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Tennessee Higher Education Commission Awarded \$35 Million GEAR UP Grant to Enhance College Readiness Across the State

NASHVILLE, TN – AUGUST 26, 2024 – The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) is proud to announce that it has been awarded a \$35 million GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

This seven-year grant, set to run from September 2024 through September 2031, will play a pivotal role in promoting college readiness and success among students in Tennessee, particularly in underserved and at-risk communities.

"A quality education can change the trajectory of a student's life," said Gov. Bill Lee. "The GEAR UP grant will help us continue to create greater opportunity and outcomes for Tennessee's most vulnerable students while helping our state meet its workforce goals."

GEAR UP TN, administered by THEC, is designed to increase academic performance, high school graduation rates, postsecondary enrollment, and families' understanding of higher education options, preparation, and financing.

The program will serve approximately 9,000 students, beginning with 1,600 seventh graders from the Class of 2030, who will receive continuous support through their first year of college. An additional cohort from the Class of 2031 will be supported until their senior year of high school, along with 1,450 priority seniors who will receive targeted services from the second through the seventh years of the grant.

"This GEAR UP grant represents a tremendous opportunity to invest in the future of Tennessee's students," said Dr. Steven Gentile, THEC Executive Director. "By focusing on academic preparation, career exploration, and college planning, we are equipping Tennessee students with the tools they need to succeed in higher education and beyond."

This will be the fourth GEAR UP grant secured by THEC since 2005, totaling an overall investment of \$109,700,000. During the past three grant periods, GEAR UP TN has directly supported more than 66,000 students in 39 counties statewide.

The GEAR UP TN 4.0 program will directly engage with high schools and their feeder middle schools in Monroe, Grainger, Cumberland, Jackson, Bedford, and Hardeman counties.

Key services offered through the program include:

- Academic development, tutoring, and support (e.g., ACT Prep, STEM initiatives)
- Mentoring and career exploration
- Dual enrollment opportunities
- Financial literacy and aid assistance
- Family engagement and professional development for school staff
- Transition planning and retention services during the first year of college

The GEAR UP TN program also focuses on creating sustainable community partnerships and providing ongoing professional development to ensure the program's lasting impact. The program's design emphasizes the importance of students believing in the value of college, being academically prepared, understanding the college application process, and developing resilience to overcome challenges.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission looks forward to the positive outcomes this grant will bring to the state's educational landscape and remains committed to supporting students on their path to higher education and future success.

For more information about GEAR UP TN, please visit CollegeForTN.org/gearuptn.

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The Tennessee Higher Education Commission was created in 1967 by the Tennessee General Assembly. The Commission develops, implements, evaluates postsecondary education policies and programs in Tennessee while coordinating the state's systems of higher education, and is relentlessly focused on increasing the number of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential.