



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

March 9, 2023

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley:

Thank you for your letter to Secretary Cardona expressing continued concerns about the Department of Education's (Department) handling of the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) Program and the fiscal year (FY) 2021 competition. Your letter was referred to my office, and I am pleased to respond. An identical letter is being sent to the other signers of the letter. Please accept my apology for the delay in responding.

I can assure you that during the FY 2021 competition, all eligible applications were carefully reviewed and given full consideration within the requirements of the law and regulations governing the GEAR UP Program. Specifically, your letter contained two questions, and I have responded to each separately:

Question 1: "Given lawmakers' intent with the latest increase in GEAR UP funding, will the Department of Education commit to holding an open funding competition for fiscal year 2023?"

Response: It is the Department's intent to hold a competition under the GEAR UP States program in FY 2023. The Department will ensure to follow the statutory requirement that at least 33% of award funding be made to GEAR UP State grants and at least 33% of award funding be made to GEAR UP Partnership grants.

Question 2: "If no competition is held in 2023, how does the Department of Education plan to rectify the issues with the previous competition?"

Response: The Department does plan to hold a GEAR UP States competition in FY 2023. The Department always aims to improve its grant competition processes from year to year, and we are committed to continuing to identifying strategies to help ensure that the peer review process meaningfully differentiates the quality of applications in future GEAR UP competitions.

Regarding Iowa, while the application was not successful in the FY 2021 GEAR UP State competition, we encourage Iowa to apply again in future GEAR UP State competitions.

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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

We thank you again for your interest in the GEAR UP Program. If you have any additional questions, your staff may contact the Department's Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs at (202) 401-0020.

Sincerely,

Nasser H. Paydar,
Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education