

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

## 2020–2021 Evaluation Results Executive Summary

### Summary of Findings

GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) Austin is a federally funded grant program encouraging economically disadvantaged students and their families to have high educational expectations, graduate high school academically ready for college, and understand how to pay for postsecondary education. In 2020–2021, the program's fourth federally funded year, GEAR UP served a cohort of 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students in the class of 2024 ( $n = 2,650$ ) across seven high schools.

Nearly all GEAR UP students received support services relevant to college preparation. Evaluation findings suggest that students, teachers, and parents had a positive perspective on the role of the program services in college preparation.

#### *GEAR UP implementation outcomes for students included:*

- Ninety-seven percent of GEAR UP students participated in one or more services.
- The majority of GEAR UP students reported tutoring (74%), mentoring (74%), and counseling (73%) as most helpful for college preparation.
- Seventy-two percent of GEAR UP students reported their facilitators were helpful in preparing them for college and career.
- A greater percentage of GEAR UP students than of non-GEAR UP students passed Texas Success Initiative (TSI) English language arts and reading (ELAR).
- GEAR UP students who participated in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) classes had higher passing rates in advanced-level courses, State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) end-of-course (EOC) algebra 1, biology, and English 1, and TSI ELAR and math than did GEAR UP students who did not participate in AVID classes.

#### *GEAR UP implementation outcomes for teachers included:*

- Ninety-six percent of teachers at GEAR UP campuses felt comfortable explaining the college process to students.
- Teachers at GEAR UP campuses were perceived by the majority of students as supportive in preparing them for college and career.

#### *GEAR UP implementation outcomes for parents included:*

- Seventy-five percent of GEAR UP students thought their parents helped them prepare for college and career.
- The majority of GEAR UP parents regarded college visits (77%) and individual meetings with facilitators / counselors (72%) as the most helpful activities supporting them to prepare their child for college.

## Recommendations

The evaluation results informed future actions for program improvement.

**Provide more information about college preparation.** Some students requested more information about college preparation, including college credits, advanced courses, college and career options, and financial aid. As GEAR UP students are at the high school level, topics about college and career preparation appear to draw an increased attention. We recommend the program continue to spend more time informing students about college requirements, college options, and financial aid / scholarships.

**Increase opportunities for family participation.** The program almost achieved its goal of involving at least 50% of families in GEAR UP services in the 2020–2021 school year. Data across years consistently demonstrated families' perceptions about the helpfulness of individual meetings with facilitators / counselors in supporting families for students' college preparation. Therefore, the program should continue to expand outreach to families so they have more opportunities to participate in family services. Families could take these opportunities to know more about how to support their children in college preparation.



**Provide more consistent implementation of GEAR UP services across GEAR UP campuses.** This year, campus variations continued to exist in the implementation of GEAR UP services, such as tutoring, college visits, counseling, and job site visits. We recommend the program continue to work toward a more consistent implementation of GEAR UP services at all GEAR UP campuses.

**Encourage more GEAR UP students to take and complete TSI assessments.** The program objectives expected that by the end of each year, the majority of GEAR UP students can

demonstrate college readiness measured by STAAR, SAT, ACT, or TSI exams. Data indicated that only a handful of GEAR UP students have met the TSI passing standard in ELAR. GEAR UP students are entering into the second year of high school in the 2020–2021 school year and might be more academically ready for TSI exams. Therefore, the program should continue to encourage more students to take TSI exams and prepare them to pass the exams. We recommend the program incorporate TSI preparation into the curriculum or take advantage of family outreach opportunities to advocate the importance of TSI exams.

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