

Attendance Matters. Graduation Matters.

Tuesday, August 25, 2015



When It Comes To Attendance Rates, 95 Percent Isn't An A

Montana's students have one of the most important jobs in the state: showing up to school each day. Students who attend class every day are more likely to succeed academically and later on in life. These students will perform better in reading and math, they have a greater chance of graduating from high school, and they'll be better prepared for college and a meaningful career.

Still, for some students, the simple act of showing up to school each day may not be that easy.

Students who miss just 18 days each year, that's two days per month, are considered chronically absent and their success rates begin to drop. When a school's average daily attendance drops below 95 percent, chronic absenteeism is likely a growing concern for a significant share of its students. In 2014, the average daily attendance for all Montana schools was 93.6 percent.

This isn't just about truancy, it is true that some absences are unavoidable because of illness or other circumstances. But when students miss too much school— regardless of the reason – it can cause them to fall behind.

That's why I'm asking Montana students to start the school year strong by committing to attend class each day.

Ensuring that Montana students show up for school this year is an undertaking in which we can all take part. Schools can be using their attendance data to identify students who may be struggling to get to class, and work with those families to find a solution. Parents can build a habit of good attendance starting as early as preschool. Community groups can organize safe walks or carpools to school. Entire classrooms of students can pledge to

attend school every day and create a friendly competition encouraging their classmates to show up.

My Graduation Matters Montana initiative is rooted in the idea that we all have a stake in our public education system. It's rooted in the idea that when Montana kids succeed, we all benefit.

Local Graduation Matters Montana communities are developing innovative and effective approaches to the attendance challenge. Graduation Matters Stevensville awards students in good academic and attendance standing a "community connections card" which local businesses reward with reduced prices on goods and services. Graduation Matters Billings is marshalling community volunteers to visit with families before school to talk about the importance of attendance from an early age. Graduation Matters Great Falls incentivizes high school students with good grades and attendance by offering late start days and by waiving end-of-semester testing. Graduation Matters Wolf Point is focusing on early-grade attendance to create positive habits and get kids on the path to graduation.

Montana's graduation rate is at an all-time high. As a result of 85.4 percent of Montana students graduating each year, the state's economy gets a \$6 million annual boost. A higher graduation rate also translates into a decrease in Montana's crime rate and an increase in civic participation.

This school year, I encourage all Montanans to take an active role in the state's public school system. Let's work together to ensure Montana children show up to school each day, are able to achieve their academic goals, and walk across that graduation stage proudly displaying their hard-earned diploma.

Attendance matters. Graduation Matters, to all Montanans.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Denise Juneau". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

- Denise Juneau, Superintendent of Public Instruction