

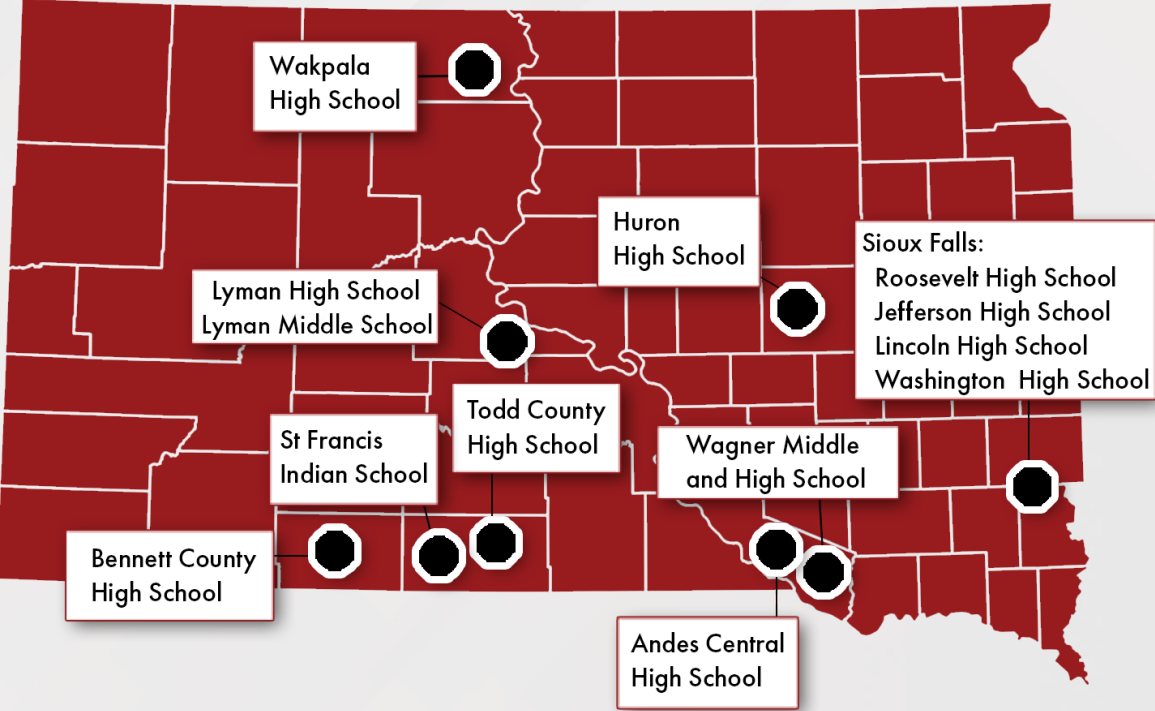
Celebrating 15 Years



South Dakota
JAG

Jobs for America's Graduates

2023-24 JAG-SD Schools



Some barriers are observable, others are hidden. For 15 years, JAG-South Dakota has been connecting with students who have barriers to success and empowering them to graduate from high school and move confidently toward the realization of their dreams.

The story of the national Jobs for America’s Graduates program began in 1980 in Delaware. After seeing the success of the program throughout the country, the Wagner Community School District started South Dakota’s first JAG program in 2009.

The program continued because of the dedication of administrators and, importantly, the JAG specialists running the program at each school and building relationships daily with their students. As the footprint of the program expanded to more districts, additional students realized the life-changing benefits of JAG.

However, without the leadership of a full-time state director, programs could not fully realize the statewide benefits and experiences of the JAG model. This would change in 2020, when following legislation and an appropriation, the Department of Education (DOE) hired a full-time state director to support and expand the foundation started more than a decade prior.

Today, JAG-SD has served more than 3,000 students. The model, and the people behind the model, have helped students across the state achieve graduation and find a path into the world.



This publication is dedicated to those JAG-SD students and specialists, upon whose foundation the next 15 years of students will build their success.

Dr. Joseph Graves
Secretary of Education

What is **JAG?**



97%

GRADUATION RATE:

JAG-SD students graduate high school, despite challenges.

99%

RETENTION RATE:

JAG-SD students don't get lost, they stay in school.

