



West Virginia GEAR UP

Year 1 Annual Evaluation Report

October 2015

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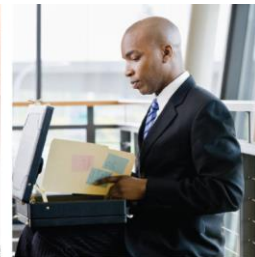
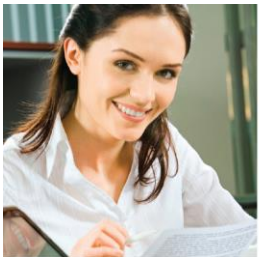


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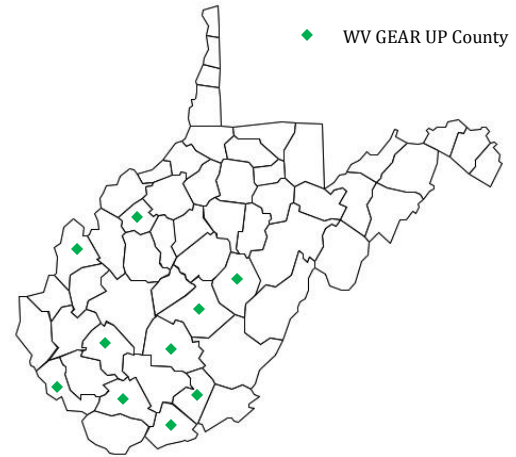
Introduction

West Virginia GEAR UP

West Virginia GEAR UP is a federally funded program that helps students in 50 high-poverty middle and high schools situated in ten counties¹ across the state prepare to succeed in education and training beyond high school. “GEAR UP” stands for “Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs,” and the program’s goal is to help more students pursue their dreams of earning a college diploma or skillset certificate.

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (Commission) manages West Virginia (WV) GEAR UP in collaboration with the West Virginia Community and Technical College System, the West Virginia Department of Education, the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts, and many other community partners. The GEAR UP program operates on 7-year cycles. The Commission is administering its second consecutive GEAR UP grant, which began in 2014 and will conclude in 2021.

Exhibit 1. Ten WV Counties Participating in GEAR UP



GEAR UP Evaluation Design

ICF International (ICF) is conducting the external program evaluation of WV GEAR UP. The evaluation framework includes a program implementation study to assist the Commission in determining the fidelity with which program activities were delivered, which outputs from the WV GEAR UP logic model were accomplished, and to inform the Commission of any facilitators or barriers to implementation. ICF is also conducting a summative outcomes study to ascertain the extent to which data-informed benchmarks, identified in concert with the Commission, are achieved. ICF plans an impact study with a quasi-experimental design to address selected program outcomes and impacts. Finally, the evaluation framework includes a sustainability study to inform the Commission about how the GEAR UP program could continue to have an impact after the grant ends.

Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this report is to describe the results of two data collection activities conducted after the publication of the *Year 1 WV GEAR UP Interim Evaluation Report*. These include the *Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey* and *Year 1 Site and County Coordinator Focus Group Interviews*. The report presents information about these data collection activities and provides a discussion that, where appropriate, incorporates these findings with those described in the *Year 1 WV GEAR UP Interim Evaluation Report*. The report concludes with a set of recommendations.

¹ Boone, Fayette, Mason, Mercer, Mingo, Nicholas, Summers, Webster, Wirt, and Wyoming

Data Sources

Year 1 data sources are described below:

Student and Parent Surveys

In November 2014, in collaboration with the Commission, ICF developed a series of Year 1 student and parent/guardian surveys, associated informed consent documents, and a detailed administration protocol. The *Year 1 WV GEAR UP Student Survey* included 23 items organized across four sections. All surveys included nine demographic items designed to gather background information about respondents and their families, four items measuring students' perceived academic ability and educational goals, and seven items measuring students' knowledge about college entrance requirements, the cost of attending college, and financial aid options. An additional three items that measured whether students had completed several important college preparation activities were also included on the Grade 12 version of the survey.

The *Year 1 WV GEAR UP Parent Survey* included 19 items organized across three sections. All surveys included nine demographic items designed to gather background information about respondents and their children, three items measuring parents' perceptions of their child's educational goals, and seven items measuring parents' knowledge about college entrance requirements, the cost of attending college, and financial aid options.

School Personnel Survey

ICF and the Commission collaborated to develop the *Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey* and associated informed consent documents in April 2015. The survey included 15 items, some with multiple item rating scales. The survey was divided into seven principal sections: (1) demographic characteristics, (2) individual participation in and satisfaction with the quality of WV GEAR UP services, (3) perceptions of college-going culture (CGC) at the school and classroom levels, (4) knowledge and comfort level with select college-related topics; (5) individual involvement in select college-related activities, (6) the extent to which schools engage in activities that systematically promote CGC, and (7) WV GEAR UP's role in supporting CGC. A reproduction of the survey is available in the Appendix of this report.

Site and County Coordinator Focus Group Interview Protocols

ICF developed the *Year 1 WV GEAR UP Site and County Coordinator Focus Group Interview Guides* and associated informed consent documents in March 2015. The site coordinator guide includes ten prompts, each with a series of questions and probes. The county coordinator guide was slightly shorter, including eight prompts. Both were designed to gather information related to five broad topic areas: (1) the extent to which various stakeholders have provided essential resources and support to facilitate implementation of WV GEAR UP, (2) the current status of program implementation (e.g., services provided and involvement of key stakeholders), (3) beliefs about the immediate and longer term impact of WV GEAR UP, (4) the extent to which the WV GEAR UP program is building a basis for sustainability in Year 1, and (5) perceptions about the effectiveness of program components and areas of future need. A reproduction of the guides is available in the Appendix.

Methods

Throughout this report, we use descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, standard deviation) and calculate frequencies (i.e., percentages) to describe baseline results from the *WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey*. In some cases, we conducted comparative statistical analyses such as analyses of variance (ANOVA), chi-square tests, or paired t-tests to explore relationships among predictor variables such as respondents' role, programmatic level, and participation in WV GEAR UP and outcomes related to CGC.

For open-ended survey items and focus group data, we conducted thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves reviewing and coding participants' responses according to broad themes, breaking those themes into subthemes, and analyzing and assessing the interrelationships among themes. Results are described in narrative form and supported by illustrative quotes.

Results: School Personnel Survey

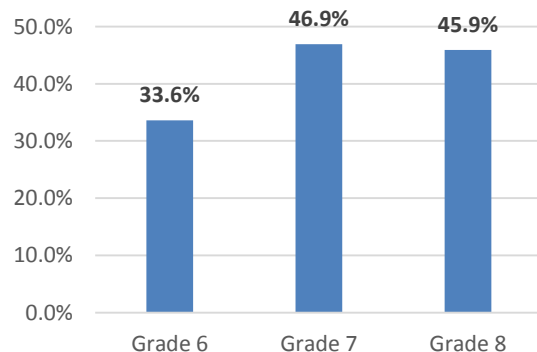
The *WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey* was administered from May to June 2015, online via the SCRIBE system to all grade 6-12 teachers, counselors, site coordinators, and school administrators employed in Year 1 WV GEAR UP schools. The following section describes the results of the survey in aggregate. Where appropriate, comparisons are made among respondent role groups, by school programmatic level, and by respondents' self-reported participation in GEAR UP.

Characteristics of Respondents

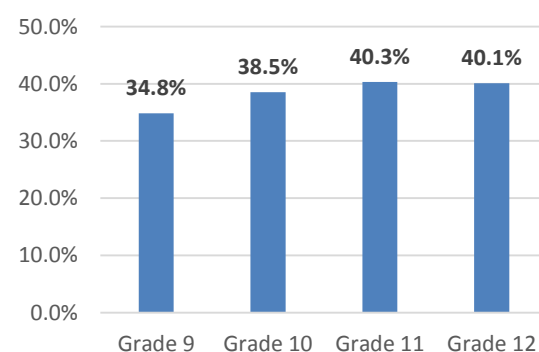
A total of 800 (N =800) individuals representing 43 WV GEAR UP schools responded to the *School Personnel Survey*. The majority reported that they were teachers (89.5%), 6.0% were administrators, and 4.5% were counselors. Figure 1 illustrates that the majority of respondents reported serving students in the middle grades (i.e., Grades 6-8). Slightly fewer served students in high school grades (i.e., Grades 9-12).

Figure 1. Grade Levels Served

Between one-third and nearly half of respondents stated they served students in grades 6-8.



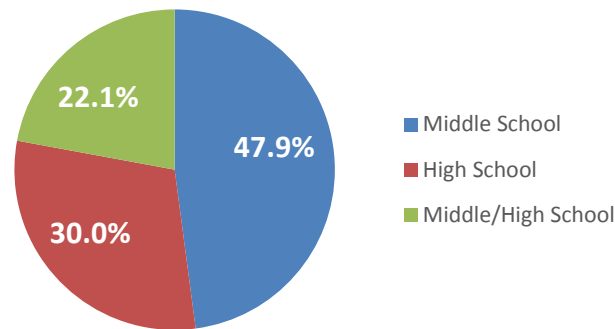
Slightly fewer respondents indicated they served students in grades 9-12.



Note: Respondents could select serving students at more than one grade level. Thus, percentages do not total 100%.

Figure 2 illustrates that nearly half of all respondents worked in middle schools, while nearly one-third worked in high schools, and slightly more than one-fifth worked in middle/high schools. The breakdown for teachers closely mirrored the overall sample, but there were differences for administrators and counselors. Most administrators who responded to the survey worked in middle schools (62.5%), and the majority of counselors worked in middle/high or high schools (55.6%).

Figure 2. Programmatic Level of Survey Respondents



A final demographic item on the survey asked respondents to indicate whether or not they were WV GEAR UP site coordinators. Forty-two respondents indicated that they were (5.3%).

Participation in and Satisfaction with GEAR UP

Respondents were next asked to provide information about the extent to which they participated in WV GEAR UP activities and the degree of their agreement with several statements about GEAR UP services.

Respondent Participation in GEAR UP

We first asked all respondents if they had participated in GEAR UP or received support through GEAR UP. A total of 742 respondents answered the question (92.8%). Of those, 52.7% indicated they had participated in GEAR UP or received support through GEAR UP. The remaining 47.3% stated they had not. Table 1 shows the breakdown of responses to this item by respondents' primary role. Notably, administrators and counselors replied affirmatively to this question more often than teachers. The difference was statistically significant ($X^2 = 9.83, p < .01$).

TABLE 1: PARTICIPATION IN GEAR UP BY ROLE GROUP

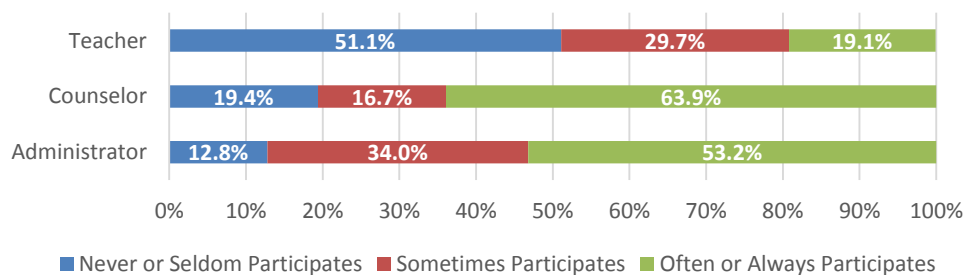
Role	N	Yes	No
Administrators	37	73.0%	27.0%
Counselors	21	71.4%	28.6%
Teachers	684	51.0%	49.0%

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

Next, we asked respondents how often they participated in GEAR UP events. Five response options were provided (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always). A total of 787 respondents answered the question (97.9%). Of those, nearly half (47.4%) indicated they “never or seldom” participated in GEAR UP events, 29.4% indicated they “sometimes” participated, and 23.2% indicated they “often or always” participated. Figure 3 shows that administrators and counselors were much less likely than teachers to indicate that they “never or seldom” participated in GEAR UP events and also far more likely than teachers to indicate that they “often or always” participated. This difference among role groups was statistically significant ($X^2 = 71.05, p < .001$).

Figure 3. Self-Reported Participation in GEAR UP Events by Roles²

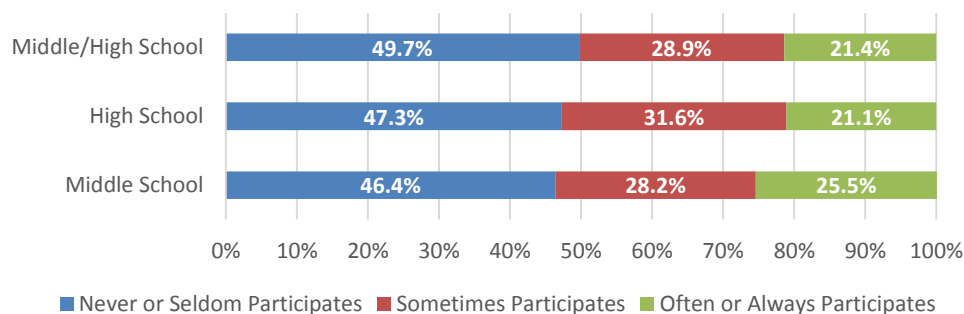
Administrators and counselors were less likely than teachers to report never or seldom participating in GEAR UP events and more likely to report often or always participating.



We did not find major differences in terms of the frequency of participation in GEAR UP events by programmatic level. Figure 4 shows that the percentage of respondents in each response category were nearly identical.

Figure 4. Self-Reported Participation in GEAR UP Events by Programmatic Level

There were no major differences in the frequency of participation in GEAR UP events by programmatic level.



² Throughout this report, the percentages shown in some figures or tables may not total to 100% due to rounding.

The survey also included an open-ended item asking respondents to describe the types of GEAR UP activities in which they participated. Not surprisingly given the percentage of respondents who indicated they had participated in GEAR UP events or activities during Year 1 (52.7%), nearly half of all survey respondents answered the question. Responses were coded into seven overarching themes: (1) *college visits*, (2) *tutoring*, (3) *financial aid events*, (4) *college/career day*, (5) *technology/teacher resources*, (6) *after-school events*, and (7) *other activities*. Examples of comments within each theme are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of GEAR UP Activities in Which Survey Respondents Participated

Theme	Sample Response
College Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We went on two field trips this year. One field trip to Charleston and one to Bluefield State College.
Tutoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... tutored for GEAR-UP....
Financial Aid Events (e.g., College Goal Sunday)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College Prep school functions, guest speakers, and parental involvement programs.
College/Career Day Activities (e.g., College Signing Day)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I participated in the first ever college signing day at our high school this year. Three students selected me to sign with them for their selected university as their teacher sponsor and someone who influenced them to make the decision to attend a postsecondary school.
Technology/Teacher Training Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ... I use iPads provided by GEAR UP regularly in my classroom instruction.
After-School Events (e.g., parent night)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> After-school events with parents and college visit field trips.
Other Activities (e.g., mentoring)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talks with students after their attendance at the college programs.

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

Respondents were most likely to indicate having participated in college visits/tours (N = 187), other activities (N = 66), college/career day events (N = 65), and tutoring events (N = 59). Many also participated in after-school, financial aid workshops/events, and technology/teacher training/resources. Among those respondents who indicated no involvement in GEAR UP, several noted late implementation as a reason they were not yet involved. The theme of *other activities* was chosen to capture participation in events not entirely related to an event or major theme. This theme included responses such as: “assisting students with logging on to take the GEAR UP survey,” “promoting/decorating for activities,” “writing recommendations,” and “leading group discussions.”

