

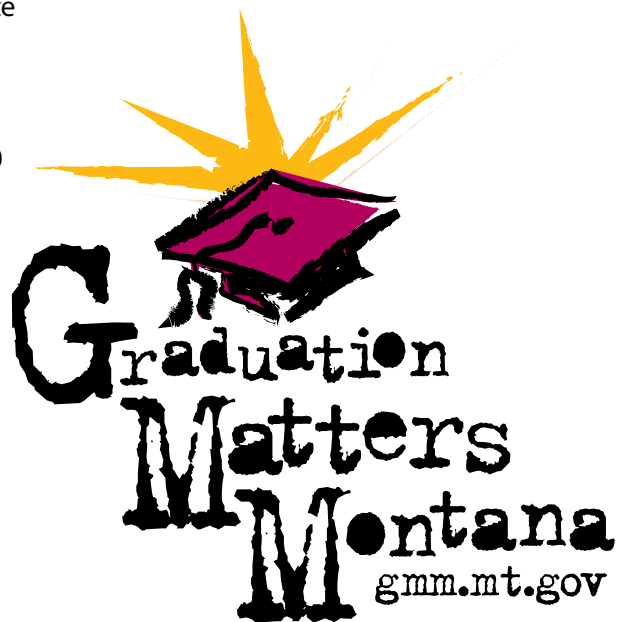
# Starting a Graduation Matters Montana Initiative in Your Town


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 2,000 Montana students drop out of school each year – an average of five every day.

***We can do better.***

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





**G**raduation  
**M**atters  
**M**ontana  
gmm.mt.gov

**Toolkit**

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## Letter from Superintendent Denise Juneau

I can imagine a day when every child in Montana graduates from high school. It's not that far off. Every year, approximately 2,000 students drop out of high school in Montana – that's about five every day. We can do better.

I believe in confronting our challenges. In response to our dropout challenge, I launched Graduation Matters Montana, a multi-pronged, statewide effort to ensure Montana's public schools are meeting the goal of graduating students ready for college and careers. Since starting the program in spring 2010, 26 communities have joined Graduation Matters. Sixty-five percent of high school students currently attend Graduation Matters schools, and more than 3,700 students have pledged to graduate through community events and our online system. Our high school dropout rate has also declined from 5.1 percent in 2009 to 4.3 percent in 2011. This is all great news and a credit to communities and schools working together at the local level.

In March 2012, the Office of Public Instruction received a grant from the Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation for \$450,000 so more communities can work to lower their dropout rates over the next three years. Communities that applied for the Graduation Matters Challenge Fund received up to \$10,000 to implement successful dropout prevention strategies.

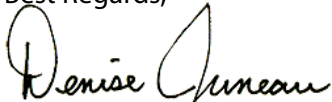
In today's economy, a quality public education is the key to economic prosperity for our young people. As parents, taxpayers, business owners and educators, we cannot ignore the long-term economic consequences of students not graduating from high school. As Montanans, we need to work together so that more students graduate from high school.

I am committed to working with educators, parents, communities and businesses to help meet this goal.

The Graduation Matters in Your Town toolkit is designed to help you increase the graduation rate in your community. The toolkit provides helpful tips, links to resources, staff you can contact for assistance and research-based best practices and effective strategies for reducing the dropout rate.

I hope you will start a Graduation Matters task force in your community. Please let us know about your efforts, and we will publicize your work as part of the statewide initiative. Should you need assistance planning your initiative, please don't hesitate to contact my staff at [graduationmatters@mt.gov](mailto:graduationmatters@mt.gov).

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](http://www.all4ed.org)*



**Graduation Matters  
Across Montana!**

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***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.***

## What is Graduation Matters Montana?

### 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.

Twenty-six communities have joined Graduation Matters, including all AA schools, smaller, more rural schools, and schools on or near our state's Indian Reservations. Sixty five percent of high school students attend Graduation Matters schools, and nearly 4,000 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. The twenty two communities that received the challenge fund have set high goals, and if these communities are successful in reaching their goals, Graduation Matters will be able to cut the statewide dropout rate in half by 2014.

### Student-Centered Policies

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

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

### Policy Changes

Superintendent Juneau proposed covering the cost of the **ACT for every high school junior** in the Office of Public Instruction's budget at the 2011 Legislature. Funding to cover the cost of the ACT for every junior has been secured through a seven-year grant under the Commissioner of Higher Education's GEAR UP program.



### 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.



This partnership between OPI and OCHE will provide a complete picture of how well our K-12 public education system is preparing all students for life after high school and provide every Montana junior the opportunity to assess their college-readiness.

Superintendent Juneau recommended adoption of the **Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Math** to the Board of Public Education (BPE), and the BPE adopted these standards in November of 2011. The Montana Common Core Standards are higher and clearer than current state standards and will prepare our students for college and to compete in today's global economy. She also convened a task force to review Montana's **accreditation** standards to make them more performance-based and to provide school districts needed flexibility to focus on results.

During the 2011 Legislative Session, Superintendent Juneau championed bills to raise the **legal drop out age** from "age 16" to "age 18 or upon graduation" and to establish common definitions and procedures for **anti-bullying policies** for all school districts. Superintendent Juneau will continue to support legislation and administrative policies that set high expectations for students and create safe school climates.

### 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 and more than 4,000 students took 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](mailto:graduationmatters@mt.gov) or call 406-444-5643.



