



West Virginia GEAR UP External Evaluation

Year 1 Annual Report

Submitted to:
West Virginia Higher Education Policy
Commission
1018 Kanawha Blvd E #700,
Charleston, WV 25301

Submitted by:
ICF Incorporated, LLC
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031

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Executive Summary

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (the Commission) is providing services under the auspices of its third Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Services commenced in 2021 and will continue through 2028. GEAR UP goals are to help middle and high school students access and succeed in postsecondary education. During this first year of operation, West Virginia (WV) GEAR UP launched services in high-poverty schools across 11 county school districts. Students in the class of 2027 can participate in GEAR UP from Grade 7 through their first year of postsecondary education and the class of 2028 can participate from Grade 7 through high school graduation as part of the WV GEAR UP cohort model. In addition, all Grade 12 students at participating high schools, beginning with the Class of 2022, can participate as WV GEAR UP “priority” students who receive college awareness and readiness services only during their senior year and first year of postsecondary education. During the 2021–2022 school year (Year 1), the program served Grade 7 students in the first GEAR UP cohort as well as Grade 12 priority students at participating high schools.

To measure progress toward goals and understand the implementation and impact of the WV GEAR UP grant, the Commission contracted with ICF to conduct an external evaluation of the program. This report presents evaluation findings from Year 1, based on an analysis of data collected from students, parents/guardians, and school personnel through surveys and interviews. Key findings from the evaluation are as follows:

Students and parents believe college is an important goal, but they have questions. In their survey responses, both students and parents believed that going to college will lead to a better future for the student and for the family. While it is not surprising that Grade 7 students have yet to speak about college with someone at school, many Grade 12 students indicated this as well. With high school graduation fast approaching, some seniors appeared to have limited awareness of college options. Similarly, parents were looking for more information about GEAR UP, suggesting a need to make it available through a variety of means and formats.

With this consideration in mind, communication and engagement are important. Some site coordinators spoke of the need to engage parents to help overcome student apathy and a general lack of knowledge about post-high school options. Although students agreed that their parents supported their aspirations, this optimism did not often materialize into concrete actions and students still had unanswered questions. In addition, findings suggest a need to tailor programming and messages. For example, the information Grade 7 students said they needed or would like to be successful was quite varied, with no clear lead topic. As a result, there is a need to make sure resources are customized to students’ interests to maintain their goals of pursuing college. Emerging from the pandemic, students also seemed to indicate a desire for fun, engaging in-person activities that also can contain college-is-possible messages.

Several findings suggest GEAR UP site coordinators also are looking for more information. In their responses to open-ended survey questions, these coordinators

offered a variety of recommendations including a timetable suggesting times to schedule and complete key activities, additional training on GEAR UP, the scheduling of townhall meetings where coordinators could get their questions answered, and more advanced notice or reminders about upcoming meetings and events. As WVGU provided monthly townhalls and included meeting dates on the project workplan, the Commission may simply need to remind all coordinators about these resources and continue to offer them in the future.

Elsewhere, for program participants, the issue of college affordability is front and center. Spotlight analyses comparing Grade 12 students from the subsample of schools that participated in both the 2014 WV GEAR UP grant (Class of 2021) and the 2021 WV GEAR UP grant (Class of 2022) revealed that Class of 2022 students were significantly more likely than Class of 2021 students to say that the cost of college would be a reason they would not attend college. At the same time, most students were unlikely to correctly estimate the cost of college. Without sufficient attention, these issues create a formidable barrier in the college planning process. If students can learn and retain information on how to pay for college—including the many financial resources available—they in turn may be less likely to use cost as a reason to dismiss the idea of postsecondary study. Related to this issue are survey findings regarding knowledge of key state financial aid programs. While the Promise Scholarship enjoyed strong recognition from students, parents, and school personnel, knowledge of other offerings such as the WV Higher Education Grant (HEG) and WV Invests showed room for improvement. Teachers can play critical roles in conveying information about options other than the well-known Promise program, which appears to be covered regularly as part of classroom instruction.

Older students had a greater sense of hope and belonging than younger students. Developing and maintaining a sense of hope and belonging are major goals of this GEAR UP grant. Based on this early data collection, Grade 12 students had a higher overall mean score on the Hope Scale than Grade 7 students. This issue may be worth monitoring as it could suggest that those closest to high school graduation may post the highest scores and those in middle school may need more encouragement and assistance.

Programming for middle school students can be a challenge. In interviews, Grade 7 students shared their desired future professions, but also indicated they were open to change. This points to a need to help students explore various careers and interests. Students also welcomed the idea of college visits, signifying the importance of these activities even when students are far from high school graduation. Interviews with these students also showed that while they were aware of their parents' professions, they had little understanding of what it took to work in these fields and whether it required a college degree. Fostering constructive conversations at home may be one element of a comprehensive approach to working with middle-school students.

In response to these findings and trends, the evaluation team offers the following recommendations to the Commission for consideration as it begins Year 2 of the 2021–2028 GEAR UP grant:

Offer engaging activities where students support each other: Among many survey questions related to college-going culture at schools, students were least likely to agree

that they help one another to follow their college and career goals. In response, GEAR UP may wish to launch leadership and mentoring programs such as the Higher Education Readiness Officers, or HEROs, program and Student Success Societies offered in the previous grant. Staff also may want to design fun field trips to colleges and other engaging activities, such as free tickets to college sporting events, to build camaraderie. Within high schools, career clubs and game-based learning activities also may help build a more supportive system.

Promote early exposure to college-awareness programming: Grade 12 students surveyed in Year 1 of the 2021 WV GEAR UP grant were significantly more likely than those surveyed in Year 7 of the 2014 WV GEAR UP grant to identify cost as a major reason they would not attend postsecondary education. Despite that finding, however, they also were significantly less likely to correctly estimate the actual cost of college. Improvements on both metrics are critical for GEAR UP success. One strategy may be to increase marketing and visibility around GEAR UP and its college-is-possible message, as some focus group participants also noted they would have liked earlier and/or more exposure to the program. Some priority focus group participants also believed that postsecondary information should be relayed starting in middle school. Specific to GEAR UP, priority students may benefit from welcoming activities at the end of Grade 11 so students learn they will be part of this program in senior year. For cohort students, it may highlight a need for more marketing to both students and parents, additional workshops focused on college costs, and high-profile events such as guest speakers and college fairs to publicize the GEAR UP college-awareness message.

Offer additional support to teachers: School personnel respondents often did not believe that college messaging was being integrated into events and did not believe teachers were strongly involved in college discussions. For their part, many teachers also did not think that classroom activities supported development of students' problem-solving skills that are necessary for postsecondary success. In response, GEAR UP may want to raise teachers' level of awareness about the program and the college-is-possible message through increased marketing and communication. Given that teacher burnout is at an all-time high—in part due to the nationwide teacher shortage and COVID-related learning loss and mental health issues (Camera, 2022)—GEAR UP may want to design fun turnkey activities or lessons that teachers can easily use in class to promote college and career awareness.

Continue to support career/technical education: Based on comments from students in the priority focus groups, career/technical education is extremely important to seniors. While many students do have careers in mind, they want the option to pursue both career/technical education and college-prep courses while in high school. Based on focus group comments, some schools may not be offering this breadth of options. At these schools, GEAR UP could identify current gaps and design extracurricular or summer programming (such as STEM-related initiatives) to help meet student needs.

Be sure to involve all students: While GEAR UP services to cohort students are still evolving, it is important to recognize the need to target all students for college awareness services. At one middle school, a student in an interview said that a college campus visit was offered as a reward for good grades and attendance. Though the evaluation team does

not have other information about this visit, it may be an early reminder of the need to ensure that activities—particularly for this age group—are open to as many students as possible. One student who went on the visit noted that it opened her eyes to the fact that college is more than just attending classes. All students, including those who may not be high achievers, may benefit from such services.

Provide more information on all sources of financial aid: Survey respondents had extensive knowledge of the Promise Scholarship but less knowledge of other options to pay for college such as the WV HEG and the WV Invests program for students pursuing careers in high-demand fields. While Promise may be a popular in-class discussion topic, the other programs also provide valuable financial assistance. GEAR UP may want to discuss how strategies used to promote Promise can be applied to other programs, particularly WV Invests, given student interest in career/technical education programs. These offerings should build knowledge not only among students and families, but also among teachers.

Deploy grade-specific messaging: As early as Grade 7, students say they plan to attend college even though they are unlikely to report that they have spoken with someone about college topics. In addition, many Grade 12 students surveyed did not report speaking with someone about college. As GEAR UP becomes more integrated into schools as the grant progresses, the program should leverage resources to speak to students about these topics in a way that is relevant at their grade level. For example, in middle school, a college awareness scavenger hunt might be an engaging way to build knowledge for these students and their families. School personnel also suggested having interactive activities for students to learn about FAFSA, the SAT, and dual-credit opportunities instead of relying on lectures alone.

Continue to provide support for site coordinators: Many site coordinators responding to the personnel survey emphasized a need for more communication and training. In response to open-ended questions, some recommended that the program have a monthly calendar or annual timetable with expected activities and events. Several also wanted additional training and townhall meetings where they could get questions answered. More advanced notice and reminders of upcoming meetings and events were among other suggestions. While such resources were available through various sources, from formal workplans to emails, meetings, and Zoom townhalls at the time of survey administration, the limited awareness of these resources suggests that coordinators may benefit from additional reminders about these options.

Offer career activities for middle schoolers: Although Grade 7 students in interviews shared their desired future professions, they also said that they were open to change and not afraid of exploring new paths. As such, the middle school years are an excellent time for students to be formally introduced to different career paths for their long-term aspirations. One option may be for GEAR UP coordinators to conduct career interest inventories or other career-related activities to help broaden and deepen student interest in specific jobs. Using the CFVW.com portal may provide engaging content for students in this age group.

Target student, parent, and teacher engagement: While most praised the work of their schools and GEAR UP, some also cited lower engagement among students and teachers as

their schools continue to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that trend, site coordinators may consider offering senior class assemblies and making presentations at faculty meetings to further publicize the program. As students seem to be craving more of the fun activities that existed before the pandemic, GEAR UP may consider sponsoring activities that specifically focus on building excitement among teachers and students. Program sites may want to increase the frequency and number of in-person college visits, during the summer or school year, to the extent possible. As pandemic restrictions ease, college fairs in schools are also important to revive. For parents, program staff may consider retaining parent champions at each school to help educate other adults about GEAR UP, college requirements, and financial aid. Programming and outreach also could help encourage more detailed, at-home conversations in which parents and children can discuss plans for life after high school graduation.

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I. Introduction

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (the Commission) is providing services under the auspices of its third Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Services commenced in 2021 and will continue through 2028. GEAR UP goals are to help middle and high school students access and succeed in postsecondary education. During this first year of operation, West Virginia (WV) GEAR UP launched services in high-poverty schools across 11 county school districts. Students in the class of 2027 can participate in GEAR UP from Grade 7 through their first year of postsecondary education and the class of 2028 can participate from Grade 7 through high school graduation as part of the WV GEAR UP cohort model. In addition, all Grade 12 students at participating high schools, beginning with the Class of 2022, can participate as WV GEAR UP “priority” students who receive college awareness and readiness services only during their senior year and first year of postsecondary education. During the 2021–2022 school year (Year 1), the program served Grade 7 students in the first GEAR UP cohort as well as Grade 12 priority students at participating high schools.

The context for delivering high school support services in Year 1 was influenced by continuing effects of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Although they were occasionally interrupted by outbreaks, particularly of the Omicron variant in late 2021, in-person classes were the norm for most students in the 2021–2022 year and masking requirements were reduced or eliminated in most districts (West Virginia Department of Education, 2022).

The economic challenges presented by the pandemic remained, however, compounding existing economic, education, and public health challenges already faced by the state. From February 2020 to September 2021, the state lost 27,700 jobs, a decline of 3.9% overall (Ettliger, 2021). Employment levels have increased in the time since, with the seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate of 3.9% representing an improvement of one percentage point compared to pre-pandemic levels from February 2020. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

In terms of education, key West Virginia metrics reveal a decline in outcomes. Nationwide, college enrollment decreased 4.1% between spring 2021 and spring 2022 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022), a trend also seen in West Virginia, where the enrollment rate declined by 9.1%, falling from 50.5% for the class of 2019 to 45.9% for the class of 2021 (West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, n.d.a). The total number of degrees and credentials awarded at the state’s public postsecondary institutions also decreased by 10.4% between 2016 and 2022 and are currently at the lowest level of the past decade (West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, n.d.b). In addition, West Virginia maintains the lowest rate in the country—21.3%—for those 25 and older who hold a bachelor’s degree, more than 11 percentage points below the national average (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.b; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.a).

Related to the decline in college enrollment are challenges in securing Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion among high school seniors. Class of 2021 students

achieved a FAFSA completion rate after high school graduation that was 2 percentage points above the rate for seniors in the previous year (College for West Virginia, 2021). However, this level is 7.3 percentage points below the target set by West Virginia's Climb, a campaign to boldly increase college access and success statewide, supported by the Commission, the West Virginia Community and Technical College System, and College for West Virginia (CFWV), with support from the Lumina Foundation. West Virginia's Climb aims to ensure that at least 60% of West Virginians have a postsecondary credential by 2030 (West Virginia's Climb, n.d.).

In addition, West Virginia continues to have among the highest rates of death due to drug overdose in the nation. While preliminary data from 2022 indicate that death rates may have declined in the state (Ahmad et. al, 2022), West Virginia had the highest death rate due to drug overdose prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a rate of 81.4 deaths per 100,000 residents (Hedegaard & Warner, 2020).

These challenges underscore the importance of the WV GEAR UP grant, the important work of the Commission to promote access to and success in postsecondary education, and the achievements accomplished thus far. For example, the state's 4-year high school graduation rate of 91.1% for 2020–2021 was 12 percentage points higher than the 2011–2012 rate of 79.3% (West Virginia Department of Education, 2022). Such accomplishments demonstrate the potential of college access and success programming to support education attainment across the state at this critical time.

GEAR UP is also working with students at a time when state leaders are stepping up other efforts to increase college-going rates. Noting the decline in enrollment, the Commission's Chancellor says the state is "laser focused on the college-going rate," meeting with high school counselors and conducting listening sessions with students (Cork, 2022). COVID-19 left many students disconnected from education, with some believing they are not prepared to move on to postsecondary study, the Chancellor noted. Nonetheless, the state is committed to its goal that 60% of adults have some type of post-high school education by 2030 to meet the needs of employers.

To measure progress toward goals and understand the implementation and impact of the WV GEAR UP grant, the Commission contracted with ICF to conduct an external evaluation of the program. This report presents evaluation findings from Year 1 (the 2021–2022 school year).

II. Methodology

Data Sources

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

Year 1 Grade 7 Student Survey

The Year 1 Grade 7 WV GEAR UP Student Survey included 25 items organized across five sections. Appendix B provides a reproduction of the survey. Nine items were demographic questions designed to gather background information about respondents and their families. Six items measured students' perceptions of their school and education goals; among these items were the Children's Hope Scale. Eight items measured students' knowledge about college-related topics, the perceived cost of attending college, and various financial aid options. Finally, two questions assessed students' participation in college preparation activities and the resources they need to be more successful in school and more prepared for college.

Year 1 surveys were administered online in February 2022 to all Grade 7 students enrolled in WV GEAR UP schools at the time of survey administration via the Standardized Collection and Reporting of Information Benefitting Education (SCRIBE) system. A total of 2,190 unique Grade 7 student survey cases were collected in Year 1 and included in analyses, representing 83% of enrolled students at the time of the survey. Survey links and scannable Quick Response (QR) codes were made available for the surveys and publicized on the WV GEAR UP website.

Year 1 Grade 7 Parent Survey

The Year 1 Grade 7 WV GEAR UP Parent/Guardian Survey included 27 items organized across five sections. Appendix B provides a reproduction of the survey. Ten questions were demographic items designed to gather background information about respondents. Six items measured parents' perceptions of their students' school and education goals, including items adapted from the Children's Hope Scale. Seven items measured parents' knowledge about college-related topics, the perceived cost of attending college, and various financial aid options. Finally, three questions assessed parents' knowledge of GEAR UP, participation in GEAR UP activities, and the resources they need to help their student be more successful in school and more prepared for college.

Year 1 surveys were administered online in February 2022 to all parents/guardians of Grade 7 students enrolled in GEAR UP schools at the time of the survey. The same SCRIBE system employed for administration of Grade 7 student surveys was used for the parent surveys. Promotional materials/reminders were sent home to parents/guardians and publicized on the WV GEAR UP website. Parent/guardian surveys were also available in paper/pencil formats to a parent/guardian for each eligible student. A total of 807 unique Grade 7 parent survey cases were collected in Year 1 and included in analyses, representing 31% of students enrolled at the time of the survey.

Year 1 Grade 12 Student Survey

The Year 1 Grade 12 WV GEAR UP Student Survey included 32 items organized across five sections. Appendix B provides a reproduction of the survey. Ten questions were demographic items designed to gather background information about respondents and their families. Six items measured students' perceptions of their school and education goals; among these items were the Children's Hope Scale. Eight items measured students' knowledge about college-related topics, the perceived cost of attending college, and various financial aid options. Eight questions assessed students' participation in college preparation activities and the resources they need to be more successful in school and more prepared for college.

Year 1 surveys were administered online during February 2022 to all Grade 12 students enrolled in WV GEAR UP schools at the time of survey administration via the SCRIBE system. A total of 1,963 unique student survey cases were collected in Year 1 and included in analyses, representing 79% of enrolled Grade 12 students at the time of the survey. Survey links and scannable QR codes were made available for the surveys and promotional materials/reminders were sent home to parents/guardians (such as emails with survey links and reminder cards) and publicized on the WV GEAR UP website.

Year 1 Personnel Survey

The Year 1 School Personnel Survey included 27 items. Appendix B provides a reproduction of the survey. In addition to 10 demographic items, the survey included two subscales measuring faculty member perceptions of college-going culture in their schools and classrooms, with 18 prompts examining the rigor and perceptions of college-going culture. Additional items asked respondents to rate their level of knowledge about financial aid programs, the perceived cost of attending college, and their ability to assist students and families with various college-related topics. Respondents were also asked about their level of involvement in college-related activities at their school and the extent to which their school promoted the college-related topics. A series of items was designated only for GEAR UP site coordinators to measure their perceptions of the helpfulness of resources and services offered and the additional needs of GEAR UP coordinators and students.

The survey was administered online between April and May 2022 to all Grade 6–12 teachers, counselors, site coordinators, and school administrators employed in WV GEAR UP schools. The evaluation team used the SCRIBE system to administer the surveys. Site coordinators were provided with a link to the survey during a regularly scheduled site coordinator meeting and instructed to distribute the link to school personnel. The link was also embedded on the WV GEAR UP website. Ultimately, 908 personnel out of 1,805 (50%) completed the survey in Year 1.

Year 1 Cohort Student Individual Interviews

In developing a research plan for this new grant, the Commission prioritized documentation of student perspectives throughout the 7-year period. To this end, the evaluation team conducted individual interviews with cohort students—Grade 7 students during the 2021–2022 academic year—at three middle schools. The Commission and evaluation team envisioned this as the first step in an annual longitudinal study to examine the education

trajectories of these students, with additional interviews planned each year. In collaboration with the Commission, evaluators developed an interview protocol with 18 questions covering topics such as students' perceptions of the current school year, their plans for the future, their abilities to succeed academically, and their impressions of GEAR UP so far (see Appendix B).

The evaluation team conducted all the interviews in person, with GEAR UP site coordinators selecting the students. The approximate length of each interview was 30 minutes. Overall, 10 female students and three male students were interviewed during spring 2022 at three GEAR UP sites. The three schools represent a cross-section of WV GEAR UP, including one Prekindergarten–Grade 8 school, a junior high school, and a combined middle school/high school. The evaluation team will continue to interview each of these students annually through their high school years and into the first year following high school.

Year 1 Priority Student Focus Groups

To document baseline conditions at GEAR UP high schools at the start of the grant, the evaluation team conducted focus groups with priority high school seniors at five high schools in March and April of the 2021–2022 academic year. The evaluation team conducted four of these focus groups in person, with a fifth conducted virtually at the school's request. The approximate length of each focus group was 60 minutes. Overall, 36 students participated in one of these focus groups, including 24 female students and 12 male students. In collaboration with the Commission, evaluators developed a focus group protocol covering topics such as students' future plans, their high school experiences, and their impressions of their school and GEAR UP (see Appendix B).

Data Analysis

Survey Analysis

Student and Parent Survey Analysis

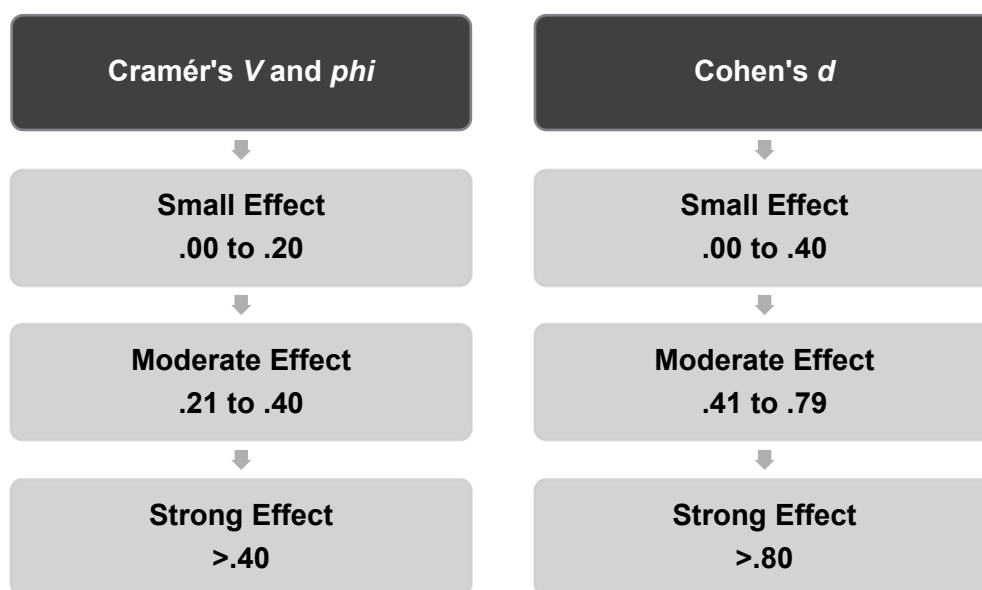
To examine outcomes for students and parents in Year 1, the evaluation team conducted descriptive analyses of survey responses. Mean values for continuous outcomes and the frequency of responses for categorical outcomes were calculated. Analysis presented in the Spotlight section of this report highlights differences in outcomes measured by student surveys for students from the Class of 2021 (Grade 12 students in Year 7 of the 2014 WV GEAR UP grant) and the Class of 2022 (Grade 12 students in Year 1 of the 2021 WV GEAR UP grant). Only schools that participated in both the 2014 and 2021 WV GEAR UP grants were included and only survey questions that were asked of both classes were analyzed. Table 1 highlights the schools and survey items included in this analysis.

Table 1. Schools and Survey Items Included In Spotlight Analysis

Schools		
Mingo Central High School Nicholas County High School Point Pleasant Junior/Senior High School Richwood High School	Scott High School Sherman High school Tug Valley High School	Van Junior/Senior High School Wahama High school Wirt County High School
Survey Items Analyzed		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student plans to continue education • Student education aspirations and expectations • Reasons students may not continue education • Students who spoke with someone about college entrance requirements and financial aid • Estimated cost of college • FAFSA and college application completion • Support to submit FAFSA and college applications 		

To examine the differences in outcomes between the Classes of 2021 and 2022, the evaluation team conducted longitudinal analyses of survey responses using descriptive and comparative statistical analyses. To determine significant differences, the evaluation team used independent samples *t*-tests for continuous outcomes and chi-square analyses for categorical outcomes. For these analyses, the evaluation team interpreted statistically significant differences using common effect size calculations. For chi-square analyses, the evaluation team interpreted *phi* or *Cramér's V* as appropriate, depending on the number of degrees of freedom in the categorical data. For independent samples *t*-tests, the evaluation team used Cohen's *d*. See Figure 1 for how the estimates for each statistic were interpreted.

Figure 1. Effect Size Interpretations for *Cohen's d*, *Cramér's V*, and *Phi*



School Personnel Survey Analysis

To examine WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey outcomes, the evaluation team conducted descriptive analyses of survey responses. Mean values for continuous outcomes and the frequency of responses for categorical outcomes are presented. In addition to presenting overall findings from Year 1, the evaluation team examined differences by respondent's reported role. As with student and parent survey analyses, the evaluation team used independent samples *t*-tests for continuous outcomes and chi-square analyses for categorical outcomes to determine significant differences. For these analyses, the evaluation team interpreted statistically significant differences using common effect size calculations. For chi-square analyses, the evaluation team interpreted *phi* or Cramér's *V* as appropriate depending on the number of degrees of freedom in the categorical data. For independent samples *t*-tests, the evaluation team used Cohen's *d*. Figure 1 provides an overview of how the estimates for each statistic were interpreted.

Interview/Focus Group Analysis

After completing all focus groups, evaluators transcribed the sessions and coded transcripts under major themes. For the cohort student individual interviews, the evaluation team grouped major findings into these categories: sense of belonging, perceptions of the school, college and career interests, and support and sources of information.

From the priority student focus groups with high school seniors, the team identified themes related to the value of college, students' college and career interests, support and sources of information, their sense of hope and belonging, and the baseline conditions at their high schools. For both the cohort and priority focus groups, the evaluation team developed conclusions and recommendations for future consideration.

III. Student and Parent Survey Results

This chapter summarizes results from analyses of Grade 7 and Grade 12 student surveys and Grade 7 parent surveys collected during Year 1 of the GEAR UP grant. This section also includes a spotlight on comparisons of outcomes from the Class of 2021 and Class of 2022. Overall, responses from 2,190 Grade 7 students, 807 Grade 7 parents, and 1,963 Grade 12 students are included in the analyses presented here.

About the Respondents

Across respondent types (i.e., Grade 7 student, Grade 7 parent/guardians, and Grade 12 students), respondents reported similar demographics: nearly all were White, non-Hispanic, and spoke English as their primary language at home and approximately half were female respondents or, in the case of parent respondents, reported having female students. Additional demographic and sociological details for each respondent type are presented below and in Tables A.1–A.8 in Appendix A.

Among Grade 7 student respondents, two-thirds (66%) indicated they did not have any siblings who currently or previously attended college and 21% reported that the highest level of education attained by their parents was a 4-year degree or higher (making up to 79% of them would-be first-generation college students¹). Notably, 46% did not know the highest level of education attained by their parents. Approximately 6–7% of Grade 7 students indicated some degree of food insecurity.² In addition, 42% reported *Sometimes* or *Often* having a hard time staying focused on homework or other things and 32% reported the same about being so worried that they could not sleep at night.

