Montana GEAR UP Senior FAFSA Completion Rate

For the first time, Montana GEAR UP had to report on its senior FAFSA completion rate for the 2012 Annual Performance Report. Data from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) shows that, as of the end of March, 268 or 55 percent of GEAR UP seniors had completed the FAFSA. This completion rate will most likely increase as many students waited to complete the FAFSA until their families’ taxes were submitted to the IRS by April 15.

The results of the FAFSA are used in determining a potential student’s eligibility for federal and other grants, work study, loans, and other financial aid offered by colleges and universities. FAFSA completion has gained increased attention from educators and researchers as an important harbinger of postsecondary enrollment. Students whose families receive assistance with the FAFSA and information about financial aid are significantly more likely to submit the application and have higher rates of postsecondary enrollment.

Based on this research, Montana GEAR UP is committed to increasing the FAFSA completion rate of seniors and adopted this as a measure in our 2011 grant proposal. Montana GEAR UP supports schools in their efforts to increase knowledge about financial aid, including the importance of FAFSA completion; to promote tools and events, such as College Goal Montana, to assist students and families with the FAFSA application; and to adopt policies that require all seniors to complete the FAFSA.

In order to maximize the amount of gift aid (institutional scholarships, institutional and federal grants, and fee waivers) a student receives, it is imperative for families to complete their tax information as soon as possible so as to meet the financial aid priority deadline of the college where they plan to enroll, usually in February or March.

Although 268 GEAR UP students completed the FAFSA, DOE data reveal that actually 304 students submitted the FAFSA. However, 36 students submitted FAFSAs that were incomplete and therefore rejected because of 66 errors; some applications had more than one error. The error reasons were varied but the three reasons listed below accounted for 74 percent of all the errors on the FAFSAs.

The recommended actions to fix the mistake are also listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reject Reason</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missing parent signature on FAFSA or Student Aid Report (SAR) - 20 occurrences</td>
<td>Signature correction must be made on a printed SAR certification page and resubmitted to the FAFSA Processor or can be corrected electronically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing student signature on Web application - 19 occurrences</td>
<td>Signature correction must be made on a printed SAR certification page and resubmitted to the FAFSA Processor or corrected electronically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s Social Security Number match, but no name match - 10 occurrences</td>
<td>Confirm (reenter the same value) Student’s First and Last Name.</td>
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Montana GEAR UP Awards Over $1,100,000 to Graduating Seniors

We are pleased to announce that 54 seniors from 19 of the 2005 grant Montana GEAR UP high schools have been awarded the Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship. Each of these scholarships is worth up to $22,200 over a five-year period.

In order to be eligible to apply for the scholarship, students are required to have received the Montana GEAR UP Achievement Grant as a junior, maintain a 2.5 GPA, be on track to complete the Montana College Prep Curriculum, write a one-page personal essay, submit a resume of all extra-curricular and leadership activities, and complete an extensive project of their choice. This was a competitive application, and the recipients were chosen by an application review committee of professionals from across the state of Montana.

Congratulations to all of the recipients and thank you to all of the scholarship committee members, as well as the school liaisons and counselors for the hard work in making this a successful scholarship program. Enclosed in this newsletter is a list of the 2012 Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship recipients.
GEAR UP Spotlight: Eureka Middle School
BY RHONDA HAMMOND, GEAR UP LIAISON

Exciting things are happening at Eureka Middle School! Through the support of Montana GEAR UP, we are able to give students the opportunity to get additional help in their classes by offering a noon tutoring program. The student interest in this program has been astounding! Ninety-four percent of our seventh grade students have spent their lunch hour receiving extra support; some have made it an integral part of each school day. We have also introduced a guided study class for students who are having difficulties in their core classes. The guided studies class serves as a more individualized approach to tackling each student’s unique educational obstacles.

While the noon tutoring and guided studies programs help the students with their day-to-day tasks, we have advisory group sessions where the students are exposed to different professions and are able to observe the skills and aptitudes required for each vocation. These sessions serve as a foundation for each student’s future prospects.

Jim Mepham, our Superintendent, Sheila Bartmess, our high school counselor, and I were able to travel to Browning in February to look some of the exciting things they are practicing at the junior high and high school level with GEAR UP. It was a very rewarding trip! Their knowledge about GEAR UP and willingness to share information with us was priceless. We use many of the materials Browning provided for us in a two-week curriculum covering career exploration using MCIS Junior. Students play games such as “around-the-world” and “jeopardy” to help them become familiar with college terms. They also have a contest where they form teams and decorate doors with some of the different careers. It is a fun and educational experience for all of us!

