2011 GRANT COMMITMENTS

A) Service Commitments:

Goal 1: Increase the academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education of GEAR UP students

Evaluation of Course Offerings
- Schools will complete an audit of their course offerings and content as they align to the Standards as well as of the vertical alignment of a school's curriculum from middle to high school and between high school grades
- Work with schools to ensure that rigorous courses are available

Pre-Algebra and Algebra 1
- Support schools in analyzing their math offerings
- Ensure that Pre-Algebra is available to 7th grade students
- Ensure Algebra 1 is offered to 8th grade students
- Ensure the necessary professional development and student supports are in place

Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment
- Schools will access opportunities for all students in AP, dual enrollment, and other advanced courses through, e.g., MTDA
- Fund AP exams for GEAR UP students
- Support select teachers for AP professional development
- Provide needed school-level support to host the MTDA

AVID
- MTGU will implement AVID in at least one other GEAR UP school

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
- Increase student enrollment in STEM courses, including four years of math
- Identify teachers for OPI's Montana Math and Science Forum work group
- Provide technology tools to enhance schools' STEM curriculum, including Parametric Technology Corporation software training to GEAR UP teachers in a STEM discipline
- Support GEAR UP middle school girls to attend the Expanding Your Horizons Conference

ACT's College and Career Readiness System (CCRS)
- All GEAR UP students will take the EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT tests in the 8th, 10th, and 11th grades
- GEAR UP school personnel will be trained to analyze the test results longitudinally and as a snapshot to identify instructional gaps affecting student attainment and then modify the curriculum or instructional practices
- GEAR UP school personnel will be trained to analyze the test results to identify students in need of remediation and to develop effective interventions to keep students on track to graduate
- Counselors in GEAR UP schools will also be trained in using the results to determine effective advising for students and families on educational and career options beyond high school.
- MTGU will fund the ACT for all 11th grade students in Montana
- Test data will be shared with students and parents to increase knowledge of and engagement in student college and career readiness
Common Core State Standards (the Standards)
• Coordinate with OPI on the transition, implementation, and assessment of higher, uniform standards as part of Montana’s adoption of the Standards infused with IEFA content
• Partner with OPI to support the Smarter Balanced Assessment’s implementation in GEAR UP schools to analyze student outcomes, measure student readiness, use diagnostic information for placement, and to identify effective approaches to strengthen instructional practices, professional development needs, and strategies that translate the Standards into classroom practices
• Provide ongoing professional development for educators to develop the critical skills necessary for curriculum mapping and alignment, instructional unit design, and using Standards assessment data to drive decision making at GEAR UP schools
• Provide financial support to OPI and the MUS for the development and implementation of curricular resources and tools, technical Standards companion guides, alignment toolkits, critical user’s guides, and a Moodle site to deliver professional development modules for educator use across the state
• Principals and educators in GEAR UP schools will be required to complete online professional development modules
• Collaborate with OPI for the necessary development and implementation of IEFA curriculum, model lessons, and companion resource guides
• With OPI and the MUS, help pre-service teachers learn to align curricula to the Standards
• Fund GEAR UP schools to re-evaluate course content, evaluate classroom practices and interventions, and align graduation requirements to the MUS college entrance requirements, ensuring that all students complete rigorous coursework aligned to the Standards

Principal Leadership Program
• Support a Principal Leadership Program at identified schools to mentor principals

Professional Learning Communities
• Support targeted schools to create PLCs to analyze student performance data using summative and formative assessments, review and develop curriculum, support vertical alignment, and acquire new content knowledge

Mathematical Coaches
• Partner with school districts to identify strong mathematical leaders to participate in a pilot project that provides coaching support to identified schools

Pre-Service Teachers
• Work with Montana postsecondary institutions to provide pre-service teachers with training and experience through practicums at GEAR UP schools, participation in GEAR UP summer programs, and mentoring programs at reservation and high poverty schools

Persistently lowest-achieving schools
• In partnership with OPI, provide targeted needs-based professional development opportunities to persistently lowest-achieving schools, e.g., instructional strategies across content areas, support for American Indian culture, and increasing content knowledge and pedagogy
• Provide professional development and classroom support materials to persistently lowest achieving schools to ensure implementation and practice of the Standards
• Provide funding for intensive supports to persistently lowest-achieving schools to increase student academic preparation, cultural relevance, and engagement, such as extended learning time through quality before- and after- school programming and/or tutoring
• Provide a transition curriculum specific to the needs of American Indian students
• Provide funding for academic enrichment that allows students to make connections between content knowledge and the world beyond their community
• Support persistently lowest-achieving schools to implement comprehensive mentoring programs based on student needs
Goal 2: Increase the rate of high school graduation and participation in postsecondary education for GEAR UP

