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Denise Juneau, State Superintendent

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Empowering Native Youth to Reclaim their Future

U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
Oversight Field Hearing
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Testimony of:

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On behalf of State Superintendent Denise Juneau

Submitted to:

Rusty Stafne, Chairman, Fort Peck Tribes
The Hon. Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
The Hon. Jon Tester, U.S. Senate

Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting the Montana Office of Public Instruction to participate in this hearing. I look forward to sharing our work and observations as they relate to the vitally important task of supporting and strengthening American Indian youth.

Thank you to Chairman Stafne for hosting this gathering. I have in my mind today Councilman Darryl Red Eagle, who so deeply believed in the beauty and promise of children, and who worked so wisely to change how we do our work to better support American Indian youth.

I am here representing State Superintendent Denise Juneau, who is unable to attend today. I am also here to speak of the ground-breaking work we are doing, in partnership with Tribal Governments, school districts, community members and families to truly improve the quality of education in our state's most struggling schools.

Under State Superintendent Denise Juneau's leadership, the Office of Public Instruction has launched an initiative called *Montana Schools of Promise*, which is working to significantly improve the quality of education in Montana's most struggling schools. Schools where a mere 15 – 25 percent of high school tenth graders are proficient in math and reading, and dropout rates are double those of the general population.

In Montana, the most struggling schools are all located on our state's Indian Reservations. *Schools of Promise* seeks to turn these schools around – providing intensive supports to all components of the school system, and engaging community, families and tribal government in the effort.

2. Listen to what works. Montana is a rural, frontier state. We struggle with federal policies and programs that are built with sky scrapers and city economies in mind. Here in Montana, we develop effective strategies that work in a vast, rural, poor state. Learn from that, and take our lessons into the national debate. And finally,
3. We can't do it alone. The Office of Public Instruction is partnering with local communities, tribal governments, state and federal allies. It's the only way we can see that lasting change will occur. Yet the vast majority of funds we rely on to do this work come from federal funds. Keep them coming: our state literally can't afford to fund the intensive work that needs to be done, and yet our communities and our nation can't afford for us not to do that work, every day, as best we can.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.