

# BRIGHT FUTURES

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THEIR STORIES.  
THEIR FUTURE.

**MONTANA GEAR UP + EDUCATIONAL TALENT SEARCH**

*Cover: My-Ahlin PrettyOnTop of Lodge Grass High School*



# Letter from the Directors



It is with immense pride and joy that we welcome you to the 2026 Bright Futures publication. Each year, we celebrate the remarkable achievements of Montana GEAR UP (MTGU) and Montana Educational Talent Search (METS) students across the state. As Directors of these two programs, we are continually inspired by the dedication, resilience, and passion our students demonstrate as they pursue their educational goals and envision their futures.

To our students, we extend our heartfelt congratulations on your accomplishments. Your hard work, determination, and commitment to learning are truly commendable. From overcoming personal challenges to mastering rigorous academic content, each milestone you reach reflects not only your individual strength and perseverance but also your role in shaping Montana's future. When students engage in education, they create transformative and generational change, strengthening families, communities, and the workforce that will drive our state's economy forward.

We also extend our deepest appreciation to the educators, counselors, mentors, families, and community partners who make this work possible. College access and student success are not the responsibility of a single program, school, or region; they are a shared community effort. Your guidance, encouragement, and belief in students help open doors, expand opportunities, and ensure that Montana's young people can pursue pathways that align with their talents and aspirations.

In this publication, you will find stories of students from across the state at different stages of their educational journeys—from those completing middle school to students graduating from high school. These stories highlight academic achievements, extracurricular accomplishments, and the vital support systems that surround each student. You will meet MTGU students, METS students, and students who participate in both programs. While their paths may differ, all share a commitment to education and inspiring career goals that will contribute to Montana's communities and economy for years to come.

Once again, congratulations to our students. Thank you to our educators, supporters, and partners for your unwavering dedication. Together, we are expanding access to education, fostering generational opportunity, and shaping a brighter future for Montana.

Sincerely,

Jeannie Origbo  
MT GEAR UP Director



Ange DeWolf-King  
MT Educational Talent  
Search Director



# METS & GEAR UP SENIORS



## CYLEE NOT AFRAID

### Hardin High School - MTGU & METS

Cylee Not Afraid will be attending Montana State University Billings this fall. Cylee is excited to branch out, meet new people, start her career, and set up her future. She has already earned her CNA and will continue to push herself in college, inspired by her mom to overcome challenges.

## ARIA ROCKWELL

### CM Russell High School - METS

Aria Rockwell plans to begin her postsecondary education at Great Falls College before transferring to the University of Montana to study art education. "I chose UM because I really like the campus, town, and community, and it seems like a very artsy campus and fun place to study." Aria recognizes art education as the perfect job to incorporate her love

for art and working with kids, something she experienced volunteering with Arts on Fire where she helped children create their own art pieces with colored bubbles. Aria's college and career path has also been strongly supported and influenced by her family and METS advisor. "When we talked about the impact of college on life and experiences, it motivated me to begin thinking about going to college. Also, the college trips I went on helped me to get the true feel of the campuses and what it would be like to live there." Aria hopes to pass this perspective down. "My advice to younger students is that you aren't going to know exactly what you want to do right away but don't get discouraged. Continue to press forward and be the best person and student you can be. Through different classes and experiences, you'll find your path and what you want to do."



## LAILA REAL BIRD

### Hardin High School - MTGU

Laila Real Bird will begin working toward a career as a registered nurse at Montana State University Billings this fall. Eager to take her education a step further than her mom, Laila wants to stay close to home and work as a CNA while earning a four-year degree. Laila notes the importance of surrounding herself with other dedicated students and staying connected to family as she takes her next steps.

## AIDEN SWAB

### Arlee High School - MTGU

Aiden Swab will be studying business administration at Salish Kootenai College this fall. "I decided to attend SKC because I really enjoyed the tour of the college. The presentation given that day gave me a full understanding of the college and what is offered." On campus, Aiden is excited to have a flexible schedule and the opportunity to meet new people. He adds, "the cost to attend SKC is very affordable for enrolled CSKT members. It's close to home as well. I decided to go into the business program because I enjoy finance and accounting." Aiden's father, who works in business administration, significantly shaped his college and career goals, as did Montana GEAR UP. Aiden notes that MTGU helped him understand a variety of college options and how to prepare for them, and he hopes that other Arlee students take advantage. "For younger students navigating college pathways, focus on building strong academic habits early, good attendance, asking for help needed, time management, and organization... Having these skills early will be a gamechanger; just slowly build them up."



