



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

2018–2019 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 2018–2019, the program's second federally funded year, GEAR UP Austin served a cohort of 7th-grade students ($n = 2,536$) across 11 middle 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-eight percent of GEAR UP students participated in one or more services.
- The majority of GEAR UP students reported college visits (66%), tutoring (61%), and classroom visits from GEAR UP facilitators (58%) as helpful for college preparation.
- Seventy-two percent of GEAR UP students reported their facilitators were helpful in preparing them for college and career.
- The percentage of GEAR UP students who passed advanced courses was similar to that of non-GEAR UP students.
- Greater percentages of GEAR UP students who participated in college visits than of GEAR UP students who did not participate in college visits enrolled in advanced courses and passed State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading and math.

GEAR UP implementation outcomes for teachers included:

- Ninety-three percent of teachers at GEAR UP campuses were confident in their knowledge of how to help students meet their college and career goals.
- 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 (75%) and individual meetings with facilitators/counselors (64%) as the most helpful activities supporting them to prepare their child for college.

Recommendations

The evaluation results informed recommendations for program improvement.

Increase opportunities for college and career exploration. Students were in favor of college visits and career-related activities. They liked the experiences/activities that helped them think about colleges and careers. Students felt it was helpful to talk with college students/professionals about college preparation. Teachers also recommended visits from professionals/college students as helpful for college preparation. College visits appeared to be related to academic achievement; therefore, the GEAR UP program should provide more opportunities for college visits. Field trip experiences could provide students with a vivid impression of what college and career life look like and therefore inspire them with a vision of college and career goals.

Provide more information about financial aid/scholarships. Students expressed a desire to know more about financial aid/scholarships that would prepare them for college. Parents suggested the program provide students with more information about financial aid/scholarships. Preparing students and parents at the middle school level for financial planning would be an effective strategy to motivate students to go to college. We recommend campus facilitators spend more time educating students about financial planning through more student workshops, one-on-one counseling, and online resources.

Provide more information about college preparation tasks. Students were interested in knowing more about college preparation steps, such as which classes to take, grade requirements, grade point average (GPA), and admission tests. Teachers suggested the program provide students with information, including a checklist of tasks students need to do for their future education, preparation for high school transition, and the college application process. As the program continues to educate students about college preparation tasks, students should better understand how to prepare for their future education and career.

Increase opportunities for family participation. Considering that fewer than half of families participated in GEAR UP services in the 2018–2019 school year, the program should expand outreach to families. With more opportunities for family participation, the likelihood of increasing families' knowledge about postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing would be higher.

Increase access to program services for Hispanic, African American, and economically disadvantaged students. Findings showed much lower percentages of Hispanic and African American and economically disadvantaged students than of their peers participated in counseling and family services. The GEAR UP program aims to prepare traditionally underrepresented groups and economically disadvantaged students for college. In alignment with its goals, the program should strategize to provide students with more equitable access to its services.

Provide more consistent implementation of GEAR UP services across GEAR UP campuses. Campus variations existed in the implementation of GEAR UP services, such as college visits, counseling, job site visits, and tutoring. A consistent implementation of GEAR UP services at all GEAR UP campuses would help ensure the fulfillment of the GEAR UP program's implementation objectives.

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