West Virginia GEAR UP External Evaluation

Year 3 Annual Report

Submitted to:
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November 2024

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 education after high school. During the third 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 (Cohort 1) can participate in WV GEAR UP from Grade 7 through their first year of postsecondary education and students from the Class of 2028 (Cohort 2) 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 2023–2024 school year (Year 3), the program served Grade 9 students in the first WV GEAR UP cohort, Grade 8 students in the second cohort, Grade 12 priority students at participating high schools, and first year postsecondary students who were graduates of participating GEAR UP high schools.

Key Findings

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 3, based on an analysis of data collected from students, parents/guardians, and school personnel through surveys and interviews. Key findings from the evaluation are as follows:

Perceptions of hope showed moderate, though sometimes uneven, progress among students. Hope is measured by the Children's Hope Scale and looks at respondents' assessments and optimism about problem-solving and future hopes pertaining to education. Cohort 1 students had higher hope than Cohort 2 and retrospective comparison group (R-Comp) students when each group was in Grade 8. Cohort 2 and R-Comp ratings were similar. However, student hope seems to increase over time with Grade 12 students surveyed in Year 3 having higher hope than students surveyed when they were in Grade 8 and Cohort 1 students surveyed in Year 3 when in Grade 9. Similar to findings from previous years, parent ratings of hope for their student continues to be higher than students' own hope for themselves.

Students appear to acquire greater knowledge of college entrance requirements and financial aid over time. Students' correct identification of financial aid programs and correct estimation of college costs increased from Grade 9 to Grade 12, suggesting they become more knowledgeable in these areas as they get closer to graduation. The WV Promise Scholarship had the highest percentage of respondents who selected the correct response for Cohort 1 (Grade 9), Cohort 2 (Grade 8), and Grade 12. Between 46% and 54%

of students in these three grades correctly identified that scholarship, whereas the WV Invests grant had the lowest percentage of students correctly identifying it (21%–31%).

Despite these findings, students and their parents continue to overestimate the cost of education after high school. Cohorts 1 and 2 students and parents as well as Grade 12 students were more likely to overestimate the costs of furthering their education versus underestimating. The students and parents alike were also more likely to indicate they could afford to attend (or have their student attend) a career/technical center versus a public 2-year or 4-year college. Furthermore, cost continues to be an often-cited reason by Cohort 1 students and parents and Grade 12 students as the reason they may not continue their education. Clearly, they still see finances as a potential barrier and lack full knowledge of available financial aid, such as understanding of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), federal student loans, and federal work study—the lowest-rated postsecondary education topics by Cohort 1 and 2 students and parents and Grade 12 students. School personnel also had difficulty correctly estimating costs of a 2- and 4-year college (26%–33% of personnel correctly estimated costs), and only 52%–67% correctly identified financial aid sources such as the Pell grant, WV Invests, and the WV Promise Scholarship.

Students exhibited increased knowledge of many topics related to education beyond high school. Cohort 1 students and parents and Grade 12 students had higher mean ratings in areas related to education needed to pursue careers/jobs of interest, different career paths, and different types of education after high school compared to knowledge in areas related to financial aid (e.g., FAFSA, federal student loans, federal work study). However, Cohort 1 students interviewed by the evaluation team expressed interest in knowing even more about college academic programs in their areas of interest and additional opportunities for hearing from or observing professionals in their career settings.

Students were in agreement that their schools had a college-going culture in several areas. Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Grade 12 students agreed that going to college will lead to a better future, they feel encouraged to take courses that will prepare them for college, and that the school staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students. One area that had less agreement was that students helped one another to follow their college and career goals. Current programming designed to focus on individual student needs and peer support are Student Success Societies and the Higher Education Readiness Officers (HEROs) program.

According to students, the HEROs program, which is in its first year, is operating as intended and promoting a college-going culture. The schools had latitude as to the approaches used to recruit students and most programs the evaluation team examined through focus groups met during school hours. The HEROs students had a desire to make an impact in their schools and serve all students, especially those without a clear path for the future. The HEROs students appreciated the skill development in leadership, teamwork, and communication. They were excited about the activities they helped plan and implement to encourage their peers in considering their future education. Several students expressed interest in having the HEROs program for all grade levels.

College visits and career fairs continue to be a highlight for students. Cohort 1 and Grade 12 surveyed students and Cohort 1 students who were interviewed universally cited the college visits as the most helpful GEAR UP activities. Yet, they also said that to increase their college and career knowledge and readiness there was a need for more college visits and information on college entrance requirements (30%–42% of Cohort 1 and Grade 12 students). This was further supported by approximately one half of GEAR UP coordinators who indicated the need for more college visits (56%) and career information (46%). Interviewed Cohort 1 students recommended that college visits be tailored to programs in which students had interest. These students also appreciated opportunities for community members to visit their schools and share about careers and education needed to pursue those careers.

Cohort 1 students who are part of the longitudinal interviews transitioned to high school and overall had a good school year. They are highly motivated (e.g., majority taking honors classes), more stable in their career decisions, and are involved in extracurriculars. A few are starting to doubt their abilities (e.g., student struggling in math and now thinking maybe engineering is not for him) while others have the "I am capable" mentality (e.g., student who believed she was capable of career options beyond that of a cosmetologist). Some acknowledged challenges with the transition to Grade 9. However, these students appreciate informal conversations with their teachers, and it is the teachers who they look to for insights on future education and career planning that encourages them.

Preliminary findings from a spotlight analysis on the relationship of the parent/guardian to survey responses showed areas that may be worth further exploration. The spotlight analysis examined differences in outcomes measured by parent survey respondents for those who reported to be the students' *Parent* or *Parent* and *Legal Guardian*, referred to as "parents," and those who selected at least one other relationship, referred to as "guardians." There are some indications of differences in responses in areas such as perceptions of hope. However, the findings must be interpreted with caution given the small sample sizes.

School personnel participation in GEAR UP activities has increased. More than half of school personnel survey respondents (54%) reported participating in GEAR UP-sponsored activities, which is an increase from the 2 previous years (42%–52%). Activities with the highest reported involvement included academic/tutor support (55%), academic planning/career advising (53%), and one-on-one advising with students (52%). However, less than half of school personnel (45%) reported involvement in GEAR UP-offered professional development, which represents a decrease from previous years (51%–54%). Scheduling conflicts, time, and family obligations were the main reasons cited for not participating in GEAR UP activities.

Recommendations

In response to these findings and trends, the evaluation team offers the following recommendations to the Commission for consideration as it begins Year 4 of the 2021–2028 GEAR UP grant:

Provide more resources to school staff to increase understanding and awareness of college costs and GEAR UP. Students, parents, and school personnel all continue to have

difficulty correctly estimating the costs of 2- and 4-year colleges. One response may be to offer resources to school staff to increase their understanding and awareness. While they are not expected to be experts, school personnel often have informal conversations with students and more resources focused on costs may enhance the depth of these conversations. One way to address this issue—and others important to GEAR UP—may be to integrate GEAR UP information with other information that teachers are seeking. One example observed by the evaluation team in another program was a new teacher academy focused on classroom management skills and student behavior. Information on college and career readiness was also embedded in this academy. Adding GEAR UP information to already desired professional development may be a way to further engage teachers in college and career issues important for West Virginia students.

Continue to enhance peer support related to college awareness and career goals. In student surveys, respondents sometimes did not believe that students help one another to follow their college and career goals. Given that this is a chief aim of the HEROs program, HEROs coordinators may want to redouble efforts that promote one-to-one student-to-student interactions that encourage informal conversations and provide support on college and career topics.

Expand data collection on HEROs students. The evaluation team is recommending an expansion of data collection on students participating in HEROs. While focus groups will continue in Year 4, ICF also is inserting HEROs-related questions into Year 4 surveys to have both quantitative and qualitative data on this important service. This expansion should promote broader understanding of HEROs across all participating students and schools. Such information is particularly important as schools integrate Cohort 2 students into their existing HEROs program.

Tailor college campus visits to students' interests. Students in surveys and interviews reported college visits among the GEAR UP events they found the most beneficial. However, as students began to narrow their college and career interests, Cohort 1 interviewees had more specific questions than general campus tours were able to address. These students reported receiving more in-depth information when interacting with college academic representatives and they were able to ask specific questions. Additionally, students reported to be more interested in visiting colleges in smaller groups and visiting specific academic departments. When planning college visits, site coordinators might consider including time for students to explore different academic departments and talk with representatives.

Invite alumni and professionals from the community to share insights and lessons learned. Cohort 1 students reported using several sources of information to make decisions on courses and potential future careers. To further that goal, GEAR UP may invite more professionals from the community to come into schools and share their experiences. Similarly, alumni may be a valuable source of information who can provide perspective to students. The Texas GEAR UP program brings alumni back to their high schools to talk not only with students but also with school staff to share their postsecondary experiences as

well as to discuss high school activities that helped them make an effective transition to college.

Consider looking at what other GEAR UP programs may be doing to increase students' resilience and hope as well as improving their mindsets. The National Council of Education and Community Partnerships (NCCEP), the national association for GEAR UP, hosts annual conferences where grantees have the opportunity to present ideas, strategies, and tools from their programs to better serve GEAR UP students. Session abstracts from previous years' NCCEP conferences are available and could be culled for programs of interest. In one such example, GEAR UP Kentucky presented on its peer mentoring program that promotes student resilience by focusing on social, emotional, and cultural barriers to success in education after high school. For this example and others, ICF could assist in making contacts with the program directors. A sample of such programs are presented in Appendix A.

Conduct additional data collection and analysis on guardians and grandparents caring for students. Data from parent/guardian surveys showed some differences between parents and guardians on feelings of hope for the future and ability of students to go to college. Such results must be viewed with caution, however, due to the small number of adult respondents identifying themselves as guardians. The Year 4 student survey will include questions to elicit whether students are cared for by a parent or guardian, and this information should yield richer data to further explore this issue and identify needs for this population.

Design specific messages for guardians of GEAR UP students. WV GEAR UP may want to consider additional messaging to guardians about students' ability to claim independent status if they have been a ward of the state. Taking this action may help in promoting a more cost-effective approach to education after high school.

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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 education beyond high school. During the third 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 education post high school graduation. During the 2023–2024 school year (Year 3), the program served Grade 9 students in the first WV GEAR UP cohort, Grade 8 students in the second cohort, Grade 12 priority students at participating high schools, and first year postsecondary students who were graduates of participating GEAR UP high schools.

The context for delivering GEAR UP services 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, although the state's unemployment rate increased from 3.6% in June 2023 to 4.2% in August 2024 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). In addition, only 55% of the state's adult population is either working or looking for work, the lowest labor force participation rate in the nation (Joint Economic Committee, 2024).

Indicators of child well-being show several challenges. Child poverty in West Virginia increased from 20% in 2019 to 25% in 2022, even as the national child poverty rate declined slightly to 16% during that time (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2024). One-third of West Virginia children had parents without secure employment in 2022, exceeding the rate of 26% for children nationwide. The same report noted that 10% of West Virginia teens are not in school and not working, which is above the U.S. rate of 7%.

Family and health data point to other pressing needs. Thirty-six percent of West Virgina children live in single-parent households, 2 percentage points above the national rate. In addition, 40% of West Virginia youth ages 10–17 are overweight or obese, compared with a 33% rate nationally.

Data indicate educational challenges prior to the high school years. For example, 71% of West Virginia's 3- and 4-year-olds are not in school, substantially higher than the U.S. average of 54%. By Grade 4, 78% of West Virginia students lack proficiency in reading, 10 percentage points above the U.S. rate. In addition, 85% of the state's Grade 8 students are not proficient in math, compared to a nationwide rate of 74%.

Data on college-going rates have fluctuated greatly. The state's 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). The state has achieved some progress since that time, as the college-going rate increased to 47.4% in 2023. The total number of degrees and credentials awarded at the state's public postsecondary institutions decreased by 13% between 2016 and 2023 (West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, n.d.-b) before rebounding with a 4.9% increase in 2024. At the same time, while 88% of West Virginia residents 25 years of age and older are high school graduates in 2022 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a), only 23% had a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b) and 45% of adults ages 25–64 have completed a degree or certification (Lumina Foundation, 2024)

Amid this mixed record of progress in college enrollment are challenges in securing Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completions among high school seniors. Similar to other states, West Virginia endured delays in processing student forms with the newly designed FAFSA in 2024. In response, Gov. Jim Justice declared a state of emergency allowing colleges and universities to suspend a requirement that students complete the FAFSA to qualify for the state's largest financial aid program. The state legislature also transferred $80 million from its rainy-day fund to provide grants to college students in fall 2024 (Kersey, 2024).

Elsewhere, the state continues to show high rates of death due to drug overdose. West Virginia had the highest death rate due to drug overdose in the nation for 2022, with a rate of 80.9 deaths per 100,000 residents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). The state also continues to report a high number of children in foster care, with more than 6,094 children in such care in April 2024 (KVC West Virginia, 2024). Other research shows that the state places four times as many children per capita in foster care compared with the United States overall (Witikko & Allen, 2023). In addition, nearly half of the state's grandparents are caring for school-age youth (Knisely, 2023). 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 education after high school, and the achievements accomplished thus far. For example, the state's 4-year high school graduation rate of 92.6% for 2022–2023 was 11 percentage points higher than the 2012–2013 rate of 81.4% (West Virginia Department of Education, 2024). 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 have enhanced efforts to increase college-going rates. The governor and state legislature enacted House Bill 2005, in which the state will cover the cost of dual enrollment courses linked to the state's most in-demand careers. While the former system mainly served students who expected to go to college, this 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 are offering courses in 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. The pilot, now called LevelUpWV has 16 public colleges and universities participating in the program. By the end of the last academic year, the state reported 13,672 program registrations with 28 pathways now in place (Skeldon, 2024).

To measure progress toward its 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 3 (the 2023–2024 school year).

II. Methodology

The Year 3 report focuses on implementation of GEAR UP in its third year of programming and presents parents' and students' perceptions of outcomes as measured by the Children's Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1997), which is described in greater detail below.

The evaluation will assess implementation of GEAR UP in all 7 years of the grant and also monitor progress toward 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 Cohorts and Comparison Group Student Survey

In Year 1–Year 3 a survey was administered to Grade 8 students. In Year 1 the survey was administered to the retrospective comparison group (R-Comp); in Year 2 the survey was administered to Grade 8 GEAR UP students (Cohort 1); and in Year 3 the survey was administered to Grade 8 GEAR UP students (Cohort 2). The student survey included 25 items organized across five sections. Appendix C 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 midyear. In subsequent years, the surveys were administered online in November through January 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 83% of enrolled students at the time of the survey. A total of 2,135 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. Finally in Year 3, a total of 2,097 unique Grade 8 student survey cases were collected and included in analyses, representing 84% 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 9 GEAR UP Cohort 1 Student Survey

In Year 3 a survey was administered to Cohort 1, current Grade 9 students. The student survey included 25 items organized across five sections. Appendix C 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.

The survey was administered online in November 2023 through January 2024 to all Grade 9 students enrolled in GEAR UP schools at the time of survey administration via the SCRIBE system. A total of 2,191 unique Grade 9 student survey cases were collected in Year 3 and included in the analyses, representing 80% of enrolled students at the time of the survey. Survey links and scannable QR codes were made available for the surveys and publicized on the GEAR UP website.

Grade 12 Student Survey

In Year 3 a survey was administered to Grade 12 students. The student survey included 32 items organized across six sections. Appendix C provides a reproduction of the survey. Nine 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. Three questions assessed students' participation in college and career preparation activities and the resources they need to be more successful in school and more prepared for college. Finally, five questions assessed students' participation in college application activities (e.g., FAFSA and college applications).

The survey was administered online in November 2023 through January 2024 to all Grade 12 students enrolled in GEAR UP schools at the time of survey administration via the SCRIBE system. A total of 1,785 unique Grade 12 student survey cases were collected in Year 3 and included in analyses, representing 79% of enrolled students at the time of the survey. Survey links and scannable QR codes were made available for the surveys and publicized on the GEAR UP website.

Grade 8 GEAR UP Cohorts and Comparison Group Parent Survey

In Year 1–Year 3 a survey was administered to Grade 8 parents/guardians. In Year 1 the survey was administered to the R-Comp group parents/guardians; in Year 2 the survey was administered to Grade 8 GEAR UP parents/guardians (Cohort 1); and in Year 3 the survey was administered to Grade 8 GEAR UP parents/guardians (Cohort 2). The parent/guardian survey included 28 items organized across five sections. Appendix C provides a reproduction of the survey. Ten questions were demographic items designed to gather

background information about respondents. Seven 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 B.7 for more detail on the types of survey respondents from the parent survey.

Parent/guardian surveys were administered alongside the student surveys each year. In the first year the surveys were administered online in February and March of 2022. In subsequent years, the surveys were administered online in November through January 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. Finally in Year 3, a total of 605 unique Grade 8 parent survey cases were collected and included in analyses, representing 24% of enrolled students at the time of the survey.

Grade 9 GEAR UP Cohort 1 Parent Survey

In Year 3 a survey was administered to Cohort 1 parents/guardians of current Grade 9 students.[1] The student survey included 28 items organized across five sections. Appendix C provides a reproduction of the survey. Ten items were demographic questions designed to gather background information about respondents and their families. Seven items measured parents' perceptions of their students' school and education goals; among these items were 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' participation in college preparation activities and the resources they need for their students to be more successful in school and more prepared for college.

The survey was administered online in November 2023 through January 2024 to all parents/guardians of Grade 9 students enrolled in GEAR UP schools at the time of survey administration via the SCRIBE system. Parent/guardian surveys were also available in paper/pencil formats to a parent/guardian for each eligible student. A total of 467 unique Grade 9 parents survey cases were collected in Year 3 and included in analyses,

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[1] The report uses the term "parent survey," which is inclusive of all caregivers who may have responded to the survey (e.g., stepparent, foster parent, grandparent, legal guardian).

representing 12% of parents of students enrolled at the time of the survey. Survey links and scannable QR codes were made available for the surveys and publicized on the GEAR UP website.

Year 3 School Personnel Survey

The Year 3 School Personnel Survey included 27 items. Appendix C 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 May 2024 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, 1,329 personnel out of 2,020 (66%) completed the survey in Year 3.

Year 3 Cohort 1 Student Individual Interviews

In developing a research plan for this current grant, the Commission prioritized documentation of student perspectives throughout the 7-year period. To this end, the evaluation team conducted individual interviews with Cohort 1 students in Years 1 and 2 and again in Year 3 when the students entered high school. 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 31 questions covering topics such as students' perceptions of the current school year, their plans for the rest of high school and beyond, their abilities to succeed academically, and their impressions of GEAR UP activities and services in their schools. This year's protocol had specific questions to gauge students' transition from middle school to high school and their expectations for high school. The protocol is included in Appendix C.

The evaluation team was able to interview the same 13 students (10 female students and 3 male students) as in Years 1 and 2. Eleven interviews were conducted in person on three different days in April. Two students from two different schools were not present on the day of the visit and were interviewed remotely about 10 days later. The average length of each interview was 50 minutes. The three high schools represent a cross-section of GEAR UP, including two schools serving students Grades 9–12 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 3 HEROs Focus Groups

One of the GEAR UP services that the Commission offers to cohort students in high schools is the Higher Education Readiness Officers (HEROs) program. HEROs clubs focus on building a stronger college-going culture in their schools and communities. For the purposes of WV GEAR UP, higher education includes certificate programs, 2-year associate degree programs, and 4-year bachelor's degree programs. As part of the external evaluation, the ICF research team is conducting five focus groups per year with a cross-section of HEROs students in the spring of Years 3–6, reaching every WV GEAR UP county at least once over the grant term. The purpose of the focus groups is to gather data on HEROs activities; student satisfaction with the HEROs program; student perceptions of the college-going culture at their schools; and successes/challenges in building an effective college-going culture for students and their families.

In collaboration with the Commission, the ICF evaluation team developed a protocol with 17 questions and selected five high schools to conduct on-site focus groups in the spring of 2024. The GEAR UP site coordinators invited their HEROs students to participate. A total of 31 students (10 male and 21 female) participated in one of the five HEROs focus groups. The protocol is included in Appendix C.

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 five student and parent surveys collected in Year 3: Grade 8 Student and Parent surveys, Grade 9 Student Survey, Grade 12 Student Survey, and School Personnel Survey. The second part of the section describes the analysis for the interviews and focus groups.

Student and Parent Grade 8 Survey Analysis

To examine outcomes for Grade 8 students and parents in Year 3, the evaluation team conducted a comparative analysis of survey responses from Grade 8 students across the first 3 years of the evaluation, exploring differences between R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 students and parents. Mean values for continuous outcomes and the frequency of responses for categorical outcomes were calculated. Student and parent survey analyses presented highlight differences between Grade 8 R-Comp respondents (i.e., Class of 2026 students and parents), Cohort 1 respondents (i.e., Class of 2027 students and parents) and Cohort 2 respondents (i.e., Class of 2028 students and parents).

To examine the differences in outcomes for student and parent survey respondents, 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 and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) 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 and ANOVAs, the evaluation team used Cohen's *d* and partial–eta squared. 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

Cramér's V and phi	Cohen's *d*	Partial-eta squared
Small Effect .00 to .20	Small Effect .2	Small Effect .01
Moderate Effect .21 to .40	Medium Effect .5	Medium Effect .06
Strong Effect >.40	Large Effect .8	Large Effect .14
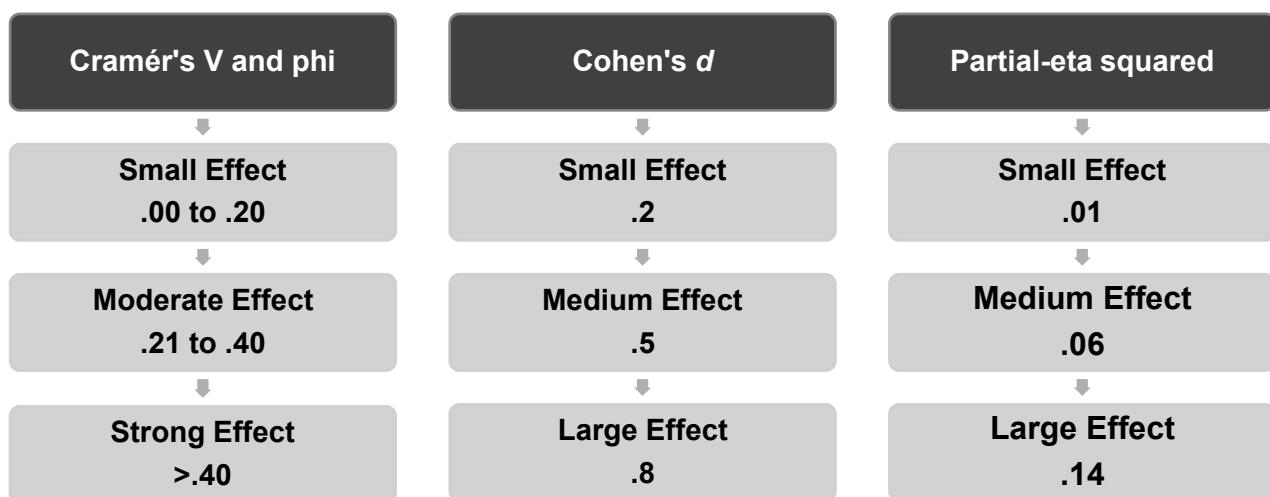
Note. Revised in 2023 to align with Rea & Parker (1992) and Cohen (1988).

Student Grade 9 and Grade 12 Survey Analysis

To examine outcomes for Grade 9 and Grade 12 students in Year 3, the evaluation team conducted descriptive analyses of survey responses. Mean values for continuous outcomes and the frequency of responses for categorical outcomes were calculated. Survey analysis presented provide descriptive statistics on Grade 9 Cohort 1 respondents (i.e., Class of 2027 students) and Grade 12 respondents (i.e., Class of 2024). Further statistical testing will be conducted with these survey respondents in subsequent years of the evaluation to include comparative statistical analysis.

Parent Survey Spotlight Analysis

Analysis presented in the Spotlight Analysis section of this report highlights differences in outcomes measured by parent survey respondents for those who reported to be the students' *Parent* or *Parent* and *Legal Guardian*, referred to as "parents," and those who selected at least one other relationship, referred to as "guardians."

School Personnel Survey Analysis

To examine GEAR UP Year 3 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 3. 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 and interviews, evaluators transcribed the sessions and coded transcripts under major themes. For the cohort student individual interviews, the evaluation team grouped major findings into several categories: students' perceptions of schools and sense of belonging, students' college and career interests, and impressions of GEAR UP and other sources of college/career information.

For the HEROs focus groups, the team identified themes related to the HEROs member profiles, the implementation of HEROs activities and events, the HERO outcomes and impact on members and the school, challenges and suggestions to improve the HEROs programs, and perceptions of hope and belonging.

For both the cohort and the HEROs 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 the student and parent surveys collected during Years 1–3 of the GEAR UP grant. Results included throughout the analysis include comparisons between R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 students and parents from Year 1–Year 3 when the students were in Grade 8.[2] This section also includes a spotlight on comparisons of outcomes from the parent survey respondents who exclusively reported to be parents of the student and those who selected at least one other relationship (referred to as guardians). 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. Student and Parent Surveys Analysis Breakdown
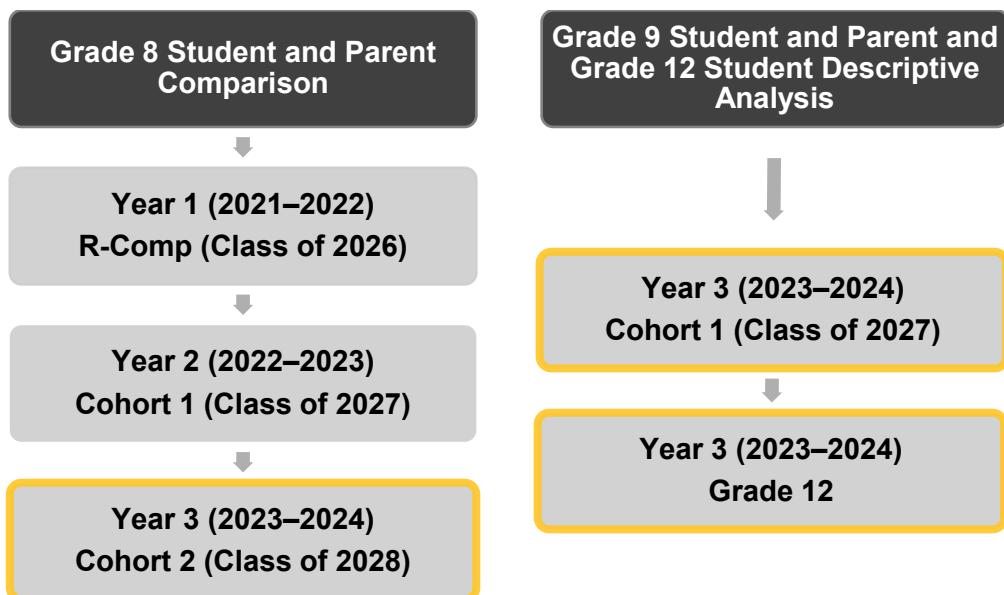
About the Respondents

Across respondent types data were collected in Year 3 (i.e., Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Grade 12 students as well as parent/guardians of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2), respondents reported relatively similar demographics: nearly all were White and spoke English as their primary language at home.[3] Around 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 B.1–B.8 in Appendix B.

Among student respondents in both Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Grade 12, more than half (53%, 57%, and 51%, respectively) indicated they did not have any siblings who currently or previously attended college. Roughly a third in all groups (34% Cohort 1 students, 28%

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[2] Cohort 2 student and parent surveys were collected in Year 3 of the WV GEAR UP grant, Cohort 1 student and parent surveys were collected in Year 2, and the R-Comp group surveys were collected in Year 1 of the grant.

[3] In Year 3 of the grant, Cohort 1 students were in Grade 9 and Cohort 2 students in Grade 8.

Cohort 2, and 33% in Grade 12) reported that the highest level of education attained by their parents was a 2-year degree or higher.[4] Approximately 4% of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 students indicated some degree of food insecurity.[5] In addition, 37% of Cohort 1 students and 40% of Cohort 2 students reported *Sometimes* or *Often* having a hard time staying focused on homework or other things and 29% and 28% reported the same about being so worried that they could not sleep at night.

Among parent/guardian respondents in both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, over half (54% and 66%, respectively) indicated that they did not have any other students who currently or previously attended college. Of Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 parent/guardian respondents, 49% and 41% noted the highest level of education achieved was 2 or more years of college. Approximately two-thirds of Cohort 1 (64%) and Cohort 2 (73%) parent/guardian survey respondents reported the highest level of education achieved was less than a bachelor's degree. By definition, their students would be first-generation college students. Over one-third of Cohort 1 (35%) and Cohort 2 (40%) parents/guardians estimated their family income to be $60,000 or less.

Perceptions about Education and Future Plans

This section presents students' and parents' perceptions about school culture, planning for continuing education beyond high school, hope as measured by the Children's Hope Scale, college entrance requirements and financial aid, postsecondary costs and financial aid, and knowledge of topics related to education beyond high school.

School Culture

Students and parents were asked five questions regarding college-going culture at their schools and to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 6-point scale, with 1 representing *Strongly Disagree* and 6 representing *Strongly Agree*.

Across Grade 8 students from Year 1–Year 3 (i.e., R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2), generally students' college-going culture mean ratings were consistent across items, with R-Comp students reporting significantly higher agreement on two items assessing the college-going culture present in their schools. R-Comp student means ratings range from 2.52 to 3.31, with an overall mean rating of 3.05. Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student ratings ranged from 2.58 to 3.31 and 2.48 to 3.31, respectively; overall Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 students had mean ratings of 3.00 and 2.97, respectively. Cohort 1 students reported significantly higher agreement

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[4] Forty-nine percent of Cohort 1 parents had not received a 4-year degree (as reported by their student) 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/

[5] Of the Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 students who reported that they *Sometimes* or *Often* didn't eat enough food because their family couldn't afford it, 4% and 5% reported this occurred in the last 30 days, respectively, and 4% reported this occurred in the last 12 months for both cohorts.

than R-Comp and Cohort 2 students that students help each other achieve college and career goals.[6] R-Comp students reported feeling significantly more encouraged to take courses that will prepare them for college than Cohort 2 students.[7] The effect size for both significant differences were small. Figure 3 presents the breakdown of reported college–going culture for the R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 students when they were in Grade 8.

Figure 3. Grade 8 Student Cohort Comparison of College–Going Culture Mean Ratings
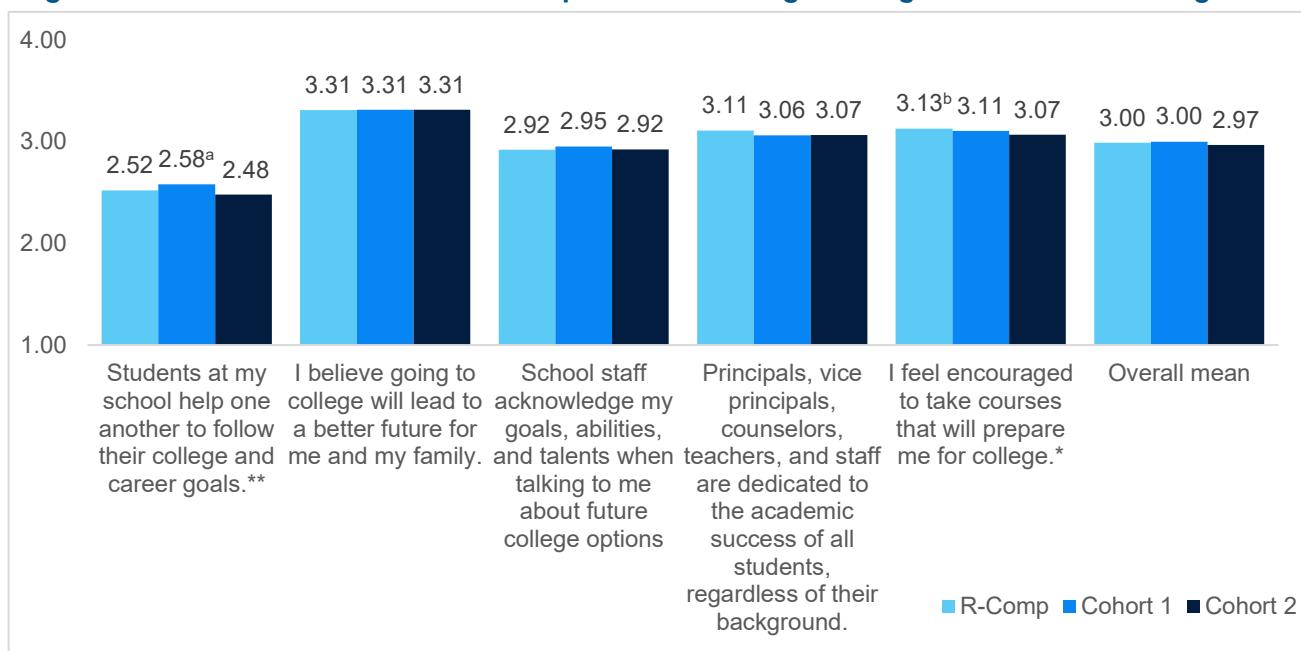
Source. WV GEAR UP R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 student surveys (Year 1–Year 3).
Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1 – *Strongly disagree,* 2 – *Disagree,* 3 – *Agree,* 4 – *Strongly agree.* Questions used for parents varied slightly in language than questions for students.
*Statistically significant (p<.05). **Statistically significant (p<.001).
[a] Cohort 1 is significantly higher than R-Comp and Cohort 2. [b] R-Comp is significantly higher than Cohort 2.

