

KANSAS

32nd Annual Kansas Legislative Breakfast | March 11, 2026

57 TRIO Programs – 14,015 Students – \$18,661,561
7 GEAR UP Programs – 10,451 Students – \$9,860,800



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WHAT ARE TRIO & GEAR UP?

TRIO and GEAR UP provide educational opportunities and supports for individuals who are low-income, the first in their families to be earning a bachelor's degree, veterans, and those with disabilities.

Our nation has declared a commitment to providing educational opportunity for all Americans regardless of race, ethnic background, or economic circumstance, and these programs serve that vision.

In support of this commitment, Congress established a series of programs to help low-income Americans prepare for and enter college, graduate, and move on to participate more fully in America's economic and social life. These programs are funded under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and are referred to as the TRIO and GEAR UP programs. While student financial aid programs help students overcome financial barriers to higher education, TRIO and GEAR UP help students overcome class, social, and cultural barriers to higher education.

According to the most recent data available, more than 3,500 TRIO programs serve over 815,000 students and 173 GEAR UP Programs serve 588,068 across 3,137 secondary schools. Participants enrolled in today's programs closely mirror our nation's multicultural and multi-ethnic society and include veterans and those with disabilities.

Current TRIO Income Levels

Size of Family	48 Contiguous States, D.C., and Outlying Jurisdictions	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$23,940	\$29,925	\$27,540
2	\$32,460	\$40,575	\$37,335
3	\$40,980	\$51,225	\$47,130
4	\$49,500	\$61,875	\$56,925
5	\$58,020	\$72,525	\$66,720
6	\$66,540	\$83,175	\$76,515
7	\$75,060	\$93,825	\$86,310
8	\$83,580	\$104,475	\$96,105
Each Additional Family Member	\$8,520	\$10,650	\$9,795

For family units with more than eight members, add the following amount for each additional family member: \$8,520 for the 48 contiguous states, the District of Columbia and outlying jurisdictions; \$10,650 for Alaska; and \$9,795 for Hawaii.

TYPES OF PROGRAMS

The name TRIO initially came into use after the first three programs were authorized under the Higher Education Act. Today, there are seven distinct TRIO programs that play a unique role in providing educational opportunities to both pre-college and college students. GEAR UP programs are closely related discretionary grant programs supporting students at high-poverty middle and high schools.

Educational Opportunity Centers

The goal of the Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) is to increase the number of adult participants who enroll in postsecondary education institutions. The program also provides services to improve the financial and economic literacy of participants. An important objective of the program is to counsel participants on financial aid options, including basic financial planning skills, and to assist in the college application process.

An analysis of EOC participants found that 59% of college-ready students were admitted to institutions of higher learning.¹

Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program

The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program honors the legacy of Dr. Ronald McNair who died tragically in the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster. These programs, known as McNair Scholars programs for short, aim to promote equity in graduate school enrollment by helping high achieving low-income, first-generation, or underrepresented minority undergraduates prepare for successful completion of doctoral degrees. Of the McNair Scholars who graduated in 2012-13, 84.3% enrolled in a graduate program the following academic year.²

Student Support Services

The goal of Student Support Services (SSS) projects is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants. SSS assists students with college requirements and provides opportunities for academic development. SSS may also provide grant aid to current participants in need of additional financial support to persist in school.

SSS participants were more likely to remain enrolled in higher education and complete a bachelor's degree as compared with eligible non-participants. SSS participants also tend to have a higher grade point average than similar students who did not receive such services.³

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Federal TRIO Programs, Educational Opportunity Centers, Fast Facts Report for the Educational Opportunity Centers Program: 2018-19

² Grantee-Level Performance Results: 2013-14 from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triomcnair/performance.html>

³ National Evaluation of Student Support Services: Examination of Student Outcomes After Six Years.

TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Talent Search

The goal of Talent Search (TS) is to increase the number of youth, 6th-12th grade, from disadvantaged backgrounds to complete high school and enroll in the postsecondary education institution of their choice. Talent Search also serves high school dropouts, to age 27, by encouraging them to re-enter the educational system and complete their education.

According to the most recent data collected by the Department of Education, 80% of TS participants were admitted to postsecondary institutions.⁴

Upward Bound

The goal of Upward Bound (UB) is to increase the rates at which participants enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education. Classic UB serves high school students from low-income families and/or students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree.

In 2018, 85% of all students who participated in UB programs immediately enrolled in college in the fall following high school graduation.⁵

Upward Bound Math Science

The goal of the Upward Bound Math Science (UBMS) programs is to help students recognize and develop their potential to excel in high school math and science and to encourage them to pursue postsecondary degrees in math and science, and ultimately careers in the math and science profession.

In recent years, 89% of students who participated in UBMS programs went directly to college after graduating from high school.⁵



⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Student Service, Fast Facts Report for the Student Support Services Program, Washington, D.C., 2016.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Federal TRIO Programs, Fast Facts Report for the Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math Science Program: 2017-18

TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Veterans Upward Bound

The goal of Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) is to increase the rates at which participants enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education. Veterans UB serves low-income, first-generation military veterans who are preparing to enter postsecondary education.

According to the National Association of Veterans Upward Bound Program Personnel, in 2015-2016, more than 74% of recent program participants were enrolled in postsecondary education programs.⁷

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)

GEAR UP Programs are designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Grants are provided to states and partnerships to provide services to high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than seventh grade, following them through their first year of college. Funds also provide college scholarships to low-income students.

“GEAR UP middle school staff, participating in the study focus groups, reported that GEAR UP middle schools were more likely than non-GEAR UP middle schools to offer honors and above-grade-level classes. They perceived that some of these changes took place with the implementation of the GEAR UP projects in 1999.”



⁷ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Student Service, Fast Facts Report for the Veterans Upward Bound Program, Washington, D.C., 2020.

⁸ United States Department of Education (2008, August 11). Early outcomes of the GEAR UP program. Retrieved March 17, 2021, from <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/gearup/index.html>

PROGRAMS OF KANSAS

Statewide TRIO Programs

The state of Kansas proudly hosts 57 TRIO programs that serve 14,015 first-generation, low-income pre-college and college students, veterans, and adult learners. There are also 200+ professionals that work for the TRIO programs in Kansas. In order to more effectively serve our students, TRIO programs have developed nearly 300 non-TRIO-related educational collaborations. In total, Kansas TRIO programs have secured \$18,661,561 in federal funding.

PROGRAM TYPE	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED	FY 25 FUNDING
Educational Opportunity Centers	4	4,000	\$1,218,636
McNair Scholars Program	4	112	\$1,218,452
Student Support Services	26	4,379	\$8,111,041
Talent Search	6	4,297	\$2,379,088
Upward Bound	12	777	\$4,081,960
Upward Bound Math Science	3	200	\$1,033,374
Veterans Upward Bound	2	250	\$619,010
	57	14,015	\$18,661,561

Statewide GEAR UP Programs

Kansas is fortunate to have both a statewide GEAR UP project along with six partnership grants. The statewide grant is funded to serve 2,500 low-income youth in the foster care system across all 105 counties in Kansas through 16 regional offices. All 4 congressional districts of Kansas are served by this grant. Six partnership grants provide support to low-income districts across the Wichita and Kansas City, KS metropolitan areas.

