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CollegeEd and NCCEP Present Maria Carmen Vargas with Parent Leadership Award for Outstanding Leadership Activities

University of California Santa Cruz GEAR UP Serves 5,100 Students

WASHINGTON D.C. — Maria Carmen Vargas from the University of California Santa Cruz GEAR UP program in Greenfield, CA was one of five recipients of the 2008 GEAR UP Parent Leadership Award presented today at the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP) Annual Conference. In collaboration with NCCEP, CollegeEd[®], a leading college planning program developed by the College Board, presented these awards to parents who have demonstrated a significant commitment and leadership in their local GEAR UP initiative and school community.

University of California Santa Cruz GEAR UP is a school/college consortium project supported by federal grant and university funds that serves 5,100 students in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties.

Maria Vargas has only been involved with GEAR UP for just under two years but has already had an impact on local children and families. Upon her realization that her attitude and actions as a mother impacted her children's academic performance, Maria was inspired to educate herself so that she could be a true role model to her own children as well as to the other children in her community. Since then, Maria has been very active in her children's school and community. She organized local parents to write a grant to develop a parent patrol and went through the UC Santa Cruz Educational Partnership Center's three-tier Parent Leadership training. In just 18 short months, Ms. Vargas has been transformed from a parent into a parent leader who speaks passionately in front of audiences that include superintendents, school administrators, teachers and students about the importance of GEAR UP and of family involvement. She is now educating parents on college access, facilitating workshops on parent advocacy and sharing her own story to inspire other parents to become involved with their own children's education and with GEAR UP.

Maria Carmen Vargas, GEAR UP/EPC Parent Leader at UCSC said this about her experience, "From EPC and GEAR UP, I learned that when I value and respect that I am and seek out opportunities to grow, I, in turn, can value, respect, and support others including my children and community. Before, I believed, like many other parents in Greenfield that a university education was only for those that could afford it. Now, I believe that a university education is for all those that want to fight for this dream no matter where they are or in what situation they find themselves in. Today, as I see the positive results my change has had in my children, I am very happy to share this great news with my community."

“Del programa GEAR UP/EPC he aprendido que al valorarme, respetarme y capacitarme puedo entonces valorar, respetar y apoyar a otros incluyendo mis hijos y mi comunidad. Yo antes pensaba –como muchos otros padres en Greenfield- que la universidad es solo para los que tienen dinero. Ahora pienso que la universidad es para todo aquel que quiera luchar por este sueño, no importa el lugar donde este ni la situación en la que se encuentre. Ahora, al ver los resultados en mis hijos, sencillamente, me hace feliz compartir esta buena noticia con mi comunidad.”

"We are thrilled to have one of the more than fifty college pathways parent leaders we have developed in six local communities be chosen for this national award. These parents are providing information to parents who might not otherwise receive information to help their children build college aspirations," notes Carol Moran, Executive Director of the UC Santa Cruz Educational Partnership Center.

The College Board, a not-for-profit membership association, established this award program as part of its on-going commitment to equity and access for all students. GEAR UP (Gaining Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is a partnership between the federal government, schools, colleges, businesses and communities designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

About CollegeEd (www.collegeboard.com/collegeed)

CollegeEd is an academic, career and college planning program for grades 7-12, developed by the College Board. CollegeEd empowers students and engages families in the college planning process. The program encourages schools to promote rigorous academic standards, parental involvement and relevant college and community partnerships. CollegeEd has been designed for school or district-wide implementation and assists educators and students in creating a college-going culture within their communities. This is the mission of CollegeEd and the College Board; connecting students to college success.

About NCCEP (www.edpartnerships.org)

The National Council for Community and Education partnerships (NCCEP) serves as the national technical assistance provider, annual conference convener and voice in Washington, D.C., for the GEAR UP program. NCCEP, a non-profit organization committed to creating and sustaining K-16 education partnerships, works to increase academic achievement and access to higher education for economically disadvantaged students. By building broad-based partnerships, linking schools and communities, developing new initiatives, supporting proven programs, and using research findings to create successful frameworks for action, NCCEP aims to invigorate the principle of equal educational opportunity for all, and to help improve K-16 education in the United States. One of the primary objectives of NCCEP is to promote students' academic achievement and encourage systems change to improve college access in schools, districts, colleges, universities and communities.

About GEAR UP (www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index/html)

The GEAR UP program is designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides six-year grants to States and local partnerships to provide services at high-need middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school. This year GEAR UP celebrates ten years of successfully serving more than 1.5 million students.

About UC Santa Cruz Educational Partnership Center (<http://epc.ucsc.edu/>)

Established in 1999, the Educational Partnership Center (EPC) coordinates academic preparation efforts on behalf of UC Santa Cruz with the goal of increasing access and opportunity to higher education for students across the Monterey Bay and San Jose/Silicon Valley regions. EPC is a research- and data-driven, umbrella organization for an array of integrated programs, serving students, teachers, families, and schools from kindergarten through college. The mission of the Educational Partnership Center is to create college-bound communities that improve student learning and increase college-going rates among students from low-income and traditionally non-college-going families in collaboration with school, college, business, and community partners. In January 2009, EPC celebrated its 10th anniversary.

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