



West Virginia **GEARUP** Evaluation

Year 3 Site Coordinator
Group Interviews:
Summary of Findings

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GEAR UP Site Coordinator Group Interviews

Evaluators conducted group interviews with GEAR UP site coordinators¹ to gain a deeper understanding of how the program was implemented during the third year (August 2010 – July 2011) 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 Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (West Virginia GEAR UP) program staff that will allow them to make any adjustments they deem necessary. This report summarizes highlights of 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 the coordinators' regularly scheduled meeting on June 14, 2011. Three 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 relevant to the evaluation. Interview questions are included in Appendix A. Questions were aligned with relevant foci of the evaluation. Each of the group interviews ranged from four to six participants, and each session lasted between 20 and 42 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 two years of the project, 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 they were implementing all activities outlined in their work plans and tended to say that they achieved "full implementation" as a result. Of the groups served by the program (student, parents, and teachers), the students seemed to be the easiest to reach through services and activities, although transportation to and from events continued to serve as a barrier to student participation at some sites. Reaching parents, however, continued to be problematic. Although site coordinators generally continued to see improvements in teacher "buy in" for GEAR UP, teacher participation in events and activities was not strong at all sites. On the whole, site

¹ GEAR UP site coordinators are hired by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission to plan, implement, monitor, and track program services and activities at each participating school. Site coordinators can be teachers, administrators, counselors, parents, or others who apply for the position (although most are staff members at the school for which they coordinate services). In Year 3, most site coordinators had served in the role during the previous school year.

coordinators reported that the services are reaching the students who need them and, to a lesser extent, teachers and parents.

Extent of Implementation

As in the second year of implementation, all site coordinators stated that their sites had fulfilled the basic requirements of the GEAR UP program by completing their work plans and offering required services and activities. The site coordinators generally stated that they “fully implemented all the events in the work plan.” Whether the program has reached full saturation may be a different question, however, given that site coordinators were not always satisfied with the level of student and parent participation in the events and activities offered through GEAR UP. One site coordinator explained, “All of my work plan, I think it [comprehensive services] is provided. Now, whether or not they participate, that’s a part, but the providing part is there.”

Although the work plans were implemented and basic requirements for service provision were met, several site coordinators acknowledged that there was room for improvement in their work. Site coordinators made comments like, “You always see that you could do something better.” One site coordinator admitted that she “feel[s] like I did all that I was supposed to do with my HEROs².” Another seemed to capture the sentiments of many by saying, “Most things are functioning. They may not work perfectly, but they are functioning.” The coordinators generally reported that they “did it all to the best of our ability” but also stated that they will “be able to do better” next year.

Some site coordinators may have tried to front-load the school year with GEAR UP events, implementing many required events and activities as early in the year as possible to ensure that they were provided. This may be a strategy coordinators are using to balance their GEAR UP responsibilities with those of their primary jobs (a challenge further discussed in the *Challenges and Resolutions: Other Challenges* section of this report). According to one site coordinator, “I usually had my work plan finished by, like, October because I know the next few months are going to be insane. So, I try to get everything over with at the beginning of the year.”

Recognition of GEAR UP in Schools

Recognition of the GEAR UP program within GEAR UP schools continues to improve, although there may be a bit of confusion or lack of understanding among some faculty about the purposes of GEAR UP and what the program can and cannot do. Several site coordinators seemed to feel that although “GEAR UP does a lot for our school,” faculty members and others “maybe don’t realize all the little things.” One site coordinator who is also a counselor said that sometimes teachers and students at his or her school may not realize that GEAR UP is providing the services—they may just think it is a service provided by the counselor. The coordinator explained,

I think that part of the problem is because I am the counselor. I go in, and they go, “Oh, it’s the counselor,” and they don’t necessarily remember that it’s not just [the] counselor, it’s GEAR UP that I bring to them too.

² HEROs, or Higher Education Readiness Officers, are students who work with the site coordinator to encourage postsecondary awareness and attainment by organizing, assisting with, and participating in activities and events.

One site coordinator who acknowledged “that sometimes people aren’t aware” that GEAR UP is providing a service also added that site coordinators “could probably do a little bit better of a job making sure that everyone knows when we do something, it is sponsored by GEAR UP.”

Teacher Buy-in and Participation

Teachers’ understanding of GEAR UP goals and purposes, and their participation in GEAR UP activities, continued to vary by site. At some schools, site coordinators reported that teachers cooperated well and participated in events at higher levels than either students or parents. A site coordinator at one such school said, “Our teachers are the best. They cooperate, and they invite you into their classrooms all the time.” At other schools, however, site coordinators reported that teachers tended to have lower participation rates than students or parents. Teachers at these schools may have had various reasons for declining to participate (e.g., events were after school hours). According to site coordinators, however, teachers who chose to participate in GEAR UP activities “greatly benefited from” the events.

One site coordinator thought that teacher participation in some events and activities might be low at the school because “a lot of our teachers don’t use the Internet,” e-mail, and other similar technologies. According to the site coordinator, “it’s a nightmare.” Such attitudes might hinder a site coordinator’s ability to communicate effectively with teachers or offer non-traditional professional development opportunities (e.g., webinars).

Site coordinators tried to encourage teacher participation in a variety of ways. In at least one school, a professional development event was scheduled and made mandatory for some teachers but not all. The teachers required to be at the event all attended. In addition to selecting a subset of teachers for the training, the site coordinator scheduled the event to coincide with a faculty senate meeting “so they weren’t having to stay after school or anything like that.” Site coordinators at a few of the sites maintained that teachers needed tangible incentives in order to be persuaded to stay or to participate in GEAR UP events—stipends, food, and so on. Engagement seemed to be better when such incentives were offered and when events were scheduled at teachers’ convenience (i.e., during regular school hours).