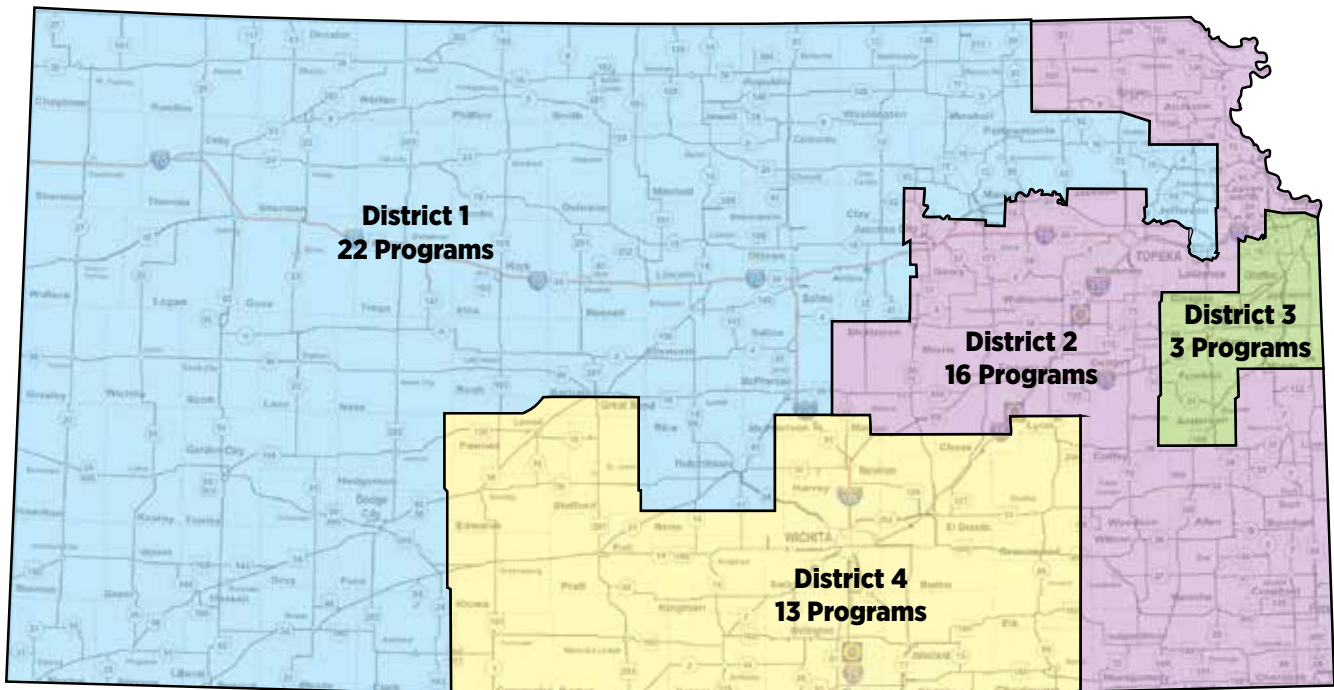
PROGRAM	LOCATION	NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED	FY 25 FUNDING
Kansas Kids GEAR UP	Statewide	2,500	\$3,500,000
University of Kansas Center for Research GEAR UP	Kansas City, KS	3,000	\$2,400,000
University of Kansas Center for Research GEAR UP	Kansas City, MO	950	\$760,000
Haysville GEAR UP	Haysville	900	\$720,000
Haysville GEAR UP	Haysville	750	\$600,000
Wichita State University GEAR UP	Wichita	1,338	\$1,070,400
Wichita State University GEAR UP	Wichita	1,013	\$810,400
		10,451	\$9,860,800

TRIO STATEWIDE DISTRIBUTION

TRIO Programs by District

There are 21 TRIO host institutions of higher education in Kansas, many of which host multiple grant awards to serve their pre-college and college students, veterans, and adult learners.

There are more than 300 different TRIO partner organizations and target middle and high schools throughout the state of Kansas. Some of these organizations collaborate with multiple programs. Our partnerships assist us in leveraging grant funds and extending the reach of services.



DISTRICT	NUMBER OF PROGRAMS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED	FY25 FUNDING
1st Congressional District	22	4,994	\$6,944,726
2nd Congressional District	17	2,955	\$5,206,703
3rd Congressional District	3	2,057	\$1,172,869
4th Congressional District	15	4,009	\$5,337,263
TOTALS	57	14,015	\$18,661,561

1ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - TRIO PROGRAMS

INSTITUTION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY25 FUNDING
Barton County Community College	Educational Opportunity Centers	1,000	\$325,656
Barton County Community College	Student Support Services	200	\$382,232
Barton County Community College	Upward Bound	57	\$309,505
Barton County Community College	Upward Bound	59	\$309,505
Cloud County Community College	Student Support Services	160	\$286,109
Colby Community College	Student Support Services	175	\$283,639
Dodge City Community College	Student Support Services	144	\$272,364
Dodge City Community College	Talent Search	500	\$220,991
Garden City Community College	Student Support Services	200	\$340,805
Haskell Indian Nations University	Student Support Services	175	\$306,514
Kansas State University	McNair Scholars Program	28	\$305,050
Kansas State University	Student Support Services	300	\$357,263
Kansas State University/ Salina	Student Support Services	160	\$275,028
Kansas State University/ Salina	Upward Bound	55	\$309,504
Seward County Community College	Student Support Services	160	\$286,109
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Educational Opportunity Centers	1,000	\$283,663
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	McNair Scholars Program	31	\$335,989
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Student Support Services	120	\$272,364
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Student Support Services	250	\$353,692
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Upward Bound	94	\$480,145
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Upward Bound Math Science	60	\$309,505
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Upward Bound Math Science	66	\$339,094
SUMMARY	22 PROGRAMS	4,994	\$6,944,726

2ND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - TRIO PROGRAMS

INSTITUTION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY25 FUNDING
Donnelly College	Student Support Services	240	\$327,760
Emporia State University	McNair Scholars Program	25	\$272,364
Emporia State University	Student Support Services	100	\$272,364
Emporia State University	Student Support Services	165	\$352,530
Emporia State University	Upward Bound	60	\$309,505
Fort Scott Community College	Student Support Services	150	\$272,364
Highland Community College	Student Support Services	140	\$272,364
Independence Community College	Student Support Services	165	\$272,364
Independence Community College	Upward Bound	65	\$349,471
Kansas City Kansas Community College	Upward Bound	60	\$299,040
Labette Community College	Student Support Services	165	\$320,606
Labette Community College	Talent Search	545	\$281,888
Neosho County Community College	Student Support Services	165	\$345,360
Neosho County Community College	Talent Search	655	\$377,896
Neosho County Community College	Upward Bound	55	\$309,505
Washburn University	Student Support Services	140	\$272,364
Washburn University	Upward Bound	60	\$298,958
SUMMARY	17 PROGRAMS	2,955	\$5,206,703