To reach out to each student’s individual interest, we are providing a very diverse selection of after-school programs. A book club was established for children interested in literature. The students read the book, “The Hunger Games” and were looking forward to watching the movie. Amateur Radio Club gives students the opportunity to obtain their radio license in a fun and enriching environment. Art Club offered students the chance to express their creativity through art. Science Club will be starting in the near future. Students will spend 20-30 minutes in the classroom doing academics and move outside to hike, snowshoe, practice archery, learn fishing techniques, golf, map, and perform community service. Involved in every activity, they will scientifically study nature, and the students will discover how things work together to coexist in the environment. With this, students will come to understand how mathematical inputs affect outcomes in all of the many activities they participate in.

April will be a busy time for us. Our financial aid day is on the 11th. We have a GEAR UP parent night planned for April 16th, and students will visit the University of Montana April 23rd. Most of our students have never been on a college campus so this will be a new experience for many.

We are offering an exciting science camp this summer. Students will spend three days and two nights at Therriault Lakes Campground camping, enjoying time with their peers, exploring our lakes, learning about GPS and mapping, and discovering astronomy! Two of our well-respected high school science teachers will run this fun and rewarding camp.

“Receiving the Achievement Grant as a junior in high school is an honor. It is one less scholarship that I have to worry about as a senior. This money will help me a lot in college, being that my mother is a single parent.”
Browning High School 11th grader

Montana GEAR UP Senior FAFSA Completion Rate (continued)

Of the 36 students with rejected FAFSA applications, 92 percent of the applications - that's 33 potential college students - had reject reasons that included a missing student or parent signature! Our goal is to increase the number of seniors submitting the FAFSA, but let’s also work to ensure that those students who take the time to submit a FAFSA, submit a complete one. Please incorporate this information into presentations and assistance on filling out the FAFSA to further prepare future students with FAFSA completion and remove delays or prevent the loss of financial assistance as students navigate the path to college.

As mentioned in the April newsletter, DOE has released a new tool for school officials to track FAFSA submission and completion statistics at individual high schools to better help students access higher education. This FAFSA Completion Tool can be found at federalstudentaid.ed.gov/datacenter/fafsahs.html. For more information on financial aid topics and the FAFSA, please contact Cory Chenoweth, Financial Aid Manager, at 406-444-0350 or cchenoweth@montana.edu.

GEAR UP Spotlight: Graduation Matters in St. Ignatius
BY ALAN PULE, GEAR UP LIAISON

“This is the best K-12 Graduation Matters I have seen in the state!” an enthusiastic Superintendent of Public Instruction announced to a packed crowd in the St. Ignatius High School gym.

Thursday, April 26, was the advertised kick off to the Graduation Matters St. Ignatius. It was also a night to showcase the great projects and accomplishments of all Mission students during the 2011-2012 school year. The Community Showcase came off with all the flair of a grand event the likes of which the town of St. Ignatius has rarely seen. From the far west end of the elementary, snaked through the elementary, and all the way to east side of the gym and high school lobby were displayed dreams, projects, pictures, performances, highlights, and information from students and classes in the St. Ignatius School District.

Community members were treated to an Italian dinner of Caesar salad, beef tortellini, and breadsticks. Desserts of either a warm chocolate chip or oatmeal raisin cookie were provided from the concession area of the high school lobby. Water and coffee provided refreshment for one’s thirst. Foreign exchange students and students from the Baking and Foreign Foods class provided additional treats from around the world for those brave enough to try them. All in all, everyone who attended hungry was sure to leave fulfilled.

Those students willing to pledge to graduate had the opportunity in both the high school gym and lobby to commit themselves to the goal, receive a Graduation Matters bracelet, and also be entered into drawings for prizes from each building. Those students who pledged will be entered into the OPI drawing for more prizes and be added to the overall total of statewide students who have taken the pledge to graduate from high school. The excitement the students expressed resonated throughout the halls with parents, teachers, and other community members in attendance to this annual event.

This was a night in the high school to focus on senior accomplishments as well. A culminating event for the seniors, the community showcase was the night for them to present their senior projects and their four years of portfolio development and community service. Students signed up for times, approved by their three committee members, throughout the evening to present the result of their labor. Tri-folds provided a glimpse into the students’ five-year plan, with pictures, information, acceptance, hopes and dreams. In a 30-minute time slot, committee and community members were privileged to listen to the end products of the education students receive from the Mission staff. Question time was available at the conclusion of each presentation and students had the opportunity to provide additional information and, if needed, defend their planning and education choices. Superintendent of Public Instruction, Denise Juneau, sat in on one student’s presentation. The student made it through with flying colors, pausing only briefly to tear up at the thought of attending Yale and being so far from her family. The Gates Millennium Scholarship will cover the financial end of her education, but she will always be a Mission Bulldog.

