

Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange Program

Annual Report for 2015/2016 Academic Year

“The Program and our resulting school business gives us a realistic experience of what it takes to run a business and be accountable.” – Participating student

Program Overview

One Montana’s **Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange** inspires students to think about their futures while they acquire hands-on knowledge and new networks to develop personal business ideas and career choices.

Participating teachers tell us the students’ Entrepreneur Exchange experience “exceeds” in-class learning. By participating, students experience hands-on what it takes to become a successful entrepreneur and marketable employee in rural and urban communities across Montana. Culturally, students develop a deeper understanding of the interdependence their rural and urban communities have on one another.

Program elements include: on-site visits and discussion with 8-10 local businesses, an entrepreneur mentor network, student leadership and team building, peer shadowing at each school community, and an optional university campus tour. These elements, in addition to educational lessons and resources provided by One Montana, enable students to apply and build upon their communication, collaboration and critical thinking skills as they develop and present their business or project plans.

School Partnerships

Ten schools participated in the 2015/16 academic year; four of these were new to the program this year (*new).

- White Sulphur Springs High School & Billings Skyview High School
- Billings West High School & St. Labre Indian School
- Helena Capital High* & Fort Benton High School*
- Simms High School* & Bozeman High School
- Great Falls- Paris Gibson Education Ctr & Twin Bridges High School*



Business Partners

A total of 54 businesses from 10 communities participated in the 2015/16 programs. These partners generously hosted educational site visits, shared personal insights, and offered mentorship to students. Seventy percent of these businesses were new site visits this year. This

expanded network helps strengthen One Montana's local community outreach, diversify industries visited, and builds stronger connections between schools and their communities.

Participating 2015/16 businesses are listed below per community.

Ashland area: Cheyenne Depot, The Flower Grinder, Ashland Mercantile, and Roxy's Rockin' Coffee Shop.

Billings: Billings365.com, Grains of Montana, Better To Gather, Northern Ag Network, Billings Chamber, Soups and Such, Velvet Cravings, Econo Print, Master Lube, Aspinwall Mountain Wear, Petroleum Club/ Billings Ad Club, and Snappy Duds. (Ten additional businesses interacted with students during a self-guided team visit exercise).

White Sulphur Springs: Tintina Resources Inc., Townsend Ranch & Feedlot, Castle Mountain Drug & Grocery, Bent Needle Sewing, and Mudderpwee's Creations.

Helena: Alan Nicholson, Great Ape Crepes, Treasure State Internet, SoFi, SPUR Studio, and Melissa Lewis & Associates.

Simms / Sun River Valley region: All Seasons Tannery, MW Mobile Welding, Merja Farms, Double Treble Ranch, and 3-D Archery.

Bozeman: Mystery Ranch, Blackstone LaunchPad, Foundant Technologies, Escape Room Montana, and TowHaul.

Great Falls: Montana Milling, Mighty Mo Brewery, Amazing Toys, Electric City Coffee, and Short Grass Web Development.

Twin Bridges: Bausch Potatoes Inc, Summit Valley Turf, Sweetgrass Rods, Montana Manufacturing Technologies, Wentzel Apiaries, and Montana Beeline.

Impacts and Results

Impacts of the Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange permeate each participating community and reach far and wide across Montana. Students have identified and tackled community needs, created products for a niche market, improved upon existing in-school enterprises, developed businesses that emphasize job skills and offer graduation incentives. All of their initiatives and ideas embody the spirit of entrepreneurship and exemplify teamwork, knowledge application, communication, and leadership.

The Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange provides a framework where student, staff, school, community, and entrepreneurs can work side by side to further knowledge application, career development and economic opportunity across the state and beyond. As well, such a hands-on glimpse into the day in a life of entrepreneurs has transformed many students' preconceived notions of what it takes to become and remain successful. Students quickly recognize the grit, dedication and passion it takes to launch and maintain a successful family business to a company with 100's of employee's.

Since its 2012 pilot year, the Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange has connected close to 300 students and 17 teachers in 12 communities to well over 150 businesses. These new relationships and mentor opportunities have inspired many students to explore new career choices and develop entrepreneurial endeavors individually and as student groups.

Participating schools support and validate their student and staff throughout the Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange by enabling their participation and travel, attending student presentations and encouraging student action and community involvement. Some schools have provided student meals, travel and teacher substitutes without requesting reimbursement from One Montana. These in-kind contributions (totaling over \$15,000 since 2012) allows One Montana to expand its outreach and programming to additional communities across Montana.

Highlights of some 2015/16 student business-projects are below.

- **St. Labre Indian School – Integrating Academics, Culture and Entrepreneurism.** St. Labre applied their One Montana experience toward planning and launching a new Made In Montana class which resulted in developing **Braves Ink**- an in-school t-shirt and decal printing business. Braves Ink meets an academic and cultural need for students to develop critical inter and intra-personal job skills in a real-life setting while applying their new knowledge and understanding of business development. With the Reservation’s unemployment rate hovering at 30% and an average 35% high school graduation rate¹, there is limited outlet and structure for students to gain these critical work-related experiences.

