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U.S. Department of Education

Grantee Voices from the Field - Spring 2021 Newsletter

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U.S. Department of Education
Office of Postsecondary Education

Grantee Voices from the Field

Spring 2021 Newsletter

Biden-Harris Team Announces New Secretary and Political Appointees

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) welcomes Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D., as the 12th Secretary of Education. Cardona was sworn in on March 2, 2021.

Secretary Cardona previously served as commissioner of education in Connecticut after being appointed by Governor Ned Lamont in August 2019. Secretary Cardona has two decades of experience as a public school educator in the city of Meriden. He began his career as an elementary teacher. He then became a school principal in 2003, where he led a school with outstanding programming for 3- to 5-year-olds, students that were bilingual, and students with sensory exceptionalities. He proudly served in this role for 10 years. In 2012, Miguel won the 2012 National Distinguished Principal Award for the state of Connecticut and the Outstanding Administrator Award from the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education. Secretary Cardona then transitioned to lead the work of performance and evaluation in the district. He then assumed the role of assistant superintendent for teaching and learning.



Secretary Cardona is very active in his community, serving on several nonprofit charitable organization boards of directors. He has had several articles published by the American Association of School Personnel Administrators Perspective, National School Boards Association, District Administration, and the Scholars Strategy Network. His greatest source of pride is his family. Secretary Cardona and his wife Marissa are the proud parents of two children.

Read Dr. Cardona's full bio [here](#).

Office of Postsecondary Education Welcomes Michelle Asha Cooper, Ph.D.

The Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) welcomes new [Biden-Harris appointee](#), Acting Assistant Secretary and Higher Education Programs Deputy Assistant Secretary, Michelle Asha Cooper, Ph.D.

Cooper is a strategic and collaborative leader, with more than 20 years of experience in postsecondary education. Through her work and lived experience, she has witnessed first-hand the transformative power of education. Acting Assistant Secretary Cooper has held key roles and leadership positions at the Institute for Higher Education Policy, Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance



(U.S. Department of Education), Council for Independent Colleges, Association of American Colleges & Universities, and King's College (Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania).

A recognized advocate for racial and economic equity, experienced practitioner, and demonstrated leader, Dr. Cooper is a champion of access and success for all students in higher education.

Read the bios of the Biden-Harris political appointees [here](#).

Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds 2021 Updates

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was passed by Congress on March 27, 2020. This bill allotted \$2.2 trillion to provide fast and direct economic aid to the American people negatively impacted by the COVID-19 emergency. Of that money, approximately \$14 billion was administered by OPE as the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF). On Jan. 14, 2021, the Department announced an additional \$22.7 billion available to higher education institutions to ensure learning continues for students during the COVID-19 emergency under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021 (CRRSAA) HEERF II.

Most recently, on March 11, 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act was signed into law. It is an unprecedented \$1.9 trillion package of assistance, including nearly \$40 billion in new investments to the HEERF program.

The OPE [Higher Education Emergency Response Unit \(ERU\)](#), a newly created office, will help administer the award distribution to institutions of higher education. To date, the ERU continues to obligate funds for the various subprograms under CFDA 84.425 (E, F, J, K, L, N, and Q). This represents over 12,000 awards to over 5,000 institutions.

For additional information on program specific CRRSAA, please visit <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opecrrsaa.html>

For additional information on program specific CARES ACT guidelines, please visit [CARES Act: Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund](#).

GEAR UP High School Program Promotes Unity and Peace

Submission by Mose Cartier, GEAR UP education specialist

Students in the [Texas A&M University-Kingsville](#) GEAR UP program joined a rally to encourage peace and unity after the U.S. Capitol incident on Jan. 6, 2021. The rally, "United for a Message of Peace and Equality," was hosted by Carroll High School Communities in School for fellow students to express their feelings and thoughts about Jan. 6. The students held signs expressing their belief in unity, diversity, peace, and equality for everyone. GEAR UP academic success coach Carlos Alvarado participated and supported students in the peace rally.