85%

POSITIVE OUTCOMES:

JAG-SD students pursue further education, employment and /or military service after high school.

Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) is a state-based national non-profit organization that serves youth who face significant challenges. The program helps these students to graduate high school and to meaningfully enter postsecondary and the workforce.

JAG-SD is mission-driven: fully immersed in its goal of **empowering young people with the skills and support they need to succeed in education, employment, and life.**

JAG coursework teaches academic and life skills. But, as any JAG student will tell you, it's much more than that. It's a built-in support system; a safe environment to build skills and confidence; an

opportunity to connect with peers, business and community leaders; and a place for students to achieve their potential.

The program's results are striking. JAG-SD graduates have gone on to the military, two- and four-year postsecondary programs, and directly into the workforce. They serve as role models for the next generation of JAG-SD students to come.



Data from 2023-24 school year

Empowering South Dakota's young people
with the skills and support to succeed in **education**

JAG-SD helps students persist through to high school graduation by connecting their learning with career-world experiences and helping them overcome barriers that impede their academic potential. You can see the JAG advantage through data and stories that tell of students staying in school, engaging in their academics, graduating, and moving on to postsecondary education.

Over its 15-year history, JAG-SD has achieved a nearly 100 percent graduation rate. This far exceeds the graduation rate of students with similar backgrounds and stories; it also exceeds the statewide average completion rate which hovers around 90 percent.

JAG specialists in participating schools teach elective, credit-bearing JAG courses for middle and high school students. The JAG curriculum centers on 37 core competencies, which are

grouped into six areas: Career Development, Job Attainment, Job Survival, Basic Skills, Leadership and Self-Development, and Personal Skills.

Three key elements form the foundation of the JAG experience. These are: project-based learning, which is an active, inquiry-based educational model; trauma-informed care, which teaches life skills and help students build relationships and overcome adversity; and employer engagement, which has been a cornerstone of the JAG program since its inception.



The JAG Advantage is a promise: JAG will give students an advantage that will set them apart from other youth in today's emerging workforce through student-centered programs that help young people achieve their fullest potential.

In its short history in South Dakota, JAG has served more than 3,000 students, who have persisted through to graduation and beyond. The national JAG program has a 40-plus year history of delivering results.





South Dakota JAG Graduate Profile

ZANE ZEPHIER

2013 GRADUATE, WAGNER HIGH SCHOOL



"I didn't have parents. I grew up with my grandmother. I struggled with homework and going to school. A positive, welcoming environment at school didn't exist for me, so I didn't take school seriously. Before JAG, my grandma was getting letters in the mail about my absences from school. Courts were getting involved. When I got connected with JAG, it gave me a positive, welcoming environment at school that didn't exist for me at the time.

JAG specialists served as parental figures in the way they helped and cared for us. They saw us on a human level – not only in school, but in life. The program is for students in general, but especially at-risk ones. The ones who struggle because of something going on in their life, so they need someone who's looking out for them. Once you get to know kids in JAG, you see the struggles they go through to succeed. It takes

tremendous effort. Most people expect less out of them; they don't have as much hope for them. But when you get someone involved, who knows how to steer them in the right direction, to teach them about willpower and perseverance, it can change everything for that student. When I was in it, my teacher and classmates in JAG were a family to me. That's what I had been missing in my life.

I went through JAG for four years, from the time I was a freshman until I graduated high school. I went to the University of South Dakota, graduated from there, and now I'm a field advisor and summer director for USD's Upward Bound program. These programs are kind of doing what JAG did for me. I'm happy to be giving back and getting to interact with kids who were like me back then."



Spotlight: **Madi Mora**

"JAG was there for me in times where I struggled to even be there for myself.

My classmates and instructors became family, and the classroom became a safe space."

– Madi Mora,
2019 Wagner High School
graduate and Army
National Guard
soldier



Empowering South Dakota's young people

with the skills and support to succeed in **employment**



JAG-SD does not say goodbye when a student walks across the stage at graduation. The relationships built in a JAG classroom persist through at least a year after 12th grade, and for many of our specialists and students, well beyond.

Jobs is in our name; it is what we do. Most of our students find their way to employment once they complete high school, with the majority of those working full-time.