Perceptions of GEAR UP Services

Next, we asked respondents about the extent to which they agreed with three general statements about the services provided through GEAR UP:

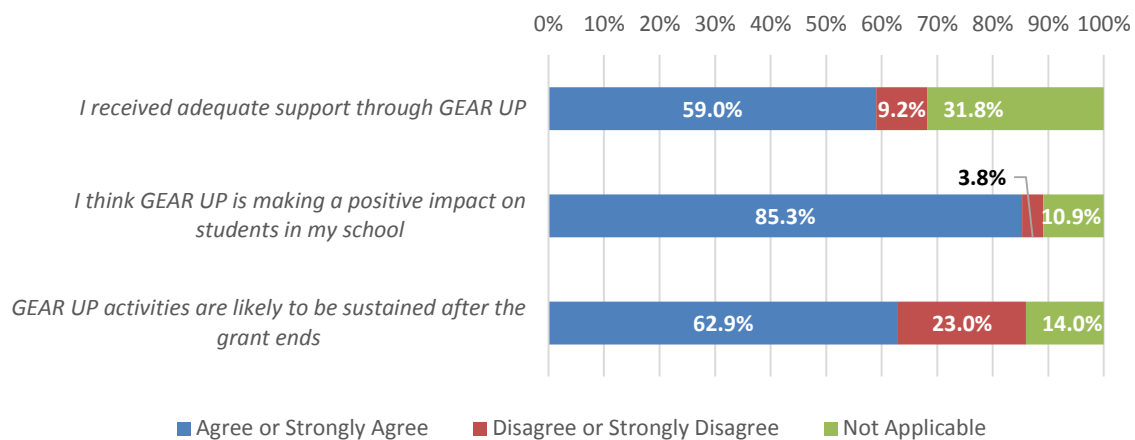
1. I received adequate support through GEAR UP.
2. I think GEAR UP is making a positive impact on students in my school.
3. GEAR UP activities are likely to be sustained after the grant ends.

Respondents had five response options for these items (1 = not applicable, 2 = strongly disagree, 3 = disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). In general, we found respondents were mostly positive about GEAR UP services. Not surprisingly given the fact that 47.3% of respondents indicated

they had not participated in GEAR UP events during Year 1, a significant percentage of respondents did choose the “not applicable” option when responding to the item “I received adequate support through GEAR UP.” Given that GEAR UP is in its first year, it is also not alarming that almost a quarter of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “GEAR UP activities are likely to be sustained after the grant ends.”

Figure 5. Participant Responses to Three Statements about GEAR UP Services

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed when presented with three statements about the quality of GEAR UP Services.



We found administrators and counselors were consistently more positive than teachers in their responses to these three items about GEAR UP services. Administrators and counselors were less likely than teachers to choose the “not applicable” option when asked if they had received adequate support through GEAR UP (4.2% and 0.0% vs. 11.9%, respectively). Teachers were also less likely than administrators and counselors to report that they “strongly agreed” with this item (36.2% vs. 68.8% and 66.7%, respectively). Differences were statistically significant ($X^2 = 49.19, p < .001$).

Administrators and counselors were also far more likely than teachers to “strongly agree” that GEAR UP was making a positive impact on students in their schools (34.0% and 30.6% vs. 15.0%, respectively) ($X^2 = 35.54, p < .001$). Finally, administrators and counselors were again more likely to strongly agree that GEAR UP activities were likely to be sustained after the grant ends (34.0% and 30.6% vs. 15.0%, respectively) ($X^2 = 31.758, p < .001$). On the other hand, and as evidenced in Table 3, counselors were more likely than other role groups to strongly disagree or disagree with this statement.

Table 3. Respondent Views about the Quality of GEAR UP Services by Roles

I received adequate support through GEAR UP.						
	N	N/A	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
Administrator	48	18.8%	0.0%	2.1%	37.5%	41.7%
Counselor	36	13.9%	0.0%	5.6%	33.3%	47.2%
Teacher	702	33.6%	3.0%	6.8%	42.0%	14.5%
I think GEAR UP is making a positive impact on students in my school.						
	N	N/A	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
Administrator	48	4.2%	0.0%	0.0%	27.1%	68.8%
Counselor	36	0.0%	2.8%	0.0%	30.6%	66.7%
Teacher	696	11.9%	1.1%	3.0%	47.7%	36.2%
GEAR UP activities are likely to be sustained after the grant ends.						
	N	N/A	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
Administrator	47	2.1%	2.1%	8.5%	53.2%	34.0%
Counselor	36	0.0%	13.9%	11.1%	44.4%	30.6%
Teacher	694	15.6%	6.9%	16.9%	45.7%	15.0%

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

CGC in School and Classroom

All respondents—teachers, administrators, and counselors—were asked to rate their schools on 24 items derived from the CGC frameworks originally developed by McDonough (2008), Jones, Bensimon, McNair, & Dowd (2011) of the National College Access Network (NCAN), and items from the College Foundation of West Virginia (CFWV) College-Going Culture Assessment. The question asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed with 24 items related to CGC in their schools using a four-point Likert-type response format (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). Teachers were also asked to rate their agreement relative to their own classroom.

Using a factor analysis technique known as principal component analysis (PCA), we sought to determine which combinations of the 24 items best measured CGC in WV GEAR UP schools. The results of our PCA suggested a two-component solution using 22 of the 24 items to be the best fit. That is, the 22 items were separated into two key components of CGC. Items were assigned based on the strength of their component loading scores. Items such as “The curriculum appropriately challenges most students,” “Students are learning effective problem-solving skills,” and “All students have the ability to succeed academically” were most strongly associated with the same underlying component, which, based on the content of these items, we chose to label as the *Expectations/Rigor* component of CGC. Similarly, items such as, “Teachers are provided information about the school’s college-going rate and FAFSA completion rates,” “College pennants, banners, and posters are visible,” and “School staff are provided with professional development on the topics of college readiness and success” were most strongly related to a second, independent underlying component. Again, based on the content of these items, we labeled this the *Visual Cues/Material Resources* component of CGC. Table 4 and Table 5 show which of the 22 items were included on each component of CGC, and the

descriptive statistics for the entire sample. In these tables, a mean score of 3.0 corresponds with the “agree” response option.

Table 4. CGC Items by Component: Expectations/Rigor

Scale Item	N	M	SD
Students are encouraged to do their best.	798	3.42	0.56
Teachers play an active role in preparing students for college.	795	3.26	0.61
Students are encouraged to set future college and career goals.	790	3.25	0.54
All students have the ability to succeed academically.	791	3.22	0.67
Teachers regularly talk to students about the importance of college.	795	3.22	0.57
Creativity and original thinking are highly valued.	797	3.17	0.61
The curriculum appropriately challenges most students.	799	3.17	0.58
Teachers are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum.	795	3.12	0.61
Students are learning effective problem-solving skills.	797	3.00	0.54
All students have the potential to succeed in college or other postsecondary training.	793	2.95	0.65
Students care about learning and getting a good education.	794	2.74	0.68

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

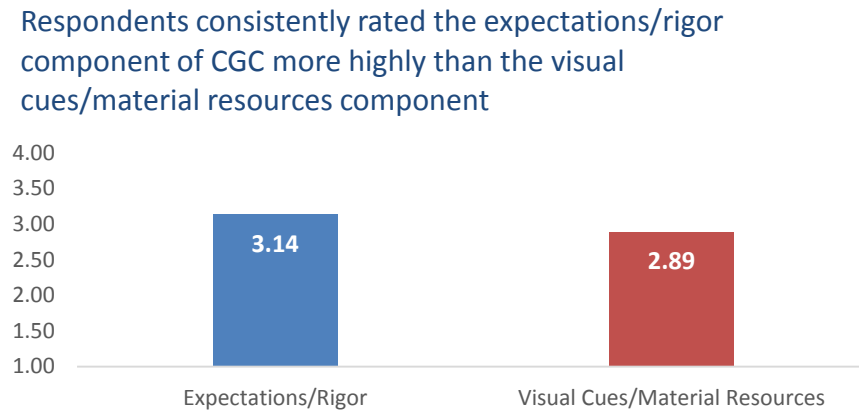
Table 5. CGC Items by Component: Visual Cues/Material Support

Scale Item	N	M	SD
Teachers have ongoing opportunities to communicate with students about the college choice process.	798	3.23	0.61
Students have access to the information and resources they need to support their college attendance decisions.	790	3.06	0.61
Teachers are equipped with the knowledge to assist students in the transition from high school to college.	792	3.05	0.67
The majority of students will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution.	794	2.97	0.58
Parents are included in the college preparation process.	789	2.97	0.67
Teachers engage in ongoing professional development about ways to promote college readiness.	789	2.87	0.71
College pennants, banners, and posters are visible.	797	2.84	0.83
Teachers include visual cues to encourage discussions about their college experience.	791	2.82	0.70
Teachers are provided information about the school's college-going rate and FAFSA completion rates.	787	2.68	0.80
School staff are provided with professional development on the topics of college readiness and success.	794	2.67	0.72
College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances.	790	2.66	0.70

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

We next calculated a component score for each of the two components of CGC for each individual respondent in the sample. These scores were defined as the average of each participant's responses to the 11 items on each scale. Examining these scores at the sample level, we found respondents were more likely to rate the performance of their schools higher on the expectations/rigor component of CGC than on the visual cues/material resources component.

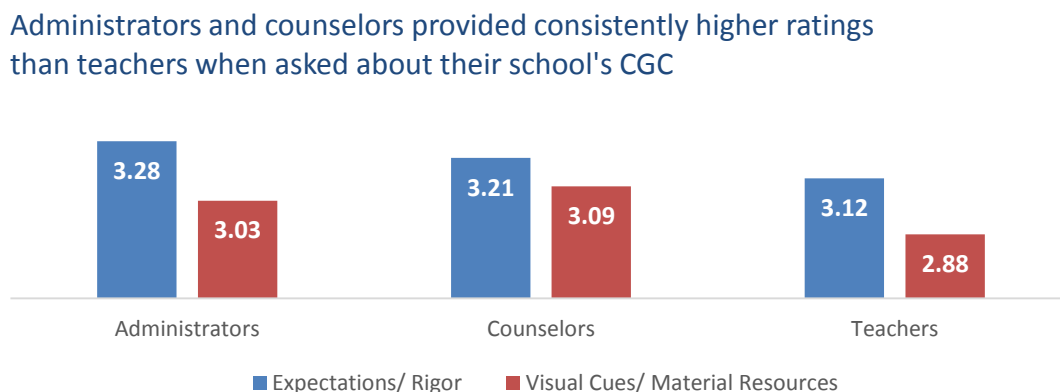
Figure 6. Average Ratings for Expectations/Rigor and Visual Cues/Material Support Components of CGC



Roles as a Predictor

We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the effect of role on respondents' ratings on the two components for CGC in schools. We found teachers provided lower ratings than other role groups on the visual cues/material resources component of their school's CGC. This difference was statistically significant at $F(2) 723 = 4.830, p < .01$. However, we found no statistically significant differences among role groups on the rigor/expectations component of CGC.

Figure 7. Differences in Mean Expectations/Rigor and Visual Cues/Material Resources Component Ratings by Roles



As noted previously, teachers were also asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with each of the CGC scale items as they related to their own classrooms. We were interested in understanding any differences that may exist between perceptions of CGC schoolwide and in classrooms. To test this, we conducted a series of paired t-tests comparing teachers' school- and classroom-level ratings for all 24 original CGC scale items.

Findings showed that 15 of 24 CGC scale items rated at the school level were found to be significantly different³ than the corresponding items rated at the classroom level. For 11 of these items, we found teachers' classroom-level ratings were higher than school ratings, reflecting the fact that teachers perceived a stronger CGC in their own classrooms than schoolwide. These included items such as, "Students are encouraged to do their best" ($t(703) = -3.015$) and "The curriculum appropriately challenges most students" ($t(705) = -4.270$). Notably, for items related to school resources such as, "Teachers have ongoing opportunities to communicate with students about the college choice process" ($t(704) = 2.813$) and "College pennants, banners, and posters are visible" ($t(703) = 4.282$), teachers perceived a stronger presence in schools than in their own classrooms.

We conducted another series of paired t-tests with teachers' classroom and school ratings, this time disaggregated by school level. The results showed the following statistically significant differences⁴:

- Middle school teachers reported their schools were better than classrooms at creating opportunities for teachers "to play an active role in preparing students for college" ($t(327) = 4.600$).
- Middle school teachers and high school teachers were both more likely to agree that their classrooms did a better job than schools when asked if, "Students care about learning and getting a good education" ($t(332) = -4.111$ and $t(217) = -3.951$, respectively).
- Middle/high school teachers rated their classrooms higher than schools on the item, "Students are encouraged to set future college and career goals" ($t(144) = -2.725$).
- High school and middle/high school teachers rated classrooms higher than schools when presented with the item, "The curriculum appropriately challenges most students" ($t(222) = -3.163$ and $t(148) = -2.783$, respectively).
- High school teachers agreed that their classrooms were better than their schools at "providing an environment where students are encouraged to do their best" ($t(220) = -3.967$) and "Teachers regularly talk to students about the importance of college" ($t(220) = -2.666$).

School Level as a Predictor

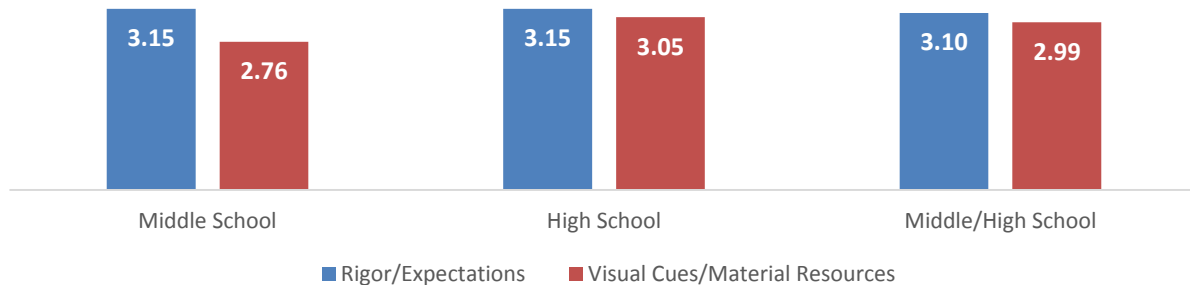
We also hypothesized that there may be important differences in perceptions of schoolwide CGC by school level. We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test this. We found middle/high and high schools were indeed more likely to rate their schools as having a higher CGC related to visual cues/material resources. This difference was statistically significant at $F(2) 723 = 32.10$, $p < .01$. However, there were no differences found in rigor/expectations component of CGC by school level (See Figure 8).

³ All differences statistically significant at $p < .01$

⁴ All differences statistically significant at $p < .01$

Figure 8. Differences in Mean Expectations/Rigor and Visual Cues/Material Resources Component Ratings by School Level

Middle school respondents provided the lowest ratings for the visual cues/material resources component of CGC in their schools. There were no differences in the rigor/expectations component by school level.



Two of the original 24 CGC items were determined not to present clear patterns of component loadings and thus were analyzed separately from the remaining 22. These items were, “Parents expect their children to attend college or some other postsecondary option,” and “The majority of students will not attend college but will seek a job or enter the military.” Table 6 shows the percentage of responses by primary role for these items. Notably, a significant percentage of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that parents expect their children to attend a postsecondary option, but also tended to agree that the majority of students will not attend college.

For both items, we found slight descriptive differences among role groups but none were significantly different. No differences were observed by programmatic level.

Table 6. Responses to Additional CGC Items by Roles

Parents expect their children to attend college or some other postsecondary option.					
	N	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
Administrators	48	0.0%	37.5%	54.2%	8.3%
Counselors	35	0.0%	28.6%	65.7%	5.7%
Teachers	709	7.3%	39.4%	47.1%	6.2%
The majority of students will not attend college but will seek a job or enter the military.					
	N	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
Administrators	48	2.1%	41.7%	54.2%	2.1%
Counselors	36	5.6%	52.8%	33.3%	8.3%
Teachers	704	1.8%	38.4%	53.3%	6.5%

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

Level of Comfort with Knowledge of Postsecondary Education Topics

A single multi-part item asked participants to rate their level of comfort with their knowledge related to ten postsecondary education topics. A four-point response format was used for each topic (1 = not at all comfortable, 2 = slightly comfortable, 3 = moderately comfortable, 4 = extremely comfortable). A fifth response option (rather not say) was included, but not used to calculate average ratings for each topic.