Alignment of Graduation Requirements
- Work with schools to align their graduation requirements with the MUS college entrance requirements
- Provide resources for schools to identify early and on-track indicators for high school completion
- Provide on-going student advisement through four-year high school plans developed in 8th grade

Dropout Prevention
- Collaborate with OPI to support schools in using the My Voice Student Aspirations Survey results for an action plan to engage students, promote a college-going culture, develop youth leadership opportunities, and expand the survey to the remaining seven GEAR UP schools
- Fund quality, researched-based intervention and support programs, such as before-, during- and/or after-school tutoring, study skills, credit recovery, local and state summer programs, and attendance improvement plans at both the middle and high school levels

Mentoring
- Support schools to implement comprehensive mentoring programs by linking students to adults who can serve as college-going role models, and through partnering with colleges that offer service learning opportunities for college students to mentor middle or high school students
- Schools will receive mentoring training, resources, and materials

Transition
- Support local middle to high school transition programs like PRIDE
- Provide reservation schools with the high school to postsecondary education transition curriculum and professional development using the University of Minnesota’s Expanding the Circle: Respecting the Past, Preparing for the Future
- Support local high school to college transition programs
- Partner with College!Now to assist students transitioning to postsecondary education through early college experiences
- Coordinate with SAF outreach teams on certain postsecondary campuses to provide mentoring, advising, financial aid guidance, and connection to campus support services for GEAR UP students in their first year of college
- Provide relevant enrollment, persistence, and achievement data to the American Indian and Minority Achievement program in OCHE to inform their work on supporting students transitioning to college and transferring from tribal colleges to units in the MUS

College Application Week
- Pay for one college application for each graduating GEAR UP senior
- Collaborate with postsecondary institutions, MCAN, and other partners to develop a College Application Week with the goal of having Montana postsecondary institutions waive the application fee for all Montana students that complete an application during that week
Goal 3: Increase GEAR UP students’ and their families’ knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing

College and Career Awareness
- Fund college visits for all GEAR UP students and some parents and provide grade-level college visit curricula
- Collaborate with postsecondary institutions, including tribal colleges, to develop uniform virtual campus tours
- With MPSEOC, SAF, and others, support college and career activities, e.g., MCIS; college/career fairs; portfolios; college student panels; educational trips; job shadows; parent/family nights
- Distribute KnowHow2Go campaign’s materials and information, and implement its activities at GEAR UP schools
- Work with a former liaison to develop “GEAR UP for Urban Indians” to provide college-going information with a cultural component that can be implemented by OPI Indian Ed Specialists and others at large Montana high schools
- Work with the Indian Education Division to develop a college and career readiness curriculum guide for American Indian students attending GEAR UP schools

Financial Aid Awareness
- Provide early financial aid awareness to middle school students through presentations
- Financial aid training and materials, as well as scholarship awareness and opportunities, such as the preferential Horatio Alger scholarship and the annual MASFAA GEAR UP scholarship, will be shared with GEAR UP educators, parents, community members, and tribal education staff
- All GEAR UP students will be presented with 21st Century Scholar Certificates

FAFSA Completion
- Encourage schools to adopt policies that require all seniors to complete the FAFSA
- College Goal Montana will be one tool that schools can use to assist with the FAFSA paperwork.
- Schools also will use the FAFSA4Caster with high school sophomores and juniors

Financial Literacy
- Partner with MT Credit Unions for Community Development to open MESAs for GEAR UP students.
- Support students in starting a savings plan through collaboration with SAF’s pilot incentive-based scholarship, which monetarily rewards students for completing specified college & career activities
- Partner with SFS to serve high school students using Get Money Smarts financial literacy curriculum
- Coordinate with SAF to offer financial literacy to first year college students attending selected colleges in the state of Montana