Part of the JAG-SD program includes introducing students to career opportunities. JAG specialists organize field trips and guest speakers to ensure that students are aware of the options that are available for them after high school graduation. JAG students have opportunities to meet and network with business leaders. They participate in community service projects and work on their employability skills.

Employers that engage with the JAG program invest their time, talent, and knowledge to customize individual learning experiences for JAG students. JAG promotes the development of meaningful connections between students and working professionals, ideas and skills, and the classroom and real-life situations.

Spotlight:

Brycen Zephier

• • •

Brycen Zephier, 2017 graduate, Wagner High School, credits JAG-SD with preparing him for life after high school – honing his reading and writing skills, improving his communication skills, and learning how to make connections. In June 2022, he started his own construction company. “I tell all my younger cousins that they should be looking into JAG. I’ve applied so many things that I learned in JAG in my professional career. I want my cousins and the other kids in my community to have that too,” he said.

CARSON KNECHT

2019 GRADUATE, BENNETT COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL



"When I first got into JAG, I wasn't sure what it was. But I can tell you now that it helped with my career aspirations. When I told my teacher that I wanted to work in film as a career, my teacher got very involved in the process of learning what people in that business do, and the steps to success in that field.

She created tailor-made projects that allowed me to practice shooting and directing films. We made a short film – a PSA on the dangers of distracted driving. Together, my JAG class wrote a script and filmed it. She let me gain experience in the field by having me edit and direct it.

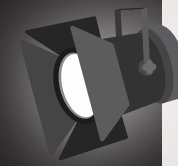
I thought that because I was interested in artistic things, JAG wouldn't be for me. I wasn't into the business and marketing aspects of filmmaking; I just wanted to make cool videos. But in JAG, I learned that those things are an important part of being a filmmaker. I learned proper business etiquette – how to shake someone's hand, how to introduce myself, how to make connections. A big part of JAG is that it helps you to find your strengths and weaknesses; then you improve on those so that you can see what you're good at, what's possible.

I think one of the most important things I learned in JAG was the networking abilities. It became second nature. My specialist helped me to tap into that part of myself that was more outgoing and able to put myself out there. I learned how to find common ground with people who are new, how to connect with people.

Another part of JAG was looking for a college that would suit me and help me get to where I wanted to go. That's how I decided to go to Dakota State. Once I was there, I made a lot of short films and put them on YouTube, and I entered them in local film festivals. Going to film festivals, I met some independent filmmakers. I've worked as a production assistant and as an extra actor. I've gotten to work with some sports broadcasting companies, and I've worked on a feature film in Aberdeen. I've also worked on a World War II movie in Pierre. I graduated from DSU in 2023.

Right now, I'm producing and acting in a feature-length film, a murder-mystery. I'm working independently and in some bigger budget productions. I know I wouldn't have been able to do the bigger budget projects without the networking abilities I learned through JAG."

Spotlight: Stockton McClanahan



"JAG has given me experiences and ideas to support our community through community service projects, volunteering, and project-based learning. Because of that, I realize that we can work together to make our community a better place for us and for future generations."

– Stockton
McClanahan,
2022 Lyman
High School
graduate



Empowering South Dakota's young people
with the skills and support to succeed in **life**



Success takes many forms; our JAG-SD students find their way to it when they know what their success can look like. It can be in the military, full-time employment, full-time college, or any combination of those. As of today, 85 percent of our students are finding their way to success through the skills they have built as members of the JAG-SD family.

Those skills they build span a spectrum of what a student will need when they leave the halls of K-12 education. They encompass career development and job attainment skills, but also life skills such as communication, leadership, and even study skills, solving conflicts, healthy choices, and understanding insurance.

JAG-SD students leave with a solid foundation of relationships and skills from which to draw when they face life's challenges and successes.



Spotlight: **Annalese Crazy Bear**

JAG-SD helped get Annalese Crazy Bear out of her comfort zone. Though she never liked talking in front of crowds, she placed third in the state at a public speaking event and went on to compete nationally. Today, Annalese is attending Mitchell Technical College where she is studying to be a medical lab technician.