Respondents reported that they were most comfortable assisting students with their knowledge of the importance and benefits of a college education ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .72$) and high school graduation requirements ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .87$). Respondents were also generally more comfortable with their knowledge of the ACT/SAT ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .92$) and requirements for college acceptance ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .93$), than they were with other topics. They were least comfortable with the topics of college savings plans/529 plans ($M = 1.97$, $SD = .94$) and the West Virginia Higher Education Grant ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.00$). Table 7 includes additional details.

Table 7. Respondents' Mean Comfort Levels with their Knowledge of Ten Postsecondary Topics

Topic	N	Mean	SD
Importance/Benefit of College Education	767	3.55	0.72
High School Graduation Requirements	777	3.15	0.87
ACT/SAT	778	2.86	0.92
Requirements for College Acceptance	782	2.86	0.93
FAFSA	790	2.65	0.98
Scholarships	787	2.58	0.97
College Selection (Match and Fit)	786	2.49	1.05
Federal Grants, Loans, and Work Study	781	2.47	0.98
WV Higher Education Grant	782	2.21	1.00
College Savings Plan/529	785	1.97	0.94

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

Next, we conducted additional analyses to determine if respondents' comfort with their knowledge of these ten topics was dependent upon their roles, the programmatic level of their schools, or their participation in GEAR UP activities. We first calculated an overall comfort/knowledge score for each participant. This score was the sum of participants' self-ratings for each of the ten topics in Table 7. The range for this value was 0-40 and the mean for the overall sample was 26.32 ($SD = 7.40$). The internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's Alpha was .91.

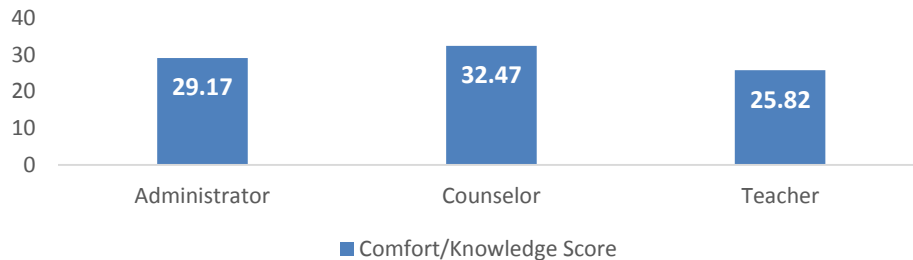
Roles as a Predictor

We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the effect of participant role on respondents' mean comfort/knowledge levels. There was a significant effect at the $p < .001$ level $F(2) 793 = 18.37$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons showed that:

- Mean comfort/knowledge scores were significantly lower for teachers ($M = 25.81$, $SD = 7.33$) than for administrators ($M = 29.16$, $SD = 6.19$) and counselors ($M = 32.47$, $SD = 6.70$).
- The largest difference was between counselors and teachers.
- The difference between administrators and counselors was not statistically significant.

Figure 9. Differences in Comfort/Knowledge Levels by Roles

Administrators and counselors reported higher comfort/knowledge levels related to postsecondary education topics than teachers.



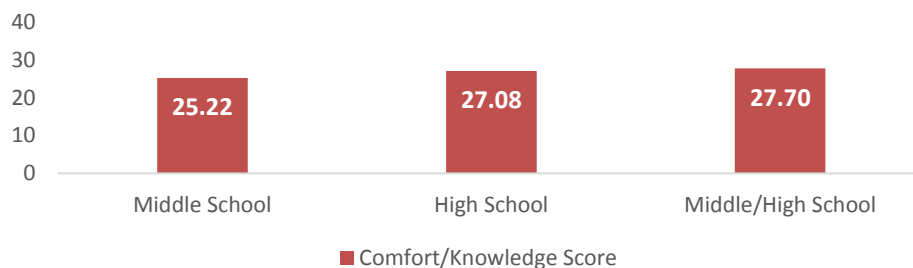
School Level as a Predictor

We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the effect of school programmatic level on respondents' mean comfort/knowledge levels. There was a significant effect at the $p < .001$ level $F(2) 793 = 8.64$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons showed that:

- Mean comfort/knowledge scores were significantly lower for respondents who worked in middle schools ($M = 25.22$, $SD = 7.33$) than for respondents who worked in high schools ($M = 27.08$, $SD = 7.57$) and middle/high schools ($M = 27.70$, $SD = 6.99$).
- The largest difference was between middle/high schools and middle schools.
- The difference between high schools and middle/high schools was not statistically significant.

Figure 10. Differences in Comfort/Knowledge Levels by School Level

Respondents in middle schools reported lower comfort/knowledge levels related to postsecondary education topics than respondents in high schools and middle/high schools.

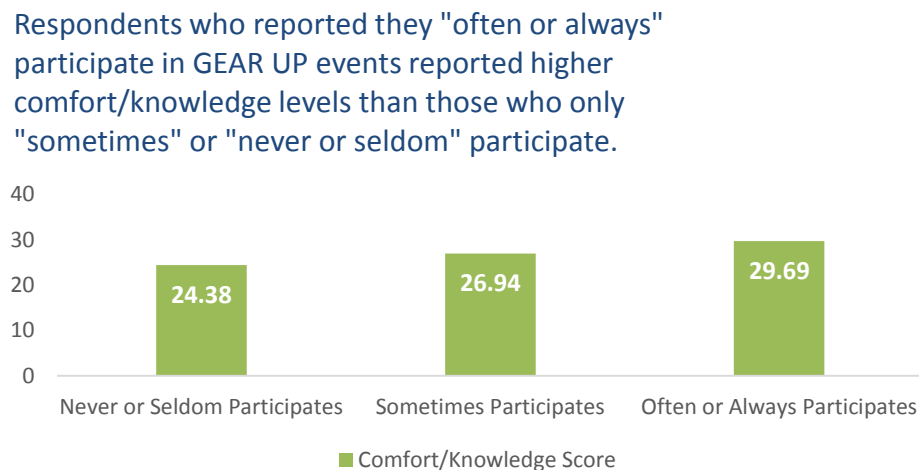


Participation in GEAR UP as a Predictor

We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the effect of self-reported participation in GEAR UP on respondents' mean comfort/knowledge levels. There was a significant effect at the $p < .001$ level $F(2) 778 = 835.224, p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons showed that:

- Mean comfort/knowledge scores were significantly lower for respondents who stated they “never or seldom” participate in GEAR UP events ($M = 24.38, SD = 7.18$) than for respondents who “sometimes” participate ($M = 26.94, SD = 6.96$) and for those who stated they “often or always” participate ($M = 29.69, SD = 7.03$).
- Mean comfort/knowledge scores were significantly higher for those participants who stated they “often or always” participate than for those who indicated they “sometimes” participate in GEAR UP events.
- The largest difference was found among those respondents who indicated that they “often or always participate” in GEAR UP events and those who indicated that they never or seldom participate.

Figure 11. Differences in Comfort/Knowledge Levels by Participation in GEAR UP Events



Level of Involvement in College-Related Activities

Respondents next indicated their level of involvement in six college-related activities at their schools (e.g., chaperoning college visits, talking with students/parents about postsecondary education). A five-point response format was used for each activity (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always). A sixth response option (not applicable) was included, but not used to calculate average ratings for each activity.

Respondents reported that they were most involved in talking with students about their plans for college or work after high school ($M = 3.84, SD = .93$), having individual discussions with students about what they want to do with their futures ($M = 3.80, SD = .99$), and offering students supplemental instructional support to prepare them for postsecondary options ($M = 3.08, SD = 1.33$). Participants were least likely to report participating in college preparation activities for their schools ($M = 2.31, SD = 1.50$).

Table 8. Respondents' Mean Involvement Levels in Six College Preparation Activities

Activity	N	Mean	SD
I talk with students about their plans for college or work after high school.	794	3.84	.93
I have individual discussions with students about what they want to do with their futures.	796	3.80	.99
I offer students supplemental instructional support to prepare them for postsecondary options.	791	3.08	1.33
I participate in GEAR UP activities.	793	2.67	1.49
I talk with parents about their ability to help prepare their students for postsecondary education.	796	2.61	1.32
I participate in the college preparation activities at my school (e.g., chaperoning college visits).	798	2.31	1.50

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

We conducted additional analyses to determine if respondents' involvement in college preparation activities was dependent upon their roles, the programmatic level of their schools, or their participation in GEAR UP activities. To accomplish this, we first calculated an overall involvement score for each participant. This score was operationalized as the sum of participants' self-ratings for each of the six activities in Table 8. The range for this value was 0-30 and the mean for the overall sample was 18.26 (SD = 5.74). The internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's Alpha was .84.

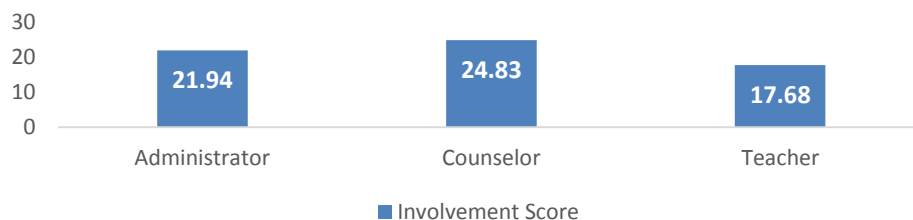
Roles as a Predictor

We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the effect of participant role on respondents' mean involvement scores. There was a significant effect at the $p < .001$ level $F(2) 795 = 40.71$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons showed that:

- Mean involvement scores were significantly lower for teachers (M = 17.68, SD = 5.56) than for administrators (M = 21.94, SD = 4.57) and counselors (M = 24.83, SD = 4.68).
- Mean involvement scores were significantly lower for administrators than for counselors.
- The largest difference was between counselors and teachers.

Figure 12. Differences in Involvement Scores by Roles

Counselors and administrators reported engaging in more college preparation activities than teachers.

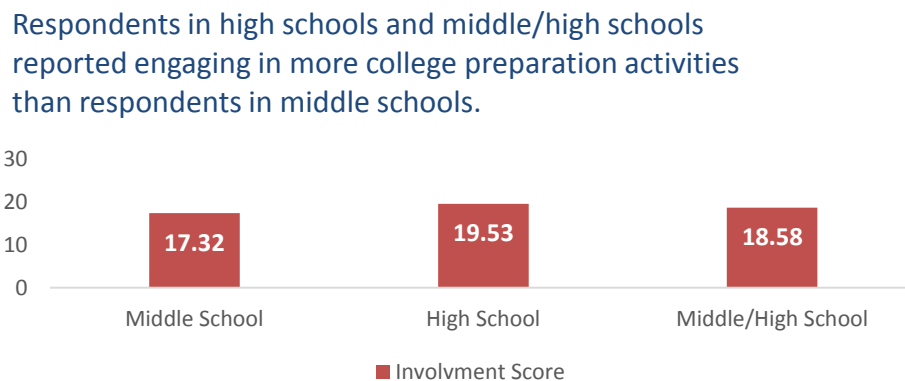


School Level as a Predictor

We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the effect of school level on respondents' mean involvement scores. There was a significant effect at the $p < .001$ level $F(2) 795 = 11.46, p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons showed that:

- Mean involvement scores were significantly lower for respondents in middle schools ($M = 17.32, SD = 6.02$) than for those in high schools ($M = 19.53, SD = 5.48$) and those in middle/high schools ($M = 18.58, SD = 5.08$).
- The largest difference was between respondents in high schools and middle schools.
- The difference between high schools and middle/high schools was not statistically significant.

Figure 13. Differences in Involvement Scores by School Level



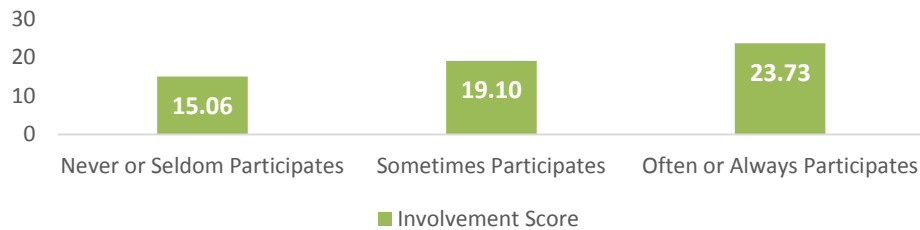
Participation in GEAR UP as a Predictor

We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the effect of participation in GEAR UP on respondents' mean involvement scores. There was a significant effect at the $p < .001$ level $F(2) 780 = 224.89, p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons showed that:

- Mean involvement scores were significantly lower for respondents who reported they “never or seldom” participate ($M = 15.06, SD = 4.90$) than for those who reported they “sometimes” participate ($M = 19.10, SD = 4.06$) and those who reported they “often or always” participate ($M = 23.73, SD = 4.48$).
- The difference between participants who “sometimes” participate and those who “often or always” participate was statistically significant.
- The largest difference was between respondents who reported they “often or always” participate in GEAR UP events and those who reported that they “never or seldom” participate.

Figure 14. Differences in Involvement Scores by Participation in GEAR UP Events

Respondents who indicated they "often or always" participate in GEAR UP events reported engaging in more college preparation activities than respondents who "never or seldom" or "sometimes" participated.



School Promotion of CGC Elements

Respondents also rated the extent to which their schools promoted 14 CGC elements as specified in Table 9. A four-point Likert-type response format was used (1 = not at all, 2 = slightly, 3 = moderately, 4 = extremely). We found respondents were most likely to agree that their schools promoted high teacher expectations ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .63$), academic support ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .68$), and rigorous coursework ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .68$). They were least likely to report that their schools supported financial aid assistance ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.08$), college application assistance ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.13$), access to college professionals ($M = 2.82$, $SD = .88$), and partnerships with institutions of higher education ($M = 2.84$, $SD = .96$). Table 9 provides the breakdown of responses for all 14 elements included on the survey.

Table 9. Respondents' Perceptions of School's Promotion of 14 Elements of CGC

Element	N	Not at All (1)	Slightly (2)	Moderately (3)	Extremely (4)
High Teacher Expectations	790	1.0%	4.4%	40.0%	54.6%
Academic Support	789	1.5%	6.0%	39.3%	53.2%
Rigorous Coursework	792	1.4%	8.3%	47.9%	42.4%
Positive Peer Influences	793	1.5%	10.1%	46.8%	41.6%
School Effort (e.g., policies, collaborative working groups)	786	1.8%	9.4%	48.0%	40.8%
Test Preparation	791	12.5%	15.5%	37.3%	34.6%
College Application Assistance	787	21.2%	13.7%	31.3%	33.8%
College Visits	786	3.3%	15.6%	47.8%	33.2%
Financial Aid Assistance	788	18.0%	17.0%	32.2%	32.7%
Life Skills Development	790	3.4%	16.6%	48.5%	31.5%
Family Involvement	785	2.8%	18.3%	47.9%	31.0%
Partnerships with Institutions of Higher Education	788	11.9%	19.2%	41.6%	27.3%
Community Support	790	4.9%	20.1%	48.1%	26.8%
Access to College Professionals	791	7.7%	26.2%	42.4%	23.8%

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

We conducted additional analyses to determine if respondents' views about the extent to which their schools promoted CGC elements was dependent upon the programmatic level of their schools. To accomplish this, we first calculated an overall promotion score for each participant. This score was operationalized as the sum of participants' self-ratings for each of the 14 elements in Table 9. The range for this value was 0-56 and the mean for the overall sample was 42.82 (SD = 8.72). The internal consistency as measured by Cronbach's Alpha was .93.

Programmatic Level as a Predictor

We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the effect of programmatic level on respondents' mean promotion scores. There was a significant effect at the $p < .001$ level $F(2, 793) = 48.91$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons showed that:

- Mean promotion scores were significantly lower for middle schools ($M = 39.99$, $SD = 8.63$) than for high schools ($M = 46.59$, $SD = 7.44$) and middle/high schools ($M = 43.91$, $SD = 8.37$).
- The difference among middle/high schools and high schools was also statistically significant, with high schools scoring slightly higher.
- The largest difference was between middle schools and high schools.

Respondents were next asked to provide a description of the most important aspect of a CGC in their school. The 669 responses were divided into six overarching themes. Table 10 shows the categorization of responses by theme, sub-theme, and count. *College Prep Activities* ($N=232$) was the most frequently identified theme followed by *Clear Expectations and Communication* ($N=204$), *Community and Family Involvement* ($N=109$), *Academic Preparation* ($N=62$), *Student Level Characteristics* ($N=33$), and *Visible Mission and Resources* ($N=29$).

Table 10. Thematic Analysis of Survey Respondents' Additional Comments

Theme	Sub-Themes	Count of Responses
Clear Expectations and Communication	Communicate benefits/importance of college	97
	Set expectations for students	45
	Staff/parents/students communicate about college	28
	Provide encouragement	12
	School level/staff buy-in	11
	Accountability for students and staff	11
College Prep Activities	Opportunities for participation in college visits	82
	Exposure/awareness to college	37
	Financial aid information/preparation assistance	32
	Career exploration/readiness activities	26
	Provide information to students/staff	20
	Information on college entrance requirements	18
	Introduce all post-high school options (e.g. Trade School)	12
	Early start	5
Community/Family Involvement	Parent/community involvement	38
	Encouragement from family/parents	30
	Speaking with previous college students/staff	16
	Increased cultural/community expectations	13
	Community support	6
	Mentoring opportunities	6
Academic Preparation	Academics/rigorous curriculum	30
	Encourage participation in AP	11
	Encourage students to be goal-oriented	10
	Provide tutoring	7
	Test preparation	4
Student-Level Characteristics	Focus on motivation	26
	Alignment with student interest	4
	Increase work ethic/discipline	3
Visible Mission and Resources	Provide visual displays of college opportunities/requirements	13
	Provide information about GEAR UP events	5
	Teacher professional development/strategies	4
	Guidance counselor services	3
	Student success recognition	1
	Student leadership opportunities	1
	Collaboration between colleagues	2

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

Many of the 204 respondents who provided comments related to *Clear Expectations and Communication* noted that students and parents need to understand the benefits and importance of college. For example, one respondent stated, “Our community relies upon coal mining, and students need to understand/accept the fact those jobs may not be available. Our students need to recognize ways to improve their lives through higher education.” In other cases, respondents spoke about the need for “high expectations” and “staff buy-in” as the most important aspects to building a CGC. Among the 232 respondents who commented about *College Preparation Activities*, one noted, “I feel that a work-shadowing program would be a great way to get students to think about the future/college choices and prep. Also more college visits starting at earlier ages.”

One hundred and nine respondents offered comments coded under the *Family and Community Involvement* theme. In most of these cases respondents indicated a need for parental involvement and overall encouragement. In other cases respondents spoke about residents having a “generational poverty” mindset. One reflected that, “Parent involvement and changing the culture of the community” were the most important aspects of promoting CGC.

Fifty-nine respondents commented on the need for *Academic Preparation*. Most mentioned the importance of a rigorous curriculum or advanced placement courses. In other instances, respondents spoke about the importance of tutoring. One said, “Have more certified teachers instead of subs. A better curriculum would help.” Respondents also commented on *Student-Level Characteristics*. In most of these cases, comments were about increasing student motivation. In other cases, respondents mentioned a lack of work ethic and discipline. For example, one respondent stated:

I would have to say that the most important aspect to building a college-going culture would be the students’ mindset. The students have to believe in themselves that they can go to college, succeed, and then be able to join the workforce where they can get a good paying job. If they don’t first believe in themselves, they aren’t going to want to go to college.

Finally, 29 comments spoke to *Visible Mission and Resources* within the school. Most comments were about the need for visual cues and an obvious mission. These sentiments were reflected in comments like, “Teachers could/should frame and post college/master’s and additional degrees and certifications in their own classrooms...Teachers could also display posters/logos/mascots/etc. from the colleges they attended...maybe even a wall in the school entry that displays the variety of colleges teachers/staff have attended.”

GEAR UP’s Role in Promoting CGC

Two items were included on the survey to measure the extent to which GEAR UP plays a role in promoting CGC within schools.

Awareness of GEAR UP Activities

First, we included a single item designed to measure the awareness of respondents about nine GEAR UP activities in their schools. A four-point Likert-type response format was used (1 = not at all aware, 2 = slightly aware, 3 = somewhat aware, 4 = highly aware).

Respondents reported being most aware of opportunities to participate in college visits ($M = 3.31$, $SD = .85$), tutoring activities ($M = 3.17$, $SD = .99$), and leadership opportunities ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.00$). They were least aware of information and events presented in other languages ($M = 2.05$, $SD = 1.11$), summer activities ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.04$), and assistance with the college entrance process ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.08$).

Table 11. Respondents' Level of Awareness of 9 GEAR UP Activities in Their Schools

Activity	N	Not at All (1)	Slightly Aware (2)	Moderately Aware (3)	Extremely Aware (4)
Opportunities to Participate in College Visits	792	5.4%	9.3%	33.5%	51.8%
Tutoring	788	10.2%	11.8%	28.4%	49.6%
Leadership Opportunities	792	12.9%	15.3%	37.8%	34.1%
Assistance with Completing Financial Aid Forms (e.g., FAFSA)	789	21.2%	14.7%	30.8%	33.3%
Test Preparation	785	16.4%	16.4%	35.9%	31.2%
Career Exploration Activities	790	14.1%	16.8%	38.2%	30.9%
Assistance with the College Entrance Process	791	21.0%	16.1%	36.5%	26.4%
Summer Activities	793	20.2%	20.1%	37.3%	22.4%
Information and Events Presented in Other Languages	786	46.1%	16.5%	23.9%	13.5%

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

Extent to Which GEAR UP Promotes CGC

Next, we asked respondents to rate the extent to which 15 WV GEAR UP activities were helpful in supporting a CGC in their schools. A four-point Likert-type response format was used (1 = not helpful, 2 = a little helpful, 3 = mostly helpful, 4 = very helpful). A fifth response option, "does not apply," was also included but not used to calculate mean scores for each activity.

Survey respondents were most likely to indicate that providing opportunities to participate in college visits ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .71$), providing information about financial aid/scholarships ($M = 3.47$, $SD = .73$), and tutoring ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .71$) were the GEAR UP activities that were most helpful in promoting CGC. Only one activity had a helpfulness rating below 3.0 (corresponds with "mostly helpful")—providing information and events in other languages ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.07$).

Table 12. Respondents' Perceptions of How Helpful GEAR UP Activities are in Promoting a CGC in Their Schools

Activity	N	Does Not Apply	Not Helpful (1)	A Little Helpful (2)	Mostly Helpful (3)	Very Helpful (4)
Provide opportunities to participate in college visits	790	1.3%	1.3%	7.5%	30.6%	59.4%
Provide information about college financial aid/scholarships	788	3.4%	1.8%	8.1%	29.1%	57.6%
Provide tutoring	787	1.0%	1.5%	8.1%	32.3%	57.1%
Provide career exploration activities	788	1.0%	1.3%	8.2%	34.5%	54.9%
Provide assistance with completing financial aid forms (e.g., FAFSA)	785	8.9%	2.2%	9.2%	24.8%	54.9%
Provide information about college entrance requirements	790	2.9%	1.3%	8.7%	33.0%	54.1%
Provide test preparation (e.g., ACT/SAT)	790	5.1%	2.0%	8.9%	31.1%	52.9%
Provide assistance with the college entrance process	789	7.2%	2.0%	9.6%	29.3%	51.8%
Provide student leadership opportunities	790	1.0%	1.4%	12.4%	34.8%	50.4%
Provide information about participating in GEAR UP events	788	1.0%	1.5%	11.5%	38.5%	47.5%
Mentoring opportunities	787	2.3%	1.7%	14.4%	34.6%	47.1%
Teacher professional development about college awareness and success strategies	785	2.9%	2.8%	16.4%	33.6%	44.2%
Provide summer activities	789	1.8%	2.8%	17.7%	34.9%	42.8%
Encourage participation in advanced classes (e.g., AP)	789	6.5%	1.9%	14.3%	34.9%	42.5%
Information and events presented in other languages	785	18.9%	11.8%	22.2%	20.1%	27.0%

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

Additional Comments

The final item on the survey asked respondents to provide any additional comments. One-hundred and ninety-eight respondents out of 800 responded. Of those, 20 noted they had nothing further to add. The remaining 178 responses were divided into five overarching themes. Table 13 shows the categorization of responses by theme, sub-theme, and count. *Accolades* was the most frequently identified theme (N =71), followed by *New to GEAR UP* (N =35), *Opportunities for Improvement* (N =31), *Sustainability/Funding* (N =30), and *Challenges* (N = 11).

Table 13. Thematic Analysis of Survey Respondents' Additional Survey Comments

Theme	Sub-Themes	Count of Responses
Accolades	Thank you	3
	Positive remarks	68
New to GEAR UP	Late implementation	5
	Limited involvement	4
	New program	10
	More information needed	16
Opportunities for Improvement	Need for expansion	10
	More teacher training/involvement	6
	More student opportunities	4
	More parental involvement	3
	Underutilized	3
	More collaboration/communication	3
	Alumni follow-up needed	2
Sustainability/Funding	Importance of funding	18
	Sustainability concerns	11
	Importance of college visits	1
Challenges	Expectations	5
	Drug problems	1
	School changes	1
	Surveys	3
	Planning	1

Source: Year 1 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

Of the 71 respondents who provided *Accolades*, they tended to note that GEAR UP had helped students, teachers, and schools with college readiness and academic preparation. For example, one respondent stated, "I would like to comment that without GEAR UP I would have NO computers in my room or access to computers. GEAR UP has also helped a lot of my students fill out their paperwork for college when counselors were unavailable or parents were stumped by the process." In other cases, coordinators were mentioned by name as "doing an excellent job." Among those who responded they were *New to GEAR UP*, one commented, "The GEAR UP program at our school is only just beginning, so I haven't had enough time to see a big change."

Thirty-one respondents mentioned *Opportunities for Improvement* of GEAR UP programming. In most of these cases, respondents indicated a need for expansion to other grades. In other cases, responses indicated that it would be helpful to have more teacher training and/or involvement. One respondent reflected, "I feel the teachers need some training on GEAR UP and how important it is within the school..." Thirty respondents commented on the *Sustainability/Funding* of the program overall. Specifically, most respondents mentioned the importance of GEAR UP funding to the success of their schools and reported concern if the funding ended. One said, "Many ideas could be continued after the GEAR UP grant is over, but funding to support some of the activities, such as college visits, does not exist." Finally, 11 comments spoke to *Challenges* within the school or GEAR UP culture, or survey timing and/or wording. These sentiments were reflected in comments like, "There is not

enough credibility given to technical schools or training programs. A college curriculum is not suited to every student's needs."

Results: Focus Groups

The following section provides an overview of the results of focus group and individual interviews conducted with GEAR UP site and county coordinators in May 2015. All focus group interviews were conducted in person as part of a regularly scheduled site coordinator meeting in Charleston, WV. Focus group participants were selected purposefully to include a blend of site coordinators working in schools serving cohort, priority, or both cohort and priority students, and to ensure a reasonable mix of participants from the three regions served by WV GEAR UP (Central, Southern, and Southwestern). We originally sampled 24 site coordinators, 8 per region. However, not all the individuals sampled attended the meeting. Ultimately, we interviewed 23 site coordinators situated in three groups of 5-9 individuals. We had originally planned to interview all ten county coordinators in a single focus group interview. Several county coordinators did not attend the meeting. Ultimately, we were able to interview half the county coordinators.⁵ Four were interviewed on-site in a focus group format and one was interviewed over the phone. All interviews were recorded with the consent of participants.

Once transcribed, all transcripts were analyzed by the evaluation team to identify major themes, sub-themes, and interrelationships. We then summarized responses within those themes and chose illustrative quotations to present examples we thought would be both compelling and useful to the Commission in moving GEAR UP toward success. Below we present a summary of results organized into five major sections: (1) Roles, Resources, and Relationships, (2) Implementation: GEAR UP Services and Community Involvement, (3) Impact: What is Success in GEAR UP? (4) Sustainability: Generating Awareness and Building Buy-In, and (5) Perceptions of Effectiveness.

Roles, Resources, and Relationships

Role of the County Coordinator

The role of the GEAR UP site coordinator is essential to the success of the project. These individuals represent the front line for GEAR UP in schools. The importance and inner workings of this role are somewhat well-known to the Commission given the work that has been completed during the previous GEAR UP grant cycle. However, the county coordinator is a new role for the program. As a result, we were very interested in learning more about how county coordinators interact with the Commission and site coordinators, what it takes for them to be effective in this role, and how site coordinators perceive the support they receive from this new role.

County coordinators generally agreed that their primary role was to assist sites and site coordinators in executing work plans. Participants varied in their level of experience and comfort with this new role. All indicated they wanted to interact with schools directly, but those who had experience as site coordinators or who noted having good communication with their regional program director reported having done so with greater frequency. One respondent said:

⁵ Four county coordinators participated in one focus group interview. We conducted one individual interview with an additional county coordinator following the meeting.

I don't think that the GEAR UP or the Higher Education Policy Commission expect us to do anything but maybe just monitor, but we are county people and it's in our county and we're signing off on requisitions. . . . I want to get involved more than they probably want me to, because I'm putting my name on documents.

County coordinators indicated that they felt helpful when equipped with the information necessary to provide assistance, but another sentiment expressed by a select few reflected some frustration when they perceived that the Commission or regional program directors had not kept them properly informed about events in their county. Conflicting views also arose regarding the level of training received for their position. Most agreed that attendance at site coordinator meetings was sufficient preparation, but two coordinators still seemed confused about their roles. Overall, participants cited their involvement in three types of duties: (1) answering questions, (2) providing budget oversight, and (3) tracking or coordinating GEAR UP activities.

Key Findings: Roles, Resources, and Relationships

- The role of the county coordinator is important to the grant. These individuals are an important link between sites and regional program directors, specifically for monitoring financial responsibilities and the completion of work plans.
- In a few cases, the intended communication patterns between regional program directors and county coordinators could be clarified.
- Regional program directors and other Commission resources are perceived as being supportive of local efforts.

Answering Questions. All county coordinators reported having responsibility for fielding and answering questions from site coordinators. Most agreed that they should “know what goes out to the schools” and be prepared to respond to questions regarding that information. Moreover, some indicated that they would be more effective if they were directly contacted when commission staff make a visit or “is in town.” One county coordinator said:

I need better communication. . . . There are times where information and stuff goes to the site coordinator, and I don't have a clue. Then I get something that has to be done, and if I had known, I could have done it.

Providing Budget Oversight. Participants also agreed that it is their responsibility to provide budget oversight and manage requisitions. However, some county coordinators commented on a lack of clarity and suggested a more defined role. In one case, a respondent observed, with disappointment, that she believed the position was limited to moving paperwork. In another case, a coordinator stated:

I need a more defined, better definition of what my role is as the district coordinator. I really don't know what my role was supposed to be, other than just kind of oversee what they're doing. But they don't need overseeing, so. . .

Tracking and Coordinating Activities. County coordinators emphasized their role in being responsive to site coordinators in planning, managing, and maintaining the work plan schedule.

County coordinators varied in the level of involvement they reported, but most agreed that they were responsible for tracking and inventory related to site activities and events. One county coordinator summed up these sentiments by saying:

...It's my responsibility to assist the site coordinators if they have issues getting any of their activities completed, to help them get their technology ordered, be the contact person for them in case they need assistance in getting speakers, what vendors to use, is there a better company we can get our equipment from, and also to be the person who makes sure that they are completing the tasks that are outlined in the work plan.

Coordination of the College Access and Success Advisory Council. County coordinators reported the College Access and Success Advisory Council to be a major activity they were responsible for organizing. In fact, the focus group discussion indicated that they had clear direction on format, meeting times, representatives, and agenda from the Commission. One coordinator said:

They [the Commission] gave us some criteria for who we should be searching out, with flexibility based on each community, but we've . . . also pulled in the people that we thought would be most beneficial to the cause. . . They said they wanted approximately ten people and I think they gave us five areas that we should look for like a student, teacher, parent, those types of things.

Resources

Next, we asked about the resources and supports provided to site coordinators, emphasizing their reactions to the GEAR UP work plan. Most site coordinators overwhelmingly agreed that the GEAR UP work plan had been a useful tool overall. However, several attributed to challenging winter weather their difficulty completing events at the times specified in the work plan and called for increased flexibility with regard to program dates. Overall, site coordinators were extremely pleased with the level of structure and detail the work plan provided. As one stated:

I was excited! Oh, we got this many thousands of dollars coming in. It's like this is for this, this is for this. But it [the work plan] made it easier for me because I knew exactly what events I have to have, what services my kids can get, and it kept me focused.

Several coordinators raised concerns about the deadlines. Discussing this aspect, one site coordinator said:

The dates, I think they should be a little more flexible... It was said by this date. And, you know, in West Virginia, especially in my part of the world, February and March are brutal. And to plan anything in February and March, it's a crap shoot.

In addition to the work plan, site coordinators mentioned other tools and support systems used to implement GEAR UP activities. Several stated that regional program directors were great resources. One site coordinator noted as helpful, "each other, the education community." Another cited, "The partner tool kit . . . also the college transition, the college decision day tool kit, I've used all of that often."

Relationships

Site coordinators across the focus groups viewed their county coordinators as useful resources primarily for financial or budget-related questions. Site coordinators reported that they often worked around the county coordinator with regard to program implementation questions, connecting directly with the Commission or their regional program directors. This is not surprising, given that county coordinators themselves also described their interactions as related primarily to budget details. One site coordinator explained, “I work more with her, our county coordinator, just keeping tabs on budget, keeping tabs on acceptable expenses, and things like that.” However, interactions between site coordinators and county coordinators varied across sites. In some cases, site coordinators reported experiencing ongoing substantive communication and support from the county coordinator. In other cases, participants reported a sense of distance between these two positions. When the interaction worked well, site coordinators reported that the county coordinators helped to move things forward. One site coordinator explained:

[The county coordinator] helps with expediting any paperwork that we turn in. For instance, if we had to reschedule something and it was about, really, to miss the board meeting, s/he says, “Hand it to me and I’ll take it to this person and it will be on the agenda.” S/he’s very proficient.

In the cases where site coordinators did not comment very positively about their county coordinator, they tended to blame busy work schedules or lack of availability for the limited communication and lack of responsiveness. One site coordinator observed: “It’s [relationship with county coordinator] been almost non-existent. . . . If I do have to ask a question or email, it’s days to get a response, with me having to send [a reminder].”

We also asked how site coordinators interacted with the Commission staff members, because they constitute a valuable resource to assist with coordinating GEAR UP. Site coordinators viewed regional program directors as an integral part of the communication line between the Commission and school sites. Site coordinators reported that regional program directors were most helpful with regard to regulation compliance, payroll resolution, and support with FAFSA and college visits. Only positive discussion occurred in the focus groups about communication between regional program directors and site coordinators. Much of the conversation concerned how supportive regional program directors are in planning and attending GEAR UP events. One coordinator’s statement was typical: “Anytime I have a question I email and get an answer. If she/he doesn’t know the answer, he/she always finds it from someone, and has been to most if not all of our school’s events.”

The focus groups offered few reflections about the relationship of the county coordinators with Commission staff in Charleston. Instead, regional program directors were mentioned as the primary contact by county coordinators. The prevailing sentiment among county coordinators was that regional program directors provided high quality support and were responsive to their needs. There were however, according to two county coordinators, a select few instances where communication lines among the regional program director, the county coordinator, and site coordinator were unclear, leading to some confusion.

Implementation: GEAR UP Services and Community Involvement

Services Provided Through GEAR UP

The most commonly reported events included: (1) tutoring, (2) college visits, (3) technology resources, (4) financial aid and other workshops, and (5) guest speakers.

Tutoring. In terms of tutoring, county coordinators talked about what they considered to be innovative strategies for meeting student needs. As one noted:

A couple of schools got a little inventive, and instead of just your normal after-school tutoring, they are bringing a substitute teacher in during the day to go into the math class and give extra help to those students that need it.

Another activity mentioned by county coordinators was the “activities bus,” an after-school bus that “travels the county and takes kids home” so that they can attend after-school events they would otherwise have been unable to attend. In general, county coordinators could not elaborate on activities provided for teachers, but one referenced activities from the previous grant. County coordinators mentioned tutoring for seniors but also their concern about limited tutoring for seniors through the GEAR UP grant at priority schools. One coordinator said, “Priority students are not a priority,” in the case of tutoring. (See the *Challenges* section for further discussion.)

Site coordinators described tutoring services as occurring sometimes in combination with pre-existing tutoring programs. They also observed that GEAR UP tutoring added value by targeting at-risk or failing students and redirecting students back on track academically. One site coordinator described this phenomenon:

The biggest [benefit of GEAR UP] that we've seen is our tutoring program, and we use that as a tool in our . . . meetings with our at-risk kids in seventh grade. . . . It's really helped a lot of those kids that were kind of falling through the cracks, to get their grades up and to get their work done.

A majority of site coordinators discussed the benefits of tutoring, while a few talked about effective tutoring strategies, such as after-school transportation and alternative approaches to instruction for the tutoring program. One site coordinator explained, “We have transportation, which I know is a problem in some schools, but we do have buses that'll transport kids to anywhere they live in the county after school, so we did have a really good tutoring program and a really good turnout for that.” In another case, one site coordinator talked about the use of iPad tutoring software

Key Findings: Implementation: Services and Involvement

- GEAR UP services appropriately target students and are well-received.
- College visits are popular and have vast potential to positively influence students' college-going self-efficacy.
- Community involvement varies by county and depends largely upon geography and the resources available locally.
- Changing the culture of parent involvement in education remains a challenge where creative solutions are needed.

for students in place of on-site tutoring offered by an instructor. She described the reason for this strategy:

Our tutoring program, that was tough for us because I can't find anybody who would accept the position. We're looking towards software next year so we can avoid that, because that was really difficult.

Student confusion about tutoring options and eligibility was also a concern for a few site coordinators. That is, the emphasis on mathematics and English seemed to deter some students who thought their weak subjects were science or social studies. One coordinator said, "I had some kids that didn't come to tutoring, but I told them to come. Because they said, 'Well, it's my science that I have an issue with.' And I'm like, 'It's the same thing'." Site coordinators in this focus group agreed that additional subjects like science and social studies should be included in tutoring. Coordinators also indicated that they had to be creative to organize tutoring services, given the challenges of transportation and teacher shortages.

College Visits. Site coordinators identified college visits as being among the services most often provided and most well-received during the past year. They spoke highly of college visits as effective services provided through GEAR UP. Participants reported that the students had heightened enthusiasm once they were able to visit an actual college campus. Representing the sentiments across focus group participants, one site coordinator stated, "...Those kids were in awe... That's been such a great experience because...it's a big deal for the kids to get to go to those college visits."

CFWV Website and Technology. Most participants agreed that the use of the CFWV website was a worthwhile stand-alone activity. Discussing the CFWV website as a service, one participant said, "We did CFWV. We had the counselor come in and with the parents and the seventh graders to make them aware of that site. She got them all on the site to get them started." Other participants also used CFWV within classes as a supplemental activity. One site coordinator reported that an essay related to career exploration was embedded in the seventh-grade English classes.

Financial Aid and Other Workshops. Parents were mentioned both as attendees of financial aid workshops and as guest speakers. Guest speakers ranged from current college students discussing the application process to parents who spoke about their professions. Speakers also included admission representatives from local universities and colleges.

Guest Speakers. County and site coordinators discussed the use of guest speakers to engage and inform seniors about college. They described the existence of multiple options for students and parents to hear from college representatives and college students. For example, one site coordinator reported, "One of the people who came and spent a few days with my seniors is the Upward Bound coach from West Virginia Tech, and he met with small groups of seniors."

Differences between cohort and priority students were not a major topic of discussion in the focus groups. However, to some, the goals for priority students were viewed as simplified and more straightforward compared to those of cohort students. That is, some site coordinators mentioned that the priority track hosted fewer overarching events with a more limited range of narrower purposes: FAFSA, SAT/ACT, and college applications. These coordinators described the process of working with priority students as less exciting. One coordinator stated, "For priority [students], it's more navigation. It's more guiding them through admissions, application, and financial aid."

Community Involvement

Community Partners. All county coordinators indicated that they had held at least one College Access and Success Advisory Council meeting as of May 2015. Typically these meetings centered on promoting FAFSA awareness and increasing application numbers for high school students. Two of the coordinators expected to hold a second meeting in June. County coordinators agreed that these meetings allowed them to better understand the context and culture of the communities served.

The level of community involvement varied by county. One county coordinator mentioned that community involvement directly reflected the workforce climate and employment rates in her county, which were low. In fact, the majority of county coordinators reported how challenging it had been to find sustainable partners. Moreover, one county coordinator commented that the WV GEAR UP parameters surrounding community representation on the College Access and Success Advisory Council were difficult to meet. Addressing this topic, one respondent stated, “That new piece they added, where you have to have the community team, which is kind of a nebulous thing, I’m not sure how. We just have a small, poor community.” Conversely, two of the five coordinators were pleased with their level of community involvement.

Site coordinators also experienced mixed results with regard to building community partnerships, with some benefiting from existing partnerships and others hindered by a lack of thriving businesses to call upon in their communities. A prevailing concern was of hesitating to reach out to businesses when operating in areas with few businesses, all stretched too thin already. Food and catering partnerships were the most frequently mentioned community ties, with these local businesses cited as the strongest financial supporters of GEAR UP events, providing food and beverages. “If we had to cater an event, our local grocery stores or our local restaurants did pitch in.” Additional partners included other grant-funded programs like TRIO’s Talent Search and Upward Bound, which facilitated additional community contacts. One site coordinator reported:

It's called the HATS Grant...the Heart of Appalachia Talent Search grant, and they're housed on Marshall's campus. It's part of Upward Bound TRIO programs. That's all kind of the same thing and [the director]'s fabulous and always brings in her office staff and even some other community people she's introduced me to...That's been probably my biggest partner.

Other site coordinators are having success reaching out to community businesses as partners. One stated:

...our community has really reached out to us, wanting to know what can we do?... What we're seeing from that is, we've got all these people in our community who really want to help, so we're working more on tapping into that...I'm looking at things from a different perspective... it's not that there's something new going on, it's just that I'm seeing it differently because of our efforts with GEAR UP.

In a few cases, site coordinators reported that it was challenging to identify community businesses not already partnered with other schools. One site coordinator reported that it was extremely difficult to identify any community business other than coal mining. In another community, the site coordinator stated, “We have four schools in the county. There are three businesses that get hit by every single organization, every single church, every single youth league.”

The difficulty of identifying and developing partnerships with businesses was widely felt by focus group participants.

University Partners. The response of county coordinators to university partner involvement was mixed. Most agreed that it is easiest to build relationships with local universities, but others reported concern about the actual physical distance to “local” universities and which colleges and universities to consider as “local.” One reported, “We really appreciate the GEAR UP funds so the kids can [go on college visits]... But for us, it’d be really nice if they could just cross the river [to Ohio].” Another stated:

[Our county] has not a single college or university within the county borders... you got to understand, every college is going to be an hour and a half away. Even the nearest two-year college is in [WV town], which is forty-five minutes from the high school... When you guys talk about local partners in a rural area, there's not a college that claims us.

A prominent sub-theme identified within this topic is that participants who reported strong university partnerships described relationships that went beyond college visits. In two cases, partners became available through the College Access and Success Advisory Council. One coordinator said, “We have a local College Access and Success Advisory Council, and we have a representative from [university name] on that.” In other cases, county coordinators mentioned having dual credit offerings with their West Virginia partner universities. One county coordinator stated, “[Our] County has [name] College, they're very active with us. We do dual credit through them. There's a representative on my advisory board.” Overall, county coordinators tended to report having college or university partners who were either closest in proximity or partners from previous grant work.

In describing university and college partnerships, several site coordinators reported being in a nascent stage, engaged in cold-calling admissions departments. However, many expressed high hopes for the future and described positive feedback taking this approach. For example, one site coordinator stated, “I’m happy I can start a relationship... I now have a network of people I can call. I wouldn’t say they’re partners, but my network is getting bigger.” In other instances, site coordinators were looking for ways to expedite the process. For example:

I would like to find a contact sheet. I don't know if that exists out there somewhere, or if it's something that I need to create myself, but who do I call? I know you get a hold of admissions, but I would like a specific person with an e-mail. That way, I can eliminate that whole searching process.

The majority of interactions with university and college partners concerned setting up college visits for students, but site coordinators also mentioned assistance during college application week and plans for future joint ventures. One reflected, “[I have plans] to have them come in and speak with the students. I’d like to do that during the kick-off event as well.”

When referring to actual college visits, site coordinators revealed that often smaller colleges—state and community—offered more personalized attention during college visits and were more proactive in building partnerships. According to one site coordinator, this customized attention manifested itself in the college visit experiences of their students. One site coordinator observed, “...They've [students] come back and said it was the best thing they'd ever done... I think that they're willing to help you do anything that's within their means. And they're willing to work with you.” Site

coordinators agreed that students benefited the most when partnerships resulted in a customized experience for them. For example, one site coordinator observed:

I think the smaller colleges might be the way to go on these college visits, because they're able to go in and [they appreciate you more]... Realistically, that's where most of the kids are going to go. It's nice to let them get exposure to Marshall and WVU and all that. But, I mean, 95 percent of your kids, if they're going to obtain a college education at an affordable place, it's going to be local. It's going to be a technical place or a small community college, a small university.

Parents, Participants from all focus groups were asked to describe parental involvement in their schools and the extent to which they were successful in encouraging parents to attend events. Participants described good attendance at some events, and the extensive involvement of some parents in school activities. Involvement varied by school and, for many site coordinators, depended upon the grade and community culture. For example, one site coordinator captured the common sentiment in his comment:

We're fighting culture in our area. Trying to get parents to events is like pulling teeth...With our kick-off event, we had pretty good turnout for our seventh-grade cohort, but every time we try to do things here towards seniors or upperclassmen and their parents, it's like pulling teeth.

A number of site coordinators reported success with parent attendance at the annual kick-off event during the school year. As one explained, "They [the parents] enjoyed the spring kick-off that we had. We had food. All the parents came, which was shocking to have at least one parent for each student there, so we're really happy to have that." Site coordinators mentioned catering and aligning the events with other (unrelated) school activities or performances as incentives for parents to attend events.

We had a really good parent turn out, but I also had the choir perform for the opening part of it. I talked to them a little bit, then the choir performed, and then I talked to them some more. And we had food, so I think tying it in like that had more parents [come] because the parents wanted to see their kids perform.

In other cases, site coordinators had more limited success but remained optimistic that it would turn around. As one explained:

We don't have a whole lot of parent involvement in our school. For our kick-off...we advertised it, we put it on... and we announced it at school. Actually, we even scheduled it before a ballgame, hoping we'd get a good crowd. But we didn't have as many as we'd like.

Another site coordinator noted the disappointment of coming in below expectations, and many focus group members agreed. She stated, "I hope that my parent involvement grows for the coming year, because it wasn't what I would like for it to be." When describing the reasons for low attendance, participants identified scheduling or weather conflicts as obstacles for parental involvement. One site coordinator noted:

Ours was disappointing. We sent letters home, did the calls—and I think the weather did hurt us a lot, too, because we had to cancel a couple times. By the time you get to have it, everybody's just kind of like, you've got other things going on.

Impact: What is Success for GEAR UP?

We asked all focus group participants to tell us what they felt success in GEAR UP would look like. Increasing awareness, filing the FAFSA, and completing college applications were a few of the activities cited most often by county coordinators as evidence of success. Their suggestions included behavior and attitude changes likely to result in more students applying to college. One coordinator summed up their sentiments:

I think it will be awareness; more people will be aware of the importance of college and postsecondary education—if we see an increase in the number of our students who do pursue postsecondary education, if we see an increase in the number who fill out a college application, file a FAFSA, get Pell Grant money, or learn about grants, or just learn that there's more out there. High school is not the end. It's the beginning.

Other coordinators mentioned changing the perspectives of parents, students, and the community. As the comment above suggests, FAFSA submission requires parental support and involvement as well as student involvement. And, for most county coordinators, the increased involvement of parents and community members is essential to supporting student success in college enrollment and completion.

.... For parents, I think hopefully it will look like a higher understanding of the process of going to college, and the steps that they need to take to help their children. As far as staff, hopefully they'll have a deeper understanding of how they can support students and create a college-going culture in their classroom and school... it looks like everyone having the same mission and working towards it as a community.

Site coordinators emphasized that having students show increased interest in postsecondary education or training was the ultimate goal of GEAR UP activities. Many expressed the desire that students be exposed to more lucrative job or career opportunities beyond those they may already consider such as fast food service. One coordinator explained, “[Success will be] That we’ll hit that one who might have been stuck [in a low wage job] and they’ll be somewhere else. Whether it’s hair or diesel mechanics or doctor or whatever. There’ll be that one.” Specifically, coordinators indicated that success was a student who showed interest in new careers and options after high school. One site coordinator explained that GEAR UP success would probably lead to economic changes for

Key Findings: Impact: What is success for GEAR UP?

- Program success will be reflected in increased numbers of student college applications and in postsecondary enrollment and retention rates.
- Other indicators of success include increased student awareness and interest in postsecondary options and a shift in the local culture related to postsecondary education.
- Success is most likely when parents and community partners are involved.

students, their families, and eventually, the community. One coordinator observed:

I think if you impact kids, you impact the home. And when you impact the home, you impact the community...That's what they're used to. Now that they're able to see there's something else out there, they go tell their brother, they go tell their cousins, they go tell their mom and dad, there's other opportunities out there than just drawing a check every month.

Examples of students who shared stories about college options were a common thread throughout the focus groups. Coordinators also talked about preparation for postsecondary options and scholarship eligibility. One county coordinator when referring to a conversation with a site coordinator emphasized, “Getting our middle school students prepared once they hit ninth grade, knowing this is what needs to be done, this is what the [promise] scholarship is, because [we have] parents coming in on junior night that are saying, ‘I want to get my student the [promise] scholarship.’ You can’t do that [that] in the year if you’re not already there...”

Sustainability: Generating Awareness and Building Buy-In for GEAR UP

We asked focus group participants to tell us about the extent to which they felt they were building a sustainable foundation for GEAR UP. Given that the project was in its first year, we asked them to focus on the extent to which they had been successful in building awareness and generating buy-in for GEAR UP in their county/school.

Generating Awareness

County coordinators acknowledged the importance and necessity of GEAR UP “selling itself” so teachers can see the benefits. However, they were optimistic that the teachers would become more involved and aware after GEAR UP had been properly introduced and implemented. Another coordinator noted that the dearth of competing events gave parents an opportunity to be involved in something positive: “The opening event—they had a lot of parents out for that. Not a lot goes on in our county, so anything that will help the students, taking trips, parents are very interested in it.”

This group of county coordinators gave accolades to the signs and billboards posted throughout the county to spread the word about GEAR UP. The impact of the communication strategies directly influenced the level of awareness, they commented. One county coordinator observed:

... I see things about FAFSA and college and GEAR UP. [It] starts the whole conversation. Everybody talks about GEAR UP. Our high school, GEAR UP things are everywhere.

In all focus groups, site coordinators discussed factors that could either foster or impede the sustainability of GEAR UP activities. Participants explained many times and in different ways that they perceived the

Key Findings: Sustainability: Generating Awareness and Buy-In

- Various kinds of outreach materials are helpful resources in spreading the word about GEAR UP.
- Increasing awareness and buy-in requires personalized communication and attention.
- Achieving faculty buy-in will create a culture of support for GEAR UP, student success, and lead to greater sustainability.

development of trust, awareness, and positive relationships as critical. A lack of knowledge and awareness was mentioned as a possible impetus for low involvement. In one case, the site coordinator recalled relating to parents and students by telling his/her own story:

And I was able to share my story with my parents about how my life went. They've known me for years as a coach and some as a teacher. "And I'm telling you, your kids can do the same thing, no matter where your life's at right now. If you've lost your job in the mines, which is a lot of people in the area, this is your kid's way out, so they don't ever have to go through what you're going through now."

Many participants throughout the focus groups asserted that it was critical to get the word out to inform parents, students, and teachers about the GEAR UP program and its activities. They offered a number of specific examples of communication strategies to increase awareness among parents and students. Site coordinators reported varying results using similar methods. One noted "personalized attention" as key. Two site coordinators discussed similar use of emails, flyers, and letters, but one participant described generally great outcomes and the other, poor outcomes.

Example 1: *I sent home flyers with the RSVP. When they would RSVP, I would call the night before and remind them and confirm their attendance...That was the key right there. It was reaching out and actually speaking one-on-one, or if you see a parent come to pick a child up, you catch them.*

Example 2: *I've called. I've given out flyers. I've written letters, mailed letters. I've offered extra incentives. Nothing will get my parents involved. I had the same four parents, which is fine, that's great, these four kids are great, but I can't get parents involved.*

Additionally, leadership support often increased participation. Site coordinators talked about the impact of an organized school effort, as the coordinator below explained:

My principal is really good about helping me carve out time to talk to those seventh graders. We'll grab them at the end of the day for about 15 minutes, and we'll have them in the auditorium, and I'll go over everything. It's always on our announcement sheet. They're constantly hearing about this. It's not just a letter that goes home. It's a variety of reaching out methods.

Interviewees also expressed appreciation for additional media support and materials to raise awareness. One site coordinator commented:

I love the pop-up banner, I love the table throws...[I would love] to have a GEAR UP table at every home game with the pop-up banner. They give us so much stuff, and we've got a lot we can give out—just to raise that awareness...

Building Buy-In

Although most focus group participants commented on student and parent awareness, the conversation surrounding buy-in gravitated heavily toward discussion of generating faculty interest. Various site and county coordinators suggested that including teachers and other faculty in GEAR UP events was essential to inculcating a sense of interest, inclusion, and thus ownership of GEAR UP success. As one participant explained:

If you can get the teacher buy-in, I think you'll have the support of people that want to see it succeed and will help with trying to find ways to have it sustain. Because if your faculty is not going to buy in, then there's not going to be that help to help it succeed. But if you can get your faculty to buy in and see the positive pieces of it, then they're going to help later when you're going, "All right, let's reach out. How can we keep this going?"

Although teachers from most schools were invited to join in college trips and college decision day activities, there were mixed reports about their actual participation. Some site coordinators reported that teachers were eager to participate:

I sent out invitations [to the kick-off]. Again, I really played it up. I invited all the teachers, the middle grade teachers, to come, too, and...they did volunteer to help serve. It was just a really good success. Then we just revisited what GEAR UP was about, and they already are aware, of course, because they got to go on the college trips and stuff.

Although all participants agreed that teacher support and buy-in is necessary to achieve long-term success, there were a few reports of teachers not showing interest. One participant reflected the feelings of a few coordinators:

I've had a hard time getting my seventh-grade teachers to buy in ... I go to the team meetings and talk to them about GEAR UP, tell them what's available, but then I don't get any feedback afterwards... And I think it's probably because they didn't know what the program was, and really I didn't either.

Many site coordinators talked about their strategies to increase buy-in by keeping faculty and other supporters informed and appreciated for their roles in college-related activities. As one site coordinator reported:

When we did our college decision day on Tuesday with our scholarship ceremony, we asked the kids to pick one or two teachers who affected them during their seventh through twelfth grades at [high school name]... it was neat to see, and the cooks, some people invited the cooks, one guy worked with the custodian so he invited him up, so even other people in the building, and there's been so many teachers emailing me, and I've asked the teachers to RSVP, and they've been so excited... They [students] would pick because these teachers have touched them in a way that maybe you don't recognize. But it's been really neat for the teachers, too, and I think they're starting to buy into it, because they're seeing that this is working, and there's kids out there making these decisions, and they're impacting that. Just a little pat on the back every once in a while is good.

Perceptions of Effectiveness

In an effort to better understand the implementation efforts of the program thus far, the evaluation team asked questions pertaining to aspects of the program that are working well and areas that need improvement.

What is Working Well?

The GEAR UP program, as noted by county coordinators, is generating substantial interest within communities and schools regarding postsecondary education. A major theme that was highlighted as a successful outcome of the grant is the increased frequency of GEAR UP-sponsored activities, and the effect this has had on the awareness of FAFSA participation at the county level. Activities such as College Application and Exploration Week and college visits, which three of the five county coordinators recognized as making a positive difference in the overall implementation of the program, were mentioned in the focus group. In addition, providing outreach materials that are advertised in communities, schools, and even classrooms is also viewed as an effective method for publicizing the program and what it stands for, with some teachers even posting their college alumni gear in the classrooms.

According to one county coordinator, “GEAR UP starts the whole conversation” about college and postsecondary education. Although GEAR UP-sponsored initiatives are successfully generating interest and awareness about the program at many schools and communities, some site coordinators note lingering difficulty in involving more parents.

Key Findings: Perceptions of Effectiveness

- GEAR UP has successfully generated interest in Year 1 and is moving toward promoting buy-in on a broader level.
- FAFSA participation is increasing.
- At times, communication can be challenging.
- Some grant requirements can be perceived as restrictive or counterproductive.
- Rurality poses challenges, especially related to developing effective community partnerships.

Overall, county coordinators felt the GEAR UP program has had a positive influence on FAFSA participation, credited to the level of discussion and emphasis on the topic since the grant began. In some instances, county coordinators recognized the dramatic increase in participation as a result of GEAR UP. As one noted:

FAFSA is a big thing. Our numbers increased tremendously from the first year that we were at [high school name]. . . In the low- to mid-thirties, last year when I was there, it was about 62 percent this year. They know; all the kids know. We talk about it all the time; it's visible.

Some of the county coordinators also found Commission personnel to be a very helpful resource, citing their responsiveness to questions and provision of valuable information for individual schools and their respective site coordinators (i.e., tutoring logs, potential guest speakers, and so forth).

Site coordinators generally agreed that the creation of the county coordinator role for this cycle of the grant was important because these individuals served as a useful resource regarding financial or budget-related questions. However, in other implementation areas, site coordinators gave the role mixed reviews. For example, many site coordinators described the county coordinators as “highly available” and “very responsive,” and in some cases, a “go-to person” for financially related questions. But many site coordinators still found direct communication with the Commission or regional program director more helpful, especially regarding program implementation. Not

surprisingly, a few county coordinators indicated some confusion about their roles and inefficiencies in program implementation. (See the *Needs Improvement* section below.)

Site coordinators also emphasized the overall helpfulness of the work plan and organizational tools for meeting the goals and objectives of the program. Many recognized the work plan's robust list of activities that could be done, including a guide to implementing those activities. In a few instances, site coordinators mentioned the lack of flexibility in the work plan's timeline, because some dates did not account for local seasonal weather or activities already in place, but generally the tools were welcomed.

What Needs Improvement?

Challenges with communication were not cited as a pervasive issue by site and county coordinators. However, the role of county coordinator, because it is new, may require additional clarification. According to a small number of county coordinators, important communications among the Commission, regional program directors, and site coordinators occasionally excluded county coordinators. As a result, the affected county coordinators sometimes felt out of the loop. Regional program directors have direct supervision responsibility for site coordinators, so this scenario is not to be unexpected. However, it may be helpful to establish or clarify the expected communication lines and the associated roles for site and county coordinators. As one county coordinator stated:

There are times where information and stuff goes [from the regional program director] to him [site coordinator], and I don't have a clue...If I had known, I could have done it.

In clarifying communication roles, it may also be useful to include guidance about elements of the inventory and budgeting process. That is, one county coordinator cited that although s/he is responsible for signing requisitions for new equipment, s/he does not always see the inventory forms afterwards from the individual sites.

Other encompassing challenges faced by county coordinators included restriction of funds, transportation for college visits, and county-level encouragement for families to participate in the FAFSA process. Though not a widely cited issue, a small number of county coordinators also noted the difficulty in giving equal attention to priority and cohort students because of limited funds for tutors and other GEAR UP resources. As one coordinator pointed out:

We couldn't have tutors for our seniors...[seniors] are called the priority group, but they don't really feel like they're a priority.

Another issue, related more to the restrictions of the grant, affects students of all grades who are near the West Virginia border with Ohio. These students are geographically disadvantaged for visits to some in-state colleges, but very close to colleges in Ohio. The out-of-state colleges near the border, according to one county coordinator, will give discounted rates to students who live in nearby West Virginia, demonstrating how important it is for students to be able to visit the colleges closest to them, yet GEAR UP restricts the use of funds for out-of-state college visits.

Despite the successes that some county coordinators reported in improved FAFSA participation within their counties, two commented on the difficulties. Family situations, according to one coordinator, are an obstacle when trying to increase participation:

They disconnect, and then they're divorced, and the ex- doesn't let the other one know how much they make, or who they were remarried to. They won't even tell the kid. The poor kid's there, and this step, you must copy this number off of the form. Whose form do I need? Mom's, Dad's, nobody's? My own?"

For site coordinators, the predominant funding issue is the degree of flexibility they have in spending. One noted that:

Even though I have the money there, I've got that restriction on spending it, and I'm not really sure that's the most effective way to go.

A small group of participants also reported problems regarding payment and paychecks arriving on time. As one site coordinator suggested, "You shouldn't have to wait a month and a half for your pay," insisting that a more efficient payment system should be implemented. It should be noted that some of this frustration is potentially attributable the nature of the site coordinator's position as a contract employee and the accompanying requirements from the West Virginia State Auditor's Office.

Three of the five county coordinators noted difficulty in finding local college partnerships because the closest colleges were, in many cases, at least an hour's bus ride away. One county coordinator noted:

Our county has not a single college or university within the county borders....every college is going to be an hour and a half away.

Many recalled cold-calling admissions departments, as well as working hard to build relationships with local colleges. Despite the success that many site coordinators reported in setting up college visits and other GEAR UP activities with community partners, some schools struggled with fostering such relationships as their communities underwent economic downturns. For instance, one site coordinator noted that the "support that was here was predominantly coal...we just lost a big one; they just pulled out this month," leaving the school with very few local partnership options. Although positive examples of schools reaching out and finding sustainable partnerships were reported, some communities are too rural to have more than extremely limited options.

Discussion

In the following section, we discuss the findings from the first year of the external evaluation of WV GEAR UP. We focus primarily upon information from the school personnel survey and site and county coordinator focus groups, given that we have not previously reported these findings to the Commission. However, where applicable, we have noted important parallels with the information collected earlier this year through the student and parent/guardian surveys. The discussion section is divided into four sub-sections: (1) implementation, (2) outcomes, (3), impact, and (4) sustainability. These topics correspond with the evaluation design proposed by ICF for WV GEAR UP.

Implementation

WV GEAR UP is in its first year of implementation for this 2014 grant cycle. Services are just beginning. Nevertheless, we found that half of all survey respondents from WV GEAR UP schools indicated participating in GEAR UP or receiving at least some support through the program this year.

