



2014 Graduation Matters Challenge Fund Awardees

Anaconda: \$7,000

Graduation Matters Anaconda has set goals of reducing their dropout rate by 50 percent and increasing the number of students who enroll in college after graduation by 50 percent. In order to reach their goals, Graduation Matters Anaconda is going to use its Challenge Fund grant to continue school-based and community-based opportunities for success through the Anaconda Leadership Academy, focus on early learning and literacy through their Operation Read to Me program, train teachers as dropout prevention specialists, and continue to support their College and Career Readiness Coaches.

Arlee: \$5,000

Arlee will launch Graduation Matters Arlee in the fall of 2014. Arlee has set goals of reducing their dropout rate to two percent by 2016 and reducing the number of students who have credit deficiencies to less than six students. In order to reach their goals, Graduation Matters Arlee will build on the efforts of the "YES Project" by creating a process and system of support for students who are credit deficient and at risk of not graduating. Additionally, Arlee will start an alternative summer program that will support students taking courses through Acellus and the Montana Digital Academy as well as provide direct instruction on job seeking skills, transitioning to college and career exploration.

Belgrade: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Belgrade has set goals to reduce the number of juniors and seniors with credit deficiencies from 40 to 10 by the end of the 2014-2015 school year and to re-enroll students who have recently dropped out of school and create a pathway to post-secondary training. The team will use its Challenge Fund grant to continue to focus on the transition from middle school to high school through their ninth grade academy, provide access to Montana Digital Academy courses for credit recovery, expand the number of students accessing dual credit opportunities, and develop partnerships with local businesses to support internships, mentoring, and career pathways for students.

Billings: \$10,000 (United Way of Yellowstone County)

Graduation Matters Billings has set goals to decrease the number of students with credit deficiencies by 50 percent and to decrease the dropout rate by seven percent by June 2015. In order to reach their goals, Graduation Matters Billings will continue to improve their district-wide credit recovery program, support students with severe credit deficiencies in achieving a high school equivalency diploma (HiSET), build programs with demonstrated success in student engagement such as Jobs for Montana Graduates and Upward Bound, and continue to build and engage their school-community leadership team. The team will also work on a district strategy to address issues of attendance and implement an Early Warning System to keep students on track, focusing on kindergarten through eighth grade.

Boulder: \$3,500

Graduation Matters Boulder has set a goal to reduce the number of students who drop out and the number of students with credit deficiencies by one third by the 2015-2016 school year. To achieve these goals, Graduation Matters Boulder will develop an early warning system to help identify students in need of interventions, use the MT Digital Academy to assist students with credit recovery, establish a

personalized learning environment for students and build business and community partnerships. The team will focus on preparing students for their career and college goals by arranging college campus visits, assisting in ACT prep and helping students complete the FASFA.

Box Elder: \$3,500

Graduation Matters Box Elder has set goals of decreasing the dropout rate from 14 percent to 9 percent, decreasing the number of students with credit deficiencies by 40 percent and increasing the percentage of students who enroll in college after graduation to 95 percent. In order to reach their goals, Graduation Matters Box Elder will build community partnerships, engage parents, elders and students in community events that include cultural elements and celebrate academic achievement, continue to identify students at risk of not graduating in early grades and coordinate partnerships and programs to make the best use of resources available to graduate students prepared for life after high school.

Bozeman: \$8,000

Graduation Matters Bozeman has set goals of reducing the dropout rate to three percent or below and decreasing the number of students who are credit deficient by 30 percent. In order to reach their goals, Graduation Matters Bozeman will increase their community and business partnerships, continue to improve their Early Warning System and support students' efforts to reduce credit deficiencies through the Montana Digital Academy, further develop a Student Support Center, and hire a Graduation Matters team leader to engage students and community leaders as well as coordinate efforts at the high school and middle schools.

Browning: \$10,000

Graduation Matters Browning has set goals of cutting their dropout rate in half to 3.5 percent, reducing the percent of students with credit deficiencies from 20 percent to 10 percent and increasing the number of freshmen completing their first year of high school with six or more credits by 50 percent. In order to reach their goals, Graduation Matters Browning will establish an Early Warning System and engage students and families through Graduation Support Meetings, improve new teacher orientation and formalize a mentoring program to support teachers, and continue to build and improve upon their Graduation Matters advisory period. The team will also review current policies such as attendance and suspension that are impacting the dropout rate.

