



2015 Graduation Matters Challenge Fund Awardees

Anaconda: \$7,000

Graduation Matters Anaconda has decreased their dropout rate to 2.2 percent. The team is going to use the Challenge Fund grant to help students recover credits and prepare them for their future by hiring a Career Center Advisor. They have successfully implemented a Saturday school credit recovery program that has helped 43 students get back on track. Graduation Matters Anaconda will continue to work on engaging student voices by conducting the My Voice™ Survey. The survey will be used as a tool to help school staff improve school climate for Anaconda's middle and high school students.

Belgrade: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Belgrade has set a goal to have 97 percent of sophomores accumulate the credits they need to graduate on time. The team will use the Challenge Fund grant to establish a freshmen academy to support at-risk students as they transition into high school. Graduation Matters Belgrade is also improving the school district's relationship with parents and students by conducting home visits. The grant will support training for K-5 teachers on implementing a home visit program.

Billings (United Way of Yellowstone County): \$5,000

Graduation Matters Billings helped 320 at-risk students recover credits through summer school, helping to keep them on track to graduate. By February 2016, GMB wants to help over 700 students engage in credit recovery. They will utilize the HiSet options program and evening and summer school programs to reach their goal. GMB has been focused on not just addressing at-risk student behaviors at the high school level but also the elementary level. Graduation Matters Billings started a Reader Tutor Mentor pilot project that trains and matches caring community members with students who are struggling to read. This project helps ensure that all third graders are proficient in reading.

Box Elder: \$3,500

Graduation Matters Box Elder has increased the number of students on the honor roll by 30 percent. The team has built community partnerships with GEAR UP, TRIO and Stone Child College. These partnerships provided funding and resources to advance students' college and career readiness. The community's participation in the effort has allowed Box Elder to offer tutoring to 7-12 grade students four nights per week.

Bozeman: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Bozeman has taken full advantage of the HiSET program. Half of all students who drop out are pursuing a HiSET equivalency diploma, but the team is working towards the goal of all students earning a diploma or equivalency degree. To address this need, they will hire a Parent Liaison to help connect with parents about the barriers that are keeping students from graduating. Graduation

Matters Bozeman is developing a partnership with the Community Mediation Center (CMC) and will use Challenge Funds to expand this partnership. The CMC will meet with parents and the Parent Liaison to facilitate a conversation about student attendance problems. Through this supportive intervention, GMB hopes to drive their dropout rate down.

Browning: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Browning's initiative resonates throughout the school system. This year, 150 kindergarten students pledged to graduate. Graduation Matters Browning established an Early Warning System and trained all of their staff to be Dropout Specialists. This has helped them refine the targeted interventions that are provided to at-risk students. Their great partnerships with several tribal organizations encouraged the Tribal Council to raise the legal dropout age to age 18 on the Blackfeet Reservation.

Cascade: \$4,000

Graduation Matters Cascade will utilize the Challenge Fund grant to support students who are credit deficient. They recognize that 17 percent of their students are not on track to graduate and want to reduce that number by 36 percent. Graduation Matters Cascade will coordinate school tutoring, Saturday school, and an alternative classroom. Staff who are coordinating these services will receive the professional development they need to implement the best credit recovery practices.

Columbia Falls: \$7,500

Graduation Matters Columbia Falls is focused on achieving a zero percent dropout rate by or before the 2016-2017 school year. They will achieve that goal by enhancing community partnerships and expanding the Graduation Matters Columbia Falls initiative to the middle school. At this time, they have 26 business partners helping students develop career plans and offering job shadow opportunities. These important connections are being made during lunch at the school. Graduation Matters Columbia Falls plans on recruiting enough people from the business community to help all at-risk students plan for their future.

Graduation Matters Gallatin County (United Way of Gallatin County): \$5,000

Graduation Matters Gallatin County has goals to increase the number of community and business partnerships by 20 percent. The team will use its Challenge Fund grant to provide staff support to coordinate county-wide efforts, provide internal and external communications support, and increase community awareness.

