



Year 3 Annual Implementation Report –
Executive Summary

Texas GEAR UP State Grant Evaluation

August 2016

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- § Projective Objective 2.2: By the end of the project's fifth year, 60% of the cohort, including limited English proficient (LEP) students, will complete a pre-AP or AP course.
- § Project Objective 2.3: By the end of the project's sixth year, at least 50% of cohort students will graduate with college credit earned by AP exam or through dual credit.
- § Project Objective 5.1: By the end of the project's fourth year, all cohort students will complete the ACT Aspire or the Preliminary SAT.^[1] By the end of the project's fifth year, all cohort students will complete the SAT or ACT.
- § Project Objective 5.2: By the end of the project's sixth year, the percentage of students meeting criterion on the ACT/SAT will meet or exceed the state average.

Interested readers should view the full report for additional information on all key findings. Select evaluation questions relevant to Year 3 implementation—addressed in the report—include the following:

- § How was Texas GEAR UP SG implemented overall and at each of the six participating schools? To what extent has implementation changed over time?
- § What were student, parent, teacher, and school staff perceptions of Texas GEAR UP SG implementation?
- § What facilitators and barriers were associated with implementation?
- § What practices implemented by grantees were perceived by grantees (students, parents, and staff) to be effective, and therefore a potential best practice?
- § What were students' and parents' levels of understanding regarding readiness (e.g., college aspirations/expectations, college options, being college-ready at each grade level, financing college)?
- §



Schools have shown varied levels of teacher PD implementation (in Year 2, two of seven schools held five vertical teaming events). Year 3 findings reflect overall higher implementation (with continued variability across schools); this includes slightly higher levels of overall student participation in Texas GEAR UP SG student support services (81%). Districts also reported substantially higher levels of student enrollment in four or more advanced courses (24%), mixed progress in parental attendance (3% attended at least three events but 49% attended at least one event), and more vertical teaming events were held.

Implementation

LEVEL AND MIX OF IMPLEMENTATION

Key Takeaway:

Overall, the Year 3 level of implementation was similar across all schools to implementation in Year 2, but was much higher than in Year 1, although variability in the mix of implementation among schools remained as the Texas GEAR UP SG primary cohort transitioned from middle school to high school. Three high schools implemented all 18 strategies tracked in Year 3.

The federal GEAR UP program encourages grantees, including the Texas GEAR UP SG, to engage in a wide range of implementation practices (referred to here as the “mix of implementation”) in order to support project objectives. Table ES.3 provides a high-level overview of the range of implementation activities engaged in to any extent by the six high schools in Year 3. All six high schools implemented the core Texas GEAR UP SG activity types in Year 3: advanced course enrollment, student support services (e.g., tutoring, comprehensive mentoring, counseling/advising), college visits, parent events, teacher PD, and community

Table ES.3. Overview of Implementation Strategies by School, 2014–15

	High School H	High School I	High School J	High School K	High School L	High School M
Implementation Strategies						
Advanced Course Enrollment	X	X	X	X	X	X
AP Course Enrollment	X	X	X	X	X	X
Summer Programs	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support Services: Tutoring	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support Services: Mentoring	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support Services: Counseling/Advising	X	X	X	X	X	X
College Visit	X	X	X	X	X	X
Job Site Visit/Job Shadowing	X	X	X			X
Educational Field Trips	X	X		X		X
Student Workshops/Events	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent Events	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent Counseling/Advising	X	X	X			X
Parent Event on College Preparation/Financial Aid	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent College Visit	X	X	X	X	X	X
Teacher Professional Development	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vertical Teaming Events*	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Alliances	X	X	X	X	X	X
Use of Statewide Services	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total Number of Strategies Implemented (Out of 18)						
	18	18	17	16	15	18

Source: Texas Education Agency, Texas GEAR UP SG Annual Performance Report Data through March 31, 2015; fall 2014 and spring 2015 site visit data.