Among Cohort 1 students and parents and Grade 12 students surveyed in Year 3, college–going culture mean ratings are presented in Figure 4. The overall mean category represents the calculated average of the mean ratings for each respondent group (i.e., Cohort 1 student, Cohort 1 parents, Grade 12 students). Student survey respondents from Cohort 1 and Grade 12 reported relatively similar agreement regarding the college–going culture present in their schools. Cohort 1 student mean ratings range from 2.65 to 3.22, with an overall mean rating of 2.98. Similarly, Grade 12 student mean ratings range from 2.67 to 3.18, with an overall mean rating of 2.95. Both Cohort 1 and Grade 12 students had the lowest agreement that *Students at my school help one another to follow their college and career goals* and the highest agreement with *I believe going to college with lead to a better future*

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[6] *Students at my school help one another to follow their college and career goals*: $F(2,6456)=7.75, p <$ .05, $\eta^2 = 0.002$.
[7] *I feel encouraged to take courses that will prepare me for college:* $F(2,6421) = 3.55, p<.05, \eta^2=0.001$.

for me and my family. The low ratings regarding student support signal future consideration of how more student-to-student support could improve school culture regarding college.

Figure 4. Year 3 Student and Parent College-Going Culture Mean Ratings
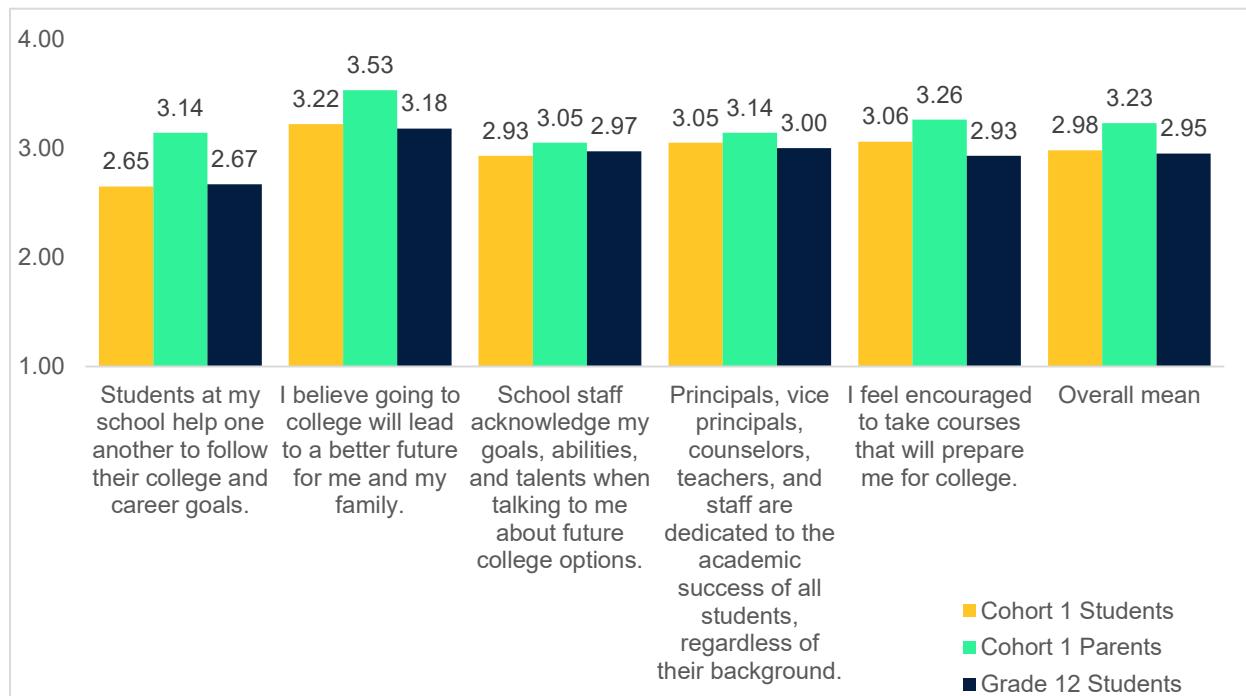
Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1 – *Strongly disagree,* 2 – *Disagree*, 3 – *Agree,* 4 – *Strongly agree*. Questions used for parents varied slightly in language than questions for students, as seen in Table B.10.

Cohort 1 parents also reported on their agreement regarding the college-going culture in their child's school, as presented in Figure 4. Overall, Cohort 1 parents had consistently higher mean ratings than student respondents, with mean ratings ranging from 3.05 to 3.53. Cohort 1 parents had the lowest agreement that *School staff acknowledge my needs as a parent/family member when talking to me about my student's future college options* and the highest agreement that *I believe my student going to college will lead to a better future for them*. Cohort 1 parents overall mean rating was 3.23. The high mean ratings for parents relative to students suggest that there is a possible discrepancy between the parent view of school culture and the student experience. It is worth noting that all three groups had the highest agreement that going to college would improve future outcomes, indicating that students and parents view college as an important pathway forward.

Postsecondary Planning

Student and parent survey respondents were asked to indicate the levels of education that they aspired and expected to achieve or for their child to achieve. For both educational aspirations and expectations, respondents could indicate five different educational outcomes: *(1) High school or less; (2) Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, e.g.,*

certificate or career/technical cert.); (3) A 2-year college degree (associate); (4) A 4-year college degree (bachelor's); and *(5) More than a 4-year college degree.*

Comparing R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 students when they were in Grade 8 (Years 1–3, respectively), Figure 5 presents students' reported aspirations and expectations to obtain each of the five educational outcomes. About a third of students, across three groups, reported they aspired to obtain a 4-year degree (33%–35%), with over half reporting aspiring to obtain an educational outcome of a 4-year degree or higher (57%–60%). Similarly to aspirations, the distribution of educational outcomes for expectations were similar across groups. However, across all groups a larger portion of students expected to obtain less than a 2-year degree than those who aspired to obtain the same level. Less than a third of students, across three groups, reported they expected to obtain a 4-year degree (29%–33%), with less than half reporting aspiring to obtain an educational outcome of a 4-year degree or higher (45%–47%).

Figure 5. Grade 8 Students' Aspirations and Expectations for Education Level by Cohort
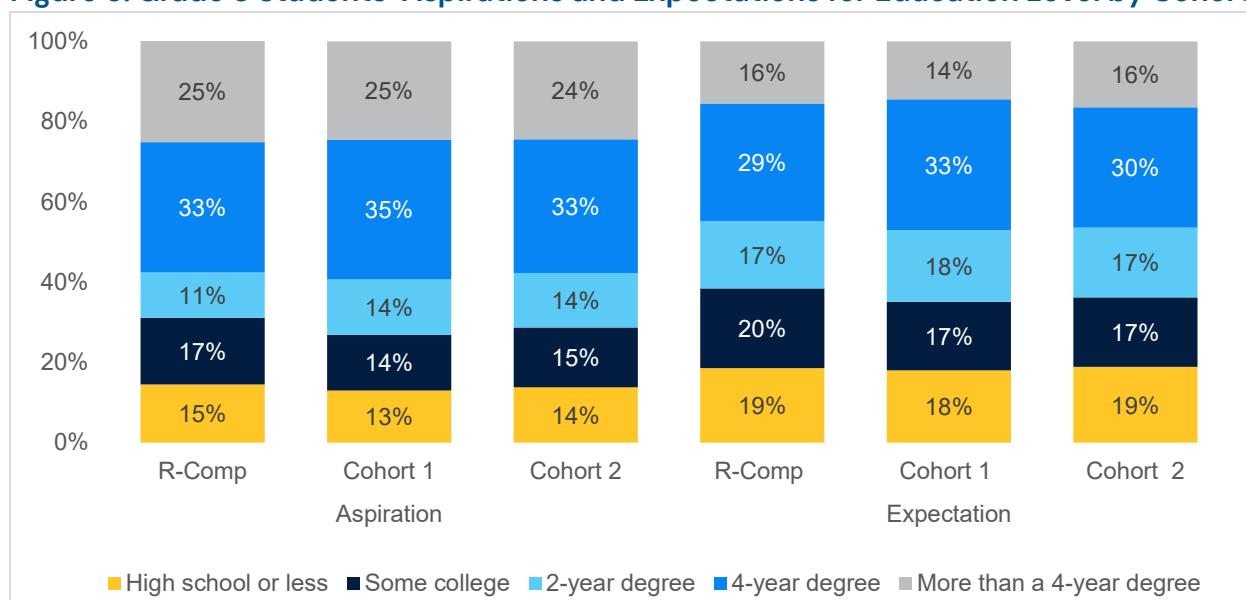
Source. WV GEAR UP R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 student surveys (Year 1–Year 3).
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Figure 6 reveals that the largest percentage of Cohort 1 students, parents, and Grade 12 students aspired to obtain a 4-year college degree, with parents constituting the largest percentage (40%) and Cohort 1 and Grade 12 students being roughly equal (34% and 36%, respectively). Among parent/guardian respondents, the majority (96%) reported to have talked with their student about attending college (see Table B.9). Aspirations for each education level remained mostly constant, except for a much lower percentage of parents (4%) aspiring for their children to obtain a high school degree or less than the Cohort 1 students (16%) and Grade 12 students (14%). Additionally, a notably larger percentage of parents aspired for their child to obtain more than a 4-year college degree (31%) compared to Cohort 1 students (22%) and Grade 12 students (20%).

Similarly to aspirations, the largest percentage of Cohort 1 students, parents, and Grade 12 students expected to obtain a 4-year college degree, with 37% of Cohort 1 parents and Grade 12 students and 31% of Cohort 1 students. A smaller percentage of parents also expected their child to obtain a high school degree or less (7%) than Cohort 1 students (20%) and Grade 12 students (17%), while a larger percentage of parents expected their child to obtain more than a 4-year college degree (20%) than Cohort 1 students (12%) and Grade 12 students (13%). Expectations for other education levels remained relatively similar across all three groups.

The data presented in Figure 6 suggest that the greatest percentage of students and parents surveyed in Year 3 both aspire to and expect the student to obtain a 4-year college degree, with parents having higher aspirations and expectations than their children on the more extreme ends of education level. Generally, parents/guardians *Agreed* that college was important for their student's career and future and *Disagreed* that it was too early to think about their students' plans beyond high school (see Table B.11 for additional detail on Cohort 1 parents'/guardians' mean scores).

Figure 6. Year 3 Students' and Parents' Aspirations and Expectations for Education
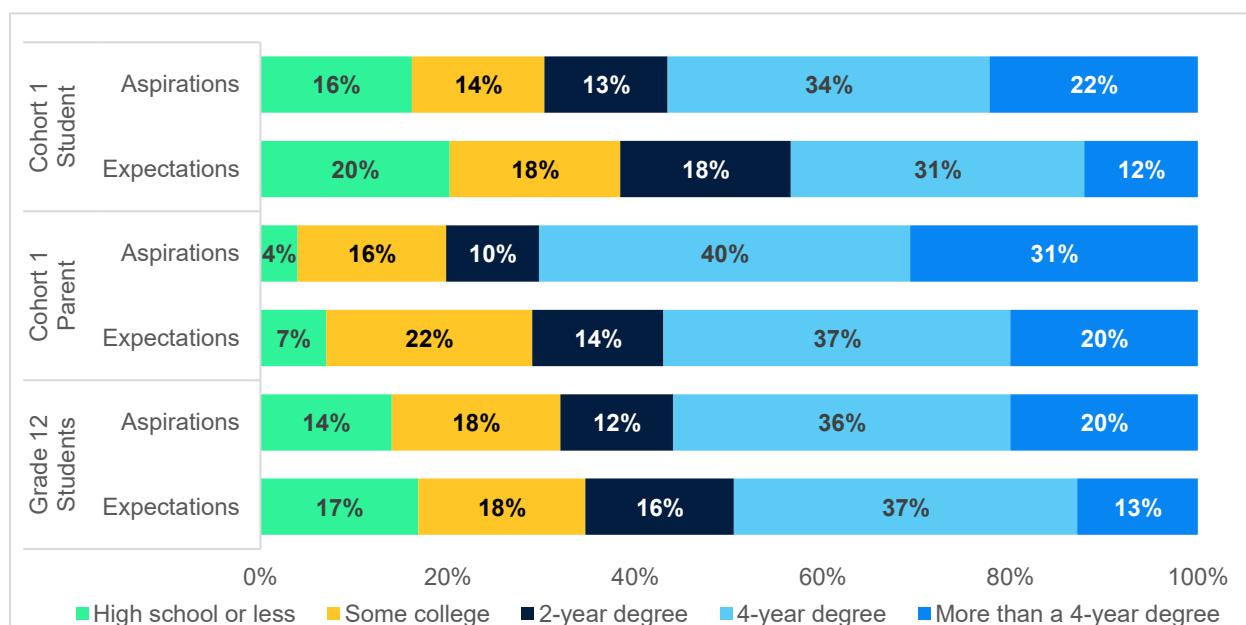
Level

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Cohort 1 and Grade 12 students were additionally asked to indicate whether they planned to continue education after high school. Both groups yielded similar results, as shown in Table B.12; 83% of Cohort 1 and 84% of Grade 12 students selected *Yes*. These percentages are consistent with findings from Figure 6 that suggest most students plan to continue their education after high school.

In Figure 7, Cohort 1 students, parents, and Grade 12 students surveyed in Year 3 were asked to select reasons why the students might be prevented from continuing education after high school. Positively, the greatest percentage of Cohort 1 students (38%), parents (47%), and Grade 12 students (42%) selected *Nothing will prevent me from continuing my education*. Of the reasons for being prevented, the next greatest percentage of Cohort 1 students (32%), parents (30%), and Grade 12 students (34%) all selected *It costs too much/I can't afford it*, suggesting the cost of college is possibly the most significant hurdle for parents and students to obtaining education after high school. Additional detail on the reasons for not continuing as reported by Cohort 1 students and parents and Grade 12 students is presented in Table B.13.

Figure 7. Students Surveyed in Year 3 Who Do Not Plan to Continue Their Education and Top Reasons They May Not Continue

Cohort 1 Student	Cohort 1 Parent	Grade 12 Student
•Nothing (38%) •Costs (32%) •Grades (27%) •Want to work (24%)	•Nothing (47%) •Costs (30%) •Financial aid (16%) •Want to work (14%)	•Nothing (42%) •Costs (34%) •Want to work (22%) •Need to work (20%)

Source. WV GEAR Up Cohort 1 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.

Hope

The Children's Hope Scale included in Cohort 1 student and parent surveys and Grade 12 student surveys measured respondents' assessments and optimism about problem-solving and future hopes pertaining to education. Hope was assessed in two categories: pathway items, defined by Hope Scale developers as a "cognitive set involving the belief in one's capabilities to produce workable routes to goals," and agency items, defined as "the self-related beliefs about initiating and sustaining movement toward those goals" (Snyder et al., 1997, p. 401). For all questions, respondents were asked to rate the frequency with which they believed each statement applied to them on a 6-point scale, with 1 representing *None of the Time* and 6 representing *All of the Time*.

Considering differences in hope across the R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 students and parents/guardians when the students were in Grade 8, Figure 8 and Figure 9 present the mean rating for agency and pathway items, with the overall hope score for student and parent respondents, respectively. Overall, Cohort 1 students had a significantly higher overall hope score compared to R-Comp students (3.98 and 3.89, respectively), while the Cohort 2 student overall hope score was similar to R-Comp students (3.93).[8] Cohort 1 students reported higher scores on all six items on the Hope Scale than R-Comp and Cohort 2 students, with Cohort 1 students reporting significantly higher scores on *When I*

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[8] Overall Mean: $F(2,6457) = 3.05$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=0.001$

have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it (3.90) and *I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me* (4.20) compared to R-Comp students.[9] Across all three groups, students had the lowest mean ratings for *I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future* (mean scores ranged from 3.72–3.84); this was also the item where Cohort 1 (3.84) had significantly higher mean scores than Cohort 2 (3.72) with a small effect.[10]

Figure 8. Grade 8 Student Hope Scale Ratings and Scores
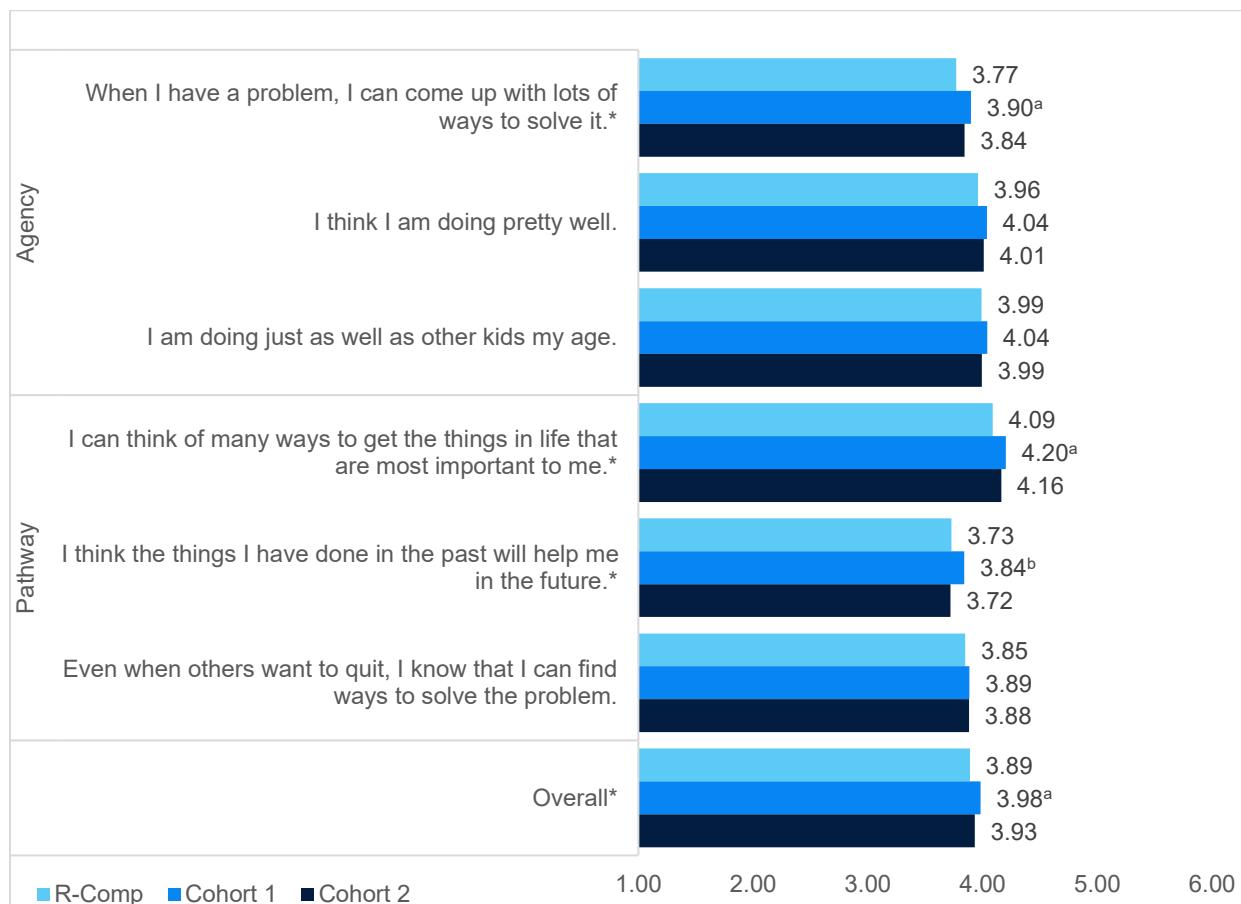
Source. WV GEAR UP R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 student surveys (Year 1–Year 3).
Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1 – *None of the time,* 2 – *A little of the time,* 3 – *Some of the time,* 4 – *A lot of the time,* 5 – *Most of the time,* 6 – *All of the time.*
*Statistically significant (*p*<.05).
[a] Cohort 1 is significantly higher than R-Comp. [b] Cohort 1 is significantly higher than Cohort 2.

Among parents/guardians of R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 students, *I am hopeful for my student's future* had the highest mean hope for parents/guardians, regardless of group (mean scores ranged from 5.45–5.61). Overall parents/guardians of Cohort 2 students had a

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[9] *When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it:* $F_{(2,6362)} = 4.46$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=0.001$; *I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me:* $F_{(2,6358)} = 3.93$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=0.001$

[10] *I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future:* $F_{(2,6374)} = 3.79$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=0.001$

slightly higher overall hope score (4.88) compared to R–Comp and Cohort 1 students (4.79 and 4.81, respectively). Parents/guardians of Cohort 2 students had significantly higher means on *I think my student is doing pretty well* (5.00) and *My student is doing just as well as other kids that are his/her age* (4.98) than parents/guardians of R–Comp and Cohort 1 parents.[11] Interestingly, parents/guardians of Cohort 1 students reported significantly lower means on the item *I am hopeful for my student's future* (5.45) compared to those in the R–Comp and Cohort 2 group. [12] Across all three groups, parents had the lowest mean ratings for *When my student has a problem, he/she can come up with lots of ways to solve it* (mean scores ranged from 4.45–4.53). Across all groups, parents'/guardians' hope was higher than all three student groups for the six agency and pathway items.

Figure 9. Grade 8 Parent Hope Scale Ratings and Scores
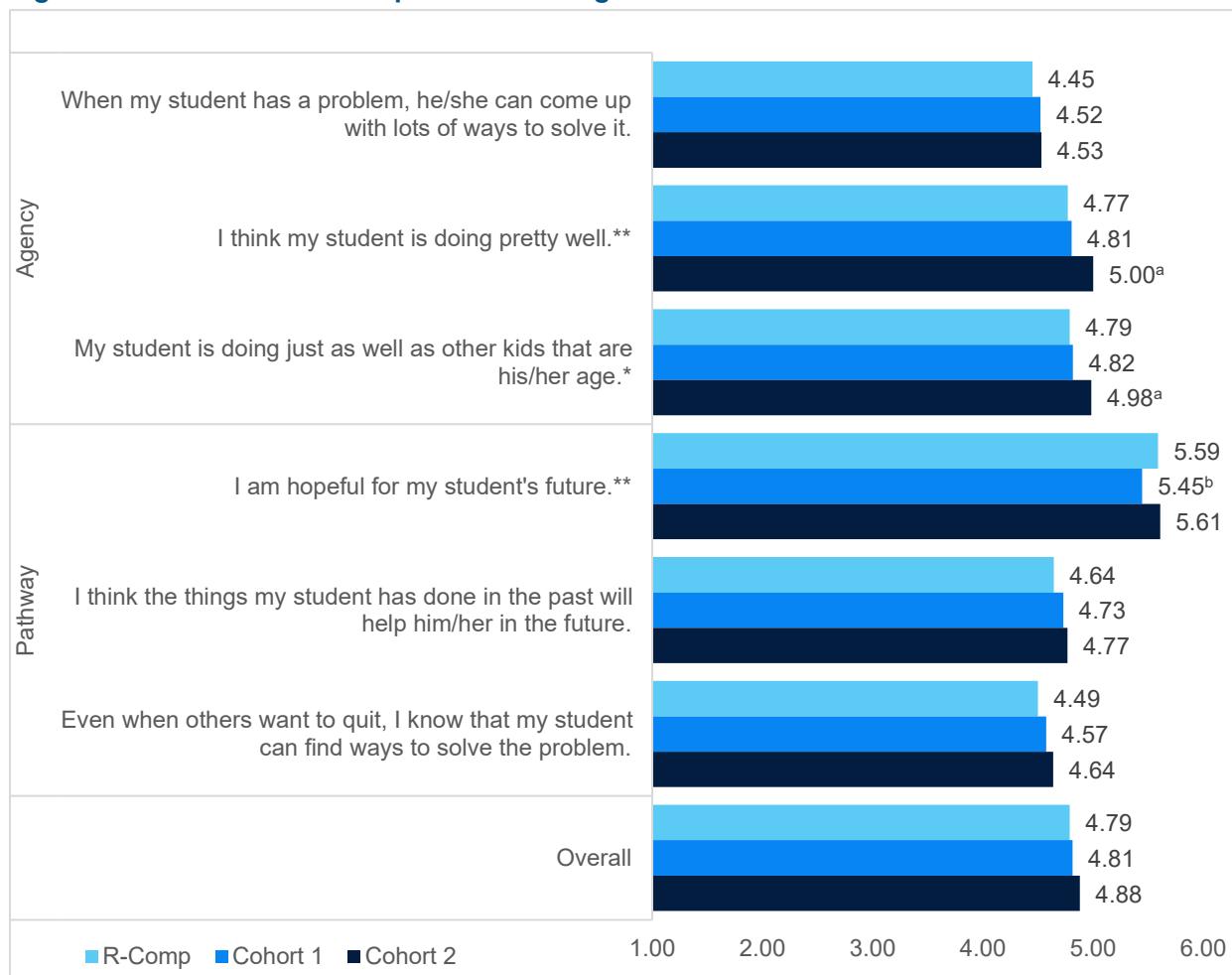
Source. WV GEAR UP R–Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 parent surveys (Year 1–Year 3).
Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1 – *None of the time,* 2 – *A little of the time,* 3 – *Some of the time,* 4 – *A lot of the time,* 5 – *Most of the time,* 6 – *All of the time.*
*Statistically significant ($p<.01$). **Statistically significant ($p<.001$).

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[11] *I think my student is doing pretty well:* $F(2,1979) = 9.07$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=0.009$; *My student is doing just as well as other kids that are his/her age:* $F(2,1971) = 5.26$, $p<.01$, $\eta^2=0.005$.
[12] *I am hopeful for my student's future:* $F(2,1971) = 7.15$, $p<.01$, $\eta^2=0.007$.

[a] Cohort 2 is significantly higher than R–Comp and Cohort 1; [b] Cohort 1 is significantly lower than R–Comp and Cohort 2.

Table 1 presents the mean ratings for questions across all three respondent groups during Year 3: Cohort 1 students and parents as well as Grade 12 students. Mean ratings were found by calculating the average of all respondent scores in each group. Table 1 also presents an overall mean rating, which was found by taking the average of the mean ratings for each question.

Cohort 1 students had the lowest mean ratings for all questions except for *I think the things I have done in the past will help me in the future* (3.87); Grade 12's mean rating was 3.84. For both Cohort 1 and Grade 12 students, that question saw the lowest average ratings, while *I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me* saw the highest average ratings for both Cohort 1 (4.11) and Grade 12 (4.27). These results suggest that students are least hopeful about how their past will positively impact their future and most hopeful about how to achieve their future goals. Additionally, Cohort 1 students had the lowest overall mean rating across all groups of 3.95, with Grade 12 students having an overall mean rating of 4.14. Cohort 1 students had consistently lower mean ratings when compared to Grade 12 students indicating that, positively, hope in one's abilities and future increases from the beginning of high school to the end.

Cohort 1 parents' mean ratings ranged from 4.42 (*When my student has a problem, he/she can come up with lots of ways to solve it*) to 5.49 (*I am hopeful for my student's future*), with an overall mean rating of 4.78. Among the three groups, Cohort 1 parents had the highest mean ratings for all questions, and the highest overall mean score, suggesting that Cohort 1 parents may possess, on average, more hope and enthusiasm in their children's abilities and futures than the students themselves.

Table 1. Year 3 Student and Parent Hope Scale Ratings and Scores

Survey Items	Cohort 1 Students	Cohort 1 Parents	Grade 12 Students
Mean Ratings for Individual Items			
Agency Items (Range 1—6)			
When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it. (When my student has a problem, he/she can come up with lots of ways to solve it.)	3.88	4.42	4.13
I think I am doing pretty well. (I think my student is doing pretty well).	3.99	4.82	4.14
I am doing just as well as other students my age. (My student is doing just as well as other kids that are his/her age.)	3.94	4.80	4.17
Pathway Items (Range 1—6)			
I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me. (I am hopeful for my student's future.)	4.11	5.49	4.27

Survey Items	Cohort 1 Students	Cohort 1 Parents	Grade 12 Students
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.)	3.87	4.66	3.84
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.)	3.91	4.48	4.14
Overall Mean Rating (Range 1–6)	3.95	4.78	4.14

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Parents reported based on their students.

Discussions on College Entrance Requirements and Financial Aid

Students in Cohort 1 and Grade 12 surveyed in Year 3 were asked whether they had spoken with anyone from their school or GEAR UP about (1) college entrance requirements and (2) the availability of financial aid to help pay for college. As shown in Figure 10, approximately two-thirds of Cohort 1 students reported that they spoke with someone about college entrance requirements and financial aid (66% and 62%, respectively), and these percentages increased for Grade 12 students (70% and 73%, respectively).

Figure 10. Year 3 Students Who Spoke with Someone About College Entrance Requirements and Financial Aid Available to Help Pay for College
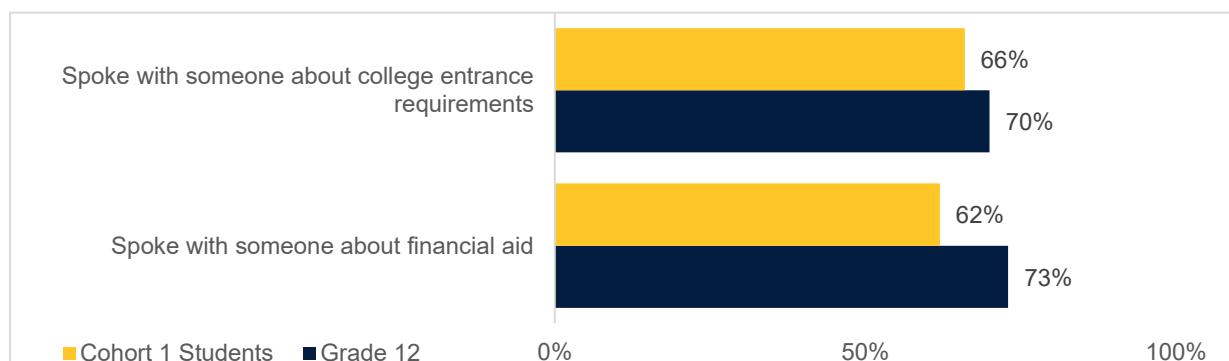
Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Grade 12 student surveys.

Postsecondary Costs and Financial Aid

Respondents were asked to estimate the average cost of tuition per year—excluding the cost of food, housing, and books—for two public college options in West Virginia: a 4-year public college and a 2-year community/technical college. The survey offered seven response options, from *Up to $3,000* to *More than $25,000*. The correct estimates were:

- 4-year public college/university: $6,001–$10,000 ($8,221)
- 2-year community/technical college: $3,001–$6,000 ($4,400)

A higher percentage of Cohort 2 students correctly estimated 4-year and 2-year college costs than R-Comp and Cohort 1 students; this increase was statistically significant for 2-

year college costs.[13] Among student cohorts about one-fifth correctly estimated the cost of a 4-year college (17%–20%) and a community college (21%–24%). Similarly, for parents/guardians, around one-fifth (22%–26%) correctly estimated the cost of a community college. Figure 11 shows the breakdown of college cost estimates by student and parent survey respondents across cohorts when the students were in Grade 8.

Figure 11. Percentage of Grade 8 Students and Parents Who Correctly Estimated College Cost by Cohort
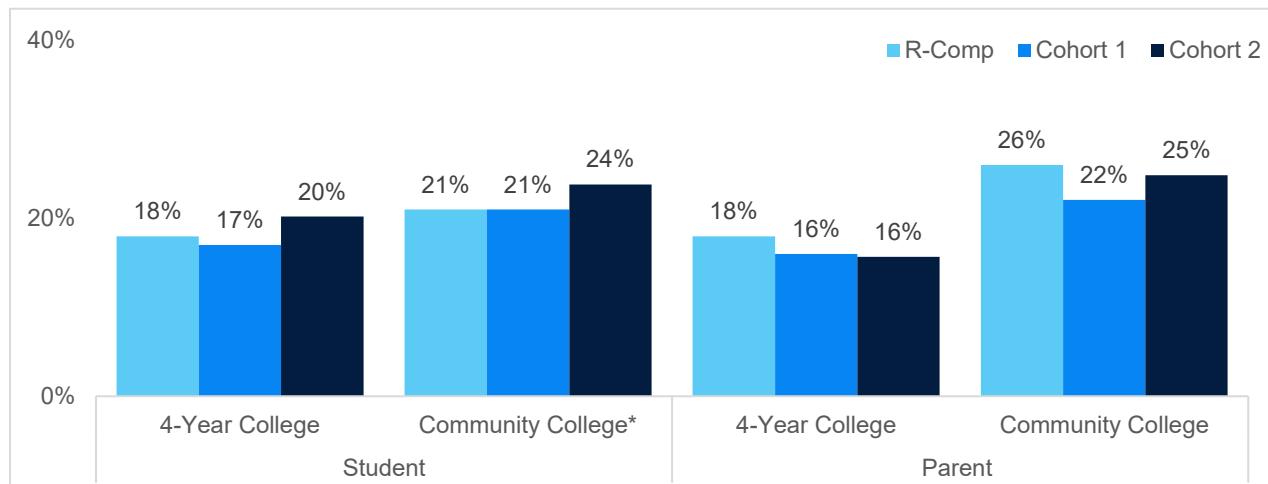
Source. WV GEAR UP R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 student and parent surveys (Year 1–Year 3).
*Statistically significant (p<.05).

