



Since 1999, Maine's GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) Program has been helping create sustainable cultures in Maine's schools that support students from economically disadvantaged households in preparing for, accessing, and succeeding in postsecondary education. Nineteen Maine school districts have participated in this federal grant program. The GEAR UP program has been successful in supporting participating schools in increasing their college-going culture; raising expectations among GEAR UP students, families, and staff that all students can plan for and be successful in postsecondary education; and academic preparation for postsecondary success.

GEAR UP is a six-year grant and serves students in 7-12th grade. The continuity of working with students from their middle school years throughout their high school education helps ensure they receive the support and information necessary to successfully continue their education after high school.

Staff at Syntiro administer The Maine Department of Education's State GEAR UP Program and provide support to GEAR UP school administration and staff through a coordinated, individualized technical assistance model. Principle activities the program uses to provide the intensive early intervention component include:

- 1) Providing a continuous personalized system of mentoring and advising to students;
- 2) Providing information about higher education options, required academic course work, and financial aid;
- 3) Ensuring student access to rigorous college preparatory courses;
- 4) Providing staff development for administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, and other school staff;
- 5) Organizing activities to encourage parental involvement in preparing students for college;
- 6) Providing assistance in obtaining summer jobs, career mentoring, and academic counseling;
- 7) Conducting early-college awareness training for partners;
- 8) Visiting college campuses; and
- 9) Connecting GEAR UP schools with business and community partners.

Maine is once again eligible to apply for this federal grant. Maine's new GEAR UP proposal will build on these most successful aspects of our current program, and anchor our proposal in a commitment to working at the administrative level to implement effective and engaging instruction, as well as build relationships and support personal champions. School district partners must implement effective interventions in planning and implementing the program, measuring its progress on a continuous basis, and sustaining the gains in academic resources. All must be committed to the vision that all students will raise their level of performance to succeed and must be willing to take on the systemic issues that are causing children to fail. Syntiro will work together in partnership with postsecondary institutions, schools, and outside organizations and leverage resources to ensure that progress is made across the K-16 continuum.

Each school district will convene a GEAR UP team which will consist of a Syntiro GEAR UP coordinator, school administrator(s), members of the guidance department, other college access initiative representatives, community partners, and faculty. The team will evaluate the needs of the school and develop a comprehensive plan that best promotes school improvement. Strategies will focus on promoting increased academic performance, professional development for teachers, and career development curriculum and resources.