

DATE: November 17, 2005

SUBJECT: GEAR-UP Status Report

ACTION RECOMMENDED: Information

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: The GEAR UP program is a discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides five-year grants to States and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school. GEAR UP funds are also used to provide college scholarships to low-income students.

GEAR UP is unique from other federal initiatives; the program employs partnerships committed to serving and accelerating the academic achievement of cohorts of 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 term of the grant.

GEAR UP – TENNESSEE ACTION PLAN

Tennessee’s 2005-2010 GEAR UP project is designed to promote student achievement and enhance awareness of the need to expand access to post-secondary education statewide, especially in those areas of the state that are traditionally underserved. Through the creation of early intervention programs, enhanced academic assessments, and a broad-based outreach campaign articulating the importance of post-secondary access, the state aims to significantly improve transition rates across all facets of the P-16 educational pipeline. The statewide GEAR UP project will incorporate best practices from ongoing site-specific GEAR UP activities in the state in order to maximize programmatic impacts. Through the implementation of the initiatives articulated above, the state will aim to: (1) increase the academic performance and preparation of students in order to prepare them for post-secondary education; (2) increase high school graduation rates and transition rates to post-secondary education; and (3) increase education expectations and aspirations for students and their families.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT DELIVERABLES

The ten counties that comprise the intervention cohort for Tennessee GEAR UP will receive direct assistance in developing and implementing localized

initiatives that support and enhance the statewide grant. Initially, the GEAR UP advisory board will work through the project director to analyze school-based data on student performance and will include research-based components for each of the activities outlined later in Section II to enable students to persist across the P-16 educational pipeline and be prepared for post-secondary education.

Tennessee GEAR UP has developed local and statewide strategies, objectives, and activities to assist in accomplishing its stated goals, priorities, objectives and targets. One of the supporting entities of these initiatives will be the ten regional P-16 councils that exist across the state. These councils serve as a civic vehicle for educational improvement and are comprised of local education, business and community leaders who represent key stakeholders in education and workforce development. Each of the regional P-16 councils share a commitment to coordinating institutional efforts to close the achievement gap in their communities and to change the culture of expectation for Tennessee students.

The following are brief descriptions of the major project interventions:

1. **Tutoring.** In the early years of the grant, tutoring interventions will be targeted to support the development of fundamental/foundational skills students will need for satisfactory performance on the Tennessee Gateway examinations (Language Arts, Algebra, and Biology). In later years, tutoring will focus directly on the content covered in the Gateway examinations.
2. **Mentoring.** Mentors will be recruited from the school, the local community, and higher education institutions. In the early years, mentors will be trained to support students' school interest and involvement. In the later years, mentoring will focus on student career awareness and the importance of participation in higher education.
3. **Summer Academies.** Summer academies are intensive week-long workshops beyond the school year that address special topics of academic need/interest for cohort students. In the early years, academies will focus on reinforcing content and concepts addressed on the Gateway examinations. In the later years of the grant, academies will focus on postsecondary opportunities and college/career linkages.
4. **Counseling.** Counseling interventions will focus on student school interest and involvement during the early years of the project. During the later years of the project, the counseling function for GEAR UP students will address academic progress, selection of an academic study track, career interests/awareness, and postsecondary planning.
5. **Academic Enrichment.** Academic enrichment will be provided to cohort students each year of the project. Enrichment activities will include academically oriented fields trips and other educational experiences that students would ordinarily not have a chance to experience. These experiences would include attendance at plays, concerts, art exhibits, museums, etc.
6. **Hands-on Instruction/Teacher Professional Development.** Project teachers will receive targeted professional development instruction that

will 1) increase teacher content knowledge; and 2) introduce and support more hands-on, active instruction in the classroom. Equipment and supplies supporting hands-on instruction will be made available to project teachers as part of their professional development experience.

7. **Study Skills/Academic Planners.** Cohort students will receive training in study skills and time management (e.g., using academic planners) to support the efficiency and organization of their study efforts.
8. **On-line Career Modules/Career Fairs.** Each year, cohort students will work with the *Collegefortn.com* website and complete on-line career modules that help students choose careers of interest and determine associated educational requirements. Similarly, later in the project, students will participate in career fairs that provide information and opportunities for students to meet and converse with career professionals of interest to the students.
9. **Job Shadowing.** As part of the Tennessee job shadowing program, cohorts students will participate in (and write about) a day on a job site related to their particular area of career interest.
10. **College Interventions.** A series of college awareness interventions will be employed for cohort students. These include visits to college campuses, college fairs, and visits by college faculty and staff to school sites to talk with students. Additionally, guest speakers representing a variety of careers will speak to students about their career and its educational requirements.
11. **College Admissions/Financial Aid Workshops.** Cohort students and parents will be provided with workshops addressing the importance of college, the process for applying to college, and important information about financial aid processes and alternatives.
12. **Parent Workshops/Conferences.** Due to key role of parents regarding their child's educational aspiration and attainment, parent workshops and school/teacher conferences will be used to a) inform parents of the support they can provide to their child; 2) promote parent awareness of higher educational institutions and financial; and 3) enable parents to encourage their child to complete high school and attend college.

