

California Education Round Table

March 10, 2005

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-0504

Dear Senator Feinstein:

The California Education Round Table seeks your support for the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). As the only federal program specifically focused on improving the academic achievement of low-income students in middle schools, this initiative complements, supports, and implements the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Additionally, the GEAR UP Program is an ideal complement to our High Performance High School initiative that Superintendent O'Connell announced last year and that presaged the current interest nationally in high schools.

California has the greatest stake in continuing the GEAR UP Program because it receives the largest amount of assistance of any state from this initiative. In 2004-2005, nearly \$42 million of GEAR UP funds flowed into California. Over the last six years, over \$150 million of GEAR UP funds have supported our state's effort to improve student achievement and close the gap between low-income and affluent students. Because of the public benefits that accrue from an educated citizenry, our state's educational institutions, private sector, and community organizations have invested over \$47 million this year alone in the GEAR UP Program to improve student achievement.

Together, over 196,000 low-income students in middle and high schools have benefited from the GEAR UP Program since 1999. The initial results indicate that the achievement levels of these students have increased:

- 44 percent more Algebra courses were offered in middle schools the year after the GEAR UP Program was introduced;
- 20 percent more students enrolled in Algebra in middle schools;
- 64 percent of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics courses in high school;
- 48 percent of students were enrolled in Honors courses in English in tenth grade;
- The average growth of 6.5 percent on the Academic Performance Index (API) at GEAR UP schools is three times more than the average of all middle schools; and,
- The average gains in GEAR UP middle schools on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the *No Child Left Behind* measure, exceeded that of other middle schools in the state.

These results are especially impressive given that the GEAR UP Program operates only in schools in which at least 51 percent of the students are from low-income families.

California needs to continue this level of progress because our future economy is increasingly dependent on a workforce with technological and advanced skills to develop new industries, create innovations, and lead the nation and the world. The GEAR UP Program provides resources to begin that effort in middle school -- those crucial years when the aspirations and preparation for college begin in earnest. Put simply, absent a continued focus on middle school reform, efforts to improve student performance and close the achievement gap by high school graduation will be unsuccessful.

We ask that you support the GEAR UP Program during negotiations on the Fiscal Year 2006 budget and the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Sincerely,

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Association of Independent California
Colleges and Universities

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Chancellor
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