Among Grade 7 parent respondents, four-fifths (80%) indicated that they did not have any other students who currently or previously attended college and just over one-quarter (27%) of respondents indicated that their student's parent(s) had earned a 4-year degree or higher (making up to 73% of their students would-be first-generation college students). Approximately one-quarter (24%) estimated their family income to be \$30,000 or less.

Among Grade 12 student respondents, over half of these students (57%) indicated they did not have any siblings who currently or previously attended college and 26% reported that the highest level of education attained by their parents was a 4-year degree or higher (making up to 74% of them would-be first-generation college students). Fewer than one-fifth (18%) estimated their family income to be \$30,000 or less. Approximately 10–11% of

¹ The evaluation team is using a definition of first-generation college student that aligns with Title 20 of the United States Code, which defines a first-generation student as one whose parent (for single-parent households) or parents do not possess a baccalaureate degree. For more information, please see 20 U.S.C. § 1070a-11 (2020) at <https://law.justia.com/codes/us/2020/title-20/chapter-28/subchapter-iv/part-a/subpart-2/division-1/sec-1070a-11/>

² Of the Grade 7 students who reported that they *Rarely*, *Sometimes*, or *Often* didn't eat enough food because their family couldn't afford it, 7% reported this occurred in the last 30 days and 6% reported this occurred in the last 12 months.

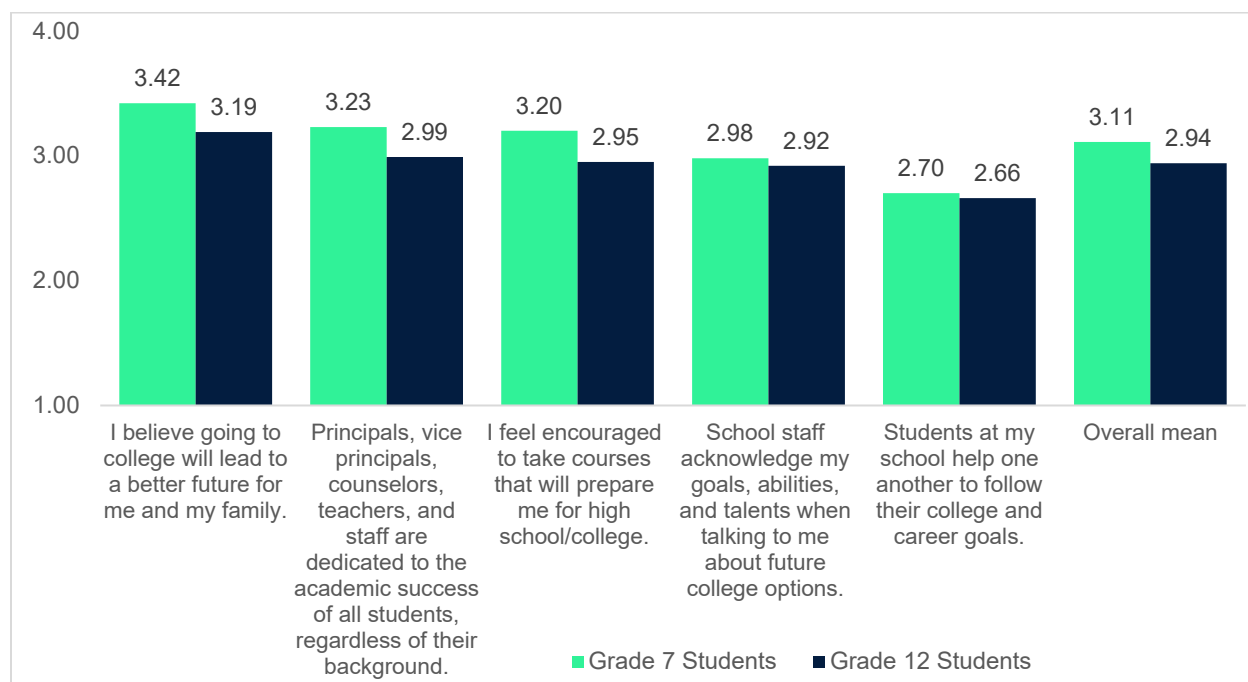
Grade 12 students indicated some degree of food insecurity.³ In addition, 48% reported *Sometimes* or *Often* having a hard time staying focused on homework or other things and 38% reported the same about being so worried that they could not sleep at night.

Perceptions about Education and Future Plans

School Culture

Students and parents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 4-point scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with five statements regarding the college-going culture at their school. The item with the highest mean rating for each group was *I believe/I believe my student going to college will lead to a better future for me and my family/for them*. Among Grade 7 students, mean ratings ranged from 2.70 (*Students at my school help one another to follow their college and career goals*) to 3.42 (*I believe going to college will lead to a better future for me and my family*); the overall mean across the five statements was 3.11. Among Grade 12 students, the mean ratings ranged from 2.66 (*Students at my school help one another to follow their college and career goals*) to 3.19 (*I believe going to college will lead to a better future for me and my family*); the overall mean across the five statements was 2.94. Grade 7 students reported mean ratings for all items that were higher than those of Grade 12 students. See Figure 2 for additional results.

Figure 2. Student College-Going Culture Mean Ratings

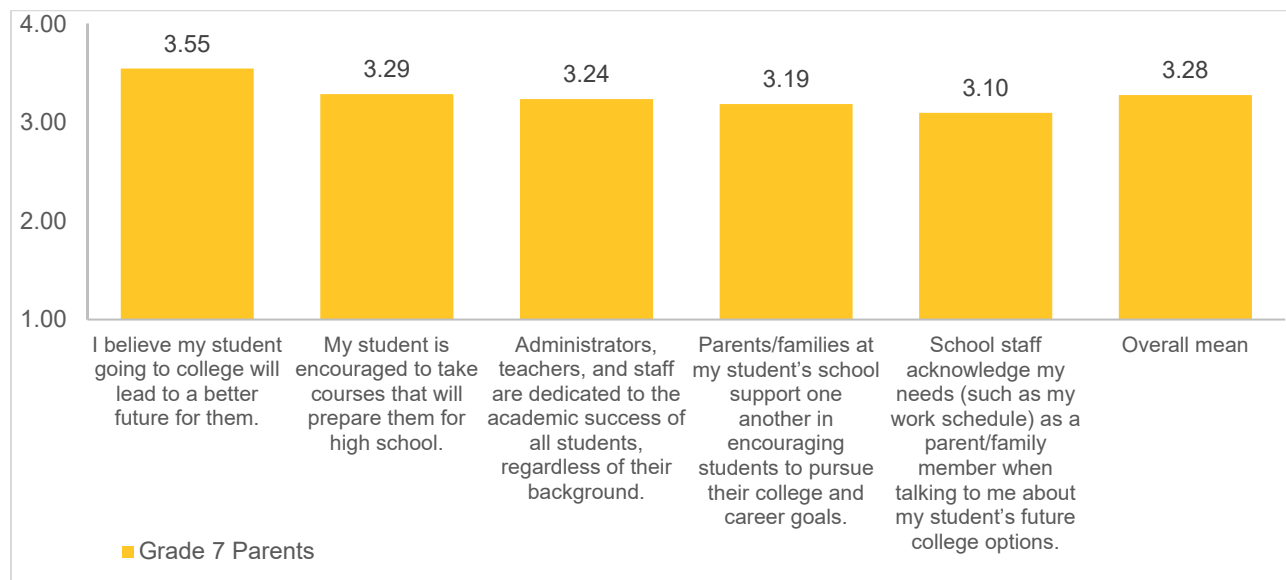


Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1–Strongly disagree, 2–Disagree, 3–Agree, 4–Strongly agree. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey.

³ Of the Grade 12 students who reported that they *Rarely*, *Sometimes*, or *Often* didn’t eat enough food because their family couldn’t afford it, 10% reported this occurred in the last 30 days and 11% reported this occurred in the last 12 months.

As seen in Figure 3, the mean ratings for Grade 7 parents ranged from 3.10 (*School staff acknowledge my needs (such as my work schedule) as a parent/family member when talking to me about my student’s future college options*) to 3.55 (*I believe my student going to college will lead to a better future for them*); the overall mean across the five statements was 3.28.

Figure 3. Parent College-Going Culture Mean Ratings

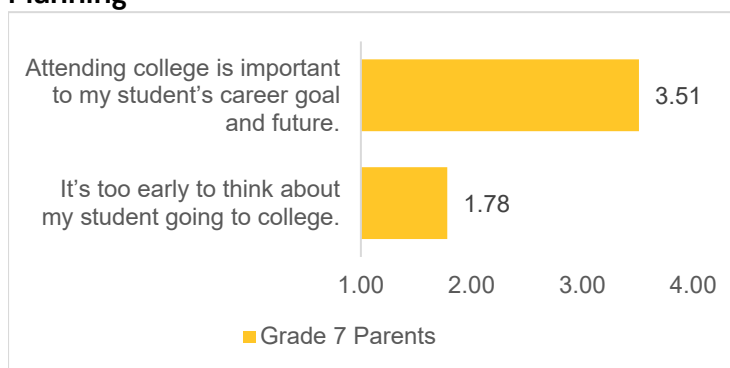


Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1–Strongly disagree, 2–Disagree, 3–Agree, 4–Strongly agree. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Postsecondary Planning

Nearly all Grade 7 parents reported that they spoke with their student about attending college (91%). Grade 7 parents rated their agreement with two statements about college planning on a 4-point Likert-type response format (i.e., 1–Strongly disagree, 2–Disagree, 3–Agree, 4–Strongly agree). As seen in Figure 4, they agreed, on average, that attending college was important for their student’s future (3.51) and, on average, they disagreed that it was too early to talk to their student about college (1.78).

Figure 4. Parent Agreement Regarding College Planning

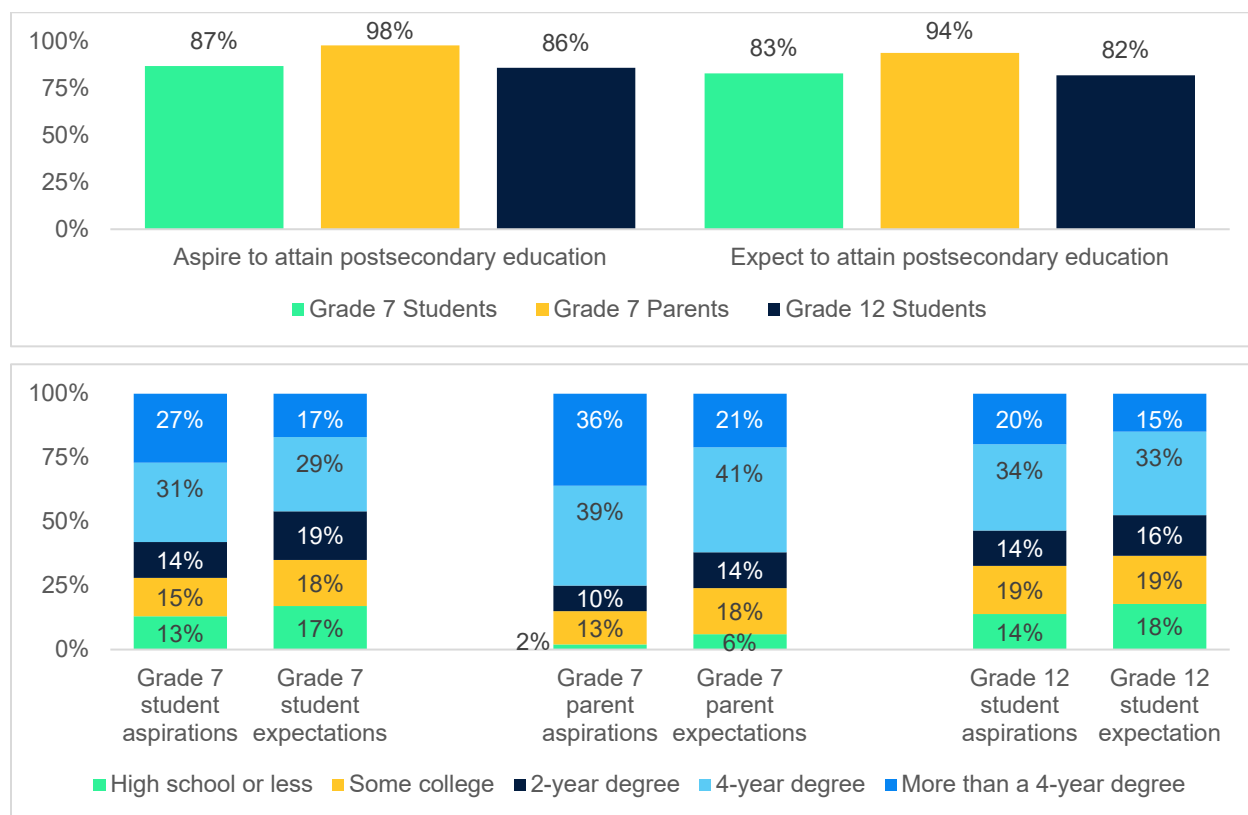


Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1–Strongly disagree, 2–Disagree, 3–Agree, 4–Strongly agree. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Students and parents/guardians were next asked to indicate the levels of education to which they, or their student, aspired and expected to achieve. Education aspirations examine the level of education respondents hope or strive to achieve while education expectations examine the level education respondents assume they will achieve. For these items, the survey included five response options: (1) *High school or less*, (2) *Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, e.g., certificate or career/tech. cert.)*, (3) *A 2-year college degree*, (4) *A 4-year college degree*, and (5) *More than a 4-year college degree*. To simplify interpretation of the findings, the evaluation team combined the last four options into a category labeled, “postsecondary education.”

Figure 5 shows that most Grade 7 and Grade 12 students aspired to attain postsecondary education (87% and 86% respectively) and expect to do so (83% and 82% respectively). Grade 7 parents reported the highest rates of education aspirations and expectations for their students with 98% who indicated they aspire for their student to attain postsecondary education and 94% who expect them to do so. In terms of degree types, respondents most often indicated they aspired and expected to attain a 4-year degree.

Figure 5. Students’ and Parents’ Aspirations and Expectations for Postsecondary Education

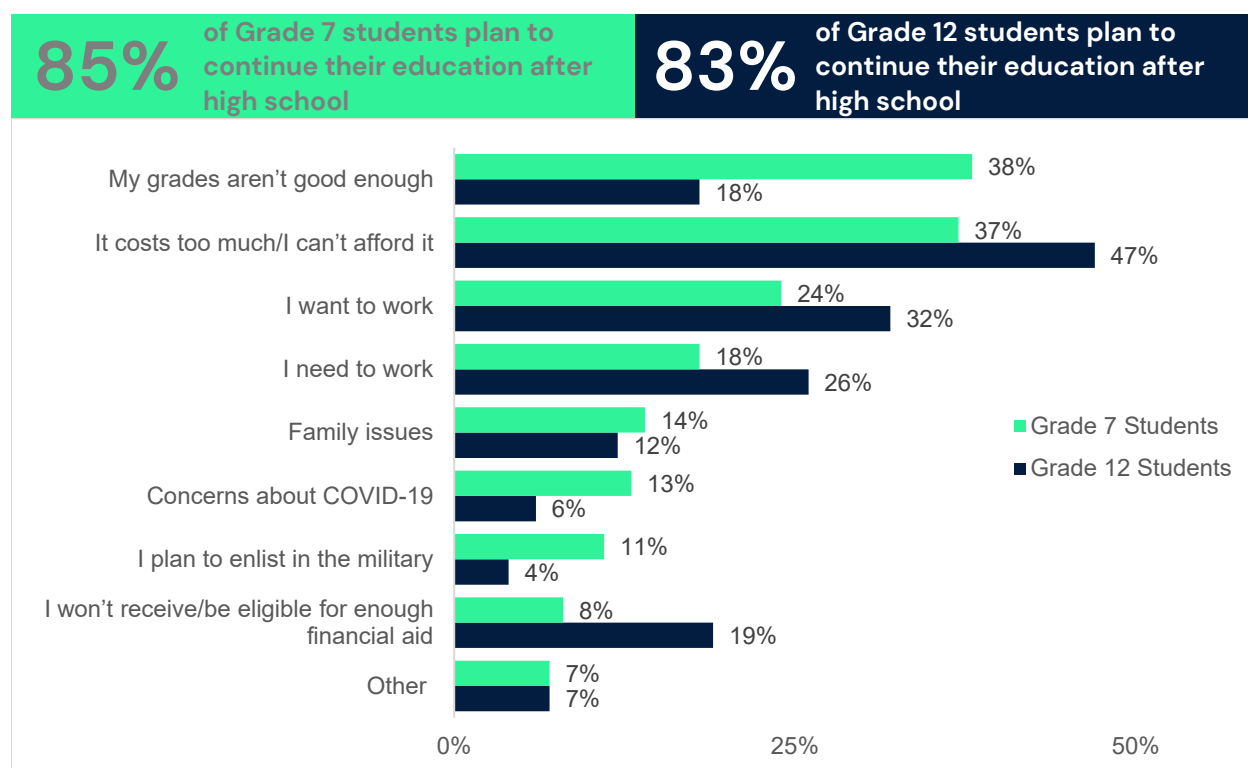


Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Students were asked to indicate whether they planned to continue their education after high school. As seen in Figure 6, nearly all of Grade 7 and Grade 12 students reported that they plan to continue their education (85% and 83% respectively). Among Grade 7 students

who indicated that they might not continue their education following high school, the most frequently cited reasons were *My grades aren't good enough* (38%) and *It costs too much* (37%). Many of the Grade 7 students who selected the *Other* response option indicated that nothing would prevent them from attending college, that they planned to pursue a career that did not require college, or that they lacked interest in college. The most frequently cited reasons for not planning to continue their education after high school among Grade 12 students were *It costs too much* (47%) and *I want to work* (32%). Written responses from Grade 12 students who selected *Other* covered themes such as no interest in college, low entrance exam scores, and mental health reasons.

Figure 6. Students Who Plan to Continue Their Education and the Reasons They May Not Continue



Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey.

Hope

The Hope Scale was included in student and parent surveys to measure respondents' sense of optimism about their ability to pursue goals successfully. As the developers of the Hope Scale explained, children's hope is defined as "a cognitive set involving the beliefs in one's capabilities to produce workable routes to goals (the pathways component), as well as the self-related beliefs about initiating and sustaining movement toward those goals (the agency component)" (Snyder et al., 1997, p. 401). Specifically, hope is measured using questions related to pathways (i.e., ability to carry out goals) and agency (i.e., the sustainment of actions to meet goals), (Snyder et al., 1997). For each item, respondents reported the frequency they believed the statement applied to them on a 6-point scale;

the scale ranged from *None of the time* to *All of the time*. Agency and pathway scores are calculated by summing the responses to the three related survey items each. A hope score is then calculated by summing the agency and pathway sub-scales.

Table 2 presents the mean ratings for each item, the mean hope score, and the mean agency and pathway sub-scale scores for each of the three respondent groups. The mean ratings represent the average response for each item. Mean ratings include all respondents for each item. To calculate mean scores, ratings were summed to create a score for each topic area and then the scores were averaged. Only those who responded to all six items were included in the mean score calculations. Among the three groups, Grade 7 parents had the highest mean ratings and mean scores. Further, the mean pathway score for each group was also higher than their respective agency score.

Grade 7 students' mean ratings ranged from 3.86 (*When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it*) to 4.15 (*I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me*) and their overall mean rating was 3.96. When all ratings were summed, the average hope score among Grade 7 students was 23.99 (11.95 agency score plus 12.03 pathway score). Grade 7 parents mean scores ranged from 4.34 (*When my student has a problem, he/she can come up with lots of ways to solve it*) to 5.55 (*I am hopeful for my student*) and the overall mean score was 4.75. The mean hope score for Grade 7 parents was 28.56 (13.89 agency score plus 14.67 pathway score). Grade 12 students' mean scores ranged from 4.11 (*I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future*) to 4.29 (*I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me*) and their overall mean score was 4.15. The mean hope score for Grade 12 students was 25.01 (12.45 agency score plus 12.56 pathway score). Across all item and sub-scale scores, Grade 7 parents reported the highest means amongst the three respondent groups. Grade 12 students reported higher means than Grade 7 students on nearly all items and all scores. Other research suggests that academic self-efficacy drops among middle school students (Fahle, Lee, and Loeb, 2019). The decrease in academic self-efficacy may be associated with the notable differences in scores between Grade 7 and Grade 12 students.

Table 2. Student and Parent Hope Scale Ratings and Scores

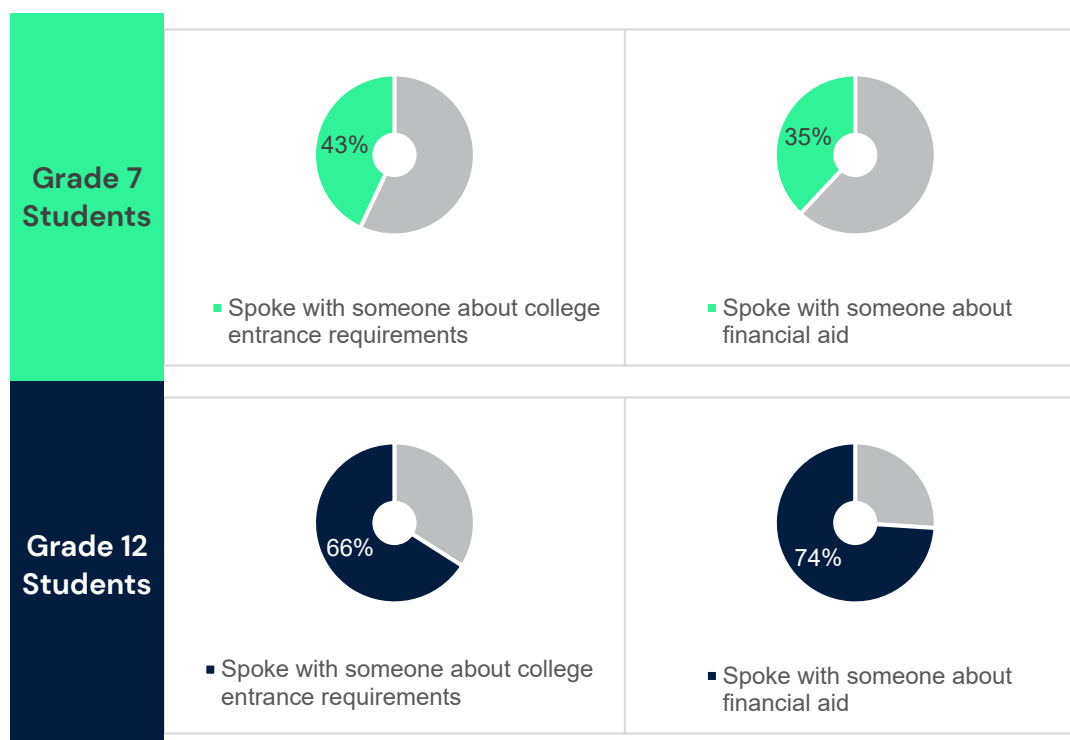
Survey items	Grade 7 Students	Grade 7 Parents	Grade 12 Students
Mean Ratings for Individual Items			
Agency Items (Range 1–6)			
When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it. <i>(When my student has a problem, he/she can come up with lots of ways to solve it.)</i>	4.15	4.34	4.12
I think I am doing pretty well. <i>(I think my student is doing pretty well.)</i>	4.03	4.79	4.12
I am doing just as well as other kids my age. <i>(My student is doing just as well as other kids that are his/her age.)</i>	4.03	4.75	4.17
Pathway Items (Range 1–6)			
I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me. <i>(I am hopeful for my student's future.)</i>	4.15	5.55	4.29
I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future. <i>(I think the things my student has done in the past will help him/her in the future.)</i>	3.89	4.64	4.11
Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem. <i>(Even when others want to quit, I know that my student can find ways to solve the problem.)</i>	3.86	4.47	4.14
Overall Mean Rating (Range 1–6)	3.96	4.75	4.15
Mean Scores for Each Topic (Includes only cases that responded to all six items)			
Hope Score (Range 6–36)	23.99	28.56	25.01
Agency Score (Range 3–18)	11.95	13.89	12.45
Pathway Score (Range 3–18)	12.03	14.67	12.56

Note. The mean ratings represent the average response for each item. Mean ratings include all respondents for each item. To calculate the mean scores, ratings were summed to create a score for each topic area and then the scores were averaged. Only those who responded to all six items were included in the mean score calculations. Statements in blue font in the survey items are the adapted survey items used for the Year 1 Parent Survey. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey. College and Financial Aid Knowledge

Discussions on College Entrance Requirements and Financial Aid

The evaluation team asked students and parents/guardians whether they had spoken with anyone from GEAR UP or their school about college entrance requirements or the availability of financial aid to help pay for college. As shown in Figure 7, fewer than half of Grade 7 students reported that they spoke with someone about college entrance requirements or financial aid (43% and 35% respectively). Most Grade 12 students reported that they spoke with someone about college entrance requirements (66%) and financial aid available to pay for college (74%).

Figure 7. Students Who Spoke With Someone About College Entrance Requirements and Financial Available to Help Pay for college



Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey.

Postsecondary Costs and Financial Aid

The next survey questions concerned estimates of the average cost of tuition—excluding the cost of food, housing, and books—for two public college options in West Virginia: (a) a 4-year public college/university, and (b) a public community/technical college. The survey offered seven response options, ranging from *Up to \$3,000* to *More than \$25,000*. The correct estimates for the 2019–2020 school year were as follows:

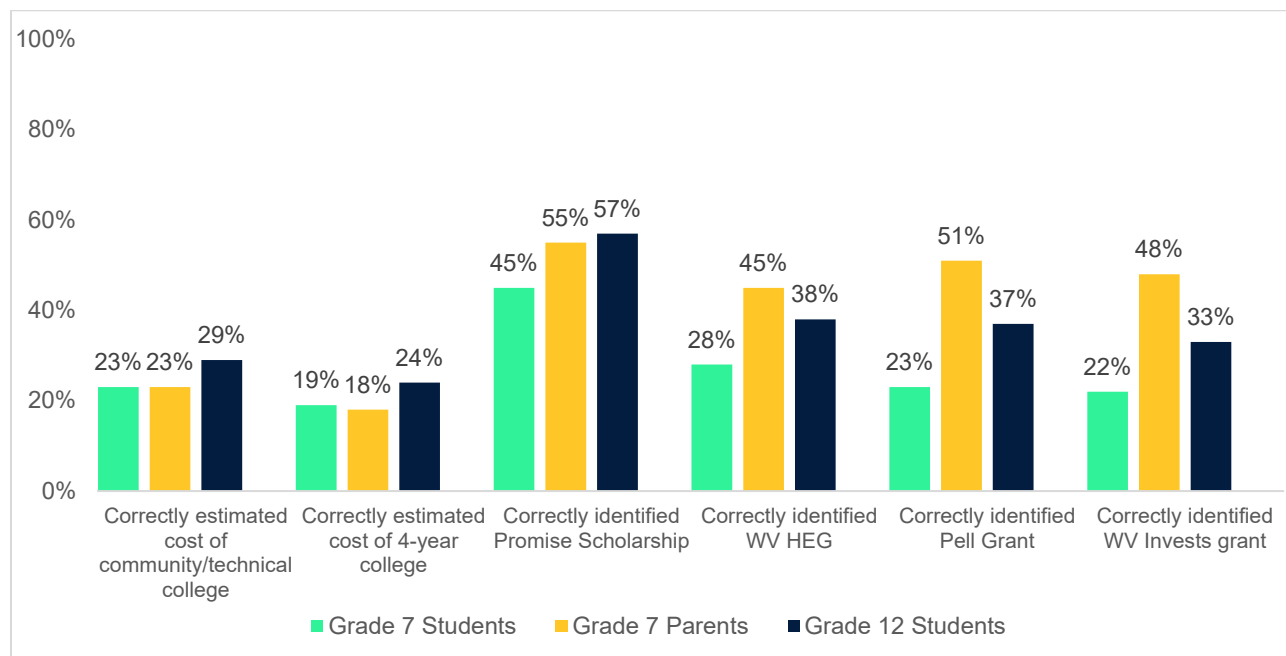
- Four-year public college/university: \$6,001–\$10,000
- Public community/technical college: \$3,001–\$6,000

As seen in Figure 8, fewer than one-quarter of Grade 7 students and Grade 7 parents correctly estimated the cost of each type of institution. Fewer than one-quarter of Grade 7 students and parents correctly estimated the cost of a 4-year college or community/technical college. Grade 12 students were slightly more likely to correctly estimate the cost of each than Grade 7 students and parents. Within all three groups of respondents, most respondents tended to overestimate the cost of each college type.

