West Virginia GEAR UP Year 6 Interim Evaluation Report

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Submitted by:
ICF External Evaluation Team

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I. Introduction

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WV HEPC) is providing services for the sixth year in its current 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.

Based on the most recent available data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2019a), West Virginia's per capita income was $25,479 in 2018, and median household income between 2014 and 2018 was $44,921. The poverty rate was 17.8% in 2017 and the state experienced a 1.7% decline in total employment between 2016 and 2017. 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 (2020) classified 16 counties in West Virginia as economically distressed for fiscal year 2020. Another 14 counties in the state were considered "at-risk." Of the 10 counties participating in the state's GEAR UP program, seven were classified as economically distressed and the other three were classified as at-risk.

West Virginia's educational attainment rates remain below the U.S. average, which has a significant economic impact for the future job and wage-earning prospects of West Virginians and the state's ability to attract and retain 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. Of West Virginians who are aged 25 years and older, 40.5% had only a high school degree (compared to 27.1% nationally), 18.6% had some college (compared to 20.6% nationally), 7.1% had an Associate's degree (compared to 8.4% nationally), and 20.3% had a Bachelor's degree or higher (compared to 31.5% nationally) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019b). Nationally, Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that, through 2028, jobs requiring a Bachelor's degree, Associate's degree, or postsecondary nondegree award will grow at more than double the rate of jobs requiring only a high school diploma (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Jobs requiring a Master's degree are projected to grow about four times as quickly as those requiring only a high school diploma.

The difficult economic circumstances of many West Virginians are only compounded by the opioid crisis. The National Center for Health Statistics reported in 2020 that West Virginia had the highest rate of death due to drug overdose in the nation (51.5 per 100,000 in 2018), which was also far ahead of the next most-affected state, Delaware (43.8 per 100,000 (National Center for Health Statistics, 2020). 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). In 2018, among all states, West Virginia had the highest rate of children and youth in foster care (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019), with 19 placements per 1,000 children.

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 in West Virginia represent 34.3% of all state participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Children's Defense Fund, 2020). 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.

These challenges underscore the importance of the WV GEAR UP grant, the important work of WV HEPC to promote 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 reached an all-time high of 91.4% in 2018-2019, and this rate was 12 percentage points higher than the 2011-12 rate of 79.3% (West Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

In addition, the total number of degrees and credentials awarded at the state's public postsecondary institutions increased by 21.5% from 2009 to 2018 (WV HEPC, 2019). Not only does GEAR UP aim to support these trends in the 10 counties participating in the grant, but WV HEPC, 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

WV HEPC 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 WV HEPC in determining the fidelity with which program activities were delivered and to inform WV HEPC 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 WV HEPC, 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 WV HEPC about how the GEAR UP program could continue to have an impact after the grant ends.

2. Purpose of this Report

The main purposes of this report are to (1) explore results from the first phase of the SAT impact study comparing the cohort students (the class of 2020) to the retrospective comparison (the class of 2019) students, also known as R-Comp students and (2) provide updates on the postsecondary experience of R-Comp students who received services in 2019-20 under a pilot initiative during their first year of college. WV GEAR UP employed transition staff in six postsecondary institutions in 2019-20 to serve R-Comp students so they could develop programming and assess its usefulness before the GEAR UP cohort begins college in fall 2020. This report includes highlights from a survey of these R-Comp students as well as interviews with transition staff about their work with first-year college students during this pilot year of services.

Cohort students receive direct, sustained support through GEAR UP from Grade 7 through the first year of college and represent the "treatment" group for the purpose of the grant evaluation. The R-Comp group (analyzed in the SAT impact study and as recipients of postsecondary services in Year 6) completed high school in 2019 and were surveyed multiple times throughout the grant. Table 1 depicts the survey schedule for these two groups, as well as the future comparison group (F-Comp or Class of 2021) for the first six years of the evaluation.

Table 1. Years 1–6 Survey Collection Schedule for R-Comp, Cohort, and F-Comp Student and Parent Groups

Group	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Class of 2019 (R-Comp)	Grade 08	N/C	Grade 10	N/C	Grade 12	Postsecondary (Students only)
Class of 2020 (Cohort)	Grade 07	Grade 08	Grade 09	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Class of 2021 (F-Comp)	N/C	N/C	Grade 08	N/C	Grade 10	N/C

N/C = Data not collected this year

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. In this report, Year 6 refers to the year of the WV GEAR UP grant in which the research took place; it does not mean the sixth year in which such research (such as a postsecondary student survey) was conducted.

1. Year 6 Postsecondary Student Survey

In October 2019, ICF collaborated with WV HEPC to develop a Postsecondary Student Survey and associated informed consent documents for the R-Comp student group. The Postsecondary Student Survey was a new instrument organized across four principal sections: (1) About You, (2) Current Educational Status, (3) College Experience, and (4) Education Future. Of the 33 items developed, seven demographic items were designed to gather background information about respondents and their families; five questions measured students' current educational and enrollment status, and the perceived support for enrollment; thirteen items were developed to understand the students' college experience, perceived postsecondary supports and challenges, communication patterns with counselors, participation in summer activities, study and job-related responsibilities, and items about lifestyle stresses such as hunger and anxiety. Finally, the survey concluded with six items designed to gather students' perceptions about remaining enrolled and paying for college. The survey instrument can be found in Appendix A.

2. Year 6 Transition and First-Year Program Staff Interview Protocol

To gather more information about services delivered on a pilot basis to R-Comp students, ICF conducted interviews in February 2020 with seven transition and first-year programs staff

working at six postsecondary institutions across the state. This work supplements previous qualitative efforts by providing insight on the fidelity of program implementation at each site. With WV HEPC input, ICF developed an interview protocol examining issues such as usefulness of transition/first-year programs staff training, ongoing support for staff, implementation of services, activities conducted by staff, and lessons learned from this pilot year that may impact services to the GEAR UP cohort expected to arrive at these institutions for the fall 2020 semester. The evaluation team conducted all interviews by phone, and all participants agreed to record the sessions. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix B.

3. Extant Data Provided by WV HEPC and WVDE for the SAT Impact Analysis

This section describes the data sources used for the SAT impact analysis. The final sample was based on students' roster file, demographic data, SAT scores, GEAR UP participation data, and grade 10 student survey data.

3.1 Student Roster File and Demographic Data

The student roster file included records of all study participants who were either treatment students (Grade 7 in 2014-15; Grade 12 in 2019-20) or R-Comp students (Grade 8 in 2014-2015; postsecondary in 2019). The data provided basic student information, such as school name, demographic data, grade-level information, and other student status information (free/reduced lunch recipient status, Individualized Education Program status). The demographic data served as the student list to which other types of data (described below) were merged.

3.2 SAT Score Data

SAT scores were the student outcomes of main interest and were used to contrast the two groups of students—cohort and R-comp. These two groups of students took the SAT when they were in Grade 11 (Year 5 for cohort students in 2018-19 and Year 4 for R-Comp students in 2017-18). The West Virginia Department of Education provided the evaluation team with students' SAT scores in Reading, Mathematics, and Science. The standardized composite scores were also derived based on Reading, Mathematics, and Science scores. Each of the three test scores per student was standardized based on a sample mean and a sample standard deviation, and the average of the three standardized scores was derived as the standardized composite scores (Z-scores).

3.3 GEAR UP Participation Data

The program participation data were collected by the program staff members when students were Grade 11 (Year 5 cohort students in 2018-19 and Year 4 R-Comp students in 2017-18). The database contained fifteen types of program participation time, expressed in hours: Counseling/Advising/Academic planning, College visit, Financial Aid Counseling/Advising, Family Counseling/Advising, Family Cultural Event, Job Site Visit, Mentoring, Student Family Events, Summer Program Enrichment, Student Workshops, Tutoring SAT/ACT, English/Language Arts Tutoring, Math Tutoring, Science Tutoring, and General Tutoring. The

sum of all program hours was derived as grand total hour. Appendix Table C1 describes these participation hour variables. The priority three participation hour variables included:

- Grand Total Hour (the sum of all program participation hours, based on 15 items)
- SAT/ACT tutoring (total online hours students spent on the TESTIVE website)
- All tutoring (all hours combined based on five tutor items: Tutoring SAT/ACT, English/Language Arts Tutoring, Math Tutoring, Science Tutoring, and General Tutoring)

SAT/ACT tutoring and all tutoring are related such that SAT/ACT time was included in the all tutoring variable. For ease of analysis and interpretation, the program hour values were coded into categorical groups with an interval of five hours.

3.4 Grade 10 Student Survey Data

The student survey was administered when study participant students were 10th graders. The collected survey data provided information on students' college going-related orientation and readiness. The following are the four main scales of interest.

- Awareness
- Confidence
- College-going self-efficacy
- College-going outcomes-expectations

The details of survey items were listed in Appendix C, Table C2. The awareness scale is based on students' awareness of postsecondary education topics, such as a 529 college savings plan, Federal Pell grants, and scholarships. The confidence scale used survey items related to students' self-confidence in one's ability in academic subjects and study skills. The college-going self-efficacy scale is based on a student's sense of self-efficacy and the survey items included questions such as students' sense of being able to pay for college and getting accepted to a college. The college-going outcomes-expectations scale is about whether students felt sure about being able to perform college-related tasks and activities, such as paying for college, getting good grades, and getting support from one's family to finish college.

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 Postsecondary Student Survey

For the first time in the grant, postsecondary surveys were administered to students who completed high school in the 2018-19 school year in both online and paper/pencil formats. A total of 478 R-Comp students who were enrolled at each of the six partner institutions received

a link to the online survey and/or a paper survey from the GEAR UP transition coordinator/staff member. The overall response rate of those at the six partner institutions was 33%. Those not enrolled at one of the six partner institutions received the survey link via a Signal Vine text message sent by WV HEPC; 44 responses were received via this method.

1.2 Transition and First Year Program Staff Interviews

The evaluation team worked with WV GEAR UP staff to identify transition and first-year programs staff for the February 2020 interviews. WV GEAR UP provided email contact information for all seven staff members working at the six target postsecondary institutions. The evaluation team then conducted outreach to schedule and complete interviews in late February. All mentors received the same set of questions regardless of postsecondary institution, with WV HEPC providing input for this interview protocol. ICF's Institutional Review Board also approved this interview instrument. All WV GEAR UP transition staff consented to the recording of interviews, and the evaluation team analyzed transcripts to identify trends. This interim report focuses on findings from these interviews.

1.3 Data Preparation of the SAT Impact Analysis

For constructing the analysis sample for the SAT impact analysis, ICF merged four data sources mentioned earlier: Roster file, Student Survey Data, SAT Data, and Program participation data. Table 2 summarizes the number of cases available in each of the data sources. The merge success rates are reported in percentages indicating what percentages of students included in the original roster received the valid survey, SAT, and program participation date. Not all students in the original roster file had data from these data sources as some students did not respond to surveys, did not take SAT, or might have moved out of the schools. The merge rates of these data were reasonably high (71%-90%). The cohort's data-merge success rates were 75%, 87%, and 90% for, survey, SAT, and program participation data, respectively. The R-Comp's data merge success rates were 73% and 91% for, respectively, the survey and SAT. Program participation data were only available from the treatment students. The evaluation team determined that these rates were reasonable.

Table 2. Number of Cases in Roster File, SAT Dataset, Survey Dataset, and the Combined Dataset

Group	Roster File	Survey Data	SAT Data	Program Participation Data
Cohort (Class of 2020	2,552	1,905 (75%)	2,218 (87%)	2,303 (90%)
R-Comp (Class of 2019)	2,498	1,775 (73%)	2,263 (91%)	n/a
Classes of 2019 and 2020 combined	5,050	3,680 (73%)	4,481 (89%)	n/a

Data notes: Percentages in the parentheses indicate the percentage of data merge success.

2. Analytic Approach

2.1 Postsecondary Student Survey

The evaluation team used descriptive and comparative statistical analyses to examine trends in survey outcomes. Mean values for continuous outcomes and the frequency of responses for categorical outcomes were calculated to assess results. For open-ended survey items, we conducted thematic analysis. During thematic analysis, we reviewed and coded participants' responses according to broad themes, broke those themes into subthemes, and analyzed and assessed the interrelationships among themes. Results are described in narrative form and supported by illustrative quotes.

2.2 Transition Staff Interviews

After conducting interviews with the seven transition and first-year programs staff, the evaluation team analyzed transcripts of these recordings and coded results under these key thematic areas:

- **Approach to the Job**, including staff members' understanding of their roles and responsibilities
- **Student Buy-In**, examining the extent to which R-Comp students participated in GEAR UP during their first year of postsecondary education
- **GEAR UP Activities**, with a primary focus on the design and success of student workshops, tutoring services, individual success plans, and family outreach
- **Communication**, including communication with students, other transition and first-year staff, and WV HEPC
- **Lessons Learned**, such as strategies or approaches from this year's work that will help staff members prepare for next year
- **Impact**, including staff perceptions of success on the job
- **Recommendations** for the future

By aggregating comments into these areas, the evaluation team can provide a detailed look at implementation of the program and explore staff perceptions of the initiative during this pilot period.

2.3 SAT Impact Analysis

The main goal of this section is to assess the GEAR UP program's impact on students' 11th grade SAT scores and conduct other exploratory analyses to derive insights on how the GEAR UP program helps students. As mentioned earlier, ICF used the cohort comparison method to evaluate the program impact. With an assumption that the adjacent cohorts were reasonably similar in student characteristics, the SAT score differences can be attributed to the difference in GEAR UP services. The study is not a randomized controlled trial; it is a quasi-experimental study. The pretest academic achievement data were not available to test the baseline equivalence of the two cohorts. Based on students' gender, socioeconomic status, and their parents' education level, the baseline equivalence of the two cohorts was examined and established with details to be presented later.

Program Impact Analysis

The main goal of analysis was to detect differences in student outcomes (SAT scores) between the cohort and R-Comp students. The general expectation predicts that cohort students would show a higher level of SAT scores than R-Comp students. As mentioned, the data from the two adjacent cohorts will allow us to address the main program impact questions. The following summarizes the main impact evaluation question (EQ):

- EQ1: Is the cohort's Grade 11 average SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) higher than the R-Comp group?

Subgroup Impact Analyses

The following set of exploratory questions examined how the program impact, as defined above, is associated with student characteristics. This set of questions explored the possibility that the program is particularly effective for subgroups defined by gender, parents' education, socioeconomic levels (defined by free/reduced lunch), and schools.

- EQ2: How does the program impact on students' SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by gender?
- EQ3: How does the program impact on students' SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by parents' education level?
- EQ4: How does the program impact on students' SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by students' socioeconomic status (defined by free/reduced lunch status)?
- EQ5: How does the program impact on students' SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by schools?

SAT and Program Participation Hours Analysis

The evaluation team also explored the question of whether students' program participation hours were associated with students' SAT outcomes. Cohort students were classified into seven groups based on the hours of program participation and, for each group, the average SAT scores (Reading, Mathematics, Science) were derived for comparison.

- EQ6: How do the Grade 11 SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by the subgroup defined by Grade 11 program hours?

The general expectation is that Grade 11 SAT scores are positively correlated with the Grade 11 program participation hours. Although the data were cross-sectional (both data sources were collected when students were Grade 11), a positive correlation will justify a future investigation regarding the program's dosage impact on students.

Student Profile Analysis

The evaluation team also conducted the student profile analysis based on levels of SAT scores. The purpose of this analysis was to understand how demographics and students' Grade 10 survey outcomes were related to students' Grade 11 SAT scores and how this relationship may be mediated by the program intervention. The analyses conducted were exploratory (not confirmatory) and correlational (not causal). If the program helps students with disadvantaged backgrounds academically, students' SAT level may not depend heavily on student characteristics within the cohort. Students were classified into subgroups based on their level of SAT composite scores (Reading, Mathematics, and Science combined) and the profile of

students was analyzed by subgroup. The following evaluation questions help describe the profile of Level 1 (low achievers), Level 2, Level 3, and Level 4 (high achievers) in terms of student characteristics.

- EQ7: How do student groups defined by Grade 11 SAT levels vary by gender composition within the whole sample, the cohort, and R-Comp?
- EQ8: How do student groups defined by Grade 11 SAT levels vary by parents' education level within the whole sample, the cohort, and R-Comp?
- EQ9: How does the program impact on students' SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by socioeconomic levels (defined by free/reduced lunch status)?
- EQ10: How do student groups defined by Grade 11 SAT levels vary by students' Grade 10 college-related survey outcomes within the whole sample, the cohort, and R-Comp?

Analysis Models

Table 3 describes the analysis models used for addressing the proposed evaluation questions.

The impact analysis, addressing the main analysis (EQ1), compared the average SAT scores of the cohort students and that of R-Comp students. The SAT score group differences in Reading, Math, and Science scores were derived as the program impact estimate. If the cohort showed higher average SAT scores than R-Comp, the impact estimate was positive, and it supported the program expectation that the program affected students' outcome. To evaluate the program impact, the evaluation team conducted a T-test and derived a standardized program effect (Hedge's d). Following the convention of What Works Clearinghouse (2020), ICF considers a standardized effect size greater than 0.25 "substantively important."