Columbia Falls: \$8,000

Graduation Matters Columbia Falls has set goals of reducing the percent of students who drop out from 3.9 percent to 2.9 percent, decreasing the number of students who are credit deficient by 10 percent and increasing the number of students who enroll in two-year colleges, universities and certificate programs or join the military after graduation by five percent. In order to reach these goals, Graduation Matters Columbia Falls will provide students at risk of not graduating with academic coaches, establish a peer tutoring program, support the transition from middle school to high school through the Peer Allies mentoring program, and dedicate staff resources to coordinating business and community partnerships to facilitate job shadowing, internship and classroom visits. Additionally, the team will work with the National Native Children's Trauma Center at the University of Montana to develop strategies to better meet the needs of Native American students.

Cut Bank: \$3,500

Graduation Matters Cut Bank has set goals of reducing the dropout rate by two students per year until they have reached a zero percent dropout rate in 2018 and increasing the number of graduates who complete a degree at a higher education institution. In order to reach this goal, Graduation Matters Cut Bank will increase parent involvement by hosting community events, work with the local Chamber of Commerce to host career skills days for all seniors and juniors, host a college fair for current students, offer scholarship opportunities beyond the first year of college, and provide additional dual credit opportunities for students to earn college credit while attending high school.

Frazer: \$4,000

Graduation Matters Frazer has set goals of achieving a 95 percent graduation rate for the upcoming senior class and doubling the number of students attending higher education institutions. In order to achieve their goals, Graduation Matters Frazer will continue efforts to increase attendance rates, support a personalized learning environment, identify students at risk of not graduating and support them with a new mentoring program, and offer all students an ACT prep class in order to prepare for the statewide ACT test of all juniors. Additionally, the Graduation Matters Frazer team has partnered with the Fort Peck Tribe and Fort Peck Community College to create more college and career opportunities.

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

Graduation Matters Gallatin County has set goals to increase the number of community and business partnerships by 25 percent, increase student leadership in their efforts and expand the team to include additional rural schools in the region. Graduation Matters Gallatin County will use its Challenge Fund grant to provide staff support to coordinate county-wide efforts, provide internal and external communications support and to increase community outreach.

Glendive: \$3,500

Graduation Matters Dawson County has set goals of decreasing their dropout rate by 2.5 percent and decreasing the number of credit deficient students by two percent by 2015. An increase in the number of students moving in and out of the community has resulted in an increase in the number of students with credit deficiencies. The Graduation Matters Dawson County team will address the credit deficiencies of all students by evaluating student data, implementing personalized education plans and offering credit recovery through the Montana Digital Academy. Additionally, the team will implement a freshmen orientation to welcome new students to high school and create a welcoming high school environment. They will focus on helping their students become career and college ready by developing programs with the local Chamber of Commerce and Dawson Community College.

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

Graduation Matters Great Falls has set goals to reduce the percent of students who drop out to 3.2 percent, reduce the number of students with credit deficiencies by five percent, increase the percent of third grade students scoring proficient or advanced from 82 percent to 85 percent, and reduce the number of students who miss more than 10 days of school per semester and also received a D or F in one or more classes. Graduation Matters Great Falls will use the Challenge Fund grant to work with students and families to develop strategies to improve the graduation rate for Native American students, continue the successful middle school career fair and produce a media awareness campaign in the winter of 2014-2015.

Hamilton: \$4,000

Graduation Matters Hamilton has set goals to reduce their dropout rate to one percent, decrease the number of students with credit deficiencies to 25 students, increase students enrolled in dual credit courses, and increase the number of students who enroll in college after graduation. In order to reach their goals, Graduation Matters Hamilton will continue to grow the number of students served by the Alternative Learning Center, support students using the Montana Digital Academy for credit recovery, dedicate staff time to bringing together community and business partners, host a career day and college campus visit for middle school students, and implement strategies to support students through middle school and high school transitions.

Hardin: \$7,000

Graduation Matters Hardin has set goals to reduce the dropout rate from 10.7 percent to 7.8 percent, reduce the number of students who are credit deficient to 50 students, and decrease the number of freshmen who do not earn enough credits to become sophomores by 50 percent. In order to reach their goals, Graduation Matters Hardin will start a Freshmen Academy, continue to offer credit recovery, tutoring and summer school opportunities, provide “Bulldog Buddy” mentoring to middle school students and continue to gather student feedback about school climate through the My Voice survey and focus group discussions.

