

Student Assistance Foundation Grants \$50,000 To Graduation Matters Montana To Increase Access To College Financial Aid

Friday, September 18, 2015
By Emilie Ritter Saunders
406-444-3160

Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau announced today that non-profit Student Assistance Foundation has pledged \$50,000 geared toward increasing student completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by March 1, 2016, opening the door to higher education for more Montana students.

Graduation Matters Montana's 53 communities are now eligible to apply for \$2,500-\$5,000 grants to increase FAFSA applications. In previous years, Graduation Matters communities have used the funds in a variety of ways such as hosting local events to complete the FAFSA, and targeting outreach to students and families to encourage FAFSA completion on time.

"Each year, there are Montana students who are eligible – but don't apply for federally funded financial aid for college," Superintendent Juneau said. "This grant funding will support Graduation Matters Montana communities in encouraging more students to apply for financial aid, which in turn will increase access to a college education."

Last fall, 15 Graduation Matters communities were awarded grants to increase the number of students who complete the FAFSA and college applications. Graduation Matters Montana communities that received the grants achieved an average 32 percent FAFSA completion rate, which resulted in an additional \$1.2 million in new financial aid for students.

"Student Assistance Foundation is excited to take this active role in helping Montana students and families access the funding they need to pursue postsecondary education," Kelly Cresswell, vice president of Foundation Activities at Student Assistance Foundation said. "This partnership with Graduation Matters Montana provides the perfect conduit to deliver the message that higher education is possible."

As a result of the partnership between Student Assistance Foundation and Graduation Matters Montana, Montana students and their families have accessed an additional \$4.3 million over the past three years in federal financial aid for college.

Graduation Matters Montana communities can apply for this grant funding at SmartAboutCollege.org or at GraduationMatters.mt.gov. The deadline to apply is Oct. 8, 2015.