Figure 12 presents the percentage of Cohort 1 students, parents, and Grade 12 students surveyed in Year 3 who correctly estimated the cost of each type of institution. Table B.17 presents a more comprehensive view of the data, showing the percentage of students and parents who were correct, under, and above in their estimates of the costs. A relatively similar percentage of Cohort 1 parents and Grade 12 students correctly estimated the costs of both options: 23% of Cohort 1 parents and 25% of Grade 12 students correctly estimated the 4-year college option, while 29% of both Cohort 1 parents and Grade 12 students correctly estimated the 2-year college option. A smaller percentage of Cohort 1 students correctly estimated the costs of both the 4-year and 2-year college response options (19% and 20%, respectively), which is understandable given the younger age and year of students in Cohort 1.

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[13] Cost of a 2-year college X^2 = 6.56, p<.05 (V = 0.03).

Figure 12. Percentage of Year 3 Students and Parents Who Correctly Estimated College Cost

Bar chart showing percentages for "Correctly Estimated Cost of 4-Year College": Cohort 1 Students 19%, Cohort 1 Parents 23%, Grade 12 Students 25%. For "Correctly Estimated Cost of Community College": Cohort 1 Students 20%, Cohort 1 Parents 29%, Grade 12 Students 29%.

Legend: Cohort 1 Students, Cohort 1 Parents, Grade 12 Students
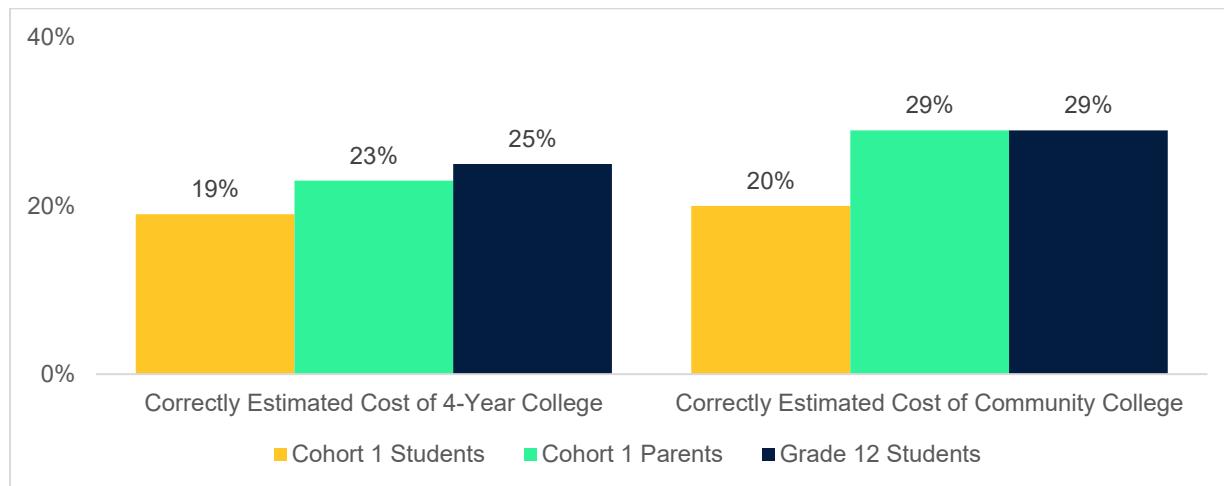
Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.

Surveys additionally provided descriptions of four financial aid sources available to students: the WV Promise Scholarship, the West Virginia Higher Education Grant, the federal Pell grant, and the West Virginia Invests grant. For each of the four descriptions, respondents were asked to identify which source they belonged to. A higher proportion of Cohort 2 students correctly identified the Pell grant and WV Promise Scholarship (27% and 46%, respectively) than did Cohort 1 and R–Comp students. Figure 13 presents the proportion of students who correctly identified the financial aid source across cohorts when the students were in Grade 8.

Bar chart showing percentages by cohort (R-Comp, Cohort 1, Cohort 2):
- WV Invests Grant: 22%, 22%, 21%
- Pell Grant: 24%, 25%, 27%
- WV Higher Education Grant: 32%, 30%, 30%
- Promise Scholarship: 44%, 44%, 46%

Legend: R-Comp, Cohort 1, Cohort 2
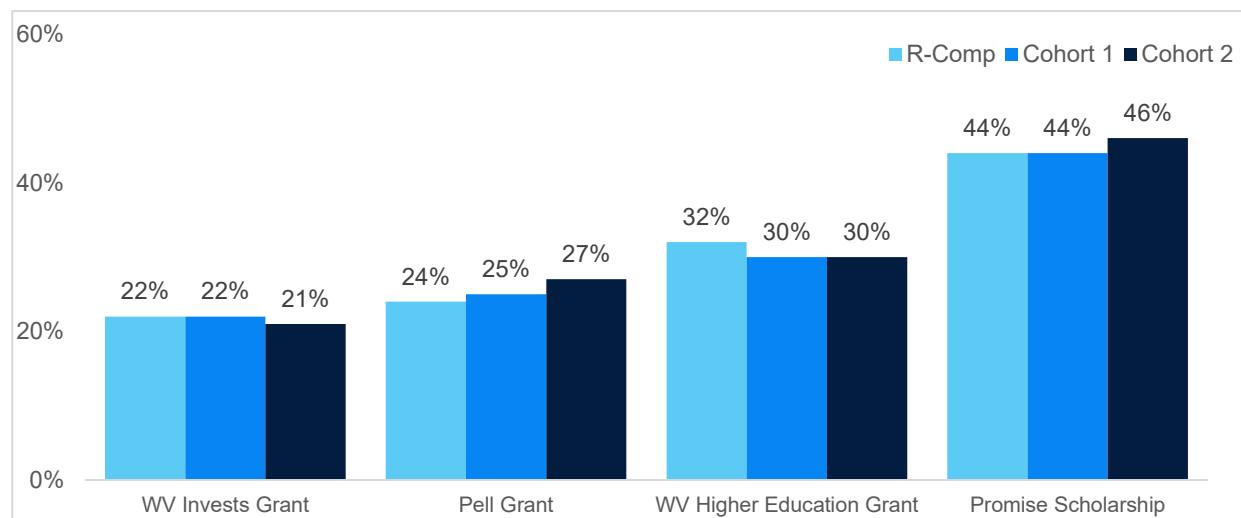
Figure 13. Percentage of Grade 8 Students Who Correctly Identified Financial Aid Sources by Cohort

Source: WV GEAR UP R-Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 surveys (Year 1–Year 3).

Figure 14 presents the percentage of Cohort 1 students, parents, and Grade 12 students surveyed in Year 3 who correctly identified the financial aid source based on their description. For all three groups, the largest percentage of respondents correctly identified the WV Promise Scholarship (48% of Cohort 1 students, 60% of Cohort 1 parents, and 54% of Grade 12 students). When comparing the three groups, the largest percentage of Cohort 1 parents correctly identified each financial aid source, with the smallest percentage of Cohort 1 students correctly identifying each source. A larger percentage of Grade 12 students correctly identified each source compared to Cohort 1 students, representing a potential growth in knowledge from Grade 9 to Grade 12 about financial aid sources as students get closer to graduating high school.

Figure 14. Percentage of Students and Parents Surveyed in Year 3 Who Correctly Identified Financial Aid Sources
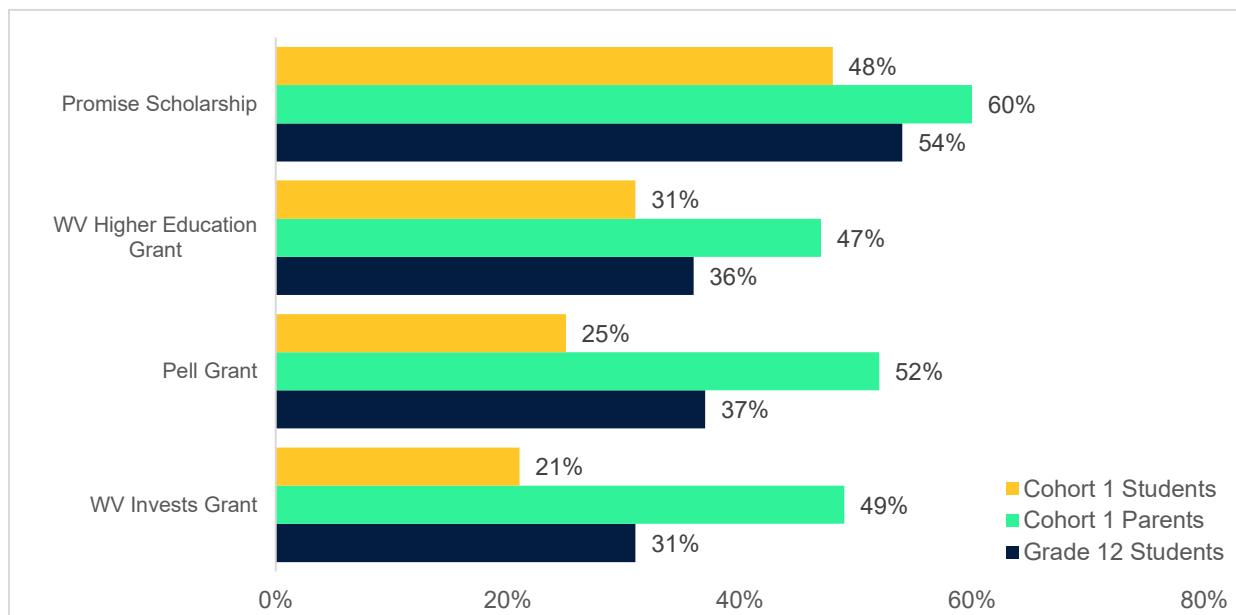
Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought they could afford three options for postsecondary education using financial aid, scholarships, and their family's resources: (1) a public 4-year college, (2) a public 2-year community/technical college, and (3) a public career/technical center. The answer scale was comprised of four options, ranging from *Definitely Not* to *Definitely*.

Figure 15 presents the mean ratings for Cohort 1 students', parents', and Grade 12 students' estimations on college affordability for surveyed respondents in Year 3. For each of the three education options, Cohort 1 students had the lowest mean ratings, ranging from 2.77 for 4-year college to 3.06 for public career/technical center. Grade 12 students had slightly higher mean ratings, ranging from 2.81 for 4-year college to 3.15 for public career/technical center. Cohort 1 parents had the highest mean ratings, ranging from 3.08 for 4-year college to 3.43 for public career/technical center. For all three respondent groups, the public 4-year college response option had the lowest mean ratings, while the public career/technical center

response option had the highest, which is unsurprising due to the price differential among programs.

Figure 15. Year 3 Student and Parent Estimation of College Affordability Mean Ratings
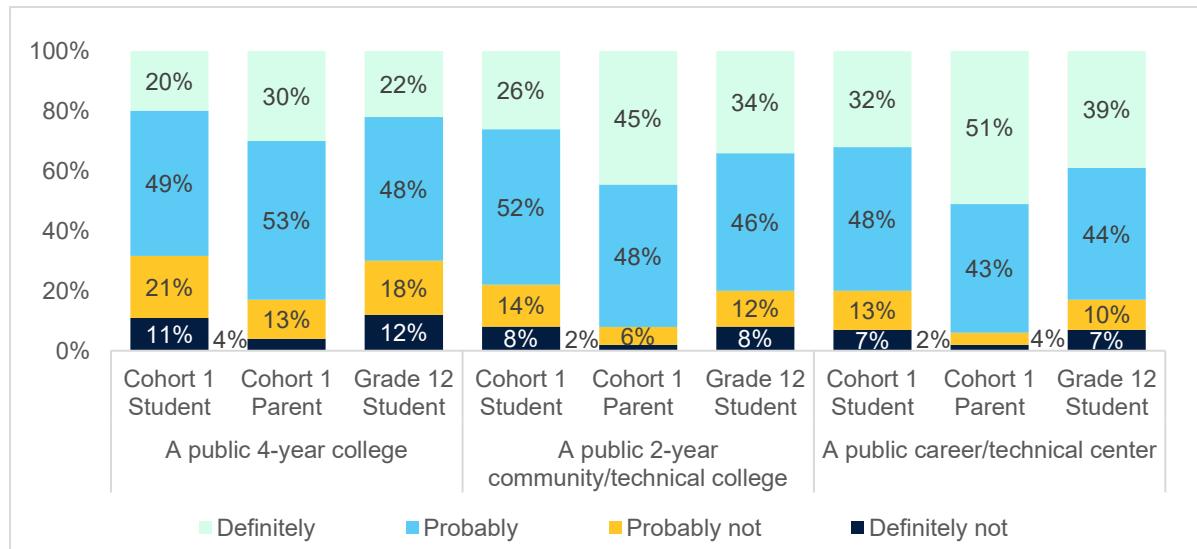
Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

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*).

Comparing student knowledge of college and career topics among groups, Cohort 1 students had significantly higher means than R–Comp and Cohort 2 students on topics related to FAFSA, federal work study and federal student loans.[14] Interestingly, Cohort 1 students also had higher mean scores on knowledge about ACT/SAT compared to students in R–Comp and Cohort 2 groups.[15] Additional significant findings are presented in Figure 16, including significant differences among R–Comp and Cohort 2 students when they were in Grade 8.[16] The effect sizes across all significant findings were small.

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[14] *FAFSA: $F(2,6336) = 12.66$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=0.004$; Federal student loans: $F(2,6290) = 6.28$, $p<.01$, $\eta^2=0.002$; Federal work study: $F(2,6275) = 4.65$, $p<.05$, $\eta^2=0.001$.*

[15] *ACT/SAT: $F(2,6285) = 7.58$, $p<.01$, $\eta^2=0.002$.*

[16] *High school graduation requirements: $F(2,6256) = 5.43$, $p<.01$, $\eta^2=0.002$.*

Figure 16. Grade 8 Student Knowledge of College and Career Topics by Cohort
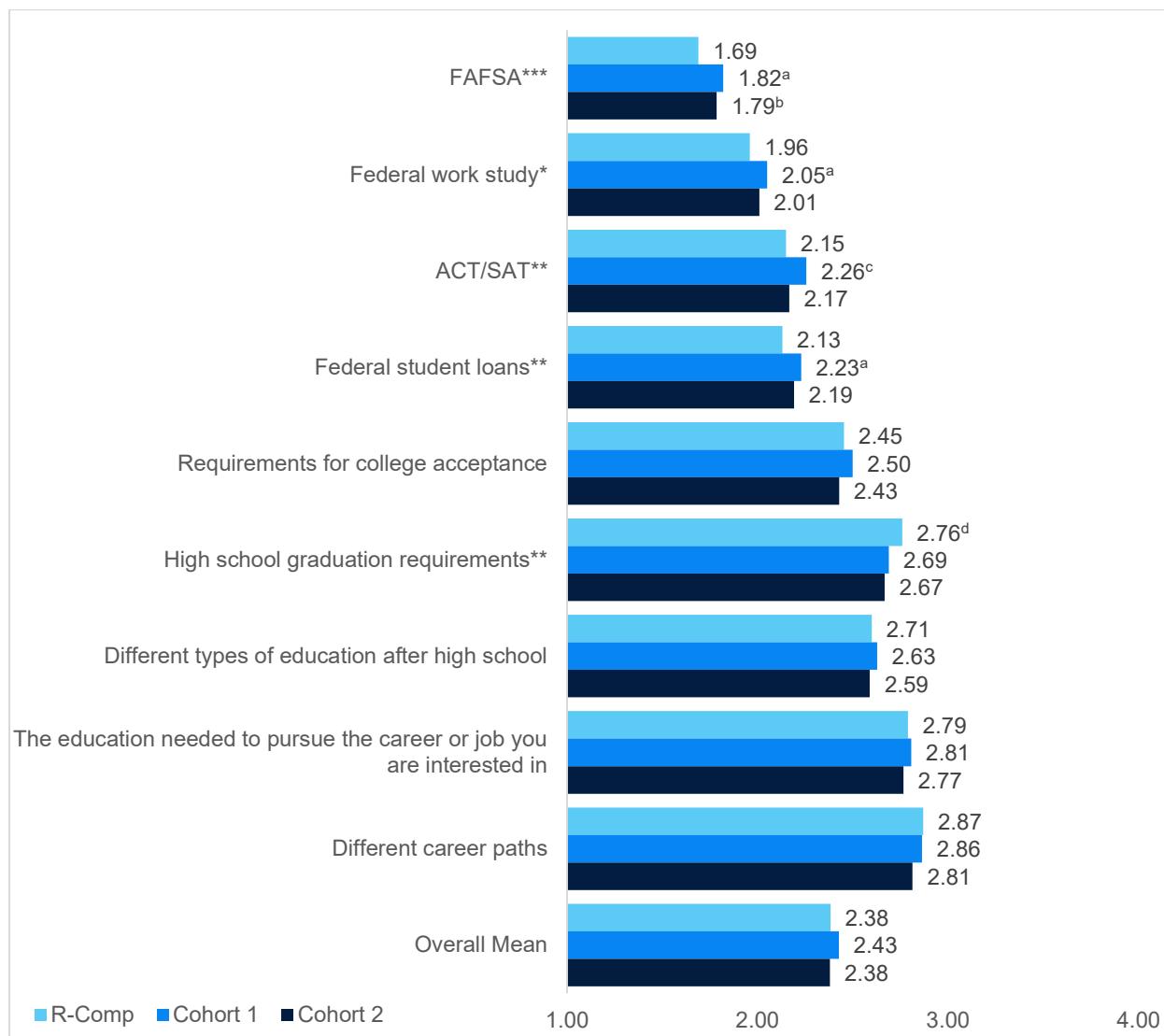
Source. WV GEAR UP R–Comp, Cohort 1, and Cohort 2 student surveys (Year 1–Year 3).
Note. Scale used to determine rating: 1 – *Not at all knowledgeable,* 2 – *Slightly knowledgeable,* 3 – *Moderately knowledgeable,* 4 – *Extremely knowledgeable*.
*Statistically significant (*p*<.05). **Statistically significant (*p*<.01). ***Statistically significant (*p*<.001).
[a]Cohort 1 is significantly higher than R–Comp. [b]Cohort 2 is significantly higher than R–Comp. [c]Cohort 1 is significantly higher than both R–Comp and Cohort 2. [d]R–Comp is significantly higher than Cohort 1 and Cohort 2.

Figure 17 presents the mean score for Cohort 1 students and parents and Grade 12 students surveyed in Year 3 along with the overall mean rating across topics related to education beyond high school. Cohort 1 students indicated they were most knowledgeable about different career paths (2.83) and least knowledgeable about FASFA (1.85), with an overall mean rating of 2.42. Grade 12 students were most knowledgeable about high school graduation requirements (3.18) and least knowledgeable about federal work study (1.99), with an overall mean rating of 2.66. Cohort 1 parents were most knowledgeable about high

school graduation requirements (2.91), least knowledgeable about federal work study (2.14), and had an overall mean rating of 2.63. These mean ratings indicate that while parents and students might have strong knowledge surrounding the typical high school to college path—considering aspects such as requirements for college acceptance and different career paths—they might benefit from increased knowledge and resources surrounding less topics they were less knowledgeable about for helping to pay for college, such as federal work study, FAFSA, and federal student loans.

Figure 17. Year 3 Student and Parent/Guardian Knowledge of College and Career Topics

FAFSA
- Cohort 1 Students: 1.85
- Cohort 1 Parents: 2.54
- Grade 12 Students: 2.33

Federal work study
- Cohort 1 Students: 1.99
- Cohort 1 Parents: 2.14
- Grade 12 Students: 1.99

ACT/SAT
- Cohort 1 Students: 2.33
- Cohort 1 Parents: 2.69
- Grade 12 Students: 2.85

Federal student loans
- Cohort 1 Students: 2.12
- Cohort 1 Parents: 2.44
- Grade 12 Students: 2.16

Requirements for college acceptance
- Cohort 1 Students: 2.47
- Cohort 1 Parents: 2.59
- Grade 12 Students: 2.68

High school graduation requirements
- Cohort 1 Students: 2.82
- Cohort 1 Parents: 2.91
- Grade 12 Students: 3.18

Different types of education after high school
- Cohort 1 Students: 2.64
- Cohort 1 Parents: 2.82
- Grade 12 Students: 2.89

The education needed to pursue the career or job you are interested in
- Cohort 1 Students: 2.75
- Cohort 1 Parents: 2.82
- Grade 12 Students: 2.99

Different career paths
- Cohort 1 Students: 2.83
- Cohort 1 Parents: 2.86
- Grade 12 Students: 2.94

Overall Mean
- Cohort 1 Students: 2.42
- Cohort 1 Parents: 2.63
- Grade 12 Students: 2.66

Legend:
- ☐ Cohort 1 Students
- ☐ Cohort 1 Parents
- ☐ Grade 12 Students

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Scale used to determine rating: 1 – *Not at all knowledgeable,* 2 – *Slightly knowledgeable,* 3 – *Moderately knowledgeable,* 4 – *Extremely knowledgeable.*

College and Career Preparation Activities/Services

This section presents parent/guardian and student survey findings on GEAR UP services. It also provides a spotlight analysis on perceptions of parents/guardians based on their relationship to the student.

GEAR UP Services

As seen in Figure 18, almost three-quarters of Cohort 1 parents surveyed in Year 3 reported that they were aware of the resources provided by GEAR UP (72%); even so, most reported that they would like to have more information about GEAR UP (81%).

Figure 18. Year 3 Cohort 1 Parent/Guardian Knowledge of GEAR UP

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 parent survey.

Respondents next rated the helpfulness of a variety of activities designed to increase their knowledge and awareness of college. Cohort 1 students surveyed in Year 3 provided feedback about 11 activities. The activities with the highest percentage of Cohort 1 students reporting that they were *Extremely helpful* or *Moderately helpful* were freshman academy/orientation activities (30%), college campus visits (28%), and in-person help with classes (25%). Over half reported that they did not participate in or that their school did not offer College Application and Exploration Week (63%), mentoring (62%), GEAR UP U Summer Academy (62%), virtual help with class (60%), Student Leadership Academy (58%), financial literacy workshops (56%), help with College for West Virginia (CFWV.com) web portal (54%), or activities related to STEM (52%). Approximately two-thirds or more of Cohort 1 parents (64%–82%) indicated that their school did not offer, or they did not attend/participate in five of the six activities about which they were asked. Over half (54%) of Cohort 1 parents reported they attended freshman academy/orientation-related events. Among those who did report participating in activities in Year 3, freshman academy/orientation activities (37%), college campus visits (26%), and the CFWV.com portal (16%) were the events/activities that parents were most likely to regard as *Extremely* or *Moderately helpful*.

Grade 12 students provided feedback about 13 activities. The activities with the highest percentage of Grade 12 students reporting that they were *Extremely helpful* or *Moderately helpful* were college campus visits (44%) and ACT/SAT preparation (40%). At least half reported that they did not participate in or that their school did not offer virtual help with classes (56%), mentoring (52%), or financial literacy workshops (52%). See Table 2 for more details.
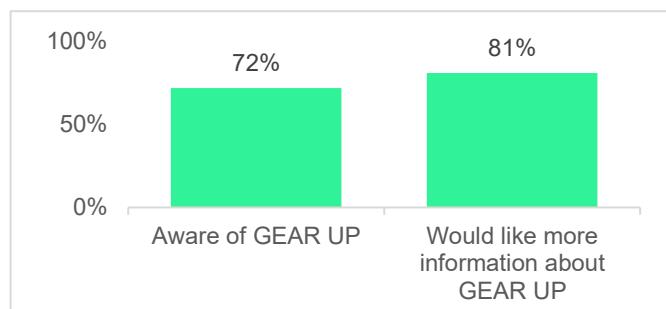
Table 2. Year 3 Cohort 1 Student and Parent/Guardian and Grade 12 Student Helpfulness Ratings of Preparation Activities

		Not offered/ does not apply	Offered, but I did not attend	Not at all helpful	Slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Extremely helpful
Cohort 1 Students	College Application and Exploration Week	50%	13%	4%	16%	12%	6%
	Activities related to STEM	35%	17%	6%	21%	15%	8%
	In-person help with classes	30%	20%	6%	19%	15%	10%
	Virtual help with classes	43%	17%	8%	16%	11%	6%
	Financial literacy workshops	43%	13%	6%	18%	13%	7%
	College for West Virginia (CFWV.com) web portal	42%	12%	7%	19%	14%	7%
	College campus visits	36%	12%	6%	18%	16%	12%
	Student Leadership Academy	45%	13%	6%	16%	12%	7%
	Mentoring	48%	14%	6%	15%	12%	6%
	GEAR UP U Summer Academy	42%	20%	6%	14%	11%	7%
	Freshman academy/orientation	30%	12%	7%	22%	18%	12%
Cohort 1 Parents	CFWV.com workshops	57%	20%	1%	9%	9%	5%
	Financial aid literacy and assistance	56%	19%	3%	8%	9%	4%
	CFWV.com portal	57%	17%	2%	10%	10%	6%
	College campus visits	50%	14%	3%	8%	12%	14%
	Family Action Network	61%	21%	1%	6%	8%	4%
	Freshman academy/orientation	31%	15%	2%	15%	19%	18%

		Not offered/ does not apply	Offered, but I did not attend	Not at all helpful	Slightly helpful	Moderately helpful	Extremely helpful
Grade 12 Students	College Application and Exploration Week	26%	21%	7%	28%	17%	0%
	Activities related to STEM	25%	22%	7%	20%	15%	11%
	In-person help with classes	20%	27%	5%	17%	17%	13%
	Virtual help with classes	32%	24%	9%	16%	11%	8%
	Financial literacy workshops	34%	18%	7%	17%	15%	9%
	Assistance with financial aid forms	24%	17%	6%	19%	19%	16%
	Text Messaging Program	25%	16%	9%	21%	18%	11%
	ACT/SAT preparation	13%	15%	8%	24%	24%	16%
	Academic planning/career advising	21%	15%	7%	23%	21%	13%
	CFWV.com web portal	22%	14%	8%	24%	18%	14%
	College Decision Day	25%	15%	7%	22%	19%	13%
	College campus visits	15%	17%	5%	18%	21%	23%
	Mentoring	34%	18%	7%	17%	15%	11%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. STEM = science, technology, engineering, and math. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

As seen in Figure 19, Grade 12 students surveyed in Year 3 who reported that they did not participate in these events most often cited a lack of awareness (33%) and a lack of interest (32%) as reasons for their lack of participation. Most Grade 12 students who selected the *Other* response option indicated that they did not attend due to a lack of a desire to attend college or the activities not including their interests.

Figure 19. Reasons Year 3 Grade 12 Students Did Not Participate in Activities
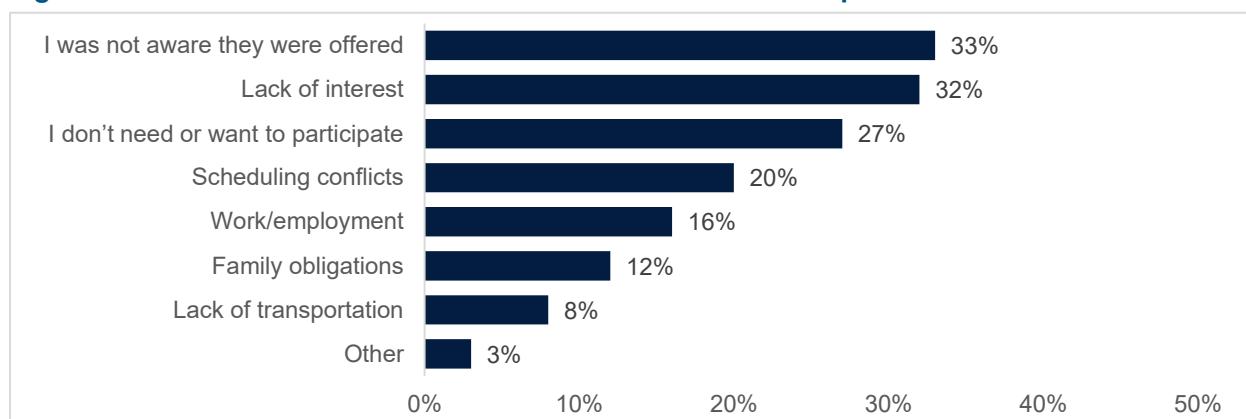
Reason	Percent
I was not aware they were offered	33%
Lack of interest	32%
I don't need or want to participate	27%
Scheduling conflicts	20%
Work/employment	16%
Family obligations	12%
Lack of transportation	8%
Other	3%

Source. WV GEAR UP Grade 12 student survey.
Note. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

The FAFSA serves as a pivotal component in students' postsecondary plans and eligibility to receive additional federal financial aid, such as the Pell grant, especially for students who come from families with lower incomes. Grade 12 students responded to survey questions regarding their participation in college preparation activities such as FAFSA completion and college application submission.[17] Select results from these items can be found in Figure 20. Over half of Grade 12 students (69%) reported that they plan to complete the FAFSA. Of the 8% of students who reported that they do not plan to submit a FAFSA, most frequently Grade 12 students reported they were not sure what the FAFSA was (12%) and that they planned to take time off between high school and college (9%). Nearly one-fourth (23%) of Grade 12 students noted they did not know if they plan to complete the FAFSA. In regard to college application submission, most Grade 12 students (84%) reported that they had submitted at least one application or planned to submit an application at a later time (59% submitted at least two applications and 25% had not submitted any applications but planned to). Nearly three-fourths of students who submitted at least one application reported they spoke with and received help from a college official (71%) and one-half of students received general help on the application submission process (51%). See Tables A.23–A.24 for additional details.

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[17] FAFSA submission became more complicated during the 2023–2024 school year as the U.S. Department of Education implemented substantial changes to the application with the goal of streamlining the form. Due to the changes, the 2024–2025 FAFSA submissions were delayed until late December 2023.

Figure 20. Year 3 Grade 12 Students Completion of FAFSA and College Applications

FAFSA
- 8% — No, I do not plan to complete
- 69% — Yes, I plan to complete
- 23% — I do not know

College Applications
- 16% — 0, and I do not plan to complete any this academic year
- 25% — 0, but I plan to complete 1 or more this academic year
- 0% — 1 application
- 59% — 2 or more applications
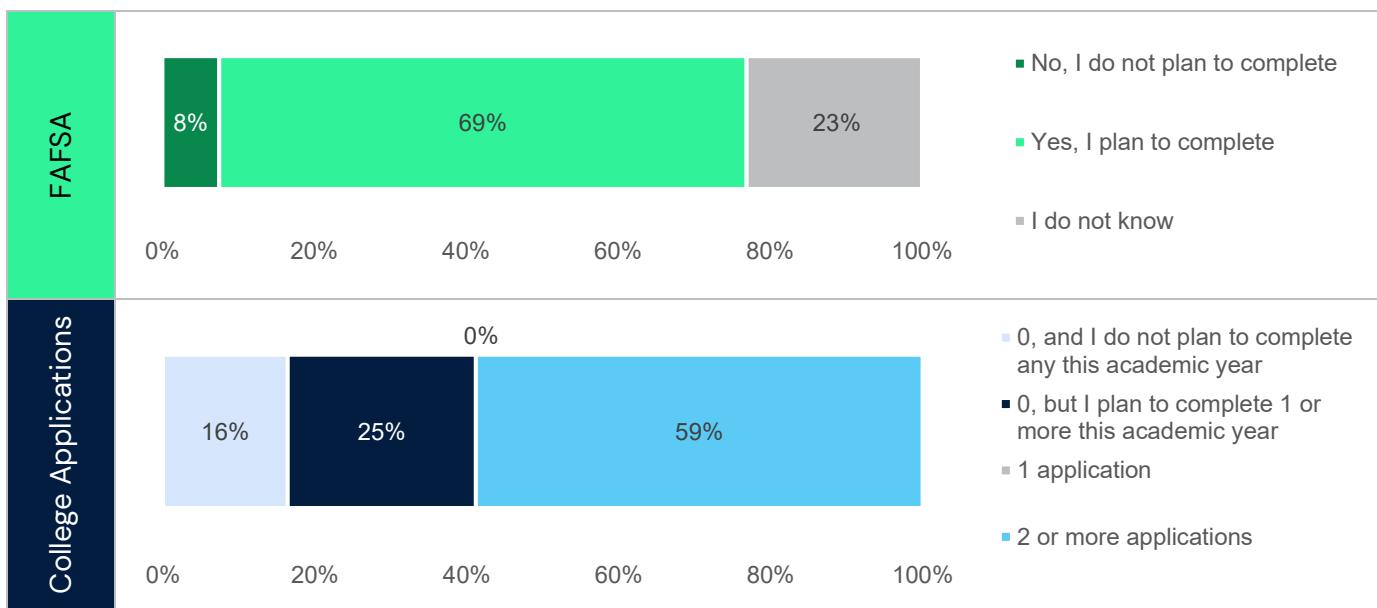
Source. WV GEAR UP Grade 12 student survey.

Cohort 1 student and parent Year 3 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 21.

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 college visits (42%) and information on college entrance requirements (42%). Over 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 (64%), college visits (63%), and information about college entrance requirements (58%). Similar to Cohort 1 students. Grade 12 students most commonly reported needing more concrete supports such as information on college financial aid and scholarships (37%), assistance with completing financial aid forms (31%), and information on college entrance requirements (30%). Table B.22 provides a complete breakdown of all response options for Cohort 1 students and parents and Grade 12 students for reported needs.

Figure 21. Top Resources Needed by Year 3 Students and Parents to Succeed in High

Cohort 1 Student	Cohort 1 Parent	Grade 12 Student
•College visits (42%) •Information about college entrance requirements (42%) •Information about college financial aid/scholarships (37%) •Career exploration activities (37%)	•Information about college financial aid/scholarships (64%) •College visits (63%) •Information about college entrance requirements (58%) •Career exploration activities (57%)	•Information about college financial aid/scholarships (37%) •Assistance with completing financial aid forms (31%) •Information about college entrance requirements (30%) •Career exploration activities (28%)

School

Source. WV GEAR Up Cohort 1 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.

