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SECTION 4: GEAR UP EVALUATION AND REPORTING

4.1 Evaluation Overview

Evaluation is an important component of Montana GEAR UP and takes on three forms. The first is the Annual Performance Report (APR) that is submitted to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) every April; the second is the annual evaluation of Montana GEAR UP by an outside evaluator; and the third is Montana GEAR UP's participation in a national evaluation consortium of GEAR UP programs. Each component is described briefly below.

It is important to note that when Montana GEAR UP's data is used for these evaluation and reporting purposes, the information is compiled and presented in the aggregate. No one student is ever singled out and identified. Please see **Figure 4-1** for the Office of the Commissioner Chief Legal Counsel's memo regarding the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act's (FERPA) provision on the release of personally identifiable educational information from student files.

Annual Performance Report (APR)

Every spring, Montana GEAR UP is required to submit the APR to the DOE. The APR serves two purposes for DOE.

- In return for granting the state the funds to operate GEAR UP, DOE expects the state to demonstrate and document the use of its funds and the status of the program through the APR. The APR is then used by DOE to determine whether progress has been made that year toward meeting the objectives of Montana GEAR UP as specified in the grant application. Ultimately, DOE bases their decision of whether to continue funding for Montana GEAR UP on their review of the APR.
- As required by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993, the APR is also used to collect data addressing the performance of GEAR UP at the national level. DOE will use Montana GEAR UP's APR in combination with all the other state and partnership APRs to show Congress what a difference the program is making and to provide a justification for continued federal funding.

The APR presents information on our program in four areas:

1. Programmatic – such as the current status of Montana GEAR UP, successes and barriers, sustainability and systemic changes, expenditures and matching contributions.
2. Demographic Data and Services Data – such as the number of students served, ethnicity, gender, LEP, IEP, and services provided to students, parents, teachers, and schools.
3. Student Outcome Data – such as enrollment in advanced courses, course completions, educational progress of students, unexcused absences, and SAT/ACT test taking.
4. Parent and Student Survey Data – such as knowledge of college entrance requirements and financial aid, educational expectations, and perceptions of affordability.

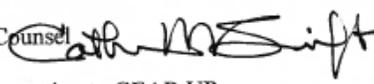


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Office of Legal Counsel
Catherine M. Swift

MEMORANDUM

TO: Sandy Merdinger, Director, Montana GEAR UP
FROM: Catherine M. Swift, Chief Legal Counsel 
RE: Dissemination of Educational Information to GEAR UP
DATE: October 18, 2011

This memorandum responds to your inquiry as to whether the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) allows for school district contractors of Montana GEAR UP to provide, as per GEAR UP requirements, personally identifiable educational information from student files. The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) mandates that such information be gathered and reviewed by GEAR UP as a requirement of the GEAR UP grant. The information is passed on from GEAR UP to the DOE, but in a statewide aggregated or statistical form, not in a personally identifiable form. The DOE uses the aggregated information to help determine the continuation of funding for Montana GEAR UP.

The data gathered by Montana GEAR UP serves three purposes. The first is to complete the Annual Performance Report (APR) for DOE. DOE uses the APR to determine whether substantial progress is being made in meeting Montana GEAR UP's objectives as well as to address the performance of GEAR UP on a national level as required by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993. Every state and partnership GEAR UP grant completes the APR.

The second purpose is the evaluation of Montana GEAR UP by an outside evaluator, who is contracted to assess the implementation and impact of the program. Evaluation of the GEAR UP program is a required component of the federal grant. The information and data that Montana GEAR UP details in the APR and that the evaluator analyzes is compiled and reported in the aggregate. No one student is ever singled out and identified.

The third purpose is for Montana GEAR UP's participation in the College and Career Readiness Evaluation Consortium ("Consortium"). The Consortium consists of GEAR UP programs from various states and its members participate in an interactive process to define, measure, and report on the value-added impact of GEAR UP on student aspirations, academic growth, and college readiness and success. Through measurement and comparison of common performance indicators, formative and summative evaluation, and research studies, the Consortium delivers a higher standard of accountability, evidence-based practice, and a

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Figure 4-1a. FERPA and the Dissemination of Educational Information Memo to GEAR UP

capacity to demonstrate the local, state and national impact of GEAR UP. As with the APR and the outside evaluator, the work of the Consortium will never individually identify a student.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act expressly allows for the release of educational information by school district contractors to Montana GEAR UP. Section 99.35 of the Act speaks directly to this issue. That section provides as follows:

§ 99.35 What conditions apply to disclosure of information for Federal or State program purposes?

