

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAF Grants \$50,000 to Graduation Matters Montana Grant Aims to Increase College-Going and Financial Aid Completion

Missoula, MT - Superintendent Denise Juneau was at Big Sky High School in Missoula to announce that nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation (SAF) recently provided a \$50,000 grant to support Graduation Matters Montana (GMM). This marks the second year that SAF has provided the funds to GMM, bringing the grand total to \$100,000.

Said Superintendent Juneau, "Student Assistance Foundation understands the importance of making sure high school students graduate and that they have the access and opportunity to pursue higher education." She continued, "This investment in Graduation Matters Montana seeks to break down barriers students and families face when considering life after high school graduation."

Graduation Matters Missoula was the recipient of a \$5,000 grant from SAF in 2012. Their successful first effort included: FAFSA open house nights, training 10 volunteer FAFSA counselors, community outreach, targeted phone banks to families to encourage participation in FAFSA open houses and collaborating with The University of Montana American Indian Student Services. A particular bright spot was Big Sky High School, which improved the percent of students completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) from 24 percent to 33 percent.

"Graduation Matters Missoula continues to be a collaborative effort in our community – involving everyone in our schools. The students, staff, parents, business community and many local organizations help us reach our shared goal – 100 percent graduation for all Missoula Public School's students," said Dr. Alex Apostle, superintendent of Missoula County Public Schools. "We are making progress toward that goal and we won't rest until we reach it."

Support from SAF in 2012-13 allowed the Office of Public Instruction to launch the Graduation Matters - Student Assistance Foundation Montana College Readiness Fund. GMM schools are invited to apply for a portion of the grant money.

Eligible activities include:

- Hosting a College Goal Montana event;
- Hosting some other type of Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion forum;
- Participation in College Application Week; and
- Hosting or participating in some other activity that will help students in the community be better prepared for college.

"Student Assistance Foundation's community outreach offices, located throughout the state, are eager to work with local schools to help students prepare for college," said Kelly Cresswell, vice president of Foundation Activities for SAF. "This partnership with Graduation Matters Montana provides us with the

means to spread the message that graduation is important, and postsecondary education is not only possible, but crucial, to future success.”

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau launched Graduation Matters Montana in 2010. Currently, 33 communities have signed on as Graduation Matters communities, including all of Montana's largest school districts. The initiative was inspired by Graduation Matters Missoula, an effort led by Missoula County Public Schools Superintendent Alex Apostle. For more information about Graduation Matters Montana, visit graduationmatters.mt.gov.

Applications are available on the Student Assistance Foundation website: www.smartaboutcollege.org and are due October 18. Awardees will be announced at the end of October.

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 \$27 million. For more information, visit www.safmt.org or www.SmartAboutCollege.org.

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