



# ***MEDIA RELEASE***

## ***“Preparing Students for College and Career, Focus of Awards”***

May 2, 2016 (updated - provides date and time of event and information about AZ GEAR UP)

Phoenix, AZ – Several school districts in Arizona are being recognized for their efforts to help prepare middle school students for college and career.

The Arizona College Access Network (AzCAN) in partnership with Arizona GEAR UP will recognize five school districts with the “Early College and Career Awareness” designation at an event scheduled for noon on Wednesday, May 4 at the Northern Arizona University GEAR UP office at 15451 N. 28<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Phoenix. **Members of the media are welcome to attend.**

Only six school districts in Arizona have earned this designation in the past year, and five of those are participating in Arizona GEAR UP’s Middle Grade Initiative (MGI); the school districts being recognized at the MGI event on Wednesday are Bullhead City Elementary, Cottonwood-Oak Creek Elementary, Douglas Unified, Holbrook Unified, and Humboldt Unified.

Linda Jensen, Director of AzCAN, says each of the school districts has taken extra steps to prepare their counselors and other college access professionals, “These districts have shown a commitment for helping middle school students prepare for college and careers. This commitment includes having at least three of their educators complete twenty hours of College Access Professionals (CAP) Training on College and Career Advising in the Middle Grades.”

Jensen explains that the educators work to create a college-going culture, “Their training includes coursework on developing a college-going culture, career planning, academic planning and transitions, and engaging middle school students. This early focus on college and career planning ensures students develop aspirations for their future and make decisions that lead to their postsecondary goals.”

Meanwhile, Teena Olszewski, Executive Director of Arizona GEAR UP, a statewide college access program aimed specifically at students from low-income communities says, “Educational professionals in our GEAR UP schools realize the important difference they can make by helping students begin their high school journeys already on track to graduate college and career ready. Pre-post surveys of our MGI participants show that the CAP training significantly increases educators’ confidence in their abilities to have that kind of impact with the students in their schools.”

The Arizona College Access Network is a key program of the Phoenix-based nonprofit College Success Arizona. Rich Nickel, the organization's CEO, offers high praise for the school districts, "We are extremely proud of these school districts and their demonstrated commitment to early awareness. They represent the exemplary schools across our state dedicated to helping their students succeed in college and careers."

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**About College Success Arizona:** College Success Arizona is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization working to significantly increase the postsecondary attainment rate of students in Arizona, particularly for those who otherwise would not be able to attend or graduate. For more information visit [www.collegesuccessarizona.org](http://www.collegesuccessarizona.org).

**About AzCAN:** AzCAN is an organization of college access professionals and programs dedicated to post high school success for all Arizonans, especially low-income, first-generation students. AzCAN's vision is that every Arizona student has the knowledge and resources necessary to successfully attain a postsecondary education, in order to succeed in life and contribute to the Arizona economy. AzCAN members include nonprofits, high school staff, college outreach programs, funders, government agencies, and business leaders, all of whom are committed to closing the education attainment gap in our state.

**About AZ GEAR UP:** GEAR UP is a federally-funded college-access program started in 1999, authorized under the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), now in 47 states. The purpose of GEAR UP is to significantly increase the number of students from low-income communities who graduate from high school prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Northern Arizona University has been the administrator of Arizona GEAR UP grant projects since 2000, and has partnered with 28 school districts over this period -- serving more than 12,000 students enrolled in grades seven to twelve in 67 schools across 26 communities.

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