Parental Engagement
- Collaborate with MPIRC on the Solid Foundations Program, a school-based, team process that strengthens family-school connections, engages parents in children’s learning, and improves student academic learning
- Partner with OPI’s implementation of the National Home Visiting Project, a model of family engagement proven to end the cycle of blame between families and school staff, at SIG and other identified schools
- Support the following at schools, e.g., parent workshops, parent materials and resource centers, student-led parent-teacher conferences, and college, career, and financial aid parent/family events
- Provide training and materials for postsecondary planning to SIG community and GEAR UP liaisons working with parents, school boards, and tribal education departments, leaders, and agencies

Student Advisement
- Provide professional development and resources through the MSCA Spring Institute, NT4CM, SFS, and MCAN
B) Management Commitments

- IP Development Conference with local management teams in April; mid-term and final reports
- Website
- Monthly newsletter
- Three annual regional and statewide meetings for GEAR UP coordinators
- Monthly updates to the program’s primary partners
- State, regional, and national GEAR UP conferences, including MCAN conference
- State Management Team consists of GEAR UP, OPI, and SAF staff and meets twice a month. The SMT hosts an annual planning.
- State Advisory Group consists of business and state partners to MTGU and meets two times a year to offer input on programmatic components and overall program direction, and to determine how to coordinate with other state access-related initiatives.
- GEAR UP graduates will be surveyed on their secondary and postsecondary experiences
- Onsite school visits in Fall & Spring
- Monthly fiscal review and reconciliation
- New liaison orientation in August
- Annual Performance Report to DOE each April

C) Evaluation Commitments

- GEAR UP graduates will be surveyed on their secondary and postsecondary experiences to guide training for school staff and planning of student services.
- Montana GEAR UP will contract with an outside evaluator to conduct an annual, four-part analysis of the program, relying on quantitative data to identify factors associated with students’ college and career readiness and is supported by qualitative data to provide a contextual understanding to inform actionable recommendations.

Part 1 – Statewide Outcomes

- With the outside evaluator, use MTGU data to identify factors in high school that contribute to postsecondary success, e.g., high school course-taking and completion trends, attendance, proficiency on state assessments, and when students are struggling in these areas
- The evaluation plan will look at factors that influence students’ success, such as whether there are differences in students’ successful completion of college prep math classes and whether these differences are based on student demographics; whether the percent of students passing college preparatory math courses match or fail to match student test scores on the state achievement tests or ACT’s EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT tests; whether the course-taking patterns of students put them on track to graduate; and what early warning indicators schools can use to intervene
- Student/parent/educator survey data collection will begin in the fall and finish by February
- Student survey data will be correlated with student performance data through a unique student identifier to delve down further into the relationships between student educational expectations and academic performance
- Student participation in GEAR UP activities also will be correlated with student academic performance and student survey data
- Serves as a platform to bridge the OPI and MUS data warehouses and test the longitudinal data analysis possibilities to increase high school graduation, and postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and completion, especially among American Indian students
- Use the MUS data warehouse to track the enrollment, remediation, persistence, and completion of GEAR UP students. MTGU will then supplement this information with data from the OPI data warehouse and the GEAR UP database to analyze what factors in the GEAR UP program are associated with college enrollment and persistence of all GEAR UP students and then the subset of American Indian GEAR UP students.
- Provide relevant enrollment, persistence, and achievement data to the AIMA program in OCHE to inform their work on supporting students transitioning to college and transferring from tribal colleges to units in the MUS.
Part 2 – Local Program Outcomes

- The outside evaluator will examine disaggregated data site by site. Sites will be compared to the state composite, as well as to each other, to identify program innovations that emerge at the local level and to share exemplary programs, curricula, or strategies that may benefit others.
- Schools will be trained to identify early warning indicators showing students at risk of being off-track to graduate and to develop interventions to prevent dropout and get them back on track.
- Juxtaposition of statewide and local performance measures will provide powerful information to guide annual modifications in the program as it is implemented.
- Examine to what extent school-level policy changes, e.g., requiring the MUS college preparatory curriculum and FAFSA completion, are positively associated with college success.

