



West Virginia **GEARUP** Evaluation

2010 Site Coordinator Group Interviews Summary

July 30, 2010

Revised:
November 2010

Since 1966, Edvantia has been in the business of developing knowledge, resources, and professional services to improve education. A not-for-profit corporation with primary offices in Tennessee and West Virginia, Edvantia offers comprehensive services grounded in research and best practice that help educators meet the needs of all students. Edvantia's national expertise is focused in two areas: **school improvement**: providing successful school improvement coaching and services, especially to underperforming schools; and **program evaluation**: designing and conducting rigorous studies that are relevant and useful for meeting a variety of client needs. Edvantia's clients and funders include federal agencies, state and local education agencies, professional associations, foundations, education product vendors, and others committed to improving education.

For information about Edvantia research, products, or services, contact



P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325 • 304.347.0400 • 800.624.9120 • fax 304.347.0487

One Vantage Way, Suite D-210, Nashville, TN 37228 • 615.565.0101 • fax 615.565.0112

info@edvantia.org • www.edvantia.org

© 2010 by Edvantia

Reproduction of this document is permitted with Edvantia cited as the source.

This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC). Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views of HEPC or its staff.

Edvantia is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer.

Contents

GEAR UP Site Coordinator Group Interviews.....	1
A Brief Word about Methods.....	1
Major Findings	1
Implementation and Reach of Services	1
Extent of Implementation.....	2
GEAR UP Recognition	2
Administrator Support.....	2
Teacher Buy-in and Participation.....	3
Attendance at Events	3
Challenges and Resolutions.....	4
Parental Involvement and Expectations.....	5
Transportation	6
Fiscal Policies and Funding Limitations.....	7
Other Challenges	8
Quality of Activities and Services	9
Parents.....	10
Students.....	10
College Trips and Cultural Experiences	11
Resources and Partnerships.....	12
Resources.....	12
Partnerships.....	14
Other Comments and Considerations	14
Shifting Program Focus	15
Administrative Support	15
Summary and Recommendations	16
Extent of Implementation.....	16
GEAR UP Recognition	16
Administrator Support.....	17
Teacher Buy-in and Participation.....	17
Attendance at Events	17
Parental Involvement and Expectations.....	17

Transportation	18
Fiscal Policies and Funding Limitations.....	18
Other Challenges	18
Quality of Activities and Services	19
Resources.....	19
Partnerships.....	19
Shifting Program Focus	19
Administrative Support	20

Appendices

- A: Site Coordinator Group Interview Questions
- B: West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation Questions

GEAR UP Site Coordinator Group Interviews

Evaluators conducted group interviews with site coordinators to gain a deeper understanding of how the program was implemented during the second year (July 2009 – July 2010) and to discern any issues that might have arisen during implementation. The purpose of gathering this feedback was to provide formative input to West Virginia GEAR UP program staff that will allow them to make any adjustments they deem necessary. This brief summary highlights the major findings of the site coordinator group interviews and presents recommendations and questions to facilitate discussion about programmatic adjustments.

A Brief Word about Methods

Edvantia evaluators conducted group interviews with site coordinators following their monthly meeting on June 1, 2010. Four groups of site coordinators spoke with evaluators about the reach of GEAR UP services, dissemination of information, perceptions of service quality, problems with implementation, and other topics of interest (interview questions are included in Appendix A). Questions were aligned with relevant foci of the evaluation. The number of participants in each of the group interviews ranged from 7 to 14, and each group interview session lasted between 20 and 45 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded, and transcripts produced from those recordings formed the basis for thematic analyses.

Major Findings

Findings are organized by evaluation question (with evaluation question numbers indicated in brackets). Please refer to Appendix B for a full list of evaluation questions.

Implementation and Reach of Services

Are services to students, parents, and schools/teachers achieving the desired reach? [F2] How, to whom, and how successfully is project information being disseminated? [S1]

As during the first year, the GEAR UP site coordinators reported that their sites were implementing various activities and services for students, parents, and teachers. Interview participants generally stated that their schools were implementing all activities outlined in their work plans. Some site coordinators briefly mentioned the flexibility they have in making certain kinds of adjustments to activities to ensure that they “always are hitting the intended target audience.” The student audiences seemed to be the easiest to reach (although transportation to and from events continued to serve as a barrier to high levels of student participation); reaching parents, however, continued to be very problematic for most sites. Although many interview participants mentioned increasing “buy in” from teachers at their schools, they did not necessarily note increasing teacher participation in events and activities. On the whole, site coordinators feel that the services are reaching students who need them and, albeit to a lesser extent, are reaching teachers and parents.

Extent of Implementation

Without exception, site coordinators stated that their sites had fulfilled the basic requirements of the GEAR UP program in terms of offering certain kinds of services. Because sites were complying with all requirements outlined in work plans, site coordinators generally determined that GEAR UP services were being provided “to a high extent.” This sentiment revealed a slight shift in perception from Year 1, when some site coordinators perceived implementation of the basic work plan as only partial implementation because it represented only the minimum requirement. At the close of Year 2, site coordinators, although they perceived implementation of the basic work plan as full implementation, did note that there is still room for improvement in implementation of activities. The slight change in perceptions could be related to increased awareness or acceptance of the limitations and requirements of program funding (e.g., “You’re only allowed to do certain available things. So they hold that, and you’re only following through with it.”).

GEAR UP Recognition

Site coordinators generally felt that recognition of the GEAR UP program and its services had increased during the second year. Site coordinators generally felt that at least “a few more [people] know more about it this year.” Others were more optimistic, stating, “I don’t think anybody doesn’t know what GEAR UP is.” Some site coordinators reported that school staff members would inquire about events, asking “when something is going to happen because it happened last year.”

Although site coordinators work to ensure that GEAR UP is adequately recognized for the services and resources it provides (such as by ensuring that GEAR UP labels are affixed to all technological resources purchased with project funds), there may still be lack of clarity in some cases. For instance, one site coordinator stated, “Some services overlap with other services the school has in place, and most of the time, I don’t know if people distinguish the difference between GEAR UP services and school-offered services.”

Administrator Support

Administrator support, which was an often-mentioned area of concern during Year 1, was barely mentioned by site coordinators in Year 2 focus groups. In one group, some of the participants were frustrated by a lack of involvement from their principals. Commented one site coordinator, “None of my events—my principal or vice principal [never] came and stayed this year or last year.” In another case, a site coordinator stated that a principal “came [to a budget meeting], but wasn’t there,” indicating that the principal had little interest in the content of the conversation. Others in the group, however, were surprised at this lack of administrator support and stated that their school administrators were very supportive and involved in GEAR UP planning and activities. In some cases, superintendents also make a point of encouraging—or even mandating—principal support and involvement in GEAR UP activities. In expressing concern for less-supported site coordinators, one participant said, “That [the principal], to me, should be the first person who should be supporting you.” The wide variance in administrator support was discussed primarily by one group; however, other site coordinators may also be experiencing differential levels of support (particularly given the fact that the issue was discussed broadly across groups during the Year 1 group interviews).