3RD CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - TRIO PROGRAMS

INSTITUTION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY25 FUNDING
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Educational Opportunity Centers	1,000	\$325,656
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Talent Search	932	\$537,708
University of Kansas Center for Research, Inc.	Veterans Upward Bound	125	\$309,505
SUMMARY	3 PROGRAMS	2,057	\$1,172,869

4TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - TRIO PROGRAMS

INSTITUTION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY25 FUNDING
Cowley College	Student Support Services	160	\$348,514
Cowley College	Upward Bound	63	\$324,979
Wichita State University	Educational Opportunity Centers	1,000	\$283,661
Wichita State University	McNair Scholars Program	28	\$305,049
Wichita State University	Student Support Services	250	\$514,726
Wichita State University	Student Support Services	115	\$306,514
Wichita State University	Student Support Services	120	\$272,364
Wichita State University	Student Support Services	120	\$272,364
Wichita State University/ Campus of Applied Science and Tech	Student Support Services	140	\$272,364
Wichita State University	Talent Search	1,165	\$672,135
Wichita State University	Talent Search	500	\$288,470
Wichita State University	Upward Bound	52	\$278,305
Wichita State University	Upward Bound	97	\$503,538
Wichita State University	Upward Bound Math Science	74	\$384,775
Wichita State University	Veterans Upward Bound	125	\$309,505
SUMMARY	15 PROGRAMS	4,009	\$5,337,263



GEAR UP STATEWIDE DISTRIBUTION

Our state GEAR UP grant, Kansas Kids GEAR UP serves every district in the state across the 105 counties. This \$3,500,000 partnership started in 2015 to provide services to 2,500 foster care youth across the state. The state grant is broken into 6 regions of service. Each district is a host to regional offices that supported area students.

Partnership Grants

Kansas institutions including the University of Kansas Center for Research and Wichita State University, each host multiple partnership grants (6 total), which serve low-income students across the greater Kansas City and Wichita area including rural Haysville, KS. GEAR UP partnership grants bring in bring \$6,360,800 to Kansas.

DISTRICT	KANSAS PARTNER GRANTS			KANSAS KIDS GEAR UP		
1st Congressional	--			8 Regional Offices	2,500 students in foster care	\$3,500,000 FY25
2nd Congressional	--			4 Regional Offices		
3rd Congressional	Kansas City (1) GEAR UP	3,000 students	\$2,400,000 FY25	1 Regional Office		
4th Congressional	Wichita (2) & Haysville (2) GEAR UP	4,001 students	\$3,200,800 FY25	3 Regional Offices		

1ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - GEAR UP PROGRAMS

OFFICE LOCATION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY25 FUNDING
Dodge City	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 4	Total state grant served 2,500 youth in foster care	Total state grant was funded for \$3,500,000
Emporia	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 6		
Garden City	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 4		
Great Bend	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 4		
Hays	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 4		
Hutchinson	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 6		
Junction City	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 3		
Lawrence	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 2		
Salina	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 3		

2ND CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - GEAR UP PROGRAMS

OFFICE LOCATION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY25 FUNDING
Pittsburg	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 1	Total state grant served 2,500 youth in foster care	Total state grant was funded for (\$3,500,000)
Parsons	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 1		
Topeka	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 3		

3RD CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - GEAR UP PROGRAMS

OFFICE LOCATION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY25 FUNDING
Kansas City	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 2	Total state grant served 2,500 youth in foster care	Total state grant was funded for (\$3,500,000)
Kansas City	University of Kansas Center for Research Inc. GEAR UP	3,000 students	\$2,400,000

4TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - GEAR UP PROGRAMS

OFFICE LOCATION	PROJECT	STUDENTS SERVED	FY25 FUNDING
Wichita	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 5	Total state grant served 2,500 youth in foster care	Total state grant was funded for (\$3,500,000)
Arkansas City	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 5		
El Dorado	Kansas Kids GEAR UP - Region 6		
Wichita	Wichita State University GEAR UP	1,338 students	\$1,070,400
Wichita	Wichita State University GEAR UP	1,013 students	\$810,400
Haysville	Haysville GEAR UP	900 students	\$720,000
Haysville	Haysville GEAR UP	750 students	\$600,000



KANSAS STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Allison Muzzy

The University of Kansas Student Support Services

Major: Journalism and Mass Communications, Concentration in Multimedia Journalism; Political Science

My first year of college was one of the hardest years of my life. I doubted why I even came to college in the first place and had a serious plan of dropping out. That was until I learned about a program for students from low-income backgrounds called TRIO and the support it offered, and I knew I needed to join it. My TRIO advisors have been instrumental in my success at the University of Kansas. They have been my backbone and the reason I keep going to class and why I have confidence applying for opportunities, scholarships, and fellowships.

During my time at the University of Kansas, I have done research in Taiwan, had my articles and photographs published in large regional newspapers, served on university committees, completed internships and fellowships, and worked four simultaneous on-campus jobs. Through encouragement from TRIO advisors, I have received the Critical Language Scholarship and Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, been nominated for the Truman Scholarship and Beinecke Scholarship representing KU and received many KU departmental awards and scholarships. However, throughout all of my experiences, being able to call myself a TRIO scholar is the one I am most proud of.

Hailee Bonham-Debolt

The University of Kansas Student Support Services

Major: Nursing

When I first started college at KU as a pre-med student, I felt a heavy weight to succeed, being the first person in my family to attend college. In the courses I was taking, I often felt disconnected to the reason I wanted to go into healthcare in the first place, helping people. I also felt like if I switched to nursing, I would be failing. Luckily, I was surrounded by people that told me that I wasn't failing, everyone's path to success just looks differently. Along with other offices on campus, TRIO, helped support my transition from the pre-med path to the nursing path. With TRIO, I had the opportunity to tour the School of Nursing campus in Kansas City. That visit helped answer many questions that I had about nursing school.

Throughout the application process and beyond, TRIO offered holistic support, including tutoring, leadership opportunities, and just being there if I needed them. Since making the switch to nursing, I have been thriving. I started nursing school in January of 2026. For me, TRIO helped guide me to where I am today. For me, switching paths was not giving up on my dream, but rather finding a different path to achieve that.



STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Gabriel Maldonado

The University of Kansas GEAR UP KCK

Major: Health and Physical Education/Fitness

When I joined GEAR UP in middle school, college was not part of my plan. At that stage in my life, I was simply moving through school without much direction, not fully focused on academics and unsure of what my future could become. Higher education was not an option, something meant for other people, not necessarily for me. I had not yet connected my daily effort in the classroom to long-term opportunity.