However, at all sites, teacher awareness and buy-in seemed to continue to rise during Year 3 as it had in the previous years. One site coordinator explained, “I haven’t had any resistance [from teachers], which is good because in our county we have a lot of resistance, you know, if somebody doesn’t like something. And I’m slowly starting to have more teachers” ask what services and resources GEAR UP can provide. Site coordinators report that teachers are realizing that GEAR UP can offer useful resources like classroom sets of books, technology, software, and so on and are appreciative of the extra support the grant provides.

Administrator support. Some sites may experience resistance from administrators at the school or county level. One site coordinator who described the teachers as “fairly supportive,” even if “some of them don’t understand what [GEAR UP] is,” stated that he or she had “troubles with the supervisors; not the teachers, but maybe the county level or the building level overall.” The site coordinator did not go on to elaborate those troubles, however, so it is not clear whether the issues were related to administrative work (e.g., approval of events) or other issues.

Administrative resistance to GEAR UP seemed to come most often from district offices rather than school-level administrators. One site coordinator said, “One of my problems besides teachers [not] staying after school . . . is help from the superintendent and the board of education. That’s a big

resistance.” The site coordinator went on to explain that trying to schedule events like college visits was difficult because the district would only approve weekend trips because weekday trips would mean “losing class time.” In this same county, another site coordinator also had trouble with district-level planning and coordination. The challenge of dealing with bureaucracies is discussed in the *Challenges and Resolutions: District-Level Support and Bureaucracy* section of this report.

Other site coordinators, however, reported having very supportive districts that were willing to approve and support GEAR UP events. One site coordinator explained that she had forgotten once to seek prior approval for a college visit from the central office; she explained, “I sent it [the approval request] in while I was on the bus on the way, and it was no problem.”

Attendance at Events

Attendance at GEAR UP events and activities continued to vary across sites, across different types of events, and at different times of the year during Year 3. Student participation in events and activities is generally better than participation from teachers or parents, although there are some variations. In at least one site, the coordinator said that participation tended to be best among teachers. That sentiment was not common, however. Teacher participation tended to be limited unless attendance was required.

Some events (e.g., college visits) seemed to be more popular with students than others, and attendance at afterschool tutoring and other events was still disappointing at some sites. Participation in family events is limited at most sites. Site coordinators try various methods to inform families and encourage participation and seem to have had fewer challenges in Year 3 than in previous years. By and large, however, they have not yet found solutions that are entirely successful in securing high levels of parental and family involvement. Challenges site coordinators face with regard to engaging families are addressed in the *Challenges and Resolutions: Parental Involvement* section of this report.

Participation in events also varied by time of year, with participation during the middle of the school year lagging for some sites. A few participants in different groups stated that participation in activities tended to be better at the beginning of the year than at the end, an observation site coordinators also made in Year 2. In other places, participation in various activities was better at the end of the year rather than at the beginning (“the fall tutoring did not take off as well as the spring tutoring did . . . [for] my 11th and 12th graders”). At one school, the site coordinator observed that parents “weren’t real sure what GEAR UP was about” near the beginning of the year. However, after engaging students (especially HEROs) in sharing the purposes of the project with parents, the site coordinator saw improved attendance. According to the coordinator, “Towards the end of the year, I was having more participation from the parents.”

Sometimes attendance at events that were supposed to be big—like the Student Success Summits—was disappointing. One site coordinator who was not highly satisfied with the Student Success Summit at her site explained,

I felt like that was something that was really hard to do on a small level, though. To get the people that, I think, we were expected to get to come to our area is—for maybe six to ten kids—was very unrealistic. I mean, I had schools that showed up to the tables that kind of seemed like they were a little put out with me at the end, that I

didn't get a big turnout. But I hadn't promised them the moon. I just told them, "We'll have who shows up." That's all you can do.

One site coordinator said that he or she felt "horrible" after only 25 people came to an event that the site coordinator and the school HEROs "had worked so hard" to organize. Such comments suggest that site coordinators may experience low morale if events continue to have lower than desired (or desirable) levels of attendance. Despite frustrations with low attendance at some events, site coordinators are generally pleased with the reactions and participation of those students, parents, and teachers who do attend.

To facilitate ease of attendance and encourage participation, site coordinators continue to couple GEAR UP events with other school events, including sporting events, events associated with graduation (e.g., baccalaureate ceremonies), and so on. They feel that they are able to generate better attendance by pairing GEAR UP events with other events people are likely to attend. One site coordinator explained, "I tried to schedule those [events] with ballgames because people won't make it to the school for a parent-teacher conference, but they'll make it to the school for a football game [or] basketball game." This strategy seems to be fairly effective in helping site coordinators boost attendance and disseminate important information.

Schools that implemented new structures or initiatives may have had particular challenges in building and sustaining attendance throughout the year. At one school, a site coordinator commented the school had "so many programs. We kind of over-programmed, and the students, everybody resisted toward the end. It was too much new stuff."

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 a few challenges, most of which seemed to be enduring issues that have been mentioned in previous years' discussions. Generally, site coordinators mentioned experiencing fewer challenges during Year 3 than in either of the two previous years. Site coordinators continued to report that the biggest challenges did not arise from the GEAR UP program, goals, and requirements *per se*, but rather from a lack of parent involvement and administrative or bureaucratic hurdles at the local level. Site coordinators in Year 3 continued to stay flexible in their approach to challenges and tried various strategies to address the issues that arose at their sites. However, they seemed to be at a loss for sustainable solutions to enduring challenges like limited transportation and low parental engagement.

GEAR UP Grade Levels

One challenge that was new to emerge in Year 3 was related to the structure of the program. Specifically, because the program served three of the four grade levels in the high schools, students in the grade level that did not receive services felt left out of the program. In all Year 3 focus groups, site coordinators mentioned that there was some disappointment and even envy among tenth-grade students during Year 3. The GEAR UP program provided services to Grades 9, 11, and 12 only; thus, students in Grade 10 did not receive any direct services from the program. Many tenth-grade

students—and even some parents—apparently noticed the differences, “and they didn’t like it.” According to site coordinators in one group, the students who were unhappy “let you know it” and their “parents let you know it, too.” In another group, a site coordinator said that some tenth-grade students felt hurt that the GEAR UP program did not include them:

It’s even more difficult at my school for them to understand, though, because I have three grade levels out of four. So, that poor tenth grade class keeps saying, “Why don’t they like us? Why doesn’t GEAR UP like us?”