Teacher Buy-in and Participation

During Year 1, site coordinators generally thought that teachers bought into the purposes and goals of the GEAR UP program. During Year 2, site coordinators expressed greater certainty that teachers supported the aims of the program and typically stated that teacher buy-in had increased during the course of the year. According to one coordinator, “I think the teachers have pretty well gone along with everything.”

Although teachers seemed to be more aware and supportive of GEAR UP, its purposes, and its activities than they had been in the first year, that awareness did not always translate into active participation. At some sites, coordinators reported that “it was easy” to gain participation and that “everyone participated.” Some site coordinators reported that they “didn’t have any problems with teachers” complying with GEAR UP requests, and teachers were “to volunteer as chaperones for field trips, cultural events.” One coordinator said, “I had no trouble getting people to help out, even with tutoring.” Further, at some sites, teachers were “really excited” about professional development. Implementing “offsite professional development,” however, was a challenge for site coordinators who struggled to convince teachers to attend.

Site coordinators had several ideas about why teacher participation in events was limited during Year 2 of the GEAR UP program. “Lack of money” was mentioned by several coordinators who made statements like, “Teachers will not come if there is not enough money” to pay them. Some teachers may have other jobs after school, so when “their school day ends, they go off somewhere else to work” and cannot participate in GEAR UP events. Some teachers (and possibly some principals) might just choose not to stay after school for GEAR UP activities because “they feel they are with these kids all day long, and they feel that is pretty much their time off—in the evening. Pay [them] or not, they would just rather not” stay. In discussing limited teacher participation, one site coordinator explained, “If you want to pay them, they’ll come. And if they’re your friends, they’ll stay.” Otherwise, “It is very hard to get them involved. The same ones that stay for other things are going to stay for this.” By the end of the year, teachers may be burned out (e.g., at the end of the year, teachers “were just tired [because] they had been there a lot”).

Such attitudes, while apparently common in several GEAR UP sites, appear to be entirely foreign in others. In one group where several participants mentioned their troubles in recruiting teacher participation, another coordinator said, “I feel really blessed because my teachers and principals are very supportive. . . . The ones who can be there, are there.” The coordinator described the apathetic attitudes other participants described as “sad.”

Attendance at Events

Attendance at GEAR UP events and activities continued to vary across sites and across different event types during Year 2. Some events (e.g., college visits) generally seemed to be more popular with students than others, and attendance at after-school tutoring still lagged targets at several sites. Site coordinators seemed to be most successful in generating satisfactory attendance levels when they combined GEAR UP events with other events at the school, including sporting events, and course scheduling for rising high school freshmen.

One site coordinator suspected that “apathy” among students might be affecting attendance rates: “The kids aren’t coming because they don’t care.” Others, however, were slightly more generous, surmising that students might not be able to attend because of factors beyond their control, like

transportation or practice schedules for extracurricular activities. One participant stated, “Some people don’t have cars, so buses get them to and from school. For parents to come back out that evening and bring their kid is not always possible.” Others noted that some GEAR UP activities, notably after-school tutoring, may conflict with extracurricular activities like sports, band, and so on. Students may choose to participate in the extracurricular activity rather than in the GEAR UP activity.

Trying to “coordinate GEAR UP with some other event”—especially when that other event is a sporting event—might pose its own unique challenges. Students may not be particularly interested in information related to academics or postsecondary education when feats of athletic glory are to be watched and school pride may be on the line. According to one coordinator,

It is really hard to get kids to want to learn about financial aid, college opportunities, or talk about the goals over the football game. That is not something you can do when they are playing the fight song behind you.

Some coordinators have held events without telling students and families in advance that they were GEAR UP events. One focus group participant said the strategy “worked out well.” Only one person mentioned an instance where there was “100% parent participation,” and that was an event coupled with students’ “signing up for high school classes.”

Limited family participation is a concern at almost all sites. One coordinator described low attendance rates as “quite a letdown,” particularly when attendance was only half of the anticipated turnout. Site coordinators try various methods to inform families and encourage participation but, by and large, have not yet found solutions that are entirely successful. The challenges site coordinators face in communicating with families is addressed in a later section of this summary.

Despite frustrations with lower-than-desired attendance at events, site coordinators are pleased with the reactions and participation of those who do come—particularly students and families who might not typically be expected to attend such events. One site coordinator described the pleasant surprise of participation from unexpected places:

There are three specific families of kids that I’ve noticed have been to every single event. I know just because I know the families and where they live and everything. It’s a big surprise that they came and that they’re participating and that they’re getting a lot from it.

Some families and students do take advantage of every opportunity they possibly can to help prepare for high school and postsecondary options. According to one site coordinator, “parents are aware that they need that extra help and are making sure that they are getting out to” GEAR UP events.

Challenges and Resolutions

What problems have emerged in implementing project activities and interventions, and how are they being resolved by those responsible for delivery? [F4]

When asked what problems they have encountered in implementing project activities, site coordinators mentioned several challenges, although the challenges seemed to be far fewer than those experienced during the first year of the grant. Like the coordinators in Year 1, site coordinators during 2009-2010 believed that the GEAR UP program, goals, and requirements *per se* did not

generally pose challenges for their schools. At a few sites, implementation appears to be very smooth with very few challenges (e.g., “It’s a very positive thing.”). Site coordinators tried various strategies to address the challenges that arose at their sites. Most tended to stay flexible, reaching solutions through “trial and error.” As one participant said, “If the first thing doesn’t work, try it a different way the second time.”

Parental Involvement and Expectations

One of the greatest challenges to emerge during the Year 2 focus groups was a lack of parental involvement in GEAR UP activities and services. Site coordinators in every group mentioned limited participation from parents and difficulty in recruiting parents to attend events. One person called parental participation “pitiful,” and coordinators were quick to concur with colleagues who expressed challenges or frustrations with limited familial participation. Group interview participants routinely made statements like the following:

- “Getting parents out after work hours was difficult.”
- “I always thought that if you feed them, they will come. But even that’s not always true.”
- “The hardest [group] to get buy-in from at my school is the parents.”
- “[Parents] value more athletics, and it’s easier to get them to come out for things like that. . . . It’s a shame you can’t get them out for academic things.”

