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State Gets \$31.5M Grant For College Readiness

East Hartford, Waterbury And New Haven Schools Participating

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By MELISSA TRAYNOR, mtraynor@courant.com

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East Hartford is one of three towns participating in a grant-funded program to help better prepare low-income students for college beginning in the sixth and seventh grades.

About 3,000 students from 12 schools in East Hartford, Waterbury and New Haven will be part of the seven-year Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Program, or GEAR UP, according to a news release from Gov. Dannel P. Malloy's office.

The program, which costs about \$75 million in total, is helped by a \$31.5 million federal education grant.

East Hartford Middle School is collaborating with Manchester Community College to "develop, provide and evaluate services to students, parents and teachers in order to fit localized needs," the news release states.

Sixth- and seventh-graders from Waterbury are partnering with Naugatuck Valley Community College and seventh-graders from eight schools in New Haven are working with Southern Connecticut State University to do the same.

GEAR UP Project Director Malia Sieve said the program aims to foster existing partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education.

"The [GEAR UP] programs have college visits built in," Sieve said, and opportunities for students to gain college credit for courses if they are able to meet certain qualifications.

"They would all be able to take advantage of those types of experiences to expose them to college, to the culture and to the expectations," she added.

In the earlier grades, Sieve said, GEAR UP programming that may not directly expose students to college can still help them think about their aspirations and how they may lead to higher education.

"It's really about supporting students as they progress from [grade] 7 through 12 and assessing them all along the way," she said.

About half of the federal grant — about \$16 million — will be dedicated to scholarships for students who progress through the GEAR UP programs as a kind of incentive. Sieve said that students will be eligible to use the scholarships for up to six years in post-secondary education.

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