## CHASE WITFORD

### Box Elder High School - MTGU

Chase Whitford will be attending Stone Child College in large part due to his mom. She emphasized the importance and expectation of higher education, encouraging Chase to stay close to home for generals before transferring to a larger institution. Chase's experience through GEAR UP activities strongly influenced his choice of degree. "The Med Start Medical Camp was an opportunity that helped me to form an interest in medicine, specifically pediatric nursing. The Worlds of Work Career Expo and MSU-Northern TekNoXpo also helped inform my decisions for higher education. Another opportunity that has benefitted me is my work study at my high school. I am able to work alongside kids to better inform my future career." As Chase gets underway in college, he's looking forward to getting out and about and meeting new people in a bigger city.

## CHARLOTTE LEFT HAND

### Lodge Grass High School - MTGU & METS

Charlotte Left Hand will follow in her grandmother's footsteps by attending Montana State University. There, Charlotte plans to study nursing, building on knowledge from science and medical high school courses and leadership development from participation in National Honor Society.





# ADDISON PARDEE

## Thompson Falls High School - MTGU

Addison Pardee will be attending North Idaho College for the Radiography Technology program. "I chose NIC because I wanted to stay close to home but still change my scenery. Coeur d'Alene is also an amazing town that I consider my second home." Addison's sisters, Bailey and Elli, motivated her to pursue a competitive postsecondary field with confidence. Addison has been preparing for college-level

coursework through years of dual credit with Flathead Valley Community College, and she's excited to delve into career-specific subjects as she continues her education. She has participated in National Honor Society and competed in both volleyball and basketball, earning multiple years athletic all-conference and academic all-state honors. Addison has also developed leadership skills through sports as a team captain, referee, coach, and mentor.

# JOSEPHINE LUNA

## Box Elder High School - MTGU

Josephine Luna's affinity for the outdoors and ranch life has translated into her interest in hands-on work through electrical engineering, which she will study at Montana Technological University this fall. She recounts the guidance and encouragement of Ms. Maroney, Box Elder's MTGU Coordinator, in helping her make this decision. "GEAR UP provided the opportunities for us to explore so many fields and helped to create financial opportunities through scholarships. The amount of information Ms. Maroney is able to provide through GEAR UP really informs students of what they can accomplish." Josephine also notes her grandmother's role: "My late grandma encouraged me to be the first person

in our family to attend college." Having found the right fit at Montana Tech, Josephine is excited to embark on her next steps. "I look forward to leaving home, and in the future bringing my knowledge back.



# CREEDANCE ADAMS

## Rocky Boy High School - MTGU

Creedance Adams was inspired to study nursing at Salish Kootenai College after realizing the need for improved healthcare within his community. Creedance gained this insight while working at a local clinic, changing his interests from construction and engineering to nursing. He points out that "the idea of college felt so distant," but GEAR UP helped make achieving his goals possible. Soon to be the first in his family to go to college, Creedance takes strength from the educational support of his mom and family.

# DOMINIC EASTMAN

## Hardin High School - MTGU

Dominic Eastman plans to attend the University of Montana for pre-nursing. He narrowed this decision with knowledge of schools and programs gained through GEAR UP activities and with CNA and EMT classes that immersed him in his future field of work. Dominic's nursing pathway is also inspired by his grandma, who works in healthcare to this day. He expands on this influence: "My grandma and great grandma took me in as a child and have raised me to be the person I am. They have helped me to be motivated and encouraged me to pursue my passions." These include cross country, basketball, track, cultural events, dances, and of course helping others.



# ASHLEY COCKERHAM

## Libby High School - MTGU

Having already earned 31 credits from Flathead Valley Community College, Ashley Cockerham will be well on her way at FVCC this fall. She has participated in robotics, Science Olympiad, Business Professionals of America (BPA), and Academic World Quest, earning first place honors in state Science Olympiad and regional BPA. "All of the competitions for these activities are hosted on college campuses, so through high school I have already been getting a taste of college life and seeing what colleges have to offer." Ashley also serves as study body president and will speak as salutatorian at graduation. Despite her extensive academic accomplishments, however, Ashley reminds younger students that it's okay to take breaks and not get burned out: "You don't need to do more work and brave the world alone." In Kalispell, Ashley is excited to be rooming with a close friend and taking part in campus life with the comfort that home isn't too far down the road.

# ISAAC KELLY

## St. Regis High School - MTGU

Isaac Kelly will follow in his sister's footsteps as he attends Montana Technological University to study electrical engineering. Montana GEAR UP helped facilitate Isaac's communication with and tour of the college. A social person who values friendships, Isaac enjoys basketball, football, track and field, hunting, fishing, and hiking.





