

Project Abstract – GEAR UP Massachusetts

Applicant: Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (DHE)

Summary: The project will serve 7,250 students over seven years, including low-income priority students and five cohorts across seven of the Commonwealth's most impoverished areas: Boston, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, Springfield, and Worcester. Target middle and high schools have poverty rates as high as 93%, and most of the largest are categorized as persistently lowest achieving State Improvement Grant (SIG) schools.

Past Success: Over the past 12 years, GEAR UP Massachusetts has helped more than 10,000 students chart a path toward high school graduation and college success. In the 2005-'11 grant, students achieved gains in standardized test scores, while comparisons with non-GEAR UP students showed that participants were much more likely to take the SAT, complete financial aid forms, and enroll in college.

Request: \$5 million annually for seven years, or \$35 million total with a dollar-for-dollar match.

Partners: DHE, Colleges of Worcester Consortium, The Education Resources Institute, College Board, Middlesex Community College, Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority, Lawrence, Lowell, Worcester, and Holyoke Public Schools, Umana Middle School (Boston), Putnam High School (Springfield), Seven Hills Behavioral Center, Valley Opportunity Center, Your Plan for College.

Proposed Goals and Objectives: GEAR UP Massachusetts will significantly increase the number of low-income students who obtain a secondary school diploma and are prepared to succeed in postsecondary education. Objectives are: (1) improve the academic achievement and performance of GEAR UP students; (2) increase GEAR UP student persistence resulting in increased high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment; and (3) increase student and family knowledge about academic requirements for college, the costs of college and available financial aid to help make college more affordable.

Activities and Services: To improve academic achievement and performance, GEAR UP Massachusetts will provide targeted professional development on pre-Advanced Placement (AP) to provide teachers with strategies to harness students' higher-level learning skills. The project also will provide tutoring and mentoring services to foster academic growth and success. To promote high school graduation and college enrollment, the program will offer AP professional development to promote state standards and rigorous course-taking patterns. High school students also will receive early diagnostic services to identify strengths and weaknesses in college readiness, with appropriate interventions so that project participants graduate high school as college ready. To increase student and family knowledge of college, GEAR UP will provide early awareness services centered on college admissions requirements, financial literacy, and financial aid programs. Program evaluation will promote data-driven decision-making, while a quasi-experimental evaluation will provide summative information on long-term success. Massachusetts will complement these services through a comprehensive scholarship program, largely funded at the state level, with expected student awards of more than \$30 million.