Prior to the Keynote address of Denise Juneau, the crowd was treated to performances from the St. Ignatius High School band and also the community ukulele group, a group of community members and high school students. Lake County Superintendent, Gale Decker spoke of his education history and the changes he has witnessed as a lifelong resident of the Mission valley. Salish and Kootenai Tribal Chairman, Joe Dur glo, a father, uncle, and cousin of many Mission students, echoed Mr. Decker’s comment and stressed the importance of education in his own life and for the tribe. Denise Juneau addressed the history of Graduation Matters, the financial benefits and costs of a high school diploma, and the importance of parental involvement in a student’s life and education. Principal, Jason Sargent, presented all speakers with Bulldog cups and to Ms. Juneau, a Mission Bulldog pullover for her wear during her travels across the state.

Drawings for all in attendance concluded the evening. Parents, students, staff, and community members departed on a high note with big smiles, anticipating what St. Ignatius School District will do to top this year’s event next April.

Summer Learning Makes a Difference
BY JESSIE SALISBURY, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Research conducted by Johns Hopkins sociology Professor Karl Alexander and his colleagues shows that low-income youth suffer significantly from a loss of academic skills over the summer. Losses pile up for these students, contributing to an achievement gap that can make the difference between whether students set out on a path for college or decide to drop out of high school.¹

For students who do not experience enriching summertime opportunities, the summer break can lead to serious academic consequences—and the disparity can be dramatic. With the prevalence of television, computers and other electronic distractions, how can parents and educators encourage kids to immerse their minds and imaginations over the summer months?

Here are six tips to encourage your middle school and high school students to keep exploring through the summer months:

- **Summer reading**—English teachers can help suggest some summer reading based on student reading ability to help students’ minds stay nimble while school is out. Local libraries sometimes offer book clubs as well to help facilitate some discussion about what students have read.
- **Career exploration**—What do your students want to do when they grow up? One great place to start

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Montana GEAR UP Reminders & Upcoming Events

May 25: Deadline for students to return health forms to campus host for statewide summer camps.
June 8: 2011-12 final program reports due.
June 15: GEARS data entry deadline.
June 10-13: MSU - Northern “Quantum Learning and a Lot of Fun!” Summer Camp for GEAR UP students entering 7th and 8th grade in the fall.
June 17-22: UM “Digging for the Past and Thinking for the Future” Summer Camp for GEAR UP students entering 7th and 8th grade in the fall.
June 24-30: DCC “GEARing UP for College” Summer Camp for GEAR UP students entering 7th and 8th grade in the fall.
July 15: 2011-12 final fiscal reports due.
July 15-21: Montana Western “CSI: Birch Creek” Summer Camp for GEAR UP students entering 7th and 8th grade in the fall.
July 15-21: Carroll College “Preserving the Planet” Summer Camp for GEAR UP students entering 7th and 8th grade in the fall.
September 10-27: MPSEOC College Fair Tours, various locations. For the full tour schedule visit: www.montanacolleges.com/schedule.pdf.

Summer Learning Makes a Difference (continued)

researching careers is ACT’s World-of-Work Map at www.act.org/world/world.html. If your students took the EXPLORE®, PLAN® or the ACT®, they will know the results of their interest inventory, and they can also use these results to start exploring careers over the summer months by checking out books or exploring sites on the internet such as mtcis.intocareers.org at the local library.

- College research—Encourage your students to begin thinking about potential majors and areas of study. ACT’s Map of College Majors at www.act.org/majorsmap/index.html details topics, work tasks, available degrees, related occupations and majors, along with salary, size and occupational growth. Montana college and university information can also be found at www.montanacolleges.com and the Montana University System website at mus.edu.
- Volunteering—Encourage your students to volunteer at a local community organization. Not only is volunteering a great thing to do, it will show colleges that they are motivated.
- Community/Tribal college—Enroll in a summer class or check out your local community or tribal college’s continuing education courses. Students can use the summer to learn a different language, or take a class in something they are interested in.
- Work experience—Encourage your students to find and secure an internship or a job-shadowing experience in a career that interests them if available in your area.

For the full research brief Summer Can Set Kids on the Right—or Wrong—Course: Study Links a Lack of Academic Achievement, High Dropout Rate, to Summertime Learning Loss, visit http://tinyurl.com/3rt6mh5.