## Montana's Graduation and Dropout Rates Three-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 2014. 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 65% 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%	81.9%
2009-2010	2,010	4.3%	80.2%	82.1%
2010-2011	1,975	4.3%	82.2%*	82.1%

### 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**

**Approximately 2,000 students in Montana did not graduate in 2011.**

### **What is at stake?<sup>1</sup>**

- 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 have an unemployment rate that is twice as high as someone who has a high school diploma.
- A high school degree is worth about \$569,000 more than being a dropout.<sup>2</sup>

### **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.<sup>3</sup>
- The lost lifetime earnings in Montana from dropouts in 2011 alone total nearly \$312 million.<sup>4</sup>
- Current economic projections show that 62% of all jobs in Montana will require some postsecondary training beyond high school in 2018<sup>5</sup>
- Montana would save more than \$29.8 million in health care costs over the lifetime of each class of dropouts.<sup>6</sup>
- 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.<sup>7</sup>
- The average high school dropout is earning \$6,684 less per year than they would if they graduated. The total cost to Montana's economy that results from reduced taxable earnings amounts to \$216 million annually.<sup>8</sup>
- 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.<sup>9</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup>The Alliance for Excellent Education, <http://www.all4ed.org> via America's Promise Grad Nation Toolkit

<sup>2</sup>The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (2010). *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018*.

<sup>3</sup>Montana Department of Corrections 2009 Biennial Report <sup>4</sup>The Alliance for Excellent Education, <http://www.all4ed.org>

<sup>5</sup>The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (2010). <sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Springer, D. A. (2010). *Montana's High School Dropouts: Examining the Fiscal Consequences*. Indianapolis: The Foundation for Educational Choice.

<sup>8</sup>The Alliance for Excellent Education, <http://www.all4ed.org>

# 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, how you compare statewide and nationally, and college-going and remediation rates.
- 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.
- Implement new strategies in your community that work to lower the dropout rate and increase college and-career-readiness.
- Identify what your community is already doing and prioritize next steps using the comprehensive community solutions table to take an inventory of "what is."

## 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.
- 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.

### 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 and 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](http://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.

### 4 GET INVOLVED IN THEIR EDUCATION

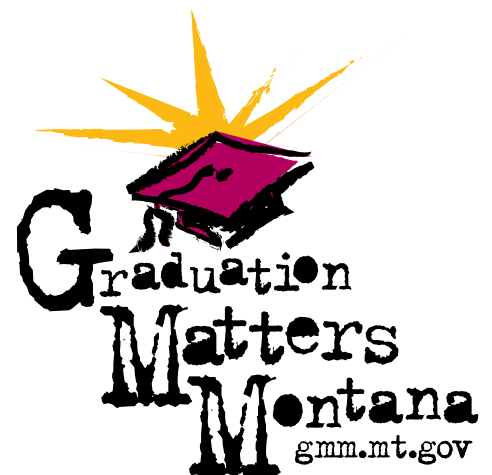
- Ask them about their homework and talk to their teachers.
- Volunteer in their classroom or school.
- Start or join a parent-teacher organization (e.g. PTA).
- Attend their school events and get to know their teachers, coaches, mentors and friends.

### 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](http://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 to identify students at-risk of dropping out and create a strategy for re-engaging them.
- 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](http://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.
- Encourage your Chamber of Commerce to take an active role in supporting K-12 education.
- Display Graduation Matters Montana materials in your workplace.

## 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 GED.
- 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

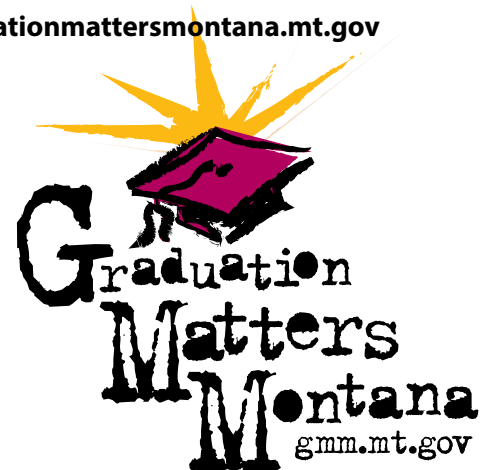
- Offer internships, externships or job shadowing.
- Collaborate with teachers and career counselors to create service-learning and other real world learning opportunities.
- Participate in a career fair or host an industry field trip.

## 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](http://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 examples of team members and 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) \_\_\_\_\_

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

Local Service Organization(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 are convening Graduation Matters Great Falls and Graduation Matters Greater Gallatin. They are also at the leadership table in 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 their local community college, 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.

## Who to Invite:

*See list on page 10 for initial participants to invite, then consider:*

- Businesses that employ young people
- Government officials, including the juvenile justice and youth court
- Health and human services, including doctors and psychologists

The OPI has recruited the following state-wide GMM partners:

- State Farm Insurance
- Optimum Cable
- Local Montana United Way Chapters
- Student Assistance Foundation
- Montana Parent Teacher Association
- First Interstate Bank
- Montana Federal Credit Union Network

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

## Convening the Team

*See the appendix 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 (see Step 2 for more data collection information); (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, which should include: designating 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.

## STEP 2: Know your Data

The OPI has been making improvements to its processes for tracking student achievement and graduation and dropout rates since 2007. These improvements include the implementation of a student information system, **Achievement in Montana (AIM)**, which collects enrollment, demographic and program participation information at the individual student level.

In spring 2012, the OPI introduced a new data warehouse, **Growth and Enhancement of Montana Students (GEMS)**. This new website allows unprecedented 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>.

### For inquiries and technical support, please contact the GEMS Help Desk:

Phone: (406) 444-5222

E-mail: [opigemshelpdesk@mt.gov](mailto:opigemshelpdesk@mt.gov)

Next, fill in the following table. Be prepared to share this 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.

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

	2009		2010		2011	
School	Drop Out Count	Drop Out Rate	Drop Out Count	Drop Out Rate	Drop Out Count	Drop Out Rate
Montana	2,423	5.1%	2,010	4.3%	1,975	4.3%

If your Graduation Matters Montana Team hasn't already done so, comparing school, district, state and national graduation rates over time can provide a sense of the overall trend of graduation rates in your town. The following NCLB Report Card <http://www.opi.mt.gov/Reports&Data/nclb-reports.php> can be helpful for collecting this information.