Braves Ink has become a beacon of opportunity. The business model emphasizes job skill and career exploration, business development, teamwork, leadership, and accountability, while boosting the local economy. The community is thrilled to support local student business efforts and as a result, Braves Ink has been so successful it now sends its overflow orders to its mentor business they met during the Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange.

“When the kids leave the classroom we just look at each other. One day we wonder what we have gotten ourselves into and the next day we are like proud parents, watching our students grow. They are now making decisions as a group, discussing ideas and solutions. [Braves Ink] is changing from a classroom to a business where we are no longer the teachers, but the advisors... I really believe that this class is life changing for these kids. They are doing something that has never been done before at St. Labre. They and the rest of the school are well aware of the importance of this adventure.” - Participating teacher

- **Sun River Valley High School- Creating Local Opportunity.** This regional school is located in a fertile valley filled with crops and cattle. While the rural students were discussing community needs and opportunities with their urban peers, they recognized the irony that there is limited access to healthy foods within a 50 mile radius of Simms, MT and neighboring communities. As well, career development and job skills training opportunities outside of agricultural industries are limited. Recognizing this food and employment desert situation, student groups identified key community needs and presented proposals to the

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

school administration and local business mentors for three local food business models that incorporate job skill training and graduation incentive earning. The seed has been planted for next year's students to refine their business ideas, implement market research and community outreach to test the sustainability of their business models.

- **Paris Gibson Education Center – Becoming Student Mentors.** PGEC is a thriving alternative high school in Great Falls, Montana. They have participated in the Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange for three years. After launching their wildly successful pepper flake product, Loki's Ghost (grown in-house), PGEC served as an inspiring mentor to their Twin Bridges, MT rural partner this year. PGEC helped their Twin Bridges peers work through the production, licensing and packaging of a new 'Mad Cow Corn' product; to be sold at school events as a fundraiser for the school's BPA club competition travels (Business Professionals of America).
- **Fort Benton- Building Community.** Fort Benton, located on the Upper Missouri River, is one of the oldest settlements in the American West. Like many small rural towns the community continues to experience "Brain Drain" as youth migrate after graduation. To help build stronger community and leadership within the school and between the school and its community, Fort Benton chose to participate in the Rural-Urban Student Entrepreneur Exchange as a Junior Class. With their urban peers from Helena, MT, they visited 12 businesses representing the high tech, service, agriculture, marketing, tourism, development, food and lobby industries. It became apparent to students that successful entrepreneurs 1.) Share many key qualities such as passion, grit, vision, adaptability, willingness to learn from mistakes, 2.) Invest in ones' community, 3.) Work hard, 4) Feel a sense of reward, and 5) appreciate being the creators of their own destiny.

Four teams of Fort Benton Juniors were tasked with researching and proposing a sustainable business to meet a real community need and niche. The students' new realizations, broadened community awareness, and stronger team spirit empowered them to enthusiastically create businesses they felt could be an asset to them personally and their community.

Totals for 2015/16

Number of ...

- Student participants: 131
 - Schools partners: 10
 - New schools: 4
 - New communities: 4
 - Businesses visited: 54
 - New businesses visited: 38
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"My role and experience at Braves Ink has even helped me in public speaking and my English final." – Participating student

In The News

The Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange has been a popular event for many local and regional newspapers across Montana. Articles were featured in the following papers: *Billings Gazette* (11/12/15), *The River Press* (12/16/15), *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* (3/1/2016), and *Great Falls Gazette* (4/5/2016).

Continued Program Enhancements

Informed by feedback from educators and students, some new educational, organizational and promotional components were added to the program this school year that created engaging and productive results and feedback. In addition, we look forward to implementing additional improvements to strengthen the Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange long term sustainability and outcomes.

• **Marketing / Promotion / Recruitment**

- **Video.** A short introductory video for the Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange was created by a St. Labre employee that can be seen on One Montana's YouTube page. The video has been an effective outreach and recruitment tool to help engage and inform prospective schools and educators prior to in-person visits. We will also produce a teacher testimonial video this summer highlighting the many ways these inspiring educators apply their Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange experience to their classroom and student learning experience.
- **Collaborations.** One Montana continues to have conversations with various Career & Technical Education associations as well as organizations that share similar student entrepreneur objectives such as 4-H, FFA, Girl Scouts, FCCLA, BPA, DECA and others to find ways to integrate and support complementary components of each other's programs.
- **Outreach and Recruitment.** This last academic year the Program Manager embarked upon promotional outreach visits to three regions of Montana: Western, Central, and Northeast. One Montana met with 13 new school prospects and many others via phone. The 2016/17 school year goal is to enroll 18 schools (8 new partners). Prospective participating communities include: Winnett, Winifred, Miles City, Plentywood, Bainville, Nashua, Hinsdale, Big Timber, Missoula (2 new schools), St. Ignatius, Butte, Valier, Conrad, Great Falls (2 new schools), Whitefish, Kalispell, Deer Lodge and Billings (1 new school).