MELINA SHEILDS

STUDENT, LYMAN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL,
2023-24 JAG-SD PRESIDENT

"I've experienced barriers that have made me the person that I am today. Each of them taught me a lesson that I use in my everyday life. ... I was never raised by my biological parents. They both suffered with alcoholism and substance abuse. I was raised by my great grandma who took care of my two older brothers and I ever since we were little. It's something that I think of everyday and motivates me to keep going. My great grandma struggled and worked so hard to give us what we wanted to have a happy childhood.

My life has been hard at some points, but I learned early on that if I dwell on self-pity, then I'm going to let myself fall into a hole that I might not get out of. ... JAG has really helped me come to terms that my barriers are just steps to success and that I'll get past anything if I put my mind to it and have the support.

When I joined JAG in my freshman year, I was really curious about it. It doesn't teach stuff like other classes: JAG teaches me how to prepare myself for the adult world. We go over finances, college applications, how to apply for jobs, how to keep up our mental health.

Another thing we do in JAG is we learn how to plan and run events. We're

planning a big community meal this year. We are a community of five towns, and one of those towns is on a reservation, and we're hosting it there. On the reservation, winter can be hard for people. So putting together this meal for the whole community to come out and be a part of it is a good way to support the community. ... A big part of JAG is about strengthening our community, keeping it close.

I've done so many things with JAG that I never thought I'd do. One of them is that I've been able to go to Washington, D.C., as a representative of South Dakota's JAG program. I loved the whole experience. We went to leadership seminars there. I got to network with business leaders, and I met a lot of people who were in JAG from other states.

While we were in D.C., someone also talked to us about the internship opportunities that are available there. That's what I want to do after high school. I want to go to college for political science and business, and I want to get an internship in D.C. Then I want to come back to my home and be a leader for my community and run for elected office someday."

For the next 15

JAG-SD is just getting started. We know from the last 15 years, that success for the next 15 will be built through relationships and community. It takes a community, and a wealth of efforts from all corners, to support our students in realizing their goals.

While JAG-SD is managed at the state level, its success is a testament to the commitment of local school leaders, JAG specialists, and employers and volunteers who engage with students in meaningful ways.

JAG-SD's advisory board is a vital component of the program's success. The purpose of the board is to assist, advise,

support, and advocate for the JAG-SD program. The Department of Education and participating school districts rely on the board to set direction for the next 15 years and beyond!

Funding to support JAG-SD comes from the state, local school districts, and generous donors. This public-private partnership demonstrates the widespread support for identifying young people of great promise and preparing them to be the citizens and leaders of the next generation.

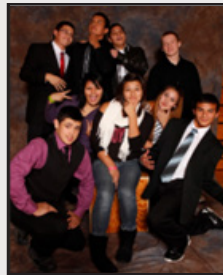


How can you get involved?

Inspired by what you have seen?

Become a part of the JAG-SD story:

- Start a program at your school
- Connect with a local program and develop relationships with students in your community
- Volunteer at local or statewide events
- Sponsor a local program
- Donate
- Follow us on social media



JAG-SD Advisory Board

- Amber Arlint, Independent State Farm Agent
- RF Buche, President, GF Buche Co.
- Matt Collins, President, Kennebec Telephone Company
- Chris Daugaard, Partner, Ernst Capital
- Linda Foos, Retired Educator
- Jake Harens, Project Delivery Senior Manager, Black Hills Energy
- Lonnie Heier, CEO, Heier Inc.
- Rob Monson, Executive Director, School Administrators of South Dakota
- V.J. Smith, Speaker and author
- Alexander (Zane) Zephier, field advisor, Upward Bound, University of South Dakota

• • • •

JAG-SD Supporters

While not an exhaustive list, the following businesses and individuals have been instrumental throughout the years in supporting JAG students, not only through financial donations but through encouragement and employment opportunities. **You are all part of the JAG Family!**

