

2020 GEAR UP Leadership Awards For IMMEDIATE RELEASE FOLLOWING THE OFFICIAL NCCEP ANNOUNCEMENT

Contact: Emily Jeffries; (202) 530-1135 ext. 2120
emily_jeffries@edpartnerships.org

NCCEP announces the 2020 GEAR UP Leadership Awards Recipients

Washington, DC -- The National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP) is honored to announce the annual Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) Leadership Awards, which recognizes the outstanding achievements of individuals and partners in three categories: Student, Community Partner, and Professional of the Year. GEAR UP is a discretionary federal education grant administered through the U.S. Department of Education designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. The following are the descriptions for this year's award recipients.



2020 Professional of the Year, Deltha Q. Colvin, is the Associate Vice President for Special Programs at Wichita State University (WSU). Colvin has been involved with TRIO and GEAR UP Programs for 54 years and currently oversees Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP and Haysville GEAR UP through Wichita State University. She is a national advocate, trainer and consultant in the development

of proposals, program management and operations, and TRIO/GEAR UP program reviews/evaluations. She is an advocate committed to supporting the advancement of young people with a focus on low-income and first-generation students, persons with disabilities and students in foster and adoptive care. Nationally, Colvin is involved in matters of diversity, student development, and general staff sensitizing and orientation. Deltha has dedicated her professional career to working toward the success of TRIO and GEAR UP Programs and assisting students and their families in gaining equal educational opportunities. View Deltha Q. Colvin's acceptance of the award [here](#).



2020 Professional of Year, Dr. Samantha Elliot Briggs, is the Project Director for GEAR UP Alabama at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. In this capacity, she provides direct services to nearly 9,000 high school students from high poverty districts located throughout Alabama's Black Belt region. Dr. Briggs has over 20 years of experience in education as an urban school teacher,

adjunct professor, curriculum writer, consultant, and director of non-profit education programs. She also holds a seat on the GEAR UP Advisory Commission providing critical insight and representation of national GEAR UP programs for NCCEP. The nomination submitted by her colleagues on her behalf listed countless examples of her tireless dedication to her students, families, and staff. From securing critical higher education partnerships to supporting students through life events outside of the classroom, Dr. Briggs supports all of the GEAR UP Alabama students like they are her own. View Dr. Samantha Elliot Brigg's acceptance of the award [here](#).



2020 Community Partner of the Year, the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges (VFIC), is a valued partner of GEAR UP Virginia. Community partners are a key tenant of the national GEAR UP framework, and key conduit to the success of GEAR UP programs across the U.S. The mission of the Virginia Foundation for Independent Colleges is to advance the distinctive values and strengths of its 15 independent colleges and universities across the state of Virginia. They do this by securing financial support, increasing visibility, facilitating innovative and collaborative programs, and supporting initiatives which ensure that a personalized educational experience remains an

affordable choice for tomorrow's leaders. The VFIC was quick to engage in a unique collaboration, with the Virginia Latino Higher Education Network (VALHEN) and GEAR UP Virginia, to bring Latinx students from across the state onto higher education institutions and provide a view of the college experience that is culturally sensitive to Latinx student populations in Virginia. View the VFIC's acceptance of the award [here](#).



2020 Student of the Year, Nellie Ellis, is a recent graduate of the GEAR UP program through Berea College Partners for Education. Through GEAR UP, Nellie has served for 4 years with Promising Appalachian Leaders in Service (PALS). Her volunteer work includes having supported various food and clothing drives, voter registration drives, and children's literacy events. Nellie has a passion for civic issues and has been serving as the Chief Ambassador with the Kentucky Youth Advocates (KYA). In her role as Chief Ambassador, she has met with members of Kentucky's General Assembly to ask for their support on bills that would help children and families. Throughout high school, GEAR UP exposed her to many opportunities that allowed her to serve

both her school and her community as a whole. Through those experiences, she developed a passion for servant leadership and civic engagement. This passion has inspired her to pursue a future career in law so that she can continue to serve others through advocacy and policy. She will be continuing her educational journey at Centre College in the Fall. View Nellie Ellis's acceptance of the award [here](#).

In previous years, thousands of GEAR UP community members nationwide convened together in-person to celebrate deserving recipients of the annual GEAR UP Leadership Awards. The celebration was taken online this year due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The recipients of the 2020 GEAR UP Leadership awards are leaders in their local communities and supporters of the national GEAR UP movement. They have provided support and leadership to GEAR UP colleagues, families, partners, and students – especially during a time where we have all had to pivot to online implementation. Join us in congratulating these deserving recipients.

###

As the membership association for GEAR UP, NCCEP builds the capacity of communities so that underserved students have the opportunity, skills, and knowledge to successfully pursue education beyond high school.