Findings from the implementation study provide important feedback on the delivery of key services, the roles of various participants, community involvement, and the relationships developed. Not surprisingly, most respondents reported being in the emerging stages of implementation. However, several participants are continuing their involvement in GEAR UP from the previous grant cycle. For these individuals, GEAR UP represents a long-standing partnership between the Commission, local colleges/community partners, and high-need students. This is good news for GEAR UP, because these pre-existing relationships can foster stakeholder buy-in for new program efforts and also serve as examples for new participants. This feature should help greatly in promoting implementation.

Service Delivery. For administrators, counselors, teachers, students, and parents, the most commonly accessed services during Year 1 were college visits, parent nights, and academic tutoring. For each activity, we found that participation varied by participant role, school level, and grade. College visits in particular seemed to have great potential as transformative events for younger students. Cohort and priority student groups often differed in terms of the breadth and depth of services offered. At least some stakeholders perceived priority student services as less diverse and more routine. However, both school personnel and grade 12 students themselves acknowledged the need for more targeted, just-in-time services in the last year of high school.

Services encountered first-year implementation challenges. First, timing was a factor. That is, some respondents noted that starting the GEAR UP grant later in the school year led to delayed service offerings and lower participation rates. Year 2 should yield greater involvement with this issue eliminated. Concerns related to academic tutoring included a shortage of both teachers and after-school transportation. However, with nearly half of all teachers reporting that they have yet to become engaged in GEAR UP services, the former issue may be remedied by more effectively reaching out to faculty. Another concern about tutoring was the emphasis on mathematics and English language arts. However, on the Year 1 student surveys, students reported the least academic confidence in science and mathematics. Expanding tutoring to these subjects should encourage student attendance and improve student confidence.

Participation in GEAR UP. Middle school faculty were less likely than high school or middle/high school faculty to report having participated in GEAR UP. We found participation to be a strong predictor of their comfort in their knowledge about postsecondary education topics and their involvement in other college-related activities. Additionally, teachers reported far less involvement in GEAR UP activities than administrators and counselors. This finding is not particularly alarming, given that the program is in the early stages of implementation, but future planning should include strategies to increase teacher involvement in activities for both cohort and priority groups. Special attention may be needed to increase the number of events and resources offered in middle schools.

Community Involvement. School personnel confirmed that rural Appalachian culture presents both challenges and opportunities for GEAR UP. In terms of challenges, both county and site coordinators indicated that community involvement largely depends on the job market and the geographic location of participating schools. For example, when universities are located nearby, the process of partnership building has been easier to implement, although not without challenges. Border counties express frustration about not having access to schools in Ohio that might offer viable postsecondary options for students. Small, poor communities reported struggling greatly to secure community partners. Nevertheless, the culture of rural Appalachia also features strong values of community and togetherness. As a result, WV GEAR UP found some success building parental and community engagement by connecting GEAR UP activities to other school or community events, often

sports events. Furthermore, some participants noted that businesses and community members have actively reached out to schools to learn how to help. It will be important to equip GEAR UP staff and community partners to sustain their willingness to tackle the underlying issues related to family and community involvement, including limited parental knowledge and educational experience (evidenced by student and parent/guardian surveys), a slowing job market, and negative peer influences.

Parent involvement saw varying degrees of success in Year 1. Initial events, like the GEAR UP kick-off, were reported as reasonably successful in generating parental involvement, but most county and site coordinators lamented low parental involvement as a continual issue and noted that they were "fighting" a culture of low parental involvement in education. Yet although the parent/guardian surveys reported limited college knowledge and experiences among parents/guardians, a great majority thought that college or other postsecondary options were important to their child's future career goals and overall success, and they wanted to learn more about these topics and about GEAR UP events. We suggest capitalizing on opportunities to remind parents and students as early as possible about the benefits and importance of postsecondary training/education and the rationale for beginning to plan early.

Relationships. Many site and county coordinators are content with the new county coordinator role and the degree of support offered by Commission staff. However, in a few cases, a communication breakdown is evident. These issues should be addressed as early as possible. One way to do so is to clarify the roles of county coordinators and to routinize communication procedures to ensure county coordinators are looped into important events and activities in their counties. Doing so would help county coordinators who are less effective and allow those who feel underutilized to support GEAR UP more effectively. Although we focus on areas for improvement in this report, it is worth underscoring that in most cases, county, site, and Commission personnel reported positive relationships with good communication and appear well-situated to work together as a team.

Outcomes

College-Going Culture (CGC). Our evaluation determined that two components best measure CGC in WV GEAR UP schools. The *rigor/expectations component* of CGC reflects the degree to which schools establish high expectations and a challenging curriculum that prepares students for postsecondary success. The *visual cues/material resources component* of CGC represents how well schools integrate messaging to communicate a vision of the importance of postsecondary education and the extent to which schools provide or receive support and professional development to further that vision. During Year 1, respondents were more likely to rate their schools higher on the rigor/expectations component than on the visual cues/material resources component. Their ratings for the rigor/expectations component did not differ across programmatic levels. These findings are not particularly surprising, because curriculum rigor and high student expectations are universally promoted in education. However, educators in middle/high and high schools rated the visual cues/material resources component significantly higher than educators in middle schools did. To some extent, this is to be expected—it makes intuitive sense that school systems with limited resources related to postsecondary education would distribute more at the high school level, because these students are closer to college or other after high school options. This approach could be considered shortsighted, however. The sooner students begin preparing for their postsecondary education, the more likely that they will succeed in their pursuit. GEAR UP is well-positioned to provide a much-needed infusion of resources at the middle school level next year.

We also found that for most items on the CGC scale, teachers tended to rate their own classrooms higher than their schools. Most commonly, teachers provided higher classroom ratings on items from the rigor/expectations component of the CGC scale, indicating they believed their classrooms held to a higher standard of rigor than the rest of the school. It is possible that this finding derives from the fact that teachers feel more in control of their classrooms than the school. Another potential explanation is social desirability bias, that is, because education as a profession values rigor/expectations so highly, teachers may tend to reply in ways that reflect favorably on their work.

Teachers were also more likely than either administrators or counselors to give low ratings to the visual cues/material resources component of CGC. In fact, for several items on this scale, they rated their schools significantly higher than their own classrooms. Several potential explanations exist. For example, perhaps messaging is more present throughout the school than in individual classrooms. Perhaps schools tend to distribute professional development and other material resources schoolwide rather than to teachers individually. Finally, teachers may not feel it is their professional responsibility to provide professional development and resources related to CGC. Regardless, for teachers to hold high expectations and implement a rigorous curriculum is essential, but not sufficient to achieve the goals of GEAR UP. For CGC to become truly pervasive, teachers need to embrace messaging in support of CGS and make practical resources available in their classrooms. Doing so will create more frequent and substantive opportunities to reinforce high expectations and to engage in meaningful postsecondary education-related experiences with students.

Knowledge of CGC topics. When asked about their level of comfort with their personal knowledge of various CGC topics, teachers reported the most awareness of the importance/benefit of postsecondary education and high school graduation requirements. They were far less comfortable with their knowledge about financial aid. This finding is very important, because this dearth of knowledge reflects the responses of students and parents in the surveys conducted earlier in the school year. If teachers represent one of the front lines for educating parents and students about these topics, they must be prepared and confident in their knowledge. Because they were least likely of all school staff members to report comfort with these topics, any planned professional development on financial aid topics should strive to involve as many teachers as possible.

Participation in College-Related Activities. Teachers were most involved in activities like talking individually with students about postsecondary education and their future goals, and to a lesser extent, in college-related activities such as attending college preparation activities at their school or talking with parents about ways to help students prepare for postsecondary education. This lack of participation may not be for lack of trying. It is possible schools may not have had the opportunity during Year 1 to provide many college-related events. This finding may also be linked to the relatively low percentage of cohort parents and students who reported on the Year 1 student/parent surveys that someone from GEAR UP or their child's school had spoken with them about financial aid or college entrance requirements. Again, teachers reported the least involvement. This is an important finding, especially since the focus groups underscored the need to build buy-in among teachers. Taking part in activities can effectively introduce teachers to the value of GEAR UP.

School Promotion of CGC Elements. Schools most commonly promoted elements of CGC such as high expectations of students, academic support, and rigorous coursework. They were less likely to promote specific college-related elements like financial aid/college application assistance or connections to college experiences via college professionals or partnerships with higher education institutions. This observation reinforces earlier findings that the topics most highly rated by

respondents seem to correspond, at least conceptually, with the rigor/expectations component of CGC, while those lowest rated correspond with the visual cues/material resources component. Respondents felt the most important aspects of CGC included engaging in college preparation activities, setting clear expectations and communications about postsecondary education, and securing community/family involvement. All three topics are important. The first and last also parallel findings from the Year 1 student/parent surveys.

GEAR UP's Role in Supporting CGC. Respondents felt that GEAR UP plays a significant role in promoting CGC in schools. At the end of Year 1, educators were most aware of highly visible GEAR UP activities such as opportunities to participate in college visits, tutoring, and leadership opportunities. All were viewed as very helpful in promoting CGC. We also found that participation in GEAR UP was a strong predictor of respondents' comfort/knowledge levels related to CGC topics and their level of involvement in college-related activities. The direction of these relationships is unknown, however. One possibility is that participating in GEAR UP events directly influences these outcomes. It is also possible that those who are more comfortable in their knowledge of these topics tend to participate in GEAR UP. Nevertheless, this is a very positive outcome for the project.

Role and Programmatic Level Differences. It is important to note that, as a group, teachers universally provided the lowest ratings on the school personnel survey. Administrators and principals tended to respond more favorably. We also found that middle schools commonly provided lower ratings than middle/high and high schools. None of these findings are particularly surprising. However, they frame the need to enhance perceptions of CGC among teachers and to work toward embedding CGC at the middle school level.

Impact

This evaluation will ultimately measure the impact of GEAR UP by comparing information about cohort students' postsecondary enrollment rates with rates for non-participating students. Even though this prospect seems very distant during Year 1, we sought input from site and county coordinators about their vision for what would be the most salient impacts of GEAR UP. Interestingly, most did not emphasize postsecondary enrollment. Both site and county coordinators overwhelmingly responded that GEAR UP would succeed if students become more aware of their postsecondary education options and know more about their eligibility for financial aid. Coordinators also indicated that GEAR UP would succeed if the program could change the hearts and minds of community members, educators, and students toward postsecondary education. Both groups also pointed to the importance of students preparing for college sooner.

These outcomes represent significant cultural shifts for West Virginia. It is important to acknowledge that GEAR UP is viewed as an important part of moving that culture forward. This is arguably more difficult to achieve and will have a more lasting impact than improving the immediate outcomes for cohort and priority students.

Sustainability

Assessing sustainability is a challenge when a program is in its most nascent stages. Nevertheless, based on their open-ended comments, survey respondents seemed well aware that the sustainability of GEAR UP services may be compromised once funding is no longer available. Respondents also noted GEAR UP's relative success in generating awareness and buy-in during Year 1. These components form the bedrock of sustainability. Respondents were very positive about GEAR

UP's ability to "sell itself" to participants. However, they noted that teachers need to become more involved if the program is to be sustainable. We saw some evidence of limited teacher involvement in Year 1, in that nearly half of all teachers indicated they had not yet participated in GEAR UP events. We will continue to monitor this outcome over time. As noted by focus group participants, building buy-in among faculty is among the most important elements to sustaining GEAR UP activities once the grant is over. Respondents believe that if teachers really buy in, they will find a way to continue promoting postsecondary education in their classrooms and schools. But for teachers to embrace that commitment, they must see the value firsthand.

Recommendations

Across all levels of the GEAR UP program, clarify the roles, responsibilities, and intended interactions among Commission staff, county and site coordinators, and school faculty members. Pay special attention to the new role of the county coordinator and to the role that teachers and other faculty members such as counselors and service personnel should play in supporting GEAR UP. Everyone has a potential role.

Encourage county and site coordinators to share effective strategies for engaging faculty members in GEAR UP activities and building a schoolwide CGC. It is especially important to engage teachers and faculty members employed in middle schools. The topic of financial aid literacy should be emphasized for all school personnel.

Continue using GEAR UP as a vehicle to infuse material resources to build CGC in schools. This step is important for all school levels, but especially for middle schools where respondents consistently reported the lowest ratings on the visual cues/material resources component of CGC and in terms of nearly all other survey outcomes. Middle schools have probably not received large amounts of material resources related to postsecondary education. GEAR UP is well-poised to help address this deficit. However, for most middle schools, GEAR UP will be in operation only for the remainder of the 2015-2016 school year. This fact underscores the importance of using this year as an opportunity to build a sustainable CGC in middle schools.

Reserve part of site coordinator meetings and/or provide additional opportunities for participants to share their experiences related to fostering effective family, community, and college/university engagement. The Year 1 evaluation of GEAR UP revealed both challenges and opportunities related to family and broader community involvement. Individuals with experience from the prior GEAR UP grant cycle have many lessons they could share with newer participants. Commission staff should also continue to provide valuable toolkits, guidance, and strategies to help with this aspect of the program. Emphasizing the option of partnering across school districts when possible may be one option to promote community involvement.

Continue to refine data collection instruments, and use information from the external evaluation to plan targeted support services that address the needs of parents, students, school faculty, and county staff. For example, multiple data sources in Year 1 indicated a need for additional academic support in science, mathematics, and study skills. Data also indicated that faculty, students, and parents/guardians reported a dearth of knowledge about important financial aid topics, including college savings plans/529 and the West Virginia Higher Education Grant. These topics are ripe for additional attention in Year 2. Evaluation reports include a wealth of additional information about the types of activities and information most requested by various role groups.

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Appendix – Consent Forms and Data Collection Instruments

Year 1 Adult Interview and Focus Group Consent Form



West Virginia postsecondary leaders and public schools in 10 counties are participating in a federal grant to implement and assess the effectiveness of the GEAR UP program to promote college awareness and enrollment among low-income students across the state. The grant's fiscal agent, the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WV HEPC), has contracted with ICF International to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of this grant program to better understand strategies used to meet program goals. As part of this important research, you are being asked to participate in an interview or focus group that should take approximately 45-60 minutes. The discussion will include questions about your opinions and experiences with GEAR UP. Please consider the details below prior to deciding to participate in this interview:

- **Confidentiality:** The session will be recorded either by audio files or written notes. The recordings of what you share will only be used by researchers. Data will be stored in a secure area accessible only to the researchers. Your answers to these questions will be kept confidential. Summary reports may indicate particular individuals by the roles they describe but all information collected via interviews and focus groups will be reported confidentially.
- **Risks:** The study presents only minimal risk to you. You will not be required to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer and reports will not identify you by name. If you feel uncomfortable while answering questions you may cease participation at any time without penalties and without loss of any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
- **Benefits:** Study participation helps build knowledge in the state and nationally about how to support students in building momentum for postsecondary education success. Where appropriate, WV HEPC and participating postsecondary institutions can use the information learned to adjust GEAR UP programming.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Your participation is voluntary, meaning that you do not have to participate in this interview or focus group if you do not want to; you may stop participating at any time. We hope you will participate in the conversation, but you do not have to share information that makes you feel uncomfortable. Your decision to participate or withdraw from the study at any time will not affect your employment status or performance review. By answering questions and signing below, you are consenting to participate.

If you have any questions about the study or your rights as a study participant, you may contact Nate Hixson, ICF International, at (304) 342-0037.

To indicate your consent to participate in this interview, please sign your name below in black/blue ink pen.