# EMMA CLARIDGE

## Thompson Falls High School - MTGU

Emma Claridge will enroll in the Radiography Technology program at North Idaho College this fall. Emma is inspired by the example of her dad’s success attending college and running a business. She’s excited to join a profession that makes a positive impact in the world and offers abundant opportunities. Emma also looks forward to exploring beyond her small hometown and meeting people with similar interests and passions. She has taken advantage of Montana GEAR UP’s assistance in funding dual credit classes and encourages other students to get a head start on college as she’s done. Emma competed in volleyball, basketball, and golf during her high school career, achieving multiple individual awards, academic all-state honors, and varsity letters. When not enjoying activities outdoors,

Emma has given back to her community, volunteering with the elementary volleyball camp, community beautification days, school blood drive, and elementary mentorship.

# SIERRA GIRSCH

## St. Ignatius High School - MTGU & METS

Sierra Girsch will be attending the University of Montana this fall. The most financially feasible option, UM represents a second home for Sierra from years spent attending the Montana AIMS Camp on campus. “The Montana AIMS Camp was a major influence on my path. We spent significant time in classrooms for sessions on math, writing, and science. This past year, we participated in ‘Reztopia,’ where we created a map of a self-designed reservation. We also heard from various speakers who illustrated the dedication required to maintain a reservation, which deepened my interest in my future studies.” Sierra is grateful for her mother’s influence and guidance, which helped shape her postsecondary decision, and for the support of programs in her school district. “Talent Search was instrumental in helping me tour various campuses and develop my decision-making process.

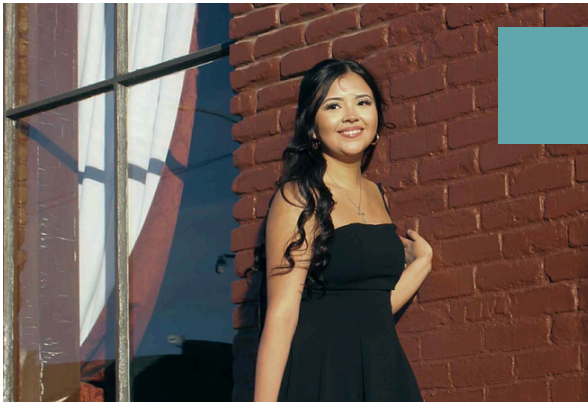
Both Talent Search and GEAR UP have been incredibly supportive in helping me identify the scholarships I rely on to afford my education. Upward Bound helped me prepare for college life and provided opportunities to travel to different states.” Sierra also notes the support of Fresh Life Church as she takes her next steps, making the first of many lasting friendships and memories at UM.



# JERSEY COFFMAN-KUNTZ

## CM Russell High School - METS

Jersey Coffman-Kuntz will be heading to Montana State University to study education or child psychology. "When we toured MSU Bozeman with Talent Search for the first time, I really liked the campus. I chose that course of study because I want to help kids, allow those who don't have a safe space to grow." Jersey is determined to become the first person in her family to attend college, and she advises younger students not to rule out postsecondary education just because of the price tag: "Spend the time looking for scholarships and grants so that you won't end up in debt. College is affordable for everyone if you commit to the work." Jersey's participation in METS helped her figure out what to study, how to afford it, and which campus was right for her future.



# ISABELLA MACDONALD

## Box Elder High School - MTGU

Isabella MacDonald will pursue pre-nursing at Stone Child College this fall. Montana GEAR UP funding has helped enable Isabella's exploration of healthcare, especially through two summers in MedStart. She looks forward to the independence and intellectual challenge of college, giving a perspective of life beyond high school. Isabella notes the

importance of outcomes related to education: "Some of my relatives didn't prioritize higher education, and I feel that that may have led them down a path that was more difficult for them. I want to prioritize my education in order to avoid those same circumstances." Isabella is backed in her pursuits by family and friends. "My parents always encourage me to show up and work hard; they have given to and supported all the extracurriculars I have wanted to pursue throughout high school. My friends have always supported me in everything I do, and that has helped me to figure out what I want to do and who I want to be."

# VIRGIL BIG KNIFE JR.

## Rocky Boy High School - MTGU

Virgil Big Knife Jr. will attend the University of Montana with the aspiration of becoming an attorney. Virgil is a naturally curious person who loves to read and gain exposure to different perspectives. He is excited about more personal freedom in college this fall. Virgil's continued education is made possible in part through the financial aid information provided by his GEAR UP coordinator, Mr. Houle. Virgil found tremendous success in BPA his junior year by placing first in fundamental spreadsheet applications.





# MALACHI ALVAREZ

## St. Ignatius High School - MTGU

Malachi Alvarez will begin his postsecondary education at Salish Kootenai College to earn his dental assistant certificate with the eventual goal of becoming a dental hygienist through Great Falls College. Malachi benefited from GEAR UP-sponsored trips to Missoula and SKC, helping him consider a variety of options after high school. He is supported by his family and friends who encourage him to find success and make something of his life.

