



West Virginia GEAR UP Year 5 Annual Evaluation Report

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Submitted by:
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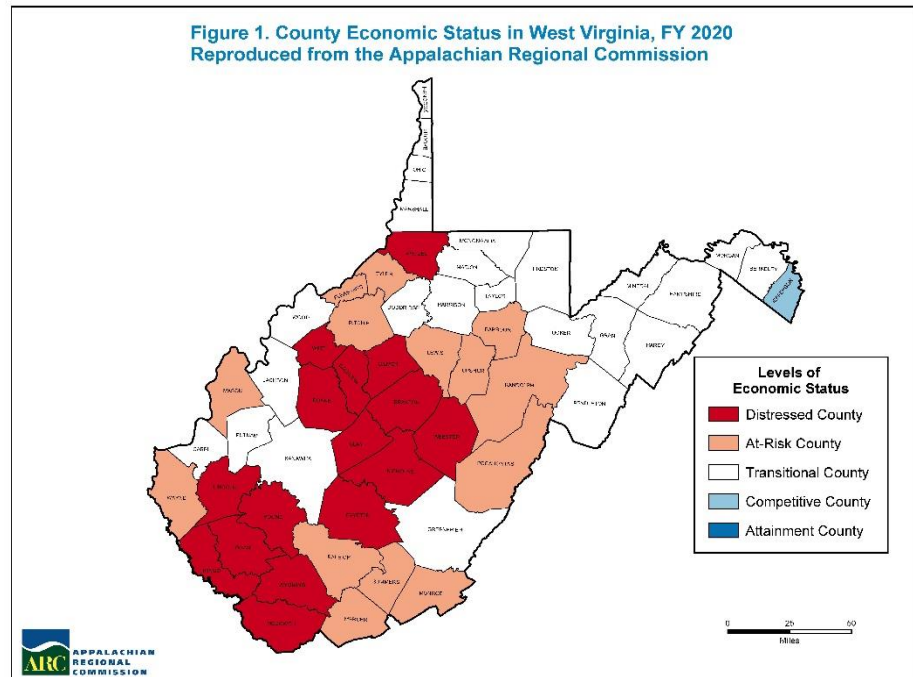
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I. Introduction

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC) is approaching the end of its second consecutive Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant, which began in 2014 and ends in 2021. GEAR UP goals are to help high school students access and succeed in postsecondary education. These goals are ambitious for the 10 counties currently served by West Virginia (WV) GEAR UP, in a state where many face a stagnant economy, pervasive poverty, low rates of educational attainment, and an accelerating opioid epidemic that threatens families and entire communities with disintegration.

According to the most recent available data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2018a), West Virginia's per capita income was \$24,774 in 2017, and median household income between 2013 and 2017 was \$44,061.



The poverty rate was 19.1% in 2017 and the state experienced a 1.2% decline in total employment between 2015 and 2016. Based on a comparison of county-level data for three economic indicators—three-year average unemployment rate, per capita market income, and poverty rate—with national averages, the Appalachian Regional Commission (2019) classified 16 counties in West Virginia as economically distressed for fiscal year 2020 (see Figure 1). Another 14 counties in the state were considered “at-risk.” Of the 10 counties participating in the state’s GEAR UP program, seven counties were classified as economically distressed and the other three counties were classified as at-risk.

West Virginia’s educational attainment rates are below the U.S. average, which has real economic impacts for the future job and wage-earning prospects of West Virginians and the ability of the state to attract employers. Based on the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau, compared to the national average, West Virginia has a higher share of adults with no education beyond a high school degree and a lower share of adults with postsecondary education. Specifically, of West Virginians who are aged 25 years and older, 40.6% had only a high school degree (compared to 27.3% nationally), 18.5% had some college (compared to 20.8% nationally), 6.9% had an Associate’s degree (compared to 8.3% nationally), and 19.9% had a Bachelor’s degree or higher (compared to 30.9% nationally) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (BLS) 10-year job growth projections released in 2017 (and updated in 2019), of the 30 fastest growing occupations, 19 generally

require some level of postsecondary education (Gonser, 2017; BLS, 2019a). In addition, jobs that require postsecondary credentials, such as a certificate, an Associate's degree, or a Bachelor's degree, are projected to grow about twice as quickly; jobs that require a Master's degree are projected to grow about three times as quickly as those requiring only a high school diploma (BLS, 2019b).

The difficult economic circumstances of many West Virginians are only compounded by the opioid crisis. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported in 2019 that West Virginia had the highest rate of death due to drug overdose in the nation (57.8 per 100,000 in 2017), which was also far ahead of the next most-affected state, Ohio (46.3 per 100,000). Additionally, the drug overdose rate in West Virginia had increased to a statistically significant degree from 2016 (52.0 per 100,000), when it also had the highest rate in the U.S.

One major impact of the opioid crisis is its effect on children, as it compounds the state's existing educational challenges. Children growing up in families with parents or guardians struggling with opioid addiction are far more likely to be neglected and removed from their homes (University of South Florida, 2018). One study found a direct correlation between opioid use and parental neglect where "for every additional 6.7 opioid prescriptions per 100 people, the removal rate for parental neglect increased by 32%" (University of South Florida, 2018). This displacement puts a strain on the foster care system, where children are frequently moved and not given a stable family life (Simon, 2017). In West Virginia, the number of children in foster care grew by 53% between 2013 and 2017, according to the state data (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019). The number of children removed from parental care in West Virginia because of drug abuse rose from 970 in 2006 to 2,171 in 2016 (Talbot, 2017).

Children who are placed into foster care or move away from their homes, formally or informally, face added challenges in applying for financial aid, which may further hinder college access and education attainment. Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is more complicated for nontraditional families; students are expected to report their parents' income—even if they may not be living with their parents (Nerd Wallet, 2018). Grandparents, foster parents, and legal guardians are not considered parents on the FAFSA and the process for students in these situations is not clear. Ultimately, this poses extra hurdles to accessing financial aid for those students who may need it the most.

Another concern facing West Virginia's school-age children is food insecurity. Statewide, one of every seven individuals—or 268,070—struggle with hunger (Feeding America, 2019). Of these individuals, 76,970 are children, representing one of every five young people in the state. Overall, children are present in more than a third of West Virginia households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Such trends may have long-term implications for children's futures. Teenagers fear a stigma around hunger and "actively hide it as much as they can," says a study examining the impact of food insecurity on youth (Urban Institute, 2016). When faced with significant food insecurity, many teens in focus groups nationally say that they may engage in risky behaviors. As a result, the problems of hunger and food insecurity affect both child health and their outlook toward school and their futures, including any goals to continue their education after high school.

The substantial economic, educational, and public health challenges in West Virginia underscore the importance of the WV GEAR UP grant, the important work of the WVHEPC to

solidify the state's access to and success in higher education, and the achievements that have been accomplished thus far. For example, the state's four-year high school graduation rate in 2017–2018 was 90.2%, 12 percentage points higher than the 2010–11 rate of 77.9% (West Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). In addition, the 2018 West Virginia Higher Education Report Card found that the total number of degrees and credentials awarded at the state's public postsecondary institutions increased by 23.3% from 2008 to 2017 (WVHEPC & West Virginia Community and Technical College System, 2019). Not only does GEAR UP aim to support these trends in the 10 counties participating in the grant, but WVHEPC, the West Virginia Community and Technical College System, and the College Foundation of West Virginia (CFWV), with support of the Lumina Foundation, have put forth a new campaign to boldly increase college access and success statewide. West Virginia's Climb aims to ensure that at least 60% of West Virginians have a postsecondary credential by 2030 (West Virginia's Climb, 2018).

1. GEAR UP Evaluation Design

WVHEPC contracted with ICF to provide an external program evaluation of WV GEAR UP. ICF's evaluation framework includes four components: (1) a program **implementation study** to assist the WVHEPC in determining the fidelity with which program activities were delivered and to inform the WVHEPC of any facilitators or barriers to implementation; (2) a summative **outcomes study** to ascertain the extent to which data-informed benchmarks, identified in concert with the WVHEPC, are achieved; (3) various **impact studies** with quasi-experimental (QED) and randomized control trial (RCT) designs to address selected program outcomes and impacts; and (4) a **sustainability study** to inform WVHEPC about how the GEAR UP program could continue to have an impact after the grant ends.

2. Purpose of this Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on evaluation findings from the analysis of data collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups through Year 5 and to translate those findings into evidence-informed recommendations for program improvement. The emphasis of this report is on findings from the most recent survey of school personnel in WV GEAR UP schools and trends evident through focus groups of site coordinators and students conducted during the 2018-2019 school year. The Year 5 interim evaluation report completed in spring 2019 provided updated survey outcome data for GEAR UP cohort students (class of 2020) as well as cohorts scheduled to graduate before and after the cohort (classes of 2019 and 2021).

The primary goal of the school personnel survey is measuring the adoption and use of practices that support a positive college-going culture among faculty and staff. This includes adherence to high standards or academic rigor and high expectations for students and the presence of visual cues and provision of material resources and support that reinforce the view that postsecondary education is possible for all students. Thus far, the evaluation team has measured these concepts in Years 1–4 using an annual survey administered to all personnel in GEAR UP schools. In Year 3, when the cohort transitioned to high school, the survey was modified and administered to all personnel serving grades 9–12, as was the case again in Year 5. This report

primarily focuses on longitudinal comparisons among school personnel between Years 3 and 5 of the project.

Gathering ground-level perspectives about the program, facilitators and barriers to successful implementation, and bringing to the surface the experiences of program staff in their own words, are critical components of the implementation study of WV GEAR UP. The primary information source for collecting this information is a series of annual face-to-face interviews conducted with site coordinators who are tasked with implementing GEAR UP in participating sites. In addition to these interviews, in Year 5, the evaluation team also conducted its first focus groups with GEAR UP cohort students at eight schools. A description of these data sources and evaluation methods, along with a summary and interpretation of findings from these interviews, are included in this report. Recommendations based on evaluation findings through Year 5 are provided at the end.

II. Data Sources

This report draws on data collected from students, program staff, and school personnel through surveys and interviews. The instruments used to collect these data are described in further detail in this section.

1. Year 5 School Personnel Surveys

In Year 5, the School Personnel Survey included 16 items. Five items were demographic questions designed to gather information about respondents' primary roles, school location, grade level(s) served, and number of years employed in school personnel. Two subscales measured faculty member perceptions of college-going culture in their schools and classrooms, with 10 prompts examining the rigor and expectations dimension of college-going culture, and 9 measuring the visual cues/material resources dimension. These items were consistent with Year 4 survey items.

Additional items asked school personnel survey respondents to rate their level of involvement in college-related activities in their school and their level of comfort with their knowledge to assist students with various college-related topics. Respondents were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with several statements about the overall experience provided through GEAR UP, how often they participated in GEAR UP activities, and to rate how effective GEAR UP activities were in helping students succeed in school and prepare for college. A series of items was also included to measure school faculty members' perceptions of the college-going efficacy of the students in their schools. Lastly, school members were asked about the likelihood that various GEAR UP activities would be sustained after the grant ends. For the first-time, personnel were also asked two additional open-ended questions related to their perspectives of college-going culture. Appendix A contains a reproduction of the School Personnel Survey.

2. Year 5 Interview Protocols

2.1 Student Focus Groups

ICF developed a student focus group protocol for this data collection, the first of its kind conducted during this grant. The protocol contained a facilitator script plus an assent form for students. In addition, students were given a parental consent form that required a parent or guardian signature for them to participate in the focus group. The protocol consisted of nine prompts plus sub-questions and probes. Prompts focused on whether students had a career in mind, their involvement in and understanding of GEAR UP, their experience with specific GEAR UP activities, their postsecondary plans, program aspects working well and needing improvement, satisfaction with GEAR UP, and closing thoughts. The protocol also included a Venn diagram for every participant to complete. The diagram asked students to identify key sources of information that they use to help plan for their futures. Choices included school, family/community, and their own efforts. Students were asked to select whether one, two or all three factors were important; they also could identify other sources, beyond these three, that they viewed as important sources of information. Appendix B contains a reproduction of the focus group protocol.

2.2 Site Coordinators

The evaluation team developed a revised site coordinator focus group facilitation protocol for the Year 5 evaluation of WV GEAR UP. The protocol included a facilitator script and informed consent form. The Year 5 protocol included nine prompts with a series of sub-questions and probes. Prompts included implementation and buy-in, interaction with the WVHEPC, partnerships, parent involvement, college visits/preparation, SAT/ACT preparation, coordinator roles, priority students, impact and sustainability, and closing thoughts. Appendix B provides a reproduction of the focus group protocol.

III. Methods

The following section describes the WV GEAR UP evaluation participants, instrument administration methods, and analytic approaches used in the development of this report.

1. Evaluation Participants and Data Collection Methods

1.1 School Personnel Survey

The WV GEAR UP school personnel survey is administered from May to June of each academic year. In Year 5, the survey was administered online to all grade 9–12 teachers, counselors, site coordinators, and school administrators employed in WV GEAR UP schools. For each year, the evaluation team utilized the Standardized Collection and Reporting of Information Benefitting Education (SCRIBE) system to administer the surveys. Each year, site coordinators were provided with a link to the survey during a regularly scheduled site

coordinator meeting and instructed to distribute the link to school personnel. The link was also embedded on the WV GEAR UP website.

Ultimately, 563 personnel completed the survey in Year 3, 600 completed the survey in Year 4, and 497 completed the survey in Year 5. Unique respondent IDs were only collected in Year 1. As a result, it is not possible to assess the number of school personnel who completed the surveys in multiple years.

1.2 Student Focus Groups

The evaluation team conducted focus groups at eight schools in May 2019 with a total of 60 students participating. WVHEPC identified the target high schools for focus groups, and they represented a geographic cross-section of the state. Each group lasted approximately 45 minutes. Site coordinators identified students for the focus groups with a goal that the group reflect the diversity of the school and include students with varied levels of participation in GEAR UP. In addition to signing an assent form just prior to the focus group, students also had to return a completed parent consent form in order to participate.

1.3 Site Coordinator Focus Groups

Site coordinators from all GEAR UP schools were invited to participate in one of four focus groups during Year 5. Three were held in person during a regularly scheduled site coordinator meeting in May 2019, and 25 coordinators attended these in-person sessions. ICF held a virtual focus group later in May 2019 for those who could not attend the in-person meeting. Two site coordinators participated in this focus group, which was conducted by telephone.

2. Analytic Approach

2.1 School Personnel Surveys

To examine changes in survey outcomes for program participants from Year 3 to Year 5 of WV GEAR UP, the evaluation team conducted longitudinal analyses of cohort survey responses from all three years, with a focus on changes between Years 4 and 5. In addition to the overall comparison of personnel by position and years of experience, the research team created four sub-groups to examine the potential influence of the inclusion of priority students at some GEAR UP schools and the impact at schools that also participated in the previous FY2008 WV GEAR UP grant. The sub-groups were used in analyses, but only those with significant or practical results were presented in the results section. The sub-group categories are defined below:

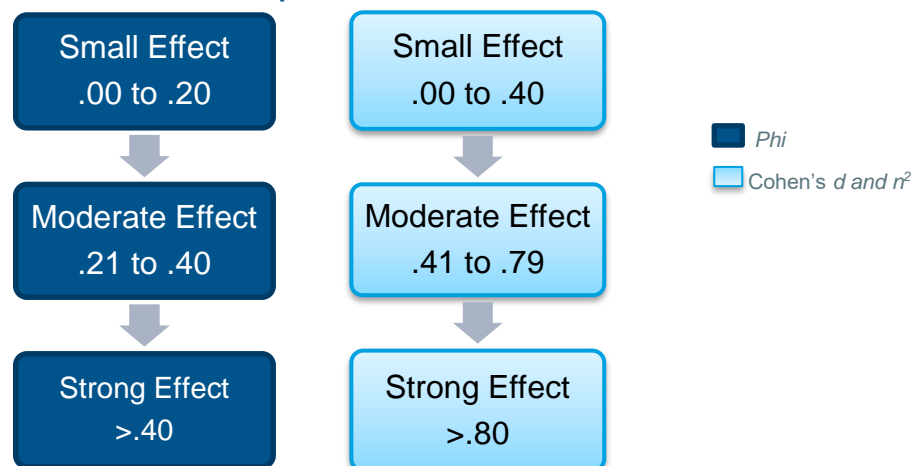
1. **Sub-Group 1:** GEAR UP schools that do not currently serve priority students and did not participate in the previous grant,
2. **Sub-Group 2:** GEAR UP schools that were not part of the previous grant (but do serve priority students),
3. **Sub-Group 3:** GEAR UP schools that do not currently serve priority students (but participated in the FY2008 WV GEAR UP grant) and

4. **Sub-Group 4:** GEAR UP schools that currently serve priority students and participated in the previous grant.

With their lack of prior exposure to GEAR UP, schools in subgroup 1, in theory, should show the greatest increases because they have only had exposure to GEAR UP since 2016. Schools in the other sub-groups have had prior exposure to GEAR UP services and, as a result, personnel may already have a higher knowledge base and interest in college awareness and preparation. As will be demonstrated in the subsequent section, however, the evaluation team did not find meaningful results from this sub-group comparison.