(a) The officials listed in § 99.31(a)(3) may have access to education records in connection with an . . . evaluation of Federal or State supported education programs, or for . . . compliance with Federal legal requirements which relate to the program.

Section 99.31(a)(3)iv provides that prior consent to disclose information is not required when the disclosure is made to an authorized representative of a state or local educational authority. Only the designated educational authorities may have access to the information and the information must be destroyed when no longer needed for the purposes listed in this section.

There is no question but that the federal GEAR UP grant to the state requires and anticipates that Montana GEAR UP will access personally identifiable educational information relative to the program for evaluation and other program purposes. FERPA expressly allows for such access. Protections are in place to ensure that such information is accessed only by the appropriate state educational authorities and their authorized employees or contractors. All of this comports with the terms of the federal grant and federal law.

I would be pleased to serve as a resource for you or for GEAR UP schools, parents and students on this issue. I can be reached at (406) 444-0325. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further questions.

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Figure 4-1b. FERPA and the Dissemination of Educational Information Memo to GEAR UP

Annual Evaluation of Montana GEAR UP

Based on a competitive request for proposals, Montana GEAR UP will enter into a contract with an external evaluator to assist our program in meeting its federal evaluation and annual reporting requirements.

The evaluation plan addresses four research questions, which are explained further below:

1. What activities do Montana GEAR UP schools implement with program funds? What is the level of implementation of those activities? Do activities prepare students with the academic preparation, non-cognitive skills, and behaviors and aspirations that increase their likelihood of college entry and completion?
2. To what extent do Montana GEAR UP schools implement college and career readiness (CCR) best practices? Are schools implementing high-impact practices, such as dual enrollment with college credit, that have been shown to be effective in research studies?
3. Do Montana GEAR UP activities achieve the three main program goals:
 - a. academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education; and
 - b. high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education; and
 - c. student and family knowledge of postsecondary options, preparation, and financing?
4. What are the relationships between participation in Montana GEAR UP services and long-term student outcomes for all students and student subgroups, especially Native American students? In particular, does participation in Montana GEAR UP activities predict: college readiness by grade 11, high school graduation, enrollment in college (including the need for remedial courses), and persistence through the first year of college?

An important tool that Montana GEAR UP developed, and will continue to refine, is a comprehensive longitudinal database, called GEARS, that allows for the ongoing collection of data to address the four research questions. Data is entered into GEARS manually by school staff as well as uploaded in batch files, such as from OPI. The GEARS database stores data about (a) Montana GEAR UP services to students, parents, and teachers; (b) statewide performance indicators; (c) participant attitudes and self-reported behaviors among students, educators, and parents; and (d) selected student academic measures related to college and career readiness and academic performance.

- *Research Question 1: Implementation.* GEARS collects important information on implementation by tracking student, parent, and teacher participation in Montana GEAR UP services as well as tracking how funds are allocated to the goals and objectives by schools and statewide. In addition, student, parent, and teacher surveys will be administered to collect information about service implementation, providing valuable formative data on how these services are implemented and might be improved.
- These findings about service data, budgets, and implementation data will be supplemented with descriptive data on service implementation from site visits. Annual school visits will be conducted so that one-third of the schools are visited annually with each school visited twice over the grant. Site visits will use interviews and observations to rate the level of implementation of services in the school's implementation plan (IP), based on a rubric developed in the previous grant. The evaluator will write a descriptive report for each school providing formative feedback to schools, including their strengths, areas of concern, and recommendations for implementing Montana GEAR UP services.