### How We Compare

Graduation Rates	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Our School					
Our District					
Montana <sup>9</sup>	82%	82.6%	80.7%	80.2%	82.2%
United States <sup>10</sup>	73.9%	74.9%	75.5%	*	*

\* Data not yet available

<sup>9</sup>NCLB Report Card: <http://www.opi.mt.gov/Reports&Data/nclb-reports.php> and "Trend Data for Graduation and Dropout Rates" [http://www.opi.mt.gov/PDF/Measurement/11\\_3YR-Trend-Data-Graduation-Rates.pdf](http://www.opi.mt.gov/PDF/Measurement/11_3YR-Trend-Data-Graduation-Rates.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2008, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2011012>, published Feb. 2011



As GMM continues to work to increase graduation rates, it is also a goal to build successful high school to college and career transitions. School districts can obtain their college-going and readiness rates by visiting the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE) website: <http://mus.edu/data/dataindex.asp>.

### Our School’s College-Going and Remediation Rates

Estimated Rates	2007	2008	2009	2010
Our School				
Our District				
MT College-Going <sup>11</sup>	54.3%	51.8%	60.9%	59%
MT Remediation <sup>11</sup>	33%	29.3%	29.4%	29.7%

Contact Andy Boehm, Dropout Data Information Coordinator, at the OPI for further information related to your district-specific data: (406) 444-0375, [aboehm@mt.gov](mailto:aboehm@mt.gov).

**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?
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?

<sup>11</sup>Montana University Developmental Education, Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, updated Nov. 9.

(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:

#### [My Voice™ Aspirations Survey](#)

The My Voice™ Aspirations Survey analyzes the perceptions of young people in grades 6 through 12 to provide educators with detailed student data that can be used to improve teaching and learning. Montana schools who participated in this program in the fall of 2011 and February of 2012 have been provided with school-level data. There is no cost for students to participate. For further information about how to use the My Voice™ Aspirations Survey, contact Steve York at the OPI: (406) 444-4434, [syork@mt.gov](mailto: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](mailto:scourt@mt.gov).

#### [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.<sup>12</sup> 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://www.dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/wmh/documents/teenpregnancyratesinmontanabycounty.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Unpublished tabulations by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. Data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002/2004, The National Center for Education Statistics: Washington, DC. Retrieved July 2010, from <http://nces.ed.gov/edat/>.

## Graduation Matters Havre Community Survey

In partnership with the Havre Area Chamber of Commerce, the Graduation Matters Havre team created and distributed an online survey for community members to share their experiences with the Havre Public School system and with Havre High School graduates. This input from the community was central to Graduation Matters Havre's planning and furthered their commitment to building relationships with local businesses and community members.

*Please see Appendix D for the survey*

### STEP 3: Implement Specific Research-Based Strategies

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.<sup>13</sup>

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 learning 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.

**Begin to formalize priorities for your GMM plan.** 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.

### Graduation Matters Hardin Student Survey

Once the GMM team looks at the numbers, oftentimes they 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 was given to thirty students who had dropped out, and eighteen of those students completed the survey and gave the team critical insight into their plan.

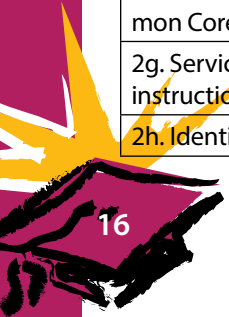


## Comprehensive Community Solutions – Take Inventory of “What Is”

This tool will help your GMM team better understand practices and plan for their GMM work. The inventory provides an opportunity for your community and local businesses to see current school efforts, to identify opportunities to build on effective practices, and/or help to establish new efforts. 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
<b>1. School policies do not unintentionally “encourage” students to drop out</b>				
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. Identify other policies to share				
<b>2. The school offers a college and career-ready curriculum</b>				
2a. All high school students have taken the Montana Career Information Systems survey or similar tool to identify career interests				
2b. The school provides college-level, dual enrollment and Advanced Placement courses to all students				
2c. The school has transitional support systems to help students cross successfully into college and careers				
2d. Students are able to receive credit for internships, job shadowing and other career experiences				
2e. Local businesses regularly work with the school on career-oriented curriculum, including participating in Big Sky Pathways and on-site job opportunities for students				
2f. The school is incorporating the Montana Common Core standards and STEM into its curricula				
2g. Service-learning and other hands-on instruction is incorporated into curricula				
2h. Identify other initiatives/policies to share				



<b>SOCIAL Integration</b>	<b>In Place</b>	<b>Not in Place</b>	<b>In Place &amp; Needs Work</b>	<b>Community Partnership Opportunity</b>
<b>3. The school has a multi-tiered dropout prevention, intervention, and recovery system</b>				
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				
<b>4. The school employs effective student support systems</b>				
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. The school has adequate staff- and teacher-to-student ratios to address the needs of the most struggling students				
4g. The school supports student involvement in Career and Technical Student Organizations				
4h. Identify other supports to share				

There are several specific 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.

### **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. During the first year of their initiative, in many cases, students were found to have moved to another district or another state entirely. Prior to the launch of this initiative, they would merely have been counted as a dropout. Through this approach and others also described in this toolkit, Missoula County Public Schools saw a 47 percent decrease in their dropout rate in one year alone.

## 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 their GED 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. Graduation Matters Billings focused their first year's work on reviewing School District 2 policies and looking at what aids and hinders graduation. As the Billings team moves forward, they are organizing listening groups to meet with at-risk students to learn what issues they face, how they view graduation and what help they think they need. The work will help Graduation Matters Billings create its strategic plan for improving graduation rates.

## 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

Lastly, students need positive support and recognition for choosing to stay in school and graduate. One way a community may engage and celebrate youth who make this commitment is by launching an *I Pledge to Graduate* event (see Appendix E for the *I Pledge to Graduate Toolkit*).

## Build Personal Connections with Students At Risk of Dropping Out

Consider establishing an On-Track to Graduate Teacher Team in your middle or high school(s) as a way to build important relationships with students at risk of dropping out. Through this strategy, teachers and administrators identify students who are at risk of dropping out using indicators such as poor attendance, behavior and course performance. The committee members either "adopt" the students by making a concerted effort to engage with, account for and encourage those students

## Year 1: I Pledge to Graduate

- In January, Year 1, Graduation Matters Belgrade hosted an *I Pledge to Graduate* Event with 451 high school students pledging to graduate through class-wide assemblies as well as having students sign their *I Pledge to Graduate* contracts in their homerooms.
- Graduation Matters Great Falls launched their *I Pledge to Graduate* campaign at both high schools, resulting in over 1,300 signed pledge cards.
- Paris Gibson Middle School had their students take the *Pledge to Graduate* alongside their parents and families in a community event that focused on creating a dedicated support system to ensure each student's success. All 60 students took the pledge, identified their reason for succeeding and asked those closest to them to witness and support their efforts.
- 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.

one-on-one, or they identify adults within the school who have already established a connection to the students. Graduation Matters Hamilton has partnered with the MSU Extension Office to help find mentors from the community.

### **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. Using all of this information, a model is created that can determine when a student is at risk for dropping out. The Early Warning System model is then utilized at any time during the school year to determine students that may need additional monitoring or intervention. An Early Warning System also indicates why the student is at risk for dropping out and provides guidance for the type of intervention needed for that particular student. In the Fall of 2012, eight school districts in Montana will participate in the pilot program of the OPI's new Early Warning System. By 2013, all schools will have the opportunity to utilize the system to determine the best interventions for their students.

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

In Montana, students who take at least three Career and Technical Education classes (CTE) 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. Graduation Matters Hamilton hosts a career fair for their 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students where adults from the community present their careers to the students. Professions represented included: law enforcement, the arts, veterinarian, dentistry, nursing, a pilot and many more. Please see Appendix D for Online Resources for Ways to Initiate Service Learning, Alternative, Experiential and Career Technical Education Options in your Community.

"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*

### **Connections at C. M. Russell High School in Great Falls**

All students are assigned to an Advisor for the time that they are enrolled at CMR. Their Connections advisor remains with them for their entire high school career. Advisors may contact parents with news about students, help plan schedules and class selections and provide students with an awareness of what CMR High School has to offer. The goal is to have each CMR student prepared with a plan for the year after they graduate. Connections time is scheduled on a bi-weekly basis throughout the school year to give each student an adult who will take a personal interest in them and monitor their progress. Classroom teachers provide information about how a student is doing in school, but the advisor has an overall picture of the student's successes, challenges and goals. Connections topics and curricula are differentiated by grade and address the changing interests and levels of maturity of students as they progress through high school.

## 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](mailto:graduationmatters@mt.gov) if you would like GMM materials.

In this Toolkit are ideas for raising public awareness of your efforts as well as a sample press conference invitation, 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.

### 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.

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.

Communication Activity	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quarter	3 <sup>rd</sup> Quarter	4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter
(Ex: GMM launch; I Pledge event)				





## Ideas for Raising Public Awareness of Your Efforts

It is recommended 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](mailto: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 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.
- 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 Middle School created videos with their students about Graduation Matters Kalispell that are played during their daily announcements at the middle school and high school. An English teacher at Hardin High School created a GMM assignment where students created a piece of persuasive media to prevent students from dropping out. [see Appendix D for the assignment information]

"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 Schools.*



- Ask business and community partners to display the Graduation Matters logo in their window, 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. [see appendix D for an example from Graduation Matters Havre.]

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! Thompson Falls hangs a new banner each fall reading “I Will Graduate,” which is signed by every senior and hung in the commons area at the school as a reminder to students, parents and the community to encourage students to graduate.

### **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**

- Partner Agreement
- Sample Letter of Invitation to Join Graduation Matters
- Sample Business/Community Organization Engagement Request
- Sample Donation/Business Involvement Letter

### **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
- Havre Letter to the Editor
- Havre Graduation Survey
- Hardin Middle School Writing Assignment

### **Appendix E:**

- "I Pledge to Graduate" Event Organizer Packet
- Miles City Media Advisory for GMM launch

## Appendix A 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, nearly 2,000 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 support Graduation Matters Montana's goal of reducing the number of students who drop out of our schools by 50 percent by 2014. 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 |

- \_ Adoption of common core standards for college and career readiness
- \_ High school graduation
- \_ Min. two years post-secondary education
- \_ Mentoring middle school & high school students
- \_ Career exploration & preparation
- \_ Career and Technical Student Organization Membership
- \_ 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 \_\_\_\_\_

CEO/President/Executive

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: \_\_\_\_\_

## 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 campaign 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 campaign 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](http://www.graduationmatters.mt.gov).

Sincerely,

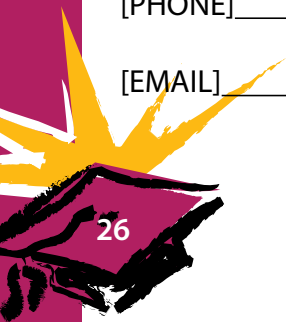
[CONTACT PERSON] \_\_\_\_\_

[TITLE] \_\_\_\_\_

[ORGANIZATION] \_\_\_\_\_

[PHONE] \_\_\_\_\_

[EMAIL] \_\_\_\_\_





## Sample Business/Community Organization Engagement Request

### [YOUR TOWN] Businesses Making a Difference

Thank you for considering helping with the Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN] initiative by providing students with the opportunity to explore their interests in a variety of job settings in and around [YOUR TOWN]. Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN] is a community-wide initiative designed to help kids stay and succeed in school. With the help of our entire community, we can help students realize their potential by staying in school, graduating, and going on to become skilled and important members of the work force.