That perspective began to change through GEAR UP's college visits and the steady support of program coordinators who consistently encouraged me to think bigger. One of the most defining moments was traveling to Chicago for the first time. Experiencing a new city, stepping onto college campuses, and seeing students thriving in environments I had never imagined for myself expanded my understanding of what was possible. More importantly, I began to realize that there were people who genuinely believed in my potential and were committed to helping me succeed. That realization became a turning point and shifted my mindset from simply getting by to actively pursuing opportunity.

Today, I work full-time with GEAR UP because I believe in the power of this program and the investment it makes in students' lives. I've experienced firsthand how exposure, guidance, and encouragement can transform a student's outlook and direction. Now, I'm committed to being that source of support for others, helping them see opportunities they may not yet see for themselves, just like someone once did for me.

Tumusifu Ndagijimana

The University of Kansas GEAR UP KCK & Talent Search

Major: Exercise Science

My journey with KU GEAR UP has been a really positive and meaningful experience that has shaped my path from high school into college. GEAR UP was there for me when I needed mentorship and support, and it helped me learn about many different career paths I could pursue. They guided me through the college process, helped me find scholarships, and even awarded me a scholarship during college, which made a huge difference for me financially and mentally. Because of their continued support, I felt more confident about my future and more prepared to handle the challenges that come with being a college student.



As a Harmon High School Class of 2024 GEAR UP alum and now a senior in college, I am truly grateful for everything they have done for me. From the trips they took me on to learning about global leadership, I was able to gain new perspectives outside of the classroom and understand the world in a bigger way. The experiences I shared with my peers helped me grow not just academically, but personally too. The doors GEAR UP has opened for me are a true blessing, and I will always appreciate the impact the program has had on my life.

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Esau F. Segoviano

The University of Kansas GEAR UP KCK

Major: Education

I was a part of the JC Harmon GEAR UP Class of 2018. My story is proof that with a little push from GEAR UP, determination, and belief in yourself, you can do it. Being part of GEAR UP didn't just prepare me academically. It showed me that my goals were possible and that my future was worth investing in.

After graduating high school and going through the GEAR UP program, I continued both my academic and athletic journey at Park University. As a student-athlete I quickly was reminded that discipline, resilience, and sacrifice is needed to make it through. Balancing practices, competitions, and coursework pushed me to grow mentally, physically, and academically. Those two years shaped my character and strengthened my

determination to keep striving for more.

With a clear vision for my future, I made the decision to transfer to the University of Kansas to complete my bachelor's degree in education. That step represented growth, courage, and commitment to my long-term goals. Earning my degree was more than just an academic achievement. I saw it is a tribute to hard work, consistency, and the foundation GEAR UP helped build. Today, as a lead site coordinator for the Kansas City, Kansas GEAR UP program, I carry forward the lessons of perseverance and purpose. My goal is not only to succeed but to inspire and uplift the next generation, especially, those in my community.

Jessica Carrol

Cowley College Upward Bound

Hello, my name is Jess, I have been in Upward Bound since 2023. This TRIO program has changed my life for the better. I have always planned to go to college but Upward Bound has made me see what my future can look like. With all of the trips and the career seeking programs, it has opened my eyes to all of the possible careers that are available.

The people in Upward Bound have made me a better person also. Speaking with students from other schools has made me see what their school can offer. I like having a safe space to talk about school work, as well as, to get tutoring if I need it. There is always someone there to help me with homework or applying for scholarships. I really appreciate this program. I am glad my friends told me to join. I don't think I would have succeeded this much without Upward Bound. This program has made a noticeable difference in my life.



STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Ivan Bueso

The University of Kansas GEAR UP KCK & Talent Search

Major: Animal Science

At the age of 14, I was an incoming freshman at J.C. Harmon High School. Growing up, I spent my early education in a predominantly white school district and later moved to an inner-city district that was starkly diverse. Being Hispanic and attending a school with students that looked like me, it was gratifying to be surrounded by people who shared the same culture as me. As I continued to change schools throughout my early education, constantly being the new student was hard for me as I was never settled down in a place long enough to foster lasting friendships. When I was first

transitioned to my new high school, I was shy and struggling in finding my identity. I still remember the day that I attended my first ever KU GEAR UP event, an after-school workshop to talk about college readiness and career exploration. This intrigued me a lot because I thought to myself “if I go to this then I would have something in common with other students who wanted to pursue college like me”. From my first workshop, I instantly felt the passion and dedication that my site coordinators showed me even though they had not known me before from their middle school program. They received me with open arms and assured me that they would do everything in their power to get me to college. This connection felt like the beginning of new relationships and a foundation to my life at Harmon.

As I started to be more involved with GEAR UP, I discovered more about myself and who I wanted to become. I became more dedicated to my goal of graduating from high school and getting a college degree. GEAR UP helped me in many ways during my four years of high school, instilling me with the confidence to believe in myself and what I was capable of, with a level of support and guidance. GEAR UP helped me to explore my options in my post-high school education, touring colleges both in-state and out of state. This was special to me as it showed me what else is out there in this world, outside of Kansas. GEAR UP also helped me to see other than myself, in giving back to the community with community service. GEAR UP has offered experiences like educational summer camps encompassing STEM, to refine my love and passion for the sciences which led me to pursue a degree in Animal Science from Kansas State University and attain my Bachelor’s of Science. GEAR UP helped me attain this degree by pushing me to apply to scholarships and even helping me secure the KC Scholars scholarship that paid for my whole college education. GEAR UP has given me so much and without them, I would not have been the person I am today. I love GEAR UP so much that they received me back with open arms in offering me a professional career to continue the work, that’s crucial for the lives of students within the same community I live in. I am forever grateful for my GEAR UP success story because I accomplished everything they told me I would accomplish. I am excited for what the future holds for our new generation of GEAR UP students and to give back to my community that shaped me for who I am today.

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Sidny Linares

Emporia State University Upward Bound

Major: Physical Therapy

I have been part of the TRIO Upward Bound program for the past four years, and during that time it has helped me push myself and grow into the person that I am today both personally and academically. Managing school, athletics, and a job requires highly developed management skills, discipline on and off the field, and determination, which I work hard to maintain every day.

Being in TRIO has helped shape me into a more focused and responsible student who is motivated to succeed. I regularly attend tutoring, which has helped me better understand difficult subjects and improve my grades. Additionally, tutoring has also helped me develop stronger study habits and helped me become more confident in my academic abilities while also enjoying the presence of my classmates. Another important service I have used is attending the TRIO college visits. These trips have helped me learn more about what college life is like, including campus expectations, housing, and student support systems. Visiting different colleges has helped me feel more prepared and excited about my future and more confident in my ability to succeed after high school. My academic goal is to attend college, complete my undergraduate degree, and continue to graduate school to become a licensed physical therapist where I can help others recover, grow stronger, and improve their quality of life. Being a student-athlete has inspired my interest in physical therapy because I understand how important injury prevention and rehabilitation are for staying healthy and active.

