

GEAR UP encourages students to attend college, educates parents



[Eileen Adams](#), Special to the Sun Journal

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DIXFIELD — A federal grant of \$700,000 for each of the next seven years at Regional School Unit 10 promises to encourage more students to seek higher education.

The GEAR UP grant also significantly involves parents.

"This is for all three regions (of RSU 10) for grades seven-12," said Gloria Jenkins, assistant superintendent and curriculum coordinator. "GEAR UP is the perfect place for parents to understand proficiency-based education and response to intervention which supports students who are struggling.

"The grant will help parents understand academics in college and how the 'Habits of Mind' is important in college," she said.

Habits of Mind, an initiative now in all RSU 10 schools, emphasizes persistence and goal-setting and helps parents understand how they can help their child, she said.

In the seventh and eighth grades, the grant will help students transfer into high school or to a vocational program at Region 9 or Region 11 schools of applied technology.

Among the activities planned that will be funded by the grant are regular parent meetings, field trips to colleges for students and parents and assistance with college applications and financial forms.

"Parents' visits to college, particularly for those who have not gone to college or had a child go to college, will show them the differences in campuses and what it's like on a college campus," Jenkins said.

Jen Whittemore, guidance counselor at Dirigo High School, said a GEAR UP grant was used several years ago for DHS students. The school still tracks graduates who have gone on to college.

She said a recent year shows that 43 percent of DHS students went to a four-year college; 27 percent, a two-year school; and 4 percent went into the

military.

DHS Principal Michael Poulin said meetings for parents will soon begin.

The principals at Mountain Valley High School and Buckfield Junior Senior High School will also soon begin to offer meetings for parents.

Jenkins said the GEAR UP grant will also enable high schools to keep in touch with students during their first year of college.

A College Access Team, consisting of administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, parents and students, will soon be formed — then the parental meetings and college visits will begin.

"This is the perfect opportunity for parents to learn about those things," Jenkins said.

The RSU 10 GEAR UP grant is part of millions of dollars directed to several schools in the Western Maine Education Collaborative, Jenkins said.

"The goal is to increase the number of students going on to college or staying in college," she said.

A specialist for GEAR UP from a company known as Syntiro, based in Readfield, is also helping families if this is the first time a child has gone to college.

Poulin said the previous GEAR UP grant at DHS worked very well.

"The number of applications to college increased, and more kids visited college campuses," he said.

Parents will soon be contacted by the district about the meetings to discuss college for their children.