



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

## 2020 GEAR UP Student College Aspiration Results Summary

### Introduction

The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) Austin has multiple project objectives aiming to match GEAR UP student outcomes with non-GEAR UP student outcomes. The Austin Independent School District (AISD) Student Climate Survey measures students' aspirations to enroll in college, and the gap between GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP students has been persistent since the grant began in the Spring 2018 semester. This report is focused on GEAR UP students' characteristics, service participation and performance, disaggregated by their college aspirations (i.e., yes, maybe, and no). The report aims to help program staff have a better understanding of aspiration gaps and address GEAR UP students' needs.

Of the 1,219 GEAR UP students who answered the college aspiration question<sup>1</sup> in the 2019–2020 AISD Student Climate Survey, 54% ( $n = 654$ ) indicated they planned to go to college after high school, 39% ( $n = 476$ ) indicated they maybe would go to college, and 7% ( $n = 89$ ) indicated they would not go to college. Of the 1,450 non-GEAR UP students who answered the college aspiration question in 2019–2020, 80% ( $n = 1,162$ ) indicated they planned to go to college after high school, 17% ( $n = 248$ ) indicated they maybe would go to college, and 3% ( $n = 40$ ) indicated they would not go to college. The purpose of this report is to provide descriptive information about GEAR UP students who answered the college aspiration question in the 2019–2020 AISD Student Climate Survey and to inform program staff who make implementation decisions. The program staff aim to know more about these students and to better understand and change aspiration gaps. Findings were focused in the following areas: (a) student characteristics, (b) GEAR UP service participation, (c) advanced course enrollment and completion, (d) Texas Success Initiative (TSI) reading and writing assessment results, (e) attendance, and (f) discipline.

### College Aspiration Highlights

In summary, GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college after high school had better performance than did GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college. Specifically, GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college after high school were more likely to:

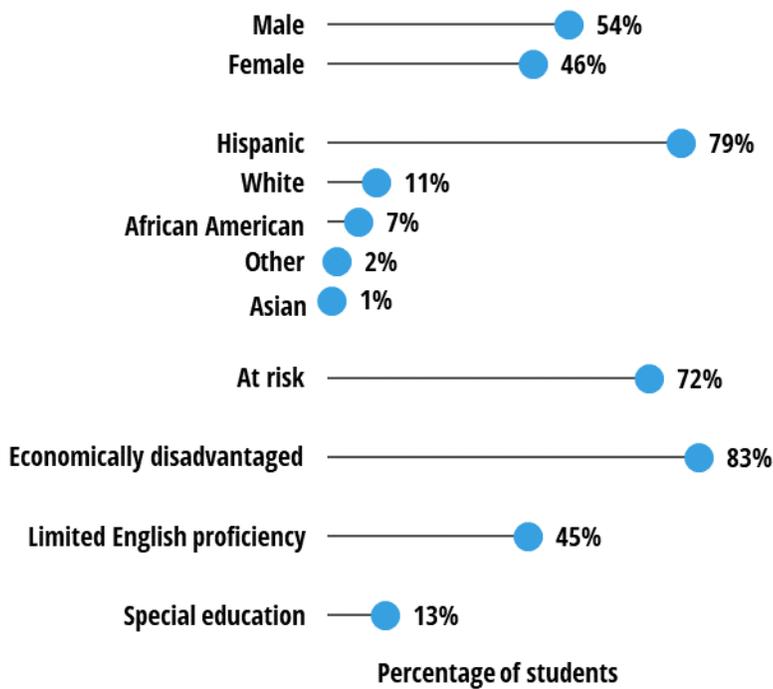
<sup>1</sup> The college aspiration question in the AISD Student Climate Survey is “I will go to college after high school (Yes, Maybe, or No)”.