Graduation Matters Great Falls (United Way of Cascade County): \$10,000

Graduation Matters Great Falls helped 118 at-risk students graduate from high school last year. Using data-driven strategies, they will continue to help students recover credits and transition into high school. Graduation Matters Great Falls will focus on supporting struggling students who are American Indian, low-income, special needs, or speak English as a second language. These students disproportionately drop out in Great Falls and across the state. Graduation Matters Great Falls will continue to use funding to help students successfully make the transition to high school by familiarizing incoming freshmen and their families with their schedule, building, and classrooms. This year they will expand this concept by

adding additional mentors who will connect students with teachers. They aim to reduce the anxiety that many students experience as they move from middle school to high school.

Hamilton: \$7,000

Graduation Matters Hamilton wants to increase student enrollment in dual credit courses by 10 percent. In order to reach their goal, Graduation Matters Hamilton has developed a successful partnership with Bitterroot Community College (BCC). This partnership has opened the door for new dual enrollment opportunities, additional staffing, and shared space opportunities. Graduation Matters Hamilton has created a school and community based network that inspires students to graduate.

Hardin: \$5,250

Last year, Graduation Matters Hardin made significant progress in engaging students. They established a “Bulldog Buddies” student mentoring program where 9th and 10th graders mentor middle school students. This year, over 100 students participated in the “Bulldog Buddies” program. In Graduation Matters Hardin’s continued efforts to ease the transition into high school, they asked seniors to share their experiences with freshmen. These conversations were a great success and helped freshmen gain the insight they need to be successful.

Harlem: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Harlem has made significant progress and wants to continue the momentum by raising their graduation rate by 10 percent. They will achieve this by continuing to monitor student progress and offer targeted interventions through their “Core Team” staff. Graduation Matters Harlem will implement a student mentor program to develop meaningful relationships between students. The mentor program will be reinforced by the My Voice™ Survey that will allow staff, parents, and community members to understand the students’ perspective and make positive changes to improve school climate.

Hays Lodge Pole: \$3,500

Graduation Matters Hays Lodge Pole will work to address chronic absenteeism, behavioral issues, and academic challenges of students. The school will offer one-on-one counseling, credit recovery, home visits, and increase the awareness of Graduation Matters in their community. Graduation Matters Hays Lodge Pole will utilize their 10 community partners to help offer job shadowing opportunities and participate in their awareness campaign. The team is focused on developing positive relationships and helpful interventions to create positive change in the lives of their students.

Helena: \$8,000 (Helena High School and Capital High School were each awarded \$4,000.)

The Helena High School team will focus on chronic absenteeism and credit recovery strategies. They have set a goal to decrease credit deficient juniors by five percent. The Helena High team will target students who are credit deficient and/or chronically absent for home visits. At these home visits, staff will improve communication with families and create detailed plans that students and parents can commit to in order to keep students on track to graduate.

The Capital High School team has implemented “Check and Connect,” a mentor program for students who are at risk of dropping out. These students meet weekly with an adult mentor that provides a stable

and supportive relationship. The mentor helps students access resources and activities and advocates on behalf of students. All “Check and Connect” mentors follow-up with parents at least once a month.

Hot Springs: \$1,500

Graduation Matters Hot Springs has achieved a 90.9 percent graduation rate. The Graduation Matters Hot Springs team has realized that 20 percent of their community did not graduate from high school. The team continues to host their “I pledge to graduate” event at their alumni basketball game. The size of the event grows each year. At the event, alumni tell students why it is important to graduate and how a diploma gives a world of opportunities. This positive community event has created a stronger connection between the students and the community.

