



# West Virginia GEAR UP External Evaluation

Year 2 Annual Report

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**Submitted to:**

West Virginia Higher Education Policy  
Commission  
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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 second year of operation, West Virginia (WV) GEAR UP continued services in 50 high-poverty schools across 11 county school districts. Students in the Class of 2027 can participate in WV GEAR UP from Grade 7 through their first year of postsecondary education and students in 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 2022–2023 school year (Year 2), the program served Grade 8 students in the first WV GEAR UP cohort, Grade 7 students in the second WV GEAR UP cohort, and 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 implementation and outcomes evaluation findings from Year 2, based on an analysis of data collected from students, parents/guardians, and school personnel through surveys and interviews. Findings are also presented from a study conducted in Years 1 and 2 that examined the effects of an evidence-based reading and writing intervention on middle school students' social and emotional well-being. Key findings from the evaluation are as follows:

**Career and technical education continue to be of interest to both college and non-college-going students.** Incoming high school students need greater awareness of career and technical education options and possible career paths that certifications can provide. In a spotlight analysis of Cohort 1 students, over two-fifths (41%) who did not plan to continue their education after high school cited the desire to work as the main reason they may not continue their education. Across all Cohort 1 students, regardless of their reported post-high school education plans, 29% indicated wanting to work as the primary reason they may not continue. Additionally, cohort interviews highlighted that students, even as early as middle school, change their career interests from year to year, as most changed or expanded their career interests in Year 2. Focus groups with priority students also indicated that students were interested in more job shadow and internship opportunities.

**College affordability and knowledge of college cost persist as a challenge among students and parents. When asked about knowledge of college and career topics,** Cohort 1 students had lower mean scores than Cohort 1 parents in areas related to paying for college, such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), work-study, and federal loans. Even among the Cohort 1 students who reported they planned to continue their education after high school, they most frequently (43%) cited cost as the main reason

they may not continue. Other knowledge gaps were evident among both parents and students. For example, less than a quarter of students and parents correctly estimated the cost of a 4-year college (18% and 23%, respectively) and community college (21% and 22%, respectively). Students and parents from both Cohort 1 and the R-Comp group most frequently overestimated the costs for a 4-year and community college. The Pell grant and West Virginia Invests (WV Invests) grant were the two least-frequently correctly identified financial aid sources among Cohort 1 students and parents. The limited knowledge and familiarity are consistent with findings from the five priority student focus groups, in which only one student mentioned familiarity with the WV Invests grant, suggesting the need for not only increased awareness of national financial aid and scholarship options, but also for local and state options.

**Several findings suggest that parents should continue to be leveraged to support student college and career knowledge and awareness.** Parents understood the importance of a postsecondary education as they agreed that their student attending college would lead to a better future and most (85%) aspired for their student to attain a postsecondary education. Generally, parental knowledge, awareness, and hope were higher than those of Cohort 1 students; parents had higher correct estimates of college costs, identifications of financial aid sources, and knowledge of the FAFSA. Cohort 1 parents not only had higher reported hope than students, but also reported being more hopeful than the R-Comp group parents. The majority (82%) of parents desire more information on WV GEAR UP and in Year 2 there was a significant increase in personnel who reported involvement with parent/family peer networks, suggesting there is already an emphasis on leveraging parents.

**With this consideration in mind, engagement with parents/guardians and student mentors is crucial.** While parents reported they were aware of WV GEAR UP, there is a need for additional opportunities to help engage with them. Parents/guardians may be most likely to attend activities their students are involved in; finding new opportunities to engage with parents/guardians at these activities is a potential area for improvement. Personnel survey findings suggest there is a lack of integration of college messaging into other school events, such as sports events and art performances. Site coordinator survey participants reported needing more tips for parent outreach. In addition to engaging parents/guardians, teachers generally reported lower involvement in college and career related activities compared to counselors. Finding opportunities for students, especially male students, to connect with teachers and administrators is important to help students find mentors and role models within their school for college and career related activities. Personnel survey respondents working with Grade 9–12 students also reported significantly lower agreement that creativity and original thinking were highly valued compared to personnel serving Grade 6–8 students.

**Grade 8 Cohort 1 students' sense of hope was significantly higher than Grade 8 R-Comp.** The Grade 8 Cohort 1 students reported significantly higher means in problem solving, well-being, getting things in life that are important, and knowledge that things in the past will help in the future than the R-Comp students. Additionally, the overall student

Cohort 1 mean hope score was significantly higher than that of the R-Comp group when they were in Grade 8. Suggesting that the services provided to students through GEAR UP may be supporting higher student hope. A spotlight analysis comparing students who did and did not indicate they planned to continue their education found that students who did not plan to continue had significantly lower levels of hope than the students who did plan to continue their education.

**Offer Career Pathway Days to engage students:** WV GEAR UP should consider partnering with colleges and employers to sponsor Career Pathway Days that show the various paths students can take in moving from high school to a self-sustaining wage, including the education required for those careers. Such events could also feature guest speakers talking about the paths taken to successful careers. These efforts would complement the WV Invests marketing initiative planned for the 2023-2024 academic year.

**Support career interest inventories and career fairs:** The program should consider increased use of career interest inventories and career fairs to help students identify and refine their interests as they approach high school graduation. WV GEAR UP and school staff could use these results to better target job shadowing and internship opportunities. Cultivating student interest in entrepreneurship may be another way to link career interest with post-high school education. Organizations such as the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, [www.nfte.com](http://www.nfte.com), have offered programming for use by WV GEAR UP programs.

**Design engaging workshops:** As some students seem disinterested in college and others are uncertain about how to pay for college, WV GEAR UP should consider designing fun, engaging workshops—both on affordability and the value of postsecondary education. Every workshop should feature an early “hook” to appeal to students. Examples include the Madison High School activity undertaken recently that featured different paychecks showing how further education can lead to better salaries. Scholarship workshops might start by highlighting unusual scholarships—for tall people, vegans, and so forth, at sites such as <https://blog.prepscholar.com/complete-list-weirdest-scholarships-you-can-win>—that students may find particularly interesting. From such engaging starts, facilitators could then emphasize the many federal, state, and local options to pay for college.

**Enhance parent engagement strategies.** About three-quarters (74%) of site coordinators indicated they would like more tips on parent outreach, which could help build family support for postsecondary education. In response, GEAR UP may offer coordinators resources from the field such as The Parent Engagement Toolkit from Oregon GEAR UP, <https://oregongearup.org/resource/parent-engagement-toolkit>. This resource offers a variety of ideas such as parent newsletters, parent peer networks, and conversation starters to help parents talk with their children about the future.

**Market at major events at the school and in the community:** WV GEAR UP should continue to sponsor information desks or tables at school events, particularly sporting events, band concerts, and so forth, to emphasize a college-is-possible message to families. The program also could work with college or minor league sports teams to sponsor a college and career event where students see a game and hear from those with various

related careers (such as sports medicine or marketing). Examples include College and Career Days organized by GEAR UP Massachusetts with the Boston Celtics (NBA) and Worcester Red Sox (minor league baseball).

**Increase educator involvement:** Coordinators also should work to increase teacher and educator involvement in WV GEAR UP and set goals to increase rates of teacher involvement. Of particular value may be athletic coaches who can serve as role models to students. In addition, WV GEAR UP might borrow from the work of the West Virginia First2 Network (STEM education program), in which college students developed a list of items that they wish they knew before college. This work has resulted in a set of resources for teachers to explore with their students. Available at <https://first2network.org/resources-for-high-school-teachers/>, these concepts could be the basis for one or more workshops to promote college knowledge before high school graduation.

**Implement engaging activities to build student enthusiasm for their future:** With some students expressing a lack of hope, program activities should all tie into the idea of cultivating hope among students. Engaging activities should seek to improve the mindset of students and build enthusiasm as they think about their future. Mentoring and social and emotional well-being opportunities already underway offer promising approaches in this regard and merit further study in Year 3. Parents also may benefit from workshops on how to support their child's social and emotional well-being.

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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 the second year of operation, West Virginia (WV) GEAR UP continued services in 50 high-poverty schools across 11 county school districts. Students in the Class of 2027 can participate in WV GEAR UP from Grade 7 through their first year of postsecondary education and students from 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 2022–2023 school year (Year 2), the program served Grade 8 students in the first WV GEAR UP cohort, Grade 7 students in the second cohort, and Grade 12 priority students at participating high schools.

The context for delivering GEAR UP services in this grant has changed in many ways since the start of the grant in 2021. Both health and economic challenges resulting from the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic have waned, and the state’s unemployment rate of 3.3% in June 2023 was below both the 3.9% rate in June 2020 and the 5.2% rate just prior to the pandemic (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023a). However, economic concerns remain as the state suffered a net job loss of 8,309 in 2022 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b). In addition, only 55% of the state’s adult population is either working or looking for work. Despite some recent improvement in this rate, it represents the lowest rate of labor force participation among all 50 states (West Virginia University, 2021).

In education, key West Virginia metrics reveal ongoing challenges. The state’s college-going rate declined from 50.5% for the Class of 2019—prior to the COVID-19 pandemic—to 45.9% for the Class of 2021 (West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, n.d.a). However, the state achieved some progress for the Class of 2022, as the college-going rate increased slightly to 46.4%. 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 age 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).

Amid the decline in college enrollment are challenges in securing Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completions among high school seniors. Class of 2022 students showed little change in FAFSA completion rates compared with students who graduated the previous year (DeBaun, 2022). This level also remains 7 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 2023 indicate that death rates may have declined in the state (Ahmad et al., 2023), 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 et al., 2020). The state also continues to report a high number of children in foster care. Statewide, 6,151 children were in foster care in January 2023, of whom nearly one-third were ages 13 to 17 (KVC West Virginia, 2023). Other research shows that the state places four times as many children per capita in foster care compared than the U.S. overall (West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, 2023). Aside from those in foster care, more than 35,000 West Virginia children and youth live with grandparents (West Virginia State University, 2020). Such family disruptions place added pressures on children, parents and relatives, and schools.

These challenges underscore the importance of the 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 2021–2022 was 12 percentage points higher than the 2011–2012 rate of 79.3% (West Virginia Department of Education, 2023). Moreover, the 4-year graduation rate has remained above 90%—even during the pandemic—since the state first crossed this level in 2017–2018.

GEAR UP is also working with students at a time when state leaders are stepping up efforts to increase college-going rates. Action taken by the governor and state legislature in 2023 is expected to produce a substantial increase in high school students taking dual enrollment courses for college credit. Under House Bill 2005, the state will cover the cost of dual enrollment courses tied to some of the state's most in-demand careers. While the former system mainly served students who expected to go to college, the new 4-year pilot program is targeting students with specific workforce interests who may not have thought about college. Community and technical colleges and 4-year institutions will offer courses in certain designated career pathways, including health care, information technology, advanced manufacturing, construction, engineering, education, agriculture, and other programs that meet a workforce need as determined by the West Virginia Department of Commerce (West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, 2023). This initiative directly supports the state's goal that 60% of adults have some type of post-high school education by 2030 to meet employer needs.

In addition to these efforts undertaken to improve access to college, GEAR UP is also working to improve social-emotional learning outcomes through the use of evidence-based research. One such initiative involves incorporating an evidence-based reading and writing activity designed to increase social and emotional well-being (Borman et al., 2019). The Borman et al. (2019) reading and writing intervention was selected for this purpose given its strong research base in improving social and emotional learning outcomes as evidenced by

its research rating of "meets What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards without reservations" (WWC, 2022). In Years 1 and 2 of the WV GEAR UP grant, a modified version of the reading and writing intervention was implemented to support middle school academic readiness and social and emotional well-being as WV GEAR UP students prepared for high school. Other activities intended to target social and emotional well-being included mentoring and other social emotional learning activities.

To measure progress toward goals and understand the implementation, outcomes, 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 the implementation and outcomes studies from Year 2 (the 2022–2023 school year). In addition, ICF embedded a study of the adapted Borman et al. (2019) reading and writing intervention into the evaluation to examine whether or not targeted GEAR UP services had an additive effect on social and emotional well-being outcomes stemming from the adapted Borman intervention. A supplemental report will be released showcasing the results of the intervention on the GEAR UP students.

### **Adapting the Reading and Writing Intervention to the WV GEAR UP Context**

In the Borman et al. (2019) study, Grade 6 students were randomly assigned to complete a reading and writing intervention or to a comparison group. Students receiving the intervention were asked to reflect on two exercises addressing concerns about belonging related to academics and interpersonal relationships. Students in the comparison group completed an activity prompting them to reflect on neutral middle school experiences (i.e., politics and school lunches). All topics were about the perspectives of Grade 7 students.

In the WV GEAR UP context, the reading and writing intervention was modified to better suit the students and the delivery of GEAR UP services. Grade 7 students in Cohort 1 completed the reading and writing activities based on West Virginia Grade 9 students' reports of concerns about belonging due to academics and interpersonal relationships. The timing of the activities and survey administration also differed from that of the Borman et al. study. Specifically, unlike in the Borman et al. study where students completed the first activity in September followed by the second activity in October to November, students in the current study completed the first activity at the end of the school year in spring 2022 with the second activity completed in fall 2022 when students were in Grade 8. Moreover, students in the Borman study took the pre-survey at the start of the school year and the post-survey at the end of the same school year. In the current implementation of the intervention, Cohort 1 students took the pre-survey at the end of the school year in spring 2022 when they were in Grade 7 and the post-survey at the end of the school year in spring 2023 when students were in Grade 8.

## II. Methodology

The Year 2 report focuses on implementation of GEAR UP in its second year of programming and presents parents and students perceptions of outcomes as measured by the Children's Hope Scale which is described in greater detail below.

The evaluation will assess implementation of GEAR UP in all seven years of the grant and also monitor progress towards goals. This year's report provides implementation and outcomes findings from surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Described below are the data sources and data analysis procedures used in this year's reporting.

### 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.

#### Grade 8 GEAR UP and Comparison Group Student Survey

In Years 1 and 2 a survey was administered to Grade 8 students. In Year 1 the survey was administered to the retrospective comparison group (R-Comp) and in Year 2 the survey was administered to Grade 8 GEAR UP students. The student survey included 25 items organized across five sections. Appendix B provides a reproduction of the survey. Eight items were demographic questions designed to gather background information about respondents and their families. Seven 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.

In the first year, the surveys were administered online in February and March of 2022 since the program began mid-year. In the second year, the surveys were administered online in November 2022 through January 2023 to all Grade 8 students enrolled in GEAR UP schools at the time of survey administration via the Standardized Collection and Reporting of Information Benefitting Education (SCRIBE) system. A total of 2,260 unique Grade 8 student survey cases were collected from the comparison students in Year 1 and included in analyses, representing 79% of enrolled students at the time of the survey. A total of 2,148 unique Grade 8 student survey cases were collected in Year 2 and included in analyses, representing 81% 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 GEAR UP website.

#### Grade 8 GEAR UP and Comparison Group Parent Survey

In Years 1 and 2 a survey was administered to Grade 8 parents/guardians. In Year 1 the survey was administered to the R-Comp group parents/guardians and in Year 2 the survey was administered to Grade 8 GEAR UP parents/guardians. The parent/guardian survey included 28 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, four 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. Throughout the report respondents from the parent survey will be referenced as parents/guardians. However these individuals also included individuals such as grandparents, legal guardians, and step or foster parents. See Table A.7 for more detail on the types of survey respondents from the parent survey.

In the first year the surveys were administered online in February and March of 2022 to all parents/guardians of Grade 8 R-Comp students. In the second year the surveys were administered online in November 2022 through January 2023 to all parents/guardians of Grade 8 students enrolled in GEAR UP schools at the time of the survey. The same SCRIBE system employed for administration of Grade 8 student surveys was used for the parent surveys. Promotional materials/reminders were sent home to parents/guardians and publicized on the GEAR UP website. Parent/guardian surveys were also available in paper/pencil formats to a parent/guardian for each eligible student. A total of 752 unique Grade 8 parent survey cases were collected in Year 1 and included in the analyses, representing 28% of students enrolled at the time of the survey. A total of 646 unique Grade 8 parent survey cases were collected in Year 2 and included in the analyses, representing 24% of students enrolled at the time of the survey.

## Year 2 School Personnel Survey

The Year 2 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 how well they thought their school was doing in most situations, 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 June 2023 to all Grade 6–12 teachers, counselors, site coordinators, and school administrators employed in 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 GEAR UP website. Ultimately, 1,236 personnel out of 2,023 (61%) completed the survey in Year 2.

## Year 2 Cohort 1 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 in Year 1 and again in Year 2 at three middle schools. In Year 2, all interviewed cohort students were in Grade 8. These interviews are part of a 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 23 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 was able to interview the same 13 students (10 female students and three male students) as in Year 1. Eleven interviews were conducted in person on 3 different days in April. Two students from the same school were not present on the day of the visit and were interviewed remotely 2 weeks later in May. The average length of each interview was 40 minutes. The three schools represent a cross-section of GEAR UP, including one Prekindergarten–Grade 8 school, a junior high school, and a combined middle school/high school. ICF's plan is to continue to interview each of these students annually throughout their high school years.

## Year 2 Priority Student Focus Groups

To document current conditions at GEAR UP high schools during the early years of the current grant, the evaluation team conducted focus groups with priority high school seniors at five high schools in April of the 2022–2023 academic year. All focus groups were conducted in person with an approximate length of 60 minutes. Overall, 39 students participated in one of these focus groups, including 19 female students and 20 male students. One of the Commission's goals when interviewing Grade 12 students in Year 2 was to gather in-depth insights about seniors' plans after graduation and the reasoning behind such decisions. To that effect, the research team worked directly with the on-site GEAR UP coordinators to recruit seniors from five GEAR UP high schools. With a variety of experiences and plans. The research team presented WVHEPC with the list of the high schools with the lowest and the highest college-going rates and WVHEPC made the final selection, which included both large and small high schools.

In collaboration with the Commission, evaluators developed a focus group protocol covering topics such as students' career and work plans, the role of postsecondary education in such plans, and the potential impact of GEAR UP services on students' decisions (see Appendix B).

## Data Analysis

Detailed descriptions of data analysis procedures are presented for the two primary types of data collection: surveys and interviews.

## Survey Analysis

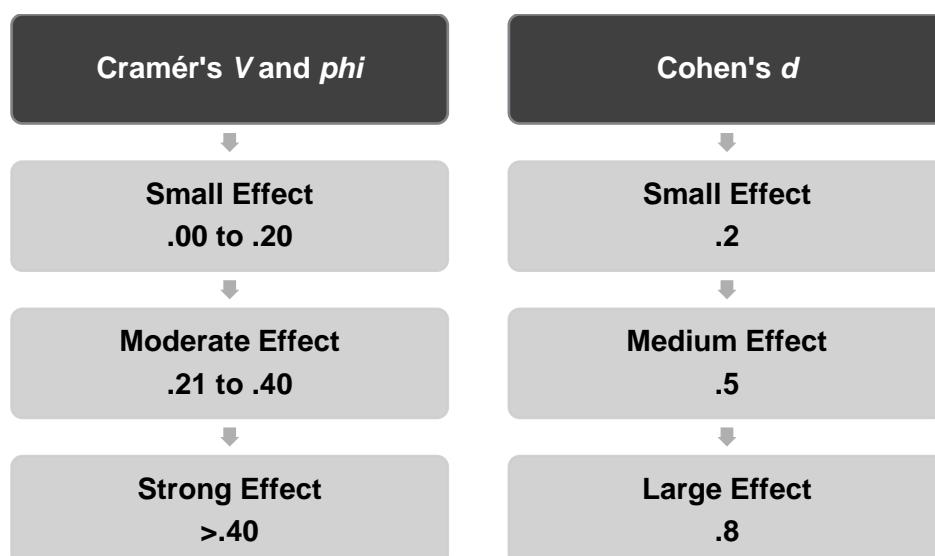
This section first describes the analysis for the four student and parent surveys: Grade 8 Student Survey, Grade 12 Student Survey, and School Personnel Survey. Next, the analysis process used for the interviews and focus groups is described.

### Student and Parent Survey Analysis

To examine outcomes for students and parents in Year 2, the evaluation team conducted descriptive analyses of survey responses. Mean values for continuous outcomes and the frequency of responses for categorical outcomes were calculated. Student and parent survey analysis presented highlight differences between Grade 8 Cohort 1 respondents (i.e., Class of 2027 students and parents) and their respective R-Comp group (i.e., Grade 8 Class of 2026 students and parents), as applicable. Analysis presented in the Spotlight Analysis section of this report highlights differences in outcomes measured by student surveys for students who said they did not want to continue their education, and students who reported they did want to continue their education.

To examine the differences in outcomes for student and parent survey respondents, including the spotlight analysis between students who intended to continue their education and those who did not, the evaluation team conducted analysis 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*



Note. Revised in 2023 to align with Rea & Parker (1992) & Cohen (1988).

## School Personnel Survey Analysis

To examine GEAR UP Year 2 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. The evaluation team examined differences between Year 1 and Year 2. 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 Cramer'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

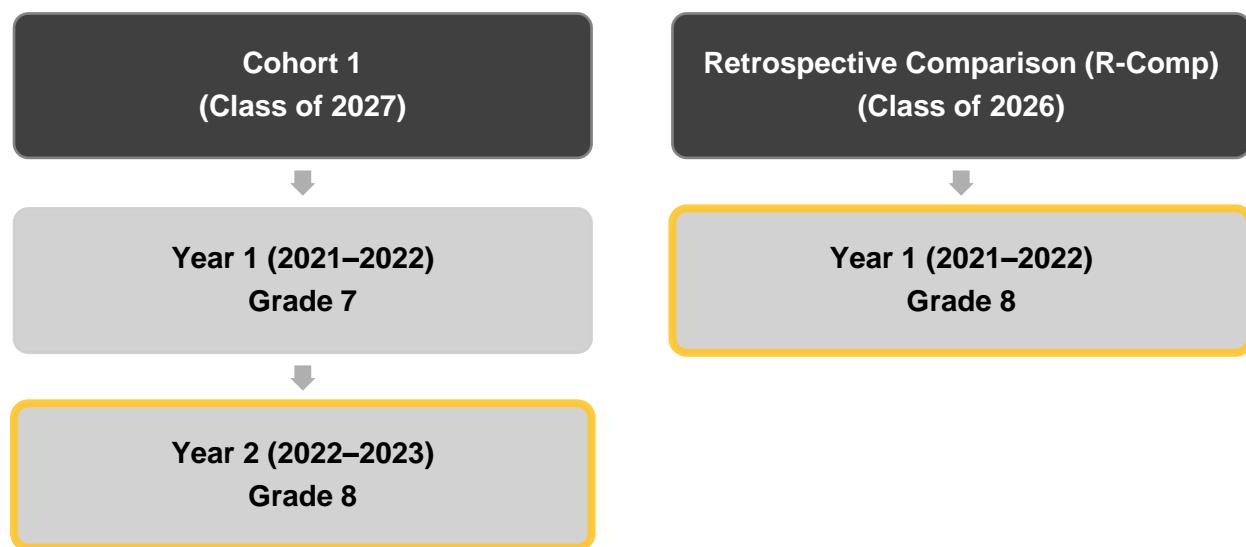
After completing all focus groups, evaluators transcribed the sessions and coded transcripts under major themes. For the cohort student individual interviews, the evaluation team grouped major findings into these categories: students' perceptions of schools and sense of belonging, students' college and career interests, impressions of GEAR UP and other sources of college/career information, and transition to high school.

From the priority student focus groups with high school seniors, the team identified themes related to the current conditions at the high schools, students' sense of hope and belonging, students' plans after graduation, and sources of help and support. 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 8 student and parent surveys collected during Years 1–2 of the GEAR UP grant. Results included throughout the analysis include comparisons between Cohort 1—Class of 2027 students and parents—and the R-Comp—Class of 2026 students and parents.<sup>1</sup> This section also includes a spotlight on comparisons of outcomes from the Cohort 1 student survey respondents who did and did not plan on continuing their education after graduating from high school. See Figure 2 for an overview of the groups included in the analysis and the grant year in which survey data was collected.

**Figure 2. Cohort 1 and Retrospective Student and Parent Surveys**



Overall, Cohort 1 responses from 2,135 Grade 8 students and 646 Grade 8 parents are included in the analyses presented here and R-Comp responses from 2,260 Grade 8 students and 752 Grade 8 parents are included.

#### About the Respondents

Across respondent types (i.e., Grade 8 students in and parent/guardians of Cohort 1 and the R-Comp), respondents reported relatively similar demographics: nearly all were White, non-Hispanic, and spoke English as their primary language at home. Approximately half were female respondents or, in the case of parent/guardian 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 student respondents in both the retrospective cohort and Cohort 1, more than half (57% and 55% respectively) indicated they did not have any siblings who currently or

<sup>1</sup> Cohort 1 student and parent surveys were collected in Year 2 of the WV GEAR UP grant and the R-Comp group surveys were collected in Year 1 of the grant when Class of 2026 students were in Grade 8.

previously attended college. Roughly a third in both groups (30% R-Comp students and 33% in Cohort 1) reported that the highest level of education attained by their parents was a 2-year degree or higher.<sup>2</sup> Slightly more than a third of students in both groups did not know the highest level of education attained by their parents—37% of R-Comp students and 35% of Cohort 1 students. Approximately 4% of Grade 8 students indicated some degree of food insecurity across both years.<sup>3</sup> In addition, in Cohort 1, 37% reported *Sometimes* or *Often* having a hard time staying focused on homework or other things and 30% reported the same about being so worried that they could not sleep at night. This was a significant difference from R-Comp students, where 55% of students had a hard time staying focused on homework and other things, and 65% were so worried they could not sleep.

Among parent/guardian respondents in both the retrospective cohort and Cohort 1, less than two-thirds (61% and 58%, respectively) indicated that they did not have any other students who currently or previously attended college<sup>4</sup>. Of Cohort 1 parent/guardian respondents, 29% noted the highest level of education achieved by their student's parent(s)/guardian(s) was 2 or more years of college, while 42% of R-Comp group parents/guardians indicated the highest level of education achieved by their student's parent(s)/guardian(s) was 2 or more years of college. Over two-thirds (67%) of Cohort 1 parent/guardian survey respondents reported the highest level of education achieved by their student's parent(s)/guardian(s) was less than a bachelor's degree. By definition, their students would be first-generation college students. Approximately one-quarter (24%) of R-Comp parents/guardians estimated their family income to be \$30,000 or less, while just one-fifth (18%) estimated the same in Cohort 1.

