

Migrant Youth Flourish in Montana



Helping the children of migrant workers to graduate gives them more options and brighter futures.

Montana Migrant Education Program (MT MEP)

Location: 7 sites across the State
Youth Served Annually: 1072 in 2007
Staff to Participant Ratio: 12:1
Participant Age: Pre-K through 12th graders

The children of migrant workers face special challenges. Montana's migrant workers travel far and frequently for low paying, seasonal jobs, often living below the national poverty level.

Migrant children face frequent disruptions that complicate learning and interfere with the consistent progress needed to graduate from high school. Seventy percent are limited in English proficiency, and a single classroom typically has students with a wide variety of skills. At the high school level, and sometimes even younger, students often perform hard, physical labor during the day and can only take classes in the evenings, battling exhaustion. These factors can lead to frustration and low academic performance, causing many children to drop out of school in their early teens, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

The Montana Migrant Education Program, in operation since 1967, recognizes that summer learning is vital to youth development, and even more so for the

migrant population. Staff members carefully review students' records from previous moves to determine what students know and build programs to expand on their abilities and provide continuity of education. Parental involvement is viewed as an essential part of the process, and home-school-community partnerships provide the support necessary to improve student achievement.

The results are strong. In 2007, 77 percent of students increased scores on reading assessments, and 88 percent increased scores on math assessments.

The program delivers well beyond the basics. A mobile computer lab travels across the state ensuring that kids are exposed to the latest technology and can do much of their work online. And the program is committed to the long-term development of migrant youth, ensuring that youth who participate in Montana's program accrue the credits necessary for graduation from high school.

Many students come from Texas to work in the fields, and the Montana MEP works closely with Texas officials to help students pass state assessments and stay on track for graduation.

The program determines what students know, builds on this knowledge, and accelerates

their learning to include new skills and abilities. Technology is used to assess children, respond to their needs, analyze risk factors, and prioritize the areas that most need improvement.

"It's innovative use of technology, but it's all for a purpose, a tool to that enables us to assess the students, determine what they need, and track progress," said Director Angela Branz-Spall. "It's technology with a heart."

Program Strength

#8 Rigorous approach to evaluation and commitment to program improvement

The Montana Migrant Education Program (MT MEP) uses the New Generation System, a database designed for migrant students in several participating states, to view student records and specific test scores, identify course history and gaps, and support graduation plans. Home schools can access progress reports that outline the students' summer program results and course credits. MT MEP also conducts pre-, mid-, and post-assessments based on the summer math and reading curricula.



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Exemplary Summer Learning Programs Honored

Across the country, many summer programs find creative ways to keep kids safe, healthy and learning over the summer months. Each year, the Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University recognizes programs for their exceptional work in making this goal a reality. This year's Excellence in Summer Learning Award winners are outstanding models of summer programs that skillfully promote high academic standards and positive youth development. They are proven models that demonstrate the power of high-quality summer learning opportunities in the lives of young people.



Award winners integrate learning with fun and engaging activities.

Characteristics of Effective Summer Learning Programs

Approach to Learning

1. Intentional focus on accelerating learning
2. Firm commitment to youth development
3. Proactive approach to summer learning

Program Infrastructure

4. Strong, empowering leadership
5. Advanced, collaborative planning
6. Extensive opportunities for staff development
7. Strategic partnerships
8. Rigorous approach to evaluation and commitment to program improvement
9. Clear focus on sustainability and cost-effectiveness

The recipients of this year's Excellence Awards are: Aim High in San Francisco, California; The 21st Century Redhound Enrichment Program, run by Corbin Independent Schools in Corbin, Kentucky; and the Montana Migrant Education Program in Helena, Montana.

A selection committee, consisting of Center board and staff members, past winners, and other experts in the field, reviewed applications based on a framework that focuses on nine characteristics of effective summer learning programs, as outlined in this bulletin.

Award winners demonstrate overall excellence, but each program also possesses distinct strengths and characteristics:

- Aim High runs challenging and supportive summer school programs in low-income areas where there are virtually no publicly-funded summer academic enrichment opportunities.
- Redhound Enrichment forms robust partnerships that reinforce thematic learning in a rural area where there are few options for parents during the summer months.
- The Montana Migrant Education Program uses rigorous assessment to target the needs of students and track results, overcoming many daunting constraints.

Despite their different strengths, all of these programs share one overriding characteristic—they achieve their mission of making high-quality summer programs available to the children they serve, regardless of their parents' ability to pay.

"The Center is pleased to recognize three remarkable summer learning programs in California, Kentucky, and Montana this year," said Ron Fairchild, executive director of the Center for Summer Learning. "By acknowledging the incredible work of our award winners, we hope to reinforce that every child should have access to an enriching, memorable summer experience like those provided by these organizations."

Redhound Supports Working Families

21st Century
Redhound Enrichment Program

Location: 2 sites in Corbin, KY
Youth Served Annually: 163 in 2007
Staff to Participant Ratio: 8:1
Participant Age: Pre-K through 8th graders

Prior to 1991, the parents and youth of Corbin, Kentucky, struggled to find quality programs during the summer months. Not only were the available options few and far between, but they were also limited to costly private individuals and organizations that operated for only a few weeks of the three-month break.

