Supporting American Indian Students

Montana Office of Public Instruction (<http://opi.mt.gov/Programs/IndianEd/Index.html>) The Indian Education Division provides leadership, education, guidance and resources to school districts, students, parents and educational agencies and organizations in the state of Montana and serves two purposes. The first is to assure that American Indian students in Montana's public schools receive a quality education that provides culturally responsive instruction. The second purpose is to assure that all students leave the public education system with an understanding of the rich history and contemporary issues of Montana's Indians in fulfillment of the state's Constitution and the Indian Education for All law.

Essential Understandings

(<http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/indianed/resources/essentialunderstandings.pdf>)

The Essential Understandings Regarding Montana's Indians is a great resource to find out more about Montana's Indians.

Montana Tribal Histories: Educators Resource Guide

(<http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/Resources/11TribalHistoriesRG.pdf>)

The Montana Tribal Histories: Educators Resource Guide provides brief Montana Tribal Histories Narratives, beginning with traditional life and aboriginal homelands. Chronologically following federal policy periods through their impact on tribes, it incorporates extensive endnotes. It is intended to provide a basic foundation of the historic storyline of tribes for core content guidance.

Supporting Students Living in Poverty

Montana Office of Public Instruction

Please contact Heather Denny, Title I Specialist and State Coordinator for Homeless Education and Neglected and Delinquent Education, at (406) 444-2036 to hdenny@mt.gov to discuss innovative approaches to better meeting the needs of students living in poverty.

Appendix D: Build Support and Keep the Community Informed and Involved

Volunteer Ideas for Families and Community Members at [YOUR TOWN]'s High School

You can volunteer your time at [YOUR TOWN] School District in a number of ways. Here are 21 ways you can volunteer right now:

1. Read to a classroom of students or one-on-one with a struggling reader
2. Mentor a student and help launch a mentoring project
3. Host a group of students for a visit to your company
4. Counsel a student on their high school or college application essays
5. Act as an interviewer for students practicing job or college entrance interviews
6. Help to kickstart a Family Friendly Walkthrough
7. Tutor a student who needs help in a class he or she is taking
8. Serve on a school committee to help raise money
9. Host a fundraising social event with your friends
10. Visit a classroom and speak about your career
11. Develop/Teach a workshop for students on a relevant topic - e.g., résumé writing, interview skills, presentations, dining/social etiquette
12. Speak to a teacher about what resources they might need in their classroom
13. Provide extra-curricular supplies for art projects or sports
14. Run a sports clinic
15. Start an internship opportunity at your business
16. Hire a high school student for a part-time job
17. Organize a tour or visit to your alma mater
18. Teach a skill you have to a student or students e.g., music, photography, art, etc.
19. Start a cleanup crew to help beautify playgrounds and common areas
20. Help a teacher with bulletin boards, re-shelving books, filing, or newsletter writing
21. Chaperone a dance or lend a hand on a class field trip or work project

Sample Press Conference Invitation to Community Leaders

Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN]

For further information
call [CONTACT PERSON] at
[PHONE NUMBER]

[DATE]

Dear Community Leader:

[YOUR TOWN] Public Schools is on the march to ensure academic achievement and high school graduation for all students. Our goal as a community must be academic success for all students and a 100 percent high school graduation rate from [YOUR TOWN'S] High School.

The [YOUR TOWN] School District has been working with prominent community leaders from local organizations to develop a lasting campaign to encourage students to stay in school through graduation. The organizations include service clubs, community nonprofit partners, and many businesses.

It is our hope that this process will instill the self confidence, intelligence, courage and desire for all students to complete high school and further pursue a variety of educational options after high school graduation. Through this collaborative effort we can ensure continued economic prosperity and a quality of life we all enjoy.

On [DATE AND TIME], we have scheduled a **press conference and rally** which will formally launch "Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN]." The conference will be held at the [LOCATION]. The event will begin at [TIME].

