2015 Graduation and Dropout Report

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MT's graduation rate increases to 86%!

$6 million annual boost to economy

Graduates' lifetime earnings increase $90 million

2015 GRADUATION AND DROPOUT REPORT

More Montana students are graduating from high school than ever before. That translates into a stronger economy, higher wages, and more opportunities for Montana's young people.

In 2009, 2,272 students were dropping out of school, and the graduation rate was 80.7 percent.

"I saw those numbers and knew that we could do better – that we must do better," Juneau said. "That's why I launched Graduation Matters Montana, a statewide initiative built on business and community support, to make sure more Montana students were graduating from high school prepared to succeed in the rest of their lives."

Since 2009, Montana's dropout rate has been cut by more than a third. The state's graduation rate reached another historic high in 2014-2015 at 86 percent.

The improvement hasn't happened by accident. In 53 Montana communities, Graduation Matters Montana has taken hold in ways that are easy to see. Students now participate in "I Pledge to Graduate" events. Graduation Matters banners decorate their hallways. Teachers, parents and community leaders are reinforcing the message that a high school diploma is indeed the first step on the path to success. A common language has developed among Montana's 53 Graduation Matters communities, placing an emphasis on the importance of a high school diploma that prepares students for life.

Montana's Graduation and Dropout Rate Data 2008-2015

	Graduation Rate	Completion Rate	High School Dropouts	High School Dropout Rate
2008-2009	80.7%	81.7%	2,272	5.0%
2009-2010	80.2%	82.0%	1,896	4.3%
2010-2011	82.2%	82.2%	1,859	4.3%
2011-2012	83.9%	83.7%	1,744	4.1%
2012-2013	84.4%	84.2%	1,500	3.6%
2013-2014	85.4%	85.0%	1,539	3.7%
2014-2015	86.0%	85.7%	1,421	3.4%

GRADUATION MATTERS MONTANA

Graduation Matters Missoula was the seed from which Graduation Matters Montana grew. The statewide initiative started with the support of Montana's seven-largest school systems, and today includes 53 communities.

The idea was simple: make sure more Montana students are graduating from high school prepared for college and careers. But the challenge was, and continues to be, developing enough community support to sustain a project that lives beyond one school year, or one graduating class. For real systemic change to take hold, Graduation Matters Montana needs to become engrained in classrooms and dinner tables across the state.

Superintendent Juneau has built a lasting community-based model by partnering with local businesses, schools, and influential leaders to implement best practices and unique strategies.

For example, Graduation Matters Hardin has developed a Freshman Academy for at-risk students and a peer-mentoring program. Graduation Matters Laurel is using the Office of Public Instruction's Early Warning System to better identify students who are at risk of

dropping out. Graduation Matters Stevensville students host monthly school assemblies meant to give teens a forum to talk about strategies for succeeding.

"Many of the schools I visit feel different today than they did five years ago," Juneau said. "The emphasis on engaging student voice, and using data tools to make sure kids aren't falling through the cracks, has made such a positive change."

As part of Graduation Matters Montana, Juneau has convened Student Advisory Boards twice per year over the last five years, bringing together a diverse group of high school students to help shape state policy goals and engage with students on the issues that matter most to them. Since 2010, 185 high school students from 75 Montana high schools have served on Juneau's Student Advisory Board.

BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Building a statewide initiative like Graduation Matters Montana requires a significant investment of time and resources to develop an innovative and lasting program. Over the last five years, Montana businesses and foundations have generously donated more than $1.3 million to help Graduation Matters Montana communities launch their local efforts.

The Dennis and Phyllis Washington Foundation has been a major financial supporter of Graduation Matters Montana, gifting $900,000 over the last few years. Financial support has also come from Student Assistance Foundation, BNSF Railway, AT&T, IBM, State Farm, D.A. Davidson, Northwestern Energy, Steele-Reese Foundation, First Interstate Bank, Charter Communications, MEA-MFT, and Applied Materials.

The money from these organizations has seed-funded local Graduation Matters Montana efforts through a competitive grant process. Graduation Matters communities have used the money to launch unique programs, including a career and college readiness center now located at Bozeman High School.

Superintendent Juneau was able to partner with some of Montana's most well-known businesses to build a lasting framework that will live beyond her time in office.

PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION FOR SUCCESS

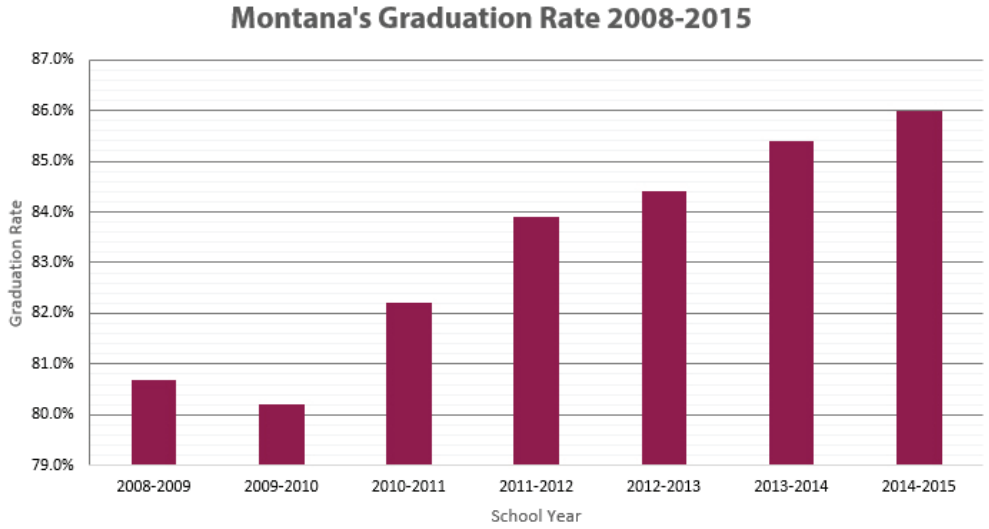
Since 2010, more than 11,000 Montana students have taken the pledge to graduate from high school. It may seem like a simple exercise, but when a student is asked to make a commitment in front of their friends, family, school and community, that student is suddenly surrounded by a group of people who want to hold them accountable.

Many of Montana's 53 Graduation Matters communities host annual "I Pledge" events for their incoming freshman. Some schools pair high school students with elementary-aged students and work on pledges at a very early age.

"This year I visited a Billings elementary school and watched as nearly 300 young children pledged to graduate from high school," Juneau said. "All of Montana is rooting for those students, and it's that kind of community effort that's required to support our public school students."

In 2008-2009, 2,272 high school students dropped out, equaling a 5 percent dropout rate. **The dropout rate has been cut by more than a third, with 1,421 high school students dropping out in 2014-2015 for a rate of 3.4 percent.**

Montana's graduation rate has steadily increased from 80.7 percent in 2008-2009, to 86 percent in 2014-2015. Montana can now boast its highest graduation rate ever recorded since the Office of Public Instruction began keeping track in 2000.



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"There is still more work to be done," Superintendent Juneau said. "But I'm confident that we're on the right track and communities now have better tools to continue this important work."

Not only are more students walking across the graduation stage, they're also better prepared for college and careers. Since 2010, Montana's English and math standards were revised to be more rigorous, and the Office of Public Instruction is also working to increase the standards for a handful of other subject areas.

All high school juniors now take the ACT college entrance exam free-of-cost, opening the door to higher education for more of Montana's students. And thanks to Graduation Matters Montana's partnership with the Student Assistance Foundation, more students are now completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), ensuring more teens have access to college and aren't leaving millions of federal dollars on the table.

Graduation and Dropout Data by AA District

	Cohort Graduation Rate	Graduates	Cohort Count	Continuing	Dropouts
AA Districts Total	85.4%	4,500	5,268	136	632
Billings HS	82.1%	1,092	1,330	30	208
Bozeman HS	86.3%	421	488	16	51
Butte HS	83.4%	292	350	*	53
Flathead HS	88.3%	651	737	10	76
Great Falls HS	84.5%	639	756	36	81
Helena HS	85.3%	627	735	*	106
Missoula HS	89.2%	778	872	37	57

**Masked for privacy because the number is less than five.*

UNDERSTANDING MONTANA'S DROPOUT RATE

The dropout count includes students who were enrolled in school on the date of the previous year's fall enrollment count, or at some time during the previous school year, and were not enrolled on the date of the current school year's fall count. The dropout rate is calculated as the number of dropouts divided by the enrollment for the previous year.

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Definitions

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's October count.

Graduation Rate: Prior to the 2010-2011 school year, the graduation rate included the number of students who completed a district's graduation requirements in four years or less from the time the student enrolled in the 9th grade or had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) allowing for more than four years to graduate. Beginning in the 2010-2011 school year, the graduation rate has been calculated using the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate calculation.

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 pass away during that same period.

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.

Migrant Student: Migrant students are those participating in the migrant education program under Title I Part C.

Economically Disadvantaged: These are students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Students are in this category for the graduation rate only if they're identified as eligible for free or reduced lunch at any time during high school.