- participate in enhanced counseling and advising activities and family engagement activities
- enroll in advanced-level courses
- pass TSI reading and writing
- have an attendance rate greater than 90%
- have fewer campus discipline incidents

### Student Characteristics

Of the 1,219 GEAR UP students who answered the college aspiration question in the AISD Student Climate Survey, 83% qualified for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL), 79% were Hispanic, and 72% were at risk (Figure 1). “At risk” applies to students who meet state-defined criteria for increased likelihood of dropping out of school. These criteria include poor academic performance, grade-level retention, alternative education, being a parent or pregnant, expulsion, previous dropout, limited English proficiency (LEP), homeless, and in care or custody of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (DPRS). A student with a disability may be defined as at risk, but not necessarily (Department of Campus and District Accountability, 2016).

**Figure 1.**  
The majority of GEAR UP students were Hispanic, economically disadvantaged, and at risk.



Source. 2019–2020 AISD student demographics records

Note. Other includes American Indian or Alaska native and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

## The Effect of College Aspirations

GEAR UP activities aimed to prepare students for college. Increasing students’ college awareness paves a path to college enrollment.

A study conducted by Lapan and Poynton (2020) suggested that high school seniors who decided to enroll in a 2-year or 4-year college were more likely than were students who had not made that decision to have developed a college-going aspirational identity by at least 10<sup>th</sup> grade and to have set higher postsecondary educational goals.

Chukhray et al. (2019) reported that families setting college-going expectations early on motivated students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds to attend college. Chukhray et al. found students perceived attending college and taking care of families financially as a way to give back to their families. Chukhray et al. indicated that incorporating parents into discussions about students’ college aspirations and the college application process is important for college-advising efforts.



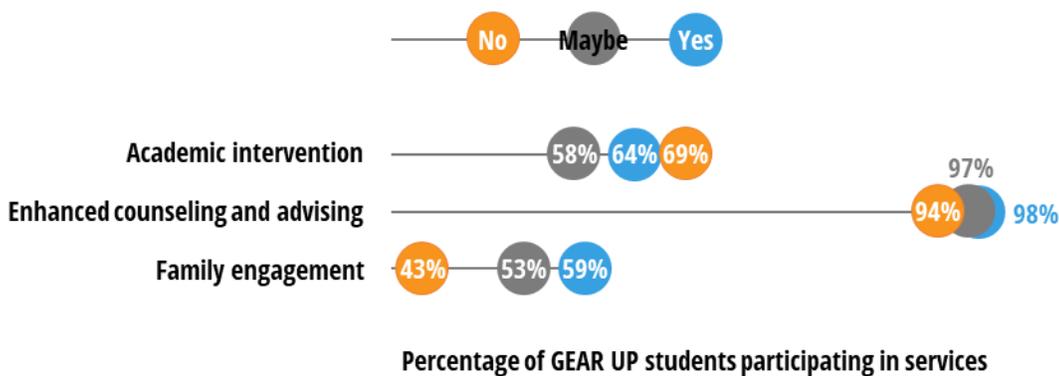
**GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college participated more in enhanced counseling and advising activities than did GEAR UP students indicating no.**

Almost all GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college after high school participated in enhanced counseling and advising activities (Figure 2). More than half of GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college participated in family engagement activities.

GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college were more likely to participate in academic intervention activities than were GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college. Of the 753 GEAR UP students who participated in academic intervention activities, 93% ( $n = 698$ ) participated in Austin Partners in Education (APIE) tutoring. Many GEAR UP students served by APIE were categorized as high need and had failing grades in their courses for one or more grading periods. Of the 276 GEAR UP students participating in academic intervention activities who indicated maybe they would go to college, 94% participated in APIE tutoring. Of the 61 GEAR UP students participating in academic intervention activities who indicated they would not go to college, 93% participated in APIE tutoring. Of the 416 GEAR UP students participating in academic intervention activities who indicated they would go to college, 92% participated in APIE tutoring.

Figure 2.

**GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college after high school were more likely than those indicating they would not go to college to participate in enhanced counseling and advising and family engagement activities.**

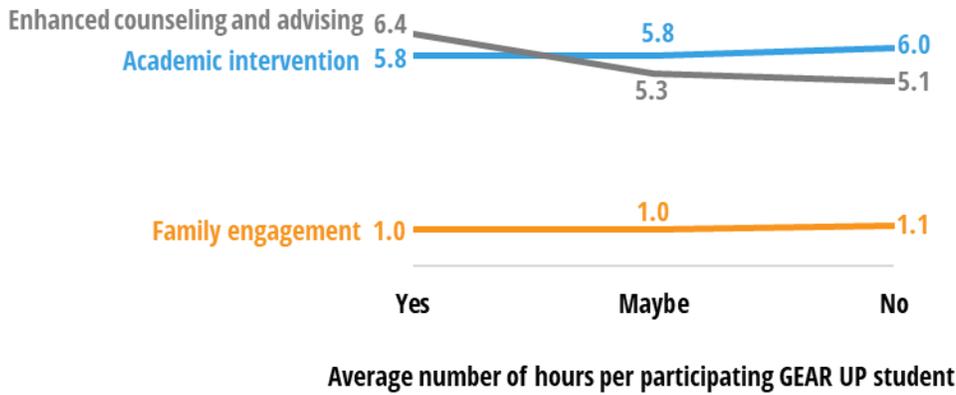


Source. AISD eCST data system, 2019–2020

GEAR UP students indicating they would go to college after high school had an average of 6.4 hours of enhanced counseling and advising activities, 5.8 hours of academic intervention activities, and 1.0 hour of family engagement activities (Figure 3). GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college had on average slightly more hours of academic intervention activities (6.0) and family engagement activities (1.1) than did the other two groups.

Figure 3.

**GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college after high school had more hours of enhanced counseling and advising than did those indicating they would not go to college, and had fewer hours of academic intervention and family engagement.**



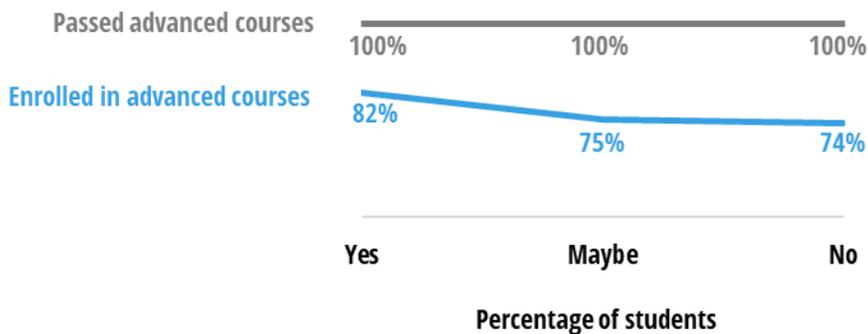
Source. AISD eCST data system, 2019–2020

**GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college performed better academically than did GEAR UP students indicating no.**

Eighty-two percent of GEAR UP students indicating they would go to college after high school enrolled in advanced-level courses, 75% of those indicating maybe they would go to college enrolled in advanced-level courses, and 74% of those indicating they would not go to college enrolled in advanced-level courses (Figure 4). These three groups had the same advanced-level course passing rates.

Figure 4.

**The percentage of GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college who enrolled in advanced-level courses was higher than that of GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college; all students in the three groups passed advanced-level courses.**



