



March 1, 2018

Dear GEAR UP Massachusetts Students and Families,

This letter contains important information about GEAR UP program benefits. Please review it carefully.

We are entering the seventh and final year of our current GEAR UP grant from the federal government. Due to limited funds available, we are obligated to make changes to the scholarship program that will take effect beginning next fall. Please know that many other states have taken a similar course in light of the program's financial limitations and a desire to assist as many students as possible.

Changes to the GEAR UP Scholarship effective September 1, 2018:

- The GEAR UP scholarship will be awarded at a **maximum** of \$620 per year for full and part time students (\$310 per semester maximum). The size of the award is dependent upon the availability of funds and the extent of each student's financial need.
- The GEAR UP scholarship will be awarded to each GEAR UP college student attending an eligible institution for a maximum of **two** semesters during undergraduate enrollment.
- GEAR UP students who **have already received two or more semesters** of the GEAR UP scholarship award prior to September 1, 2018 are **no longer** eligible for additional scholarship funds.
- An eligible institution is defined as a state-approved public, private, independent, for profit or non-profit institution located in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and authorized to offer undergraduate degrees, certificates or diploma programs and that is also approved by the U.S. Department of Education to administer Title IV programs. MA state-approved public, private, independent and non-profit institutions that have **reciprocity agreements** with and approved by the Commonwealth, and that award associate and bachelor's degrees, are also eligible to participate (VT, PA and Washington, D.C.).

We sincerely regret having to make changes to the GEAR UP scholarship program. Please know that Governor Baker's FY2019 budget recommendation includes a \$7.1 million increase to the general scholarship line item that would, if approved by the legislature, provide "last dollar" aid to cover 100% of tuition and fees for students who enroll at one of the state's 15 community colleges. For those GEAR UP students who enroll at a community college, the proposed aid increase may offset the reduction of a GEAR UP scholarship. Students who wish to transfer from a community college to a state university or UMass campus can realize additional savings through the Commonwealth Commitment, Massachusetts' college affordability program for transfer students. Please visit www.mass.edu/macomcom to learn more about the financial incentives and requirements.

If you have questions, the GEAR UP team within your area and the Department of Higher Education's Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) remains deeply committed to supporting you as you pursue your dream of earning a two or four year college degree. Our team stands ready to assist you and your financial aid office in outlining the best plan to meet your financial needs. Together, we will do all that we can to help you identify the resources to achieve your goal of academic success and degree completion.

You should know that between the years of 2014 - 2018, GEAR UP students enrolled and persisted in college at higher rates than at any other time during our grant. Thank you for being part of GEAR UP's amazing success story.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R.E. Dais".

Robert E. Dais, Statewide Director
GEAR UP Massachusetts