Spotlight Analysis: Parents' and Guardians' Perceptions of Education and Future Plans

This section presents findings from analyses comparing parents'/guardians' perceptions measured by parent surveys for Cohort 1 (Grade 9) respondents in Year 3 who indicated they were a *Parent* of the participating GEAR UP Cohort 1 students and those who indicated another relationship to the student (i.e., *Grandparent*, *Legal Guardian*, *Step or Foster Parent*, or *Other*). Figure 22 provides a breakdown of the reported relationships between parent/guardian respondents and their Cohort 1 student. As respondents were able to select multiple relations, some reported they were a combination, such as *Parent* and *Grandparent*; *Parent* and *Legal Guardian*; or *Grandparent* and *Legal Guardian*.

Figure 22. Guardian Relationship to Year 3 Cohort 1 Student
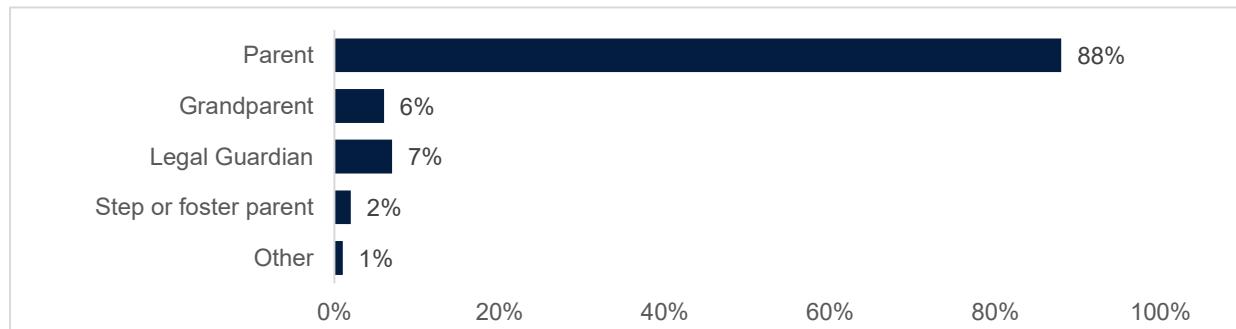
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 parent survey.
Note. Percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. There were 457 respondents in total.

For the spotlight analysis, subsequent findings will be broken out by respondents who reported to be the student's *Parent* or *Parent* and *Legal Guardian,* referred to as "parents," and those who selected at least one other relationship, referred to as "guardians*."* When recategorized into these two groups, there were 402 total respondents (88%) who were considered parents and 55 (12%) who are considered guardians.[18]

Because the sample sizes between these two groups are substantially different, the interpretation of these findings should be considered with extreme caution. In subsequent years of the evaluation, a similar question on the parental/guardian relationship of student's primary caregiver(s) will be included in student survey data collection to provide a more robust sample to further explore differences.

Regardless of the respondents' relationship to the Cohort 1 students, respondents noted discussing and valuing education after high school with their student. Across both groups, the majority of parents and guardians noted they had talked with their student about attending college, 96% and 91%, respectively. Both parents and guardians *Agreed* to *Strongly agreed* that attending college was important to their student's career goals and future (with mean scores of 3.49 for both groups) and *Disagreed* that Grade 9 was too early to think about their student going to college (with mean scores of 1.69 and 1.77, respectively).

Considering parents'/guardians' perceptions of the college–going culture at their students' school, mainly parents' and guardians' agreement on the college–going culture of the school was consistent, with the exception of staff acknowledgement of the respondents' needs; see Figure 23. While both parents and guardians *Agreed* that school staff acknowledged their needs (such as their work schedule), guardians had significantly higher agreement then parents, with a small effect size.[19]

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[18] The percentages differ from that of Figure 22 as the figure shows all of respondents reported relationships with a student (e.g., *Parent* and *Step or foster parent*), while the reclassification of respondents for the spotlight analysis provides an unduplicated grouping of respondents into two categories (i.e., "parents" and "guardians").

[19] *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:* $t=2.26$, $p<.05$ (d=−.36).

Figure 23. Year 3 Parent and Guardian Perceptions of College–Going Culture in School

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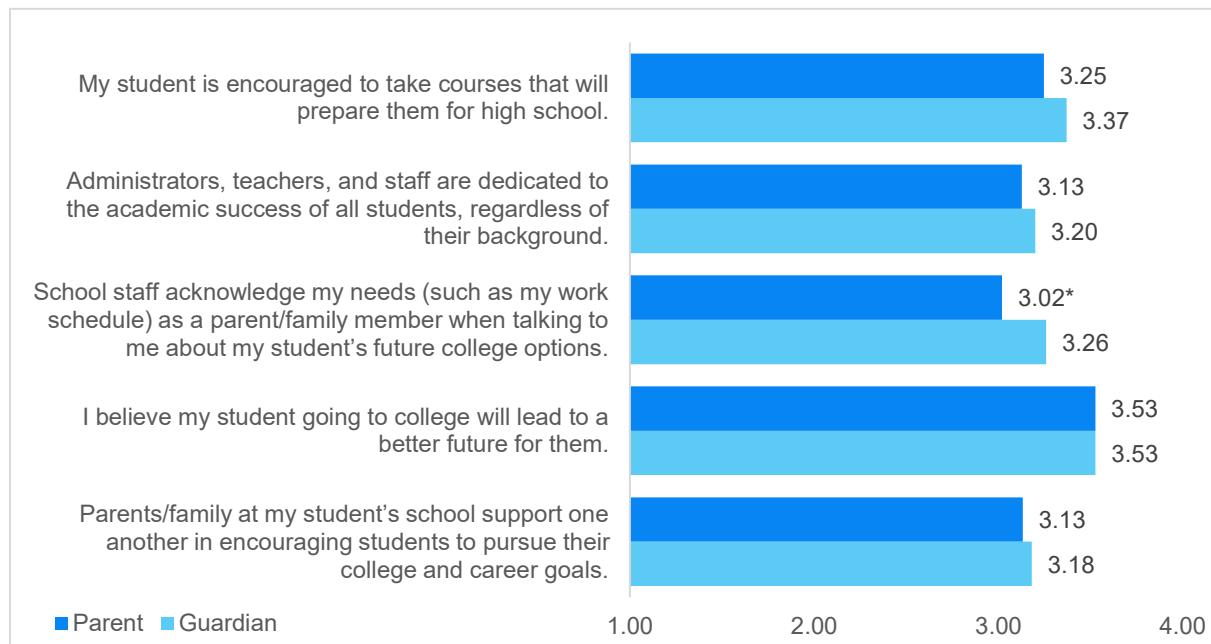
Note. Scale used to determine rating: 1 – *Strongly disagree*, 2 – *Disagree*, 3 – *Agree*, 4 – *Strongly agree*.

*Statistically significant compared to guardians of students (*p*<.05).

Parent/guardian respondents of Cohort 1 students were also asked to report the reason(s) their student may not be able to continue their education. Across both groups, most frequently, parents and guardians reported nothing would prevent their students from continuing their education (46%), followed by concerns regarding cost and affordability (29% and 35%, respectively). The percentage of respondents who reported their students' grades were not good enough was significantly higher for the guardians of Cohort 1 students compared to parents (difference of 16 percentage points), with a small effect size.[20] Figure 24 provides additional detail on the reasons parents/guardians reported their student may not be able to continue their education after high school.

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[20] *It costs too much/They can't afford it*: X^2=10.12, *p*<.001 (*phi*=.15).

Figure 24. Reasons Year 3 Parents and Guardians Reported Students May Not Continue

Reason	Parent	Guardian
Nothing will prevent my student from continuing their education	46%	46%
It costs too much/They can't afford it	29%	35%
Their grades aren't good enough	12%*	28%
They want to work	15%	9%
They need to work	6%	2%
Family issues	3%	7%
They plan to enlist in the military	5%	9%
They won't receive/be eligible for enough financial aid	18%	7%
Concerns about COVID-19	0%	0%
Other	5%	7%
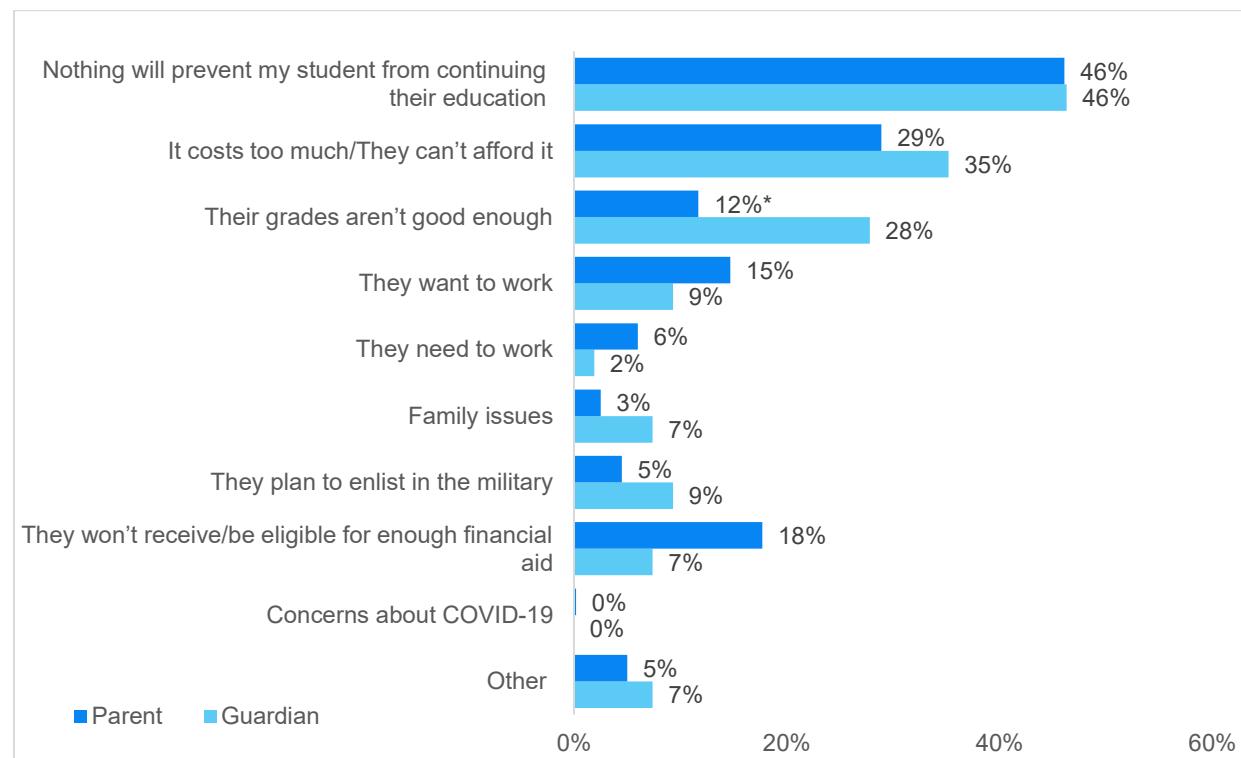
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 parent survey.
Note. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.
*Statistically significant compared to guardians of students (*p*<.01).

Comparisons in parents' and guardians' hope were assessed according to their relationship with their student. 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, parents/guardians reported the degree to which they believed the statement applied to their student on a 6-point scale, ranging from *None of the time* to *All of the time*. Figure 25 displays analyses of parents' and guardians' mean scores for each of the items as well as the overall mean score across items. Across all items, parents had a higher hope score compared to guardians; however, the difference was only significant for the two items related to students' ability to solve problems.[21] Parents' overall hope score was also significantly higher than guardians' (4.81 and 4.54, respectively).[22] All differences reported to be statistically significant had a small effect size.

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[21] *When my student has a problem, he/she can come up with lots of ways to solve it: t*=2.336, p<.05 (d=.33); *Even when others want to quit, I know that my student can find ways to solve the problem: t*= 2.195, *p*<.05 (*d*=.30).
[22] Overall mean: *t*= 2.092, *p*<.05 (*d*=.30).

Figure 25. Year 3 Parent and Guardian Hope Scale Scores

Item	Parents	Guardians
When my student has a problem, he/she can come up with lots of ways to solve it.	4.46*	4.05
I think my student is doing pretty well.	4.87	4.60
My student is doing just as well as other kids that are his/her age.	4.84	4.56
I am hopeful for my student's future.	5.52	5.42
I think the things my student has done in the past will help him/her in the future.	4.68	4.44
Even when others want to quit, I know that my student can find ways to solve the problem.	4.52*	4.15
Overall mean	4.81*	4.54

Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 parent survey.
*Statistically significant compared to guardians of students (*p*<.05).

As seen in Figure 26, the majority of parent/guardian respondents reported they *Probably* or *Definitely* could afford all three of the postsecondary options. Parents had a slightly higher, albeit not significant, perception of affordability. For a 2-year college and career/technical center (CTC), one-tenth or less of parents and guardians (7% and 10%, respectively, for 2-year and 5% and 10% for CTC, respectively) reported they could *Definitely not* or *Probably not* afford it. Alternatively, for a 4-year college, closer to one-fifth of parents and guardians reported they could not afford it (17% and 22%, respectively). For a 4-year college, 83% of parents believed they *Probably* or *Definitely* could afford it compared to 78% of

Figure 26. Year 3 Parent Affordability of Postsecondary Options
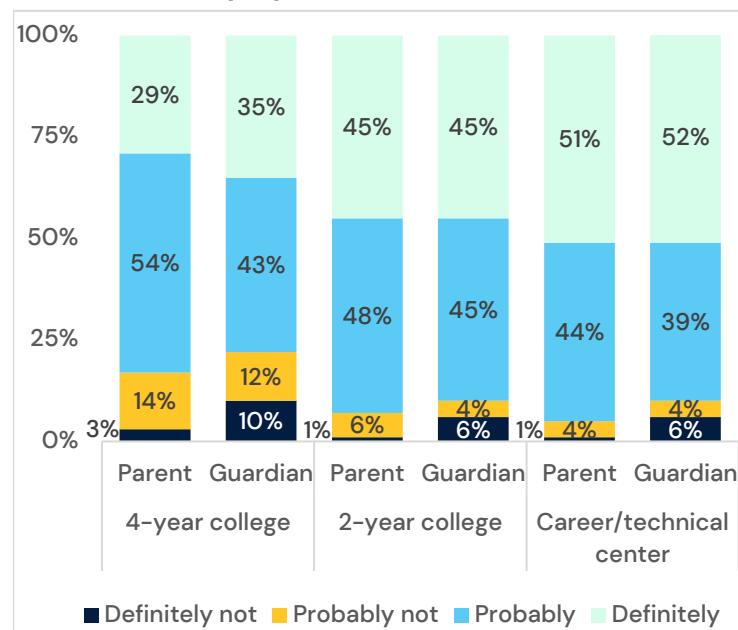
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 parent survey.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

guardians—this was the option related to education beyond high school with the greatest difference between groups.

Additionally, Figure 27 shows parents' and guardians' knowledge of college and career topics presented as mean scores. Parents had significantly lower reported knowledge of *federal work study* (2.11) compared to guardians (2.42), with a small effect size.[23] There were no other significant differences between parents' and guardians' knowledge of college and career topics.

Figure 27. Year 3 Parents' and Guardians' Knowledge of College and Career Topics
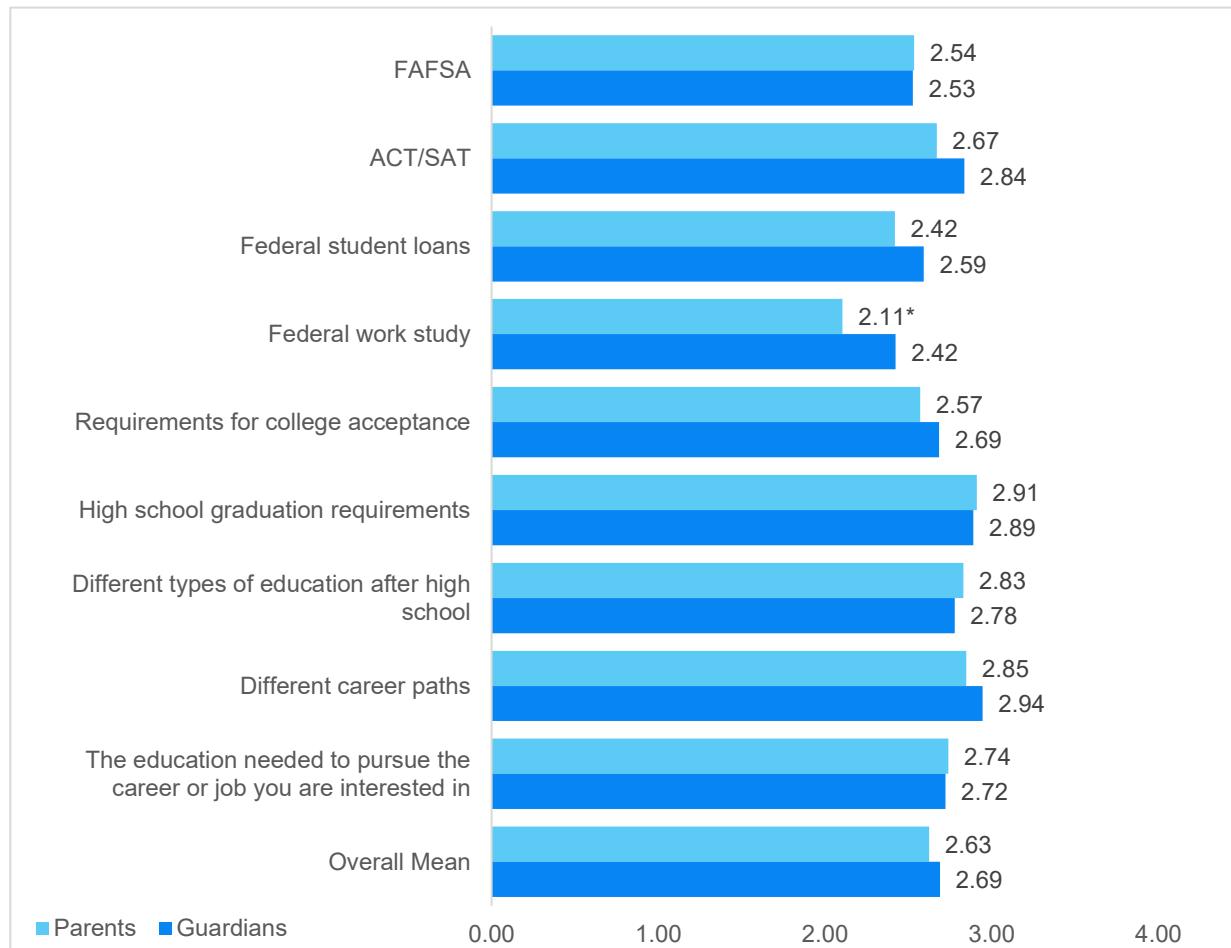
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 parent survey.
Note. Scale used to determine rating: 1 – *Not at all knowledgeable,* 2 – *Slightly knowledgeable,* 3 – *Moderately knowledgeable,* 4 – *Extremely knowledgeable.*
*Statistically significant compared to guardians of students (*p*<.05).

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[23] *Federal work study: t*=−2.327, p<.05 (d=−.35).

IV. School Personnel Survey Results

This chapter summarizes results from the GEAR UP Year 3 School Personnel Survey analysis. This includes findings about faculty member perceptions of college-going culture in their schools, their knowledge of college costs and financial aid programs, and their involvement in college-related activities. Overall, 1,329 personnel are included in the analyses presented in this section, which represents 66% of school personnel at the time of survey administration. Longitudinal analysis is presented to compare school personnel survey results from Year 1 to Year 3 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 (74%) 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 1 and Year 2 were similar to those of survey respondents from Year 3. The majority of personnel survey respondents were teachers (78%), followed by administrators (6%) and counselors (5%). Five percent of respondents reported that they served as a GEAR UP site coordinator. More information about respondent backgrounds can be found in Tables A.25–A.29.

School personnel also reported their experience applying for and receiving financing for their postsecondary education, as shown in Figure 28. Four-fifths (80%) of personnel reported having experience applying for the FAFSA and almost two-thirds (65%) reported having experience receiving a loan to be repaid. A little over one-tenth (11% and 13%, respectively) of personnel noted they had no personal experience applying for or receiving financing.

Figure 28. School Personnel Experience Applying and Receiving Financing for Postsecondary Education by Percentage of Respondents
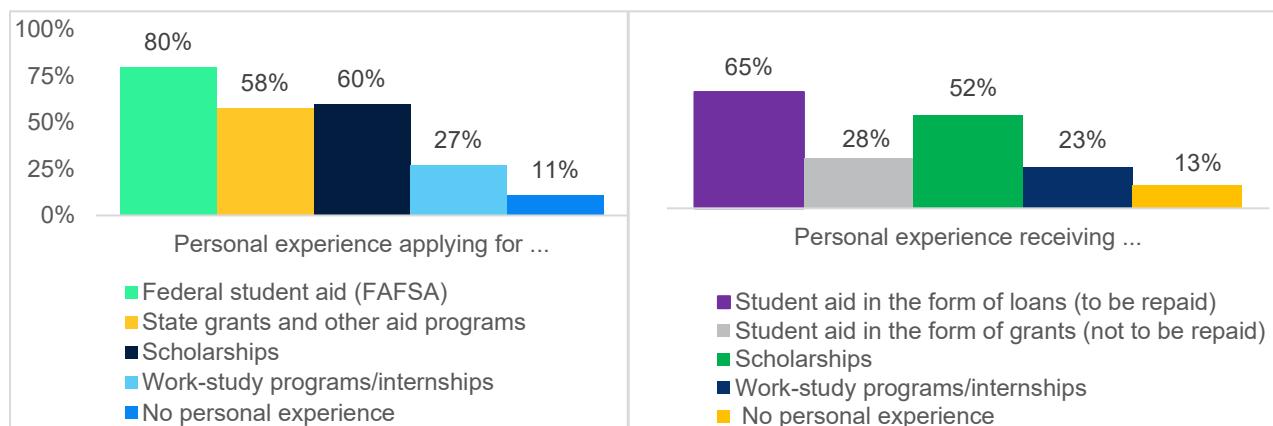
Personal experience applying for ...
- Federal student aid (FAFSA) — 80%
- State grants and other aid programs — 58%
- Scholarships — 60%
- Work-study programs/internships — 27%
- No personal experience — 11%

Personal experience receiving ...
- Student aid in the form of loans (to be repaid) — 65%
- Student aid in the form of grants (not to be repaid) — 28%
- Scholarships — 52%
- Work-study programs/internships — 23%
- No personal experience — 13%

Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 Personnel Survey.
Note. Response percentages may 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. Compared to the previous year, there was no significant difference in the overall mean college–going culture score (3.17 in Year 2 and 3.19 in Year 3). Figure 29 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.

Figure 29. School Personnel Mean Agreement about their School by Grades Served

Teachers and staff …

Statement	Grades 9-12	Grades 6-8
help students set goals that are achievable.	3.29	3.26
are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background.	3.43	3.41
openly communicate to students that college will lead to a better future for them and their family.	3.31	3.27
make themselves available to students and their families when completing college materials.	3.29	3.04***
talk with parents and families about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for college.	3.14	3.07*
acknowledge student goals, abilities, and talents when talking to them about future college options.	3.32	3.25*

Teachers …

Statement	Grades 9-12	Grades 6-8
in my school can help students overcome frustration when confronted with difficult tasks.	3.27	3.25
are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum.	3.08	3.13
include visual cues to encourage discussions about their college experience.	3.12	3.04*
can help increase the percentage of students who are promoted to the next grade at my school.	3.27	3.25

Students …

Statement	Grades 9-12	Grades 6-8
encourage one another to follow their college and career goals.	3.11	3.01**
will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution.	3.20	3.06***
are learning effective problem-solving skills.	3.05	3.12*
are encouraged to choose courses that prepare them for college.	3.38	3.13***
are exposed to success stories of school alumni to help encourage their future success.	3.16	3.15

Statement	Grades 9-12	Grades 6-8
Creativity and original thinking are highly valued.	3.25	3.24
College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances.	3.03	2.87***
College pennants, banners, and posters are visible in your school.	3.32	3.09***

■ Serving students in Grades 9-12
■ Serving students in Grades 6-8

*Source.* WV GEAR UP Year 3 Personnel Survey.

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

*Statistically significant compared to Grades 6–8 (p<.05). **Statistically significant compared to Grades 6–8 (p<.01). ***Statistically significant compared to Grades 6–8 (p<.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 (3.03) than those serving students in Grades 6–8 (2.87).[24] 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* (3.43 and 3.41, respectively). Personnel serving Grades 9–12 had significantly higher mean agreement related to several items assessing their schools' college going culture.[25] However, personnel serving Grades 6–8 had significantly higher mean agreement that students were learning effective problem-solving skills.[26] 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*). Reported in Figure 30 are the mean score for each item and an indication of which items had significant differences between Year 2 and Year 3. Overall, in Year 3, teachers' mean agreement was the lowest with *I talk with parents and families about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for college* (2.74) and *College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances* (2.94)—for the former, teachers' mean agreement significantly decreased compared to Year 2.[27]

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[24] *College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances*: $t=-3.902$, $p<.001$ ($d=0.22$).

[25] *Students are encouraged to choose courses that prepare them for college*: $t=-7.209$, $p<.001$ ($d=0.40$); *Students will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution*: $t=-4.053$, $p<.05$ ($d=0.23$); *Students encourage one another to follow their college and career goals*: $t=-2.959$, $p<.01$ ($d=0.16$); *Teachers and staff acknowledge student goals, abilities, and talents when talking to them about future college options*: $t=-2.353$, $p<.05$ ($d=0.13$); *Teachers and staff talk with parents and families about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for college*: $t=-2.067$, $p<.05$ ($d=0.11$); *Teachers and staff make themselves available to students and their families when completing college materials*: $t=-7.301$, $p<.001$ ($d=0.41$); *College pennants, banners, and posters are visible in your school*: $t=-6.055$, $p<.001$ ($d=0.33$); *Teachers include visual cues to encourage discussions about their college experience*: $t=-2.385$, $p<.05$ ($d=0.13$).

[26] *Students are learning effective problem-solving skills*: $t=1.959$, $p<.05$ ($d=0.11$).

[27] *I talk with parents and families about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for college*: $t=-9.994$, $p<.001$ ($d=0.48$).

Figure 30. Teacher Mean Agreement about Their Classroom

Statement	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
I help students set goals that are achievable.	3.38	3.39	3.41
I am dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background.	3.55	3.54	3.56
I openly communicate to students that college will lead to a better future for them and their family.	3.24	3.30	3.32
I make myself available to students and their families when completing college materials.	3.03	3.10	3.09
I talk with parents and families about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for college.	2.93	3.03	2.74***
I acknowledge student goals, abilities, and talents when talking to them about future college options.	3.37	3.39	3.42
I can help students overcome frustration when confronted with difficult tasks.	3.38	3.39	3.41
I am able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum.	3.22	3.22	3.23
I include visual cues to encourage discussions about their college experience.	2.90	3.04	3.12*
I can help increase the percentage of students who are promoted to the next grade at my classroom.	3.29	3.33	3.32
Students encourage one another to follow their college and career goals.	3.07	3.14	3.15
Most students will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution.	3.09	3.15	3.19
Students are learning effective problem-solving skills.	3.22	3.22	3.28*
Student are encouraged to choose courses that prepare them for college.	3.20	3.26	3.29
Students are exposed to success stories of school alumni to help encourage their future success.	3.10	3.17	3.22
Creativity and original thinking are highly valued.	3.39	3.37	3.44**
College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances.	2.75	2.91	2.94
College pennants, banners, and posters are visible in your school.	2.82	3.00	2.99

■ Year 1   ■ Year 2   ■ Year 3

Source. WV GEAR UP Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 personnel surveys.

Note. Scale used to determine rating 1 – *Strongly disagree,* 2 – *Disagree,* 3 – *Agree,* 4 - *Strongly agree.*

*Statistically significant compared to Year 2 ($p<.05$). **Statistically significant compared to Year 2 ($p<.01$). ***Statistically significant compared to Year 2 ($p<.001$).

Similar to personnel, teachers had the highest mean agreement that *I am dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background* (3.56). Across several response items, teacher mean scores of the college-going culture in their classroom significantly increased in Year 3, such as including visual cues to encourage discussion related to college, students learning effective problem-solving skills, and valuing creativity and original thinking.[28] The effect sizes for all observed significant differences were small.

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 31, school personnel had the most familiarity with and knowledge of the FAFSA (67%). This was followed by their knowledge of scholarships (e.g., institutional) (62%); the WV Promise Scholarship (58%); and federal grants, loans, and work-study (54%). Over one-tenth (11%) of personnel survey respondents reported they did not know what the WV Invests grant or College Savings Plan/529 were.

Figure 31. School Personnel Knowledge of Financial Aid Programs by Percentage of Respondents
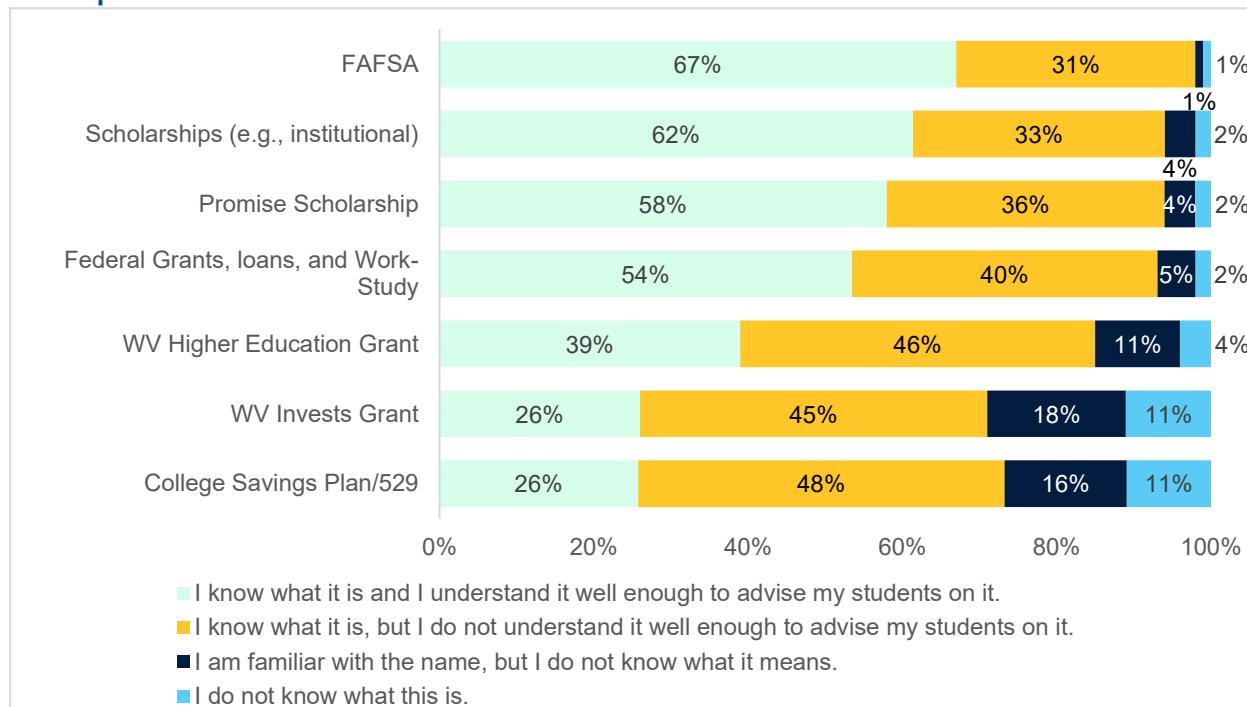
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 personnel survey.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

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[28] *I include visual cues to encourage discussions about their college experience*: t=−2.348, p<.05 (d=0.11); *I talk with parents and families about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for college*: t=9.994, p<.001 (d=0.48); *Students are learning effective problem-solving skills*: t=−2.399, p<.05 (d=11); *Creativity and original thinking are highly valued*: t=−2.776, p<.01 (d=0.12).

School personnel respondents also rated their ability to assist students and their families on eight college-related topics. Respondents were offered four response options to rate their ability (i.e., 1 – *Not at all able,* 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. Overall, counselors (3.85), administrators (3.75), and teachers (3.46) reported that they were best able to support students and families in conveying *The importance/benefit of a college education.* Figure 32 shows that reported ability among counselors was consistently the highest, followed by administrators, and then teachers across all included college related topics. Counselors had the lowest perceived ability to assist with course test preparation (3.39). Alternatively, administrators and teachers had the lowest perceived ability to assist with college match and fit (3.15 and 2.92, respectively).

