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New GEAR UP Program Offers Resources to Local Students

Berea, KY — Partners for Education at Berea College has been awarded a Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant that will serve students from the following schools:

- Barbourville Independent
- East Bernstadt Independent
- Jenkins Independent
- Middlesboro Independent
- Somerset Independent
- Casey County
- Clinton County
- Cumberland County
- Harlan County
- Letcher County
- Lincoln County
- McCreary County
- Wayne County
- Whitley County

The United States Department of Education grant will provide over 10,000 students in 14 districts with an array of services aligned to accomplish three overarching goals: lift educational aspirations, build academic skills and connect academics to college and career.

The GEAR UP: Promise Zone grant will build on the work begun in the previous grant. Despite the unprecedented circumstances of the 2019-20 school year, GEAR UP Promise Zone students' FAFSA

completion rate was 5.5% ahead of the state. The grant also provided opportunities for Appalachian student voices to be heard at 31 national convenings.

“There are two steps to addressing persistent poverty,” said Sandi Curd, promise zone coordinator at Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation. “The first step is to empower the economic mobility of our youth, and the second is to practice those careers here. The new grant provides a map to that end.”

Students will continue to receive services from key partnerships established from the previous grant with Texas Instruments, WIN Learning, Learning Blade, the East Kentucky Challenger Center, Paradigm Shift and Families and Schools Together designed to assess and improve academic skills. Mentors will work with students to improve challenge areas and services will be tailored to address preparation gaps. Students will also build academic skills and confidence through the National Math Science Initiative’s advanced placement training incentive program which uses the College Board’s Advanced Placement curriculum and exam as a framework.

The grant will create pathways for parents and caretakers to become more informed and involved in school, which will enable the schools to better support educational success. Parents and caretakers will also learn about college admission processes and how to apply for financial aid with the goal of increasing the number of students who successfully complete college with limited debt.

“We are thrilled to continue GEAR UP work in these counties.” Dreama Gentry, executive director at Partners for Education said. “We believe in these students and their potential. The new grant can begin where the original grant left off and push past the limits of what was accomplished in 7 years.”

Since the inception of GEAR UP in 1999, Partners for Education at Berea College has provided GEAR UP services to students and families in eastern Kentucky. Partners for Education uses a place based, student focused approach to improve educational outcomes. By braiding services and aligning federal, state and private funding streams, Partners for Education works to ensure all Appalachian students succeed.

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Berea College, the first interracial and coeducational college in the South, focuses on learning, labor and service. The College admits only academically promising students with limited financial resources, primarily from Kentucky and Appalachia, although students come from 40 states and 60 countries. Every Berea student receives a Tuition Promise Scholarship, which means no Berea student pays for tuition. Berea is one of seven federally recognized Work Colleges, so students work 10 hours or more weekly, earning money for books, housing, and meals. The College’s motto, “God has made of one blood all peoples of the earth,” speaks to its inclusive Christian character.