The subgroup impact analysis, addressing EQ2 to EQ5, used the same approach of comparing the group SAT score means; however, the comparison was done within samples defined by student characteristics. EQ2, for example, asked whether the size of program impact varied by gender. The analysis team assessed the SAT group mean difference within the male student sample and within the female sample. This addressed the question of whether the program was effective equally for both male and female students. The same analytical framework was used for EQ3 (parents' education level) and EQ4 (students' socioeconomic status). This section also examined the between-school SAT score differences (EQ5). As mentioned, these are exploratory analyses whose findings are meant to help formulate future research questions.

The SAT and program participation hours analysis examines the correlation between Grade 11 program participation and Grade 11 SAT scores. The values of program hour variables were not normally distributed and a Pearson correlation analysis, which expects two variables to be normally distributed, would not be appropriate. For simplicity of interpretation, the hour variable was coded into subgroups based on the hour with a five-hour interval (e.g., students with 0 hours of participation; students 1-to-5 hours of participation) and the average SAT scores were derived per subgroup. Again, this analysis is an exploratory one and the expectation is that the time and SAT scores should be positively correlated.

The profile analysis described the profile of students who varied by the SAT score levels. Our interest was the student profile in terms of gender, socioeconomic level (free/reduced lunch status), parents' education level, and four college-going-related scales (awareness, confidence, college-going self-efficacy, and college-going outcomes-expectations; see Appendix C Table C2

for details of the scales). The four subgroups of students were created based on percentile thresholds of SAT composite scores (Reading, Math, and Science combined):

- Level 1 group (low achievers): Students with an SAT composite score in the 0% to 24.9% percentile scores
- Level 2 group: Students with an SAT composite score in the 25% to 49.9 percentile scores
- Level 3 group: Students with an SAT composite score in the 50% to 74.9% percentile scores
- Level 4 group (high achievers): Students with an SAT composite score in the 75% to 100% percentile scores

Table 3. Summary of Evaluation Questions and Analysis Approaches

Evaluation Question	Analytical Approach
Program Impact Analysis	
EQ1: Is the cohort's 11th grade average SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) higher than the R-Comp group?	The comparison of group means: the average SAT scores of the cohort and R-Comp students were compared.
Subgroup Program Impact Analysis	
EQ2: How does the program impact on students' SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by gender?	The comparison of group means: the sample was split into the male student sample and female student sample and within each sub-sample, the average SAT scores of the cohort and R-Comp students were compared.
EQ3: How does the program impact on students' SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by parents' education level?	The comparison of group means: the sample was split into sub-samples defined by parents' education level (students with at least one parent with a 4-year college degree vs. the rest of students) and within each sub-sample the average SAT scores of the cohort and R-Comp students were compared.
EQ4: How does the program impact on students' SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by socioeconomic levels (defined by free/reduced lunch status)?	The comparison of group means: the sample was split into sub-samples defined by students' socioeconomic level (defined by individual-level free/reduced lunch status) and within each sub-sample the average SAT scores of the cohort and R-Comp students were compared.
EQ5: How does the program impact on students' SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by school?	The comparison of group means: the sample was split into sub-samples defined by schools and with each sub-sample, the average SAT scores of the cohort and R-Comp students were compared.
SAT and Program Participation Hours Analysis	
EQ6: How do the 11th grade SAT scores (Reading, Math, and Science) vary by the subgroup defined by 11th grade program hours?	The comparison of average SAT scores by subgroups defined by program participation hours (as a reference, the average SAT score of the R-Comp students was also compared against the subgroups)
Profile Analysis	

EQ7: How do student groups defined by 11th grade SAT levels vary by gender?	The comparison of gender composition (%) by SAT levels based on the whole sample, the cohort sample, and the R-Comp sample
EQ8: How do student groups defined by 11th grade SAT levels vary by parents' education level	The comparison of parents' education (% parents graduated college) by SAT levels based on the whole sample, the cohort sample, and the R-Comp sample
EQ9: How do student groups defined by 11th grade SAT levels vary by socioeconomic status?	The comparison of socioeconomic status (% free/reduced lunch status recipient) by SAT levels based on the whole sample, the cohort sample, and the R-Comp sample
EQ10: How do student groups defined by 11th grade SAT levels vary by students' 10th grade college-related survey outcomes?	The comparison of students' college-going-related variables (awareness, college-going outcomes-expectations, college-going self-efficacy, confidence) by SAT levels based on the whole sample, the cohort sample, and the R-Comp sample

Baseline Equivalence Analysis

As mentioned, the two cohorts are adjacent ones and thus the evaluation team assumes that no substantial composition change of students occurred between the two groups. To test this empirically, at least with available variables, the baseline equivalence analysis was conducted. Considering What Works Clearinghouse guidelines, the most appropriate pretest variable would be students' academic achievement scores collected before the intervention started when students were 7th graders. These data were not available. The two cohorts were instead compared in terms of gender (coded 1 if male, 0 if female), free/reduced lunch status (coded 1 if students receive lunch for free or a reduced price; otherwise coded 0), and parents' college education level (coded 1 if at least one parent graduated college; otherwise coded 0). Table 4 shows that the two cohorts were equivalent in these student characteristics. The standardized effect sizes (gender 0.02, lunch status 0.04, parent education 0.02) were all smaller than the What Works Clearinghouse threshold of 0.05 and thus the two cohorts are considered equivalent at least on these available and observable pretest variables.

Table 4. Baseline Equivalence of Two Student Cohorts Based on Gender, Socioeconomic Status, and Parents' Education Level

	Cohort			R-Comp			Group Mean Difference	
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	Raw	Standardized
Gender (Male=1; Female=0)	2,552	0.52	0.50	2,498	0.51	0.50	0.01	0.02
Free/Reduced Lunch Status	2,552	0.47	0.50	2,498	0.45	0.50	0.02	0.04
At least one parent graduated college	1,663	0.34	0.47	1,544	0.33	0.47	0.01	0.02

Note: Standardized group mean differences were all smaller than the What Works Clearinghouse threshold of 0.05 and thus the baseline equivalence was established.

IV. Results

1. Postsecondary Student Survey Outcomes

This section provides a variety of analyses from the Year 6 survey of the R-Comp group during their first year after high school. A total of 204 responses was received from the postsecondary survey; responses included those who reported that they were enrolled at one of the six WV GEAR UP partner institutions, those enrolled at another higher education institution, and those who reported they were not enrolled in postsecondary education. Results for all analyses reported in this section are based on those who responded to the question.

1.1 Characteristics of Respondents

As in previous years, the survey included questions prompting respondents to report on their demographics, including race, ethnicity, gender, language, and highest level of education of parents/guardians. The Year 6 R-Comp respondents continued to be mostly White (94%), non-Hispanic (97%), and speak English (100%). Almost three-quarters of respondents (72%) reported that they were female, compared to 27% who selected male and 1% who selected other. Regarding parental education level, nearly all respondents identified the highest level of education among their parents/guardians. Only 1% of respondents selected *I don't know*. Among those who did know, 35% of respondents reported that the highest level of education of their parents/guardians was at least a two-year college degree.

1.2 Findings

Current Educational Status

Eighty-nine percent of the total respondents indicated that they were enrolled in a college/university at the time they participated in the survey. Among those currently enrolled, 88% enrolled at an institution that partnered with WV HEPC to provide WV GEAR UP postsecondary services. Table 5 provides an overview the institutions selected by respondents.

Table 5. Respondent Enrollment Status

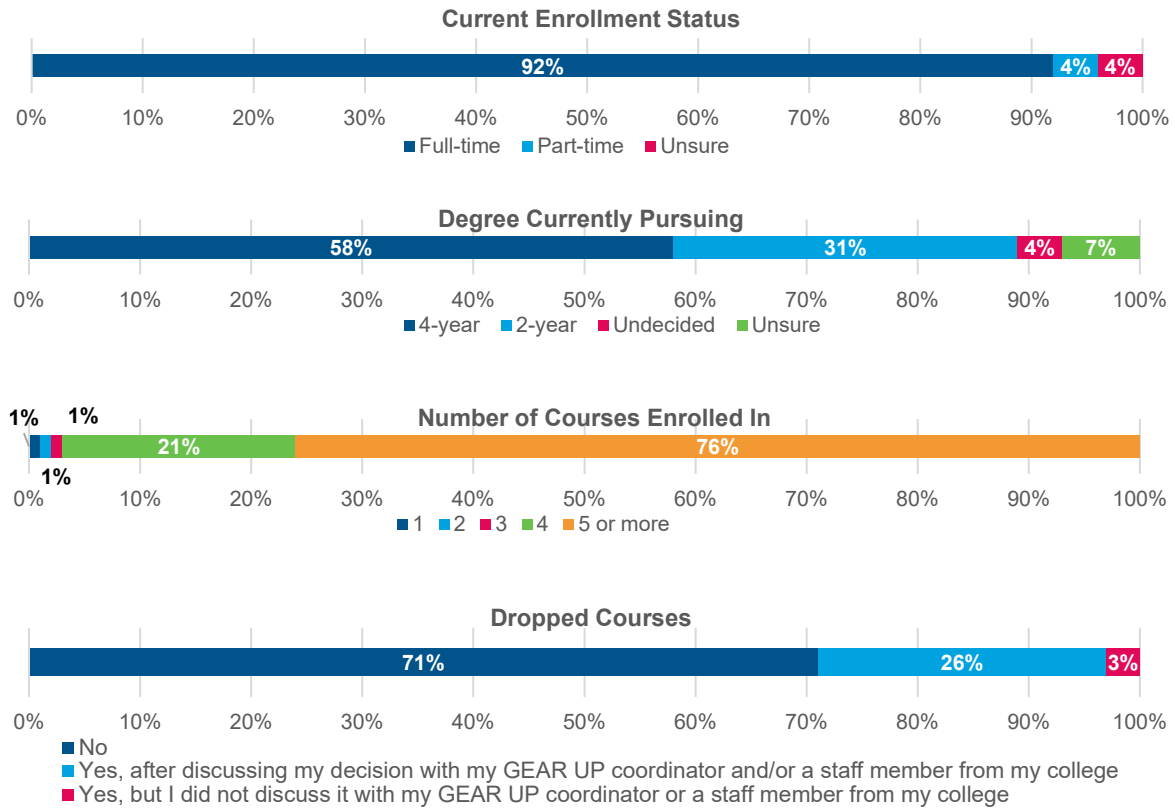
Enrollment Status	
Enrolled in college/university	**89%**
Bluefield State College	8%
Concord University	13%
Marshall University	12%
Southern West Virginia Community & Technical College	41%
West Virginia University	10%
West Virginia University Institute of Technology	4%
Other Institution of Higher Education	12%
Not enrolled in postsecondary education	**11%**

Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey
NOTE: Respondents had the option to also indicate that they joined the military after graduating high school. However, no respondents selected this option.

Among all student respondents enrolled in any college/university, most reported that they enrolled full-time (92%), in five or more classes (76%), and planned to attain a four-year degree,

as seen in Figure 1. Seventy-one percent of respondents also indicated they have not dropped any courses since starting postsecondary education. Of those 29% who did indicate they had dropped a course, nearly ninety percent reported speaking to a GEAR UP counselor or staff member at their college prior to doing so.

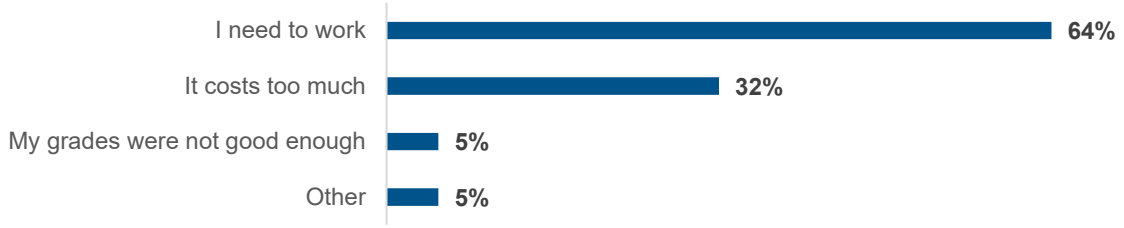
Figure 1. Current Status of Respondents Enrolled in a College/University



Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

As seen in Figure 2, among the reasons why respondents did not enroll in a college/university, the most frequently selected option was *I need to work* (64%).

Figure 2. Reasons Respondents Did Not Enroll in Postsecondary Education

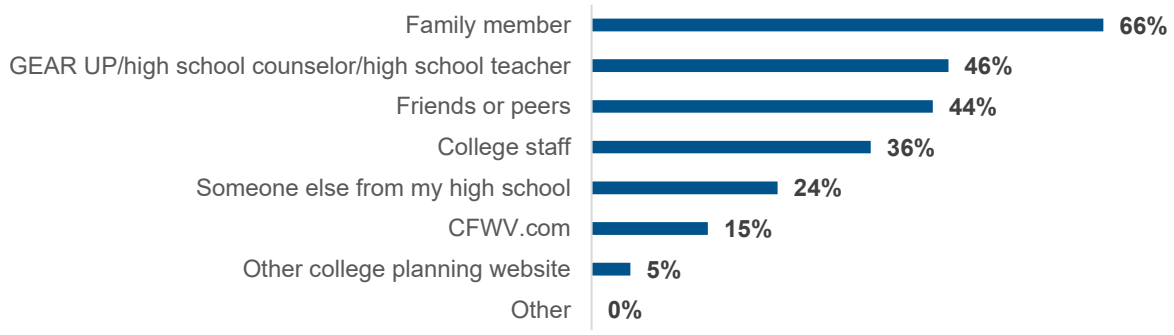


Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

The survey also included items that helped to influence their college choice, including their GEAR UP/high school counselor/high school teacher, someone else from their high school, college staff, family member, friends of peers, CFWV.com, and other college planning websites.

As noted in Figure 3, the most frequently selected item was family members (66%) followed by their GEAR UP/high counselor or high school teacher (46%). These findings suggest the importance of continuing to educate and inform families and high school staff about postsecondary education options and benefits.

Figure 3. Items That Helped Respondents Determine Which College to Enroll In

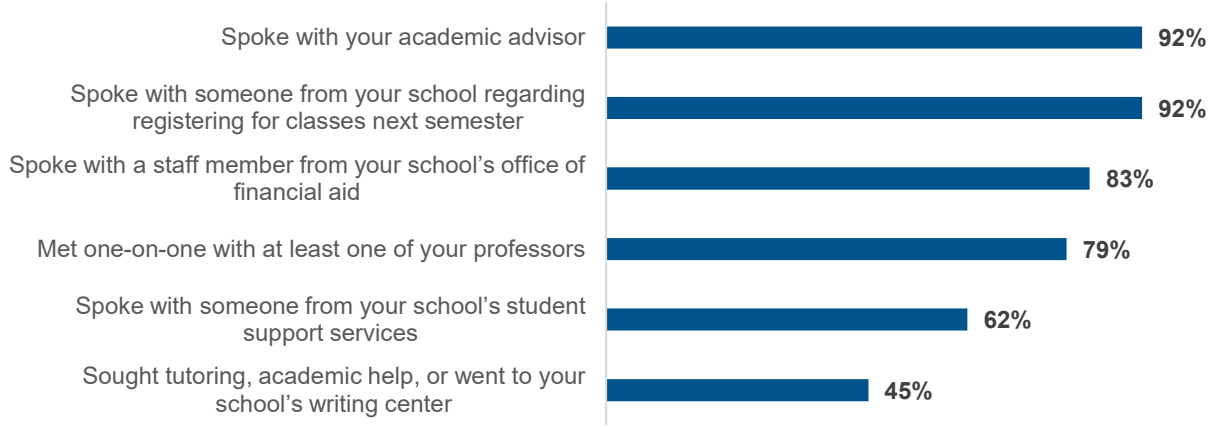


Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

College Experience

Students enrolled at a college/university provided feedback about their college experience so far. In the summer before postsecondary enrollment, most respondents reported that they attended a college orientation (91%), discussed their degree and/or major with someone from their institution (82%), and spoke with the transition coordinator/college counselor; 38% reported that they received career counseling. Respondents also indicated activities they participated in since they began college. Among the activities respondents reported they did most often were *spoke with an academic advisor and spoke with someone from your school about classes next semester* (92%), *spoke with a staff member from your school's office of financial aid* (83%), *met one-on-one with at least on your professors* (79%).