I believe TRIO programs are extremely important in higher education because they provide support for students who are balancing many responsibilities and may not always have access to the same resources as others. What makes TRIO especially meaningful is the strong sense of love, encouragement, and community that comes with that support. Throughout my time in the program, I have gained mentors who truly care about my success and who treat me like family rather than just another student. They take the time to listen, check in, and push me to do better and want the best for every student in the program. Being part of TRIO has made me feel seen, valued, and believed in. This kind of support makes a huge difference academically and emotionally, and it helps students stay motivated and confident in reaching their goals.



STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Brian Alvarez-De La Cruz **The University of Kansas GEAR UP KCK**

Major: Biology

My name is Brian Alvarez-De La Cruz, a first-generation Mexican-American. Navigating the path to higher education was unfamiliar territory. Although my parents had college educations from Mexico, the U.S. college process felt overwhelming and unknown. I knew it was going to be expensive and the means to pay for it low, so my parents set early expectations. I first joined KU GEAR UP as a 7th grader around 2012 and immediately found a sense of belonging. The social connections with students from other schools, building friendships, and participating in programs alongside peers who shared similar experiences. Summer camps quickly became something I looked forward to each year because they made learning fun while expanding my perspective and confidence.

Through GEAR UP, I was exposed to opportunities that shaped how I saw myself and my future. I still remember receiving my first smartphone through the program. That phone made me feel like I had reached the pinnacle of technology at the time. More importantly, GEAR UP helped me grow academically and personally. I learned how to write with purpose, including crafting one of the best essay hooks I had ever written, which gave me confidence in my voice and ability. “ $E=mc^2$ was fundamental in the world of physics, something Einstein came up with and has led the world to new discoveries. While equations require fundamental variables, I believe this scholarship is one of the those variables to a successful life through an equation I have yet to build.” Those early experiences helped lay the foundation for my college journey and ultimately earning my degree from the University of Saint Mary.

Today, I have come full circle as a KU GEAR UP Site Coordinator at Central Middle School. Every day, I see the positive impact the program has on students, especially bilingual and newcomer students whose experiences mirror my own as a young child learning to navigate a new language and culture. A 4-year-old child who cried when the pre-k teacher said, “You look so handsome!” that for some reason I thought meant I looked like a bird! Haha, that’s how little English I knew at the time.

Helping students find confidence, belonging, and opportunity fills my heart because I know firsthand what that support means. Growing up, I had adults who believed in me, starting with my parents and expanding so much further. Now it is my turn to be that adult for others. My journey is proof that GEAR UP WORKS!

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Samantha Avila

The University of Kansas McNair Scholars Program

Major: Visual Art

Being part of the TRIO McNair Scholars Program during the summer of 2024 was a transformative experience that shaped both my academic growth and personal development. Under the mentorship of Dr. Joshua Miner, I worked on a research project exploring historical patterns and systems in the film industry. The program gave me the chance to combine careful research with creative thinking, learning how to gather information, analyze trends, and draw meaningful connections. It challenged me to approach complex ideas thoughtfully and encouraged me to consider how my findings could contribute to broader discussions. Through this process, I gained a deeper understanding of how research can inform and enhance creative practice, and I learned to value both patience and persistence in pursuing answers to challenging questions.



The guidance and support I received through McNair extended far beyond the research itself. The program helped me build confidence in my ability to manage independent projects and think critically under pressure. Through workshops, mentorship, and feedback, I learned to organize my ideas, ask meaningful questions, and refine my work. McNair also gave me a sense of belonging in an academic community where I could see my potential reflected in my peers and mentors. I realized that curiosity and dedication are as important as technical skills, and that personal growth is just as valuable as the final results.

Presenting my research at the Kansas Union Ballroom in August, the Heartland Conference Center in September, and the SACNAS Conference in Phoenix in October was both exciting and rewarding. Each presentation required me to clearly communicate my findings to diverse audiences and reflect on the significance of my work. Sharing my research reinforced the importance of preparation, clarity, and connecting ideas in ways that are meaningful to others.

The McNair Scholars Program has strengthened my skills as a researcher, deepened my confidence in pursuing academic challenges, and inspired me to continue exploring creative and scholarly opportunities. It has prepared me for graduate study and given me the tools to contribute thoughtfully and meaningfully to my field.

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Theo Wright

Emporia State University McNair Scholars Program

Major: Applied Sociology

Growing up, college never felt like an option for me, so I didn't think much about it, and by the time I did, I was in my last year of high school. Navigating college as a first-generation student was even harder; I made plenty of mistakes, but each one became a learning experience that shaped how I navigate higher education today. After my second year of college, I applied to the McNair Scholars Program. It took me a while to figure out what I wanted to do with a sociology degree, and once I settled on becoming a professor, I knew I needed help getting into and surviving graduate school. McNair has taught me so much and has given me countless opportunities to grow and obtain the skills needed to succeed in graduate school. Anytime I felt like I couldn't make it, like that world just isn't for someone like me, I always had the

McNair staff and my fellow scholars to give me words of encouragement and push me to do my very best. I would not be where I am today without the community and support of McNair, and for that I will always be grateful. I've been accepted into a PhD program for the fall!

Kellee Banks

Emporia State University Student Support Services and McNair Scholars Program

Majors: Bachelor of Arts Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship; Master of Science in Clinical Psychology

I joined SSS hoping they could help me figure out how to fund the big dreams and goals I was pursuing. Not only did they guide me in doing that, but they also encouraged me to keep dreaming just as big as before. I later joined the McNair program, knowing I always intended to go to graduate school and eventually earn the title "Dr. Banks," though I had no idea how many papers and research articles would go into earning those two letters. Throughout my time at ESU, I faced learning curves and unexpected transitions that sometimes left me lying on "the red couch" [in our TRIO office] in defeat. To the TRIO staff, that was the signal that I needed support—and they never failed to step in. They consistently offered a safe space, resources, and guidance that helped me problem-solve, advocate for myself, and succeed. Wherever I go and whatever I do, I know that TRIO works. I am currently interviewing for doctoral programs in clinical psychology.



STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

David Alberto Nevarez-Saenz

The University of Kansas Talent Search, Wichita State University Upward Bound Math & Science, Wichita State University McNair Scholars Program

Major: Master of Science - Aerospace Engineering, Space Systems Design

David Alberto Nevarez-Saenz went to school in Kansas City, KS and attended Grant Elementary School, Rosedale Middle School, and Sumner Academy of Arts and Science. He attended Wichita State University and earned a Bachelor of Science in Aerospace Engineering, and attended the University of Central Florida and earned a Master of Science in Aerospace Engineering: Space Systems Design. He is currently working at Airbus in Mobile, Alabama, as a Retrofit Solution Engineer where he modifies and upgrades aircraft cabins for airlines worldwide.

David was a participant in the University of Kansas TRIO Talent Search (6th -12th Grades); Wichita State University Upward Bound Math & Science (9th-12th Grades); and the Wichita State University McNair Scholars Program (College).