Hays-Lodge Pole: \$3,500

Graduation Matters Hays-Lodge Pole has set a goal of reducing their dropout rate and number of students with credit deficiencies by 25 percent. In order to meet their goals, Graduation Matters Hays-Lodge Pole will work to address the chronic absenteeism, behavioral issues and academic challenges by implementing an early warning system, offering one-on-one counseling, utilizing a truancy officer, and offering credit recovery courses through the Montana Digital Academy. The team will also develop community partnerships to assist in implementing a mentoring program to help students through school and prepare them for their career and college goals.

Hot Springs: \$3,000

Graduation Matters Hot Springs has set a goal of 100 percent graduation rate, to decrease the number of students who are credit deficient by 10 percent, and to increase awareness of the range of college and career opportunities. In order to meet these goals, Graduation Matters Hot Springs will work with their Jobs for Montana Graduates students to create a monthly school and community newsletter, begin speaking to students about college and career planning in elementary school and continue through high school, provide opportunities for students to visit colleges and certification programs, bring in guest speakers to expose students to a range of occupations, and hold annual “I pledge to graduate” events.

Kalispell: \$10,000

Graduation Matters Kalispell has set goals of reducing the dropout rate from four percent to two percent, increasing the graduation rate from 83 percent to 92 percent and reducing the rate of students with credit deficiencies from 12 percent to eight percent by the end of the 2015-2016 school year. In order to meet these goals, Graduation Matters Kalispell will use its Challenge Fund grant to support the summer credit retrieval and Christmas Catch Up programs, coordination of the “I pledge to graduate” event with eighth grade students, a public awareness campaign, and recruitment of mentors for sophomores who are at risk of not graduating.

Laurel: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Laurel has set a goal of reducing the dropout rate to one percent by 2018. In order to meet their goal, Graduation Matters Laurel will establish a “LINK Crew” mentoring program for freshmen to assist with their transition into high school, continue to offer credit recovery opportunities and the HiSet Options program, and increase business and community engagement.

Lewistown: \$3,000

Graduation Matters Lewistown has set goals of reducing the dropout rate below two percent by 2015, to work with 21 students on credit recovery, and to reduce the percentage of students who miss 10 or more days in one or more class each semester. Graduation Matters Lewistown has requested to use their Challenge Fund grant to provide college visit opportunities to nine of Montana’s college campuses, support staff time for coordination of Graduation Matters efforts, and support activities during College Application Week.

Libby: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Libby has set goals of reducing the dropout rate and the percentage of students who are credit deficient to less than one percent by 2016, to increase the percentage of students who enroll in college after graduation by 18 percent and to increase their business and community partnerships. In order to reach these goals, Graduation Matters Libby will participate in College Goal Montana, launch an initiative to improve attendance rates, host family education nights, and support mentoring opportunities for current students and first generation college students.

Lincoln: \$4,000

Graduation Matters Lincoln has set goals to decrease the dropout rate by five percent, decrease the percent of students who are credit deficient by 10 percent, increase the number of students who complete the FAFSA by five percent, and increase the number of students who enroll in post-secondary education after high school by five percent. In order to reach these goals, Graduation Matters Lincoln will continue to use the Montana Digital Academy, summer school, and tutoring to decrease credit deficiencies, begin a freshman orientation program for parents and students, participate in College Goal Montana, increase parent and community attendance at open houses and parent-teacher conferences, and hold a Graduation Matters ceremony in the fall of 2014.

Livingston: \$10,000

Graduation Matters Livingston has set a goal to increase the graduation rate to 86 percent and decrease the percentage of students with credit deficiencies to 10 percent by 2015. Graduation Matters Livingston will use their Challenge Fund grant to promote attendance and parent/community engagement in the elementary schools, provide mentoring activities and freshmen transition programs, expand the home visiting program, address school climate issues, convene the school-community “Rally Team” and to continue to work on a plan to redesign Livingston Public Schools.

Lockwood: \$8,000

Graduation Matters Lockwood has set a goal to reduce the dropout rate of Lockwood students who drop out from Billings’ high schools by 10 percent, reduce the number of students who are credit deficient by 15 percent and increase community and business partnerships. In order to achieve their goals, Graduation Matters Lockwood will institute the evidence-based “Check and Connect” program which centers around increasing student engagement through relationship building, monitoring educational

progress, individualized interventions, encouraging participation in extracurricular activities and increasing family engagement.