- *Research Question 2: CCR Best Practices.* An educator survey will be conducted annually to assess how educators view the implementation of CCR best practices. Montana GEAR UP has previously developed and used an educator survey that addresses the larger CCR best practices emphasized in the research literature that go beyond specific GEAR UP services. The best practices correspond to the three broad GEAR UP goals of preparing students academically for college, creating a culture of high aspirations and expectations to graduate from high school and attend college, and instilling the knowledge that students and families need to understand financial aid and college admissions procedures. By tracking educator perceptions over time, the evaluation will document how school college-going cultures change and are sustained in schools as a result of participation in Montana GEAR UP.
- The school site visits, described previously, will follow-up on the educator survey results and document examples of CCR best practices. These CCR practices will be included in further revisions of a *Best Practices Guide*, initiated during the previous grant cycle. The guide provides a resource for sharing expertise across the Montana GEAR UP network using examples from other rural Montana schools serving similar populations of disadvantaged students.
- *Research Question 3: APR and State Performance Indicators.* Montana GEAR UP has developed 18 statewide performance indicators to measure annual progress towards achieving the three program goals and objectives. The indicators are further described in 6(b).
- *Research Question 4: Program Services in Relation to Student Outcomes.* The fourth evaluation question will be addressed by a longitudinal analysis of students as they progress from grade 7 through high school and into their first year of college. Each year the GEARS database will accumulate more information on individual students, including participation patterns in GEAR UP services; student expectations, attitudes, and satisfaction levels from surveys; student behaviors including grades and course taking throughout high school; and outcomes including student achievement, ACT college-readiness scores, graduation from high school, entry into college, and progress through the first year of college including remedial courses needed. The longitudinal analyses will focus on cohorts of students and will examine relationships between program inputs and short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes for students in grades 8 through 13. The results to these analyses are very important as schools search to identify practices that are most beneficial to help students achieve program goals.
- The longitudinal analyses will be guided by the logic model developed for Montana GEAR UP schools. The contracted evaluator will work with Montana GEAR UP staff to develop a more refined evaluation logic model that links program contextual variables (e.g., student population characteristics, community conditions); program services or inputs organized around the three major goals; and short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. This model will be used to plan correlational and multiple regression analyses that test relationships between program inputs and outcomes for all students and for important sub-groups, such as American Indian students. Because Montana GEAR UP districts are small with one middle school, one high school, or in some cases one grade K12 school, collecting similar data on non-program control or comparison schools will not be possible.

GEAR UP College and Career Readiness Evaluation Consortium (Consortium)

Montana GEAR UP has entered a partnership of 13 state GEAR UP grants to form the Consortium. Operating as a learning network, the Consortium originated from a common purpose/goal among GEAR UP state grantees to strengthen the evaluation of the program through

interstate collaboration, data-sharing, and research. The Consortium seeks to demonstrate the impact of GEAR UP across local, state, and national levels of implementation as well as to build a culture of evidence-based assessment and decision-making. Member states are Arizona, Idaho, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Central to this effort, the Consortium is partnering with ACT, Inc., to conduct research on a cohort of students taking the College and Career Readiness System suite of assessments – EXPLORE (now Aspire), PLAN (now Aspire), and the ACT – to examine the performance of GEAR UP versus non-GEAR UP students on these tests and to further understand the growth that GEAR UP students are making in their postsecondary preparation. These analyses will provide the first large-scale, longitudinal GEAR UP evaluation looking at the linkages between GEAR UP services to students and families, as they relate to student outcomes, postsecondary enrollment, and subsequent success. Ultimately, this research and evaluation will strengthen GEAR UP, as well as inform college access programming in local education agencies outside of GEAR UP.

The Consortium is additionally partnering with the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP), the DOE-designated technical assistance provider and policy advocate for GEAR UP nationally. NCCEP serves as the managing partner for the Consortium and employs the Consortium Evaluation Director.

Lastly, the Consortium is partnering with the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) to build and manage a data repository to house the de-identified student data of all 14 Consortium states.

Each state member of the Consortium commits to: 1) administer the EXPLORE (Aspire) to all 8th grade GEAR UP students; 2) administer the PLAN (Aspire) to all 10th grade GEAR UP students; 3) administer the ACT to all 11th grade GEAR UP students; 4) share the results of the Aspire and ACT assessments, the 4-year cohort high school graduation rate of GEAR UP students, and postsecondary enrollment data; 5) share the professional services costs associated with a consortium consultant and costs for data systems housing and maintenance; and 6) benefit equally from the in-kind costs associated with research and evaluation services of ACT, Inc., and other providers of external evaluation services.

Through measurement and comparison of common performance indicators, formative and summative evaluation, and research studies, the Consortium delivers a higher standard of accountability, evidence-based practice, and capacity for demonstrating local, state, and national impact that has been seen in few college access programs.

Data Collection

Data will be collected on an annual basis as students move from middle school to high school to college. Sources of data will include student performance and demographic data from GEAR UP schools, the Office of Public Instruction (OPI), the Office of Commissioner of Higher Education (OCHE), ACT, the DOE, and NSC; surveys of students, parents, educators, and high school graduates from each GEAR UP school as well as of specific events, such as summer programs; school IPs; and site visits/classroom observations. In the first year of the evaluation, an online

database, GEARS, was built to allow for future longitudinal statistical analyses of the data and generation of both formative and summative findings.

4.2 GEAR UP Evaluation and Assessment Reporting System (GEARS)

“GEARS” stands for GEAR UP Evaluation and Assessment Reporting System. GEARS is an online data collection system for recording all the major services that participating schools provide through their GEAR UP sub-grants. It also allows for following the progress of GEAR UP students, schools, and the state program itself through the life of the grant. Finally, the data gathered in GEARS is necessary to sustain the federal grant and is compiled and presented in aggregate to the DOE on an annual basis through the APR.