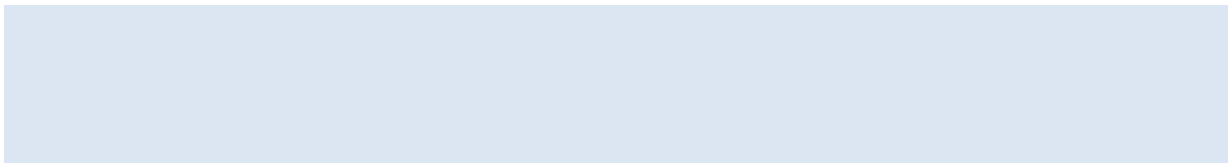
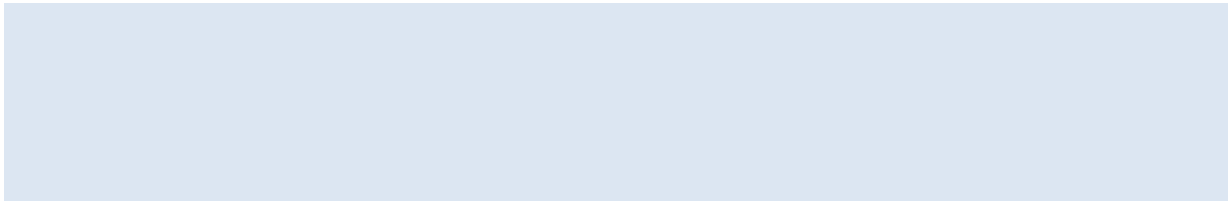
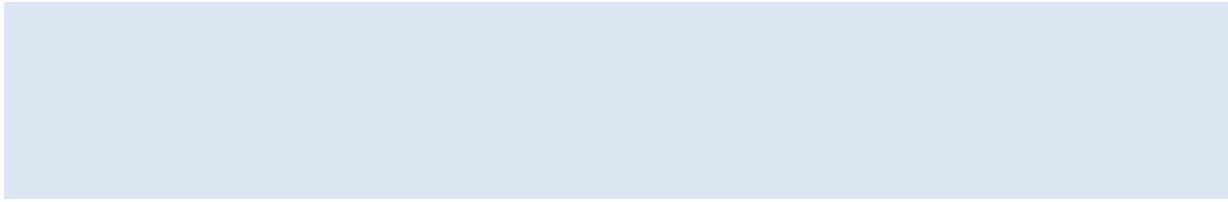
Notes: An “X” indicates that a school reported implementing the strategy, although it does not capture the level of implementation (such as the number of students served) for each strategy. “AP” = advanced placement. Asterisk indicates a new implementation category captured in Year 3.

In addition, Table ES.4 includes indicators regarding whether each school was on target to meet relevant project objectives. At least some schools were on track to meet each objective, except for parental involvement in which all schools were far from meeting the project objective in Year 3. Most schools (all except for High Schools H and I) were on track to meet Project Objective 1.1 regarding Algebra I completion in Grade 9. Only School L was on track to meet Project Objectives 2.2 and 2.3, based on student enrollment in pre-AP and AP courses. Although all schools met Project Objective 3.1 regarding teacher training, only two schools (High Schools K and M) met the annual objective for five days of vertical alignment (Project Objective 3.2). Four of the Texas GEAR UP SG high schools met the objective related to student support services (Project Objective 4.1) and summer programs (Project Objective 4.2). In order to meet near-term objectives (Project Objectives 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 5.1 and 5.2), each Texas GEAR UP SG high school will need to increase its emphasis on advanced course enrollment/completion and preparation for college entrance exams (both test-taking and successful scores).





STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN COLLEGE VISITS AND JOB SITE VISITS





SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION: YEAR 1 THROUGH YEAR 3

In the report, differences in implementation from across time points are highlighted. Table ES.5 summarizes some of the key implementation data comparisons among the first three years of Texas GEAR UP SG.

Table ES.5. Summary Comparison of Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 Implementation Data

Implementation Area	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Level and Mix of Implementation	Varied across districts. One middle school (from District 3) implemented the widest range of activities.	Variability remained; however, overall, implementation was higher. Two middle schools (Districts 1 and 3) implemented a wide range of activities.	District 3 continued to implement a broad range (and have high percentages of student participation) but additional districts also demonstrated successful mix of implementation.
Student Participation in Texas GEAR UP SG Student Support Services	39% of students participated.	78% of students participated.	81% of students participated.
Student Participation in Any Texas GEAR UP SG Activities	81% of students participated.	99% of students participated.	95% of students participated.
Number of Advanced Courses	0% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.	10% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.	24% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.
Enrollment in an Advanced Mathematics Course	22% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics.	43% of students were enrolled in advanced	



Implementation Area	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Parental Attendance at Three or More Texas GEAR UP SG Events^b	No parent at any middle school attended three or more events; 5% of parents participated in at least one event.	7% of parents attended three or more events; 38% of parents attended at least one event.	3% of parents attended three or more events; 49% of parents attended at least one event.
Teacher Professional Development and Vertical Teaming	Most middle schools had already designed and scheduled PD for the school year.	Two middle schools held five days of vertical teaming events.	Two high schools held five days of vertical teaming events.

Source: Texas Education Agency, Texas GEAR UP SG Annual Performance Report Data through March 31, 2015; Student Surveys (Spring 2015).

Note: Texas GEAR UP SG implementation in Year 1 and Year 2 occurred in seven middle schools; In Year 3, implementation occurred in six high schools within the same four districts. N/A reflects areas that the evaluation did not specifically focus on, but are topics of interest for Year 3 implementation.

^a ELA = English language arts. In Year 1, evaluation data did not include advanced course taking for social studies.

^b Parental attendance is defined as any adult household member attending an event associated with the given student.

Key Takeaway:

Although students' educational aspirations and expectations increased in Year 3, the gap between aspirations and expectations widened from Year 2 to Year 3. Students do not expect to achieve as high of an educational outcome as indicated by their aspirations. However, students' reported knowledge of college-related terms/concepts, especially the SAT and ACT, increased from Year 2 to Year 3.

Consistent with prior years, there continued to be multiple indicators in Year 3 that students both need and want financial information as it relates to postsecondary education. With continued implementation of Texas GEAR UP SG activities, students may gain knowledge and information about the financial aspects of college and may view affordability as less of a barrier to educational aspirations.

Student Surveys

Texas GEAR UP SG cohort students completed surveys in fall 2014 and spring 2015. In addition to learning about perceptions of Texas GEAR UP SG implementation, the surveys provided important information about educational aspirations and expectations, knowledge of college financial issues, and knowledge of college-related concepts. Although parent surveys were administered in spring 2015, low response rates prohibit the use of these data in this report.

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Students' aspirations continued to increase on a similar path from prior years with a four percentage point increase from spring 2014 to spring 2015 (compared to a five percentage point increase between spring 2013 and spring 2014). Students' educational aspirations were significantly higher than educational expectations and the gap between them widened from Year 2 to Year 3.⁸ Of students who do not plan to go to college, the greatest percentage selected *concerns about cost* as a main reason for not continuing onto postsecondary education (46% across schools); this was also the case in Year 2 (48% of students selected this option).

⁸ The term significant is used in making comp



KNOWLEDGE ABOUT COLLEGE

Evaluation survey data indicated that Texas GEAR UP SG served schools where the students generally understood the importance of college (65% of students rated themselves as *knowledgeable* or *extremely knowledgeable*) more than the requirements to get accepted (50% of students rated themselves as *knowledgeable* or *extremely knowledgeable*). Students also reported that they continued to need information on specific aspects of college requirements, as only 46% indicated they were *knowledgeable* or *extremely knowledgeable* about the SAT (38% for the ACT). Students' average perceived knowledge of each of the relevant items differed significantly across schools. Only 34% of students selected GEAR UP staff or events as a source for college information (compared to 46% in spring 2014). This implies that Texas GEAR

Key Takeaway:

Situating Texas GEAR UP SG in the context of existing school/district efforts and the priorities of other programs is a way to strengthen the implementation of Texas GEAR UP SG through strategic collaboration.



tutors were most effective when they worked with students who needed remediation or extra support during class time. Additionally, the school hired a student teacher as the afterschool tutor because the individual was already familiar with the students and the course content, and had a demonstrated ability to work with a larger group of students. Similarly, at High School M, providing content-specific tutors proved to be a useful approach to help bolster students' areas of need, specifically related to ELA, in preparation for state exams.

