

USU Awarded \$16.9M Education Grant to Help Students Prepare for College

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Students from American Preparatory Academy in West Valley City visited USU as part of the STARS! GEAR UP program encouraging a college-going culture in Utah. Credit: USU STARS!

Utah State University STARS! has been awarded \$16.9 million over seven years to help middle and high school students in Salt Lake County prepare to enter and succeed in college.

The USU STARS! program provides academic support, mentoring, and guidance to help students. While selection was based on helping schools with a higher population of disadvantaged backgrounds, first-generation students, and underserved populations, all students in each grade band will be supported in reaching a higher education institution that meets their needs.

The initiative by the U.S. Department of Education, called Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs—or GEAR UP—awards competitive state and partnership grants. This award marks the fourth STARS! education grant received by USU to work with schools across the state since 2012.

As part of this initiative, USU created the STARS! (Science, Technology, Arithmetic, Reading Students) GEAR UP partnership with key academic, community, and business partners including Granite School District and Salt Lake Community College. The partnership goal is to increase all secondary students' academic achievement, creating a pipeline of academically prepared students enrolling into college.

Beginning in 2018, this new grant will serve 3,052 students in the Granite School District, starting in seventh grade and following them through their first year of college in 2025. The eight schools included in the grant are Eisenhower, Granite Park, Hunter, Kearns, Kennedy, Matheson, Valley and West Lake Junior High School. Schools will continue to be added as the students move into high school.

“GEAR UP funds have served our students in poverty, helping them close the achievement gap and preparing them for college and careers,” said Danny Stirland, director over 15 junior high schools for the Granite School District. “Many students are and will be the first member in their family to graduate high school and go to college. GEAR UP has helped with bringing kids and families out of generational poverty, empowering them to lead successful lives.”

Oversight for the grant will be provided by Jim Dorward, director of the USU STARS! GEAR UP program and professor, mathematics education and program evaluation at USU.

“The USU STARS! partnership program serves over 10,000 students in Utah,” said Dorward. “Information from our first grant shows a substantial increase in the number of high school graduates enrolling in colleges throughout the state and beyond.”

“As a leading land-grant university, USU is committed to making public education accessible to all students,” said USU President Noelle E. Cockett. “USU’s participation in this grant aligns our engagement in the state’s K-12 education system with the professional development expertise that we offer in areas of math, engineering, and computer science training for teachers and students.”

USU STARS! GEAR UP is part of the School of Teacher Education and Leadership in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education & Human Services at USU. Other partners in the grant include USU Department of Mathematics and Statistics, USU College of Engineering/Department of Computer Science, Advancement Via Individual Determination, AVID Higher Education, Texas Instruments, Utah NASA Space Consortium, Northrup Grumman, Hill Air Force Base and the United Way.

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Additional Resources:

- USU STARS! GEAR UP
- Granite School District

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