Site coordinators found it a bit challenging to explain that the students would receive services in the 2011-2012 school year but just not during the current year. Site coordinators also have begun to think about how the ninth-grade students next year may feel about being the only class not receiving GEAR UP services. However, they do not seem to have solutions at the ready for dealing with any potential negative or hurt feelings.

In two of the GEAR UP high schools, Grade 9 is the only grade level currently receiving services. In those schools, upper-class students may feel jealous of the extra services that freshmen received during the 2010-2011 school year. A site coordinator at one of these schools explained,

I had seniors this year, and, you know, they’re not part of GEAR UP, and they were jealous of my ninth graders because they have been in GEAR UP [since seventh grade]. . . . They have already visited four or five colleges, and this senior was so upset.

The ninth-grade students at these schools understand that they are receiving extra services other students are not receiving. However, it may not be easy for the other students in the schools to understand why.

Parental Involvement

Limited parental involvement in GEAR UP activities and services continued to pose a challenge to sites during Year 3. Site coordinators in every focus group mentioned limited participation from parents and difficulty in recruiting parents to attend events. Site coordinators called parental engagement and participation “our biggest challenge” and “our largest hurdle.” Parents may be unaware of events, unable to attend, or unwilling to attend. Even when parents know that GEAR UP services are available, “getting them there to take advantage of it” is a major challenge. Site coordinators reported that it tends to be students “that take advantage of it, whether their parents are involved or not. We still have a lot of student involvement.” Parents may be depending on students to give them any information they may need to know (as was reported by site coordinators during Year 2 group discussions). However, especially if their child is younger, they may not realize that they will need information about college entrance requirements and financial aid “before they know it.”

Some site coordinators, however, had very positive experiences with parents of ninth-grade students. These parents were described as “appreciative” parents who wanted to know more about GEAR UP, “especially financial aid.” One site coordinator explained the changing expectations about parental involvement in high school:

I think my best reaction comes from my ninth grade parents this year because they’re still involved a lot with their kids at school, and they feel welcomed. At high school, we tend to not want parents at the school, or we have in the past. And they want to

be involved, and if we can start there with those parents, then I think we are going to see a big difference by the time those kids are seniors. If we can keep them involved.

Communicating with parents. Although communicating with parents was mentioned as a challenge in both of the previous years, site coordinators in Year 3 did not mention the challenge. One site coordinator praised the automated calling system as “the best tool because that’s the biggest means of communication that we have” for parents. Site coordinators also communicate with parents through phone calls, conversations, Edline, and various GEAR UP-specific sites and pages (e.g., websites, Facebook).

Some site coordinators may struggle to reach parents because many parents are reluctant to use technology. Although students “are all for the technology,” according to one site coordinator,

The parents have this technology barrier. They don’t know how to use it. They don’t want to learn how to use it. They are afraid of it. They just don’t want to have anything to do with this technology at all.

“Vocabulary and wording” may also pose some challenges in reaching out to parents. This may be a particular challenge in surveys, however, and be less problematic for routine service delivery within the program.

Site coordinators continue trying to boost parental awareness and involvement in various ways, most notably by scheduling GEAR UP events in conjunction with sporting events and other activities that parents are likely to attend. Some site coordinators may not have comprehensive plans or ideas for increasing parent involvement, however, because the problem seems to be intractable and “a social issue in our area.” With different, non-traditional family structures, joblessness, homelessness, foster families, and so on, students (and site coordinators) may not always be sure who should be acting as their parent figures. Several site coordinators seem to feel that “we’re trying to tackle a task that is well beyond us” in developing meaningful, sustained, widespread family involvement.

Transportation

Transportation for students and parents to attend afterschool events continues to challenge many GEAR UP sites. The GEAR UP school sites are located in fairly rural areas and serve student populations that are geographically dispersed throughout the counties. One site coordinator explained the challenge of transportation to GEAR UP events:

Parents live far away from the school, so services are kind of hard to get to. The parents can’t get to the school as often as they should. Like, some kids ride a bus an hour each way in the morning and afternoon, so availability to the school is tough for a lot of parents.

Site coordinators continued to be concerned about transportation issues and how they affected the delivery and receipt of GEAR UP services. However, many did not seem to know how to deal adequately with the problem. Some sites are able to offer activity buses to provide transportation for students who participate in afterschool events. However, other sites are not able to offer that kind of transportation for participants. Even in areas that have afterschool activity busing, students may not be able to take advantage of the transportation because the bus routes travel only the main road and not to the students’ houses, leaving a transportation gap that families are not able to fill. The other

major strategy that seems designed to alleviate some of the transportation problems is to combine GEAR UP events with other school events that students and parents are likely to attend (e.g., offering tutoring during the school day, combining workshops with sporting events), thereby eliminating the need for students and parents to make another trip to the school. Limited transportation, however, may contribute to limited parental participation and lower-than-desired student participation in afterschool tutoring. It may also hinder expanded implementation of GEAR UP services.

District-Level Support and Bureaucracy

Site coordinators in two of the three focus groups mentioned having issues with county policies or procedures regarding procurement or payment. In one group, a site coordinator mentioned having “some money issues,” and another site coordinator, who seemed to be familiar with the situation, said “it wasn’t a GEAR UP program” problem; rather, was an issue that originated with the county. The issue seemed to be minor, however, and appeared to have been resolved.

Site coordinators from one county, reported a great deal of resistance from their district office. When asked what the district did that was resistant to GEAR UP, one site coordinator replied, “Not approve things.” Another explained that sometimes “you don’t really hear back whether it has been approved or not . . . I wasn’t told, ‘No, you weren’t approved. I wasn’t told I was approved. They just kind of pretended it [the request] didn’t happen.” Later in the discussion, the topic again arose, and one of the site coordinators from the county said, “Even following up, I still don’t get any reply.”

Such lack of approval for activities tended to affect college visits most. Although GEAR UP pays for these trips, districts often must approve the trips because county funds pay for insurance. As one site coordinator explained, “If it’s not approved, it’s not covered through our insurance.” Site coordinators could not offer campus visits unless the travel was approved, but it was extremely challenging for them to get approval in a timely manner.

Navigating the district procedures and processes for approval of purchase orders was also a lengthy and frustrating process. Although other site coordinators may have some difficulties or frustrations in dealing with district bureaucracies, the issue emerged most from the site coordinators in one county. One site coordinator who deals with purchase orders for a school organization was frustrated by the difference in school-based approvals (which happen quickly) and district-based approval processes: “With the purchase orders for GEAR UP, it takes an eternity and an act of Congress to go through.”

When asked whether these site coordinators had tried to talk with district personnel about these issues, one replied, “It’s worthless.” Often district staff are not accessible to the site coordinators. For instance, the school site may be distant from the central office location or the site coordinator may be a classroom teacher who is unable to find time to leave the school or the classroom to call or visit the central office. One site coordinator explained:

They are very inaccessible to me because by the time I get out of school and I get to the Board office, no one is there. And they won’t let me out of the work day to go do that, to go talk with them. They won’t come to the school to meet with me. So it’s virtually impossible for me to meet with anybody.

Although phone discussions with district-level personnel may work very well in some districts and may be appropriate to resolve issues, they are not always the most effective method of

communication for site coordinators. One site coordinator agreed that “it’s hard to talk on the phone about something like” approval for GEAR UP trip or procurement requests.

The disconnect between district-level administrators and site coordinators can hamper site coordinators in procuring resources and providing services. One site coordinator tried to explain the lack of district support: “Possibly they don’t understand what GEAR UP is trying to do. It’s possible that they just have so many other things on their plate and really can’t do it. I don’t know what the situation is.” However, the site coordinators were extremely frustrated at the lack of support from the county office.

Other Challenges

Site coordinators mentioned very few other challenges during Year 3 discussions. In addition to expressing mild frustration with the number of surveys school stakeholders are asked to complete (for multiple purposes, not only the GEAR UP evaluation), some site coordinators mentioned challenges recruiting tutors and balancing GEAR UP work and administrative tasks with their other work responsibilities.

Recruiting tutors. A few of the sites had trouble fully implementing the tutoring component of the GEAR UP project because they struggled to find qualified people to serve as tutors. When tutor jobs were posted, one site received no responses and no interest. At one site, the coordinator managed the challenge by doing “a lot of afterschool tutoring on our own,” and another school eventually hired a tutor after raising the pay rate by \$10 an hour. Another site with a similar challenge in the previous year, however, had implemented the tutoring program as an in-school initiative and recruited classroom teachers to serve as tutors:

We faced that problem last year and, to a degree, faced it with afterschool tutoring this year. But we implemented [it] as a during-school tutoring position, where teachers could give up their planning [time]. And the teachers bid the job based on giving up their planning [time] and were able to work that job and do the tutoring during school. . . . So we were able to do it during the school day, and that seemed to help out a lot with that.

Another site recruited retired English and mathematics teachers to come to the school during the day to tutor students or assist in classrooms if needed.

Balancing GEAR UP and school work. A few site coordinators may still struggle to find an appropriate balance between doing their day jobs (whether as classroom teachers, counselors, or other roles) and fulfilling all of their GEAR UP responsibilities. Several site coordinators mentioned doing GEAR UP work at home or putting in long hours at the school (or both) in order to do both their GEAR UP and regular school work. One coordinator who was a teacher explained, “I think it is just a little harder for us. . . . I mean we have kids, we are teaching all day long. You have to do all of the GEAR UP stuff at home.” A site coordinator who was a counselor also noted that it was difficult to fulfill job responsibilities as a GEAR UP site coordinator and school counselor during the day: “I still had to do it at home ‘cause there was no time. Or after school.” Site coordinators tried to manage their time and balance their responsibilities by setting priorities. Sometimes GEAR UP priorities came first, and at other times “it was just like trying to do your primary job first and then GEAR UP kind of had to take” a backseat in some instances. Difficulties in trying to balance responsibilities may have resulted in basic implementation of services rather than expanded implementation in Year 3. One site

coordinator explained, “I didn’t *not* implement it [GEAR UP activities] at all. I just did the bare bones. You know, you prioritize.”

Balancing GEAR UP activities and school work may also be a challenge for classroom teachers in a few sites. In one school, the site coordinator purchased software to assist with tutoring in a content area. However, the coordinator struggled “to get the math teachers to use the math tutoring software” because the teachers were required to use another kind of software on a regular basis for their instruction. “So getting them to go one more time—or even once a month—was really difficult for me.”

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 3. Site coordinators’ discussions revealed perceptions that most of the services were of good quality, highly relevant, and highly useful. None of the interviewees mentioned any negative reactions to any events and, in fact, often mentioned students and parents thanking them for offering the activities. Students seemed to be the most engaged in GEAR UP activities, according to the site coordinators, especially college visits. In general, site coordinators indicated that stakeholders were satisfied with the kinds of activities that were being implemented. They also reported 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 providing students with helpful resources and experiences to which they might not otherwise have access.

Services for Students and Parents

Site coordinators perceived that the services offered to students and parents were of high quality, highly relevant, and very useful. They were satisfied with the events and services provided, even if they were not always happy with the turnout for events. Site coordinators credited GEAR UP services with helping students achieve more (e.g., earn more Promise Scholarships) and aspire to higher levels of achievement. One site coordinator said that GEAR UP has “changed the culture of our entire school . . . it seems like almost every single student is at least thinking now about what they’re going to do after high school and that they can do something after high school.”

Parents who attend events are generally very “appreciative” and interested in the information and services provided. Site coordinators have had parents “say thank you for different things . . . they’re realizing that we’re doing something for their kids that some of them cannot do.” Scholarships, incentive awards, and financial aid are especially popular with parents. Site coordinators described financial aspects of the project as “a big thing” for parents.

Although parents seem to be pleased with GEAR UP services, their reactions to GEAR UP efforts overall might be mixed. Although “students are receptive because they are happy to get anything,” parents in some areas may be “a little less excited.” One site coordinator explained,

In some ways, the parents are very enthused as they want their kid to have as many options for college as possible. . . . Some parents don’t want the students to leave

those areas. They think if they go to college, they're never coming back. And I think some parents are supportive and want their students to obtain a higher level of education.

This concern—the tension between wanting children to succeed in life and wanting children to stay close to family—echoes parental worries that site coordinators mentioned during Year 2.

Site coordinators generally had more to say about student services than about services targeted toward parents. This focus may be understandable, given that site coordinators work more closely and frequently with students than with parents. However, site coordinators stated that they were very “satisfied with what GEAR UP offers our kids.” Some site coordinators who are also parents mentioned being “thankful . . . for what they [students] can do” through GEAR UP. In addition to the technological resources that GEAR UP is providing for their schools, students are being offered a variety of services and activities like ACT and other test preparation, tutoring, college visits, and so on. One site coordinator said, “I feel like the work plan is really beneficial to the students.”

Student workshops and events. Several site coordinators mentioned two specific workshop facilitators and complimented their sessions for students. Jim Scherr, who offered ACT tutoring, and Aric Bostic, who conducted a workshop on academic leadership, made very positive impressions on almost all site coordinators and students. The academic leadership workshop from Aric Bostic was widely acclaimed as useful and beneficial for students. The presentation was described as “wonderful,” “phenomenal,” and “money very well spent.” ACT preparation sessions with Jim Scherr were also described primarily as “fantastic.” Most site coordinators stated that students found the sessions to be very helpful in preparing them for the ACT. Another site coordinator, however, did not believe that the ACT preparation session was particularly helpful for students at her site. Students and teachers both were confused about the way he presented tips and the priority he gave to strategies for eliminating guesses from among the answer choices (20 minutes of a 60-minute workshop). The students “hated it,” and both they and the teachers who attended told the site coordinator that the session was confusing and not helpful. However, that experience seemed to be the only negative experience any site had with Mr. Scherr.

Many site coordinators said that students graduated or earned higher scores on the ACT (and even Promise Scholarships) as a result of GEAR UP-sponsored activities and interventions (especially tutoring, test prep, and use of technology). “Last year [with] the Promise Scholarship, our school only had three kids with Promise Scholarships. This year, we had 12 kids with Promise Scholarships, and it had a lot to do with GEAR UP.”

Financial aid services (including workshops) were greatly appreciated by students as well as parents. Site coordinators thought these events tended to be very helpful and practical. One described a financial aid workshop as “wonderful.” Another site coordinator said that students who attended a financial aid workshop “were really receptive to that, but they didn’t know a lot about it. It was really kind of an eye opener” for the students about the financial aid available to them. College Goal Sunday (addressed separately), an event designed to help families complete and file their FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] forms, was also described as a helpful event, even though there were some challenges and disappointments at a few of the sites.

Other events that site coordinators mentioned for their usefulness and positive student reactions were job shadowing in a setting that let students see all the various jobs required to run the organization

(from receptionists to high-level professionals), and a mathematics and science expo, described as “very impressive” and “fantastic.” Students “loved” these events.

At one school, ninth grade tutoring went much better than academic enrichment activities for students in Grades 11 and 12. The site coordinator explained that the enrichment activities for the upper grades did not go well “because there are no suggestions of what to do. Nobody thought it would be helpful . . . There were no faculty members willing to get on board with it. No students would get on board with it.” Ninth grade students, however, were more willing to stay for the tutoring, and the site coordinator thought it “was really effective.” The coordinator said that some students passed on to the next grade as a result of the tutoring.

HEROs. There were scattered mentions of the HEROs during group discussions in Year 3. Although no negative comments about the HEROs program were made, some site coordinators were not sure how to make best use of the program. At least one felt that she didn’t make the best possible use of the HEROs because she mainly asked them to do “busy work” (e.g., hanging up posters in the school). She “felt like some of the other stuff, it just added to my work load and wouldn’t have necessarily been beneficial to helping them learn anything.”

College Goal Sunday. College Goal Sunday was repeatedly mentioned as a positive, high-quality event by site coordinators in all focus groups. It is perceived as very helpful, very useful, and relevant for families. In some cases, it may take pressure off of school staff—especially counselors—who occasionally may be asked to help families with the FAFSA. These staff can direct families to attend College Goal Sunday rather than sorting through families’ W2 forms and FAFSAs themselves. At one site, there was even a tax professional who helped parents who had not yet filed their taxes prior to completing the FAFSA. According to the site coordinator, “That was awesome.”

Attendance at College Goal Sunday, however, was a little disappointing for some site coordinators. The timing of the event and the locations may have deterred families from attending. Because the event was held on a Sunday, families that attend religious services and activities devoutly may have chosen to skip College Goal Sunday. As one site coordinator explained, such families are “at church all day on Sunday, and they’re not missing it.” Because the events were held in various sites—not all of which were GEAR UP sites—coordinators thought that some parents may have felt slightly intimidated and might have opted not to go. One explained, “I think they [parents] would come to the school more so than go to the places they’re not familiar with.”

Governor’s Honors Symposium. Site coordinators participating in one focus group expressed displeasure with only one event: the Governor’s Honor Symposium. They were dissatisfied with several aspects of the event, including the fact that the Governor had not attended the event in either Year 2 or Year 3. As one of the site coordinators said, “If it’s going to be the Governor’s Honor Symposium, the Governor needs to be there.” The medallions given to students were described as “cheesy,” but more importantly, students were not always sure why they were getting them. Some site coordinators may also be unsure about the purpose of the event. One said, “I don’t even know the purpose of it. I mean, that’s it. You get to meet the Governor, and you get a medallion that you can wear at graduation.” Except, as another site coordinator observed, “you don’t really get to meet the Governor.” These site coordinators were also frustrated that the event made no distinction between students who graduated high school with the minimum effort and those who achieve highly. Students also may not have been able to attend the event because the timing often conflicts with proms and regional and state competitions in sporting events. Site coordinators did like the event more when it was held at the Clay Center as opposed to the Civic Center, however.

Reflecting for improvement. During one focus group discussion, site coordinators reflected on events they held during the past year and talked about how they might build on those events or refine them in the next school year. Two coordinators specifically discussed their Student Success Summits and how they could build on those events to either continue the conversations (e.g., what impacts academic/educational persistence, what happens after high school, what is the college lingo) with students, parents, and even community members in the 2011-2012 school year.

College Visits

College visits continue to be very well received and highly valued by students and parents. Site coordinators also continued to be very enthusiastic about college visits. Coordinators described the college trips in glowing terms (e.g., “probably the most influential part of the GEAR UP program”; “the most helpful” activity) and tended to say things like, “I wish we could do more” college visits. They also stated that students “want to do more college visits. They love the college visits.”

Site coordinators praised the college visits as important ways to provide opportunities and experiences to students who might not otherwise have opportunities to visit college campuses. According to the site coordinators, some students “would never get to set foot on campus until they actually would go to college if it wasn’t for the GEAR UP program taking them.” The “kids won’t be able to get out there” without GEAR UP trips because “nobody will take them.” Some parents may want to take their children to campus visits but simply lack the resources or time to do so.

Students who attend college visits enjoy the experiences and gain valuable perspectives that cannot be gathered from websites or guidebooks. Further, exposure to campus life may increase their comfort level and familiarity with aspects of the collegiate experience that can be intimidating at first (e.g., navigating campus, navigating the cafeteria). Seeing themselves on college campuses may also help students visualize themselves as college students. One site coordinator explained,

The students who get involved with that [college visits], and I think that the more they can see college as a real, tangible, attainable thing, I think the better it is for students in the area because it helps them believe that it’s even possible. Showing them that it exists and it is attainable is really good.

Site coordinators do not appear to have to recruit heavily to encourage adequate attendance on college trips. However, they do try to advertise the events and ensure that students are aware of the opportunities. One site coordinator took several pictures from a college visit, enlarged them, and posted them on bulletin boards around the school. This prompted several students who had not gone on the visit to ask about it. The site coordinator believed that the pictures of the visit will encourage more students to go on college visits next year.

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’ focus group discussions in Year 3, sites seem to be using GEAR UP-provided resources appropriately and effectively. Partnerships with higher education institutions appear to be very positive. Few sites appear to have partnerships with other entities.

Resources

GEAR UP site coordinators continue to use program funding to purchase resources and services for their schools. Site coordinators reported that GEAR UP funds have been used to (1) purchase equipment and resources, including technological tools and other materials (e.g., computers, laptops, netbooks, mobile learning labs, iPads, Kindles, electronic white boards, responders, calculators and graphing calculators, ELMOs [wireless tablets], various software, flat screen televisions, document cameras) for academic or instructional enhancement; (2) sponsor or enhance professional development for teachers, offer training (e.g., for technology use), and bring special facilitators to the school (e.g., to analyze WESTEST data in depth); 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, to purchase the textbooks for dual credit courses, to purchase classroom sets of books for teachers, and to provide tutoring for ACT preparation.

Site coordinators are grateful for the funding because their districts or schools would not be able to purchase these kinds of resources without it. The technology purchases tended to be the first resources mentioned and the most talked about, indicating that site coordinators may be most satisfied with the program's ability to provide such valuable tools to their schools. In speaking about the computer labs that GEAR UP money has provided for a school, one site coordinator said he or she was "extremely thankful as a classroom teacher, and I see them being used every single day." Another noted the technological transformation that has taken place in only a couple of years:

When I went to [the high school] three years ago . . . very few classrooms had SMART boards in them; now, every classroom [does]. All of it's not paid for by GEAR UP, but a lot of it is paid for by GEAR UP.

Providing funding for students to enroll in dual credit is also a highly lauded use of GEAR UP funds. Site coordinators, students, and parents all appreciate the opportunity for students to earn college credit while they are still enrolled in high school. Dual credit is "an opportunity that kids did not have until GEAR UP came into our school and partnered" with the local college. GEAR UP funding for dual credit courses has also expanded the enrollment in those courses. One site coordinator explained,

What you end up having, instead of three or four kids signing up because they have to pay \$150 to \$200 for the class and another \$100 for the book . . . is you have 25 or 30 kids signing up. So that is what the difference has made. Because a lot of our kids, they can't come up with that money to pay for the dual credit classes.

Some site coordinators "really try to [sell] to parents" the economic benefits of dual credit courses, telling parents that they will not have to "pay for these classes when their kids get to college because they have already taken them" in high school.

One site coordinator believed that GEAR UP funds were being "underutilized." The coordinator went on to say, "There are a lot of things that they [GEAR UP funds] could be used for. Not every GEAR UP teacher has a printer in their classroom. I think that is an essential item as an educator. I think we could help with ink. We are always running out of ink . . . toners, or supplies." The coordinator seemed to accept some responsibility for not following up by looking into or making those kinds of purchases: "It was just such a struggle to get anything approved that those things fell by, and I did the things that were bigger."

In some cases, counties may already pay for services that GEAR UP funds, such as tutoring. In those instances, site coordinators may feel limited in how they use resources that are earmarked for tutoring or other specific purposes. One site coordinator talked about the frustration, saying, “If the county is going to pay for the tutoring, then maybe we could use that money in a different area in a different way” (e.g., paying for Advanced Placement test fees or dual credit).

Human Resources. As in previous years, site coordinators appreciated the high level of responsiveness and quality they perceived in the human resources associated with the West Virginia GEAR UP project. GEAR UP regional coordinators³ and West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) personnel continued to receive very high praise for their professionalism and helpfulness. One site coordinator said, “The quality of services that I get from GEAR UP [staff] is always high quality.” Regional coordinators were described as “outstanding” and “extremely patient and extremely helpful.” Site coordinators all appreciated the resources and assistance they received from their regional coordinators.

Some comments suggested that site coordinators believe HEPC staff can make just about anything happen. In discussing how to solve enduring challenges in one county, a coordinator from another county suggested that “Adam could do it”—“it” being to help contact county officials or officials at the West Virginia Department of Education to find a resolution to those problems. Although HEPC staff may not have influence with district or state-level K-12 personnel, site coordinators trust that they can help make contacts and help sites find ways to work through their challenges.

Partnerships

In Year 3, site coordinators all described their partnerships with institutions of higher education (IHEs) in very positive terms. The conversations held in Year 3 suggest that the relationships are improving. The IHEs were perceived to be dependable resources; enthusiastic about working with the GEAR UP sites; open, cooperative, and receptive to GEAR UP students; and very accommodating for the groups. In describing the partnership with an IHE, one site coordinator said, “They [the partner college] do so much with us, and we’re very grateful for it. And all of the colleges that we have visited have been very accommodating, and the kids have all had great experiences.” 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. The IHEs are all “excited to have the students” and regularly “give them stuff.”

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 and universities visited during 2010-2011 included

Bluefield State College
 Bridgmont Community and Technical College
 Concord University
 Fairmont State University
 Glenville State College
 Ohio University Southern Campus at Ironton
 Marshall University
 Mountain State University
 New River Community and Technical College
 Southern WV Community and Technical College
 University of Charleston
 West Virginia University
 West Virginia State University
 WV School of Osteopathic Medicine

³ Regional coordinators, employed by HEPC through the GEAR UP program, are based at partnering institutions of higher education (IHEs) within each of the three GEAR UP regions and serve as resources for site coordinators for planning and coordinating events and as liaisons between sites and HEPC or IHEs, as needed.

college gear (e.g., items provided by the IHE). IHEs are also benefiting from having more students enroll in dual credit courses and having a ready pool of potential recruits. Partnerships between the high schools and the IHEs continue to provide mutually beneficial relationships in which students are exposed to different colleges and colleges have opportunities to recruit a variety of students.

Discussion about the partnerships between GEAR UP sites and IHEs focused mainly on arranging campus tours and, to a lesser extent, dual credit opportunities. Arranging campus visits is widely agreed to be beneficial (e.g., “a really good experience for the students to see something that they otherwise wouldn’t get to experience”). However, such visits can have unintended consequences. Although college visits can help inspire students to aspire to college and help them figure out what they want in a college, they can also help students figure out what they do *not* want in a college. One site coordinator told of taking a group of students to WVU, and although they enjoyed the visit, none of them applied to WVU, which another site coordinator described as “a hard campus.” Dual credit courses, also widely praised by site coordinators, are also giving students opportunities they may not have had without the GEAR UP grant.

GEAR UP involvement in sites and sponsored activities (e.g., dual credit) may be helping to facilitate improvements in relationships between sites and partner IHEs. For instance, one site coordinator who said that his or her high school’s partnership with its IHE partner was getting better explained, “since GEAR UP has been in place over the past three years, the partnership has been really good because GEAR UP has not only paid for the dual credit classes but also the book.” At this site during Year 4, IHE partner faculty are going to teach college classes for the high school students at the high school site. Another site coordinator said that the relationship between the school and the IHE partner “was actually pretty bad until GEAR UP came back in. Like, I think we had done something that severed ties, and then GEAR UP kind of came in and repaired them.”

Some sites rely on regional coordinators to help manage and mediate relationships and arrangements with the IHEs. Others are making their own arrangements and plan directly with the colleges or universities rather than coordinating activities through regional coordinators. Direct relationships between high schools and IHEs continue to be a promising indicator of potential sustainability of those relationships when GEAR UP funding is no longer available.

Other Comments and Considerations

Site coordinators offered few other comments during focus group interviews in Year 3. Their comments throughout the discussions indicate that, as in previous years, they remain committed to the GEAR UP program and want it to succeed; most especially, however, they want their students to succeed. They expressed gratitude for the program, extolling the opportunities that students have through GEAR UP that they would not have without it and calling it “a blessing.”

In one focus group, as the discussion was drawing to a close, one of the more veteran educators gave some advice to a younger teacher in an effort to help her manage challenges she was facing in her school. The evaluator followed up on this discussion by asking if the site coordinators often talked with each other about how to address challenges in GEAR UP and in their primary jobs. The coordinators mentioned having “whatever little bit of time we have” during breakout sessions at their meetings. However, they generally expressed a desire for more sharing time: “more time for just help from other people.” One of them suggested that a technological tool (“maybe an account for GEAR

UP, like Facebook, only for teachers or something”) would be a helpful and easy way for teachers to share advice with one another.

Summary and Recommendations

Site coordinators are satisfied with the West Virginia GEAR UP program and continue to report that it is serving the students in their schools and counties well. College visits consistently are perceived as particularly beneficial for students. Site coordinators report that these trips provide students with opportunities they would not have without GEAR UP funds. GEAR UP resources are still 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 quite strong and are improving; the relationships also appear to be mutually beneficial for students and for IHEs.

The concerns and challenges that emerged during Year 3 focus groups were challenges that arose in previous years as well. The challenges of increasing parental involvement, dealing with transportation to and from afterschool events in rural areas, and managing district-level bureaucracies seem to be enduring challenges without ready or simple solutions. Site coordinators continue to manage these challenges by trying different strategies and being flexible in scheduling activities. Having excellent support and information from HEPC personnel helps ensure that they are able to address other challenges as they arise. Site coordinators believe that they are implementing their GEAR UP work plans, but they are also looking for ways to improve their work and service delivery.

Based on the findings of the Year 3 focus groups, several recommendations can be made to continue improvements in the implementation of the West Virginia GEAR UP project. The recommendations should be considered formative suggestions rather than absolute solutions. While some may be easy to implement during Year 4, 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 are implementing their work plans and providing required services and activities. They generally feel that they could improve their activities and services in the coming school year and have begun to reflect on ways to do so. HEPC personnel should continue discussions with regional coordinators and site coordinators about expectations for implementation of GEAR UP activities and services.

Recognition of GEAR UP

- Staff at GEAR UP schools are generally familiar with the GEAR UP program but may not always be certain about what services and resources are provided by GEAR UP and which are provided by other sources. Students seem to be very familiar with the program, although parents’ level of familiarity with GEAR UP is unclear—due, perhaps, to limited parental involvement in GEAR UP activities. Site coordinators should be encouraged to reinvigorate

their efforts to share information about the program and ensure that staff and school stakeholders are aware of the services, activities, and resources provided through GEAR UP funding.

Teacher Buy-in and Participation

- It appears that teacher awareness of GEAR UP and buy-in to the goals and purposes of the program continues to increase. Although some sites seem to have enthusiastic participation from teachers, other sites continue to struggle to achieve satisfactory teacher participation rates. 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. 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

- Although participants in GEAR UP events appreciate the information and assistance they receive, attendance levels continue to disappoint site coordinators, 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. 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.

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

GEAR UP Grade Levels

- During Year 3, students in Grade 10 were not directly served by the GEAR UP program while students in Grades 9, 11, and 12 did receive services. Some Grade 10 students (and parents) noticed and were upset by the gap in service. HEPC staff may have anticipated such reactions due to the long-planned structure of the project. During Year 4, students in Grade 9 will receive no direct services. HEPC staff should encourage site coordinators to be prepared to deal with the reactions of these students and parents. Providing a list of phrases or concepts that coordinators can draw upon during discussions about the issue may be particularly helpful.

Parental Involvement

- Limited parental involvement continues to disappoint site coordinators. Although parents who come to events appreciate the information and support, site coordinators continue to believe that more parents should be in attendance. HEPC staff may want to consider providing site coordinators with additional training, assistance, and tools for communicating effectively with parents of underserved student populations and encouraging their

participation in events. Site coordinators can also continue to share ideas and success stories with one another about how they have been able to reach out to parents.

Transportation

- For the third year, the lack of transportation is a challenge that appears to be limiting participation in GEAR UP events. At many sites, students and parents do not have a way to travel back to the high school campus for afterschool events; even sites with activity buses may struggle to serve all students due to limited bus routes (e.g., only main roads rather than directly to students' homes). Because so many sites continue to have concerns about transportation issues, HEPC program staff 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 and/or scheduling options that might work in the contexts of the GEAR UP sites to maximize opportunities for student and parent participation.

District-Level Support and Bureaucracy

- A few of the site coordinators struggle in their relationships with their district offices. The issue seemed most pronounced in one county, where requests for approval of activities or for approval of purchase orders seemed routinely to go nowhere. 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. If necessary, HEPC staff may want to meet with county-level personnel to help facilitate the relationship and explain the importance of timely responses to requests and paperwork for the federal grant.

Other Challenges

- **Recruiting tutors.** Some site coordinators are frustrated by their difficulties in recruiting qualified individuals to provide academic tutoring services. Site coordinators should be encouraged to continue sharing their ideas with one another about how to overcome the challenge (e.g., making tutoring a during-school activity, hiring retired teachers).
- **Balancing GEAR UP and school work.** Most site coordinators appeared to struggle at times to balance their GEAR UP work and responsibilities with the work and responsibilities of their primary jobs. During Year 4, while coordinators will again be serving three grade levels, extra assistance or tips for time and work management may be helpful.

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. Some sites still seem to be struggling with full, effective implementation of the tutoring component. HEPC personnel may want to work with sites to achieve fuller implementation of the tutoring component, particularly when tutoring must be implemented after school (with the attendant difficulties associated with adequate transportation to and from afterschool events).

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

Resources

- For the third year, program resources appear to be utilized for appropriate purposes and in appropriate ways. HEPC staff should continue to encourage GEAR UP site coordinators to monitor the needs of their sites to ensure that equipment purchases, professional development or training plans, and speakers or workshops are well suited to the needs of the students, teachers, and parents in their schools.

Partnerships

- Relationships with partnering IHEs (and other IHEs that are not official partners) have been quite positive during the third year. HEPC staff should consider what kind of technical assistance or advice may be necessary for those relationships from both the secondary and postsecondary perspectives to ensure sustainable, positive relationships. There are no discernable challenges at this time; site coordinators praised the relationships with partner IHEs, which appear to be receptive and responsive to requests from and to the needs of GEAR UP sites.
- Site coordinators did not mention partnerships with entities other than IHEs. If it is a HEPC goal for sites to develop further community or business partnerships, additional assistance may be needed in this area. If site coordinators are to help their schools develop such partnerships, they may need guidance or discussions about the types of partnerships which may best meet the goals of GEAR UP, state or regional resources or organizations that 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

Time for Advising and Mentoring

- Site coordinators may appreciate more time or opportunity during GEAR UP events or through technological tools to share advice and experiences with one another. Although they have some time (40 minutes – 1 hour) for sharing during breakout sessions at site coordinator meetings, time for mentoring may be limited. Site coordinators could make use of such mentoring time to share experiences or offer advice about GEAR UP or about teaching or education in general—both of which may be helpful to more junior or inexperienced teachers or site coordinators.

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, how long you've worked with GEAR UP, and what your role is when you're not wearing your site coordinator hat.

TARGET QUESTIONS:

- 2) To what degree are GEAR UP services being provided to 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]
(*Probe for: professional development, technology, giveaways, advertisements and related materials [flyers, handouts], data*)
- 7) What are some examples of students' or parents' reactions to the GEAR UP project? [F3]
- 8) To what degree do you believe the GEAR UP program is currently carried out in your school(s)? [F2]
(*Probe for: number of services/activities implemented; number of services/activities planned/workplan activities met*)

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?