# AMBER SPARKS

## Superior High School - MTGU

Amber Sparks is headed to Montana State University-Northern to earn an AAS in Diesel Technology and explains how she got there. "Growing up, I faced numerous challenges, including to undergo multiple surgeries. Despite this, I never let those obstacles define me or limit my ambitions. Instead, they strengthened my determination to pursue my goals, one of which is furthering my education MSU-Northern in Diesel Technology. I have always been fascinated by tractors and other heavy equipment. As I got older, that interest turned into hands-on experiences when I began working alongside my dad, fixing trucks and cars. Through those experiences, I gained valuable knowledge about how vehicles function and developed practical skills that deepened my passion for mechanics. When I started researching MSU-Northern, I had the opportunity to tour the campus as part of a small group of girls. That visit confirmed everything I had hoped for and more. I instantly felt at home. From that moment on, I knew it was where I wanted to be, and I jokingly say that's when my 'senioritis' really kicked in. Having grown up in a small town, I appreciate the sense of community and familiarity that comes with it. Havre feels like a natural fit for me, as it shares that same close-knit atmosphere, while still offering new opportunities for growth and learning."



# MY-AHLIN PRETTYONTOP

## Lodge Grass High School - MTGU & METS

My-Ahlin PrettyOnTop will attend Montana State University in Bozeman to pursue neonatal nursing. "MSU offers great clinical experiences and resources that will prepare me well for this career. I'm excited to learn from experience nurses and gain hands-on skills to make a difference in newborns' lives. This program aligns perfectly with my goals, and I'm confident it will help me achieve my dream of working in neonatal care." My-Ahlin learned from her mom the value of education and importance of finding a fulfilling career. My-Ahlin's experience caring for her siblings' made clear how helpful and lifechanging her future work will

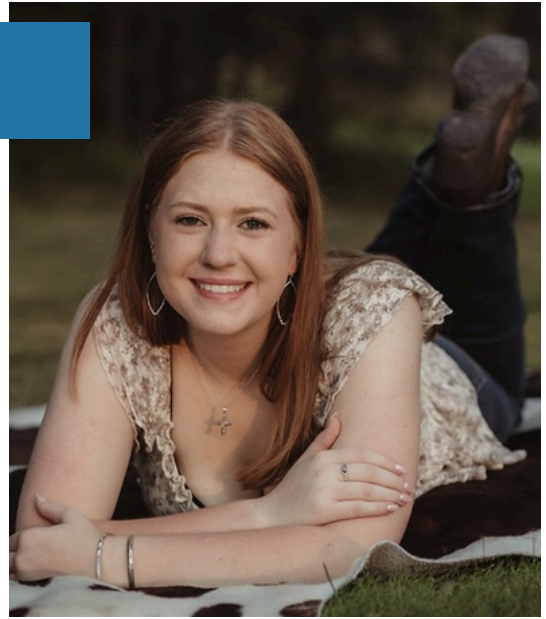
be. She notes the necessity and compassion that nursing asks of her but also the opportunity it offers to achieve her dreams and help in her community.

# ADDISON SKRANAK

## Libby High School - MTGU

Addison Skranak will be attending Montana Technological University in the fall, following in the footsteps of her uncle. "He attended Montana Tech, which allowed me to feel more confident in their program. Montana Tech's petroleum engineering department is highly respected, and knowing someone who succeeded there made it evidently the right fit for me." Addison also speaks to the support of school staff and programs. "Montana GEAR UP, especially Deanna Malyevac, supported me by making college feel more possible and less overwhelming. She helped me through Running Start, and the program helped pay for my classes. Mrs. Malyevac was always advocating for us and making sure we had the opportunities and support we needed to succeed."

Addison's participation in Science Olympiad, robotics, and golf has also prepared her for postsecondary education. "Science Olympiad and robotics got me really interested in STEM, especially through competitions and hands-on problem solving. I liked being able to actually apply what I was learning. Golf, on the other hand, taught me patience and how to stay focused even when things aren't going well." Addison will be building upon honors received in these activities, which "represent the effort (she's) put in to both individual and team-based activities." She looks forward to continuing this balance by gaining independence in college while working with peers. "I'm excited to be in an environment where everyone is able to work toward their goals at a higher level, and where I can really dive into engineering ... it's more about your future and what you choose to make of it."



# BAYLEY MILLER

## Ronan High School - METS

Bayley Miller will be attending Green River College to study air traffic controlling. "I discovered my program of study through a college career readiness class I took freshman year of high school. After looking into it, I realized it was something that I wanted and was willing to do. I focused my studies on math, science, and language classes to work towards my goal. During junior year, I started my college hunt, researching FFA approved schools and finally one stuck out. It was close to home and had the resources for me to achieve my dream career." Along the way, METS helped Bayley answer college questions and apply for scholarships. She encourages younger students to reach out for help as she did. "There are always people willing to help out with anything you need and willing to support you with whatever endeavors you may have." Bayley

recognizes her mom as the person who most shaped her decision to attend college: "She has supported me through all points in my life, even if they were hard to get through for the both of us." Bayley's early experience in high school joining pep band led to branching out into leadership roles through National Honor Society and Associated Study Body and emphasized the benefits of pursuing something unfamiliar. "I am looking forward to the new beginning, the chance to start my own life away from what I once knew and learn how to help out a new community."



## ALECIA STEELE

### St. Ignatius High School - MTGU

Alecia Steele will study medicine and play volleyball at Centralia College this fall. She identified Centralia as the campus that best aligned with her healthcare career goals and provided a stimulating environment at an affordable cost, especially somewhere new. "It is exciting to step outside of a small town and see how much more there is to explore. I'm especially

excited to experience new cultures, try new foods, meet new people, and create memories that will shape who I will become." Alecia's decision to attend college was strongly influenced by her dad: "Seeing his dedication and belief in me made me want to continue my education make him proud," and also assistance within her school district: "Montana GEAR UP supported me by giving advice, guidance, and resources. MTGU helped me explore my options, understand scholarships, and stay focused on my goals, which helped me feel confident and prepared to take this next step in my life."

## COLVIN WYLES

### Lodge Grass High School - MTGU & METS

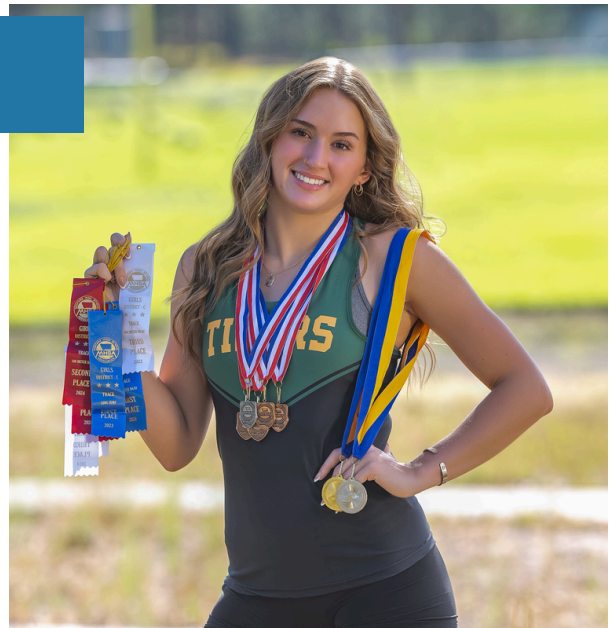
College has always been part of the plan for Colvin Wyles, and he's interested in studying welding wherever he goes. Colvin identifies his older sister, a freshman at Dawson Community College playing collegiate basketball, as the person who shaped his decision to attend college. "She made me believe in myself that I can thrive in college coming out of Lodge Grass High School." At LGHS, Colvin has found success competing in cross country, track and field, and especially basketball, taking part in the 2025-26 undefeated season capped off by Class B Conference, District, Divisional, and State titles. Colvin also participates in powwows and has a small business cutting hair. "These have all shown me that it takes hard work and dedication to meet goals that are set." As Colvin transitions to college, he's looking forward to meeting new people from all over the world, gaining exposure to new cultures and places. Visiting a variety of campuses with MTGU and METS has helped prepare him for the change. "Visits took me out of my high school environment and put me in the full college atmosphere." Colvin also highlights the importance of his family in preparing him for life after high school. "My mother and grandmother taught me the importance of prayer. They love me unconditionally and support me 100% in everything that I do. My siblings (seven of them) taught me patience. They give me so much life. Because of them, I am a humble role model for my younger brothers and my sisters' protectors. My grandfather and uncles always give advice and show up no matter what. I have an unbelievable support system that I am grateful for."



# JAMIE CLEVELAND

## St. Regis High School - MTGU

Jamie Cleveland will be attending Montana Technological University to run collegiate track and study radiology. "I chose to study radiology because I've always been interested in the medical field and how the body works. I like the idea of being able to help people and be part of figuring out what's going on with their health." Jamie is keen on the importance of determination and consistency in both her athletics and academics. She overcame ACL/meniscus reconstruction on her way to setting multiple school records and made significant progress in postsecondary education before completing high school. "One of the biggest things GEAR UP did for me was give me the chance to get a head start on my education through dual enrollment. I'll be graduating this May with my Associate of Science, which I'm really proud of." Along with teachers, coaches, and friends, Jamie cites the support of her parents in impacting her success. "They've always supported me and pushed me to work hard, no matter what I'm doing. Being adopted has always shaped who I am and how I look at my future. It's made me more aware of the opportunities I've been given, and I don't want to take any of that for granted." Jamie views college as one of these opportunities. "College feels like a fresh start and a chance to grow, not just in school but as a person too."



## METS & GEAR UP W/ 8<sup>th</sup> GRADERS



# LANGDON C. KENNEY

## Thompson Falls Jr. High School - MTGU

Langdon C. Kenney already has a clear path for his future. "Going into high school, I am most excited about taking shop classes like welding, small engines, and CAD. By the time I graduate, I want to get a welding certificate through Flathead Valley Community College and maybe do a work study through one of our local mechanics or automotive shops." Langdon hopes to work at or own a mechanics shop down the line but recently started his own detailing business and is already getting to work this spring and summer. Langdon explains how

his love for vehicles runs in the family: "One of my biggest supporters is my Papa. He is a car person and used to own an auto body shop. Aside from that, he's worked in transportation his whole life. He can fix almost anything, is a good mechanic, and knows a lot about cars. I like getting to work with him and having him teach me about engines." Participating in GEAR UP activities, such as Core Day, Science on Wheels, and presentations from guest speakers, has helped Langdon realize his ambitions and how to achieve them. Langdon recently attended a campus visit sponsored by GEAR UP to Missoula College and was excited to see their large diesel engine bays and learn about their automotive program.



## OLIVE STREETS

### Polson Middle School - METS

Olive Streets has the goal of maintaining good grades and attendance as she transitions into high school. Olive is excited to meet new people and continue participating in Talent Search by spending time with friends, attending workshops, and exploring college and career opportunities. Olive plans on postsecondary education in Missoula, either at the University of Montana or a cosmetology school. Until then, she'll be enjoying volleyball, singing in choir, and summers spent waterskiing on Flathead Lake.

## JAYONA HALF

### Lodge Grass Middle School - MTGU

Jayona Half is excited to continue competing in cross country, basketball, and track and field as she moves up to high school. With goals of eventually attending college and becoming a travel nurse, Jayona wants her future teachers to know that she is kind, respectful, and working to do her best academically.



## MAYA NANCE

### St. Ignatius Middle School - MTGU

Maya Nance dreams of someday owning her own farm-to-table restaurant, something she's excited to prepare for with photography and cooking classes in high school. She practices the former by taking pictures of animals. Maya also plays tennis and volleyball, emphasizing the importance of sportsmanship for her personally. This is reflected in Maya's academics, where she sets high goals and works best when part of a group. Maya is hoping to narrow her college options by attending GEAR UP activities in the years to come.



## MANNY WALLS

### Box Elder Middle School - MTGU

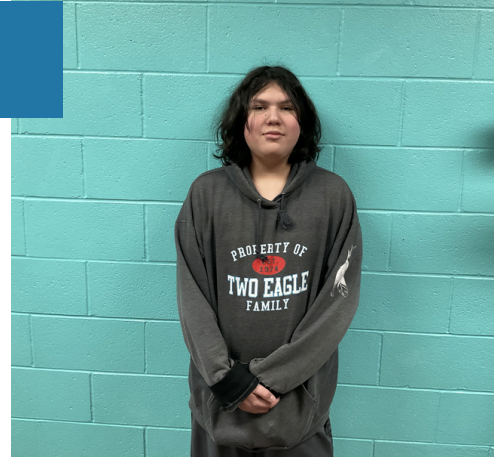
Manny Walls looks forward to beginning his adult life with a career in carpentry or construction. He recalls building a pool on the reservation when he was younger, using a tarp and square haybales so kids had the chance to cool off during summer. His generosity also extends to the Salvation Army where he volunteers. Manny stays in shape by competing in track and field.



# DANTE HAMELINE

## Two Eagle River School - METS

Dante Hameline is a talented artist who hopes to graduate early and attend a four-year college. While still considering options for what to study after high school, Dante has the career goal of becoming a tattoo artist and already gets commissions to draw. Skilled across various media and art forms, Dante also has a knack for math and regularly attends the Montana American Indians in Math and Science program (MT AIMS) at the University of Montana. He wants his future teachers to know about his ability in math and love for drawing.



# IVY TORRES

## North Middle School - METS

Ivy Torres enjoys meeting new people and learning new things through her participation in METS. She explains of the program, "It helps you figure out what you want to do in your future." Ivy also loves to draw, craft, and read: "Drawing is fun because I can create things with colors, and I love to read because it influences my imagination and increases my vocabulary." Some of the areas Ivy might explore in college are architecture, cosmetology, and photography.

# AJAY B. NOT AFRAID

## Hardin Middle School - MTGU & METS

Ajay Not Afraid is excited that only four years separate him from graduating high school and studying mechanical engineering at an out-of-state college. Ajay plans to be more open to asking for help as he maintains good grades and positive study habits in high school.



