



## **Education: Students deserve, need STEM skills**

June 05, 2013 9:30 am

As the school year ends, we celebrate the accomplishments of our graduates and hope they have the skills required for the jobs that await them in this increasingly complex global marketplace.

In the 2000s, Montana had the 13th-fastest growth in the nation in jobs that required more than a high school diploma and the 10th-fastest growth rate in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) jobs.

With increases in jobs come increases in the educational requirements to fill them. By 2018, nine of every 10 Montana STEM jobs will require some post-secondary education and training, and seven of these a bachelor's degree or higher.

Yet 18 percent of our high school students fail to graduate on time and more than 54 percent of our eighth graders are below grade level in reading and math.

According to the business leader's organization America's Edge, the U.S. high school graduation rate ranks in the bottom third of developed nations. On an international test of applied knowledge and skills, U.S. 15-year-olds scored well below the average of industrialized nations in math.

We do not belong in the middle of the pack and must implement education approaches that will create proficiencies in core academic subjects and develop a work force of communicators, collaborators and critical thinkers through rigorous educational standards.

The Montana Common Core Standards now being implemented are guiding us to more rigorous internationally benchmarked academic standards and challenging us to adopt curricula so that our students can compete against the world's best.

We are now focused on reforming our education system, and that reform should include steps to improve academic outcomes and get students prepared for the real world.

My "wish" for every Montana student who receives a diploma is to have the skills our businesses need to help our economy and communities excel.

*Glen Wheeler, Bonner*