Source. 2019–2020 AISD course enrollment records

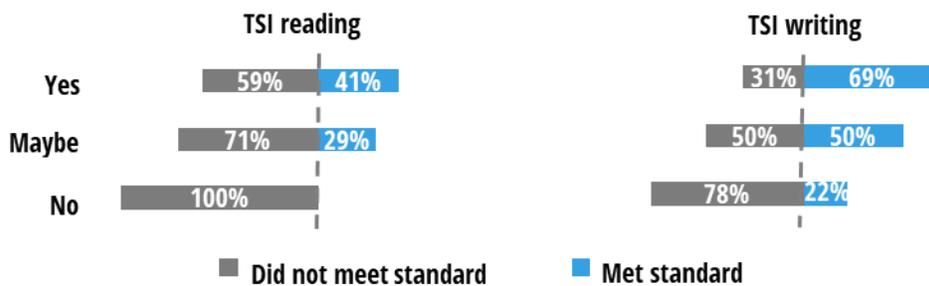
Note. The difference in percentages of GEAR UP students enrolling in advanced-level courses was significant between students indicating yes they would go to college and those indicating maybe ( $p = .01$ ).

In 2019–2020, 25% ( $n = 166$ ) of GEAR UP students indicating yes they would go to college took TSI reading, TSI writing, or TSI math; 21% ( $n = 102$ ) of GEAR UP students indicating maybe they would go to college took TSI reading, TSI writing, or TSI math; and 20% ( $n = 18$ ) of GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college took TSI reading, TSI writing, or TSI math. Given the low number of GEAR UP students indicating yes ( $n = 11$ ), maybe ( $n = 15$ ), or no ( $n = 2$ ) they would go to college who took TSI math, results related to TSI math were not included in the report.

GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college were more likely to meet the TSI passing standard in reading and writing than were GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college (Figure 5). Many GEAR UP students indicating yes (69%) or maybe (50%) they would go to college met the TSI passing standard in writing, as compared with 22% for GEAR UP students indicating they would not go college. Notably, the differences in the TSI writing passing rates between the three groups were statistically significant.

Figure 5.

The percentages of GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college who met the TSI passing standard in reading and writing were higher than those of GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college.



Source. AISD eCST data system, 2019–2020; 2019–2020 AISD student TEAMS records

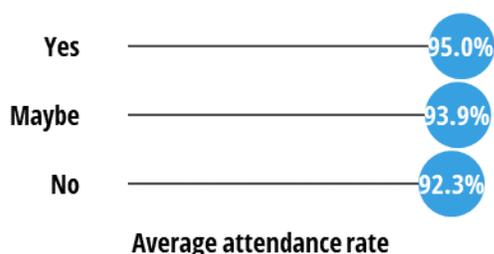
Note. The differences in percentages of GEAR UP students passing TSI writing between students indicating yes they would go to college and those indicating maybe were significant ( $p < .01$ ), between students indicating yes they would go to college and those indicating no were significant ( $p < .01$ ), and between students indicating maybe they would go to college and those indicating no were significant ( $p = .04$ ).

### GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college had better attendance than did GEAR UP students indicating no.

GEAR UP students indicating they would go to college after high school had the highest attendance rate (95.0%), followed by GEAR UP students indicating maybe they would go to college (93.9%) and GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college (92.3%; Figure 6).

Figure 6.

The attendance rate of GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college was higher than that of GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college.

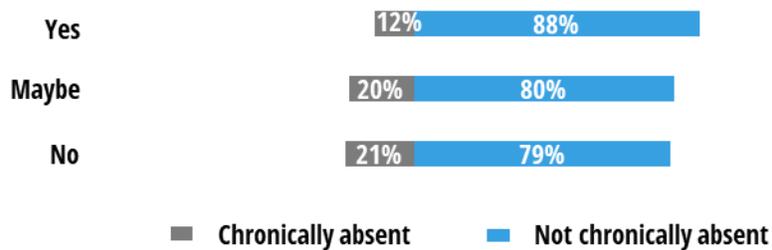


Source. 2019–2020 AISD attendance records

A gap existed between GEAR UP students indicating they would go to college after high school and GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college, with respect to chronic absenteeism (i.e., less than 90% attendance during the academic year). Eighty-eight percent of GEAR UP students indicating they would go to college after high school had an attendance rate greater than 90%, meaning 12% were chronically absent (Figure 7). In contrast, 21% of GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college after high school were chronically absent.