Miles City: \$10,000

Graduation Matters Miles City has set a goal to reduce the dropout rate to one percent and cut the number of students with credit deficiencies in half by the end of the 2014-2015 school year. Graduation Matters Miles City will use their Challenge Fund grant to continue their successful peer tutoring program, the S.O.S. Tutoring Program, hire a Graduation Matters coach, support Career Clusters student groups, and to continue the recently launched “Freshman Academy” on the first day of school.

Missoula: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Missoula has set a goal to reduce the dropout rate to 1.8 percent and increase the graduation rate to 92 percent by the end of the 2014-2015 school year and to reduce the number of students with credit deficiencies by 10 percent. Graduation Matters Missoula will use its Challenge Fund grant to provide NCBI trainings to improve students’ sense of belonging for fifth and seventh grade students. Additional funds will be used to provide a stipend for a FAFSA coach to coordinate and analyze Missoula’s efforts to increase the number of students who apply for federal financial aid for college.

Polson: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Polson has set a goal to decrease the dropout rate and number of students with credit deficiencies by 10 percent. In order to meet their goals, Graduation Matters Polson will continue to support “LINK,” the freshman transition and mentoring program, establish career exploration opportunities in middle school, expand Jobs for Montana Graduates, host FAFSA nights for students and families and continue to support credit recovery opportunities.

Rocky Boy: \$3,500

Graduation Matters Rocky Boy has set a goal to reduce the dropout rate to below 10 percent and to reduce the credit deficiencies of 20 students by the end of the next school year. In order to meet these goals, Graduation Matters Rocky Boy will continue efforts to identify students at risk of dropping out and provide mentoring and intervention supports, offer credit recovery opportunities through the Montana Digital Academy, offer dual credit opportunities, and focus on increasing attendance. The team will also increase outreach to parents, community members and business partners to engage them in ‘stay in school’ and college and career planning efforts.

St. Ignatius: \$5,000

Graduation Matters St. Ignatius has a goal of reducing the number of students who drop out to two. In order to reach their goal, Graduation Matters St. Ignatius will use its Challenge Fund grant for dedicated staff time to coordinate the initiative, support summer programming and the Mission Forward Academy, support the annual community showcase, and incentives for attendance, positive behavior and academic achievement.

Stevensville: \$7,000

Graduation Matters Stevensville has set goals to cut their dropout rate and the number of students with credit deficiencies in half by the end of the next school year, increase the number of students completing college applications by 20 percent, and to increase the number of community and business partners participating in their Business Forum. In order to achieve their goals, Graduation Matters

Stevensville will continue to improve upon the successful strategies of advisory periods, Freshman Orientation, Business Forum, tutorial and homework assistance, summer school and College Night. The Team will also review the attendance policy and continue to implement strategies which improve attendance.

Thompson Falls: \$10,000

Graduation Matters Thompson Falls has set goals to increase the graduation rate to 96 percent and ensure 96 percent of students are on track to graduate by 2015, build new business and community partnerships and increase the number of students who complete the FAFSA and apply to college. Graduation Matters Thompson Falls will use its Challenge Fund grant to provide dedicated staff time for planning and community outreach, continue to provide the Graduation Matters After School Tutoring Lab and the Summer School Life Skills program, host community events, and provide incentives for attendance, academic success and positive behavior.

Three Forks: \$4,000

Graduation Matters Three Forks has set a goal to decrease the dropout rate to less than one percent, to eliminate credit deficiencies of currently enrolled high school students, and to strengthen community, family and business partnerships. Graduation Matters Three Forks will use its Challenge Fund grant to expand partnerships with local businesses to work with students to plan for their life after high school, host career day activities for grades six through 12, and provide credit recovery opportunities through the Montana Digital Academy.

Townsend: \$5,000

Graduation Matters Townsend has set a goal of a 100 percent graduation rate and to cut the number of students who have credit deficiencies in half by 2015, to increase the number of students who complete the FAFSA by 10 percent and increase business and community partnerships. Graduation Matters Townsend will use its Challenge Fund grant to provide stipends for the coordination of team efforts, hosting community events and a career day, as well as tutoring and credit recovery opportunities for students.

Whitefish: \$3,500

Graduation Matters Whitefish has set a goal to cut the number of students dropping out from 12 to six, reduce the percentage of students who are credit deficient to 10 percent, and build school-community partnerships. In order to reach their goals, Graduation Matters Whitefish will develop a peer tutoring program, build community awareness about their new initiative, improve high school “academy time,” address freshman transitions to high school and improve their sense of belonging, and host a Graduation Matters event with community members, parents and students.

For more information about Graduation Matters Montana, go to:

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