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NEWS RELEASE

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Iowa Schools GEAR UP For College Attainment at Statewide Conference

National leaders among speakers at two-day conference focused on “college-going” culture

Des Moines, IA, April 7, 2016 -- Iowa is working hard to reach a 70% college attainment goal for its citizens by the year 2025. GEAR UP Iowa, a program of Iowa College Aid, is at the forefront of this effort and will hold its first GEAR UP Iowa Conference on April 7 and 8 at the Holiday Inn and Suites in Urbandale, IA.

The conference will feature national leaders in education and college affordability who will be joined by educators and community members from across the state of Iowa to discuss building a “college-going” culture in Iowa schools and communities.

“We have worked hard to build a program that promotes maximum impact on student success while continuously striving to be responsive to the needs of schools,” said Christina Sibouih, GEAR UP Iowa’s Program Director. “This conference will allow us to promote efforts in refining and improving GEAR UP Iowa’s work with school and community leaders.”

Ranjit Sidhu, President and CEO of the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP), will provide the opening presentation on Thursday, April 7 to set the tone for the conference. Author and documentarian Adam Carroll, whose recent film “Broke, Busted and Disgusted” looks at the economic difficulties facing students attending college, will be the featured speaker on Friday, April 8.

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Other speakers include postsecondary education expert David Ford; Kenneth Williams, author of *Unfold The Soul*; and Sara Brown Wessling, the 2010 National Teacher of the Year.

Sessions throughout the conference will allow the nearly 130 attending counselors, teachers, administrators and district personnel from schools in the 12 GEAR UP Iowa partner school districts to share ways to engage students beyond the classroom and develop community and parental involvement that helps school districts create and sustain college-going cultures. GEAR UP Iowa school districts include Cedar Rapids, Clinton, Columbus Junction, Davenport, Denison, Des Moines, Fort Dodge, Marshalltown, Ottumwa, Perry, Sioux City and Storm Lake.

“The needs and unique characteristics of the attendees may differ,” said Karen Misjak, Iowa College Aid’s Executive Director, “but our shared purpose and values weave together a powerful and united community under the GEAR UP banner to make postsecondary education a reality for all students.”

To learn more about GEAR UP Iowa, please visit www.GEARUPIowa.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 over \$70.0 million annually, 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.

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. GEAR UP Iowa works to create a college-going culture through statewide and school-based services to a cohort of approximately 6,000 high school students and their families in 18 communities across Iowa. The [Iowa College Aid](http://www.IowaCollegeAid.gov) 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.