Part 3 – School Context Factors

- It may be possible to determine specific professional development, core and supplementary materials adoptions, or course offerings patterns that lead to increased/diminished student success.
- It also may be possible, when more than one site has selected similar or even identical strategies yet achieved different student outcomes, to isolate other factors impacting success.
- School context factors could include: whether there are unique qualities or challenges based on culture, language, or other community factors; whether there are differences evident in college preparatory math based on the instructional approach or assessment used by a school; and/or whether school size impacts the efficacy of any GEAR UP strategies or course offering patterns.
- An online questionnaire followed by interviews with administrators and teachers will facilitate data collection to develop a profile for each site. From this data, evaluators will design a matrix to look for patterns and possible clusters that could be used in subsequent analysis of quantitative data, e.g., trends and relationships connected to site context factors.
- Data from site visits will be gathered during the spring.

Part 4 – Classroom and/or Teacher Factors

- When there is a discrepancy between different performance measures, such as grades in a math class and performance on the state math achievement test, for example, the evaluator will use classroom observations and site visits at identified schools to determine the cause of the discrepancy and inform program modifications at the site and state levels.
- Using an observation protocol that includes factors associated with student academic success, the evaluator will assess the quality and consistency of the curriculum and instruction provided to GEAR UP students. The use of classroom observations will seek to answer, e.g., whether the curriculum and adopted program is consistent with the actual taught curriculum observed; whether the teacher demonstrates strong content knowledge; and whether the teacher links the academic content to the student’s world.
- Classroom observations also will be used to ferret out what instructional strategies uniquely support GEAR UP students, motivating them while providing rigorous instruction.
- As feasible, replicate these exemplary teaching practices to other sites via coaching, cross-classroom observations, and other training.
- Data from classroom observations will be gathered during the spring.

Evaluation Management

- Determine baselines for performance measures after first-year program data are collected, tabulated, and analyzed. Where baseline data are available, targets are identified; others will be set once baseline data becomes available.
- Sources of data will include student performance and demographic data from GEAR UP schools, OPI, OCHE, and ACT; surveys of students, parents, and educators from each GEAR UP school as well as of specific events such as college visits and summer programs; school implementation plans; and site/classroom observations.
- Build an online GEAR UP database the first year of the project.
- Collect data on an ongoing basis and provide to the evaluators in June.
- The evaluator will convene a pre-evaluation meeting with project representatives to refine data needs; determine
additional data sources; identify needed software development for data collection; and refine research design and pose questions to enhance the overall evaluation design and increase its efficacy for formative project enhancement and summative replication.

- Each August, this team will engage in a meeting to examine and verify the preliminary findings of the multifaceted analysis conducted by the external evaluator. The evaluation report will be due each September.

**GEAR UP College and Career Readiness Evaluation Consortium.**

- Montana GEAR UP will participate in a national-level evaluation of GEAR UP with 11 other state GEAR UP programs through the GEAR UP College and Career Readiness Evaluation Consortium.
- This plan will use a carefully matched comparison group design that will match GEAR UP students with non-participants based on key characteristics, such as demographics, test scores and other academic achievement measures, and years in school/grade level. ACT, Inc. will partner with the Consortium to find the appropriate comparison groups in the region and perform the comparative analyses. ACT will analyze each state’s student- and school-level data against the benchmarked standards in 2012-13 and beyond.
- The Consortium plans to stage development and work as follows: Phase I – Systemic Planning (FY 2011-12), retention of a management consultant, establishment of goals, objectives, measures, and the execution of data-sharing agreements; Phase II – Research and Evaluation Framework (FY 2012-13), identification of available data through state collection efforts and ACT’s repository of assessment data; and Phase III – Implementation (FYs 2013-18), formative and summative evaluation, research studies, and national initiatives, made possible by strong and expanded partnerships and external support.
- Each state member of the Consortium commits to: 1) administer the EXPLORE to all 8th grade GEAR UP students; 2) administer the PLAN to all 10th grade GEAR UP students; 3) administer the ACT to all 11th grade GEAR UP students; 4) share the results of the EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT assessments, the 4-year cohort high school graduation rate of GEAR UP students, and postsecondary enrollment data as verified through the National Student Clearinghouse; 5) share results from common survey questions in grant years two, four, and six, indicating GEAR UP students’ and families’ knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing; 6) share the professional services costs associated with a consortium consultant and costs for data systems housing and maintenance; and 7) benefit equally from the in-kind costs associated with research and evaluation services of ACT, Inc., and other providers of external evaluation services.

**2005 GEAR UP Grant Note:** some students previously served at GEAR UP schools are eligible to apply for college scholarships: Achievement Grant (juniors) and Pathways Scholarship (seniors)