PRA developed GEARS to track student cohorts as they progress through middle and high school on a number of key variables reflecting attainment of program goals and objectives. The variable list includes unexcused school absences, achievement test scores, college entrance exam participation and scores, math and science course sequences, advanced placement and international baccalaureate courses, FAFSA completion, high school graduation, postsecondary education, and other indicators to fully assess progress in achieving Montana GEAR UP’s three main goals. GEAR UP services that are provided to students, parents, and educators, as well as in-kind contributions to the program are also entered into the database. The database will include school and district tags for each student so that school or district-level progress reports can be generated. Limited student background information is also included such as ethnicity, limited English proficiency, and individual education plan status. Beginning in Year 3 of the grant, schools’ IPs were tied into GEARS to allow for easier management of grant funds to schools, linking GEAR UP services outlined in schools’ IPs to those services entered in GEARS, and a smoother IP development and review process.

GEARS can be accessed from the following website: <https://grant2.praed.net/mtgearup/index.php>.

GEARS Timeline

The collection of GEARS data is spread throughout the school year according to the following timeline. To the extent feasible, Montana GEAR UP will obtain data from OPI, ACT, the NSC, the OCHE data warehouse, and DOE to pre-populate the fields in GEARS in order to reduce the data entry burden for liaisons. These data include: Aspire and ACT scores; student first and last names and middle initial, birth date, gender, race, ethnicity, lunch eligibility, limited English proficiency, IEP status, FAFSA completion, postsecondary enrollment and persistence, postsecondary course remediation, and Smarter Balanced Assessment scores. **Please note that the student and parent surveys will occur at a minimum of every other year.**

September

- A data entry reminder will be sent out detailing the exact data that needs to be reviewed/updated.
- Based on the spring promotion field for students filled out in June, new student performance records for all 8th through 12th grade students will be automatically created. Review this list to make sure that it is accurate – adding new students who have enrolled, making students who did not return from the prior school year inactive, changing grade levels as needed. If a student is inactive, enter the date of inactivity, and choose the reason. If you have a student who never enrolled in your school this fall or who left in early September and so never really participated in GEAR UP this year, *please make the inactive date 8/15*. All 8th - 12th grade students should be entered and/or updated in GEARS by September 30.
- Don't forget to check that the parent pages of a student are completed, identifying one or two parent/guardians per student. Note that providing names is optional.
- Please review the list of educators in GEARS for accuracy and report any deletions needed. Please add staff as needed, too, by September 30.
- Start entering student, parent, and teacher (staff) services. All your students/staff will need to be entered into GEARS to accurately record who participated in a given service. Remember, ***only those services that are related to the Montana GEAR UP goals and objectives and are funded wholly or partially by Montana GEAR UP federal funds or matching funds should be recorded.*** Refer to the student, parent, and teacher (staff) service cheat sheets, as well as IPs, for help categorizing services.

October/November

- (October 1 – parent survey opens. This survey will be available online as well as on paper. For the paper survey, please make sure the ID number of the parent's child/student is on the survey.)
- In early October, Montana GEAR UP will obtain from OPI a list of all 7th grade students for upload into GEARS. As with your 8th - 12th grade students, review this list to make sure that it is accurate – adding new students who have enrolled and making students who did not actually enroll inactive. If you have a student who never enrolled in your school this fall or who left in early September and so never really participated in GEAR UP this year, *please make the inactive date 8/15*.
- Keep entering student, parent, and teacher (staff) services; they will be checked monthly.
- Remember to keep your student list current: 1) add new students as they transfer in; 2) make inactive those students who leave your school.

December

- (December 1 – online student survey opens. Make sure that *all* your students are updated in GEARS as they will log into the survey using their last name and birth date as it appears in GEARS.)
- (December 19 – parent survey closes.)
- For schools that were part of the 2011 grant, you will receive by secure email in late November/early December a list of students who graduated from high school the prior spring. We gather most fall postsecondary enrollment data from the Montana University System, the NSC, and tribal college registrars. This list contains student names for whom

there is no match, and we ask for your help in figuring out what these students are doing in the summer/fall after high school graduation. Your responses are due *January 15*.

- Keep entering services (they will be checked monthly)
- Remember to keep your student list current: 1) add new students as they transfer in, 2) make inactive those students who leave your school.

