Utah State University’s Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services and school researchers have been awarded a federal Department of Education Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) partnership grant for $2.2 million a year over a proposed seven years for a total of $15.45 million.

The funds go toward a regional initiative designed to help better prepare students for entrance into and success in higher education institutions.

Named the STARS! (Science, Technology, Arithmetic, Reading Students) GEAR UP Partnership, USU has partnered with Rocky Mountain NASA Space Consortium, Texas Instruments, the Space Dynamic Laboratory, SureScore, the Ute Indian Tribe, the USU Student Services Access and Diversity Center, the USU Department of Teacher Education and Leadership, seven school districts (six in Utah, one in Nevada) and three public Utah charter schools, which together will match dollar-for-dollar the federal funding for a project total of $30.9 million. The partners also collaborate to provide professional development, mentoring, hands-on classroom instruction and other resources throughout the duration of the project.

“Texas Instruments is a proud supporter of the nationwide GEAR UP program and we are excited to kick off our partnership with Utah State University,” said Eric Batten, systemic initiatives manager of Texas Instruments Education Technology. “We have achieved dramatic increases in student mathematics and science college readiness in other GEAR UP schools and we are eager to work in collaboration with Utah State University and partner school districts across the state of Utah to increase college readiness in mathematics and science.”
The program, which will serve nearly 3,000 students from middle school graduation into their first year of college, was designed to serve as a blueprint for success in other schools and tackles several key sustainability challenges by:

- Specifically targeting the academic and social environments — including students, teachers, parents and administrators, and providing each with the necessary tools to succeed.
- Creating a sustainable program that will eventually include entire student bodies instead of a finite number of students.
- Enabling project partners to bring the grant program much closer to students across the region — not only virtually, but also in person through USU’s network of satellite campuses.
- Leveraging the resources of USU and its national partners to ensure the program meets specific annual goals.

“On average, only 16.1 percent of the students graduating from our target schools are enrolling in a college after graduation, and in some cases that number is as low as five percent,” said Yolanda Flores Niemann, professor of psychology at the College of Education. “To combat this trend, we need to focus on more than just academics. We need to eliminate certain stigmas and stereotypes, and help students, parents, teachers, administrators and community members envision a college degree as a real possibility for students of all cultural and economic backgrounds. These issues are not singular to Utah, and with our program, we are setting a high expectation for success that we hope can serve as a model throughout the United States.”

The participating schools are all from more rural Intermountain West communities, and at least 50 percent of each student body qualifies for free or reduced lunch. The schools include students who need supplemental academic support in order to meet and exceed state academic standards in mathematics and science as well as students who need cultural and/or language support in order to transition into an English academic program. The STARS! program for success will also help high achievers continue their academic trajectory with goal-focused intentionality.

“I am extremely excited for the opportunities this grant will give our students over the next six years,” said Marshal Garrett, superintendent of the Logan City School District. “The grant will allow us to redouble our efforts to get students to focus on post secondary education opportunities and see that they are capable of being successful after high school. We are very appreciative of USU for including us in this grant and look forward to working with them and the other schools and districts over the life of this grant.”

USU is one of four recipients of a 2012 GEAR UP partnership grant, and received the largest grant allotment of the year.

About USU’s College of Education and Human Services

The Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at Utah State University is committed to offering high quality graduate and undergraduate programs in education and human services that are innovative and widely accessible. The college is also dedicated to establishing and maintaining nationally visible research centers that advance knowledge and professional practices. For more information, see the college website.

Press contacts: Jeff DuBois, Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services Public Relations, (801) 461-9789, jeff@methodcommunications.com; Jacob Moon, Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services Public Relations, (801) 461-9797, Jacob@methodcommunications.com

USU contact: Yolanda Flores Niemann, (435) 797-7337, yolanda.fniemann@usu.edu
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