Surveys provided descriptions of four financial aid sources available to students: Promise Scholarship, West Virginia Higher Education Grant (WV HEG), Pell Grant, and the West Virginia Invests (WV Invests) grant. Respondents were asked to match each description to the correct financial aid source. Grade 7 students most often correctly identified the Promise Scholarship (45%); around one-quarter correctly identified WV HEG (28%), Pell

Grant (23%), and the WV Invests grant (22%) from the descriptions. Approximately half of parents correctly identified each of the financial aid sources. Grade 12 students were also most likely to correctly identify the Promise Scholarship (57%), followed by WV HEG (38%), the Pell Grant (37%), and WV Invests (33%).

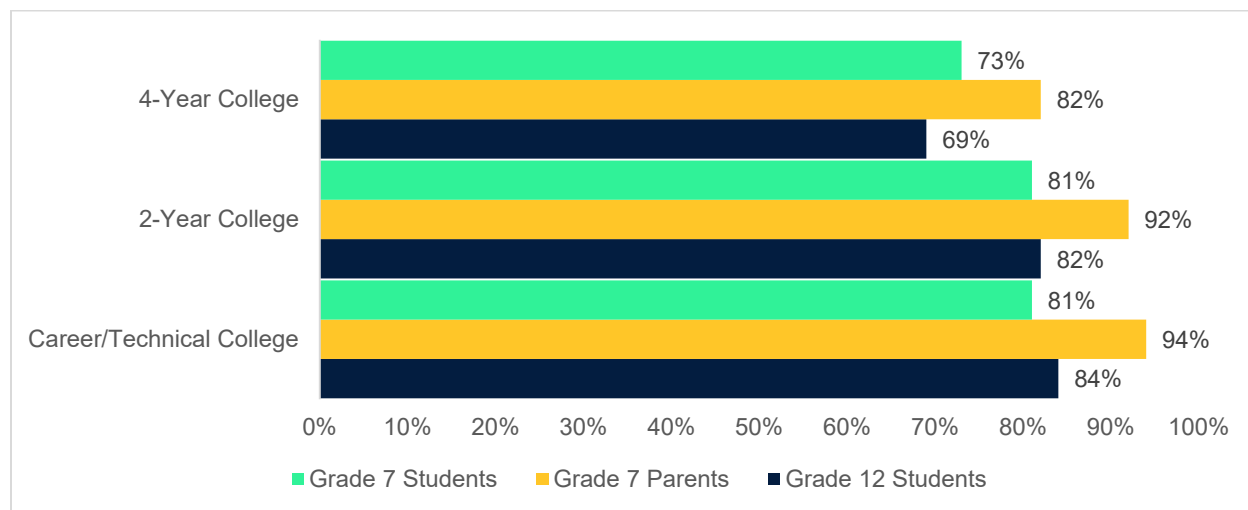
Figure 8. Percentage of Students and Parents Who Correctly Estimated the Cost of College and Identified Financial Aid Sources



Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Surveys also asked respondents to reply to items about the affordability of postsecondary education. These questions prompted students and parents/guardians to indicate the extent to which they thought they could afford to attend any of three public postsecondary education options: (1) a public 4-year college, (2) a public 2-year community/technical college, and (3) a public career/technical college. As seen in Figure 9, most respondents (69%–94%) perceived that they *Probably* or *Definitely* could afford the postsecondary education options presented, with parent respondents generally reporting higher perceptions of affordability than student respondents. Further, respondents reported their perceptions that career/technical college (81%–94%) and 2-year colleges (81%–92%) were more affordable than 4-year colleges (69%–82%).

Figure 9. Percentage of Students and Parents Who Perceived They *Probably* or *Definitely* Can Afford College



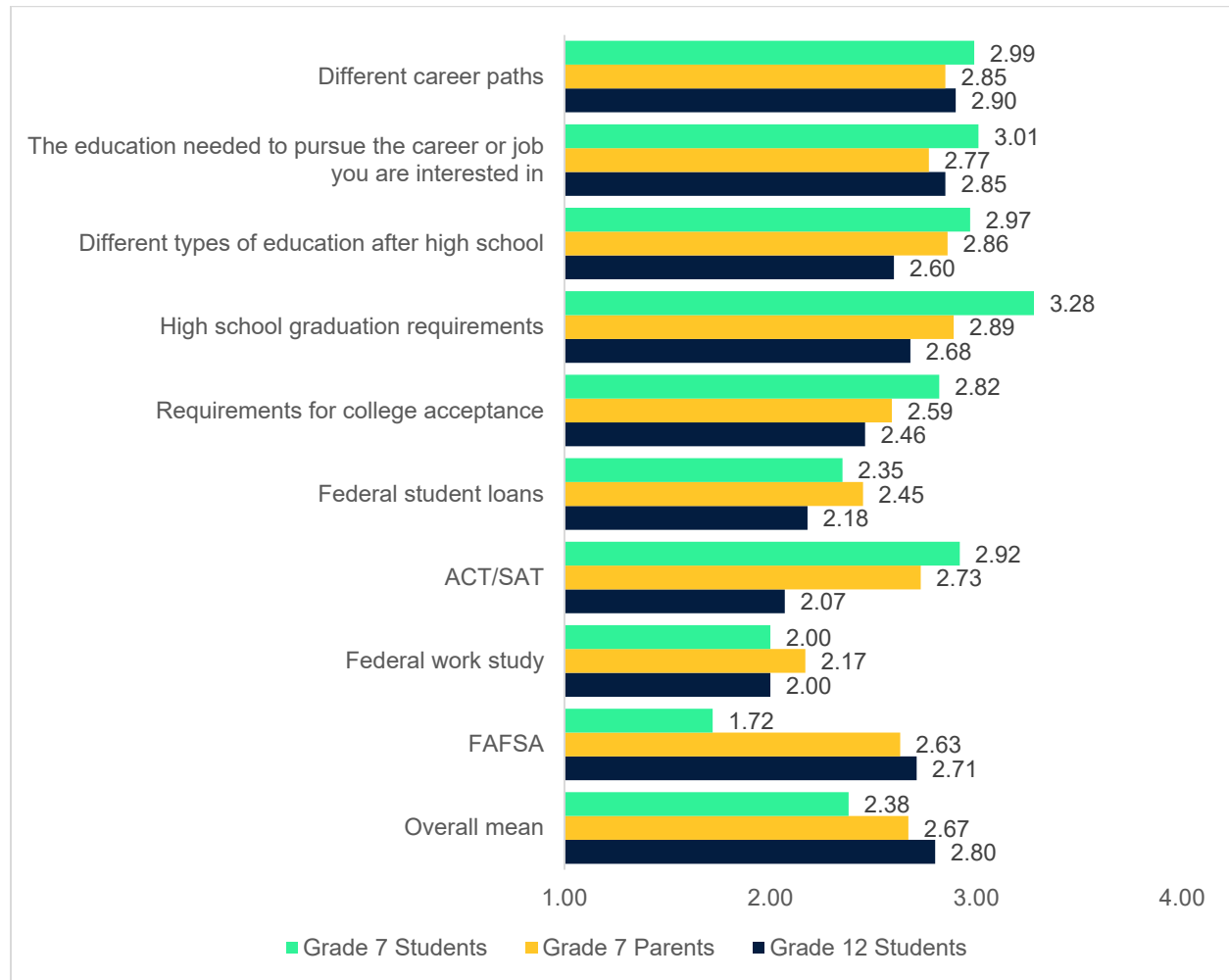
Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Knowledge of Postsecondary Topics

Students and parents/guardians indicated their level of knowledge of nine college topics using a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from not at all knowledgeable to extremely knowledgeable (i.e., 1–Not at all knowledgeable, 2–Slightly knowledgeable, 3–Moderately knowledgeable, 4–Extremely knowledgeable). Grade 7 students’ mean knowledge was highest for career-related topics in comparison to the other college access topics, such as different career options (2.90) and the education needed to pursue the career they were interested in (2.85). Their mean across all items was 2.38. Grade 7 parents’ level of knowledge was similar to students. Their highest reported knowledge pertained to topics for preparation after high schools, such as the education types (2.86) and different career options (2.85), while their lowest knowledge mean scores were related to paying for college, such as work study (2.17) and loans (2.45). Their average mean score across all items was 2.67.⁴ Grade 12 students reported the highest knowledge for high school graduation requirements (3.28) and the education needed to pursue the career they were interested in (3.01). The average mean rating across all items was 2.80. See Figure 10 for more details. Grade 12 students reported the highest mean scores for seven of the nine items compared to Grade 7 students and parents.

⁴ Parent/guardian responses regarding level of knowledge should be interpreted with extreme caution. Parent findings only include responses from parents who responded to the survey online. Responses from parents who responded to the paper version of the survey were removed due to an error in this question on the paper survey.

Figure 10. Student and Parent Knowledge of College and Career Topics



Note. Parent findings only include responses from parents who responded to the survey online, which may not be reflective of parents who completed the paper survey. Responses from parents who responded to the paper version of the survey were removed due to an error in this question on the paper survey. Both the ACT and SAT standardized assessments are widely used for college admission determinations; the SAT is used as the Grade 11 West Virginia state assessment for math and reading. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

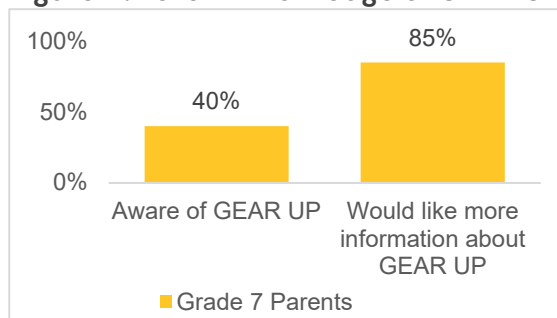
College and Career Preparation Activities/Services

GEAR UP Services

As seen in Figure 11, fewer than half of Grade 7 parents reported that they were aware of the resources provided by GEAR UP (40%) and most reported that they would like to have more information about GEAR UP (85%).

Respondents next rated the helpfulness of a variety of activities designed to increase their knowledge and awareness of college. Grade 7 students provided feedback about six activities. The activities with the highest percentage of Grade 7 students reporting that they were *Extremely helpful* or *Moderately helpful* were activities related to STEM (26%) and help with classes (26%). At least half reported that they did not attend the events or that they were not offered at their school. More than three-quarters of Grade 7 parents indicated that they did not attend/participate in the three activities about which they were asked. Among those who did report that they participated, college visits were the event that parents were most likely to regard as *Extremely* or *Moderately helpful* (15%). The events and activities that Grade 12 students were most likely to report were *Extremely* or *Moderately Helpful* were assistance with completing financial aid forms (38%) and ACT/SAT preparation (36%). See Table 3 for more details.

Figure 11. Parent Knowledge of GEAR UP



Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Table 3. Student and Parent Helpfulness Ratings of Preparation Activities

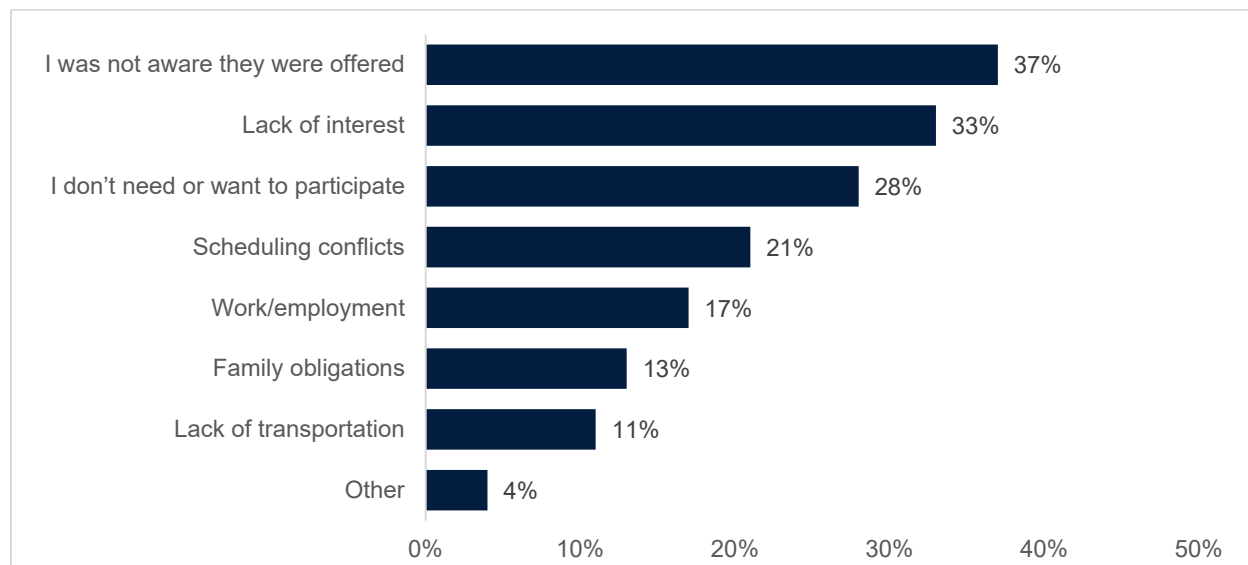
	Not offered/ does not apply	Offered, but I did not attend	Not at all helpful	Slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Extremely helpful
Grade 7 Students						
College Application and Exploration Week	65%	8%	3%	12%	7%	6%
CFWV.com web portal	55%	7%	6%	16%	10%	7%
Financial literacy workshops	59%	7%	6%	13%	10%	6%
Activities related to STEM	38%	12%	5%	18%	17%	9%
Help with classes	36%	15%	4%	19%	14%	12%
College campus visits (virtual)	56%	7%	4%	13%	11%	9%
Grade 7 Parents						
CFWV workshops for families	76%	10%	2%	4%	5%	3%
Accessing CFWV.com portal	74%	9%	2%	5%	6%	4%
Financial aid literacy and assistance	71%	11%	1%	6%	7%	5%
College campus visits	68%	9%	1%	7%	7%	8%
Grade 12 Students						
Txt 4 Success initiative	39%	17%	8%	17%	10%	9%
College Application and Exploration Week	31%	21%	5%	18%	13%	12%
College Decision Day and/or other college acceptance events	30%	19%	6%	17%	15%	13%
Academic planning/career advising	25%	17%	7%	21%	17%	13%
Accessing CFWV.com portal	25%	16%	8%	21%	17%	14%
College campus visits (virtual)	23%	24%	7%	17%	16%	15%
ACT/SAT preparation	15%	21%	7%	22%	20%	16%
Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA)	14%	28%	4%	16%	17%	21%

Note. CFWV stands for College for West Virginia. STEM stands for science, technology, engineering, and math. Txt 4 Success refers to a statewide texting program, managed by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, which sends college reminders and advice to college-bound students; for more information, see <https://www.cfwvconnect.com/txt-4-success/>. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

As seen in Figure 12, Grade 12 students who reported that they did not participate in these events most often cited a lack of awareness (37%) and a lack of interest (33%) as reasons

for their lack of participation. Most Grade 12 students who selected the *Other* response option indicated that they did not attend due to their school absence at the time of the event or they do not intend to attend college.

Figure 12. Reasons Grade 12 Students Did Not Participate in Activities



Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey.

Each survey next asked respondents to select from among a list of resources that they believed they or their student need from their school or GEAR UP to succeed in high school and prepare for college. Results from the analyses of these questions can be found in Figure 13.

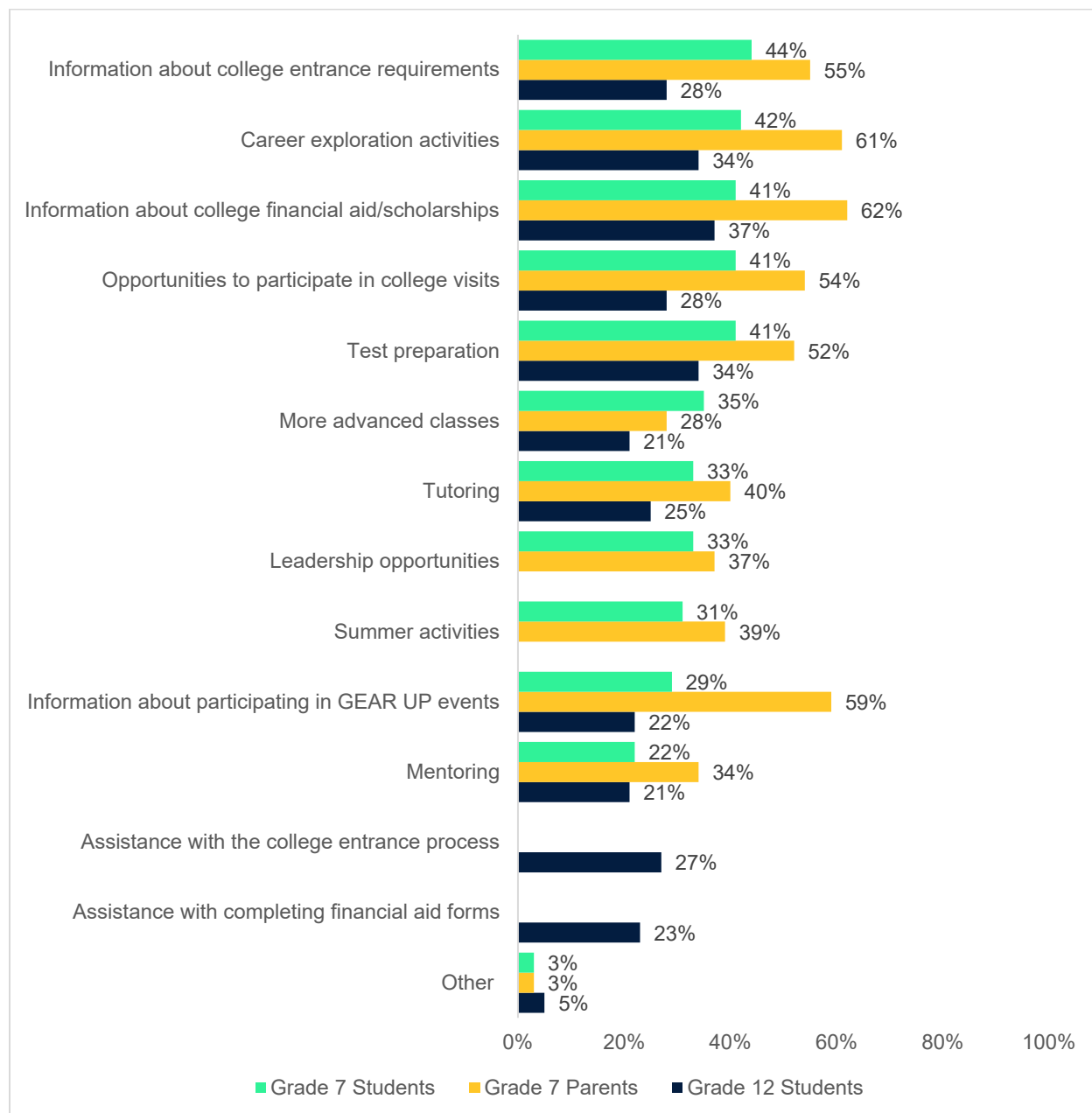
Grade 7 students selected a variety of supports. They most often selected resources that would improve their knowledge about college and career, such as *Information about college entrance requirements* (44%), *Career exploration activities* (42%), *Opportunities to participate in college visits* (41%), and *Information about college financial aid/scholarships* (41%). Respondents who selected *Other* were provided space to include more details about their suggestions. Among the other resources requested by Grade 7 students were resources about specific academic subjects (e.g., mechanical engineering, performing arts, and college classes), suggestions for non-academic support (e.g., help with work applications, how to complete real life tasks such as filing taxes), and help/support with schoolwork.

More than half of Grade 7 parents indicated that, for their student to be successful in high school and prepared for college, they would like more *Information about college financial aid/scholarships* (62%), *Career exploration activities* (61%), *Information about participating in GEAR UP events* (59%), *Information about college entrance requirements* (55%), *Opportunities to participate in college visits* (54%), and information about *Test preparation* (52%). There were eight written responses from Grade 7 parents who selected *Other*;

examples of these responses included “Later would be nice, he is only 13,” “Hands-on opportunities,” and “Don’t know anything about it.”

Among resources for success in high school and college, the most frequently selected by Grade 12 students were *Career exploration activities* (34%), *Test preparation* (34%) and *Information about college financial aid/scholarships* (37%). Most Grade 12 students who selected the *Other* response option wrote they intended to go to career/technical school instead of a four-year college or university or they were not continuing their education; their responses included information about joining the military, more topics covered by classes, credit recovery, and information about the workforce.

Figure 13. Resources Needed by Students and Parents to Succeed in High School and Prepare for College



Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Only Grade 12 students received the options *Assistance with college entrance process* and *Assistance with completing financial aid forms*. Only Grade 7 students and parents received the options *Learning opportunities* and *Summer activities*. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

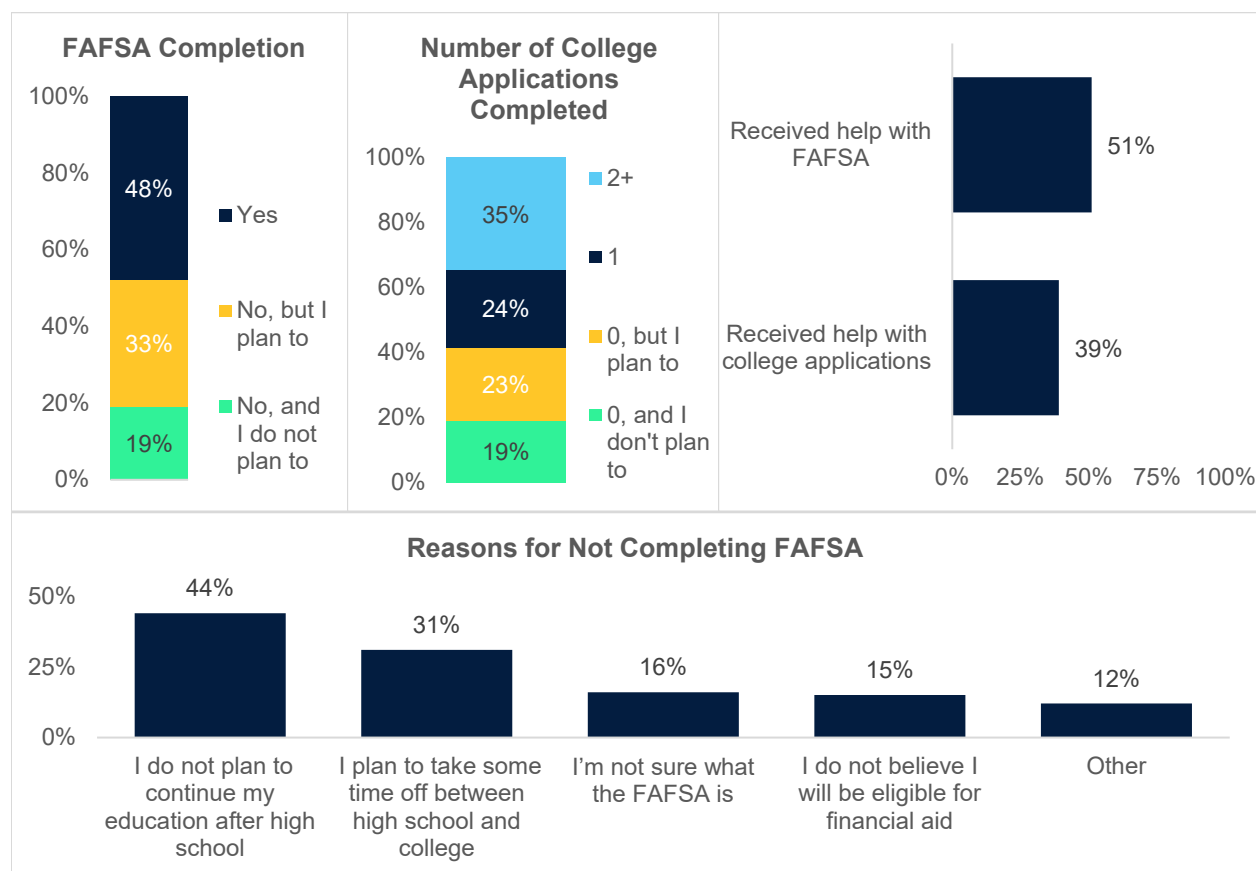
FAFSA and College Applications

Grade 12 students responded to survey questions regarding their participation in college preparation activities such as FAFSA completion and college application submission.

Results from these items can be found in Figure 14. Most Grade 12 students (81%) reported that they had already completed or planned to complete the FAFSA (48% and 33% respectively). Of the 19% of students who reported that they do not plan to submit a FAFSA, almost one-half (44%) reported that they do not plan to continue their education. Reasons respondents who selected the *Other* response option offered for not planning to complete the FAFSA included that their school did not accept a FAFSA, they plan to join the military, issues with their parents’ taxes, and they prefer to work instead of continuing their education. Of the 48% who had already submitted their FAFSA, approximately half (51%) reported they received help to do so.

Grade 12 students also reported on the number of college applications they submitted at the time of the survey. Similar to FAFSA completion outcomes, most Grade 12 of students (82%) reported that they had submitted at least one application or planned to submit an application at a later time (35% submitted at least two applications, 24% submitted one application, 23% had not submitted any applications but planned to). More than half (59%) reported they had already submitted at least one application. Over one-third of students who submitted at least one application reported they received help to submit it.

Figure 14. Grade 12 Student College Preparation Activities Completed



Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. Response percentages for reasons student did not complete the FAFSA will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey.