Talent Search Director Raises Interest in Robotics

Submission by Mose Cartier GEAR UP education specialist

[The Weatherford College TRIO Talent Search program](#) is successfully teaching Talent Search students about the future of robotics. Director of TRIO Talent Search Dr. Deborah Jogie-Cregger, and Dean of Workforce & Technical Education Janetta Kruse, work with students in the [TRIO Talent Search](#) program, and report that the robotics arm of that program brings with it a new adventure for some middle school students.



Dr. Jogie-Cregger applied for a supplemental STEM grant, and used the grant award from the Office of Postsecondary Education to launch the Robotics Program. Having worked in other school districts until six years ago when she came to Weatherford College, she realized that "Not a lot of resources are available in rural areas. With robotics, we target middle school students, hoping to help them develop a love for STEM and technology at an early age."

Both women expect more robotics in the future. "Technology is a way of life, and we want to make sure our programs meet the needs of our community," said Dr. Jogie-Cregger. "We instill a love of learning and offer support. We teach them early about financial aid, resources, etc. College can be a reality, although some students may not realize they have that opportunity."

Read more in the [Weatherford Newsletter](#).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions' STEM Research and Scholarly Publications

Submissions by Margarita Melendez, HSI-STEM program specialist

University of Puerto Rico Publishes Advancements in Diabetes Research

The University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences campus (San Juan) published an article in the Global Journal of Medical Research: Radiology, Diagnostic Imaging, and Instrumentation. The article titled, [Shear Wave Elastography Detects Asymptomatic Changes of the Liver among Diabetes Mellitus Type 2 Patients](#), explores the use of specialized radiological monitoring for Type 2 diabetes patients with chronic liver disease. The collaborating scientist-researchers are Dr. Bárbara L. Riestra-Candelaria, Juan Carlos Jorge, Miriam Rodríguez, Gory Ballester-Ortiz & Loida A. González-Rodríguez



Read the article [here](#).

University of Puerto Rico Publishes Cancer-Related Research Article

Researchers at the University of Puerto Rico - Medical Sciences campus published an article in the journal [Trends in Cancer](#). The article is titled [Building Diverse Mentoring Networks that Transcend Boundaries in Cancer Research](#). The article highlights the critical importance of developing the scientific identity of peer scientists through robust, flexible mentoring networks that can help to ameliorate the severe lack of underrepresented minority scholars in biomedical research.

Read the article [here](#).

OPE Employee Spotlight Nalini Lamba-Nieves

Nalini Lamba-Nieves is the lead program specialist for the [Strengthening Institutions Program](#). Lamba-Nieves has previously worked with the Hispanic-Serving Institutions Program and the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Program. She has also worked with the CARES Act Program since its inception, processing awards and managing hundreds of grants to ensure students and educational institutions receive ongoing financial support throughout the Coronavirus pandemic. Lamba-Nieves has proudly served the Department for 20 years. She dedicates her career to ensuring all students, regardless of their background or socio-economic status, can obtain a quality postsecondary education. Lamba-Nieves takes pride in helping traditionally disadvantaged populations have opportunities to achieve their dreams.



Calendar of Events

OPE Peer Review Opportunities

The Department announces ongoing opportunities for individuals to participate in its peer review process for competitive grant funding applications. Learn how to become a peer reviewer in the [Department's peer reviewer toolkit](#) and visit the [Department's peer review FAQs](#).

Grantee Satisfaction Survey Results


View the final results of the 2020 Grantee Satisfaction Survey

The Department invites you to view the [2020 Grantee Satisfaction Survey](#). Thank you to the 900 OPE grantee project directors for sharing feedback and suggestions for improvement with the Department. Our offices use the survey data collected to improve the delivery of services to our grantee community. Contact your Department program officer to learn more about the 2020 Grantee Satisfaction Survey.

Share Your Good News With the Grantee Community

Email photos, stories, updates and other news to OPE Management and Support Unit, at Sariane.leigh@ed.gov or call 202-453-7768 



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