

## Opening Statement

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10:00 a.m. January 16, 2014

**United States Senate, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**  
Room 106, Dirksen Senate Office Building

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Alexander and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in the roundtable on “Strengthening Federal Access Programs to Meet 21<sup>st</sup> Century Needs”, and to discuss the roles of federal access programs, in particular, GEAR UP, in improving low-income students access to, and success in, higher education. I represent Washington State GEAR UP at the Washington Student Achievement Council. Washington State is home to one state GEAR UP program and nine partnership programs.

Federal access programs play a critical role in improving student outcomes in higher education by providing academic, social, and financial support. Both the National College Access Network and the Lumina Education Foundation have identified the same three areas of support and services as being key to improving student outcomes. GEAR UP, TRIO and Federal student financial aid programs provide support in these areas through a variety of services that include tutoring, mentoring/advising, financial literacy, family engagement, financial aid and scholarships.

To provide effective and targeted services, we need innovation in research and evaluation to identify services and interventions that have the greatest impact on postsecondary education. Washington State GEAR UP, and 14 state programs formed a College and Career Readiness Evaluation Consortium. This longitudinal, self-initiated project will study over 150,000 students, to identify which interventions have the greatest impact on college going aspirations, academic preparation, high school success and postsecondary enrollment, persistence and completion. The Consortium is working in partnership with ACT, the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center and the US Department of Education.

Research has shown that students, especially those from low-income families, face particular challenges at the critical transition points of middle to high school and high school to college. The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 has positioned GEAR UP to address this issue because it is the only federal access program to provide comprehensive services from the middle school to post-secondary education – starting in the seventh grade through the first year of post-secondary education.

GEAR UP’s success lies in the collaboration among program administrators, school districts, higher education partners, community based organizations, and the state. We find that coordinated intervention efforts, a healthy learning community, and regular information sharing among state and partnership programs has created more opportunities for GEAR UP students and their families. Complementary and supplemental services ensure students and families have access to comprehensive intervention services over a six- to seven-year period.

The flexibility provided for GEAR UP in the HEOA allows us to create programs that are responsive to the culture and needs of the community of students. With a high degree of intentionality and engagement, programs solicit strong support from school district leadership, educate and engage families as partners, and provide rigorous and relevant curriculum. All these have proven to be effective in helping the target population access and succeed in postsecondary education. A study by the Washington State University's Social and Economic Science Research Center concludes: "Contrasting GEAR UP participants with a comparison group of other low-income students, GEAR UP students had more positive outcomes on virtually all measures of enrollment, persistence and degree attainment." (Mann, 2012)

Thank you.