

# USU Grant Helps Students go to College

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More students are taking advanced math and science courses in STARS! GEAR UP schools to prepare for college success.

Eight years ago, schools that were not yet in the Utah State University STARS! program had some of the lowest high school graduation rates in the state. Few students at these schools (on average, only 16 percent) went on to college. Today, more than 3 times that number are completing their first year of college after participating in GEAR UP programming.

Over 95 percent of these students have participated in one or more of the services provided by the USU STARS! program. These efforts coincide with similar goals of increased graduation rates and continuing post-secondary education initiatives by the Utah Governor's Office. High school graduation rates at GEAR

UP schools in 2018 were over 90 percent. Students are also taking more challenging courses; enrollment in advanced science courses in these high schools has increased by 60 percent and in advanced math courses by 45 percent.

In 2012, the STARS! program received its first federal funding of \$15 million from the Department of Education's Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). These funds targeted nearly 3,000 students who started the program in middle school and continued through high school and into college. The program focused on academic preparation and the creation of a college-attending culture in the schools it served. In 2018, the program served over 3,300 students in ten schools.

USU's Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services formed the STARS! (Science, Technology, Arithmetic, Reading Students) partnership as a collaboration of schools, community, and business partners. The matching efforts of program partners brings the total to over \$30 million in support services and resources going into participating schools. Since that time, USU has received three additional grants totaling \$128 million and has helped an additional 10,000 students in these schools.

Federal GEAR UP funding targets schools with low-income and at-risk students. Utah districts with schools participating in the STARS! GEAR UP program at the start of the grant include Logan, Tooele, Uintah, Davis, South Sanpete, North Sanpete and Nevada's Elko school districts, as well as three public charter schools in Salt Lake City. These schools represent a diverse demographic. Around 69 percent of the students are considered low-income. Caucasian students make up 61 percent of enrollment, and Latino students make up 26 percent.

"The focus is working with low-income schools to make sure every student is thinking about college, and knows what to expect when they get there," said Beth Foley, dean of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at USU. "Students in the STARS! program are supported academically so they have the tools they need to graduate from college."

Teachers, guidance counselors and administrators involved in the program were already working hard to help their students succeed. One of the first steps in the program was to hire a site coordinator for each school—educators whose primary job is to get students the support they need to graduate and see college as an option. They work in the schools to provide tutoring support, especially in the areas of math and science. They also open up more possibilities by leading training and workshops for students and families on college and careers readiness and financial aid.

The program supports efforts in each school by providing and funding professional development and resources for teachers and staff. For example, Texas Instruments helps teachers become comfortable with their equipment through workshops where students can try out the products.

USU's School of Teacher Education and Leadership is ideally suited to provide leadership for the grant-funded project and professional development for teachers and principals. With a focus on content in the areas of science, technology, mathematics and literacy, they provide research-based professional development to help teachers use technology to maximize student learning.

"The extraordinary success of the USU STARS! program clearly shows the importance of these partnerships in school success," said Kathy Trundle, department head of the School of Teacher Education and Leadership at USU. "By helping students and teachers obtain and use the tools earlier in the educational process, our schools experienced a remarkable boost in graduation rates as well as college-going rates."

Trundle also serves as the principal investigator for one of the USU STARS! grants.

Innovative, on-campus programming for students and parents, as well as professional development for teachers are provided by USU faculty and staff from the School of Teacher Education and Leadership in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education & Human Services along with the College of Engineering and the College of Science.

Additional information can be found at <http://utahstars.usu.edu/>.

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