Overview of the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act: 
*Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)*

**GEAR UP / HEA Reauthorization**

- Higher Education Act is the federal legislation that authorizes numerous higher education and financial aid programs, including GEAR UP.

- The law has a five-year lifespan, after which it must be "reauthorized" to continue.

- The HEA was set to be reauthorized in 2003, but it has been postponed year after year.

- The reauthorization provides the most significant opportunity to make changes and improvements to existing programs.

**GEAR UP Reauthorization**

- Who did Congress consult to make their decisions about GEAR UP reauthorization?
  - Grantees
  - NCCEP
  - Higher Ed, Student, and Financial Aid Associations
  - US Department of Education / Inspector General
  - Government Accountability Office
  - Congressional Research Service
  - Member Prerogative and Priorities

**NCCEP Reauthorization Priorities**

- Grant duration: adding a 7th year
- Cohort management: greater flexibility and providing optional services into postsecondary education
- GEAR UP scholarship: increased flexibility
- Match relief: allowing greater flexibility in raising, documenting and targeting match
- Expanding allowable activities
- Greater role for State leadership and coordination: academic alignment, technical assistance, convening, and college access marketing campaigns

Overview of Changes to GEAR UP

- This document will briefly summarize how changes to GU will impact:
  - Program scope, eligibility and awards
  - Cohort and Priority Student management
  - GEAR UP scholarship
  - GEAR UP match requirements
  - Allowable program activities

Program Scope

- GEAR UP funding “authorization”: $400 Million
- Grant “award period”: 6 or 7 Years
  - You will have the option to apply for a 7-year GEAR UP grant if you follow GEAR UP students through their first year of postsecondary education
- Far greater emphasis on academics, postsecondary success, and lasting school improvement

Program Eligibility

- Minor changes to Partnership language, deemphasizing “elementary” and “secondary” schools and emphasizing school districts
- Removed CBO’s and Philanthropic Organizations from the list of the required two potential partners, but refer to them as “sponsoring organizations” elsewhere in the legislation as allowable partners
- These changes will have no practical impact on your partnership design
- No changes to the 50% free and reduced lunch requirement for schools to be served through cohort model

**GEAR UP Awards**
- Retains basic award distribution guidelines with some additional direction for the Secretary of Education
  - 33% set aside for state grants
  - 33% set aside for partnership grants
  - Remainder awarded at the discretion of Secretary, wherein the USDOE will consider, “to the extent reasonably practical:”
    - Number, quality and promise of applications
    - Geographic distribution
    - Urban / Rural distribution
  - USDOE will reevaluate the distribution of funds on an annual basis
- Continues to emphasize coordination between GEAR UP projects and other federal or non-federal programs
- Allows students who fall between two grant projects to be served:
  - “Provide services under this chapter to students who have received services under a previous GEAR UP grant award but have not yet completed 12th grade.”
- Emphasis on “supplement, not supplant”

**Cohort and Priority Student Management**
- You have the option of serving students through the first year of postsecondary education
- Added “students with disabilities” in program purpose
- Expands “priority student” definition to include students “otherwise considered by the eligible entity [the applicant] to be a disconnected student”
-Disconnected students include: limited English proficient students; students with disabilities; homeless students; youth participating in or aging out of foster care; pregnant or parenting teens; youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice system; and other students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education.
- Allows grants to serve students who fall between two grants
• The legislation will require applicants to more explicitly address:
  • How cohorts are defined
  • How cohort vacancies will be filled
  • How applicants will serve students attending different secondary schools

GEAR UP Scholarship
• The original GEAR UP legislation set a very high bar for “minimum” GEAR UP scholarships—the lesser of:
  • 75% of the Cost of Attendance, or
  • The maximum Pell Grant ($4,731 for FY 2008)

• As a result, most GEAR UP sites didn’t offer GEAR UP scholarships due to the cost of establishing and maintaining scholarships

• The reauthorization of GU will provide partnerships and states with greater flexibility in determining scholarship award sizes by:
  • Reducing the “minimum” GU scholarship to the minimum Pell Grant: $400 (FY 2008)
  • Allowing for a maximum scholarship to be up to the Total Cost of Attendance (when considering other aid)
  • States can still “waiver” out or reduce their scholarship requirement if they can meet current standards