In order to best match your needs and the needs of students, please fill out the following form and return it to [CONTACT PERSON]. Please check any and all possibilities for you or anyone at your business.

- Job Shadowing:** A one-day experience where a student observes you or one of your employees in an everyday work experience.
  - If offering a job-shadowing or internship opportunity, please describe the opportunity in detail, including the project, location, schedule, skills to be taught, and expectations of the student. Please address the following questions:
    - What do you hope a student will learn?
    - How many hours/days will this experience be?
    - Will this experience be highly supervised or more of an independent learning experience?
    - Can you accommodate a student with special physical needs?
    - Are there any safety precautions a student would need (safety goggles, gloves, close-toed shoes, special clothing, etc.)?
    - Will you be able to offer any type of incentives, discounts or pay? (If so, please describe.)
    - Are there any particular skills the student needs for this experience (e.g., driver's license, computer skills, customer relation skills, ability to lift, etc.)?
- Internships:** Paid or unpaid internships are a longer-term experience, with the employer designating work-related assignments for students to complete. This involves teaching the student the skills needed and what is expected. Because of the time commitment, internships must take place after school hours or on weekends. This is a great opportunity for a student to get real experience in the workplace and a sense of why education will help them.

- Mentor Relationships:** Several nonprofit programs in [YOUR TOWN] offer opportunities for caring adults to make a difference in the lives of young people. You can be a Big Brother or Sister, tutor kids after school, or take advantage of other opportunities to be a mentor and role model for a young person.
- Classroom Presentations:** presenting your experience as a businessperson and/or explaining why students might want to pursue a career in your field.
- Other Opportunities for businesses:**
  - Promote this initiative on your billboards, newsletters, Facebook, website, in your print ads, etc.
  - Adopt a classroom
  - Offer discounts or incentives for students who graduate or receive their GED
  - Offer discounts or incentives for students completing a project or in conjunction with classroom teachers

**Thank you for supporting students by volunteering your time to make a difference in their lives!**

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Business Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

Source: Borrowed from Graduation Matters Missoula <http://www.graduationmattersmissoula.com>



## Sample Donation/Business Involvement Letter

[DATE]

Dear [LOCAL BUSINESS/COMMUNITY LEADER],

Did you know that in Montana there are over 2,000 students who drop out of high school every year? That's five students a day! In [YOUR TOWN], about [XX] students drop out annually, and we are working to confront the dropout rate and improve educational opportunities for all students by launching Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN]. We are joining a statewide effort to improve graduation rates and ensure all our students are ready for college and careers. We are asking you to join our community-wide effort.

As future employers of these students, you already understand the difference between an employee who is prepared for the rigors of working at your business and one who is not. You also know how important it is that we have quality schools in order to attract families to our community.

A quality education is the key to economic prosperity for our young people. As parents, taxpayers, business owners and educators, we cannot ignore the long-term economic consequences of individuals not graduating from high school. As Montanans, we need to work together and share in the accountability of graduating more students from [YOUR TOWN'S] high school.

We also know that receiving a diploma is just one part of our work. In today's global economy, we need to ensure our students are graduating ready for college and careers. Montana students need to receive an education that allows them to compete not only with students across the country, but around the world.

There are many ways to get involved: join the Graduation Matters task force, provide students with internship and job-shadowing opportunities and voice support for Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN] by linking your website to the Graduation Matters Montana website (<http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>), publishing the logo in printed and online communications and displaying a sign in your workplace indicating support for the initiative.

Lastly, a gift of \$ \_\_\_\_ would help with the launch/expansion of "x program" [INSERT LOCAL PROGRAM DESCRIPTION. Be specific.] Will you consider making an investment in this important work?

[GRADUATION MATTERS CONTACT] \_\_\_\_\_ will be in touch with you soon to speak with you about our plan for Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN]. Montana's future prosperity is tied to the success of today's students. We hope that you will consider joining us in this effort.

Sincerely,

Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN] Team

## Appendix B

Several tools that the OPI finds particularly useful for Montana's needs include the following items:

**State and Community Profile:** <http://opi.mt.gov/PDF/GradMatters/State&CommunityProfile.pdf>

Used in concert with the Montana Kids Count Data Center, this State and Community Profile document can help you take stock of your community's resources and needs. The Montana Kids Count Data Center provides a range of data that is useful for developing a community profile relating to children, education, needs for services and employment: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/bystate/stateprofile.aspx?state=MT&loc=28>.

**Dropout Profiles Related to Attendance, Credits, Credit Accumulation, Age and Withdrawal**

Understanding why and when students drop out helps to bring some students back and prevents other students from dropping out. Reviewing school transcripts and attendance records of recent dropouts is one method of ascertaining this information. Another way to assess when dropouts leave school can be used with this Excel spreadsheet that collects student-level data to construct a profile of students who drop out, withdraw or transfer in a given year: <http://opi.mt.gov/PDF/GradMatters/DropoutProfile.xls>.

**The National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS:88)**

Yet another, equally important method to understand why students drop out involves surveying them directly about their reasons for leaving school. The National Educational Longitudinal Survey is a survey of early dropouts, leaving school by the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Consider discussing the NELS: 88 questions with last year's dropouts and the students you consider potential future dropouts. With this new learning, you will be better able to design a support system to keep students in school: <http://opi.mt.gov/PDF/GradMatters/NELS88.pdf>.



## Appendix C

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

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.

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.

Big Sky Pathways [http://opi.mt.gov/programs/CTAE/CTE.html#gpm1\\_1](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](mailto:teyer@mt.gov).