Tennessee GEAR UP – 11th and 12th Grade Cohorts: As Tennessee transitions into the Knowledge Economy, one important phenomenon should not be overlooked: the need to significantly expand and enhance educational access opportunities and ease transitions across the educational pipeline for all Tennesseans. This reality poses both challenges and opportunities for Tennessee. As a result, targeted GEAR UP initiatives for the 11th and 12th grade cohorts will be centered on immediate and urgent interventions for those students for whom such transitions are imminent. In order to effectuate this end, the GEAR UP initiative will focus on the following for the 11th and 12th grade cohort:

1. **College for Tennesseans: College Pays ... We Can Get You There:** As a policy mechanism for enhancing access, student learning, and educational attainment, the state will initiate a broad-based public

outreach campaign similar in form and structure to the Texas Education Go Get It! campaign. Through a combination of educational outreach and support, this program will increase awareness of the benefits of higher education and provides a vehicle for developing educational and business partnerships among a variety of stakeholders. This outreach campaign will impart the benefits of higher education and education in general; fosters and promotes parental, employer, and community involvement; provides effective consumer information to students, parents, and prospective students; and articulates the needs of the P-16 education to the general public and legislature. The Commission will work cooperatively with elected officials, other state agencies, the governing boards, P-16 councils, and all post-secondary institutions to construct a common agenda that fosters educational access that will be articulated through the College Pays initiative.

2. ***P-16 Educational Transitions and Curricula Alignment:*** A primary focus of the GEAR UP initiative will be to align curricula across all educational levels and reduce curricula overlap; align K-12 exit requirements and college entrance/placement requirements; align the college preparatory curriculum with admissions and placement practices; and link assessments for measuring high school student's achievement with college admissions decisions and college course placement. Through the alignment of both curricula and assessments, the state will be able to increase the number students graduating from high school and the likelihood of such students moving onto postsecondary education and ultimately graduating from college. To facilitate this objective, the Commission will work cooperatively with secondary education to ensure that the foundation skills of high school students are maximized through rigorous course-taking. In support of this outcome, the Commission will work collaboratively with the State Department of Education to ensure the adoption of the college preparatory curricula as the default curricula for all high school students.
3. ***Dual Enrollment, Early Immersion, and Collegiate Success:*** In order to enhance access to educational opportunities and enhance the viability of the senior year in high school, the Commission will support the expansion of dual enrollment programs for 11th and 12th graders, especially in the community college sector. Such courses entail the presentation of instructional opportunities for advanced students, as well as early intervention programs for students in need of remediation. To support those students in need of additional and/or advanced preparation prior to college enrollment, funds will be allocated for governor's schools, summer immersion, and intensive refresher programs that facilitate seamless transitions to post-secondary education for traditional and non-traditional students. Furthermore, the Commission will utilize incentive funding for programs that enhance student academic success in their transitional freshman year. Such programs will include, but are not limited to, the creation and/or expansion of first-year studies programs, learning communities, and academic support initiatives tailored to individual needs; ensuring intensive enrollment of freshmen in foundation courses; offering need-responsive schedules to students; and

enhancing diverse opportunities through flexible offerings, distance learning, and enhanced financial aid.

4. ***Align Master Planning Policy Goals with the New Funding Formula:*** The Commission's revised funding formula supports the goals and objectives of the Master Plan and GEAR UP, which are collectively focused on enhancing and promoting student access and preparation. Consistent with this goal, student retention and persistence across the P-16 pipeline will be highlighted in the institutional funding formula to articulate and support the importance of student completion to degree. Incentives will be created within both the institutional funding formula and the performance funding program that encourage student retention.

Given the multiplicity of programs and initiatives to be undertaken through Tennessee GEAR UP, over sixty thousand students will be served through GEAR UP related activities. For many of these students, they will be the first members of their families to participate in post-secondary education. Through programs that enhance student preparation to the significant scholarship commitment of the state, the face of Tennessee P-16 education will forever be changed by the receipt of GEAR UP funds. Being a relatively poor state with systemic budgetary challenges, the opportunity to participate in the GEAR UP initiative will not only expand resources, but will bring attention to the need to focus on student preparation and access.