Figure 32. School Personnel Perceived Ability to Assist Students and Families on College Topics by Role
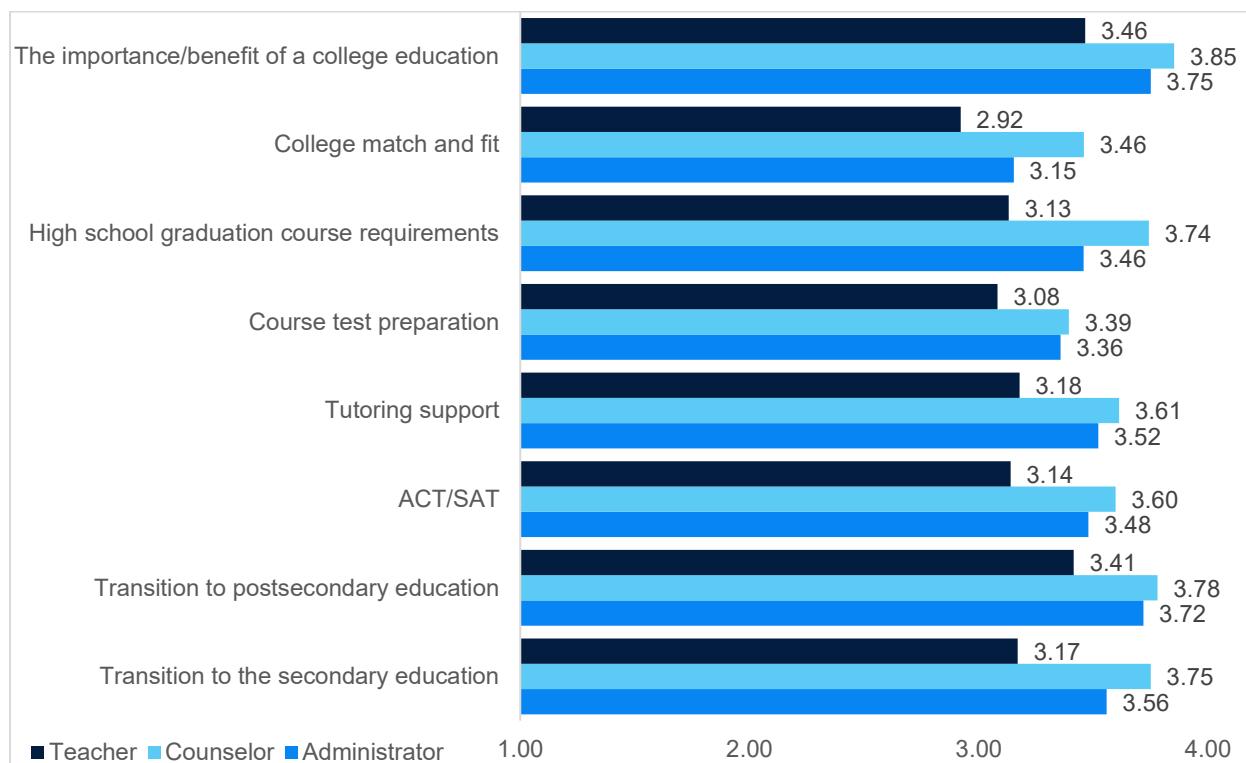
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 personnel survey.
Note. Scale used to determine rating: 1 – *Not at all able,* 2 – *Slightly able,* 3 – *Moderately able,* 4 – *Extremely able.*

Personnel survey respondents were asked to report estimates of the average cost of tuition—excluding the cost of food, housing, and books—for two public college options in West Virginia: (a) a 4-year public college/university, and (b) a public community/technical college. As in the student and parent surveys, respondents were offered seven response options, ranging from *Up to $3,000* to *More than $25,000.* As seen in Figure 33, in Year 3, 26% of personnel respondents correctly estimated the cost of a 4-year public college/university and 33% for a public community/technical college. There were no

significant differences in correct estimates of the cost of college between Year 2 and Year 3. However, the proportion of school personnel who correctly identified the WV Invests grant was significantly higher in Year 3 compared to Year 2.[29]

Figure 33. Percentage of Personnel Who Correctly Estimated the Cost of College and Identified Financial Aid Sources
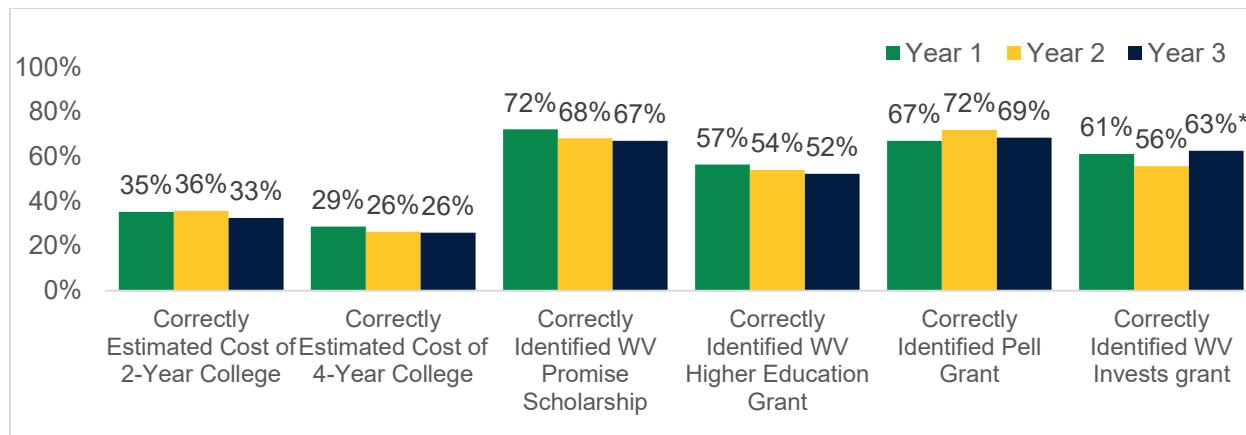
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 surveys.
*Statistically significant compared to Year 2 ($p<.01$).

GEAR UP Involvement

School personnel were also asked to report the extent to which they were involved in GEAR UP–sponsored events in Year 3. Figure 34 displays school personnel respondents' reported participation in GEAR UP–sponsored activities by year, with significant differences in participation between years. The effect size of the observed differences between Year 2 and Year 3 was small.[30] Reported participation in Year 3 (54%) was the highest across all 3 years (52% in Year 2 and 42% in Year 1).

Figure 34. School Personnel Participation in GEAR UP–Sponsored Activities by Year
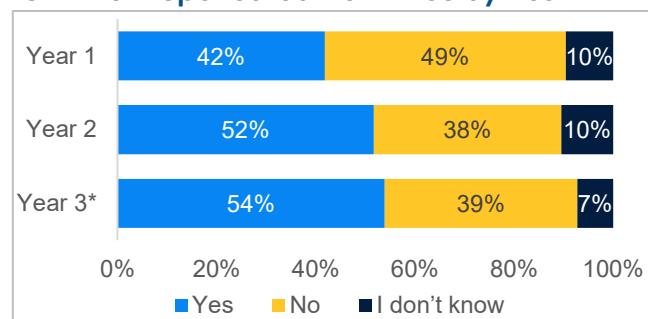
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.
*Statistically significant compared to Year 2 (p<.05).

In addition to individual involvement, personnel also reported on the extent to which their school promoted a collection of 16 activities or services on a 4-point scale (i.e., 1 – *Not at all*, 2 – *Slightly*, 3 – *Moderately*, 4 – *Extremely*). Figure 36 provides an overview of mean personnel perceptions for each activity by respondent role.

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[29] Correctly identified WV Invests : X^2 = 11.86, $p<.01$ (*Phi* = 0.07).
[30] Participation in GEAR UP–sponsored activities: X^2 = 8.01, $p<.05$ (*V* = 0.06).

Figure 35. School Personnel Perception of the Extent to Which Their School Promotes Activities by Role

Activity	Teacher	Counselor	Administrator
Academic/tutor support	3.21	3.42	3.27
Parent/family peer networks	2.97	3.00	3.06
Credit recovery, Advanced Placement, and dual-credit opportunities	2.91	3.26	2.89
Academic planning/career advising	3.26	3.63	3.41
One-on-one advising with students	3.03	3.70	3.27
Professional development	2.79	3.21	3.00
Txt 4 Success initiative	2.37	2.92	2.23
Academic enrichment	2.80	3.19	3.00
College Decision Day and/or acceptance events	2.82	3.11	2.74
ACT/SAT preparation	2.81	2.86	2.64
College Application and Exploration Week	3.11	3.60	3.27
Financial literacy workshops	2.72	3.05	2.66
Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA)	2.85	3.08	2.72
Mentoring programs	2.78	3.29	2.79
College campus visit	3.29	3.78	3.61
Summer activities	2.92	3.57	2.96

Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 personnel survey.
Note. Scale used to determine rating: 1 – *Not at all,* 2 – *Slightly,* 3 – *Moderately,* 4 – *Extremely.*

Overall, counselors had the highest mean agreement that the school promoted all activities, except parent/family peer networks. For this item, administrators' mean agreement was slightly higher (3.06) than counselors' (3.00). Across all roles, personnel had the highest agreement that their school promoted *college campus visits* (3.78 for counselors, 3.61 for administrators, and 3.29 for teachers). Teachers and administrators had the lowest reported agreement for their school promoting the *Txt 4 Success initiative* (2.37 and 2.23), while counselors had the lowest agreement that their school promoted *ACT/SAT preparation* (2.86).

Personnel survey respondents also indicated their involvement in activities provided by their school, as shown in Figure 36. Among personnel respondents, the activities with the highest involvement in Year 3 were *Academic/tutor support* (55%) and *Academic planning/career advising* (53%). There were significant differences in reported personnel involvement in several activities from Year 2 to Year 3, including a significant increase in reported involvement with *Summer activities*.[31] There was a significant decline in personnel involvement with *Professional development* in Year 3.[32] Effect sizes for differences in involvement were small.

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[31] *Summer activities*: X^2=4.06, *p*<.05 (*phi*=−.04).
[32] *Professional development*: X^2=8.20, *p*<.01 (*phi*=.06).

Figure 36. School Personnel Reported Involvement in Activities

Academic/tutor support
- Year 1: 57%
- Year 2: 57%
- Year 3: 55%

Academic planning/career advising
- Year 1: 52%
- Year 2: 50%
- Year 3: 53%

One-on-one advising with students
- Year 1: 57%
- Year 2: 53%
- Year 3: 52%

Parent/family peer networks
- Year 1: 38%
- Year 2: 49%
- Year 3: 49%

Professional development
- Year 1: 54%
- Year 2: 51%
- Year 3: 45%**

College Application and Exploration Week
- Year 1: 43%
- Year 2: 44%
- Year 3: 44%

College campus visit
- Year 1: 49%
- Year 2: 45%
- Year 3: 42%

ACT/SAT preparation
- Year 1: 46%
- Year 2: 41%
- Year 3: 41%

Academic Enrichment
- Year 2: 41%
- Year 3: 39%

Credit recovery, Advanced Placement, and dual-credit opportunities
- Year 1: 42%
- Year 2: 37%
- Year 3: 39%

College Decision Day and/or acceptance events
- Year 1: 35%
- Year 2: 33%
- Year 3: 33%

Summer activities
- Year 1: 24%
- Year 2: 24%
- Year 3: 28%*

Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA)
- Year 1: 36%
- Year 2: 30%
- Year 3: 27%

Mentoring programs
- Year 1: 27%
- Year 2: 28%
- Year 3: 27%

Financial literacy workshops
- Year 1: 24%
- Year 2: 25%
- Year 3: 23%

Txt 4 Success initiative
- Year 1: 10%
- Year 2: 15%
- Year 3: 15%

Legend: ■ Year 1 ■ Year 2 ■ Year 3

Source. WV GEAR UP Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 surveys.

Note. Academic Enrichment was not offered in Year 1. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

*Statistically significant by year ($p < .05$). **Statistically significant by year ($p < .01$).

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 had scheduling conflicts (32%), that they lacked time to participate (31%), that they had family obligations (28%), and that they were not aware the services were offered (27%). Figure 37 summarizes the additional reasons personnel reported for not participating in Year 3.

Figure 37. School Personnel Reasons for Not Participating in GEAR UP–Sponsored Activities
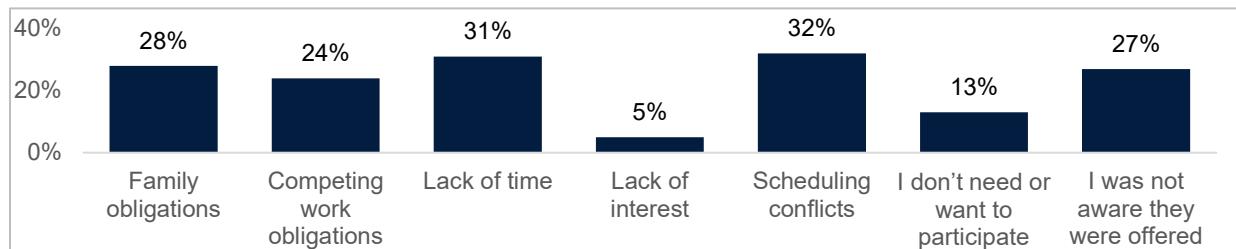
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 personnel survey.
Note. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

Site Coordinator Experiences and Perceptions

In Year 3, 5% of personnel respondents, indicating they were GEAR UP site coordinators, reported their perceptions of the college–going culture within their school—a total of 63 respondents. About half of site coordinator respondents reported they believed *About half* (48%) or *Most* (48%) 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 (91%) reported that the Commission was *Very helpful*.

Site coordinators were also asked to identify the services most

Figure 38. Site Coordinator Services Most Needed by GEAR UP Students
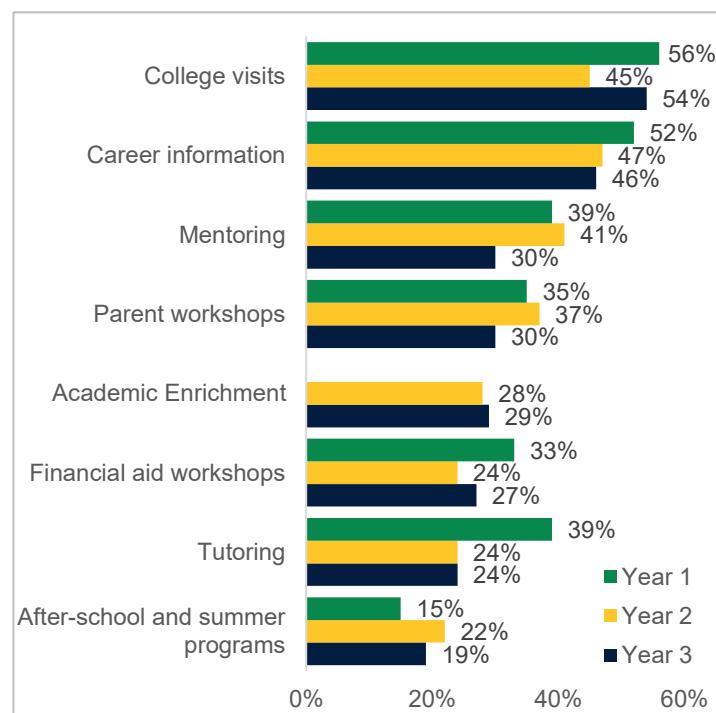
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 personnel surveys.
Note. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

needed by GEAR UP students. As seen in Figure 38, the most frequently reported services by site coordinators for Year 3 were *College visits* (54%) and *Career information* (46%). 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 39, over half (57%) of site coordinators reported they would like more tips for parent outreach to help them become a more successful GEAR UP coordinator.

Figure 39. Site Coordinator Services Needed to Become More Successful
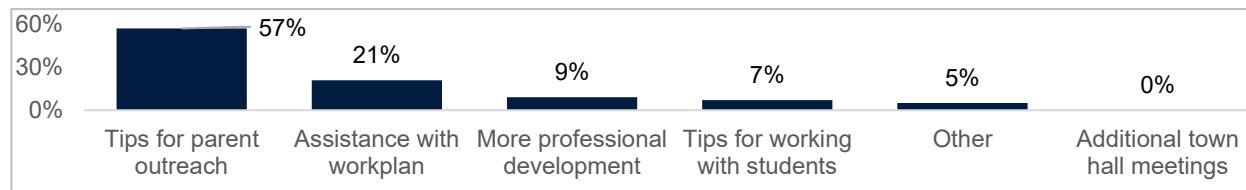
Source. WV GEAR UP Year 3 personnel survey.
Note. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

Lastly, a final open-ended question sought input about the role GEAR UP can play in improving the school's college-going culture. Among the 33 respondents, the most frequently shared theme continued to be prioritizing exploration and awareness of educational opportunities beyond high school for students.

Even though personnel generally shared positive perceptions of the role GEAR UP was playing in supporting or increasing the college-going culture, respondents provided a few recommendations for improvement. Recommendations centered on increasing visibility and expanding the programming already being offered:

> *GEAR UP can help our staff, students, parents, and community members instill a sense of purpose and pride in the secondary school experience by focusing on this experience as a bridge to their future and the post-secondary options available to them. This will help increase engagement and rigor in the academic arena. – Teacher*

Increase Visibility and Engagement: More involvement from GEAR UP staff, including having a full-time employee at the school to dedicate more time to building a college-going culture. Respondents noted how additional support from county and regional coordinators—or a full-time GEAR UP employee—would help alleviate the heavy workload and allow for more staff time dedicated to building the college-going culture. One respondent explained:

> *Site coordinators often get limited access to students because of other job responsibilities. A full-time GEAR UP employee at the school would be able to dedicate more time to building a college-going culture.*

Expand FAFSA Workshops: Continue and expand workshops for students and parents on how to apply for colleges, specifically supporting FAFSA completion and finding scholarships. Personnel noted the continued emphasis on providing students and families

with information on the costs of college and how to pay for college was important to support a college-going culture.

Lastly, one personnel respondent shared that it would be beneficial if schools were provided with more information on their former students' education and career outcomes to inform their planning and considerations of alumni engagement.

V. Cohort 1 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, and perceptions of GEAR UP. The team interviewed the same students in Years 1, 2 and 3 to examine any major changes.

Students' Perceptions of Schools and Sense of Belonging

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

Family and Home Arrangements

Students did not report any changes in their living arrangements in the past year. Similar to the 2022–2023 academic year, all the participants but one live with their parents and siblings—the other student continues living with grandparents. All students reported expecting to complete high school in the same school they are currently attending.

The student who has a sibling with a severe illness continued to be very engaged in the school and the community. The student who last year reported experiencing anxiety is currently receiving professional help to manage it.

All students reported being supported at home in their academic and personal decisions. One student shared that family members "are very supportive of me, whatever I do. And then no matter what happens, they're always with me." Several other students also shared how they felt supported. For example, when a student suggested adding a second possible career path: "She [My mom] said they're both good careers;" or when another student shared their aspirations at home: "My mom said that I should do it."

Three students who have or had older siblings at the same high school reported talking more with them about high school life: "I ask my sister because she's a senior." They also asked them for advice about classes and teachers. One student decided to join the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps program (JROTC) following the sibling's path. A second student joined the same after-school student organization as the sibling and planned to take similar classes as the sibling.

Community

Cohort 1 students are willing to leave the community for education after high school but, compared to last year, they were interested in staying close to home. As students considered college options, they narrowed their selection to in-state higher education institutions. In fact, only two were still open to going to college in a state other than West Virginia, while last year three expressed the interest. For example, one student who last year noted her willingness to attend an Ivy League school has now set her mind to completing the bachelor's degree in-state and considering other options for graduate studies when the

time arrives. The cost, being closer to home, and the quality of in-state institutions' academic programs are the main reasons behind the students' decisions. One of the students explained:

> I had originally thought that I wanted to go to college somewhere down south where the beaches are… it costs more to get tuition down in a different state, and West Virginia has some very nice nursing programs. … I'm thinking it's now in the cards to probably stay here.

A different student noted his intention to return after college and work "helping people" in the community and staying long-term:

> When I get older and have kids, I'd love them to grow up here where they're not in the city and stuff. They can feel safe, and they can be out in the woods … in a small town, everyone knows everyone. I enjoy that about our community.

School

General opinion of the school year. All students but one were highly satisfied with their school experiences as Grade 9 students. In last year's interviews, students reported having some worries about being able to adapt to the academic and social expectations of high school. Students reported not having had much hardship in that regard. They were pleased with the classes, teachers, and classmates. The following quote illustrates the perceptions of one student:

> It's going really good. All my classes I've been doing good in, so I'm happy about that. I really like my friend group. We're all getting along really well, so it's been a really fun year so far.

Students said they enjoyed having a say in their academic options and having more activities and events in which to participate. One student remarked, "Being able to have a little bit more control over your school life is so much better." Others described high school as "chill and calm" and "way better than middle school." Despite the overall good experience, one student mentioned that the transition was challenging: "It's a rough experience transitioning, but once you get into the groove of it, it's really fun."

The student who was not experiencing a good first year of high school was mainly disappointed with her classes: "Not as bad as I thought, but not as good as it could have been." She had great hopes of signing up for classes more oriented to her career interests, but the options were narrower, and she was dissatisfied with the quality of some electives.

Current classes. In last year's conversations, most of the students reported being interested in taking honors classes in high school. In Year 3, nine of the 13 students reported taking one or more honors classes in Grade 9. The main differences they found compared to general-level classes were that they had to "read a few more books," "do more tests," and "study a bit more" and that they "do everything faster." Besides these adjustments, students found honors classes "not difficult" or "really not bad." A different student

described honors classes as a bit challenging, but doable. One student was having a better experience with honors classes than with regular classes:

> I've had to study a bit more because it's a lot more tests and not just this really big one at the end of the year. It's a lot of small ones that add up over time, which I like, and it's a lot easier than having to memorize so many things and putting [it] in one test. I really like that.

Overall, students were satisfied with the selection of classes they had to fulfill requirements and with the electives. The three high schools offer vocational and technical classes to juniors and seniors, but one of the high schools offers classes in business to freshmen and sophomores, which interested the interviewed students. Despite the high level of satisfaction with the current classes, three students could not enroll in all the classes they marked as their first options. For example, one of the students enrolled in all the honors classes she wanted but not in two electives she preferred (chemistry and forensics). Instead, she was put in desktop publishing and in an English literature special topic that she did not enjoy and was able to transfer out of to a different course. She explained:

> The only thing I didn't like was the beginning of the year, where my classes—I didn't really get the ones I wanted. I got all the honors I wanted, but not the electives that I picked, but it worked out. … I got put in a Gothic literature class. … But we changed it to criminal justice stuff, so it worked out.

The student who was dissatisfied with her experience as a Grade 9 student was disappointed with several classes she was taking. She thought that her Spanish class was not going to be as difficult as it was. Additionally, she decided to try one honors class, but she was not enjoying it:

> I chose honors, but then I was like, I don't really want it. And I thought she [counselor] changed it, but I guess I still got put in it. … The only one [class] that's academically challenging is the honors history. I don't really know why.

This student also made comments about the low academic quality of some elective classes. Students said they mainly watch movies and do no other substantial work.

One of the high schools seemed to have pushed technical and vocational careers in recent years. One student felt the discontinuation of Advanced Placement (AP) courses was detrimental to college-track students:

> My opinion is not very positive on getting rid of AP classes. I had thought that we should probably expand on the AP classes because we only had one and it was AP U.S. History … you can get a college credit for history, but some people who don't need that credit, they have no other options for AP classes. I thought that they should expand more and have probably. … We had AP Biology I thought, and I think they did away with it this year maybe, but I think they should have a science, English, math, and history one."

Academic support and challenges. Students were asked about the support that schools provide to help them to succeed academically. Students reported being able to finish homework during school hours, being offered additional time to catch up on missing

homework when absent from school, and that their schools have tutoring services after school. None of the students reported needing these services so far. A student from one school mentioned believing that the tutoring services were online, but the other students said it took place after school. A second student liked helping friends with their homework because she saw it as an opportunity to review content and reinforce what she already learned:

> I tutor some of my really close friends and I feel like being able to help them is something super helpful to me too because I get to review it too.

All students felt motivated to do well in school. One student mentioned, "It's good for my future to do well," but several noted having problems focusing on schoolwork or "feel[ing] stressed when [they] don't have a good grade." One student continued struggling with math, as he did in middle school, to the point of failing the class. He was not sure if the school offered a credit recovery program in the summer, but he did not feel too worried about retaking the class next year. When asked about after-school tutoring services, he remarked that he had other activities after school that prevented him from staying.

A different student from another school was having a hard time with math as well: "I used to be really good at math, but I'm not as good at math anymore. And it's just not going the way that I had planned it to be." A third student felt nervous about presenting in front of the class. Two students attributed their anxious feelings to ineffective organizational and time management skills: "My organizational skills, they aren't very good. … I know I have a focus problem."

Students thought that their middle schools prepared them well academically. Some students shared recommendations to ease the transition. Students would have liked to have more information about "how long they [classes] are and how much homework we do;" and to have met the teachers "before school even starts and they should get to know the students better and how they work." Two different students suggested providing Grade 8 students or high school Grade 9 students with workshops about time management and other study skills.

One of the students does not have an internet connection at home. While it was not a barrier during middle school, it prevented her from working independently as a high school student:

> Usually [teachers] say if I have any questions while home I can message them. But I can't do that. I don't have internet. … If they have textbooks in the classroom, we're not allowed to take them home or anything.

Interests and after-school activities. Students continued playing sports as part of teams but with some nuances. Some of them continued playing their favorite sport, several of them tried different sports, and a few were not doing sports at all. The three students who did not participate in middle school sports decided to try them in high school. One student played golf, a second student attended cheerleading try-outs without liking it, and the third student missed the softball try-outs but made the cheer team.

Three students who played sports last year stopped doing it in high school for different reasons. One student was participating in several community youth organizations instead. The second student did not like the environment of the high school cheer squad: "It just wasn't as fun as it always was. I've cheered since I was 5, and it just didn't seem the same. … Cheer is a lot of drama." The third student stopped softball participation to ease the transition to high school demands: "I wanted to put more time into my academic life and also be able to have a little bit more freedom, because softball was really draining for me and stressed me out a lot."

Several students were active in different student associations. Two students were members of the student council. Additionally, seven students reported being part of different GEAR UP initiatives, such as the Higher Education Readiness Officers (HEROs) and the Student Success Society. Following an older sibling's recommendation, a different student joined the Health Sciences and Technology Academy program in their high school: "It's a program that you learn about different careers … we usually meet once a week … just high schoolers, I think like 16, 17 [students] …. we work on our projects that we present."

Students found sports and student organizations provided additional opportunities to meet people and expand their interests. Although some students were more involved than others, students from the three high schools mentioned they wanted more after-school options. A student from one school asked for more opportunities to explore the arts and entertainment area, such as a theater club, a book club, or a debate club. A second student was not aware of the science club at the high school and suggested having more opportunities that addressed science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) interests: "A lot of kids actually in my grade are like really into science."

Another student reflected on the benefits of having after-school clubs to build a resume:

> I feel like [the school] just lacks some activities that more colleges are looking for—more leadership opportunities and things like that,

STUDENT SUCCESS SOCIETIES

The Student Success Societies provide Cohort students with targeted support to succeed in high school and beyond. In Year 3, each of the 21 high schools had at least 1 on-site mentor who facilitated meetings with 10–12 Grade 9 students.

The 25 mentors across the 21 high schools were selected based on their educational background, previous experience in mentoring, and similarities with the student body backgrounds. Grade 9 students were invited to join the group based on their social, emotional, and academic needs, and particularly those who did not have the resources to help them explore and make decisions about their college and career options. The mentors had a toolkit with structured activities and ideas to guide the meetings. The meetings and activities helped students discover their strengths and challenges as high school students, provided guidelines about the next steps after graduation, and functioned as a care peer community.

At the end of the academic year, the Student Success Societies reported a total of 3,219 hours of mentorship activities that impacted 276 Grade 9 students.

more student involvement. ... I feel it's a lack of, again, more science, more STEM-type things.

For some students, involvement in after-school activities fosters a sense of belonging: "I do have some really niche interests and so it's just being able to find people that share the same thing is kind of hard."

Friends. Being able to keep old friends and make new ones was a concern for several students when beginning high school. All students kept friends from middle school and made new ones, some from the same middle school and some from other middle schools. Students had good relationships with classmates as well. Regarding the degree of ease or difficulty of making new friends in high school, students thought it was not difficult. Two students, however, commented:

> *It was kind of easy to begin with, but after the first 9 weeks, you don't really make new friends.*

> *Some [classmates] can be really judgmental.*

Having friends was a key factor for students' well-being: "I made a new friend, and we get along good. She's making the school year go better."

Teachers. Most students spoke highly of their high school teachers, with comments such as "they are all really nice," "I love my teachers," they are "very good at their jobs and they like helping a lot," and for one student the teachers are "the best thing of school." Another student pointed out that teacher/student relationships are different in high school compared to middle school:

> *In high school there are so many students, so there are less relationships with the teachers. ... Most teachers care, but not as much as I was used to.*

Students talked about how they knew whether teachers and other school staff cared about students. For example, when they "talk to us a lot," "are friendly and they try to help as much as they can," "if you need extra help on the assignment that you're given, you could probably come in at another class time and they'll help you on it," and "as long as you ask nicely and explain to them, they usually give you an extension."

One student did not fit well with their teachers' teaching styles and was having a difficult time in class: "I don't think classes are enjoyable. Maybe they should try different ways of teaching." This student proposed they have more group projects: "Projects are more my style, especially group projects, those are so much easier because it's not one person working on them."

Students' College and Career Interests

All students reported feeling hopeful about their futures. Students noted being confident that high school will prepare them well for their after-graduation plans and that family, teachers, and staff can provide college and career guidance. A student shared her excitement:

> *I'm just so excited to see what the future holds because I have been working towards being able to meet that goal for so long and now it's coming at me and it's so exciting. I have so many good people surrounding me and enabling it that I truly feel like I'm set up to succeed.*

Plans After Graduation

In Year 1, most of the students indicated they already had a future profession in mind. In Year 2, seven of the 13 students changed or expanded their career interests. In Year 3, two students changed their minds and two more added a backup plan. The male students reaffirmed their interests in engineering, medicine, and teaching. Two of them added physical therapy as an option to enable them to continue being involved in sports. The female students confirmed their preferences for nursing, cinematography, law, physics, veterinary medicine, cosmetology, business, and the arts. One student now aspires to be a pediatrician instead of a nurse. Another student who was undecided between veterinarian and dental hygienist has decided to be a veterinarian. Another student added mental health counseling as a backup plan to her interest in the film industry.

The student who wanted to receive training as a cosmetologist and own her own business was having such a pleasant experience with high school classes that she wondered about pursuing additional interests: "I know I'm smart enough to make money. I'll probably still end up doing it, but I know from my grades, I'm smart enough to do something better."

In Year 3, students narrowed their interests and learned valuable information about their future careers. All students use the internet to find colleges with the best academic programs for their areas of interest and general information about requirements in their desired professions. In Year 3, several students reported being more specific with their searches, as the following quote illustrates:

> *I'll Google the thing that I'm interested in, then I'll look up how many years I have to go to school for it. Then I'll look up schools that are good for it, or I'll ask people that maybe have family members that did that, and they'll tell me where they went.*

Additionally, students gathered information about academic programs and college life when touring college campuses. Students shared examples of the information they learned. For example, the student who wants to be a pediatrician "asked how many years it would take, and they said like 11 years to be a pediatrician. So, yeah, lot of schooling." The student who planned to own a spa researched average salaries. The student who wants to be a physicist looked into different college tuition ranges. One of the students interested in nursing researched the different nurse types and their certification requirements.

High School Career Paths

Students have become more aware of the different career paths their high schools offer and how the pathways can help them gain experience, knowledge, and certification. One of the high schools offers a health science program for juniors and seniors and a business concentration open to lowerclassmen. Next year it will launch an education program. The

interviewed students were planning to get certificates in these areas. Students from a second high school mentioned that the school offers certificates in welding, engineering, and cosmetology for upperclassmen, which interested two of the interviewed Grade 9 students. A student commented, "I've learned that we offer a lot of technical classes. … It's like go and get your technical certification and then being able to go straight to work." Students from the third high school mentioned several certificates, such as welding, mechanics, nursing, and JROTC. One student mentioned being interested in getting a certificate in one of these areas.

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

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

School Support

Students think that counselors, teachers, and the GEAR UP site coordinator are the best people to provide information about classes and career paths. Students were not shy about reaching out to them with questions: "I talk to anybody about it to see what they think will be best and then what I think will be best." Conversations with teachers and counselors were influential in students' decisions about which classes to take as high school students.

Counselors. Students reported seeing their counselors mainly for class scheduling. One student asked specifically for advice about the best classes for her career interests:

> I was talking to the counselor that was doing my schedule and I was like, "This might sound a little weird, but I kind of want to try to find something that'll help me with being something that works in a mental institution." And she was like, "Oh no, it's fine. I used to do that." I was like, "Really?" She was like, "Yeah, it was pretty crazy, but it is kind of worth it really." So, I was like, "Hey, so what classes should I take?" And she was like, "Psychology is really good because it's about the brain or whatever. And sociology is how people communicate with others and stuff." And I was like, "You know what, I'll take them."

Teachers. Teachers were viewed as good sources of information. Students looked for opportunities for their teachers to know what their interests are: "My teachers are aware of this because I do make it known through my work." And some teachers proactively started conversations with students about career interests. In one high school, the Grade 9 English teacher assigned an essay about students' career aspirations. In another high school, a student remembered having an informal conversation with the math teacher: "In school, I've talked to my math teacher because it was free time, and we were talking about careers and stuff."

The student who was interested in being an English teacher reported having several conversations with different teachers about their own experiences as educators:

> I've asked some of my teachers, "Why did you become a teacher?" I've learned a lot about my career path. With all my teachers, I've asked all my teachers about it.

The students who want to pursue a career in human or animal sciences and cosmetology had conversations with the different technical center programs' coordinators to learn more about their respective programs. One student asked, "How the work is over there, what classes [are] good to take for nursing and help me achieve that?" The student who wants to be a physicist asked teachers about their experiences as college students in a STEM discipline: "I know a few of my teachers that have been through their physics programs."