## Perceptions about Education and Future Plans

This section presents students' and parents' perceptions about school culture, postsecondary planning, hope as measured by The Children's Hope Scale, college entrance requirements and financial aid, postsecondary costs and financial aid, and knowledge of postsecondary topics.

<sup>2</sup> Thirty-nine percent of Cohort 1 parents had not received a 4-year degree and thus their child would be a first-generation college student. 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/>

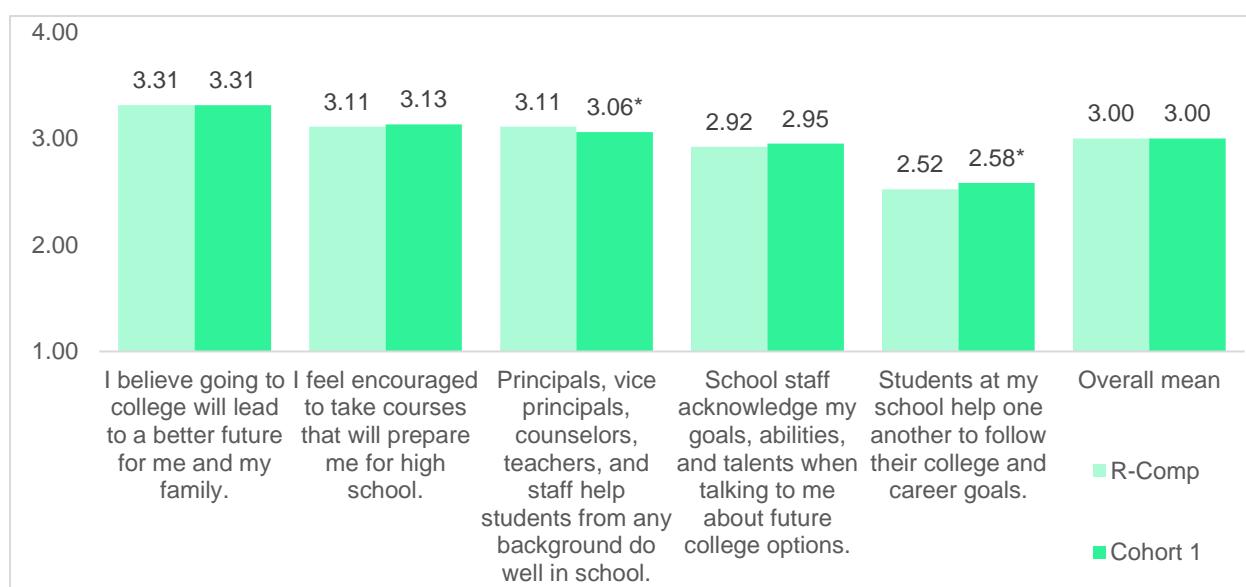
<sup>3</sup> Of the Grade 8 students who reported that they *Sometimes* or *Often* didn't eat enough food because their family couldn't afford it, 4% reported this occurred in the last 30 days and 4% reported this occurred in the last 12 months in both Year 1 and Year 2.

<sup>4</sup> Of Cohort 1 respondents to the parent survey, 84% reported that they were parents of students, while 18% reported being grandparents, legal guardians, step or foster parents, or other roles; of R-Comp respondents, 84% reported being parents and 18% reported other roles. Note that respondents were able to select multiple responses to this question.

## 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 all groups was *I believe my student going to college will lead to a better future for me and my family/for them*, which was 3.31 for both years. Among Grade 8 students, the lowest mean rating was *Students at my school help one another to follow their college and career goals*, which was 2.52 in the R-Comp group and 2.58 in Cohort 1. The highest mean ratings were for *I believe going to college will lead to a better future for me and my family*, with 3.31 for both groups. The overall mean across the five statements was 3.00 for both groups. In comparison to R-Comp students, Cohort 1 students reported significantly lower agreement levels that *Principals, vice principals, counselors, teachers, and staff help students from any background do well in school*, and significantly higher agreement levels *Students at my school help one another to follow their college and career goals*.<sup>5</sup> The differences reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size. See Figure 3 for additional results.

**Figure 3. Student College-Going Culture Mean Ratings**



Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys.

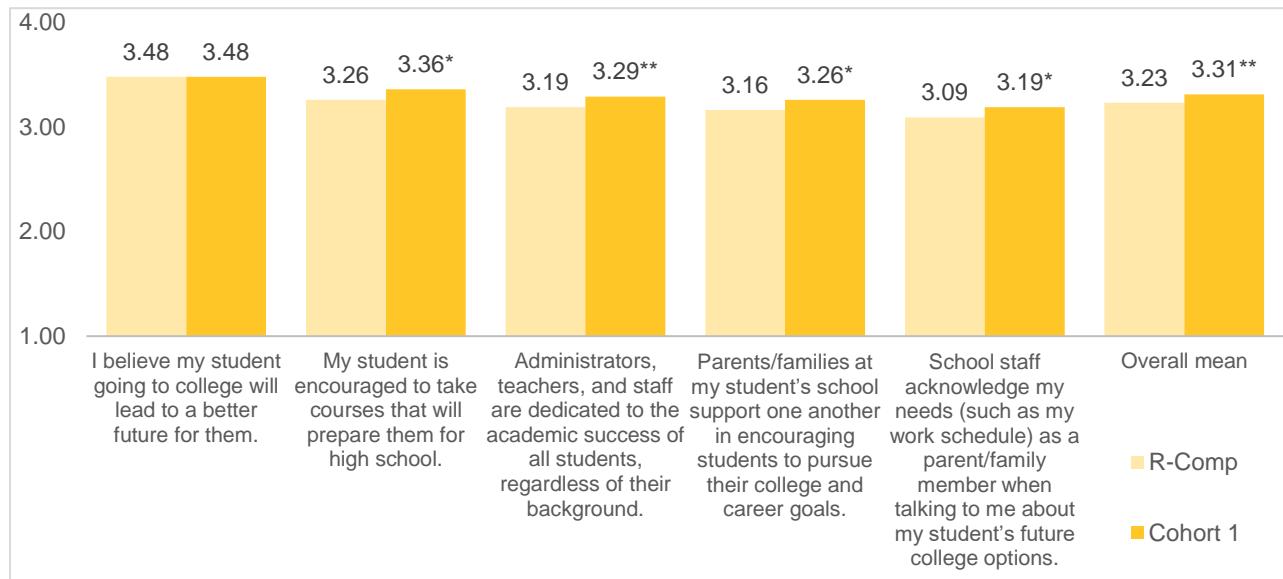
Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1—Strongly disagree, 2—Disagree, 3—Agree, 4—Strongly agree. \*Statistically significant compared to the R-Comp group ( $p \leq 0.05$ ).

As seen in Figure 4, the mean ratings for Grade 8 parents ranged from 3.09 in the R-Comp group and 3.19 in Cohort 1—*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 3.48 across both groups—*I believe my student going to college will lead to a better future for them*; the overall mean across the five statements was 3.23 in the R-Comp

<sup>5</sup> *Principals, vice principals, counselors, teachers, and staff help students from any background do well in school*:  $t=2.451$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$  ( $d=0.07$ ); *Students at my school help one another to follow their college and career goals*:  $t=2.046$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$  ( $d=-0.06$ ).

group and 3.31 in Cohort 1. In comparison to R-Comp parents, Cohort 1 parents reported significantly higher agreement levels for four of the five items and the overall mean.<sup>6</sup> The differences reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size.

**Figure 4. Parent/Guardian College-Going Culture Mean Ratings**



Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1—Strongly disagree, 2—Disagree, 3—Agree, 4—Strongly agree. \*Statistically significant compared to the R-Comp group ( $p \leq .05$ ). \*\*Statistically significant compared to the R-Comp group ( $p \leq .01$ ).

## Postsecondary Planning

Nearly all Cohort 1 Grade 8 parents reported that they spoke with their student about attending college (93%), which was comparable to the R-Comp group (94%). Cohort 1 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 5, they agreed, on average, that attending college was important for their student's future (3.42) and, on average, they disagreed that it was too early to think about their student going to college (1.93). However, the R-Comp group parents had significantly lower mean agreement to the statement that it was too early to thinking about their student going to college compared to Cohort 1 parents, with a small effect size.<sup>7</sup> Mean

<sup>6</sup> My student is encouraged to take courses that will prepare them for high school:  $t = -2.686$ ,  $p \leq .01$  ( $d = .15$ ); Administrators, teachers, and staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background:  $t = -2.627$ ,  $p \leq .01$  ( $d = .14$ ); Parents/families at my student's school support one another in encouraging students to pursue their college and career goals:  $t = -2.563$ ,  $p \leq .05$ , ( $d = .14$ ); 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:  $t = -2.517$ ,  $p \leq .05$  ( $d = .14$ ); Overall mean:  $t = -2.627$ ,  $p \leq .01$  ( $d = .14$ ).

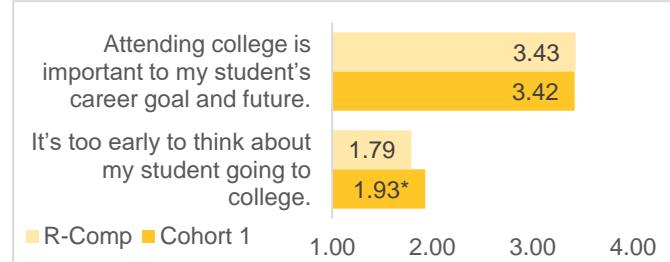
<sup>7</sup> It's too early to talk to my student about college:  $t = -3.124$ ,  $p \leq .01$  ( $d = .17$ ).

agreement on parental perceptions of the importance of attending college for Cohort 1 parents was similar to agreement among the R-Comp group.

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 6 shows that most Cohort 1 students and parents aspired to attain/for their child to attain a postsecondary education (87% and 97%, respectively) and expect to do so (82% and 95%, respectively). In terms of degree types, Cohort 1 respondents—students and parents alike—most often indicated they aspired and expected to attain a 4-year degree. However, a large proportion of students still aspired to and expected only some college or less (27% and 35%, respectively). Likewise, about a quarter of parents expected their student to have some college or less (24%).

**Figure 5. Parent/Guardian Agreement Regarding College Planning**

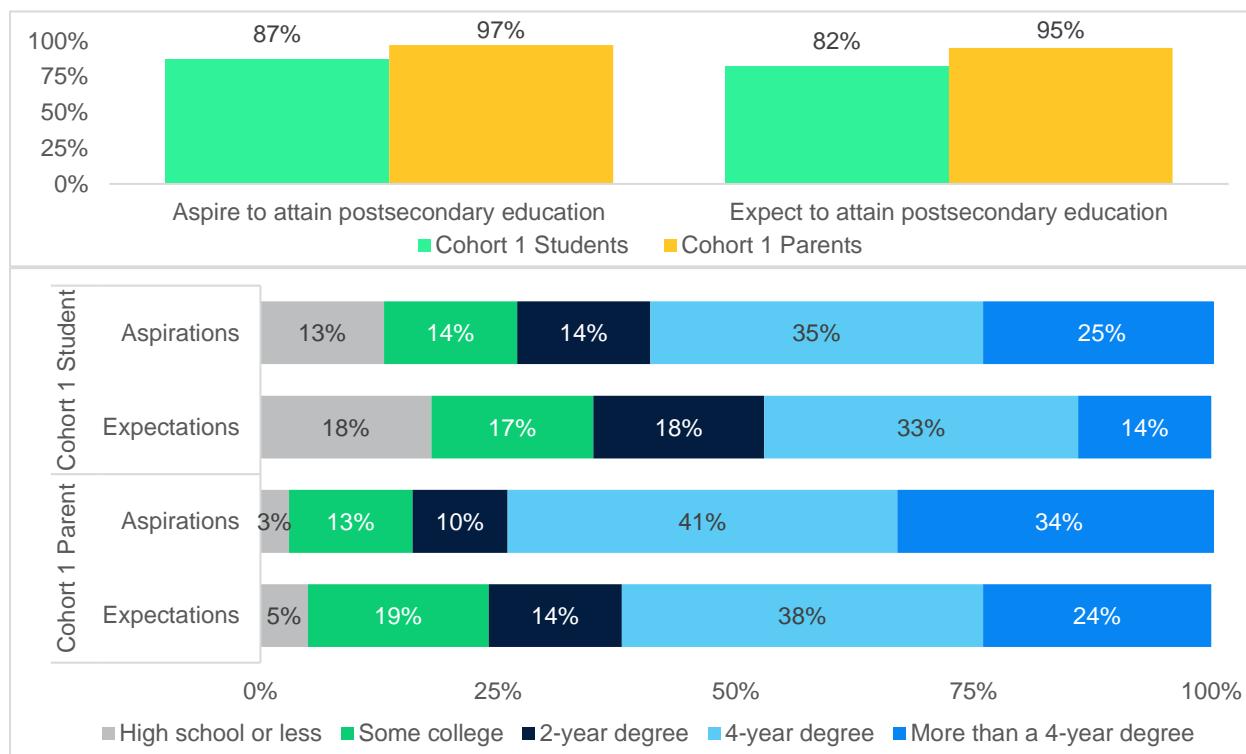


Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1—Strongly disagree, 2—Disagree, 3—Agree, 4—Strongly agree.

\*Statistically significant compared to the R-Comp group ( $p \leq .01$ ).

**Figure 6. Students' and Parents' Aspirations and Expectations for Postsecondary Education**

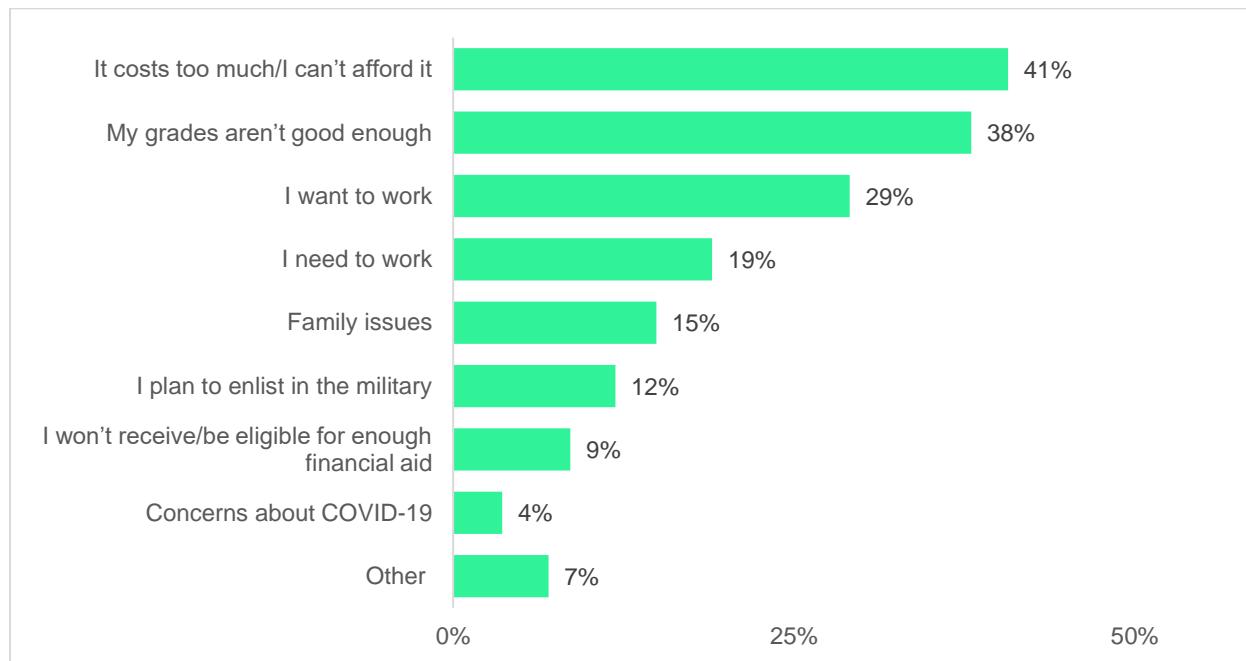


Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys and WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Cohort 1 students were asked to indicate whether they planned to continue their education after high school. Most of the students reported that they planned to continue their education (86%). As seen in Figure 7, among Cohort 1 students who indicated that they did not plan to continue their education following high school, the most frequently cited reasons were *It costs too much* (41%) and *My grades aren't good enough* (38%). Cohort 1 students who selected the *Other* response option indicated that nothing would prevent them from attending college, they lacked the motivation to continue schooling after high school, or that they planned to pursue a career that did not require college. Additional analysis of the comparisons between Cohort 1 students who indicated they planned to continue their education after high school and those who did not is presented in the Spotlight Analysis section of the report.

**Figure 7. Students Who Do Not Plan to Continue Their Education and the Reasons They May Not Continue**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey.

Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

## Hope

The Children's 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 subscales.

Table 1 presents the mean ratings for each item, the mean hope score, and the mean agency and pathway subscale scores for each of the two 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 groups, Cohort 1 parents generally

had the highest mean ratings and mean scores, with the exception of *I am hopeful for my student's future*, for which R-Comp group parents had a significantly higher mean score.<sup>8</sup>

Cohort 1 students' mean ratings ranged from 3.84 (*I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future*) to 4.20 (*I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me*); their overall mean rating was 3.98. When all ratings were summed, the average hope score among Cohort 1 students was 23.92 (11.98 agency score plus 11.94 pathway score). Cohort 1 parents' mean scores ranged from 4.52 (When my student has a problem, he/she can come up with lots of ways to solve it) to 5.45 (*I am hopeful for my student's future*); the overall mean score was 4.81. The mean hope score for Cohort 1 parents was 28.83 (14.09 agency score plus 14.74 pathway score). Overall, across all items and subscale scores, Cohort 1 parents reported higher means compared to Cohort 1 students. Comparing the Cohort 1 students to the R-Comp, Cohort 1 students reported significantly higher means in problem solving, well-being, getting things in life that are important, and knowledge that things in the past will help in the future.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the overall student Cohort 1 mean hope score was significantly higher than that of the R-Comp group (3.98 and 3.89, respectively).<sup>10</sup> All of the differences reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size.

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<sup>8</sup> *I am hopeful for my student's future*:  $t=3.024$ ,  $p\leq.01$  ( $d=.16$ ).

<sup>9</sup> *I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future*:  $t=2.331$ ,  $p\leq.05$  ( $d=.07$ ); *I think I am doing pretty well*:  $t=2.086$ ,  $p\leq.05$  ( $d=.06$ ); *When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it*:  $t=3.012$ ,  $p\leq.01$  ( $d=.09$ ); *I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me*:  $t=-2.792$ ,  $p\leq.01$  ( $d=.09$ ).

<sup>10</sup> Overall mean:  $t=2.514$ ,  $p\leq.05$  ( $d=.06$ ).

**Table 1. Student and Parent/Guardian Hope Scale Ratings and Scores**

Survey items	R-Comp Students	Cohort 1 Students	R-Comp Parents	Cohort 1 Parents
<b>Mean Ratings for Individual Items</b>				
<b>Agency Items (Range 1–6)</b>				
When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it. (When my student has a problem, he/she can come up with lots of ways to solve it.)	3.77	3.90**	4.45	4.52
I think I am doing pretty well. (I think my student is doing pretty well.)	3.96	4.04*	4.77	4.81
I am doing just as well as other kids my age. (My student is doing just as well as other kids that are his/her age.)	3.99	4.04	4.79	4.82
<b>Pathway Items (Range 1–6)</b>				
I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me. (I am hopeful for my student's future.)	4.09	4.20**	5.59	5.45**
I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future. (I think the things my student has done in the past will help him/her in the future.)	3.73	3.84*	4.64	4.73
Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem. (Even when others want to quit, I know that my student can find ways to solve the problem.)	3.85	3.89	4.49	4.57
<b>Overall Mean Rating (Range 1–6)</b>	3.89	3.98*	4.79	4.81

Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys and WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

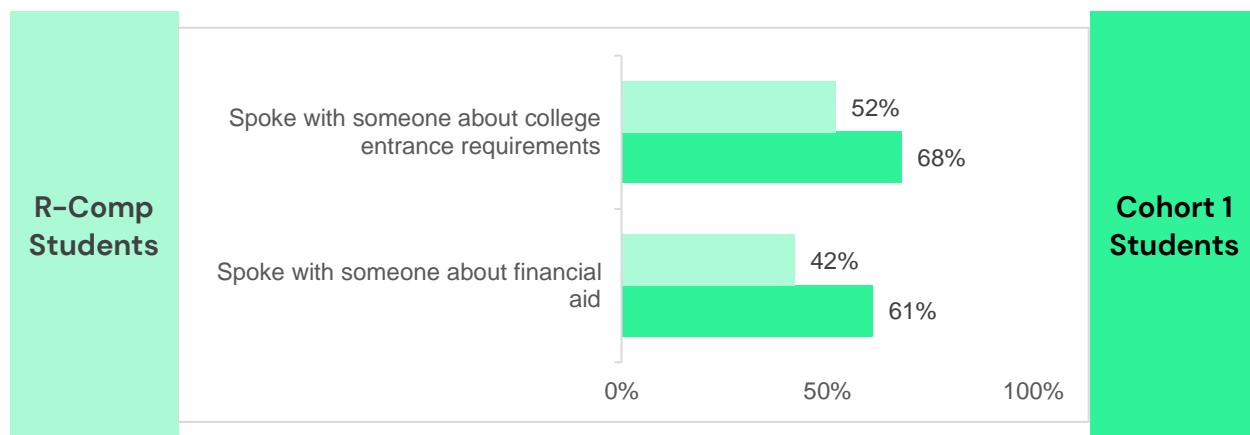
Note. Statements in blue font in the survey items are the adapted survey items used for the Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1—None of the time, 2—A little of the time, 3—Some of the time, 4—A lot of the time, 4—Most of the time, 4—All of the time. \*Statistically significant compared to the R-Comp group ( $p \leq .05$ ). \*\*Statistically significant compared to the R-Comp group ( $p \leq .01$ ).

## Discussions on College Entrance Requirements and Financial Aid

The evaluation team asked students 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 8, approximately two thirds of Cohort 1 students reported that they spoke with someone about college entrance requirements or financial aid (68% and 61% respectively). In comparison to R-Comp students, significantly more Cohort 1 students reported both speaking with someone about college entrance

requirements or financial aid in Year 2.<sup>11</sup> The differences reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size.

**Figure 8. Students Who Spoke with Someone About College Entrance Requirements and Financial Aid Available to Help Pay for College**



Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys.

Note. \*Statistically significant compared to the R-Comp group ( $p \leq .001$ ).

### 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 2020–2021 school year were as follows:

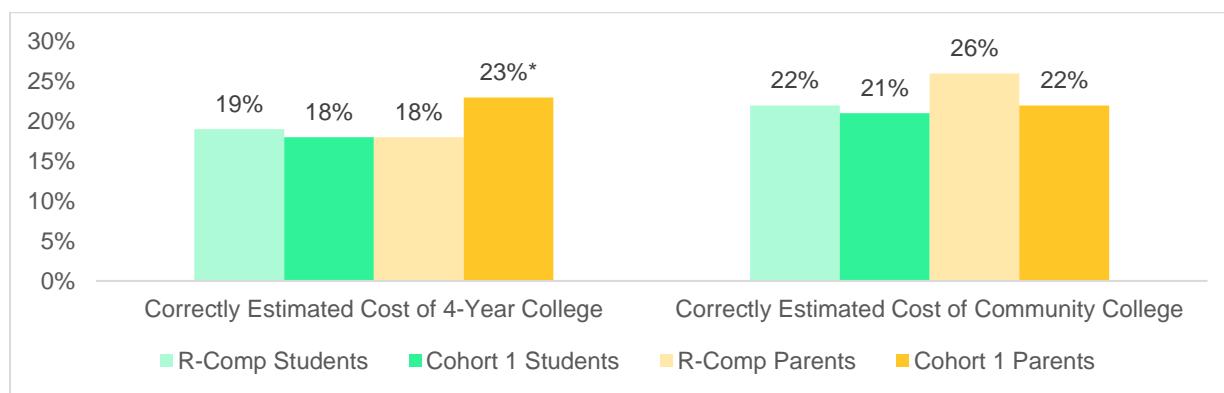
- Four-year public college/university: \$10,001–\$15,000<sup>12</sup>
- Public community/technical college: \$3,001–\$6,000

As seen in Figure 9, approximately one-quarter or less of students and parents correctly estimated the cost of each type of institution. For a 4-year public college/university, 18% of Cohort 1 students and 23% of Cohort 1 parents correctly identified the cost, which was similar to the correct estimates of the R-Comp group of students. However, Cohort 1 parents were significantly more likely to correctly estimate the cost of a 4-year college compared to the parent/guardian R-Comp group.<sup>13</sup> The difference reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size. Generally, respondents more frequently correctly estimated the cost of a community/technical college, as 21% of Cohort 1 students and 22% of Cohort 1 parents correctly estimated the cost—similar to their respective R-Comp groups.

<sup>11</sup> Spoke with someone about college entrance requirements:  $X^2=126.344$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi=.17$ ); Spoke with someone about financial aid:  $X^2=154.930$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi=.19$ ).

<sup>12</sup> In Year 1 the correct cost of a 4-year public college/university was \$6,001–\$10,000. Assessment of the correct estimates of college costs are based on the year the data was collected. Therefore, the correct estimates for the R-Comp groups are \$6,001–\$10,000 and \$10,001–\$15,000 for Cohort 1.

<sup>13</sup> Correctly estimated the cost of a 4-year college:  $X^2=6.79$ ,  $p \leq .01$  ( $\phi=-.07$ ).

