

Student Assistance Foundation Grants \$75,000 to Graduation Matters Montana

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Student Assistance Foundation Grants \$75,000 to Graduation Matters Montana \$25,000 to go to Scholarships for Montana Students

Helena, MT - Superintendent Denise Juneau announced that nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation (SAF) provided a \$50,000 grant to support Graduation Matters Montana (GMM) and \$25,000 to launch a new scholarship fund, the Graduation Matters Montana-Student Assistance Foundation Circle of Succe\$\$ Scholarship. This marks the third year that SAF has provided the funds to GMM, bringing the grand total to \$175,000.

"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," said Superintendent Juneau. She continued, "This increased investment in Graduation Matters Montana seeks to break down barriers students and families face when considering life after high school graduation."

Last fall, 12 Graduation Matters communities were awarded grants ranging from \$2,000 to \$5,000 to increase the number of students who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and college applications. The grantees 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 an average 35 percent FAFSA completion rate, which was above the state average of 30 percent.

The third year for the GMM-SAF College Readiness Fund, has been structured based on effective practices from the previous round of grantees. College Readiness Fund applications are available on the Graduation Matters Montana website and are due Oct. 6. Awardees will be announced in October.

This year's applications should include the following components:

- Student and family contact strategies,
- Recruiting and training volunteer FAFSA coaches, and
- Coordinating FAFSA and college application events with local community partners.

"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."

Students who have attended a Graduation Matters school or are a member of Superintendent Juneau's Student Advisory Board will be eligible to apply for the Graduation Matters Montana-Student Assistance Foundation Circle of Succe\$\$ Scholarship. Twenty-five students will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to use on their career and college goals. The applications for this need-based scholarship will be available Jan. 1, 2015.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau launched Graduation Matters Montana in 2010. Since 2009, the graduation rate has increased from 80.7 percent to 84.4 percent, and the dropout rate has decreased from five percent to 3.6 percent. Currently, 43 communities have signed on as Graduation Matters communities. For more information about Graduation Matters Montana, visit <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.