Kalispell: \$8,000

Graduation Matters Kalispell has reduced their dropout rate to 3.5 percent. Their goal is to keep decreasing their dropout rate by .5 percent each year until it is zero. In order to meet this goal, Graduation Matters Kalispell will use its Challenge Fund grant to support the summer credit recovery and Christmas Catch Up programs, coordination of the “I pledge to graduate” event, a public awareness campaign, and recruitment of adult mentors for sophomores who are at risk of not graduating.

Laurel: \$7,400

Graduation Matters Laurel has increased their graduation rate to 92 percent. They have grown their graduation rate by implementing the “LINK Crew” peer mentoring program for freshmen, credit recovery opportunities, the HiSet Options program, and increased business and community engagement. They are going to expand this success by introducing the elementary and middle school students to the Graduation Matters Laurel initiative.

Lewistown: \$3,000

Graduation Matters Lewistown has set a goal of maintaining their 1.2 percent dropout rate. Graduation Matters Lewistown has requested to use their Challenge Fund grant to provide college visit opportunities to five of Montana’s college campuses, to support staff time for coordination of Graduation Matters efforts, and to implement a new peer mentoring program.

Libby: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Libby wants to increase the percentage of students who enroll in college by 20 percent. In order to reach this goal, Graduation Matters Libby has implemented several programs: College Goal Montana, College Application Week, “College for a Day,” “First Time College Student,” and FAFSA completion events. The team continues to prepare their students for college and careers by encouraging students to achieve their dreams.

Lincoln: \$3,000

Graduation Matters Lincoln wants to decrease the dropout rate by 1.8 percent and decrease credit deficient students by five percent. In order to reach these goals, Graduation Matters Lincoln will make students knowledgeable about graduation requirements, utilize the Montana Digital Academy, offer personalized tutoring, and increase parent communication and participation in school activities.

Livingston: \$10,000

Graduation Matters Livingston helped 134 students graduate who were at-risk of dropping out. The team will use their Challenge Fund grant to implement a peer mentoring program and student advisory period to support and learn from students. Graduation Matters Livingston has leveraged resources by hiring an AmeriCorps* VISTA (Volunteer in Service to American) to increase capacity of their Graduation Matters initiative.

Lockwood: \$4,500

Graduation Matters Lockwood has set a goal to reduce chronic absenteeism by 25 percent. Graduation Matters Lockwood has recognized that a large number of students are missing school because of health and dental problems. The team is working with Riverstone Health to open a school-based health center to lower the amount of chronically absent students.

Miles City: \$7,000

Graduation Matters Miles City has experienced a rise in the number of students entering and leaving their schools. Graduation Matters Miles City will use their grant to continue their successful peer tutoring program, maintain the Graduation Coach, and hire a Transfer Student Liaison.

Missoula: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Missoula will continue to create an inclusive and safe school environment. The Graduation Matters Missoula team will use its Challenge Fund grant to expand the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) trainings. These trainings improve students' sense of belonging at school and in their community. The NCBI training will be expanded to all elementary, middle and high schools during the 2015-2016 school year.

Plains: \$3,000

Graduation Matters Plains has set a goal to decrease credit deficient students by 10 percent. They will use the Challenge Fund grant to help pay teacher stipends to offer a credit recovery summer class and a "how to study" class. These courses will reinforce the "how to be successful" high school freshmen orientation that Graduation Matters Plains will implement during the first week of school.

Polson: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Polson has set a goal to reduce dropouts by five percent in each grade level. In order to meet their goals, Graduation Matters Polson has hired a Graduation Coach. This coach identifies students who are at risk of leaving school, develops relationships, and helps them access the resources they need to be successful. The Graduation Coach has already made a positive impact that is translating into a decreased dropout rate.

Poplar: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Poplar has set a goal of helping 10 students recover credits by the fall of 2015. They will use the Challenge Fund to maintain their eight week summer school. They also plan to improve

relevancy and workforce readiness by integrating lessons on employment skills and vocational opportunities into local curriculum.

