

**DATE:** November 19, 2009

**SUBJECT:** GEAR UP TN / College Access Challenge Grant Status Report

**ACTION RECOMMENDED:** Information

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:** The GEAR UP initiative is a federal discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides six-year grants to states to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school. GEAR UP TN is designed to promote student achievement and enhance awareness of the need to expand access to post-secondary education statewide, especially in those areas of the state that are traditionally underserved. GEAR UP TN funds are also used to provide incentive awards to students graduating from the high schools served and scholarships to low-income students in the cohort.

The College Access Challenge Grant focuses on initiatives such as providing professional development opportunities for school counselors and postsecondary financial aid administrators and admissions officers, increasing the reach and frequency of media messages through the statewide college access campaign, and enhancing the services offered to low-income students through the expansion of current college access programs. The overall goal of Tennessee's CACG is to create a network among organizations working in college access with a unified message while also increasing the number of underserved students enrolling and succeeding in postsecondary education.

Staff plan to report details from the GEAR UP grant fall activities; discuss a new grant award from the Lumina Foundation; report highlights from the College Access Challenge Grant initiatives including the 2009 College Access and Success Conference; and describe enhancements to the mentor website [www.CollegeforTN.org](http://www.CollegeforTN.org) and Application Week.