• The GEAR UP Scholarship is still a requirement for state grants, unless they are provided a “waiver” to opt out of the scholarship requirement or reduce the percentage of funds dedicated to the scholarship requirement

• The reauthorization spells out in more detail what expenses the scholarship can cover:
  • Tuition, fees, books, supplies and any required equipment
  • Any additional expenses required for students with special needs

• Scholarship funds must be put into a “trust” based on:
  • Minimum Pell × # GU Students = GU Trust
• GU Students must be notified about the scholarship eligibility requirements at the time they enroll in GEAR UP (21st Century Scholarship Certificate)

• Students and the program have 6 years after students enroll in postsecondary education to utilize their scholarships

• If funds remain after the 6-year period, those funds must be returned to the Secretary

• Otherwise, grantees still enjoy broad flexibility in creating scholarship eligibility requirements, distribution formulas, and redistribution of underutilized funds

GEAR UP Match Requirements
• GEAR UP will still require a dollar-for-dollar match of non-federal funds (cash or in-kind) with greater clarification on implementation issues and allowable sources

• Match “may be” accrued over the entire duration of the grant award period and the grantee will need to demonstrate “substantial progress” towards meeting annual goals

• Match may be claimed at the time it is “obligated” rather than paid

• Clarification on allowable match sources:
  • Funds paid to scholarships from “pre-existing non-federal financial aid programs”
  • Cost of administering the scholarship program
  • In-kind human resources
  • Equipment, supplies, transpiration expenses, in-kind or discounted program services, indirect costs, and facility usage
  • Other resources recognized by the Secretary

• Greater flexibility on match reduction

• Grantee can request a reduced match percentage at the time of application
  • Must demonstrate significant economic hardship

• Partnership grants may request that non-federal contributions to the GEAR UP scholarship funds be matched on a 2-for-1 basis at the time of application

Allowable Program Activities
• There are four big “themes” when it comes to GEAR UP activities
The inclusion of “mandatory” activities

The expansion of “permissible” activities

Greater emphasis on academics

Greater differentiation between state and partnership grants

**Mandatory Activities: (must be addressed by all applicants)**

- Providing information on financial aid
- Encouraging students to enroll in rigorous and challenging curricula and coursework, “to reduce the need for remedial coursework at the postsecondary level.”
- Increasing HS graduation rates
- Assisting students apply for and enroll in postsecondary education
- Scholarships (for State Grant applicants only)

**Permissible Activities for State and Partnership Grants: (optional)**

- Tutoring and mentoring
- Outreach activities to recruit priority students (states)
- Developing rigorous academic standards and curricula, including AP/IB
- Expanding access to a rigorous core curriculum and challenging state standards
- Dual / Concurrent enrollment
- Application and financial aid assistance
- Developing graduation and career plans
- Special programs in STEM
- Scholarship support
- College trips and college-based programs
- Extended school day, school year, or summer programs that offer additional academic classes or assistance with college admissions applications
- Identifying at-risk students / early alert systems
- After-school programs
- Assisting students find summer jobs and internships
- Academic and personal counseling
- Financial literacy programs
- Skills assessments
- Family counseling and home visits
- Professional development
- Programs for limited English proficient students
- College entrance exam prep course
- Improving parent and family involvement in elementary and secondary schools
- Parent engagement and leadership
- Providing services for students through their first year of postsecondary education
- In the event that you lose a match source or partner, you can engage new partners to provide match resources or services
- College access marketing

**Additional Permissible Activities for States Only:**
- Providing direct technical assistance to schools, districts and GEAR UP Partnership programs
- Providing professional development for professionals in the State and any Partnership programs
- Aligning state policies for K-16 strategies
- Disseminating information on best practices for serving GEAR UP and other low-income students
- Disseminating information on “effective coursework and support services”
- Disseminating information on how to more effectively engage parents and preparing low-incomes students for postsecondary education

- Aligning state academic standards and curricula with postsecondary and workforce expectations

- Developing “alternatives” to traditional secondary school options that help students earn college credit prior to HS graduation
  - Includes a range of postsecondary credentials—not just an AA or BA
  - Creating personalized drop-out recovery programs at community colleges

For More Information:

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