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

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

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.



## Appendix D

### Volunteer Ideas for Families and Community Members at [YOUR TOWN]'s High School<sup>2</sup>

You can volunteer your time at [YOUR TOWN] School District in a number of ways. Here are 20 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. Tutor a student who needs help in a class he or she is taking
7. Serve on a school committee to help raise money
8. Host a fundraising social event with your friends
9. Visit a classroom and speak about your career
10. Develop/Teach a workshop for students on a relevant topic - e.g., résumé writing, interview skills, presentations, dining/social etiquette
11. Speak to a teacher about what resources they might need in their classroom
12. Provide extra-curricular supplies for art projects or sports
13. Run a sports clinic
14. Start an internship opportunity at your business
15. Hire a high school student for a part-time job
16. Organize a tour or visit to your alma mater
17. Teach a skill you have to a student or students e.g., music, photography, art, etc.
18. Start a cleanup crew to help beautify playgrounds and common areas
19. Help a teacher with bulletin boards, re-shelving books, filing, or newsletter writing
20. Chaperone a dance or lend a hand on a class field trip or work project

<sup>2</sup>Source: Adapted from "Volunteer with Breakthrough Silicon Valley!" <http://www.breakthroughsv.org/volunteer.html>

## 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](http://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.*

Media Advisory for

[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 2,000 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]

###



## Sample Letter to the Editor

[DATE]

Dear Editor,

In the United States, one in four students will not graduate from high school. In Montana, five students drop out of school every day. It can be easy to ignore this statistic if you don't happen to know someone who has dropped out, but America's high school dropout epidemic affects all of us.

The good news is that for the first time in a long while, there is a feeling that there is something we can do about it. According to *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Crisis*, the U.S. graduation rate increased from 72 percent in 2002 to 75 percent in 2008 – about half of a percentage point per year. That may be a small percentage but it is huge in numbers of young people who are moving forward. If we as a community don't address this dropout crisis, we won't develop enough prospective employees with the skill-set American businesses need to compete in a global economy.

With this reality in mind, we are forming a coalition of school administrators, community leaders, business owners, educators, students and families here in [YOUR TOWN]. With the assistance of Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau, the Montana OPI and [LOCAL EDUCATION LEADER], our goal is to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college or a career. We invite you to be a part of Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN] and the effort to raise the expectations we have for students.

These children are our future taxpayers, employees, employers and parents. We all have a stake in making sure that every one of them graduates from high school. We invite you to join us at the kick-off event on [DATE] at [TIME]. Please contact [CONTACT NAME, NUMBER, EMAIL] for more information.

Whether you are a community leader, business owner, educator, student or family member, your help is needed in ensuring students in [YOUR TOWN] graduate ready for college and careers.

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[ORGANIZATION]

## 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.)*



## Havre Graduation Survey

The first five questions will gather demographic information to ensure that the important stakeholder groups are properly segmented in the survey results.

- 1. What is your current age?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. What is your current employment status?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Where do you currently reside?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. What is or was your involvement in the Havre Public School system?** \_\_\_\_\_

Parent of Current/Former student

Current Student

Former Student/Graduate

Former Student/Did Not Graduate

Teacher

Administrator

Community Member

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Where did you complete High School?**

Havre

Other \_\_\_\_\_

The following questions ask about your experiences with Havre High School Graduates. On a scale of 1 - 10, with 1 being not at all proficient, 6 being average, and 10 being exemplary, please rate the following:

- 1. How would you rate a Havre High School Graduate's ability to think critically?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. How would you rate a Havre High School Graduate's ability to communicate effectively?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. How would you rate a Havre High School Graduate's ability to work in a team?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. How would you rate a Havre High School Graduate's overall business and career readiness?** \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. How would you rate a Havre High School Graduate's overall business and career readiness compared to graduates from other places?** \_\_\_\_\_

As the primary consumer and beneficiary of education, the Havre business community is invested in the continued improvement and collaboration between area businesses and education. The following questions will ask you about the opportunities to further grow this collaboration.



**What are Havre schools doing best to prepare graduates for careers? Please rank 1 - 6 (with 1 being the BEST) according to what the schools do BEST.**

<input type="checkbox"/>	College Readiness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Effective Communication Skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	Interpersonal Skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	Basic Skills (Reading, Writing, and Math)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Technical Skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	Financial/Practical Skills

**What area do Havre Public Schools need the most improvement to prepare graduates for careers? Please rank the following from 1 - 6 (with 1 being the MOST IMPROVED) according to which area needs the MOST IMPROVEMENT.**

<input type="checkbox"/>	College Readiness
<input type="checkbox"/>	Effective Communication Skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	Interpersonal Skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	Basic Skills (Reading, Writing, and Math)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Technical Skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	Financial/Life Skills

**Ideally, what is the most crucial change that could lead to better preparedness for Havre Public School Graduates?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	A Business Focused Curriculum
<input type="checkbox"/>	Expanded Programs at MSU-N for High School Students
<input type="checkbox"/>	Field Trips to Local Businesses
<input type="checkbox"/>	Classroom Visits from Area Business People

**What is the most crucial way the Havre Area Chamber of Commerce can better integrate the business community into the Havre Public School System in the next year? (Written response)**

