



Student Safety is Montana's Number One Priority This School Year

The classroom doors are opening for the 2018-2019 school year! When parents drop their students off at the bus stop or in front of their school this fall, they deserve peace of mind in knowing that their child will return safely home to the dinner table that evening. As State Superintendent, I have made school safety my top priority. All Montana students must be safe and secure in their classrooms before learning can occur.

School safety messages have been driven at the national level and mostly as it relates to school shootings. Our state is not immune to those conversations and we must have a voice for rural, western states at the table. In Montana, when we talk about school safety we take an all-hazards approach. Some of the biggest threats to our schools are natural disaster related including wildfires, floods, wildlife, and winter storms.

I am fortunate to represent Montana in national school safety discussions through the Council of Chief State School Officers' School Safety Steering Committee and I have also participated in President Trump's Federal Commission on School Safety. My message has been consistent; **Montana cannot have a top-down approach to protecting our students and schools.** The threats that classrooms in rural Montana face are much different than those in metro Washington, D.C.

The Office of Public Instruction is working with local school and community leaders to ensure that all-hazard emergency response plans are in place for every school. Having a school safety plan is crucial, but each of these plans look different as they reflect the unique challenges and opportunities of the community in which they exist.

As I travel the state, I continue to listen to parents, students, teachers, school leaders, community leaders, law enforcement, and emergency response experts about how we can best protect Montana's most precious treasures: our children.

Welcome back to school and have a safe year!

Elsie Arntzen
State Superintendent