January

- Start entering student performance data, e.g., grades, absences. A data entry reminder will be sent out detailing the exact data that needs to be reviewed/updated.
- Keep entering services (they will be checked monthly); remember to keep your student list current.
- January 16 – online educator survey opens.
- (January 30 – student survey closes.)

February

- February 28 – all pertinent student performance data needed for the APR *must* be entered.
- February 28 – educator survey closes.
- Keep entering services (they will be checked monthly); remember to keep your student list current.

March/April

- Between March and May, the external evaluator will visit approximately six GEAR UP middle and high schools.
- Keep entering services (they will be checked monthly); remember to keep your student list current.
- March 31 – deadline for entering student, parent, and teacher (staff) services into GEARS to include in the APR.
- April 15 – APR submitted to DOE.

May/June

- Start entering end of the year student performance data, e.g., course completion, promotion, graduation data, etc. A data entry reminder will be sent out detailing the exact data that needs to be reviewed and updated.
- Keep entering services. Don't forget local summer programs!
- June 9 – deadline for entering end of the year course and graduation data.
- June 30 – GEARS closed for services (except for summer program services) and student performance data for the school year.

July/August

- August 4 – all local summer program services must be entered into GEARS, with the exception of camps that are still occurring. State staff will enter state summer camp services.
- August 15 – rollover of student data in GEARS to prepare for the next school year. Students' grade levels will be determined by the June promotion field in GEARS.

4.3 Surveys

The external evaluator will administer surveys of educators every winter to support the APR, evaluator visits to schools, and the annual evaluation of GEAR UP; **students and parents will be surveyed at a minimum of every other year.** Additionally, Montana GEAR UP annually surveys each class of graduating seniors the following fall to gather data on these students' post-high school plans. Lastly, Montana GEAR UP developed brief surveys to assess the effectiveness of summer programming and college visits, two areas that receive significant funding. Each survey and its administration are described below.

Parent Survey

The parent survey will be accessible both online and hard copy and linked to the student. Depending on schools' preferences for administering the survey (online, hard copy, or both), The external evaluator will mail the surveys to the liaisons as well as provide instructions on accessing the electronic survey. If a parent has more than one child in either the middle or the high school, please ask the parent to select one child for whom to complete the survey per middle school or per high school. If a parent has children in both the middle school and high school, please ask the parent to complete one survey for a child at the middle school and one survey for a child at the high school. Generally, the parent survey is open for three months and should close by the end of April.

Montana GEAR UP is required by DOE to achieve a **50 percent return rate** on the parent surveys. Below are some tips for administering the parent survey, as supplied by school liaisons with a high parent survey return rate:

- I would suggest that every liaison get to know their football, volleyball, and basketball coaches and ask that they have the students bring their surveys home at the same time they bring home other documents needing signing for a student to participate in their sport. This worked really well.
- We have a parent open house where we had a chili dinner. We handed out surveys as parents came in to eat.
- I put the link on our Facebook page, on the campus portal where students and parents check grades, and on the GEAR UP section of our school's webpage. Also did homeroom competitions for ice cream. If a homeroom had 100 percent, all got ice cream and cookies and if a homeroom got 80 percent, they got no bake cookies made by our lunch ladies.
- Our parent survey is given during p/t conferences in November. The HS counselor and I have iPads, log in, and distribute them to parents while they are waiting to talk to teachers.
- I caught a lot of parents at basketball games and other school events. This really helped with getting the surveys done.
- I personally called and checked in with most parents that didn't get it filled out in the first couple weeks.
- I promised each class a party if everyone in the class returned their surveys. It worked!
- The parent surveys are done at one of our family nights where I serve food. They do them before they leave. The ones that don't make it to the dinner, I call them and hound them until they hand it in. In years past, I have also offered a reward (like a candy bar) to the students, so they have an incentive to get the surveys back.
- The home room teachers hand out the surveys at parent/teacher conferences. In most cases, the parents fill them out right then; otherwise, the students bring them back.

- I set up a GEAR UP table by the front door and informed parents during parent/teacher conferences if they fill out the survey – they will be eligible to sign up for a \$20.00 cash drawing.
- We got a good response rate because we are a small school so we can go right to the homes of students and parents if nothing else works. We send out letters with surveys, have tables at special events, call on phone, and if none of these work, we go directly to individuals' homes.

Questions on the parent survey explore educational expectations for child, engagement in child's school and learning, knowledge about college enrollment and financial aid, perceptions of child's academic performance, knowledge of GEAR UP services, high school graduation and college preparation and enrollment, and school communication with parents.

