



**IowaCollegeAid.gov**  
Your Financial Aid Connection

## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Iowa Students Tackle Student Loan Debt Issue at National GEAR UP Conference**

*Students from Davenport West and Columbus Junction present solutions in Washington D.C.*

**Des Moines, IA, July 26, 2012** – Fifteen GEAR UP Iowa students from Davenport West High School and Columbus Junction High School presented their solutions for reducing the educational debt load of Iowa college students to college access professionals from across the nation during the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP) and GEAR UP annual conference. The NCCEP/GEAR UP annual conference, entitled *E4 (R)EVOLUTION: Education, Empowerment, Equity & Economics*, convened in Washington D.C. from July 22 to July 25, 2012. The event serves as an important gathering for all college access professionals, particularly those who coordinate their efforts with GEAR UP programs as well as local, state and federal policy makers who want to learn more about creating and sustaining K-16 education and community collaboratives designed to improve education and promote student success.

During the 2011-12 school year, GEAR UP Iowa challenged its students across the state to research and provide solutions to the growing problem of high levels of student loan debt amongst Iowa college students. The students were allowed to present their solutions in any format for a chance to win an all-expenses paid trip to Washington D.C. to attend the NCCEP/GEAR UP conference. “These students put a lot of work into researching factors that relate to Iowa’s high student loan debt,” explained Karen Misjak, executive director of the Iowa College Student Aid Commission, the state agency charged with administering the statewide GEAR UP Iowa grant. “Through GEAR UP Iowa, we are working to create a college-going culture in the state, and that includes understanding ways to pay for college and how to keep borrowing at a reasonable level,” explained Misjak.

In addition to presenting their solutions at the NCCEP/GEAR UP annual conference, the students were able to network with other students and college access professionals, tour the national monuments, and meet personally with Senator Grassley, Senator Harkin, and Congressman Loebsack.

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“A college degree is the key to economic opportunity,” stated Misjak. “As educational attainment increases, income also increases and the percent of the population living in poverty decreases,” explained Misjak. “For Iowans with only high school degrees, the poverty rate is three times higher than for those with bachelor’s degrees or higher. For Iowans with less than a high school education, the poverty rate is more than six times higher,” Misjak said. “Through GEAR UP Iowa, we hope students will see their potential and aspire to achieve their dreams through education and career goals.”

For more information about GEAR UP Iowa as well as other services available to help Iowans plan, prepare and pay for college, visit [www.IowaCollegeAid.gov](http://www.IowaCollegeAid.gov) or contact Iowa College Aid at 877-272-4456.

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***About the Iowa College Student Aid Commission***

*Iowa College Aid provides college access, financial literacy, and outreach services to Iowa’s students and families as they prepare, plan and pay for college. Iowa College Aid also administers state scholarship, grant, work study, and loan forgiveness programs totaling nearly \$60.0 million annually, administers the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) program, provides borrowers with assistance to avoid the serious consequences of default, conducts research and distributes higher education data, and offers Iowans assistance in obtaining student financial aid and college-related information. Through its role, Iowa College Aid also serves as the state-designated administrator of the U.S. Department of Education’s College Access Challenge Grant, which is designed to increase the college-going culture in Iowa. Additionally, Iowa College Aid is the administrator of the Federal GEAR-UP Grant, a multi-year state-wide grant which is being utilized to provide early awareness programming and outreach initiatives to thousands of Iowa’s students and families. More information is available at [www.IowaCollegeAid.gov](http://www.IowaCollegeAid.gov).*

***About GEAR UP Iowa***

*Funded by a \$16.8 million Federal grant, GEAR UP Iowa (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is charged with significantly increasing the number of students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. The Iowa College Student Aid Commission administers GEAR UP Iowa in partnership with the Iowa Department of Education and other state agencies; local school districts; postsecondary educational institutions; and community organizations, businesses, and industries. More information is available at [www.gearupiowa.gov](http://www.gearupiowa.gov).*