"I enjoyed meeting new students my age in a different community and learning from the diversity of businesses, their industry and their stories." – Participating student

• **Curriculum Enhancements**

- **A Student Workbook** was created to help guide students and teachers through the program experience, related lessons, business development, and reflection. The workbook was designed with flexibility for teachers to use and apply to their specific classroom subject matter and related education standards.
- **A Standards "Crosswalk" Document** was completed and is a key element to inform teachers and administration on the programs curriculum application across multiple subjects and educational standards.

- **Virtual Teachers' Lounge.** Recognizing the value teachers' gain from their four-day interaction with one another during the physical exchange, an interest was expressed to create an outlet for teachers involved in student entrepreneurship to interact and share ideas and questions throughout the year. To help meet this need, One Montana has partnered with Inspired Classroom of Missoula, to offer a quarterly online Virtual Teachers' Lounge. The pilot Lounge featured three teachers who have implemented in-school businesses using unique models to meet the needs of students, school, curriculum, career development and community. The Lounge also serves as a promotional and outreach tool to engage future schools in the Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange. The next Lounge will be Fall 2016.
- **Peer to Peer Interactions.** In our original grant proposal, the Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange model included each partner visiting their respective community for the final student presentations. Though all partners agree it's important for the students to participate in each other's presentations, few schools have been able to make this program commitment. The challenge is mostly due to the ever demanding school and student schedule, Montana's lengthy travel times, and inclement weather windows. To offer this important learning and cultural component, One Montana will be working in conjunction with Inspired Classroom to pilot an ongoing student correspondence portal with live online student presentations where peers and business mentors can watch, ask questions and interact as they learn and inspire each other with their final program presentation. The presentations will be archived online where other schools, businesses and the public can view and be inspired by the innovative student work.
- **Online Teen Pitch Contest.** All participants appreciate the real-life application of classroom learning. As a result, many students are ready to test their business ideas out on a larger audience. An online teen business pitch contest will give Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange participants and other Montana teens an opportunity to compare and pitch their business ideas to a large audience and panel of entrepreneur judges. The Teen Pitch contest guidelines, judges, marketing collateral and prizes (cash and free mentor consulting services) will be developed this summer, promoted during the Fall and winners announced December 2016. Montana State University will help promote the event during their 'Entrepreneur For a Day' event for high school students.
- **Program Review.** A team of teachers and program administrators convened in June 2016 with the goal to review and strengthen the Rural-Urban Student and Entrepreneur Exchange program's impact, evaluation, and sustainability. In addition to some of the previously mentioned enhancements, the outcomes of this review will help create a promotional video of teacher testimonials and implement online lessons with built-in assessments for the 2016/17 school year.
- **Assessment.** This Summer and Fall, we will be asking past student participants to complete an online survey. They will be asked to reflect on their Rural-Urban Student Entrepreneur Exchange experience, its impacts on their awareness and life choices relative to personal career development, entrepreneurship and rural-urban cultural understanding. As another assessment tool, One Montana will offer online student lessons for teachers using

'nearpod'. This platform offers innovative real-time learning and assessment tools that can be accessed by participating teachers and One Montana before, during and after the program. Implementing this new resource will help teachers and One Montana gauge student engagement, learning and application throughout the Rural-Urban Student Entrepreneur Exchange.

"This was a highlight of the year for many of my students." – Participating teacher

Challenges

While we are achieving our plan to expand the Rural-Urban Student Entrepreneur Exchange in line with program goals, it has become clear that continued expansion will require the program manager to work in conjunction with a part-time seasonal assistant to help service schools during a narrow Fall and Spring program window. Although each semester is 4 months long, in actuality, most schools have a short 1.5 month window of opportunity where there are minimal conflicts with testing, extracurricular activities and clubs. The assistant will help facilitate the increased number of schools in the far reaches of MT in 2016/17 (some of which are 7-9 hours away from our One Montana office), help schedule on-site program business visits, and develop and launch the new online Teen Pitch contest.

As mentioned in the Program Enhancement section, One Montana will be reformatting the final peer to peer presentations to better meet student and school needs, interests and schedules. In lieu of most in-person final presentations, we will pilot a student correspondence portal and live online student presentations where peers and business mentors can watch, ask questions and interact as they learn and inspire each other with their final program presentation and innovative entrepreneurial endeavors.

Though we have a few rural communities and urban classrooms that have now cycled out of the program, we have found that these teachers and students are invaluable program advocates and now mentors for new participants. They also appreciate the program's new online modalities which will provide further opportunity to stay involved with their peers and other communities across Montana.