Spotlight Analysis: Ongoing Effects of COVID on College Perceptions and Behaviors

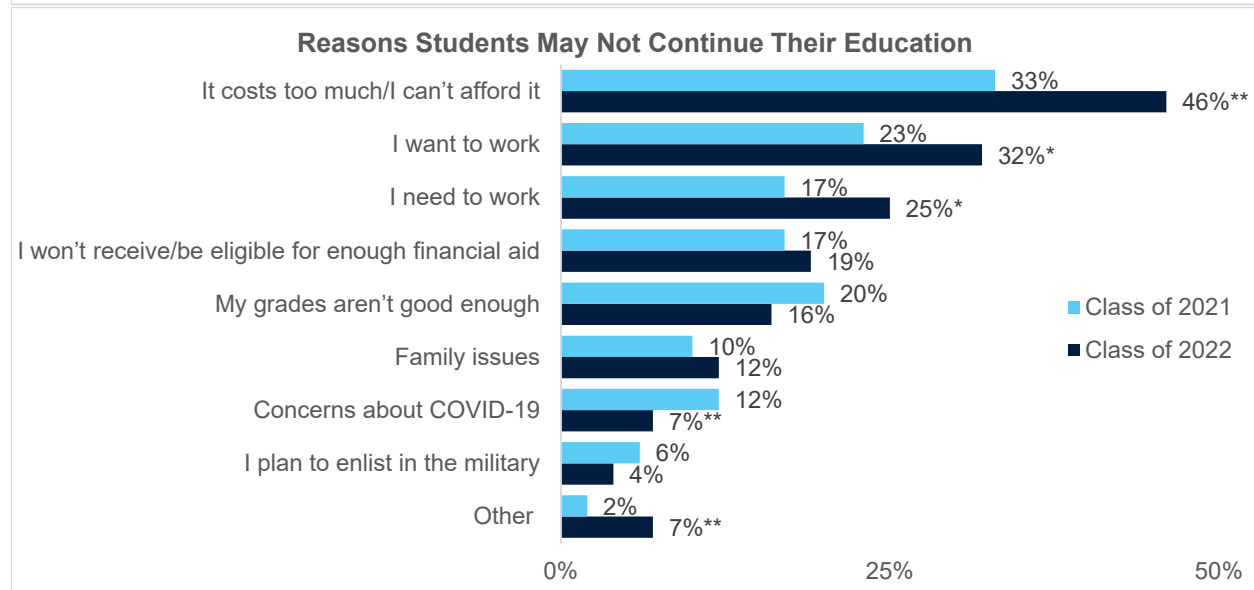
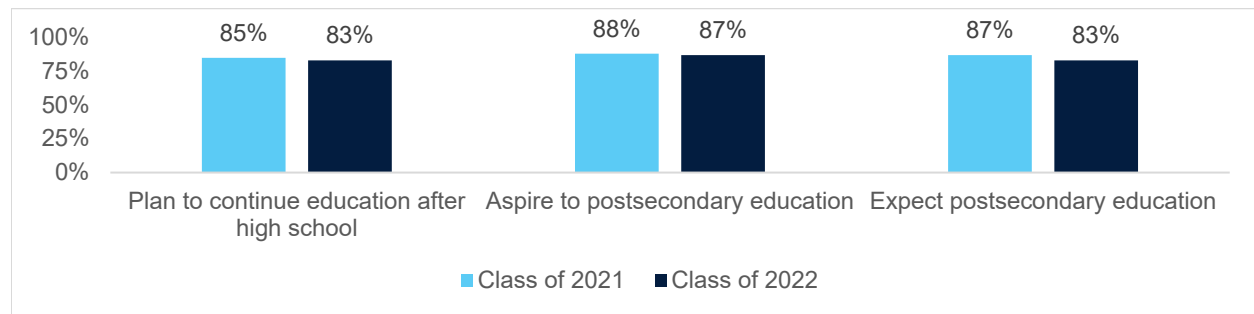
This section presents findings from analyses comparing outcomes measured by student surveys for Grade 12 students from Year 7 of the 2014 WV GEAR UP grant (Class of 2021) and Year 1 of the 2021 WV GEAR UP grant (Class of 2022). Data were collected from the Class of 2021 between November 2020 and February 2021; data were collected from the Class of 2022 in February 2022. Only responses from students who attended schools that participated in both grants and only questions asked in both surveys were included in these analyses. The schools and survey items included in these analyses can be found in Table 1. A total of 537 Class of 2021 and 905 Class of 2022 cases were included in analyses. In the following findings, all differences reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size.

As seen in Figure 15, plans and goals for continuing education after high school were similar across the two groups. However, there were significant differences in the reasons students reported that they may not continue their education. The percentage of those who selected the following options was significantly higher for the Class of 2022 than the Class of 2021: *It costs too much* (difference of 13 percentage points), *I want to work* (difference of 9 percentage points), *I need to work* (difference of 8 percentage points), and *Other* (difference of 5 percentage points).⁵ The percentage of those who selected *Concerns about COVID-19* was significantly lower for the Class of 2022 compared to the Class of 2021 by 5 percentage points.⁶ The differences in responses regarding grades, family issues, plans to join the military, and financial aid eligibility were not significant.

⁵ It costs too much: $X^2=22.37$, $p\leq.001$, ($\phi=.13$); I want to work: $X^2=10.01$, $p\leq.01$, ($\phi=.09$); I need to work: $X^2=11.00$, $p\leq.01$, ($\phi=.09$); Other: $X^2=14.74$ $p\leq.001$, ($\phi=.11$).

⁶ Concerns about COVID-19: $X^2=11.04$, $p\leq.001$, ($\phi=.09$).

Figure 15. Student Education Goals and Plans



Note. Response percentages for reasons students may not continue their education will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: Year 7 (2014 WV GEAR UP grant) Student Survey and Year 1 (2021 WV GEAR UP grant) Student Survey.

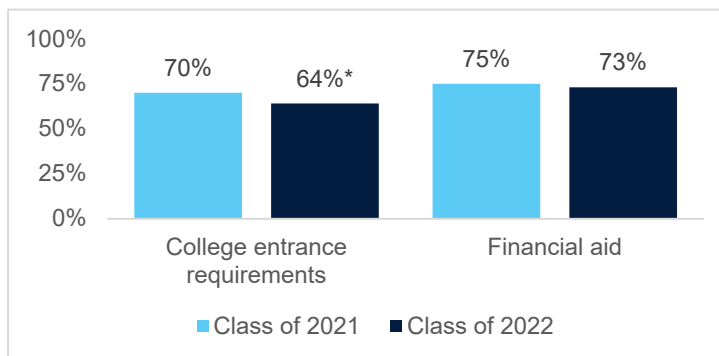
*Statistically significant compared to Class of 2021 ($p \leq .01$). **Statistically significant compared to Class of 2021 ($p \leq .001$).

Figure 16 shows that the percentage of Class of 2022 students who reported they spoke with someone at their school about college entrance requirements was significantly lower than the percentage of Class of 2021 students who reported the same (64% vs. 70%, respectively).⁷ About three-quarters of respondents in both groups reported they spoke with someone about the availability of financial aid.

As seen in Figure 17, the percentage of students in the Class of 2022 who correctly estimated the cost of a 2-year community/technical college and a 4-year college was significantly lower than the percentage of those who did so from the Class of 2021,⁸ by 16 percentage points for a 2-year college and 18 percentage points for a 4-year college. Students in both groups were more likely to overestimate than underestimate costs. This difference in knowledge about the cost of college may be a driver for the higher percentage of students in the Class of 2022 who indicated the cost of college as a reason they may not continue their education (in Figure 15).

The final survey items analyzed here concern college preparation activities. Figure 18 shows that respondents from the Class of 2022 were significantly more likely to have completed the FAFSA than were those from the Class

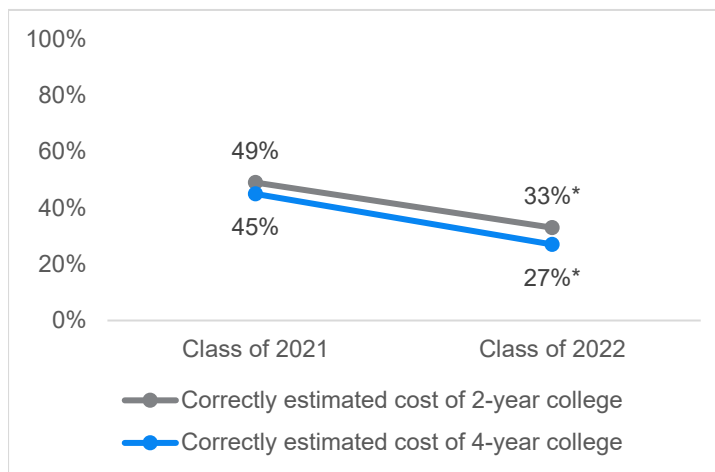
Figure 16. Students Who Spoke With Someone About College Entrance Requirements and Availability of Financial Aid to Help Pay for College



Note. Source: Year 7 (2014 WV GEAR UP grant) Student Survey and Year 1 (2021 WV GEAR UP grant) Student Survey.

*Statistically significant compared to Class of 2021 ($p \leq .05$).

Figure 17. Students Who Correctly Estimated the Cost of College



Note. Source: Year 7 (2014 WV GEAR UP grant) Student Survey and Year 1 (2021 WV GEAR UP grant) Student Survey.

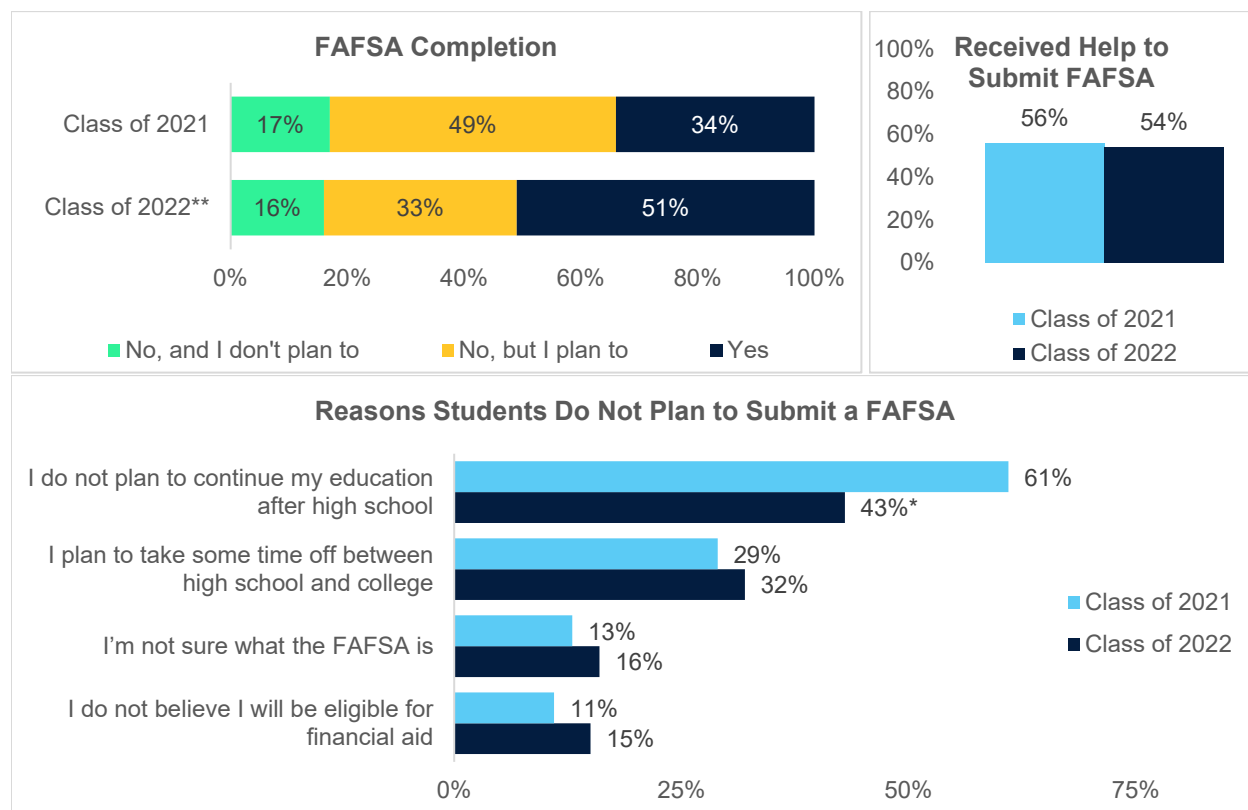
*Statistically significant compared to Class of 2021 ($p \leq .001$).

⁷Talked about college entrance requirements: $X^2=5.20, p \leq .05, (\phi=.06)$.

⁸ Cost of community/technical college: $X^2=34.56, p \leq .001, (\phi=.16)$; Cost of 4-year college: $X^2=45.29, p \leq .001, (\phi=.18)$.

of 2021; 34% of the Class of 2021 had done so compared to 51% of the Class of 2022.⁹ This divergence may be due in part to the difference in the time data were collected each year as some Class of 2021 students responded as early as November in the school year, only one month after the FAFSA was available to submit while Class of 2022 students only responded in February, four months after the FAFSA was available. Among the reasons students indicated they did not plan to submit a FAFSA, the percentage of Class of 2022 students who reported they were not planning to continue their education was significantly lower than Class of 2021 students, by 18 percentage points.¹⁰ There were no other significant differences for the other options. Over half of students reported they received help to submit their FAFSA both years.

Figure 18. FAFSA Completion and Help to Submit FAFSA



Note. Response percentages for reasons students do not plan to submit a FAFSA will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: Year 7 (2014 WV GEAR UP grant) Student Survey and Year 1 (2021 WV GEAR UP grant) Student Survey.

*Statistically significant compared to Class of 2021 ($p \leq .01$); **Statistically significant compared to Class of 2021 ($p \leq .001$).

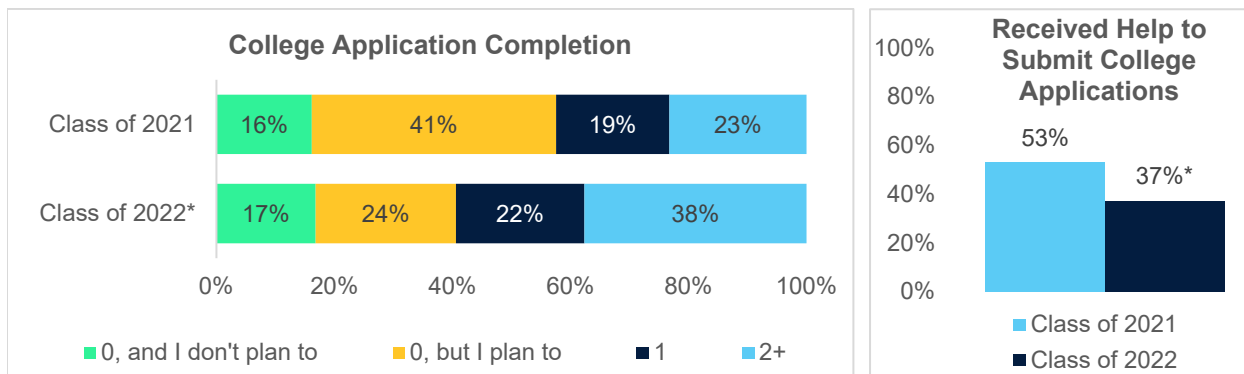
Figure 19 displays analyses of student college application completion rates. Students from the Class of 2022 had significantly higher application completion rates than did those from

⁹ FAFSA completion: $X^2=38.40, p \leq .001, (\phi=.16)$

¹⁰ Not planning to continue education: $X^2=7.63 p \leq .01, (\phi=.18)$

the Class of 2021 (60% vs. 42%, respectively).¹¹ As with FAFSA submission rates, this difference may be due to the later data collection for the Class of 2022. Despite their higher application completion rate, a significantly smaller percentage of students from the Class of 2022 than from the Class of 2021 reported they received help to submit their applications.¹²

Figure 19. College Preparation Activities Completed



Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. Source: Year 7 (2014 WV GEAR UP grant) Student Survey and Year 1 (2021 WV GEAR UP grant) Student Survey.

*Statistically significant compared to Class of 2021 ($p \leq .001$).

¹¹ College application completion: $X^2=40.15$, $p \leq .001$, ($phi=.17$)

¹² Received help to submit college applications: $X^2=17.59$, $p \leq .001$, ($phi=.15$)

IV. School Personnel Survey Results

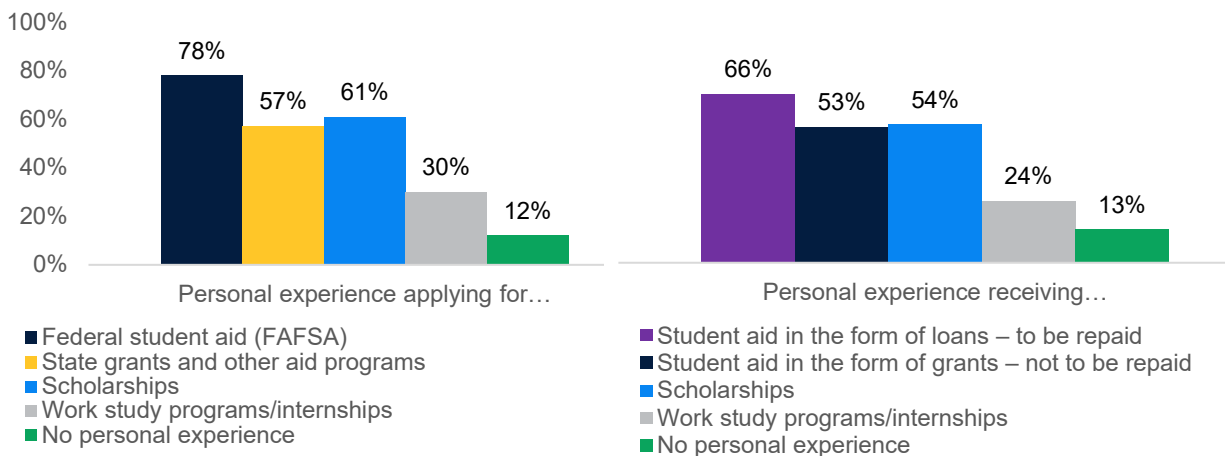
This chapter summarizes results from the WV GEAR UP Year 1 School Personnel Survey analysis. This includes the findings about faculty member perceptions of college-going culture in their schools as well as their knowledge of college costs and financial aid programs and their involvement in college-related activities. Overall, 908 personnel are included in the analyses presented in this section, which represents 50% of school personnel at the time of survey administration

About the Respondents

The survey prompted personnel to report their demographic information, including gender, community type, position, years in the role, grade level(s) served, and if they themselves were a first-generation college student. Nearly three-quarters of personnel (70%) reported they were female, with most (81%) indicating that they grew up in a rural community, and over half (57%) responding that they themselves were first-generation college students. The majority of personnel survey respondents were teachers (87%), followed by counselors (7%) and administrators (6%), with experience ranging from first-time teachers to those with 50 or more years of experience. Around one-tenth (11%) of personnel reported they had a year or less of experience working in their role, with an average of nine years of experience across school personnel respondents. Six percent of respondents reported that they served as a GEAR UP site coordinator. More information about respondent backgrounds can be found in Tables A.9–A.13.

School personnel also reported their experience applying and receiving financing for their postsecondary education, as shown in Figure 20. A little over one-tenth (12%–13%) of personnel had no personal experience applying or receiving financing, while over half had experience with federal or state student loans, grants, or scholarships.

Figure 20. School Personnel Experience Applying and Receiving Financing for Postsecondary Education by Percentage of Respondents

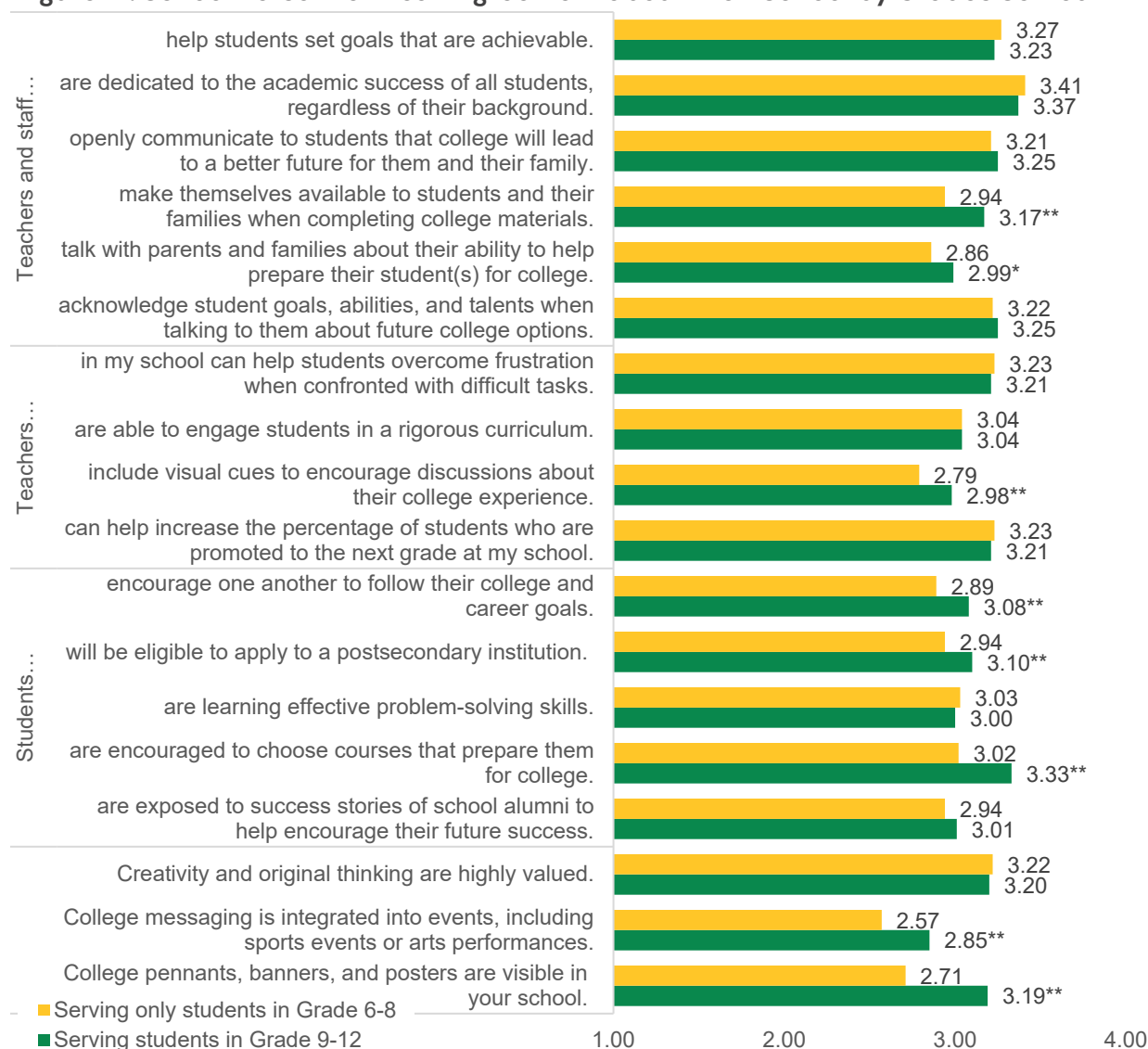


Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

School Culture

The personnel survey included questions about overall college-going culture in GEAR UP schools and classrooms. First, all respondents—teachers, administrators, and counselors—were asked to rate their schools on 18 items measuring 2 components of college-going culture: (1) expectations/rigor and (2) visual cues/material resources. The following section summarizes those findings. Each item asked respondents to use a 4-point Likert-type response format (i.e., 1–*Strongly disagree*, 2–*Disagree*, 3–*Agree*, 4–*Strongly agree*); results are reported as a mean score for each item. Across the 18 statements, the overall mean was 3.09 for personnel survey respondents. Figure 21 provides an overview of school personnel mean agreement with statements about each component of college-going culture within their schools by grades served. Respondents were grouped into those who served students in Grade 9–12 and those who only reported serving Grade 6–8.

Figure 21. School Personnel Mean Agreement about their School by Grades Served



Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

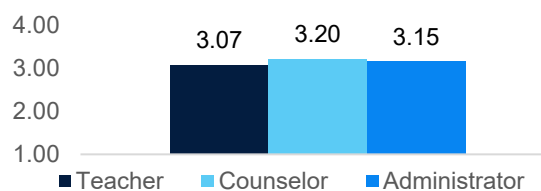
*Statistically significant compared to Grade 6–8 ($p \leq .01$); **Statistically significant compared to Grade 6–8 ($p \leq .001$).

Overall, personnel were least likely to agree that *College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances*, with personnel serving students in Grade 9–12 (2.85) indicating significantly higher agreement than those serving only students in Grade 6–8 (2.57). The effect size for the observed difference was small.¹³ Conversely, personnel respondents serving both Grade 9–12 and Grade 6–8 were most likely to agree that *Teachers and staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background* (3.37 and 3.41).

As seen in Figure 22, there were no significant differences in mean college-going culture measures by respondent role. Counselors had the highest reported overall mean (3.20), followed by administrators (3.15) and teachers (3.07).

The survey then asked teachers to assess their classroom using the same 18 items measuring two components of college-going culture: (1) expectations/rigor and (2) visual cues/material resources. Teachers used the same 4-point Likert-type response to rate agreement (i.e., 1–*Strongly disagree*, 2–*Disagree*, 3–*Agree*, 4–*Strongly agree*), reported in Figure 23 as a mean score for each item.

Figure 22. School Personnel Overall Mean Agreement about their School by Role



Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

¹³ College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances: $t(898) = 5.522, p < .001 (d = .37)$.