At sites where participation is high at the beginning of the year, site coordinators might have trouble sustaining the interest and enthusiasm through the spring semester. Participation at certain events (like financial aid workshops) tends to be high throughout the year—at least in comparison to other kinds of events. At some schools, however, parental involvement with GEAR UP declined as the school year went on. As one site coordinator explained, “At the beginning of the year, parents were involved, but . . . by the end of the year, the attendance had dropped.” Some site coordinators noted a decline in student participation through the year, too, suggesting that parental excitement may wane if their child’s enthusiasm does.

Some site coordinators also suggested that parental involvement tends to decline as students get older. Many of them agreed that “it is much more difficult to get the high school parents to come than it is [for] middle school” parents.” The decline in parental involvement starts in the middle grades, though. As one middle school coordinator explained,

I noticed with junior high . . . parents just kind of drop off the face of the earth. Like at the beginning of the seventh grade, they still have some questions, but at the end of the seventh grade, it’s almost non-existent. By the end of eighth grade, you may or may not see that parent ever again. GEAR UP has kind of helped a lot of those parents feel more comfortable coming in.

Some parents appear to rely on their children to share the information available at GEAR UP activities. One site coordinator explained, “I’ve had the parents say, ‘I don’t need to come because they learned about this today and they can tell me about it.’” Another participant followed up: “And then they [the students] don’t tell them.”

An added layer of complication may be that students intentionally discourage their parents from coming. In one group, a participant surmised, “I think it’s that the kids don’t want the parents there. It’s not that the parents don’t want to come. Maybe they [the students] don’t inform them . . . they don’t want them there.” This sentiment was not widely shared by other site coordinators; however, it does seem to be a plausible hypothesis that might apply for some students.

Most coordinators tended to think that parents who attended events were grateful for the information and believed it would be helpful for their children. As one person stated, “With GEAR UP, they [parents] are seeing that there is a chance for their children to go to school.” That very vision—of children going away to school—may be a threat to some parents, however. A couple of site coordinators suggested that a small proportion of parents (“maybe 5-10%”) may “view GEAR UP as a threat in that they feel threatened about their kids leaving.” Another stated, “They feel like you’re trying to take their kids away and put them somewhere else.” Such sentiments, if they exist, may reveal parental expectations that children will stay close to home and choose the same kind of life the parents have. These attitudes may also be incredibly difficult to address and overcome because they likely tap into families’ deeply held values and belief structures.

Sites work to make sure parents face as few barriers to participation as possible. Site coordinators are keenly aware that families may lack the financial resources not only to help their children gain various experiences but also, in some cases, to participate in GEAR UP activities. One site coordinator described what his or her school did to make sure parents could be included:

GEAR UP offers resources to parents that wouldn't necessarily have the resources to get their child into a specific school—a gas card or one of our faculty helping. We include the family in the central trip so they actually get to ride the bus with the children. We reach out to as many parents as we can so that it will not be a financial reason that they don't participate and not seek out a school or resources.

Parents, however, are more aware of GEAR UP and are more familiar with its activities and purposes. As one site coordinator explained,

It is still a little bit of a challenge to get parents to come to some of the meetings . . . but they are more aware of what the program is. So when they hear about it, it’s not like they don’t have a clue what GEAR UP is.

Another coordinator observed that there were more parents involved in Year 2 than in Year 1; this coordinator thought the increased involvement could be “because they learned a little bit more about it.” Increasing awareness may be the first step toward increasing participation. However, if parental or familial participation continues to be limited, the concern could become a larger issue limiting the reach of the GEAR UP program.

Transportation

Families’ lack of adequate transportation to events outside of regular school hours continues to pose a great challenge at West Virginia GEAR UP sites. Coordinators were universally concerned about transportation issues and how they affected the delivery and receipt of GEAR UP services. Although site coordinators try to manage this challenge by scheduling as many activities as possible during school hours or in conjunction with other, typically well attended events (e.g., sporting events), limited transportation hampers participation and may hinder expanded implementation of GEAR UP services.

One site coordinator lamented, “There might be money allotted to transportation, but it’s not enough for the needs of the work plan to ensure that every student is getting the same opportunity.” Site coordinators are frustrated that they are not able to find adequate solutions to the transportation challenge (e.g., “Part of the transportation problem is that I haven’t been able to find an answer yet.”).

Fiscal Policies and Funding Limitations

Site coordinators in every group mentioned funding or fiscal policies—and most comments reflected challenges. A couple of people did mention, in glowing terms, the forethought that is evident in GEAR UP’s financial guidelines and requirements, ensuring that activities can be paid for and that changing circumstances can be accommodated through some level of financial flexibility. One said, “This is the only program where they thought ahead. The financial aspect has to be there, then this other stuff can follow. That is why it’s successful.” Another mentioned having been “able to transfer some of the food and transportation money into our actual program money” after weather prevented a planned-for trip, “so that’s good.” Most other participants, however, expressed varying levels of frustration with fiscal policies and administrative practices.

Most of the frustration site coordinators expressed was related to administrative practices within their counties with respect to invoicing or billing and budgeting. Coordinators generally felt that because many budgetary and fiscal requests “have to go through your county, not through GEAR UP,” many requests and tasks faced “a longer delay because of that process.” Some site coordinators may face a more difficult road than others, with roadblocks being erected by individuals who have to process or sign fiscal paperwork:

- “We also have a problem in our county . . . [at] the central office—not the superintendent, but our treasurer—in making sure that invoices were turned in and all that. We feel a bit helpless because we are constantly getting them turned in on time, but they are not getting paid. That has been a source of irritation . . .”
- “I also think we need to have another method of getting our incentives, bus trips, and everything because when everything goes through the secretary, our stuff gets completed when she has time and that’s a problem for me.”

Other site coordinators have had their supply or resources orders lost, placed incorrectly (resulting in an order for three small copy machines ending up as “one copier and three cords”), or fallen victim to various other mishaps.

Site coordinators fully recognized that difficulties at the county level in processing invoices or working out budget details occasionally resulted in conflicts with the needs of the GEAR UP program. However, they were often at a loss for how to resolve the issues. They tended to state that billing issues were “just kind of out of our hands” and that it was “something I don’t know if there is a fix to.” Two people in one group discussed the situation in which coordinators often find themselves:

That’s just the money. If you buy something, you go out and pay for it. You submit it. It’s out of your hands. Well they want us to be more involved with that but that’s something we’re not allowed to be involved in.

As far as any of the fiscal things in purchasing and exactly what [another participant] said in filling out the paperwork. We can’t go make sure checks are cut or we’re not there to make

sure it's put on the right person's desk. We can just send it there. That's kind of been a challenge the last two years actually. Of making sure, the money is spent and that it's spent appropriately.