**Figure 9. Percentage of Students and Parents Who Correctly Estimated College Cost**

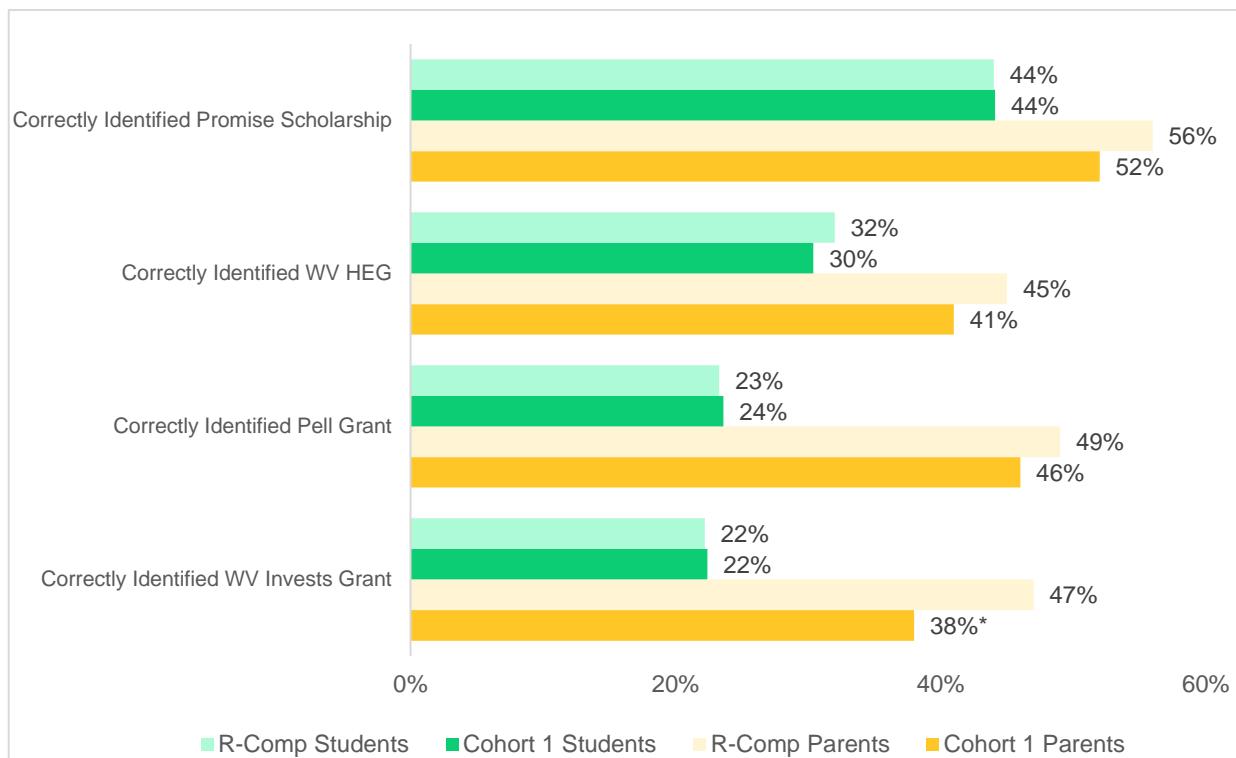
Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys and WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

Note. \*Statistically significant compared to the R-Comp group ( $p \leq .01$ ).

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. R-Comp group parents most often correctly identified each of the financial aid sources compared to students (Cohort 1 and R-Comp group) and Cohort 1 parents, as seen in Figure 10. Cohort 1 students most frequently correctly identified the Promise Scholarship (44%) and WV HEG (30%) from the descriptions, which were similar rates to the student R-Comp group. Similar to students, Cohort 1 parents most frequently correctly identified the Promise Scholarship (52%). Cohort 1 parents were significantly less likely to correctly identify the WV Invests grant compared to the R-Comp group parents, as 38% of respondents correctly identified it; 9 percentage points lower than the R-Comp group.<sup>14</sup> The WV Invests grant was initially rolled out in the state in 2019, with 2021 having the largest recipients awarded thus far with a decrease in recipients the following year, 1,431 recipients and 1,335 recipients, respectively. R-Comp data was collected during the 2021–22 academic year and Cohort 1 in 2022–23; it may be that the higher awareness of the WV Invests grant among R-Comp parents was associated with the large number recipients in 2021. The difference reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size.

<sup>14</sup> Correctly identified WV Invests grant:  $\chi^2 = 12.24$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi = .08$ ).

**Figure 10. Percentage of Students and Parents Who Correctly Identified Financial Aid Sources**



Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys and WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

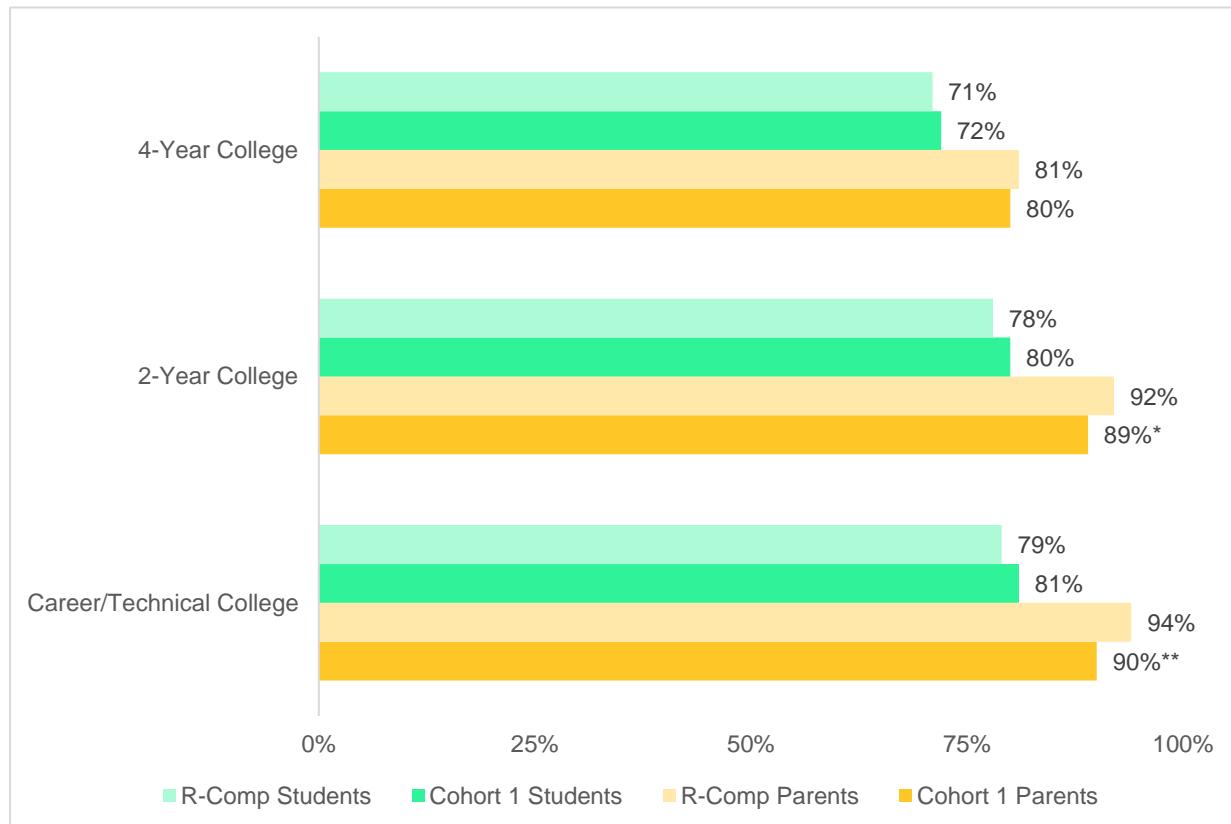
Note. \*Statistically significant compared to the R-Comp group ( $p \leq .001$ ).

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 11, most respondents (71%–94%) perceived that they *Probably* or *Definitely* could afford the postsecondary education options presented, with parent/guardian respondents generally reporting higher perceptions of affordability than student respondents. Cohort 1 students and parents and R-Comp group respondents generally reported similar perceptions of affordability for 2- and 4-year colleges. However, Cohort 1 parent/guardian respondents reported significantly lower perceptions of the affordability of a 2-year college (89% and 92%, respectively) and career/technical college (90% and 94%, respectively) compared to the R-Comp group parents, which may be influenced by their lower levels of awareness across all financial aid sources.<sup>15</sup> The difference reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size. Further, Cohort 1 student and parent/guardian respondents reported their perceptions that

<sup>15</sup> *Probably* or *Definitely* could afford 2-year college:  $\chi^2 = 4.20$ ,  $p \leq .05$  ( $\phi = -.05$ ); *Probably* or *Definitely* could afford career/technical college:  $\chi^2 = 8.17$ ,  $p \leq .01$  ( $\phi = -.06$ ).

career/technical college (81% and 90%) and 2-year colleges (80% and 89%) were more affordable than 4-year colleges (72% and 80%).

**Figure 11. Percentage of Students and Parents Who Perceived They Probably or Definitely Can Afford College**

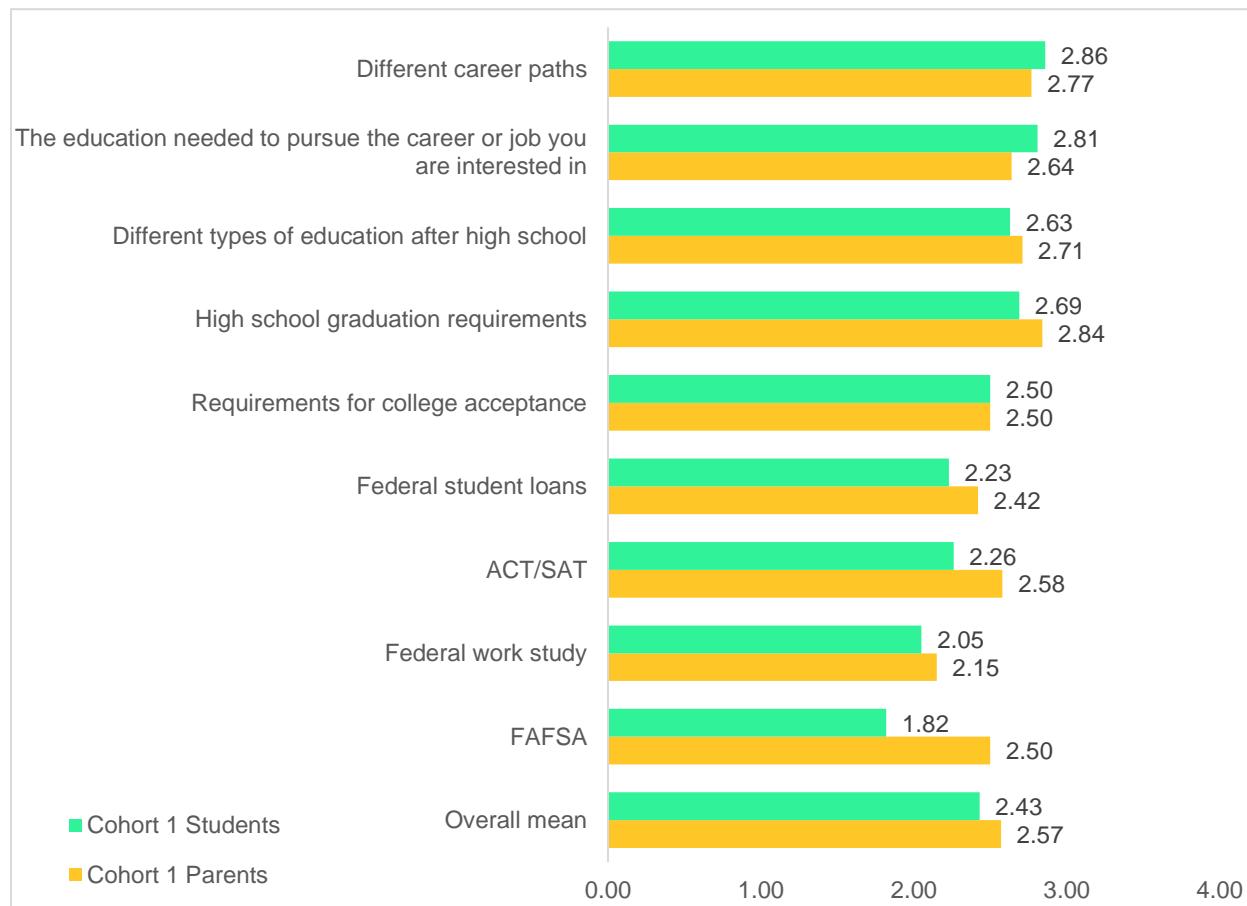


## Knowledge of Postsecondary Topics

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*). Cohort 1 students' mean knowledge was highest for career-related topics, such as different career paths (2.86) and the education needed to pursue the career they were interested in (2.81). While student's lowest knowledge mean scores were related to paying for college, such as FAFSA (1.82), work-study (2.05), and loans (2.23). Their mean across all items was 2.43. Cohort 1 parents' level of knowledge was similar to students. Their highest reported knowledge pertained to topics for preparation for graduation and after high school including high school graduation requirements (2.84), different career paths (2.77), and different types of education after high school (2.71). While parent's lowest knowledge mean scores were related to paying for

college, such as work-study (2.15) and loans (2.42). Their average mean score across all items was 2.57. See Figure 12 for more details. Cohort 1 parents reported higher mean scores than the Cohort 1 students for six of the nine items.

**Figure 12. Student and Parent/Guardian Knowledge of College and Career Topics**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 2 Parent Survey.

## College and Career Preparation Activities/Services

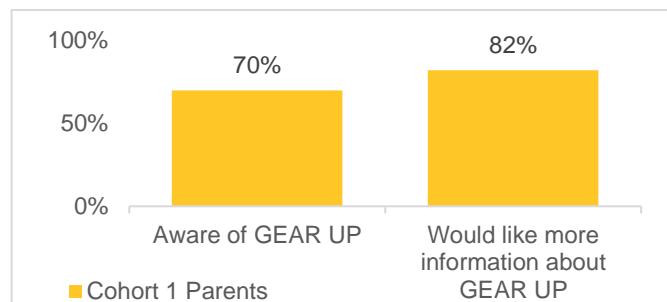
This section presents parent/guardian and student survey findings on GEAR UP services. The section also provides a spotlight analysis on student perceptions of the accessibility and feasibility of college.

## GEAR UP Services

As seen in Figure 13, almost three-fourths of Cohort 1 parents reported that they were aware of the resources provided by GEAR UP (70%); even so, most reported that they would like to have more information about GEAR UP (82%).

Respondents next rated the helpfulness of a variety of activities designed to increase their knowledge and awareness of college. Cohort 1 students provided feedback about nine activities. The activities with the highest percentage of Cohort 1 students reporting that they were *Extremely helpful* or *Moderately helpful* were College Application and Exploration Week (40%) and college campus visits (34%). At least half reported that they did not participate in or that their school did not offer virtual help with class (54%), Student Leadership Academy (53%), mentoring (53%), or financial literacy workshops (50%). More than half of Cohort 1 parents indicated that they did not attend/participate in the four activities about which they were asked. Among those who did report that they participated, college campus visits (25%) and College for West Virginia's CFWV.com portal (20%) were the event/activity that parents were most likely to regard as *Extremely* or *Moderately helpful*. See Table 2 for more details.

**Figure 13. Parent/Guardian Knowledge of GEAR UP**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Parent Survey.

**Table 2. Cohort 1 Student and Parent/Guardian 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
<b>Cohort 1 Students</b>						
College Application and Exploration Week	--	18%	8%	35%	24%	16%
Activities related to STEM	29%	13%	6%	23%	19%	10%
In-person help with classes	31%	15%	6%	19%	17%	12%
Virtual help with classes	39%	15%	9%	17%	12%	7%
Financial literacy workshops	40%	10%	7%	20%	13%	9%
CFWV.com web portal	37%	8%	9%	21%	16%	9%
College campus visits	29%	11%	7%	20%	18%	16%
Student Leadership Academy	43%	10%	6%	17%	14%	9%
Mentoring	42%	11%	7%	18%	13%	10%

Cohort 1 Parents/Guardians						
College for West Virginia (CFWV) workshops for families	62%	10%	3%	10%	8%	8%
Financial aid literacy and assistance	61%	10%	2%	10%	10%	8%
CFWV.com portal	59%	9%	3%	9%	12%	8%
College campus visits	53%	12%	2%	8%	13%	12%

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 2 Parent Survey.

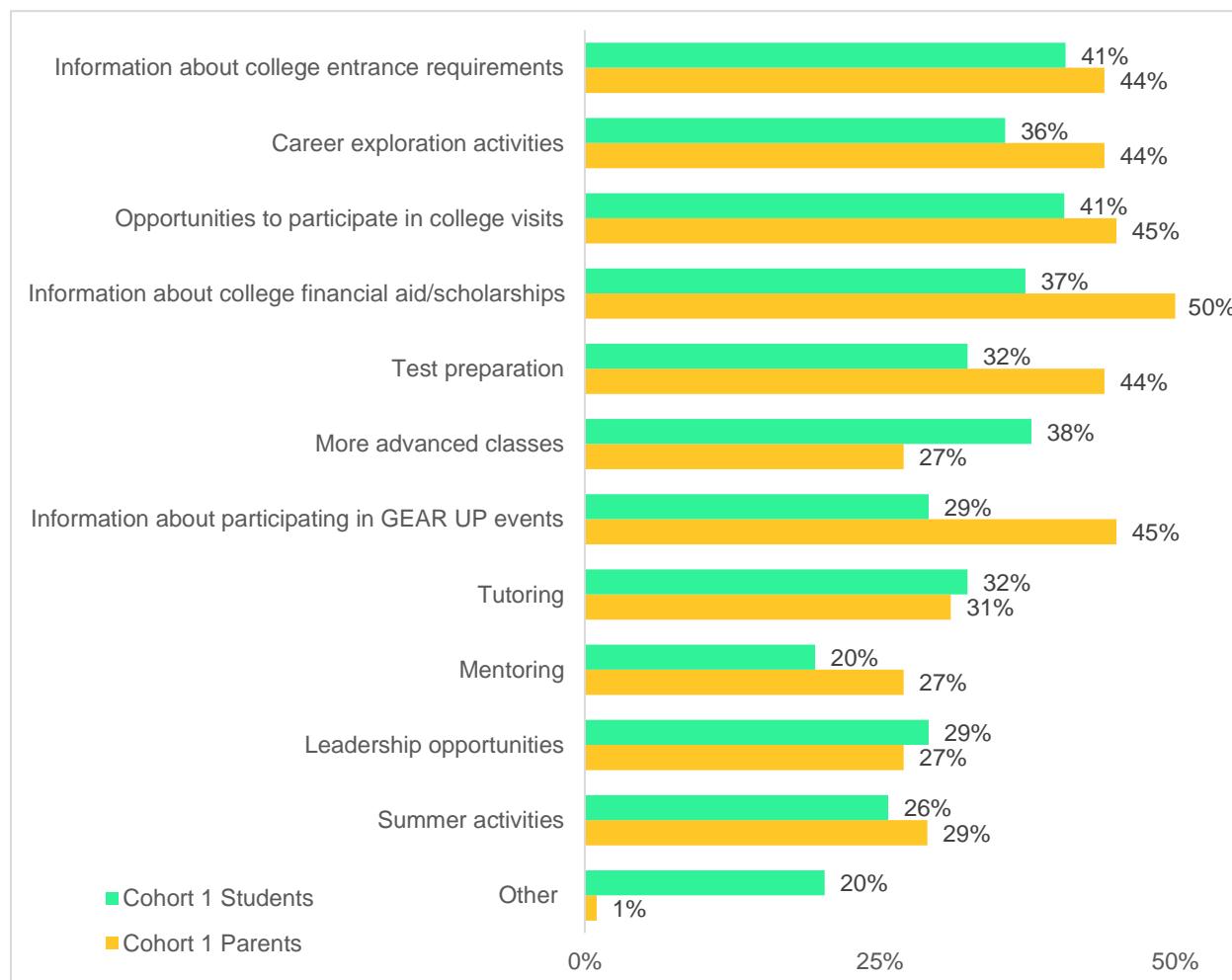
Note. STEM stands for science, technology, engineering, and math. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Cohort 1 student and parent survey respondents were next asked 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 are presented in Figure 14.

Cohort 1 students selected a variety of supports. They most often selected resources that would improve their college and career knowledge and readiness, such as *Information about college entrance requirements* (41%), *Opportunities to participate in college visits* (41%), *More advanced classes* (38%), and *Information about college financial aid/scholarships* (37%). Respondents who selected *Other* (20%) were provided space to include more details about their suggestions. Among the other resources requested by Cohort 1 students were resources about specific academic subjects or instruction (e.g., STEM courses, improved quality of instruction) and suggestions for non-academic support (e.g., how to pay bills, college applications).

About half of Cohort 1 parent/guardians 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* (50%), *Opportunities to participate in college visits* (45%), and *Information about participating in GEAR UP events* (45%). Responses from Cohort 1 parents/guardians who selected *Other* (which represented approximately 1% of parents/guardians) centered on increased communication; examples of these responses included "I need to see the work my child is doing" and "Help."

**Figure 14. Resources Needed by Students and Parents to Succeed in High School and Prepare for College**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey and WV GEAR UP Year 2 Parent Survey.

Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

## Spotlight Analysis: Student Perceptions of the Accessibility and Feasibility of College

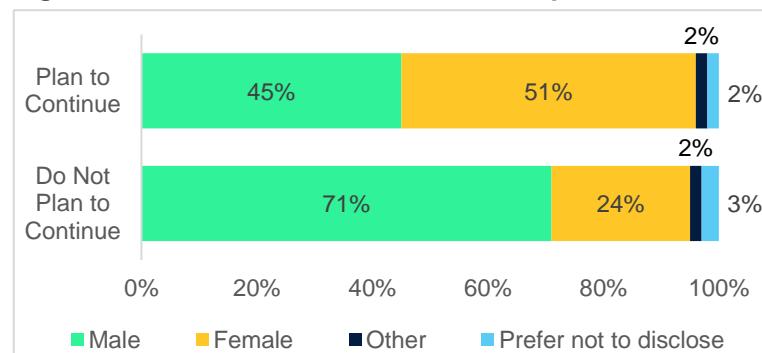
This section presents findings from analyses comparing student perceptions measured by student surveys for Cohort 1 (Grade 8) students who indicated they did and did not plan to continue their education after high school. A total of 1,810 Cohort 1 students reported planning to continue their education (86%) and 306 students reported that they were not planning on continuing.

Overall, of the Cohort 1 student survey respondents who reported they did not plan to continue their education after high school, the majority noted they were male (71%) and less than one-quarter were female (24%). For those who reported they planned to continue, over half (51%) noted they were female. Figure 15 provides additional details on the gender of student respondents for each analysis group.

As seen in Figure 16, there were significant differences between students' plans to continue their education after high school based on the highest educational level achieved by their parents/guardians. Over half (54%) of students who reported they planned to continue their education noted their parent had received a postsecondary degree and the majority (77%) of students who reported they did not plan to attend noted their parent had not received a postsecondary degree.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 17 shows the percentage of students who reported they spoke with someone at their school about college entrance requirements for both those who plan to and do not plan to continue their education after high school. A significantly higher percentage of students who indicated

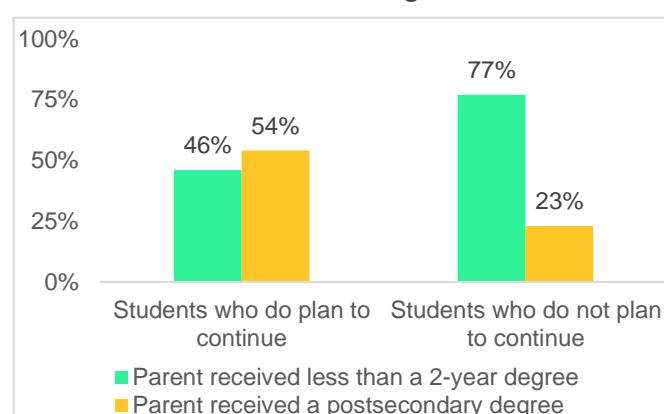
**Figure 15. Student Plans to Continue by Gender**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

**Figure 16. Parental Educational Level by Student Plans for Continuing Their Education\***



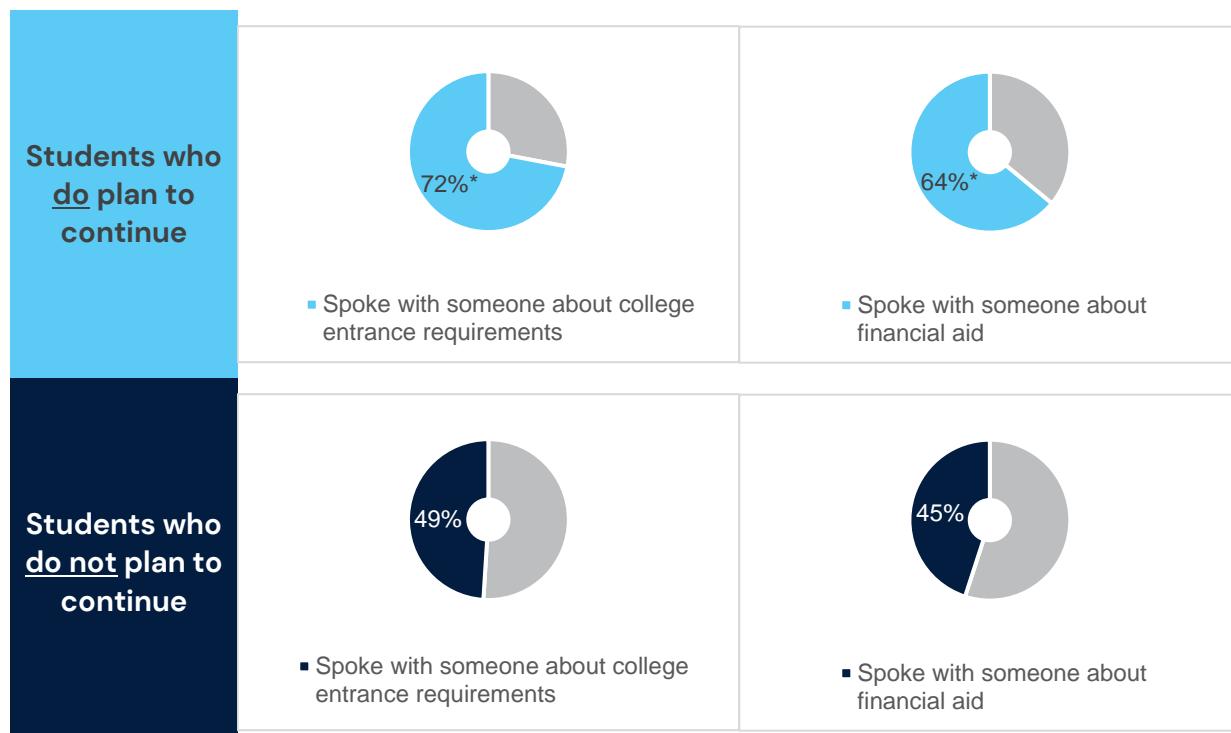
Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. \*Statistically significant compared to students who do not plan to continue ( $p \leq .001$ ).