One of the high schools offered an elective course, Introduction to Majors. One of the interviewed students planned to take it next year and asked the teacher about the content of the class: "I asked Ms. [name] about it, and she said they go through all the career clusters and explain it and make PowerPoints."

Having positive experiences in the classroom seemed to be a factor for students to keep on a college or career track. One of the students exclaimed that she was not going to college if she had to take another Spanish class:

> I was told that I needed Spanish I and II to go to college. So, I was like, okay, I guess I'll try to take Spanish I. Don't like it at all ... I will not go to college over that class!

The student who wanted to be an engineer just discovered that he did not enjoy math as much as he did in the past: "I am decent at math, but it's not like my favorite thing."

GEAR UP Activities and Services

Activities. Two students attended GEAR UP U summer camp at Marshall University in 2023 and planned to attend GEAR UP U at Glenville State University in June 2024. Most students attended one or both Student Leadership Academy events in Charleston in fall 2023 and in spring 2024. Additionally, one high school organized a college fair at lunchtime for juniors and seniors and college campus tours at Glenville State University and Marshall University. A second high school visited Marshall University's Bill Noe Flight School located at West Virginia International Yeager Airport in Charleston and also hosted college representatives for juniors and seniors. The third high school organized a trip to BridgeValley Community and Technical College, a trip to the Bill Noe Flight School, a career fair, and hosted a guest speaker who gave a presentation about careers in law: "There was a guy that was a lawyer, but he talked about school and stuff and how long it took."

Students mentioned college trips and career fairs as the best GEAR UP events they attended in Year 3. A student described how college trips were organized and how she benefited from them:

They split us up into four groups. With the last one, when we went into the nursing wing, she asked who all wanted to be nurses and who all wanted to go into the nursing programs, and there were three or four of us, so we just got to be in the front and get to hear everything.

Another student mentioned what they learned from career fairs:

They kept explaining about how they do things, how much money you would make, how much time it would take for you to get farther into it, and how the wage would increase over time.

Some students were not able to attend all events because students had to be absent on those days. One student felt nervous about the possible negative impact that attending day-long events might have on her academic performance: "I feel like I'd get too stressed out if I missed a day of school and I feel like I'd get five classes behind. So, I just haven't chosen to go."

Six Cohort 1 students were invited and accepted as part of the HEROs group at their school. Two additional students were invited to the Student Success Society with one accepting the invitation and the other declining. The student who opted to participate in the Student Success Society found it beneficial and cited learning tips for studying, the next steps after graduation, and time management skills. The student who opted out shared: "It was outside my comfort zone. … I didn't really know anybody in there, and it was an after-school thing."

Impact of activities. College campus visits were the students' favorite activity and they provided numerous comments about the impact. For some students, campus tours provided a firsthand experience of what college life could be:

It gives you a good idea of what a college campus would look like and what they expect of you, and what opportunities there are in your state, nearby.

For others, they provided a chance to learn more about their academic programs of interest and how to finance it:

STUDENT LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The Student Leadership Academy aims to empower students with valuable leadership skills while motivating them to pursue their dreams through education.

In one of the organized events, around 600 Grade 9 students from 21 high schools filled up an auditorium in Charleston, WV, to listen to a motivational speaker sharing his journey overcoming physical, social, mental, and emotional challenges to become a para-athlete and American Ninja Warrior Competitor. Students were also invited to write on boards what leadership meant to them. At the end of the event, each high school took its board back home to reflect on the comments.

In a second event—the STEM Academy—students returned to Charleston to attend a friendly presentation by a distinguished psychologist about how the brain works. By challenging conventional notions of success, the presenter equipped students with different strategies to manage their own emotions and thoughts.

These events reflected on hope, resilience, and creativity as key elements to empower students to success despite the obstacles.

They have a really nice nursing program and I want to go into nursing, and it's just spread [out] my options a lot better, and they have a good grant program. It's something about being in West Virginia.

Visiting several college campuses helped students perceive their differences and form opinions about the pros and cons of each one:

Those are the closest colleges to me, Marshall and [Glenville], and going there gave me an option of what I wanted to see, because I was having a hard time between the two, but it helped me make my decision.

The career fair also provided useful information to students:

All Grade 9 students went to [the career fair] and we went around, and we learned about different careers. It was just a bunch of different careers, and it was only five minutes long for each one. I just got a lot of information for each one.

The Student Leadership Academy events also had a positive impact on participating students. The guest speakers provided lessons on resilience, motivation, and acceptance that stayed with students, as the following quotes illustrate:

Some people came in to talk to us about staying on path[ways] and going to college.

I learned how your brain can function in different ways, and how you just have to think better thoughts.

The GEAR UP U summer camps also facilitated connections with students from differing schools: "I have some friends in this high school and some in other high schools." Additionally, students mentioned attending a workshop at GEAR UP U focused on grit and resilience, which they found beneficial.

There's a thing called Seeds [Training] where they [the trainers] take you into a room and they just talk about how to better yourself. … It was just very nice. I don't know how to explain

GEAR UP U! SUMMER ACADEMY

The GEAR UP U! Summer Academy in Year 3 took place at Glenville State University, a small university in the center of the state. At the end of June, 124 rising Grade 10 and 11 students from 21 high schools joined their counselors and the state GEAR UP staff for 2 days to experience what life as a college student would be like. Students were housed in campus dormitories and worked closely with college students who acted as mentors. Besides touring the campus, students were able to participate in several college events, such as the student organization fair and several student clubs.

The college campus experience included attending actual college classes in several subject areas of interest (biology, music, surveying, political science, education, leadership, and others) and interacting with professors and other students.

As part of the WV GEAR UP focus on providing students with social and emotional skills, a team from an external vendor whose mission centers on leadership and personal growth hosted team-building activities two times each day. From the positive comments students made during the 2-day camp, GEAR UP U! is one of the most cherished events organized by the WV GU team.

it. … In a situation like that, you might think it would be awkward because it's all high school and middle school students, but everyone there was really nice and nobody saw it that way.

GEAR UP site coordinators. Students also receive information and support from GEAR UP site coordinators. One student reported having checked with the site coordinator "about college and credits I need and what classes I should maybe take the year I'm going up to."

Some of the ways GEAR UP site coordinators make students aware of GEAR UP events are through schoolwide general announcements at the beginning or the end of the school day, sharing information with students at lunchtime, and distributing flyers. Students appreciated receiving the information: "She's [the site coordinator] good with all that stuff."

Parent involvement. Generally, students preferred to attend GEAR UP events with classmates instead of with parents:

I think it's more fun that the kids get to have fun themselves … because there could be a naggy parent that's like, "Don't do that. Don't go there." I think it's better with just the kids and the friends.

However, five of the 13 students were open to involving parents and family members in GEAR UP activities under certain conditions. For example, when visiting specific academic departments during college tours, if the student or family is provided with an opportunity to talk individually with a college representative this was seen as important to have family present.

I think it would be a good idea because then you could get insight into what your parents think about it too and stuff like that.

Let's say the last college that we went to, how I had heard they had a great nursing program, I would've liked to have my mom or dad there so they can help.

Besides GEAR UP experiences, students reported having had other opportunities to explore college and career topics at their schools. In addition to participating in the Health Sciences and Technology Academy after-school organization, which also held a summer camp at Marshall University in summer of 2023, one English high school teacher took a few students to visit the partner community college to learn more about the new education associate degree available for the 2024–2025 academic year. During the visit, students learned about the Grow Your Own program to expand the teacher workforce. A student explained the visit:

We went on a trip to [name of college]. It was for the Grow Your Own program. … We went, and they taught us about teaching stuff … if I come back and I teach here at [name] high school for 5 years, there goes all my college debt.

In another school, one of the science teachers organized a trip to Virginia Tech, to explore "the life of a physics major in Virginia Tech and it was super nice."

The essay assignment in the English class about students' college and career aspirations was an opportunity for one of the students to find out that "math is a roadblock for mechanical engineering."

As Cohort 1 students finished their first year of high school, they reflected on the general impact of the GEAR UP program from their 3 years of participation. They praised the program and the chances to explore different college and career opportunities. Two students expressed their feelings:

> *GEAR UP has been very, very helpful with different opportunities I didn't even know that I had. I was talking to my brother the other day and I was telling him about all these different things, and he was like, "Wow, I wish I would've had that when I came to high school because it seems very helpful."*

> *Before GEAR UP, I wasn't interested in college at all. I did not want to go one bit, but then I started visiting colleges, and I was like, this ain't that bad. And I was like, yeah, I think I need to go to college so I can be a little bit more successful.*

Suggestions to improve the GEAR UP activities. Some students provided ideas about ways to improve the experience of attending GEAR UP events. Regarding college campus visits, students suggested targeting academic departments of interest among students, and having smaller groups of participants to foster interaction with college representatives:

> *Getting [into] little groups, not really big groups of 40 people, but maybe 10, 15 people in a group and then just sit there and talk about it. And talk about different colleges, like what college or trade school, because some people don't want to go to college.*

> *Something and maybe meet up with some people, like you can specifically ask them, yeah, questions about that.*

Interaction with current college students was suggested as beneficial to getting honest feedback:

> *I feel like the activities that help me the most are being able to go and visit these places and actually have experiences from current college students talking to us and being able to tell us what's happening, what their thoughts on it are, genuinely.*

Students wanted to expand the catalog of possible colleges to visit: "Maybe some more community colleges." Additionally, students suggested organizing more career fairs and visiting real workplaces related to their interests, such as law firms and hospitals:

> *Maybe another career fair thing and have one that's like mechanical engineering and stuff.*

> *Probably, go somewhere to deal with law and just learn about that or about being a lawyer.*

VI. HEROs Focus Group Findings

This chapter contains the findings of the focus group sessions conducted with students from five high schools. The chapter is divided in five sections: (1) HEROs member profile; (2) Implementation of HEROs activities; (3) HERO outcomes and impact on members and the school; (4) Challenges and suggestions to improve the HEROs program; and (5) HEROs perceptions of hope and belonging.

HEROs Member Profile

Focus group findings are presented in three areas: (1) Members' recruitment and awareness; (2) The mission of HEROs and reasons to join, and (3), Members' participation in other groups.

Members' Recruitment and Awareness

Students became aware of the HEROs group and were invited to join through different channels. In three of the five participating schools, site coordinators invited students personally. In another school, the group meets during the school day—along with several other groups—and the HEROs group was offered as one of these clubs for Grade 9 students to join. At the beginning of the school year, the site coordinator explained the group's purpose to prospective students and any Grade 9 student could elect to participate. In the fifth school, Grade 9 students were nominated by their English or math teachers at the site coordinator's request. These students explained that teachers selected students who they thought would be a good HERO based on grades, behavior, and aspirations. Then, the site coordinator or the teachers invited each student individually.

The variety of recruitment approaches helps in understanding why the HEROs member profile is different across schools. Although in Year 3 HEROs was intended for Cohort 1 students who were in Grade 9, two of the schools included upperclassmen. In one school, the site coordinator had engaged high school students in years past to organize GEAR UP events. For this site coordinator, being a HERO was a way to formally acknowledge and involve these students. In this school, there are two or three HEROs from each grade from Grade 8 to Grade 11. The site coordinator considered it important to involve the middle school in the GEAR UP programming, and shared with the ICF researcher that she did not know that HEROs was open exclusively to Grade 9 students when she extended the invitation.

In the school in which the HEROs group is one of the school organizations offered to Grade 9 students, one Grade 11 student approached the site coordinator to express her interest and was accepted into the group. In the other three schools, all HEROs were Grade 9 students. On average, each school had between eight and 10 HEROs.

All students participating in the focus groups reported they were familiar with the GEAR UP program. A few students became familiar with HEROs through presentations in other GEAR UP activities, such as the GEAR UP U summer program and the Student Leadership

Academy events held in Charleston. In two schools, two students invited friends to join the group. Additionally, in one school, a Grade 9 student mentioned that she had an older sister who was a HERO while in high school: "My sister was a HERO before she graduated and then after that; I was more involved with her, so it just developed. And then after [sister's name] graduated, [site coordinator's name] was just like, 'You can fill her spot.'"

The Mission of HEROs and Reasons to Join

The HEROs mission is "to promote a college-going culture that supports students in the college-going process and encourages them to dream big and earn a certificate or diploma."[33] Students were asked what they understood to be the mission of HEROs. In their responses, as evidenced by a sample of quotes below, students mentioned acquiring and disseminating information about college and career options to help themselves and other students when planning their career options after graduation.

> *[HEROs] is about learning your options to move on after high school and just getting more familiar with some college campuses and doing all this to better prepare you for your future.*

> *[HEROs] is mainly a group where you just get to help the school, and help your peers, and make improvements all over the school.*

> *[HEROs] is promoting [college] and celebration of your opportunities after high school.*

The mission resonated with students and that connection was the reason they chose to be a HERO. Among the reasons noted to participate, students mentioned joining the group as an opportunity to gain access to college and career resources and to share those resources with other students. The following two quotes illustrate those sentiments.

> *I would like to gain a little bit more knowledge about where I can go to get my engineering degree or maybe what scholarships I can get … just what colleges would be best.*

> *GEAR UP does a lot of helpful things for the students in the school. So, it's like if we can help them, we're helping other students.*

A positive experience with past GEAR UP events and activities also motivated some students to be more involved in the program. Other students were looking for additional opportunities to interact with peers outside the daily classroom activities.

In one school, students saw the HEROs group as an opportunity to be in a school leadership position:

> *It was also a lot about people with very good leadership skills, that they thought would really do good around school, helping others.*

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[33] See West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission's Higher Education Readiness Officers.

Two students from this same school mentioned that being a HERO will help them build a strong college application, with one saying:

> The best thing for me is that it really looks good on your resume. It's going to help you get into a really good college, because everybody needs some leadership skills in life. And that's what all colleges look for now.

Some students at this school felt proud of being selected to be HEROs, as one student noted:

> It feels pretty good to be nominated for something like that, out of all the people that are in our freshman class.

Members' Participation in Other Groups

HEROs was not the only school activity in which the students were involved. Almost all students reported being involved in other student groups and sports. The organizations most often reported were Future Business Leaders of America (six students) and the National Honor Society (10 students). Additionally, all 10 participating students from one of the schools were part of the Beta club, an organization focused on service, academic achievement, character, and leadership, and Young Life, a Christian ministry organization. Three other students were part of the school's student council. Other students reported being involved in various activities, such as the band and the music club (2 students), academic organizations (2 students), chess club (1 student), writing club (1 student), and the Health, Science, Technology Academy (1 student). Two students reported being involved in sports.

When asked their reasons for wanting to be a HERO, students said they were looking for opportunities to express their interests and use their skills: "I love public speaking, I love directing, I love working with people." Other participants showed interest in serving their community in general: "I want to be more involved with community service. Not because it's something I have to do—it's just to help people." Others were interested in making the most out of their high school years:

> We only have 4 years of high school, so we should try it all in this small amount of time that we have here.

Besides the HEROs group's purpose, students did not find substantial differences between HEROs and the other school activities in which they participated. Some students mentioned that since HEROs is a small group and its objective is to foster the school's college-going culture, meetings and activities are more targeted, but the skills you bring and develop are transferable to other activities:

> This group is a little smaller, and more hand-picked, so we're more suited to the things that we need to be suited for GEAR UP.

> I think it's mainly the same because of all the leadership skills that go into everything around here.

One student liked that HEROs was not a competition, unlike other groups he was part of: "[HEROs] is to share the information that you have with your classmates." Another student mentioned that HEROs provides opportunities to "work independently, but [you] also have opportunities to work as a group." One student who was also part of a different club finally decided to stay only with HEROs because it better fit their personality:

> *I was in the [Future Business Leaders of America] but they're very talkative and I'm not. They're really outgoing and … I don't really like talking a lot in front of people.*

HERO Implementation

Focus group findings are presented in two areas: (1) Meetings and activities and (2) Satisfaction with HEROs activities.

Meetings and Activities

The five schools are all unique in how they structure HEROs meetings. Four schools hold monthly meetings, three schools meet during school hours for an hour, and the fourth school meets immediately after school for 2 hours. The fifth school holds informal meetings during school hours, which are as long or as short as needed. In two schools, the HEROs meetings competed with other activities or commitments some students had: "I think some of the challenges are just being able for everybody to come to a meeting at the same time, because we all have a lot of things that we're doing right now." Nevertheless, students reported attending most of the HEROs meetings so far.

The main objective of the meetings is to help site coordinators organize GEAR UP events and activities for Grade 9 students, seniors, and, in some instances, students in all grade levels and school staff. Among the activities and events students mentioned assisting with or participating in were college trips, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) nights, the Student Leadership Academy, and college and job fairs. Additionally, two HEROs groups looked for opportunities to serve the whole school and the community. One school crafted cards with sweets for students and teachers to celebrate holidays. Another school wrote cards for a local veterans' hospital.

Site coordinators came to the meetings with agendas of items to discuss and timelines. The HEROs had opportunities to contribute ideas. Usually, site coordinators shared the upcoming GEAR UP activities and HEROs worked together to make it happen. In one school, the students kept meeting minutes detailing tasks, responsibilities, and timelines. They even created a flyer that outlined the purpose of HEROs, "which is shown to people who ask what it is."

Students seemed satisfied with the structure of the meetings. Even though site coordinators came with specific events that needed to be taken care of, HEROs felt they could contribute significantly to the implementation. One student explained the nature of the meetings:

We work on a lot of projects. Each month we have a different objective in those projects, and each person has to step up and do their part … and that was important because we all had to get it done, we had to get it done in time, and we had to get it done right, and we all had to go over the ideas of what we wanted to do before we settled on that idea.

All HEROs felt they actively contributed to the group. Students engaged in several planning steps such as the selection of college campuses to visit, the advertisement of events, and setting up the school space for the college/career fairs. Students shared different things they did as part of their assignments, such as designing flyers, distributing flyers to students and teachers, hanging flyers in halls and on classroom walls, and helping participants in the college/career fairs to navigate the activity. One student commented that the site coordinator's requests "are all very blank canvas and easy to apply." One student gave an example of how they distributed the tasks:

If we're going to promote this thing, we need so many flyers. Who's going to design that? Who's going to have the say in where they get put up? Who's going to hang them up?

HEROs engaged in other college and career oriented activities as well, such as College Decision Day: "We had to make the certificates and make sure that everything was set up properly." Another student described helping with College Awareness Week:

It was fun to go around and ask the teachers what colleges they went to as well, to get everyone involved, as well as the teachers.

In one of the schools and as part of the GEAR UP activities, the site coordinator and the HEROs organized a breakfast with Grade 9 parents to present the GEAR UP program in their school. This event was well attended and included a presenter from a higher education institution:

We did a breakfast thing where we had all of the parents … to talk about what GEAR UP is and explain it to everyone and what the benefits are.

Satisfaction with HEROs Activities

Students said they were satisfied with the HEROs meetings and activities in which they were involved. Each student had their favorite activity, but in general, they were pleased when events they helped with went as planned and had strong participation.

I think the College Decision Day was pretty successful. Everything went smoothly. It was really organized.

I would say the cool factor of it comes from the fact that we get to have a lot of these field trips, we get to go to a lot places.

Students said that although their focus was on implementing GEAR UP activities, they also appreciated the opportunity to do additional things for the school and the community, such as the advertisement of school tutoring services, handing out small gifts during teacher appreciation week, and involvement with a local hospital:

I thought it was good to send cards to the veterans' hospital, because I feel like a lot of them probably don't get cards or very many visitors, so I thought it was good to send them cards, and just wish them happy holidays.

HERO Outcomes and Impact

Focus group findings are presented in two areas: (1) Member outcomes and (2) School outcomes.

Member Outcomes

The benefits of participating in HEROs clustered around two themes: Students' educational plans and knowledge, and skill development.

Educational plans and knowledge. HEROs mentioned access to college and career resources as one of the advantages of being part of HEROs, since they are the first ones to become aware of upcoming events and activities:

We get the opportunity to get a little bit more time with colleges. Because setting up and talking to [site coordinator's name], she has a lot of information that she can give us. And as a sophomore, we don't always get the chance to talk to college professors and mentors and everything. So being a part of HEROs gives us that opportunity.

Consequently, students increased their knowledge around making college and career decisions:

I feel like it expands my knowledge about other colleges and opportunities after high school.

Some of the knowledge gained was acquired through informal conversations with site coordinators and peers during the HEROs meetings. Several students shared the nature of these conversations:

It's more casual conversation, it's a lot of what people are interested in doing and then bringing up, "Oh, well there's this that could help you do that." … Certain classes that we can take and stuff like that will help.

For some students, advanced access to resources and information came with the responsibility of keeping it accurate and updated to share with other students:

With us being HEROs, I feel like we should know more than just the average people that go on the trips, and that we need to inform the seniors about the FAFSA and help around the school with College Days and handing out Marshall [University] [information] or any other colleges that they may be interested in. We just help them make a choice and explain to them about GEAR UP.

Skills development. Students also shared how being a HERO helped them to use and develop different skills such as leadership, teamwork, and communication.

Leadership. HEROs from two schools held leadership positions in other student organizations and noted that they saw themselves as leaders. In the other three schools, students' experiences were more varied. These students defined leadership as including service and being a role model:

> *Just to help others that are not as successful. As people, we should automatically just have the urge to help anyone that we can. But I think to be a leader is to bring people up when they're not feeling as good, or just help them when they need it.*

> *Being a leader is like setting examples for others who should probably follow that path, and maybe stay away from some of the other things that you probably shouldn't be doing.*

In one school, being part of HEROs was viewed by students as an opportunity to exhibit leadership skills:

> *I feel like we were all chosen for this because we all have good leadership skills, and we can all have good minds to think of ideas, and what we want to do.*

> *We're directing people to success… the seniors to financial aid, or even their own futures with the job fair, and things of that nature.*

Having a voice and making decisions. Students appreciated the high degree of involvement and decision-making power they had as HEROs:

> *Everyone gets to have their own share and voice in what happens. It's never one person [who] says an idea and it gets executed; it's always, it gets incorporated and redone and rewritten over and over and over again until everyone is satisfied with the result.*

Teamwork. Most HEROs students reported teamwork as one of the skills most used in HEROs meetings and activities.

> *A lot of times you don't get to pick your groups. … So, it's important that you're able to step up and take charge and be like, "We need to do this, and we need to do it this way, so we get the grade that we want."*

> *Definitely teamwork … working with others and getting along well with other people.*

Communication. Communication skills, defined as "public speaking" and "talking with other people," were mentioned as skills HEROs develop:

> *It really does help with communication because the day we were handing out stuff, we had to talk to people a little bit about GEAR UP and all that stuff.*

> *I think it helps social skills a lot, because you're able to talk with people, and understand what other people actually mean when they say something. And you're able to bounce ideas off of each other with creativity.*

Other skills. Students also mentioned other benefits they gained as HEROs, such as organization skills and the ability to meet and collaborate with people with similar interests: "You can make a lot of relationships during all these different groups."

HEROs added that the skills they were developing were transferable to other organizations in which they were involved. One student explained how he plans to use leadership skills in a different context:

> I'm in the band, right? So next year all the seniors are going to be gone and graduated … that's going to leave me in my section to be the section leader. So, I'm going to have to use some quality leadership skills.

School Outcomes

Students shared how the HEROs activities have impacted their schools. The parent breakfast described earlier provided the site coordinator an opportunity to meet Grade 9 parents and to explain GEAR UP activities offered. Additionally, students and families learned about the nursing program at West Virginia University directly from one of the university's representatives. One HERO recalled:

> I also really liked the breakfast thing that talked about GEAR UP … a woman from [West Virginia University] came and was talking about the nursing [program] … and so a lot of kids got to learn about the nursing program.

Students in another school were particularly proud of the work done for the school's seniors:

> A lot of people saw them, for example, the FAFSA things that we hung up about financial aid, I feel like a lot of people actually did see it as seniors, and they considered their options.

HEROs in one school shared that the job fair for Grade 9 students they helped with was the most impactful event. The HEROs also mentioned how they helped other students too: "We can help kids participate in the events that [site coordinator's name] puts together."

Having HEROs disseminate information across students and classrooms increased awareness of the GEAR UP program:

> After talking with some of my friends about the program, they have been very quick to sign up for a lot of the other events GEAR UP is hosting.

> Some people might feel that they can't do enough to go to college. And I feel like HEROs reach out to them and tell them that they have the chance and that they can get help and understand it better, and that they do have a way that they can go to college.

Challenges and Suggestions to Improve HEROs

Generally, HEROs did not report challenges with their groups. One group mentioned that they had some issues narrowing down ideas about the best way to execute the plans:

> *Getting everybody to agree, because not all of us can be there at one time.
> So, some people will miss, and then they'll come, and they'll be like, "I didn't
> agree on this." So, it's mostly just getting people okay with each of our ideas.*

Students shared several suggestions to improve HEROs meetings and activities. One group was thinking about meeting more frequently to have more time to plan events. Students from two schools would like to have more members: "I wouldn't mind if more people are involved." Students from three schools suggested extending the membership to students in other grades for different reasons:

> *I think having more of the upperclassmen, like seniors. … If we had more of
> those, they would be able to tell us, the younger generation, what to expect
> and what helped them the most. So, we could keep that going.*

> *I feel like it would be more beneficial if juniors tried to help juniors, or seniors
> tried to help seniors. Because I feel like they would listen to people in their
> own grade and people their own age.*

Students in one school suggested having a HEROs group for each grade level that met separately and as a larger group: "I think it'd be helpful if maybe we had one for every grade, and then they all met separately, and then we would all come together for a meeting every month."

Students also offered ideas about different activities that HEROs could help with. One group mentioned that they could do more for the school's seniors:

> *Maybe having a thing where we could just tell the seniors about different
> scholarship opportunities and different just opportunities about going to
> college and just filling out the FAFSA forms and stuff like that.*

Another group mentioned that the school could bring more college representatives in:

> *Having the president of Marshall or something, coming here, and talking
> about everything that you can do at Marshall, all the clubs you can get
> involved in, all the classes you can take that want to lead up to your career
> you want to do.*

Two students mentioned that they would like to introduce middle school students to career exploration activities:

> *A presentation or something maybe, or just what they can become and
> maybe jobs for them in different types of fields.*

Three groups of HEROs wanted to reach and provide GEAR UP information to all students regardless of their plans after graduation:

> *Having a job fair next year for the kids that want to just go directly into the
> workforce so they can see what's around this area. They would decide just to
> get into the workforce, see what their options are.*

> *I think that more career exploration would help, because we all have different
> things that we want to do and different jobs that we want to take. So, if we*

could all learn what we want, it would teach us better, and we would know what to expect from it.

Members of one HEROs group saw themselves as ambassadors of GEAR UP, with the task of "inform[ing] and show[ing] [students] that they have other options than just quitting." "You don't even have to come to the club, you can come to us individually and talk to us because we all know," one added.

Finally, some HEROs wanted to extend their activities to the community and student body at large to "make more of an impact on our community and our school and taking care of it. And just keeping everything in good shape."

I think it would be cool, maybe our teacher appreciation week at school, to go around and make gifts or something. Or maybe get cupcakes or something like that, sweet treats for the teachers, and go around and pass them out. To show that we appreciate them. If it wasn't for them, we all wouldn't be in this group or anything.

Hope and Belonging

Focus group findings about HEROs perceptions on hope and sense of belonging are presented in two areas: (1) HEROs members and (2) Perceptions on the school.

HEROs Members

All HEROs reported feeling hopeful about their future. Students shared their plans for life after high school graduation, which included studying in different institutions to get certificates in cosmetology and electricity; getting a college degree to practice in the medical field as nurses, general doctors and specialists, physical therapists, and psychologists; or pursuing careers in other fields such as engineering, law, education, space exploration, and creative writing.

Participation in HEROs provided an opportunity to strengthen friendships, meet more people, and create community. These connections were important for students. One student reflected:

[HEROs] also gives you like-minded people who are also looking for these things. And not only serves as a way to think about what you want to do but gives you connections to find them.

Students shared that they feel safe in HEROs expressing their ideas and that members showed respect and considered all input provided by different members.

[The site coordinator] is like, "How do we like this?" Well, we didn't like it. So, we kept trying different things until we found what all of us could … we could finally agree on. So, we sometimes bargain with how we like things to look.

> *We all work very good together too. I feel we're all very kind to each other and don't judge each other's ideas. And I feel we all know how to band together, and just, we work very well together.*

Some of the HEROs knew each other before joining the group. However, looking for friends was not the main purpose for joining. Members from one group saw each other more as "coworkers" than friends since the group is very task-oriented. They also clarified that being friends was not a prerequisite to joining the group: "You don't have to be friends to be in HEROs. It is a working group." However, for other students, being part of HEROs provides them with a comfortable space, because it is a "group that sits down and cares about your future and talks to you about your opportunities." Another student expressed the same sentiment:

> *I feel like we're all friendly with each other. We all know that we agree, and we support each other even if we all don't hang out outside of the HEROs group, that they know that we would support them and their decision.*

Participating in HEROs contributed to members feeling part of the school community and having opportunities to interact more with teachers and peers.

> *I like being part of a community, and it's not just … it's a very specific community.*

> *I feel like it's definitely in the interactions between teachers especially, and having them know you, and know you as this hard-working committed person who's doing these things around the school or associates you with these good changes that are being made, knowing you're very productive, you seem more trustworthy.*

Additionally, HEROs appreciated that other students recognized their efforts to improve the school. A student explained: "It is kind of nice to be appreciated by some people who vaguely know me."

Overall, HEROs felt welcomed in a student group in which they actively contributed to the success of the planned activities. As one student noted:

> *I love the environment. I love getting to talk to people. I love getting to discuss these ideas and really give my time to some kind of people, and just get to really collaborate over something that everyone seems so passionate about getting just right.*

Perceptions on the School

HEROs from all five schools thought that their schools offered a wide variety of career paths to students to accommodate different aspirations. HEROs from one of the schools in particular were satisfied with the school's preparation offerings for education beyond high school. The students shared that the career and technical education program was expanding as well as the dual credit options and job shadowing opportunities. Students said the options were well publicized.

In other schools, HEROs mentioned that schools needed to continue "presenting [students] with ideas of financial aid or college readiness, giving [students] ideas of what maybe they're more geared to do in life … to get the kids where they want to be."

Overall, the interviewed HEROs seem to be high-achieving students, are active in school activities, and prefer to interact with peers who have similar aspirations of pursuing further education after high school. However, all of them reported having classmates and knowing other students who did not share a similar excitement: "Some people feel kind of lost." Students shared that the apathy that some classmates showed about their future after high school was due to a lack of family support:

> *If your parents raise you with the intent—saying you're going to be able to make it to college, you are going to go to college—then you're going to go to college. You don't really think about the money until you get into high school, and you have to really worry about it. But people with parents who can't afford to send you to college don't really talk about it.*

> *We have quite a few people whose parents haven't gone to college or something like that. And that also has a big impact on whether they decide they're going to college or not. If their parents either hasn't gone … or even if they do go to college but they have a business, maybe they'll go into a family business rather than going into college.*

HEROs—and GEAR UP as a whole—help schools spread the message that "college is possible, but also that [students] have options beyond it." HEROs became a valuable resource for schools by "providing some resources that students wouldn't have to begin with." GEAR UP helps students to open their options: "You don't have to stick with what your hometown says, go out and be you. Yeah, [GEAR UP] really helps open up people to new ideas."

One student mentioned that students might be more receptive to considering different ideas and re-evaluating plans if the information and suggestions come from peers instead of from other adults:

> *They're probably more likely to listen to peers rather than teachers. … [Students say,] "Oh yeah, I know I've heard that from teachers all the time." So now it's like if I tell her, "Hey listen, we really got to be thinking about what we want to do," they'll be like, "Oh yeah."*

For some HEROs, the group played a key role in encouraging students to explore different options:

> *For us being able to help set up these events or do things like that, we're secondhand helping other people explore their minds, explore their own interests and stuff like that.*

A HERO from another school believed that "a lot of the time it's less of the message and more of the positive experience, which then influences [students] to think of our message more positively." In fact, for HEROs in one school, the best HERO outcome would be:

*That we help these students find their futures. I mean, that is what we were
made for, the group itself: HEROs. It's also showing us how to help people in
different ways, and how we can show people different career paths and
things like that. So, it's showing us how to help.*

VIII. Discussion and Recommendations

The evaluation team's Year 3 data collection activities—surveys of students, parents, and
school personnel and interviews/focus groups with students—provided a wealth of
information about the implementation of the current WV GEAR UP grant. Key findings
included the following:

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 3, based on an analysis of data collected from students, parents/guardians, and
school personnel through surveys and interviews. Key findings from the evaluation are as
follows:

**Perceptions of hope showed moderate, though sometimes uneven, progress among
students.** Hope is measured by the Children's Hope Scale and looks at respondents'
assessments and optimism about problem-solving and future hopes pertaining to
education. Cohort 1 students had higher hope than Cohort 2 and retrospective comparison
group (R-Comp) students when each group was in Grade 8. Cohort 2 and R-Comp ratings
were similar. However, student hope seems to increase over time with Grade 12 students
surveyed in Year 3 having higher hope than students surveyed when they were in Grade 8
and Cohort 1 students surveyed in Year 3 when in Grade 9. Similar to findings from previous
years, parent ratings of hope for their student continues to be higher than students' own
hope for themselves.

**Students appear to acquire greater knowledge of college entrance requirements and
financial aid over time.** Students' correct identification of financial aid programs and
correct estimation of college costs increased from Grade 9 to Grade 12, suggesting they
become more knowledgeable in these areas as they get closer to graduation. The WV
Promise Scholarship had the highest percentage of respondents who selected the correct
response for Cohort 1 (Grade 9), Cohort 2 (Grade 8), and Grade 12. Between 46% and 54%
of students in these three grades correctly identified that scholarship, whereas the WV
Invests grant had the lowest percentage of students correctly identifying it (21%–31%).

**Despite these findings, students and their parents continue to overestimate the cost of
education after high school.** Cohorts 1 and 2 students and parents as well as Grade 12
students were more likely to overestimate the costs of furthering their education versus
underestimating. The students and parents alike were also more likely to indicate they
could afford to attend (or have their student attend) a career/technical center versus a
public 2-year or 4-year college. Furthermore, cost continues to be an often-cited reason
by Cohort 1 students and parents and Grade 12 students as the reason they may not
continue their education. Clearly, they still see finances as a potential barrier and lack full

knowledge of available financial aid, such as understanding of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), federal student loans, and federal work study—the lowest-rated postsecondary education topics by Cohort 1 and 2 students and parents and Grade 12 students. School personnel also had difficulty correctly estimating costs of a 2- and 4-year college (26%–33% of personnel correctly estimated costs), and only 52%–67% correctly identified financial aid sources such as the Pell grant, WV Invests, and the WV Promise Scholarship.

Students exhibited increased knowledge of many education topics related to education beyond high school. Cohort 1 students and parents and Grade 12 students had higher mean ratings in areas related to education needed to pursue careers/jobs of interest, different career paths, and different types of education after high school compared to knowledge in areas related to financial aid (e.g., FAFSA, federal student loans, federal work study). However, Cohort 1 students interviewed by the evaluation team expressed interest in knowing even more about college academic programs in their areas of interest and additional opportunities for hearing from or observing professionals in their career settings.

Students were in agreement that their schools had a college-going culture in several areas. Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Grade 12 students agreed that going to college will lead to a better future, they feel encouraged to take courses that will prepare them for college, and that the school staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students. One area that had less agreement was that students helped one another to follow their college and career goals. Current programming designed to focus on individual student needs and peer support are Student Success Societies and the Higher Education Readiness Officers (HEROs) program.

According to students, the HEROs program, which is in its first year, is operating as intended and promoting a college-going culture. The schools had latitude as to the approaches used to recruit students and most programs the evaluation team examined through focus groups met during school hours. The HEROs students had a desire to make an impact in their schools and serve all students, especially those without a clear path for the future. The HEROs students appreciated the skill development in leadership, teamwork, and communication. They were excited about the activities they helped plan and implement to encourage their peers in considering their future education. Several students expressed interest in having the HEROs program for all grade levels.

College visits and career fairs continue to be a highlight for students. Cohort 1 and Grade 12 surveyed students and Cohort 1 students who were interviewed universally cited the college visits as the most helpful GEAR UP activities. Yet, they also said that to increase their college and career knowledge and readiness there was a need for more college visits and information on college entrance requirements (30%–42% of Cohort 1 and Grade 12 students). This was further supported by approximately one half of GEAR UP coordinators who indicated the need for more college visits (56%) and career information (46%). Interviewed Cohort 1 students recommended that college visits be tailored to programs in which students had interest. These students also appreciated opportunities for community members to visit their schools and share about careers and education needed to pursue those careers.

Cohort 1 students who are part of the longitudinal interviews transitioned to high school and overall had a good school year. They are highly motivated (e.g., majority taking honors classes), more stable in their career decisions, and are involved in extracurriculars. A few are starting to doubt their abilities (e.g., student struggling in math and now thinking maybe engineering is not for him) while others have the "I am capable" mentality (e.g., student who believed she was capable of career options beyond that of a cosmetologist). Some acknowledged challenges with the transition to Grade 9. However, these students appreciate informal conversations with their teachers, and it is the teachers who they look to for insights on future education and career planning that encourages them.

Preliminary findings from a spotlight analysis on the relationship of the parent/guardian to survey responses showed areas that may be worth further exploration. The spotlight analysis examined differences in outcomes measured by parent survey respondents for those who reported to be the students' *Parent* or *Parent* and *Legal Guardian*, referred to as "parents," and those who selected at least one other relationship, referred to as "guardians." There are some indications of differences in responses in areas such as perceptions of hope. However, the findings must be interpreted with caution given the small sample sizes.

School personnel participation in GEAR UP activities has increased. More than half of school personnel survey respondents (54%) reported participating in GEAR UP-sponsored activities, which is an increase from the 2 previous years (42%–52%). Activities with the highest reported involvement included academic/tutor support (55%), academic planning/career advising (53%), and one-on-one advising with students (52%). However, less than half of school personnel (45%) reported involvement in GEAR UP-offered professional development, which represents a decrease from previous years (51%–54%). Scheduling conflicts, time, and family obligations were the main reasons cited for not participating in GEAR UP activities.

Recommendations for Year 4

In response to these findings and trends, the evaluation team offers the following recommendations to the Commission for consideration as it begins Year 4 of the 2021–2028 GEAR UP grant:

Provide more resources to school staff to increase understanding and awareness of college costs and GEAR UP. Students, parents, and school personnel all continue to have difficulty correctly estimating the costs of 2- and 4-year colleges. One response may be to offer resources to school staff to increase their understanding and awareness. While they are not expected to be experts, school personnel often have informal conversations with students and more resources focused on costs may enhance the depth of these conversations. One way to address this issue—and others important to GEAR UP—may be to integrate GEAR UP information with other information that teachers are seeking. One example observed by the evaluation team in another program was a new teacher academy focused on classroom management skills and student behavior. Information on college and career readiness was also embedded in this academy. Adding GEAR UP information to

already desired professional development may be a way to further engage teachers in college and career issues important for West Virginia students.

Continue to enhance peer support related to college awareness and career goals. In student surveys, respondents sometimes did not believe that students help one another to follow their college and career goals. Given that this is a chief aim of the HEROs program, HEROs coordinators may want to redouble efforts that promote one-to-one student-to-student interactions that encourage informal conversations and provide support on college and career topics.

Expand data collection on HEROs students. The evaluation team is recommending an expansion of data collection on students participating in HEROs. While focus groups will continue in Year 4, ICF also is inserting HEROs-related questions into Year 4 surveys to have both quantitative and qualitative data on this important service. This expansion should promote broader understanding of HEROs across all participating students and schools. Such information is particularly important as schools integrate Cohort 2 students into their existing HEROs program.

Tailor college campus visits to students' interests. Students in surveys and interviews reported college visits among the GEAR UP events they found the most beneficial. However, as students began to narrow their college and career interests, Cohort 1 interviewees had more specific questions than general campus tours were able to address. These students reported receiving more in-depth information when interacting with college academic representatives and they were able to ask specific questions. Additionally, students reported to be more interested in visiting colleges in smaller groups and visiting specific academic departments. When planning college visits, site coordinators might consider including time for students to explore different academic departments and talk with representatives.

Invite alumni and professionals from the community to share insights and lessons learned. Cohort 1 students reported using several sources of information to make decisions on courses and potential future careers. To further that goal, GEAR UP may invite more professionals from the community to come into schools and share their experiences. Similarly, alumni may be a valuable source of information who can provide perspective to students. The Texas GEAR UP program brings alumni back to their high schools to talk not only with students but also with school staff to share their postsecondary experiences as well as to discuss high school activities that helped them make an effective transition to college.

Consider looking at what other GEAR UP programs may be doing to increase students' resilience and hope as well as improving their mindsets. The National Council of Education and Community Partnerships (NCCEP), the national association for GEAR UP, hosts annual conferences where grantees have the opportunity to present ideas, strategies, and tools from their programs to better serve GEAR UP students. Session abstracts from previous years' NCCEP conferences are available and could be culled for programs of interest. In one such example, GEAR UP Kentucky presented on its peer mentoring program that promotes student resilience by focusing on social, emotional, and cultural barriers to

success in education after high school. For this example and others, ICF could assist in making contacts with the program directors. A sample of such programs are presented in Appendix A.

Conduct additional data collection and analysis on guardians and grandparents caring for students. Data from parent/guardian surveys showed some differences between parents and guardians on feelings of hope for the future and ability of students to go to college. Such results must be viewed with caution, however, due to the small number of adult respondents identifying themselves as guardians. The Year 4 student survey will include questions to elicit whether students are cared for by a parent or guardian, and this information should yield richer data to further explore this issue and identify needs for this population.

Design specific messages for guardians of GEAR UP students. WV GEAR UP may want to consider additional messaging to guardians about students' ability to claim independent status if they have been a ward of the state. Taking this action may help in promoting a more cost-effective approach to education after high school.

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Appendix A. 2019–2024 National Conference for Education Partnerships (NCCEP) Annual Conference Sessions

The following NCCEP sessions were identified by ICF as ones that had a reference to resilience, hope, or mindset that may be of interest to WVGU staff and for which additional information could be culled or contacts made to find out more details. Information depicted in the table below was obtained from the NCCEP's website: https://www.edpartnerships.org/events-archives

Conference Year	Session Name	Abstract	Presenter
2019	Readiness From the Inside Out: Reinforcing Self-Reflection, Relevancy, and Relationships	In this interactive session, we will explore critical non-cognitive skills necessary for college readiness, retention, and resiliency. Participants will establish a foundation of the principles behind the Johari window model and how these principles can be implemented into GEAR UP student activities to afford students reflection that leads to meaningful college and career preparation. Participants will gain skills in how to be mindful of their own self-reflection to enhance relationships and relevancy with students. Current and relevant research will be translated into practical activities for use with students that will be provided to session participants for immediate classroom and/or workshop use. Learning Objectives: 1. Identify and explore critical noncognitive skills necessary for college readiness and retention. 2. Identify and explore best practices that will result in and understanding of how to develop programs/curriculum/workshops that infuse the fundamental principles of Johari window model within the middle school/high school/college infrastructure. 3. Experience interactive activities that can become part of GEAR UP student activities grounded in research and focused on mindset, resiliency, personal responsibility, emotional intelligence, behavior change, goal-setting, and self-reflection.	Jennifer Murphy, Ph.D., Program Director/Faculty, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ
2019	Flipping the Funnel: Upending Traditional	In this facilitated discussion, participants will explore upending the paradigm of student advisement from a traditional method to a	Terry Hosler, Service Coordinator, GEAR UP: Opportunity, Berea,

Conference Year	Session Name	Abstract	Presenter
	Student Advisement Through a Problem-Solving Approach	broadened problem-solving framework and solution team approach. Utilizing Google's "What problem do you want to solve?" question as a prompt for students exploring education and career pathways, this approach opens students' views of success and personal life-impact through a team-building mindset that empowers and engages students in grit and resilience, and advises students to be flexible with career and educational preparation options. Session participants will gain a variety of resources, including quick to implement, no-cost activities; student discussion guides utilizing sensitive listening/responsive questioning methods; and templates for progressive approaches for working with students on transferrable skills that help students identify life-impact goals. Learning Objectives: 1. Explore a sensitive listening/responsive questioning method of working with students on postsecondary and career pursuits from a problem-solving framework reaching beyond barriers in student views of success. 2. Share challenges and gain additional approaches in working with students to develop grit, resilience, and broader perspectives. 3. Use table team activities to practice student support techniques by integrating problem-solving and solution team methods into an educational culture for student planning.	KY; Samuel Wansley, Service Coordinator, GEAR UP Promise Zone, Middlesboro, KY
	Taking the Plunge: Tangible Strategies and Activities for the Transition to High School	Attendees will learn about best practices for an intensive 8th to 9th summer program that engages students to explore their vision for future academic success and social/emotional satisfaction in high school and beyond. Presenters will highlight on-track rates, algebra passing rates, behavior, attendance, and grades; showcase relevant curriculum in literacy, math, and counseling; and integrate parent programs into this transition year. Attendees will experience community building activities, using growth mindsets that foster students' sense of belonging and academic mastery. Attendees will leave ready to replicate proven strategies from this interactive session. Learning	Susan Garr, Professional Development Manager, Center for College Access and Success/Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL; Aniseto Rangel, Senior Program Manager, Center for College Access and Success/Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL; Wendy M. Stack, Ph.D., Associate

Conference Year	Session Name	Abstract	Presenter
		Objectives: 1. Interact with data demonstrating that participating students are significantly more likely to stay on-track, graduate on time, and enroll in college. 2. Explore relevant and engaging curricula and experiential educational activities which incorporate growth mindsets and students' critical thinking skills. 3. Replicate and adapt 9th grade on-track resources from this proven GEAR UP Program to individual programs in other areas of the country.	VP and Executive Director Center for College Access and Success and Chicago GEAR UP, Northeastern Illinois University; Esperanza Valle, Parent Mentor, Center for College Access and Success/Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL
2019	Growth Mindset: Maximizing Your Potential	Come explore the research of Dr. Carol Dweck at Stanford University on growth mindset and learn how it can be applied to help your students set and achieve bold goals. Through simple but powerful exercises such as sketching self-portraits and telling short stories, any teacher can quickly help students grasp their potential for improvement. In this session, participants will discover three activities that can be deployed in the classroom to teach students about the power of their mindset with respect to learning outcomes and personally learn more about how to change their own mindset. Learning Objectives: 1. Understand how your student can learn to work more effectively towards success in a low-stress environment. 2. Learn ways to help your student get comfortable setting and achieving ambitious goals. 3. Identify strategies to foster a growth mindset in your student, so that they seek challenges rather than avoid them.	Carrie Finsilver, Director of School Partnerships, Revolution Prep, Santa Monica, CA
2020	Reconceptualized: Relationships + Reflection = Relevance	Overview: We teach methods for improving a student's critical thinking, rhetorical analysis, creative thinking, comprehension, and problem-solving skills; but how often do we teach the art of self-reflection? Cultivating this metacognitive skill can increase academic, interpersonal, and emotional resiliency, and lead to student success. As educators, we must navigate our own experiences with self-reflection in order to build relationships with students by asking	Jennifer Murphy, Ph.D., Director, Arizona State University GEAR UP

Conference Year	Session Name	Abstract	Presenter
		the right questions and providing the necessary feedback to elicit trust, foster change, and reinforce relevancy in learning. This interactive seminar will offer a unique perspective to cultivate student self-reflection, investigate the quality of relationships we cultivate, address how to engage in collaborative conversations, and explore how to provide change-based feedback. Key topics to be addressed include Johari's Window in relation to exploring social-emotional content, metacognition, and motivational interviewing. Session participants will walk away with research-based practical activities for use with students in the classroom and/or workshop setting.	
2022	The Power of Peers in Building Resiliency	In this interactive, team presentation, GEAR UP Kentucky will partner with parenting and youth development expert Dr. Deborah Gilboa ("Dr. G") to highlight a hybrid, multi-level peer mentoring program that leverages near-peer relationships to develop resilience around the social, emotional, fiscal, and cultural barriers of postsecondary success. Attendees will participate in a sample structured mentoring activity on building skills to improve resiliency, learn strategies for recruiting, selecting, and training student mentors at the secondary and postsecondary levels, and receive an overview of the curriculum including goals, student perspectives, assessment tools and ideas for implementation in GEAR UP schools. Learning Objectives: – Understand the research basis for levering peer mentoring to improve resilience and the strategies for measuring growth in resilience. – Define and experience the components of a resiliency-focused peer mentoring program. – Identify and discuss obstacles to implement peer mentoring programs.	Laura Negron, Associate Director of Operations & Development, GEAR UP Kentucky Deborah Gilboa, MD, Parenting & Youth Development Expert, Ask Dr. G Amy Tobin, Postsecondary Transition Coordinator, GEAR UP Kentucky
2022	Fostering Learning Mindsets: Strategies for Promoting	Overview: Why does academic engagement decline through middle and high school, particularly for students from marginalized communities? And what can we do to help ALL students stay engaged? In this session,	Jacquie Beaubien, Motivation & Mindset Consultant

Conference Year	Session Name	Abstract	Presenter
	Academic Engagement	you will gain an experiential and research-based understanding of what fuels human motivation and learn simple strategies for creating inclusive and motivating environments, that: (1) help students believe they can succeed (growth mindset); (2) trust that they belong and are valued in academic settings; and (3) see that their education can help them reach personally meaningful goals (sense of purpose). Often referred to as Learning Mindsets, participants will have time to explore how to apply the shared recommendations to their context. Information on additional free online evidence-based recommendations and resources will also be provided. Objectives: • Gain a research-informed understanding of factors that influence mindsets, motivation, and academic engagement. • Learn simple strategies for creating more inclusive, motivating learning conditions that foster students' sense of belonging, a growth mindset, and a sense of purpose for succeeding in school. • Know how to access free, evidence-based resources for additional strategies on how to support students' motivation and mindsets.	
2022	Advancing Academics Through SEL: Is Resilience the Key?	The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has placed the need for social-emotional learning supports in the spotlight. Fortunately, districts now have more funding to support such efforts. How can we leverage the best social-emotional and academic outcomes for students? Is focusing on resilience the key? In this interactive lecture, participants will explore resilience as a concept and find out what our case study revealed about its correlations to academic success within our cohort. Learning Objectives: – Develop an understanding of the dynamic nature of resilience and discuss its association with student outcomes. – Develop an awareness of the important role schools/educators can play in fostering resiliency. – Plan a practical strategy to promote resilience.	Waynetta Turner, Site Facilitator, GEAR UP Birmingham Donna Turner, Ph.D., Evaluator, SpectrumRED Melody Harrington, Site Facilitator, GEAR UP Birmingham
2023	GEAR UP Gamified: The	Get your students in the competitive spirit and embark on their career discovery journey	Hadiyah Elder, Site Coordinator, DeSoto

Conference Year	Session Name	Abstract	Presenter
	New Wave to Student Engagement in Career Exploration Let's talk CAREERS with DeSoto ISD NXT Generation GEAR UP!	with ChatterHigh. This high-level career exploration platform creates accessibility to many postsecondary pathways and possible career goals. ChatterHigh makes this gamified experience fun and creates a sense of community as students explore their opportunities. Integrating this program into the classroom as a data-driven resource helps contribute "hope" in students by building authentic career interest profiles. This session will be primarily a facilitated dialogue and participant engagement with a small percentage of lecturing. Learning Objectives: (1) Learn how ChatterHigh's divergent exploration, self-reflection, and convergent thinking algorithm creates authentic career interest profiles for each student. (2) Learn the connections between hope-action theory, vocational identity, and student engagement in the context of career development classes (3) Discover a resource that allows for successful delivery of various supplemental curricula in any learning environments (i.e., remote, blended, or face-to-face).	Independent School District Shanta Duren, Project Director, DeSoto ISD Lee Taal, CEO, ChatterHigh Chanel Truitt, Site Coordinator, DeSoto ISD
2024	Influencing Your District through SEL	Coordinators, administrators, and evaluators, join us for an engaging session that unravels the influence of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) – the secret sauce for personal growth, effective communication, and conquering the academic adventure! Discover ways to integrate SEL into your mentoring program so mentees not only survive but thrive personally and academically. It's mentorship like you've never seen before – dynamic, impactful, and downright fun! Dive into the art of behavior management, where balance and awareness will reset your students and create well-managed classrooms. Don't miss out on this SEL experience! Join us and turn learning into a captivating journey filled with new friends, laughter, and growth. Learning Objectives: (1) 5 SEL Competencies: develop specific skills to contribute to students' emotional well-being and positive social interactions, which are essential for personal growth, effective communication, and	Eva Reyna, Senior Principal, Jubilee Academies Shareika Jones, GEAR UP Social Emotional Coach, Jubilee Academies Kassandra Placencio, GEAR UP Social Emotional Coach, Jubilee Academies

Conference Year	Session Name	Abstract	Presenter
		success in school and postsecondary life. (2) Difference Makers: incorporate social emotional learning into your mentoring program to create supportive environments for mentees to grow personally and academically with guidance from their mentors. (3) Balance Check and Reset: establish a well-managed classroom that supports effective teaching and learning while fostering a positive and respectful environment for all students.	

Appendix B. Technical Detail

Table B.1 Year 3 Student Gender

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
Male	52%	48%	49%	48%	50%
Female	45%	52%	47%	52%	47%
Other	1%	1%	1%	<1%	<1%
Prefer not to say	2%	<1%	2%	0%	2%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Parents reported the gender of their student in the parent survey. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.2 Year 3 Race and Ethnicity of Respondents

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
White	94%	98%	96%	99%	96%
Black	4%	1%	3%	2%	3%
Asian	1%	0%	1%	<1%	1%
Hispanic	3%	1%	2%	<1%	2%
AIAN	3%	1%	2%	<1%	1%
NHPI	<1%	0%	<1%	0%	<1%
MENA	1%	0%	<1%	0%	<1%
Other	1%	<1%	2%	<1%	1%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. AIAN = American Indian or Alaska Native. NHPI = Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. MENA = Middle Eastern or North African.

Table B.3 Year 3 Respondent Relation to Child

	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Parents
Parent	90%	88%
Grandparent	5%	6%
Legal guardian	6%	7%
Step or foster parent	3%	2%
Other	1%	1%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 parent surveys.
Note. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

Table B.4 Year 3 Primary Language Spoken at Home

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
English	99%	98%	99%	100%	99%
Spanish	<1%	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%
Other	1%	0%	<1%	0%	<1%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.5 Year 3 Highest Level of Education Earned by Parents

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
Some high school	6%	5%	10%	5%	8%
High school diploma/GED	17%	29%	20%	26%	29%
Some college	10%	23%	11%	19%	15%
2-year college degree (associate)	5%	16%	8%	14%	9%
4-year college degree (bachelor's)	12%	15%	15%	19%	15%
Master's degree	9%	9%	9%	14%	8%
PhD or higher	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%
Don't know	39%	3%	25%	2%	15%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.6 Year 3 Number of Siblings/Children in Family Who Attended or Currently Attend College

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
0	57%	66%	53%	54%	51%
1	18%	13%	21%	18%	27%
2	10%	3%	11%	7%	11%
3	4%	1%	4%	2%	3%
4	2%	<1%	2%	1%	1%
5 or more	3%	1%	3%	<1%	2%
I don't have siblings/other students	6%	15%	6%	18%	6%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.7 Year 3 Estimated Family Income

	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
$30,000 or less	22%	15%	17%
$30,001–$60,000	18%	20%	23%
$60,001–$100,000	23%	25%	0%
$100,001 or more	17%	16%	13%
Don't know or I'd rather not say	20%	24%	47%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding. This question was not asked of Cohort 2 (Grade 8 students).

Table B.8 Year 3 Student–Reported Experience With Food Insecurity, Focus, and Worry

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 9 Students	Grade 12 Students
In the last 30 days, I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.			
Never/rarely true	95%	96%	95%
Sometimes/often true	5%	5%	5%
In the last 12 months, I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.			
Never/rarely true	96%	96%	95%
Sometimes/often true	4%	5%	5%
In the last 12 months, I have had a hard time staying focused on my homework or other things I had to do.			
Never/rarely true	60%	61%	57%
Sometimes/often true	40%	39%	43%
In the last 12 months, I have been so worried about something that I could not sleep at night.			
Never/rarely true	71%	72%	68%
Sometimes/often true	29%	28%	32%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.9 Year 3 Parent–Reported Talks with Students

Have you talked with your student about attending college?	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Parents
Yes	93%	96%
No	7%	5%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 parent survey.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.10 Year 3 Student– and Parent–Reported Experience of School Culture

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
Students at my school help one another to follow their college and career goals. (Parents/family at my student's school support one another in encouraging students to pursue their college and career goals.)	2.48	3.19	2.65	3.14	2.67
I believe going to college will lead to a better future for me and my family. (I believe my student going to college will lead to a better future for them.)	3.31	3.46	3.22	3.53	3.18
School staff acknowledge my goals, abilities, and talents when talking to me about future college options. (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.)	2.92	3.14	2.93	3.05	2.97
Principals, vice principals, counselors, teachers, and staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background (for example, disabilities, gender, income status, race). (Administrators, teachers, and staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background.)	3.07	3.19	3.05	3.14	3.00
I feel encouraged to take courses that will prepare me for college. (My student is encouraged to take courses that will prepare them for high school.)	3.07	3.27	3.06	3.26	2.93
Overall Mean Rating (Range 1–6)	2.97	3.25	2.98	3.23	2.95

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1 – *Strongly disagree*, 2 – *Disagree*, 3 – *Agree*, 4 – *Strongly agree*. The table presents mean scores across response options.

Table B.11 Year 3 Parent–Reported Thoughts on College Readiness

	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Parents
Attending college is important to my student's career goal and future.	3.43	3.49
It's too early to think about my student going to college.	1.79	1.69

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 parent survey.
Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1 – *Strongly disagree*, 2 – *Disagree*, 3 – *Agree*, 4 – *Strongly agree*. The table presents mean scores across response options.

Table B.12 Year 3 Student–Reported Plan to Continue Education Post High School

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 9 Students	Grade 12 Students
Yes	85%	83%	84%
No	15%	18%	16%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.13 Year 3 Student- and Parent–Reported Factors that Prevent Education Post–High School

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
Nothing will prevent me from continuing my education	44%	49%	38%	47%	42%
My grades aren't good enough	25%	10%	27%	14%	15%
It costs too much/I can't afford it	28%	32%	32%	30%	34%
I <u>need</u> to work	16%	7%	16%	5%	20%
I <u>want</u> to work	21%	11%	24%	14%	22%
Concerns about COVID–19	2%	1%	1%	<1%	1%
Family issues	11%	4%	11%	3%	8%
I plan to enlist in the military	8%	4%	8%	5%	6%
I won't receive/be eligible for enough financial aid	6%	18%	8%	16%	12%
Other	0%	3%	2%	5%	3%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. COVID–19 = Coronavirus Disease 2019.

Table B.14 Year 3 Student– and Parent–Reported Education Aspirations and Expectations

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
What is the highest level of education you _would like_ to get?					
High school or less	14%	4%	16%	4%	14%
Some college (less than a 2– or 4–year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)	15%	17%	14%	16%	18%
2–year college degree (associate)	14%	11%	13%	10%	12%
4–year college degree (bachelor's)	33%	37%	34%	40%	36%
More than a 4–year college degree	24%	32%	22%	31%	20%
What is the highest level of education that you _expect_ to get?					
High school or less	19%	7%	20%	7%	17%
Some college (less than a 2– or 4–year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)	17%	21%	18%	22%	18%
2-year college degree (associate)	17%	15%	18%	14%	16%
4–year college degree (bachelor's)	30%	38%	31%	37%	37%
More than a 4–year college degree	16%	19%	12%	20%	13%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.15 Year 3 Student–Reported Speaking on College–Related Topics

Has anyone from your school or GEAR UP ever spoken with you about …	Grade 8 Students	Grade 9 Students	Grade 12 Students
college entrance requirements?	60%	66%	70%
the availability of financial aid to help pay for college?	54%	62%	73%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1, Cohort 2, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Students were asked to report "yes" or "no" to the questions. Only "yes" responses are reported in the table.

Table B.16 Year 3 Student– and Parent–Reported Estimation of College Affordability

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
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?					
A public 4–year college	2.81	3.09	2.77	3.08	2.81
A public 2–year community/technical college	2.98	3.36	2.96	3.35	3.07
A public career/technical center	3.03	3.45	3.06	3.43	3.15

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Scale used to determine mean rating: 1 – *Definitely Not,* 2 – *Probably Not,* 3 – *Probably,* 4 – *Definitely.* The table presents mean scores across response options.

Table B.17 Year 3 Student– and Parent–Reported Estimation of College Costs

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
A 4-year public college in West Virginia					
Correct	20%	16%	19%	23%	25%
Under	24%	10%	20%	8%	17%
Over	56%	74%	61%	69%	58%
A 2-year public community/technical college in West Virginia					
Correct	24%	25%	20%	29%	29%
Under	16%	9%	14%	9%	16%
Over	60%	66%	67%	63%	55%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.18 Year 3 Student and Parent Correct Identification of Financial Aid Programs

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
WV Promise Scholarship	46%	56%	48%	60%	54%
WV Higher Education Grant	30%	41%	31%	46%	36%
Federal Pell Grant	27%	49%	25%	51%	37%
WV Invests Grant	21%	42%	21%	50%	31%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.

Table B.19 Year 3 Student– and Parent–Reported Knowledge of College and Career Topics

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)	1.79	2.38	1.85	2.54	2.33
ACT/SAT	2.17	2.58	2.33	2.69	2.85
Federal student loans	2.19	2.30	2.12	2.44	2.16
Federal work study	2.01	1.98	1.99	2.14	1.99
Requirements for college acceptance	2.43	2.50	2.47	2.59	2.68
High school graduation requirements	2.67	2.92	2.82	2.91	3.18
Different types of education after high school (for example, certificate programs, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges)	2.59	2.76	2.64	2.82	2.89
Different career paths	2.81	2.81	2.83	2.86	2.94
The education needed to pursue the career or job you are interested in	2.77	2.68	2.75	2.73	2.95
Overall Mean Rating (Range 1–6)	2.38	2.54	2.42	2.63	2.66

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.

Note. Scale used to determine rating: 1 – *Not at all knowledgeable,* 2 – *Slightly knowledgeable,* 3 – *Moderately knowledgeable,* 4 – *Extremely knowledgeable.* The table presents mean scores across response options.

Table B.20 Year 3 Student–Reported Reasons for Not Participating in College/Career Readiness Activities

	Grade 12 Students
Family obligations	12%
Work/employment	16%
Lack of transportation	8%
Lack of interest	32%
Scheduling conflicts	20%
I don't need or want to participate	27%
I was not aware they were offered	33%
Other	3%

Source. WV GEAR UP Grade 12 student survey.

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

Table B.21 Year 3 Parent–Reported Experiences with GEAR UP Program

	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Parents
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?		
Yes	62%	72%
No	38%	28%
Would you like to receive more information about the services GEAR UP provides to you and your student?		
Yes	80%	81%
No	20%	19%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 parent survey.

Table B.22 Year 3 Student– and Parent–Reported Need for College and Career Activities/Services

	Grade 8 Students	Grade 8 Parents	Grade 9 Students	Grade 9 Parents	Grade 12 Students
More advanced classes (for example, Advanced Placement, dual credit)	37%	25%	30%	28%	17%
Information about participating in GEAR UP events	32%	51%	29%	54%	24%
Tutoring	31%	32%	30%	33%	18%
Mentoring	20%	30%	19%	28%	15%
Opportunities to participate in college visits	44%	49%	42%	62%	26%
Information about college entrance requirements	41%	51%	42%	57%	30%
Information about college financial aid/scholarships	38%	58%	37%	64%	37%
Leadership opportunities	30%	34%	28%	34%	14%
Summer activities	27%	30%	22%	28%	10%
Career exploration activities	36%	53%	37%	56%	28%
Test preparation	33%	45%	32%	52%	26%
Assistance with the college entrance process	--	--	---	---	26%
Assistance with completing financial aid forms (for example, FAFSA)	--	--	---	---	31%
Family events	21%	--	14%	---	9%
Other	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%

Source. WV GEAR UP Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 student, parent, and Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses. FAFSA = Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

Table B.23 Year 3 Student–Reported Plan to Complete FASFA

	Grade 12 Students
No, I do not plan to complete the FASFA this academic year	8%
Yes, I plan to complete the FASFA this academic year	69%
I do not know	23%

Source. WV GEAR UP Grade 12 student surveys. FAFSA = Federal Application for Federal Student Aid.

Table B.24 Year 3 Student–Reported Experiences with College Applications

	Grade 12 Students
How many college applications have you completed?	
0, and I do not plan to complete any this academic year	16%
0, but I plan to complete one or more this academic year	25%
1	0%
2 or more	59%
Have you spoken with or received assistance from a college official (admissions counselor, financial aid representative, faculty member, etc.) about attending college?	
Yes, I spoke with/received assistance from college official	71%
No, I did not speak with/receive assistance from college official	30%
Did you receive in-person and/or virtual help from GEAR UP or anyone else at your school to complete your college application?	
Yes, I received help from GEAR UP or someone else from my school to complete college applications	51%
No, I did not receive help from GEAR UP or anyone else at my school to submit my college applications	49%

Source. WV GEAR UP Grade 12 student surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.25 Personnel Gender

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Male	30%	27%	26%
Female	70%	73%	74%
Other	<1%	<1%	<1%

Source. WV GEAR UP Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 personnel surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.26 Personnel Community Type

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Rural	81%	83%	83%
Suburban	15%	13%	14%
Urban	3%	3%	3%
Other	1%	1%	1%

Source. WV GEAR UP Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 personnel surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.27 Personnel First–Generation Status

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Yes	57%	57%	57%
No	41%	41%	40%
Unsure—I do not know if my parents/guardians graduated from college or not	<1%	1%	<1%
Not applicable—I did not attend college	2%	2%	2%

Source. WV GEAR UP Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 personnel surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.28 Personnel Role

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Administrator	6%	6%	6%
Counselor	7%	4%	5%
Teacher	80%	80%	78%
Other	8%	10%	12%

Source. WV GEAR UP Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 personnel surveys.
Note. Some items may not total to 100% due to rounding.

Table B.29 Grade(s) Served by Personnel

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Grade 6	29%	35%	35%	Grade 10	48%	45%	47%
Grade 7	41%	41%	40%	Grade 11	48%	46%	48%
Grade 8	40%	40%	41%	Grade 12	48%	44%	47%
Grade 9	43%	40%	42%				

Source. WV GEAR UP Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 personnel surveys.
Note. Response percentages may not add up to 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

Appendix C. Data Collection Instruments

Grade 8 Student Survey

West Virginia GEAR UP Student Survey: 2023–2024 School Year – 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 West Virginia GEAR UP on behalf of WVHEPC to make sure GEAR UP is helping students as best as 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 15–20 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. 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 Kimberly Good at 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 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.