Based on your involvement in the community, I would personally like to invite you to this very important press conference. Your presence at this event will speak volumes about its importance and potential impact on our city, county and state. If we have time, you may be asked to say a few words about the importance of staying in school, working hard and graduating, but overall just your presence will have significant impact.

This is a big moment for all of us. I realize you are very busy, but I hope you will make time to be a part of this very important effort.

I look forward to your valued participation and involvement in this important program. Please call or e-mail if you have questions. An R.S.V.P. would be helpful to [PERSON] at [PHONE #], or [E-MAIL ADDRESS]

Respectfully,

[NAME]

Superintendent, [YOUR TOWN] Public Schools

Source: Borrowed from www.graduationmattersmissoula.org

Sample Media Advisory for Graduation Matters Launch

If Superintendent Juneau is joining your community for the launch, please work with OPI's Communications Director to coordinate media outreach: (406) 444-3160.

[Date]

Contact: [CONTACT PERSON], [PHONE NUMBER]

[YOUR TOWN] Joins Statewide Effort to Graduate Students

Ready for College and Careers

[YOUR TOWN] Public Schools is on the march to ensure academic achievement and high school graduation for all students. The [YOUR TOWN] School District has been working with prominent community leaders from local organizations to develop a lasting campaign to encourage students to stay in school through graduation. Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN] seeks to graduate students ready for college and careers through collaborative partnerships with community organizations, businesses, families and youth.

[INSERT QUOTATION FROM COMMUNITY LEADER, SCHOOL OFFICIAL, ETC. ABOUT Graduation Matters YOUR TOWN].

[YOUR TOWN] is joining a statewide effort, Graduation Matters Montana, launched by Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau to increase the number of students who graduate ready for college and careers.

In today's global economy, a quality education is the key to economic prosperity for our young people. More than 1,800 students drop out of Montana schools each year. The combined economic effects of students not graduating from high school are devastating not only to individuals but to Montana communities.

WHO: [YOUR TOWN] School District, [GUEST SPEAKERS/COMMUNITY LEADERS]

WHAT: Press conference to launch Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN]

WHEN: [Time]

WHERE: [Location]

###

Havre Letter to Editor

<http://www.havredailynews.com/news/story-586637.html>

Graduation Matters

Andy Carlson

Published: Friday, April 13th, 2012

As the end of the school year rapidly approaches students in the class of 2012 have already begun to make plans for graduation. Graduation is the culmination of a K-12 journey that is cause for celebration. On Sunday, May 27, at 4 p.m., family, friends and the community will gather inside the Havre High School gymnasium to commemorate this joyous occasion. Unfortunately there are students who started that journey that for varying reasons will not be present at the ceremony.

It is an unsettling truth, and we as a school district have spent much time and energy trying to come up with ideas to reduce the number of students that will not be receiving their diploma this spring. In March we were informed by the OPI that we were the recipients of a Graduation Matters grant to help us in our endeavor to reduce the number of dropouts in Havre Public Schools. Graduation Matters is a statewide effort to emphasize the importance of graduation and to encourage students across the state to stay in school.

One of the exciting aspects in Havre becoming a Graduation Matters district is that, as our students travel across the state they will see a recurring theme displayed in store windows, on billboards and various reader boards. Each participating school district may put their own brand of uniqueness into local efforts but the core of the message remains true.

Graduation matters. It matters for Spartans, Bruins, Tigers and it matters for Blue Ponies. Dropout prevention is an issue that affects the entire community. It is a cause that I hope our community will help us in finding solutions.

I want to recognize two individuals that have already agreed to help Havre Public Schools promote Graduation Matters in Havre: Debbie Vandenberg, executive director of the Havre Area Chamber of Commerce, and James Limbaugh, chancellor of Montana State University-Northern. These two individuals represent organizations that are directly impacted by the success of Havre Public Schools and its students. I was greatly encouraged by their willingness to lend their voices and to collaborate on ideas that promote Graduation Matters in Havre.