Congratulations to the 2011-12 Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship Recipients!

Montana GEAR UP is pleased to award the Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship to 54 graduating seniors from 19 Montana GEAR UP High Schools from the 2005 grant. In order to be eligible for the Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship, students were required to have received the $1,500 Montana GEAR UP Achievement Grant as a junior, qualify for a federal Pell Grant, maintain a 2.5 GPA while being on track to complete the Montana College Prep Curriculum, submit a one-page personal essay and a project of their choice. The recipients were selected based on academic achievement, extra-curricular and leadership activities, as well as the quality of their submitted project. We wish the following Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship recipients the best in their endeavors after high school!

**Arlee High School**
- Carter Clinkenbeard: The Four Forces of Flight
- AnnaMarie Greenwood: Collection of Poetry
- Logan Lefler: Essay and Portfolio: Being Happy

**Box Elder High School**
- Clarissa Bumpas: Mosaic Glass Table Donation
- Antonio Morsette: The Effects of Phthalates on Brassica Rapa
- Harold Whitford Jr: The Environmental Impact of Plastics in a Structural Material

**Browning High School**
- Dusti Boyce: Career Research Project: Obstetrician/Gynecologist (Fetal Development)
- Jonathan Hall: Career Research Project: Exercise Science
- Quinton Morgan: UNC Art Project
- Brendan Running Wolf: Native American Heritage Games
- Iris Sharp: Personal Narrative
- Ashton Smith: Community Service Project: Cupcakes for Life

**Charlo High School**
- Breanna Bilile: Career Research Project: Graphic Design
- Dawn Blevins: Make it with Wool Sewing Contest
- Devin Collinder: Career Research Project: Civil Engineering
- Ross Fullerton: Career Research Project: Farm and Ranch Management
- Serena Long: Presentation Honoring Law Enforcement
- Kinley Pope: Physical Therapy Job Shadow

**Dutton/Brady High School**
- Amber Reeve: Making Quilts for Fort Harrison VA Hospital
- Wyatt Shumway: Community Service Project: Reading Chairs for Library

**Flathead High School**
- Ashly Jones: Career Research Project: Physical Therapy

**Glacier High School**
- Donald Clark: Montana Conservation Corps Project Portfolio

**Hardin High School**
- Jordan Delp: Career Research Project: Engineering
- Mallory Edgar: Scrapbook of Agricultural Experiences
- Jacque Miller: Research Project on Connective Tissues
- Bethany Norby: Scrapbook
- Victoria Snyder: Lesson Plan for Substitute Teacher
- Summer Zier: Career Research Project: English as a Second Language (ESL) Teacher
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**Harlem High School**
- Jason Cliff: Career Research Project: Physical Therapy
- Gordon Craker: Community Service Project: Harlem Food Drive
- Riley Green: Log Railing and Deck Enclosure
- Shawnae Harding: Career Research Project: Dialysis Technician
- Sapphire Long Knife: Native American Culture: Dance, Language, Sign Language
- Cole McCann: Sheep Wagon Restoration
- Natacha Messerly: Community Service Project: Hanging Flower Baskets on Main Street
- Sasha Snow: Teenage Pregnancy

**Heart Butte High School**
- Kyle Kriskovich: Science Research Project: Restless Leg Syndrome

**Lincoln High School**
- Loni Brady: Research Project about Jane Austin

**Nashua High School**
- Jared Busch: Varsity Basketball Video Scrapbook
- Lacey Fortin: Personal Biography
- Jennifer Ramsbacher: Art Portfolio
- Cami Rosencrans: Essay: Analyzing the Symbolism Found in “Lord of the Flies”

**Noxon High School**
- Duyna Brown: Senior Class Council Petition

**Rocky Boy High School**
- Kristie Russette: Wires and Heartstrings: A Collection of Poetry

**Simms High School**
- Marcie Clausen: Organized “Teen Day” event at school
- Katelyn Lapke: Lesson Plan of Life Experiences
- Cheyenne Mulvihill: Hope4Hailey: Anti-Bullying Campaign and Website

**St. Ignatius High School**
- Mitchell Rose Bear Don’t Walk: Performing Arts Portfolio
- Jennifer Larsson: Yearbook Layout and Editing

**St. Regis High School**
- Juliana Spencer: Tanzania Orphan Service Project

**Winnett High School**
- Meghan Barnett: AutoCAD Portfolio
- Tierany Browning: AutoCAD Design Project: Caterpillar
- Whitney Wollman: AutoCAD Portfolio

**Wolf Point High School**
- Amanda Sansaver: Career Research Project: Physical Therapist