

October 26, 2006

GEAR UP DIRECTOR HIRED

BOISE — An educator with 20 years of experience has been chosen to lead the State Board of Education's GEAR UP Idaho program.

Steven Abels, the director of the Individual Occupational Training Program at Sandpoint High School, and a certified career development facilitator, will begin working November 13. Abels brings a wealth of practical experience to the position having worked with numerous federal, state and county agencies including the Veterans Administration, Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Services and private vendors.

GEAR UP is a federally funded grant program that will infuse \$18 million into Idaho's education system, including \$9 million in scholarships for financially needy students. The program is aimed at helping low income students become better prepared for higher education.

"I look forward to the opportunity of being the GEAR UP manager for the State of Idaho. Having the ability to offer students the chance to attend college can only lead to a highly skilled workforce and has the potential of increasing the number of students able to continue their education past high school."

Abels is a passionate advocate for students, teaching them to channel their skills into rewarding careers. He is also the creator of the Career-College Assistance Program at Sandpoint High School which offers guidance to students to gain information about colleges, financial aid and scholarships.

Abels holds a master's degree in Adult Education from the University of Idaho and a Bachelor's of Science in Education from University of Idaho.

The GEAR UP program focuses on talking with students beginning in middle school about the importance of post-secondary education. Close to 90 middle and high schools throughout the state are eligible. The grant funds additional counseling staff and sets up regional counseling centers throughout the state. The regional centers will also include creation of a community advisory committee to develop programs and strategies to best fit the needs of the local community. Using grant funds and partnering with Idaho's colleges and universities, the state will also begin a marketing campaign to help parents and students understand how education can benefit them as an individual as well as their community.