Figure 23. Teacher Mean Agreement about their Classroom



Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

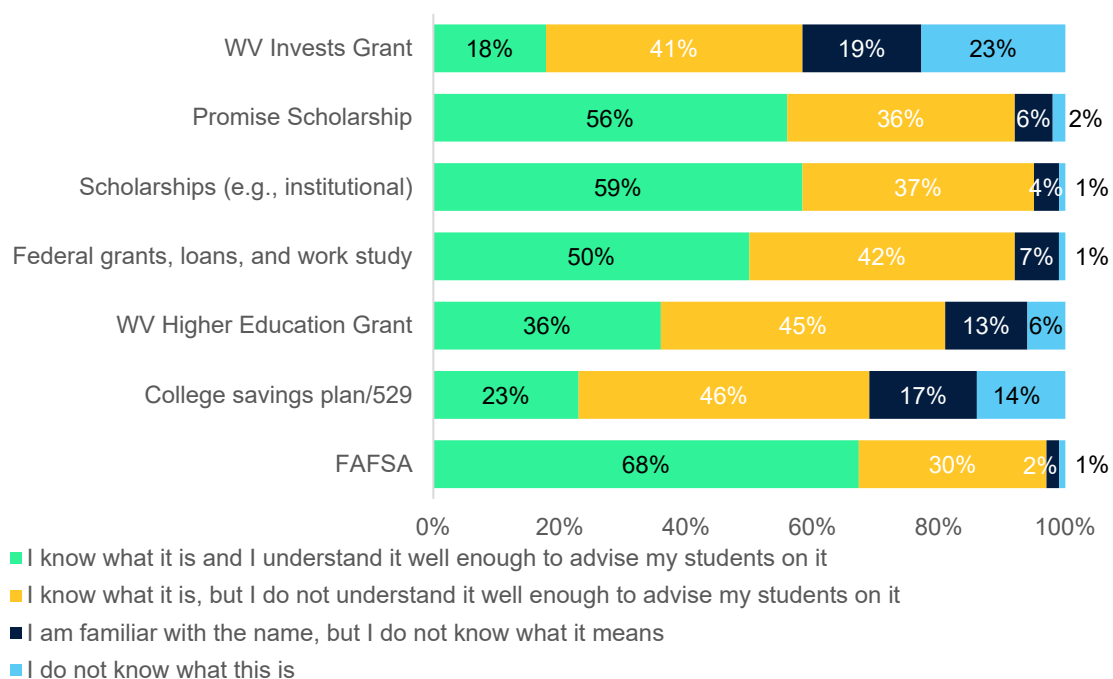
Overall, teachers’ mean agreement was the lowest for *Most students will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution* (2.73) and *Students are learning effective problem-solving skills* (2.82). Teachers had the highest mean agreement for *I make myself available to students and their families when completing college materials* (3.55).

College and Financial Aid Knowledge

Several questions asked respondents about their knowledge of various financial aid programs and their ability to provide students and their families with assistance in understanding college-related topics.

As seen in Figure 24, school personnel had the most familiarity with and knowledge of the FAFSA (68%). This was followed by their knowledge of scholarships (e.g., institutional) (59%); the Promise Scholarship (56%); and federal grants, loans, and work study (50%). Over two-fifths (42%) of personnel survey respondents reported they did not know what the WV Invests grant was or did not know what it meant.

Figure 24. School Personnel Knowledge of Financial Aid Programs by Percentage of Respondents



Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

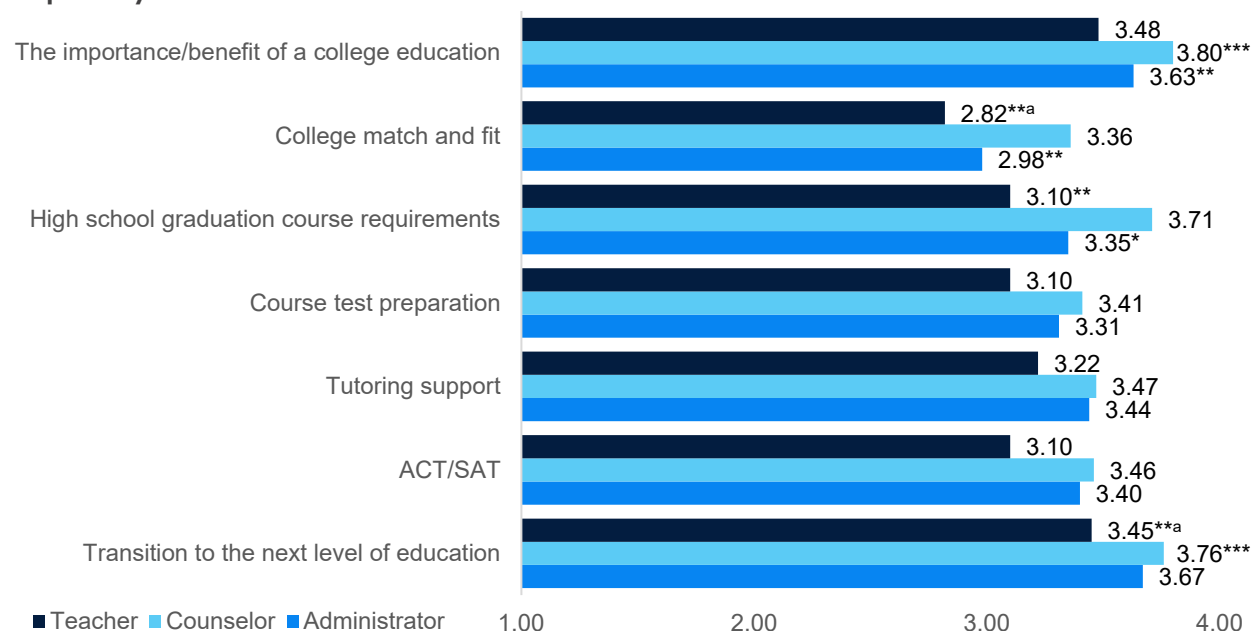
School personnel respondents also rated their ability to assist students and their families on seven college-related topics. Respondents were offered four response options to rate their ability (i.e., 1–Not at all, 2–Slightly able, 3–Moderately able, 4–Extremely able). School personnel mean ability scores by role were calculated to compare perceived ability to assist across roles, indicating statistically significant differences in perceptions by role. Overall, counselors (3.80) and teachers (3.48) reported that they were best able to support students and families in conveying *The importance/benefit of a college education*. Figure 25 shows that reported ability among counselors was significantly higher than teachers for conveying *The importance/benefit of a college education*, *High school graduation course requirements*, and *Transition to the next level of education*. Effect sizes for these differences between counselors and teachers were moderate.¹⁴

Administrators reported that they were best able to support students and families in *Transition to the next level of education* (3.67). However, the reported ability among administrators was significantly lower than counselors for *High school graduation course requirements*, *College match and fit*, and *The importance/benefit of a college education*. Effect sizes for the observed differences between administrators and counselors were

¹⁴ High school graduation course requirements: $t(776) = 5.478, p < .01 (d = .742)$; Transition to the next level of education: $t(765) = 3.494, p < .001 (d = .477)$; Importance/benefit of a college education: $t(774) = 3.543, p < .001 (d = .48)$.

small to moderate.¹⁵ On the other hand, administrators were statistically significantly more likely than teachers to report ability to support *College match and fit* and the *Transition to the next level of education*. Effect sizes for the differences between administrators and teachers were small.¹⁶

Figure 25. School Personnel Perceived Ability to Assist Students and Families on College Topics by Role



Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

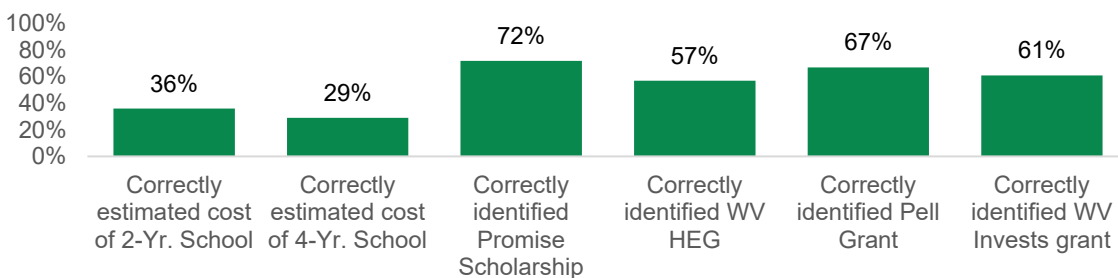
*Statistically significant compared to counselors ($p \leq .05$); **Statistically significant compared to counselors ($p \leq .01$); **aStatistically significant compared to administrators ($p \leq .01$); ***Statistically significant compared to teachers ($p \leq .001$).

Personnel survey respondents were asked to report estimates of the average cost of tuition—excluding the cost of food, housing, and books—for two public college options in West Virginia: (a) a 4-year public college/university, and (b) a public community/technical college. As in the student and parent surveys, respondents were offered seven response options, ranging from *Up to \$3,000* to *More than \$25,000*. As seen in Figure 26, 29% of personnel respondents correctly estimated the cost of a 4-year public college/university and 36% for a public community/technical college. However, approximately half or more of personnel respondents over-estimated the cost of a 4-year or 2-year college (61% and 49%, respectively).

¹⁵ High school graduation course requirements: $t(109) = 2.964, p < .05 (d = .564)$; College match and fit: $t(109) = 2.898, p < .05 (d = .551)$; Importance/benefit of a college education: $t(109) = 1.634, p < .01 (d = .311)$.

¹⁶ Transition to the next level of education: $t(758) = 2.296, p < .01 (d = .33)$, College match and fit: $t(768) = 1.315, p < .01 (d = .189)$.

Figure 26. Percentage of Personnel Who Correctly Estimated the Cost of College and Identified Financial Aid Sources



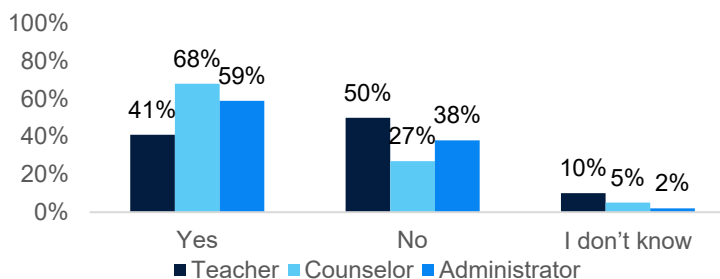
Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

Based on the description of four financial aid programs available to West Virginia students, personnel survey respondents identified the program they believed matched the description. As seen in Figure 26, across the four programs—Promise Scholarship, WV HEG, Pell Grant, and the WV Invests grant—the majority (57%–72%) of personnel correctly indicated the financial aid program. The Promise Scholarship was the most recognizable program (72%) among personnel survey respondents, while WV HEG was the least recognizable (57%).

GEAR UP Involvement

School personnel were also asked to report the extent to which they were involved in GEAR UP–sponsored events in Year 1. Figure 27 displays school personnel respondents’ reported participation in GEAR UP–sponsored activities by role, with significant differences in participation among teachers, counselors, and administrators. The effect size of the observed differences between roles was small.¹⁷ Counselors reported the highest levels of participation in events (68%), followed by administrators (59%) and teachers (41%).

Figure 27. School Personnel Participation in GEAR UP–sponsored Activities by Role

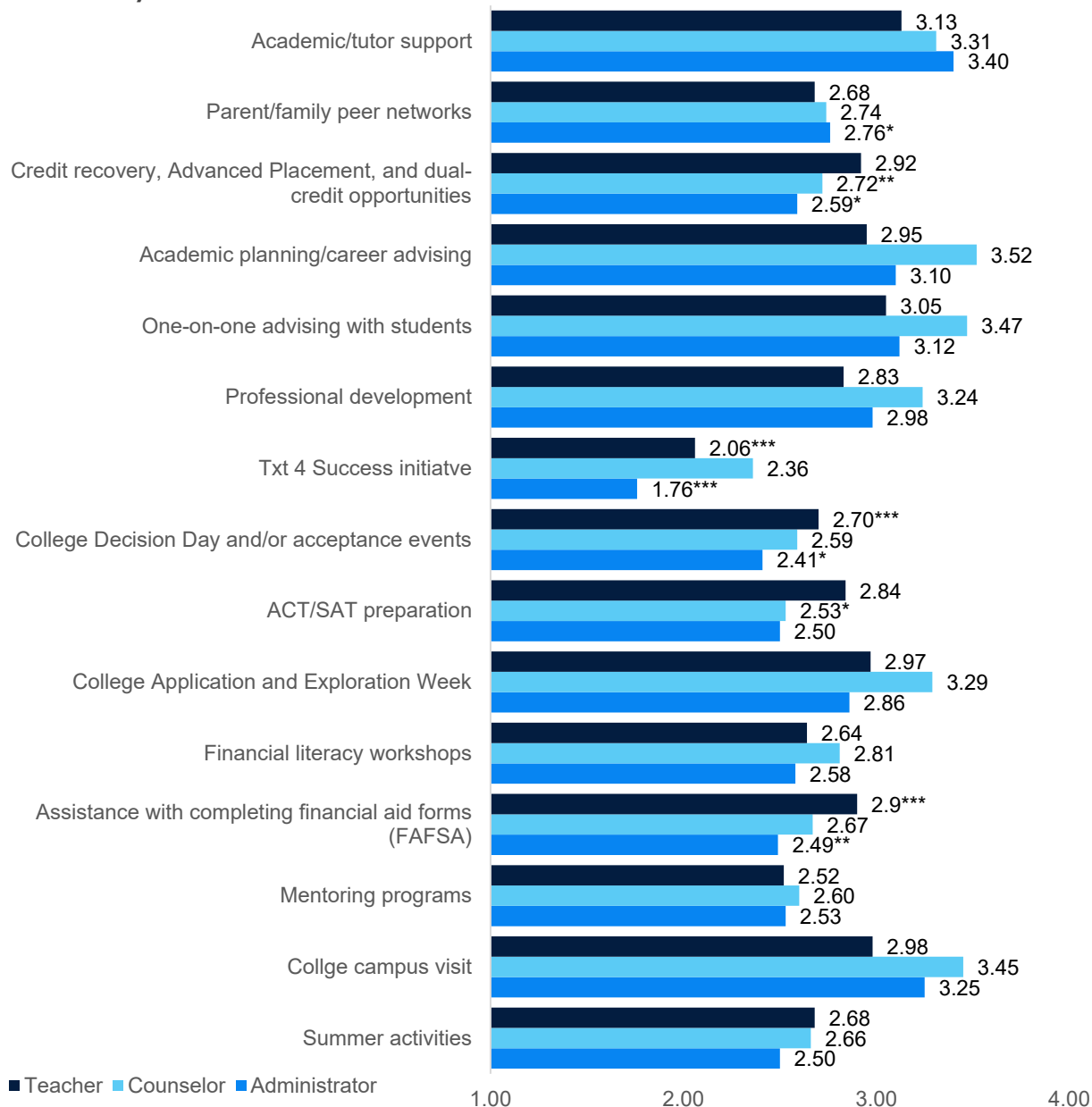


Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

In addition to individual involvement, personnel also reported on the extent to which their school promoted a collection of 15 activities or services on a 4–point scale (i.e., 1–*Not at all*, 2–*Slightly*, 3–*Moderately*, 4–*Extremely*). Figure 28 provides an overview of mean personnel perceptions for each activity by respondent role, with several statistically significant differences across roles.

¹⁷ Participation in GEAR UP–sponsored activities: $X^2 = 23.92, p < .001 (V = .119)$.

Figure 28. School Personnel Perception of the Extent to Which Their School Promotes Activities by Role



Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

*Statistically significant compared to teachers ($p \leq .05$); **Statistically significant compared to teachers ($p \leq .01$); ***Statistically significant compared to counselors ($p \leq .001$).

Counselors had significantly higher mean agreement that the school promoted the *Txt 4 Success initiative* than did administrators, with a moderate effect size.¹⁸ Counselors also had significantly higher mean agreement regarding the *Txt 4 Success initiative* compared to

¹⁸ *Txt 4 Success initiative*: $t(106) = 2.749, p < .001 (d = .531)$.

teachers, with a small effect size.¹⁹ Conversely, teachers had significantly higher mean agreement than counselors about school promotion of *ACT/ACT preparation; Credit recovery, Advanced Placement, and dual-credit opportunities; College Decision Day and/or acceptance events; and Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA)*, all with small effect sizes.²⁰ Teachers also had significantly higher mean agreement than administrators on school promotion of *Credit recovery, Advanced Placement, and dual-credit opportunities; College Decision Day and/or acceptance events; and Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA)*, each with small effect sizes.²¹ However, regarding school promotion of *Parent/family peer networks*, teachers had significantly lower mean agreement compared to administrators, with a small effect size.²²

Personnel survey respondents also indicated their involvement in activities provided by their school, as shown in Figure 29 by respondent role. Among counselors, the activities with the highest involvement were *Academic planning/career advising* (98%), *One-on-one advising with students* (98%), and *College campus visit* (93%). Among teachers and administrators, activities with the highest reported involvement were *Academic/tutor support* (56% and 75%, respectively), *One-on-one advising with students* (53% and 73%, respectively), and *Professional development* (51% and 73%, respectively). Overall, there were significant variations in reported personnel involvement by role for all activities, excluding *ACT/SAT preparation*. Effect sizes for differences between roles were small to moderate.²³

¹⁹ Txt 4 Success initiative: $t(743) = 2.080, p < .001 (d = .284)$.

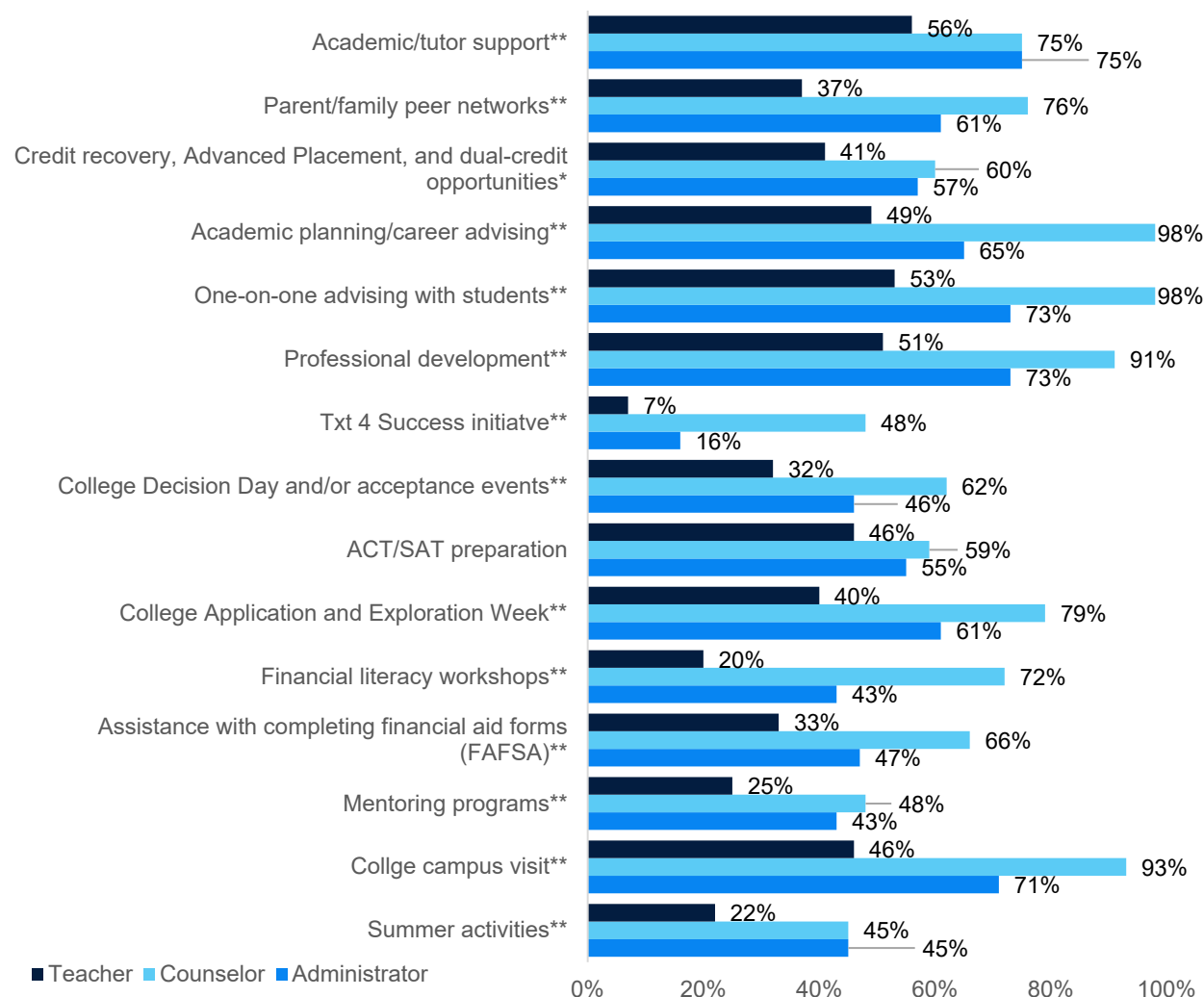
²⁰ ACT/SAT preparation: $t(762) = 1.979, p < .05 (d = .27)$; Credit recovery, Advanced Placement, and dual-credit opportunities: $t(758) = 1.249, p < .01 (d = .171)$; Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA): $t(766) = 1.418, p < .001 (d = .194)$; College Decision Day and/or acceptance events: $t(763) = 0.759, p < .001 (d = .104)$.

²¹ College Decision Day and/or acceptance events: $t(756) = 1.782, p < .05 (d = .258)$; Credit recovery, Advanced Placement, and dual-credit opportunities: $t(751) = 1.985, p < .05 (d = .288)$; Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA): $t(759) = 2.394, p < .01 (d = .347)$.

²² Parent/family peer networks: $t(750) = 0.629, p < .05 (d = .091)$.

²³ Credit recovery, Advanced Placement, and dual-credit opportunities: $X^2 = 12.198, p < .01 (Phi = .122)$; Academic/tutor support: $X^2 = 14.005, p < .001 (Phi = .131)$; Parent/family peer networks: $X^2 = 55.445, p < .001 (Phi = .260)$; Academic planning/career advising: $X^2 = 54.055, p < .001 (Phi = .257)$; One-on-one advising with students: $X^2 = 50.323, p < .001 (Phi = .248)$; Professional development: $X^2 = 42.154, p < .001 (Phi = .227)$; Txt 4 Success initiative: $X^2 = 97.878, p < .001 (Phi = .347)$; College Decision Day and/or acceptance events: $X^2 = 23.811, p < .001 (Phi = .171)$; College Application and Exploration Week: $X^2 = 37.855, p < .001 (Phi = .215)$; Financial literacy workshops: $X^2 = 90.513, p < .001 (Phi = .332)$; Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA): $X^2 = 26.412, p < .001 (Phi = .179)$; Mentoring programs: $X^2 = 21.722, p < .001 (Phi = .163)$; College campus visit: $X^2 = 56.669, p < .001 (Phi = .263)$; Summer activities: $X^2 = 27.959, p < .001 (Phi = .185)$.

Figure 29. School Personnel Reported Involvement in Activities by Role



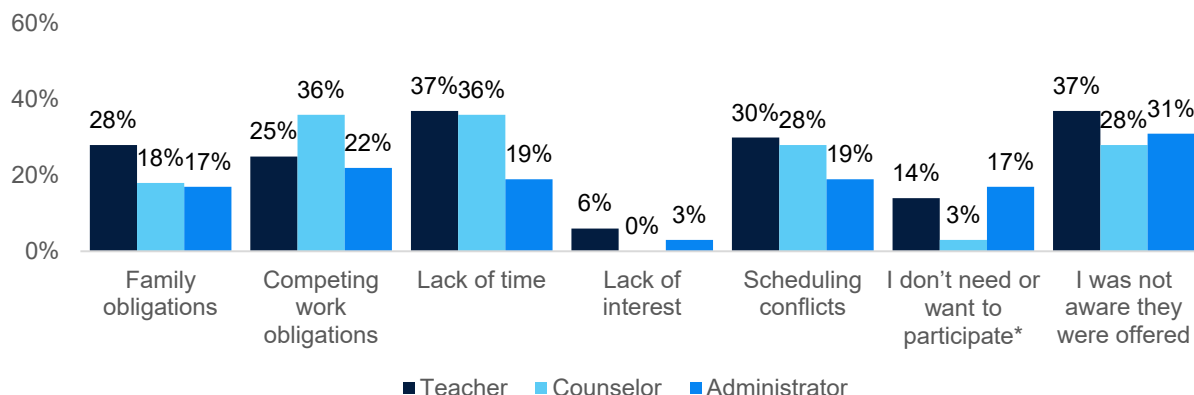
Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

*Statistically significant by role ($p \leq .01$); **Statistically significant by role ($p \leq .001$).

Staff members who reported not participating in one or more of the indicated activities and services were asked to describe the reason(s) they did not participate. Overall, the most common reasons were that they were not aware the services were offered (26%) and they lacked time to participate (26%). Figure 30 summarizes the additional reasons personnel reported for not participating, reported by respondent role. The most frequently reported reason among counselors was *Competing work obligations* (36%) and *Lack of time* (36%). There was a significant difference among teachers, counselors, and administrators who reported *I don't need or want to participate* (14%, 3%, and 17%, respectively). The effect size for difference between roles was small.²⁴

²⁴ I don't need or want to participate: $X^2 = 6.127, p < .05$ ($\Phi = .085$).

Figure 30. School Personnel Reasons for Not Participating in GEAR UP–sponsored Activities by Role



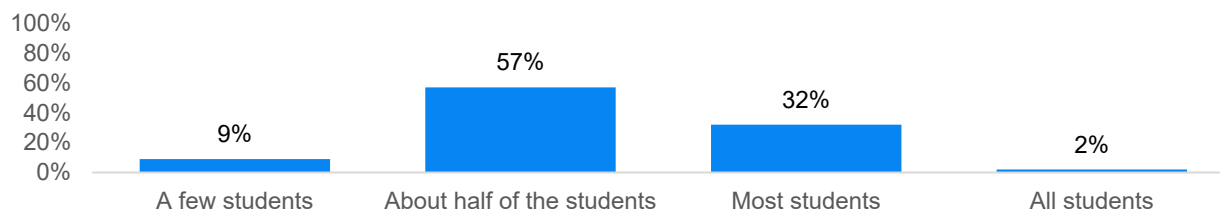
Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

*Statistically significant across roles ($p \leq .05$).

Site Coordinator Experiences and Perceptions

In Year 1, the 6% of personnel respondents indicating they were GEAR UP site coordinators reported their perceptions of the college-going culture within their school, a total of 53 respondents. Most site coordinator respondents (89%) reported they believed about half or most of students attending their schools want to go to college (see Figure 31).

Figure 31. Site Coordinator Perceptions of GEAR UP Cohort Students Who Want to Go to College by Percentage of Respondents

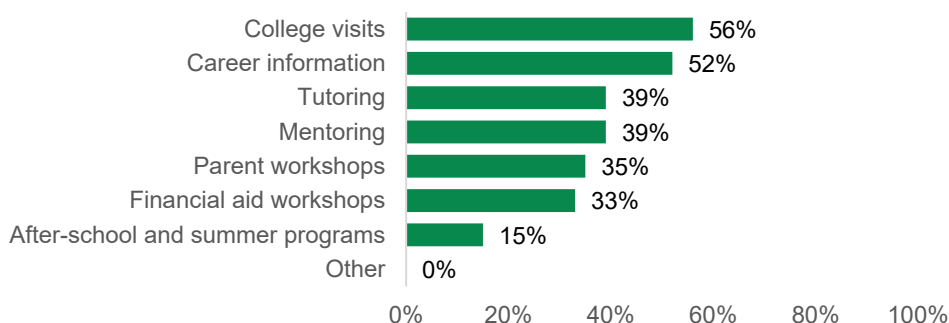


Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

Site coordinators also reported on the helpfulness of the Commission in ensuring staff have the information and resources needed to carry out GEAR UP activities. Respondents rated the helpfulness from *Not helpful* to *Very helpful*, with no participants reporting that the Commission was *Not helpful*. Overall, 85% of site coordinators reported that the Commission was *Helpful* or *Very helpful*.

Site coordinators were also asked to identify the services most needed by GEAR UP students. As seen in Figure 32, over half of site coordinators reported that *College visits* (56%) and *Career information* (52%) were the most needed services. Additionally, over a third of coordinators thought that *Tutoring* (39%), *Mentoring* (39%) and *Parent workshops* (35%) were the most needed services for students to plan their future.

Figure 32. Site Coordinator Services Most Needed by GEAR UP Students by Percentage of Respondents



Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because site coordinator respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

Two open-ended questions specifically for GEAR UP site coordinators prompted respondents to provide additional context about their work and attitudes. One question asked what activities could help them in their role with GEAR UP, and coordinators submitted 22 individual comments. Six comments focused on stronger communication, with suggestions such as:

- Establishment of a monthly calendar with activities and events;
- A timetable suggesting times to schedule and complete activities;
- Additional training, including more townhall meetings where coordinators could ask questions; and
- More advanced notice and reminders of upcoming meetings and events.

In recommending a more detailed list of activities, one coordinator wanted information on what effective GEAR UP implementation looks like, requesting “more discussion of the programs and how everything works. Too much information in a short time made things confusing.” While the program offered resources through Zoom townhalls, emails, meetings, and other avenues, new coordinators may have had difficulty processing all the information during the first year of their work.

Additionally, five commenters recommended hiring more staff or having a site coordinator who could spend more time in the school. One said, “As a large school, it would be beneficial to have two coordinators,” while another urged, “more paid staff to help coordinate activities.”

Nine coordinators offered comments suggesting either more or improved GEAR UP activities, including designing more program activities specifically for middle schoolers. As one coordinator said, such activities are important “so we can help them make a connection between their middle school years and their future.” Individual coordinators also commented on these needs for middle schoolers:

- College Decision Day activities for middle school students;

- Interactive ideas to teach students about FAFSA, ACT/SAT, and dual credit, rather than just relying on lectures; and
- More opportunities to be on a college campus, whether via formal college visits or visits through a club or sports activity.

Three comments focused on the need to garner buy-in for GEAR UP from other program partners. One coordinator suggested that teachers should play a stronger role with students who are in danger of failing, by, for example, calling the student's home to offer more assistance. Another coordinator wanted more support from their county GEAR UP contact.

A second open-ended question sought input about the role GEAR UP can play in improving the school's college-going culture. Twenty-five respondents submitted answers, with about half commenting on the importance of the GEAR UP team sharing new possibilities and activities with students and their families. Respondents recommended that these activities should include college visits, leadership academies, summer camp programs, technology programs, and guest speakers to encourage children and their families to think about the future. Said one, "GEAR UP is the door of opportunity for creating a college-going culture at [name of school]."

Several coordinators also mentioned the need to promote career and trade programs as well as traditional colleges. "Not all students' plans are geared towards colleges," one noted. Other suggestions were to:

- Provide students with more financial information about college;
- Promote workshops and mentoring opportunities for parents as well as students; and
- Tell students what various postsecondary programs offer and how they differ from each other.

In conveying information on the range of postsecondary programs, several respondents cited the importance of career/technical and certificate programs. As one coordinator put it, "We need to promote the benefits of even a certificate program—anything to help them go on to have higher earning potential."

Five coordinators reported the need to engage parents to help overcome student apathy and a general lack of knowledge about post-high school options. The following coordinator comments exemplify this view:

Students and families do not see or understand the connection between academic preparation and postsecondary education. Big dreams and goals; but a lack of understanding of how to make the dreams and goals a reality.

We need to do more in reaching our parents. Many of them did not attend college, so we need to teach them that it is important for their child.

Three respondents suggested that GEAR UP can provide valuable financial aid information, such as need-based aid, as well as career and scholarship information through sources such as CFVW.com. Six coordinators offered that they expect GEAR UP to have a generally

positive impact on the school environment, thereby supporting a stronger college-going culture. One sought more training for school staff “to help them become more confident and motivated in their role as student advisors.”

V. Cohort Student Interview Findings

Among the 13 cohort students participating in interviews, 12 lived with their parents and siblings, and the other student lived with a grandmother. Many are first-generation college students based on Title 20 of the *United States Code*, which defines a first-generation student as one whose parent (for single-parent households) or parents do not possess a baccalaureate degree.²⁵ Overall, students reported that only 8 of 26 parents had either a college degree or some college credit. Two parents had a vocational school certificate and fourteen had a high school diploma or passed the General Education Development (GED) assessment as their highest credential. The education background of two parents was unknown. Students most frequently identified mothers rather than fathers as having some college experience. Three mothers were described as having a college degree, with a fourth mother planning to return to finish her degree. Two students indicated having a father with a college degree. A third student mentioned that his father started but never finished college. Only one student said both parents have some experience in postsecondary study.

Students said they currently live in small communities, not far from their school, enabling them to participate in extracurricular activities. All but two ride the school bus to and from school, with the longest journey taking 30 minutes. All students reported that they had extended family in the area. When asked if they would like to work and live in their hometown area in the future, most replied that they were likely to leave the area for postsecondary education. They were unsure about where they might live after college but indicated they are open to moving to other parts of the state or even leaving the state. Nonetheless, they largely feel comfortable, happy, and accepted in their hometowns and at school. As one said:

I think this is a nice place to live. You've got people You know everyone, it's a small town. Everyone knows you. If you're ever in trouble and you need help, everyone will help you.

Student Perceptions of the School

All but one student said they attended just one elementary school from kindergarten onward. The other student arrived at the beginning of the current school year from another school in the same county. Students indicated that they know the teachers, the administrators, the counselors, and all the staff who work at their schools. They said they were comfortable talking with any of them and felt respected in their interactions with adults, with two commenting:

²⁵ The 2020 U.S. Code, Title 20 Education (20 U.S.C. § 1070a-11 [2020]) defines "first generation college student" as "(A) an individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree; or (B) in the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree." <https://law.justia.com/codes/us/2020/title-20/chapter-28/subchapter-iv/part-a/subpart-2/division-1/sec-1070a-11/>

The teachers here are really nice and I love having that. And they're easy to talk to, which makes me feel better about certain things.

Most of the teachers are willing to help with anything like that and they understand.

When asked about their academic year experiences, all were happy that the school year was almost over and satisfied with their academic outcomes. All but one said they expect to finish the year with strong grades; the other student was concerned about failing math and science. Students' favorite subjects varied, but history, English, math, and arts were most popular among the group. Two students did not like science, another did not enjoy reading, and two did not feel engaged with social studies. One student mentioned "Careers" as their favorite course, as this school offered a variety of electives to middle grade students such as Novels, Botany, Careers, and Photography. Those with access to such electives enjoyed these options. After school, all students except for one reported being active in sports year-round and said they planned to continue practicing in summer leagues.

Asked about their plans for the next school year, the students expressed confidence that they will perform well in Grade 8. They said they already know their class schedules and next year's teachers. They said they expect Grade 8 to be a continuation of their current course content, although at one school, two students expressed some anxiety about the coming year. One student with concerns about academics, cited family problems that affected concentration and mood while at school. This student was the only one to voice some concern about "occasionally" feeling like an outsider in school. While the student usually felt that she belonged, there are times when that was not the case:

Sometimes I have different opinions than other people. And it's just different.

This student said the disagreements are largely due to conflicting personalities among students but believed the problem can be overcome.

Looking ahead to high school, students expected to encounter more difficult classes but they believed that Grade 8 will prepare them to succeed academically. They also wanted to be with their current classmates and friends in as many classes as possible. They were excited about a wider offering of electives, and their worries seemed to be more social than academic. Said one:

I think that it will be difficult because there's so many classes and it's such a big place. I don't know if I'll be able to find my way around.

One student also wondered if there would be time to participate in extracurricular activities in high school due to the academic demands:

I probably am going to have my schedule filled and even if I do have some free time, it would be nice to just be able to sit and relax for a little while.

Across all the interviews, it was clear that students were motivated to perform well in school. They generally cited strong self-esteem and a desire to achieve. One student, for example, deliberately enrolled in the elective class Novels despite confessing that she does not like reading; nonetheless, she wanted to challenge herself. Another student stated that a major goal for next year is to "Mostly get better on fractions, because I need a little help

on that ... to pass it, to go into high school.” These students seemed to value education and did not seem hesitant about undertaking challenging schoolwork.

Students’ College and Career Interests

Most of the Grade 7 students indicated they already had a future profession in mind. Among the male student participants, one was interested in engineering, another wanted to be a doctor, and a third expressed interest in K–12 teaching. The female participants had a diverse set of interests: medicine, directing movies, law, and fashion design as well as careers in cosmetology, astronomy, veterinary medicine, nursing, counseling, and the arts. The three male participants wanted to continue playing sports in college, and one aspired to be a professional soccer player. Among the female participants, only one would like to continue playing softball in college but none see themselves as professional athletes. Anecdotally, one participant said he always wanted to be a “ninja,” but recently learned it was not really a profession. In another school, one of the participants liked the arts and saw herself becoming a tattoo artist.

When asked if they understood the path needed to practice their desired profession, student answers varied and only four believed they knew what was required. Those wanting to be a medical doctor and lawyer knew they needed graduate study in medical school and law school. The student who aimed to be an astronomist thought a bachelor’s degree would suffice. The student aspiring to be a movie director thought a bachelor’s degree in theater would help her find a job as an assistant director.

The other students did not know the differences between a vocational school, a 2-year degree-granting community college, and a 4-year degree-granting college or university. They had heard each of these terms but did not know how those schools might fit with their career aspirations. For example, one of the students who wanted to be a veterinarian thought that studying for 2 years after high school would be sufficient. Her mother works for a veterinarian, but she did not know if her mother had a technical degree or a bachelor’s degree. Such a comment may indicate that these types of conversations are not common at home. In most cases, students could not describe the education/career path their parents took or their specific duties at work.

The student interested in being a tattoo artist knew that if she wanted to open her own business, she would need “a business license and [to] rent a building to use, have a bank account, [and] hire employees.” She hoped to take a career class in high school. Students knew that there were more offerings in high school but had little knowledge about whether they could start taking career/technical classes in high school to explore possible career paths.

When asked about the colleges and universities that they were considering attending, most students mentioned the two largest public universities in the state (West Virginia University and Marshall University), the nearby community college, and the private University of Charleston. A few mentioned larger out-of-state institutions such as the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and Duke University.

Support and Sources of Information

All students said that their families supported their professional and career interests. However, the frequency, quality, and depth of these conversations at home was not clear. One student had older siblings in high school, but the siblings did not want to talk about high school life. For parents who may have finished high school more than 10 years ago, the curriculum and graduation requirements might have changed and they may lack current information about offerings.

Students said that they feel comfortable turning to the GEAR UP coordinator or another teacher with questions related to their future professional goals. All but one student knew who the GEAR UP coordinator was at their school. Students had broad or general questions about high school, college, and future jobs, which may suggest they had not yet had an in-depth conversation with teachers or counselors about career pathways.

Three students who appeared the most certain about their future profession said they look for information on the internet about that career. However, the student who aspired to be a lawyer did not know who to ask for help or how to look for information.

Asked about GEAR UP activities, students said the coordinator brings them together a few times a year to provide general information. Among the specific planned activities, students from one school mentioned that they visited two college campuses in person and talked with a college representative online. Those from a second school described online visits to three different campuses, complemented by additional homework to write about why attending these institutions would be good. Students from this school also said they received general information about college programs and requirements, read worksheets with information about different colleges, and attended talks about high school, with one student noting:

She [the GEAR UP advisor] asks us what we want to do whenever we get older—a college to attend—and all kinds of stuff like college.

Students at the third school discussed in-person visits to two universities and a workshop about creating a phone application, or app. One student remarked that the in-person visit was reserved for a select group of students based on their grades and attendance. Direct contact with college campuses and representatives helped some students to debunk misconceptions about college, such as that it was just “a big building with, like, a bunch of different classes.” For one of the students, this experience was very motivating:

First, I was—I don't want to do more schooling. But when we went to Marshall for GEAR UP, I got to figure out more stuff that you can do, and it isn't that bad actually. Seeing everybody and we got to do hands-on stuff and see what they do. So, it was actually pretty fun and it made me want to go to college actually—cause at first I didn't.

Students from two schools cited an activity in which they installed a phone app through which they were able to learn more about college. They believed this was a GEAR UP activity. Students from one school also mentioned that they participated in AVID, which

includes a variety of classroom activities and lesson plans for educators that support career readiness and success.

Overall, students from one school indicated significantly more knowledge about college planning compared to those at the other two schools. These students said they knew about the option of scholarships to finance college—the Promise Scholarship, in particular—and had knowledge of high school career/technical classes and dorms in college. One student mentioned talking about financing college at home and the need to find financial assistance. Discussing a conversation with a parent, this student said, “‘Mom, if I get into college, it'd be a lot.’ She's like, ‘Right? Get a scholarship.’”

VI. Priority Student Focus Group Findings

Most participants across the five focus groups conducted with priority students during spring 2022 expressed a desire to attend college or pursue a technical career that required some additional training after high school. Most also praised the work of GEAR UP site coordinators thus far in the new grant. Although participants were hopeful about their futures, their optimism was tempered in part by financial realities and concerns about paying for postsecondary education. In addition, while most students cited strong support from school educators, those from two schools were less enthusiastic about the overall school environment during their high school years. Major themes emerging from the focus groups are outlined in the following subsections, which examine student perceptions of the value of college, students' college and career interests, sources of support and information, baseline conditions at the high schools, and students' sense of hope and belonging.

Perceptions of the Value of College

Students in the focus groups strongly valued the idea of attending college. To these seniors, college was understood primarily as the completion of either a 2-year associate's degree or a 4-year bachelor's degree. Among the benefits of a college education, many mentioned that college is the place, as one student noted, "to acquire work skills." They discussed the types of jobs they want, explaining that college can help them attain the knowledge and credentials needed to practice their desired profession. Other students said a college degree provides a path for financial independence and is an effective springboard to adulthood. In this sense, college is perceived as the next step along the pathway of personal development and maturity. As students said:

It's a place to find your passion.

I think it builds you as a person. So, whether it's a technical school, community college, university—I think you need it.

For some students, the value of college is that it can provide more long-term career options than those available to their parents. One student noted:

My dad's got black lung. It's not good because he worked in coal mines. So he is like, "Go to school, go to college because if you don't, then you're going to have to do what I do. And you don't want to do what I do." And I'm like, "You know what? I don't want to do what you do, so I'm going to school."

Despite these positive views, a few participants—particularly from one high school—did not recognize or were unsure about the value of college. To these students, college is simply too expensive to consider. The rest of the participants from this high school also made comments about the high cost of attending college. Typical comments included:

I don't like how you have to put yourself in debt, I guess.

I did my FAFSA, and I figured out I wouldn't get any back. So then I kind of just decided it was too much money.

Students said the messages they heard about college caused both excitement and anxiety. The general message received from the school, family members, and the community is that

college has value. In many cases, families were supportive of their goals. Students also shared anecdotes about acquaintances who regretted missed opportunities to continue their education after high school. In addition, students recalled receiving messages about the fun of attending college, including independence, new friends, social life, and parties. Some believed they received too much information, which paradoxically led them to feel pressured and confused. They also believed that college—typically perceived as a two- or four-year degree—is often presented as the only valid option for post-high school success. As one student noted:

I think there's a lot of pressure put on the kids to attend college, whether that's what they want to do.

Among challenges and potential barriers to achieving success in college, students acknowledged that the college years may be stressful due to academic rigor and an anticipated lack of closeness and understanding with professors. Some expressed concern about their ability to manage assignments, work with faculty who have different styles and grading criteria, and live on their own until they find the help they need. Typical of that view were these comments:

I think it's stressful just trying to figure it out because it's a huge change from high school to college.

It's always nice to know that you have help learning about where to go for help, like when you are in a specific college and who's for what, that's comforting, because it's so crazy and to know what to do.

Not surprisingly, the cost of attending college was a major preoccupation for all students and their families. They expressed concern about maintaining scholarships and the economic burden college may impose on their families. Most students said they received one or more scholarships, such as the Promise Scholarship and institutional scholarships. Some said they were thinking about finding a part-time job in college to help with costs, but they were worried about not being able to keep up with their school assignments.

Asked about the breadth of postsecondary education, students agreed that most of their peers view the main options as community colleges and 4-year degree-granting institutions. However, many view 1- and 2-year certificates as a valid path as well. Students appreciated the career and technical education courses offered through their high schools as an opportunity to explore different career interests. They also agreed that students should study and work in something that makes them happy. These comments were typical of this view:

I feel like college isn't for everyone. You can still find a good job not going to college.

I feel like a community college is just as good as a regular college.

College and Career Interests

Almost all focus group participants said they had a desired profession or field in mind. A substantial number preferred health sciences careers, such as a medical doctor, physician's assistant, dentist, obstetrician, physical therapist, radiation oncologist, surgical assistant,

phlebotomist, lab technician, nurse, and mental health professional. Education was the second most-cited area, with respondents reporting interest in serving as an elementary teacher, day care/prekindergarten teacher, or speech pathologist. One student mentioned computer information systems and another hoped to work as a graphic designer. Other students had diverse interests including wildlife biology, criminal justice, forensics, business, heating and cooling systems, cosmetology, culinary services, and welding.

Asked if they knew what education they needed to reach their career goal, most indicated an awareness of requirements, such as a postgraduate degree for physicians, psychiatrists, and dentists; a bachelor's degree for physical therapists, nurses, and teachers; and a technical certificate for welders. Students also identified many different paths to obtain these degrees. Students seeking a doctoral degree planned to begin undergraduate studies in a 4-year-degree-granting institution. Those whose main aim was a bachelor's degree planned to start college at either a 2- or 4-year institution. For careers in cosmetology, phlebotomy, welding, and heating and cooling, students believed that a technical certificate was sufficient. Students interested in culinary arts and cosmetology wanted to complement this technical field with business studies. As one student said of trade and technical schools:

[It's a] different type of higher education, but still higher education.

At the time of the focus groups, many students indicated they had already committed to attending a postsecondary institution—a technical school, 2-year college, or 4-year institution—in fall 2022. All of these students reported that they chose in-state options, even though a few said they also had applied to an out-of-state college or university. One student was accepted to Harvard University, but a full scholarship from a major in-state university was a deciding factor in the decision to stay within the state. Another had an out-of-state athletic scholarship but expected more communication from the coach and finally decided to stay close to home at another institution that offered a sports scholarship. Students cited economic reasons and proximity to home as their chief considerations as they made decisions about which institutions to attend. One student who wanted to be a teacher was indecisive about her upcoming college choice but had several options. Overall, other students were pleased with the decisions they made.

Of the students who were still undecided regarding their postsecondary plans, most reported wanting to stay in state at public colleges and universities—both large and small. None had plans to take a gap year out of fear of losing momentum and interest in continuing studying. As one noted:

If I take a break, then I'm not going to want to go back.

The students who planned to attend career/technical institutions planned to attend nearby centers. One student planned to join the U.S. Army and will study heating and cooling systems there. Another student planned to join the National Guard and had no plans to pursue postsecondary study.

Support and Sources of Information

With the help of a Venn diagram with circles representing three sources from which students might receive support to plan for their future—their own efforts, family/community, and school—students described how they sought assistance. Many students mentioned emotional support and encouragement from family and friends. Students whose parents or siblings had college experience said they received helpful advice.

Most students also mentioned the importance of teachers and other staff, but answers varied based on their satisfaction with high school. Of those citing the influence of school, counselors and specific teachers were described as influential in setting a plan for the future. Students at one school were especially satisfied with the school environment. One noted the helpfulness of information available through the school:

I think our school has done a good job about letting us know that. Just getting us familiar with other colleges in the state, especially.

Other students said they sought answers in the community, talking with people they knew before turning to teachers or school counselors. These seniors believed it was the students' responsibility to look for additional information and find answers to questions.

One common theme among all students was that they relied on their own efforts, explaining how they proactively looked for information online and devised questions for counselors and teachers. Even students who were first-generation college attendees mentioned that they tried to manage the college process on their own before they considered asking school staff. Still, some said they occasionally felt lost. As one noted:

My parents and none of my siblings went to college, so I have no idea what I'm doing when it comes to that.

Students also were asked about their familiarity with specific terms related to college preparation, including various grants, loans, and available services. All students knew about the Pell Grant, student loans, the FAFSA, and the Promise Scholarship. Most said they were aware of WV Invests, the WV HEG, CFWV, and Txt 4 Success services. At one high school, some students were not familiar with the WV HEG, and in another high school, some students did not know about that initiative or WV Invests. After prompting, many said they had visited the CFWV website even if they did not recognize its name. Also, while students subscribed to Txt 4 Success, they did not know whether the messages came from a GEAR UP coordinator, a college, or other source.

Baseline Conditions at High Schools

The five schools in the focus groups shared many similar characteristics, according to the responses of participating students. Most noted that their schools offered college awareness activities such as college-themed bulletin boards, financial aid workshops, information on different types of colleges, and announcements of scholarship opportunities via emails and social media.

For many of these students, teachers and counselors encouraged the possibility of college while the school offered dual-credit courses and opportunities to talk with college

representatives. Students also said that they learned of various postsecondary options, including certificate programs and 2- and 4-year colleges. This remark was typical of this view:

They're very supportive that any kid, if they work hard enough and want it bad enough, can go where they want to go. And they do anything they can to help get people there.

At one school, students described attending a college fair open to seniors from all local high schools where they could talk to college representatives and file free applications. However, some students at another school remarked that college fairs or specially-designed college days were not as prevalent after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Students at two of the five schools reported some challenges in planning for their post-high school careers. At one school, students noted that a new schoolwide schedule made it challenging for seniors to pursue both rigorous college preparation classes and career/technical courses offered at a career center. One student said:

With the new trimester schedule, I had to choose between my [Advanced Placement] and dual enrollment classes and my [career and technical education] pathway. Normally, I would have completed both.

The career/technical pathway was important for many students, including those who spent part of their days at a health science career center where they could earn a certificate by graduation. Because of that credential, "I already have a fallback plan if school doesn't work out," one student said.

Students at another school said they saw a rapid decline in student and teacher engagement after the return from COVID-19 closures, with one noting:

I just feel like we had a lot more freedom before COVID ... which makes a lot of students angry, or I think, even sad. And then, that causes them not to apply themselves in the classroom.

Participants from this site said administrators discouraged large gatherings before, during, and after school, which affected school spirit and dampened enthusiasm for high school and, in some cases, college. This comment illustrated that view:

This year, it was all about test scores and they haven't really made school a fun place anymore. We didn't have any of the pep rallies that we would normally have.

Despite challenges, most students credited the work of the GEAR UP coordinator with providing encouragement to succeed in high school and develop post-high school plans. They cited coordinators who were willing to go the extra mile to work with families to complete the FAFSA and help students develop education plans. Students remarked:

They do multiple FAFSA workshops because they want you to get that free money. We do that because it's hard to file for FAFSA by yourself.

If you're not sure about what career you want to go into, you can always talk to the counselor or a teacher or someone. There's always someone that's going to be there to help you through, talk you through what you want to do.

For some students, however, the specter of a costly education tempered their enthusiasm for college. Several said that, despite help and guidance from GEAR UP, they were concerned about forgoing several years' worth of full-time wages to seek a postsecondary degree. These two comments illustrated that view:

I'm glad there's a scholarship for \$500, but I need \$7,000.

I think I'm a pretty good student. I just don't like the idea of spending 4 years just to put myself in debt when I could be working.

Students' Sense of Hope and Belonging

Most students felt hopeful about their future and believed they were valued members of the school community. However, the responses sometimes depended on how students viewed the baseline conditions at their schools, as described in the last subsection.

Among factors contributing to a sense of hope, students cited living in a small community and studying in small high schools. They viewed the small size as an advantage because teachers and administrators can develop a closer relationship with students, facilitating connections and communication. However, some believed that their schools lacked the resources of larger districts, which may translate into larger class sizes or fewer course options at their smaller schools. Nonetheless, nearly all expressed the intention of staying and working in West Virginia in the future and cited the benefits of having many relatives in the area.

Students from one of the larger schools, however, were dissatisfied with recent academic changes adopted by the administration. They cited cuts in career/technical education offerings as well as strict requirements to access Advanced Placement, dual-credit, and honors classes. Most perceived these changes as a move to make clear distinctions among students. Only a select group of 11–15 students had access to dual-credit classes, they said, while another small group could enroll in Advanced Placement and honors courses. But they believed the rest of the student body had fewer options to explore careers and education pathways.

Another school had experienced changes at the leadership level, with several different principals in recent years. Students believed that this led to low enthusiasm among teachers and some students who struggled to see a path for their future. One student said:

I think before COVID we had a larger sense of belonging, but after COVID a lot of things in the school system have changed. And it's just like we're going through the motions every day.

Overall, most students believed that those with a commitment to pursue postsecondary education find a way to enroll in classes and take part in activities that relate to their future plans. However, they believed that a sizable part of the student body at their schools were unsure of their future path, think only about the immediate short-term, and, as a result, are

not as hopeful for the future. These unsure students also did not request help or often know where to look for assistance. As one focus group participant noted:

For people that are undecided, there's not a whole lot here to help them develop a plan.

To help these students, focus group participants suggested starting to provide information about options as early as middle school and helping them better prepare for the transition to high school. Once in high school, these students also suggested having continued access to both career and technical education programs as well as rigorous courses to prepare for college.

VII. Discussion and Recommendations

The evaluation team's Year 1 data collection activities—surveys of students, parents, and school personnel and interviews/focus groups with students—provided a wealth of information about early implementation of the new grant and the path forward for the program in the coming years. Prominent issues included the following:

Students and parents believe college is an important goal, but they have questions. In their survey responses, both students and parents believed that going to college will lead to a better future for the student and for the family. While it is not surprising that Grade 7 students have yet to speak about college with someone at school, many Grade 12 students indicated this as well. With high school graduation fast approaching, some seniors appeared to have limited awareness of college options. Similarly, parents were looking for more information about GEAR UP, suggesting a need to make it available through a variety of means and formats.

With this consideration in mind, communication and engagement are important. Some site coordinators spoke of the need to engage parents to help overcome student apathy and a general lack of knowledge about post-high school options. Although students agreed that their parents supported their aspirations, this optimism did not often materialize into concrete actions and students still had unanswered questions. In addition, findings suggest a need to tailor programming and messages. For example, the information Grade 7 students said they needed or would like to be successful was quite varied, with no clear lead topic. As a result, there is a need to make sure resources are customized to students' interests to maintain their goals of pursuing college. Emerging from the pandemic, students also seemed to indicate a desire for fun, engaging in-person activities that also can contain college-is-possible messages.

Several findings suggest GEAR UP site coordinators also are looking for more information. In their responses to open-ended survey questions, these coordinators offered a variety of recommendations including a timetable suggesting times to schedule and complete key activities, additional training on GEAR UP, the scheduling of townhall meetings where coordinators could get their questions answered, and more advanced notice or reminders about upcoming meetings and events. As WVGU provided monthly townhalls and included meeting dates on the project workplan, the Commission may simply need to remind all coordinators about these resources and continue to offer them in the future.