A few site coordinators in one group complained that budget restrictions limiting funds to \$5 per meal for students on trips were unreasonable. One participant asked, rhetorically, "Now where are you going to get a \$5 meal unless it's Hardee's or Wendy's?" Site coordinators who shared this frustration wanted to give students an opportunity to go to a "nice restaurant" and "be served a meal," rather than simply eat at another fast food restaurant. The motivation behind the sentiment was to give students another kind of cultural experience that they might not get in their homes or communities.

Other Challenges

In addition to the challenges mentioned previously, and the challenges of promoting and increasing attendance at GEAR UP events, several other challenges were mentioned by a few site coordinators.

Record keeping and other administrative tasks. Record keeping and reporting requirements continue to pose challenges for site coordinators. One participant referred to a decrease in the amount of "paperwork" from Year 1 to Year 2 (saying, "I don't miss the paperwork."). However, many participants still felt that some of the administrative requirements were overwhelming and even unnecessary. Said one participant, "We need to spend less time on paperwork and more time doing [things] for the students."

The Performance Online Evaluation Tracking System (POETS) was particularly unpopular among those who mentioned it. These coordinators felt that many of their efforts were duplicative (e.g., entering the data in POETS and forwarding the paper-based records to regional coordinators or HEPC staff). One person explained the intensity of his or her disdain for the system:

I dislike POETS so much it made me do less this year. It made me mad. It really did. I would rather have them signing papers and making the secretaries mad at me by using a copier in the office than using POETS because it's on paper.

Although researchers might see the processes as data back-up or a normal part of data verification and cleaning, at least one site coordinator saw these processes as "questioning [his or her] integrity," thinking GEAR UP did not trust him or her to be honest or enter the data correctly. The site coordinator said, "GEAR UP acted like I was a first-year teacher, and I resented that." One site coordinator also refused to enter data into POETS after receiving an e-mail asking him or her to explain certain information that he or she had entered. The person felt that the question was insulting and stated, "I don't think we should have to prove everything that we do."

At least one other site coordinator did not see a need for ongoing research throughout the life of the project. The person felt that the research effort—"between the APR [annual performance report] and the surveys we did last year and the beginning of this year"—was overkill and that the money spent on research could have been better spent on service delivery. This respondent stated,

We're supposed to be trying to help our kids get through college and it seems to me the research would automatically be there when the class of 2014 graduates. It is not like we should talk in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 about how it is working because we're

not going to know anything until 2014 when those kids graduate and go to college or don't go to college. That ultimately is the measuring point.

These comments suggest that the site coordinators either do not fully understand or do not fully buy into the purposes of the research effort and need for high-quality record-keeping throughout the life of the project.

Communicating with families. Communication with families, as in Year 1, continues to challenge most sites. Site coordinators are still not convinced that materials they send home with students actually make it into the hands of the parents (e.g., “You send papers home by the student, they get thrown away”; students “aren’t good at taking home their papers, and most of the parents don’t check their backpacks or binders”). Difficulties in communicating with families can have a negative impact on the GEAR UP program’s ability to reach out to families who may be particularly in need of postsecondary information—hindering the dissemination of information about events or opportunities that families might not otherwise have access to.

One coordinator said that there was good turnout at several events but that, “I aggravated them [parents] to death. I called and e-mailed them [and] did a lot to try to get them in.” Once parents came to the first event, “they really seemed to appreciate it, and they turned out” for future events. Intensive communication efforts, then, may be successful. However, the *aggravation strategy* used by this particular coordinator may not be practical for coordinators at all schools.

Some site coordinators use countywide automated calling systems to inform families about upcoming events. Using this kind of system has “helped a little bit” in some cases. According to one site coordinator, “It made my life easier. I don’t know if it was successful,” but it was more efficient than the site coordinator spending the time to call more than 100 people. In Year 1, a few site coordinators also used the automated calling systems successfully, but use of that technology did not seem to increase during the second year.

Weather and Flu. In some groups, site coordinators mentioned that inclement weather had been a challenge for their schools, although the influence of bad weather did not seem as prominent as it had been in Year 1. However, heavy snowfall during the winter months did lead to school delays and closures. Such closures led site coordinators to postpone events (or, in apparently rare cases cancel them). According to one participant, “Snow really impacted a lot of things this year.” Another concern unique to Year 2 was a decline in attendance and participation at some events as a result of concerns about the H1N1 flu. The impact of weather and flu on scheduling for and attendance at events was mildly frustrating for the site coordinators, but they seemed to take the challenge in stride, recognizing that such factors were unpredictable and unavoidable.

Quality of Activities and Services

How do stakeholders perceive the quality of project activities, interventions, products, and outputs? [F3]

Reactions to and perceptions of GEAR UP activities continued to be very positive during Year 2. Although the quality, relevance, and utility of activities and services may be “dependent on each individual coordinator,” most respondents agreed with the participant who called the quality of events “perfectly good.” Most participants also seemed to think the activities were highly relevant and

useful. None of the interviewees mentioned any negative reactions to any events and, in fact, often cited high levels of satisfaction and enthusiasm from attendees. One person stated, “I have received nothing but positive feedback . . . from students, parents, and the teachers.” Another coordinator explained, “I’ve had good response from those who attended—it’s just a matter of numbers who attended” (referring to troubles in recruiting participants for events). Students seem to be interested in most of the GEAR UP activities, according to the site coordinators, especially college visits and other field trips. In general, site coordinators indicated that stakeholders were satisfied with the kinds of activities that were being implemented. They also felt that participants were getting important information and—especially—that students were getting invaluable experiences through GEAR UP activities. Site coordinators generally agreed that GEAR UP was “exposing the kids to a lot more” opportunity and experience than they had seen in the past and that “some of them would not otherwise have.”

Parents

Although parental involvement and attendance may be low at most sites, parents who have participated in various activities reacted favorably to them. Financial aid workshops, in particular, seemed to elicit very positive responses from parents. “Financial aid is such an obscure thing, especially for first generation” families, according to one of the site coordinators. The coordinator went on to say,

To be able to offer those workshops and to have a financial aid officer come in and work through a FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] with them—many have never seen something like that in their lives. It has been very helpful [and] well-received.

One site coordinator described the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as “a pretty monumental thing to some parents who were, themselves, non-readers.” Parents often personally thank site coordinators for providing opportunities to help them learn how to apply for financial aid, how to apply for college, and so on. One participant stated, “They didn’t want to be holding their children back, but they were because they didn’t know how” to help them. Another participant said, “There were two parents in particular that said if it weren’t for GEAR UP, their daughter would not be able to go to college.” The coordinator described the program as “really rewarding” for those parents.