Sign your name here

Date

Clearly print your name here

Year 1 County Coordinator Focus Group Guide

Facilitator Guidelines:

- Introduce yourself and/or leaders of the focus group as representatives of ICF International and describe your roles in supporting the meeting (i.e., facilitator, note taker).
- Briefly discuss the purpose of the focus group: *Explain that the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) has contracted with ICF International to conduct an independent evaluation of the West Virginia GEAR UP program. ICF is interested in learning more about activities taking place at the regional, county, and school level; the extent of support received by schools; and perceptions on GEAR UP's operation. Explain that this is not an evaluation of county coordinators or other GEAR UP personnel. The purpose of this focus group is to learn more about the program's operation and activities and to obtain a variety of views about the program. People can agree or disagree with comments, but only one person can speak at a time. The session will take approximately 40-50 minutes.*
- Convey to each participant our confidentiality policy: *Hand out consent forms. Remind them they received them by email. (1) The focus group is voluntary; (2) you can decline to answer any questions, or you can stop participating in the focus group at any time—participation will not impact you at school; (3) the information will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law by the evaluation team who have signed confidentiality agreements ensuring the protection of data; (4) focus group data will be maintained in secure areas; and (5) please respect others' privacy by not sharing any information outside of the focus group.*
- Ask if they have any questions for you before you begin. Review and ask participants to sign the consent form prior to the start of the focus group.
- Ask permission to record the focus group: *In order to capture the discussion, I would like to record the session. Only evaluation team members will have access to the recording. If at least one person chooses not to have the focus group recorded, we will not record the session but will take notes. We will not include your name(s) in these notes. Any information that can be used to identify an individual will be removed from transcripts prior to being shared. **START RECORDER NOW!***
- Each focus group should have six to 10 participants. The focus group is for County Coordinators during the 2014-2015 school year.

Materials

- Pen and paper or index card for each participant

Time	Questions	Facilitator's Activity
3 min	INTRODUCTION Please introduce yourself, your county, how long you've been with GEAR UP, and what you do in your district in addition to GEAR UP.	Introduce self and colleagues. Colleagues will primarily take notes, may speak up to ask for clarification.
5-8 min	YOUR JOB Can you tell me a bit about your main responsibilities as a county GEAR UP coordinator? What is your level of involvement with individual schools? (1A, 1D) How do you interact with HEPC personnel? (1D)	Probe for similarities /differences in how they approach their jobs and possible reasons for this. <u>Probe for any training received and perceived value of training.</u> Probe whether contact is ongoing and consistent.

5 min	IMPLEMENTATION Could you talk about how GEAR UP is going in your county so far this year? What services are being provided to students, parents, and teachers? (1B, 1C, 1E, 2D, 2F). How if at all, do services differ for middle and high schools that are participating in the project?	Probe for trends across counties and any barriers/challenges encountered. If no activities yet for a certain group, ask when services will begin.
5-7 min	PARTNERS How are local college and university partners involved in the program in your county? What resources, if any, have they provided? (1D) What other community partners do you work with through GEAR UP? (1D) <i>Does your county have a Local College Access and Success Advisory Council? If so, how do you work with them?</i>	Probe for satisfaction with level and extent of involvement by postsecondary partner institutions. Probe for whether the coordinator plans to recruit new partners, who they are, and what they will be expected to do. Probe for challenges faced and supports from GEAR UP that could help address challenges.
10-12 min	PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS Take the pen and index card in front of you. Take two minutes to write down a few things that you think are “working well” in West Virginia GEAR UP on the left side. Then write down a few things on the right side that you think could be enhanced or improved. <u>TIME THE ACTIVITY.</u> (1A, 1B, 1E, 1F, 2F)	After 2-3 minutes, <u>ask everyone to share at least one item</u> “working well” and any improvements and why they selected these items. For each item, ask if others agree with the statement and identify any areas of consensus.
5 min	IMPACT At the end of the day, what will success in the GEAR UP grant look like for your county? There is a range of GEAR UP services available to students and families. Looking across this array of services, how do you think we will best know whether they have had an impact? (2A-E, 3A-B)	Probe for views on the impact on homework completion, test scores, course completion, grades, student/parent knowledge of college, etc. Probe for other impacts (fin aid knowledge, impact on staff/faculty, interactions/support from district, parent involvement, etc.)
3-5 min	SUSTAINABILITY How, if at all, have you begun to build awareness and gain buy-in throughout your school for GEAR UP related activities and initiatives.	Identify any potential best practices.
2 min	CLOSING Is there anything else we should know to understand how the GEAR UP program is working in your county?	Collect index cards.

Thank you very much for your time.

Year 1 Site Coordinator Focus Group Guide

Facilitator Guidelines:

- Introduce yourself and/or leaders of the focus group as representatives of ICF International and describe your roles in supporting the meeting (i.e., facilitator, note taker).
- Briefly discuss the purpose of the focus group: *Explain that the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC) has contracted with ICF International to conduct an independent evaluation of the West Virginia GEAR UP program. ICF is interested in learning more about activities taking place at the school level, the extent of support received by schools, and perceptions on GEAR UP's operation. Explain that this is not an evaluation of site coordinators, your school, or other GEAR UP personnel. The purpose of this focus group is to learn more about the program's operation and activities and to obtain a variety of views about the program. People can agree or disagree with comments, but only one person can speak at a time. The session will take approximately 40-50 minutes.*
- Convey to each participant our confidentiality policy: *Hand out consent forms. Remind them they received them by email. (1) The focus group is voluntary; (2) you can decline to answer any questions, or you can stop participating in the focus group at any time—participation will not impact you at school; (3) the information will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law by the evaluation team who have signed confidentiality agreements ensuring the protection of data; (4) focus group data will be maintained in secure areas; and (5) please respect others' privacy by not sharing any information outside of the focus group.*
- Ask if they have any questions for you before you begin. Review and ask participants to sign the consent form prior to the start of the focus group.
- Ask permission to record the focus group: *In order to capture the discussion, I would like to record the session. Only evaluation team members will have access to the recording. If at least one person chooses not to have the focus group recorded, we will not record the session but will take notes. We will not include your name(s) in these notes. Any information that can be used to identify an individual will be removed from transcripts prior to being shared. **START RECORDER NOW!***
- Each focus group should have six to 10 participants. The focus group is for Site Coordinators during the 2014-2015 school year.

Materials

- Pen and paper or index card for each participant

Time	Questions	Facilitator's Activity
3 min	INTRODUCTION Please introduce yourself, your school, how long you've been with GEAR UP and what you do at the school in addition to GEAR UP (teacher, counselor, etc.).	Probe for whether site coordinators' schools serve cohort, priority, or both groups of students.
5-8 min	IMPLEMENTATION Could you talk about how GEAR UP is going in your school so far this year? What services are you providing to students, parents, and teachers? If you serve both groups, how do GEAR UP services differ for cohort and priority students? (1A, 1C, 1E, 2C, 2D, 2F)	Probe for trends across sites and any barriers/challenges encountered. If no activities yet for a certain group, ask when services will begin. (no Summer 2015 activities are planned at this time)

5 min	WORKPLAN What resources are you using to organize your work that have been most useful in helping you to meet the goals and objectives of the GEAR UP grant? Probe: Has the workplan helped organize your efforts and activities in meeting the goals of the GEAR UP project? What changes would you like to see to the current workplan? Probe: Do you feel that the GEAR UP workplan has been relevant and purposeful in building or increasing the college going culture in your school?	Probe for effectiveness of the current workplan. Probe for clarity and understanding of the workplan and its usefulness in achieving GEAR UP goals. Probe for weaknesses or issues in regard to the current workplan.
5 min	INTERACTION How do you interact with HEPC personnel (e.g., regional program directors, internal evaluator, project director)? How satisfied are you with the information and resources received? How have you shared any of these resources with others in your school? (1D, 1E) <i>How would you describe your interaction with your county coordinator?</i>	Identify common threads across the schools. Probe whether contact is ongoing and consistent. Probe for differences in participant views and possible reasons for this.
5 min	PARTNERS How are local <i>college and university</i> partners involved in the program at your school? What resources, if any, have they provided so far? (1D) What other <i>community partners</i> do you work with on GEAR UP? (1D)	Probe for satisfaction with level and extent of involvement by postsecondary partner institutions as well as any new partners expected. Probe for differences in how they may be involved with priority students compared with cohort students.
5 min	PARENT INVOLVEMENT How involved are parents in GEAR UP at your school? How satisfied are you with this level of involvement? (1A-E, 2C) What current methods are you employing to increase parent participation?	Probe for strategies perceived as effective or ineffective. Probe for current methods being used to increase parent participation. Probe for additional methods to help increase parent participation rates.
10-12 min	PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS Take the pen and index card in front of you. Take two minutes to write down a few things that you think are “working well” in West Virginia GEAR UP on the left side. Then write down a few things on the right side that you think could be enhanced or improved. <i>TIME THE ACTIVITY.</i> (1A, 1B, 1E, 1F, 2F)	After 2-3 minutes, <i>ask everyone to share at least one item</i> “working well” and any improvements and why they selected these items. For each item, ask if others agree with the statement and identify any areas of consensus.

5-7 min	<p>IMPACT</p> <p>At the end of the day, what will success in the GEAR UP grant look like for your school?</p> <p>When we discussed implementation of GEAR UP and the services you provide, we talked about a range of GEAR UP services that are in place or are planned at your school. Looking across these services, how do you think we will best know whether they have had an impact? (2A-E, 3A-B)</p> <p>Please describe the personal impact that the GEAR UP program has had on you and your work to this point? How has it changed your role in the school?</p>	<p>Probe for views on the impact on homework completion, test scores, course completion, grades, high school graduation, etc.</p> <p>Probe for other impacts (fin aid knowledge, impact on staff/faculty, interactions/support from district, parent involvement, etc.)</p> <p>Probe for impact on priority as well as cohort students. Make note of any important differences.</p> <p>Probe for views on the impact of working with the GEAR UP program and how it is impacted their approach on themselves and their work efforts.</p>
5 min	<p>SUSTAINABILITY</p> <p>How, if at all, have you begun to build awareness and gain buy-in throughout your school for GEAR UP related activities and initiatives.</p>	<p>Identify any potential best practices.</p>
2 min	<p>CLOSING</p> <p>Is there anything else we should know to understand how the GEAR UP program is working at your school?</p>	<p>Collect index cards.</p>

Thank you very much for your time.

Year 1 School Personnel Survey

We are looking for your feedback about the college-going culture—that is, promoting a school culture that encourages all students to consider any “college” options including certificate programs, two-year degree programs, four-year degree programs, or military training after high school graduation and prepares them to make informed decisions about these and other available postsecondary educational opportunities— at your school.

- 1 **What is your current primary position at your school?** ☐ Administrator ☐ Counselor ☐ Teacher
- 2 **What current grade level(s) do you serve (check all that apply)?** ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12
- 3 **In which school are you currently working?** [Dropdown List]
- 4 **Are you a GEAR UP site coordinator?** ☐ Yes ☐ No
- 5 **Please rate your level of agreement twice for each of the statements below: once for your level of agreement that the statement accurately reflects your SCHOOL and once for your level of agreement that the statement accurately reflects your own CLASSROOM (Note: classroom items asked only of teachers).**

	In My School				In My Classroom			
	SA	A	D	SD	SA	A	D	SD
Teachers have ongoing opportunities to communicate with students about the college choice process.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
The curriculum appropriately challenges most students.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
All students have the ability to succeed academically.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Parents expect their children to attend college or secure other postsecondary education.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Students are encouraged to do their best.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Teachers regularly talk to students about the importance of college.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Students care about learning and getting a good education.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Teachers play an active role in preparing students for college.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
College pennants, banners, and posters are visible.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Parents are included in the college preparation process.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
The majority of students will not attend but will seek a job or enter the military.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Students are learning effective problem-solving skills.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Teachers engage in ongoing professional development (PD) about ways to promote college readiness.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Teachers are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Creativity and original thinking are highly valued.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Teachers are equipped with the knowledge to assist students in the transition from high school to college.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
School staff are provided with PD on the topics of college readiness and success.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
The majority of students will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Students have access to the information and resources they need to support their college attendance decisions.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Teachers include visual cues to encourage discussions about their college experience	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
All students have the potential to succeed in college or other postsecondary training.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Students are encouraged to set future college and career goals. Students are encouraged to set future college and career goals.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
Teachers are provided information about the school's college-going rate and FAFSA completion rates.	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1

Note: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, D = Strongly Disagree

6 How comfortable do you feel about your level of knowledge to assist students with the following college topics?

	<i>Not at all Comfortable</i>	<i>Slightly Comfortable</i>	<i>Moderately Comfortable</i>	<i>Extremely Comfortable</i>	<i>Rather not say</i>
<i>FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)</i>	1	2	3	4	99
<i>College savings plan/529</i>	1	2	3	4	99
<i>ACT/SAT</i>	1	2	3	4	99
<i>WV Higher Education Grant</i>	1	2	3	4	99
<i>Federal grants, loans, and work-study</i>	1	2	3	4	99
<i>College Selection (Match and Fit)</i>	1	2	3	4	99
<i>Scholarships (e.g., PROMISE or Institutional)</i>	1	2	3	4	99
<i>Requirements for college acceptance</i>	1	2	3	4	99
<i>The importance/benefit of a college education</i>	1	2	3	4	99
<i>High school graduation requirements</i>	1	2	3	4	99

7 Please rate the level of your involvement in the college-related activities presented below.

	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
<i>I participate in the college preparation activities of my school (e.g., chaperoning college visits).</i>	99	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I participate in GEAR UP activities.</i>	99	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I have individual discussions with students about what they want to do with their futures.</i>	99	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I talk with students about their plans for college or work after high school.</i>	99	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I offer students supplemental instructional support to prepare them for postsecondary options.</i>	99	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I talk with parents about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for postsecondary education.</i>	99	1	2	3	4	5

8 To what extent does your school already promote the following elements related to a college-going culture?

	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Slightly</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Extremely</i>
<i>Family Involvement</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>High Teacher Expectations</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Positive Peer Influences</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Academic Support</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Financial Aid Assistance</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>College Application Assistance</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Test Preparation (e.g., ACT/SAT)</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Partnership with Institutions of Higher Education</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Community Support</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>College Visits</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Access to College Professionals</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Life Skills Development</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Rigorous Coursework</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>School Effort (e.g., policies, collaborative working groups)</i>	1	2	3	4

9 In your opinion, what is the most important aspect to building a college going culture at your school?

10 Please indicate your level of awareness about the GEAR UP activities available at your school:

	Not At All	Slightly Aware	Somewhat Aware	Highly Aware
<i>Tutoring</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Opportunities to participate in college visits</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Summer activities</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Career exploration activities</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Test preparation (e.g., ACT/SAT)</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Assistance with the college entrance process</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Assistance with completing financial aid forms (e.g., FAFSA)</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Information and events presented in other languages (e.g., Spanish)</i>	1	2	3	4

11 Tell us how the following GEAR UP activities below might help to promote a college-going culture in your school:

	Does not Apply	Not Helpful	A little Helpful	Mostly Helpful	Very Helpful
<i>Encourage participation in advanced classes (e.g., AP)</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide information about participating in GEAR UP events</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide tutoring</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide opportunities to participate in college visits</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide information about college entrance requirements</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide information about college financial aid/scholarships</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide student leadership opportunities</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide summer activities</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide career exploration activities</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide test preparation (e.g., ACT/SAT)</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide assistance with the college entrance process</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Provide assistance with completing financial aid forms (e.g., FAFSA)</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Information and events presented in other languages (e.g., Spanish)</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Teacher professional Development about College awareness and success strategies</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>Mentoring opportunities</i>	99	1	2	3	4

12 In your opinion, what is the most important aspect to building a college going culture at your school?

13 Have you ever participated in GEAR UP activities or received support through GEAR UP?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please elaborate:

14 How often do you participate in GEAR UP activities?

<i>Never</i>	<i>Seldom</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Always</i>
1	2	3	4	5

15 The next set of items ask about your level of agreement related to the quality of service provided to you through GEAR UP.

	<i>Not Applicable</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
<i>I received adequate support through GEAR UP.</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>I think GEAR UP is making a positive impact on students in my school.</i>	99	1	2	3	4
<i>GEAR UP activities are likely to be sustained after the grant ends.</i>	99	1	2	3	4

16 Please use this space for additional comments, questions, or concerns: