

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

2019–2020 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 2019–2020, the program’s third federally funded year, GEAR UP Austin served a cohort of 8th-grade students ($n = 2,546$) 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-seven percent of GEAR UP students participated in one or more services.
- The majority of GEAR UP students reported college visits (63%) and classroom visits from GEAR UP facilitators (52%) as helpful for college preparation.
- Sixty-nine 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 same (100%) as that of non-GEAR UP students.
- A greater percentage of GEAR UP students who received a high dosage of Austin Partners In Education (APIE) tutoring than of GEAR UP students who received a low dosage of APIE tutoring passed Texas Success Initiative (TSI) reading and writing.

GEAR UP implementation outcomes for teachers included:

- Ninety-four 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-one percent of GEAR UP students thought their parents helped them prepare for college and career.
- The majority of GEAR UP parents regarded college visits (76%) and individual meetings with facilitators / counselors (63%) 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. Some students requested more field trips. They liked the experiences that helped them understand college and career options. The GEAR UP program should continue to provide more opportunities for college visits.

Provide more information about financial aid / scholarships. Many students' top concern about college enrollment was college tuition. Students desired to know more about financial aid / scholarships that would prepare them for college. Parents also indicated interests in seeking financial aid / scholarships for their child's college. As GEAR UP students



enter into high school next year, topics about financial planning for college become more crucial. We recommend the program continue to spend more time educating students about financial planning.

Increase opportunities for family participation. The program achieved its goal of involving at least 50% of families in GEAR UP services in the 2019–2020 school year. Given the importance of family engagement in students' college preparation, 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 postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing.

Increase participation of Hispanic, African American, and economically disadvantaged students in program services. Findings showed lower percentages of Hispanic and African American and economically disadvantaged students than of their peers participated in college visits and family services. Because students, teachers, and parents regarded college

visits as the most helpful GEAR UP activity that prepared students for college, ensuring all students participate in college visits seems critical. In alignment with its goals that prepare traditionally underrepresented groups and economically disadvantaged students for college, the program should continue 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 fulfill the GEAR UP program's implementation objectives.

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November 2020

Publication 19.45