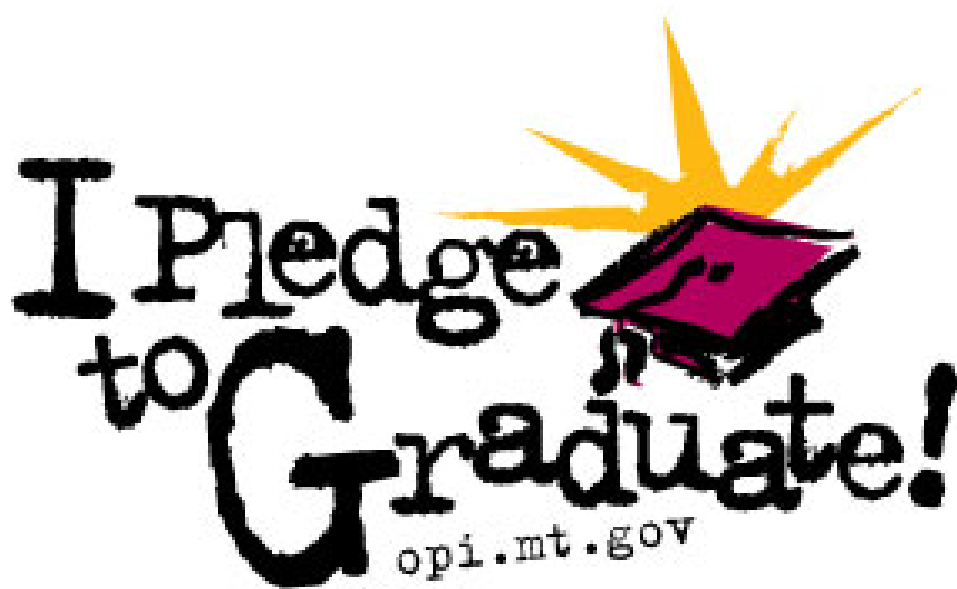


## Hardin Middle School Writing Assignment, Teacher Laura Lowe

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>What: Open Letter or Editorial</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Who: Next Year’s Freshmen (8<sup>th</sup> graders)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Where: Middle School Newsletter</b></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;"><b>What: Persuasive Letter</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Where: Good Friend or Cousin</b></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;"><b>What: Open Letter to the Community</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Who: Parents, Employers, Neighbors &amp; Friends</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Where: Big Horn County News</b></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;"><b>What: Letter on How to Improve the School</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Who: Janine Pease and the HHS Staff</b></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;"><b>What: Brochure</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Who: For Distribution to Teenagers</b></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;"><b>What: Poster</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Who: Students</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Where: Walls in the School Office</b></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)



# Event Organizer Packet



## Welcome!

---

Thank you for your interest in doing an *I Pledge to Graduate* event at your school! This packet will help you plan your school's event.



## Here's what's in your packet:

1. Steps to launching an *I Pledge to Graduate* event in your school
2. Sample event planning tool
3. Graduation Matters Montana press release example

## Questions? Great ideas? Contact us!

Email: [graduationmatters@mt.gov](mailto:graduationmatters@mt.gov)

Phone: (406) 444-5643 Fax: (406) 444-2893

Mailing address:

**Graduation Matters Montana  
Montana Office of Public Instruction  
PO Box 202501  
Helena, MT 59620-2501**

## Find us online!

Website: <http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>

Twitter: GradMattersMT

Facebook: Graduation Matters Montana

**This toolkit uses information from DoSomething.org and the Global Youth Service Day Toolkit**



## 4 steps to launching an *I Pledge to Graduate* event

### 1. Prepare and Plan

**Build a team (3-5 members) or ask an existing school group (Student Council, Business Professionals Association, etc) to work with you**

- A successful team will include students as co-leaders, at least one school staff member and a community member.
- Identify responsibilities for each member (see planning tool on page 4).

**Set your goal for target**

- Contact Andy Boehm, OPI Dropout Data Coordinator, at 444-0375, [aboehm@mt.gov](mailto:aboehm@mt.gov), to obtain data information on dropout rates in your school and district.
- Commit to 100% of your targeted student population signing the pledge.
  - a. Groups to consider: freshmen class, all high school students, seventh or eighth graders, elementary students

**Determine event details**

- Event ideas: pep-rally or assembly, pizza party, at end of freshmen orientation, table in cafeteria, at an Open House or sporting event, Spirit Week .

**Get permission and confirm space for event**

**Identify incentives for students**

- Seek donations from local businesses: free coffee with pledge card, gift certificates, free night of bowling, iTunes cards, t-shirts, food discounts and more.
- Use incentives to encourage ongoing Pledge activities: weekly drawings, prizes at graduation, new business discounts, etc.
- Each student who makes the pledge will be entered into OPI's incentives drawing (gift cards and iPods awarded each month).

**Order pledge cards and signage from OPI**

- Contact GMM at 444-5643 or [graduationmatters@mt.gov](mailto:graduationmatters@mt.gov) to order Pledge cards, wristbands and signage for your event.

**Get local "celebrity" involvement**

- Graduation Matters Missoula invited the city mayor to participate. He sent a letter to every incoming freshman asking each student to commit to graduating from high school.
- Some local "celebrities" you might invite to join your initiative: elected official, tribal elders, local musician, athlete or artist, high school alumni or someone who overcame odds to graduate.



### **Publicize event with fliers, press release, social media and media outreach**

- Issue press releases, invite media to your event and continue to update them.
- Make sure someone is ready to answer questions and media requests.

## **2. Day of event coordination**

### **Set up and prepare for student attendance**

- Have supplies on hand: pencils, scissors, and signage.

### **Have students sign pledge cards and then give them a wristband**

### **Collect cards from students**

- Students take the small cut off card to use for incentives and to remind them of their pledge to graduate.

### **Tally number of pledges received**

### **After event, send signed cards to OPI**

- Send to OPI, Attn: Thea Whalen, PO Box 202501, Helena, MT 59620.
- OPI will then create certificates for each student and mail them to the school; students will also be entered into a monthly drawing for an iPod Touch or gas cards.

## **3. Celebrate and Recognize**

### **Share number of pledges made with school and community**

- Use social media, school newspapers and press releases to local media to share the number of students who took the pledge.

### **Announce incentive winners**

### **Volunteer Appreciation**

### **Distribute Pledge Certificates**

- Distribute in homeroom or have a school-wide assembly.