Parents who are involved with GEAR UP activities are asking more questions and seeking out more resources. Some site coordinators described conversations with parents who were looking forward to the next year, helping students plan for courses and asking what kinds of support and resources GEAR UP might be able to offer to their children (e.g., “Is GEAR UP going to help out with dual credit classes?”). Site coordinators ascribe these requests for more information directly to the impact GEAR UP is having on these parents.

Students

Students generally continue to have positive perceptions of GEAR UP. Coordinators observed that students really seemed to enjoy and get a great deal of information and experience from college trips and cultural events. They also appreciated incentives—including incentive awards as well as flash drives and other give-aways. According to one participant, “They love that they [GEAR UP] give us incentive money to spread out there.”

Students seemed to be enthusiastic about most GEAR UP services and activities (although after-school tutoring was not mentioned as one of the activities students often inquired about). According to site coordinators, students “look forward to GEAR UP trips and activities. . . . They’re really excited about learning or seeing different things.” Students often asked when the next GEAR UP event would be—especially trips. Some site coordinators noted that students “whose parents have the money to do things . . . are not excited,” while the students whose parents are less able to afford trips and similar experiences tend to be more excited for GEAR UP activities.

Some site coordinators, however, were worried that student and parent enthusiasm had declined during Year 2 in comparison to Year 1. Said one participant, “I feel like the first year, they were really excited about it and then this year, not so much.” Another site coordinator said, “The parents’ interest waned. The kids were really excited about it at first, but this year, parent participation was not as it was the year before.”

GEAR UP activities, however, seem to impact students’ enthusiasm and aspirations for postsecondary attainment, according to focus group participants. When students “get to see that college life,” it “makes them want to do it more.” Some site coordinators saw students on the college trips “that probably would never have gone and seen a college campus if it wasn’t for” GEAR UP. Students who might not have appeared interested in college before now are “actually showing enthusiasm and wanting to know how to apply, what to do.”

According to some of the site coordinators, the students like the fact “that it’s free,” and also enjoy “getting out of school for the day.” One site coordinator ascribed the popularity of an event to students’ desire to get out of school (“I had a really good response for that, and I attributed that to the fact that it was during a school day so they got to get out of school.”). Such statements may be perfectly realistic statements about students’ motives; they could also, however, indicate pessimism or skepticism about students’ motives, intentions, or commitment to planning for postsecondary education.

College Trips and Cultural Experiences

As during the first year of the program, college visits were very well received by students and parents. Site coordinators, for the most part, continued to be very enthusiastic about college visits and other experiential trips (e.g., cultural experiences). Coordinators typically used words like “wonderful” to describe the college trips during Year 2. One site coordinator said, “The college trips alone are phenomenal,” and went on to say that he or she wished there was more funding to include more students in the middle grades.

Another explained, “Our kids don’t know that there is anything else out there, that there is something to strive for. And the field trips, the college trips, are a must, and we need more of them.” Most site coordinators felt very strongly that college trips helped show students that they could go to college—or at least achieve more than they may have thought. One participant explained,

It’s shown kids that there is something else to want. . . . A lot of them don’t know that they are supposed to have more out of life, want things, or want to accomplish goals. This program has kind of shown the kids that there is a next step in life.

College trips help the students realize that “it’s not so scary,” and it “makes college seem more attainable and that they can do it.” Visiting a college campus or a cultural center also “makes it easier

to go to the next place.” Site coordinators clearly seemed to view the college trips as windows into students’ possible futures, and they seemed to want to do everything possible to ensure that as many students as possible could see the views those windows offered.

Cultural trips and experiences were also described in glowing terms—with words like “amazing.” At least one middle school site plans to continue the cultural activity even in the absence of GEAR UP funds to support it; community support for funding is apparently being sought and secured. Other site coordinators described cultural events and stated that the students “had a blast” visiting different sites and engaging in different cultural activities.

Although some site coordinators during Year 1 expressed a desire for college visits to be longer and more substantive, similar concerns were not mentioned during Year 2. A few site coordinators, however, might believe that only one or two college visits might be sufficient and that resources should be directed in other ways (for instance, directed for the purchase of durable goods like technological resources). Other site coordinators would not change the funding ratios. One site coordinator praised the program for funding all the costs for the college trips to ensure that all students have equal opportunity to participate:

The fact that it's 100% paid for doesn't knock anybody out of going and that's the thing they take into account. You have other field trips or other things that the school is paying for and sometimes people are excluded. That is something I think is important that all the kids get to go.

Resources and Partnerships

How effectively, efficiently, and appropriately are (a) resources being used, and (b) partners collaborating toward GEAR UP goals? [F5]

Based on site coordinators’ responses, sites seem to be using GEAR UP-provided resources appropriately and effectively. Partnerships with higher education institutions seem to be adequate to good; partnerships with other entities, however, seem to be very limited.

Resources

GEAR UP coordinators may typically feel that “the money is the best part” of the GEAR UP program because it allows schools to do so many things they would not otherwise be able to do. Similar to the finding in Year 1, site coordinators reported that GEAR UP funds have been used to (1) purchase equipment and resources, including incentives, technology, equipment, and other materials (e.g., computers, SMART boards, responders, graphing calculators, ELMOs, mobile learning labs, various software) for academic or instructional enhancement; (2) provide training and professional development; and (3) fund college visits and other trips. Several sites are also using project resources to fund dual enrollment or dual credit courses for students (and, in some cases, to purchase the textbooks as well) and tutoring for ACT preparation.

Several site coordinators reported that teachers in their schools were making use of the resources purchased through GEAR UP. Site coordinators routinely stated that the technological resources were very helpful, providing teachers and students with opportunities for extended or advanced teaching and learning that were not available before the grant. For instance, one site coordinator reported that

a science teacher was able to use an ELMO to project biology slides to a whole class whereas prior to GEAR UP, the teacher had to send students three at a time to look at the slides through the three microscopes that were available to him. Site coordinators felt that students, teachers, and schools generally were benefiting from the technological resources procured through GEAR UP. One site coordinator stated that the GEAR UP funding has allowed the school to purchase equipment (e.g., computers with video editing capabilities) that has helped student extend their skills and experience and “make a lot of things nice for our school.” The technology “makes a huge difference. It is nice.”

The use of GEAR UP funds to provide training and professional development to teachers was mentioned by several site coordinators. The coordinators did not go into a great deal of detail about the training and development events, however. Those who mentioned the training generally described it as “beneficial,” and several stated that they had received ideas for training sessions to offer through the GEAR UP training they received. Others in one group, however, stated that there were some specific training needs their schools’ teachers voiced that they were not able to address through GEAR UP; the site coordinators did not offer further explanations or examples of those specific training needs, however.

