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**Montana Educators GEAR UP to help Montana Students Go to College**

(HELENA) Educators from across the state will gather at the Montana GEAR UP 2008 Annual Fall Conference at the Red Lion Colonial Inn in Helena Sept. 15 and 16 to learn new ways to help and inspire students to follow their dreams of postsecondary education.

“Too many students think college just happens, but it doesn’t work that way,” said Sandy Merdinger, Montana GEAR UP Director. “GEAR UP and its Montana partners believe postsecondary education is possible for all Montana students and we work hard to deliver that message to parents and students in middle and high school. We hope educators leave this conference energized to continue to work toward this important goal.”

Conference participants will attend sessions on topics including “Financial Literacy: Reading Between the Dollar Signs,” “College 101: Introduction to College for Middle and High School Students,” “Native American Peer Mentors,” and more.

Plus, attendees will hear from keynote speakers including Ranjit Sidhu, ACT Senior Vice President for Strategic Initiatives; Mary Sheehy Moe, Montana’s Deputy Commissioner of Two-Year Education; and Brad Eldredge, Director of Institutional Research for the Montana University System.

On the first night of the conference, nonprofit Student Assistance Foundation (SAF) will host a reception at ExplorationWorks from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. introducing Montana educators to the national KnowHow2GO campaign ([www.KnowHow2GO.org](http://www.KnowHow2GO.org)), and its Montana counterpart, Montana KnowHow2GO ([www.KnowHow2GOMontana.org](http://www.KnowHow2GOMontana.org)).

KnowHow2GO is a media campaign funded by the American Council on Education, Lumina Foundation for Education and the Ad Council designed to turn students’ college dreams into action-oriented goals. The campaign is based on four steps:

- Be a pain — Let everyone know that you’re going to college and need their help.
- Push yourself — Working a little harder today will make getting into college even easier.
- Find the right fit — Find out what kind of school is the best match for you and your career goals.
- Put your hands on some cash — If you think you can’t afford college, think again! There’s lots of aid out there.

Recently, KnowHow2GO unveiled its new, dynamic media campaign aimed at encouraging students to “Take the Tough Classes.”

“We know that students need to take an active role in achieving their goals of postsecondary education,” said Kelly Chapman, SAF’s Executive Vice President of Foundation Activities. “KnowHow2GO gives Montana students a road map, and in so doing, empowers them to shape their future.”

*Montana GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) partners with up to 25 middle and receiving high schools in low-income communities to increase the number of students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. The program’s three goals are to promote early college and career awareness; financial aid awareness, planning, and scholarships; and improved academic support and rigor. The program serves an entire grade of students beginning in the seventh grade and follows the class through high school. Grant funds are also used to provide scholarships. Montana GEAR UP is funded by a six-year, \$18 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education and is administered through the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education in Helena. For more information, visit [www.gearup.montana.edu/](http://www.gearup.montana.edu/).*

*Student Assistance Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Montana corporation that provides students with knowledge and tools to finance and pursue their postsecondary education. Funds generated by SAF are returned to Montanans in the form of education grants and public benefit programs - to date more than \$13 million. For more information, visit [www.SmartAboutCollege.org](http://www.SmartAboutCollege.org) or [www.safmt.org](http://www.safmt.org).*