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OPI and SAF Award 15 Grants to Support College-Going and College-Readiness

Helena, MT — Today, Superintendent Denise Juneau and Kelly Cresswell, vice president of Foundation Activities at Student Assistance Foundation (SAF), announced the 15 Graduation Matters communities who will be receiving more than \$46,000 in grants from the Graduation Matters Montana Student Assistance Foundation College Readiness Fund. Communities will receive grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$4,000. Remaining funds from the \$50,000 donation from SAF will be used for bonuses to districts who meet FAFSA completion goals of 35 percent.

"This strategic investment of funding is expected to bring in millions of dollars in federal grant funding for Montana students and families for college," said Superintendent Juneau. "It is exciting to see Graduation Matters communities setting high goals to reach out to and engage students and families as they prepare for life after high school."

Last year's grantee communities were successful in bringing in an estimated \$2.7 million more dollars in federal grant funding for Montana students and families for college than they did in 2013. Schools who received the grants achieved a 35 percent FAFSA completion rate by the March 1 early application deadline, which was well above the state average of 30 percent.

Schools have set their sights on increasing the number of students in their schools who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by participating in programs such as College Goal Montana. Grantee schools will also participate in College Application Week this November, an effort to raise awareness about college opportunities and increase the number of Montana students who apply for college.

Other activities that will be supported by the grant include: providing college and career exploration and mentoring opportunities for high school students, financial literacy and budgeting presentations, and outreach to families to increase awareness of financial aid and college and certificate options.

"In addition to funding the important work that will be done through these grants, SAF outreach staff will be participating in many of the activities that will be carried out by our grantees," said Kelly Cresswell. "Understandably, students and parents are concerned about the cost of higher education. All of us working together will ensure that more students have resources to succeed after high school."

High Schools Receiving Awards from the Graduation Matters Montana Student Assistance Foundation College Readiness Fund: Anaconda (\$3,500), Bozeman (\$4,000), Butte (\$3,000), Columbia Falls (\$1,000), Hamilton (\$3,500), Hardin (\$2,500), Libby (\$3,500), Livingston (\$4,000), Miles City (\$3,500), Rocky Boy (\$2,570), Ronan (\$3,000), Saint Regis (\$1,000), Skyview High School in Billings (\$4,000), Thompson Falls (\$4,000), and Troy (\$3,000).

More information about Graduation Matters Montana can be found at:
<http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>.

About Student Assistance Foundation

Student Assistance Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Montana corporation that provides students with knowledge and tools to pursue and fund their postsecondary education. Funds generated by SAF are returned to Montanans in the form of education grants and public benefit programs - to date more than \$28 million. For more information, visit www.safmt.org or www.SmartAboutCollege.org.

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