Rocky Boy: \$6,600

Graduation Matters Rocky Boy achieved a 95 percent graduation rate. In order to maintain this success, Graduation Matters Rocky Boy will continue efforts to identify students at risk of dropping out and provide targeted support, including weekly group therapy. They will also offer individual counseling for students who need the extra assistance. Graduation Matters Rocky Boy is increasing capacity to offer these services by hiring a counseling intern.

Ronan: \$8,000

Graduation Matters Ronan has a goal to reduce chronic absenteeism by 20 percent. They will accomplish that goal by hiring a Graduation Coach with their grant funding. The Graduation Coach will work on identifying and connecting with at-risk students who are chronically absent. The Graduation Matters Ronan coach will connect students and their families with credit recovery options and community resources. These identified students will be encouraged to prepare and envision their future with an after-high school plan.

Shelby: \$2,250

Graduation Matters Shelby has a graduation rate of 96 percent. The team plans on continuing this success by addressing the substance abuse problems that have impacted students. Graduation Matters Shelby knows this is a problem because students identified substance abuse as a barrier to increasing student success. They plan on reducing the problem by educating their students on the consequences of substance abuse.

Sidney: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Sidney wants to reduce credit deficient students by five percent. The team has acknowledged that many of their students don't have access to the technology they need at home to advance their education. Graduation Matters Sidney plans on providing a student study center that will allow these students to focus on their coursework and give them access to the tools they need to complete assignments. They also plan on engaging their students in conversations to learn about the barriers that are preventing them from achieving academic success.

St. Ignatius: \$5,000

Graduation Matters St. Ignatius has identified 22 students who are at risk of dropping out. These students are monitored by a staff member, and each student has an Individual Learning Plan (ILP). The plans help staff closely monitor the students and their successes. Staff review the ILPs with parents and students to make any necessary adjustments. The Graduation Matters St. Ignatius team has been able to hire a team member to work with all at-risk students.

Stevensville: \$7,000

Graduation Matters Stevensville has achieved a 95.9 percent graduation rate. This success at the high school level has allowed Graduation Matters Stevensville to expand to their elementary and middle

schools. Their first grade students are drawing pictures of themselves graduating. Fourth grade students are researching jobs they want to pursue after graduation. Seventh graders are meeting with community members to learn how to be successful in that specific line of work.

Thompson Falls: \$6,000

Graduation Matters Thompson Falls wants 100 percent of their students to graduate. The team will continue to use its Challenge Fund grant to provide dedicated staff time for the After School Tutoring Lab, the Summer School Life Skills program, and to provide incentives for attendance, academic success and positive behavior. The School Life Skills program has been very successful at providing valuable experiential learning about everyday life skills. This relevant curriculum has helped more students stay engaged in school.

Three Forks: \$3,000

Graduation Matters Three Forks has a 1.0 percent dropout rate. They were able to achieve this by minimizing students who are credit deficient and strengthening business partnerships. The team has developed an internship program with their local business partners. Students are offered elective credits for participating in this program. They will continue to create these career and training opportunities for students by increasing their community partnerships.

Townsend: \$4,000

Graduation Matters Townsend has worked to raise community awareness. Business owners in Townsend know that their participation will improve the well-being of students and benefit their community. The team will use its Challenge Fund grant to hire a Coordination Team. This team will help encourage and facilitate the Graduation Matters Townsend initiative. Their efforts will focus on expanding the initiative to the elementary and middle schools.

Troy: \$3,000

Graduation Matters Troy has a 2.2 percent dropout rate. They will use their Challenge Fund grant to have students take the pledge to graduate and use it as an opportunity to encourage their career and college aspirations. They will convene partners to help support school staff in promoting college awareness and career guidance. Additionally, Graduation Matters Troy will host College Goal Montana and College Application Week events to help students apply to college and career training programs.

For more information about Graduation Matters Montana, go to:

<http://graduationmatters.mt.gov>.