GEAR UP CONFERENCE ENHANCEMENTS

Each year, the Texas GEAR UP SG hosts a Texas GEAR UP conference that brings together GEAR UP programs from across the state to network and share best practices. In Year 3 of Texas GEAR UP SG implementation, there were added components of the statewide conference that site visit participants and collaborator interviewees noted as being particularly effective. For example, involving parents in the conference was an effective approach to helping them become more invested in the program and aware of how they can support the GEAR UP mission at their school. Additionally, many parents and educators liked the GEAR UP Lounge as a central location to network, share ideas, learn first-hand about newly created statewide resources, and seek out supports. AMS Pictures set up the GEAR UP Lounge to introduce statewide resources to attendees.

EXTENDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Instead of a typical one-day PD session that may not be sufficient to help teachers to sustain changes in their instructional practice, High Schools H and I had curriculum specialists available to support teachers' implementation of PBL. Site visit participants spoke about how it was a useful complement to the three Saturdays of PBL training they received. It was also anticipated to be a way to sustain the practices they learned over time by having the curriculum specialists provide feedback, guidance, resources, and ideas regarding the application of PBL in teachers' classrooms.

Recommendations

Based on the range of data analyzed to date, several recommendations with regard to program implementation are made. These include the following:

- § **Continue Progress on Student Perceptions.** Data from Year 3 indicated minimal changes in students' educational aspirations and expectations, agreement that college is important, disagreement that it is too early to think about college, and plans to attend college. In order to progress on these important aspects of the program, TEA and its statewide collaborators are encouraged to provide districts with additional strategies related to increasing awareness and knowledge of college opportunities available to students. Efforts that include targeted outreach to those most at risk might also be a useful strategy. Ongoing attention to helping students set high aspirations and gain confidence that they can expect to achieve will help accelerate progress in this area.
- § **Seek to Better Understand and Potentially Model High School M Implementation.** In Year 3, High School M engaged in the full range of implementation encouraged by the Texas GEAR UP SG program. Student survey data reflected the ways in which these actions may be positively influencing students' perceptions. Successes included strong implementation of mentoring, counseling, college visits, student events, and parent events. High School M had high levels of involvement, high percentage of involvement, and high



with Texas GEAR UP SG or school staff about college entrance requirements. Although there were some exceptions to these generally favorable findings related to High School M, collectively, the findings suggest that this school may serve as an example for specific aspects of Texas GEAR UP SG, as well as being an overall case of success. However, it is important to note that there may be external factors to consider, such as an environment that is particularly receptive to Texas GEAR UP SG services or related programming that reinforces Texas GEAR UP SG goals. During future site visits, the evaluation team will seek to better understand why Texas GEAR UP SG appears to be so successful at this school.

- § **Identify Strategies to Reach Out to Parents.** Similar to prior years, all schools need to identify strategies to improve parental engagement with Texas GEAR UP SG activities, and TEA needs to encourage the Support Center to provide additional leadership in this area based on what was learned regarding why parents do and do not attend events.⁹ Additionally, there was minimal attention devoted to the Parent and Community Engagement Coordinator, a Support Center staff member intended to support schools in this effort. The evaluation team will continue to collect data on these efforts and about parents' perceptions to inform how they might be engaged differently going forward.
- § **Increase Statewide Implementation Efforts.** Although statewide efforts have made significant teacher and student resources available through the Texas GEAR UP website, use within at least the Texas GEAR UP SG cohort continues to be low.¹⁰ Similarly, TEA has identified its Texas Gateway for online resources as a strategy for providing GEAR UP-related teacher PD statewide, but has not yet fully implemented this strategy.¹¹ TEA and its collaborators will want to continue to focus efforts on these statewide project objectives. Consistent with prior years, TEA has experienced some success with implementing the statewide coalition and conference opportunities, and TEA and Texas GEAR UP SG staff should use these conferences as an outlet for communicating and educating about other statewide resources as they become available. One Texas GEAR UP SG coordinator suggested having a section of the website dedicated to GEAR UP parent activities that have occurred nationwide so the staff can get an idea of what has worked well for other school districts then tweak it to fit their own.
- § **Expand and Deepen Sustainability Efforts.** Throughout this report, some early progress toward sustainability emerged, such as how some schools intended to bolster their collaboration with a university to continue mentoring programs in the long term and change the college-going culture so that teachers continue to have high expectations and academically rigorous instruction. The early practices of District 3 in their approach to involving the city council in their advisory council may be a particular practice to monitor as