<sup>16</sup> Highest level of education achieved by parents/guardians:  $\chi^2=55.23$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi = -.20$ ).

they planned to continue reported they had spoken with someone about college entrance requirements (72% versus 49%, respectively) and financial aid (64% versus 45%, respectively) compared to students who did not plan to continue.<sup>17</sup> The differences reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size.

**Figure 17. Students Who Spoke With Someone About College Entrance Requirements and Availability of Financial Aid to Help Pay for College**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey.

Note. \*Statistically significant compared to students who do not plan to continue ( $p \leq .001$ ).

Regardless of students' reported plans for after high school, Cohort 1 students were asked to report the reason(s) that they may not be able to continue their education, which varied significantly based on the students' plans to continue. The percentage of those who selected the following options was significantly higher for the Cohort 1 students who indicated they planned to continue their education than those who did not: *It costs too much/I can't afford it* (difference of 15 percentage points) and *Family issues* (difference of 7 percentage points).<sup>18</sup> The percentage of those who selected *I want to work* and *Other* was significantly lower for those who planned to continue their education than those who did not by 14 and 6 percentage points, respectively.<sup>19</sup> All differences reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size. The differences in responses regarding grades, need to

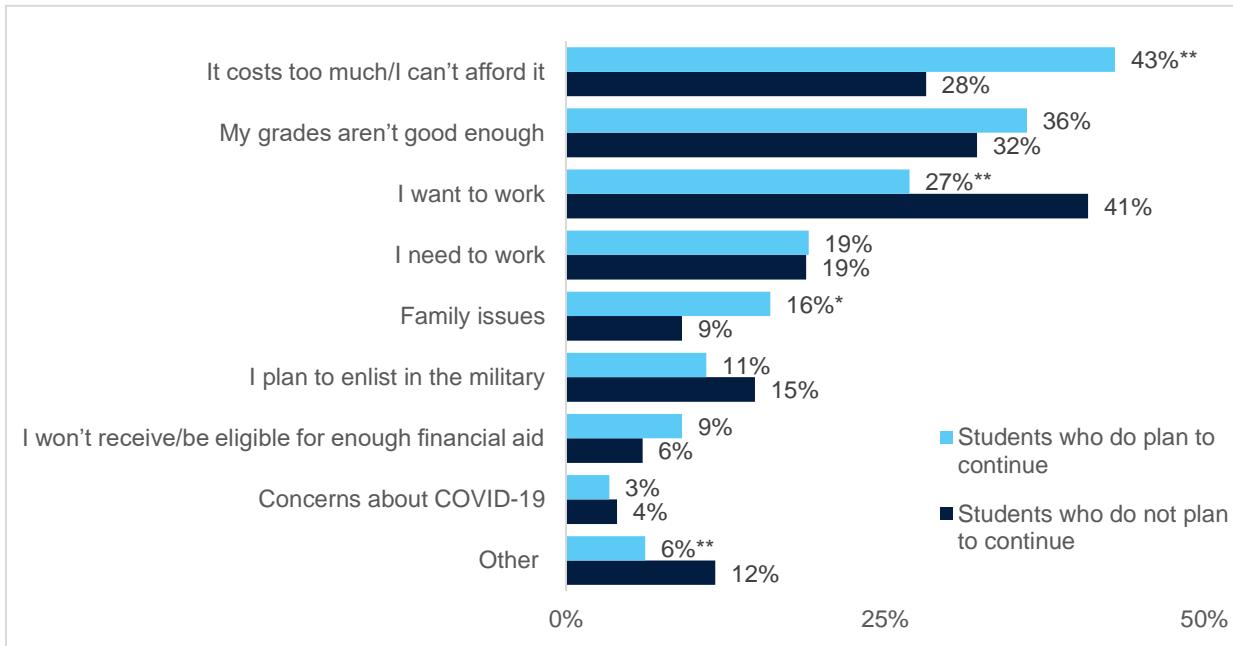
<sup>17</sup> Spoke about college entrance requirements:  $X^2=60.47$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi = .17$ ); Spoke about financial aid:  $X^2=40.33$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi = .14$ ).

<sup>18</sup> *It costs too much/I can't afford it*:  $X^2=22.99$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi = -.11$ ); *Family issues*:  $X^2=9.48$ ,  $p \leq .01$  ( $\phi = -.07$ ).

<sup>19</sup> *I want to work*:  $X^2=24.22$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi = .11$ ); *Other*:  $X^2=11.74$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi = .08$ ).

work, plans to join the military, financial aid eligibility, and concerns about COVID-19 were not significant. Figure 18 provides additional detail on the reasons students reported they may not be able to continue their education after high school.

**Figure 18. Reasons Students May Not Continue by Their Plans**

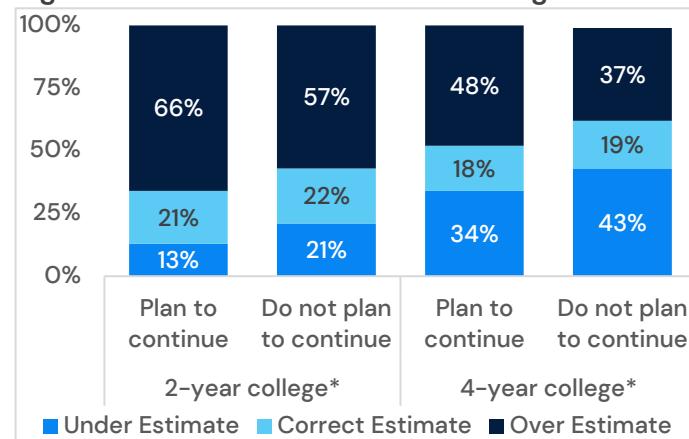


Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey.

Note. Response percentages for reasons students do not plan to continue their education will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. \*Statistically significant compared to students who do not plan to continue ( $p \leq .01$ ). \*\*Statistically significant compared to students who do not plan to continue ( $p \leq .001$ ).

As seen in Figure 19, less than one-quarter of students who planned to continue their education correctly estimated the cost of a 2-year community/technical college and a 4-year college (21% and 18%, respectively), which were similar to the students who did not plan to continue (22% and 19%, respectively). The majority of students, regardless of their plans for continuing education after high school, were more likely to overestimate the cost of a 2-year college (57%–66%) than underestimate (13%–21%). For 4-year college estimates, students who planned to continue most frequently overestimated the cost (48%), while

**Figure 19. Student Estimates of College Cost**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. \*Statistically significant compared to students who do not plan to continue ( $p \leq .001$ ).

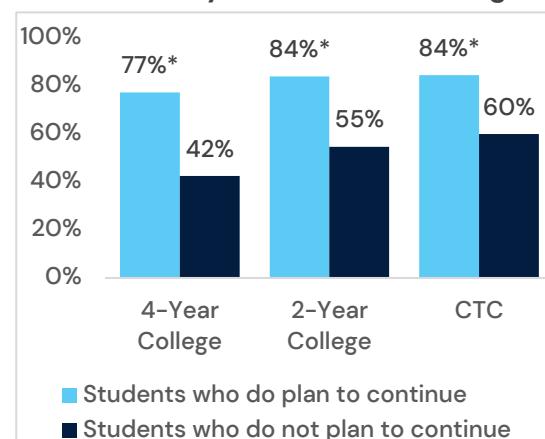
those who did not plan to continue most frequently underestimated (43%). There were no significant differences in correct estimates of a 2- or 4-year college between students who did and did not plan to continue their education after high school.

Additionally, as seen in Figure 20, students who did not plan to continue their education after graduating high school were significantly less likely to report that they *Probably* or *Definitely* could afford each of the college options.<sup>20</sup> All differences reported to be statistically significant had a moderate effect size.

Lastly, comparisons in students overall hope were assessed according to their reported plans after graduating high school. As noted previously, the Children's Hope Scale measures respondents' sense of optimism about their ability to pursue goals successfully. For each of the six items, students reported the degree to which they believed the statement applied to them on a 6-point scale, ranging from *None of the time* to *All of the time*. Figure 21 displays analyses of students' mean scores for each of the items as well as the overall mean score

across items. Students who reported they planned to continue their education after high school had significantly higher hope across all items as well as the overall mean score than students who reported not planning to continue.<sup>21</sup> All differences reported to be statistically significant had a small to moderate effect size. The items with the greatest difference in scores were *I am doing just as well as other kids my age* and *I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future*, which are subscales of the agency and pathway constructs, respectively.

**Figure 20. Students Who Probably and Definitely Could Afford College**

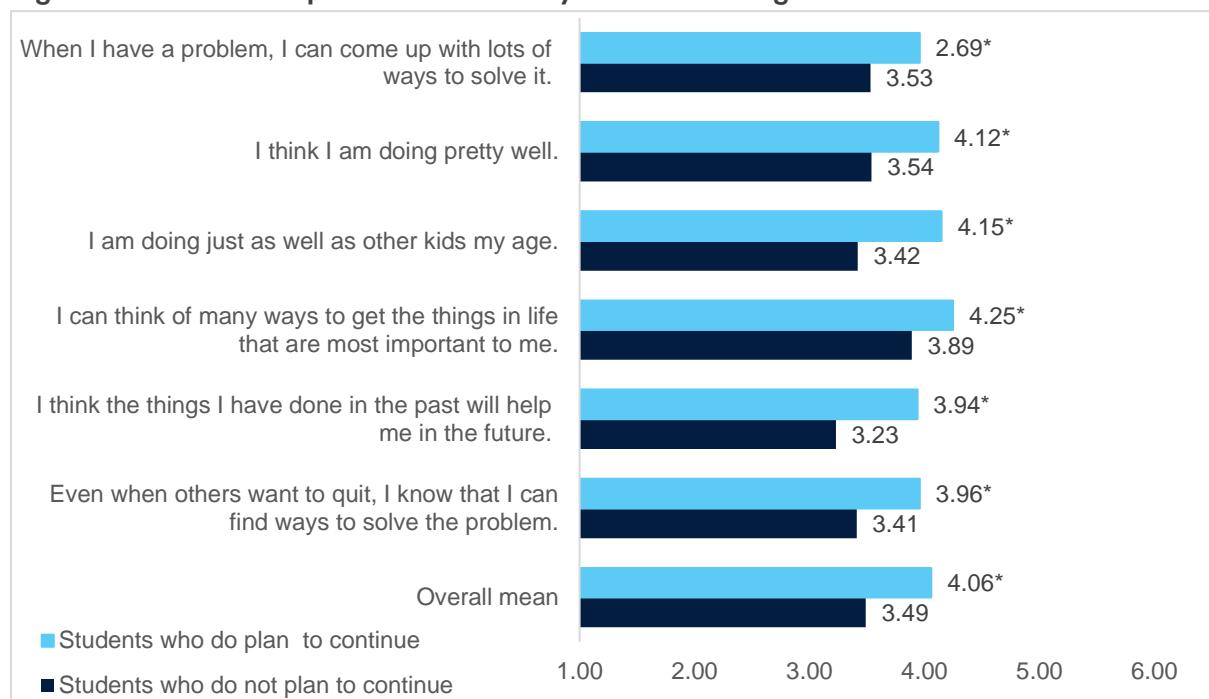


Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey.

Note. \*Statistically significant compared to students who do not plan to continue ( $p \leq .001$ ).

<sup>20</sup> *Probably* or *Definitely* could afford a 4-year college:  $X^2 = 152.83$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi = -.27$ ); *Probably* or *Definitely* could afford a 2-year college:  $X^2 = 133.54$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi = -.26$ ); *Probably* or *Definitely* could afford a community/technical college:  $X^2 = 97.20$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $\phi = -.22$ ).

<sup>21</sup> *When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it*:  $t = 4.605$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $d = -.30$ ); *I think I am doing pretty well*:  $t = 7.414$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $d = -.46$ ); *I am doing just as well as other kids my age*:  $t = 7.929$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $d = -.50$ ); *I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me*:  $t = 4.033$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $d = -.28$ ); *I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future*:  $t = 7.637$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $d = -.51$ ); *Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem*:  $t = 5.679$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $d = -.38$ ); Overall mean:  $t = 7.986$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $d = -.50$ ).

**Figure 21. Student Hope Scale Scores by Plans After High School**

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Student Survey.

Note. \*Statistically significant compared to students who do not plan to continue ( $p \leq 0.001$ ).

## IV. School Personnel Survey Results

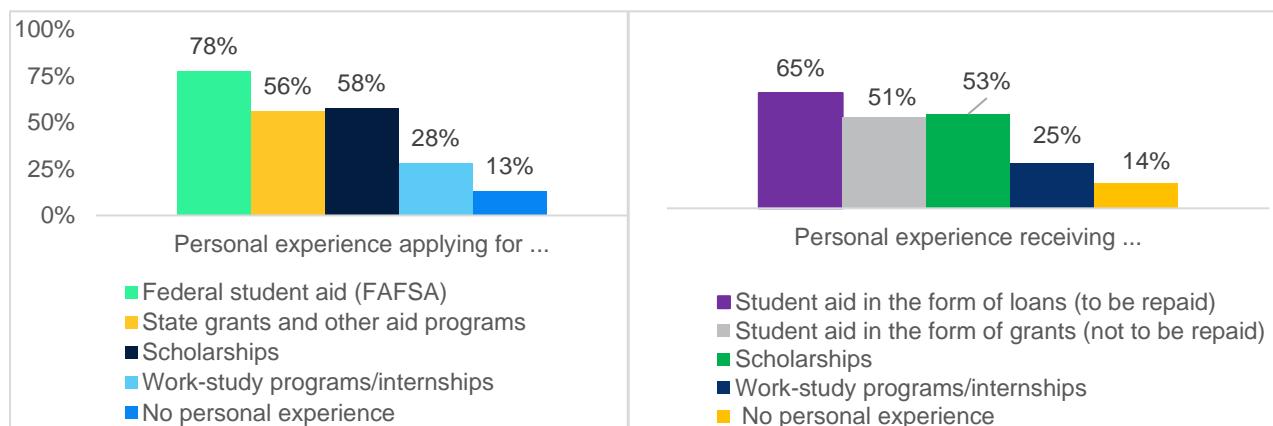
This chapter summarizes results from the GEAR UP Year 2 School Personnel Survey analysis. This includes the findings about faculty member perceptions of college-going culture in their schools as well as their knowledge of college costs and financial aid programs and their involvement in college-related activities. Overall, 1,236 personnel are included in the analyses presented in this section, which represents 61% of school personnel at the time of survey administration. Longitudinal analysis is presented to compare school personnel survey results from Year 1 to Year 2 of grant implementation.

### 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 (73%) reported they were female, with most (83%) indicating that they grew up in a rural community, and over half (57%) responding that they themselves were first-generation college students. Personnel survey respondent demographics for Year 2 were similar to those of survey respondents from Year 1. The majority of personnel survey respondents were teachers (80%), followed by counselors (4%) and administrators (6%), with an average of 9 years of experience at their role or school. Four 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 for and receiving financing for their postsecondary education, as shown in Figure 22. Over three-quarters (78%) of personnel reported having experience applying for the FAFSA and almost two-thirds (65%) having experience receiving a loan to be repaid. A little over one-tenth (13% and 14%) of personnel noted they had no personal experience applying for or receiving financing.

**Figure 22. School Personnel Experience Applying and Receiving Financing for Postsecondary Education by Percentage of Respondents**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Personnel Survey.

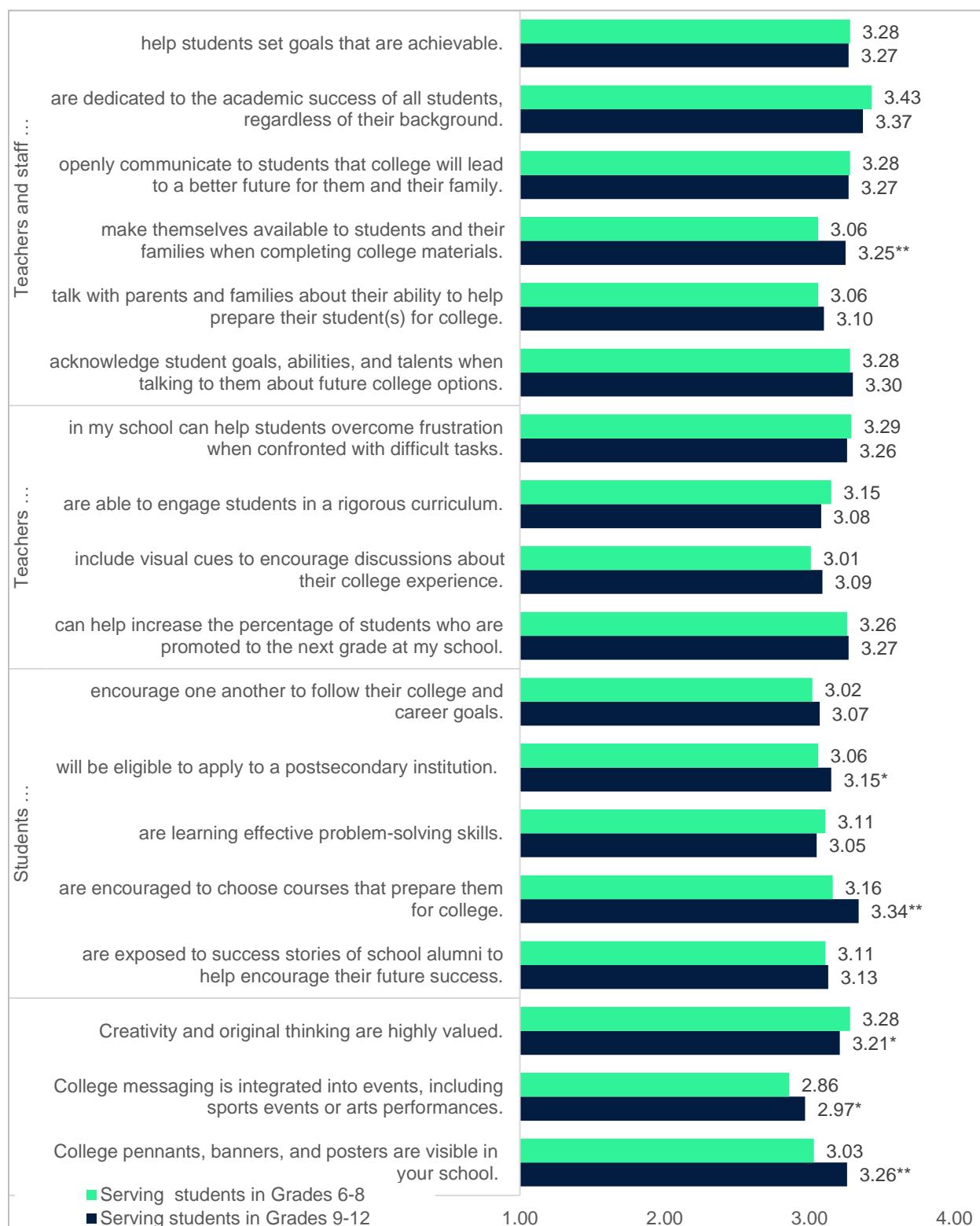
Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

## 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 two 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 all personnel survey respondents in Year 2, there was a significant increase in the overall mean college-going culture score (3.09 in Year 1 and 3.17 in Year 2).<sup>22</sup> The effect size for the observed difference was small. Figure 23 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 Grades 9–12 and those who reported serving Grades 6–8.

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<sup>22</sup> Overall college-going culture mean score:  $t=-3.951$ ,  $p\leq.001$  ( $d=.17$ ).

**Figure 23. School Personnel Mean Agreement about their School by Grades Served**

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Personnel Survey.

Note. \*Statistically significant compared to Grades 6-8 ( $p \leq .05$ ); \*\*Statistically significant compared to Grades 6-8 ( $p \leq .001$ ).

Personnel were least likely to agree that *College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances*, with personnel serving students in Grades 9–12 indicating significantly higher agreement (2.97) than those serving students in Grades 6–8 (2.86).<sup>23</sup> Conversely, personnel respondents serving both Grades 9–12 and Grades 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 3.43, respectively). Personnel serving Grades 9–12 had significantly higher mean agreement related to the college application requirements and process, choosing courses that prepare them for college, and display of college materials.<sup>24</sup> However, personnel serving Grades 6–8 had significantly higher mean agreement that creativity and original thinking were highly valued in their school.<sup>25</sup> The effect sizes for all observed significant differences were small.

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), which is reported in Figure 24 as a mean score for each item. Overall, in Year 2, teachers' mean agreement was the lowest that *College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances* (2.91) and *College pennants, banners, and posters are visible* (3.00)—both of which teachers' mean agreement significantly increased compared to Year 1.<sup>26</sup> Similar to personnel, teachers had the highest mean agreement that *I am dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background* (3.54). Across several response items, teacher mean scores of the college-going culture in their classroom significantly increased in Year 2, including talking with parents and families about their ability to help prepare their student, including visual cues, exposing students to success stories, and students encouraging each other to follow their college and career goals.<sup>27</sup> The effect sizes for all observed significant differences were small.

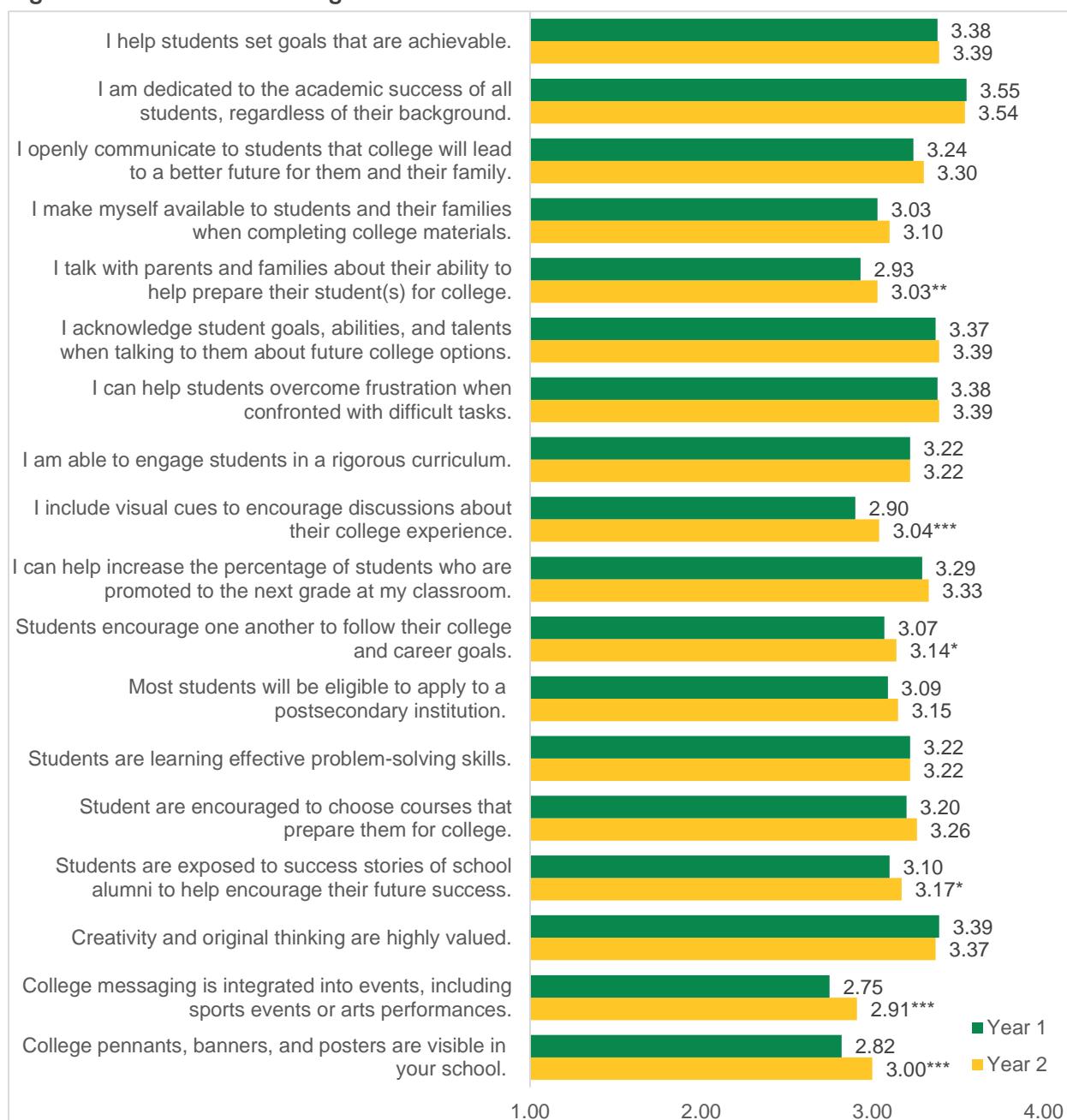
<sup>23</sup> *College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances*:  $t=-2.455$ ,  $p\le.01$  ( $d=-.15$ ).

<sup>24</sup> *Students are encouraged to choose courses that prepare them for college*:  $t=-4.492$ ,  $p\le.001$  ( $d=.27$ ); *Students will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution*:  $t=-2.500$ ,  $p\le.05$  ( $d=.15$ ); *Teachers and staff make themselves available to students and their families when completing college materials*:  $t=-4.782$ ,  $p\le.001$  ( $d=.29$ ); *College pennants, banners, and posters are visible in your school*:  $t=-5.303$ ,  $p\le.001$  ( $d=.32$ ).

<sup>25</sup> *Creativity and original thinking are highly valued*:  $t=-2.030$ ,  $p\le.05$  ( $d=-.12$ ).

<sup>26</sup> *College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances*:  $t=-4.285$ ,  $p\le.001$  ( $d=.21$ ); *College pennants, banners, and posters are visible in your school*:  $t=-4.344$ ,  $p\le.001$  ( $d=.22$ ).

<sup>27</sup> *Students encourage one another to follow their college and career goals*:  $t=-2.220$ ,  $p\le.05$  ( $d=.11$ ); *Students are exposed to success stories of school alumni to help encourage their future success*:  $t=-2.068$ ,  $p\le.05$  ( $d=.10$ ); *I talk with parents and families about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for college*:  $t=-2.937$ ,  $p\le.01$  ( $d=.15$ ); *I include visual cues to encourage discussions about their college experience*:  $t=-3.744$ ,  $p\le.001$  ( $d=.19$ ).

**Figure 24. Teacher Mean Agreement about Their Classroom**

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 and Year 2 personnel surveys.

Note. \*Statistically significant by Year ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). \*\*Statistically significant by year ( $p \leq 0.01$ ).

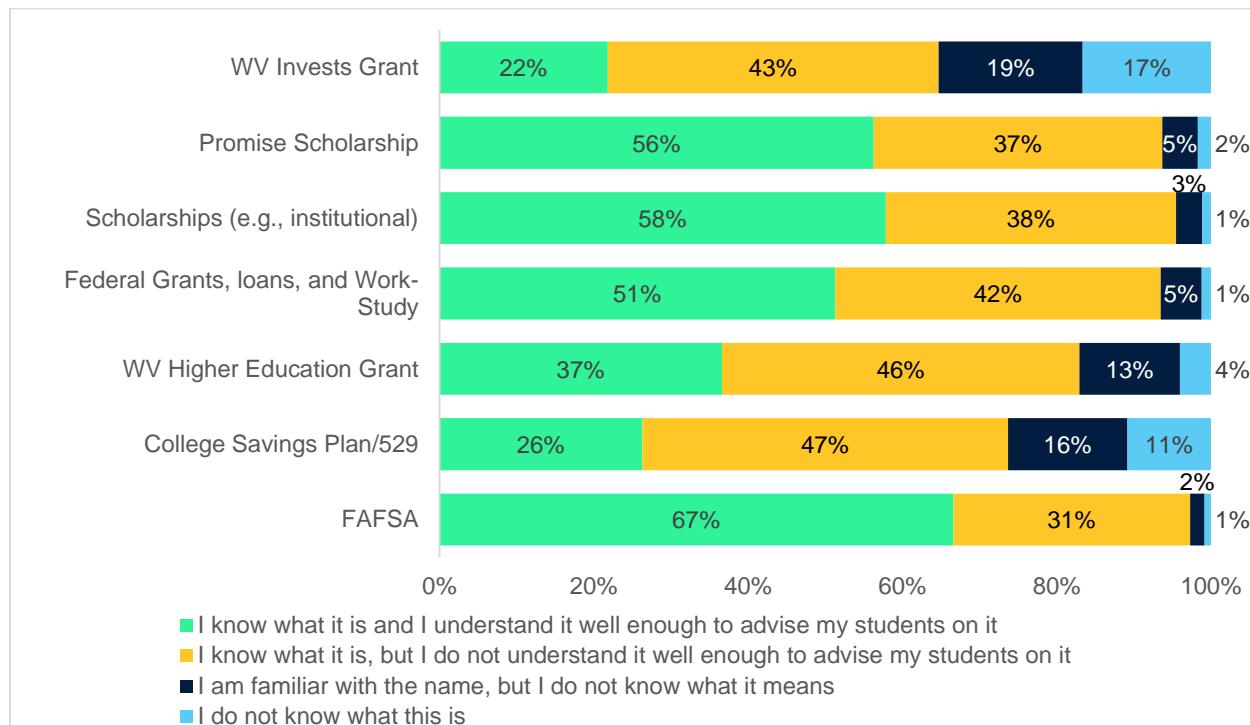
\*\*\*Statistically significant by year ( $p \leq 0.001$ ).

## 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 25, school personnel had the most familiarity with and knowledge of the FAFSA (67%). This was followed by their knowledge of scholarships (e.g., institutional) (58%); the Promise Scholarship (56%); and federal grants, loans, and work-study (51%). Over one-third (36%) of personnel survey respondents reported they did not know what the WV Invests grant was or did not know what it meant.

**Figure 25. School Personnel Knowledge of Financial Aid Programs by Percentage of Respondents**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Personnel Survey.

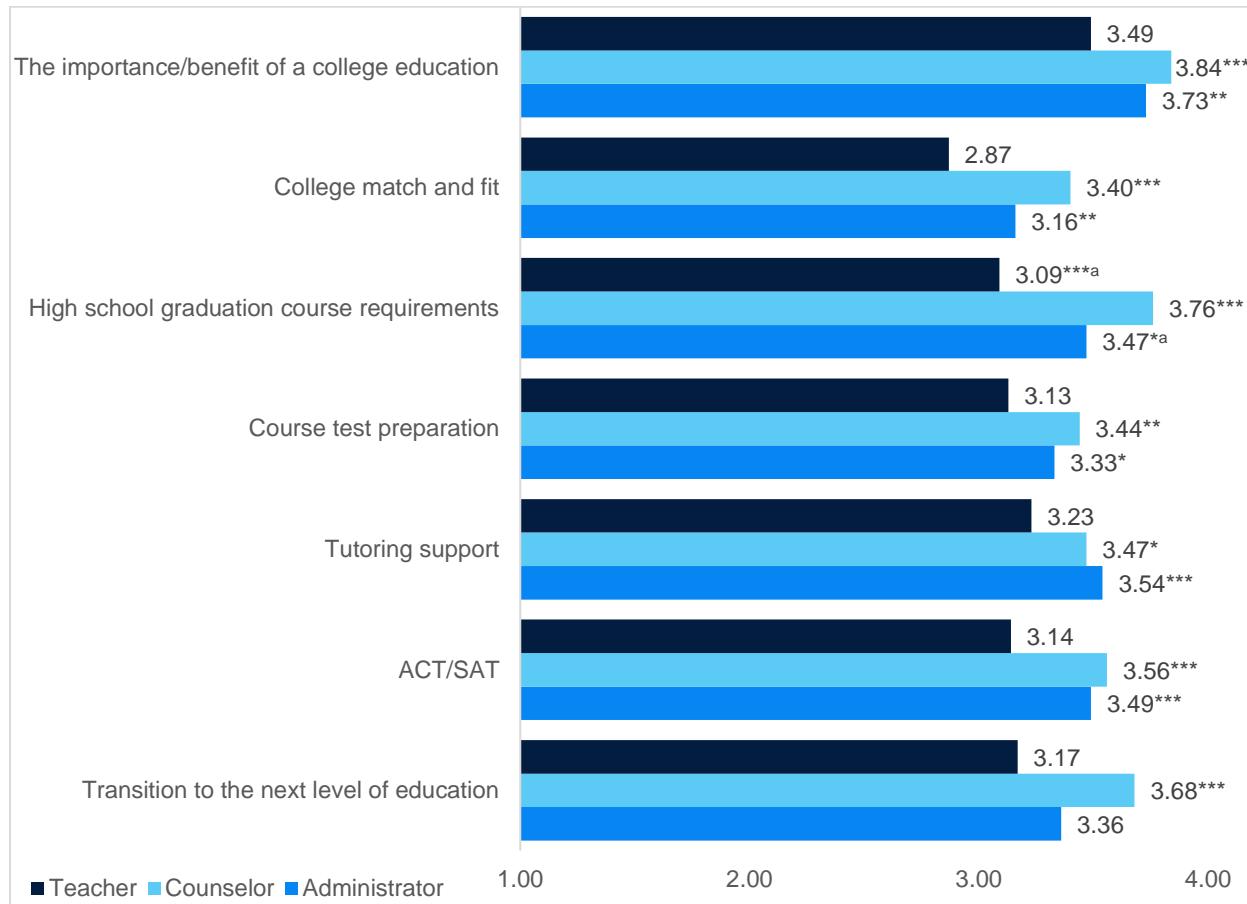
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

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 (3.84), administrators (3.73), and teachers (3.49) reported that they were best able to support students and families in conveying *The importance/benefit of a college education*. Figure 26 shows that reported ability among counselors was significantly higher than teachers across all included college-related topics. Effect sizes for these differences between counselors and teachers were small to moderate.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Tutoring support: t=2.463, p≤.05 (d=−.33); Course test preparation: t=2.786, p≤.01 (d=−.39); Transition to the next level of education: t=4.676, p≤.001 (d=−.67); ACT/SAT: t=4.361, p≤.001 (d=−.53); High school graduation course requirements: t=5.778, p≤.001 (d=−.80); College match and fit: t=4.132, p≤.001 (d=−.63); The importance/benefit of a college education: t=3.964, p≤.001 (d=−.55).*

Administrators reported their ability to assist students and families with high school graduation requirements was significantly lower than counselors, with a moderate effect size.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, administrators were statistically significantly more likely than teachers to report ability to support all topics, except the *Transition to the secondary education*—for which administrators still reported higher ability, however there were no significant differences. Effect sizes for the differences between administrators and teachers were small to moderate.<sup>30</sup>

**Figure 26. School Personnel Perceived Ability to Assist Students and Families on College Topics by Role**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Personnel Survey.

Note. \*Statistically significant compared to teachers ( $p \leq .05$ ); <sup>a</sup>Statistically significant compared to counselors ( $p \leq .05$ ); \*\*Statistically significant compared to teachers ( $p \leq .01$ ); \*\*\*Statistically significant compared to teachers ( $p \leq .001$ ); <sup>\*\*\*a</sup>Statistically significant compared to administrator ( $p \leq .001$ ).

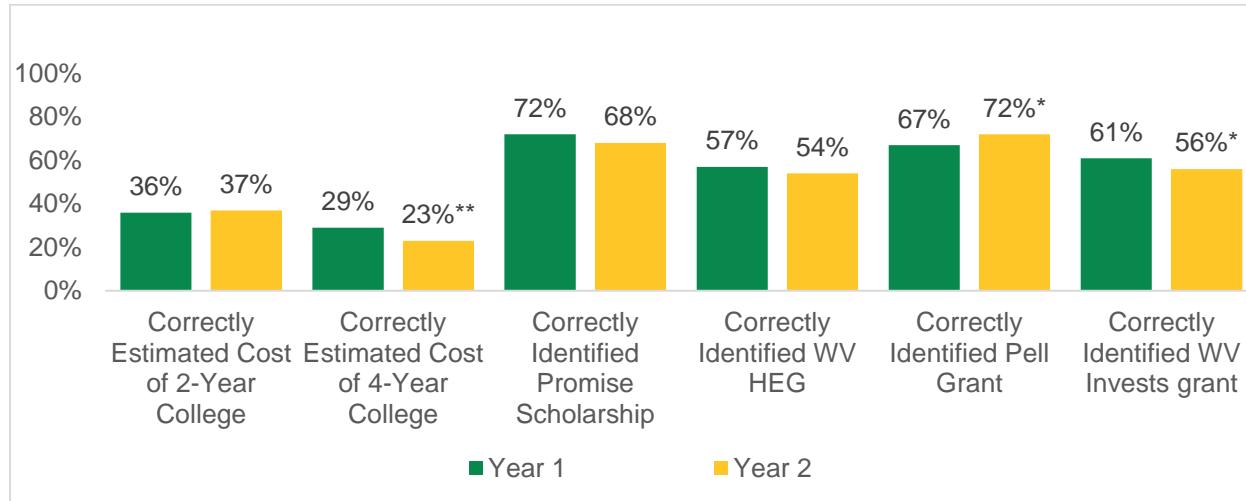
Personnel survey respondents were asked to report estimates of the average cost of tuition—excluding the cost of food, housing, and books—for two public college options in

<sup>29</sup> High school graduation course requirements:  $t = -2.560$ ,  $p \leq .05$  ( $d = .46$ ).

<sup>30</sup> Course test preparation:  $t = 2.030$ ,  $p \leq .05$  ( $d = -.25$ ); College match and fit:  $t = 2.811$ ,  $p \leq .01$  ( $d = -.35$ ); High school graduation course requirements:  $t = 4.099$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $d = -.45$ ); Tutoring support:  $t = 3.751$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $d = -.43$ ); ACT/SAT:  $t = 4.032$ ,  $p \leq .001$  ( $d = -.43$ ).

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 27, in Year 2, 23% of personnel respondents in Year 2 correctly estimated the cost of a 4-year public college/university and 37% for a public community/technical college. There was a significant decline in personnel correct estimates of the cost of a 4-year college from Year 1 to Year 2, with a small effect size.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 27. Percentage of Personnel Who Correctly Estimated the Cost of College and Identified Financial Aid Sources**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 and Year 2 surveys.

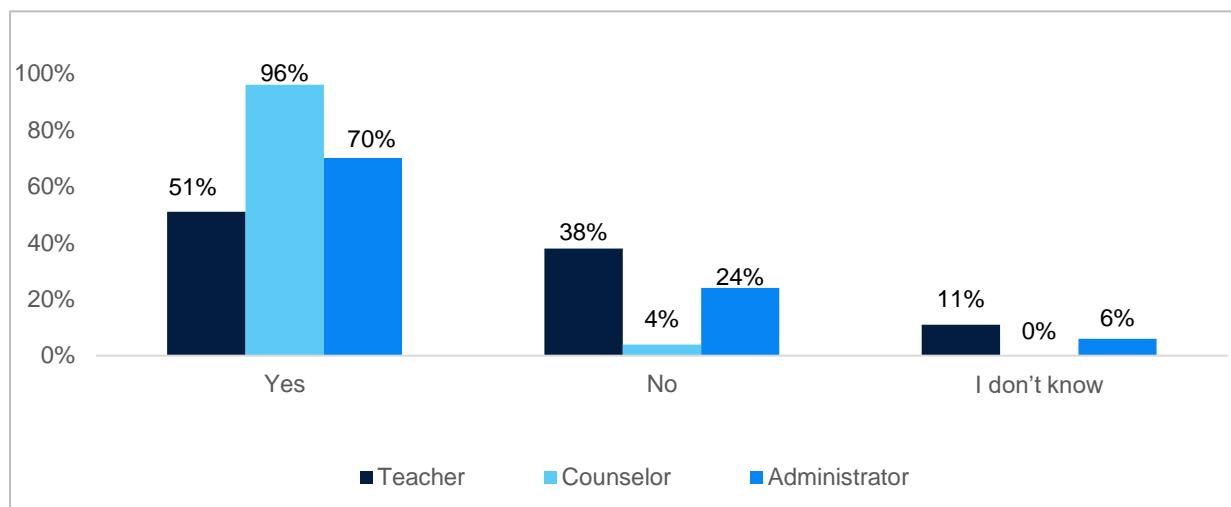
Note. \*Statistically significant compared to Year 1 ( $p \leq .05$ ); \*\*Statistically significant compared to Year 1 ( $p \leq .01$ ).

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 27, across the four programs—Promise Scholarship, WV HEG, Pell grant, and the WV Invests grant—over half (54%–72%) of personnel correctly identified the financial aid program in Year 2. Significantly fewer personnel respondents correctly identified the WV Invests grant in Year 2 compared to Year 1.<sup>32</sup> In Year 2, the Pell grant was the most recognizable program (72%) among personnel survey respondents, as significantly more personnel correctly identified it that year.<sup>33</sup> Effect sizes for the significant differences were small.

<sup>31</sup> Correctly estimated the cost of a 4-year college:  $\chi^2 = 9.28$ ,  $p \leq .01$  ( $\phi = -.07$ ).

<sup>32</sup> Correctly identified WV Invests grant:  $\chi^2 = 6.05$ ,  $p \leq .05$  ( $\phi = -.05$ ).

<sup>33</sup> Correctly identified Pell grant:  $\chi^2 = 5.85$ ,  $p \leq .05$  ( $\phi = .05$ ).

**Figure 28. School Personnel Participation in GEAR UP-sponsored Activities by Role\***

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Personnel Survey.

Note. \*Statistically significant compared by role ( $p \leq .001$ ).

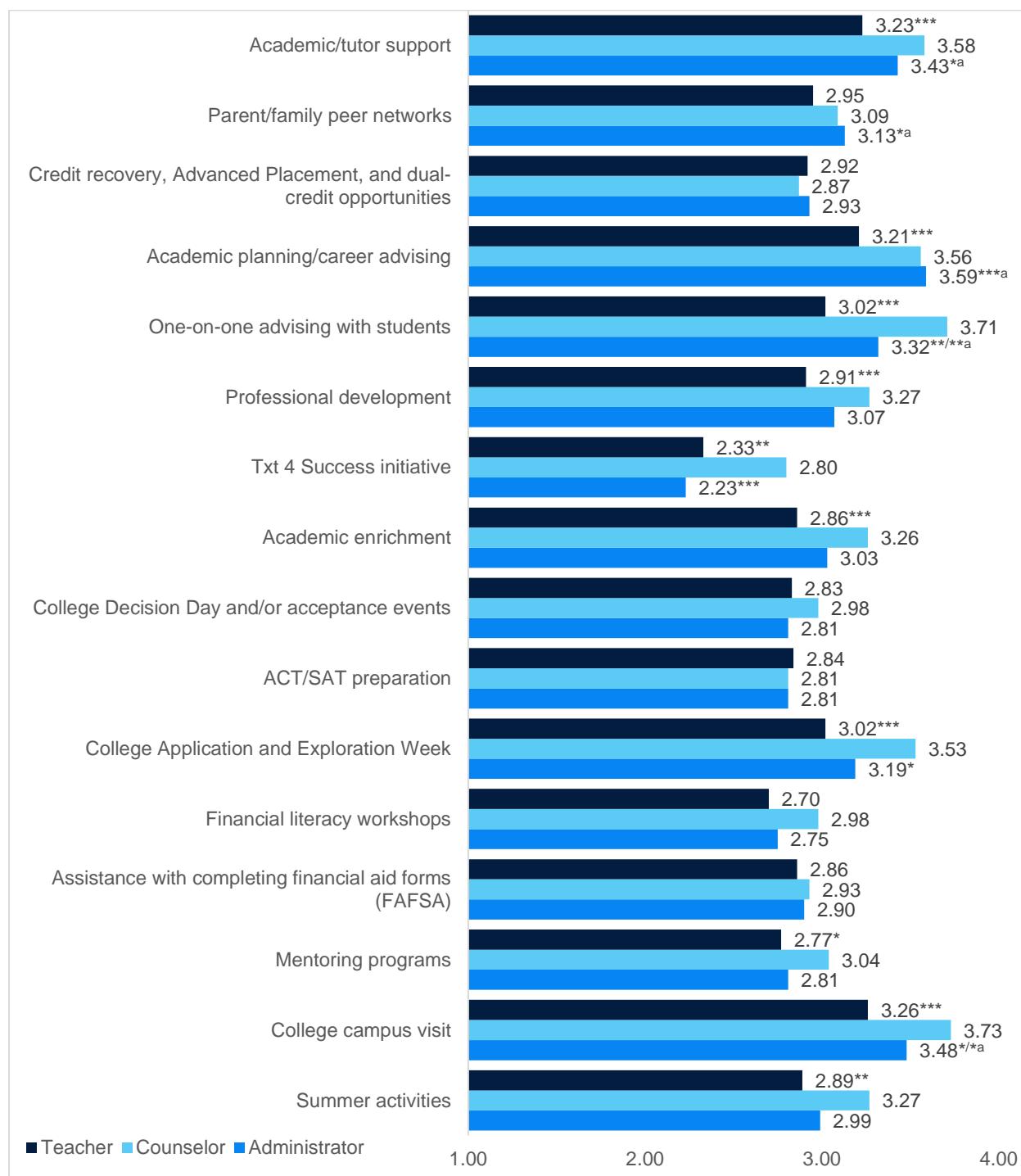
## GEAR UP Involvement

School personnel were also asked to report the extent to which they were involved in GEAR UP-sponsored events in Year 2. Figure 28 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.<sup>34</sup> Counselors reported the highest levels of participation in events (96%), followed by administrators (70%) and teachers (51%).

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 29 provides an overview of mean personnel perceptions for each activity by respondent role, with several statistically significant differences across roles.

<sup>34</sup> Participation in GEAR UP-sponsored activities:  $X^2 = 51.01, p \leq .001 (V = .15)$ .

**Figure 29. School Personnel Perception of the Extent to Which Their School Promotes Activities by Role**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Personnel Survey.

Note. \*Statistically significant compared to counselors ( $p \leq .05$ ); <sup>a</sup>Statistically significant compared to teachers ( $p \leq .05$ ); \*\*Statistically significant compared to counselors ( $p \leq .01$ ); \*\*\*Statistically significant compared to teachers ( $p \leq .01$ ); <sup>\*\*a</sup>Statistically significant compared to counselors ( $p \leq .001$ );

\*\*\*<sup>a</sup>Statistically significant compared to teachers ( $p \leq .001$ ).

Counselors had significantly higher mean agreement that the school promoted *One-on-one advising with students*, *Txt 4 Success initiative*, *College Application and Exploration Week*, and *College campus visit* than did administrators, with small to moderate effect sizes.<sup>35</sup> Counselors also had significantly higher mean agreement across several activities compared to teachers, all with small to moderate effect sizes.<sup>36</sup> However, administrators had significantly higher mean agreement than teachers on school promotion of *Academic/tutor support*, *Parent/family peer networks*, *Academic planning/career advising*, *One-on-one advising with students*, and *College campus visit*—each with small to moderate effect sizes.<sup>37</sup>

Personnel survey respondents also indicated their involvement in activities provided by their school, as shown in Figure 30. Among personnel respondents, the activities with the highest involvement in Year 2 were *Academic/tutor support* (57%) and *One-on-one advising with students* (53%). There were significant differences in reported personnel involvement in several activities from Year 1 to Year 2, including a significant increase in reported involvement with *Parent/family peer networks* and *Txt 4 Success*.<sup>38</sup> There were significant declines in personnel involvement with *ACT/SAT preparation*; *Credit recovery*, *Advanced Placement*, and *dual-credit opportunities*; and *Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA)* in Year 2.<sup>39</sup> Effect sizes for differences in involvement were small.

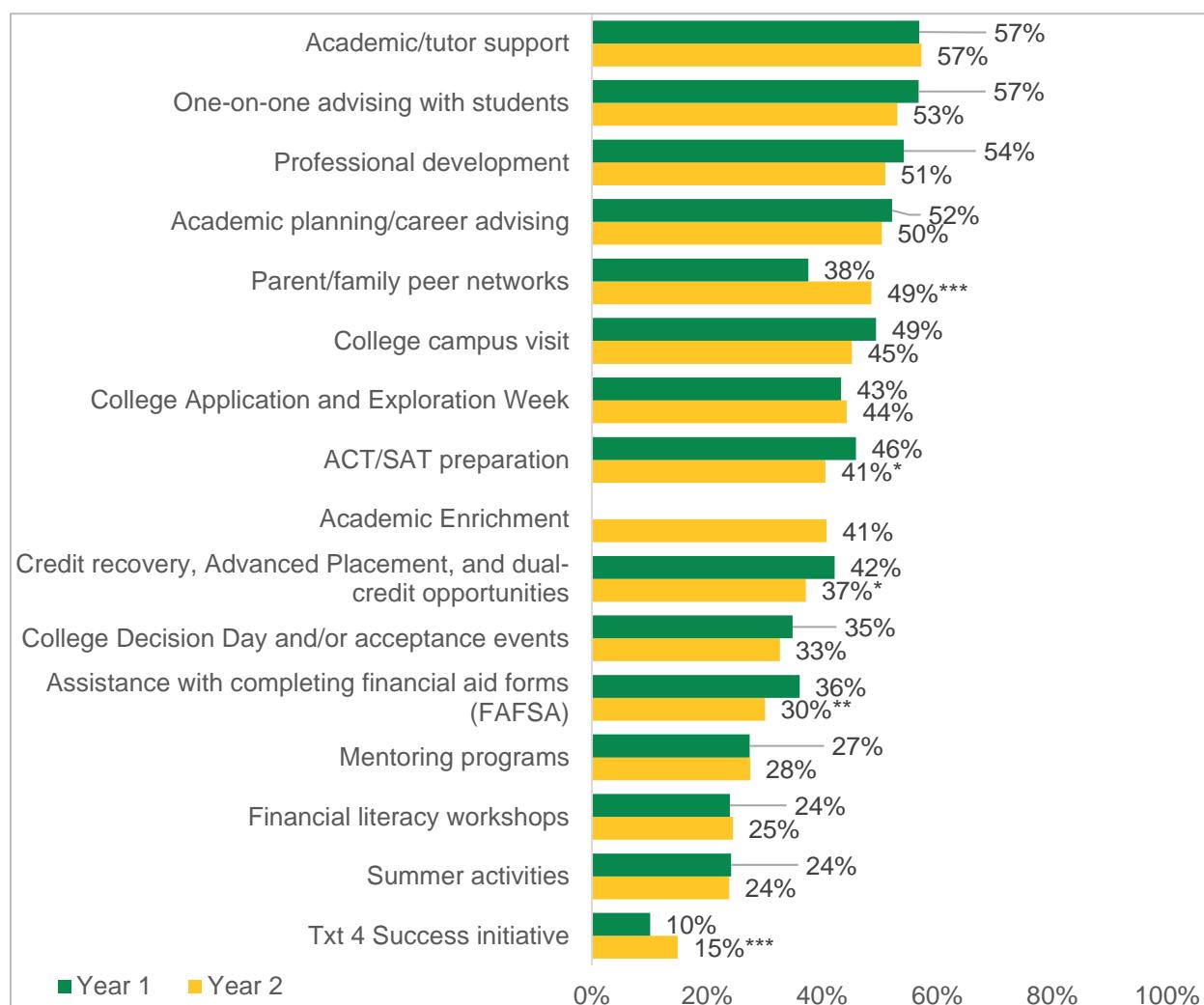
<sup>35</sup> *College Application and Exploration Week*:  $t=-2.227$ ,  $p\leq .05$  ( $d=.39$ ); *College campus visit*:  $t=-2.149$ ,  $p\leq .05$  ( $d=.39$ ); *One-on-one advising with students*:  $t=-3.070$ ,  $p\leq .01$  ( $d=.56$ ); *Txt 4 Success initiative*:  $t=-2.699$ ,  $p\leq .01$  ( $d=.50$ ).

<sup>36</sup> *Mentoring programs*:  $t=2.005$ ,  $p\leq .05$  ( $d=-.28$ ); *Summer activities*:  $t=3.157$ ,  $p\leq .01$  ( $d=-.43$ ); *Txt 4 Success initiative*:  $t=2.837$ ,  $p\leq .01$  ( $d=-.42$ ); *Professional development*:  $t=3.669$ ,  $p\leq .01$  ( $d=-.40$ ); *Academic/tutor support*:  $t=4.319$ ,  $p\leq .001$  ( $d=-.46$ ); *Academic planning/career advising*:  $t=4.351$ ,  $p\leq .001$  ( $d=-.46$ ); *One-on-one advising with students*:  $t=5.768$ ,  $p\leq .001$  ( $d=-.80$ ); *Academic enrichment*:  $t=3.579$ ,  $p\leq .001$  ( $d=-.43$ ); *College Application and Exploration Week*:  $t=4.666$ ,  $p\leq .001$  ( $d=-.53$ ); *College campus visit*:  $t=4.233$ ,  $p\leq .001$  ( $d=-.59$ ).

<sup>37</sup> *College campus visit*:  $t=2.432$ ,  $p\leq .05$  ( $d=-.27$ ); *Parent/family peer networks*:  $t=2.037$ ,  $p\leq .05$  ( $d=-.22$ ); *Academic/tutor support*:  $t=2.290$ ,  $p\leq .05$  ( $d=-.26$ ); *One-on-one advising with students*:  $t=2.793$ ,  $p\leq .01$  ( $d=-.34$ ); *Academic planning/career advising*:  $t=4.986$ ,  $p\leq .001$  ( $d=-.50$ ).

<sup>38</sup> *Parent/family peer networks*:  $\chi^2=24.982$ ,  $p\leq .001$  ( $\phi=-.11$ ); *Txt 4 Success initiative*:  $\chi^2=10.760$ ,  $p\leq .001$  ( $\phi=-.07$ ).

<sup>39</sup> *ACT/SAT preparation*:  $\chi^2=5.800$ ,  $p\leq .05$  ( $\phi=.05$ ); *Credit recovery*, *Advanced Placement*, and *dual-credit opportunities*:  $\chi^2=5.489$ ,  $p\leq .05$  ( $\phi=.05$ ); *Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA)*:  $\chi^2=8.229$ ,  $p\leq .01$  ( $\phi=.06$ ).

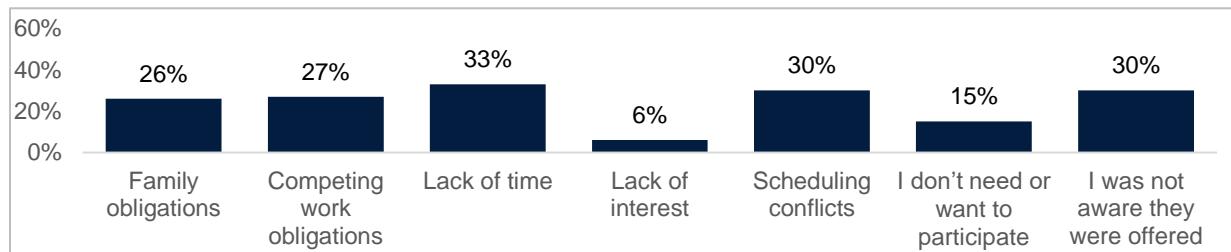
**Figure 30. School Personnel Reported Involvement in Activities**

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 and Year 2 surveys.

Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. \*Statistically significant by year ( $p \leq 0.05$ ); \*\*Statistically significant by year ( $p \leq 0.01$ ); \*\*\*Statistically significant by year ( $p \leq 0.001$ ).

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 lacked time to participate (33%), they were not aware the services were offered (30%), and they had scheduling conflicts (30%). Figure 31 summarizes the additional reasons personnel reported for not participating in Year 2.

**Figure 31. School Personnel Reasons for Not Participating in GEAR UP-sponsored Activities**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Personnel Survey.

Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

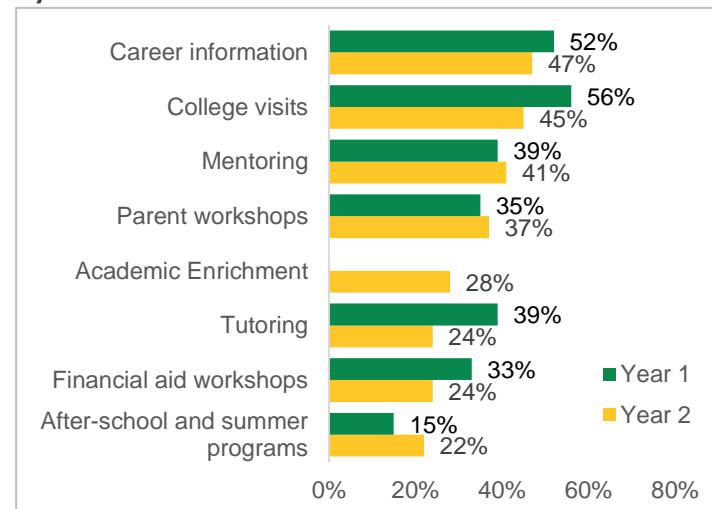
## Site Coordinator Experiences and Perceptions

In Year 2, the 4% of personnel respondents indicating they were GEAR UP site coordinators, reported their perceptions of the college-going culture within their school—a total of 54 respondents. Over half (53%) of site coordinator respondents reported they believed about half of students attending their schools want to go to college. 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*. The majority of site coordinators (79%) reported that the Commission was *Very helpful* and about one-fifth (21%) reported the Commission was *Somewhat helpful* or *Not helpful*.

Site coordinators were also asked to identify the services most needed by GEAR UP students. As seen in Figure 32, the most frequently reported services by site coordinators for Year 2 and Year 1 were *Career information* (47% and 52%, respectively) and *College visits* (45% and 56%, respectively). Additionally, over a third of coordinators thought that *Mentoring* (41%) and *Parent workshops* (37%) were the most needed services in Year 2 for students to plan their future.

GEAR UP coordinators were also prompted to provide additional context about their work and attitudes. One question asked what activities could help them in their role with GEAR UP to become a more successful coordinator. As seen in Figure 33, about three-quarters (74%) of site coordinators reported

**Figure 32. Site Coordinator Services Most Needed by GEAR UP Students**

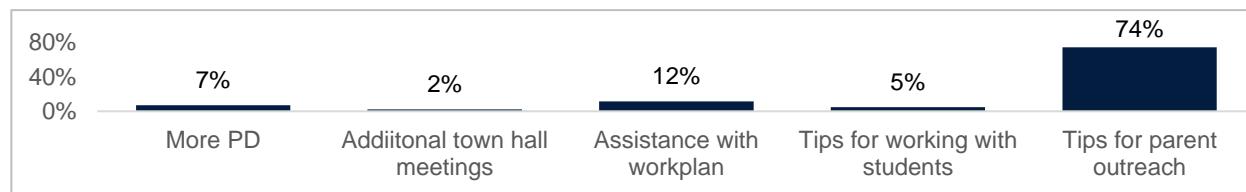


Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 and Year 2 personnel surveys.

Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

they would like more tips for parent outreach to help them become a more successful GEAR UP coordinator.

**Figure 33. Site Coordinator Services Needed to Become More Successful**



Source: WV GEAR UP Year 2 Personnel Survey.

Note. Response percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

Lastly, a final open-ended question sought input about the role GEAR UP can play in improving the school's college-going culture. Twenty-five (25) respondents submitted answers; the most frequently shared theme was offering more postsecondary exploration and awareness options for students. One participating school personnel shared:

*I believe access and exposure are the most beneficial activities to enhance a college-going culture at my school. My students are just not well versed in post-secondary opportunities.*

Respondents recommended that these activities support not only student's career exploration, but also support the development of skills that would help them succeed at the postsecondary level and increase their knowledge of the financial aid supports available to them. Coordinators recommended incorporating more engaging activities for students, including:

- **More in-person guest speakers.** A coordinator shared their students were already doing a lot of work on the computers, so when they had to watch a guest speaker online, they lost interest or got distracted.
- **Get a Life game from the WV State Treasurer's Office.** A coordinator emphasized the need to gain increased buy-in among students by "giving them a reason to buy-in. Make it real." The coordinator noted the game focused on real life experience that helped their students understand why education is valuable.

Several respondents cited the importance of incorporating students' parents and families into GEAR UP activities and helping them to also understand the value of a postsecondary education. As one coordinator explained:

*Getting parents to understand that technical school, community college, and universities are all positives for their children. They need to understand that more education can mean more income in the future for their child.*

Five coordinators also reported the need for increasing the opportunities for students to visualize and feel comfortable picturing themselves at college. Coordinators shared that college campus visits, support with the college application process, and more general support during the transition from high school to college increase student's comfort and

familiarity. Several respondents noted GEAR UP was playing a substantial role in their school and community in building a college-going culture and facilitating conversations about college from middle school through high school.

## V. Cohort Student Interview Findings

This chapter summarizes the findings of one-to-one interviews with a small group of GEAR UP cohort students, with an emphasis on students' sense of belonging, college and career interests, perceptions of GEAR UP, and thoughts about the transition to high school. The team interviewed the same students in Year 1 and Year 2 to examine any major changes.

### Students' Perceptions of Schools and Sense of Belonging

Student interview findings are presented in three areas: (1) family arrangements, (2) community, and (3) school.

#### Family Arrangements

Similar to Year 1, all the 13 participants but one live with their parents and siblings. The other student lives with grandparents. Students did not report any changes in their living arrangements in the past year, and they plan to attend the closest high school to their homes. During the Year 1 interviews, two students reported having communication problems at home. This year, these students seemed to have overcome the family disagreements and felt calmer. A third student reported that their older sibling has a serious illness that requires extended periods of hospitalization. This family drives 2 hours for visits on the weekends. Despite the situation, the parents want the Grade 8 student to be involved in school as much as possible. A fourth student reported having a difficult time dealing with rejection. She tried out for the middle school softball team last year and did not make it. She had the same experience this year. The student also ran for class president, but she was not elected.

Despite these challenges, students felt comfortable talking at home about school issues and worries, as well as with friends. One student shared:

*I'll normally tell my mom if things are bad. ... My mom, she's always there for me. So, it's really helpful.*

#### Community

Students did not report any major changes in their communities. They have the same friends as last year and some made new ones. One student is allowed to have a boyfriend and another one enjoys having more freedom to go to places compared with last year.

Also compared to last year, students' future plans are similar as many are willing 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 for a good job opportunity or simply to travel. A student shared:

*I think I want to get out of the state and just go everywhere and explore.*

#### School

Students are highly satisfied with their school experiences in the 2022–2023 academic year. As Grade 8 students, they are the oldest in the building and administrators at one school expect them to be role models. One student explained:

*[We are expected to] step up and be more responsible to show the underclassmen what their expectations are when they're up there.*

Students think that they have had many opportunities to grow personally and faced different challenges, such as speaking in public. As one noted:

*When you have to stand in front of everybody in that class, I hate that so much. I have to do it though, to get the grade for it.*

One of the schools had a new principal this year, another school had a new vice principal, but besides a few new teachers, the staff are the same in the three schools. Students reported being satisfied with their teachers. One student said:

*They're teaching a lot. They're explaining a lot more so you can understand the subjects easier.*

When asked about their relationship with their counselor, students reported not having checked with him/her personally yet beyond the regular interactions in group settings in the classroom.

Compared to last year, all students but two found Grade 8 classes similar in difficulty or even easier than Grade 7 classes. Said one:

*It's just like last year because it's not much different. You just learn new skills.*

One student found Grade 8 "more difficult" and explained it in these terms:

*To me, seventh grade was reviewing stuff, but now it's new stuff.*

Math continued to be the subject that worries students the most. Typical of that view was this comment:

*I'm not doing this well. I'm not doing that well in math.*

Similar to last year, science class causes different reactions as some like the class and others dislike it. One student noted:

*It's just the most difficult thing ever—it makes no sense to me, for some reason. We were going over the genes, your blood types and everything, and it was so confusing.*

Grade 8 students are satisfied with the electives in their schools. One school offered Computing, Astronomy, Novels, Spanish, and Personal Finance. A second school offered Art, Intramural Sports, Coding, Career Planning, Homeroom, and Yearbook. These electives were added as a new academic period, and students felt satisfied with their options. The third school offered Art, Band, Advanced Physical Education, and Computing. Students from one of the schools mentioned that half of the Grade 8 students take an Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) class and the other half take a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) class. They think that teachers and principals selected which students went to each class.

Students felt motivated to perform well in school. A student who was having problems with math cut his involvement in sports to have time to attend after-school tutoring.

Like last year, all students except for one are active in sports year-round and plan to continue playing in summer leagues. In one of the schools, students perceived that they had more opportunities this year to get involved in after-school activities such as sports, band, pep rallies, and theater. Students from the other two schools mentioned tutoring and sports as the after-school offerings.

Students appreciated the school trips. They mentioned activities such as going to the movies and attending a war reenactment event. Students across schools also were excited about the upcoming end-of-the-school-year trip. One class was going to Washington D.C. and another to Tennessee. One student explained why it is important that the school provides opportunities to travel:

*We live in a fairly small town. We don't have a lot to do. So, I feel like whenever kids get these opportunities to see the big world, what lies out there, I feel like it definitely gives them motivation.*

On the downside, students from two schools mentioned stricter rules regarding the use of phones and a greater control about the possible use of drugs and vaping devices. One noted:

*I feel like instead of being so hard on us, they should trust us at least one more time, with our phones and stuff like that.*

In one of these schools, some Grade 8 students are selected to visit classes with younger students to talk about the risks of using drugs. One student said:

*We teach them about the dangers of doing drugs and stuff.*

## **Students' College and Career Interests**

In Year 1, most of the students indicated they already have a future profession in mind. One boy was interested in engineering, another wanted to be a doctor, and the third one expressed interest in K-12 teaching. The girls had a diverse set of interests: medical field, movie director, and lawyer as well as careers in cosmetology, astronomy, veterinary medicine, nursing, counseling, and the arts. This year, seven of the 13 students changed or expanded their career interests. The student interested in astronomy widened her interest to physics and pursuing that field as a college major. The student interested in law also sees herself as a counselor. The student who wanted to be a teacher is considering receiving formal training as a sports coach as well.

For some students, the switch was more drastic. One student who considered becoming a veterinarian now wants to be a nurse specializing in obstetrics; the other one wants to be a dental hygienist. The student interested in being a 911 operator is thinking now of attending college to become an ultrasound technician or to study something in the medical field.

Lastly, one of the students who wanted to be a nurse still wants to attend college, but she is no longer interested in nursing.

Regarding the educational path needed to practice their desired professions, students wanted to continue studying and going to college to get a degree. One student explained:

*I'd like to do something after high school. I'd like to further my education after high school—like a trade school, a community college, whatever it is, an online college, something.*

The student who wants to be a tattoo artist has plans to study arts in college as well. The student who wants to be a cosmetologist thought that she needed to attend college to get the certificate. She also wants to play softball in college:

*I'd like to go to college. I don't know which one I want, I have, like, five options.*

Students mentioned in-state colleges and universities as possible destinations. The student who wants to be an engineer is considering the University of North Carolina and working in Texas. The student who aspires to be a movie director still thinks that going to California is her best bet. The student who wants to study physics has her mind set to attend universities in the Northeast, preferably the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

## Impressions of GEAR UP and Other Sources of College/Career Information

Student interview findings are presented in two areas: (1) Family and school support and (2) GEAR UP activities and services.

### Family and School Support

Similar to Year 1, students felt supported by their families about their college plans but still have not had in-depth conversations about next steps. Some students had brief talks about "what college would be better" to attend, but most of the conversations were general about career interests or the benefits of having a degree. One student explained:

*They said that's a good idea and that they're proud of me because I'll be the first college graduate out of them.*

The student who wants to be a movie director had conversations with their father about it, but he did not seem very supportive. The student said:

*And then my dad had asked me what I wanted it to be. So, it was like, "I'm going to try to be a movie director," and he goes, "You know, that's probably going to be really hard for you. ... I mean, like a lot of college." And I was like, "Yeah, I know," and he goes "Have you thought of like an alternative?" And I was like, "Maybe photography if I can manage to get better at it." And he goes, "That one's probably going to be difficult, too."*

Regarding college and career advice, the AVID class is a resource in one of the schools. The three students who attended the AVID class received information about career/college options. Said one:

*We really just mostly talk about going to college and if we want to go to college and planning career paths.*

One student, however, said that they used that period to catch up on homework and other classes.

Some students mentioned doing some research online on their own about the colleges and universities that interest them. Specifically, these were the three students who wanted to study out of state and a student who wanted to study medicine at Marshall University. One of these students mentioned using the College for West Virginia (CFWV) website to research about jobs and careers:

*We go on CFWV. It's like a thing to learn about classes for college and all the careers.*

The student who is not interested in becoming a nurse anymore said she felt discouraged after looking for more information about nurses' duties online:

*I'll search, look up websites, and see like what college courses you need for it and classes. ... The things about nursing, I just didn't want to. I just thought about how you would see people, like, not well and I don't think mentally I could handle that.*

Overall, students feel that they will have more opportunities to explore different career paths in high school.

## GEAR UP Activities and Services

Regarding the GEAR UP activities and services offered in their schools, students in one school mentioned a trip to Marshall University; a visit to a technical/vocational school; the Student Leadership Academy; general announcements from the GEAR UP coordinator; and GEAR UP U at Marshall University. A student said the following about the Student Leadership Academy:

*We went to this huge place with all kinds of other schools and then there was Marshall University and all these other universities. Those people in those costumes as animals or like whatever their mascot is. And they did a dance off. And then two guys talked about GEAR UP and what all they had to offer.*

The same student described the visit to the technical/vocational school:

*We went to the trade school and there were people that would explain different types of careers. Robots and stuff with oil and all kinds of stuff. ... I learned what it was like being in a trade school, cause I've been to a college, but I haven't been there before. I liked what it was.*

Students from a second school also reported a campus visit to Marshall University, general announcements from the GEAR UP coordinator, and GEAR UP U. One student made the following comment about the trip to Marshall and their understanding about college:

*I think it's a bit like high school, just everyone is more mature, and they live on campus, and stuff. And it's basically a summer camp, but all year long.*

Students from this school also attended a college fair and two GEAR UP nights with their parents. Regarding this activity, a student described the purpose:

*The first time, they just taught you about college, and then the second time they taught you about money and how to save, and stuff like that.*

Students from the third school mentioned receiving general announcements from the GEAR UP coordinator, tutoring after class, and a virtual meeting with a representative from GEAR UP. Two of the students who attended did not recall the content or purpose of the virtual meeting but mentioned experiencing connectivity issues. Students had an upcoming visit to the University of Charleston and an upcoming workshop also in Charleston (STEM Academy with Kate the Chemist). One student seemed to be particularly excited about the GEAR UP activities:

*The opportunities this year have been fantastic, and I really enjoy it...I am really excited to go watch these chemistry experiments because again, I love science."*

Students from the third school also reported listening to a motivational guest speaker in a virtual activity along with other middle school students. They were also aware of the camp at Marshall University in the summer. Students from the three schools are most looking forward to the camp. One student described it as a three-day camp in which students had to pick three classes or areas of interest:

*I think I signed up for the sports class. ... I think there was one with engineering, but you have to sign up for three classes. And I'm excited to meet new people and make new friends and stuff.*

Students had a sense that they would receive more information about possible career pathways and college options in high school but often had little information beyond that. As one student remarked:

*I guess we'll see when I get there.*

They also shared what information GEAR UP could provide that would help them to make informed decisions about their future. Another student mentioned wanting more college campus tours:

*Probably visiting the college ... so I can like see what most of them are like.*

A third student suggested visits from colleges and technical school representatives at school, and two students wanted more information about college options. This student explained:

*I like to learn prices and how far colleges are and like housing and that type of stuff for colleges, what are its pricing and how far of a drive and that type of stuff.*

The student who wants to be a movie director would like to know which college degree would prepare her for this career. A fifth student mentioned, "maybe in high school, talk more about college scholarships and stuff you can do." A different student would like to have more information about the right path for the future:

*Start to get more familiar with things that I will be working with in the future and so I can get an idea of what's to come, what I should expect, what I should be studying for.*

Another student suggested it would be helpful to have more information about each career and the range of job possibilities associated with the career:

*Explain each career better and show what all you can do in that one career.*

## Transition to High School

Transitioning from middle school to high school can be an exciting time, but it can also be stressful in the view of students. From course selection to extracurricular activities, they shared a variety of comments such as the following:

*I'm going to have more teachers. Literally, so many more people. I am going to assume that the work is going to be harder.*

## High School Course Selection

Students said that they have received their Grade 9 course options and have to select their classes at the end of the Grade 8 school year. At the point at which the interviews occurred, students indicated that two schools had started the course selection process. One school had Grade 8 students visit the high school and meet teachers and visit labs and career and technical classrooms; these students received information about required classes, electives, honors classes, Advanced Placement classes, and dual credit classes.

One student shared what they knew about dual credit classes:

*We have a Southern [Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College] program where you do it as a junior, and you can get your first 2 years of college done.*

The student interested in engineering remembered visiting the engineering lab. Another student from this school mentioned that they discussed high school options in the Career Planning class:

*They're going over after high school and high school classes. They're going over what you could do after, more as a career.*

One student from the same school was aware of the career and technical education classes but could not elaborate:

*I don't really know how those work. I know some of them are just for juniors and that, and some of them are only for sophomores.*

Another student from this school expected high school to be the time to explore more career interests and to gain exposure to different paths.

Although students from this school had not yet made their course selections, they had an idea about what they wanted to take—and most of them want to take honors classes.

At the time of the interview, Grade 8 students from the second school recently scheduled their classes for next year. The school organized an after-school event to which parents were invited. One student described this event in the following way:

*We had a big meeting in our gym where our counselor ... talked about all of our classes, what they were. We got to fill them out. We got to ask questions about them. And so, I feel like that really helped with us picking classes and helping people get into things that I wanted.*

This event proved to be useful, in two students' views:

*I've learned that there are a lot more classes than I originally thought because I haven't heard of a lot because I don't have tons of friends in high school, so I really got to learn about all the different classes there are, all the different opportunities that are right in front of me.*

These students learned that career and technical classes were reserved for Grades 11 and 12 students and that the high school offers honors and dual credit classes. Grade 8 students from this school will tour the high school soon. Even though the middle and high schools are physically connected, middle school students were not knowledgeable of the high school operations.

Students at the third school had not started the course selection process yet. They could not mention the academic offerings or career pathways at their high school. Students were not sure about the electives the school offered. One student knew a bit about course options because he has siblings in high school:

*I knew about welding and all those because he'd [my brother] taken them and, oh, you can actually graduate with a nursing degree if you take Health Science or something like that.*

## Extracurricular Activities

Almost all the interviewed Grade 8 students had plans to stay involved in sports in high school. Besides sports, they were not able to mention other after-school activities that will be available:

*I think there's two that I don't know the name of one, but one is like the SADD [probably Students Against Destructive Decisions] club. It's not actually sad but, like, I don't know what it stands for. I've no idea.*

One student expressed interest in taking drama or theater classes, and another was interested in creating a club with an arts focus. For these students, participating in clubs is a way to meet friends. One student shared:

*We don't usually do clubs in our middle school, not as freely as we can in high school. So, I feel like if I can get into one in high school, I can be able to get more out there to get more people, more friends, because that's one of my other goals for high school.*

Lastly, another student is interested in opportunities for community service:

*In middle school, we don't get community hours, but I still do stuff. ... I'm going to try to do as much as I can.*

## Concerns and Expectations

Students across schools felt nervous about facing the academic rigors of high school. One student explained:

*The subjects are going to be harder.*

Students wanted to perform well in high school. One is even thinking about getting a tutor to have a strong start. Another student noted:

*Because I watched all my friends this year who have always had straight As go there and they'll have Ds and Fs. But I feel like I'll do fine, as long as I pay attention.*

Some students expressed that high school is the time to figure out what they want to do for a career. One student commented:

*I'm not really afraid of changing my career path because I know if I do ever think about changing it, the high school has plenty [of] other classes that I can choose from to get me thinking about different career options.*

The main challenges and concerns that students had about high school were of a social nature. Several students expect challenges about how to manage in a big school with new teachers, routines, and expectations. The following quote exemplifies concerns expressed by different students:

*I know people are going to be different once they get up there. Like they're going to see themselves as more mature—not being mean—but try to be more mature than they are. And I feel like that's going to mess up a lot of people.*

Others heard about bullying, fights, and other inappropriate behaviors, with one commenting:

*I've heard that the seniors are mean to freshmen and stuff.*

Additionally, other students are worried about not being able to make friends. As one stated:

*I'm also scared that my friends that I have now will drift apart, and that we won't be friends.*

## VI. Priority Student Focus Group Findings

This chapter contains highlights of the priority high school senior focus groups conducted at five high schools in spring 2023. It examines current conditions at these schools as they prepare to welcome cohort students next year. Findings also focus on students' sense of belonging and whether they see themselves on track to attend a two- or four-year college, a certificate/technical program, or no college at all.

### Current Conditions at the High Schools

Four of the five participating high schools had small senior classes for 2023. Whereas the largest school had around 120 graduating seniors, one school had only around 25, and another had approximately 37 seniors.

