

6 Goal 3: Academic Rigor & Support

6.1 MGSLP Essay Contest

6.1.1 Brief Overview of Essay Contest

The Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program (MGSLP), a major partner in the GEAR UP Program, sponsors an essay competition every year. The essay contest was created to encourage students in middle school to think about saving for college, to emphasize the importance of writing well, and to provide an incentive for students to write.

New essay topics are offered each year, and students choose their topic about which to write. MGSLP encourages schools to have the students write an essay for the contest as part of a school assignment – either in class or as homework.

By having students complete an essay for the contest writing content standards one, two, and four will be fulfilled.

- Content Standard 1 – Students write clearly and effectively
- Content Standard 2 – Students apply a range of skills and strategies in the writing process
- Content Standard 4 – Students write for a variety of purposes and audiences.

The essay contest is open to 7th and 8th grades in GEAR UP schools. First place recipients will be awarded a \$200 college scholarship, and MGSLP expects to award 180 college scholarships for a total of \$36,000. There will be at least one recipient per school, per grade level. Additional scholarships will be awarded based on elements listed on the scoring guide as well as based upon the number of essays submitted per school, per grade level.

MGSLP will hold the scholarship in the recipient's name until he or she enters an eligible postsecondary educational institution: any accredited college in the United States. The student must enroll at the institution within five years of graduating from high school.

MGSLP hopes the contest will encourage students to pursue their passions, expand their education, and secure the skills to succeed in tomorrow's world. Additionally, the essay contest aims to inspire teachers, parents, and other caring adults to expect more from students and to help them achieve more.

6.1.2 Guidelines & Requirements

- Students select to write on only one essay topic.
- All essays must be typed using Times New Roman, size 12 font, double spaced.
- It is imperative that the correct student information is on each essay. (See sample essay format in Section 6.1.3) Please make certain the following information is included in the upper right hand corner of each essay:
 - ✓ first and last name of the student
 - ✓ name of the teacher
 - ✓ grade level of student
 - ✓ name of school
- Essays should be approximately in the 200 to 500-word range. To determine the word count on an essay in Microsoft Word, go to Tools > Word Count.
- Essays will be judged based on content, organization, personality, word choice, and grammar. The attached Reader Scoring Guide (see section 6.1.6) will be used to rate each essay. English teachers are encouraged to review the scoring guide and communicate the importance of these writing elements to students.
- Essays that do not follow the above guidelines or are not postmarked by the submission date will be disqualified.

6.1.4 Tentative Schedule

Early October:	Essay information out to schools
Late October:	Recipient Information Forms and Pictures due back from students to MGSLP from previous year's contest
Early January:	Previous year's essay book sent out to schools
Early February:	Essays due to MGSLP
Mid-April:	Essay winners announced
Late April:	Begin presenting awards at ceremonies

6.1.5 Instructions for the GEAR UP Liaison

Liaisons will receive the guidelines and essay topics via email and hard copy. These are then copied and distributed to the appropriate parties (principal, 7/8 grade English teachers, counselor, etc.).

Schools are encouraged to have the students write an essay for the contest as part of a school assignment – either in class or as homework. Work collaboratively with your school’s English teachers: remind staff periodically of the deadline; follow up to see how things are going; and address any questions/concerns. Putting information in staff, student, and parent newsletters, etc., can create excitement about the contest.

Collect essays from teachers for mailing to MGSLP. Review the essays collected to make sure the appropriate information is on each one. If not, collaborate with the appropriate school staff to have the student correct the information on his or her essay. Make sure essays are postmarked by the deadline date; if possible, please mail all essays together, bundled by grade level.

Liaisons will be notified via email and hard copy of the winners. This information should not be revealed to the school staff or student body until the awards ceremony. Work with MGSLP Outreach Coordinator to set up a date and time that a staff person from MGSLP can come to your awards ceremony at the end of the school year to present the awards to students or to have award certificates sent to you.

Collect releases and pictures from students so that their essays may be included in a book of winning essays, and mail/email the items to MGSLP. Follow up with students whose releases have not been turned in, and communicate with MGSLP regarding their status. If a student is a past winner, a new release must be filled out for the new award.

Copies of the previous year’s winning essays will be sent to you in book form; please distribute these essay books to the appropriate parties.

Distribute “Intent to Enroll Forms” to essay contest scholarship winners in current year’s graduating class. Every year help track down high school graduates who were previous winners who have not had their money disbursed and find out status on graduates not disbursed (military, dropout, in college, etc.).

6.1.6 Scoring Guide



**Essay Contest
200x-200x**

For MGSLP Use ONLY

Winner HM Certificate

Reader Scoring Guide

READER NAME: _____

STUDENT NAME: _____

STUDENT GRADE LEVEL: _____

SCHOOL NAME: _____

Please use the table below to score the essay by circling a rating for each writing element.

		Well Written	Adequate	Marginal	Poorly Written	
Ideas/Content	Relevant to topic, original	4	3	2	1	Unclear, limited, lacks purpose
Organization	Easy to follow	4	3	2	1	Lacks direction
Personality	Expressive, engaging, and honest	4	3	2	1	Lifeless, mechanical
Word Choice	Varied, interesting, and accurate	4	3	2	1	Limited vocabulary
Grammar	Has few, minor errors	4	3	2	1	Has numerous, distracting errors
TOTAL PER COLUMN						GRAND TOTAL OF COLUMNS

COMMENTS

READERS must return completed scoring guides and essays no later than March xx, 200x to:

Tina Wagner, Outreach Coordinator
Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program • PO Box 203101, Helena, MT 59620-3101
Phone (406) 444-0350 • E-mail twagner@mgslp.state.mt.us

6.1.7 Essay Contest Contact Information

For information regarding general questions about essay contest:

Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program
Tina Wagner, Outreach Coordinator
PO Box 203101
Helena, MT 59620-3101

406-444-0350 (direct)
800-537-7508 (toll free)
406-431-4753 (cellular)
406-444-1869 (fax)

twagner@mgslp.state.mt.us (email)

For information on student accounts and disbursement of funds awarded:

Montana Guaranteed Student Loan Program
Janice Kirkpatrick, Scholarship Coordinator
PO Box 203101
Helena, MT 59620-3101

406-444-0638 (direct)
800-537-7508 (toll free)
406-444-1869 (fax)

jkirkpatrick@mgslp.state.mt.us (email)