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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 16, 2021

**Arizona GEAR UP helps families plan for postsecondary success**

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Phoenix—[Arizona GEAR UP](https://in.nau.edu/gear-up), a project of Northern Arizona University that helps increase educational opportunity and access for youth living in low-income communities in Arizona, will launch an innovative college and career readiness strategy for parents of middle-grade students. Research shows the earlier students and families prepare for postsecondary education, the better chances for success. The [Discover Parent Guide](https://in.nau.edu/gear-up/discover-guide/) complements the [Discover Guide](http://in.nau.edu/gear-up/discover-guide/), which is a college readiness and exploration manual. The Discover Parent Guide builds awareness for parents regarding postsecondary options and attainment. Additionally, the guide provides developmental benchmarks for students from middle school through high school to help parents support their child’s academic success. Arizona GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) also provides instructional videos to support students, teachers and parents through these efforts.

Arizona GEAR UP developed these innovative strategies to align with the [Achieve60AZ](https://achieve60az.com/) alliance, which states that by 2030, 60 percent of Arizona adults, ages 25 to 64, will hold a postsecondary credential or degree.

“We know how influential parents are in helping move students through the college application process and supporting their students in college,” said NAU President **Rita Cheng**. “Arizona GEAR UP has been helping the state’s middle and high school students prepare for college for 20 years, and I am grateful for the work they’re doing to reach parents as well. This is one of the many ways NAU is helping all students be successful at the college level.”

In collaboration with [project partners](https://in.nau.edu/gear-up/project-partners/), Arizona GEAR UP provides services to 41 high schools throughout Arizona and the middle schools that feed into them. Arizona GEAR UP will send Discover Guides and Discover Parent Guides to all eighth-grade families in these targeted schools. In addition, [both guides are available for download, free of charge, in both English and Spanish](http://in.nau.edu/gear-up/discover-guide). Discover Parent Guide highlights include:

* Information regarding postsecondary options;
* Developmental benchmarks for students to help parents support their child’s progress;
* Necessary steps for postsecondary pathways;
* Materials regarding goal setting and postsecondary attainment.

“Two out of three jobs/careers will require some type of postsecondary education. AZGU is committed to promoting and expanding access to postsecondary options among the students we serve. Working with the entire family is a critical component of our work to increasing this access,” said **Ramona Mellott**, dean of the College of Education and co-principal investigator of Arizona GEAR UP. “The Discover Parent Guide is designed to provide valuable information to parents on postsecondary options and attainment, and prepares them to help their child achieve postsecondary success.”

Arizona GEAR UP is a seven-year partnership between the U.S. Department of Education, NAU and local, state and national partners including the Arizona Business & Education Coalition, Arizona K12 Center, Be a Leader Foundation, Center for the Future of Arizona, College Success Arizona, Expect More Arizona, Helios Education Foundation, National Council for Community and Education Partnerships and Student Success Agency.

Arizona GEAR UP aims to foster partnerships and collaborations between NAU, middle and high schools in low-income communities and organizations throughout the state that are committed to enhancing education in Arizona.

The grant focuses on the Five Es of Equity—engage, empower, excel, elevate and enrich—and includes three broad efforts:

* Expanding GEAR UP to serve all seniors in 41 Title I high schools with a graduation rate below the state average. These schools, known as GEAR UP Achieve60 schools, serve almost 11,600 seniors each year.
* Serving five high schools and the middle schools that feed into those schools, and working with students (on average, 4,100 students in grades 7-12 each year) to increase academic performance, high school graduation rates and collegiate preparation and success.
* Reaching additional middle and high school students statewide through large-scale dissemination and use of published students’ guides.

This is the fourth GEAR UP grant NAU has been awarded since the university began administering this program in 2000. Gov. Doug Ducey designated NAU as Arizona’s applicant for GEAR UP, and the award includes a dollar-for-dollar match to the $31.7 million in federal funds. Education professor Daniel Kain has been a principal investigator since 2002; Mellott is a co-PI on the current grant, which builds on 20 years of experience, as well as research on best practices in college access to leverage an innovative design that makes it possible for more than 15,000 students to benefit annually from program services.

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