Partnerships with our local university and the Havre Area Chamber of Commerce are significant steps in creating a centralized effort in our community to encourage children to remain in school and to graduate. If you have an idea that you would like to share with one of us regarding Graduation Matters, I would encourage you to take a moment to do so.

One of the first things you can do is to go online and complete a survey created in partnership with the Havre Area Chamber of Commerce. It can be found by typing <http://www.formsite.com/hpsk12/form102/index.html?1334090850907> into your web browser.

Please join us in demonstrating to the children of our community that Graduation Matters in Havre.

(Andy Carlson is superintendent of Havre Public Schools.)

Hardin Middle School Writing Assignment, Teacher Laura Lowe

<p style="text-align: center;">What: Open Letter or Editorial</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Who: Next Year’s Freshmen (8th graders)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Where: Middle School Newsletter</p> <p>How can they prepare themselves for the way high school differs from middle school?</p> <p>What do you wish you had known as a freshman? What are the most important things you recommend they keep in mind to be more successful in high school and to make their time in high school more productive for their future?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">What: Persuasive Letter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Where: Good Friend or Cousin</p> <p>Give the reasons why dropping out of school to get a job without graduating is not a good idea in a letter designed to convince someone you know well.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">What: Open Letter to the Community</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Who: Parents, Employers, Neighbors & Friends</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Where: Big Horn County News</p> <p>How can other adults outside of the school better help to support high school students graduate, especially those who are having trouble staying in school? What kinds of assistance make a difference in the lives of teenagers who work? How can neighbors and friends of parents (and friends of other family members) help remind families how to avoid the pressures that make it difficult to succeed in school?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">What: Letter on How to Improve the School</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Who: Janine Pease and the HHS Staff</p> <p>What are the ways in which the adult staff at our high school—teachers, administrators, counselors—can organize education better to help encourage students to stay in school, graduate, and be more successful in preparing for life?</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">What: Brochure</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Who: For Distribution to Teenagers</p> <p>Must have a “Facts” page, a “What You Can Do” page, and a “Resources for Help” page with links to information which would help a student graduate who might otherwise consider dropping out. This can be a single fold “booklet” style or a two-fold (three-panel) style brochure.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">What: Poster</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Who: Students</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Where: Walls in the School Office</p> <p>Must have a slogan and persuasive information in a text box, as well as an eye-catching design. Should promote the message to “Stay in School” and suggest some actions and resources to help students who might be considering dropping out.</p>

No matter which option you choose, you must include at least three facts (or more!) about the consequences of dropping out—as well as a brief citation of the source where each piece of information is from.

Each of the assignment options will be scored based on the quality of the writing (and for the brochure and poster, the attractiveness and effectiveness of the design).

Acknowledgements

The *Graduation Matters Montana* and *I Pledge to Graduate* Toolkits are the result of the dedicated effort and effective collaboration of several individuals at the OPI. Under the vision and leadership of state Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau, the following people lent their time and energy in the research, writing, editing and design of these toolkits and their contributions are greatly appreciated:

Deborah Halliday

Community Learning Partnerships Policy Advisor

Emilie Saunders

Communications Director

Jennifer Bezanson

Program Assistant

Ellen Leidl

Graphic Designer

Additionally, several people were instrumental in reviewing the toolkit and providing helpful feedback:

Denise Juneau

Superintendent of Public Instruction

Office of Public Instruction

Dennis Parman

Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction

Office of Public Instruction

Steve York

Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services

Office of Public Instruction

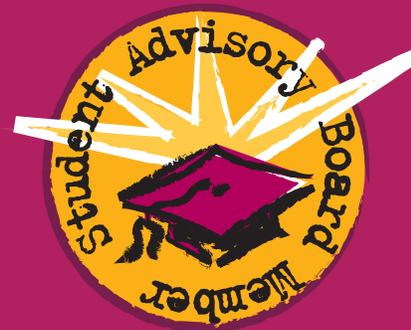
TJ Eyer

Operations Manager

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Superintendent Denise Juneau



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