2015 Montana Dropout Rate Summary

	Dropout Rate	Dropout Count	Enrollment
Total (Grades 7-12)	**2.3%**	**1,465**	**63,565**
High School Total	**3.4%**	**1,421**	**41,816**
Grade 12	5.0%	488	9,825
Grade 11	4.5%	460	10,255
Grade 10	3.0%	321	10,828
Grade 9	1.4%	152	10,908
Grade 8	0.2%	27	10,807
Grade 7	0.2%	17	10,942
Gender			
Male	2.6%	858	32,792
Female	2.0%	607	30,773
Race/Ethnicity			
American Indian	6.3%	418	6,598
Asian	1.3%	7	546
Black	2.0%	14	700
Hispanic	2.8%	72	2,547
Pacific Islander	5.1%	8	157
White	1.8%	915	51,686
Other	2.3%	31	1,331

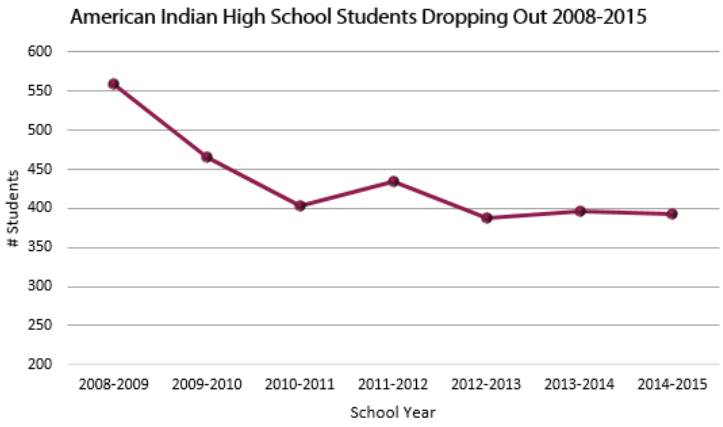
The number of Montana students dropping out has been cut by a third since 2009. Over the last seven years, the dropout rate has declined from 5 percent to 3.4 percent, resulting in 851 fewer dropouts in 2015 compared to 2009.

High school seniors are far more likely to drop out of school than freshmen. Males are more likely to drop out than females.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL STUDENTS

It's true more Montana students now have access to a wider range of post-high-school opportunities, but a disproportionate share of low income and minority students aren't completing their high school education.

Twenty-nine percent of Montana's dropouts are American Indian, while American Indian students make up only 10 percent of the state's public school population. Montana's American Indian drop-out rate continues to improve, but it remains far behind the rate of white students. **Still, the number of American Indian students dropping out of high school has dropped by nearly a third since 2008.**



American Indian Graduation and Dropout Rate Data

	Cohort Graduation Rate	High School Dropout Rate	High School Dropout Count	High School Enrollment	Dropout Rate Grades7-12
2008-2009	60.8%	12.3%	559	4537	8.4%
2009-2010	59.7%	10.3%	465	4506	6.9%
2010-2011	63.0%	9.8%	404	4112	6.6%
2011-2012	62.9%	10.4%	434	4195	6.9%
2012-2013	65.4%	9.5%	387	4059	6.3%
2013-2014	65.0%	9.7%	396	4074	6.5%
2014-2015	66.6%	9.5%	393	4128	6.3%

Fewer of Montana's low income students are graduating from high school, however that rate continues to improve. In 2009-2010, 74.6 percent of low income students were graduating from high school, that rate has ticked up 2.3 percentage points to 76.9 percent.

2015 4-Year Cohort Graduation Rate

Student Groups	Graduates	Dropouts	Continuing	Cohort Count	Cohort Graduation Rate
All Students	**9,161**	**1,199**	**287**	**10,647**	**86.0%**
American Indian	775	297	91	1,163	66.6%
Asian	110	*	*	116	94.8%
Black	122	16	10	148	82.4%
Hispanic	333	51	16	400	83.3%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	31	*	-	33	93.9%
White	7,790	828	169	8,787	88.7%
Economically Disadvantaged	3,675	899	204	4,778	76.9%
Special Education	966	246	72	1,284	75.2%
Limited English Learners	237	101	43	381	62.2%
Homeless	323	124	47	494	65.4%
Migrant	19	*	*	23	82.6%

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A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OPENS DOORS TO ECONOMIC SUCCESS

The U.S. Census Bureau's most recent American Community Survey finds the median salary for Montanans who did not graduate from high school earn $18,384 annually, that's $6,734 less than someone with a high school diploma and $18,863 less than someone with a college degree. Montanans without a high school diploma are more likely to live in poverty. The poverty rate for someone who didn't graduate from high school is nearly twice that of someone with a high school diploma.

According to calculations made by the Alliance for Excellent Education, Montana is likely to see significant economic gains as a result of increases in its high school graduation rate from 2009 to 2015, which resulted in 540 additional high school graduates. **Because more students are graduating from high school, the Alliance estimates Montana will see a $6 million annual boost to the state's economy.** Those graduates will contribute an additional $10.3 million in spending on homes, and a $700,000 increase in auto sales.

Collectively, those added graduates will likely earn an additional $90 million over the course of their lifetimes, compared to if they had not graduated from high school.

Raising Montana's graduation rate has never been just about a number. It's about making sure every student in Montana, no matter their zip code, has an equal shot at success. Graduation Matters Montana is rooted in the idea that each of us has a stake in our public education system. When Montana kids succeed, we all benefit.

"There is still more work to be done," Superintendent Juneau said. "But I'm confident that we're on the right track and communities now have better tools to continue this important work."