Texas GEAR UP: Beyond Grad

Annual Implementation Report

Evaluation of Years 1 and 2

Submitted to:
Texas Education Agency
William B. Travis Building
1701 North Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701-1494

Submitted by:
ICF
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031

and

Agile Analytics
1621 West 6th Street
Austin, TX 78703

Submitted on:
April 2021

Executive Summary

A.1   Program Overview

The T H [D V   (G X F D W L R Q) Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP): Beyond Grad grant S U R J U D P   U H I H U U H G   W R   D V ³ * (in this report) serves approximately 10,000 students from six Texas independent school districts

readiness programs. TNTP also conducted a needs assessment in Year 1 to help inform the PD to be delivered in Year 2; most districts reported that their needs assessment findings revealed the need to increase rigor.

Key Findings: Program Year 2

⋊   **Academic Initiatives.** School principals credited the increase in Algebra I enrollment among Grade 8 students in Year 2 compared to previous years in the district with their focus on GEAR UP goals and objectives. Districts also implemented strategies such as aligning middle school and high school academic language and curriculum and focusing on increasing Advanced Placement (AP) test scores to help increase preparedness and success in advanced courses among students.

ᚷ **Scaling Initiatives Across Texas.** Services provided by GEAR UP, such as TXOC CCR curriculum, were piloted by TEA in the six GEAR UP districts in Year 2 as well as three additional school districts in Texas with the intention that such services may be able to be scaled statewide. Feedback from districts that participated in the TXOC CCR pilot program in Year 2 indicated that they agreed that the curriculum provided opportunities to learn about careers and endorsements; however, they less frequently agreed that the materials were grade-appropriate. They were also generally satisfied with the instructor resources, student resources, and the trainings they received.

Promising Practices

Based on an analysis of implementation in Years 1 and 2, the evaluation team identified the following set of promising practices:

ᚷ **Hire current personnel within the district to serve in the GEAR UP coordinator role.** The District 5 principal explained that because the GEAR UP coordinator previously held a role in the district before GEAR UP, personnel in the school knew the coordinator and did not have to spend time to build a relationship. The existing relationships help to expedite buy-in to the grant and the integration of the program at the high school.

ᚷ **Increase AP class rigor and student expectations to increase AP scores.** To help increase rigor in AP classes and the number of students who passed AP exams, District 3 personnel conducted a book study on All 4s and 5s: A Guide to Teaching and Leading Advanced Placement Programs by Andrew Sharos. A high school administrator said that this study helped their school to understand how to set higher expectations for their students enrolled in AP courses and also increase the rigor of the courses. The administrator credited this new approach as leading to an increase in AP examination scores.

ᚷ

students across all grades. As part of their GEAR UP sustainability planning, the coordinator added that the district planned to implement the AVID curriculum in the Kindergarten through Grade 5 classes to help enhance the college-going culture across the district.

X **Make statewide services and resources easily accessible for all educators.** To help increase successful scaling of resources, Texas OnCourse provided their curriculum and related resources on their public-facing website that can be accessed by anyone. This effort increased the accessibility of all of the components of their TXOC CCR curriculum work to not only those who participated in the pilot, but anyone interested in the resources.

X **Provide question and answer sessions for parents/guardians with older students and/or recent graduates during parent events.** District 6 personnel held an event in which parents and families were able to ask recent college graduates from the district questions about their experiences and recommendations for future students. Class of 2024 parents ZKR DWWHQGHG WKH HYHQW QRWHG WKH\ WULHG WR DVVHVV HDUO\ SWXGHQW experiences.

X **Provide activities to actively engage students and parents in college and career events.** Districts 2, 5, and 6 reported that they used scavenger hunts in student and parent events to help maintain participant engagement and received positive feedback regarding these activities.

X **Pair college and career family events with existing parent events.** Districts described connecting with parents and families to provide them with information about GEAR UP and college and career options during events held for other purposes. Providing information at events where parents and families are most likely to be in attendance for other purposes, such as school performances or athletic events, may help personnel connect with parents and families they may otherwise never have reached.

Recommendations

In addition, the evaluation team identified the following recommendations for TEA to consider in future grant implementation and implementation of similar programming outside of GEAR UP:

X **Integrate TXOC CCR curriculum and resources with other existing college and career readiness initiatives and activities.** Strategically aligning TXOC CCR curriculum with other college and career readiness initiatives and activities already implemented at schools, such as AVID courses, may help schools build on their college-going culture and streamline efforts to communicate information to students about postsecondary education, careers, and the transition to high school.

X **Provide additional training to TXOC CCR teachers and administrators to help them expand on and adapt lessons to make them relevant to students across Texas.** To increase the usability of the TXOC CCR resources in a wide variety of settings, trainings on how to adapt lessons so that they may be expanded may be helpful. In addition, providing guidance on how to adapt the content so that it may resonate with students of different backgrounds with different experiences may help to enhance the implementation of the curriculum.

X **Provide grade-relevant college and career readiness services and activities as early as possible.** Districts should consider developing a college-going culture across students of all grades in a grade-appropriate manner. This approach may potentially mitigate common barriers to postsecondary education, such as limited information regarding scho(h A (n)3.a3.9p-2.9904 (di)a