

Montana Office of Public Instruction
R372A150003

Project Title: Creating a Montana Data-Use Culture

Project Description: The Montana Office of Public Instruction requests \$3,483,164 over four years to create a Montana data-use culture under the Evaluation and Research Priority of the Statewide, Longitudinal Data Systems Grant for FY 2015. We like to believe that our students are college and career ready, but the fact is, we aren't sure. Montana lacks fundamental research and evaluation that can help us understand where students struggle and where they thrive so that we can design accurate solutions to help ensure student success. Our project builds on the 2012 SLDS grant, which delivered the course-taking data that will enhance existing research and provide opportunities for exciting new research.

This grant will support three key goals:

- 1) Create long-term, direct partnerships with university researchers: One large gap in the SLDS system that precludes it from reaching its full potential is a lack of direct partnerships among the state's largest research and teaching colleges and the OPI. Researchers at these institutions are currently conducting research on employment outcomes for Montana students, student debt load, and the motivation to enter high paying fields. Data that is or will be in the SLDS can inform these and future research areas.
- 2) Increase teacher use of data to enhance teaching: Teachers could access the SLDS to improve instruction in their schools, but many teachers lack the expertise to accurately use the data contained in GEMS, while others lack the knowledge of what data are available to them. This grant will form a partnership between the OPI and the major teacher preparation programs in the state, leveraging a new graduate program at one of the colleges to enhance the data-use knowledge and skills of future teachers as well as reach out to current teachers with professional development courses created in partnership with the teacher preparation programs.

Enhance the OPI's understanding of its own program effectiveness: Several grants within the OPI have focused on school- or community-based interventions to enhance student performance in a given subject matter, geographical area, or under-supported group. In many of these cases, data that was collected has not been incorporated into the SLDS. Within this goal is a special emphasis on serving at-risk students, particularly those who are homeless or in the child-welfare or juvenile justice systems. This grant will allow the OPI to include at-risk youth from our juvenile justice system, compile this with other data in our system, consult with outside researchers to explore how financial literacy may contribute, give teachers another outreach tool for at-risk youth, and demonstrate which policies may work in getting more at-risk students to graduate, enter post-secondary education, and successfully enter the workforce.