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ILLINOIS STUDENT ASSISTANCE COMMISSION AWARDED FEDERAL GEAR UP GRANT
ISAC to partner with 25 middle schools and 25 high schools to support college readiness

CHICAGO – The [Illinois Student Assistance Commission](#) (ISAC) is pleased to announce that it has received a seven-year, \$18.6 million federal [Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs](#) (GEAR UP) grant, and launched its first year of [Illinois GEAR UP](#) (ILGU). The federal GEAR UP program provides competitive matching grants to states and partnerships working with high-need middle and high schools to provide early intervention that will improve college attendance and success and raise the expectations of low-income students. ISAC was among the state applicants in the most recent grant competition, and proposed a package of interventions and supports focused on non-cognitive skill development for students.

“The GEAR UP program recognizes that outreach and early intervention can be pivotal for student success,” said Eric Zarnikow, executive director of ISAC. “ISAC’s experience and expertise in college access and outreach throughout the state--especially with low-income and first generation high school students--along with its broad network of partnerships, makes the agency particularly well-suited to developing early interventions that will support the students in ILGU as well as help build long-term capacity in Illinois for these critical supports.”

Over the next seven years, ISAC will use a cohort model to provide direct services to approximately 30,500 students in 25 middle schools and 25 high schools across Illinois. All 7th graders at participating middle schools will receive services, and the program will follow the first cohort of 7th grade students through their first year of college. As soon as the first cohort of 7th graders transitions to high school, the high school will begin to receive services under the ILGU program. In addition, each year, the next class of 7th graders will be added to the program and receive services for the duration of the grant period.

“We are excited about the opportunities and services that ILGU will be providing our students and the support they will receive in preparing them for college and career opportunities that will allow them to reach their goals as well as enrich our community with a better prepared workforce,” said Brian Kern, principal of [Vandalia Junior High School](#). “As an educational community, we have had many conversations about the best way to develop non-cognitive skills, such as perseverance and grit, within a student. ILGU will provide a platform for our students to develop these skills.”

In addition to supporting non-cognitive skill development, ILGU and its partners will also provide academic preparation and remediation prevention, college and career exploration, assistance with college applications and financial aid, support for successful transitions from middle school through to college, services to increase family engagement, and school enrichment and capacity-building.

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“We are thrilled to be included in an effort that will enable our students to develop skills that will support them not only through middle and high school to college, but throughout their lives,” said Kyle Ackman, principal of [Rock Falls Middle School](#). “This is also an important opportunity for our staff, parents and the school community to continue to build the skills and capacity to assist our students in the decades to come. It is truly a community initiative to support our students and our future.”

In addition to the middle schools and high schools that will be a part of ILGU, ISAC will be working with other organizations to provide supportive services and professional development, including [Advance Illinois](#), [Appalachian State University](#), [Chicago Gear UP Alliance](#), [Illinois Board of Higher Education](#), [Illinois Community College Board](#), [Northeastern Illinois University](#), [Northern Illinois University Education Systems Center](#), and [Partnership for College Completion](#), among others.

“We have worked with our community partners for many years to build a path for our students to reach their goals,” said Anne Burton, principal of [Hoopeston Area Middle School](#). “ILGU will provide the roadmap and much-needed financial and other supports to help us construct that self-sustaining path. What I love about the program is that it will provide a host of similar services to each school, but the paths that get built will be unique to the needs of the school.”

To learn more about ILGU, visit www.isac.org/gear-up

About ISAC

The mission of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is to help make college accessible and affordable for students throughout Illinois. ISAC provides comprehensive, objective, and timely information on education and financial aid for students and their families--giving them access to the tools they need to make the educational choices that are right for them. Then, through the state scholarship and grant programs ISAC administers, ISAC can help students make those choices a reality. www.isac.org

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