College visits and other trips were generally perceived as very beneficial for students—as discussed elsewhere in this summary. Although a small number of site coordinators would have preferred to commit more funding to purchase durable goods (like more technological equipment) and less to funding college visits, that view was clearly in the minority. Site coordinators repeatedly praised the value of trips for broadening students’ experiences and perceptions.

Human Resources. As in Year 1, site coordinators appreciated the high level of quality they perceived in the human resources associated with the West Virginia GEAR UP project—namely, regional coordinators and HEPC personnel. Several site coordinators had very high praise for the professionalism and helpfulness of project staff:

- “They do a good job in getting the information out so that everybody is well-informed. You can’t say you didn’t know.”
- “They answer questions very quickly. It’s very organized, very thorough.”
- “They’re doing a great job, and they’re very consistent.”
- “If you want something, they give you the information.”
- “They follow through with things. If they give you an idea or something, you need a little bit of follow up on it, they don’t just say things. They follow through with everything they say in their meetings or e-mail.”

Site coordinators appreciate HEPC staff members’ efforts to provide a broad range of helpful information and resources that they can use at or adapt for their own sites. They also particularly appreciated the promptness with which staff responded to request for help or information. Several participants stated that they “never go more than a day” without a response to a call or e-mail sent to HEPC staff.

Some site coordinators noted impressive progress from Year 1 to Year 2 in HEPC staff learning all the requirements of the program from the ground up, how to function efficiently and effectively, how to

manage all program activities and functions, and so on. One site coordinator said that now, in “the second year . . . it’s old hat” to operate the program. The coordinator was very impressed that such tremendous progress had been made not only among HEPC staff but also among the site coordinators.

Partnerships

Participants generally described their partnerships with institutions of higher education (IHEs) in positive terms. They appreciated the special efforts the IHEs were making to reach out to the schools and the students—even at the middle school level. One site coordinator said, “We’ve had a good partnership, and it really has helped our students . . . The parents have been really appreciative of it as well.” The IHEs were perceived to be dependable resources and were enthusiastic about working with the GEAR UP sites.

GEAR UP students were benefiting from their sites’ relationships with IHEs in several different ways: dual credit or dual enrollment course offerings, online courses, scholarships, campus visits, free college gear (e.g., items provided by the IHE), and special trips designed for specific student populations (e.g., special education students). The IHEs also may be benefiting from the relationships; one person stated that a college representative commented that recruitment would soon need to start as young as middle school. Partnerships between middle schools, high schools, and IHEs, then, allow for mutually beneficial relationships in which students are exposed to different colleges and colleges have opportunities to recruit a variety of students.

GEAR UP sites are, for the most part, working well with their official partnering IHEs; only one person briefly mentioned that the relationship was not as strong as it should be but was improving. Most other sites mentioned having positive relationships with their partner colleges. The sites are, however, branching out and trying to “coordinate with several colleges.” Several site coordinators mentioned that other IHEs that were not their official partners were also very helpful and generous, particularly during GEAR UP students’ visits to campus.

Some sites rely on regional coordinators to help manage and mediate relationships and arrangements with the IHEs. However, many sites are making their own arrangements and plans directly with the colleges or universities rather than coordinating activities through regional coordinators. For instance, the site coordinators may have developed relationships with contact people at the higher education partners, or higher education representatives may reach out to the GEAR UP schools to make arrangements for college visits or other college awareness activities for GEAR UP students. The establishment of such direct relationships is probably a promising development for the sustainability of those relationships when GEAR UP funding is no longer available.

Some schools are also cultivating relationships with other local partners (e.g., local businesses who provide materials). Different communities may have different levels of ability and resources to provide support, however. Although some sites “worked with everybody possible this year,” no other formalized partnerships are apparent at this time.

Other Comments and Considerations

Site coordinators’ comments indicate that they are committed to the GEAR UP program and that they want the program to succeed. Further, an underlying theme in their comments—sometimes made

explicit—is commitment to the students and families served by their schools and GEAR UP activities. They are willing to do what it takes—spend time without being under contract (see below), personally track people down to get information or required forms, finesse relationships and work deals to provide GEAR UP activities—to ensure that the program is successful and that students and families have access to all the resources GEAR UP can provide.

Shifting Program Focus

Middle school coordinators seemed to be universally disappointed that the program would be moving out of the middle schools during the 2010-2011 school year. They perceive great benefits in the program for students and believe that starting as early as possible to get children thinking about college is the best strategy. Coordinators generally seemed to be worried about students younger than those in the 2014 cohort, expressing concern that the loss of early awareness services in the middle school would be detrimental and could lead to lower student motivation at the secondary level. Some coordinators sounded almost hopeless about the prospect of losing GEAR UP services at the middle school level (e.g., “When they get to high school, it’s almost too late for [counselors] to help them”; “If we lose them at the middle school level, we’re not going to get them back at the high school level”). One middle school site coordinator expressed the worries of many with a simple statement: “I think we’re going to miss it a lot.”

Some site coordinators were concerned about the time that might be lost as a new coordinator or counselor had to take time to learn about each of the students. Said one, “With me, it took—sadly—two years to get going, and now we’re eliminated. A new counselor has to start all over. I think it’s a bad setup because they’re starting all over. Two years of learning are lost.” Another site coordinator added, “And the kids haven’t changed. [They should] have the same people with them, even if they’re not in the same building.” Middle school site coordinators who share facilities with (or are physically very close to) the high school may feel particularly stung by not being included in Year 3 of GEAR UP. Said one, “There is no reason we could not have still been a part of GEAR UP.”

Administrative Support

In one group, interviewees stated that they were very concerned about the responsibilities for logistics and administrative requirements that would fall to the high school site coordinators in the 2010-2011 school year. Some site coordinators worried that the 2010-2011 move into high schools only might be problematic for site coordinators. They were particularly concerned about having three grade levels (9, 11, and 12) to manage both from the programmatic standpoint and the data entry standpoint—in addition to their “regular” jobs.

In one group, the site coordinators suggested that coordinators at the middle school level be allowed to serve as assistants to the high school site coordinators to help ease the workload (even if it means that high school coordinators receive a smaller-than-announced increase in their stipend). They seemed especially concerned about the data entry burden (e.g., for documenting daily tutoring participation for 9th, 11th, and 12th graders). One coordinator said, “As a high school coordinator, I would be grateful for the help because it’s already overwhelming just with juniors and seniors. The freshman class is going to be our largest class in the entire school.” During the conversation about the increased workload and responsibilities that would come with the new freshman class, a high school coordinator went on to say, “I wouldn’t mind losing a little bit of that \$450 [raise] to have a little extra help.” Another added, “It’s hard to do your primary job in addition to this, and I would like the help.”