Student Survey

When the student survey is offered, it will be accessible online through GEARS. Students will log on using their first initial, last name, and birth date. More detailed instructions will be provided by the external evaluator in their letter/email to liaisons outlining the process for administering the student survey. The survey takes about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Parent consent forms are required before a student can take the survey. GAER UP recommends including the form in orientation process at the beginning of the school year to make it easier to engage parents.

Montana GEAR UP is required by DOE to achieve an **80 percent return rate** on the student surveys. Because the survey is accessed through GEARS, liaisons will be able to monitor directly which students have completed the survey. Below are some tips for administering the student survey, as supplied by school liaisons with a high student survey return rate:

- I set up a time with their teachers that I could meet with the students to fill out surveys. I also baked cookies and gave them to the students that completed their surveys.
- Poptarts!
- I have been able to achieve success by communicating and collaborating with staff and conducting the survey during a core class such as English or Science. The teacher and myself are in the computer lab while the students are taking the survey.
- I bribe them with O'Henry bars, caramel popcorn, or Rocky Road brownies! It works everytime!
- I personally went to all 7th to 10th grade students during academic time to complete the My Voice and the GEAR UP surveys with the iPads or Chromebooks over the first week of December. IT put the link on the GEAR UP page of our school's website for ease of finding to complete the survey.
- First thing is the GEAR UP liaison or coordinator goes to a staff meeting and asks what day would work for everyone. Once the day is chosen, make it happen. With the 7th and 8th graders, we take them to computer lab as soon as the morning bell rings and work on the surveys. If the student can't log on or the password won't work, I have a hard copy on hand and they fill out the survey that way. With the 9 – 12 students, I call the 9th grade first. As soon as they are done, I call 10th graders and so on. For all the absent students, I just went and got them before lunch, and they either do the survey on the computer or hard copy if there is trouble logging in.
- We worked student surveys into our MAPs testing windows.

- ☛ Students fill them out when they are in our class. I have rewards that the school gives me for them when they are done – the treat is usually something small like their favorite....rice crispy bars. I tell the students how important the surveys are so we get continued funding.
- ☛ We have the students do the surveys during their computer class.
- ☛ I had my wonderful Science Teacher do them because she has computers in her classroom and all she needed was a list of students who should take the survey and the website address! If a student was missing the day she started, then she took the next day to finish them up.
- ☛ I had a week in November for our Career and College lessons, and I took one of those days and brought every class to the computer lab. Every student in our school takes history so I utilized history classes and the only students we missed were absent that entire week...although I caught up with a few of them later on.
- ☛ My 7th and 8th grade English teacher administered the surveys and as she has the students daily, sometimes twice a day, she was able to remind them and shepherd the process.
- ☛ I filled them all out myself (jokes)!

Questions on the student survey are similar to the parent survey and explore students' academic expectations, knowledge about college enrollment and financial aid, academic performance, assessment of GEAR UP services, and high school graduation and college preparation and enrollment, and engagement.

Educator Survey

The educator survey will be available online in the early winter. School staff will be able to access the survey through GEARS using their last name as the username and their State Educator ID (SEID) number as the password. It will take about 15 minutes to complete. The educator survey provides important information for the annual evaluation report of Montana GEAR UP for planning purposes of the program as well as for tailoring the external evaluator's site visits to selected schools. The external evaluator will send out a letter/email to liaisons explaining the survey process as well as a letter addressed to educators that the liaisons can distribute to the appropriate personnel in their school (teachers, counselors, administrators, paraprofessionals) to further explain the purpose of the survey, how to access the survey online, and to lend legitimacy to the request for their participation. GEAR UP would like a return rate of 80%, completed by May 1st.

Questions on the educator survey explore school-wide and teaching practices that research has shown to be associated with preparing all students for college and careers.

Graduate Survey

The goal of the graduate survey is to gather information on what Montana GEAR UP high school graduates are doing four months or so after their graduation. It provides valuable information about the effectiveness of Montana GEAR UP, how well high schools prepared their students to be college and career ready, what students wish they had known in high school about college, and how well students were supported in the transition to college. The graduate survey is available in November/December to catch students once they have settled into college life. The survey is available in electronic copy only.

It is preferred that graduates themselves complete the survey, as they are the primary source of information. You could send each graduate an email with a link to the survey.

College Visit Survey

The college visit survey opens in the fall and runs throughout the school year. It is available both online and hard copy. The survey is brief and covers how students prepared for their college visit, activities on the college campus, and perceptions on how the visit affected student's college awareness. Students should complete one survey for each campus visit. So, for example, if students visit, MSU-Billings and City College, UM and SKC, Great Falls College and the University of Great Falls, or Carroll College and Helena College, they should complete a survey for each college and not collapse their views on the two (or more) campuses visited into one survey. If this is not possible, then students should pick *one* campus that best represents their experience for the survey. To save time, it might be helpful to type in your school name and campus to be visited on the survey before printing the survey out/copying it. Completed surveys should be mailed to Montana GEAR UP, brought to a meeting, or given to a school grant manager. Schools will receive survey results for the program. Schools with a significant number of students visiting a particular campus will also receive personalized survey results for that campus visit.

