

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 8
INTRODUCED BY C. JUNEAU

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA REQUESTING THE STATE-TRIBAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE TO GATHER INFORMATION RELATING TO THE DROPOUT RATES, GRADUATION RATES, AND AT-RISK FACTORS AMONG AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS IN MONTANA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND TO DEVELOP A STRATEGIC STATE PLAN TO REDUCE THE DROPOUT RATE AMONG ALL STUDENTS; AND REQUIRING A REPORT OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE 59TH LEGISLATURE.

WHEREAS, according to a 2001 report entitled "Equal Educational Opportunity for Native American Students in Montana Public Schools" by the Montana Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Montana's American Indians drop out of public schools at an average rate of 10.4%, which is more than twice the dropout rate of 4.2% for all Montana students; and

WHEREAS, the school completion rate for American Indian students is only 56.1%, far below the 81.8% for all Montana students; and

WHEREAS, Montana's American Indian students drop out of high school at a rate more than 3 times that of non-Indian students and drop out of grades 7 and 8 at a rate 12 times that of non-Indian students; and

WHEREAS, according to data published by the Office of Public Instruction, the high school graduation rate for American Indian students dropped 12% between 1995 and 1999; and

WHEREAS, when compared to the 9th grade enrollment figures for American Indian students, the 55% high school graduation rate of American Indian students in Montana is alarmingly low; and

WHEREAS, according to the Digest of Education Statistics, three of the four Montana counties with the highest unemployment rates, which are double and triple the national average, are located on Indian reservations; and

WHEREAS, the consequences of dropping out of school are lifelong and life-altering for the individual, result in significant reductions in state per-ANB funding to local school districts, and threaten the vitality of the state's economy and the stability of society; and

WHEREAS, although the State of Montana has made numerous pronouncements and attempts to institute educational reforms concerning Indian education since acknowledgment and recognition in Article X, section 1, of the Montana Constitution of the contribution of Montana's American Indians and the commitment

of the state to preserve their cultural heritage through education, the United States Commission on Civil Rights found that the disparities in education, including dropout rates that are double those of non-Indian students, low achievement levels and test scores, and few high school graduates with little advancement to higher education, provided evidence that Indian children in Montana public schools are in a crisis situation.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

That the State-Tribal Relations Committee, in collaboration with the Board of Public Education, the Board of Regents, the Office of Public Instruction, local school districts, tribal education departments, and educational organizations throughout the state:

(1) gather information relating to the dropout rates, graduation rates, and at-risk factors, including age, credit deficiencies, drug and alcohol use, teen pregnancy, attendance, and suspension and expulsion, among American Indian students in Montana's public schools;

(2) hold public hearings throughout the state in school districts located on reservations and in urban areas to seek recommendations to address the dropout rate and at-risk factors;

(3) develop a fiscal impact statement for those schools from which students drop out;

(4) collaborate with the Office of Public Instruction American Indian Education Office and the Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education that are currently working through a United States Department of Education Dropout Prevention program with six Montana public school districts located on Indian reservations and that will be coordinating a plan for dropout prevention;

(5) collaborate on this study with Montana's Interagency Coordinating Council, which has dropout prevention as one of its major goals; and

(6) produce a comprehensive, research-based, strategic state plan to break the cycle of at-risk factors and significantly reduce the dropout rate, while increasing the graduation rate among Montana's American Indian students.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Committee reports its findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the 59th Legislature.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of the resolution and any Committee report be sent to each tribal government located on the seven Montana reservations and to the Little Shell Band of Chippewa.

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