## **Douglas kicks off GEAR UP program**

By Bruce Whetten

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The Douglas Unified School District in conjunction with Northern Arizona University and the Arizona Governor's Office officially kicked off its GEAR UP program last week.

GEAR UP, which stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, is a free program offered to seventh grade schools in selected schools throughout the state. It helps students succeed in school and also helps families learn abut choices for education after high school and how to pay for it.

Douglas' GEAR UP site coordinator Alfred Novoa said GEAR UP believes every student should have the opportunity to go to college if they work hard, take the right courses and stay in school. GEAR UP also believes that planning for the future begins with seventh grade students and continues through graduation which for this class will be May, 2018.

The program is for all seventh graders at Ray Borane and Paul Huber Middle Schools, then when the students move up to Douglas High School they will be followed through there as well. Students at the local charter schools will be adopted into the GEAR UP program should they attend Douglas High School.

Novoa said the program is a year round program which also includes summer enrichment programs.

"We're trying to create a college atmosphere, a college culture at both middle schools," he said. "A lot of these kids are living day to day and don't really know what they want to do after they graduate from high school."

Novoa is hoping this program will help these students make a plan for their future.

Novoa quoted Antoine de Saint-Exupery, a French writer who once said "a goal without a plan is just a wish."

"I'm here to give those kids that extra push they might need to get going," he said.

"I'm really excited about the opportunity for our community and the kids in seventh grade," Superintendent Rogers said. "I think the best part of it is there are going to be opportunities for tutoring, mentoring, for planning not only for college but also post secondary education. Even though its just one grade level I think its something our whole community will benefit from in the long run."

According to information provided to the Douglas Dispatch by Novoa GEAR UP began in 1999 and has had great results including better student grades, attendance, higher test scores, increased enrollment in courses that prepare students for college, lower high school drop-out rates and increased college enrollment rates.

"Like with anything new we are starting off at the bottom," Novoa said. He was hired by the district in September to run this program and is assisted by Eleanor Poano. "It's a hard job but as long as we can get the kids excited I think it'll be great for all these kids because they know they have options, they know have choices that they can go to college. Once these kids get to high school we're going to teach them and their parents how to apply for scholarships, how to apply for grants. ... So the kid won't have that excuse that I couldn't go to college."