

## State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board **Fall 2012**



The Student Advisory Board is part of Graduation Matters Montana, an initiative to increase the number of Montana students who graduate from high school through collaborative partnerships with schools, community organizations, businesses and youth.



**2012 2013**  
Superintendent Denise Juneau

“Students are counting on us to set high expectations for them, provide them with opportunities to explore their career interests, and open up doors to mentorship while they are in high school. As adults, we need to work together to break down the barriers our students face in achieving their dreams in order to create a brighter economic future for all Montanans.”

*Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Denise Juneau*



## Overview

State Superintendent Denise Juneau's 2012 – 2013 Student Advisory Board (SAB) convened its first summit on October 11-12, 2012 in Billings at the Yellowstone Art Museum. The theme of the Summit was “Ensuring Every Student Graduates,” and SAB members offered Superintendent Juneau advice on how schools can better support high school students to graduate prepared for college and careers.



The SAB is comprised of 36 high school students from 30 Montana schools. Members were nominated by local school staff and community members and completed an application process for selection to the Board. Board members, representing grades 10-12, traveled from rural communities such as Wibaux and Eureka and from larger communities like Great Falls and Missoula. The SAB reflects a broad range of student backgrounds and includes writers, athletes, class presidents, rural students, urban students, and students who have dropped out and then re-enrolled in school.

## SAB Priorities and Recommendations

SAB members decided on five priority areas that they think are important to ensuring that all students graduate. They also discussed two critical questions related to the following topics: (1) “What are the two most troublesome things about failing to graduate?” and (2) “What are two actions that will make the most difference in improving graduation rates?”

### 1. Teacher Compassion

*Critical Issues:* SAB members emphasized how important teachers are in creating a safe, equitable learning environment. Members described the challenge that teachers face in being compassionate, while not attempting to be a student's best friend. Furthermore, members stressed the need for equality in the classroom and less student favoritism, and the importance of creating a classroom environment where students are both respectful and collaborative.

*Creative Solutions:* SAB members recommended that teachers receive trainings led by students in order to better understand students' perspectives, that teachers be provided a reference guide of best practices for how to engage students, and that teachers keep in mind Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - that creating a safe environment and respectful relationships must be in place before real learning can occur.

## Research

- According to the *Journal of School Health*, studies show that students with caring and supportive interpersonal relationships in school report more positive academic attitudes and values, in addition to greater satisfaction with school. <sup>1</sup>



## 2. Student Input

*Critical Issues:* SAB members described school as being too rule-bound, offering too few choices and opportunities for student input.

*Creative Solutions:* SAB members recommended that school student handbooks include informal agreements developed by students and teachers through a consensual process. Items to be addressed could include: general guidelines for respectful behavior between students and teachers; I Pledge to Graduate activities; and “I Promise” activities, which would be pledges students make to themselves regarding life decisions that could then be reinforced by school staff.

## Research

- The Association for Middle Level Education found that young students can, and should, be involved in classroom curriculum planning, as they have good ideas that can enhance teacher-learning situations. Youth should have opportunities for involvement in team governance, which emphasizes student initiative and responsibility. Because of adolescents’ drive toward independence, curriculum that is challenging must enable students to increasingly guide the course of their education. <sup>2</sup>

## 3. Bullying Prevention

*Critical Issues:* As was the case in previous SAB Summits, the issue of bullying in schools was a major concern. SAB members described school as having, at times, an unsafe environment, with students arriving to school in fear of being bullied. Members recounted how isolating the impacts of bullying can be, how it prevents students from focusing on academics, and how bullying can be a distraction for everyone.

*Creative Solutions:* SAB members suggested that schools provide workshops for students to develop a greater understanding and tolerance of differences, that schools provide similar workshops for school staff, and that there are stricter and more consistent consequences when bullying does occur.



## Research

- According to the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, research examining the characteristics of youth involved in bullying has consistently found that both bullies and those who are bullied demonstrate poorer psychosocial functioning than their non-involved peers. Moreover, the research showed that both bullies and bullying victims have poorer academic achievement. <sup>3</sup>
- The Bully Free Montana Toolkit provides several ways to prevent bullying in schools:
  - Form a bullying prevention team, or give an existing team responsibility for coordinating the school’s bullying prevention efforts. Make sure the team includes administrators, teachers, school staff, students and community members.
  - Conduct a survey to analyze the current level of reported bullying behavior at the school.
  - Start bullying prevention and intervention education early. Begin teaching students in kindergarten or elementary school; don’t wait until middle school.
  - Train school personnel and students to appropriately respond to bullying. <sup>4</sup>

## 4. Dropout Prevention in Early Grades

*Critical Issues:* SAB members emphasized that younger students need to be aware of the importance of high school graduation and that teachers in early grades need to focus more on the goal of graduation. SAB members said there needs to be more of a sense of continuity from grade to grade, with students building on a foundation of learning and experience that clearly points to high school graduation.

*Creative Solutions:* SAB members recommended offering more mentoring opportunities between older students and younger students, having I Pledge to Graduate events in earlier grades - and repeating the pledge throughout students' years in school - and having students write themselves a letter in an earlier grade about why they want to graduate, which they would then read in later grades.