The high school coordinators in the group went on to say that if needs for help were to be prioritized, their biggest need would probably be for assistance in entering information into POETS.

Summary and Recommendations

Generally, site coordinators are satisfied with the West Virginia GEAR UP program and believe that it is serving well the students in their schools and counties. College visits, cultural experiences, and other trips are perceived as particularly beneficial for students. Site coordinators believe that these activities are vivid demonstrations for students that they can have and achieve more than they might previously have thought. GEAR UP resources are being used to enhance schools' technological capabilities, to provide professional development to teachers, and to provide enhanced academic opportunities to students (e.g., dual credit courses). Relationships with partnering IHEs are generally strong and perceived as mutually beneficial. Enduring challenges such as a lack of parental involvement, transportation difficulties, and administrative policies and practices (particularly with regard to fiscal matters) occasionally frustrate site coordinators as they seek to implement and improve GEAR UP services. Remaining flexible and having excellent support and information from HEPC personnel helps ensure that they are able to address most other challenges as they arise. Despite the challenges they face, site coordinators believe that they are fully implementing the GEAR UP program in their schools and are fulfilling the commitments of their work plans.

Many of the concerns and challenges that emerged during Year 1 focus groups were not apparent during Year 2 discussions. This could indicate that HEPC staff and site coordinators have been able to successfully negotiate solutions to those problems. Based on the findings of the Year 2 focus groups, several recommendations can be made to continue improvements to the implementation of the West Virginia GEAR UP project. The recommendations should be considered formative suggestions rather than absolute solutions. While some may be practicable and easy to implement during Year 3, others may require more planning or lack feasibility due to funding or logistical requirements and constraints. Recommendations are organized to correspond with their related findings.

Are services to students, parents, and schools/teachers achieving the desired reach? [F2] How, to whom, and how successfully is project information being disseminated? [S1]

Extent of Implementation

- Site coordinators generally feel that they are successfully implementing the GEAR UP program in their schools. HEPC personnel should continue discussions with site coordinators about expectations for implementation of GEAR UP activities and services. Further, HEPC may want to consider offering formal incentives or recognition for sites that go above and beyond the minimum requirements to ensure site coordinators that their efforts above and beyond requirements are noticed and appreciated.

GEAR UP Recognition

- Site coordinators generally seem to be doing a good job in promoting GEAR UP and ensuring that the program is given proper credit for sponsorship of events and resources. Site coordinators should be encouraged to keep up their efforts to increase awareness of the program.

Administrator Support

- Administrator support seems to vary greatly across sites. Within the corps of site coordinators, there is ample administrator expertise to draw from in searching for a solution to this challenge. Regional coordinators should be encouraged to work with site coordinators who are also administrators to brainstorm strategies that may be helpful for non-administrator coordinators to use in trying to build explicit and/or active support from school (and, if needed, county) administrators.

Teacher Buy-in and Participation

- Although teacher buy-in seems to be increasing, teacher participation has not necessarily followed suit. HEPC staff should consider providing general and/or targeted assistance to site coordinators regarding methods for boosting teacher participation in GEAR UP events. Staff could facilitate “best practices” discussions wherein site coordinators share their effective strategies with their peers at monthly meetings. Alternately, regional coordinators could brainstorm strategies that might be effective in different situations (e.g., when dealing with an active resistor, when dealing with a willing-but-overworked colleague).

Attendance at Events

- Attendance at events still appears to be disappointing, particularly for events held outside of regular school hours and not in conjunction with other events. HEPC staff should consider providing general and/or targeted assistance to site coordinators regarding methods for boosting attendance. Staff could facilitate “best practices” discussions wherein site coordinators who are able to achieve high levels of attendance could discuss their strategies with their peers at monthly meetings. Alternately, regional coordinators could brainstorm strategies that might be effective for each site’s context. Assistance for this concern should be careful to take into account transportation and geographic issues that challenge many GEAR UP sites.
- If feasible and desirable, HEPC personnel should consider creating a mechanism for distributing information about attendance rates for various events (e.g., kickoff events, college trips). Such information can be disseminated by regional coordinators or at monthly site coordinator meetings. HEPC staff should take care to present the data in such a way that site coordinators do not feel targeted or admonished for attendance rates at their sites (e.g., presented aggregated data rather than site-specific data). However, using the information to spur coordinators’ competitive natures might help coordinators be inspired to work in different ways to boost attendance. HEPC personnel could also use these opportunities to set goals for attendance at future events.

What problems have emerged in implementing project activities and interventions, and how are they being resolved by those responsible for delivery? [F4]

Parental Involvement and Expectations

- Parental involvement during Year 2 was generally disappointing across all sites. Although parents who come to events appreciate the information and support, site coordinators do not believe that enough parents are coming to events. HEPC may want to consider providing site

coordinators with additional training, assistance, and tools for communicating with parents of underserved student populations and encouraging their participation in events. Although part of the situation depends on parents' attitudes, expectations, and receptiveness, another part depends on site coordinators' ability to communicate effectively with different stakeholders about the program.

Transportation

- Transportation continues to be a challenge that may be seriously limiting participation in GEAR UP events. Because so many sites continue to have concerns about transportation issues, HEPC should look into transportation concerns as an area for further development and assistance. In collaboration with site coordinators, staff should examine and discuss strategies for improving transportation options that might work in the contexts of the GEAR UP sites.

Fiscal Policies and Funding Limitations

- Many site coordinators struggle with timely fulfillment of the GEAR UP grant's fiscal requirements, in part because of difficulties they experience in dealing with their schools' or counties' fiscal policies. HEPC staff should consider what options may be available to site coordinators and to program staff to address delays and other challenges that have been reported during the first two years of the grant. If necessary, HEPC staff may want to meet with county level personnel to explain the importance of timely billing and reporting for the federal grant.

Other Challenges

- **Record keeping and administrative tasks.** Some site coordinators are frustrated with record keeping and administrative requirements, some of which they feel are duplicative and unnecessary. HEPC may again want to reexamine the administrative burden of site coordinators and determine (a) whether it is onerous and (b) if there are any feasible strategies for decreasing the burden while still gathering the necessary information. HEPC staff should also take care to fully explain to site coordinators the reasons behind administrative requirements—including the importance of accurate and complete record keeping for research purposes. If HEPC deems it necessary, Edvantia evaluators could re-explain the purposes and procedures of the evaluation, including how site coordinators' work contributes to the crucial effort.
- **Communicating with families.** HEPC should provide regional and site coordinators with assistance in finding creative, cost effective ways to communicate with family members. HEPC staff may also want to consider including students and parents in the GEAR UP Cohort (8th grade students in 2009-2010) and Priority Cohort (11th and 12th graders each year) in the distribution list for programmatic e-mail updates about the GEAR UP project; site coordinators could also be encouraged to create e-mail lists to provide updates about specific, local activities and information.

How do stakeholders perceive the quality of project activities, interventions, products, and outputs? [F3]

Quality of Activities and Services

- Activities and services are being very well received and are perceived to be of high quality, relevance, and utility. While activities are being very well received, HEPC personnel might focus some attention on achieving fuller implementation of the tutoring component (which did not seem to be as well implemented as other components) and on boosting enthusiasm (which may have lagged during Year 2).

How effectively, efficiently, and appropriately are (a) resources being used, and (b) partners collaborating toward GEAR UP goals? [F5]

Resources

- Program resources appear to be utilized for appropriate purposes and in appropriate ways. GEAR UP site coordinators should be encouraged to continue monitoring the needs of their sites to ensure that equipment purchases and professional development or training plans are well-suited to the needs of the students and teachers in their schools.

Partnerships

- Relationships with partnering IHEs (and other IHEs that are not official partners) have generally been positive during the second year—marking an improvement since the first year. HEPC should consider what kind of monitoring is necessary for those relationships from both the secondary and postsecondary perspective to ensure continuing positive relationships. Technical assistance and advice should be given as necessary to enhance relationships or address problem areas before they become full-blown challenges. There are no discernable challenges at this time; most site coordinators praised the relationships with partner IHEs. However, HEPC may want to determine the costs and benefits of following up with IHEs (including those with the GEAR UP regions who are not official partners) to ensure that IHEs continue to be responsive to GEAR UP schools' messages and requests, and to ensure that the partners continue to design activities that are highly beneficial for students' college awareness.
- If it is a HEPC goal for sites to develop further partnerships beyond those with the IHEs, further assistance may be needed in this area. Consider discussing what types of partnerships may best meet the goals of GEAR UP, what state or regional resources or organizations might fit that vision, how sites can develop those partnerships, how HEPC can provide support to nurture those relationships, and how such partnerships can help sustain the program after the grant.

Other Comments and Considerations

Shifting Program Focus

- Many site coordinators are deeply concerned about the programmatic shift during the 2010-2011 school year from middle and high schools into high schools only. Although this shift has

been long-planned, site coordinators seem to be having trouble accepting it now that the time for the change has arrived. HEPC staff should discuss the implications of the shift for both the program and for the students at different levels. To the extent possible, site coordinators who have lingering concerns should be assured that the change is necessary and that future programs may be able to renew the focus on middle school students.

Administrative Support

- High school site coordinators are concerned about the increasing requirements that they will need to fill following the programmatic shift into high schools only. Specifically, they are concerned that they will not be able to keep up with the administrative and record keeping requirements for three full classes of students. HEPC staff should consider reviewing the need for additional administrative support in the high schools during 2010-2011. If HEPC determines that additional support is needed, one solution might be to re-hire middle school coordinators to help with administrative tasks (and providing a smaller-than-planned-for raise to the high school coordinators to offset or neutralize the cost).

APPENDIX A

Site Coordinator Group Interview Questions

Site Coordinator Group Interview Questions

For Target Questions, the number of the corresponding evaluation question is listed following each interview item. Please refer to Appendix B for a complete list of evaluation questions.

WARM UP QUESTION:

1) Let's go around the room and find out which school or schools you work with as a site coordinator and what your role is when you're not wearing your site coordinator hat.

TARGET QUESTIONS:

2) To what extent are GEAR UP services being provided to the intended recipients (students, parents, and teachers)? [F2, S1]

(Probe for: challenges in achieving intended attendance levels, issues with buy-in from teachers)

3) Describe any problems you have encountered in implementing the GEAR UP project. How have those problems been resolved? [F4]

4) What do you think about the quality of the GEAR UP services and activities? [F3]

(Probe for: things they are most and least satisfied with in terms of activities happening at their schools; most and least satisfied with in their activities with HEPC GEAR UP staff; perceptions of relevance; perceptions of usefulness)

5) Please tell us a little about how the partnering relationships with local colleges and universities are working. What about partnerships with other agencies? [F5]

6) Please tell us how you've been using the resources given to you as part of the GEAR UP grant. [F5]

7) What are some examples of students' or parents' reactions to the GEAR UP project? [F3]

8) To what extent do you believe the GEAR UP program is currently implemented at your school(s)? [F2]

(Probe for: number of services/activities implemented; number of services/activities planned)

FINAL QUESTION:

Is there anything else you would like to share with us about the GEAR UP program?

APPENDIX B

West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation Questions

West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation Questions

Implementation questions. The central question for the formative evaluation is the degree to which the West Virginia GEAR UP activities are being implemented as planned. This is referred to as the formative question, or “F.” The evaluators also will examine the degree to which the activities are producing the outputs intended.

- F1. Are project activities being implemented with fidelity to the design?
- F2. Are services to students, parents, and schools/teachers achieving the desired reach?
- F3. How do stakeholders perceive the quality of project activities, interventions, products, and outputs?
- F4. What problems have emerged in implementing project activities and interventions, and how are they being resolved by those responsible for delivery?
- F5. How effectively, efficiently, and appropriately are (a) resources being used, and (b) partners collaborating toward GEAR UP goals?

Outcome questions. The evaluation includes a number of questions relating to the outcomes the West Virginia GEAR UP project is intended to achieve. These are organized by project objective (O), with the addition of O9, which aligns with all objectives.

- O1. To what extent does GEAR UP increase student interest and involvement in school?
- O2. To what extent is student academic achievement increasing?
- O3. To what extent does GEAR UP promote student academic progression?
- O4. To what extent does GEAR UP promote student career awareness and interests?
- O5. To what extent does GEAR UP promote students’ “college knowledge”?
- O6. Does student participation in postsecondary opportunities increase?
- O7. To what extent do GEAR UP activities promote academic development and capacity of GEAR UP schools and educators?
- O8. To what extent does GEAR UP increase parent knowledge of college admissions and financial aid?
- O9. How do activities and interventions, and other variables, relate to the above goals?

Sustainability questions. Through reviews of the development and use of the college information Web portal, project staff interviews, site coordinator focus groups, school personnel surveys, and project documentation review, the evaluation team will examine the degree to which this GEAR UP model shows promise to be sustainable and transferable.

- S1. How, to whom, and how successfully is project information being disseminated?
- S2. Which, if any, project elements appear to be sustainable beyond the life of the project?