“The Talent Search Program: This program allowed me to reach my goals of going to college debt-free through all the one-on-one meetings, financial/college/family workshops, guest speakers, college visits, summer camps/academies, community service, and many more of the free resources! Every single activity taught me something unique that I eventually implemented in my everyday life. The TRIO Staff helped me prepare for college over a span of 6 years and I am extremely thankful for that. Please take advantage of the great team of mentors who want to help YOU be successful! In all honesty, TRIO really works!

The Upward Bound Math & Science Program (WSU UBMS): Going to WSU’s campus during my summers as a high school student really gave me the advantage to excel in my classes in the following school years. I got the opportunities to do my first research projects and express myself in ways that made me become a better version of myself. The mentoring and workshops shaped me as the person I am today.

The McNair Scholars Program: The amazing thing about TRIO is how they build you from a 12-year-old until you earn your doctorate degree! The college guidance on pushing forward helped me learn of the amazing opportunities with a doctorate degree. Combining research guidance and workshops, the program helped me learn how I can make a positive world impact in aerospace engineering by finding methods to minimize turbofan engine noise.

We go to space to improve life on earth. My next steps are to work on satellite systems to study climate change, track environmental degradation, and predict weather for the betterment of humanity. TRIO is a direct contributor to this.”



STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Jordan Earl

Emporia State University Student Support Services

My name is Jordan Earl. I am originally from Utah, but I moved to Kansas in 2024 to finish my Senior year of high school and attend college. I am the oldest of four brothers with my youngest brother being 3 in March. I am a First Gen student and TRIO has helped me a lot with figuring out my classes and schedule. I am currently working as a TRIO Peer Advisor for math and science subjects. My favorite subject is math, but I also really enjoy Chemistry. I also work in my hometown as a Library Assistant, and I love reading. I enjoy painting, crocheting, and watching K-dramas. I am really enjoying my first year at ESU and I can't wait to start the nursing program!

Brianna Hand

Emporia State University Student Support Services

I am Brianna Hand, I am a single mom of 2 really awesome young boys. When I started my college journey back in 2014 I focused on Art. I was the president of the Art club at Cowley, built great relationships with the mentors around me and went on to ESU after graduation. I intended to be an Art Teacher. My time at ESU was cut short and I moved home. Dianne Flickenger, the English Specialist for our SSS program at Cowley, reached out to me about a job opportunity with the UB program and said I would be great for the role. I applied and soon was given the opportunity as the Program Specialist. I am now the Academic Coordinator and love spending every day with my students. I soon applied back to ESU and the rest is history. Without these wonderful people around me through TRIO I truly would not be where I am today. I am so thankful for all the support I have received and encouragement to keep moving forward.



Ayanna Smith

Emporia State University Student Support Services

Hey, everyone! My name is Ayanna Smith. I am a current student here at Emporia State. I'm a junior now, but I graduate in December, so I'm super excited. I am in the last step of obtaining my real estate license, so I'm ready to get started on my career. I have also been given the opportunity to work with College Works painting this summer. This experience is wonderful cause it gives me the chance to run my own painting company! I am a TRO SSS student and tutor, and I have loved my time in this program! My biggest passion outside of working is skating (roller skating). It's the most freeing thing!

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

John Joshua Bernardino

The University of Kansas Upward Bound Math & Science

Major: Applied Economics and Management

John Joshua Bernardino's family immigrated to the United States from the Philippines when he was 12 years old to seek a better opportunity, education and life for him and his siblings. Life was difficult for John Joshua when he first arrived in the U.S. as he was learning and getting adjusted to a new country, culture, and customs. In addition, he had to learn a new language and thus, initially struggled academically in school. However, he was determined to overcome his deficiencies by spending extra time working on his academics and seeking assistance from his teachers.



By the time he reached high school, he had a better foundation and was involved in numerous extracurricular activities, including the University of Kansas Upward Bound Math and Science Program to support his academics. He began to excel. He continued his academic rise but encountered the COVID-19 pandemic that forced schools across the U.S. to go online. However, unlike most students who struggled to adjust to the online format of school, John Joshua stayed focused. Through hard work, perseverance, assistance from his teachers and the University of Kansas Upward Bound Math and Science Program, he was able to maintain his high academic marks and graduated from Topeka High School as class valedictorian in 2021.

After graduating from Topeka High School, he enrolled at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. He excelled academically at Cornell University and graduated in the spring of 2025 with a degree in Applied Economics and Management. He is currently employed with Epic Systems as a Technical Solutions Engineer.



Hope Zavala

The University of Kansas Veterans Upward Bound

Hope completed an application for Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) services at a Veterans Treatment Court in 2024. Hope met with VUB staff to research nursing and social work programs in Kansas City and Pittsburg, KS. In 2025, Hope graduated Veterans Treatment Court and later enrolled in a nursing program at Concorde Career College where she is on track to graduate in June 2027. She starts clinicals soon and made the President's list during the fall of 2025 with a GPA of 3.9.

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Juan Flores-Hernandez

Wichita State University Upward Bound Math & Science

From Remote Learning to Rudd Scholar: Juan Flores-Hernandez's journey with UBMS turned uncertainty into opportunity, leading him to Wichita State University as a Health Science Pre-Nursing major.

"If you were to tell me 4 years ago that I would be able to attend college without worrying about the cost, I wouldn't know how to react. It was my 8th-grade year, and the COVID-19 lockdown was still going on, but I was still attending remote classes. It was in one of those classes that a teacher talked to us about the Upward Bound Math Science program at Wichita State University. When I realized I really wanted to join this program, one of my teachers decided to drive to my house just to give me an application, and it was thanks to her persistence that I got in.



Beginning freshman year, not having a clue about the do's and the don'ts of high school made it nerve-racking for me, and I was afraid of messing up right off the bat. Hearing about the guidance and assistance that UBMS offers its participants throughout high school with decision-making about college and life after graduation made me immediately want to sign up. When I got the letter saying that I had been accepted, I immediately felt relieved. I now had advisors and mentors who I could turn to if I ever had any questions. Throughout the program, they offered me workshops such as ACT prep, practicing scholarship essays, and even mental health workshops. I believe this helped give me the advantage when it came to my senior year and helped me to win the Rudd Foundation Scholarship. I will forever be thankful to my UBMS advisors, Ms. Berg and Mr. Veasey, for giving me the chance to join the UBMS family and putting me on the path of success."

Vernon Rose

The University of Kansas Veterans Upward Bound

Vernon completed an application for Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) services online in fall 2025 after moving into a shelter for veterans in Kansas City, KS. Throughout the fall, VUB worked with him on researching college programs where he could pursue his goal of playing football while earning an Associate degree. VUB assisted Vernon in getting college transcripts sent to various schools and also referred him to a Kansas City grant program to get a free laptop computer. After contemplating schools in Minnesota, KU and community colleges in Kansas, Vernon enrolled in Butler County Community College in Spring 2026 and is preparing for the upcoming football season.