### Research

- The American Psychological Association has found that early childhood lays the foundation upon which to build future academic success. Ninety percent of brain development is estimated to occur before age five, providing a critical window for optimal brain development.
- The APA's research states that recipients of high-quality early childhood education (i.e., consisting of a holistic, nurturing, consistent, and stimulating curriculum) exhibit lower rates of grade retention, higher levels of academic achievement, fewer special education services, and a stronger commitment to graduate from high school.
- The National Dropout Prevention Center found that early literacy development is vital to later academic success. Children with poor reading skills are more likely to repeat a grade, setting the stage for a pattern of failure in school. Fundamental reading skills are learned before children reach school age.<sup>5</sup>

## 5. School Rigidity

*Critical Issues:* SAB members described school as often being too rigid, with too many long lectures and big homework assignments. Members also believed that they are required to take classes that are not relevant to their lives and that there are few courses that prepare them for college and career interests.

*Creative Solutions:* SAB members recommended that schools should provide more class options and more interactive lessons, develop strategies for creating a more engaging and inviting classroom environment, and place less emphasis on homework.

### Research

- The *Journal of School Health*, published by the American School Health Association, states that young people need to know what adults expect regarding conduct, that consistent and predictable consequences result from not meeting those expectations, and that expectations are fair.<sup>1</sup>
- Research from *Listening to Student Voices* states that for many students, freedom in school is very important to them, as is having some "control". Students feel successful when they are able to direct their education, in addition to having a say in how the school is managed.<sup>6</sup>

## I Pledge to Graduate

The 2010–2011 SAB helped OPI develop the “I Pledge to Graduate” initiative, in which a student pledges to graduate, identifies a personal reason for his or her pledge, and has a trusted adult sign the pledge. The OPI launched the “I Pledge to Graduate” initiative in fall 2011, and since then, 6,443 Montana students have taken the pledge.



### Students Pledge at the Summit

- All SAB members signed an “I Pledge to Graduate” card and received a Graduation Matters Montana wristband from Superintendent Juneau.
- SAB members are distributing “I Pledge to Graduate” cards to students in their schools and encouraging students to pledge online at:  
<http://graduationmatters.mt.gov/>.



*Superintendent Juneau and SAB members will reconvene for the spring summit on April 29 and April 30, 2013 in Helena, Montana.*

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> “Relationships Matter: Linking Teacher Support to Student Engagement and Achievement”. – Klem, Adena M., Connell, James P. Journal of School Health, American School Health Association, 2009. Web. 9 Oct. 2009.  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1746-1561.2004.tb08283.x/abstract>
- <sup>2</sup> “How Might Middle School Students Be Involved in Classroom Curriculum Planning?” -Association for Middle Level Education, <http://www.amle.org/publications/webexclusive/planning/tabid/652/default.aspx>
- <sup>3</sup> “Bullying Behaviors Among US Youth, Prevalence and Association with Psychosocial Adjustment”-The Journal of the American Medical Association. US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Web, 21 June, 2008.
- <sup>4</sup> Bully free Montana Toolkit- Graduation Matters Montana Toolkit| Web. 2012.
- <sup>5</sup> “Facing the School Dropout Dilemma” – American Psychological Association, Web, 2013,  
<http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/school-dropout-prevention.aspx>.
- <sup>6</sup> “Listening to Student Voices”- Education Evolving, Web. 2013. <http://www.educationevolving.org/studentvoices>.

# State Superintendent's Student Advisory Board Members 2011-2012

## Returning Members:

Larry Bratke	Bozeman High School
Meg Maclean	Hamilton High School
Michael Devlin	Polson High School
Natalie McAlpine	Valier High School
Reed Lone Fight	Bozeman High School
Ryan Vicek	Alberton High School
Simon Doney	Fergus High School
Walt Zeimer	Wibaux County High School

## New Members:

Alex Linse	Laurel High School
Anna Deleray	Glacier High School
Brittany Brown	Big Sky High School
Caleb Fickas	Noxon High School
Charity Ratliff	Hardin High School
Chloe Autio	Hellgate High School
Cory Buckley	Paris Gibson Education Center
Dakota Running Crane	Browning High School
Eric Wakeland	Project for Alternative Learning
Josiah Anderson	Hobson High School
Justin Anninos- Rippy	Great Falls High School
Kathryn Stein	Lincoln County High School
Khyree Harper	Laurel High School
Kylie Lutes	Park High School
Layne Johnson	Froid High School
LoRae Hartman	Hobson High School
Marcus Richards	Victor High School
Mikealla Newton	Troy High School
Morgan Obert-Cain	Broadwater High School
Sharidan Russell	Polson High School
Shelbi Fitzpatrick	Cut Bank High School
Sophia Echeverio	Stevensville High School
Stacia Hill	Big Sky High School
Tayler Korb	CM Russell High School
Tucker Shea	Lone Peak High School
Xander Heyneman	Absarokee High School

