

Lisa (Labosky) Schleipfer  
*Durant Daily Democrat*  
Sunday, Nov. 10, 2002

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Students in middle schools across Bryan County are getting a unique opportunity to participate in a program that will give them viable options for success after high school graduation. The program, GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), is a federally funded program through the U.S. Department of Education.

Southeastern Oklahoma State University was awarded a federal GEAR UP Grant in the amount of \$13,614,076 in federal and matching funds. The Partnership serves a cohort group of 1852 sixth and seventh grade students in seventeen school districts throughout southeastern Oklahoma. This specific cohort group of students will continue to be served by the GEAR UP Partnership beginning in 2001 and continuing through the students' sophomore and junior years.

"The mission of the Partnership is to significantly increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education. The grant will address remediation in math, science and language arts; as well as introduce cultural programs, career awareness activities and college awareness services," said Rudy Manley, Director of the Partnership.

To address remediation in math and language arts, GEAR UP has partnered with the HOSTS (Help One Student To Succeed) Corporation, a nationally recognized mentoring and tutoring program. Mentors are recruited throughout the community, and establish a one on one relationship with a student in the program. The mentors are then guided by individualized lesson plans that help the student in their learning process.

"Anyone who would like to make a difference in a child's life can become a mentor. Mentors typically volunteer one to two hours per week, and are made up of parents, business persons, retirees and other students," Manley said.

For the past year, GEAR UP has been a prominent fixture in Bryan County. This past summer the Partnership piloted a summer school for 30 Bryan County GEAR UP students. The academic remediation program, "Miss Sally" was in its fourth year of operation, under the company Schoolware, Inc. Teachers from Bennington, Caddo, Calera, and Colbert schools oversaw and taught the curriculum.

The HOSTS mentoring program has also made an impact in the Bryan County schools. Schools reported that several students across the county gained up to two and a half grade levels in less than one school year, after being mentored one to two hours a week for a single semester! Those students made the most gains during their first year of mentoring received a \$50 bond, courtesy of John Wyatt from the Durant Partners in Education Foundation. Those students were: Trevor DeCaire, Achille; Holler Porter, Bennington; Samantha Whitmire and Justin Eastwood, Caddo; Britton Weger, Calera; Bryant Cummins, Colbert; Brittany Fowler, Durant; Jessie Graham, Rock Creek and Lacreata Bowen, Silo.

“The GEAR UP Program has helped students improve their skills in math, science and language arts,” said Ann Prentice, GEAR UP Site Coordinator for Rock Creek School. “These materials have benefited the students and would not have been available without GEAR UP funding.”

In addition to setting up the HOSTS program, the Partnership began the first of the five year long curriculum alignment process, in which teachers serving as curriculum alignment coaches attended workshops for six Saturdays during the past year. The purpose of curriculum alignment is to insure that all skills are developed by all students at the appropriate grade level.

“Our first year was phenomenal,” said Pat Britt, Partnership Coordinator for GEAR UP. “It was challenging, to be sure, but more than that it was exciting to see the program develop. Our school partners are creative, industrious and dedicated. We have a terrific team, and that team spirit of cooperation will make it possible to really help our students become successful as they progress through school.”

GEAR UP provides information to parents and students about college and career awareness, and makes them aware of opportunities for tuition assistance such as OHLAP (Oklahoma Higher Learning Access Program). OHLAP is a state scholarship program for students in Oklahoma that can provide full tuition to any state university in Oklahoma to those who qualify. For more information on OHLAP, visit [www.okhighered.org/ohlap](http://www.okhighered.org/ohlap).

For more information on GEAR UP and its programs, or to volunteer, please contact your local school or the GEAR UP office at 800-435-1327 x 3122. Visit the website at [www.sosu.edu/gearup](http://www.sosu.edu/gearup).