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Makayla Clark

Kansas City Kansas Community College Upward Bound

Major: Elementary Education

I was involved in Upward Bound for about three years, beginning around my sophomore year of high school. When I first joined, my main goal was simply to meet new friends and try something new. I did not fully understand how much the program would shape my future. Over time, Upward Bound became more than just an activity-it became a community that supported me academically and personally. The program helped me prepare for college and guided me through important steps like applying for scholarships and exploring my options after high school.

One of the most impactful parts of Upward Bound was the exposure it gave me to different colleges. Visiting campuses helped me see myself as a future college student and made higher education feel possible. The program gave me the confidence to believe that I could succeed in college. Without Upward Bound, I do not think I would have felt as prepared or supported in taking that next step. It truly gave me the foundation and encouragement I needed.

Now, I attend the University of Saint Mary in Leavenworth, Kansas, where I am studying Elementary Education. I am proud of how far I have come, and I credit much of my confidence and readiness to the guidance and opportunities I received through Upward Bound.

Jeffrey Platt

The University of Kansas Veterans Upward Bound

Jeffrey completed an application for Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) services online in fall 2025. Jeffrey was interested in changing careers so he met with VUB staff to research different programs for accounting and medical billing / coding at different community colleges in Kansas City. Jeffrey ultimately decided to pursue an Associate Degree in accounting at Kansas City Kansas Community College. VUB referred him to the VA's Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E) program to secure funding and resources to go back to school. He was approved in the spring of 2026 and is preparing to enter school this year.

Gedeon Bashimbe

The University of Kansas Veterans Upward Bound

Gedeon completed an application for Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) services at the Veterans Affairs hospital in 2023. Across 2024, Gedeon considered a few postsecondary education options at different schools and together we worked on researching degrees in business and philosophy at MCCCKC, UMKC and KU. In 2025, VUB referred him to the VA's Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E) program to secure funding and resources to go back to school. He was approved in the fall of 2025 and is preparing to enter school this year.

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Malai Brown

Kansas City Kansas Community College Upward Bound

Being in Upward Bound has played a major role in both my academic growth and personal development. Before joining the program, I was unsure about what I wanted to do after high school and did not fully understand the steps needed to reach my goals. Upward Bound provided consistent guidance, encouragement, and a strong support system that pushed me to set higher expectations for myself and work toward achieving them. Through academic advising, workshops, and tutoring sessions, I strengthened my study habits, improved my time and behavioral management skills, and gained clarity about my future career path.

Upward Bound also gave me valuable knowledge about the college application process. The program guided me through requirements I did not know were necessary, including applications, financial aid, and scholarships. In addition, we participated in multiple college tours and campus visits. When I first joined Upward Bound, I had only one university in mind. However, after visiting different colleges in various cities and states, I discovered several institutions that truly interested me. The program also supported career exploration through weekend workshops focused on time management, effective study strategies, and even learning healthy ways to manage stress through meditation. The mentors and advisors genuinely cared about my success and were always available to answer questions or provide reassurance.

During the Spring of 2025, we visited Harris-Stowe State University in St. Louis. Before the tour, I had not submitted an application, but my advisor encouraged me to apply because she believed it would be a great fit for my major. After being accepted, I felt excited and confident about beginning this new chapter. Not only is the university close to home, but it also has a strong history as a teachers' college, which makes it an especially meaningful place to continue my education.

Being in Upward Bound ultimately led me to discover my passion and to have the confidence to pursue it. Through the guidance, exposure, and opportunities the program provided, I was able to explore different career paths and better understand what truly interests me. The college tours, workshops, and one-on-one support helped me realize that I am capable of achieving goals that once felt out of reach. Upward Bound has helped me find and attend a college of my choice, feel prepared, motivated, and certain about the path I am taking toward my future.

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Samuel Lockridge

The University of Kansas Upward Bound

Major: Psychology

From Wyandotte to the World

Samuel Lockridge shows what's possible when talent meets strong educational support. A USD 500 and F.L. Schlagle High School alumnus, his journey from Wyandotte County classrooms to community leadership highlights both his determination and KU Upward Bound's impact.

At Schlagle High, he graduated third in his class in 2007, served as President of both the Student Council and the National Honor Society, participated in forensics and track, and led the Marching Stallions as Drum Major. KU Upward Bound's academic rigor and mentorship gave Samuel the confidence and skills to transition to college and pursue leadership roles in higher education.

Samuel advanced academically and socially at Florida A&M University, where he joined the student government, competed in athletics, and earned a degree in Psychology in 2012. Unlike many of his peers, he returned to Kansas City, driven by challenges like educational gaps and instability, and inspired by Genesis 2:15 to "work and take care of" his community.

To bridge the gap between local government and community, Samuel founded EMBRACE, a nonprofit focused on civic engagement and safety. His leadership also extended to relief for the Flint water crisis and hurricane recovery in Houston.

Samuel's roles in education and extracurricular leadership directly shape student futures. Coaching, program development, and organizing fundraisers extend his impact, nurturing resilience and opportunities for the next generation. Samuel now serves as a resource for TRIO programs on both sides of the state line.

"KU Upward Bound turned my 'what if' into 'what's next.' It provided the mentorship and academic grit that transformed a Schlagle High School student into a college graduate and community advocate. I am a product of my community, but I am a success story because of the support systems that believed in me."

Samuel Lockridge's success reflects not just personal achievement, but progress for his community. His story shows how programs like KU Upward Bound empower students to reach their goals and support others.



STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Marijayne Cournoyer

Haskell Indian Nations University Student Support Services

I am Marijayne Cournoyer, a non-traditional, first-generation student at Haskell Indian Nations University. I am a mother of four on top of being a straight A student, student ambassador, TRIO scholar, and an Intern with Career Services Department at Haskell. I plan on graduating in May with my Associate degree in Social Work. After I graduate, I will continue to further my education, I recently declared my four-year degree in Business, then plan on getting an MSW, and to become a licensed Social Worker.

I did not think I would ever go back to school until I got my GED in 2023 and applied for college right after. Now I am a 4.0 college student with plans on furthering my education further than originally planned. I fell in love with learning and grateful for everyone at Haskell because when I felt like I didn't belong or wanted to give up, they were there to help me get through whatever I was struggling with. I am glad to be a first-generation student.

Amya Andy

Haskell Indian Nations University Student Support Services

Major: Business Administration

My name is Amya Andy. I am a sophomore at Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, and I'm proving that where you come from doesn't define where you're going. Growing up in discriminatory Oklahoma as a queer woman of color and losing my mom when I was four, I've faced more than my fair share of challenges. But I've always worked to make my mom proud, and that drive has carried me through. I'm on track to graduate with my AA in Social Work in 2025, and then my BS in Business Administration in 2027. Along the way, I've thrived in higher education, worked in national parks, and become freer in embracing who I truly am.

My journey is proof that resilience can overcome any obstacle. I didn't come from money or privilege, but I'm determined to create a life that's good for me. If you put your mind to it, anything is possible. No matter where you start, you can always build a future that's brighter than you ever imagined.



STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES



Edgar Olguin

Wichita State University Student Support Services

Major: Mechanical Engineering

I have always been fascinated by the process behind creation. Innovation hidden in everyday objects. In any given room most things have a story of how they ended up like that. Going from raw materials, then manufacturing in some shape, way, or form, then into a product. Curiosity grew from wanting to recreate what I saw around me, even when a lack of tools, materials, or experience made it frustrating. As the youngest child of parents who immigrated from Mexico without access to a high school education, I grew up understanding that I am not entitled to a good life; I must earn it. I wish to find a middle ground compared to my siblings, my sister struggles to find work using the degree she fought hard for, but

without strong professional connections she failed to make the most of her skills. My brother failed to push his education past high school but found success through hands-on opportunity through his friends and connections. Their examples taught me that effort alone is not enough—planning and networking matter.

At Wichita State University, I have challenged myself each year to grow beyond academics. I joined Go Baby Go and the 3d printed prosthetics clubs and improved my time management by separating where I start and finish my work using the TRIO SSS lab. Socially, I tend to be quiet and can seem unapproachable, but I always want to help when asked, making sure I show commitment and loyalty to the connections I have. Each semester challenging myself to learn a new skill that I feel would help me in the future in smaller but meaningful ways. These skills include learning to bake, using 3D CAD software, and lockpicking.

I pride myself for my honesty and am driven more by self-discipline than recognition, holding myself to high standards to the point of doubting my own achievements. Ultimately, I chose to pursue Mechanical Engineering, as I wish to contribute to manufacturing and the processes that shape the world around us.

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP Student Highlights

Isabella - Region 3, Topeka, Salina, and Manhattan area

We are celebrating and spotlighting a student named Isabella. Isabella is a youth in foster care and has been a part of the Kansas Kids @ GEARUP program for over a year. She has participated in many activities and events over this past year. Some of the events she has participated in include the Financial Literacy/budgeting workshop in Leawood, KS in which she was able to use a gift card and put her budgeting skills to work at Walmart, activities in school for college exploration and academic planning, financial aid counseling workshops, RYAC meeting, and working on scholarships.

Isabella has navigated and overcome many of the challenges that can come along with being a youth in foster care, including moving from a different city to a new school, getting aquatinted with new friends and teachers, finding ways to get involved and be an active part of her school community. She is hard worker and constantly striving to set and achieve goals for herself and her future, this has really helped her rise above challenges she has faced. She recently graduated high school in Topeka at semester with a 3.58 GPA. She would like to pursue a career in nursing. She has applied and been accepted to Newman University and is currently deciding between Newman University and the University of Kansas to pursue her higher education goals. She was on the cheer team during her time in high school and is employed full time currently. Isabella expressed that she is thankful for the support and guidance that her KKGU advisor has provided and continues to provide! A quote from Miss Isabella “GEAR UP impacted me by helping me understand that I can do college if I put my mind to it. They helped me to understand that there are scholarships that can help me.”

It has been great working with Isabella. Her hard work and determination is applauded and her commitment to reaching her goals is outstanding! Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP looks forward to continuing to partner with Isabella to help provide support in her academic and career goals. Recently, we have been working on applying for scholarships and ensuring she has all the information she needs to move forward in this next step of her education journey!

Logan - Region 4, Garden City, Great Bend, Hays area

Logan is an 18-year-old high school senior who has demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination throughout his high school career. He was placed in state custody with St. Francis Foster Care Services during his sophomore year, a major life change that could have easily derailed his academic progress. Instead, Logan has used that transition as a turning point. Since entering foster care, he has thrived academically, becoming an excellent student who is highly motivated, responsible, and focused on his future.

During his senior year, Logan began working with Kansas Kids @ GEAR UP in Region 4 to explore and secure post-secondary opportunities. Through these conversations, he developed a clear plan for his education and career. Logan hopes to attend Manhattan Tech to earn an associate's degree and then continue his training in a lineman school, with the goal of becoming an electrical lineman. He is very intentional about his choices, often asking questions about how each step in his education will help him build a stable, long-term career.

Logan's dedication to his goals is especially evident in the way he balances school and work. In addition to completing his high school coursework, he works full-time at an aluminum manufacturing plant. There, he welds shelving units, cake racks, pizza racks, and aluminum pallets. The skills he has gained on the job have strengthened his work ethic and taught him

STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

the importance of reliability, time management, and attention to detail. Despite his demanding schedule, Logan continues to perform well in his classes and remains engaged in planning for his future.

For Logan, GEAR UP has been much more than just a scholarship opportunity. The program has provided him with guidance, encouragement, and a pathway to possibilities he once wasn't sure were within reach. Through GEAR UP, he has learned more about financial aid, college admissions, and career options in the trades. Knowing that the scholarship can help cover the cost of his education has eased some of the financial worries that come with planning for college as a youth in foster care. This support has allowed him to focus more on his studies and career goals and less on the barriers that could stand in his way.

Logan is proud of how far he has come since his sophomore year and recognizes the growth he has experienced both personally and academically. He has learned to advocate for himself, to ask for help when he needs it, and to stay committed even when life feels overwhelming. His journey reflects a deep sense of responsibility and maturity beyond his years. After graduation, Logan looks forward to starting his associate's degree at Manhattan Tech, continuing to build his technical skills, and moving closer to his dream of working as an electrical lineman. He is excited about his future and the opportunity to create a stable, successful life for himself through education, hard work, and perseverance.

Emily - Region 6, El Dorado, Emporia, Hutchinson area

Emily joined KKGU when she was in 8th grade. While in our program, she was trying to balance parenthood and continue her high school education. Through sheer confidence, perseverance, and the help of KKGU, she graduated with her high school diploma in May 2025. Emily participated in a variety of opportunities provided by KKGU. Such as tutoring in English, life-skill activities, Brighter Future, and RYAK, which provided job skills and budgeting. She also participated in STEM activities (Cosmosphere) and leadership activities, and attended many college visits, so she would eventually choose a college that fits all her needs.

Some of Emily's struggles were that she became pregnant in the eighth grade and wasn't sure if she would be able to stay in the foster home she was in. Her foster parent allowed Emily and her daughter to remain placed in her home. By ninth grade, she was working on time management between schoolwork and motherhood. Such as completing assignments, keeping grades up, working at a part time job and providing for her daughter. Emily enjoys animals, learning about criminal justice and the law, and mostly spending time with her daughter. KKGU provided Emily with resources to help her navigate being a student, single mother and being able to complete high school and having the means to go on to college.

What is most inspiring about Emily is that she is the first in her family to pursue post-secondary education. She is attending WSU Tech in the law enforcement program. Alongside the law enforcement, she is taking classes to also receive credit for being an EMT.

KANSAS TO THE STARS



TRIO

EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITY CENTERS

RONALD E. MCNAIR
POST-BACCALAUREATE
ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

TALENT SEARCH

UPWARD BOUND

UPWARD BOUND MATH/SCIENCE

VETERANS UPWARD BOUND