Keeping the Promise
ISU 4U Promise helps make college more accessible and affordable to a targeted group of underserved kids in Des Moines

Ten-year-old Aleena Tran isn’t afraid to dream big about her future.

Walking through the hallway at King Elementary School with her sparkly kitty lunch bag, Aleena imagines that someday she will be an educator who helps students solve multiplication problems, memorize state capitals, and study the planets.

“I really want to be a teacher,” Aleena said. “I believe that my dream will come true, because I feel that many people support my dream. This makes me happy.”

The ISU 4U Promise program begins nurturing dreams like Aleena’s – as early as kindergarten – with a rich curriculum of activities, special events, and speeches.

Promising kids learn from ISU students and educators that it is possible for them to attend one of Iowa State’s six under-graduate colleges. New worlds unfold as these kids learn that they can become an entomologist who studies bugs, or a business, among other careers.

“My major is meaningful to me because I know that teachers play a huge role in children’s lives as they grow up,” Bailey Oberbroeckling, an elementary education major, told writer Lynn Campbell for a story in the College of Human Sciences magazine.

Iowa State offers degree programs leading to professions working with children and families

Aleena Tran works with her fifth-grade teacher, Brooke Miller-Fry (‘03 elementary education), on math problems at King Elementary.

The program also provides generous tuition awards.

How the Promise works
ISU 4U Promise was conceptualized in 2013 by then-ISU President Steven Leath (L) and State Representative Ako Abdul-Samad. Created to make college more accessible and affordable for students at King and Moulton elementary schools in Des Moines, the program carves a supportive, positive path from elementary school to Iowa State’s front door.

“We show these kids that the future is full of possibilities, and we expose them to all kinds of new ideas,” said Kaya Pippsit, assistant program director for ISU 4 U Promise. “We are selling enthusiasm.”

The program also features before- and after-school programs, family events, back-to-school nights, and field trips. Fifth graders tour the ISU campus, and high-school students stay in the residence halls during an overnight campus visit.

To receive the ISU 4U Promise tuition award, students must graduate fifth grade at King or Moulton elementary schools, stay in the district, and graduate from a Des Moines public high school. The award will vary, depending on the number of years students attend King or Moulton, up to full tuition. To maintain eligibility, students must remain active in the program, meet attendance standards, take the ACT, and earn acceptance into ISU.

Graduating to bigger things
The oldest students in the program are currently high school juniors who plan to enter ISU in the fall of 2018. More than half of these 22 students, including Somerle Rhiner, are eligible for free tuition.

With plans to major in premedical and health sciences at ISU, Somerle wants to become a doctor. “I am so excited to attend Iowa State,” she said. “I just want to go to college now!”

“Dreams are coming true for me and many other students,” she said. “The tuition is important, but the support I’ve received and the skills I’ve learned are even more valuable.”

Program organizers identify student skills and harness those talents. Somerle was selected to mentor young students, and she has spoken to large groups at

Financial Aid, Des Moines Public Schools, and numerous community organizations and businesses in the Moulton and King neighborhoods.

“It is very rewarding to see an enthusiastic child proclaim, ‘I want to be a food scientist!’ or ‘I want to be an event planner!’” Pippsit said. “Many people work hard to show these kids that their futures are bright.”

Carole Gieseke

Somerle Rhiner stands in the library of Callanan Middle School after participating in a mentorship program with students at the school.

Callanan Middle School. These experiences have helped her to secure career-related opportunities. “I do volunteer work, and this summer I will job shadow at a hospital,” she said.

It takes a village to keep a Promise
A unique fusion of education, community, and business partners works year-round to ensure that ISU 4U Promise is successful.

“Everyone pulls together to create a sense of community and friendship, so these kids have a strong support system that carries them through grade school and into their college years,” Pippsit said. Each year, ISU officials attend King and Moulton fifth-grade graduation ceremonies to demonstrate their commitment to each child’s goals and dreams.

Promise partners include the ISU School of Education, ISU Extension and Outreach, Human Development and Family Studies,

Financial Aid, Des Moines Public Schools, and numerous community organizations and businesses in the Moulton and King neighborhoods.

“I am so excited to attend Iowa State,” she said. “I just want to become a doctor. I am so excited to attend King and Moulton, up to full tuition. To maintain eligibility, students must remain active in the program, meet attendance standards, take the ACT, and earn acceptance into ISU.

A practicum student works with young children in Iowa State’s Child Development Laboratory School.

Careers with kids
Iowa State offers degree programs leading to professions working with children and families

I want to work with kids.” That’s a common request when students first arrive at Iowa State and are just starting to think about majors and careers. For those students, ISU has a number of programs from which they can choose.

Elementary education; early childhood education; and child, adult, and family services degree programs – all offered through the College of Human Sciences – prepare Iowa State students for careers in teaching, special education, child care, youth services, advocacy programs, preschool education, and more. These majors, which allow graduates to connect one-on-one with children and youth, are considered to be some of the most meaningful degree programs available, according to findings of a national survey of 1.4 million college graduates.

“My major is meaningful to me because I know that teachers play a huge role in children’s lives as they grow up,” Bailey Oberbroeckling, an elementary education major, told writer Lynn Campbell for a story in the College of Human Sciences magazine.

Iowa State’s Child Development Laboratory School is a hands-on resource for students in early childhood, where they gain valuable experience working with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. And early childhood majors also have an opportunity to work with students in kindergarten through third grade in area schools before they student-teach.

Elementary education students learn to teach the basics – like math, reading, and science – and also can choose to specialize in an area such as art or coaching. The child, adult, and family services major prepares students to work with young children and their families, making Iowa and the world a better place.

“Everyone pulls together to create a sense of community and friendship, so these kids have a strong support system that carries them through grade school and into their college years,” Pippsit said. Each year, ISU officials attend King and Moulton fifth-grade graduation ceremonies to demonstrate their commitment to each child’s goals and dreams.

Promise partners include the ISU School of Education, ISU Extension and Outreach, Human Development and Family Studies,

Financial Aid, Des Moines Public Schools, and numerous community organizations and businesses in the Moulton and King neighborhoods.

“It is very rewarding to see an enthusiastic child proclaim, ‘I want to be a food scientist!’ or ‘I want to be an event planner!’” Pippsit said. “Many people work hard to show these kids that their futures are bright.”

Angie Haggerty

“Everyone pulls together to create a sense of community and friendship, so these kids have a strong support system that carries them through grade school and into their college years,” Pippsit said. Each year, ISU officials attend King and Moulton fifth-grade graduation ceremonies to demonstrate their commitment to each child’s goals and dreams.

Promise partners include the ISU School of Education, ISU Extension and Outreach, Human Development and Family Studies, Financial Aid, Des Moines Public Schools, and numerous community organizations and businesses in the Moulton and King neighborhoods.

“It is very rewarding to see an enthusiastic child proclaim, ‘I want to be a food scientist!’ or ‘I want to be an event planner!’” Pippsit said. “Many people work hard to show these kids that their futures are bright.”

Angie Haggerty

“My major is meaningful to me because I know that teachers play a huge role in children’s lives as they grow up.” Bailey Oberbroeckling