Most students interested in a college degree took advanced classes in high school. However, the offerings of Advanced Placement (AP) and dual credit classes varied among schools. While some schools only offered one or two AP courses, a third school had eight AP classes, four honors classes, and a wide selection of dual credit classes.

All five high schools offered dual credit opportunities, and the number of classes and arrangements varied among schools. One school provided school buses to transport students to a local community college to take dual credit classes on campus. Two of the focus group participants in this school will graduate with an associate degree, another senior is three credits short of this degree, and several others had some college credits as well.

In other schools, the offering of dual credit courses was more limited, and some classes were in person and others were delivered in an asynchronous format. All students across schools preferred in-person classes. As one student noted, "I want to kind of stay away from the virtual stuff. I learn better in person."

A senior who transferred in from another county 2 years ago thinks that her current school does not have a curriculum as rigorous as the one at her former high school. Other participants in the focus group at this school seconded her comments, adding that they did not find the curriculum challenging. As one stated:

*Here it just feels like there's just a lot of busy work to keep you busy during the time that you're here and not actually anything that's like helpful.*

College-bound students from a different school mentioned that teachers should provide a teaching/learning environment experience that is more similar to college expectations. These students expected a more interactive experience instead of lectures and study guides, as typified by these comments:

*She [the high school teacher] bashes us for asking questions.  
[Another high school teacher] gives us a study guide, then we'll have a test a week later. And that will just be continuously.*

Participants from this school noted that they did not have a wide range of electives. They suggested having a life skills class that helps students understand documentation related

to having a job, such as W-2 forms, how to fill out taxes, and other basic skills such as cooking or banking.

Equally popular among students were the career and technical education (CTE) classes. One significant finding—for the second consecutive year—was that students valued the academic rigor and opportunities in both advanced classes and CTE classes. In fact, many students who plan to go to college will graduate high school with technical certificates. For these students, CTE classes gave them the opportunity to have an early taste of what working in their desired field may be like.

For some students, these classes reinforced their commitment to a specific industry. For other students, these classes sparked an interest in a field they had not thought about previously. One student said:

*[T]hat broadcasting class I was talking about that I'm in. I didn't know I enjoyed being behind the camera, and then I kind of just found out.*

Students also provided suggestions to improve the offering and quality of both advanced and CTE classes. They mentioned that their high schools need more certified teachers to teach AP classes and dual credit classes. One student explained:

*We can think of a million different classes that should be offered here. It's the problem of getting people to agree to teach them and getting qualified to teach them.*

College-bound students from one school suggested hiring an AP math teacher and added that they did not feel academically prepared for college. Students reported that this school has experienced high teacher turnover.

Students in three schools also wanted to expand the certificate options and collaboration with local businesses to provide job shadowing and internship opportunities. Two students from one of the smallest schools combined their class schedule with an internship and were satisfied with the experience. One student shared:

*The [program] helped me decide because it allowed me to go to groups in health and wellness and get hands-on experiences with the doctors' offices.*

## **Students' Sense of Hope and Belonging**

All students, regardless of their career path, felt optimistic about their future. Some college-going students are more open to leaving the county or state than noncollege-bound students, though some college-bound students are not ready yet to move. One stated:

*I decided [on] Southern just a few months ago. I was between there and Marshall [University], but I just came to the realization that I wanted to stay home.*

Students who want to pursue a degree in nursing or in another health sciences major are confident that they can find good jobs in the community or the state of West Virginia. One student said:

*Most of the people that are graduating from that program right now already have jobs. So, I won't ever have to really worry about job security.*

However, in one of the schools, almost all students—regardless of their career path—spoke of the desire to leave the community. This sentiment could be linked to their negative perceptions about the school and its offerings as expressed by one student:

*It looks good on paper that we're all passing, going to college, and everything. But as far as our mood here, I mean, it sucks.*

In another school, seniors cited the rural context of the community and the lack of job opportunities as a reason to leave the county. One student shared:

*I really I don't plan on staying in [this county] because, if you probably noticed just driving through, there's not much here.*

In two of the five high schools, students did not feel valued or heard by the school leaders. In the first school, students expressed dissatisfaction toward counselors—including the GEAR UP coordinator—and administrators. One student frankly said:

*They don't listen to anyone. ... They ask, but they just don't listen.*

In the second school, dissatisfaction with school leadership was due to two factors: the high turnover of teachers and principals—which undermines stability and prevents long-term planning—and the recurrent neglect of students' opinions and ideas.

## Students' Future Plans

One of the Commission's goals when interviewing Grade 12 students was to gather in-depth insights about seniors' plans after graduation and the reasoning behind such decisions. To that effect, the research team worked directly with the on-site GEAR UP coordinators to recruit seniors with a variety of experiences and plans, and all interacted with the same conversation prompts, regardless of their plans. Three of the focus groups featured many students with different plans, but two focus groups had an overwhelming presence of college-track students. For the data analysis, the research team divided students into three categories: Associates/Bachelor's degree track students; certificate/technical track students; and workforce track students, according to their plans after graduation. The following three subsections describe each group in more detail. A fourth subsection was added to briefly describe the characteristics of the only indecisive senior.

### Associates/Bachelor's Degree Track Students

This category includes seniors who will attend a 2-year or 4-year degree-granting institution. In total, 24 seniors (or 61% of participants) fell into this group.

These students had diverse college and career interests. Health sciences majors were the most cited (nursing, sports medicine, veterinary, dermatology, radiology). Other interests were law, environmental sciences, engineering, math teacher, social studies teacher, criminology, business, and communications/broadcasting.

Most students first showed interest in their desired majors during their middle school years, which influenced their selection of elective classes in high school. One student mentioned

attending a 3-week camp at Fairmont State University, which provided an early experience of college life. Two other seniors from a different school noted that taking elective classes in business and broadcasting sparked their interest in these fields.

Two students decided about their college majors during their senior year. One of these students wanted to be a dental hygienist but a teacher encouraged her to pursue a degree in nursing. Another student toured a community college and changed their major from education to lab technician.

Students said they selected these majors because of personal interest and the conviction that they will get high-paid jobs and/or job security. One student explained:

*My program is 2 years, and it has a 100% hiring rate. Most of the people that are graduating from that program right now already have jobs. So, I won't ever have to really worry about job security.*

The value of attending college is also linked to students' career aspirations. Many students noted that to work in some professions, a college diploma is required: "You're not going to be a doctor if you don't go to school." Additionally, college-bound students think that a college degree is becoming a necessity. A student stated:

*It seems that college is getting more important as we go along. So, you can't really get most jobs without it anymore. So, it's more like a necessity.*

A senior mentioned that he has always enjoyed learning and college is a step further to grow as a person:

*I want[ed] to go to college throughout my school career. I've really enjoyed school and I like learning. So, I just want to further my education and hopefully get a good job.*

Seniors expect to study in both large and small public in-state colleges and universities: Marshall University, West Virginia University, Glenville State University, and Mountwest Community and Technical College. One student will attend a small private college in Kentucky with an athletic scholarship, and another student will attend Harvard University. Some seniors will go first to a local community college with the intent to transfer to a 4-year institution. For example, one student plans to start at Mountwest before transferring to Marshall for nursing.

Affordability and distance from their family home were the main reasons for seniors to select these educational institutions. For one student, the decision to attend Marshall University was a more complicated one:

*I didn't really want to go to Marshall because a lot of people in my family went and they were pushing me to go into Marshall and telling me I had to go there. But I had other colleges [I was] interested in going to. I had a full ride to Berea College, which is Kentucky. But they don't have radiology and I didn't want to go to Southern because I don't want to take the SAT test and Marshall doesn't require the SAT test.*

Most students will commute to attend classes. Some also want to find a part-time job to help with expenses. One student explained:

*I'm hoping I can pass the EKG test on the 9<sup>th</sup>, and I could get a job at the hospital while I go to college.*

For these students, college is viewed as both a stressful and exciting experience that "pays off in the end." When asked what comes to mind when thinking about college, seniors mentioned: "anxious," "meeting new people," "time management," "new experience," "unlimited stress," "academic work," "parties," "money," "expensive," and "not for everyone."

These seniors took AP and dual credit classes. Some students cited those classes as a factor in pursuing a specific major. In one school, the AP United States Government and Politics class was a positive influence on students, with one student commenting:

*AP government and politics—because it's just a class that educates you on how the world works around you, you know, and it's just so enlightening.*

A few students will graduate high school with an associate degree or just a few credits shy of this degree. This was particularly evident at the high school that sent students to the community college to take those classes. Still, these seniors would like to have more AP and dual credit opportunities.

Seniors also wanted more information about scholarships. One senior even suggested creating an app to apply to several of them at once, similar to the Common App to apply to college.

## Certificate/Technical Track Students

This category includes seniors who will attend a career/technical center to pursue a certificate. In total, seven seniors (or 17% of participants) fell into this group.

The desired certificates are mostly in the following industries: welding, cosmetology, lab technician, veterinary technician, and machinery. The education institutions chosen are BridgeValley Community and Technical College and Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College.

Students said their families support their decisions except one who faced pressure at home to change her field of interest from being a paramedic to another kind of certificate.

This group of seniors does not have interest in extending their education beyond their desired certificate. They do not believe they need an associate or bachelor's degree to practice their desired professions and they prefer a hands-on profession that requires a less intensive commitment in time and financial cost. These students said they did not take AP or dual credit classes while in high school. They are confident they can get high-paying jobs with a certificate. One student explained:

*The reason why I'm not going to college is because I won't need it. I'll already be making pretty good money as an electrician.*

A visit to the technical school was decisive for two students to find their passion:

*And [the GEAR UP coordinator] organized our sophomore year for us to go down to the vocational school, which is where I'm now further in electrical.*

These seniors had a strong interest in starting to earn money as soon as possible. One student said:

*So, what I could be doing is getting a degree in welding and also making money while doing it. So, it really caught my eye there about a trade school.*

All but one student already earned a certificate during their last 2 years of high school and wanted to earn more to reflect their skills and knowledge, which in turn will put them in a strong competitive position to access high-paid jobs. One student explained the advantages of getting a certificate and becoming a skilled worker instead of acquiring the skills as an apprentice:

*I could either go and do a 5-year apprenticeship under the steel workers, which is the union that is welding. Or I could just go to the BridgeValley program like 1 year, 9 months and just go and you start the job, as not an apprenticeship, but as a journeyman welder.*

These seniors want more internships and work-based opportunities and more flexibility to fit them in their calendars. One student shared:

*I tried to do shop job shadowing because it's a requirement for BridgeValley and just the timing to do it was awful. Like I couldn't do it during school, and I couldn't do it on weekends.*

## Workforce Track Students

The third group of students consists of seniors who are going directly to the workforce after graduation. All but two have already secured a job position in masonry, core drilling, tree removal, welding, extermination, and weeding and mowing grass.

Seven seniors (or 17% of participants) fell into this group. All students but one are male and most already earned a certificate in high school in the fields of carpentry, building maintenance, welding, or mechanic. Three students did not take any CTE classes during high school. One wants to work as a tattoo artist with the idea of learning the skills while working in a tattoo parlor. This student has not started to look for any apprenticeship position yet. The second student is looking for jobs as a welder or electrician. The third senior took Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) classes but is not interested in joining the Army. These last two students said they did not enjoy their experience in high school. One student stated:

*I wanted to do welding. But school really makes that tough on me. I hate school. I hate school. So, I believe a workforce would be the best thing for me for right now.*

This senior mentioned that the technical center associated with the high school did not offer a welding certificate; however, a fellow classmate and participant in the focus group listed all the certificates he got in the electrical industry and mentioned welding.

Other seniors are satisfied with the certificates earned in high school. They believe they obtained the knowledge and skills needed to perform well in their desired jobs. In the words of one student:

*You don't just learn ... you also learn about life experiences.*

Four students do not exclude the possibility of enrolling in a career/technical center in the future to earn more certificates if they are not happy with their work experiences. One student shared:

*I'm probably going to go to work with core drilling and after that probably go to a trade school and get a higher paying job.*

One senior in this group noted that he did not want to spend money even on a certificate from a career/technical school:

*There's not enough money to pay the bills.*

Students in this group perceive postsecondary education more as an expense than an investment. One student said:

*I could be working up to that point and making money [rather] than not really making money, kind of losing money. I could be getting sort of the same education while I'm actually working the job.*

These students advocated for a more flexible school schedule in which they could take all the required classes for high school graduation in the morning and have the rest of the day to pursue other interests, such as having a full-time job.

## Indecisive Students

Only one senior is included in this category. This student did not show any preference for any industry or field of study and did not make any decision about post-high school plans at the time of the interview:

*I'm still unsure because, I mean, I have no idea what I want to do. There are a million things you could do, but I don't know what I'd like to do for the rest of my life.*

This senior is afraid of making a commitment in time, money, and effort only to realize that they may not be happy with the chosen degree.

## Sources of Help and Support

Asked about the help and support they received when thinking about their career decisions, students typically cited one or more of three sources: their families, their school, and the GEAR UP program during their senior year.

### Family Support

In general, most students said their families supported their decisions. Two students mentioned disagreement at home regarding the path chosen. One student wanted to go to a community college first to take general classes and think about what she wanted to do in

the field of health care, but the family pushed her to go to a 4-year college to study radiology. Another student wanted to go to a CTE school to be a paramedic, but the family disagreed. They wanted her to get a different certificate. The senior was still thinking about what certificate would be a good replacement.

One student planning to attend college mentioned that higher education was a relevant topic in her house, even though she is a first-generation student:

*I'm a first generation. Nobody in my family has gone to college, so it's always been a big thing.*

The cost of attending college is a concern for families. As one student said, "My parents would not be paying for any college. They can't. I'm from a poor family with a set income." A student mentioned that one parent has a chronic illness that is consuming the family's financial resources. For these seniors, taking out loans is the last resort, and they are considering part-time jobs to cover expenses or attending completely virtually. One student stated:

*I just found out I got [the West Virginia Promise Scholarship] and before that I wasn't going to go to school [on campus]. I was just going to take a business degree online from Marshall and live at home because I was not going to take \$5,000 of loans out to go.*

Students said they believe that taking a gap year is detrimental and that their parents generally agree. The fear is that graduating seniors will lose momentum to continue their education. As a student mentioned, "*I might not go back to college.*"

A gap year was not an option either for career/technical track students or for workforce track students. Even some of the students who are considering getting a certificate if they do not like their jobs set the summer to make a decision. A student explained:

*It depends on how the workforce goes. So, I might go next fall and go take my welding classes at BridgeValley. It just depends on how I like the job I get.*

## School Support

In students' decisions about their plans after graduation, all of them felt supported and helped by teachers. One student shared:

*The majority of teachers here, if you came to them and were like, "Hey, I need help with this," the teachers will help you.*

Students appreciated that teachers showed interest in their plans. One student commented:

*They definitely want to make sure you pick something instead of just wandering out in life with nothing.*

Some teachers went beyond their responsibilities. In one school, one of the teachers held a part-time position as an instructor in the local community college. This teacher acted as the connecting piece between students, advanced classes, and college aspirations.

In another school, a teacher connected a student to his marital partner, who worked for a community college, to provide the student with more information about her desired major.

In a different school, one student mentioned that the first time she heard about Pell grants and West Virginia Invest was through a conversation with one teacher. This student said:

*[This information was] one of the reasons why I chose a community college because it could potentially be completely free.*

Students from one of the schools in which they felt neglected by leadership and counselors still cited the help of one teacher to navigate the process of selecting the right classes for their career ambitions, finishing school, and preparing for the next steps after graduation.

One grateful student remarked:

*[Teacher's name] is always calling people for us, contacting people for us. She's like, "If you need something, contact me; I'll contact them." And she always does it.*

In the other school where students felt dissatisfied, they found help and resources from the counselor, who is the GEAR UP coordinator. The school is small, and this person knows the students well. One student shared:

*If she knows that you're interested in something specific, and she runs across a scholarship that's set towards that, then she goes and she finds [student's name] or somebody else. And if she came across something, they pulled you out saying, "Hey, I heard about that. Check it." She'll even bring you the form that she printed out. It's ready to go. We just have to do it.*

Another source of support came from specific classes and activities. AP and dual credit classes provided college content. CTE classes provided opportunities to experience and show required skills to practice a profession. Three seniors from the same school who want to pursue a degree in nursing noted that they enjoyed the school health program. One student said:

*Going to the health and wellness center in [name of place], it just allows us to kind of dip our feet into the water of the medical field, kind of see what we're in for, just get a little bit of experience in it. And I think when I started doing that, that's when I realized that this is something I want to stick to.*

Students across four focus groups shared that their schools did a good job to promote all postsecondary options among students. In the fifth school, students shared second thoughts about their decisions during senior year. They attributed their indecision to the lack of support from counselors. One student remarked:

*If I'm going to be honest, the counselors and staff, they don't really talk to you about college or what you want to do. I had never talked to the counselors until this year, and that was because I needed stuff for graduation because they've got me Best of Class and until then I never talked to the counselors.*

## GEAR UP Activities

Among the GEAR UP offerings provided during the 2022–2023 academic year, students cited job fairs and college fairs as the most popular activities and those with the greatest impact. One school visited a college fair tailored for health careers. One student shared:

*We went to a college fair, and they had an actual station set up for nursing. It showed you how a baby was delivered and stuff. That was an activity that really pushed me to want to go into that.*

Students wanted to talk directly with college representatives. Two students said:

*You could talk with anybody that it was a bunch of teachers and staff that came down from [West Virginia University] and you could talk to them about their programs. "What do you want to do? How can I help you?" and all that stuff. And when I went there, it really helped me.*

*What helped me the most was them telling me about their experience. What they did, how they did it. Not sugarcoating it. They actually gave me the rundown.*

Another activity in which students were able to interact directly with college representatives was during campus tours. Seniors mentioned visiting West Virginia University, Fairmont State University, and nearby community colleges such as BridgeValley Community and Technical College. One of the smallest high schools organized visits to four different institutions of higher education. Seniors appreciated the many visits because “you always learn something new in every visit.”

For students interested in joining the workforce or pursuing a technical certificate, having more job fairs is important. One student explained:

*Maybe have like another job fair earlier in the school year. So, like, in the middle of the school year instead of at the very end. So, they get time to look at the jobs and really think about it and talk to the people before they have to, like, make a rough decision about stuff.*

Most students who planned to attend college completed the FAFSA at home and/or did not experience problems with doing it. Schools provided FAFSA workshops with external staff to help. Students from four schools thought that these experts came from Charleston, WV, but could not provide more details about their affiliation. Seniors from one high school identified the experts from a community college nearby. Overall, seniors want to have more information and resources about financial help and scholarships.

Seniors from one school mentioned that the school had an incentive for completing the FAFSA, but they did not think they reached the targeted quota. They suggested making FAFSA completion a requisite for graduation.

Among other activities, one school organized a wellness fair that students found valuable and much more needed in the school. One student said:

*I think a lot of people here struggle with mental health, so I think that the mental health day was a really good thing.*

At one focus group, students mentioned that they received weekly messages via the Txt 4 Success app. One student explained:

*I received a message almost every week, like every week, sometimes multiple times a week.*

Students across focus groups acknowledged that they did not check their school email accounts regularly and preferred communications to their personal email accounts or phones. Participants from one of the smallest schools mentioned reading the monthly newsletter the counselor/GEAR UP coordinator disseminates.

GEAR UP coordinators communicated with seniors in different ways. Students mentioned periodic newsletters and general announcements through the school intercom at the beginning of the day. However, seniors from one school mentioned that they missed these announcements when they were in the career and technical center. Gathering seniors as a group in a classroom was another common way of communication.

In one school, seniors appreciated the one-on-one meeting with the GEAR UP coordinator to talk specifically about students' plans and needs. In this school, the number of seniors was so small that the GEAR UP coordinator knew students' aspirations by heart and was able to tailor the support. One student mentioned that the GEAR UP coordinator stopped her in the halls to mention that she came across a specific scholarship for her desired major and that she was going to send the link to her later.

Having more one-on-one conversations with counselors and GEAR UP coordinators was one of the suggestions made by the seniors from another school. These seniors also suggested having a career expert to help students widen their career expectations:

*Like a career expert so you can see what there is to offer. Yeah, because I feel like us, we only know like a select amount of job opportunities and there's so much more than the little bit that we know.*

Students from one school noted that they did not receive help from the assigned GEAR UP coordinator. Below is one example of a complaint:

*They used to talk to students about scholarships and give scholarships out a bulletin with scholarships on them. They don't do that no more. They don't tell us what we can do to get scholarships.*

Participants in this focus group also mentioned that some announcements for GEAR UP activities were made with such short notice that it was difficult for them to make proper arrangements to participate. In this school, students took part in one college fair, one job fair, FAFSA workshops, and a college tour organized by a teacher.

To be able to make plans and arrangements for the future, seniors across schools suggested the program work earlier with students. One student recommended:

*The same thing that they're doing with us now—do it for all 4 years.*

## VIII. Discussion and Recommendations

The evaluation team's Year 2 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:

**Career and technical education continue to be of interest to both college and non-college-going students.** Incoming students need more awareness of career and technical education options, and the possible career paths that certifications can provide. In the spotlight analysis of Cohort 1 students who did and did not indicate they planned to continue their education, over two-fifths (41%) of students who did not plan to continue cited the desire to work after high school as the main reason they may not continue their education. Across all Cohort 1 students, regardless of their reported plans to continue, 29% indicated wanting to work as the primary reason they may not continue. Additionally, cohort interviews highlighted that students, even as early as middle school, change their career interests from year to year, as most student participants changed or expanded their career interests in Year 2. Focus groups with priority students also indicated that students were interested in more job shadow and internship opportunities.

**College affordability and knowledge of college cost persist as a challenge among students and parents.** When asked about knowledge of college and career topics, Cohort 1 students had lower mean scores than Cohort 1 parents in areas related to paying for college, such as FAFSA, work-study, and federal loans. Even among the Cohort 1 students who reported they planned to continue their education after high school, they most frequently (43%) cited cost as the main reason they may not continue. Other knowledge gaps were evident among both parents and students. Less than a quarter of students and parents correctly estimated the cost of a 4-year college (18% and 23%, respectively) and community college (21% and 22%, respectively). The Pell grant and WV Invests grant were the two least frequently correctly identified financial aid sources among Cohort 1 students and parents. The limited knowledge and familiarity are consistent with the five priority student focus groups, in which only one student mentioned familiarity with the WV Invests grant, suggesting the need for not only increased awareness of national financial aid and scholarship options but also for local and state options.

**Several findings suggest that parents should continue to be leveraged to support student college and career knowledge and awareness.** Parents understood the importance of a postsecondary education as they agreed that their student going to college would lead to a better future and most (85%) aspired for their student to attain a postsecondary education. Generally, parental knowledge, awareness, and hope were higher than those of Cohort 1 students; parents had higher correct estimates of college costs, identifications of financial aid sources, and knowledge of FAFSA. Cohort 1 parents not only had higher reported hope than students, but also reported being more hopeful than the R-Comp group parents. The majority (82%) of parents desire more information on WV GEAR UP and in Year 2 there was a significant increase in personnel-reported involvement with parent/family peer networks, suggesting there is already an emphasis on leveraging parents.

**With this consideration in mind, engagement with parents and student mentors is crucial.** Parents reported they were aware of WV GEAR UP, however there are additional opportunities to engage with them. Parents may be most likely to attend activities their students are involved in; finding new opportunities to engage with parents at these activities is a potential area for improvement. Personnel survey findings suggest there is a lack of integration of college messaging into other school events, such as sport events and art performances. Site coordinator survey participants reported needing more tips for parent outreach. In addition to engaging parents, administrators and in particular teachers, generally reported lower involvement in college- and career-related activities, compared to counselors. Finding opportunities for students, especially male students, to connect with teachers and administrators is important to help students find mentors and role models within their school for college and career related activities. Personnel survey respondents who reported working with Grades 9–Grade 12 students reported significantly lower agreement that creativity and original thinking were highly valued compared to personnel serving Grades 6–Grade 8 students.

**Grade 8 Cohort 1 students' sense of hope was significantly higher than Grade 8 R-Comp.** The Grade 8 Cohort 1 students reported significantly higher means in problem solving, well-being, getting things in life that are important, and knowledge that things in the past will help in the future than the R-Comp students. Additionally, the overall student Cohort 1 mean hope score was significantly higher than that of the R-Comp group when they were in Grade 8. Suggesting that the services provided to students through GEAR UP may be supporting higher student hope. A spotlight analysis comparing students who did and did not indicate they planned to continue their education found that students who did not plan to continue had significantly lower levels of hope than the students who did plan to continue their education.

## Recommendations for Year 3

In response to these findings and trends, the evaluation team offers the following recommendations to the Commission for consideration as it begins Year 3 of the 2021–2028 GEAR UP grant:

**Offer Career Pathway Days to engage students.** WV GEAR UP should consider partnering with colleges and employers to sponsor Career Pathway Days that show the various paths students can take in moving from high school to a self-sustaining wage, including the education required for those careers. Such events could feature guest speakers talking about the paths taken to successful careers. These efforts would complement the WV Invests marketing initiative planned for the 2023–2024 academic year.

**Support career interest inventories and Career Fairs.** The program should consider increased use of career interest inventories and Career Fairs to help students identify and refine their interests as they approach high school graduation. WV GEAR UP and school staff could use these results to better target job shadowing and internship opportunities. Cultivating student interest in entrepreneurship may be another way to link career interest with post-high school education. Organizations such as the Network for Teaching

Entrepreneurship, [www.nfte.com](http://www.nfte.com), have offered programming for use by WV GEAR UP programs.

**Design engaging workshops.** As some students seem disinterested in college and others are uncertain about how to pay for college, WV GEAR UP should consider designing fun, engaging workshops both on affordability and the value of postsecondary education. Every workshop should feature an early “hook” to appeal to students. Examples include the Madison High School activity undertaken recently that featured different paychecks showing how further education can lead to better salaries. Scholarship workshops might start by highlighting unusual scholarships (for tall people, vegans, and so forth, at sites such as <https://blog.prepscholar.com/complete-list-weirdest-scholarships-you-can-win>) that students may find particularly interesting. From such engaging starts, facilitators could then emphasize the many federal, state, and local options to pay for college.

