

LA GEAR-UP and GEAR-UP HAMMOND

A Wonderful Opportunity

by
Katherine Pedersen

I know that there are students at Hammond Junior High who could start algebra in junior high – and be taking calculus by their junior or, at the latest, senior year in high school. It is very exciting to realize that this potential will be actualized through a program known as GEAR-UP. The purpose of this note is to familiarize the mathematics community with the program and to convey the excitement and opportunity that GEAR-UP has brought to Louisiana and to Hammond.

GEAR-UP is an acronym for “Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs.” The program is funded through the U.S. Department of Education. It focuses on raising students’ skill levels in English/Language Arts and mathematics as well as improving their thinking and problem-solving capabilities. Activities to raise the educational aspirations of the participating students and their parents are also included in the program..

Louisiana has received funding for two GEAR-UP Programs: LA GEAR-UP and GEAR-UP HAMMOND. LA GEAR-UP is a statewide program that will provide additional academic and counseling support to selected junior high schools in Louisiana. LA GEAR-UP is currently seeking educators throughout Louisiana to provide professional development for teachers and staff at the selected schools. LA GEAR-UP is a collaborative effort of Louisiana Board of Regents, the Louisiana Department of Education, the Louisiana Systemic Initiatives Program and a variety of other organizations and agencies.

GEAR-UP HAMMOND is a joint venture of Southeastern Louisiana University College of Basic Studies, College of Arts and Sciences, and the Departments of Mathematics, English, and Chemistry and Physics, the Tangipahoa Parish School System, Miller Memorial Library/Tangipahoa Alcohol and Drug Abuse Family Resource Center, and the City of Hammond. A goal of GEAR-UP HAMMOND is to increase by at least 50% the number of students taking algebra in the 8th grade and going on to take a college preparatory curriculum in high school. To realize this goal, GEAR-UP HAMMOND is providing additional expertise in English, science and mathematics to the students at Hammond Junior High. Career information, counseling, and mentoring activities are provided by volunteer and community organizations.

In year one, all students in the seventh grade (approximately 265 students) at Hammond Junior High will be provided full services. In each successive year, these students will continue in the program with the new seventh graders entering the program. The total student population being served will therefore grow each year of the project from one class in Year One (Grade 7) to five classes in Year Five (grades 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11). As students matriculate to high schools, referrals to existing programs including Upward Bound, Math/Science Upward Bound, and Educational Talent Search will be made.

At the present time, there is an emphasis on assisting the students in preparing for the LEAP test. The reports are that the students, teachers and GEAR-UP HAMMOND personnel are working very hard. We know they are – and I have already put my bid in to be their calculus teacher when the students are ready!