



Rayburn Barton
Executive Director

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To: Dalton Floyd, Chairman, and Members
SC Commission on Higher Education

From: Susan Cole, Chairman
Committee on Access & Equity and Student Services

SC GEAR UP Program

Summary

The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Education and the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, was awarded a five-year federal grant in July of 1999 to develop a statewide Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness of Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) project. This grant is a matching funds grant with a formal agreement from the State of South Carolina for one million dollars per year for five years and includes in-kind services from the SC Commission on Higher Education and the business and professional community totaling \$4,889,993 for five years. In year 2000/2001 the US Department of Education issued another supplemental GEAR UP grant for the implementation of AIM COLLEGE. GEAR UP is dedicated to increasing education expectations for participating students, providing SC students and their families with knowledge of post-secondary education options and financing; promoting academic achievement in an enriched, stimulating, and active learning environment; and developing an appropriate and consistent training component for educators. The program uses innovative activities as well as collaborations with partnerships around the State to provide both focused interventions in academics and personal development including mentoring/tutoring. The mission of GEAR UP is to significantly increase the number of low-income students who are prepared for and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP and its partnerships also use a broad statewide information component that reaches every eligible school in South Carolina. Schools with a 7th grade and that have a 50% or higher free and reduced lunch status as of October 1999 qualify for GEAR UP services.

The business partnerships portion of this program developed a school district "adoption" program enacted by one of the state's top employers. The program, **High Performance Partnerships**, was put in place within the SC Chamber of Commerce to develop and facilitate collaborations between schools and businesses for the future of the grant and beyond. The

Chamber projects a total of 120 business and school partnerships. There are currently 52 formal partnerships across the State that touch 13,688 students. During the 2000 – 2001 school year the partnerships focus on mentoring; tutoring; career awareness; science, math and technology activities that strengthen academic growth; parental involvement development and incentives; and professional development activities for educators.

An academic portion of the GEAR UP program builds on the "**Saturday Academy/Summer Institute**" concept as practiced successfully by the University of South Carolina - Spartanburg. School/college partnerships have developed and implemented 20 Saturday sessions to enhance the academic skills of 7th grade "at-risk" students in each participating program. The GEAR UP Saturday Academies are held at ten public and private colleges and universities in the state and serve over 600 students. In addition to the Saturday Academy, each group of students participate in a three to five week Summer Institute as well as in a minimum of five sessions in the fall of the 8th grade year. Collaboration with other pre-existing academic and personal growth programs encourage students and their families to continue developing their potential for success beyond the bounds of the current Saturday Academy and Summer Institute programs. Participants in the program are developing a stronger academic base in math, science, language arts, and technology. Both the PACT and Explore testing programs are given to determine student progress as well as to develop strategies for teaching that address improvement goals. Students also participate in activities that encourage involvement in their State and nation. In addition to these activities, students also develop leadership and team-building skills.

A student/parent information component of the grant is an early awareness program for 42,000 qualifying 6th and 7th grade middle school students. In collaboration with the SC Commission on Higher Education's 8th grade Higher Education Awareness Program - HEAP - the GEAR UP program collaborates to form a seamless and **comprehensive SC Middle School Early Awareness Program**. Students, parents and educators participating in this program use the power2earn.com website to learn more about college and career opportunities and the importance of planning early for success. Educators teach lessons in early awareness that are taught before and after a career fair at their school. Students interview at least three career/college visitors to gather information used to compose an essay on "Why it's Important to Plan Early for College." The recipient of the 2000/2001 award is East Clarendon Middle School student Rebecca Coker. During the 2000/2001 school year 6th grade students at selected GEAR UP sites participated in a pilot program that included the opportunity to shadow someone in a career. Another focus of this pilot program included local faith community leaders. These leaders spoke to their congregations about the importance of shadow volunteering as well encouraging congregation members to volunteer to participate in the career/college fairs. The Power2earn.com website was also visited by numerous students, parents, businesses and educators who discovered important information regarding higher education opportunities, costs, and financial aid. Students and parents are awarded the 21st Century Scholars Certificate and brochures with important information regarding college financial aid opportunities and preparation. Evaluations of the program for 2000/2001 are being completed the week of June 4, 2001.

With 6th, 7th and 8th grade early awareness programs established, a new program called **GEAR UP AIM COLLEGE** was funded by the US Department of Education this year for students in

grades 9 – 13. This program addresses and assists students in qualifying SC high schools (approximately 200,000 students) and colleges in overcoming identified barriers by creating the Aim College curriculum. The curriculum development begins on June 13, 2001 and will be implemented, marketed, and disseminated in the fall of 2001. A team of consultants from School-to-Work coordinators, high school and middle school faculty, guidance counselors, and colleges will design the materials and will include:

- Tools for GEAR UP schools to specifically address the different financial, academic, and emotional barriers to college that students face at each grade level.
- Resources for admissions and financial aid criteria, requirements and applications
- Student exploration into career options, interests, and “the right fit”
- Timeline and To Do Lists for college preparation at each grade level
- Ideas and programs to involve and increase the interest of parents
- Student and parent goal setting information
- Test preparation materials and information
- Academic preparation to assist in preventing remediation in college

The **South Carolina Governor's School for Science and Mathematics** has also designed and implemented a science program for the Saturday Academies and Summer Institutes. This small group of talented and energetic 11th and 12th grade Governor's School students - **TEAM GEAR UP** - provide an interactive learning experience with students in the Saturday Academy and Summer Institute programs both at the colleges and on the campus of the Governor's School. Scholarships have been provided this summer for four of the Saturday Academy/Summer Institute students to attend this Governor's School summer program. The team has presented 15 classes during the 2000/2001 school year.

South Carolina Educational Television is a key partner in the SC GEAR UP efforts. As a partner, SCETV produces numerous media components for the SC Governor's School of Science and Mathematics; the High Performance Partnership/SC Department of Education mentoring component; college, student and educator training videos; and community education videos for use across the State. Eight public service announcements have been developed and marketed statewide this year. A GEAR UP-Celebration video and a GEAR UP Information video has been developed and distributed during the 2000/2001 year. A mentor training video has been developed for the SC Department of Education component and is being used to promote new mentoring sites across the state.

The **South Carolina Department of Education** is leading the way in early preparation with a mentor-training program. This program includes extensive training for business partners participating in mentoring services at GEAR UP schools. The new design is also training parents and retired citizen groups to take active roles as mentors in GEAR UP schools.

The SC Commission on Higher Education's State GEAR UP program also coordinates collaboration efforts with the three separately funded GEAR UP partnership programs that operate at **Clafin University, Technical College of the Lowcountry, and South Carolina State**. Regular meetings with these program directors strengthen the relationships between the

Saturday Academy and Summer Institute programs. The SC GEAR UP mentoring and TEAM GEARUP programs also share their resources and training with the partners.

In order to build strong and lasting ties with GEAR UP schools and their communities, a dedicated group of ten GEAR UP and HEAP leaders have - together - "adopted" all the SC GEAR UP school districts. The leaders build collaborations within the districts and become contacts for not only GEAR UP and HEAP but promote other CHE Student Services as well.

GEAR UP builds collaborations by structuring a program that will use the best and most creative resources available to enhance educational efforts around the state. Other strong collaborations currently exist with organizations such as ACT, SAT and various career planning and business organizations. Extensive evaluation components allow for continued growth and effectiveness in State GEAR UP programs. GEAR UP data analysis will provide PACT scores, ACT Explore scores, student evaluation, parent evaluation, and educator evaluation as well as identify student progress as it develops strategies for academic preparation to attend and succeed in college.