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☆ Opportunities in Maine!

Maine's State GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is moving ahead with its transition from the first six-year grant.

GEAR UP is a discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of students from low income families who are prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education. The US Department of Education provides multi-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow them through high school. GEAR UP funds may also be used to provide college scholarships to participating students.

GEAR UP is unique among other initiatives. This program employs partnerships committed to serving and accelerating the academic achievement of participating students through their high school graduation. GEAR UP partnerships supplement (not supplant) existing reform efforts, offer services that promote academic preparation and the understanding of necessary costs to attend college, provide professional development, and continuously build capacity so that projects can be sustained beyond the period of the project.

- For more information visit our website at



www.gearupme.org



☆ Accomplishments of GEAR UP (from the APR submitted in March, 2006)

The GEAR UP partners, including representatives from the institutions of higher education, have met once and a spring meeting is scheduled for June.

Specifically, the following

activities have comprised the work of this reporting period: support was provided to participating districts to hire new advisors, all positions were filled and new advisors oriented and added to the GEAR UP listserv, and they participated in professional development activities and monthly advisor meetings.

☆ Graduate Students Provide a Snapshot Into Early College Experiences

In the winter of 2006, GEAR UP staff met with Susan Iverson's Graduate Studies class. Susan was requiring all of her graduate students to participate in a service learning activity related to higher education. Four graduate students dedicated their semester to interviewing and analyzing the experiences of first year, first generation college students. Their research will inform our work as a result of their findings related to what encouraged these students to consider college, what they found helpful in preparing them for college, and what services are contributing the most to their success. These students presented their findings at the April Advisor's Meeting. See the next page for the themes on which the students focused their questions.



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The students identified the following themes to focus their questions:

Q1. How do college students afford their education?

- Financial aid, either federal or state, including work-study.
- Scholarships from their high school.
- Participation in pre-college programs like Upward Bound or Early College for ME, which provide financial assistance.
- Financial support from families or part-time jobs.
- Loans.

Q2. What would students recommend for success in college?

- Take advantage of available resources, especially key people on campus.
- Time management.
- Personal responsibility to do as well as possible, both before getting to college and after arriving.

Q3. What/who influences students to attend college?

- Family (specifically mother and father)
- Friends
- Self
- Teachers and Guidance Counselors
- Upward Bound and other organized support systems

☆ **Success Stories** ☆

GEAR UP Advisors shared lots of stories of students who were influenced through their participation in GEAR UP. These successes are bigger than any one program or person. Creating schools that encourage students toward post-secondary opportunities and ensure that all students have the skills to be successful takes the time, commitment, and talents of all the school staff. April Harvey stated: "We have an excellent staff and high standards, especially for a rural school. I have been very lucky to work at Piscataquis Community High School for the past five years."

☆ In one Maine high school, one GEAR UP student was the class president and Salutatorian. Another student at this same high school was the class Valedictorian. In a graduating class of just over 50, 22 of the students were active GEAR UP participants. Nineteen of the 22 successfully completed all of the GEAR UP requirements, and have been accepted into a college or university. Out of those 19, 15 will receive GEAR UP scholarships.

☆ In another Maine high school two GEAR UP students received full scholarships at their four-year universities, and another received almost a full scholarship. A different GEAR UP student was not much interested in the academic side of school until his senior year. He worked hard and was

accepted to a four-year university where he will be using his GEAR UP scholarship. Another young man from this same school,, who was expelled during his high school years, returned to finish his schooling. He is going on to college and is receiving a GEAR UP scholarship. Yet another young man, who dropped out of school mid-year, pursued adult education, graduated, and will be using his GEAR UP scholarship to continue his education.

☆ One special education student had never considered college as an option for his future. His mother never graduated from school and he never thought of himself as college material. But, this student decided to go to a local technical college just this year and he was very successful; he received a scholarship and was accepted at Washington County Community College where he will study diesel mechanics. His mother, a single parent, is so excited for her child and knows that this is such a huge accomplishment. This young man has a younger sister who is participating in GEAR UP as well and now she has decided she can go to college, too!!!

☆ Another young GEAR UP participant decided to take advantage of early college classes while in high school. This young man successfully completed his first class and then began to look for more opportunities. Not only was he successful but several of his friends followed his lead. This



student is now enrolled in a four-year college.

☆ Another young man who was not at all interested in college decided to go on some of the college tours and visits. The tours were sponsored by Maine Educational Loan Marketing Corporation (MELMAC) and organized by GEAR UP. After visiting several colleges he decided he wanted to apply. He did and was accepted into Thomas College.

☆ One GEAR UP advisor helps many students. During fall registration these students seek her out to be sure they are taking the appropriate classes to get them ready for college. She has helped students complete forms and meet deadlines, supports their focus and interest in college, and helps to ensure they are prepared to meet the rigors of college academics.

☆ A young man was diagnosed with cancer in his freshman year. This student missed almost an entire year of school. His mother, a single parent, had never attended college but together with the support of the school and GEAR UP, this student persevered, made it through high school, and was accepted into college.

☆ A student who seriously considered dropping out of school was instead guided to enroll in a vocational education program. He had a fabulous year, and was one of only two students in the entire class that received an "Outstanding" as a

grade on his exit portfolio. This student has been accepted into a college in Florida.

☆ Another student, who came from a long line of lobster fishermen, already had his future mapped out, or so he thought. He already owned a boat and was making lots of money. No one in his family had graduated from college. Yet, after much consideration, he decided to put the lobstering on hold and attend college instead.

☆ One GEAR UP student, basically homeless for the last two years, stayed in school due, in large part, to the support of her school "family".

This student is a star student and athlete who became discouraged when all of her friends were applying to colleges. The guidance office team and her GEAR UP advisor pulled her from classes one day and supported her in filling out some college applications and her FAFSA form. This student was quickly accepted at a Maine university, but she also continued to apply to other colleges that interested her. Somehow, through the community grapevine, a Portland financial group heard about her. This group asked to meet with her and were so impressed with her they agreed to pay all of her education costs, anywhere in the world that she wanted to go to school. This student has chosen to attend The Art Academy of San Francisco to study advertising.

☆ A young woman who had little interest or success in school decided to attend Job Corps in Bangor. She was extremely successful there and has been accepted at Eastern Maine Community College. This level of success totally changed this student's outlook and personality.

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