The evaluation team used descriptive statistical analyses when examining differences in survey outcomes across these groups of personnel and across years of time. For all groups and time periods examined, the evaluation team presents sample sizes, mean values, and standard deviations for continuous outcomes, and the frequency count and percentages of responses for categorical outcomes. For any significance tests, the evaluation team used independent samples t-tests and analyses of variance (ANOVA) for continuous outcomes and chi-square analyses for categorical outcomes. When overall tests showed statistically significant differences, the evaluation team then conducted separate post-hoc comparisons and interpreted the differences across various groups of respondents using a common effect size estimate, *Phi* and Cohen's *d*. For chi-square analyses, the evaluation team interpreted *Phi*. For independent samples t-tests and ANOVA, the evaluation team used Cohen's *d* and *Eta-squared* (n^2), as appropriate. See Figure 2 for the interpretations used.

Figure 2. Effect Size Interpretations for *Phi* and Cohen's *d*



2.2 Student Focus Groups

ICF transcribed all eight student focus group sessions and coded transcripts by question and thematic area, grouping similar comments and themes via spreadsheet. Major themes included knowledge of and interest in postsecondary education, college visits/planning, perceptions of GEAR UP activities, students' financial concerns, tutoring and Testive services, and program suggestions/impact. Evaluators also analyzed the Venn diagram responses to determine the leading sources of information for students about their post-high school options.

2.3 Site Coordinator Focus Groups

After completing all focus groups, ICF evaluators transcribed the sessions and coded transcripts under three primary themes: implementation, impact/outcomes, and sustainability. Most comments focused on implementation, which the team analyzed by prominent sub-themes such as partnerships with colleges and universities, FAFSA completion initiatives, college acceptance programming, and the stability/evolution of GEAR UP programs.

IV. Results

To examine changes in survey outcomes for school personnel from Year 3 to Year 5 of WV GEAR UP, the evaluation team conducted a longitudinal analysis of survey responses to identify notable year-to-year changes. This analysis also examined answers based on the position held by the respondent such as teacher, counselor, or administrator. For student and coordinator focus groups, evaluators focused primarily on major findings regarding program implementation and impressions of program services. This analysis also includes coordinator views on sustainability of GEAR UP activities after the end of the grant.

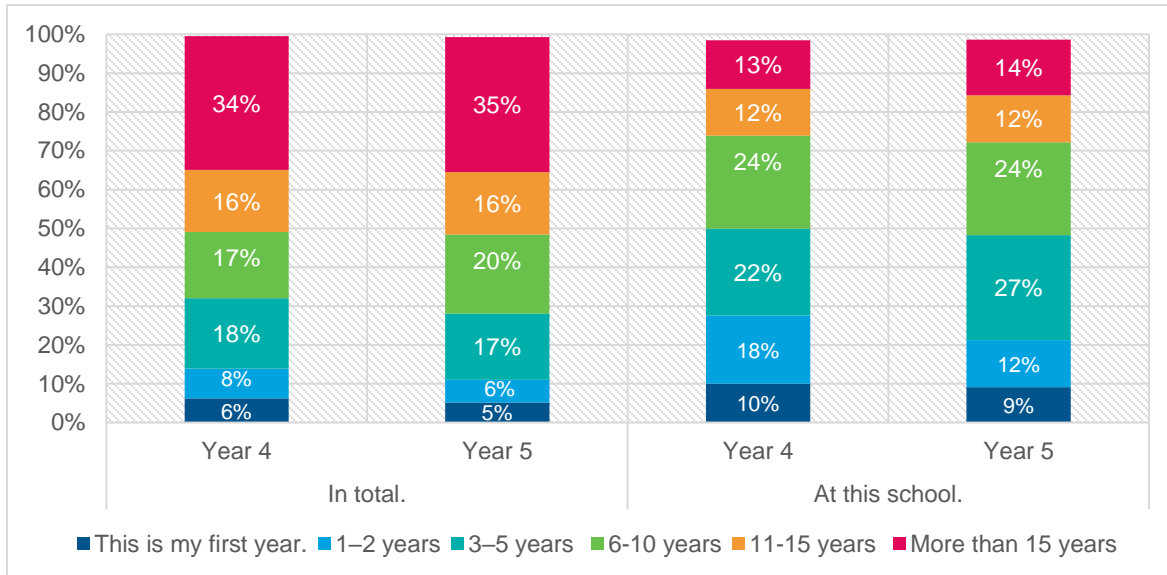
1. School Personnel Survey Outcomes

1.1 Characteristics of Respondents

Fifty-six percent of the estimated 891 possible faculty and staff members responded to the Year 5 school personnel survey. The majority of the total 497 individuals representing 23 WV GEAR UP schools were teachers (88%) and the remaining 12% were equally split between administrators and counselors. Approximately 5% indicated that, in addition to their primary role, they also served as a GEAR UP site coordinator. We found no significant differences across Years 1–5 in the distribution of their primary roles or in the percentage who also served as site coordinators.

The survey asked respondents to indicate which grade level(s) they serve. The majority of the 497 respondents indicated that they served 10th grade (77%), 11th grade (77%) and 12th grade students (77%). Lastly, 72% of personnel indicated that they served freshman students.

The evaluation team also asked respondents to indicate how many years of experience they had working in their current role in the school and how many years they had working in that role in total. Figure 3 displays these results in percentages out of 497, highlighting that nearly half of all personnel respondents had more than 10 years total experience in their role. When compared to the previous year, fewer respondents reported between 1–2 years' experience and slightly more had 3–5 years' experience, indicating that those teachers probably stayed on in their current school.

Figure 3. School Personnel Experience Breakdown by Respondents with Years' Experience

Source: Year 4 and Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

Note: Percentages may not total 100%, charts did not include missing values.

1.2 Trend Data for Years 3 Through 5

1.2.1 Participation/Satisfaction with GEAR UP and Perceptions of Program Effectiveness

Participation. We asked school personnel how often they had participated in GEAR UP activities. Five response options were provided (i.e., 1 = *Never*, 2 = *Seldom*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 4 = *Often*, 5 = *Always*). A total of 484 respondents answered the question in Year 5 (97% of 497). Of those, 27% (compared to 30% in Year 4 and 35% in Year 3) indicated that they “never or seldom” participated in GEAR UP events, 35% (compared to 33% in Year 4 and 34% in Year 3) indicated that they “sometimes” participated, and 37% (compared to 37% in Year 4 and compared to 30% in Year 3) indicated that they “often or always” participated. We found no statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses across Years 3–5. However, we found post-hoc analysis reveals that personnel with less than one-year total experience were significantly less likely to participate in activities. Additionally, counselors were more likely to participate in activities. Effect sizes for both were relatively small ($d=.1$).

The survey included an open-ended item asking respondents to describe the types of GEAR UP activities in which they participated. Nearly half of all Year 5 survey respondents (i.e., 246 of 497) provided a response. We coded comments into one or more of the following themes: (1) when possible/when asked ($n=34$), (2) field trips/college visits ($n=43$), (3) classroom support ($n=20$), (4) college application day ($n=15$), (5) not involved/informed ($n=16$), (6) schoolwide activities offered during the day ($n=9$), (7) mentorship ($n=11$), (8) financial aid/FAFSA activities ($n=12$), and (9) academic support ($n=8$). Examples of comments organized under each of these themes are presented in Table 1 (see page 13).

In Year 5, respondents' answers were like the previous year, indicating that they were most likely to discuss having participated in college visits or field trips and offer classroom support.

For a quarter of the respondents, they also mentioned that they were chaperones for the college visits. Several respondents in Year 5 also shared that they participated when asked or required, usually during the school day. In fact, several respondents mentioned either offering classroom incentives or providing overall encouragement in GEAR UP activities as their level of participation. Often when describing participation in schoolwide and classroom-level efforts, respondents also mentioned their time restrictions. For example, according to one respondent, “I am only at the school two periods then travel to other schools. I am often out of the school when activities are planned and am definitely unable to go on any of the day trips. I try to participate in those activities that I can during my time at the school, but, again my time is limited.” Similarly, another respondent noted, “When I have juniors or seniors during the time of activities, I help.” Lastly, there were a few respondents who shared concerns that they had not yet participated in an event because they were either not included, invited, or informed about GEAR UP activities at their school ($n=20$) and several others mentioned they did not work with the cohort of students served ($n=14$).

Additionally, a few other Year 5 respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with either the program activities or structure. For example, one respondent said, “As a classroom content teacher, it is difficult to stop class to participate in GEAR UP activities without shortchanging students.” In other cases, respondents spoke about their limited time or conflicting work schedule. For example, one respondent reported that s/he was “unable to attend activities due to my schedule.”

Table 1. Sample Comments about School Personnel Participation in GEAR UP Activities

Topic	Sample Comment
a. Classroom support	<i>I encourage students to participate and always support them in their decisions to do so by not making it a big deal if they have to miss a class period or two. I encourage them to organize and plan another College Decision Day since it was so memorable to them in the past.</i>
b. Academic support	<i>I have provided after-school tutoring, which is my extent of any form of GEAR UP activities.</i>
c. Field trips/college visits	<i>I chaperoned a field trip for Career Day I am always talking to students about college and the importance of success in high school to be awarded scholarships for college.</i>
d. College signing day	<i>I have chaperoned several events. Assisted with our freshman orientation and reward programs. Additionally, I attend our College Signing Day.</i>
e. Financial aid	<i>I assist with college app week, financial aid workshops, FAFSA ID workshops, assisting in completing FAFSA,</i>
f. Mentorship	<i>I am the SSS mentor so I meet weekly to cover character building and college preparedness with juniors.</i>
g. All activities	<i>Even though I am not the direct coordinator, I try to assist her in any way possible, including arranging practice SAT and ACT exams, chaperoning college tours, College Decision Day, and I truly love College Exploration Week, sharing my experiences with my students, decorating my classroom door with my alma maters, and just showcasing the importance of a college education and where it can take you!</i>
h. Not included/informed	<i>Not offered the opportunity to participate.</i>

Source: Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

Satisfaction. We next asked respondents about the extent to which they agreed with two statements about the services provided through GEAR UP: (1) “I think GEAR UP is making a positive impact on students in my school,” and (2) “GEAR UP activities are likely to be sustained after the grant ends.” Respondents had five response options for these items (i.e., 0 = *Not Applicable*, 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Agree*, 4 = *Strongly Agree*).

We found that respondents from Year 3, Year 4, and Year 5 were positive about GEAR UP services. Very few disagreed or strongly disagreed that GEAR UP was making a positive impact in Year 5 (3%) and even fewer reported this perception in Years 3 and 4 (2% respectively). In fact, the vast majority of respondents, 93% (compared to 94% in Year 4 and 95% in Year 3), agreed or strongly agreed that GEAR UP was making a positive impact on students at their school. We found there were no significant differences across years.

Additionally, while the number of Year 5 respondents agreeing that GEAR UP was making a positive impact showed no significant difference across Years 3–5, Year 5 respondents with between 1- and 2-total years of experience had the highest level of agreement about both the impact and sustainability of GEAR UP activities. In fact, respondents with between 1 and 10 years of total experience were more likely to agree than those in their first year and those with more than 11 years total experience. The effect size for this difference was very small when using an ANOVA analysis to compare between groups ($\eta_p = .04$). Table 2 provides further details on means. Additionally, respondents’ agreement that GEAR UP activities were likely to be sustained also differed descriptively by years of experience, but we found no significant difference when comparing means.

Table 2. Level of Agreement about Impact and Sustainability of GEAR UP Activities Based on Years of Experience

Years' Experience in Total	Positive Impact			Sustainability		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
This is my first year.	24	3.45	0.51	23	3.09	0.73
1–2 years	28	3.71	0.46	28	3.25	0.70
3–5 years	83	3.63	0.57	78	3.13	0.89
6–10 years	94	3.68	0.49	91	2.89	0.89
11–15 years	76	3.51	0.59	74	2.97	0.83
More than 15 years	167	3.41	0.66	157	2.90	0.87
Total	472	3.54	0.59	451	2.98	0.86

Source: Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

When responding to the item, “GEAR UP activities are likely to be sustained after the grant ends,” respondents were slightly more likely in Year 5 than in previous years to choose the “not applicable” response option (5% in Year 5 compared to 4% in Years 4 and 3), but there were no significant differences found when comparing across Years 3–5.

Perceptions of Program Effectiveness. In Years 3, 4, and 5 we asked school personnel to (a) indicate whether they participated in 11 GEAR UP-sponsored activities, and (b) to rate the effectiveness of these activities in helping students to succeed in school and prepare for college. Six response options were provided for each activity (i.e., 1 = *It was not offered/does not apply*, 2 = *I did not attend*, 3 = *Not at all effective*, 4 = *Slightly effective*, 5 = *Moderately effective*, 6 = *Extremely effective*). Table 3 shows the percentage of personnel in Years 3, 4 and 5 who reported either that an activity was not offered or that they did not attend.

In Year 5, fewer than 5% of respondents, on average, indicated that these activities were not offered/did not apply or that they did not attend. Notably, we found large decreases (between 7 and 18 percentage points, depending on the item) from Year 4 to Year 5 in the percentage of personnel who either did not participate in all activities or responded “did not apply.”

Table 3. Percentage of School Personnel Responding “Not Offered” or “Did Not Attend” by Activity and Year

Activity	Year 3		Year 4		Year 5		Difference (Y5 – Y4)
	<i>n</i>	Not Offered or Did Not Attend	<i>N</i>	Not Offered or Did Not Attend	<i>n</i>	Not Offered or Did Not Attend	
a. Tutoring*	546	33%	585	16%	484	8.7%	7 points
b. Opportunities to participate in college visits*	545	32%	585	11%	487	3.3%	8 points
c. Summer activities*	544	49%	594	29%	478	11.1%	18 points
d. College Application and Exploration Week*	544	29%	594	12%	484	4.3%	8 points
e. Provide information about college entrance requirements*	539	28%	594	12%	485	4.5%	7 points
f. Career exploration activities*	545	25%	593	11%	487	4.1%	7 points
g. Test preparation*	542	29%	592	12%	487	2.7%	9 points
h. Assistance with the college entrance process*	540	32%	593	12%	487	4.3%	8 points
i. Assistance with FAFSA*	541	33%	593	11%	483	3.7%	8 points
j. Teacher professional development*	543	41%	593	21%	485	13.8%	7 points
k. Mentoring opportunities*	540	36%	593	16%	485	7.4%	9 points
l. Senate	-	-	-	-	481	9.4%	-
m. College Decision Day	-	-	-	-	484	4.8%	-

Sources: Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

* Statistically significant ($p < .001$); effect sizes are small ranging between $\phi = .16$ and $\phi = .33$

Table 4 shows the average effectiveness ratings by year for each activity. We include only those respondents who chose an answer other than *it was not offered/does not apply* or *did not attend*. The evaluation team found that Year 5 respondents reported all items as being moderately and extremely effective, which was similar to Year 4 respondents. There were no statistically significant differences found between Year 4 and Year 5 for any of the items.

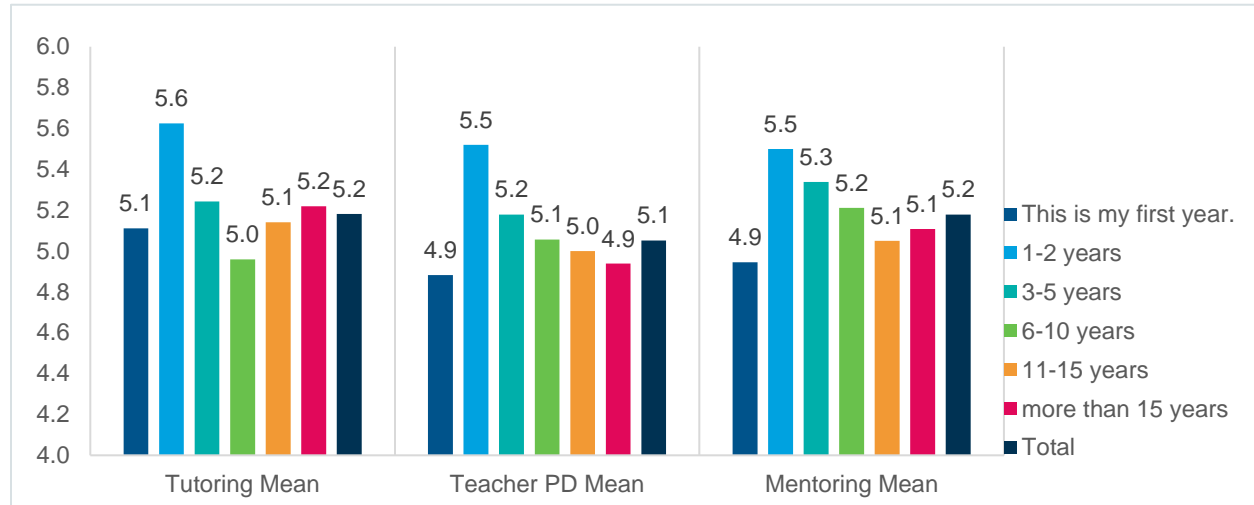
Table 4. School Personnel Ratings of the Effectiveness of GEAR UP Resources, Information, and Tools by Year

Resource, Information, or Tool	Year 3			Year 4			Year 5		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
a. Tutoring	365	5.15	0.79	495	5.23	0.76	383	5.17	0.79
b. Opportunities to participate in college visits	373	5.44	0.69	523	5.55	0.67	423	5.53	0.67
c. Summer activities	276	5.05	0.77	410	5.10	0.83	337	5.06	0.84
d. College Application and Exploration Week	387	5.34	0.73	521	5.39	0.73	424	5.37	0.74
e. Provide information about college entrance requirements	388	5.35	0.69	519	5.42	0.71	426	5.39	0.72
f. Career exploration activities	410	5.27	0.73	520	5.36	0.73	428	5.30	0.74
g. Test preparation	383	5.29	0.74	519	5.39	0.70	439	5.40	0.72
h. Assistance with the college entrance process	370	5.35	0.70	516	5.47	0.67	426	5.44	0.70
i. Assistance with FAFSA	362	5.43	0.74	522	5.56	0.66	427	5.58	0.65
j. Teacher professional development	318	5.12	0.74	460	5.12	0.84	370	5.05	0.80
k. Mentoring opportunities	347	5.25	0.73	491	5.23	0.77	394	5.17	0.79

Sources: Year 3, Year 4, and Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

Post-hoc analysis by subgroup, position, and years of experience was also conducted. While the number of Year 5 respondents agreeing to the effectiveness of GEAR UP activities showed no significant difference across Years 3–5, Year 5 respondents with between 1- and 2-total years' experience had the highest level of agreement about effectiveness of three GEAR UP activities: tutoring, teacher professional development (PD), and mentoring. In fact, respondents with between 1- and 2-total years of experience were more likely to agree than their counterparts with total years' experience. The effect size for this difference was very small when using an ANOVA analysis to compare between groups ($n^2 = .04$). Figure 4 provides further details on means. Additionally, respondents' agreement that GEAR UP activities were effective also differed descriptively by position, but we found no significant difference when comparing means.

Figure 4. School Personnel with Reported Means for Tutoring, Professional Development, and Mentoring by Total Years of Experience



1.2.2 College-Going Culture in my School

We asked all respondents—teachers, administrators, and counselors—to rate their schools on 19 items measuring two components of college-going culture: (1) expectations/rigor and (2) visual cues/material resources. Each item used a four-point Likert-type response format (i.e., 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Agree*, 4 = *Strongly Agree*).

Expectations/Rigor. Table 5 (page 18) shows each of the 10 items assigned to the rigor/expectations component of college-going culture, and the descriptive statistics for the entire sample of school personnel each year. Overall, respondents agreed to all items, rating items a mean score that ranged between 3.00 and 3.51 (between agree to strongly agree). We conducted an ANOVA to determine whether ratings for the nine items included in all three years varied by year. We found there were no significant changes in the average respondent ratings for 9 of the 10 expectations/rigor items from Year 4 to Year 5. For the item, “Teachers are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum,” there were significant decreases found from Year 4 to Year 5 ($p < .001$).

Table 5. Average School-Level College-Going Culture Ratings by Item and Year: Expectations/Rigor Component

Item	Year 3			Year 4			Year 5		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
a. Creativity and original thinking are highly valued.	561	3.39	0.60	598	3.36	0.63	496	3.35	0.61
b. Teachers expect all students to succeed academically.	562	3.38	0.62	596	3.38	0.62	496	3.37	0.63
c. Students are encouraged to do their best.	562	3.51	0.59	598	3.49	0.61	493	3.51	0.57
d. Teachers regularly talk to students about the importance of college.	559	3.40	0.61	596	3.40	0.59	496	3.38	0.60
e. Students care about learning and getting a good education.	561	2.99	0.70	595	3.01	0.72	496	3.00	0.74
f. Students are encouraged to set future college and career goals.	559	3.43	0.58	597	3.40	0.59	496	3.41	0.57
g. Students are learning effective problem-solving skills.	561	3.17	0.66	595	3.15	0.69	496	3.09	0.66
h. Teachers are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum.*	561	3.16	0.67	594	3.37	0.69	493	3.10	0.68
i. The curriculum appropriately challenges most students.	557	3.25	0.60	591	3.20	0.66	492	3.18	0.64
j. Advanced (e.g., honors, pre-AP) courses are appropriately rigorous.	559	3.39	0.63	596	3.35	0.65	489	3.40	0.65

Sources: Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

* Statistically significant by year ($p < .001$)

While we found there was significant variance on one item by program year, additional analysis returned statistically significant results by position and number of total years' experience for other items. As shown in Table 6, counselors reported statistically significant ($p < .001$) higher ratings than teachers across five items: "creativity and original thinking are highly valued;" "students are encouraged to set future college and career goals;" "students are learning effective problem-solving skills;" "teachers are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum;" and "advanced (e.g., honors, pre-AP) courses are appropriately rigorous." We also saw substantively important differences in all items regarding the extent to which personnel with 1–2 years of total experience consistently reported higher ratings in their perceptions of college-going culture than other personnel (approximately .15 to .25 points higher). While we conducted analysis to determine whether school status subgroup comparisons were significant, no differences were found.

Table 6. Average School-Level College-Going Culture Ratings by Item and Position: Expectations/Rigor Component

Item	Administrator			Counselor			Teacher		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
a. Creativity and original thinking are highly valued.*	30	3.40	0.50	32	3.56	0.50	434	3.33	0.63
b. Teachers expect all students to succeed academically.	30	3.27	0.64	32	3.50	0.67	434	3.36	0.63
c. Students are encouraged to do their best.	30	3.50	0.51	32	3.66	0.48	431	3.50	0.58
d. Teachers regularly talk to students about the importance of college.	29	3.41	0.50	32	3.50	0.57	435	3.36	0.61
e. Students care about learning and getting a good education.	30	3.13	0.51	32	3.22	0.61	434	2.98	0.76
f. Students are encouraged to set future college and career goals.*	30	3.43	0.57	32	3.63	0.49	434	3.39	0.58
g. Students are learning effective problem-solving skills.*	30	3.20	0.55	32	3.38	0.71	431	3.07	0.69
h. Teachers are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum.*	30	3.43	0.63	32	3.59	0.56	427	3.35	0.66
i. The curriculum appropriately challenges most students.	28	3.21	0.57	32	3.38	0.61	432	3.17	0.64
j. Advanced (e.g., honors, pre-AP) courses are appropriately rigorous.*	30	3.43	0.63	32	3.59	.56	427	3.35	.66

Source: Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

* Statistically significant between Counselor and Teacher position ($p < .05$)

Overall, the findings illustrate that WV GEAR UP has not found gains from Year 4 to Year 5 but has sustained the gains in most items initially achieved in prior years. In addition, counselors had stronger beliefs about expectations and rigor across several items compared to teachers. Finally, personnel with 1–2 years of total experience consistently reported higher ratings in their perceptions of expectations and rigor than other personnel.

Visual Cues/Material Resources. Table 7 shows average school personnel perceptions of the visual cues/material resources component of college-going culture in their schools. Overall, respondents agreed to all items, rating items a mean score that ranged between 3.03 and 3.41 (between agree to strongly agree). We again used ANOVAs to check for items with statistically significant changes over time. We found that while several items showed an increase in rating from Year 4 to Year 5, statistically significant differences in average scale ratings were found for only one item, “Teachers are provided information about the school's college-going rate and FAFSA completion rates” and the effect size was small ($d = .17$).

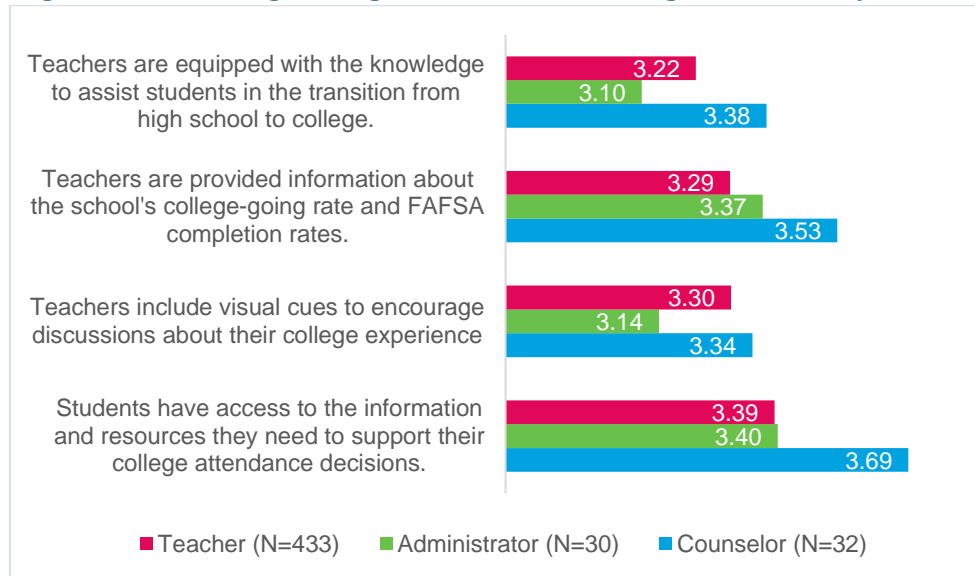
Table 7. Average School-Level College-Going Culture Ratings by Item and Year: Visual Cues/Material Resources Component

Item	Year 3			Year 4			Year 5		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
a. College pennants, banners, and posters are visible.	561	3.39	.61	596	3.35	.65	497	3.40	.65
b. Parents are included in the college preparation process.	560	3.36	.58	594	3.34	.63	496	3.40	.59
c. School staff are provided with professional development on the topics of college readiness and success.	560	2.98	.73	594	3.04	.76	495	3.10	.70
d. Students have access to the information and resources they need to support their college attendance decisions.	558	3.39	.55	594	3.37	.61	495	3.41	.58
e. Teachers include visual cues to encourage discussions about their college experience.	561	3.19	.63	596	3.23	.65	496	3.29	.56
f. Teachers are provided information about the school's college-going rate and FAFSA completion rates.*	560	3.17	.69	597	3.22	.72	496	3.31	.69
g. College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances.	555	2.99	.72	593	3.04	.72	493	3.07	.74
h. Teachers engage in ongoing professional development about ways to promote college readiness.	558	2.91	.76	593	2.96	.77	494	3.03	.72
i. Teachers are equipped with the knowledge to assist students in the transition from high school to college.	556	3.13	.65	587	3.19	.65	495	3.22	.62

Sources: Year 3, Year 4, and Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

* Statistically significant by year ($p < .05$)

Post-hoc analyses revealed that in overall average college-going culture scores across Years 3–5, average ratings varied by position—teacher, counselor, administrator. We found particularly noteworthy differences with respect to four items, as shown in Figure 5, but the effect sizes were small.

Figure 5. Four College-Going Culture Items Showing Differences by Position

Using ANOVAs and post-hoc tests, we also compared the average overall scores on the college-going culture scales for both the Expectations/Rigor and Visual Cues/Material Resources components across time (see Figure 6). We found average Year 5 scores on the Expectations/Rigor component increased in Year 5, but no significant differences were found in the scores. The average Visual Cues/Material Resources score for Year 5 was higher than in Year 1, but slightly decreased from Year 4; no differences were significant.

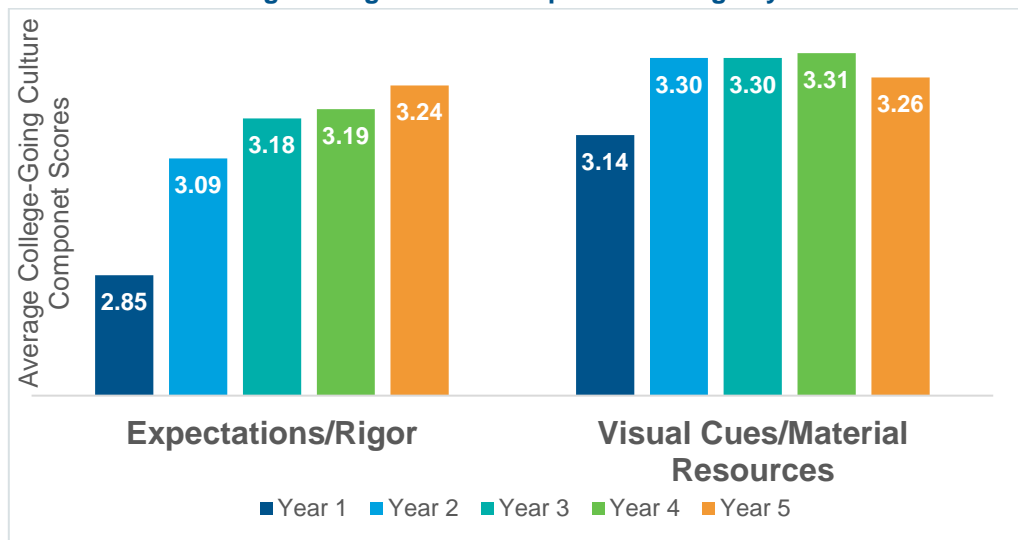
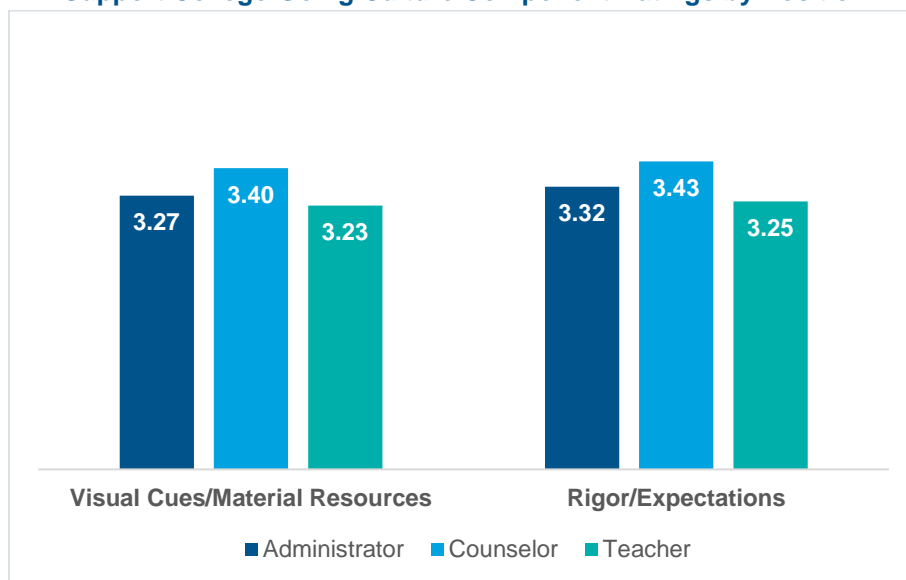
Figure 6. School-Level Expectations/Rigor and Visual Cues/Material Resources College-Going Culture Component Ratings by Year

Figure 7 shows that average ratings varied by position—teacher, counselor, administrator. Post-hoc analyses revealed that significant differences were found in Year 5 average scores by position. Counselors were more likely to report a higher rating than either teacher or administrator. The effect sizes were small ($d=.35$).

Figure 7. School-Level Expectations/Rigor and Visual Cues/Material Support College-Going Culture Component Ratings by Position



1.2.3 My Role in Building a College-Going Culture

In Year 5, 322 of 497 respondents commented on what they perceived their role to be in building a college-going culture at school. While many respondents indicated their role had not changed since Year 1 of the grant, one respondent shared that “the role to promote college has always existed, but GEAR UP has organized and coordinated the efforts.” Other respondents shared similar sentiments. Table 8 shows the similarities in how responses were categorized in Year 4 and Year 5 based on theme and sample comment. Most respondents believed their primary role was encouragement ($n=65$) and shared how important it is to “encourage students” to pursue their goals. Specifically, respondents reported encouraging students to participate and support involvement in GEAR UP and other college readiness activities that will expose them to “future interests” ($n=20$). At least one-third of respondents also reported their role as mentor or advisor where they “talk or communicate,” with students about their future ($n=37$). This was followed by the commonly reported theme of “preparation” for future success including “helping prepare them for academic rigor” ($n=31$). Lastly, respondents described their role in “providing resources on college and career options” ($n=35$).

Overall, the majority of respondents made similar comments to those made in Year 4, specifically related to the three themes: communicating the importance and benefits of college, providing resources, and making college seem attainable. In most cases, respondents indicated that they saw their role as advisor or mentor to talk with students and “aid them in any way...to encourage them to go to college.” Several respondents also mentioned their role as talking to students about “the importance of exploring multiple options” available, including but not limited to four-year degree institutions. According to these respondents, students need both exposure and encouragement to find the right “college fit” and by providing them information about the benefits of two-year or vocational school options, and financial aid options.

Respondents were also asked to share any changes in their perception about their role that they have had over time. Even with so many similarities across years and several respondents who reported “no change” in their own role, other respondents shared how GEAR UP provided

resources and encouragement to personnel to support them; so while their role is the same, respondents found that the knowledge and support has increased to help them execute their role. One respondent said, “College preparation are discussed more now than in the past.” And another said, “My role is crucial. I have become more involved with the help of GEAR UP, learned more ways to incorporate college-going culture throughout our building, I have learned so much more to do to promote college and career readiness.

Table 8. School Personnel Perceptions about their Role and the Most Important Aspect in Building a College-Going Culture, Themes and Sample Comments by Year

Theme	Sample Comment
a. Talk or Communicate	<p>Year 5: My role as an educator is to provide positive information about the benefits of a college education. My role has not changed; however, the information about the importance has become more visual and vocal to our students with the presence of GEAR UP in our school.</p> <p>Year 4: Discussing the value of education. By explaining to students how important it is to complete their HS diploma and try to attend a College to make them more valuable to employers.</p>
b. Provide resources on college and career options	<p>Year 5: Building a college going culture includes letting students know they have choices and options. Not every student needs to attend a 4-year institution. Perhaps, a 2 year school or trade school. Students need to have options and choices.</p> <p>Year 4: Students need to know and be aware of their options, what is available, and what they need to accomplish in order to succeed in a college or trade. Knowledge is power and broadcasting as much information as possible is one key to success.</p>
c. Encouragement: Making college seem attainable	<p>Year 5: My role as a teacher, is to help students understand that they have the ability to go to college, they just have to work hard and want it for themselves. I have to instill the importance of postsecondary educating into my students.</p> <p>Year 4: I think that letting them see that a college education is attainable is something that is so important. Many of our students don't think that they can go to college and be successful, but having continued discussion and providing abundant information helps them see that they can actually pursue a degree.</p>
d. Support GEAR UP and similar efforts	<p>Year 5: I believe my role is to learn as much as I can about building a college going culture at my school and share it with ALL of my students. It has changed by me being involved in decision making for GEAR UP.</p> <p>Year 4: I think providing an opportunity for students to visit colleges makes the possibility seem a reality more than an abstract idea, especially to students who don't have college educated parents. Also, making colleges visible in our building and available for information is extremely beneficial. As professionals, we all proudly promote our own colleges and universities, but placing them in direct contact with the schools has a deeper impact.</p>

Source: Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Survey

1.2.4 Most Important Aspect of Building a College-Going Culture

Additionally, the Year 5 survey included the open-ended item asking respondents to describe the most important aspect of building a college-going culture. Similar to previous year comments, more than half of all survey respondents (351 of 497) answered the question. Responses were coded into one or more of five themes: (a) encourage and support student success, (b) promote interest and options, (c) application and/or planning support, (d) academic support and rigorous curriculum, and (e) talk to students. Additional comments within this topic revealed that several personnel believed “not all students are college-going material.” One respondent expressed, “Many students attend our career and technical center. I think that this needs to be considered in creating a postsecondary culture at our school.” Table 9 includes sample comments on college-going culture.

Table 9. Comments Regarding the Most Important Aspect of College-Going Culture

Theme	Sample Comment
a. Encourage and support student success	<i>Creating opportunities for students to explore and learn and helping students set goals and expectations.</i>
b. Promote interest and options	<i>College visual clues that lead to topics of college interest.</i>
c. Application and/or college planning support	<i>The most important aspect to building a college-going culture at my school is informing students about the kinds of colleges, the financing of a college education, the requirements for entry to different colleges, and the importance of choosing a major that will lead to a job that they will enjoy doing.</i>
d. Academic support and rigorous curriculum	<i>Administrative support of more rigorous curriculum. Students must have a rigorous curriculum to be able or equipped to be successful at college.</i>
e. Talk to students	<i>We need to encourage and talk to our students about the importance of college and that there are ways for them to be successful.</i>

Source: Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

1.2.5 Most Significant Factor that Prevents Students from Setting Postsecondary Goals

Personnel were asked to report specifically on the most significant factor that prevents students from setting postsecondary goals. In Year 5, 62% (307 of 497) respondents provided open-ended comments. The most commonly reported themes included: 1) family, 2) poverty, and 3) interest. Each of these themes, as well as some other themes are described in greater detail in this section.

Family. Approximately 40% of responses ($n=123$) were about the “lack of parental involvement” or in-home support that “prevent our students from preparing for postsecondary education and training goals.” One respondent commented that even though some students who are first-generation students receive GEAR UP services, “lack of assistance from family” limits students’ postsecondary interest and goal-setting. Another respondent recognized that “they do not have examples at home or family members encouraging them to do so.” Other staff commented about the role of both home and school saying, “The fact that their parents or grandparents didn’t go to college. Also, a lack of information provided by the school on the importance of postsecondary education.” Other comments around family were about close family ties and fear of leaving home. One respondent said, “We have many students who do not want to leave their

families because they are the caregiver. They feel that if they leave, no one will be there to assist their families.”

Poverty. Others confirmed that many students come from an “economically disadvantaged” background and that “financial constraints” and a “culture of poverty” can act as barriers to setting future college and career goals ($n=67$). One respondent agreed with this barrier and noted, “We live in an economically depressed area; a lack of hope prevents a lot of our students from pursuing postsecondary education or training.” In a similar sentiment, respondents reported the concern of financial resources was students’ “worry of how they will pay for school.” In any case, personnel believed that “local economy is a hindrance” to student outcomes.

Interest. Several respondents ($n=66$) reported how students’ lack of interest and “motivation” in school is a major obstacle to their success and setting postsecondary goals. One respondent shared, “They don’t want to put the effort in to obtain these things. Most are just thinking about today and not the future and right now they certainly can’t see themselves doing more ‘school work.’” In a similar sentiment when talking about student work ethic, another respondent said, “They see no value in pushing themselves to gather information and build skills.”

Other remaining responses could be organized into three themes: (1) self-efficacy, (2) culture, and (3) knowledge. Feelings of confidence, ability to organize, and desire to persevere were some topics that were used to describe student attitudes and self-efficacy. One respondent shared, “I think that students simply lack in the planning and organization skills needed to set appropriate postsecondary goals.” When talking about the community culture, several respondents discussed the lack of “encouragement” around college and another respondent said, “Computer classes and literacy are not important in this county.” Lastly, several other respondents discussed the limited knowledge in preparing for college. One respondent reported, “Not all students understand the need to prepare properly for a postsecondary education. Many avoid AP and other difficult courses and choose an easy path through school and often resist challenges that would prepare them for postsecondary life.”

1.2.6 Most Significant Factor that Prevents Students from Achieving Postsecondary Goals

Personnel were next asked to talk specifically about the most significant factor that prevents students from achieving postsecondary goals. Although fewer personnel responded to this question than the previous question, nearly 200 respondents commented and similarly, of these, the majority of responses ($n=75$) were about the “lack of family support” to “push them to receive their goals” and funding ($n=74$). These themes and other common themes are discussed in this section.

Family. Respondents agreed that “support from home” and “encouragement” makes the biggest difference in students achieving their future goals ($n=75$). Other comments around family were about family expectations. One respondent said, “Many parents, while not malicious, discourage their children/family members from setting goals with college because they believe that since it couldn’t happen for them then it probably can’t happen for anyone.”

Funding. Many respondents also mentioned “socioeconomic conditions” and “funding” as common barriers to achieving a postsecondary degree ($n=74$). One respondent reported, “The lack of financial aid and the lack of funding to attend school can prevent good students from attending.” In this respect, respondents discussed that “many students are hesitant to take out

student loans,” “families hesitate taking out student loans because of debt issues,” and “[students/families] can’t afford college, even with grants.” This is explained by respondents that families “can’t afford to pay for their child’s transportation to and from college, their housing, or even their food in some cases.” A few staff members commented on the struggles of middle-class families; for example, according to one respondent, “Most middle-class families do not qualify for financial aid and do not have money saved to attend.”

Self-Efficacy. When analyzing responses about barriers to achievement, there were certain self-efficacy characteristics ($n=43$) that respondents mentioned, listed in the order of frequency: “confidence” or “belief in oneself,” “work ethic,” and “self-discipline.” One respondent described, “If they encounter a problem, giving up instead of pressing on.”

School-Based Challenges. Additionally, several respondents talked about school-based challenges, including rigorous curriculum, low expectations, and need for adult mentors ($n=46$). One individual reported that “poor teachers, low expectations, apathy toward the importance of education from all realms” were the most prominent barriers to achieving goals. A few respondents mentioned that the “unrealistic expectations” can leave students feeling inadequate. One individual reported, “I do not believe we have a culture of excellence in our school system. I don’t believe we demand enough of our students. We do have some excellent teachers, but, overall, I think we don’t believe they can do so much more than we expect.”

Interest/Motivation. Respondents also noted the need for students to have an “interest” or “motivation” to achieve their goals ($n=35$). One respondent shared, “The students feel like it is too much trouble. They are happy to work part time fast food or grocery store jobs. They do not see the importance of education for the future.” Another respondent also commented about the “lack of motivation.”

Preparation. Members shared several examples that pointed to students’ need for preparation in both cognitive and non-cognitive skills—for example, time management, study skills, and academic preparedness ($n=23$). One respondent reported that students are “not prepared for the obstacles they will face and little life problem solving skills.” Another respondent shared, “I don’t think high school classes teach the skills necessary to be successful in college, such as time management or note-taking. Many students are unprepared for lectures.” And yet another respondent mentioned that they are not “reading at grade-level.” Respondents also mentioned lack of life skills, “like time and money management.”

Community/Culture. Respondents also shared about ways community or culture should be considered as a barrier ($n=9$). One respondent reported, “Their family life and the culture around here. West Virginians seem to abhor education and those who are educated...” Several other respondents talked about the fear of leaving home. One staff member wrote, “In high school, students have a family of teachers and peers with whom they are comfortable supporting them. In college, this is often not the case.”

1.2.7 Knowledge of Postsecondary Education Topics and Involvement in College-Related Activities

Two items on the school personnel survey asked respondents to rate their level of comfort with their knowledge to assist students with ten college-related topics and to rate their own

involvement in several college-related activities at their school.¹ Respondents had four response options for comfort/knowledge items (1 = *Not at all comfortable*, 2 = *Slightly comfortable*, 3 = *Moderately comfortable*, 4 = *Extremely comfortable*) and five response options for involvement items (1 = *Never*, 2 = *Seldom*, 3 = *Sometimes*, 4 = *Often*, 5 = *Always*). Another option, (*Rather not say or not applicable*) was included on each scale, but these options were not used to calculate average ratings.

Comfort/Knowledge. Table 10 shows that respondents ranged in their level of comfort about their knowledge of postsecondary items. Respondents felt the least comfortable with “college savings plan/529” (mean score of 2.42—between slightly and moderately comfortable) and greatest comfort with “importance/benefit of college education” (mean score of 3.67—between moderately and extremely comfortable). A series of ANOVAs showed that the average comfort/knowledge levels reported by survey respondents differed significantly and positively across Years 3–5 for one topic, “college selection” ($p < .05$).

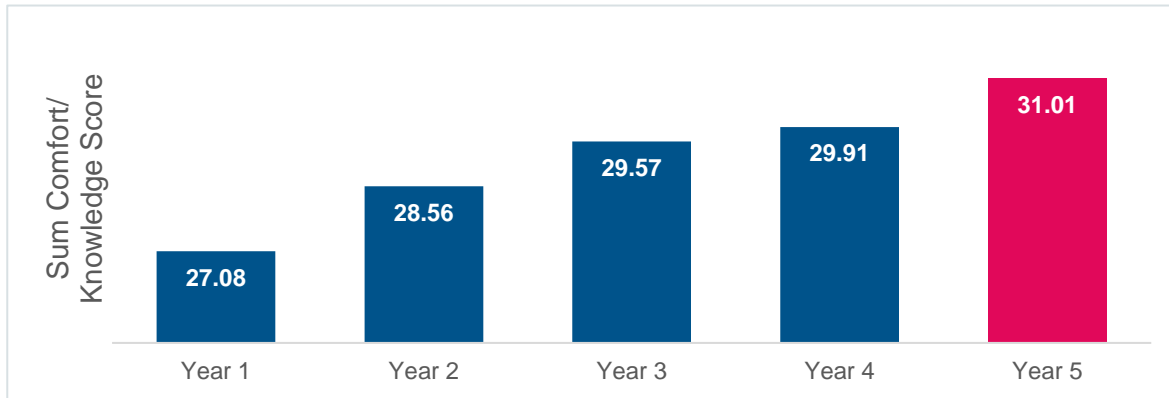
Table 10. School Personnel Respondents’ Comfort with their Knowledge to Assist Students with Postsecondary Education Topics by Year

Postsecondary Education Topic	Year 3			Year 4			Year 5		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
a. FAFSA	556	3.00	0.91	593	2.98	0.93	491	3.05	0.90
b. College savings plan/529	553	2.39	1.01	586	2.35	1.04	489	2.42	1.03
c. ACT/SAT	551	3.24	0.85	586	3.27	0.83	485	3.35	0.83
d. WV Higher Education Grant	555	2.62	1.03	589	2.68	1.03	491	2.71	1.06
e. Federal grants, loans, and work-study	554	2.87	0.95	587	2.90	0.97	490	2.94	0.97
f. College selection (match and fit)*	551	2.97	0.98	593	3.03	0.95	489	3.22	0.87
g. Scholarships (e.g., PROMISE or Institutional)	548	2.99	0.92	584	3.02	0.92	488	3.05	0.93
h. Requirements for college acceptance	549	3.21	0.83	584	3.25	0.84	482	3.28	0.84
i. Importance/benefit of college education	520	3.71	0.58	570	3.69	0.58	474	3.67	0.65
j. High school graduation requirements	529	3.48	0.69	574	3.50	0.70	475	3.45	0.76

Sources: Year 3, Year 4, and Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

* Statistically significant ($p < .05$)

We also compared the overall sum comfort/knowledge score between Year 4 and Year 5. This score was operationalized as the sum of participant self-ratings for each of the 10 items on the scale. The range for this variable was 0–40 points, and a score of 30 points would indicate “moderate” comfort with the 10 college-related topics. We calculated a one-way ANOVA on respondents’ knowledge score, using year and position as the predictor. The overall results showed that comfort/knowledge levels increased significantly in Year 5 and showed that respondents felt “moderate” comfort. The effect size for the difference between Year 4 and Year 5 ratings was very small ($d = .1$) (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. School Personnel Respondents' Total Score for Comfort with Their Knowledge to Assist Students with Postsecondary Education Topics by Year

Post-hoc analysis also revealed that while years of total experience does not predict overall knowledge, counselors (score = 36.8) were significantly more likely to have higher overall knowledge scores than both administrators (score = 31.4) and teachers (score = 30.4). This effect size was large ($d > 1.0$).

Involvement. The evaluation team next examined the extent to which respondents reported that they were involved in each of the six college-related activities offered by their schools. Responses across items ranged from 2.83 to 4.09—or from sometimes to often involved. The largest Year 5 involvement scores were for “I talk with students about their plans for college or work after high school” and “I have individual discussions with students about what they want to do with their futures.” ANOVAs revealed that there were no significant differences found in any of the involvement across years for any activities (Table 11).

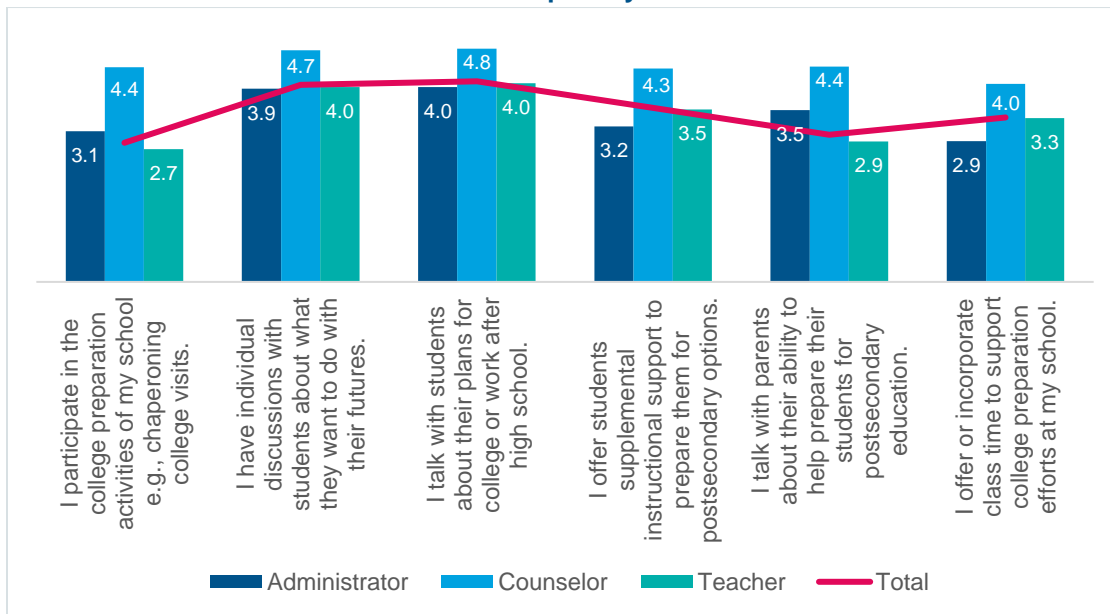
Table 11. School Personnel Involvement in Six College-Related Activities by Year

Item	Year 3			Year 4			Year 5		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
a. I participate in the college preparation activities of my school, e.g., chaperoning college visits.	558	2.71	1.42	597	2.76	1.37	494	2.83	1.35
b. I have individual discussions with students about what they want to do with their futures.	560	4.01	0.80	596	4.05	.82	495	4.01	0.84
c. I talk with students about their plans for college or work after high school.	555	4.06	0.79	594	4.11	.78	494	4.09	0.79
d. I offer students supplemental instructional support to prepare them for postsecondary options.	554	3.51	1.15	593	3.58	1.12	495	3.55	1.15
e. I talk with parents about their ability to help prepare their students for postsecondary education.	551	2.96	1.30	593	3.08	1.23	488	3.00	1.26
f. I offer or incorporate class time to support college preparation efforts at my school.	553	3.25	1.31	590	3.27	1.36	492	3.35	1.25

Sources: Year 3, Year 4, and Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

Post-hoc analysis revealed some involvement patterns based on years of experience and position. Specifically, first year teachers had the least involvement in all activities. However, the difference was only significant across groups for one activity: “I participate in college preparation activities of my school, e.g., chaperoning college visits.” Regarding position, counselors consistently reported significantly higher levels of involvement than both administrators and teachers. Figure 9 shows the average “total” rating compared to the ratings of respondents, by position.

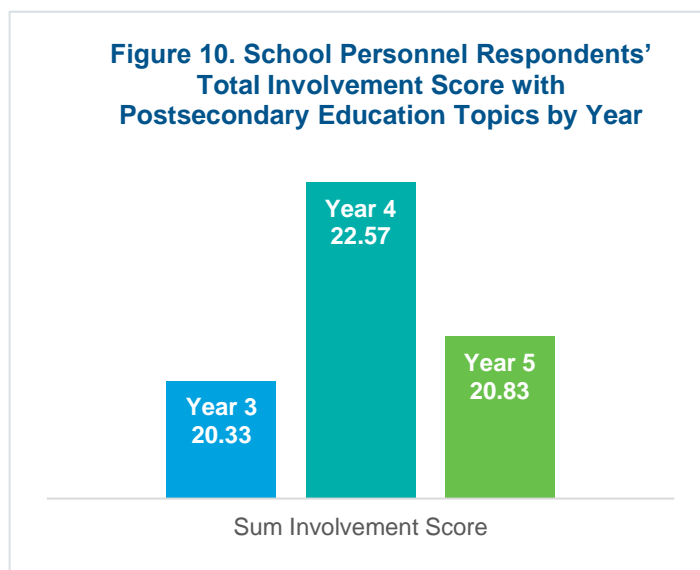
Figure 9. School Personnel Respondents' Mean Involvement Score with Postsecondary Education Topics by Position



We also calculated an overall involvement score for each participant. This score was operationalized as the total of participant self-ratings for the first five items on the scale (Figure 10). The range for this variable was 0–30 points, and a score of 18 points indicated being involved “sometimes.” Once again, we conducted ANOVA on school personnel respondents’ involvement scores using the year of response as the predictor variable. We found personnel reported significantly different involvement levels across years ($p < .001$).

Year 5 respondents had a slightly lower involvement than respondents in the previous year. We found no statistically significant differences across years.

Figure 10. School Personnel Respondents' Total Involvement Score with Postsecondary Education Topics by Year



1.2.8 Perceptions Reported by School Personnel of Student College-Going Efficacy

In Years 3–5, we asked school personnel to respond to 10 items designed to measure their perceptions of student efficacy related to college-going efficacy (e.g., “The majority of students will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution”). Items were adapted from Gibbons (2005) and utilized a four-point Likert-type response scale (i.e., 1 = *Not at all sure*, 2 = *Somewhat sure*, 3 = *Sure*, 4 = *Very sure*). The option of *not applicable* was also offered, but not included in averaging item scores.

Results are presented in Table 12 and show that Year 5 average responses ranged between 2.16 and 2.80 (between “somewhat sure” and “sure”). We used independent samples t-tests to test for statistically significant differences between Year 4 and Year 5 average ratings on each item. There were no positive differences found between those years. However, we found a negative difference for four items: “Can go to college after high school,” “Can get good grades in their high school science classes,” “Can get good grades in their high school math classes,” and “Could get A’s and B’s.” Nevertheless, the effect size for these differences were small ($d = .15, .11, .12, .11$, respectively).

Table 12. School Personnel Perceptions of their Students’ College-Going Efficacy

The majority of students...	Year 3			Year 4			Year 5		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
a. Will not attend (college) but will seek a job or enter the military.	538	2.06	0.87	576	2.10	0.90	472	2.16	0.93
b. Will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution.	548	2.67	0.83	587	2.70	0.83	478	2.63	0.82
c. Can make an educational plan that will prepare them for college.	540	2.50	0.82	583	2.58	0.83	474	2.53	0.82
d. Can get good grades in their high school science classes.*	547	2.48	0.75	586	2.55	0.82	478	2.46	0.81
e. Can get good grades in their high school math classes.*	545	2.33	0.79	587	2.45	0.85	479	2.35	0.83
f. Can choose the high school classes needed to get into college.	544	2.66	0.84	586	2.69	0.89	479	2.61	0.86
g. Know enough about computers/technology to get into college.	546	2.86	0.86	587	2.82	0.84	478	2.80	0.85
h. Can go to college after high school.*	548	2.65	0.84	587	2.67	0.86	477	2.54	0.84
i. Could get A’s and B’s in college.*	542	2.29	0.81	586	2.31	0.87	477	2.21	0.89
j. Could finish college and receive a college degree.	540	2.46	0.83	587	2.48	0.87	468	2.41	0.87

Sources: Year 3, Year 4, and Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

* Statistically significant ($p < .05$).

1.2.9 Sustainability of GEAR UP Activities

In Years 3–5, the evaluation team asked school personnel to indicate the extent to which they believed their schools were likely to continue promoting 11 specific activities after the GEAR UP grant ends. Respondents used a four-point Likert-type scale (i.e., 1 = *Not at all*, 2 = *Slightly*, 3 = *Moderately*, 4 = *Extremely*). A fifth option, *not applicable*, was also offered, but not included in calculating mean ratings.

Table 13 shows the average ratings for all three years on ten items. One additional item was added to the Year 5 survey, “College Decision Day...” Respondents in Year 5 reported their schools were most likely to sustain “academic support,” “financial literacy,” “partnership with institutions of higher education,” “College Decision Day and/or other college acceptance ceremonies/programming,” and “College Application and Exploration Week.” While sustainability ratings from Year 4 to Year 5 are lower overall, we found one significant difference in the negative direction with respect to the extent to which respondents thought “access to college professionals” would be sustained. The effect size for this difference was small to medium ($d = .43$).

Table 13. Average Sustainability Ratings Reported by School Personnel by Year

Resource	Year 3			Year 4			Year 5		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
a. Family involvement	543	3.14	0.76	575	3.09	0.78	472	3.08	0.80
b. Mentoring	544	3.13	0.81	576	3.09	0.80	472	3.05	0.80
c. Academic support	543	3.36	0.73	575	3.29	0.73	469	3.29	0.77
d. Financial aid literacy	544	3.26	0.75	571	3.22	0.79	472	3.18	0.80
e. Partnership with institutions of higher education	542	3.19	0.78	571	3.17	0.79	469	3.15	0.79
f. Community support	543	3.04	0.82	568	3.06	0.82	468	3.01	0.85
g. College visits	545	3.11	0.91	574	2.98	0.94	472	2.94	0.93
h. Access to college professionals*	544	3.02	0.88	575	2.97	0.87	468	2.64	0.60
i. Life skills development	543	3.11	0.80	572	3.10	0.80	469	3.04	0.84
j. College Application and Exploration Week	534	3.22	0.82	569	3.20	0.79	466	3.12	0.85
k. College Decision Day and/or other college acceptance ceremonies/programming	NA			NA			465	3.14	0.86

Sources: Year 3, Year 4, and Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

* Statistically significant ($p < .001$)

Overall sustainability ratings varied by the total number of years’ experience. For eight items, we found the differences were statistically significant at $p < .05$. Figure 11 shows that for four items “partnerships with institutions of higher education,” “community support,” “life skills development” and “college decision,” there was a significant difference by total years’ experience with a medium effect size of .40 or above. The trend shows that ratings tended to decrease as the years of experience increased (with some exceptions) but, for all eight items sustainability perceptions were highest amongst personnel with a total 1-2 years’ experience.

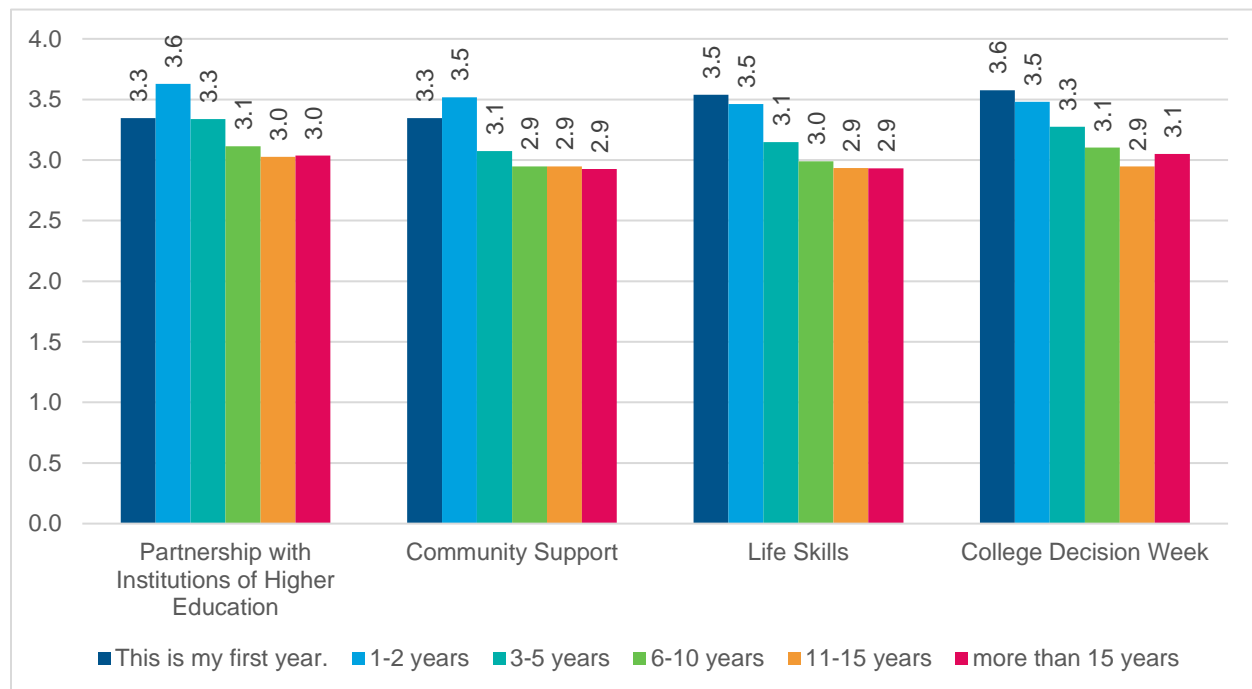
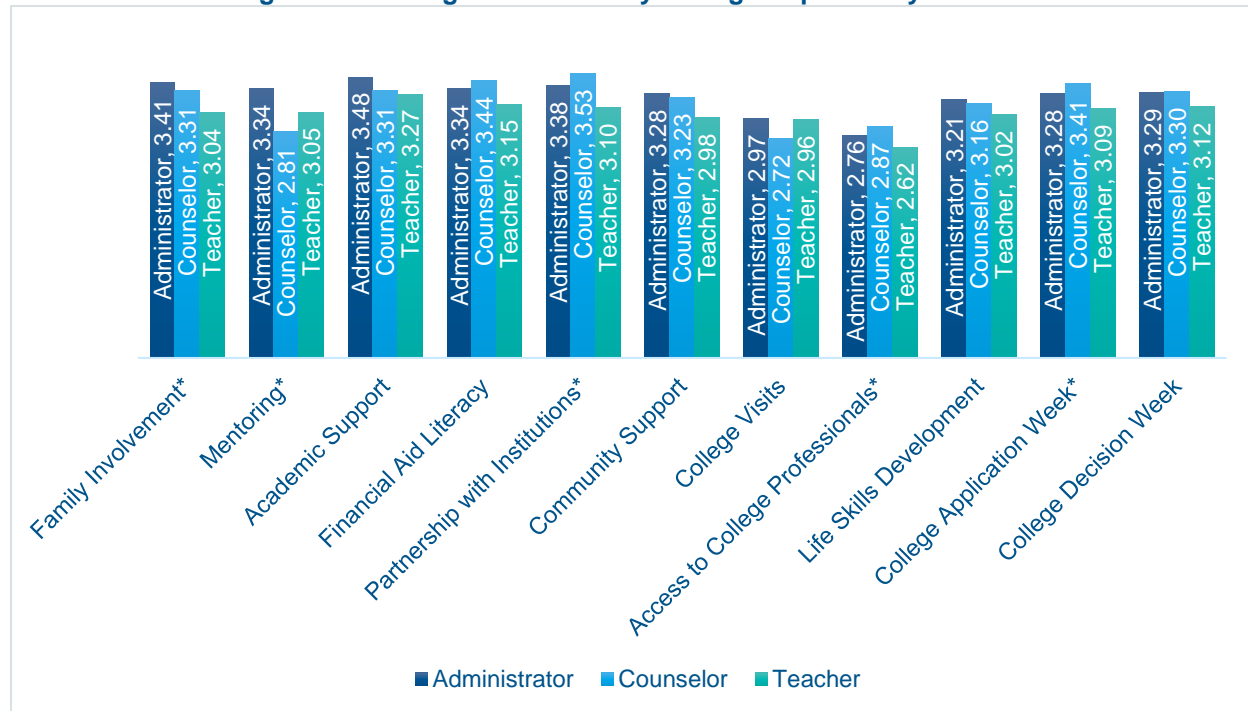
Figure 11. Mean Sustainability Ratings Reported by Total Years' Experience

Figure 12 shows the post-hoc analysis of average sustainability ratings by position—teacher, counselor, administrator. We found some significant differences in Year 5 scores by position. Specifically, counselors were significantly more likely to report a higher rating than teachers on five activities: 1) financial aid literacy, 2) partnership with institutions of higher education, 3) access to college professionals, and 4) college application week. These effect sizes were medium ($d=.30$ to $d=.81$). *Administrators were also more likely to report higher ratings than teachers in two areas, 1) family involvement and 2) mentoring ($d=.48$ and $d=.35$, respectively).* The figure also shows that counselors rated mentoring and college visits as the least sustainable activities, even less than teachers or administrators. We also found administrators and counselors had a significant difference in their beliefs about the sustainability of mentoring activities. This effect was also medium ($d=.75$).

Figure 12. Average Sustainability Ratings Reported by Position

Source: Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

* Statistically significant ($p < .05$); ** statistically significant ($p < .01$)

Sustainability Comments. The sustainability item also asked respondents to elaborate on their ratings. Approximately 30% of the total 497 respondents added a useable comment regarding their school's ability to sustain activities ($n=149$). More than in previous years, we found half of those 149 comments ($n=81$) concerned how and why funding from GEAR UP was essential to sustaining the activities listed in Table 12. Importantly, 68% of those 81 personnel (55 out of 81) commented that the loss of GEAR UP funding would mean that few activities, if any, would be continued. Comments indicated a limited ability to raise and/or support activities that cost money because either the school, community, or both were under-resourced.

In these cases, personnel reported that they just do not have any other financial or parental resources to sustain the work that GEAR UP has been doing. For example, according to one participant, "Our school is poor, the community is poor, and most students' parents don't parent the kids and don't care." Another participant stated, "As long as we can provide funding we will continue with these programs, as the area is economically disadvantaged. The GEAR UP program helps to provide and obtain the monetary support that is often difficult to receive in a rural area."

Remaining staff reported that while funding was a barrier to the provision of services, they would make every effort to support what services they could. Specifically, many personnel reported that the most expensive activity was college visits and would be the hardest to continue after the grant ends. A few staff comments included:

I think our school will use the resources available to assist students with the college selection, application process, and financial aid application. When it comes to college visits and bringing college professionals into the school, I think it will be less than now because the financial resources will not be here.

We will try to continue with all of the activities we have been doing under the GEAR UP program if we can secure funds for activities such as college and job-site visits. Most of the other activities should not be a problem to maintain.

I think the school will try to continue college-promoting efforts, but they may not be able to do as much without the financial resources or support to make things like college field trips happen.

Roles and Responsibilities. In general, staff recognized the counseling office efforts to build and continue GEAR UP and other college readiness activities; some shared their counseling office would be successful while others relied on staff involvement. One staff member reported, “We will continue with College Application Week with the help from the Counseling Dept.” And another reported, “We have great counselors at [our school] so I see them putting forth their best efforts in the future to continue many of the most effective GEAR UP initiatives.” Another example of staff perspective of the role in sustaining efforts through the counseling office was a staff member who shared that “these elements sound as if they fall under the school counselor’s job description to an extent: part of the education team, someone who gives valuable assistance to students, helping them with their academic goals, their social and personal development, and with their career development.”

Not everyone held such an optimistic view; one respondent noted, “Our school counselor is very ineffective for multiple reasons, so GEAR UP provides assistance that our students would not otherwise receive.” Another recognized viewpoint is that the administration is responsible for these efforts to support students and should make every effort to be more positive. Specifically, one respondent noted, “I feel the only reason they do the things now is because of the grant. In fact, the administration from the board and the office complain about it now. There is no way they will continue doing it after the grant ends.”

Valuable Resources. In terms of value, staff reported that GEAR UP activities like College Decision Day and FAFSA workshops are extremely valuable to students and parents. According to one respondent, “[They are] held so often throughout the year as we can bring parents in, and with the guidance and support of a trained professional, assist them in correctly completing it for their child.” Some staff commented on the ability of their school to sustain GEAR UP practices that “truly made a difference.” One respondent shared, “College Decision Day is a huge event for us.” Other comments noted that the school or staff would “support and help students, grant money or not.” One staff member noted, “My school is committed to maintaining an established college-bound culture. To that end, we will still continue to involve families and the community in encouraging students to attend college and connecting them with resources to help them achieve this goal.”

Overall, many respondents indicated that they would try to sustain college readiness efforts, with some noting specific examples like college visits/field trips, financial aid workshops, academic support or tutoring, and a day or week focused on college application and exploration. Table 14 provides sample comments across themes.

Table 14. Comments Provided by School Personnel Regarding the Potential Sustainability of GEAR UP Services

Theme	Sample Comment
a. College Application Week	<p><i>College application and exploration week is extremely important in the decision-making process of where to go to college.</i></p> <p><i>...Things that can and will likely be continued are college app week, FAFSA workshops and assisting students and families with transitioning to college.</i></p>
b. College visits/field trips	<p><i>The greatest benefit to many of our students has been the field trips to visit colleges and technical schools. Those will probably be eliminated due to lack of funding.</i></p>
c. School will continue to promote college readiness	<p><i>I really do not see where this program would be missed at our school. I feel we can support the 10 things above as we would in a normal year. We would plan visits and bring different colleges in as planned, have a College Fair, have our own activities and not need to see the state put out \$1,000 a month for a coordinator. The problem is, the coordinator needs to be someone who is retired or a substitute etc. The meetings, paperwork, and planning take too much time out of a regular employee's school schedule.</i></p> <p><i>My school promotes student success, so we will do anything to provide assistance. But allowing GEAR UP to aid in this has taken a strain off of the school which is greatly appreciated.</i></p> <p><i>Many of these items have been going on before the GEAR UP Grant ever existed at our school. The monies from the GEAR UP Program has helped with equipment needed, a computer lab, tables and chairs for the counseling area. The only monies we had previously in the counseling department was the \$200 faculty senate money we received each school year.</i></p>
d. Counselor role	<p><i>The loss of funding will impact our school's ability to go beyond the basic services "in-house" currently. Our counselors are overwhelmed already with multiple demands. How much can you ask one person to accomplish? Many students do not value their educational opportunities, nor are they supported by parents willing to extend themselves further.</i></p>
e. Limited resources	<p><i>Our county is poor and anything that requires funding to do, we will not be able to afford to do.</i></p> <p><i>I cautiously hope that this program will be sustained through teacher buy in and effort. However, without a paycheck attached I can see all the good accomplished to this point simply falling by the wayside.</i></p>

Source: Year 5 WV GEAR UP School Personnel Surveys

2. Student Focus Groups

Sixty GEAR UP students participated in focus groups held at eight different schools in May 2019. The evaluation team developed a focus group protocol with input from WVHEPC and received approval from ICF's Institutional Research Board. The protocol included questions asking students about their participation in the program, including involvement in tutoring, mentoring, and other activities. Questions also focused on their perceptions of GEAR UP, their

college plans, and their views on college awareness and the availability of financial aid. This section summarizes major findings from these focus groups, organized by key themes.

2.1 Knowledge of and Interest in Postsecondary Education

Most participating students had at least a general idea about their future careers, and most of these plans would require some form of postsecondary education. Desired careers included nursing, speech pathology, education, and criminal justice.

Overall, students overwhelmingly said that GEAR UP provided substantial help by providing college information, visits to postsecondary institutions, and workshops/activities to prepare for life after high school. Said one student:

GEAR UP is a blessing. It has helped so much. We're a lot more prepared because of GEAR UP.

Opportunity. I feel like GEAR UP has given us so many opportunities to visit colleges. And if they don't have answers to our questions, they'll get it for us.

At one school, some students thought their GEAR UP program was not as effective as others around the state because their school has cycled through four site coordinators during their time in the program. These students had learned about other schools through the various academies and conferences where they interacted with students from other schools.

However, virtually all students in the focus groups would recommend the program to others. Aside from learning about college, they noted that GEAR UP has helped them develop leadership skills and plans for the future. "It's not just about college," one student said. "It's about learning to be a leader."

2.2 College Visits and Planning

Students in focus groups also talked about visiting a variety of colleges and universities, including Marshall University, West Virginia University, West Virginia State University, Concord University, and Bluefield State College. At most schools, students indicated that they have traveled to a variety of postsecondary institutions. According to one student:

We've visited an array of different schools—bigger universities, smaller four-year colleges, and community colleges. We've been everywhere.

Nearly all students said they enjoyed the visits, although some mentioned the need for more in-depth trips that included meetings with students or professors. At least one student in most focus groups also asked for more information about out-of-state college options. According to one student:

I know they want us to stay in state, but they shouldn't restrict us to such a narrow selection. There are other things out there.

Students cited some barriers to attending college trips, such as after-school jobs or family responsibilities, fear of missing school tests, and an inability to get parent or teacher permission. At some schools, students said most trips were to four-year institutions and that may have limited their appeal. According to one student:

Some people don't have the money to get into four-year colleges, and they're not thinking about those schools.

Outside of college visits, students said other related GEAR UP activities included college fairs held at the high school, College Exploration Week activities, and guest speakers from colleges and the military.

Overall, most students in focus groups said they plan to attend college. Some said they wanted to stay closer to home rather than attend a college two to three hours away. Others said they wanted to attend a smaller college or university where they may have more interaction with their professors.

2.3 Helpful Sources of Information

One focus group activity had students complete a Venn diagram where they identified areas where they received information about colleges. The three choices were their school, family/community, and student's own efforts. Participants could select one, two, or all three areas where they received most of their information.

Overall, about 60% of students selected the middle of the Venn diagram, identifying all three areas as important sources for information. Asked to explain their answers, most said all areas were influential in their college search. At one school, students said they included 'school' among their choices only because of GEAR UP's efforts. Others cited the influence of peers and other students, who they grouped under the option for family/community.

The remainder selected one or two options, with student's own efforts as a popular choice. Said one student who selected school and his own efforts:

I feel like I do a lot of my own research, because not a lot of people in my family went to college...So they [family] do help, they are really supportive. But I feel like I just rely more on [my counselor] telling me about things, and you know, researching a bunch of places.

Among those citing school as important, some students did cite factors beyond GEAR UP. One student said, "The school is very important in trying to make sure we know our options, and they're very encouraging."

A few students mentioned other options beyond the three listed, including churches and middle school teachers who influenced their thinking.

2.4 Perceptions of GEAR UP Activities

Students in the focus groups were most likely to cite the Higher Education Resource Officers (HEROs) and Student Success Societies (SSS) as GEAR UP activities in which they participated regularly. At one school, students believed HEROs are "like the GEAR UP officers," providing leadership for activities. Students at one school described how HEROs created a music video that included the different prices of colleges including two-year, four-year, in-state, and out-of-state institutions.

SSS activities included canned food drives, a clothing drive, volunteer work at an animal shelter, and a tutoring program for elementary school students. At one school, GEAR UP leaders helped

seniors complete their FAFSAs and celebrated their accomplishment by hanging candy-filled balloons on cars in the senior parking lot. Most students in SSS praised the value of the activity. “The mentors have made such a positive impact on my life” through SSS, one participant said.

Still, at a few schools, students indicated that the same students tended to participate in these activities. One student believed that students in HEROs or SSS are viewed as “nerds” and some students will not participate for that reason. At another school, career and technical education (CTE) students found it harder to participate in either program because they have some classes off the main school campus. In response to this challenge, the GEAR UP coordinator at the school created another SSS group to better support those students.

Students also praised other GEAR UP activities, particularly those that brought together youth from different schools such as Student Leadership Academy and GEAR UP U Summer Academy. Both activities help students build social, interpersonal, and leadership skills. Said one student of GEAR UP U Summer Academy:

I really think it brings people out of their shell and builds them up. You learn to speak in front of people, and it builds friendships.

At three schools, students recalled participating in job site visits. These events included trips to a hospital, a weather center, and a machinery/production facility. Students thought these were particularly useful for those interested in technical or health careers.

College Decision Day, where seniors participate in a ceremony to honor their post-high school plans, was another popular activity at schools where GEAR UP served senior priority students.

Few focus group participants cited strong parent involvement in the program, though they said the program does reach out to families. At some schools, students cited the annual kickoff meeting and College Decision Day as activities to draw in families, sometimes with limited success. But a vocal minority of students said their parents are involved and interested as evidenced in the following student comments:

If my parents see something with the word GEAR UP on it, they automatically sign it.

The parent organization is the best thing because my mom didn't know much about college.

Other helpful activities cited by students included Coolspeak, a Student Voice Forum, financial aid workshops, and guest speaker assemblies.

2.5 Students' Financial Concerns

Despite positive perceptions of GEAR UP and college, most students had significant concerns about how to pay for their education after high school. Some mentioned that they are actively looking for scholarships or attempting to increase their SAT scores to qualify for the WV PROMISE Scholarship.

Notably, many were vocal about not wanting to incur debt, citing major family financial pressures. A few even expressed concern about even telling their parents that they might incur debt. Typical of that theme were these comments:

If I were to take out student loans, I wouldn't tell my parents. I would try to do it myself.

I'm kind of scared. I know you're supposed to just get the financial aid package and not worry about it, but I am worried.

I know some people in my family who will probably never be out of debt. It's just ridiculous.

One student was nervous at the thought of even applying to college for fear of doing something that would trigger an unexpected cost. The student stated, "I'm afraid I'm going to mess something up and I don't want to put my parents in debt for the rest of their lives." Another worried that s/he will have no one to co-sign loans since his/her parents already have substantial student loan debt.

Most students had heard of the WV PROMISE Scholarship, but some were unsure how much aid the program provides. Most also heard of Pell Grants but some mentioned they were unsure of the amount of aid. Still, a few students said the WV PROMISE Scholarship was the key to affording college. "If I don't get PROMISE, I don't know how I'm going to do it," one said.

As these students approached their senior year of high school, some also still had questions about college costs and financial aid. For example, one asked about the difference between a scholarship and a grant. A few students mentioned work/study as an option, although one student thought it meant taking an apprenticeship. Students also mentioned that they wanted more information on scholarships.

I feel like we don't talk about them enough. I want to know what's available, the requirements for them, where you find them and where you fill them out.

One student said her mother made her sign up for scholarship.org after attending a GEAR UP event. That student is applying for scholarships already and had received three so far at the time of the focus group.

2.6 Tutoring and Testive

Students were asked several questions about tutoring, particularly their knowledge and use of Testive, a new GEAR UP service to help them prepare for the SAT and ACT. As was evident among site coordinators in their spring 2019 focus groups, students said their school either embraced the Testive initiative or rarely used it at all.

At one school, a math teacher conducted morning tutoring sessions from 7–8 a.m. using Testive. At this school, all focus group participants said they have used Testive to prepare for the SAT and ACT. Another school provided after-school English and math tutoring with Testive. While some were ambivalent about the service, others cited it as a reason for improved test scores that could position them to receive the WV PROMISE Scholarship.

When we were studying for the SAT, they set all of us up with accounts and it helped me tremendously.

I'm thankful for it now, with better scores.

For students with knowledge of both Testive and Khan Academy, a similar service offered in some GEAR UP schools, they said Testive was more effective. They particularly liked Testive's questions of the day, as it was easy to remember to do this every day on a cell phone.

At another school, the SSS coordinator also does tutoring with options before and after school and also during lunch periods. However, some students in focus groups were unsure whether they had access to tutoring through GEAR UP.

2.7 Program Suggestions and Impact

While most students viewed GEAR UP as working well at their schools, some did offer suggestions. A few students said GEAR UP needs more visibility at their schools. These students cited low levels of involvement in activities and said GEAR UP needs to publicize events earlier so that students have time to complete permission slips. But others said low levels of involvement may reflect a belief that GEAR UP is not considered a "cool" activity. Because of this perception, some students may choose not to participate.

At some schools, focus group participants said they were among the most active GEAR UP members and that many of their classmates had little interest in college or the program. "Half of them don't have a clue what it is," one student said. Added another: "It's provided a lot of opportunities. But it's up to students to take advantage of that."

Looking at the program's overall impact, most students believed it has made a difference in their planning for the future. More than half a dozen students said they are now helping their siblings with academics or college preparation, something they likely would not have done without the program's services. "GEAR UP is by far the best program I've ever experienced," one concluded.

3. Site Coordinator Focus Groups

ICF conducted four focus groups with 27 WV GEAR UP site coordinators in May 2019 to gain their perceptions of the program and its operation during the 2018–19 school year. This section provides key findings from those focus groups with a focus on implementation and sustainability. Implementation analysis covers topics such as coordinator roles and responsibilities, college partners, academic assistance, and college awareness activities.

This data collection builds on findings from prior-year focus groups with site coordinators, and it reflects ICF's annual goal to provide qualitative data on the operation of GEAR UP as cohort students move closer to high school graduation.

Prior to the May focus groups, ICF developed a detailed focus group protocol with input from WVHEPC and received approval to use the protocol from ICF's Institutional Research Board. ICF staff conducted three focus groups in person; the other focus group was conducted by phone for coordinators who could not attend an in-person session. All focus groups were recorded and transcribed. ICF evaluators coded these transcripts according to a range of themes. The findings from that analysis are presented in this section.

3.1 Implementation

3.1.1 School Buy-In

Across the focus groups, most coordinators were pleased with school buy-in to GEAR UP. They cited positive feedback from teachers, students, and parents and an increased perception that the program is contributing to a stronger “college-is-possible” message at schools. Typical of that view were these comments:

[GEAR UP] seems to run smoother every year that we go along.

[GEAR UP has] definitely just become a part of what we do throughout the school year now.

Several noted that events designed mainly for students—such as College Decision Days—help build school buy-in as well. Decision days honor students as they make their choices to attend college; however, many schools also use the event to identify and thank teachers who have contributed to student success.

A few coordinators believed that school personnel were more aware but not always more invested in GEAR UP. This lack of enthusiasm may exist because the program serves only a portion of the students who might benefit at these schools.

3.1.2 Communication

Coordinators continue to praise the strong level of communication between participating schools and the WVHEPC staff that oversee GEAR UP. They note that WVHEPC staff are always accessible and available to answer questions. As one noted:

You might get an automatic email that says, ‘I’m on vacation. I may not get back to you.’ And then 10 minutes later you have a response anyway.

While there were exceptions, most coordinators believed that county coordinators for GEAR UP were not active in the program. When involved, most focused on budget/fiscal issues. However, a few believed that their county coordinators were heavily involved, including one who was “constantly in touch.” One county coordinator was on medical leave for part of the year.

3.1.3 FAFSA Completion

Coordinators reported some success in getting students and families to complete the FAFSA. They sponsored several financial aid workshops during the year, with varied attendance. One noted that those who attend workshops likely are already engaged in their child’s college choice. As one noted:

A lot of times the parents who show up at the events are those that were going to come to school anyway and ask for assistance.

Yet the repetition of GEAR UP messaging can have an impact. One coordinator noted that before GEAR UP, the FAFSA completion rate was no more than 30%. For 2018–19, the rate was 64%. “It’s been transformational in our building,” one said, and another noted that the school “never had FAFSA workshops until GEAR UP.”

Although many coordinators cited some progress in FAFSA awareness, they sometimes had to take unusual steps to get families to complete the forms. For example, one coordinator took a

hotspot and laptop to a student's house to have the parent/guardian fill out the form. Others said they tried to find outside assistance, such as getting college financial aid personnel to help on FAFSA nights.

One challenge noted by some coordinators is that students associate the financial aid form—and GEAR UP in general—with attending a four-year university and many have little interest in that. “They hear the word ‘college’ and they think a four-year university. They believe a four-year school is not their thing, so they won’t fill out the FAFSA.”

3.1.4 College Visits

Most coordinators called college visits the favorite part of their job. These coordinators said their annual dilemma is whether to conduct two college visits nearby or one farther away from the school. If they choose the latter option, they try to find a local college that will pay for a bus and/or food to cover a second visit. One coordinator said it's important to take students on multiple trips.

If they've been on more than one trip, I think they feel that it's more attainable. It's not this dream scenario.

A few coordinators noted difficulties in scheduling college visits for CTE students. The school may allow them to miss time, but it may be a problem for students whose CTE programs have required seat-time hours in class.

Other coordinators described trying to recruit students for trips who may have academic promise but may think college is unattainable due to family circumstances.

The kids we take on trips are the kids that I wouldn't see going on a college trip themselves or with their parents or anything like that.

Postsecondary institutions cited by GEAR UP coordinators as popular sites for visits included Marshall University, West Virginia University, West Virginia State, and local community colleges. A few said students had attended out-of-state institutions, such as Roanoke College and Radford University in Virginia.

3.1.5 Partnerships

Most coordinators believed they had forged strong partnerships with colleges. Some noted that West Virginia University and Marshall have chartered buses for college visits, an important benefit for districts with limited budgets. West Virginia University Institute of Technology has sent staff to some schools and also provided food on college visits, and Southern West Virginia Technical Community College helps another school with FAFSA completion and College Decision Day.

Some coordinators believed that smaller postsecondary institutions had the most in-depth college visits, with more information than just a basic tour. As one coordinator said, “Students appreciated college visits that allowed students to sit in on classes and observe.”

One school also partnered with a financial literacy program called Get A Life. Others cited support from churches on after-school programs and AmeriCorps for graduation coaching.

3.1.6 Testive

Coordinators had a range of views on Testive, a new tool in GEAR UP to help students prepare for the SAT and ACT. At many schools, teachers have used Khan Academy test preparation and saw no need to change. Several coordinators said the online training for Testive was not particularly effective, making it a tougher sell for schools. Some noted that Khan Academy released an updated version of its service so Testive was not necessarily needed as it was previously. As two coordinators noted:

I think they felt like Testive was just another thing that was being pushed on them, and our principal didn't really enforce it.

My teachers didn't find it user-friendly. They used the Khan Academy site previously and they wanted to continue to use what they had done previously. I think it had to do with our teachers using something previously and they just wanted to stick with it.

Some coordinators believed teachers needed much more training on Testive if they wanted to use it effectively. A requirement that students create a CFWV account and then use that for Testive also added to the complexity. According to one coordinator, "It was an ordeal. It was a long, drawn out process when it didn't need to be."

One coordinator noted that students in the HEROs program who attended GEAR UP U Summer Academy came back to school knowing the Testive program. "The students actually helped teachers learn the system."

Some coordinators expressed their enthusiasm about the resource. One coordinator said the school used Testive extensively and deployed a GEAR UP tutor to use it with students. "The students who used it really enjoyed it. They liked combining the videos with the actual tutor."

Another coordinator said teachers valued its practice tests to document growth or declines among students. One school even started an incentive program in which the homeroom with the highest composite score won an ice skating trip and a dinner. They held another competition later and the highest-performing homeroom won a snow tubing trip.

"Once we got it, our teachers loved it," one coordinator said. Another coordinator credited Testive with an increase in the percent of students who qualified for the PROMISE Scholarship. At another school, teachers decided to try Testive after they heard that their central office was against it. Most liked the service, used it regularly, and gave students credit for participation.

3.1.7 Other GEAR UP Activities

Several coordinators described HEROs and SSS among the most successful activities. At one school, HEROs post college trivia questions about college around the school and students spend the week seeking the answers. Club members then go into homerooms for game-show style competitions, with the winning homeroom receiving a prize. SSS have undertaken various service activities, including clean-up and beautification projects.

Coordinators from a couple of schools discussed partnering with other organizations to provide academic support to students. One school had success in partnering with AmeriCorps, which provided graduation coaches at the school. These coaches helped students with credit recovery, and they worked with GEAR UP on helping students complete FAFSAs. "I'm very

blessed to have them,” the coordinator said. Another coordinator had help from local churches and other organizations for an after-school program with homework help and SAT preparation.

Many sites continued tutoring services in the 2018–19 year, and coordinators believed that school-day tutoring seemed to work best. Lunch-hour tutoring in particular was considered an effective way to reach and serve students. Few students attended after-school sessions due to jobs or other activities.

3.1.8 Parent Involvement

Coordinators offered a mixed assessment of parent involvement in the program. Some believed that more parents were attending events and asking more questions about their children’s post-high school options. According to one coordinator, parent involvement “is not where we want it to be...but it is increasing.”

One coordinator had difficulty creating a parent support group due to weather and work stoppages. “I pretty much scrapped that plan and will roll it out in August,” this coordinator said. Some were discouraged by low parent response rates on the GEAR UP survey. Some teachers even gave extra credit to those who returned a completed survey.

A few coordinators noted that some families have endured a cycle of poverty so long that parents see little hope in the GEAR UP message. But another believed that parents are more responsive to requests—such as filling out financial aid forms—because their children have a newfound optimism about college and their futures.

3.2 Impact and Outcomes

As cohort students move closer to high school graduation, coordinators believe that one major impact of the program is a strengthened college-going culture at schools. Teachers have more information about the cost of college that they can convey to students, and college awareness activities occur with increasing frequency. Some examples cited by coordinators included:

- A college fact-of-the-day mentioned during the school’s morning announcements;
- A wall where students place cards indicating where they plan to go after college, such as logos representing a college, a company or a branch of the military; and
- An elementary or middle school graduation walk, where students in caps and gowns go back to their former schools.

Several coordinators said the repetition of activities helps embed the college-is-possible message at their schools. As coordinators stated:

I think that just having the re-occurring activities every year changes the culture itself.

We're constantly talking about that next step with our students. Now that they're in 11th and 12th grade, I think they understand more what GEAR UP is doing for them than they did before.

Coordinators viewed College Decision Days as increasingly important in building this college-going culture. These events honor seniors with post-graduation plans, and celebrations are popular with families and teachers as well.

It was really nice. Out of 150 seniors, we had 100 that made a decision to do something after high school, whether it was two year or four-year college, the military, or apprenticeship programs.

GEAR UP's steady presence can also motivate students and staff. At one school, the coordinator said the cohort is helping to spread the college-is-possible message, working with younger grades. At another school, the coordinator spoke about becoming more empowered to work with students.

When I first started, I thought I don't want to step on the counselor's toes. I'm a classroom teacher, why am I telling them all of these things about going to college? But now that I've done it for four years, I just step up to the plate all the time in meetings, student meetings, whenever.

Focus group participants also were asked about how they view success in their job as a GEAR UP coordinator. Overall, most believed that attainment of the workplan was an important indicator. However, many also viewed success as working with students to help them achieve both personal and academic strides. They said GEAR UP is successful when it can keep students focused on the end result, which is postsecondary education and other plans for their futures. These comments typified this view:

It's about meeting your workplan, but also doing it with enthusiasm and buy-in from the community, students, families, teachers, everybody.

I want students to be able to plan their future, anticipate problems and be able to come up with answers and solutions.

3.3 Sustainability

Looking to the future, most coordinators believed they could sustain low-cost GEAR UP activities such as graduation walks, FAFSA workshops, College Decision Day, and perhaps a mentoring initiative after the grant comes to an end. However, they were not as optimistic about continuing college visits. As one said:

We come from a very poor county and unless we do fundraising, I don't see college visits continuing unless perhaps for seniors.

Coordinators were divided on the question of whether their school would continue SSS and mentoring. According to one coordinator, "We have a lot of caring faculty members who would like to do that." The coordinator explained that without a stipend, however, it may be more on an informal, one-to-one basis rather than the group setting used frequently in SSS.

Others said GEAR UP-supported tutoring likely would not continue, and many said students would miss opportunities such as leadership academies.

Still, the years of experience in running GEAR UP has left some coordinators optimistic about sustainability. Typical were these comments:

The events seem to come more naturally to me now. I just feel there's a lot of things we can sustain with our comfort in doing these things already.

I think we can sustain everything that doesn't cost money.

One coordinator was also heartened that cohort students are among those stepping up to think about sustainability. That school's HEROs group is including current 9th and 10th graders in the group so that the activity can keep going even after the cohort graduates from high school.

V. Discussion

Year 5 marked the first time the evaluation team conducted focus groups with students during this project, and this data collection yielded many insights when viewed along with the school personnel survey and site coordinator focus groups. For example, focus group participants and survey respondents often credited GEAR UP for achieving some progress in instilling a college-going culture at their schools. Many saw college-going culture moving in a steadily upward direction within their building. School personnel showed an increase in their comfort with knowledge and ability to involve themselves in talking, advising, and mentoring students about their postsecondary options. In fact, several personnel believed that was their role in building college-going culture at their school.

Yet challenges remained. Asked to identify barriers to achievement, some respondents in the school personnel survey cited students' lack of confidence and apathy toward the importance of education. In focus groups, many students acknowledged some degree of apathy toward education and GEAR UP among their classmates, noting that these students have little or no interest in college and cannot see themselves continuing their education. One suggestion by students was to offer more speakers, visits, or programming aimed at CTE students and others who may be interested in a two-year, rather than four-year, college education.

Elsewhere, many site coordinators joined students in praising the benefits of some specific GEAR UP activities, particularly HEROs, SSS, and college visits. Students generally expressed high levels of satisfaction with their GEAR UP coordinators, and coordinators said they valued the strong support provided by WVHEPC. Asked to identify where they get the most support for college, most also listed all three available choices—school, community, and their own efforts.

Data collection from both students and site coordinators showed varied opinions on Testive, the new resource provided by GEAR UP to support students in preparing for the SAT. In the view of some coordinators, Khan Academy was a similar and more popular option already entrenched at schools. Yet students and staff at several other schools cited Testive as a strong activity, with use before school, during school, and after school. Many students in focus groups said they liked the step-by-step help available via Testive. However, they indicated that the success of Testive may depend on the teacher/instructional coach supporting the activity. If they liked the teacher, they liked the program.

Similar to past years' findings, FAFSA remained a challenge at some sites. Most site coordinators cited progress in raising FAFSA awareness, but they sometimes had to take unusual steps to get families to complete the forms. One coordinator took a hotspot and laptop to a student's house to have the parent/guardian fill out the form.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

The school personnel survey, student focus groups, and site coordinator focus groups in Year 5 yielded rich information about the evolution of the GEAR UP grant. Results from all three indicated that the program has provided many benefits, including an increased college-going culture at many schools. While student involvement still may leave room for improvement at some schools, data collected during Year 5 indicate satisfaction with many GEAR UP activities including HEROs, SSS mentoring services, FAFSA workshops, and college visits. Looking across the varied data collected this year, however, the evaluation team offers these considerations for WVHEPC moving forward:

Re-double efforts to focus on all types of postsecondary institutions, including two-year colleges. Students in focus groups believed that those most likely to participate in GEAR UP are youth most interested in attending four-year colleges and universities. Many said this is not surprising as college visits and college messaging often appear to emphasize a four-year college education even though some students—due to finances and/or career goals—are more interested in shorter-term programs. Additionally, many respondents in the school personnel survey indicated that students need both exposure and encouragement to select the right “college fit” based on their interests, background, and finances.

As students approach high school graduation, GEAR UP may want to consider adding more visits to technical and two-year colleges and stepping up outreach to students in CTE programs who may still want some post-high school education to meet career goals.

Support schools in building a sustainability plan that may continue GEAR UP services. Findings from the personnel survey and site coordinator focus groups indicated that some schools may be hard pressed to continue GEAR UP services, particularly more costly programming such as college visits. However, school officials generally find value in GEAR UP services including the SSS mentoring initiative, College Decision Days, the HEROs program, and financial aid workshops. Given these factors, it may be useful for each school or GEAR UP team to develop a sustainability plan that outlines activities for continuation, designates champions or a team to carry out the vision, and offers possible strategies to overcome barriers such as cost. A hidden potential resource for sustainability may be GEAR UP students themselves. As one coordinator noted, cohort students in HEROs at one school have begun to recruit younger students into the club so that the activity continues once the cohort graduates. This type of strategy may be worthy of replication in other sites. In addition, involving parents of cohort students—some of whom may have younger children in the same schools—may be another potential hidden source of support for sustainability. Newer school personnel also may represent another potential resource for sustainability. As noted in the school personnel survey, those personnel with 1-2 years of experience had the highest level of involvement and beliefs about GEAR UP sustainability at schools.

Share best practices across GEAR UP sites. Individual coordinators have crafted many strategies that they view as effective in their schools. Several also said that their years of experience with the program have given them more confidence to design and execute new programming. It would be valuable to have coordinators share these emerging best practices with other GEAR UP staff at coordinator meetings. Strategies for successful College Decision Days, FAFSA workshops, college visits, HEROs, and test preparation could be shared with

other schools to build their capacity to offer such services. This sharing could prove particularly effective in combatting the student apathy identified by some students and school personnel in Year 5 data collection. Site coordinators could share insights at in-person coordinator meetings or through more flexible settings such as webinars, social media, and video platforms. Site coordinators have become major champions of the GEAR UP program, and their expertise can serve as a catalyst to inspire change at other schools in the partnership.

Continue to focus on financial aid awareness and literacy activities to emphasize that college is possible for GEAR UP students. Many students in focus groups expressed major concerns about their ability to afford college. This was evident in myriad comments from students who do not want to take out loans and from some who indicated they do not even want to raise the issue of loans with their parents due to family poverty and debt. A small number of students also seemed to have key knowledge gaps such as not knowing the difference between a scholarship and a grant and equating college work/study with on-the-job apprenticeships. Some similar concerns arose in the school personnel survey as well, as many respondents mentioned socioeconomic conditions and funding as common barriers to achieving a postsecondary degree even for students well qualified to succeed in college. In the view of these school personnel, financial concerns make it difficult for students and their families to envision not only paying college tuition but also affording college-related housing, food, and transportation. As students approach high school graduation, providing one-to-one counseling on college financing is imperative to help students pursue their goals. Schools also may consider bringing back alumni who have succeeded in college to provide testimonials or lessons learned about how best to afford and succeed in college.

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VIII. Appendix A: 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” option and prepares them to make informed decisions about postsecondary educational opportunities—at your school. Postsecondary options may include certificate programs, two-year degree programs, four-year degree programs, or military training after high school graduation.

1. What is your current primary position at your school? ☐ Administrator ☐ Counselor ☐ Teacher
2. How many years have you worked in this position or role **in total**?
☐ This is my first year ☐ 1–2 years ☐ 3–5 years ☐ 6–10 years ☐ 11–15 years
☐ More than 15 years
3. How many years have you worked in this position or role **at this school**?
☐ This is my first year ☐ 1–2 years ☐ 3–5 years ☐ 6–10 years ☐ 11–15 years ☐ 16–20 years
☐ More than 20 years
4. What current grade level(s) do you serve (check all that apply)? ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12
5. In which school(s) are you currently working?
6. Are you a GEAR UP site coordinator?
7. For items a–r, 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**.

	In My School					In My Classroom			
<i>The following set of items ask about topics related to Rigor and Expectations.</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Creativity and original thinking are highly valued.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
b. Teachers expect all students to succeed academically.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
c. Students are encouraged to do their best.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
d. Teachers regularly talk to students about the importance of college.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
e. Students care about learning and getting a good education.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1

f. Students are encouraged to set future college and career goals.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
g. Students are learning effective problem solving skills.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
h. Teachers are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
i. Advanced (i.e., honors, pre-AP, etc.) courses are appropriately rigorous.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
j. The curriculum appropriately challenges most students.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
The next set of items ask about topics related to Visual Cues and Material Resources.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
k. College pennants, banners, and posters are visible.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
l. Parents are included in the college preparation process.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
m. School staff are provided with professional development on the topics of college readiness and success.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
n. Students have access to the information and resources they need to support their college attendance decisions.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
o. Teachers include visual cues to encourage discussions about their own college experience	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
p. Teachers are provided information about the school's college-going rate and FAFSA completion rates.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
q. College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1

r. Teachers engage in ongoing professional development about ways to promote college readiness.	4	3	2	1		4	3	2	1
s. 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

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

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

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

	Not Applicable	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
a. I participate in the college preparation activities of my school (e.g., chaperoning college visits).	99	1	2	3	4	5
b. I have individual discussions with students about what they want to do with their futures.	99	1	2	3	4	5
c. I talk with students about their plans for college or work after high school.	99	1	2	3	4	5
d. I offer students supplemental instructional support to prepare them for postsecondary options.	99	1	2	3	4	5

	Not Applicable	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
e. I offer or incorporate class time to support college preparation efforts at my school.	99	1	2	3	4	5
f. I talk with parents about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for postsecondary education.	99	1	2	3	4	5

10. What is the most important aspect to building a college-going culture at your school?

11. How have your beliefs about what is most important to building a college-going culture at your school changed over time?

12. Please explain what you see as your role in building a college-going culture at your school? How has your role changed, if at all, since the presence of GEAR UP at your school?

The next few questions ask specifically about your GEAR UP experiences.

13. Please indicate how effective participation in GEAR UP-sponsored activities available at your school has been in helping your students to succeed in school/prepare for college:

	It was not offered/ does not apply	I did not attend	Not at all effective	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Extremely effective
a. Tutoring and homework assistance	99	999	1	2	3	4
b. Opportunities to participate in college visits	99	999	1	2	3	4
c. Summer activities	99	999	1	2	3	4
d. College Application and Exploration Week	99	999	1	2	3	4
e. Provide information about college entrance requirements	99	999	1	2	3	4
f. Career exploration activities	99	999	1	2	3	4
g. Test preparation (e.g., Testive ACT/SAT prep)	99	999	1	2	3	4
h. Assistance with the college entrance process	99	999	1	2	3	4

	It was not offered/ does not apply	I did not attend	Not at all effective	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Extremely effective
i. Assistance with completing financial aid forms (e.g., FAFSA)	99	999	1	2	3	4
j. Teacher professional development about college awareness and success strategies	99	999	1	2	3	4
k. Student Success Societies/mentoring opportunities	99	999	1	2	3	4
l. Faculty Senate presentations	99	999	1	2	3	4
m. College Decision Day and/or other college acceptance ceremonies/programming	99	999	1	2	3	4

14. In general, how often do you participate in GEAR UP activities?

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

Please elaborate:

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

	Not Applicable	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. I think GEAR UP is making a positive impact on students in my school.	99	1	2	3	4
b. I think GEAR UP is making a positive impact on my colleagues in my school	99	1	2	3	4
c. GEAR UP activities are likely to be sustained after the grant ends.	99	1	2	3	4

16. Thinking about the future when GEAR UP services and activities are no longer at your school, to what extent will your school promote the following elements related to a college-going culture?

	Does Not Apply	Not at All	Slightly	Moderately	Extremely
Family involvement	99	1	2	3	4
Mentoring	99	1	2	3	4
Academic support	99	1	2	3	4
Financial aid literacy	99	1	2	3	4
Partnership with institutions of higher education	99	1	2	3	4
Community support	99	1	2	3	4
College visits	99	1	2	3	4
Access to college professionals	99	1	2	3	4
Life skills development	99	1	2	3	4
College Application and Exploration Week	99	1	2	3	4
College Decision Day and/or other college acceptance ceremonies/programming	99	1	2	3	4

Please elaborate:

17. This question asks about your belief in students' ability to prepare for and succeed in college. How sure are you that the majority of students...

	Not Applicable	Not at All Sure	Somewhat Sure	Sure	Very Sure
a. will not attend college but will seek a job or enter the military.	99	1	2	3	4
b. will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution.	99	1	2	3	4
c. can make an educational plan that will prepare them for college	99	1	2	3	4
d. can get good grades in their high school science classes	99	1	2	3	4
e. can get good grades in their high school math classes	99	1	2	3	4
f. can choose the high school classes needed to get into college	99	1	2	3	4
g. know enough about computers/technology to get into college	99	1	2	3	4
h. can go to college after high school	99	1	2	3	4
i. could get A's and B's in College	99	1	2	3	4
j. could finish college and receive a college degree	99	1	2	3	4

18. What do you feel is the most significant factor that prevents students from setting postsecondary education or training goals?
19. What do you feel is the most significant factor that prevents students from achieving their postsecondary education or training goals?
20. Please use this space for additional comments, questions, or concerns:

IX. Appendix B: Focus Group Protocols

West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation

Spring 2019 Focus Group Guide for Site Coordinators at High Schools

Facilitator Guidelines:

- Introduce yourself and colleagues as representatives of ICF and describe your role (i.e., facilitator).
- Briefly discuss the focus group's purpose: Explain that the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (the Commission) has contracted with ICF to conduct an independent evaluation of the West Virginia GEAR UP program. The purpose of this focus group is to learn more about the program's operation and activities. Explain that this is not an evaluation of site coordinators, their schools, or other GEAR UP personnel. They can agree or disagree with comments, but only one person speaks at a time. The session will take approximately 45–50 minutes.
- Convey to each participant our confidentiality policy: Remind them (1) The focus group is voluntary; (2) they can decline to answer any questions or stop participating at any time without any consequences; (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) ICF maintains focus group data in secure areas; and (5) please respect each other's confidentiality by not sharing any information outside of this focus group.
- Ask if they have any questions before you begin. Hand out consent forms, review, and ask them to sign before the focus group begins.
- Ask permission to record the focus group: State that: *"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!**

Time	Questions	Facilitator's Activity
2 min	INTRODUCTION Please introduce yourself, your school, how long you've been with GEAR UP, and your role at the school in addition to GEAR UP (teacher, counselor, etc.).	Probe: Are you the only GEAR UP site coordinator at your school or part of a team of site coordinators? If part of a team, what is your specific responsibility in the school?
7-10 min	IMPLEMENTATION AND BUY-IN How is GEAR UP going in your school this year? What activities were provided to students, parents, and teachers? How have you built awareness and buy-in at your school for GEAR UP? For those involved for more than one year, how has buy-in changed since your first year working on the grant?	Probe for college application week, financial aid/awareness workshops, student leadership academy, college decision days, HEROs, tutoring, Student Success Societies, SAT/ACT prep (e.g., Testive). Probe for trends across sites, any new or existing challenges, and lessons learned. Probe for perceptions of buy-in among teachers, students, and parents.

5 min	<p>INTERACTION</p> <p>In what ways and how often do you interact with HEPC personnel about the work you are doing through GEAR UP (e.g., regional program directors, project director)?</p> <p>In what ways and how often do you interact with your county coordinator about GEAR UP? For those of you who have been involved for more than this past year, how has this changed over time?</p> <p>How satisfied are you with the information and resources you receive related to GEAR UP? How could they be improved?</p>	<p>Identify common threads across the schools. Probe for the extent of support received from GEAR UP staff.</p> <p>Probe for differences in participant views and possible reasons for this.</p>
3 min	<p>PARTNERS</p> <p>How have local <i>college and community</i> partners been involved in GEAR UP at your school over the past year, and what resources have they provided?</p>	<p>Probe for satisfaction with level and extent of involvement. Probe for strategies perceived as successful in achieving partner support. Probe for comments on college partners in their geographic area and WVGU's college-specific partners (SWVCTC, Concord, and WVSU).</p>
5 min	<p>PARENT INVOLVEMENT</p> <p>How involved are parents in GEAR UP at your school? How, if at all, has this improved since your school became involved in GEAR UP?</p>	<p>Probe for strategies perceived as effective or ineffective and new strategies designed for parents of high school students. Probe for any barriers they see regarding parent participation.</p>
5 min	<p>COLLEGE VISITS AND PREPARATION</p> <p>What role has GEAR UP played in helping students learn about colleges, college entrance requirements, and financial aid? What strategies have worked/not worked?</p>	<p>Probe for GEAR UP role in scheduling college visits, learning about college entrance requirements, and FAFSA/financial aid issues. Probe for lessons learned and best practices. Probe for other services that may be important to improve college preparation.</p>
5 min.	<p>COLLEGE ASSESSMENTS</p> <p>One new activity for 2018–19 is to help students prepare for the SAT and ACT. How would you describe implementation of these services at your school? Did they achieve the desired effects?</p>	<p>Probe whether the school offered the service and who delivered it. Probe specifically about the use/effectiveness of Testive test prep software. Probe for successes/challenges, ways to make it more useful for students for teachers, and whether students were more likely to take these assessments as a result.</p>
5 min	<p>YOUR ROLE AS COORDINATOR</p> <p>How do you define being a successful coordinator at your school?</p>	<p>Probe for how coordinators balance short-term goals such as FAFSA completion or achieving the GEAR UP work plan with long-term improvement such as changing school culture.</p>
3-5 min	<p>PRIORITY STUDENTS</p> <p>For coordinators currently working with high school seniors, how have services for priority students evolved at your school during this grant? What</p>	<p>Probe for promising practices, lessons learned, and impact on senior success.</p>

	strategies have worked/not worked? What is the impact of service on senior success?	
5 min	IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY Overall for cohort and priority students, how would you describe GEAR UP's impact at your school? What, if any, services have been sustained for younger students? What challenges do you face in sustaining these activities?	Probe for views on culture, homework completion, test preparation/scores, course completion, grades, high school graduation, financial aid knowledge, etc. Probe for which services may be most difficult to sustain.
	CLOSING Is there anything else we should know to understand the GEAR UP program at your school?	

Thank you very much for your time.

West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation

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 Postsecondary Commission (HEPC), has contracted with ICF 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 a focus group that should take approximately 45–50 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 challenges and successes will be reported confidentially.
- **Risks:** The study presents 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 at any time you feel uncomfortable while answering questions or want to talk with someone after the discussion, please let the interviewer know.
- **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, 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 can 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 can call Samantha Spinney, ICF, at (703) 272-6681.

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



West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation

Cohort Student Focus Group Guide – Spring 2019

Facilitator Guidelines:

- Introduce yourself and colleagues as representatives of ICF and describe your role (i.e., facilitator).
- Briefly discuss the focus group's purpose: *The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (the Commission) has hired a company, ICF, to study how West Virginia GEAR UP is working. Today, we will have a group discussion, called a focus group, so that you all can share your views and experiences with West Virginia GEAR UP. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers—only your own opinion. The goal is to hear many different viewpoints. I also want to know if you agree or disagree with what others are saying and why. Please, only one person speak at a time. This focus group discussion will take approximately 45 minutes.*
- Convey to each participant our confidentiality policy: *Before we get started, I want to remind you about a few things related to confidentiality: (1) Your participation in this focus group discussion is voluntary; (2) you can decline to answer any questions or stop participating in the discussion at any time without any consequences; (3) the information you share today will be kept in confidence by the ICF team to the extent permitted by law; (4) the ICF team has signed confidentiality agreements that we will protect the information that you share with us; (5) the ICF team will store focus group data in secure areas; and (6) please respect each other's confidentiality by not sharing any information outside of this focus group.*
- Ask if they have any questions before you begin. Hand out assent forms, review, and ask them to sign before the focus group begins.
- Ask permission to record the focus group: *In order to capture the discussion, I would like to record the session. Only ICF evaluation team members will have access to the recording, which will not be shared with anybody in your school or the GEAR UP program. 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 prior to sharing any findings. **START RECORDER NOW!***
- Pen, index card, and sheet with Venn diagram distributed to all participants.

Time	Opening Questions	Facilitator's Activity
2 min	INTRODUCTION Please introduce yourself, and whether you have a future career in mind.	Note if college is required for these careers and probe to see if students know what type of education (if any) is needed for the careers that they name.
3 min	WHAT IS GEAR UP? In your own words, how would you describe the GEAR UP program at your school? What do you think of when someone mentions GEAR UP?	Provide background if needed on key activities (college visits, mentoring, College Application and Exploration Week, financial aid information/knowledge, Student Leadership Academy, GEAR UP U, job site visits, texting).

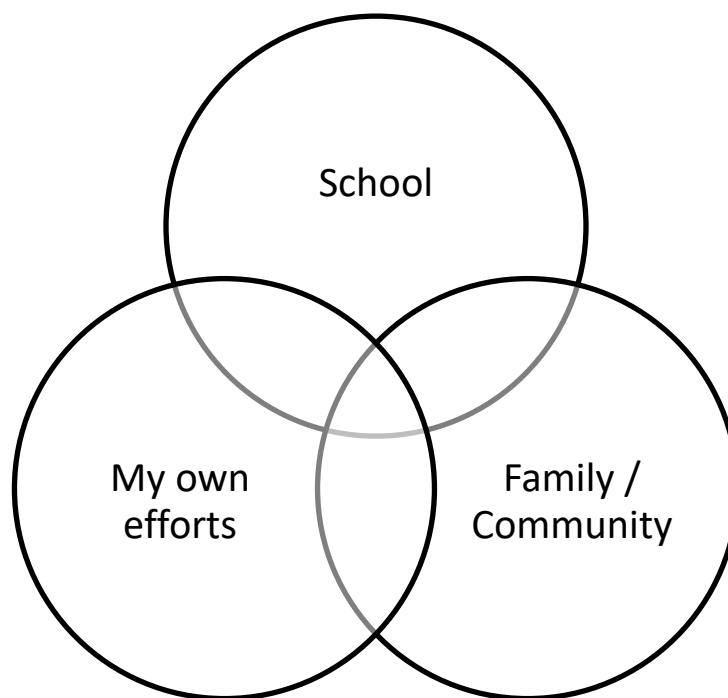
3-5 min	GEAR UP PARTICIPATION How long have you been at a GEAR UP school? What GEAR UP activities have you participated in? How often do you participate? Is there anything that has prevented you from participating?	Ask to see if other students participated in similar activities or had similar barriers to attendance.
5 min	COLLEGE ENROLLMENT Do you plan to attend college? If so, what colleges are on your list? How do you think you will pay for college?	Probe for interest in two-/four-year and technical institutions. Probe for knowledge of financial aid/FAFSA and whether parents/guardians are interested in having them attend college.
10 min	PLANNING YOUR FUTURE / VENN DIAGRAM Everyone received a paper with a Venn diagram at the start. Please look at this and tell us where you get the most support to plan for your future. The paper has circles representing 3 ways you may get most of your support: from school; from community/family; and from your own efforts. Some of you may rely mostly on one of these sources; others from 2 or all 3. Mark an X in the area where you get the most support to plan for your future. For example, if you mainly rely on just 1 of these sources, mark an X in that circle. If you get the most support from 2 of these sources, mark an X where those 2 circles intersect. If you regularly rely on all 3 sources, mark an X in the center of the diagram where all circles intersect. If you believe there are sources not listed in the diagram, please include them at the bottom of your handout. We'll take a minute for you to mark your copy. <i>After 1-2 minutes, ask participants to share their answer and why they made that choice.</i>	Probe whether students talk about college or careers with parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and friends. <i>Follow-up questions: What have you learned from these sources? Within the school, what information about college has GEAR UP provided to you? What questions about college do you still have?</i>
10-12 min	EXPERIENCE WITH GEAR UP I'm going to read a list of West Virginia GEAR UP activities one at a time and I'd like you to give me your impressions of these activities. Have you participated this year or prior to this year? What was your experience? What could make it better? --College visits --Tutoring --Student Success Societies --HEROs --GEAR UP U Summer Academy --Student leadership academy --Job site visits --Career exploration/CFWV College App Week --Testive SAT/ACT prep (<i>new activity for 2018-19</i>) --Parent/family activities	Ask students whether they agree or disagree with individual comments. Probe for reasons why students did/did not participate.

5-7 min	ATTITUDES TOWARD GEAR UP Everyone should have a pen and index card. On one side, please write down what you think is working well in GEAR UP. On the other side, write down any items you think could be improved. I'll give you a few minutes to write down responses. <i>(After 3-4 minutes, have everyone share at least one item from each side of their card).</i>	Probe for views on staff, college tours, tutoring, activities, SSS/mentoring. For items that students think could be improved, probe for how those things could be improved and what would make them better. <i>Possible follow-up questions: Why is that important? How will it change the way you learn about college?</i>
2-3 min.	PROGRAM SATISFACTION Would you recommend the GEAR UP program to other students? Why or why not?	Note areas of agreement/disagreement among students.
2 min.	CLOSING Is there anything else we should know about what students at your school think of the GEAR UP program?	Collect the index cards, pens, and Venn diagrams.

Thank you very much for your time.

Where do you get the most support to plan for your future?

Please mark an X in the area where you get the most support to plan for your future. If you mainly rely on just 1 of these three sources, mark an X in that circle alone. If you get the most support from 2 of these sources, mark an X where those 2 circles intersect. If you regularly rely on all 3 sources, mark an X in the center of the diagram where all the circles intersect.



Are there any other sources of support not included above? Please list here.

West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation

Parent Consent for Student Focus Group Participation

April 2019

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your student's high school is participating in a statewide study to learn about preparing middle and high school students for college or other postsecondary education. The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission has contracted with ICF to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the West Virginia Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant program to better understand strategies that schools use to meet program goals. As part of this evaluation, 6–10 students will be given the opportunity to participate in a focus group which should take approximately 45 minutes. A focus group involves your student in a classroom-like discussion with other students and the GEAR UP evaluation team. The discussion will include questions about students' opinions and experiences with GEAR UP, such as mentoring programs or college visits. The information provided by students will be used to improve the program in the future. ICF has worked with your school's GEAR UP coordinator to identify students to participate in the focus group and to establish an appropriate time and place at the school for the focus group.

Please consider the details below prior to deciding to allow your student to participate in the focus group:

- **Confidentiality:** All information about your student will remain confidential to the extent permitted by law. In the session, your student will be identified by their first name, and in notes they will be identified by first name or initials only. In written reports, the data collected by researchers will be reported in a manner that summarizes across students. We would like to record the focus group to ensure the accuracy of our notes. However, any recordings will not be shared beyond the evaluation team. We will not include student names or any other personally identifiable information about you or your student in written reports.
- **Risks:** The study presents minimal risk to your student. Researchers will not identify specific students in order to maintain confidentiality. Data will be stored in a secure area accessible only to the researchers during the study. While we will ask all focus group participants to not discuss any of the information after the session is finished, we cannot guarantee that all focus group participants will keep information private.
- **Benefits:** Study participation helps build knowledge in the state and nationally about how to support students to prepare for postsecondary education. Where appropriate, GEAR UP schools can use the information learned from the study to adjust their GEAR UP activities, events, and/or resources.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. If a student does not participate in the study, he or she will still receive the academic and non-academic supports offered at his or her school. Additionally, you may withdraw your student from the study at any time with no consequences. If you agree that

your student may participate in the focus group, your student will still have the chance to decide if they want to participate. Your student will be able to decline to answer any question that he or she does not wish to answer and withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Samantha Spinney, ICF, at (703) 272-6681. Please complete the form on the following page and turn in the completed form to [name of GEAR UP coordinator] by May 3. **Your student will not be able to participate in the focus group without your signed consent to do so.**

Sincerely,
Samantha Spinney

To indicate your consent to have your student participate in this West Virginia GEAR UP focus group in Spring 2019, please sign your name below in black/blue ink pen.

☐ YES, I will allow my student, _____,
[Please Print Full Student Name]
to participate in this student focus group.

☐ NO, I do not want my student, _____,
[Please Print Full Student Name]
to participate in this student focus group.

Your name (Please Print): _____

Your signature: _____ Date: _____

West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation

Student Focus Group Participation, Spring 2019

Dear Student,

Your school is participating in a statewide study to learn about preparing middle and high school students for college or other postsecondary education. The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission has contracted our team at ICF to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the West Virginia Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant program to better understand strategies that schools use to meet program goals. As part of this important research, you are being asked to participate in a focus group with 6–10 other students which should take approximately 45 minutes. A focus group involves you participating in a classroom-like discussion with other students led by questions from a member of the GEAR UP evaluation team. The focus group discussion will include questions about your opinions and experiences with GEAR UP. Please consider the details below prior to deciding to participate in the focus group:

- **Confidentiality:** Your answers during the focus group will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. The focus group discussion will be recorded either by audio files or written notes. The recordings of what you share will only be used by our research team. In written reports, the data collected by researchers will be reported in a manner that summarizes across students. We will not include student names or any other personally identifiable information about you in written reports. Please keep in mind that what individuals talk about during the focus group is private and you should not discuss it with anyone after the session is finished.
- **Risks:** The study presents 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 at any time you feel uncomfortable while answering questions or want to talk with someone after the discussion please let the focus group leader know or see your guidance counselor. While we will ask all focus group participants to not discuss any of the information after the session is finished, we cannot guarantee that focus group participants will keep information private. We will be working with your school to establish an appropriate time and place at the school for the focus group.
- **Benefits:** Study participation helps build knowledge in the state and nationally about how to support students to prepare for college or other postsecondary education. Where appropriate, GEAR UP schools can use the information learned to adjust GEAR UP activities, events, and/or resources. If it is appropriate to the time of day when the focus group is held, light snacks and drinks may be provided.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Your participation is voluntary meaning that you do not have to participate in this focus group if you do not want to. If you decide to participate then change your mind, you can 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 you at school or with GEAR UP. 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 or your parent/legal guardian can call Samantha Spinney, ICF, at (703) 272-6681. In order to participate in the student focus group, we must also have signed consent from your parent/legal guardian agreeing to your participation.



To indicate your consent to participate in this focus group, please sign your name below in black/blue ink pen and return the form to the focus group leader.

Sign your name here

Date

Clearly print your name here