Redhound Enrichment began to provide a safe place for children whose parents worked and had no outlet for childcare in the summer months, and evolved into a summer-long program with an enriching and educational focus, in a district where summer school is not offered and 88 percent of youths have working parents.

Redhound Enrichment is an outstanding example of a school-based program dedicated to its families and community, with careful consideration given to parents' and youths' needs.

Program managers forged relationships with an impressive list of local and state organizations to create a dynamic summer learning experience.

The practice of partnering with school-year teachers, parents, and community groups enables the program to offer a variety of enrichment activities to both educate and engage youngsters, including fitness, science, nature, geography, and more. "Partnerships are what make our program fly," said Director Karen West.

A thematic approach for each day's activity contributes to a weekly theme, and each weekly theme contributes to the summer's central theme. For example, in 2007, the central theme, "Road Trip USA," informed weekly themes like "It's Great to Be a Kentuckian," which included a visit from a park ranger and a trip to Cumberland Falls. As part of this partnership-enlivened thematic learning, students might go fishing, navigate a National Guard obstacle



Redhound Enrichment combines academics with thematic learning and physical activity.

course, create music videos, learn digital photography, or broadcast live from a local radio station.

It's fun skill-building but it's really more, said West. "We have a saying that 'if it's not fun for us, it's not fun for the children.' We offer real-world, interactive projects that aren't available during the school year, but we make connections and integrate the activities with learning."

Redhound Enrichment is located in an area with a dearth of alternate, organized youth activities where 40 percent of residents live below the poverty level and over 60 percent of elementary school children qualify for free or reduced-priced meals. The Corbin program is available on an income-based sliding fee scale. "We work hard to strike a balance between raising the money we need to be a high-quality program and remaining affordable," West said.

In 2006, more than half of the participants demonstrated significant academic gains compared to their previous performance. More than 50 percent of students who attended regularly increased their grades by

one letter grade or more in both math and reading courses. In addition, more than 75 percent of students who attended regularly earned a score of proficient or above on state testing in mathematics, and more than 80 percent earned a score of proficient or above in reading/language arts.

As Amon W. Couch, principal of Central Primary School, explained, "This program is such an integral part of who we are as a school; it would be hard to imagine functioning without it."

Program Strength #7 Strategic partnerships

Extensive partnerships, particularly crucial in a rural area, help produce an effective and unique summer program. Program partners range from the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife and Cumberland Falls State Resort Park to the Army National Guard Mountain Warriors and Baptist Family Fitness. The program also works closely with the school system, local public library, summer meals program and other valuable community resources.

Middle School Students Aim for Success

Aim High

Location: 11 sites across the San Francisco Bay Area/12 sites in 2008
Youth Served Annually: 950 in 2007
1100 in 2008
Staff to Participant Ratio: 8:1
Participant Age: 6th through 9th graders

In a major urban area where many schools are persistently overcrowded and underperforming, Aim High emerges as a summer refuge, a school-based summer school program inspiring adolescents to push on and achieve. "It is a life raft during the summer months for kids in our community," affirms Principal Jim Dierke, whose middle school sends the program a large number of students. Such a life raft, however, does not just support students for the five-week summer curriculum or even the three-to-four year-long engagement; Aim High supports its participants well into adulthood through its power to impact academic and social development and establish meaningful relationships.

Aim High will oversee twelve summer campuses in 2008, serving low-income neighborhoods in San Francisco, Oakland, and East Palo Alto, with the mission of providing under-served urban youth with a challenging, innovative, and highly supportive educational summer program.

"I am grateful for Aim High for giving me the opportunity to teach and be taught by amazing teachers and curious students."

Anna, an intern and Aim High graduate.

The program serves children across 12 locations—89 percent attend public schools, 97 percent are students of color, 69 percent speak a language other than English at home, and average household income is \$36,000. Academic work that includes math, sciences, humanities and "issues and choices" in the morning segues into electives, outdoor activities, sports, and field trips in the afternoon.



Aim High's multi-faceted approach fosters a sense of community.

"We provide a highly personalized, enriching academic experience for middle school students, as well as a sense of community," said Executive Director Alec Lee. "Many come back for three or more years. It's not a one shot deal."

Since its founding in 1986, Aim High has sought to instill a positive school culture through CORE values—Community, Opportunity, Respect, and high Expectations—in its thousands of students, teachers, volunteers and collaborators.

The program involves a diverse teaching staff that fosters positive role models in small learning communities. Over 5,000 students have graduated from Aim High over the past 22 years and hundreds of others have taught or interned, with many going on to pursue education careers.

The vast majority of Aim High graduates go on to graduate from high school on time, and attend two or four year colleges. Many students and families credit Aim High with being a pivotal experience in their academic development.

"I am grateful for Aim High for giving me the opportunity to teach and be taught by amazing teachers and curious students," wrote one intern and Aim High graduate. "Every day you learn something new and every day, every person is more enriched and enlivened by their Aim High experience."

Program Strength #3 Proactive Approach to Summer Learning

Aim High provides a continuum of summer programming and school-year opportunities for students in the 6th through 9th grades who come from low-income families in underperforming schools. Designed to provide ongoing support at a critical crossroads in their development, youth are encouraged to participate in the program through the summer leading up to high school, with over 80 percent of participants participating for three or four consecutive summers. The connection to the program extends beyond middle school, with nearly one-third of Aim High staff being graduates of the program.