## **4. Next Steps**

### **Identify ways to continue support for students to reach goal of graduating**



# Sample *I Pledge to Graduate* event planning tool

Use this planning tool to make sure you think through all the details.

	Task	Volunteer	Start Date	Deadline	Completed (Y/N)
<b>I Pledge Coordinator</b>					
	Identify 3-5 team members including one school staff member and students as co-leaders				
	Hold a meeting with everyone interested in helping to plan the event to share the goals and discuss ideas				
	Create a master timeline for all tasks needed to carry out the event to use it to monitor the team's progress				
<b>Volunteer Management</b>					
	Create a list of volunteer tasks or roles for the event				
	Determine how many volunteers are needed & begin to recruit!				
<b>Materials &amp; Supplies</b>					
	Create a list of supplies and materials needed to complete the project				
	Draft letter to businesses to solicit incentive prizes and discounts				
	Order pledge cards and wristbands from OPI				
<b>Event details</b>					
	Identify where you want the event to occur; confirm space				
	Designate someone to coordinate speakers/presentations				
	Talk to your school about engaging a local public official or celebrity				
<b>Public Relations, Outreach, &amp; Media</b>					
	Talk to your school office about inviting the press to your event				
	Identify someone to take photographs (Remember to create a photo release form if your school hasn't already)				
<b>Celebrate &amp; Reflect</b>					
	Bring everyone together afterwards to celebrate and identify what will improve the event for next time!				
	Send all event materials, media and success stories to OPI; OPI will send Pledge certificates to the school				



## Sample Letter to the Editor

[DATE]

Dear Editor,

In the United States, one in four students will not graduate from high school. In Montana, five students drop out of school every day. It can be easy to ignore this statistic if you don't happen to know someone who has dropped out, but America's high school dropout epidemic affects all of us.

The good news is that for the first time in a long while, there is a feeling that there is something we can do about it. According to *Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Crisis*, the U.S. graduation rate increased from 72 percent in 2002 to 75 percent in 2008 – about half of a percentage point per year. That may be a small percentage but it is huge in numbers of young people who are moving forward. If we as a community don't address this dropout crisis, we won't develop enough prospective employees with the skill-set American businesses need to compete in a global economy.

With this reality in mind, we are forming a coalition of school administrators, community leaders, business owners, educators, students and families here in [YOUR TOWN]. With the assistance of Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau, the Montana Office of Public Instruction and [LOCAL EDUCATION LEADER], our goal is to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college or a career. We invite you to be a part of Graduation Matters [YOUR TOWN] and the effort to raise the expectations we have for students.

These children are our future taxpayers, employees, employers and parents. We all have a stake in making sure that every one of them graduates from high school. We invite you to join us at the kick-off event on [DATE] at [TIME]. Please contact [CONTACT NAME, NUMBER, EMAIL] for more information.

Whether you are a community leader, business owner, educator, student or family member, your help is needed in ensuring students in [YOUR TOWN] graduate ready for college and careers.

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[ORGANIZATION]

## Online Resources

### Montana Resources:

Career resources for students: Montana Career Resource Network

<http://www.ourfactsyourfuture.org/cgi/career/?PAGEID=3&SUBID=211>

Four Day School Week Report

[http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/superintendent/11OCT\\_4Day\\_School.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/superintendent/11OCT_4Day_School.pdf)

Graduation Matters Missoula

<http://graduationmattersmissoula.com/>

Gear Up

<http://mus.edu/gearup>

Jobs for Montana's Graduates

<http://wsd.dli.mt.gov/jmg/jmg.asp>

KnowHow2GoMontana

<http://www.knowhow2gomontana.org/>

Montana Digital Academy

<http://montanadigitalacademy.org/>

Montana Statewide Dropout and Graduate Report 2009-2010 School Year

[http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/Measurement/DropoutReportFY09\\_10.pdf](http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/Measurement/DropoutReportFY09_10.pdf)

### Other Resources:

Beyond the Bully Pulpit: The Mayor's Role in Dropout Prevention (October 2010, National Dropout Prevention Center/Network at Clemson University)

[http://www.dropoutprevention.org/sites/default/files/uploads/webcast/slides\\_20101012.pdf](http://www.dropoutprevention.org/sites/default/files/uploads/webcast/slides_20101012.pdf)

Bringing Off-Track Youth Into the Center of High School Reform: Lessons and Tools from Leading Communities (June 2009, Jobs for the Future)

<http://opi.mt.gov/PDF/GradMatters/EarlyWarningSystems.pdf>

Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic (November 2011, Civic Enterprises and Everyone Graduates Center)

[http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/~/\\_media/Files/Our%20Work/Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation\\_FullReport\\_FINAL%2011-30-10.ashx](http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Grad-Nation/~/_media/Files/Our%20Work/Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation_FullReport_FINAL%2011-30-10.ashx)

The Community Tool Box (2011, University of Kansas Work Group for Community Health and Development)

[http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section\\_1045.aspx](http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/section_1045.aspx)



Early Warning Systems online tool (from the National High School Center)  
<http://www.betterhighschools.org/ews.asp>

Exemplary Practices in Alternative Education: Indicators of Quality Programming (January 2009, National Alternative Education Association)  
<http://www.the-naea.com/files/1008/File/ExemplaryPracticesinAE.pdf>

The Freshmen Academy— Pepperell High School, Rome, Georgia  
<http://www.pepperellhigh.com/FreshmanAcademy.html>

Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle the Dropout Crisis (February 2009, America's Promise Alliance)  
<http://www.americaspromise.org/~media/Files/Our%20Work/Dropout%20Prevention/Grad%20Nation%20Guidebook%20052809.ashx>

On the Bus — Mississippi Department of Education  
<http://www.onthebus.ms/>

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