1st Tribal Lending	Cherry-Todd Electric	Four Directions Healing	Dawn Marie Johnson	Patrick Oil	Smithy Grain
895-Hair	Cooperative	Frederick-Romero Ranch	Johnson Farms	Pizza Hut	Snake Den Lodge
Abby's	Choal Construction	Fresh Start	Jones Food Center	POET	Some Dude Productions
Agtegra Cooperative	CITlbank	Frontier Motors	K BAR T Trucking	Prairie Dust Bar	South Dakota Army National Guard
Altria	City of Lake Andes	Garnos Ranch	Keller Williams Realty	Prairie View Ringnecks	South Dakota Community Foundation
Amazing Grace Daycare	City of Sioux Falls	GE Associates	Kennebec KOA	Presho General Store	Southeast Technical College
Amazon	Clinton Store	GF Buche Company	Kennebec Telephone Co	Promising Futures Fund	Speckles Storage
Amber Arlint	Coffee Cup Fuel Stop - Vivian	Gerry's Motel	Kenora Family Foundation	Pump'r Niks	Sportsman's Lanes
Jessica Ashton	Matt & Christie Collins Family	Gould Construction	Kings Inn	Raven Angus	State Farm Agency, Amber Arlint
AT&T	Country Curl	Gray Avenue Designs	Kool Beans Coffee & Roasterie	Reli Bar	Sugar Shack Lodge
Avera Health Care	Raven Cournoyer	Hahn Contracting	KPI Insurance	Reuman Consulting	Tall Tines Trophy Properties
Avera Hospital	Dairy Queen	Halverson Oil	Kustom Rock Crushing	Reuman Seed Farm	Thomas Farms & Feedlot
B&L Beef and Grain	Dakota Mill & Grain	Halvorson Hunts	Lake Andes Senior Living Center	Rez Raised Ranch	Thrift Store and More
B&L Farms	Dakota Power Fluid	Harms Oil Company	Lyman County Herald	Rosebud Sioux Tribe Council	Todd County Courthouse
BankWest Insurance	Dakota Wesleyan University	Lonnie Heier	Lyman County Historical Museum	Rosebud Sioux Tribe Tribal Education Department	Todd County School District Nursing
BankWest	DakotAbilities	Henriksen Autobody	Lyman FFA	Rosenbauer	Tripp County Courthouse
The Beauty Lounge	Dakotaland Birdseed	Hieb's Cenex	Ma & Pa Angus	Sunshine and Rubies Boutique	TRT Farms
Benji's Diner	Dakotamart	Steve Hildebrand	Madsen Quality Fencing	Sam's Repair	TSP, Inc.
Bennett County Hospital and Nursing Home	Chris & Emily Daugaard	Hills Trucking	Marmen Energy	Sanford Hospital	Scott & Renee Van Der Werff
Berg Construction	Dennis & Linda Daugaard	Hjellming Construction	Marsh McLennan Agency	Schulte Subaru	Wagner Community Hospital
BigIron Auctions	Deffenbaugh Homes	Homewood Suites	Medicine Creek Golf Course	ScottE Enterprises	Wellmark Foundation
Billion Automotive	Diehm Farms	Howe Electric	Medicine Creek Ranch	Shear Illusions	Wells Fargo
BJ's Food Center	Dollar General	Howe, Inc.	Michael Hoffer Construction	Shirley's Diner	White Thunder Organics
Bomgaars	Douglas County Memorial Hospital	Husman's Grocery	Midwestern Mechanical	Showplace Cabinetry	Wiconi Wakan Health and Healing Center
Boom's Restaurant	Dana Dykhous	Hutches Café & Motel	Millard Ranches	Sicangu Co	Kylie Wilson-Long
Brakke Ranches	Express Employment Professionals	Hy-Vee	Jay & Laura Mitchell	Sioux Empire Community Theatre	Xcel Energy
Brooks Construction Services	Farm Bureau Financial	Indian Health Service Dental Clinic	Modern Woodmen	Sioux Empire Housing Partnership	Yankton Sioux Tribe (YST)
RF Buche	First Fidelity Bank	Wagner Indian Health Service Clinic	The Inside Scoop	Sioux Falls Development Foundation	Summer Youth Program
Buche Foods	First Interstate Bank	Janssen Law	Montgomery Furniture	Sioux Falls Fire Rescue	Dylan Young
Buche's Gus Stop	First PREMIER Bank	Jet Lanes	Mosquito Park Enterprises	V.J Smith	
Tony Burke	Fort Randall Casino	Jewel II Theater	Mustang Disaster CleanUp		
Cahoy's Food Center			Nellie B Farms		
			Oldenkamp Trucking		



Jobs for America's Graduates

doe.sd.gov/JAG-SD

