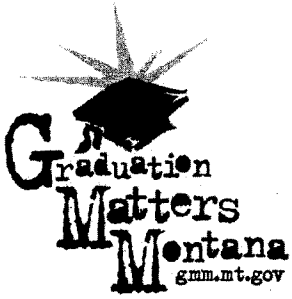

SENATE EDUCATION
EXHIBIT NO. 8
DATE 1/23/13
BILL NO. SB/4

SB 14: Provide Funding to Educate 19-Year-Olds

What SB 14 does:

This bill: (1) amends the definition of "pupil" to include students who are 19 years of age or older in Average Number Belonging (ANB) calculations and (2) retains the requirement that local School Board Trustees provide special permission for the enrollment of students 19 years of age or older.

Why we need SB 14:

In the 2011-2012 school year, 120 students 19 years of age or older were enrolled in the Fall Semester and 97 were enrolled in the Spring Semester. For some students, it can take more than four years to earn their high school diploma, yet schools do not receive any state funding to educate 19-year-olds. Currently, Montana is the only state in the nation that cuts off school funding when a student turns nineteen.[1] The majority of states fund students until they are 21 years of age, including all of Montana's neighboring states (ID, WY, ND, SD).[2] In today's global economy, a student needs *at minimum* a high school diploma to find a decent-paying job, and Montana cannot afford to disincentivize local schools' efforts to graduate every student.

Educating Montana's 19-year-old students makes sense:

- **Students who need a "5th year" or an extra semester of high school are often highly motivated to graduate** and need the extra time to recover core credits, have transferred from a school system that makes them a "late start" in Montana's school system, or dropped out of school due to family circumstances and have reenrolled in high school to earn their diploma.

- Montana schools that receive funding for students who are age 19 or older **will be able to broaden their efforts for student success**, which may include more flexible scheduling (such as night time and weekend courses) to support students who have family obligations or employment responsibilities.

- **Investing in student success while they are still enrolled in school** makes sense, as the number of students who drop out and say they will pursue a GED is much higher than the number of students who actually receive a GED. The wages and tax contributions of a high school graduate are substantially higher over the life time of a graduate compared to a high school dropout.[3]

SB 14 is a critical piece of a comprehensive, statewide strategy:

Graduation Matters Montana consists of 28 locally-designed 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. Sixty-five percent of Montana students currently attend a school with a Graduation Matters initiative. Since launching Graduation Matters Montana, our high school dropout rate has declined from 5.1 percent to 4.1 percent and from 2,423 students dropping out annually to 1,841 students. SB 14 would provide communities with another strategy to build on the successes of the past two years.

Prepared by the Office of Public Instruction, January 2013

[1] Education Commission of the States. *Student Accountability Initiatives: Upper Statutory Ages.*
[2] Ibid.
[3] Alliance for Excellent Education.