Elsewhere, for program participants, the issue of college affordability is front and center. Spotlight analyses comparing Grade 12 students from the subsample of schools that participated in both the 2014 WV GEAR UP grant (Class of 2021) and the 2021 WV GEAR UP grant (Class of 2022) revealed that Class of 2022 students were significantly more likely than Class of 2021 students to say that the cost of college would be a reason they would not attend college. At the same time, most students were unlikely to correctly estimate the cost of college. Without sufficient attention, these issues create a formidable barrier in the college planning process. If students can learn and retain information on how to pay for college—including the many financial resources available—they in turn may be

less likely to use cost as a reason to dismiss the idea of postsecondary study. Related to this issue are survey findings regarding knowledge of key state financial aid programs. While the Promise Scholarship enjoyed strong recognition from students, parents, and school personnel, knowledge of other offerings such as the WV HEG and WV Invests showed room for improvement. Teachers can play critical roles in conveying information about options other than the well-known Promise program, which appears to be covered regularly as part of classroom instruction.

Older students had a greater sense of hope and belonging than younger students.

Developing and maintaining a sense of hope and belonging are major goals of this GEAR UP grant. Based on this early data collection, Grade 12 students had a higher overall mean score on the Hope Scale than Grade 7 students. This issue may be worth monitoring as it could suggest that those closest to high school graduation may post the highest scores and those in middle school may need more encouragement and assistance.

Programming for middle school students can be a challenge. In interviews, Grade 7 students shared their desired future professions, but also indicated they were open to change. This points to a need to help students explore various careers and interests. Students also welcomed the idea of college visits, signifying the importance of these activities even when students are far from high school graduation. Interviews with these students also showed that while they were aware of their parents' professions, they had little understanding of what it took to work in these fields and whether it required a college degree. Fostering constructive conversations at home may be one element of a comprehensive approach to working with middle-school students.

In response to these findings and trends, the evaluation team offers the following recommendations to the Commission for consideration as it begins Year 2 of the 2021–2028 GEAR UP grant:

Offer engaging activities where students support each other: Among many survey questions related to college-going culture at schools, students were least likely to agree that they help one another to follow their college and career goals. In response, GEAR UP may wish to launch leadership and mentoring programs such as the Higher Education Readiness Officers, or HEROs, program and Student Success Societies offered in the previous grant. Staff also may want to design fun field trips to colleges and other engaging activities, such as free tickets to college sporting events, to build camaraderie. Within high schools, career clubs and game-based learning activities also may help build a more supportive system.

Promote early exposure to college-awareness programming: Grade 12 students surveyed in Year 1 of the 2021 WV GEAR UP grant were significantly more likely than those surveyed in Year 7 of the 2014 WV GEAR UP grant to identify cost as a major reason they would not attend postsecondary education. Despite that finding, however, they also were significantly less likely to correctly estimate the actual cost of college. Improvements on both metrics are critical for GEAR UP success. One strategy may be to increase marketing and visibility around GEAR UP and its college-is-possible message, as some focus group participants also noted they would have liked earlier and/or more exposure to the program. Some priority focus group participants also believed that postsecondary information should be

relayed starting in middle school. Specific to GEAR UP, priority students may benefit from participating in welcoming activities at the end of Grade 11 so students learn they will be part of this program in senior year. For cohort students, it may highlight a need for more marketing to both students and parents, additional workshops focused on college costs, and high-profile events such as guest speakers and college fairs to publicize the GEAR UP college-awareness message.

Offer additional support to teachers: School personnel respondents often did not believe that college messaging was being integrated into events and did not believe teachers were strongly involved in college discussions. For their part, many teachers also did not think that classroom activities supported development of students' problem-solving skills that are necessary for postsecondary success. In response, GEAR UP may want to raise teachers' level of awareness about the program and the college-is-possible message through increased marketing and communication. Given that teacher burnout is at an all-time high—in part due to the nationwide teacher shortage and COVID-related learning loss and mental health issues (Camera, 2022)—GEAR UP may want to design fun turnkey activities or lessons that teachers can easily use in class to promote college and career awareness.

Continue to support career/technical education: Based on comments from students in the priority focus groups, career/technical education is extremely important to seniors. While many students do have careers in mind, they want the option to pursue both career/technical education and college-prep courses while in high school. Based on focus group comments, some schools may not be offering this breadth of options. At these schools, GEAR UP could identify current gaps and design extracurricular or summer programming (such as STEM-related initiatives) to help meet student needs.

Be sure to involve all students: While GEAR UP services to cohort students are still evolving, it is important to recognize the need to target all students for college awareness services. At one middle school, a student in an interview said that a college campus visit was offered as a reward for good grades and attendance. Though the evaluation team does not have other information about this visit, it may be an early reminder of the need to ensure that activities—particularly for this age group—are open to as many students as possible. One student who went on the visit noted that it opened her eyes to the fact that college is more than just attending classes. All students, including those who may not be high achievers, may benefit from such services.

Provide more information on all sources of financial aid: Survey respondents had extensive knowledge of the Promise Scholarship but less knowledge of other options to pay for college such as the WV HEG and the WV Invests program for students pursuing careers in high-demand fields. While Promise may be a popular in-class discussion topic, the other programs also provide valuable financial assistance. GEAR UP may want to discuss how strategies used to promote Promise can be applied to other programs, particularly WV Invests, given student interest in career/technical education programs. These offerings should build knowledge not only among students and families, but also among teachers.

Deploy grade-specific messaging: As early as Grade 7, students say they plan to attend college even though they are unlikely to report that they have spoken with someone about college topics. In addition, many Grade 12 students surveyed did not report speaking with

someone about college. As GEAR UP becomes more integrated into schools as the grant progresses, the program should leverage resources to speak to students about these topics in a way that is relevant at their grade level. For example, in middle school, a college awareness scavenger hunt might be an engaging way to build knowledge for these students and their families. School personnel also suggested having interactive activities for students to learn about FAFSA, the SAT, and dual-credit opportunities instead of relying on lectures alone.

Continue to provide support for site coordinators: Many site coordinators responding to the personnel survey emphasized a need for more communication and training. In response to open-ended questions, some recommended that the program have a monthly calendar or annual timetable with expected activities and events. Several also wanted additional training and townhall meetings where they could get questions answered. More advanced notice and reminders of upcoming meetings and events were among other suggestions. While such resources were available through various sources, from formal workplans to emails, meetings, and Zoom townhalls at the time of survey administration, the limited awareness of these resources suggests that coordinators may benefit from additional reminders about these options.

Offer career activities for middle schoolers: Although Grade 7 students in interviews shared their desired future professions, they also said that they were open to change and not afraid of exploring new paths. As such, the middle school years are an excellent time for students to be formally introduced to different career paths for their long-term aspirations. One option may be for GEAR UP coordinators to conduct career interest inventories or other career-related activities to help broaden and deepen student interest in specific jobs. Using the CFWV.com portal may provide engaging content for students in this age group.

Target student, parent, and teacher engagement: While most praised the work of their schools and GEAR UP, some also cited lower engagement among students and teachers as their schools continue to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that trend, site coordinators may consider offering senior class assemblies and making presentations at faculty meetings to further publicize the program. As students seem to be craving more of the fun activities that existed before the pandemic, GEAR UP may consider sponsoring activities that specifically focus on building excitement among teachers and students. Program sites may want to increase the frequency and number of in-person college visits, during the summer or school year, to the extent possible. As pandemic restrictions ease, college fairs in schools are also important to revive. For parents, program staff may consider retaining parent champions at each school to help educate other adults about GEAR UP, college requirements, and financial aid. Programming and outreach also could help encourage more detailed, at-home conversations in which parents and children can discuss plans for life after high school graduation.

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Appendix A. Technical Detail

Table A.1 Student Gender

	Grade 7 Students	Grade 7 Parents	Grade 12 Students
Male	50%	48%	50%
Female	48%	52%	49%
Other	2%	>1%	1%

Note. Parents reported the gender of their student in the parent survey. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Table A.2 Race and Ethnicity of Respondents

	Grade 7 Students	Grade 7 Parents	Grade 12 Students
White	96%	97%	98%
Black or African American	3%	2%	2%
Asian	1%	>1%	1%
Hispanic or Latino/a	1%	1%	1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%	1%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	>1%	>1%	>1%
Middle Eastern or North African	>1%	>1%	>1%
Other	1%	>1%	1%

Note. Percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Table A.3 Primary Language Spoken at Home

	Grade 7 Students	Grade 7 Parents	Grade 12 Students
English	99%	99%	100%
Spanish	1%	1%	>1%
Other	>1%	0%	>1%

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Table A.4 Highest Level of Education Earned by Parents

	Grade 7 Students	Grade 7 Parents	Grade 12 Students
Some high school	6%	6%	8%
High school diploma/GED	13%	27%	30%
Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, e.g., certificate or career/tech. cert.)	9%	25%	15%
2-year college degree (associate's)	5%	15%	10%
4-year college degree (bachelor's)	11%	14%	16%
Master's degree	8%	11%	8%
Doctorate or higher	2%	2%	2%
Don't know	46%	1%	12%

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Table A.5 Number of Siblings/Children in Family Who Attended or Currently Attend College

	Grade 7 Students	Grade 7 Parents	Grade 12 Students
0	60%	64%	51%
1	18%	12%	29%
2	9%	6%	10%
3	4%	1%	3%
4	2%	>1%	1%
5 or more	3%	>1%	1%
I don't have siblings/other students	6%	16%	6%

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Table A.6 Estimated Family Income

	Grade 7 Parents	Grade 12 Students
\$30,000 or Less	24%	18%
\$30,001-\$60,000	22%	18%
\$60,001-\$100,000	24%	16%
\$100,001 or More	13%	11%
Don't know or I'd rather not say	17%	38%

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Table A.7 Parent Relationship to Student

	Grade 7 Parents
Parent	89%
Grandparent	7%
Legal guardian	8%
Step or foster parent	2%
Other	1%

Note. Percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Table A.8 Student-Reported Experience With Food Insecurity, Focus, and Worry

	Grade 7 Students	Grade 12 Students
<u>In the last 30 days</u> , I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.		
Never true	93%	90%
Rarely true	4%	5%
Sometimes true	2%	3%
Often true	1%	2%
<u>In the last 12 months</u> , I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.		
Never true	94%	89%
Rarely true	3%	6%
Sometimes true	2%	4%
Often true	1%	1%
<u>In the last 12 months</u> , I have had a hard time staying focused on my homework or other things I had to do.		
Never true	36%	34%
Rarely true	22%	18%
Sometimes true	24%	27%
Often true	18%	21%
<u>In the last 12 months</u> , I have been so worried about something that I could not sleep at night.		
Never true	46%	42%
Rarely true	22%	20%
Sometimes true	18%	21%
Often true	14%	17%

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 1 Parent Survey.

Table A.9 Personnel Gender

	Personnel
Male	30%
Female	70%
Other	>1%

Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

Table A.10 Personnel Community Type

	Personnel
Rural	81%
Suburban	15%
Urban	3%
Other	1%

Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

Table A.11 Personnel First-Generation Status

	Personnel
Yes	57%
No	41%
Unsure—I do not know if my parents/guardians graduated from college or not	>1%
Not applicable—I did not attend college	2%

Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

Table A.12 Personnel Role

	Personnel
Administrator	6%
Counselor	7%
Teacher	87%

Note. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

Table A.13 Grade(s) Served by Personnel

	Personnel		Personnel
Grade 6	29%	Grade 10	48%
Grade 7	41%	Grade 11	48%
Grade 8	40%	Grade 12	48%
Grade 9	43%		

Note. Percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 Personnel Survey.

Appendix B. Data Collection Instruments

Grade 7 Student Survey

2021-22 West Virginia GEAR UP Student Survey – Grade 7/8

Your school is part of the West Virginia GEAR UP program. GEAR UP stands for *Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs*. The program is run by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC). A company called ICF is doing a study of WV GEAR UP for WVHEPC to learn if GEAR UP is achieving its goals.

GEAR UP is asking all students in your grade to do a survey. The survey asks questions about what you know and think about college. It asks what you think about other options after high school. It asks about your goals for high school and beyond and where you are on their path to achieving those goals. It asks about how you think those goals can be met. Finally, it asks questions about what school activities you have participated in.

This survey takes about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Your parent or guardian has been informed that you will be asked to complete this survey and your school has not received an objection to your participation from your parent or guardian. Filling out this survey is voluntary—you do not have to do it if you do not want to. You can skip questions or stop taking the survey at any time. There are no consequences if you do not take the survey or finish the survey. Your answers to the survey questions will be kept private. We will only summarize answers to questions across groups of students. Your individual answers will not be shared. Your name will not be on the survey and your individual answers will not be shared with anyone at your school or your parents/guardians. Completing the survey presents very little risk to you. Completing the survey will help to improve college and career programs at your school and other schools in West Virginia.

If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact Samantha Spinney at samantha.spinney@icf.com or (703) 272-6681. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact Christine Walrath at christine.walrath@icf.com or (646) 695-8154.

*Respondents who answered **By Selecting...** with **I do not agree to take this survey** are redirected to page 12.*

By selecting “I agree to take this survey,” you are indicating that you agree to the terms as described and agree to take the survey.

- I agree to take this survey.
 - I do not agree to take this survey. (Proceed to end of survey.)
-

Section I: About You

1. Please type your 9-digit lunch/WVEIS number in the field below. If there are zeroes at the beginning of your number, please include them. _____

2. Select the school you currently attend. (Select only one answer.)

[Select an answer]

3. What grade are you in? (Select only one answer.)

- 7
- 8
- Other – Write In (Required): _____ (Proceed to end of survey)

4. What is your gender? (Select only one answer.)

- Male
- Female
- Other – Write In (Required): _____

5. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply.)

- White
- Black or African American
- Asian
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Other – Write In (Required): _____

6. What is the main language you speak at home? (Select only one answer.)

- English
- Spanish
- Other – Write In (Required): _____

7. What is the highest level of education achieved by your parent(s)/guardian(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 college degree and your father has a high school diploma, select 4-year college degree. (Select only one answer.)

- 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

8. If you have brothers or sisters, how many have attended college in the past or are in college now? (Select only one answer.)

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3

- 4
- 5 or more
- I don't have brothers or sisters

Section II: About Your School

9. Please select how much you agree with the following statements about your school. (Select only one answer per row.)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students at my school help one another to follow their college and career goals.				
I believe going to college will lead to a better future for me and my family.				
School staff acknowledge my goals, abilities, and talents when talking to me about future college options.				
Principals, vice principals, counselors, teachers, and staff help students from any background do well in school.				
I feel encouraged to take courses that will prepare me for high school.				

Section III: Your Educational Goals and Aspirations

10. Do you plan to continue your education after high school? (Select only one answer.)

- Yes
- No

11. What, if anything, may prevent you from continuing your education after high school?

(Select all that apply.)

- My grades aren't good enough
- It costs too much/I can't afford it
- I need to work
- I want to work
- Concerns about COVID-19
- Family issues
- I plan to enlist in the military
- I won't receive/be eligible for enough financial aid
- Other (please write in reason): _____

12. What is the highest level of education that you would like to get? (Select only one answer.)

- High school or less

- 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)
- More than a 4-year college degree

13. What is the highest level of education that you expect to get? (Select only one answer.)

- High school or less
- 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)
- More than a 4-year college degree

14. Please read the following sentences below and think about how you are in most situations.

There are no right or wrong answers. (Select only one answer per row.)

	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	A lot of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
I think I am doing pretty well.						
I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.						
I am doing just as well as other kids my age.						
When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.						
I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.						
Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.						

15. Please rate how much the following statements are true for you. (Select only one answer per row.)

	Never True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True
<u>In the last 30 days</u> , I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.				
<u>In the last 12 months</u> , I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.				
<u>In the last 12 months</u> , I have had a hard time staying focused on my homework or other things I had to do.				
<u>In the last 12 months</u> , I have been so worried about something that I could not sleep at night.				

Section IV: College Knowledge and Awareness

16. Has anyone from your school or GEAR UP ever spoken with you about... (Select only one answer.)

	Yes	No
College entrance requirements?		
The availability of financial aid to help you pay for college?		

17. Do you think that you could afford to attend one of the following types of colleges using financial aid, scholarships, and your family’s resources? (Select only one answer per row.)

	Definitely Not	Probably Not	Probably	Definitely
A public 4-year college				
A public 2-year community/technical college				
A public career/technical center				

18. On average, how much do you think it costs for one year of in-state tuition to attend the following college options in West Virginia? Your estimate should not include the cost of food, housing, or books. (Select only one answer per row.)

	Up to \$3,000	\$3,001-\$6,000	\$6,001-\$10,000	\$10,001-\$15,000	\$15,001-\$20,000	\$20,001-\$25,000	More than \$25,000
A 4-year public college in West Virginia							
A 2-year public community/technical college in West Virginia							

Questions 19-22 ask about your knowledge of different financial aid programs available to West Virginia students. Please review each statement and select the correct program that matches the description.

19. This merit-based financial aid program for West Virginia residents offers up to \$4,750 annually to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back. (Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

20. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provided maximum annual awards of \$3,000 during the 2021-22 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back.

(Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

21. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provided qualifying students up to \$6,495 during the 2021-22 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. (Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

22. This financial aid program for West Virginia students enrolled in eligible certificate and associate degree programs provides aid to cover the remaining amount of tuition, mandatory fees, and academic program fees that are not covered by other scholarships and grants. This amount does not need to be paid back. (Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

23. Please rate your level of knowledge about the following topics. (Select only one answer per row.)

	Not at all knowledgeable	Slightly knowledgeable	Moderately knowledgeable	Extremely knowledgeable
FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)				
ACT/SAT				
Federal student loans				
Federal work study				
Requirements for college acceptance				
High school graduation requirements				
Different types of education after high school (e.g., certificate programs, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges)				

Different career paths				
The education needed to pursue the career or job you are interested in				

Section V: College and Career Activities/Services

24. Have you participated in any of the activities below? If you did attend, how helpful was the activity in preparing you for your future? (Select only one answer per row.)

	Not offered/does not apply	Offered, but I did not attend	Not at all helpful	Slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Extremely helpful
College Application and Exploration Week						
Activities relates to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)						
Help with classes (for example, tutoring or homework help)						
Financial literacy workshops (for example, Get a Life Program)						
CFWV.com Web Portal (for example, creating CFWV.com accounts)						
College campus visits (virtual)						

25. Which of the following do you need from your school or GEAR UP to help you be more successful in school and more prepared for college? (Select all that apply)

- More advanced classes (e.g., AP, dual credit)
- Information about participating in GEAR UP events
- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Opportunities to participate in college visits
- Information about college entrance requirements
- Information about college financial aid/scholarships
- Leadership opportunities

- Summer activities
- Career exploration activities
- Test preparation
- Other - Write In (Required): _____

Please select Submit form to complete the survey. Thank you for your time!

Grade 7 Parent/Guardian Survey

West Virginia GEAR UP Parent Survey: 2021–2022 School Year Grade 7 and Grade 8

Your student's school is part of the West Virginia GEAR UP program. GEAR UP stands for *Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs*. The program is run by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC). A company called ICF is doing a study of WV GEAR UP for WVHEPC to learn if GEAR UP is achieving its goals.

GEAR UP is asking all parents/guardian of students in Grade 7 and Grade 8 at your student's school to do a survey. The survey asks questions about what you know and think about college as an option for your student. It asks what you think about other options after high school. It asks about your goals for your student for high school and beyond and where your student is on the path to achieving those goals. It asks about how you think those goals can be met. Finally, it asks questions about what school activities for parents/guardians you have participated in.

This survey takes about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Filling out this survey is voluntary—you do not have to do it if you do not want to. You can skip questions or stop taking the survey at any time. There are no consequences if you do not take the survey or finish the survey. Your answers to the survey questions will be kept private. We will only summarize answers to questions across groups of parents/guardians. Your individual answers will not be shared. Your name will not be on the survey and your individual answers will not be shared with anyone at your student's school. Completing the survey presents very little risk to you. Completing the survey will help to improve college and career programs at your school and other schools in West Virginia. As an incentive for taking the survey, you will be entered into a raffle for a \$50 Visa gift card.

If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact Samantha Spinney at samantha.spinney@icf.com or (703) 272-6681. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact Christine Walrath at christine.walrath@icf.com or (646) 695-8154.

By selecting "I agree to take this survey," you are indicating that you agree to the terms as described and agree to take the survey.

- I agree to take this survey.
 - I do not agree to take this survey. (Proceed to end of survey)
-

Section I: About You

1. Please type your student's 9-digit lunch/WVEIS number in the field below. If there are zeroes at the beginning of your student's number, please include them. _____

2. Select the school the student that brought this survey home currently attends. (Select only one answer.)

[Select an answer]

3. In what grade is the student that brought this survey home? (Select only one answer.)

- 7
- 8
- Other – Write In (Required): _____ (Proceed to end of survey)

4. What is your student's gender? (Select only one answer.)

- Male
- Female
- Other – Write In (Required): _____

5. What is your relationship to the student who brought this survey home? (Select all that apply.)

- Parent
- Grandparent
- Legal Guardian
- Step or foster parent
- Other – Write In (Required): _____

6. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply.)

- White
- Black or African American
- Asian
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Other – Write In (Required): _____

7. What is the main language you speak at home? (Select only one answer.)

- English
- Spanish
- Other – Write In (Required): _____

8. Which of the following options best describes your family's total income (before taxes) during the past 12 months? Please include income for yourself and all your family members living with you during this time. (Select only one answer.)

- \$30,000 or Less
- \$30,001-\$60,000
- \$60,001-\$100,000
- \$100,001 or More
- Don't know or I'd rather not say

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

- 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

10. If you have other students, how many have attended or are currently attending college? (Select only one answer.)

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more
- I don’t have other students

Section II: About Your Student's School

11. Please select how much you agree with the following statements about your student’s school. (Select only one answer per row.)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Parents/family at my student’s school support one another in encouraging students to pursue their college and career goals.				
I believe my student going to college will lead to a better future for them.				
School staff acknowledge my needs (such as my work schedule) as a parent/family member when talking to me about my student’s future college options.				
Administrators, teachers, and staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background.				
My student is encouraged to take courses that will prepare them for high school.				

Section III: Your Student's Educational Goals and Aspirations

12. Have you talked with your student about attending college? (Select only one answer.)

- Yes
- No

13. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Select only one answer per row.)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Attending college is important to my student's career goal and future.				
It's too early to think about my student going to college.				

14. What is the highest level of education that you would like your student to get? (Select only one answer.)

- High school or less
- 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)
- More than a 4-year college degree

15. What is the highest level of education that you expect your student to get? (Select only one answer.)

- High school or less
- 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)
- More than a 4-year college degree

16. Please read the following sentences below and think about how you/your student are doing in most situations. (Select only one answer per row.)

	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	A lot of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
I think my student is doing pretty well.						
My student is doing just as well as other kids that are his/her age.						
When my student has a problem, he/she can come up with lots of ways to solve it.						

I think the things my student has done in the past will help him/her in the future.						
Even when others want to quit, I know that my student can find ways to solve the problem.						
I am hopeful for my student's future.						

Section IV: College Knowledge and Awareness

17. Do you think that your student could afford to attend one of the following types of colleges using financial aid, scholarships, and your family’s resources? *(Select only one answer per row.)*

	Definitely Not	Probably Not	Probably	Definitely
A public 4-year college				
A public 2-year community/technical college				
A public career/technical center				

18. On average, how much do you think it costs for one year of in-state tuition to attend the following college options in West Virginia? Your estimate should not include the cost of food, housing, or books. *(Select only one answer per row.)*

	Up to \$3,000	\$3,001-\$6,000	\$6,001-\$10,000	\$10,001-\$15,000	\$15,001-\$20,000	\$20,001-\$25,000	More than \$25,000
A 4-year public college in West Virginia							
A 2-year public community/technical college in West Virginia							

Questions 19-22 ask about your knowledge of different financial aid programs available to West Virginia students. Please review each statement and select the correct program that matches the description.

19. This merit-based financial aid program for West Virginia residents offers up to \$4,750 annually to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

20. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provided maximum annual awards of \$3,000 during the 2021-22 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back.

(Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

21. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provided qualifying students up to \$6,495 during the 2021-22 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. (Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

22. This financial aid program for West Virginia students enrolled in eligible certificate and associate degree programs provides aid to cover the remaining amount of tuition, mandatory fees, and academic program fees that are not covered by other scholarships and grants. This amount does not need to be paid back. (Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

23. Please rate your level of knowledge about the following topics. (Select only one answer per row.)

	Not at all knowledgeable	Slightly knowledgeable	Moderately knowledgeable	Extremely knowledgeable
FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)				
ACT/SAT				
Federal student loans				
Federal work study				
Requirements for college acceptance				
High school graduation requirements				
Different types of education after high				

school (e.g., certificate programs, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges)				
Different career paths				
The education needed to pursue the career or job your student is interested in				

Section V: GEAR UP Activities/Services

24. Have you participated in any of the family activities below? If you did attend, how helpful was the activity in helping you prepare for your student’s future? (Select only one answer per row.)

	Not offered/does not apply	Offered, but I did not attend	Not at all helpful	Slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Extremely helpful
College for West Virginia (CFWV) workshops for families						
Financial aid literacy and assistance						
Accessing CFWV.com portal						
College campus visits						

25. Are you aware that GEAR UP provides resources to help students plan for their education after high school and for career exploration at your student’s school? (Select only one answer.)

- Yes
- No

26. Would you like to receive more information about the services GEAR UP provides to you and your student? (Select only one answer.)

- Yes
- No

27. Which of the following do you need from your student’s school or GEAR UP to help your student be more successful in school and more prepared for college? (Select all that apply.)

- More advanced classes
- Information about participating in GEAR UP events
- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Opportunities to participate in college visits
- Information about college entrance requirements
- Information about college financial aid/scholarships
- Leadership opportunities
- Summer activities
- Career exploration activities
- Test preparation
- Other (please describe): _____

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Please select Submit form to complete the survey. Thank you for your time!

Grade 12 Student Survey

West Virginia GEAR UP Student Survey: 2021–2022 School Year Grade 12

Your school is part of the West Virginia GEAR UP program. GEAR UP stands for *Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs*. The program is run by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC). A company called ICF is doing a study of WV GEAR UP for WVHEPC to learn if GEAR UP is achieving its goals.

GEAR UP is asking all students in your grade to do a survey. The survey asks questions about what you know and think about college. It asks what you think about other options after high school. It asks about your goals for high school and beyond and where you are on their path to achieving those goals. It asks about how you think those goals can be met. Finally, it asks questions about what school activities you have participated in.

This survey takes about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Your parent or guardian has been informed that you will be asked to complete this survey and your school has not received an objection to your participation from your parent or guardian. Filling out this survey is voluntary—you do not have to do it if you do not want to. You can skip questions or stop taking the survey at any time. There are no consequences if you do not take the survey or finish the survey. Your answers to the survey questions will be kept private. We will only summarize answers to questions across groups of students. Your individual answers will not be shared. Your name will not be on the survey and your individual answers will not be shared with anyone at your school or your parents/guardians. Completing the survey presents very little risk to you. Completing the survey will help to improve college and career programs at your school and other schools in West Virginia.

If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact Samantha Spinney at samantha.spinney@icf.com or (703) 272-6681. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact Christine Walrath at christine.walrath@icf.com or (646) 695-8154.

By selecting “I agree to take this survey,” you are indicating that you agree to the terms as described and agree to take the survey.

- I agree to take this survey.
 - I do not agree to take this survey. (Proceed to end of survey.)
-

Section I: About You

1. Please type your 9-digit lunch/WVEIS number in the field below. If there are zeroes at the beginning of your number, please include them. _____

2. Select the school you currently attend. (Select only one answer.)

[Select an answer]

3. Are you a grade 12 student (or a grade 11 student planning on graduating in Spring 2022)?

(Select only one answer.)

- Yes
- No (Proceed to end of survey)

4. What is your gender? (Select only one answer.)

- Male
- Female
- Other – Write In (Required): _____

5. What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply.)

- White
- Black or African American
- Asian
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Other – Write In (Required): _____

6. What is the main language you speak at home? (Select only one answer.)

- English
- Spanish
- Other – Write In (Required): _____

7. How much money do you think your family made (before taxes) during the past 12 months?

As you think about it, please include any money you earned from working and all the money you think the people living in your house made. (Select only one answer.)

- \$30,000 or Less
- \$30,001-\$60,000
- \$60,001-\$100,000
- \$100,001 or More
- Don't know or I'd rather not say

8. What is the highest level of education achieved by your parent(s)/guardian(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 college degree and your father has a high school diploma, select 4-year college degree. (Select only one answer.)

- 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

9. If you have brothers or sisters, how many have attended college in the past or are in college now? (Select only one answer.)

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more
- I don’t have brothers or sisters

Section II: About Your School

10. Please select how much you agree with the following statements about your school. (Select only one answer per row.)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students at my school help one another to follow their college and career goals.				
I believe going to college will lead to a better future for me and my family.				
School staff acknowledge my goals, abilities, and talents when talking to me about future college options.				
Principals, vice principals, counselors, teachers, and staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background (for example, disabilities, gender, income status, race).				
I feel encouraged to take courses that will prepare me for college.				

Section III: Your Educational Goals and Aspirations

11. Do you plan to continue your education after high school? (Select only one answer.)

- Yes
- No

12. What, if anything, may prevent you from continuing your education after high school? (Select all that apply.)

- My grades aren’t good enough

- It costs too much/I can't afford it
- I need to work
- I want to work
- Concerns about COVID-19
- Family issues
- I plan to enlist in the military
- I won't receive/be eligible for enough financial aid
- Other (please write in reason): _____

13. What is the highest level of education that you would like to get? (Select only one answer.)

- High school or less
- 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)
- More than a 4-year college degree

14. What is the highest level of education that you expect to get? (Select only one answer.)

- High school or less
- 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)
- More than a 4-year college degree

15. Please read the following sentences below and think about how you are in most situations.

There are no right or wrong answers. (Select only one answer per row.)

	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	A lot of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
I think I am doing pretty well.						
I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.						
I am doing just as well as other students my age.						
When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.						
I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.						
Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.						

16. Please rate how much the following statements are true for you. (Select only one answer per row.)

	Never True	Rarely True	Sometimes True	Often True
<u>In the last 30 days</u> , I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.				
<u>In the last 12 months</u> , I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.				
<u>In the last 12 months</u> , I have had a hard time staying focused on my homework or other things I had to do.				
<u>In the last 12 months</u> , I have been so worried about something that I could not sleep at night.				

Section IV: College Knowledge and Awareness

17. Has anyone from your school or GEAR UP ever spoken with you about... (Select only one answer.)

	Yes	No
College entrance requirements?		
The availability of financial aid to help you pay for college?		

18. Do you think that you could afford to attend one of the following types of colleges using financial aid, scholarships, and your family's resources? (Select only one answer per row.)

	Definitely Not	Probably Not	Probably	Definitely
A public 4-year college				
A public 2-year community/technical college				
A public career/technical center				

19. On average, how much do you think it costs for one year of in-state tuition to attend the following college options in West Virginia? Your estimate should not include the cost of food, housing, or books. (Select only one answer per row.)

	Up to \$3,000	\$3,001-\$6,000	\$6,001-\$10,000	\$10,001-\$15,000	\$15,001-\$20,000	\$20,001-\$25,000	More than \$25,000
A 4-year public college in West Virginia							
A 2-year public community/technical							

college in West Virginia							
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Questions 20-23 ask about your knowledge of different financial aid programs available to West Virginia students. Please review each statement and select the correct program that matches the description.

20. This merit-based financial aid program for West Virginia residents offers up to \$4,750 annually to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back. (Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

21. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provided maximum annual awards of \$3,000 during the 2021-22 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. (Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

22. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provided qualifying students up to \$6,495 during the 2021-22 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. (Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

23. This financial aid program for West Virginia students enrolled in eligible certificate and associate degree programs provides aid to cover the remaining amount of tuition, mandatory fees, and academic program fees that are not covered by other scholarships and grants. This amount does not need to be paid back. (Select only one answer.)

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

24. Please rate your level of knowledge about the following topics. (Select only one answer per row.)

	Not at all knowledgeable	Slightly knowledgeable	Moderately knowledgeable	Extremely knowledgeable
--	--------------------------	------------------------	--------------------------	-------------------------

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)				
ACT/SAT				
Federal student loans				
Federal work study				
Requirements for college acceptance				
High school graduation requirements				
Different types of education after high school (e.g., certificate programs, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges)				
Different career paths				
The education needed to pursue the career or job you are interested in				

Section V: College and Career Activities/Services

25. Have you participated in any of the activities below? If you did attend, how helpful was the activity in preparing you for your future? *(Select only one answer per row.)*

	Not offered/does not apply	Offered, but I did not attend	Not at all helpful	Slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Extremely helpful
College Application and Exploration Week						
Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA)						
Text for Success initiative						
ACT/SAT preparation						

Academic planning/career advising						
Accessing CFWV.com portal						
College Decision Day and/or other college acceptance events						
College campus visits (virtual)						

26. If you did not participate in one or more of these activities/services, why not? (Select all that apply)

- Family obligations
- Work/employment
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of interest
- Scheduling conflicts
- I don't need or want to participate
- I was not aware they were offered
- Other - Write In (Required): _____

27. Which of the following do you need from your school or GEAR UP to help you be more successful in school and more prepared for college? (Select all that apply)

- More advanced classes (e.g., AP, dual credit)
- Information about participating in GEAR UP events
- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Opportunities to participate in college visits
- Information about college entrance requirements
- Information about college financial aid/scholarships
- Career exploration activities
- Test preparation
- Assistance with the college entrance process
- Assistance with completing financial aid forms (e.g., FAFSA)
- Other - Write In (Required): _____

Section VI: College Preparation Activities

28. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is available to be completed. Have you completed your FAFSA yet? (Select only one answer.)

- No, and I do not plan to complete the FAFSA this academic year. (
- No, but I plan to complete the FAFSA this academic year. (Skip to Question 30)
- Yes (Skip to Question 30)

29. What are the main reasons you do not plan to do so? (Select all that apply.) (Skip Question 30.)

- I plan to take some time off between high school and college
- I do not plan to continue my education after high school
- I'm not sure what the FAFSA is
- I do not believe I will be eligible for financial aid
- Other (please write in the reason): _____

30. Did you receive in-person and/or virtual help from GEAR UP or anyone else at your school to complete your FAFSA? (Select only one answer.)

- Yes, I received help from GEAR UP or someone else at my school to complete my FAFSA.
- No, I did not receive help from GEAR UP or anyone else at my school to submit my FAFSA.

31. How many college applications have you completed? (Select only one answer.)

- 0, and I do not plan to complete any this academic year. (Proceed to end of survey)
- 0, but I plan to complete one or more this academic year. (Proceed to end of survey)
- 1
- 2 or more

32. Did you receive in-person and/or virtual help from GEAR UP or anyone else at your school to complete your college applications? (Select only one answer.)

- Yes, I received help from GEAR UP or someone else from my school to complete college applications.
- No, I did not receive help from GEAR UP or anyone else at my school to submit my college applications.

Please select Submit form to complete the survey. Thank you for your time!

School Personnel Survey

WV GEAR UP 2021-22 School Year School Personnel Survey

Congratulations! We are excited that your school was selected as a West Virginia (WV) GEAR UP school. GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. West Virginia was 1 of only 4 state grants that received this funding. This exciting program will serve 11 counties for the next seven years through a \$24.5 million-dollar federal grant and your students will reap the benefits! The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC) was selected by Governor Justice to serve as the fiscal agent for the program. The WVHEPC has selected ICF to study the overall impact of the GEAR UP grant to not only determine if goals are being met, but ways to improve services impacting your students and their families over the next seven years.

GEAR UP asks that all teachers and staff complete the survey to better serve your school. The survey includes questions about you and your role at your school, your school's college-going culture, college and financial aid knowledge, and involvement in and implementation of school activities. This survey takes about 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Filling out this survey is voluntary. You can skip questions or stop taking the survey at any time. Your answers to the survey questions will be kept private. We will only summarize answers to questions across personnel. Your name will not be on the survey and your individual answers will not be shared with anyone at your school. Completing the survey will help to improve college and career programs at your school and other schools in West Virginia.

If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact Samantha Spinney with ICF at samantha.spinney@icf.com or (703) 272-6681. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact Christine Walrath at christine.walrath@icf.com or (646) 695-8154.

By selecting "I agree to take this survey," you are indicating that you agree to the terms as described and agree to take the survey.

- I agree to take this survey.
- I do not agree to take this survey. (Survey ends)

Section I: About Yourself

1. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other: _____

2. What type of community did you grow up in?

- Rural community
 Suburban community
 Urban community
 Other: _____
3. When you attended college, were you a first-generation college student (meaning neither of your parents/guardians graduated from a 2-year or 4-year college)?
- Yes
 No
 Unsure—I do not know if my parents/guardians graduated from college or not.
 Not applicable—I did not attend college.
4. What has been your personal experience applying for financing for postsecondary education? (*Select all that apply.*)
- Applied for federal student aid (FAFSA)
 Applied for state grants and other aid programs
 Applied for scholarships
 Applied for work study programs/internships
 No personal experience applying for financial support to pay for college
5. What has been your personal experience receiving financing for postsecondary education? (*Select all that apply.*)
- Received student aid in the form of loans (needed to be repaid)
 Received student aid in the form of grants (did not need to be repaid)
 Received scholarships
 Received work study programs/internships
 No personal experience receiving financial support to pay for college
6. What is your current primary position at your school?
- Administrator Counselor Teacher Other: _____
7. How many years have you worked in this position or role at the school (please enter a number)? [only accept numerical response]
8. What current grade level(s) do you serve? (*Select all that apply.*)
- 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
9. In which school(s) are you currently working? (drop- down list)
10. Are you a GEAR UP site coordinator? Yes No

Section II: School Culture

11. For items a - r, please rate your level of agreement for each of the statements below about your SCHOOL. [**This set of directions in brackets only visible for teachers: If you are a teacher, please rate your level of agreement twice: once for your level of agreement that the statement accurately reflects your SCHOOL and once for your level of agreement that the statement accurately reflects your own CLASSROOM.**] Note that the term “college” refers to any type of postsecondary education, including 2-year

community college, 4-year college/university, and career and technical schools.

	In My School				In My Classroom (THIS COLUMN ONLY VISIBLE FOR TEACHERS)			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Students are encouraged to choose courses that prepare them for college.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
b. Creativity and original thinking are highly valued.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
c. Teachers are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
d. Students are learning effective problem-solving skills.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
e. Teachers and staff openly communicate to students that college will lead to a better future for them and their family.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
f. Most students will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
g. Teachers and staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background (for example, disabilities, gender, income status, race).	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
h. Teachers in my school can help students overcome frustration when confronted with difficult tasks.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
i. Teachers and staff help students set goals that are achievable.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
j. Students encourage one another to follow their college and career goals.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
k. Teachers can help increase the percentage of students who are promoted to the next grade at my school	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
l. Teachers and staff acknowledge student goals, abilities, and talents when talking to them about future college options.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
m. Students are exposed to	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

success stories of school alumni to help encourage their future success.									
n. Teachers and staff talk with parents and families about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for college.	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
o. Teachers and staff make themselves available to students and their families when completing college materials.	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
p. College pennants, banners, and posters are visible in your school.	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
q. College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances.	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
r. Teachers include visual cues to encourage discussions about their college experience.	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4

12. Please read the following sentences below and think about how your school is doing in most situations.

	<i>None of the time</i>	<i>A little of the time</i>	<i>Some of the time</i>	<i>A lot of the time</i>	<i>Most of the time</i>	<i>All of the time</i>
a. <i>I think my school is doing pretty well.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. <i>My school is doing just as well as other schools in the area.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. <i>My school provides lots of ways to help students solve problems.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. <i>I think students' past experiences will help them in the future.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. <i>Even when others want to quit, our school finds ways to persevere.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. <i>I am hopeful for the future of our students.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section III: College and Financial Aid Knowledge

13. Please rate your level of knowledge about each of the following programs that students and families can use to pay for college.

	I do not know what this is	I am familiar with the name, but I do not know what it means	I know what it is, but I do not understand it well enough to advise my students on it	I know what it is and I understand it well enough to advise my students on it
<i>FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>College savings plan/529</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>WV Higher Education Grant</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Federal grants, loans, and work-study</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Scholarships (e.g., Institutional)</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>PROMISE Scholarship</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>WV Invests Grant</i>	1	2	3	4

14. Please rate your ability to assist students and their families in understanding the following topics.

	Not at all able	Slightly able	Moderately able	Extremely able
<i>If respondent serves Grades 6, 7, 8 based on response to Q8: Transition into secondary education</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>If respondent serves Grades 9, 10, 11, 12 based on response to Q8: Transition into postsecondary education</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>ACT/SAT</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Tutoring support</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Course test preparation</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>High school graduation course requirements</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>College match and fit</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>The importance/benefit of a college education</i>	1	2	3	4

15. On average, how much do you think it costs for one year of in-state tuition to attend the following college options in West Virginia? Your estimate should not include the cost of food, housing, or books.

	Up to \$3,000	\$3,001-\$6,000	\$6,001-\$10,000	\$10,001-\$15,000	\$15,001-\$20,000	\$20,001-\$25,000	More than \$25,000
A 4-year public college in West Virginia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A 2-year public community/technical college in West Virginia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Questions 16-19 ask about your knowledge of different financial aid programs available to West Virginia students. Please review each statement and select the correct program that matches the description.

16. This merit-based financial aid program for West Virginia residents offers up to \$4,750 annually to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back.

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

17. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provided maximum annual awards of \$3,000 during the 2021-22 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back.

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

18. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provided qualifying students up to \$6,495 during the 2021-22 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back.

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

19. This financial aid program for West Virginia students enrolled in eligible certificate and associate degree programs provides aid to cover the remaining amount of tuition, mandatory fees, and academic program fees that are not covered by other scholarships and grants. This amount does not need to be paid back.

- WV Invests Grant
- WV Promise Scholarship
- WV Higher Education Grant
- Federal Pell Grant

Section IV: College Readiness and/or GEAR UP Involvement

20. Have you ever participated in GEAR UP-sponsored activities or received support through GEAR UP?

- Yes No I don't know

21. Please select to what extent your school promotes each of the following activities. Then, please indicate whether you have been involved in that activity (e.g., as a participant, activity organizer).

	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Slightly</i>	<i>Moderately</i>	<i>Extremely</i>		<i>Yes, I have been involved.</i>	<i>No, I have not been involved.</i>
Academic planning/career advising	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Credit recovery, AP, and dual credit opportunities	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Parent/family peer networks	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Academic/tutoring support	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA)	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Financial literacy workshops	1	2	3	4		Y	N
College Application and Exploration Week	1	2	3	4		Y	N
ACT/SAT preparation	1	2	3	4		Y	N
College Decision Day and/or other acceptance events	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Summer activities (e.g., Student Leadership Academy)	1	2	3	4		Y	N
College campus visits (including virtual)	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Mentoring programs (e.g., Student Success Society)	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Text 4 Success initiative	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Professional development (e.g., Social and Emotional Learning, Hope)	1	2	3	4		Y	N
One-on-one advising with students	1	2	3	4		Y	N

22. If you did not participate in one or more of these activities/services, why not? (Select all that apply.)

- Family obligations
- Competing work obligations
- Lack of time
- Lack of interest
- Scheduling conflicts
- I don't need or want to participate.
- I was not aware they were offered.
- Other—Write In (Required): _____

Section V: Questions for GEAR UP Site Coordinators Only

23. How many students in the GEAR UP cohort do you believe want to go to college?

- A few students
- About half of the students
- Most students
- All students

24. How helpful are staff at WVHEPC in making sure you have the information and resources to carry out GEAR UP activities?

- Not helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Helpful
- Very helpful

25. What activities or services might help you in becoming a more successful GEAR UP coordinator at your school?

Comment:

26. What services do you believe are **most needed** by GEAR UP students at your school to help them plan for their future? (*Please select up to 3 items.*)

- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- College visits
- Career information
- Parent workshops
- Financial aid workshops
- After-school and summer programs
- Other (please describe): _____

27. What roles do you think GEAR UP can play in enhancing the college-going culture at your school?

Comment:

Please select Submit form to complete the survey. Thank you for your time!

Grade 7 Interview Protocol

West Virginia GEAR UP: 2022 Student Interview Protocol – Longitudinal Study

Introduce yourself and colleagues as representatives of ICF and describe your role (i.e., interviewer).

Briefly discuss the interview's purpose: Hello and thank you for talking to me today. I'm [name], and I'm from a company called ICF. We were hired to learn about how the GEAR UP program at your school is working. *We are interviewing students from GEAR UP middle schools to learn more about their current school experiences and future plans.*

Convey to each participant the confidentiality policy: Remind the student about our confidentiality policy: Before we begin, I want you to know that (1) *Your participation in this interview is voluntary, so you do not have to participate;* (2) *you can decide not to answer any questions or stop participating in the discussion at any time without any consequences;* (3) *the information you share today will be kept in confidence by the ICF team to the extent permitted by law, meaning that we will not share what you say to us with anyone else;* (4) *the ICF team has signed confidentiality agreements that we will protect the information that you share with us;* (5) *the ICF team will put this data in a safe area so no one can get it.*

Ask if individuals have questions before the interview begins. Have the student complete the assent form. Ask the interviewee for permission to record the interview.

I. **Background**

First, let's talk a little bit about you and your experiences in school.

1. Tell me about how your school year is going so far.

Probe for whether they view it as easy or hard. Probe for favorite/least favorite subjects, connections with teachers and students.

2. What are the main things you like about your school? Are there things that you think could be improved?
3. When something is difficult for you in school, do you reach out for help? If so, who do you go to? If not, what are your reasons for not seeking help?

Probe for going to teachers, counselors, tutors, parents/guardians, siblings.

4. What activities do you take part in when you are not in school (after school and during the summer)?
5. Tell me about your community. What's it like to live around here?

Probe whether the student believes he/she lives in a rural area (i.e., out in the country), a small town, or a larger urban area (i.e., in the city or nearby suburbs) and the reasons for their answer.

6. Do you feel like you belong in this community?

Probe for reasons why or why not students feel that they belong.

7. Do you think you will live here when you grow up? Why or why not?

Probe reasons why the student would or would not expect to stay in this community (family, friends, career interests). Probe what they like or dislike about the community.

II. **Student perceptions**

Next, I'm going to read a few statements and I'd like to know whether you agree or disagree with them.

8. Tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following.

--It is important for me to do well in school

--Adults at this school care about the students

--I feel like I belong in my school

--I feel like an outsider in my school

--I am doing just as well as other kids my age

--I have a hard time staying focused on my schoolwork

--I feel hopeful about my future

Probe for any reasons for lack of hope, belonging or focus and how the situation might be improved.

III. **Your Future**

Now, I'd like to ask you about your thoughts about the future.

9. Tell me about any goals you have for 8th grade next year.

Probe for academic, personal and extracurricular activity goals.

10. What are your hopes for high school? For after high school?

Probe for academic/personal goals and extracurricular activities (high school)

11. When someone says the word 'college,' what do you think of?

12. Has a member of your family (parent/guardian, sibling) attended college?

Probe whether family member earned a degree. Probe whether student has talked to a family member about college.

13. Who do you talk with about your plans for your future?

Probe for parents/guardians, siblings, extended family, and members of the community.

14. Do you plan to continue your education after high school? Why or why not?

Probe for whether they are interested in a particular college or other postsecondary institution. Probe any reasons the student does not want to continue (lack of interest, finances, etc.)

15. Please tell me whether you have a career in mind. What are your reasons for considering this career?

Probe whether the student knows the education level required for the career.

IV. **GEAR UP and Closing**

Finally, I'd like to ask you about GEAR UP. You are part of the GEAR UP program that began at your school this year and will continue to be part of the program for the next 6 years.

16. Tell me what, if anything, you know about the GEAR UP program? *(Describe the program and note activities such as virtual college visits and STEM Boot Camps if students are unfamiliar).*

17. Do you plan to participate in GEAR UP activities? Why or why not?

Probe for type of activity that may interest them most (college visit, tutoring, mentoring, community service)

18. Is there anything else you would like to say about your school, your future plans, or GEAR UP?

Thank you for your time.

Grade 12 Focus Group Protocol

West Virginia GEAR UP: 2022 Student Focus Group

Facilitator Guidelines:

- Introduce yourself and colleagues as representatives of ICF and describe your role (i.e., facilitator).
- Briefly discuss the focus group's purpose: *The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (the Commission) has hired a company, ICF, to study the West Virginia GEAR UP program. Today, we will have a group discussion, called a focus group, so that you all can share your views and experiences with West Virginia GEAR UP. Please know that there are no right or wrong answers—only your own opinion. The goal is to hear many different viewpoints. I also want to know if you agree or disagree with what others are saying and why. Please, only one person speak at a time. This focus group discussion will take approximately 45 minutes.*

Convey to each participant our confidentiality policy: *Before we get started, I want to remind you about a few things related to confidentiality: (1) Your participation in this focus group discussion is voluntary; (2) you can decline to answer any questions or stop participating in the discussion at any time without any consequences; (3) the information you share today will be kept in confidence by the ICF team to the extent permitted by law; (4) the ICF team has signed confidentiality agreements that we will protect the information that you share with us; (5) the ICF team will store focus group data in secure areas; and (6) please respect each other's confidentiality by not sharing any information outside of this focus group.*

Ask if they have any questions before you begin. Hand out assent forms, review, and ask them to sign before the focus group begins (if in person). Read assent forms and obtain verbal assent if virtual.

Ask permission to record the focus group: *In order to capture the discussion, I would like to record the session. Only ICF evaluation team members will have access to the recording, which will not be shared with anybody in your school or the GEAR UP program. If at least one person chooses not to have the focus group recorded, we will not record the session but will take notes. We will not include your name(s) in these notes. Any information that can be used to identify an individual will be removed prior to sharing any findings. **START RECORDER NOW!***

Pen and sheet with Venn diagram distributed to all participants (if held in person).

Time	Opening Questions	Facilitator's Activity
2 min	INTRODUCTION Please introduce yourself, and whether you have a future career in mind.	Probe if college is required for these careers and if students know what type of education is needed for the careers that they name.
3 min	COLLEGE PLANS Do you plan to attend college next year? If	Probe for interest in two-/four-year and technical institutions. Probe for reasons why they would not attend including

	<p>so, what colleges are on your list? If you don't plan to attend, why not?</p>	<p>cost, grades, lack of interest, desire to work/join military, need to care for children or elders, or wanting to take time off from school.</p>
<p>5-7 min</p>	<p>COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE</p> <p>Next I'd like to ask how your school supports the message that college is possible for all students. Schools might support this idea through activities like college fairs or college bulletin boards or by having discussions about college. They also may encourage you to improve your academic performance for the goal of attending college. Thinking about these and other activities, do you think your school supports a college-going culture? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Probe for presence of college fairs, bulletin boards, discussions with teachers/ counselors about college, and encouragement to take rigorous courses and achieve high grades. Probe for other items students may see as college-going activities. Probe for what types of activities they liked as well as what the school could do to improve the culture.</p>
<p>10 min.</p>	<p>COLLEGE TERMS</p> <p>Now I'm going to read out a few college-related terms. Please tell me if you've heard of them and what, if anything, you know about them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Pell Grants --Student loans --FAFSA --WV Invests Grant --WV Promise Scholarship --WV Higher Education Grant --College for West Virginia, or CFWV --Txt 4 Success 	<p>After first response to each item, ask how many other students know the term. Probe whether students have questions about an item and what more they would like to know about it. If no one knows a term, provide a very brief explanation.</p>

<p>7-10 min</p>	<p>PLANNING YOUR FUTURE / VENN DIAGRAM</p> <p>Please see the Venn diagram here (paper copy for in person or graphic if online). Please tell us where you get the most support to plan for your future. The paper has circles representing 3 ways you may get this support: from school; from community/family; and from your own efforts. Some of you may rely mostly on one source; others from 2 or all 3. Mark an X in the area where you get the most support to plan for your future. For example, if you mainly rely on just 1 of these sources, mark an X in that circle. If you get the most support from 2 of these sources, mark an X where those 2 circles intersect. If you regularly rely on all 3 sources, mark an X in the center where all circles intersect. If you believe there are sources not listed in the diagram, please include them at the bottom of your handout. We'll take a minute for you to mark your copy. <i>After 1-2 minutes, ask participants to share their answer and why they made that choice.</i></p>	<p>Probe whether students talk about college or careers with parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and friends.</p> <p><i>Follow-up questions: What have you learned from these sources? Within the school, what information about college have teachers, guidance or GEAR UP provided to you? What questions about college do you still have?</i></p>
<p>5-7 min</p>	<p>HELP FROM YOUR SCHOOL</p> <p>Looking back at your high school experience, what specific activities or services at school have helped you when thinking about your future? What else do you still need from your school to be more successful and more prepared for college and career?</p>	<p>Probe for financial aid/FAFSA help, career exploration, test prep, college visits, more advanced courses, tutoring, mentoring. Ask students whether they agree or disagree with individual comments. Probe for reasons why students did/did not participate.</p>
<p>5 min</p>	<p>HOPE AND BELONGING</p> <p>One priority for GEAR UP is to promote hope and belonging among students. How connected do you feel toward students and staff at your school? How does the school foster a culture of belonging for all students?</p>	<p>Probe for ways in which the school is welcoming to students such as teacher/student communication, family outreach, and advising/support. Probe for suggestions on how the school may improve belonging and connectedness.</p>

2 min	CLOSING Is there anything else we should know about what students at your school think about college or the GEAR UP program?	
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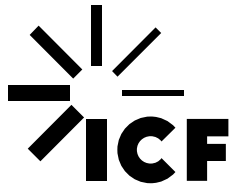
Thank you very much for your time.

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

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



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



icf.com



twitter.com/ICF

linkedin.com/company/icf-international

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About ICF

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