# WILLIAM SHARBONO

## St. Ignatius Middle School - MTGU

William Sharbono aspires to play football and study mechanical engineering in college, building on his experience working with cars and small engines. As he enters high school, William is excited for the chance to letter in football, basketball, and track and for the variety of classes. He has earned recognition for his academic and athletic efforts with a 4.0 GPA, High Honor Roll, Golden Eagle Award, Coaches Award, Bulldog Award, and Citizenship Award. "I have a supportive family, encouraging coaches, and awesome teachers who motivate me to succeed in sports, school, and life."



# JACOBY LITTLE LIGHT

## Lodge Grass Middle School - MTGU & METS

Jacoby Little Light has no shortage of hobbies as he thinks about his high school goals. He loves the competition and cultural connections he finds in cross country, football, basketball, track, singing, dancing, and handgames, and plans to continue these activities in high school. On the academic side, Jacoby aspires to make honor roll and graduate as either salutatorian or valedictorian. After high school, he envisions himself attending college and earning a degree, following the supportive example of his parents, grandpa, and grandma.

# PATIENCE COFFEE

## Rocky Boy Middle School - MTGU

Patience Coffee has high expectations for herself in high school, aspiring to graduate with a 4.0 GPA as valedictorian. She also hopes to excel in science, BPA, and volleyball. With a love of reading and passion for science, Patience plans to earn her postsecondary education and practice as a registered nurse in Portland.



# LILLIE RAEDEL

## St. Regis Middle School - MTGU

Lillie Raedel sees herself pursuing welding after high school and is excited to gain experience as she progresses to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She aims to complete as much dual credit as possible over the next four years before attending Hobart Institute of Welding Technology. Lillie has enjoyed learning about trade careers during GEAR UP trips. She also has been actively developing leadership through participation in basketball, volleyball, and volunteering in her community.

# TRISTAN NOT AFRAID

## Box Elder Middle School - MTGU

Tristan Not Afraid is excited to improve in math and eventually graduate in the years ahead. He plays basketball and runs cross country and track and field. Envisioning college down the line, he has enjoyed college visits with MTGU.



## EMMA LYTLE

### Arlee Junior School - MTGU

Emma Lytle is looking forward to the academic rigor of high school, planning to take advanced classes and earn high grades. She's also building up her resume through participation in GEAR UP activities and extracurriculars like 4-H, volleyball, track, and wrestling. "These activities teach me how to be more responsible and stay active throughout the year. I also volunteer to help the first grade students at my school. This is important to me because it helps me control my patience and how to work with younger kids." Emma's mom, dad, brother, and sister push her to do her best and be herself. She's interested in eventually working with animals as a veterinarian or in a related field.



## ACE HOSTETLER

### Ronan Middle School - METS

In high school, Ace Hostetler is excited to reunite with their brother, improve academically, and continue attending METS field trips and workshops. Ace encourages other students to join METS for the program's support of students choosing their futures. Ace's plan is to join either the Army or Navy Seals. In the meantime, Ace wants future teachers to be aware of their dedication to friends, schoolwork, and hobbies; these include boxing, cleaning, volunteering, writing poetry and songs, and practicing as a spiritual medium.



## SIMEON SHATTUCK

### Libby Middle School - MTGU

Simeon Shattuck is looking forward to the challenge of advanced coursework in high school and plans to graduate as valedictorian. A self-motivated learner, Simeon is interested in science and engineering as college and career focuses. His extracurricular activities and hobbies are numerous, including Science Olympiad, Libby Middle School Jazz Band, Libby 8<sup>th</sup>-grade Concert Band, Kootenai Outdoor Adventure Program, and Libby Educational Enrichment Program. "All of these activities and hobbies enrich my education, benefit me physically, support my artistic and musical development, and I truly enjoy them." His passion and initiative to learn independently have helped him earn high placements in Science Olympiad, solos in concert band and jazz band, and first place in his school talent show.





# JANIE MITCHELL

## St. Ignatius Middle School - MTGU & METS

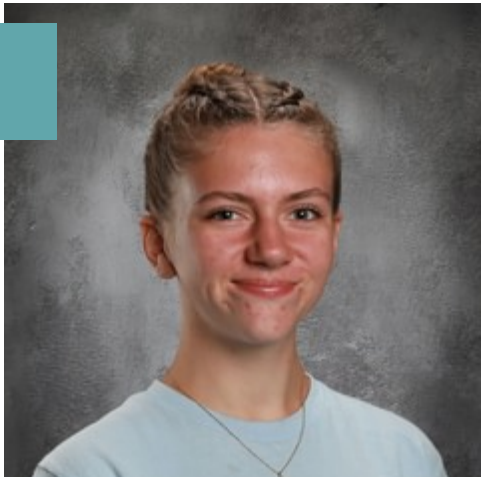
Janie Mitchell is looking forward to the expanded class options in high school, especially in language arts, law, photography, and art. Janie has the postsecondary goal of earning her degree in criminal justice (either at the University of Montana or Harvard University) and becoming a lawyer. Loving to work with others through team sports, Janie participates in cross country, basketball, cheerleading, tennis, and Special Olympics. She also hits the stage with Missoula Children’s Theatre and may pursue acting as another career option.

