

WASHINGTON, Sept. 23, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Congressman Chaka Fattah (PA-02), architect of GEAR UP, the nation's most successful college readiness program, helped launch a week of national events celebrating the program's success today at home in Philadelphia

. Speaking at a National GEAR UP Week opening ceremony hosted by the Philadelphia

School District, Fattah charged students with continuing to dream big and recognize that a college degree is within reach.

"GEAR UP is about you. It's about your future; it's about the opportunities that are in front of you," Fattah told the students assembled from 11 Philadelphia public high schools. "The idea is to have a conversation with you about your future ... you can do anything that you can imagine. You can achieve it."

Following Fattah's keynote address, the 200-plus students and parents in attendance participated in workshops focused on financial aid for college education, choosing the right school and career guidance – all three are critical components of GEAR UP's comprehensive approach to college readiness.

"GEAR UP Philadelphia is the perfect recipe of resources for the students in Philadelphia. Through the PA State GEAR UP and Philadelphia Partnership grants we are able to speak directly to the needs of each student as it relates to college-readiness," said Ali Robinson-Rogers

, Director of GEAR UP Philadelphia. "Our staff are passionate, committed people who understand the challenges of a large urban district. In spite of the many obstacles we are currently facing, GEAR UP Philadelphia will continue to put student needs first."

The excitement and energy around the Philadelphia kickoff event mirrors the enthusiasm of state and partner GEAR UP programs around the country that are highlighting the program's successes this week, while raising awareness amongst stakeholders—families, students, educators, and public officials—about the impacts of GEAR UP in their community.

GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) provides six-year grants, administered by the Department of Education, to states and partner organizations that offer critical early college awareness and support activities to students from high poverty and their families. Focusing on entire classes—or cohorts—the program includes mentoring, academic preparation, financial education, and college scholarships to improve access to higher education. GEAR UP serves each cohort starting in middle school and follows them through high school graduation and their first year in college.

In a video distributed today to more than 8,000 members of the GEAR UP community, Congressman Fattah said that the program has been a proven success in creating "college-going" cultures and preparing students for higher education, but said that the work is not done.

"We have to—as President Obama said—lead the world by 2020 in the number of adults graduating from college. We have a lot of work to do, and the young people and the populations served by GEAR UP have to be a part of that success story," Fattah said in his taped remarks.

This Sunday marks 15 years since GEAR UP was created by Congressman Fattah and signed into law by President Clinton. It continues to have a strong impact in communities and states across the country. GEAR UP's high school student graduation rate is 84% compared with a national high school graduation rate of 73.4%. Further, the program continues to innovate, recently forming the College and Career Readiness Evaluation Consortium—a GEAR UP community-led partnership aimed at holding GEAR UP accountable to higher accountability standards.

GEAR UP's unique approach to college preparation and accessibility has earned it accolades, as has its evolution and focus on utilizing best practices. Recently, the New America Foundation called GEAR UP the most promising college readiness program and appealed to Congress to triple its federal funding.

"There is no more valuable message that we can impart on our communities than the importance of a college education. GEAR UP is a change agent for new generations of students who never believed that high school graduation and a college degree were in reach," Fattah said. "Not only has GEAR UP been transformative for the thousands of students it's touched in all 50 states, but just as important, we have now created a network of GEAR UP alumni who are giving back to the program, and contributing to our country's dialogue around education policy

Congressional "GEAR UP" Architect Kicks Off National GEAR UP Week

Written by Australian Business

in unprecedented ways."

Launched earlier this year, the GEAR UP Alumni Leadership Academy (GUALA) is a new initiative from the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP) designed to train and engage GEAR UP alumni in advocacy and leadership. The initiative was created with support from the national GEAR UP community and funding from The Kresge Foundation.

NCCEP is the Department of Education's designated training and technical assistance provider to the GEAR UP grantees, and coordinates National GEAR UP Week. For more information on NCCEP and National GEAR UP Events happening this week please visit: www.edpartnerships.org

SOURCE Office of Congressman Chaka Fattah

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