Figure 7.

**The percentage of GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college who were chronically absent was lower than that of GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college.**



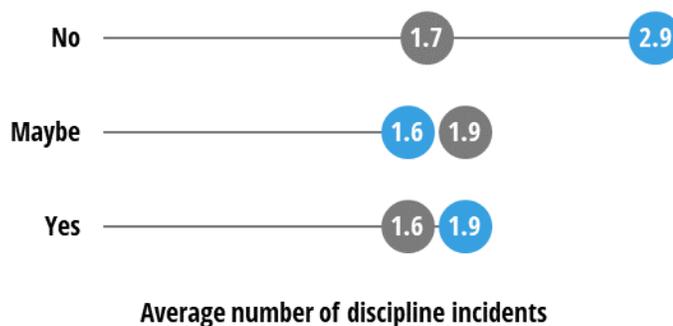
Source. 2019–2020 AISD attendance records

**GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college had fewer campus discipline incidents than did GEAR UP students indicating no.**

GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college after high school had an average of less than 2.0 campus discipline incidents, while GEAR UP students indicating they would not go college had an average of 2.9 campus discipline incidents (Figure 8). However, GEAR UP students indicating maybe they would go to college had on average a slightly higher number of removal or suspension incidents than did the other two groups.

Figure 8.

**GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college had fewer campus discipline incidents than did GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college; however, GEAR UP students indicating maybe they would go to college had slightly more removal or suspension incidents than did the other two groups.**



Source. 2019–2020 AISD discipline records

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Data presented in this report found that GEAR UP students indicating yes or maybe they would go to college after high school had better academic performance, greater attendance, and fewer campus discipline incidents than did GEAR UP students indicating they would not go to college. The results informed recommendations for program improvement.

- **Increase opportunities for collaboration between different programs with similar goals.** As students who had higher college aspirations showed better performance, the program staff should disseminate findings to other programs preparing students for college and career and seek continued collaboration for common goals. We recommend the program staff continue to create opportunities to strengthen students' college aspirations through collaborative activities with other programs with similar goals.
- **Provide more information about college and career preparation and financial aid processes.** Findings showed almost half of GEAR UP students who participated in the AISD Student Climate Survey indicated maybe (39%) or no (17%) they would go to college. Understanding the obstacles for students to pursue college education would be the first and foremost step to increase students' college aspirations. Ensuring all students understand the definition of college as any type of postsecondary education would help motivate students' college aspiration. Also, the program staff should continue to focus on students who indicated maybe they would go to college and to understand the root cause of what would propel them to become more assured to pursue college education.

In addition, findings obtained from the student focus groups conducted in the 2018 and 2019 fall semesters revealed career goals motivated their college aspirations (Wang & Orr, 2019 and 2020). Also, findings obtained from student focus groups and surveys demonstrated that students' main concern about college education was college tuition. The program staff should continue to provide more opportunities for college and career exploration and more information about financial aid and scholarships.

- **Provide more college and career readiness training to all teachers and staff.** Teachers and staff play a critical role in motivating students to go to college. Equipping teachers and staff with knowledge about college and career readiness activities provides students with additional avenue for college and career preparation support. Therefore, we recommend the program staff continue to involve all teachers and staff to participate in professional development activities related to college and career readiness.
- **Increase participation of Hispanic, African American, and economically disadvantaged students in GEAR UP services.** GEAR UP students' participation in GEAR UP services across the last two years consistently showed lower percentages of Hispanic and African American and economically disadvantaged students than of their peers participated in college visits and family services (Wang & Looby, 2019 and 2020). GEAR UP students' participation in GEAR UP services increases their exposure to college and career options and college aspirations. Ensuring all GEAR UP students' participation in GEAR UP services seems critical. The program should continue to increase Hispanic, African American, and economically disadvantaged students' access to its services.

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