NEWS RELEASE

State education leaders assemble to kick off $18 million GEAR UP grant

Dr. Brian Noland, chancellor of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, and Dr. Steve Paine, state superintendent of schools, hosted county superintendents, principals and business officers today in Charleston to formally kick off the state’s GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) grant. The nearly 100 attendees were provided an overview of the grant from Denise Whittaker, interim project director, and heard from a panel of seasoned GEAR UP leaders about best practices.

Noland and Paine thanked the participants for attending the meeting, expressed their appreciation for the positive work that is occurring in public education in West Virginia, and highlighted the opportunities the grant will provide in advancing educational opportunities for students in the target counties.

Paine noted that if the state is ever to truly realize its potential, everyone must work diligently to ensure all students are prepared for some form of education or training beyond high school. Noland echoed his remarks by adding that the grant will serve as the vehicle for promoting statewide preschool-through-college initiatives and the development of a unified message about college access.

The GEAR UP grant, which was awarded in July by the U.S. Department of Education, funds direct services to low-income West Virginia students who have been identified as being at risk of not pursuing an education past high school. Over a six-year
period, approximately 13,000 students will participate in the project at schools in 10 counties, including Boone, Clay, Lincoln, McDowell, Mingo, Roane, Summers, Webster, Wirt and Wyoming with regional sites at Concord University, Glenville State College, and Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College.

West Virginia GEAR UP will provide specialized academic preparation programs as well as financial incentives for students to attend college. The project will include programs aimed at increasing parent/guardian involvement in the education and educational aspirations of students. The funding also will be used for financial aid and career awareness programs for students, parents and schools to help remove the cultural barriers that keep students from furthering their educations.

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