Figure 4. Activities Participated in Summer 2019

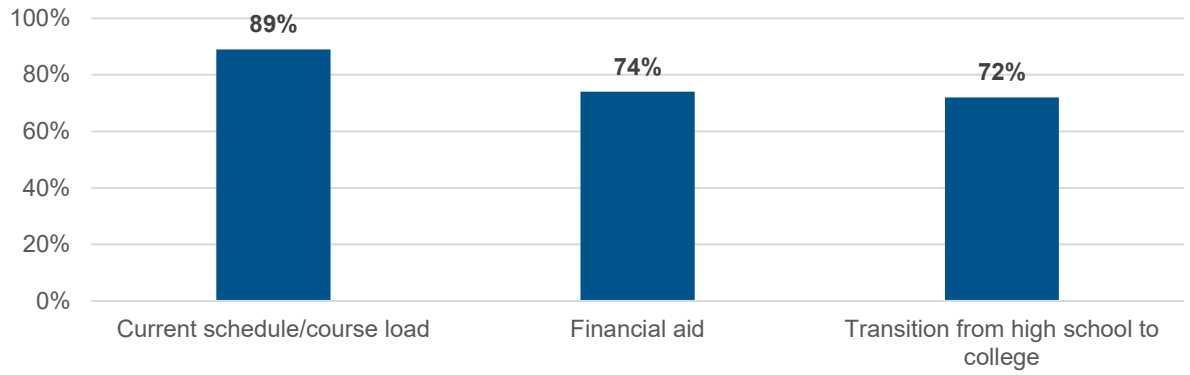


Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey.

Respondents enrolled in a college/university also indicated if they spoke with their transition coordinator/college counselor about current schedule/course load, financial aid, and the transition from high school to college; respondents enrolled at the six GEAR UP partner

institutions were asked also if they spoke with their GEAR UP coordinator regarding the same topics. Most often respondents reported that they spoke with their transition coordinator/college counselor and/or their GEAR UP coordinator about their current schedule/course load (89%); 74% and 72% reported that they spoke their transition coordinator/college counselor and/or their GEAR UP coordinator about financial aid and the transition from high school to college, respectively.

Figure 5. Topics Discussed with Transition Coordinator/ College Counselor and/or GEAR UP Coordinator



Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

The frequency in which respondents communicate with their transition coordinator/college counselor, academic advisor, and student support services staff as well as the ways students received postsecondary counseling since high school were also reported on by respondents. Respondents were most likely to indicate that they spoke with their academic advisor at least once a month (49%); 37% reported that they spoke with their transition coordinator/college counselors once a month while 35% reported the same about their institution's student support services staff.[1] Should be noted that the transition coordinators/college counselors also serve as academic advisors at some institutions.

Table 6. Frequency Respondents Spoke to Transition Coordinator/College Counselor, Academic Advisor, and or Student Support Services Staff

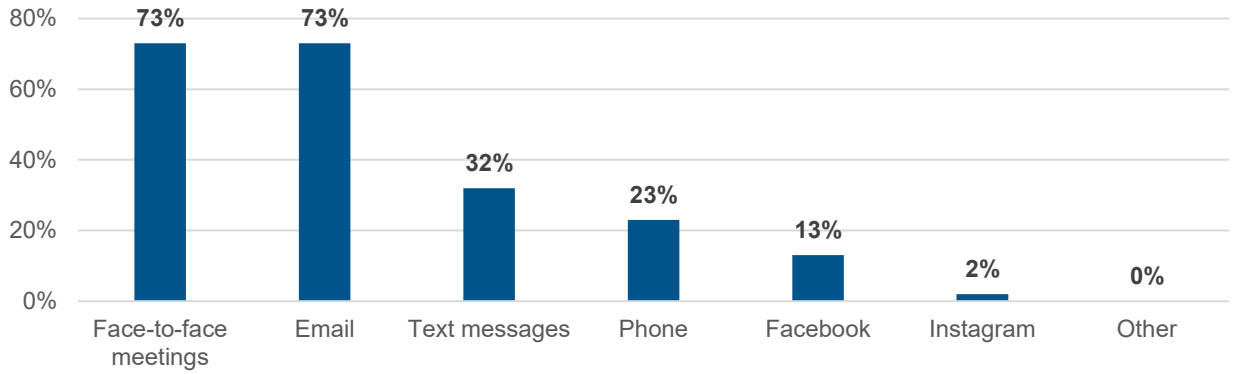
	Transition Coordinator/ College Counselor	Academic Advisor	Student Support Services Staff
Never; I'm not sure who this is.	22%	5%	16%
Never; I know who this person is, but I do not need to speak to them.	12%	6%	19%
Less than once a month	29%	41%	30%
1–2 times a month	18%	27%	16%
3–4 times or more a month	8%	11%	11%
At least once a week	11%	11%	8%

Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

[1] Student Support Services at the six GEAR UP partner institutions are funded through Federal TRIO grants and students must be eligible to receive services.

As seen in Figure 6, most respondents indicated that the format of postsecondary counseling they received from people at their college was face-to-face counseling (73%) and email messaging (73%).

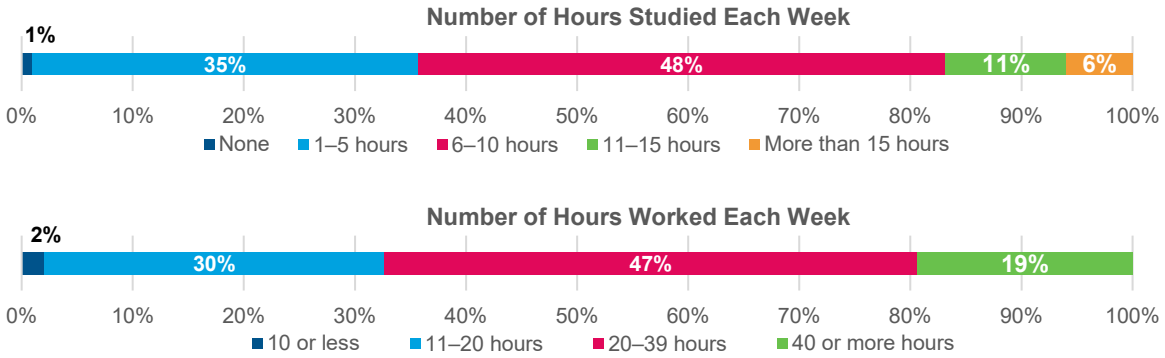
Figure 6. Format of Postsecondary Counseling



Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

Most respondents indicated, as shown in Figure 7, that they studied between one and ten hours each week (83%). Of the 37% of respondents who said they have a job, the most frequently selected range of hours that they worked each week was 20-39 hours. Among those who reported that they worked at least twenty hours each week were 67% of those were enrolled part-time.

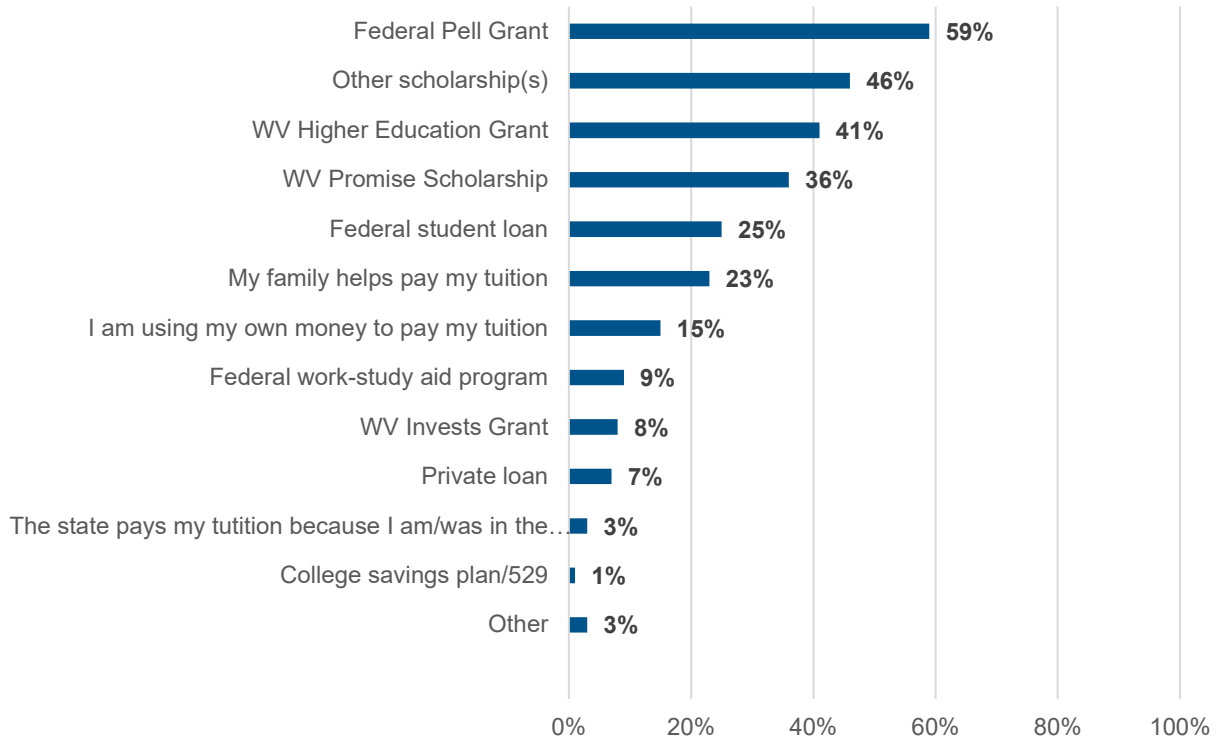
Figure 7. Number of Hours Studied and/or Worked Each Week



Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

Respondents relied on a variety of resources to help cover the cost of their postsecondary education, including a Federal Pell Grant (59%), scholarships (46%), and the WV Higher Education Grant (41%). Figure 8 provides a further breakdown of the financial resources reported.

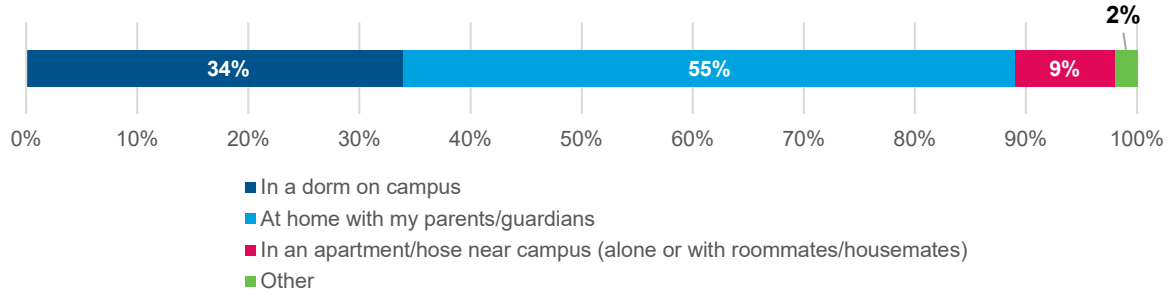
Figure 8. Financial Aid Used to Pay for College



Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

More than half of students indicated that they lived at home while attending college (55%). Further, 34% reported they lived in a dorm, 9% reported an apartment/house, and 2% reported another location.

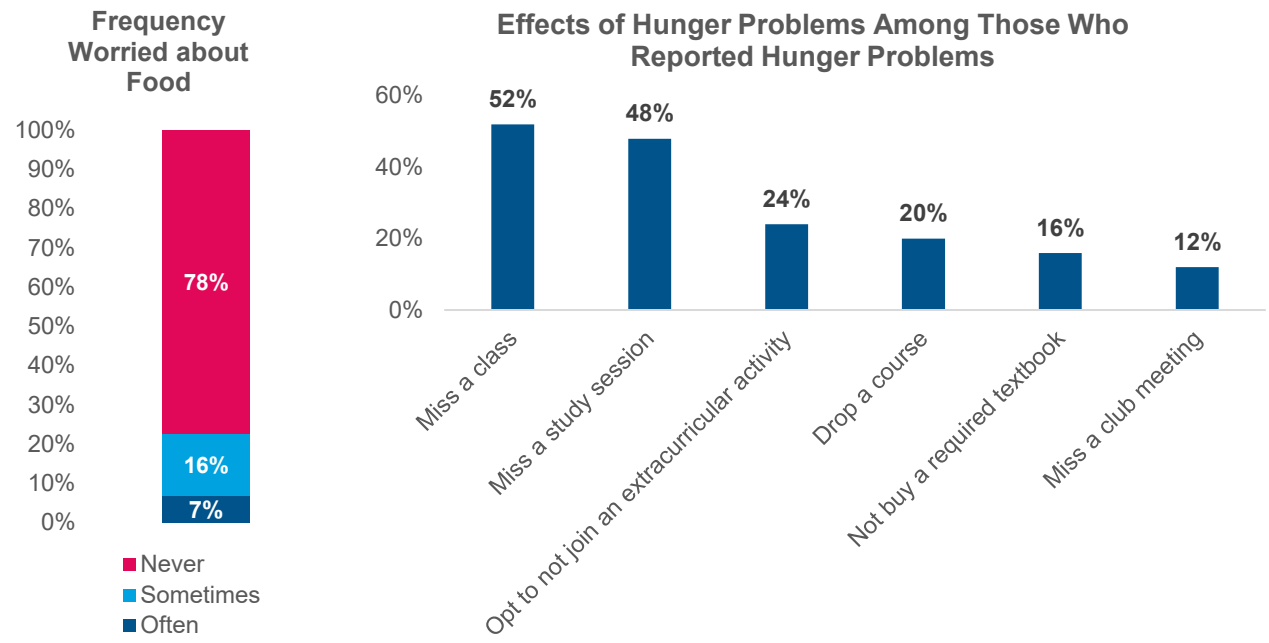
Figure 9. Location Respondents Enrolled in Postsecondary Education Live



Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

Almost one-quarter (23%) of those in college reported that they were often or sometimes worried whether their food or meal plan would run out before they would have money to buy more. Further, 14% of respondents enrolled in a college/university indicated hunger problems affected them in at least one way—and more than half of these respondents said it caused them to miss a class.

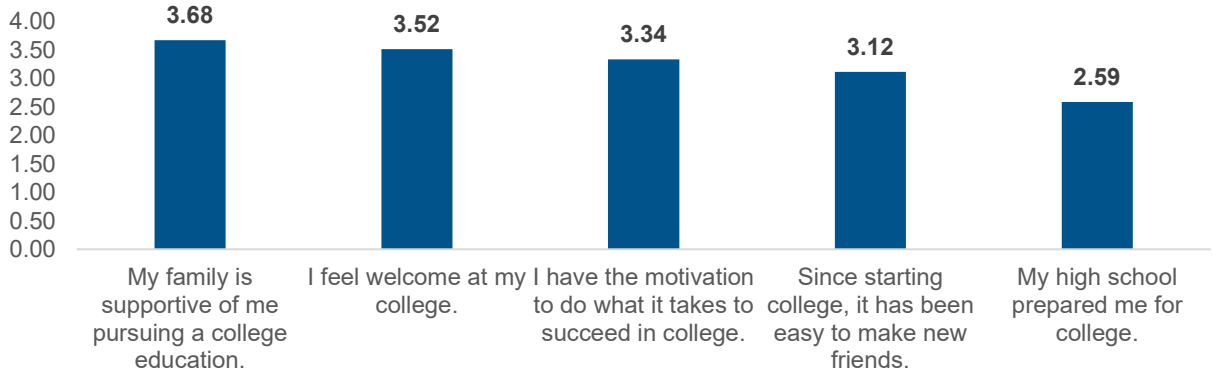
Figure 10. Self-Reported Food Insecurity and Effects



Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

Survey respondents indicated their level of agreement to five statements related to their experience beginning college. The items used a four-point scale: 1=*strongly disagree,* 2=*disagree,* 3=*agree, and* 4=*strongly agree*. The average level of agreement to each item was then calculated, as shown in Figure 11. The highest mean was for the statement *My family is supportive of me pursuing a college education* (3.68) while the lowest was *My high school prepared me for college* (2.59).

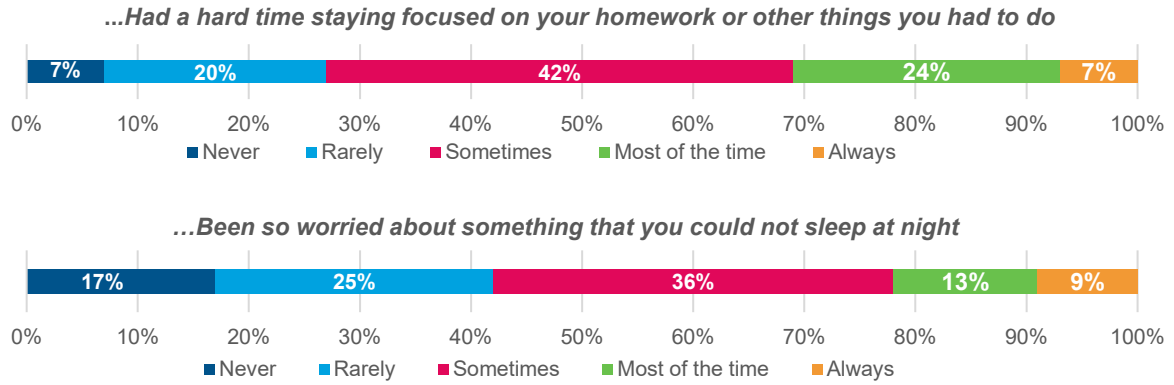
Figure 11. College-Going Experience



Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

Regarding their experience in the past twelve months, respondents were then asked to indicate the frequency in which they had a hard time staying focused and been so worried that they were unable to sleep at night. Almost one-third selected *always* or *most of the time* had a hard time staying focused on their homework or other things they had to do (31%). Fewer selected the same to indicate how often they were so worried about something that they could not sleep at night (22%).

Figure 12. Frequency Respondents Had a Hard Time Focusing on Homework or Been Worried

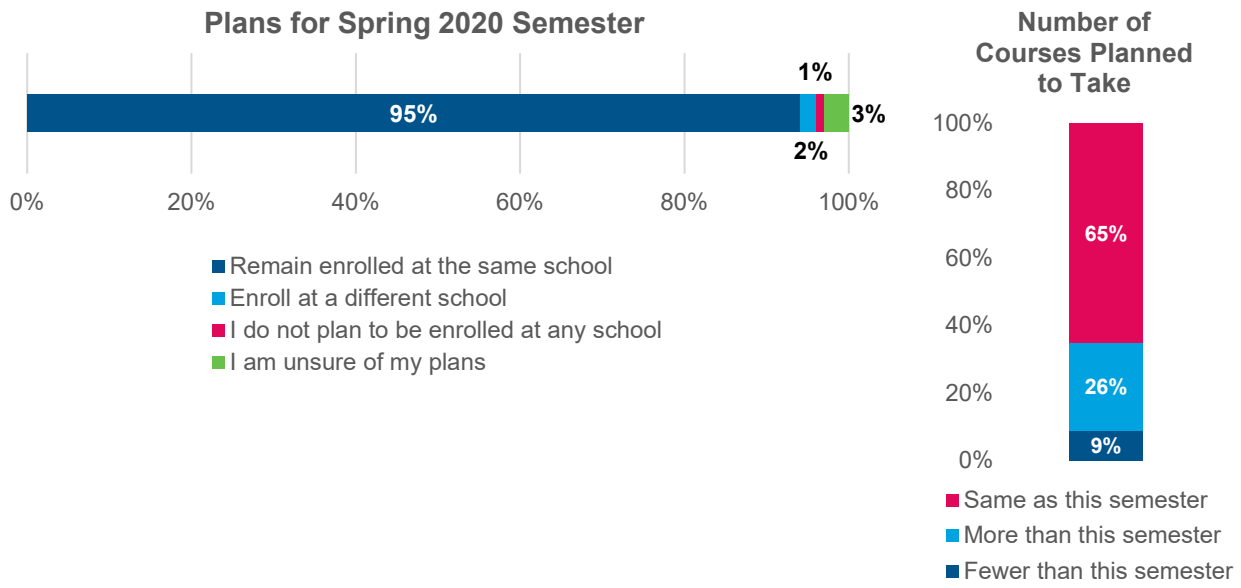


Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey.

Education Future

Nearly all respondents indicated that they planned to remain enrolled at the same school in the spring 2020 semester (95%); most also indicated that they also planned to enroll in the same number of courses that they were enrolled in during the previous semester (65%). The respondent who indicated that they do not plan to enroll in any school in the spring 2020 semester reported that they did not plan to do so because they could not afford to pay for the semester.

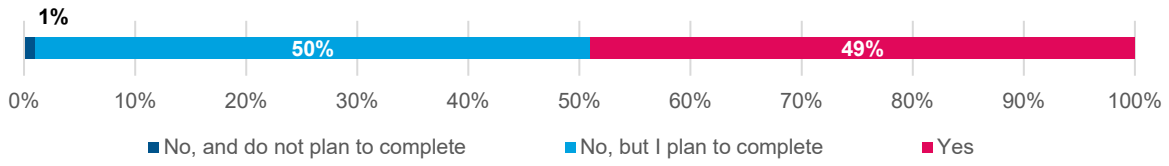
Figure 13. Plans for Spring 2020 Semester



Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey.

Nearly every respondent currently enrolled at a college/university indicated that they had already completed their FAFSA or planned to do so (99%).

Figure 14. Self-Reported FAFSA Completion



Source: Year 6 WV GEAR UP Postsecondary Survey

Assistance and Resources to Help Enhance Experience

The final survey question called for all respondents to reflect on the kind of assistance/resources that could have helped them have a better experience during the semester. The majority of those who responded reported that they did not have any suggestions, or they had a positive experience. Among the resources that respondents reported that they would like to have had were support with financial aid, support from professors and/or academic advisors, and support as they navigated the transition from high school to postsecondary education. Some representative comments of these findings are below.

> *More communication from a counselor regarding getting involved. Although, the college hosts informational meetings for clubs it is still hard to get involved and make those connections. With a counselor being put on your case you are more likely to be pushed to do things. With the type of person I am that is exactly what I need.*
>
> *More help with applying to the FAFSA*
>
> *How to use Blackboard better*
>
> *…Help with gas to travel to and from school*
>
> *To talk with somebody about the extra stuff that could help me with my college experience*

2. Transition Staff Interview Findings

2.1 Background

ICF conducted interviews with seven WV GEAR UP transition coordinators/staff in February 2020 to gain their perceptions on implementation of a pilot program of services to first-year college students during the 2019-20 school year. This section of the report provides a high-level overview of findings with a focus on implementation, student buy-in, student activities, and lessons learned for next year. It includes topics such as program staff roles and responsibilities, workshops, one-to-one meetings with students, academic assistance to students, and perceptions of their success to date.

This data collection was conducted as part of ICF's Year 6 evaluation of WV GEAR UP. It is the first time ICF has collected data from staff who began work in summer or fall 2019. For 2019-20, their primary goal was to serve GEAR UP R-Comp students who had only received one year of just-in-time GEAR UP assistance as priority students, graduated from program high schools in 2019, and enrolled in postsecondary education the following fall. WV GEAR UP considers the 2019-20 period as a pilot year in serving first-year college students in preparation for the arrival of WV GEAR UP cohort students in fall 2020. This work reflects ICF's annual goal to provide

qualitative data on the operation of GEAR UP and findings that can be used to enhance services in the future.

For the 2019-20 academic year, WV GEAR UP hired transition coordinators/staff at six postsecondary institutions expected to enroll a significant number of GEAR UP students:

- Bluefield State College
- Concord University
- Marshall University
- Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College—main campus and Williamson Campus
- West Virginia University
- West Virginia University Institute of Technology

Prior to this data collection, ICF developed an interview protocol with input from WV HEPC. This protocol was reviewed and approved by ICF's Institutional Research Board. All interviews were conducted by phone, with each lasting 40 to 60 minutes. ICF recorded calls, transcribed the recordings, and then coded the transcripts according to major areas of implementation. ICF conducted these interviews prior to the restrictions and policy changes made by many colleges and universities in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Major findings are organized into the following categories: overview and approach to the job, student buy-in, GEAR UP activities conducted, communication, lessons learned, and program impact. Each of these categories of findings is described in more detail in this section.

2.2 Findings

Approach to the Job

All program staff began work during the summer or fall of 2019. Three started in June or July; two others began in August and the remainder started after the launch of the academic year. Overall, most had some prior experience in student services or advising in a postsecondary education setting. Typical pre-GEAR UP employment included work as an academic success coach, advisor on another Federal grant, and tutoring program manager.

All recalled that they received some training from WV HEPC and that it helped them in learning their roles and responsibilities. They also cited practical advantages from the training such as learning allowable and non-allowable costs. Most did not have any suggestions to improve training, although one mentioned it would be helpful to know more about GEAR UP activities that took place during high school. All praised the work of WV HEPC to stay in touch with staff via email and individual or group phone calls during the academic year.

For the spring 2020 semester, most transition coordinators/staff have caseloads of 35–55 students after losing some students from fall 2019. They reported that students left for a variety of reasons, including jobs, academic probation, medical reasons, and a decision to switch programs or transfer to another college or university. One has a spring 2019 caseload of 90 students. Another staff member from a large university has 118 students.

Staff described their role as advisors whose primary goal was to promote student adjustment to and success at college. They identified one key metric of success as having GEAR UP students

post a retention rate that is above the average rate at the individual institution. To attain that objective, students should be on track to earn 15 credits per semester and 30 credits during their freshman year. In supporting this goal, staff schedule one-to-one meetings with students as well as group workshops. Another requirement is for students to complete an Individual Success Plan (ISP) for their college careers. Staff said they monitor credits earned, midterm grades, and the number of students with grade point averages of 2.0 or above. They also maintain individual student records regarding participation in one-to-one meetings, attendance at group workshops, and overall hours of participation.

Student Buy-In

Many staff members reported low buy-in among students, few of whom believed they had participated in the GEAR UP program as priority high school seniors. In addition, some students were quick to point out that the class behind them received GEAR UP services and they were unhappy about that and less inclined to participate now. These two comments from staff members reflected this view:

> *Students said they knew about GEAR UP, but they said it was the class after them that got all the services. They were a little upset about that and didn't understand why they would have to do it now.*
>
> *I had one student who said, 'Why am I in GEAR UP? I wasn't in it before.' There can be resistance and confusion.*

Most agreed that workshops generally have not been successful and have had minimal attendance. Family events also have not drawn interest. One cited stronger student buy-in during the spring semester, with more students coming in for appointments. However, she still saw little interest in workshops as her first one in the spring semester had no attendees. Staff at this site filmed the workshop and posted it on YouTube and Facebook hoping that students would access it later.

Those interviewed cited other potential reasons for low student involvement. Some believed that students were unsure about their goals and college choices. Students on two-year campuses are commuters, making it more difficult to participate in activities. Most students also hold jobs on campus, with their family's small business, or at other jobs in their home communities. One cited a scholarship requiring students to perform community service as a competing activity that limited participation. In addition, at many sites, some students opted not to participate in GEAR UP because they are part of TRIO programs that promise multiple years of advising and support services rather than the single year of support provided by GEAR UP.

Despite these trends, three staff members cited progress in reaching students. This success may have occurred because they had specific assignments that required students to interact with them. At one institution, the GEAR UP staffer served as the official academic advisor for students. This was typically not the case at other institutions, where students had another advisor outside GEAR UP who performed this function.

This staff member, who started in June, was able to schedule one-to-one meetings with students soon after they arrived on campus. Since that time, she has embraced the idea of intensive case management with students and reported success.

> *My students are faithful in contacting me. I have a few that just walk in, but the majority will make an appointment … I am their first-year assigned advisor here, so they come to me for anything that they need.*

At another institution, the staff member taught a one-credit freshman seminar course in which she interacted with GEAR UP students. As a result, she was able to forge relationships with those GEAR UP students in her seminar. Participation in activities was linked to a grade in the course, which helped facilitate a relationship with GEAR UP. However, she cited less interaction with students since the end of this course.

GEAR UP Activities

Staff said they offered at least two workshops every semester and encouraged students to meet with them individually to complete an ISP. They also reviewed student progress via grades and early alert systems, and most organized at least one activity inviting parents/families. Their perceptions of key activities are provided below.

Early Alert/Review of Grades: Transition coordinators/staff said they receive midterm grades for GEAR UP students, and some indicated they receive information through a campus early alert system during a semester. They said they used this information to reach out to students to publicize the availability of tutoring and support services. One thought it important to contact all students, even those doing well academically. She separated students into four groups: (1) those doing very poorly, (2) those struggling but not yet failing, (3) those with high grades, and (4) those with middling grades. "Then I just write each of them an email accordingly," she said, with praise for high achievers and reminders for struggling students to meet with her and/or access other available campus services.

Workshops: GEAR UP staff designed workshops on a variety of topics including time management, academic planning, self-advocacy, career planning, and health/wellness. Many also did financial aid workshops and offered to help students complete the FAFSA. However, most reported low attendance or even no attendance at some of these events. As two noted:

> *They do not like attending workshops. That's very clear.*

> *I feel like the workshops are not really that valuable. I don't mean to sound negative but there's just so little attendance at them for all the work that's involved.*

However, there were some successes. At one campus, a workshop on sophomore housing options was well attended. They also said students are more likely to attend a workshop if it includes food or occurs in late afternoon or early evening. As one noted:

> *College kids don't have a lot of money so if you feed them, they will come.*

On one campus, GEAR UP conducted a two-part workshop on academic mindset that drew moderate to strong interest. After the second workshop, she held an impromptu focus group to ask students what they wanted for future workshops. They cited time management, self-esteem, and study skills, among other suggestions. GEAR UP used these suggestions to develop a success pathway the program will use with cohort students next year. This GEAR UP Success Ambassadors Pathway includes key tasks and activities to help students develop academic, social, personal, and professional skills to ease the transition to college.

Many agreed that lack of study skills is a major barrier to many students and that workshops on this topic can be helpful. As one noted, “Looking over a PowerPoint before a test is not studying.”

Parent/Family Outreach: Those interviewed said they organized at least one parent activity but that few family members attended. In some cases, students did not want their parents present because they wanted their independence; others indicated that they have not lived with their parents for some time. Given that many parents have low incomes, one staffer questioned the value of asking parents to incur travel costs to come to campus.

Another noted that lack of interest in parent activities reinforced challenges she experienced in other facets of the program.

> *There's very limited participation in workshops, and there's very little parent interest in attending anything.*

Individual Success Plans: Staff members reported mixed success in getting GEAR UP students to create ISPs. On one campus, the GEAR UP staffer did not need health insurance so the campus re-allocated funds to hire two graduate assistants to help with ISPs. At this campus, about 70% of students created success plans.

At a two-year campus where the transition staff member is also the student’s academic advisor, nearly all students (47 of 50) completed ISPs. This individual held one-to-one sessions before the start of the academic year, when she also registered students for classes. As an advisor, she was able to do intensive case management that began early and continued through the year.

> *I feel like the campus mom to freshmen, which is a good thing. I feel like intensive case management helps them to stay on track.*

At another campus, however, GEAR UP could get few students to meet to develop the ISP. The staff member held a welcome to GEAR UP event with food and seven students attended. While these students completed an ISP, no others would agree to a one-to-one meeting. Others also said they scheduled events with meals to draw student interest in completing a success plan, with limited success.

Another staff member found it difficult to schedule face-to-face meetings with students but had some complete their ISPs online. She justified this approach noting that some students attended strictly online and had transportation challenges in getting to campus.

Tutoring: Campuses had individual or small group tutoring services available to GEAR UP students. Many said it has been difficult to get students to participate, as some do not respond to GEAR UP messaging while others say tutoring may not be available at hours convenient to students. A few said they provided some academic assistance to students on their own, chiefly to help with writing and/or in using Blackboard for online courses.

One institution offers Brainfuse Live Tutoring for students to access at any time. The staffer at this school said some students—mainly those in online courses—appear to be using the service. She added:

> *A lot of students may be taking only online classes, so tutoring also needs to be online.*

Communication

Several questions on the interview protocol focused on how transition coordinators/staff communicate with students—including what platforms work well to reach them—and the quality of their interaction with WV HEPC and other GEAR UP staff. Below is a summary of views on these topics.

Communication with Students: GEAR UP generally used email to connect with students. One staff member also employed texting but on other campuses this practice was strongly discouraged for privacy reasons. Several used Facebook to facilitate communication, and one posted her workshops on YouTube. Many said they also relied on athletic coaches or other campus advisors to connect with students or to monitor their progress.

Staff members said they kept detailed records of all contact with students.

> *I keep a file on each student. I type up progress notes every time I speak to them on the phone. If they come in, I'll do a progress note and place it in their file. I also do a degree audit that's kept in their file.*

Communication with WV HEPC and Other Staff: All were pleased with the availability of WV HEPC staff to answer their questions. Staff have participated in regular calls via the Zoom videoconference platform. These not only provide opportunities to ask questions but also encourage sharing of ideas across the various campuses. Some individuals—typically those hired the earliest—had an opportunity to visit with high school GEAR UP site coordinators. Most believed this contact could be increased in spring 2020 to help promote effective transition of cohort students to postsecondary education this fall.

Lessons Learned

Most staff cited lessons learned from the 2019-20 year that will help them plan activities for the GEAR UP cohort that arrives in fall 2020. Early contact with students is essential to build relationships, they said. One institution is planning an early move-in option for cohort students in which students can move in four days early and GEAR UP will provide special programming to help them acclimate to campus and build community. Interviewees offered two main reasons why they expect improved buy-in next fall: (1) Staff already will be in place when students arrive on campus; and (2) fall 2020 freshmen will have extensive prior experience with GEAR UP. According to one staff member:

> *I think student buy-in will look very different next year because these students will be aware of GEAR UP and have been through this program.*

However, most said it is important to reach out to students in spring 2020 even before they graduate from high school. Some have sent emails to high school site coordinators; one noted that she was a teacher at a GEAR UP high school and has reconnected with colleagues to see if she can visit this spring. Most also said they expected to meet some cohort students at a Governor's GEAR UP Honors Symposium scheduled for spring 2020, but this event has been cancelled due to COVID-19.

Aside from early communication with students, another takeaway from the 2019-20 year is that some students do not like the idea of group workshops. Staff indicated they are likely to repeat workshops that had the most attendance this year and would schedule others based on

feedback from students this year and early next year. However, they did not believe that parent/family activities should continue next fall.

Some saw value in offering incentives to encourage student participation. At one campus, students received a goody bag for completing the ISP. On another campus, GEAR UP organized a free, celebratory lunch for GEAR UP students who placed on the Dean's List or President's List of high achievers.

On reaching students, one noted that persistence was important even if some did not immediately engage with GEAR UP. This staffer outlined a successful approach to reach these individuals:

> *I would write them emails, and I just started going to classes. I would let the teacher know that I was here to talk to their new student, and would it be okay if I came into the classroom. And if they'd point out the student, I would reach out and schedule a meeting with them.*

As noted earlier, one staff member has developed a GEAR UP Success Ambassadors Pathway with tasks and activities to help students develop academic, social, personal, and professional skills that support success in college. She believed this pathway is one critical lesson learned and she wants to disseminate this plan to other campuses for possible use with cohort students next year.

Program Impact

Asked how they would judge the impact of their efforts, staff generally defined success based on certain statistical goals as well as their ability to build relationships. Some mentioned the ability to reach key metrics such as a high rate of students who returned for the spring 2020 semester or who will return in fall 2020. Yet most said the ability to establish relationships with students was a key barometer of their success. This sentiment was expressed through these comments:

> *Success is if I reach one student. If a student comes in and asks questions or responds, that's a win.*
>
> *I think being a successful coordinator is about connecting with them in a meaningful way.*

Since some students did not participate at all, staff expressed the opinion that they likely found other advisors or support services on campus. Overall, many believed that GEAR UP offered services similar to those already available on campus including advising, tutoring, and transition-to-college assistance. Most were also able to refer students to other campus services such as counseling, so those services would continue for students who request them.

3. SAT Impact Analysis Results

This section describes the findings from five sets of proposed analyses:

- The program impact analysis (EQ1)
- The subgroup program impact analysis (EQ2-5)
- SAT and program participation hours analysis (EQ 6)

- Profile analysis (EQ 7-10)

The Program Impact Analysis

The average SAT scores for Reading, Math, and Science were compared per group and the group differences were derived as the program impact estimates. Table 7 summarizes the results and Figures 15 and 16 summarize the same information graphically. The differences between the cohort and R-Comp students were all small and unexpectedly negative (the R-Comp group's average scores were higher than the cohort's). The standardized effect sizes for Reading, Math, and Science scores were, respectively, -0.01 (not statistically significant), -0.04 (not statistically significant), and -0.08 (statistically significant). These estimates were all smaller than 0.20, the threshold value of which What Works Clearinghouse guideline considers "substantively important." The program impact analysis did not support the program expectation that GEAR-UP program improves students' SAT scores.

Table 7. SAT Score Comparison of the Cohort and the R-Comp Group

	Cohort			R-Comp				Standardized
SAT Section	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	Difference	Effects
Reading	2,218	460.46	86.84	2,263	461.59	83.06	-1.12	-0.01
Math	2,218	438.12	83.76	2,263	441.25	84.75	-3.14	-0.04
Science	2,218	23.16	4.56	2,263	23.51	4.37	-0.35*	-0.08

Note: Statistical significance (2-tail test): ~=p<.10, * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, *** = p<.001

Figure 15. Cohort Comparison of SAT Reading and Math Average Scores

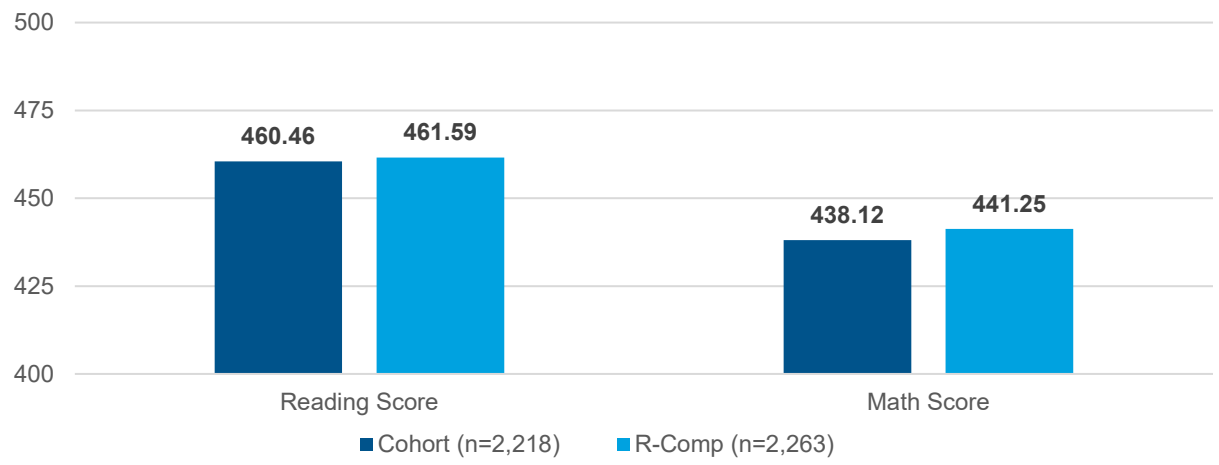
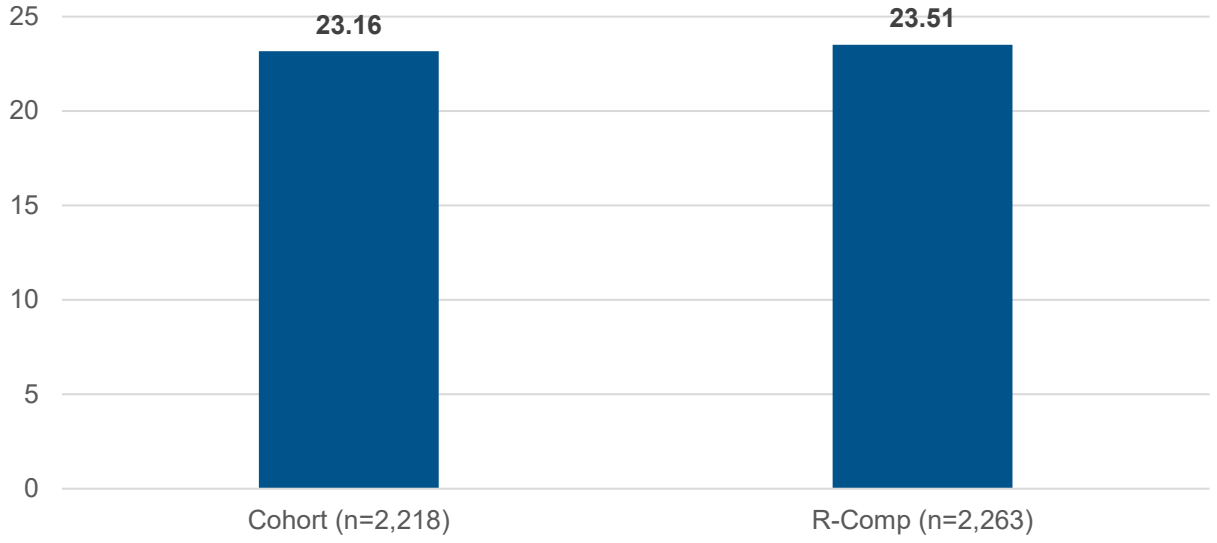


Figure 16. Cohort Comparison of SAT Science Average Scores



The Subgroup Program Impact Analysis

The findings from the main analysis did not provide evidence of program impact when SAT scores were used as outcomes. This section explores the possibility that the program impact is detectable within specific subgroups. As discussed earlier, the subgroup analysis is based on subsamples separated by the following characteristics of students:

- Male students vs. female students
- Students with free/reduced lunch status vs. students without
- Students with a college educated parent vs. students without
- School

Tables 8, 9, and 10 summarize the subgroup analysis findings, respectively, for Reading, Mathematics, and Science scores. None of the findings were indicative of the program impact within each subgroup. In most contrasts, the R-Comp group's score averages were slightly higher than the cohort's average, which was consistent with findings based on the whole sample (also reported at the top row for a reference purpose). The estimated differences, however, were small and none of the standardized effects was greater than .20.

Table 8. Subgroup Program Impact Analysis findings from SAT Reading Scores

Student Subgroup	Cohort N	Cohort M	Cohort SD	R-Comp N	R-Comp M	R-Comp SD	Difference	Standardized Effects
All students	2,218	460.46	86.84	2,263	461.59	83.06	-1.12	-0.01
Male	1,155	445.39	88.96	1,128	451.05	83.43	-5.65	-0.07
Female	1,063	476.84	81.41	1,135	472.06	81.38	4.78	0.06
Parent with college education	992	459.61	83.06	992	452.91	77.21	6.69~	0.08
Parent without college education	544	488.40	92.64	492	498.88	87.78	-10.48~	-0.12
Free/reduced lunch	999	442.65	80.59	997	442.46	73.41	0.20	0.00
No free/reduced lunch	1,219	475.06	89.06	1,266	476.65	87.05	-1.59	-0.02

Note: Statistical significance (2-tail test): ~=p<.10, * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, *** = p<.001

Table 9. Subgroup Program Impact Analysis findings from SAT Mathematics Scores

Student Subgroup	Cohort N	Cohort M	Cohort SD	R-Comp N	R-Comp M	R-Comp SD	Difference	Standardized Effects
All students	2,218	438.12	83.76	2,263	441.25	84.75	-3.14	-0.04
Male	1,155	433.55	87.70	1,128	439.80	90.86	-6.25~	-0.07
Female	1,063	443.08	79.00	1,135	442.70	78.22	0.38	0.00
Parent with college education	992	435.08	79.24	992	432.06	76.26	3.02	0.04
Parent without college education	544	467.79	90.89	492	475.24	90.82	-7.45	-0.08
Free/reduced lunch	999	420.74	78.24	997	422.74	75.25	-2.00	-0.03
No free/reduced lunch	1,219	452.35	85.47	1,266	455.83	88.89	-3.47	-0.04

Note: Statistical significance (2-tail test): ~=p<.10, * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, *** = p<.001

Table 10. Subgroup Program Impact Analysis findings from SAT Science Scores

Student Subgroup	Cohort N	Cohort M	Cohort SD	R-Comp N	R-Comp M	R-Comp SD	Difference	Standardized Effects
All students	2,218	23.16	4.56	2,263	23.51	4.37	-0.35*	-0.08
Male	1,155	22.68	4.69	1,128	23.24	4.48	-0.56*	-0.12
Female	1,063	23.69	4.35	1,135	23.78	4.25	-0.09	-0.02
Parent with college education	992	23.02	4.41	992	23.17	4.14	-0.14	-0.03
Parent without college education	544	24.66	4.74	492	25.25	4.47	-0.59*	-0.13
Free/reduced lunch	999	22.31	4.28	997	22.61	3.98	-0.30	-0.07
No free/reduced lunch	1,219	23.86	4.66	1,266	24.23	4.53	-0.36*	-0.08

Note: Statistical significance (2-tail test): ~=p<.10, * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, *** = p<.001

The program impact may also vary among 23 GEAR UP schools. For each of three test types, the program impact was estimated for all 23 GEAR UP schools. Table 11 selectively shows the results when the standardized program effect was greater than 0.15 (or smaller than -0.15). Table 11 contains 15 schools and only four of them found positive program impacts. In the rest

of the schools, the R-Comp students' SAT average scores were slightly higher than the cohort students' scores.

Table 11. School-Specific Program Impact Analysis findings

School	SAT Section	Cohort N	R-Comp N	Difference	Standardized Effects
Hannan High School	Reading	40	41	-36.23~	-0.40
	Science	40	41	-2.04*	-0.46
	Mathematics	--	--	--	--
Meadow Bridge High School	Reading	--	--	--	--
	Science	--	--	--	--
	Mathematics	26	37	-22.71	-0.32
Midland Trail High School	Reading	--	--	--	--
	Science	--	--	--	--
	Mathematics	65	76	-14.48	-0.19
Mingo Central Comprehensive High School	Reading	--	--	--	--
	Science	--	--	--	--
	Mathematics	153	149	17.28*	0.23
PikeView High School	Reading	--	--	--	--
	Science	--	--	--	--
	Mathematics	160	123	16.19	0.18
Princeton Senior High School	Reading	--	--	--	--
	Science	--	--	--	--
	Mathematics	207	199	-19.72*	-0.22
Richwood High School	Reading	--	--	--	--
	Science	--	--	--	--
	Mathematics	79	75	-16.39	-0.21
Scott High School	Reading	105	136	-14.74	-0.18
	Science	105	136	-0.80	-0.19
	Mathematics	105	136	-22.83*	-0.27
Sherman High School	Reading	--	--	--	--
	Science	--	--	--	--
	Mathematics	99	88	-17.16	-0.21
Valley High School	Reading	45	47	-24.80	-0.34
	Science	45	47	-2.22*	-0.56
	Mathematics	45	47	-18.57	-0.29
Van Junior/Senior High School	Reading	24	32	22.19	0.29
	Science	24	32	1.15	0.27
	Mathematics	136	133	20.09	0.26
Wahama High School	Reading	59	69	-16.99	-0.18
	Science	78	101	-0.93	-0.23
	Mathematics	78	101	-21.77~	-0.28
Westside High School	Reading	136	133	17.10~	0.22
	Science	136	133	0.72	0.18
	Mathematics	136	133	20.09*	0.26
Wirt County High School	Reading	--	--	--	--
	Science	136	133	17.10	0.22
	Mathematics	--	--	--	--
Wyoming County East High School	Reading	--	--	--	--
	Science	118	101	-1.09~	-0.25
	Mathematics	118	101	-15.91	-0.22

Note: Statistical significance (2-tail test): ~=p<.10, * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, *** = p<.001

SAT and Program Participation Hours Analyses

The analysis here addresses evaluation question 6, examining the correlation of Grade 11 SAT total scores and Grade 11 program participation hours. The cohort sample was classified into eight groups defined by hours of program participation. The first subgroup consisted of those who spent zero program hours and other subgroups had longer program hours such that each group's program time increased by the increment of five hours (e.g., 0 to 4.9 hours, 5 to 9.9 hours, 10 to 14 hours, etc.). As a reference, the R-Comp group was also added to the analysis sample. Table 12 contrasted the average SAT total scores (standardized as Z-scores) by total hours (hours of all activities combined), SAT/ACT tutoring hours (TESTIVE hours), and all types of tutoring (four tutoring items combined, including the TESTIVE items). Figure 17 summarizes the same findings graphically.

The clear pattern is that students who spent more time with the program had higher SAT average scores. There is an unexpected trend around the "between 20 to 25 hours" subgroup such that the average scores were lower than the subgroups adjacent to it, which is likely a result of these subgroups having a small number of cases (see Table 12), making the SAT average scores unreliable. Again, the overall pattern suggested the positive correlation between program time and SAT scores.

An interesting pattern with the total hour line (dark blue line in Figure 17) was that two low-hour Subgroups 1 and 2 (students who spent 0 program hours or spent 0 to 4.9 hours) had lower average scores than R-Comp students (the average scores for the R-Comp group, subgroups 1 and 2 were, respectively, 0.02, -0.44 and -0.17).

This may characterize the type of students who did not fully participate in the program even when it was available to them in their schools. Relatedly, for all three program participation variables, the cohort subgroups did not surpass the average score of the R-Comp group until students received a substantial amount of program hours. For total hours, students who used fifteen hours of program time or more had an average SAT score higher than the R-Comp students. For two tutor items, cohort students who used five hours or more had an average SAT score higher than R-Comp students. Again, this may mean that students who used zero or a minimum amount of program hours might have avoided program participation because they had low expectations about their educational prospects or had already decided they were not continuing their education.

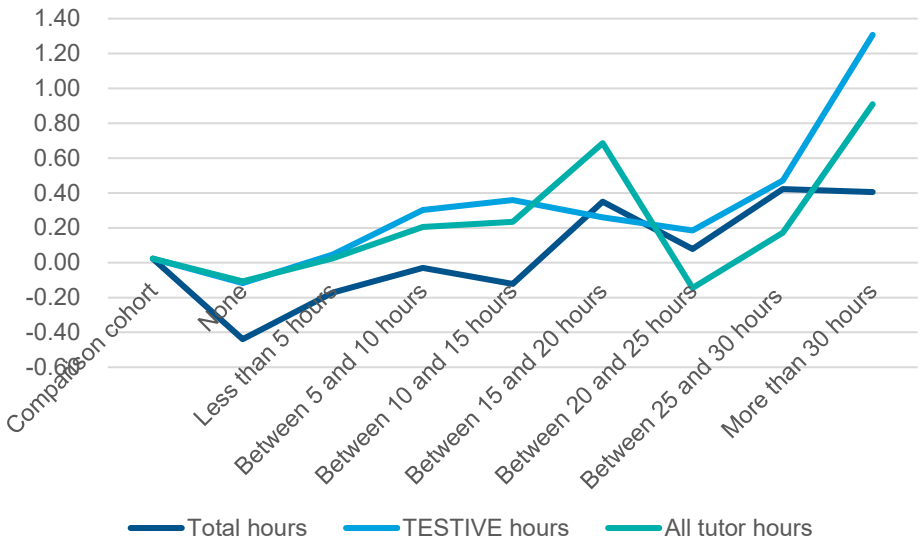
As mentioned, the analysis relied on cross-sectional data and thus the detected patterns do not imply causation. The positive association implies either (a) the program promoted students' SAT scores or (b) students with higher SAT scores were academically oriented students who took the program participation seriously. The result confirms the importance of a future research study on the relationship between program participation and students' academic achievement scores.

Table 12. The Association between Students' Program Participation Hours and SAT Total Average Scores

Cohorts and Number of Program Participation Hours for Cohort Group	Total Hours			Testive (SAT/ACT) Hours			All Tutoring Hours		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
R-Comp	2,263	0.02	0.98	2,263	0.02	0.98	2,263	0.02	0.98
Cohort groups:									
None	164	-0.44	0.90	1,428	-0.12	1.03	1,389	-0.11	1.04
Less than 5 hours	699	-0.17	1.05	540	0.05	0.96	557	0.03	0.95
Between 5 and 10 hours	467	-0.03	0.99	131	0.30	0.83	135	0.20	0.88
Between 10 and 15 hours	317	-0.12	0.88	67	0.36	1.04	69	0.23	0.96
Between 15 and 20 hours	169	0.35	0.96	28	0.26	1.13	29	0.69	1.31
Between 20 and 25 hours	94	0.08	1.00	9	0.18	0.58	11	-0.15	0.76
Between 25 and 30 hours	51	0.42	1.06	3	0.47	0.44	7	0.17	0.44
More than 30 hours	257	0.40	1.02	12	1.31	1.20	21	0.91	1.09

Note: SAT total scores was a composite score based on Reading scores, Mathematics scores, and Science scores. See Appendix C Table C1 for descriptive statistics of the program participation hour data.

Figure 17. The Comparison of SAT Total Average Scores (Z-scores) by Subgroups Defined by Status and Program Participation Hours.



Profile Analyses

This section describes the profile of students whose SAT score levels varied. The composite scores were created from Reading, Mathematics, and Science scores. Students of two cohorts were classified into four subgroups based on SAT composite scores (Z-scores): Level 1 (low achievers, SAT score percentile 0% to 24.9%), Level 2 (25% to 49.9%), level 3 (50% to 74.9%), and Level 4 (high achievers, 75% to 100%). Because two cohorts were involved, the analysis compared eight subgroups, i.e., the cohort subgroups Level 1 to 4 and the R-Comp group subgroups Level 1 to 4. As described earlier, the profiles of the eight subgroups of students were described in terms of:

- Gender (male)
- Socioeconomic status (free/reduced lunch status)
- Parents' education level (at least one parent graduated college vs. others)

The characteristics of students as captured by the 10th grade student survey with respect to students' concept of going to college will describe students in the eight subgroups.

- Awareness scale
- College-going outcomes-expectations scale
- College-going self-efficacy scale
- Confidence scale

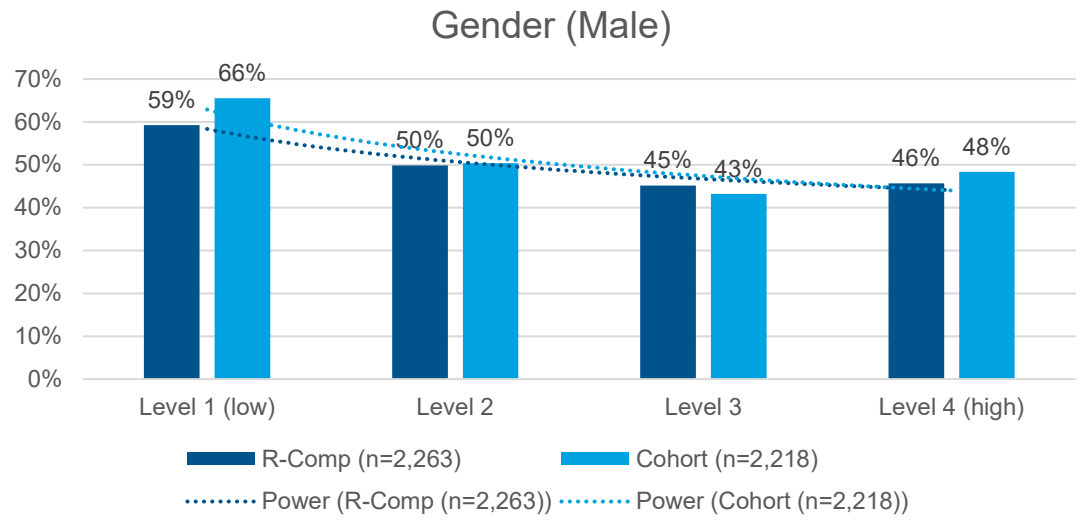
Table 13 describes the profile of students by gender, socioeconomic status, and parents' college education. Figures 18 and 19 describe the same information graphically. The overall pattern is that, regardless of treatment status (cohort difference), ability group membership is associated with student characteristics of our interest. Discussion of gender, socioeconomic status, and parents' college education will follow.

Table 13. Student Characteristics by Cohort and SAT Total Score Levels

	SAT Level by Quartile			
Subgroup	**0%-24%**	**25%-49%**	**50%-74%**	**75%-100%**
Gender Composition				
Cohort (n=2,218)	66%	50%	43%	48%
R-Comp (n=2,263)	59%	50%	45%	46%
Socioeconomic Status (Free/Reduced Lunch)				
Cohort (n=2,218)	54%	54%	41%	31%
R-Comp (n=2,263)	53%	53%	43%	28%
Parents' College Education				
Cohort (n=1,536)	28%	29%	33%	49%
R-Comp (n=1,484)	19%	27%	32%	51%

The overall trend shown in Figure 18 is that there were more male students than female students in lower-achiever groups defined by SAT scores. Simply put, male students had a lower achievement level than female students. There was one noticeable difference between the two cohorts. In the low-achiever subgroup (Level 1), the gender composition varied substantively by cohort: the Comp-R group was 59% male and the cohort was 66% male (the difference being 7%). This means that the cohort had many more males in the lowest SAT level than the R-Comp group. Thus, the probability that male students were found in the lowest achievement group was higher for the cohort than for R-Comp. To highlight this pattern and assist interpretation, the two trendlines were added to the figure.

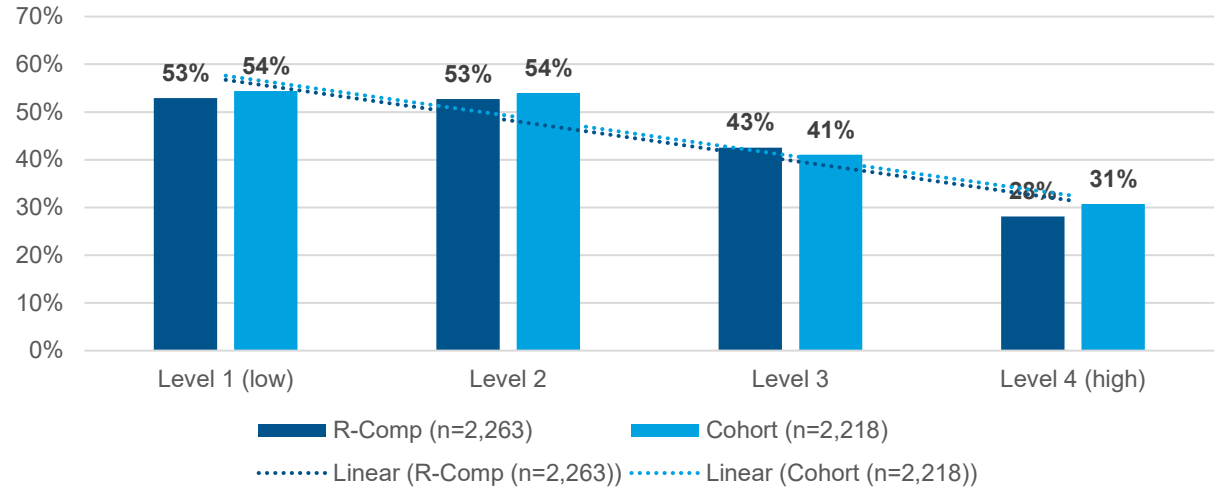
Figure 18. Gender Composition (Male) by Treatment Status and SAT Total Score Levels



Note: The two trendlines were based on a power function to capture the fact that Level 1 percentages were substantially larger than those of Level 2, 3, and 4.

As shown in Figure 19, the socioeconomic status is also associated with students' SAT levels such that lower achieving subgroups (Level 1 and 2) had a higher concentration of students who had the free/reduced lunch status (Level 1 R-Comp 53%, cohort 54%; Level 2 R-Comp 53%, cohort 54%). The percentage of free/reduced lunch recipients was substantially lower in the higher achieving subgroups (Level 3 R-Comp 43%, cohort 41%, Level 4 R-Comp 28%, cohort 31%). The two linear lines were added to the figure to show that the trend was almost identical for both cohorts.

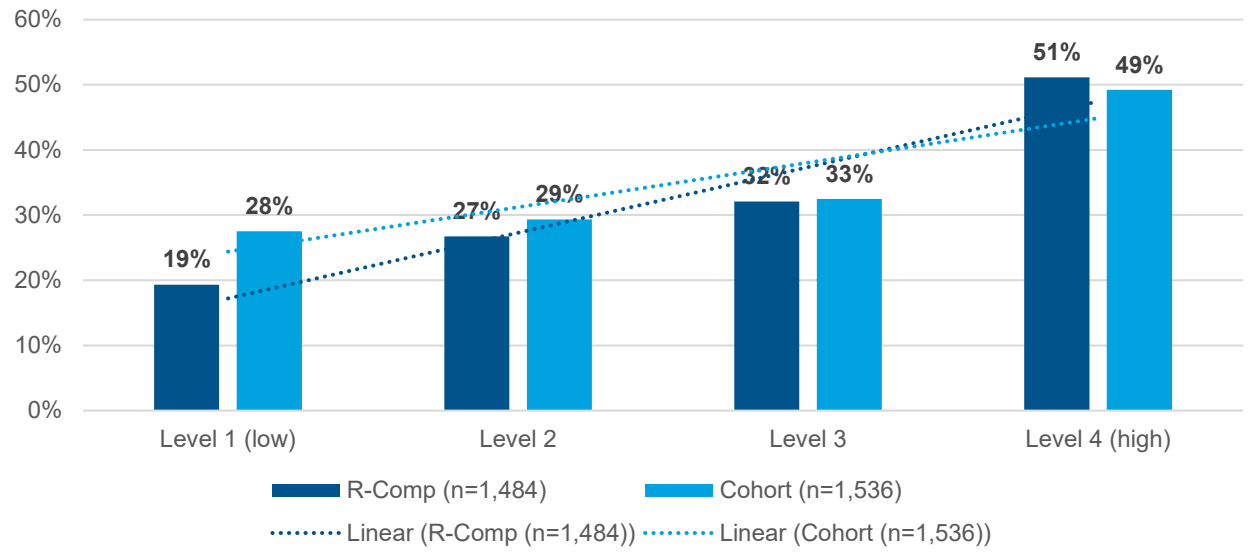
Figure 19. Socioeconomic Status (Free/reduced Lunch Status) by Treatment Status and SAT Total Score Levels



Note: The two trendlines were added to describe the data patterns across SAT levels.

Figure 20 describes how parents' college education is associated with SAT score levels. There is a gradual increase of percentages going from Level 1 to Level 3 (R-Comp 19%, 27%, 32%; Cohort 28%, 29%, 33%). The Level 4 group for both cohorts exhibited a high concentration of students with college educated parents (R-Comp 51%, Cohort 49%). The result clearly shows the advantage of students with college-educated parents. Level 1 (the lowest SAT level) is interesting in that the cohort group had a higher concentration of students with a college-educated parent than the R-Comp group (Cohort 28%; R-Comp 19%). Other levels did not show this group difference. Although parents' education level generally was correlated with students' SAT scores, the correlation is weaker for the cohort group than for the R-comp group. The cohort, thus, was less influenced by students' family background than the R-comp group when analyzing parents' education and students' SAT level.

Figure 20. Parents' College Education by Treatment Status and SAT Total Score Levels



Note: The two trendlines were added to describe the data patterns across SAT levels.

Table 14 describes the profile of students by students' college aspiration and readiness related scales. Figures 21 to 24 describe the same information graphically. All scales, except the awareness scale, showed a clear pattern of positive correlation: the higher the SAT levels, the higher the student scores on college-going related scales. The awareness scale exhibited a non-linear association between SAT levels and the scale. Detailed explanations of the trend will follow.

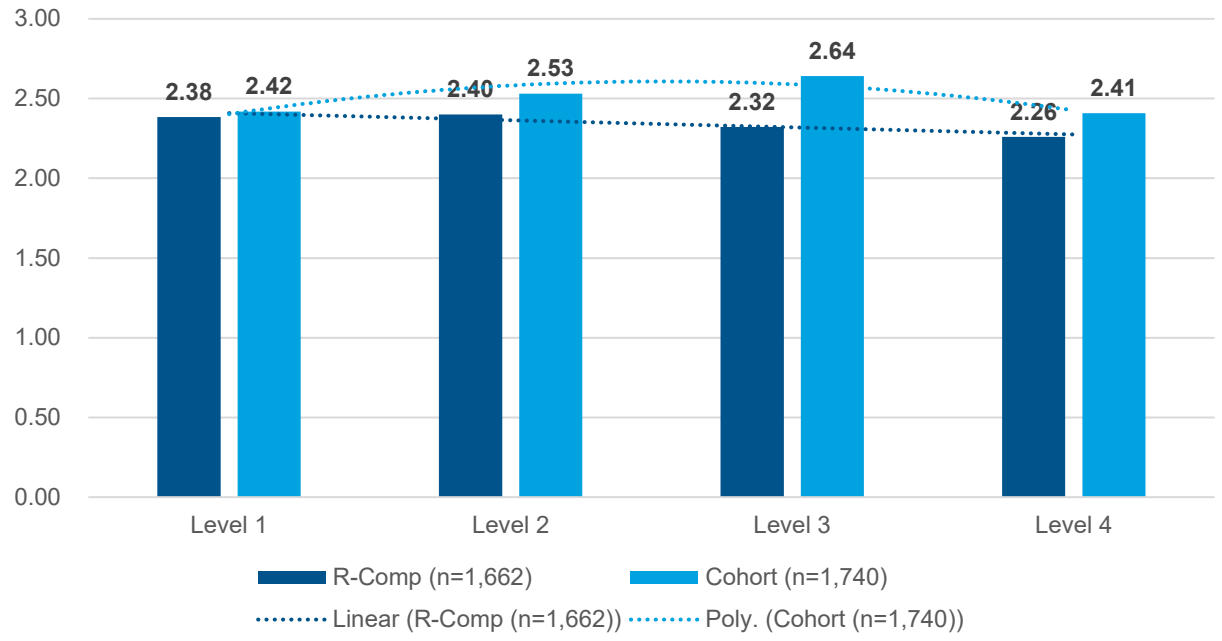
Table 14. Student's College-Going-Related Scales by Cohort and SAT Total Score Levels

	SAT Level by Quartile							
	0%-24%		25%-49%		50%-74%		75%-100%	
Subgroup	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Awareness								
Cohort (n=1,740)	2.42	0.79	2.53	0.75	2.64	0.72	2.41	0.74
R-Comp (n=1,662)	2.38	0.86	2.40	0.78	2.32	0.78	2.26	0.74
College-Going Outcomes-Expectations								
Cohort (n=1,752)	3.17	1.11	3.49	1.03	3.85	0.83	3.89	0.85

R-Comp (n=1,674)	3.17	1.11	3.48	1.01	3.69	0.90	4.06	0.72
College-Going Self-Efficacy								
Cohort (n=1,753)	3.10	1.03	3.40	0.90	3.73	0.80	3.84	0.80
R-Comp (n=1,691)	3.10	0.99	3.36	0.89	3.54	0.84	3.94	0.71
Confidence								
Cohort (n=1,734)	1.94	0.44	2.03	0.43	2.14	0.44	2.29	0.44
R-Comp (n=1,694)	1.93	0.45	1.99	0.42	2.07	0.43	2.33	0.41

As shown in Figure 21, SAT levels and the awareness scores were associated in a complex way. The R-Comp pattern showed that student's SAT level and awareness were almost negatively correlated, although the between-level differences were small. In contrast, the cohort showed that the correlation was positive for Level 1, 2, and 3, but Level 4's average awareness score was lower than Level 3's average score.

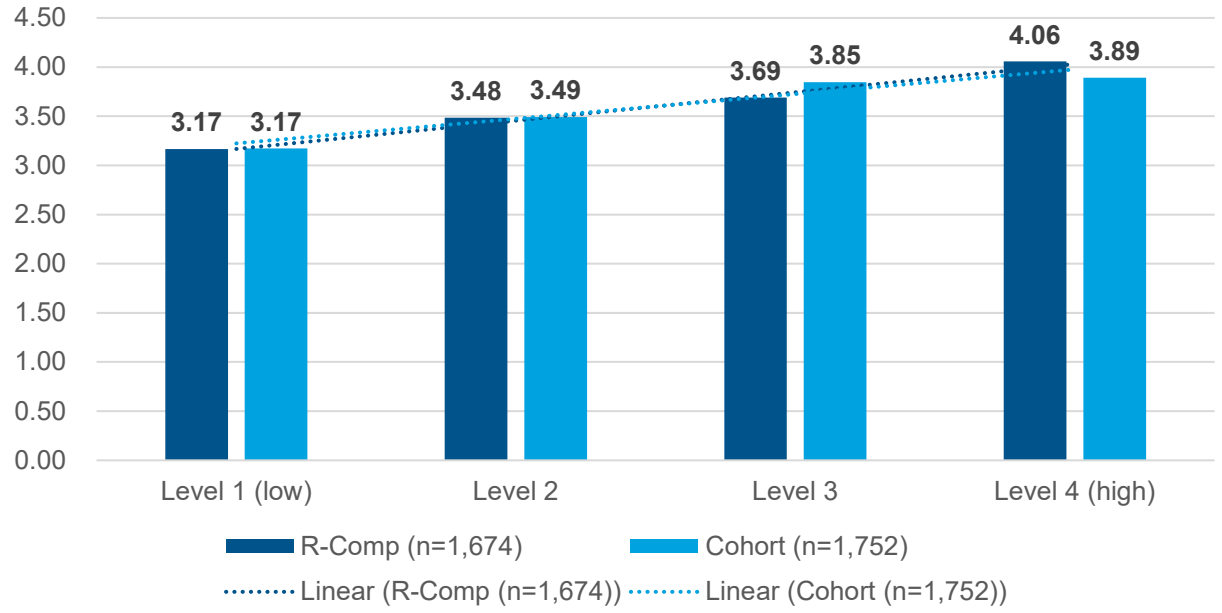
Figure 21. Awareness Scores by Treatment Status and by SAT Total Score Levels



Note: The two trendlines were added to describe the data patterns across SAT levels. The trendline for the cohort was based on a polynomial function.

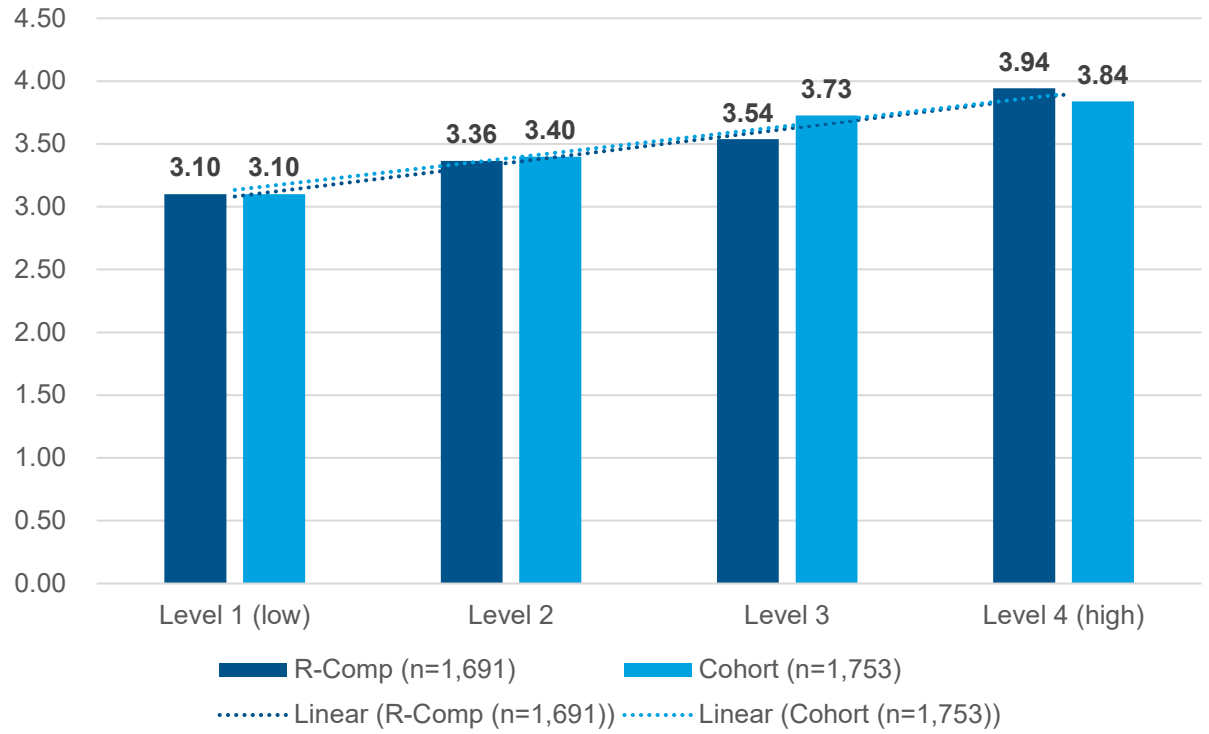
Figures 22, 23, and 24 show that three college-related scales are positively associated with SAT score levels. As indicated by the trend lines, the two cohorts exhibited a similar positive association in all these analyses.

Figure 22. College-Going Outcomes-Expectations Scores by Treatment Status and by SAT Total Score Levels



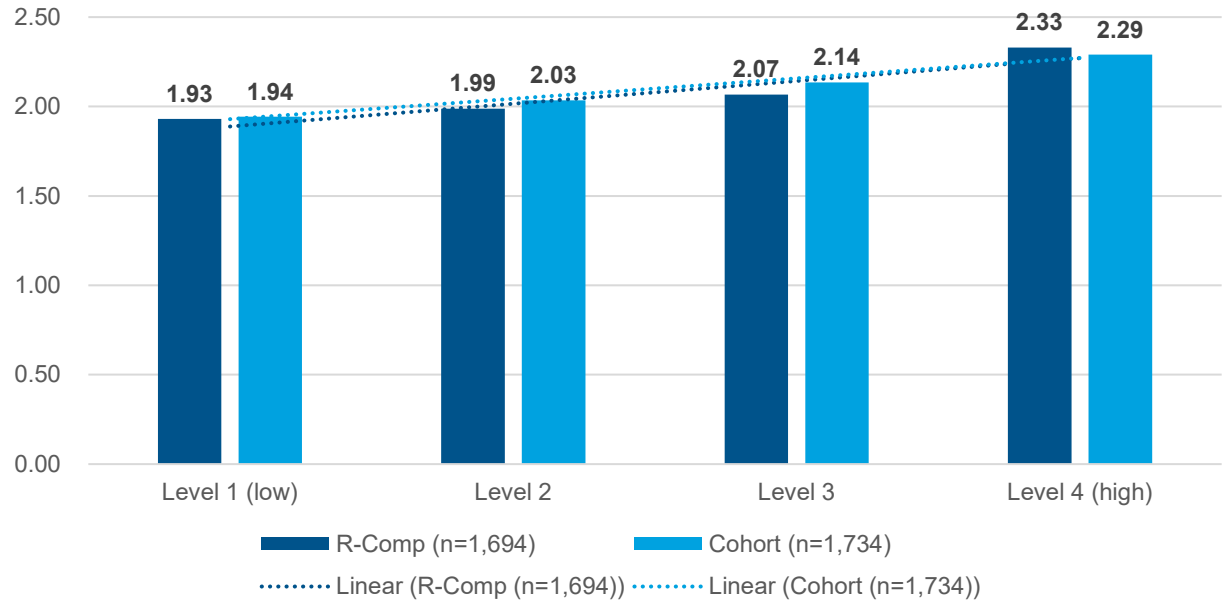
Note: The two trendlines were added to describe the data patterns across SAT levels.

Figure 23. College-Going Self-Efficacy Scores by Treatment Status and by SAT Total Score Levels



Note: The two trendlines were added to describe the data patterns across SAT levels.

Figure 24. Confidence Scores by Treatment Status and by SAT Total Score Levels



Note: The two trendlines were added to describe the data patterns across SAT levels.

V. Discussion

Year 6 WV GEAR UP research activities conducted to date have generated several important findings regarding first-year college students and the impact of the program on SAT scores. These findings may be important in documenting the most promising strategies when working with students from Grade 11 through the first year of postsecondary education. Key topics for discussion follow:

GEAR UP participation in Year 1 of college was uneven. As the first year of college unfolded for R-Comp students, many were confused by their participation in GEAR UP. While students connected with someone, mostly academic advisors at the college, there was some variation across sites. Transition staff who also served as academic advisors or instructors reported greater student participation in GEAR UP offerings and had more opportunities to interact with students.

Students faced multiple challenges to college success. Multiple data points from surveys and transition staff interviews suggest that R-Comp students face academic and other barriers to success. For example, transition staff indicated students seemed to lack study skills to be successful, and student surveys indicated that many felt stress due to academics and homework responsibilities. However, only 45% of R-Comp survey respondents said they accessed tutoring or academic support services at their college, even though such services may help address these concerns.

The need for other support services also was clear. Nearly one-third (31%) of survey respondents said they always or most of the time had difficulty staying focused on their homework or other assignments. In addition, nearly one-quarter (23%) of those in college reported that they were often or sometimes worried their food or meal plan would run out before

they would have money to buy more. Such data indicate a high need for services available through GEAR UP and other campus support programs.

Families play a key factor in college decisions. Two-thirds of survey respondents reported that they had a family member or members who helped them in making their college choice. Respondents also were highly likely to agree that their families are supportive of education. However, despite access to many different programs and services in high school, R-Comp students did not always give positive marks to their high school academic experience. For example, many first-year college students in the postsecondary survey gave comparatively low marks when asked if their high school prepared them adequately for college.

Despite challenges in the first year of postsecondary services, staff remain optimistic. While transition staff encountered challenges in serving R-Comp students in 2019-2020, most of these individuals are optimistic about serving cohort students next year. As the cohort is familiar with GEAR UP and expects to receive program services, most staff members believe they will have greater success next year. This pilot year of assistance to first-year college students also allowed staff to experiment with different strategies to promote one-to-one contact and workshop attendance.

First-year students remain committed to pursuing higher education. While some students struggled with focus, hunger, and lack of preparation, a majority plan to remain enrolled as full-time students. Nearly all respondents (95%) said they would stay enrolled at the same school, and most said they either have completed or plan to complete the FAFSA. In addition, 49% of respondents reported that they spoke to their academic advisor at least once a month.

The program did not appear to produce an overall student impact on SAT scores. Regarding SAT for students in the GEAR UP cohort, the impact analysis did not produce evidence of GEAR UP program impact on grade 11 SAT scores of students overall. The average SAT Reading, Mathematics, and Science scores of the cohort and those of the R-Comp group were similar when analyzing the whole sample as well as subgroup samples. These two groups performed at the same level regardless of the GEAR UP program intervention and regardless of students' subgroup status such as gender and socioeconomic levels as defined by students' free/reduced lunch status and parents' education.

Despite that overall conclusion, program participation still matters. Although the SAT analysis did not provide evidence of program effectiveness, this question may depend on the extent of student participation in GEAR UP. For example, the research team found a positive correlation between the average SAT composite scores and program time variables based on total hours of program participation: TESTIVE hours (SAT and ACT preparation program hours) and all types of tutor hours (including TESTIVE hours). Students with more program hours had higher SAT composite scores, indicating either (a) the service helped to increase students' SAT scores and/or (b) high-achieving students tend to attend the program activities. These findings call for future rigorous research, such as a randomized control trial, on how the program directly impacts student achievement.

An analysis of SAT scores against student characteristics and college awareness generated noteworthy findings. Regardless of treatment status and participation in the cohort, there was a correlation between SAT levels and specific student characteristics and awareness levels. Groups with higher levels of SAT scores had high representation of female students, students with a higher socioeconomic level, and students whose parents had a college education. Additional analysis showed that students with higher SAT levels had higher scores

on college-related variables such as self-efficacy, educational expectations, and confidence. These trends were evident among both the cohort and R-Comp.

The patterns detected were not the same exactly by student cohort. At the lowest SAT level, the proportion of male students was higher in the cohort than in the R-Comp group. This indicates that the gender disadvantage is more salient in the cohort than in the R-Comp group. Likewise, in the lowest SAT level, the proportion of students with college-educated parents was higher in the cohort than the R-Comp group. When SAT Levels 1, 2, and 3 were considered (excluding the top Level 4), proportions of cohort students with college-educated parents were similar across levels. The R-Comp group, in contrast, had SAT levels that were more tightly correlated with parents' education levels. This may mean that the cohort was more meritocratic than the R-Comp group in that—at least for SAT Levels 1, 2, and 3—parents' education was not a strong factor in student achievement.

In addition, the connection between SAT and postsecondary awareness exhibited an unexpected pattern. For the R-Comp group, SAT levels were negatively correlated with the awareness scale. One possible explanation is that many students with higher SAT scores may come from well-to-do families with educated parents and thus students may not necessarily be aware of government programs, such as Federal student loans and Federal Pell Grants. For the cohort, the awareness level was associated with a higher level of SAT scores from Level 1 to Level 3; however, students in the top group had the lowest awareness level. It is possible that, because of the program intervention, academically oriented students are more likely to develop awareness of available options than academically struggling students; however, the top group (SAT Level 4), who are likely to come from well-to-do families, may not need to cultivate awareness of government assistance programs.

VI. Recommendations

In response to these trends, the evaluation team offers the following recommendations to WV HEPC as it approaches the remainder of Year 6 of the program:

WV GEAR UP should encourage early contact between cohort students and GEAR UP transition staff. While this may be challenging in the current environment due to COVID-19, WV GEAR UP could use video calls or other technology to introduce students to their GEAR UP contact at college this spring and summer. This would establish a solid foundation for staff to work closely with first-year students in the 2020-21 academic year.

GEAR UP transition staff should be featured prominently at student welcoming events. Colleges and universities should more fully utilize GEAR UP transition staff as presenters during formal orientation, welcome weeks, or other virtual activities offered to students entering in fall 2020. This also may help staff make important connections before the start of fall classes.

Where feasible, transition staff should be encouraged to serve as advisors or instructors for GEAR UP students. Staff who worked in these capacities during 2019-20 were the most likely to establish strong relationships with first-year college students. In serving as academic advisors or instructors of first-year seminars, they could adapt workshops developed during the pilot year or offer these as part of extra-credit opportunities in a first-year seminar.

Transition staff should focus on early identification of struggling students to help them obtain tutoring and other academic help. Both survey and interview data suggest that first-year college students entered college with gaps in preparation. However, fewer than half of these students responding to the R-Comp survey said they accessed tutoring or academic support. The ability to identify struggling students early in the freshman year and refer them for help is important so that they remain in college.

Intensive case management may be needed to address other student needs. Survey data on the number of students with food insecurity and the number struggling to maintain focus on their classwork indicate the value of promoting students' social and emotional health. This data may suggest the need for an intensive case management model for first-year students who can have easy access to a range of services.

More research on SAT findings may yield important results. While GEAR UP overall did not appear to impact SAT performance, students with more program hours had higher SAT composite scores. Given that finding, it is possible that SAT preparation offered through GEAR UP helped to increase students' scores. These findings call for future rigorous research, such as a randomized control trial or more detailed quasi-experimental study, on how the service directly impacts student's achievement. Furthermore, some findings from the SAT student profile analysis suggested that gender bias found in SAT results was stronger for the cohort than for the R-Comp group and the socioeconomic bias may be weaker for the cohort than for the R-Comp group. Since these were based on cross sectional data and simple descriptive analysis, further exploratory data analysis may be necessary to understand how the GEAR-UP intervention interacts with student characteristics.

VII. References

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Appendix A: Postsecondary Student Survey

West Virginia GEAR UP Student Survey – 2019–20 School Year
Postsecondary

Directions: Please respond to all questions by completely filling in the circle for each answer:

Like this: ● Not like this: ✓ ✗ /

I. Section I: About You

1. What is your gender?

☐ *Male* ☐ *Female* ☐ *Other* ☐

2. What is your race?

☐ *White*
☐ *Black or African American*
☐ *Asian*
☐ *American Indian or Alaska Native*
☐ *Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander*
☐ *Two or more races*
☐ *Other* ☐

3. What is your ethnicity?

☐ *Hispanic or Latino* ☐ *Not Hispanic or Latino* ☐ *Other* ☐

4. What is the main language you speak at home?

☐ *English* ☐ *Spanish* ☐ *Other* ☐

5. What is the highest level of education achieved by your parent(s)/guardians(s)? *Please answer this question for the parent/guardian who achieved the highest level of education. For example, if your mother has a 4-year degree and your father has a high school diploma, select 4-year college degree.*

☐ *Some high school*
☐ *High school diploma/GED*
☐ *Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, e.g., certificate or career/tech. cert.)*
☐ *2-year college degree (Associate's)*
☐ *4-year college degree (Bachelor's)*
☐ *Master's degree*
☐ *Ph.D. or higher*
☐ *Don't know*

6. Are you enrolled in college or in the military?

☐ *Yes, I attend a college/university. (Go to Question 8 and continue to the end of the survey.)*
☐ *Yes, I am enrolled in the military. (You may end the survey after answering this question.)*
☐ *No, I am not enrolled in a college or the military. (Go to Question 7.)*

7. What was the primary reason for not attending college? *(After answering this question, you may end the survey.)*

☐ *My grades weren't good enough to get accepted*
☐ *It costs too much/I can't afford it*

- ☐ *I need to work.*
- ☐ *Other* _____

8. What school do you currently attend?
   - ☐ *Bluefield State College*
   - ☐ *Concord University*
   - ☐ *Marshall University*
   - ☐ *Southern West Virginia Community & Technical College*
   - ☐ *West Virginia University*
   - ☐ *West Virginia University Institute of Technology*
   - ☐ *Other (write in name)* _____

If one of the 6 partner institutions is selected, then go to question 9 and skip question 10.
If [Other] is selected, go to question 10.

9. Please write your ***college ID*** number in the spaces below If there are zeroes at the beginning of your number, please include them.

Your College ID number:

This is an Example: College ID number: 09132567

_0_	_0_	_9_	_1_	_3_	_2_	_5_	_6_	_7_	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
●	●	0	0	0	0	0	0	0									
1	1	1	●	1	1	1	1	1									
2	2	2	2	2	●	2	2	2									
3	3	3	3	●	3	3	3	3									
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4									
5	5	5	5	5	5	●	5	5									
6	6	6	6	6	6	6	●	6									
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	●									
8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8									
9	9	●	9	9	9	9	9	9									

10. Please write your ***9-digit lunch/WVEIS number*** (used while you were in 12th grade at a West Virginia high school) in the spaces below. If there are zeroes at the beginning of your number, please include them.

This is an Example: lunch/WVEIS number: 09132567 Your lunch/WVEIS number:

_0_	_0_	_9_	_1_	_3_	_2_	_5_	_6_	_7_	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
●	●	0	0	0	0	0	0	0									
1	1	1	●	1	1	1	1	1									
2	2	2	2	2	●	2	2	2									
3	3	3	3	●	3	3	3	3									
4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4									
5	5	5	5	5	5	●	5	5									
6	6	6	6	6	6	6	●	6									
7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	●									
8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8									
9	9	●	9	9	9	9	9	9									

III. Section III: College Experience

16. During the summer did you…

	Yes	*No*
Attend a college orientation?	☐	☐
Speak with your transition coordinator/college counselor?	☐	☐
Receive career counseling?	☐	☐
Discuss your degree and/or major with someone from your college?	☐	☐

17. Please indicate the activities you have participated in *since you started college.*

	Yes	*No*
Spoke with your academic advisor	☐	☐
Sought tutoring, academic help, or went to your school's writing center	☐	☐
Met one-on-one with at least one of your professors	☐	☐
Spoke with a staff member from your school's office of financial aid	☐	☐
Spoke with someone from your school's student support services	☐	☐
Spoke with your transition coordinator/college counselor regarding your current schedule/course load	☐	☐
Spoke with your transition coordinator/college counselor about financial aid	☐	☐
Spoke with your transition coordinator/college counselor about the transition from high school to college	☐	☐
Spoke with someone from your school regarding registering for classes next semester	☐	☐

If you are attending Bluefield State College, Concord University, Marshall University, Southern West Virginia Community & Technical College, West Virginia University, or West Virginia University Institute of Technology, please also answer the following question:

18. Please indicate the activities you have participated in *since you started college.*

	Yes	*No*
Spoke with your GEAR UP coordinator regarding your current schedule/course load	☐	☐
Spoke with your GEAR UP coordinator about financial aid	☐	☐
Spoke with your GEAR UP coordinator about the transition from high school to college	☐	☐

19. How frequently do you communicate with each of these people?

	Transition Coordinator/ College Counselor	*Academic Advisor*	*Student Support Services Staff*
Never; I'm not sure who this is.	☐	☐	☐
Never; I know who this person is, but I do not need to speak to them.	☐	☐	☐
Less than once a month	☐	☐	☐
1–2 times a month	☐	☐	☐
3–4 times or more a month	☐	☐	☐
At least once a week	☐	☐	☐

20. Select all of the ways you have received postsecondary counseling since graduating high school. ***(Select all that apply.)***

- ☐ Face-to-face meetings
- ☐ Text messages
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Other _____

21. How many hours do you study each week?

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1–5 hours
- ☐ 6–10 hours
- ☐ 11–15 hours
- ☐ More than 15 hours

22. If you currently have a job, how many hours a week do you work?

- ☐ 10 or less
- ☐ 11–20 hours a week
- ☐ 20–39 hours a week
- ☐ 40 or more hours a week
- ☐ I do not currently have a job

23. How are you paying for college? ***<u>Check all that apply.</u>***

- ☐ WV Promise Scholarship
- ☐ Other scholarship(s)
- ☐ Federal Pell Grant
- ☐ Federal student loan
- ☐ Private loan
- ☐ The state pays my tuition because I am/was in the foster care system
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ WV Higher Education Grant
- ☐ WV Invests Grant
- ☐ College savings plan/529
- ☐ Federal work-study financial aid program
- ☐ I am using my own money to pay my tuition
- ☐ My family helps pay my tuition

24. Where are you currently living?

- ☐ In a dorm on campus
- ☐ At home with my parents/guardians
- ☐ In an apartment/house near campus (alone or with roommates/housemates)
- ☐ Other: _____

25. Think about the time since you started college. Is the following statement true for you?

	Often True	*Sometimes True*	*Never True*
Since starting college, I have worried whether my food or meal plan would run out before I got money to buy more.	☐	☐	☐

26. Since you started college, have hunger problems caused you to do any of the following?

	Yes	*No*
Miss a class	☐	☐
Miss a study session	☐	☐
Miss a club meeting	☐	☐
Opt to not join an extracurricular activity	☐	☐
Not buy a required textbook	☐	☐
Drop a class	☐	☐

27. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*
I feel welcome at my college.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Since starting college, it has been easy to make new friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have the motivation to do what it takes to succeed in college.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My high school prepared me for college.	☐	☐	☐	☐
My family is supportive of me pursuing a college education.	☐	☐	☐	☐

28. In the past 12 months, how often have you…

	Never	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Most of the time*	*Always*
…had a hard time staying focused on your homework or other things you had to do?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
…been so worried about something that you could not sleep at night?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

IV. Section IV: Education Future

29. What are your plans for the spring 2020 semester?

- ☐ Remain enrolled at the same school (answer Question 30, skip Question 31)
- ☐ Enroll at a different school (skip Questions 30 and 31, answer Question 32)
- ☐ I do not plan to be enrolled at any school (skip Question 30, answer question 31)
- ☐ I am unsure of my plans (skip Questions 30 and 31, answer Question 32)

30. In the previous question, if you indicated that ***you are planning to remain enrolled at the same school*** or that you are ***planning to enroll in a different school*** in the spring, how many courses do you plan to enroll in?

- ☐ The same as this semester
- ☐ Fewer than this semester
- ☐ More than this semester

31. In the previous question, if you indicated that ***you are not planning to enroll at any school in the spring***, please select the reason(s) why below. ***Select all that apply.***

- ☐ I cannot afford to pay for my next semester
- ☐ I am not doing well in my classes
- ☐ I am about to lose my financial aid

- ☐ I don't like being in college
- ☐ Other: _____

32. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) can be completed as early as October 1, 2019. Have you completed your FAFSA yet?

- ☐ No, and I do not plan to complete the FAFSA this academic year because I do not plan to be enrolled in postsecondary education next year.
- ☐ No, but I plan to complete the FAFSA this academic year.
- ☐ Yes

33. What kind of assistance/resources could have helped you have a better experience this semester?

Thank you for your time!

Appendix B: Transition Staff Interview Protocol

West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation

2020 Interview Guide for Transition and First Year Programs Staff

Facilitator Guidelines:

1. Introduce yourself and colleagues as representatives of ICF and describe your role (i.e., facilitator).
2. Briefly discuss the purpose of the interview: Explain that the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WV HEPC) has contracted with ICF to conduct an independent evaluation of the West Virginia GEAR UP program. The purpose of this phone interview is to learn more about the activities and perceptions of Transition and First Year Program staff. Explain that this is not an evaluation of Transition and First Year Program staff or other GEAR UP personnel. The session will take approximately 45-50 minutes.
1. Convey to each participant our confidentiality policy: *(1) The interview 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 by the evaluation team, who have signed confidentiality agreements ensuring the protection of data; (4) ICF maintains interview data in secure areas; and (5) please respect confidentiality by not sharing any information outside of this interview.*
2. Ask permission to participate in the focus group: *Now that you have heard about the content of this focus group and the confidentiality provisions, do you consent to participate?*
3. Ask permission to record the interview: *In order to capture the discussion, I would like to record the session. Only evaluation team members will have access to the recording. If you choose not to have the interview recorded, we will not record the session but will take notes. We will not include your name(s) or the institution that you represent in these notes. Any information that can be used to identify an individual will be removed from transcripts prior to being shared.*
4. Ask if they have any questions for you before you begin.
5. **Start the recording.**

Time	Questions	Facilitator's Activity
2 min	**INTRODUCTION** Please introduce yourself, the college/university where you work, and how long you've been with GEAR UP.	Probe: Have you had prior experience with GEAR UP? With similar programs/services at the postsecondary level?
3 min	**JOB RESPONSIBILITIES**	Probe for changes that may have taken place since the start

	Tell us about your job as a WV GEAR UP College Transition and First Year Program staff member at your campus. What are your goals and objectives for this year? How would you describe your typical day or week?	of the academic year. Identify commonalities / differences among College Transition and First Year Program staff at different campuses. Probe for goals related to student success and retention.
3 min	**TRAINING AND PREPARATION** What training did you receive for this position either from WV HEPC or your institution? What were your impressions of this training? Did you feel the training and guidance helped you start at this position?	Probe for any suggested improvements to the training.
7-10 min	**IMPLEMENTATION AND BUY-IN** How are GEAR UP activities going this year? What activities have been provided to students? How have you built awareness and buy-in among students and among other college/university staff? What new ideas or changes do you plan to implement next year?	Probe for involvement in intrusive advising, individual success plan development, orientation support, case management services, early alert system, tutoring, student workshops, retention. Probe for perceptions of buy-in among students.
3 min	**PARENT/FAMILY ENGAGEMENT** How do you communicate with parents? What interactions with parents have you had over the last semester? What strategies do you think work best to engage parents?	Probe for most effective and less effective strategies and similarities or differences across sites.
3-5 min	**INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS** How do you communicate with students? What strategies work best or worst? How often do you meet with students?	Probe for success of specific platforms in reaching students (email, texting, one-to-one meetings, small group workshops/events). Probe for key points in a semester where there is staff / student contact.
3-5 min	**STUDENT CHALLENGES**	Probe for effectiveness of orientation / onboarding activities, student

	What challenges do GEAR UP students face in their first year of college? How have you addressed these challenges?	understanding of college requirements, study skills, adjustment issues.
5 min	**CAMPUS SUPPORT** What non-GEAR UP offices / staff do you work with on your campus, and what resources have they provided? Are you able to refer students to other campus resources, and do students take advantage of these referrals?	Probe for coordination with other campus services (early alert, tutoring, mental health services, etc.) and satisfaction with extent of campus involvement. Probe for strategies perceived as successful in obtaining campus support.
3 min	**INTERACTION WITH HEPC / GEAR UP** In what ways and how often do you interact with HEPC personnel about your work in GEAR UP (e.g., Coordinator of WV GEAR UP College Transition and First Year Programs)? In what ways and how often do you interact with other WV GEAR UP College Transition and First Year Program staff? What additional support can WV HEPC provide to help you provide services at your campus?	Probe for impressions of the GEAR UP workplan / scope of services for WV GEAR UP College Transition and First Year Program staff. Identify common threads across staff.
5 min.	**PROMISING PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED** What activities/strategies are working well? What could be improved? What lessons have you learned that will help you with the GEAR UP freshmen coming to your institution next fall?	Probe for strategies / approaches that may change for the next academic year.
3 min	**YOUR ROLE AS COORDINATOR** How do you define being successful in your position at your college / university?	Probe for how staff balance short-term goals such as orientation / onboarding with longer-term goals such as persistence/retention, case management and tutoring.
3 min	**PROGRAM IMPACT** Overall, how would you describe the impact of these postsecondary services on eligible students? Are	Probe for views on campus culture, student motivation, student communication. Probe for which first-year services

	there plans to continue these activities for future non-GEAR UP students?	may be most difficult to continue. Probe for any campus services that may continue for future first-year students or students as they move to the second year of college.
CLOSING	**Is there anything else we should know to understand the GEAR UP program at your college/university?**	

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 (WV 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 an interview or 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 (for in-person interviews / focus groups), 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

Appendix C: SAT Impact Analysis Technical Detail

Table C1. Program Participation Hours

Program	N	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Counseling/ Advising/ Academic Planning	2,552	2.49	1.75	0	20.17
College Visit	2,552	1.59	0	0	23.25
Financial Aid Counseling/Advising	2,552	0.03	0	0	2.00
Family Counseling/Advising	2,552	0.09	0	0	2.00
Family Cultural Event	2,552	0.00	0	0	2.00
Job Site Visit	2,552	0.14	0	0	6.00
Mentoring	2,552	2.16	0	0	82.67
Student Family Events	2,552	0.26	0	0	5.5
Summer Program-Enrichment	2,552	2.84	0	0	60.50
Student Workshops	2,552	1.73	0	0	64.00
Tutoring SAT/ACT	2,552	1.64	0	0	90.00
English/Language Arts Tutoring	2,552	0.13	0	0	29.00
Math Tutoring	2,552	0.11	0	0	38.08
Science Tutoring	2,552	0.01	0	0	3.00
General Tutoring	2,552	0.07	0	0	41.33
All	**2,552**	**13.27**	**6.25**	**0**	**199.5**

Data notes: The program participation hour data were available only for cohort students (n=2,552). Grand Total variable is the sum of all 15 items listed in this table.

Table C2. Description of Student Survey Scales: Awareness, Confidence, Self-Efficacy, and Expectation

Awareness

How aware are you about the following topics? (Not at all, Slightly, Moderately, Extremely)

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)

College savings plan/529

ACT/SAT

Federal work-study

Federal Pell Grants

Federal student loans

WV Higher Education Grant

Scholarships (e.g., PROMISE or Institutional)

Requirements for college acceptance

The importance/benefit of a college education

High school graduation requirements

As you think about your current skills, how confident are you of your ability in the following areas? (Not confident, Confident, Very Confident, Don't Know)

Math

English/Language Arts

Science

Study skills
Ability to do well in college level courses in the future
Ability to do well on college entrance exams (e.g., SAT, ACT)

College-Going Self-Efficacy

How sure are you about being able to do the following? (Don't Know, Not at All Sure, Somewhat Sure, Sure, Very Sure)
I can find a way to pay for college.
I can get accepted to a college.
I can have family support for going to college.
I can choose a good college.
I can get a scholarship or grant for college.
I can make an educational plan that will prepare me for college.
I can make my family proud with my choices after high school.
I can choose college courses that best fit my interests.
I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me.
I can get good grades in my high school math classes.
I can get good grades in my high school science classes.
I can choose the high school classes needed to get into a good college.
I know enough about computers to get into college.
I can go to college after high school.

College-Going Outcomes-Expectations

If you do go to college, how sure are you about being able to do the following? (Don't Know, Not at All Sure, Somewhat Sure, Sure, Very Sure)
I could pay for each year of college.
I could get A's and B's in college.
I could get my family to support my wish of finishing college.
I could take care of myself in college.
I could fit in at college.
I could get good enough grades to get or keep a scholarship.
I could finish college and receive a college degree.
I could care for my family responsibilities while in college.
I could set my own schedule while in college.
I could make friends at college.
I could get the education I need for my choice of career.
I could get a job after I graduate from college.
I would like being in college.
I could be smart enough to finish college.
I could pick the right things to study at college.
I could do the classwork and homework assignments in college classes.