**Enhance parent engagement strategies.** About three-quarters (74%) of site coordinators indicated they would like more tips on parent outreach, which could help build family support for postsecondary education. In response, GEAR UP may offer coordinators resources from the field such as The Parent Engagement Toolkit from Oregon GEAR UP, <https://oregongearup.org/resource/parent-engagement-toolkit>. This resource offers a variety of ideas such as parent newsletters, parent peer networks, and conversation starters to help parents talk with their children about the future.

**Market at major events at the school and in the community.** WV GEAR UP should continue to sponsor information desks or tables at school events—particularly sporting events, band concerts, and so on—to emphasize a college-is-possible message to families. The program also could work with college or minor league sports teams to sponsor a college and career event where students see a game and hear from those with various related careers (such as sports medicine or marketing). Examples include College and Career Days organized by GEAR UP Massachusetts with the Boston Celtics (NBA) and Worcester Red Sox (minor league baseball).

**Increase educator involvement.** Coordinators also should work to increase teacher and educator involvement in WV GEAR UP and set goals to increase rates of teacher involvement. Of particular value may be athletic coaches who can serve as role models to students. In addition, WV GEAR UP might borrow from the work of the West Virginia First2 Network (STEM education program), where college students developed a list of items on what they wish they knew before college. This work has resulted in a set of resources for teachers to explore with their students. Available at <https://first2network.org/resources-for-high-school-teachers/>, these concepts could be the basis for one or more workshops to promote college knowledge before high school graduation.

**Implement engaging activities to build student enthusiasm for their future.** With some students expressing a lack of hope, program activities should all tie into the idea of cultivating hope among students. Engaging activities should seek to improve the mindset of students and build enthusiasm as they think about their future. Mentoring and social and emotional well-being opportunities already underway offer promising approaches in this

regard and merit further study in Year 3. Parents also may benefit from workshops on how to support their child's social and emotional well-being.

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## Appendix A. Technical Detail

Table A.1 Student Gender

	Grade 8 Students		Grade 8 Parents	
	R-Comp	Cohort 1	R-Comp	Cohort 1*
Male	52%	49%	48%	44%
Female	46%	47%	52%	54%
No disclosure	--	3%	--	2%
Other	2%	2%	<1%	--

Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys and WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

Note. Parents reported the gender of their student in the parent survey. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. \*Parent responses differed significantly between the retrospective comparison (R-Comp) group and Cohort 1:  $\chi^2=21.040$ ,  $p\leq.001$  ( $\phi=.108$ ).

Table A.2 Race and Ethnicity of Respondents

	Grade 8 Students		Grade 8 Parents	
	R-Comp	Cohort 1	R-Comp	Cohort 1
White	96%	95%	97%	91%**
Black or African American	4%	3%	3%	6%*
Asian	1%	1%	1%	1%
Hispanic or Latino/a	2%	2%	1%	3%*
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%	2%	1%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%	<1%	--	<1%
Middle Eastern or North African	<1%	<1%	--	<1%
Other	1%	1%	<1%	<1%

Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys and WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

Note. Percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. \*The percentage of parent/guardian respondents who selected Black differed significantly between the R-Comp group and Cohort 1:  $\chi^2=8.207$ ,  $p\leq.01$  ( $\phi=.077$ ); the percentage of parent/guardian respondents who selected Hispanic or Latino/a differed significantly between the R-Comp group and Cohort 1:  $\chi^2=9.665$ ,  $p\leq.01$  ( $\phi=.083$ ). \*\*The percentage of parent/guardian respondents who selected White differed significantly between the R-Comp group and Cohort 1:  $\chi^2=20.760$ ,  $p\leq.001$  ( $\phi=-.122$ ).

**Table A.3 Primary Language Spoken at Home**

	Grade 8 Students		Grade 8 Parents	
	R-Comp	Cohort 1	R-Comp	Cohort 1
English	99%	99%	99%	99%
Spanish	1%	<1%	<1%	1%
Other	<1%	1%	<1%	--

Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys and WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

**Table A.4 Highest Level of Education Earned by Parents**

	Grade 8 Students		Grade 8 Parents	
	R-Comp	Cohort 1	R-Comp	Cohort 1*
Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, e.g., certificate or career/tech. cert.) or less	34%	32%	56%	67%
2-year college degree (associate) or higher	30%	33%	42%	29%
Don't know	37%	35%	1%	4%

Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys and WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. \*Parent/guardian respondents differed significantly between the R-Comp group and Cohort 1:  $\chi^2=32.374$ ,  $p\leq.001$  (phi=.153).

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

	Grade 8 Students		Grade 8 Parents	
	R-Comp	Cohort 1	R-Comp	Cohort 1
0	57%	55%	61%	58%
1	21%	20%	16%	18%
2	9%	9%	7%	8%
3	3%	4%	1%	2%
4	2%	2%	<1%	1%
5 or more	3%	4%	1%	1%
I don't have siblings/other students	6%	6%	15%	13%

Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys and WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

**Table A.6 Estimated Family Income**

	Grade 8 Parents	
	R-Comp	Cohort 1*
\$30,000 or Less	24%	18%
\$30,001-\$60,000	18%	24%
\$60,001-\$100,000	27%	25%
\$100,001 or More	17%	17%
Don't know or I'd rather not say	15%	17%

Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp parent surveys.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. \*Parent/guardian respondents differed significantly between the R-Comp group and Cohort 1:  $\chi^2=12.357$ ,  $p\leq.05$  ( $\text{V}=.094$ ).

**Table A.7 Parent Relationship to Student**

	Grade 8 Parents	
	R-Comp	Cohort 1
Parent	87%	84%*
Grandparent	7%	8%
Legal guardian	7%	7%
Step or foster parent	3%	2%
Other	1%	1%

Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp Parent Surveys.

Note. Percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. \*The number of parent/guardian respondents who selected Parent differed significantly between the R-Comp group and Cohort 1:  $\chi^2=2.613$ ,  $p\leq.05$  ( $\text{phi}=-.043$ ).

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

		Grade 8 Students	
		R-Comp	Cohort 1
<u>In the last 30 days, I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.</u>			
Never / rarely true		96%	96%
Sometimes / often true		4%	4%
<u>In the last 12 months, I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.</u>			
Never / rarely true		96%	96%
Sometimes / often true		4%	4%
<u>In the last 12 months, I have had a hard time staying focused on my homework or other things I had to do.*</u>			
Never / rarely true		55%	63%
Sometimes / often true		45%	37%
<u>In the last 12 months, I have been so worried about something that I could not sleep at night.*</u>			
Never / rarely true		65%	70%
Sometimes / often true		35%	30%

Source: WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and R-Comp student surveys.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. \*Responses to *in the last 12 months, I have had a hard time staying focused on my homework or other things I had to do* differed significantly between the R-Comp group and Cohort 1:  $X^2=25.590$ ,  $p\le.001$  ( $\phi=-.08$ ); responses to *in the last 12 months, I have been so worried about something that I could not sleep at night* differed significantly between the R-Comp group and Cohort 1:  $X^2=15.591$ ,  $p\le.001$  ( $\phi=-.06$ ).

**Table A.9 Personnel Gender**

	Year 1	Year 2
Male	30%	27%
Female	70%	73%
Other	<1%	<1%

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 and Year 2 personnel surveys.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

**Table A.10 Personnel Community Type**

	Year 1	Year 2
Rural	81%	83%
Suburban	15%	13%
Urban	3%	3%
Other	1%	1%

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 and Year 2 personnel surveys.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

**Table A.11 Personnel First-Generation Status**

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

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 and Year 2 personnel surveys.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

**Table A.12 Personnel Role**

	Year 1	Year 2
Administrator	6%	6%
Counselor	7%	4%
Teacher	80%	80%
Other	8%	10%

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 and Year 2 personnel surveys.

Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

**Table A.13 Grade(s) Served by Personnel**

	Year 1	Year 2		Year 1	Year 2
Grade 6	29%	35%	Grade 10	48%	45%
Grade 7	41%	41%	Grade 11	48%	46%
Grade 8	40%	40%	Grade 12	48%	44%
Grade 9	43%	40%			

Source: WV GEAR UP Year 1 and Year 2 personnel surveys.

Note. Percentages will not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

## Appendix B. Data Collection Instruments

### Grade 8 Student Survey

#### 2022–23 West Virginia GEAR UP Student Survey – Grade 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 on behalf of WVHEPC to make sure GEAR UP is helping students the best that it can.

GEAR UP is asking all students in your grade to complete a survey about college knowledge, plans, and school activities. 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 by the ICF and WVHEPC research team. We will only summarize answers to questions across groups of students in reports. Your individual answers will not be shared in any reports. 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](mailto: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](mailto: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 7.*

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.

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### 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]

Respondents who did answer to 3. What grade are you in? (Select ... with Other – Write In Required): are redirected to page 7.

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

- 8  
 Other – Write In (Required): \_\_\_\_\_

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## Section II: About Your School

4. With which gender do you most identify? (Select only one answer.)

- Male  Other – Write In (Required): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Female  Non-binary/gender-queer  
 Prefer not to disclose

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

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

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.)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> 0<br><input type="radio"/> 1<br><input type="radio"/> 2<br><input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4<br><input type="radio"/> 5 or more<br><input type="radio"/> I don't have brothers or sisters |
|--|--|

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

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
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.				

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### 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.)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> My grades aren't good enough<br><input type="radio"/> It costs too much/I can't afford it<br><input type="radio"/> I <u>need</u> to work<br><input type="radio"/> I <u>want</u> to work<br><input type="radio"/> Concerns about COVID-19 | <input type="radio"/> Family issues<br><input type="radio"/> I plan to enlist in the military<br><input type="radio"/> I won't receive/be eligible for enough financial aid<br><input type="radio"/> 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.				

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Respondents who didn't answer to 3. What grade are you in? (Select ... with 8 are redirected to page 7

## 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 and fees 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 students offers up to \$5,000 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 2022–23 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 \$6,895 during the 2022–23 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> WV Invests Grant<br><input type="radio"/> WV Promise Scholarship | <input type="radio"/> WV Higher Education Grant<br><input type="radio"/> Federal Pell Grant |
|--|---|

22. This financial aid program for West Virginia students was designed to cover the cost of tuition, mandatory fees and academic program fees for certificate or associate degree programs in specific high-demand fields at a participating West Virginia public two- or four-year institution. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> WV Invests Grant<br><input type="radio"/> WV Promise Scholarship | <input type="radio"/> WV Higher Education Grant<br><input type="radio"/> 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				

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## Section V: College and Career Activities/Services

24. Have you participated in any of the activities below in the last year? 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)						
In-person help with classes (for example, tutoring or homework help)						
Virtual 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(in-person or virtual)						
Student Leadership Academy						
Mentoring						

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
- 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
- Family events
- Other - Write In (Required): \_\_\_\_\_

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

## Grade 8 Parent Survey

### West Virginia GEAR UP Parent Survey: 2022–23 School Year – 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 on behalf of WVHEPC to make sure GEAR UP is helping students the best that it can.

GEAR UP is asking all parents/guardian of students in 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 by the ICF and WVHEPC research team. We will only summarize answers to questions across groups of parents/guardians in reports. Your individual answers will not be shared in any reports. 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](mailto: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](mailto: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 8.*

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.

## 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]

*Respondents who answered **In what grade...** with **Other – Write in (Required)**: are redirected to Page 8.*

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

- 8
- Other – Write In (Required): \_\_\_\_\_

4. With which gender do you most identify? (Select only one answer.)

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to disclose
- 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

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Page 3

## 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/families 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.				

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### 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.						

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## 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 and fees 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 students offers up to \$5,000 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 2022–23 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 \$6,895 during the 2022–23 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 was designed to cover the cost of tuition, mandatory fees and academic program fees for certificate or associate degree programs in specific high-demand fields at a participating West Virginia public two- or four-year institution. 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

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Page 6

*Respondents who didn't answer to 3. In what grade is the student that b... with 8 are redirected to page 8.*

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				

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## Section V: GEAR UP Activities/Services

24. Have you participated in any of the family activities below in the last year? 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 (in-person or virtual)						

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): \_\_\_\_\_

## Grade 8 School Personnel Survey

### West Virginia GEAR UP School Personnel Survey: 2022–23 School Year

Thank you for your continued partnership in helping West Virginia's students through the West Virginia (WV) GEAR UP program. GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. West Virginia was one of only four states that received this funding last year. This exciting program will serve 11 counties for 7 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 Jim 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 to find ways to improve services impacting your students and their families over the next 7 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 Kimberly Good with ICF at [Kimberly.Good@icf.com](mailto:Kimberly.Good@icf.com) or (989) 573-3679. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you can contact Christine Walrath at [christine.walrath@icf.com](mailto: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.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Applied for federal student aid (Free Application for Federal Student Aid [FAFSA])
<input type="checkbox"/> Applied for state grants and other aid programs
<input type="checkbox"/> Applied for scholarships
<input type="checkbox"/> Applied for work-study programs/internships
<input type="checkbox"/> 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.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Received student aid in the form of loans (needed to be repaid)
<input type="checkbox"/> Received student aid in the form of grants (did not need to be repaid)
<input type="checkbox"/> Received scholarships
<input type="checkbox"/> Received work-study programs/internships
<input type="checkbox"/> No personal experience receiving financial support to pay for college

6. What is your current primary position at your school?

- |                                     |                                    |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Administrator | <input type="radio"/> Teacher      |
| <input type="radio"/> Counselor     | <input type="radio"/> 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.)

- |                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 6 | <input type="radio"/> 10 |
| <input type="radio"/> 7 | <input type="radio"/> 11 |
| <input type="radio"/> 8 | <input type="radio"/> 12 |
| <input type="radio"/> 9 |                          |

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 <b>[THIS COLUMN ONLY VISIBLE FOR TEACHERS]</b>
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Students are encouraged to choose courses that prepare them for college.	1	2	3	4	1
Creativity and original thinking are highly valued.	1	2	3	4	1
Teachers are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum.	1	2	3	4	1
Students are learning effective problem-solving skills.	1	2	3	4	1
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
Most students will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution.	1	2	3	4	1
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
Teachers in my school can help students overcome frustration when confronted with difficult tasks.	1	2	3	4	1
Teachers and staff help students set goals that are achievable.	1	2	3	4	1
Students encourage one another to follow their college and career goals.	1	2	3	4	1
Teachers can help increase the percentage of students who are promoted to the next grade at my school.	1	2	3	4	1
Teachers and staff acknowledge student goals, abilities, and talents when talking to them about future college options.	1	2	3	4	1
Students are exposed to success stories of school alumni to help encourage their future success.	1	2	3	4	1
Teachers and staff talk with parents and families about their ability to	1	2	3	4	1

	In My School				In My Classroom <span style="color: red;">[THIS COLUMN ONLY VISIBLE FOR TEACHERS]</span>			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
help prepare their student(s) for college.								
Teachers and staff make themselves available to students and their families when completing college materials.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
College pennants, banners, and posters are visible in your school.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
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.

	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 school is doing pretty well.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
My school is doing just as well as other schools in the area.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
My school provides lots of ways to help students solve problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
I think students' past experiences will help them in the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Even when others want to quit, our school finds ways to persevere.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
I am hopeful for the future of our students.	<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
FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)	1	2	3	4

College savings plan/529	1	2	3	4
WV Higher Education Grant	1	2	3	4
Federal grants, loans, and work-study	1	2	3	4
Scholarships (e.g., institutional)	1	2	3	4
Promise Scholarship	1	2	3	4
WV Invests grant	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
[If respondent serves Grades 6, 7, 8 based on response to Q8:] Transition into secondary education	1	2	3	4
[If respondent serves Grades 9, 10, 11, 12 based on response to Q8:] Transition into postsecondary education	1	2	3	4
ACT/SAT	1	2	3	4
Tutoring support	1	2	3	4
Course test preparation	1	2	3	4
High school graduation course requirements	1	2	3	4
College match and fit	1	2	3	4
The importance/benefit of a college education	1	2	3	4

15. On average, how much do you think it costs for 1 year of in-state tuition and fees 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							
A 2-year public community/technical college in West Virginia							

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

16. This merit-based financial aid program for West Virginia residents offers up to \$5,250 annually starting in the 2023–2024 academic year to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back.

West Virginia Invests Grant

West Virginia Promise Scholarship

West Virginia Higher Education Grant

Federal Pell Grant

17. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provided maximum annual awards of \$3,300 during the 2023–24 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back.

West Virginia Invests Grant

West Virginia Promise Scholarship

West Virginia Higher Education Grant

Federal Pell Grant

18. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provided qualifying students up to \$7,395 during the 2023–24 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back.

West Virginia Invests Grant

West Virginia Promise Scholarship

West Virginia Higher Education Grant

Federal Pell Grant

19. This financial aid program for West Virginia students was designed to cover the cost of tuition, mandatory fees, and academic program fees for certificate or associate degree programs in specific high-demand fields at a participating West Virginia public 2- or 4-year institution. This amount does not need to be paid back.

West Virginia Invests Grant

West Virginia Promise Scholarship

West Virginia 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).

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Extremely		Yes, I have been involved	No, I have not been involved
Academic planning/career advising	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Credit recovery, AP, and dual-credit opportunities	1	2	3	4		Y	N

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Extremely		Yes, I have been involved	No, I have not been involved
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., GEAR UP U)	1	2	3	4		Y	N
College campus visits (including virtual)	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Mentoring programs (e.g., Student Success Society, Student Leadership Academy)	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Txt 4 Success initiative	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Professional development (e.g., Social and Emotional Learning, Hope, Texas Instruments [TI])	1	2	3	4		Y	N
Academic enrichment (e.g., TI activities)	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
- Most students
- About half of the 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
- Very helpful

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

- More professional development on GEAR UP implementation
- Additional town hall meetings
- Assistance with the GEAR UP workplan
- Tips for working with students
- Tips for parent outreach
- Other (*please comment below*)

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.*)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Tutoring                | <input type="radio"/> Afterschool and summer programs   |
| <input type="radio"/> Mentoring               | <input type="radio"/> Academic enrichment opportunities |
| <input type="radio"/> College visits          | <input type="radio"/> Other ( <i>please describe</i> ): |
| <input type="radio"/> Career information      | -----   |
| <input type="radio"/> Parent workshops        | -----   |
| <input type="radio"/> Financial aid workshops |   |

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!**

## Cohort 1 Student Interview Protocol

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

*[For returning participants]:* Last year, we talked about your experiences as a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student, your aspirations for 8<sup>th</sup> grade, your thoughts about your school and teachers, your hometown and community, your plans for the future, possible careers, and the idea of attending college. We are going to cover all these points today as well as some new topics.

First, let's talk a little bit about your experiences as an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student.

*[For new participants]:* Today we are going to talk about your experiences as an 8th grade student, your aspirations for 9<sup>th</sup> grade, your thoughts about your school and teachers, your hometown and community, your plans for the future, possible careers, and the idea of attending college.

1. Tell me about how your school year is going so far. Which classes do you take? Are these the classes you wanted to take?  
*Probe for whether they view it as easy or hard. Probe for favorite/least favorite subjects, connections with teachers and students.*
2. When compared to 7<sup>th</sup> grade, do you find 8<sup>th</sup> grade more difficult, less difficult, or similar?  
*Why?*
3. What is your biggest challenge? What is the easiest part?
4. Is 8<sup>th</sup> grade living up to your expectations so far?

*Probe for fulfilling expectations academically, socially, personally and reasons why or why not it is meeting expectations.*

5. Last year, you mentioned activities important to you (such as practiced sports after school, liked to do arts—at least one activity per student based on last year’s answers). What about this year?
6. Is the school doing something different or new this year, like having more or fewer activities, trips, and dances, more or fewer electives, a new cafeteria menu...compared to last year?
7. What do you like best about your school? *Probe for activities, services, events.* Are there things that you think could be improved?
8. When something is difficult for you in school, do you reach out for help? If so, to whom do you go? If not, what are your reasons for not seeking help?  
*Probe for going to teachers, counselors, tutors, parents/guardians, siblings. Probe why the student identified the specific individual(s).*
9. What activities do you take part in when you are not in school (after school and during the summer)? Do you have any new interests since we spoke last year?
10. Tell me more about your community this year. What’s it like to live around here right now?  
*Probe whether anything has changed for the student since last year or new activities in town. Probe student’s feelings about the community.*
11. 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***

**Last year, I read some statements about how you felt you were doing in school. I am going to do the same thing today.**

12. 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.**

13. How do you feel about going to high school next year?
14. Tell me about your plans for 9<sup>th</sup> grade next year.  
*Probe for academic, personal, and extracurricular activity goals.*
15. What do you know about the teachers and the classes you can take in high school?  
*Probe if student knows about the different academic paths and offerings, including Honors/AP and career/technical education classes.*
16. Are you interested in a specific career path in high school? If so, how did you learn about it?  
*Probe if student attended any information session or talked with teachers, counselors.*
17. Please tell me whether you have a career in mind. Last year, you said you were thinking of [going to college, playing professional sports, etc.] after graduating high school. Are you still interested in this career? What are your reasons for considering this career? Do you know the education level required for the career?
18. 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.)*
19. Who do you talk with about your plans for your future? What are your conversations about specifically?  
*Probe for discussions with parents/guardians, siblings, extended family, and members of the community. Probe for discussion of college and 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 when you were in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and will continue to be part of the program for the next 5 years.

20. Have you participated in any GEAR UP activities this year, such as career exploration activities, college and career fairs, college representative visits, college tours? Why or why not?
21. What did you learn through these activities? Which ones did you like the most? And the least? Why?
22. Do you plan to participate in GEAR UP activities in high school? Why or why not?

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

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

**Thank you for your time.**

## Priority Student Focus Group Protocol

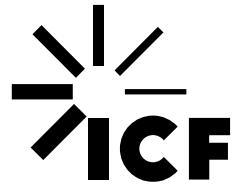
### Facilitator Guidelines:

- Introduce yourself and colleagues as representatives of ICF and describe your role (i.e., facilitator).
- Briefly discuss the focus group's purpose: *Thank you for joining us today to discuss your future plans, your experiences in school, and your experiences with West Virginia GEAR UP. Your county is one of only 11 in the state selected to participate in GEAR UP. We want to understand how it impacts students, their families, and the schools they attend. ICF has been chosen 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 and your plans for the future. In this session, we have students with different plans and goals after graduation. We at ICF and the GEAR UP program acknowledge and value all experiences and plans. We want to hear and to learn from each of you. 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. I need your help to create a welcoming session in which students feel comfortable to share. Please, only one person speaks at a time. This focus group discussion will take approximately 45–55 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 so others can't access it; 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: *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!***

Time	Opening Questions	Facilitator's Activity
<b>5 min</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> Please introduce yourself and tell us your plans after graduation. Are your plans set or do you think they might change?	<i>Probe if they will continue studying, join the military, workforce, or take a gap year, for example.</i>
<b>7-10 min</b>	<b>REASONS FOR THE DECISION</b> Take a moment and think about the two or three main reasons behind your decision of [attending college/vocational school/work/finish studying, etc.-what students indicated previously]. What are the main reasons behind your decision? <i>Specifically for the non-college going students:</i> What are the reasons you are not interested in college?	<i>For the non-college going: Probe for reasons such as: The career path doesn't require a college degree; Cost; Poor grades; Lack of interest; Not a clear idea of what they want to study; Desire/need to work immediately; Family responsibilities; More time to think/plan about the future; Too much stress/workload; A belief that college is not needed to succeed in life</i>
<b>5 min</b>	<b>CAREER/WORK PLANS</b> If you have a career in mind, what do you think is the education needed to get there? Do you have a plan to get that education?	<i>Probe if college or any kind of credential/certification is required for these careers.</i>
<b>5-7 min</b>	<b>HELP FROM YOUR SCHOOL</b> Looking back at your high school experience, what specific classes have helped you when thinking about your future? Which people have helped you? Which activities and services? Is there any other help that you consider important?	<i>Probe for participation in GEAR UP activities: financial aid/FAFSA help, career exploration, test prep, college visits, AP courses, dual credit courses, tutoring, mentoring, etc. Probe whether student has talked with counselor or another individual to set up a career and academic plan.</i>
<b>5-7 min</b>	<b>VALUE AND BENEFIT OF COLLEGE</b> How would you define the value of college? Do you believe there is value in attending? What kind of messages do you receive about attending college? What is your opinion of them? <i>For the non-college attending:</i> Is college an option for you for a later time?	<i>Probe whether or not they see it as worthwhile to attend college if it means they forego a full-time paycheck. Probe whether they believe messages about the importance of college are effective or not and where they learned about them (web site, school presentation, etc.) Probe for whether they may take a gap year.</i>
<b>5-7 min</b>	<b>HOPE AND BELONGING</b> Do you feel hopeful about your future? Why or why not? On the topic of belonging, do you believe you are a valued member of the school community? Why? How does the school foster a culture of hope and belonging for all students?	<i>For individual comments, probe whether others agree or disagree with those comments. Probe for ways in which the school is welcoming to students and promotes a sense of hope, such as teacher/student communication, family outreach, and advising/support. Probe for suggestions on how the school may improve a sense of belonging and connectedness.</i>

<b>5–7 min</b>	<p><b>GEAR UP SERVICES</b></p> <p>Are you aware of the GEAR UP services at your school? What do you know about them?</p> <p>Did you find the GEAR UP services and activities valuable? Which ones were the most beneficial for you? The least?</p> <p>Would you recommend the program and these activities to other students? Why?</p>	<p><i>Probe their level of participation and satisfaction with GEAR UP activities. If students do not recall activities, probe whether they participated in college visits, FAFSA assistance services, College Application and Exploration Week, College Decision Day, Text 4 Success, etc.</i></p>
<b>5–7 min</b>	<p><b>SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE</b></p> <p>What could the school or GEAR UP do to help you in preparing for your future that it isn't doing now?</p> <p>What suggestions do you have?</p>	<p><i>Probe for career activities such as job shadowing or internships, college visits or guest speakers, more career/technical education options, additional counseling.</i></p>
<b>2 min</b>	<p><b>CLOSING</b></p> <p>Is there anything else we should know about what students at your school think about college or the GEAR UP program?</p>	

**Thank you very much for your time.**



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## About ICF

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