In all of her dreams, Janie is cheered on by her open and supportive family. Although Janie is a good student, she wants her future teachers to know her first as kind person.

# GABBY TAYLOR

## Thompson Falls Junior High School - MTGU

In high school, Gabby Taylor wants to participate in National Honor Society while continuing to compete and make memories with peers in softball, basketball, and cross country. Gabby also hopes to attend more GEAR UP college visits like a recent trip to Flathead Valley Community College in which she explored a variety of STEM careers through Power Your Future. Finding herself increasingly fascinated with the innerworkings humans and animals, Gabby plans to become a physician’s assistant, physical therapist, or other professional in a related biological field. As she moves into high school, Gabby hopes that her teachers will challenge her, knowing that the academic rigor will prepare her for her future.



# STEVIE GREASON

## Libby Middle School - MTGU

Stevie Greason hopes to “enjoy every second” of high school while building a robust resume for college with interest in studying medicine, psychology, or law. She is delving in to scientific fields through Science Olympiad and also loves archery, a hobby among others picked up while living in Alaska. “As a child I would often venture out into the tundra and stay walking or exploring for hours, often with my dog. Sometimes I would even bring out a book and read out in the wilderness. Today, I like to think that I maintained most of my adventurous nature, though through more direct channels, such as hiking, archery, and of course reading.”

# TIRSTEN WINDY BOY

## Rocky Boy Middle School - MTGU

Tirsten Windy Boy is excited for volleyball, science clubs, and business and personal finance classes in high school. Also planning to join BPA, Tirsten looks to graduate with a 4.0 GPA as valedictorian before going to nursing school. She hopes to return to Rocky Boy following her postsecondary education to help her people. With the support of her family and strong willingness to learn and grow, Tirsten is well on her way.



# DOMANICK MILLER

## St. Regis Middle School - MTGU



Domanick Miller is looking to prepare for college over the next four years. He hopes to leave high school with an associate degree and a scholarship to fund his higher education. Domanick is considering law or business as college majors but acknowledges the value of trades options as well. He is excited to pursue trades classes like welding and wood shop in high school along with athletics. Domanick competes in football, basketball, track, and BPA. In the community, he assists older residents by volunteering to clean,

shovel, and chop wood. High expectations from his dad have helped Domanick make honor roll with perfect attendance.

# GIA THREE IRONS

## Hardin Middle School - MTGU

Gia Three Irons plans to continue her high academic achievement as she moves up to high school. She stays active through volleyball, softball, swimming, and parading during Crow Fair. Gia hopes to attend GEAR UP college visits in coming years to determine her postsecondary choices but would prefer a good college fit not too far from home.





# AVA VAN MAANEN

## Arlee Junior High - MTGU

Ava Van Maanen is looking forward to integrated age groups across academics, athletics, and extracurricular clubs in high school, where she aspires to graduate with honors and excel in sports, especially softball, track, and cross country. Ava explains, "These sports are important because they have taught me and continue to teach me teamwork, determination, skill, and perseverance." Ava also volunteers in a first grade classroom with a peer, assisting students with math and sight words. Ava notes the importance of this work "

because it highlights the importance of patience and communication." Though college remains far off, Ava is considering studying law at the University of Montana. Along with educators and role models who push and inspire her, Ava's support system is at home. "Most importantly, I have a loving and supporting family. My parents Rekka and Tony and my brother Trevor have always encouraged me, giving me not only the skills but the courage to pursue my dreams and goals."








To help plan your own Bright Future, check out our Next Steps guide!










# SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS 2026

## 21ST CENTURY SCHOLARSHIP

-  **\$1,000 one-time scholarship** for college, trade school, or certificate programs
-  **Must graduate from a Montana GEAR UP** school and enroll in college
-  **Use it anytime before age 22** – you don't have to go right after high school
-  **Choose which semester to use it** (fall or spring –your choice!)
-  **Claim online through Award Montana** during set fall or spring windows

## TRIO ACHIEVEMENT GRANT

-  **\$1,500 one-time award** sent directly to your college for expenses like tuition, books, or housing
-  **Must be in TRIO (Talent Search or Upward Bound)** during high school and at graduation
-  **Minimum 2.0 GPA** and on track to complete college prep coursework
-  **FAFSA required + Pell Grant eligible** to qualify
-  **Limited awards** (first qualified applicants) – apply early!



AWARD MONTANA

TRIO