Summer Program Surveys

Both state and local summer program surveys are used to improve future summer program offerings and assess their effectiveness in increasing college and career awareness among students as well as, for credit recovery programs, in helping students get back on track for on-time graduation. The surveys are short and available online as well as paper copy. Students provide their perceptions on a series of statements about the summer program, evaluate various summer program components, and state what they liked best about the program or how it could be changed to make it a better experience. The survey should be administered in the last day or two of the camp so students have enough time to experience the camp's benefits and to respond more meaningfully. Completed paper surveys should be mailed to Montana GEAR UP within five days of the camp's end.

Table 4-1 provides an overview of survey administration details.

Table 4-1. Survey Administration Overview

Survey	Return Rate	Open	Close	Format
Parent Survey (biennial)	50%	October	December	Electronic and paper
Student Survey (biennial)	80%	December	January	Electronic (GEARS)
Educator Survey	NA	January	February	Electronic
Graduate Survey	NA	November/December (TBD)	January (TBD)	Electronic
College Visit Survey	NA	Beginning of Fall	End of School Year	Electronic and paper
Summer Program Surveys	NA	<i>Due within 5 days of camp's conclusion</i>		Electronic and paper

4.4 Evaluator Site Visits

As part of the evaluation of Montana GEAR UP, each spring the external evaluator will visit six sites, with a site consisting of a middle school and a high school. All schools will be visited at least once by the end of the grant. The purpose of the site visits is to address the following two research questions:

- What GEAR UP services are being implemented at each school and what is the level of implementation of these services?
- To what extent and in what areas does each school implement college and career ready (CCR) best practices, and how are these practices implemented?

Below are the steps the external evaluator will take to plan and implement the site visits.

Step 1: Document and Data Review

While the site visits will follow the same general protocol for each school, the specifics of interview topics, who will be interviewed, and any informal observation activities will be guided by two types of data: the annual IP and the educator survey results.

Level of implementation of GEAR UP services/activities (first research question)

The focus of the implementation analysis will be determined by an examination of the annual IPs. From these documents, the evaluator will select two or three major GEAR UP services or activities—based on funding levels and any other information on the relative emphasis of the different activities—as the focal points for assessing service implementation. For example, if the majority of funds requested at a particular school were for (a) student tutoring and mentoring services, and (b) aligning curriculum with Montana Common Core Standards, the evaluator would choose these two service areas.

Implementation of school college and career readiness best practices (second research question)

Based on results of the fall educator survey, the evaluator will choose the one or two strongest CCR best practice areas; that is, one or two areas for which educators report a relatively high level of use in their efforts to improve college and career readiness. The goal of this assessment is description and amplification of best practices rather than an overall judgment of implementation level. The external evaluator will assess the extent to which GEAR UP service implementation supports CCR best practices that are evident. A connection between funded services and best practices is an indicator that schools are using Montana GEAR UP funds in meaningful ways rather than as isolated add-on activities that are not really related to a larger school improvement effort.

Step 2: Planning the Site Visit Specifics

Once the evaluator identifies the GEAR UP services and CCR best practices in step 1, he will suggest more specific procedures for the actual site visit through email to the school grant manager, liaison, and the evaluation program manager. Through email and telephone conversations, final arrangements will be made on the observation topics and the interview and observation schedule. At this point, the GEAR UP liaison can begin scheduling activities.

Each site visit will be customized to the school’s GEAR UP services and best practices, e.g., who will be interviewed and what informal observations will occur, although the external evaluator will use a common assessment to rate the implementation of the GEAR UP services. For example, if a major service or best practice service is parent involvement, then the external evaluator would want to interview some parents in a focus group and the parent coordinator on the faculty, and perhaps visit the parent resource center. Or, if the emphasis were motivating American Indian students to stay in school and pursue college, then the external evaluator might want to interview students who are in the program and perhaps community members serving as college-going mentors. Finally, if the main GEAR UP activity is after-school tutoring and the main CCR area is curriculum alignment with common core state standards, the external evaluator would want to predominantly interview teachers as well as a group of students who participate in the tutoring. Before the visit, a schedule will be developed by the evaluator and school liaison. A rough, sample schedule is provided as **Figure 4-2**.

