



**EDUCATION AND LOCAL GOV'T**  
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**EXHIBIT 8**

...COLLEGE IS POSS

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## Montana Wins \$28 Million Grant to Help Middle and High School Students Become College and Career Ready

(Helena) – The U.S. Department of Education recently awarded the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education a seven-year, \$28 million GEAR UP grant for the state to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. Montana GEAR UP will partner with 18 middle and receiving high schools from around the state, 13 of which are located on or bordering Montana's seven American Indian reservations, to improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates. The participating schools are: Arlee, Box Elder, Browning, Eureka, Hardin, Harlem, Hays-Lodge Pole, Heart Butte, Lame Deer, Libby, Lodge Grass, Pryor, Rocky Boy, St. Ignatius, St. Regis, Thompson Falls, Troy, and Wolf Point.

“This is great news for K-12 and postsecondary education in Montana,” said Commissioner of Higher Education Dr. Sheila Stearns. “The students of today are the future workers and leaders of the State. This is Montana's third GEAR UP grant, and it reflects our commitment to ensuring access to postsecondary education and to strong collaboration between K-12 and higher education.”

Serving students in grades seven through twelve, Montana GEAR UP will provide college and career readiness services, such as tutoring, financial aid information, enrollment in rigorous academic courses, comprehensive mentoring, college visits, supplemental curriculum materials, and professional development for school staff. The program continues to serve these students as they progress through middle and high school. Beginning in year two of the grant, Montana GEAR UP will work through postsecondary institutions to support GEAR UP college freshman with their transition to and retention in college. By the end of the grant, more than 8800 students, including 5800 American Indian students, will have participated in the program.

Montana GEAR UP will also provide services at the state level to benefit all Montana schools and students. These include funding the annual Montana School Counselor Association Spring Institute, supporting the Montana College Access Network, support for the Common Core State Standards implementation, and most significantly funding the ACT test for all Montana public high school juniors.

GAINING EARLY AWARENESS & READINESS FOR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS  
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