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GEAR UP Iowa students more likely to enroll in college

**New study released today confirms impact of program
to increase educational access and success for low-income Iowans**

An increase in college enrollment rates and a substantial reduction in the enrollment gap for low-income schools were the central findings of an analysis of the impact on Eastern Iowa schools taking part in GEAR UP Iowa from 2008 to 2014, according to a study to be released today.

GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is a federal program administered by Iowa College Aid to improve college access, success and completion rates for low-income students. The study analyzed college enrollment rates for students in Iowa's first GEAR UP grant, who graduated from high school in 2014. From 7th through 12th grades, these students and their families received services that included mentoring, tutoring, college entrance test preparation, career and major advising, college visits and financial aid counseling. Students also received GEAR UP Iowa scholarships of up to \$3,200 a year for up to four years.

The study examined data for more than 17,000 students, both GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP, in the six eastern Iowa counties covered by the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency. After adjusting for student demographics such as race, sex and income, the study found that college enrollment rates for GEAR UP Iowa students were 3 to 4 percentage points higher than rates for their non-GEAR UP counterparts. Those numbers represent a decrease by half in the college enrollment gap between students

of lower socioeconomic status (lower SES) and higher socioeconomic status. “This substantial reduction in inequality is noteworthy in its potential to promote social mobility for lower-SES students, neighborhoods, and communities,” the study said.

In addition, the study found that GEAR UP Iowa did not have a significant effect on college persistence. The study pointed out that a flat persistence rate could actually be viewed as favorable because it indicates that GEAR UP did not send underprepared students, who would be likely to drop out, to college.

“Improving College Access at Low-Income High Schools? The Impact of GEAR UP on Postsecondary Enrollment and Persistence” was written by Nicholas A. Bowman and Sanga Kim of the University of Iowa, Laura Ingleby and Christina Sibaouih of Iowa College Aid, and David C. Ford of the Mississippi Bend Area Education Agency. The study was made possible by a grant from the Roy. J. Carver Charitable Trust.

The GEAR UP Iowa program served more than 5,000 students in 17 Iowa school districts from 2008 to 2014. The \$16.8 million federal grant was matched 1:1 with state and partner cash and in-kind contributions. In 2014, Iowa College Aid was awarded a \$22.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education for GEAR UP Iowa 2.0, which includes \$22.4 million in state and partner matching contributions. More than 8,000 students in 12 districts who are currently in GEAR UP Iowa 2.0 are projected to graduate from high school in 2020.

For more information about GEAR UP Iowa, go to GEARUPIowa.gov. For more information about Iowa College Aid and the other programs it administers, go to IowaCollegeAid.gov.

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Iowa College Aid makes college possible for all Iowans. We advocate for students and families while providing programs and resources to support college access, success and completion.

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