The reality is setting in – Montana GEAR UP received a new 7-year, $28 million GEAR UP grant from the U.S. Department of Education at the end of September. The application was challenging to write and the competition was stiff. Just nineteen state grant applications were funded with 36 applications received. Between state and partnership grants there is almost a 45 percent drop in the number of programs funded. Unfortunately, the Salish Kootenai College partnership grant was not funded. The only remaining partnership grant in Montana is the Fort Peck Community College grant, which runs until 2014.

Of course, the heart of Montana GEAR UP is our mission statement: Montana GEAR UP believes that postsecondary education is possible for all Montana students, regardless of economic background. Montana GEAR UP supports schools, students, and their families to increase students’ college and career readiness through academic preparedness, postsecondary planning, and financial aid knowledge so that they may succeed in their education beyond high school. In the 2011 grant that mission is primarily manifested in 18 middle schools and their receiving high schools across the state (see map below). Over the next seven years, we plan to serve 8,800 students, including 5,800 American Indian students, in grades seven through the first year of postsecondary education to improve high school graduation, college enrollment rates, and retention in college.

Fewer schools will be served in this grant due to the types and intensity of interventions as well as the size of student enrollment. The grant’s focus is directed toward ensuring students are academically college and career ready. Our expectations of the schools are high, just as we expect schools to raise their expectations of students. More specific services are required in part due to the more prescriptive nature of GEAR UP with the passage of the Higher Education Opportunities Act in 2008. All services offered are in line with the three goals of the grant:

- Increase the academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education of GEAR UP students.
- Increase the rate of high school graduation and (continued on page 4)

Montana GEAR UP Receives New 7-Year Grant

BY SANDY MERDINGER, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

2011 Montana GEAR UP
Grant Schools:
- Arlee
- Box Elder
- Browning
- Eureka/Lincoln Co.
- Hardin
- Harlem
- Hays/Lodge Pole
- Heart Butte
- Lame Deer
- Libby
- Lodge Grass
- Pryor/Plenty Coups
- Rocky Boy
- St. Ignatius
- St. Regis
- Thompson Falls
- Troy
- Wolf Point
New Prepare and Pay Web Page Offers Guidance for Students

The Montana University System, Office of Student Financial Services (SFS) is delighted to announce the new Prepare and Pay Web Page, which was developed for the new Montana University System’s Website. SFS believes getting a college education is an investment that will pay back for a lifetime, and it’s never too early to prepare for it. The Prepare and Pay Web Page invites students, parents, and the public to discover all of the options available through the Montana University System and teaches them how to achieve their dreams by getting the latest information regarding career programs, college costs, financial aid and scholarships, and financial literacy. Below is a snapshot of the tools available for students and parents. We encourage you to explore this resourceful new website by visiting: mus.edu/Prepare.

EXPLORE and PLAN Testing Window Now Open

BY JESSIE SALISBURY, PROGRAM COORDINATOR

The EXPLORE and PLAN testing window opens November 7th and closes November 22nd with a November 28th deadline for returning test answer sheets to ACT. If any additional materials are needed for your students, test administrators, or counselors, please contact Jessie Salisbury at (406) 444-0056 or jsalisbury@montana.edu. Here are a few important reminders for administering the tests:

- EXPLORE tests should be administered to 8th grade students only.
- PLAN tests should be administered to 10th grade students only.
- One test proctor is needed for the first 10-25 students. If you are testing more than 25 students you are required to have an additional test proctor for every 25 students.
- The non-cognitive portion of the EXPLORE and PLAN is required to be administered this year at GEAR UP schools. This portion of the test for EXPLORE includes the Needs Assessment, Plans and Background Information, and UNIACT Interest Inventory. This portion of the test for the PLAN includes the Needs Assessment, High School Course/Grade Information, UNIACT Interest Inventory, and the Education Opportunity Service (EOS), which allows students to “opt in” to receive information from colleges.
- The non-cognitive portion of both EXPLORE and PLAN must be administered before the cognitive portion of the test.
- Keep your test booklets as this will allow review of the test when students receive their scores. Additionally when used in conjunction with the Item Response Summary Report the test booklets become a useful tool for curriculum review.

Montana GEAR UP schools should receive test results mid to late December. Montana GEAR UP and ACT will be working together to provide some further training on how schools can use their EXPLORE and PLAN test data.
**Graduation Matters Montana**

**B Y  D E B  H A L L I D A Y ,  O P I  P O L I C Y  A D V I S O R**

This past fall, Office of Public Instruction Superintendent Denise Juneau launched Graduation Matters Montana, a statewide effort to ensure Montana’s public schools graduate more students prepared for college and careers. Nearly 2,000 Montana students drop out of school each year. Superintendent Juneau believes we need to set an expectation that every Montana student will graduate from high school. In order for our young people to compete in the 21st Century global economy, a high school diploma is key.