Montana GEAR UP Site Visit Schedule	
Primary GEAR UP activity: after-school tutoring	
School CCR area: curriculum alignment with common core state standards	
8:00 a.m.	Interview principal about after-school tutoring and curriculum alignment with common core state standards
9:00 a.m.	Interview GEAR UP liaison about after-school tutoring and collect data on effects of tutoring on student academic achievement
9:30 a.m.	Interview tutors about after-school tutoring
11:00 a.m.	Interview a group of participating students about after-school program
12:00 p.m.	Lunch
12:30 p.m.	Interview pairs of teachers in 20-minute intervals on curriculum alignment with common core state standards
1:30 p.m.	Observe several classrooms on curriculum alignment with common core state standards
2:30 p.m.	Interview curriculum department chairs on curriculum alignment with common core state standards
3:30 p.m.	Observe after-school tutoring program

Figure 4-2. Example of an External Evaluator Site Visit Schedule

Step 3: Conducting the Site Visits

In all cases, the external evaluator will want to interview the school principal as the school’s instructional leader and the liaison. Beyond that, the evaluator and program staff (during step 2) will identify appropriate teachers, students, parents, counselors, and/or community members that can be reasonably interviewed (either individually or in small focus groups) to collect data on GEAR UP activities and school CCR best practices.

The external evaluator does not anticipate doing systematic observations, but informal observations of key activities can be useful especially for gathering data on GEAR UP services and school CCR best practices. Again, this will depend on local conditions. For example, if the emphasis of a GEAR UP service and CCR practice is advanced mathematics and science courses for all students, the

evaluator may visit some of these classrooms to provide detail about how CCR practices are carried out.

The interviews will be semi-structured – a flexible interview in which the interviewer does not follow a formalized list of questions but has a list of general topics instead. However, the following generic questions will be used for appropriate individuals or focus groups in order to gather targeted information.

Level of implementation of services/activities (first research question)

- Describe how you are implementing this GEAR UP service in some detail.
- Are there challenges or barriers to making this service work effectively?
- How pervasive is this service area across the school, students, parents, etc.?
- How far along are you in changing teacher, student, parent, etc., attitudes and behaviors through this service/practice area?
- How would you rate the level of implementation of this service?
- Do you have any evidence that this service is achieving its goals?

College and career readiness best practices (second research question)

- Describe how you are implementing this practice area in some detail.
- Are there challenges or barriers to making this practice work effectively?
- Provide some examples of how this practice area is changing the attitudes and behaviors of teachers, students, parents, etc., towards improving college and career readiness.
- How would you rate the level of implementation of this practice?
- Do you have any evidence that this practice area is achieving its goals?
- What have you learned from this experience and are there ways you want to improve what you are doing with this practice area?
- Based on your experience, what advice would you give to other schools who want to implement this practice area towards achieving better results?

Step 4: Reporting Results

Results from the site visits will be reported in a *site implementation report* and a *best practices report*.

Level of implementation of services/activities (first research question)

The site implementation report will focus only on the main GEAR UP services studied during the visit, including how they relate to the three broad GEAR UP goals. In brief narrative and bullet points, the evaluator will present main findings of the interviews and any informal observations relevant to the area.

Following these results, the evaluator will present his judgment of *high, medium, or low* implementation level by judging the data along three basic questions:

- Is the service operating smoothly and as designed?
- Is it pervasive for the target audience?
- Is there evidence that it is effective?

In cases of an overall rating of *LOW*, the external evaluator may present a set of recommendations to suggest ways that implementation can be improved. Finally, as stated earlier the external evaluator will comment on the extent to which GEAR UP service implementation is supportive of the larger efforts of the school to adopt CCR best practices.

College and career readiness best practices (second research question)

The development of a best practice is a two-step process. First, the external evaluator will make a comparison between interview and observation findings and the educator survey results for the specific practice area. This will help amplify the quantitative survey results with on-the-ground descriptive examples. It will also be an opportunity to note any discrepancies between survey results and interview/observation data. The site visit report will include a brief description of the best practice area and the extent to which the field data support or contradict the survey results.

Second, the information from site visits will also be used to write a well-informed and documented best practices report. Hence, over several waves of school site visits, the external evaluator will accumulate enough information to produce the best practices report beginning in the summer of 2019, and then adding to that for subsequent reports on a biennial basis. These write-ups will likely be organized by topic areas or practice clusters, and will include descriptions from different schools of how the practices were implemented, implementation challenges and how they were addressed including lessons learned, and any anecdotal or hard evidence that the practices are pervasive and effective.