Graduation Matters encourages locally-designed initiatives that engage schools, communities, businesses, and families in a focused effort to increase the number of students who graduate prepared for college and careers. Local Graduation Matters initiatives have already launched in Billings, Belgrade, Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Hamilton, Helena, Kalispell, Missoula, and Townsend. This fall, more than half of Montana high school students have a Graduation Matters initiative in their town.

If you’re interested in starting a local Graduation Matters initiative in your town, or if you’d like to host an I Pledge to Graduate event, in which students pledge to a significant adult that they will graduate and identify specific reasons why graduation is important to them, please go to the OPI website, [http://graduationmatters.mt.gov](http://graduationmatters.mt.gov) or contact Deborah Halliday, OPI Policy Advisor, Community Learning Partnerships, at 406-444-3559 or [dhalliday@mt.gov](mailto:dhalliday@mt.gov).

**AVID Program Encourages Summer Learning for Browning Students**


As the team of teachers from Browning Middle School watched and welcomed students into the classroom at the beginning of this summer, one teacher provided what they thought was positive reinforcement to one of the students by stating "glad you decided to be here at summer school!" The student drearily replied back "I have to be here".

AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) is an elementary through postsecondary college readiness system that is designed to increase school-wide learning and performance. The AVID program in Browning is the first in Montana, and is funded by Montana GEAR UP.

At Browning Middle School, 20 students attended a four-day summer school program (June 6-9) that utilized AVID strategies. Through guidance, inspiration, laughter, and music, a team of four teachers provided relevant core curriculum to help students become aware, recognize and build their self-concept, creativity, and social skills. Students were constantly engaged through hands-on activities, writing and verbal assignments, and a local business field trip. Students rose to the challenge to increase their knowledge base towards the AVID mission statement: “AVID’s mission is to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society.” The group of 20 students certainly are another step closer.

The same student mentioned earlier reflected on the four days and shared her thoughts. “I got to meet people I may have never met, and we all had fun learning.”

**Survey Says...**

In April 2011, Montana GEAR UP awarded the competitive, four-year, $22,200 Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholarship to 48 high school seniors from 18 Montana GEAR UP schools. In order to qualify for the scholarship, students must have received the $1,500 Achievement Grant in 11th grade, graduated from a Montana GEAR UP high school with at least a 2.5 GPA, been eligible for a Pell Grant, and completed the application. The chart to the right shows where these students are pursuing their postsecondary education.

**2011 Montana GEAR UP Pathways Scholars: Where are they now?**

- **Montana State University Campuses**: 27%
- **The University of Montana Campuses**: 36%
- **Community Colleges**: 13%
- **Tribal Colleges**: 2%
- **Private/Independent Colleges**: 4%
- **Out of State Colleges**: 18%
Montana GEAR UP Receives New 7-Year Grant (continued)

- Increase GEAR UP students, and their families’ knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing.

College and career readiness activities include comprehensive mentoring, completion of four-year high school plans, academic advising, ACT’s College and Career Readiness System (EXPLORE in 8th grade, PLAN in 10th grade, and ACT in 11th grade), enrollment in rigorous academic courses, dual enrollment, data-driven assessment of student academic progress, tutoring, college visits and other college awareness activities, career fairs, job shadowing, financial aid information, FAFSA completion requirements, and matched education savings accounts. In addition, all high schools are expected to become Graduation Matters Montana schools; needs-based professional development and professional learning communities are emphasized; and one college application per graduating senior will be funded. Pilot initiatives include funding AVID in a second Montana GEAR UP school, a principal leadership program, and the National Home Visiting Project. Beginning in year two of the grant, Montana GEAR UP will work through postsecondary institutions and the Student Assistance Foundation to support GEAR UP college freshmen with their transition to and retention in college.

At the state level, Montana GEAR UP is funding a pilot of the ACT + Writing for all juniors in Montana GEAR UP schools plus 33 other Montana high schools. That will be followed with a statewide implementation of the ACT Plus Writing at all Montana public high schools next year. Additionally, we will continue to support the Montana School Counselor Association (MSCA) annual spring conference and implementation of the new common core state standards. Montana GEAR UP will work with the Montana College Access Network (MCAN) to provide an annual fall conference that meets the needs of GEAR UP schools as well as the many other partners in MCAN.

The staff at Montana GEAR UP wishes to thank the many partners written into the grant for their support of GEAR UP and to staff at the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education and the Office of Public Instruction for their support, ideas, editing, etc. as we wrote the grant application. We couldn’t have done it without you!

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Our mission: Montana GEAR UP believes that postsecondary education is possible for all Montana students, regardless of economic background. Montana GEAR UP supports schools, students, and their families to increase students' college and career readiness through academic preparedness, postsecondary planning, and financial aid knowledge so that they may succeed in their education beyond high school.