- o I agree to take this survey

- o I do not agree to take this survey

Section I: About You

1. Please type your nine-digit lunch/West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS) number in the field below. If there are zeros 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.)*
   o 8
   o Other – Write In (Required): _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

4. With which gender do you most identify? (*Select only one answer.*)
   o Male
   o Female
   o Prefer not to disclose
   o Other – Write In (Required): _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

5. What is your race/ethnicity? (*Select all that apply.*)
   o White
   o Black or African American
   o Asian
   o Hispanic or Latino/a
   o American Indian or Alaska Native
   o Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   o Middle Eastern or North African
   o Other – Write In (Required): _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

6. What is the main language you speak at home? (*Select only one answer.*)
   o English
   o Spanish
   o 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.)*
   o Some high school

- High school diploma/GED
- Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree; for example, a certificate or career/technical certification)
- 2-year college degree (associate)
- 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
- Master's degree
- PhD or higher
- Don't know

8. If you have brothers or sisters, how many have attended college in the past or are in college now? (*Select only one answer.*)
- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 or more
- I don't have brothers or sisters

Section II: About Your School

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

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

Section III: Your Educational Goals and Aspirations

10. Do you plan to continue your education after high school? *(Select only one answer.)*
- Yes
- No

11. What, if anything, may prevent you from continuing your education after high school? *(Select all that apply.)*
    o Nothing will prevent me from continuing my education
    o My grades aren't good enough
    o It costs too much/I can't afford it
    o I need to work
    o I want to work
    o Concerns about COVID-19
    o Family issues
    o I plan to enlist in the military
    o I won't receive/be eligible for enough financial aid
    o Other (please write in reason): _____

12. What is the highest level of education that you would like to get? *(Select only one answer.)*
    o High school or less
    o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree; for example, a certificate or career/technical certification)
    o 2-year college degree (associate)
    o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    o More than a 4-year college degree

13. What is the highest level of education that you expect to get? *(Select only one answer.)*
    o High school or less
    o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree; for example, a certificate or career/technical certification)
    o 2-year college degree (associate)
    o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    o 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.						

	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
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
In the last 30 days, I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.				
In the last 12 months, I didn't eat enough food because my family couldn't afford it.				
In the last 12 months, I have had a hard time staying focused on my homework or other things I had to do.				
In the last 12 months, I have been so worried about something that I could not sleep at night.				

Section IV: College Knowledge and Awareness

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

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

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

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

18. On average, how much do you think it costs for 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. *(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 $5,200 annually to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o West Virginia Invests Grant
    o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o Federal Pell Grant

20. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provides maximum annual awards of $3,300 during the 2023–2024 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o West Virginia Invests Grant
    o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o Federal Pell Grant

21. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provides qualifying students up to $7,395 during the 2023–2024 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o West Virginia Invests Grant
    o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o 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 2- or 4-year institution. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o West Virginia Invests Grant
    o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o 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 (for example, certificate programs, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges)				
Different career paths				
The education needed to pursue the career or job you are interested in				

Section V: College and Career Activities/Services

24. Have you participated in any of the activities below 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 related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM; for example, STEM Academy, in-class help with these subjects, and activities with Texas Instruments equipment)						
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)						
College for West Virginia's CFWV.com						

	Not Offered/ Does Not Apply	Offered, But I Did Not Attend	Not At All Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Moderately Helpful	Extremely Helpful
web portal (for example, creating CFWV.com accounts)						
College campus visits (in-person or virtual)						
Student Leadership Academy						
Mentoring (for example Student Success Society, Cultivating a Success Mindset)						
GEAR UP U Summer Academy						

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)*
    o   More advanced classes
    o   Information about participating in GEAR UP events
    o   Tutoring
    o   Mentoring
    o   Opportunities to participate in college visits
    o   Information about college entrance requirements
    o   Information about college financial aid/scholarships
    o   Leadership opportunities
    o   Summer activities
    o   Career exploration activities
    o   Test preparation
    o   Family events
    o   Other – Write In (Required): _____

*Please select **Submit form** to complete the survey*.

Thank you for your time!

Grade 8 Parent Survey

West Virginia GEAR UP Parent Survey: 2023–24 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/guardians 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 15–20 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 Kimberly Good at 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 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.

- o   I agree to take this survey

- o   I do not agree to take this survey

Section I: About You

1. Please type your student's nine-digit lunch/West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS)number in the field below. If there are zeros at the beginning of your student's number, please include them. _____

2. Select the school the student who 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 who brought this survey home? (*Select only one answer.*)
    - o 8
    - o Other – Write In (Required): _____

4. With which gender does your student most identify? (*Select only one answer.*)
    - o Male
    - o Female
    - o Prefer not to disclose
    - o Other – Write In (Required): _____

5. What is your relationship to the student who brought this survey home? (*Select all that apply.*)
    - o Parent
    - o Grandparent
    - o Legal Guardian
    - o Step or foster parent
    - o Other – Write In (Required): _____

6. What is your race/ethnicity? (*Select all that apply.*)
    - o White
    - o Black or African American
    - o Asian
    - o Hispanic or Latino/a
    - o American Indian or Alaska Native
    - o Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    - o Middle Eastern or North African
    - o Other – Write In (Required): _____

7. What is the main language you speak at home? (*Select only one answer.*)
    - o English
    - o Spanish
    - o 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.*)
    o $30,000 or Less
    o $30,001 – $60,000
    o $60,001 – $100,000
    o $100,001 or More
    o   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.*)

    o   Some high school
    o   High school diploma/GED
    o   Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)
    o   2-year college degree (associate)
    o   4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    o   Master's degree
    o   PhD or higher
    o   Don't know

10. If you have other students, how many have attended or are currently attending college? (*Select only one answer.*)
    o   0
    o   1
    o   2
    o   3
    o   4
    o   5 or more
    o   I don't have other students

Section II: About Your Student's School

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

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Parents/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.				

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
School staff acknowledge my needs (such as my work schedule) as a parent/family member when talking to me about my student's future college options.				
Administrators, teachers, and staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background.				
My student is encouraged to take courses that will prepare them for high school.				

Section III: Your Student's Educational Goals and Aspirations

12. Have you talked with your student about attending college? (*Select only one answer.*)
    o Yes
    o 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.*)
    o High school or less
    o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)
    o 2-year college degree (associate)
    o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    o 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.)*
    o High school or less
    o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)
    o 2-year college degree (associate)
    o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    o More than a 4-year college degree

16. What, if anything, may prevent your student from continuing their education after high school? (*Select all that apply.*)

- o   Nothing will prevent my student from continuing their education
- o   Their grades aren't good enough
- o   It costs too much/They can't afford it
- o   They <u>need</u> to work
- o   They <u>want</u> to work
- o   Concerns about COVID-19
- o   Family issues
- o   They plan to enlist in the military
- o   They won't receive/be eligible for enough financial aid
- o   Other (please write in reason): _____

17. 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.						

Page 5

Section IV: College Knowledge and Awareness

18. 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				

19. 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. *(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 20–23 ask about your knowledge of different financial aid programs available to West Virginia students. Please review each statement and select the correct program that matches the description.

20. This merit-based financial aid program for West Virginia students offers up to $5,200 annually to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o   WV Invests Grant
    o   WV Promise Scholarship
    o   WV Higher Education Grant
    o   Federal Pell Grant

21. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provides maximum annual awards of $3,300 during the 2023–2024 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o   WV Invests Grant
    o   WV Promise Scholarship
    o   WV Higher Education Grant
    o   Federal Pell Grant

22. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provides qualifying students up to $7,395 during the 2023–2024 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o   WV Invests Grant
    o   WV Promise Scholarship
    o   WV Higher Education Grant
    o   Federal Pell Grant

23. 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.)*

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

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

	Not at All Knowledgeable	Slightly Knowledgeable	Moderately Knowledgeable	Extremely Knowledgeable
FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)				
ACT/SAT				
Federal student loans				
Federal work study				
Requirements for college acceptance				
High school graduation requirements				
Different types of education after high school (for example, certificate programs, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges)				
Different career paths				
The education needed to pursue the career or job you are interested in				

Section V: GEAR UP Activities/Services

25. 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						

	Not Offered/ Does Not Apply	Offered, But I Did Not Attend	Not at All Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Moderately Helpful	Extremely Helpful
Financial aid literacy and assistance						
Accessing CFWV.com portal						
College campus visits (in-person or virtual)						

26. 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.)*
    o   Yes
    o   No

27. Would you like to receive more information about the services GEAR UP provides to you and your student? *(Select only one answer.)*
    o   Yes
    o   No

28. 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.)*
    o   More advanced classes
    o   Information about participating in GEAR UP events
    o   Tutoring
    o   Mentoring
    o   Opportunities to participate in college visits
    o   Information about college entrance requirements
    o   Information about college financial aid/scholarships
    o   Leadership opportunities
    o   Summer activities
    o   Career exploration activities
    o   Test preparation
    o   Other (please describe): _____

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

Grade 9 and 10 Student Survey

West Virginia GEAR UP Student Survey: 2023–2024 School Year – Grade 9 and 10

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 West Virginia GEAR UP on behalf of WVHEPC to make sure GEAR UP is helping students as best as 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 15–20 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. 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 Kimberly Good at 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 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.

- o   I agree to take this survey

- o   I do not agree to take this survey

Section I: About You

1. Please type your nine-digit lunch/West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS) number in the field below. If there are zeros 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 answer **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.)*
   o   9
   o   10
   o   Other – Write In (Required): _____

___

4. With which gender do you most identify? (*Select only one answer.*)
   o   Male
   o   Female
   o   Prefer not to disclose
   o   Other – Write In (Required): _____

5. What is your race/ethnicity? (*Select all that apply.*)
   o   White
   o   Black or African American
   o   Asian
   o   Hispanic or Latino/a
   o   American Indian or Alaska Native
   o   Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   o   Middle Eastern or North African
   o   Other – Write In (Required): _____

6. What is the main language you speak at home? (*Select only one answer.*)
   o   English
   o   Spanish
   o   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.*)
   o   Some high school
   o   High school diploma/GED
   o   Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree; for example, a certificate or career/technical certification)

- 2-year college degree (associate)
- 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
- Master's degree
- PhD or higher
- Don't know

8. If you have brothers or sisters, how many have attended college in the past or are in college now? (*Select only one answer.*)
   - 0
   - 1
   - 2
   - 3
   - 4
   - 5 or more
   - I don't have brothers or sisters

Section II: About Your School

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

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

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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.)*
    - Nothing will prevent me from continuing my education
    - My grades aren't good enough

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

12. What is the highest level of education that you <u>would like</u> to get? *(Select only one answer.)*
    - o High school or less
    - o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree; for example, a certificate or career/technical certification)
    - o 2-year college degree (associate)
    - o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    - o More than a 4-year college degree

13. What is the highest level of education that you <u>expect</u> to get? *(Select only one answer.)*
    - o High school or less
    - o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree; for example, a certificate or career/technical certification)
    - o 2-year college degree (associate)
    - o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    - o More than a 4-year college degree

14. Please read the following sentences below and think about how you are in most situations. There are no right or wrong answers. *(Select only one answer per row.)*

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

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

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

Section IV: College Knowledge and Awareness

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

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

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

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

18. On average, how much do you think it costs for 1 year of in-state tuition and fees to attend the following college options in West Virginia? Your estimate should <u>not</u> 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 $5,200 annually to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o West Virginia Invests Grant
    o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o Federal Pell Grant

20. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provides maximum annual awards of $3,300 during the 2023–2024 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o West Virginia Invests Grant
    o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o Federal Pell Grant

21. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provides qualifying students up to $7,395 during the 2023–2024 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o West Virginia Invests Grant
    o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o 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 2- or 4-year institution. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o West Virginia Invests Grant

- o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
- o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
- o 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 (for example, certificate programs, 2–year colleges, 4–year colleges)				
Different career paths				
The education needed to pursue the career or job you are interested in				

Section V: College and Career Activities/Services

24. Have you participated in any of the activities below 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 related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM; for example, STEM Academy)						

	Not Offered/ Does Not Apply	Offered, But I Did Not Attend	Not At All Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Moderately Helpful	Extremely Helpful
In-person help with classes (for example, tutoring or homework help)						
Virtual help with classes (for example, tutoring or homework help, assistance through the Brainfuse tutoring site)						
Financial literacy workshops (for example, Get a Life Program)						
College for West Virginia's CFWV.com web portal (for example, creating CFWV.com accounts)						
College campus visits (in-person or virtual)						
Student Leadership Academy						
Mentoring (for example Student Success Society, CoolSpeak event Cultivating a Success Mindset)						
GEAR UP U Summer Academy						
For Grade 9 students only: Freshman academy/orientation and other transition to high school events						

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)*
    o   More advanced classes
    o   Information about participating in GEAR UP events

- o Tutoring
- o Mentoring
- o Opportunities to participate in college visits
- o Information about college entrance requirements
- o Information about college financial aid/scholarships
- o Leadership opportunities
- o Summer activities
- o Career exploration activities
- o Test preparation
- o Family events
- o Other – Write In (Required): _____

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*Please select **Submit form** to complete the survey.*

Thank you for your time!

Grade 9 and 10 Parent Survey

West Virginia GEAR UP Parent Survey: 2023–2024 School Year – Grade 9 and 10

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 West Virginia GEAR UP on behalf of WVHEPC to make sure GEAR UP is helping students as best as it can.

GEAR UP is asking all parents/guardians of students in Grades 9 and 10 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 15–20 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 Kimberly Good at 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 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.

- o   I agree to take this survey

- o   I do not agree to take this survey

Section I: About You

1. Please type your student's nine–digit lunch/West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS) number in the field below. If there are zeros at the beginning of your student's number, please include them. _____

2. Select the school the student who brought this survey home currently attends. (*Select only one answer.*)
   [Select an answer]

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

3. In what grade is the student who brought this survey home? (*Select only one answer.*)
   - o 9
   - o 10
   - o Other – Write In (Required): _____

4. What is your student's gender? (*Select only one answer.*)
   - o Male
   - o Female
   - o Prefer not to disclose
   - o Other – Write In (Required): _____

5. What is your relationship to the student who brought this survey home? (*Select all that apply.*)
   - o Parent
   - o Grandparent
   - o Legal Guardian
   - o Step or foster parent
   - o Other – Write In (Required): _____

6. What is your race/ethnicity? (*Select all that apply.*)
   - o White
   - o Black or African American
   - o Asian
   - o Hispanic or Latino/a
   - o American Indian or Alaska Native
   - o Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   - o Middle Eastern or North African
   - o Other – Write In (Required): _____

7. What is the main language you speak at home? (*Select only one answer.*)
   - o English
   - o Spanish
   - o 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.*)
    o $30,000 or Less
    o $30,001 – $60,000
    o $60,001 – $100,000
    o $100,001 or More
    o 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.*)
    o Some high school
    o High school diploma/GED
    o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)
    o 2-year college degree (associate)
    o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    o Master's degree
    o PhD or higher
    o Don't know

10. If you have other students, how many have attended or are currently attending college? (*Select only one answer.*)
    o 0
    o 1
    o 2
    o 3
    o 4
    o 5 or more
    o I don't have other students

Section II: About Your Student's School

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

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Parents/family at my student's school support one another in encouraging students to pursue their college and career goals.				
I believe my student going to college will lead to a better future for them.				

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
School staff acknowledge my needs (such as my work schedule) as a parent/family member when talking to me about my student's future college options.				
Administrators, teachers, and staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background.				
My student is encouraged to take courses that will prepare them for high school.				

Section III: Your Student's Educational Goals and Aspirations

12. Have you talked with your student about attending college? (_Select only one answer._)
    o Yes
    o 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._)
    o High school or less
    o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)
    o 2-year college degree (associate)
    o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    o 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._)
    o High school or less
    o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)
    o 2-year college degree (associate)
    o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    o More than a 4-year college degree

16. What, if anything, may prevent your student from continuing their education after high school? *(Select all that apply.)*
    o   Nothing will prevent my student from continuing their education
    o   Their grades aren't good enough
    o   It costs too much/They can't afford it
    o   They <u>need</u> to work
    o   They <u>want</u> to work
    o   Concerns about COVID-19
    o   Family issues
    o   They plan to enlist in the military
    o   They won't receive/be eligible for enough financial aid
    o   Other (please write in reason): _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

17. 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.						

Page 5

Section IV: College Knowledge and Awareness

18. 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				

19. On average, how much do you think it costs for 1 year of in-state tuition to attend the following college options in West Virginia? Your estimate should not include the cost of food, housing, or books. *(Select only one answer per row.)*

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

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

20. This merit-based financial aid program for West Virginia residents offers up to $5,200 annually to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
   o   WV Invests Grant
   o   WV Promise Scholarship
   o   WV Higher Education Grant
   o   Federal Pell Grant

21. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provided maximum annual awards of $3,300 during the 2023–2024 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
   o   WV Invests Grant
   o   WV Promise Scholarship
   o   WV Higher Education Grant
   o   Federal Pell Grant

22. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provided qualifying students up to $7,395 during the 2023–2024 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
   o   WV Invests Grant
   o   WV Promise Scholarship
   o   WV Higher Education Grant
   o   Federal Pell Grant

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

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

	Not at All Knowledgeable	Slightly Knowledgeable	Moderately Knowledgeable	Extremely Knowledgeable
FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)				
ACT/SAT				
Federal student loans				
Federal work study				
Requirements for college acceptance				
High school graduation requirements				
Different types of education after high school (for example, certificate programs, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges)				
Different career paths				
The education needed to pursue the career or job you are interested in				

Section V: GEAR UP Activities/Services

25. 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)						
For parents of Grade 9 students only: Family Action Network						
For parents of Grade 9 students only: Freshman academy/orientation and other transition to high school events						

26. 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

27. Would you like to receive more information about the services GEAR UP provides to you and your student? *(Select only one answer.)*
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No

28. 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.)*
    o   More advanced classes
    o   Information about participating in GEAR UP events
    o   Tutoring
    o   Mentoring
    o   Opportunities to participate in college visits
    o   Information about college entrance requirements
    o   Information about college financial aid/scholarships
    o   Leadership opportunities
    o   Summer activities
    o   Career exploration activities
    o   Test preparation
    o   Other (please describe): _____

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

Grade 12 Student Survey

West Virginia GEAR UP Student Survey: 2023–2024 School Year – Grade 12

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

GEAR UP is asking all students in your grade to complete a survey about college knowledge, plans, and school activities. This survey takes about 15–20 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. 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 Kimberly Good at 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 or (646) 695-8154.

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

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

- o   I agree to take this survey

- o   I do not agree to take this survey

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Section I: About You

1.   Please type your nine-digit lunch/West Virginia Education Information System (WVEIS) number in the field below. If there are zeros 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 answered **Are you a Grade 12 …** with **No** are redirected to page 12.*

3. Are you a Grade 12 student (or a Grade 11 student planning on graduating in spring 2022)? *(Select only one answer.)*
   - ○ Yes
   - ○ No

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4. What is your gender? (*Select only one answer.*)
   - ○ Male
   - ○ Female
   - ○ Prefer not to disclose
   - ○ Other – Write In (Required): _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

5. What is your race/ethnicity? *(Select all that apply.)*
   - ○ White
   - ○ Black or African American
   - ○ Asian
   - ○ Hispanic or Latino/a
   - ○ American Indian or Alaska Native
   - ○ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   - ○ Middle Eastern or North African
   - ○ Other – Write In (Required): _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

6. What is the main language you speak at home? (*Select only one answer.*)
   - ○ English
   - ○ Spanish
   - ○ Other – Write In (Required): _ _ _ _ _

7. How much money do you think your family made (before taxes) during the past 12 months? As you think about it, please include any money you earned from working and all the money you think the people living in your house made. *(Select only one answer.)*
   - ○ $30,000 or Less
   - ○ $30,001 – $60,000
   - ○ $60,001 – $100,000
   - ○ $100,001 or More
   - ○ Don't know or I'd rather not say

8. What is the highest level of education achieved by your parent(s)/guardian(s)? Please answer this question for the parent/guardian who achieved the highest level of education. For example, if

your mother has a 4-year college degree and your father has a high school diploma, select 4-year college degree. *(Select only one answer.)*

- o Some high school
- o High school diploma/GED
- o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)
- o 2-year college degree (associate)
- o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
- o Master's degree
- o PhD or higher
- o Don't know

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

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

Section II: About Your School

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

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

Section III: Your Educational Goals and Aspirations

11. Do you plan to continue your education after high school? *(Select only one answer.)*
    o Yes
    o No

12. What, if anything, may prevent you from continuing your education after high school? *(Select all that apply.)*
    o Nothing will prevent me from continuing my education
    o My grades aren't good enough
    o It costs too much/I can't afford it
    o I need to work
    o I want to work
    o Concerns about COVID-19
    o Family issues
    o I plan to enlist in the military
    o I won't receive/be eligible for enough financial aid
    o Other (please write in reason): _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

13. What is the highest level of education that you *would like* to get? *(Select only one answer.)*
    o High school or less
    o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)
    o 2-year college degree (associate)
    o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    o More than a 4-year college degree

14. What is the highest level of education that you *expect* to get? *(Select only one answer.)*
    o High school or less
    o Some college (less than a 2- or 4-year degree, for example, certificate or career/tech. cert.)
    o 2-year college degree (associate)
    o 4-year college degree (bachelor's)
    o More than a 4-year college degree

15. Please read the following sentences below and think about how you are in most situations. There are no right or wrong answers. *(Select only one answer per row.)*

	None of the Time	A Little of the Time	Some of the Time	A Lot of the Time	Most of the Time	All of the Time
I think I am doing pretty well.						
I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me.						
I am doing just as well as other students my age.						
When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it.						

	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 the things I have done in the past will help me in the future.						
Even when others want to quit, I know that I can find ways to solve the problem.						

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

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

Section IV: College Knowledge and Awareness

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

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

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

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

19. On average, how much do you think it costs for 1 year of in-state tuition to attend the following college options in West Virginia? Your estimate should not include the cost of food, housing, or books. *(Select only one answer per row.)*

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

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

20. This merit-based financial aid program for West Virginia residents offers up to $5,200 annually to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o   WV Invests Grant
    o   WV Promise Scholarship
    o   WV Higher Education Grant
    o   Federal Pell Grant

21. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provided maximum annual awards of $3,300 during the 2023–2024 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o   WV Invests Grant
    o   WV Promise Scholarship
    o   WV Higher Education Grant
    o   Federal Pell Grant

22. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provided qualifying students up to $7,395 during the 2023–2024 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back. *(Select only one answer.)*
    o   WV Invests Grant
    o   WV Promise Scholarship
    o   WV Higher Education Grant
    o   Federal Pell Grant

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

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

	Not at All Knowledgeable	Slightly Knowledgeable	Moderately Knowledgeable	Extremely Knowledgeable
FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)				
ACT/SAT				
Federal student loans				
Federal work study				
Requirements for college acceptance				
High school graduation requirements				
Different types of education after high school (for example, certificate programs, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges)				
Different career paths				
The education needed to pursue the career or job you are interested in				

Section V: College and Career Activities/Services

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

	Not Offered/ Does Not Apply	Offered, But I Did Not Attend	Not at All Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Moderately Helpful	Extremely Helpful
College Application and Exploration Week						
Activities related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)						
In-person help with classes (for example,						

	Not Offered/ Does Not Apply	Offered, But I Did Not Attend	Not at All Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Moderately Helpful	Extremely Helpful
tutoring or homework help)						
Virtual help with classes (for example, tutoring or homework help)						
Financial literacy workshops (for example, Get a Life Program)						
Assistance with financial aid forms (FAFSA)						
Txt 4 Success College Counseling/Text Messaging Program						
ACT/SAT preparation						
Academic planning/career advising						
College for West Virginia's CFWV.com web portal (for example, accessing CFWV.com)						
College Decision Day and/or other college acceptance events						
College campus visits (in-person or virtual)						
Mentoring						

26. If you did not participate in one or more of these activities/services, why not? *(Select all that apply)*
    o   Family obligations
    o   Work/employment
    o   Lack of transportation
    o   Lack of interest
    o   Scheduling conflicts
    o   I don't need or want to participate
    o   I was not aware they were offered
    o   Other – Write In (Required): _____

27. Which of the following do you need from your school or GEAR UP to help you be more successful in school and more prepared for college? *(Select all that apply)*
    o More advanced classes (for example, Advanced Placement, dual credit)
    o Information about participating in GEAR UP events
    o Tutoring
    o Mentoring
    o Opportunities to participate in college visits
    o Information about college entrance requirements
    o Information about college financial aid/scholarships
    o Leadership opportunities
    o Summer activities
    o Career exploration activities
    o Test preparation
    o Assistance with the college entrance process
    o Assistance with completing financial aid forms (for example, FAFSA)
    o Family events
    o Other – Write In (Required): _____

Section VI: College Preparation Activities

*Respondents who answer **The Free Application for Federal S …** with **No, but I plan to complete the FAFSA this academic year** are redirected to page 10.*

28. Do you plan to complete your FAFSA? *(Select only one answer.)*
    o No, I do not plan to complete the FAFSA this academic year
    o Yes, I plan to complete the FAFSA this academic year
    o I do not know

*Hide to Respondents who answered **28. The Free Application for Federal S …** with **Yes.***

29. What are the main reasons you do not plan to do so? *(Select all that apply.)*
    o I plan to take some time off between high school and college
    o I do not plan to continue my education after high school
    o I'm not sure what the FAFSA is
    o I do not believe I will be eligible for financial aid
    o Other (please write in the reason): _____

*Respondents who answer **31. How many college applications have …** with **0, and I do not plan to complete any this academic year** are redirected to page 12.*

30. How many college applications have you completed? *(Select only one answer.)*
    o   0, and I do not plan to complete any this academic year
    o   0, but I plan to complete one or more this academic year
    o   1
    o   2 or more

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31. Have you spoken with or received assistance from a college official (admissions counselor, financial aid representative, faculty member, etc.) about attending college?
    o   Yes, I spoke with/received assistance from college official
    o   No, I did not speak with/receive assistance from college official

32. Did you receive in-person and/or virtual help from GEAR UP or anyone else at your school to complete your college applications? *(Select only one answer.)*
    o   Yes, I received help from GEAR UP or someone else from my school to complete college applications
    o   No, I did not receive help from GEAR UP or anyone else at my school to submit my college applications

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

Personnel Survey

WV GEAR UP 2023–24 School Year School Personnel Survey

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 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 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.

- o   I agree to take this survey.

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

Section I: About Yourself

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

2. What type of community did you grow up in?
   - o   Rural community
   - o   Suburban community
   - o   Urban community
   - o   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)?
   o Yes
   o No
   o Unsure—I do not know if my parents/guardians graduated from college or not.
   o Not applicable—I did not attend college.

4. What has been your personal experience <u>applying</u> for financing for postsecondary education? (*Select all that apply.*)
   o Applied for federal student aid (Free Application for Federal Student Aid [FAFSA])
   o Applied for state grants and other aid programs
   o Applied for scholarships
   o Applied for work study programs/internships
   o No personal experience applying for financial support to pay for college

5. What has been your personal experience <u>receiving</u> financing for postsecondary education? (*Select all that apply.*)
   o Received student aid in the form of loans (needed to be repaid)
   o Received student aid in the form of grants (did not need to be repaid)
   o Received scholarships
   o Received work study programs/internships
   o No personal experience receiving financial support to pay for college

6. What is your current primary position at your school?
   o Administrator
   o Counselor
   o Teacher
   o 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.*)
   o 6
   o 7
   o 8
   o 9
   o 10
   o 11
   o 12

9. In which school are you currently working? [drop-down list]

10. Are you a GEAR UP site coordinator?
    o Yes
    o No

Section II: School Culture

11. For items a–r, please rate your level of agreement for each of the statements below about your <u>school</u>. [This set of directions in brackets is 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 <u>school</u> and once for your level of agreement that the statement accurately reflects your own <u>classroom</u>.] Note that the term "college" refers to any type of postsecondary education, including 2-year community college, 4-year college/university, and career and technical schools.

	In My School					In My Classroom [THIS COLUMN ONLY VISIBLE FOR TEACHERS]			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Students are encouraged to choose courses that prepare them for college.									
b. Creativity and original thinking are highly valued.									
c. Teachers are able to engage students in a rigorous curriculum.									
d. Students are learning effective problem-solving skills.									
e. Teachers and staff openly communicate to students that college will lead to a better future for them and their family.									
f. Most students will be eligible to apply to a postsecondary institution.									
g. Teachers and staff are dedicated to the academic success of all students, regardless of their background (for example, disabilities, gender, income status, race).									
h. Teachers in my school can help students overcome frustration when confronted with difficult tasks.									

	In My School					In My Classroom [THIS COLUMN ONLY VISIBLE FOR TEACHERS]			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
i. Teachers and staff help students set goals that are achievable.									
j. Students encourage one another to follow their college and career goals.									
k. Teachers can help increase the percentage of students who are promoted to the next grade at my school.									
l. Teachers and staff acknowledge student goals, abilities, and talents when talking to them about future college options.									
m. Students are exposed to success stories of school alumni to help encourage their future success.									
n. Teachers and staff talk with parents and families about their ability to help prepare their student(s) for college.									
o. Teachers and staff make themselves available to students and their families when completing college materials.									
p. College pennants, banners, and posters are visible in your school.									
q. College messaging is integrated into events, including sports events or arts performances.									
r. Teachers include visual cues to encourage discussions about their college experience.									

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
a. I think my school is doing pretty well.						
b. My school is doing just as well as other schools in the area.						
c. My school provides lots of ways to help students solve problems.						
d. I think students' past experiences will help them in the future.						
e. Even when others want to quit, our school finds ways to persevere.						
f. I am hopeful for the future of our students.						

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)				
College savings plan/529				
WV Higher Education Grant				
Federal grants, loans, and work study				
Scholarships (e.g., institutional)				
Promise Scholarship				
WV Invests grant				

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				
[If respondent serves Grades 9, 10, 11, 12 based on response to Q8:] Transition into postsecondary education				
ACT/SAT				
Tutoring support				
Course test preparation				
High school graduation course requirements				
College match and fit				
The importance/benefit of a college education				

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 $5,500 annually starting in the 2024-2025 academic year to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees. This amount does not need to be paid back.
    o   West Virginia Invests Grant
    o   West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o   West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o   Federal Pell Grant

17. This need-based financial aid program for West Virginia students provided maximum annual awards of $3,400 during the 2024–2025 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back.
    o West Virginia Invests Grant
    o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o Federal Pell Grant

18. This need-based U.S. financial aid program provided qualifying students up to $7,395 during the 2024–2025 school year. This amount does not need to be paid back.
    o West Virginia Invests Grant
    o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o 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.
    o West Virginia Invests Grant
    o West Virginia Promise Scholarship
    o West Virginia Higher Education Grant
    o 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?
    o Yes
    o No
    o 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							
Credit recovery, AP, and dual-credit opportunities							
Parent/family peer networks							

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Extremely		Yes, I Have Been Involved	No, I Have Not Been Involved
Academic/tutoring support							
Assistance with completing financial aid forms (FAFSA)							
Financial literacy workshops							
College Application and Exploration Week							
ACT/SAT preparation							
College Decision Day and/or other acceptance events							
Summer activities (e.g., GEAR UP U)							
College campus visits (including virtual)							
Mentoring programs (e.g., Student Success Society, Student Leadership Academy)							
Txt 4 Success initiative							
Professional development (e.g., Social and Emotional Learning, Hope, Texas Instruments [TI])							
Academic enrichment (e.g., TI activities)							
One-on-one advising with students							

22. If you did not participate in one or more of these activities/services, why not? (*Select all that apply.*)
    o   Family obligations
    o   Competing work obligations
    o   Lack of time
    o   Lack of interest
    o   Scheduling conflicts
    o   I don't need or want to participate.
    o   I was not aware they were offered.
    o   Other—Write In (Required): _____

23. What academic enrichment opportunities should be offered to students by WV GEAR UP? Academic enrichment is anything that enhances a student's academic experience, increases their knowledge of college preparation and planning, or provides access to rigorous coursework.

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Comment:
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Section V: Questions for GEAR UP Site Coordinators Only

24. How many students in the GEAR UP cohort do you believe want to go to college?
    o   A few students
    o   About half of the students
    o   Most students
    o   All students

25. How helpful are staff at WVHEPC in making sure you have the information and resources to carry out GEAR UP activities?
    o   Not helpful
    o   Somewhat helpful
    o   Very helpful

26. What activities or services might help you in becoming a more successful GEAR UP coordinator at your school?
    o   More professional development on GEAR UP implementation
    o   Additional town hall meetings
    o   Assistance with the GEAR UP workplan
    o   Tips for working with students
    o   Tips for parent outreach
    o   Other (*please comment below*)

```
Comment:
```

27. What services do you believe are <u>most needed</u> by GEAR UP students at your school to help them plan for their future? (*Please select up to 3 items.*)
    o   Tutoring
    o   Mentoring

- College visits
- Career information
- Parent workshops
- Financial aid workshops
- Afterschool and summer programs
- Academic enrichment opportunities
- Other (*please describe*):
  _____

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

Comment:

<u>Please select Submit form to complete the survey</u>.
Thank you for your time!

Priority Student Focus Group Protocol

West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation
2024 Student Interview Protocol for Longitudinal Study – March/April 2024

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

<u>Briefly discuss the interview's purpose:</u> *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 high schools to learn more about their current school experiences and future plans.*

<u>Convey to each participant the confidentiality policy:</u> 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 (20 minutes)

[For returning participants]: Last year, we talked about your experiences as an 8th grade student, your aspirations for high school, your thoughts about your school and teachers, your plans for the future, possible careers, and the idea of attending college. Now you are a high school student, and we are interested in knowing about the transition from middle school to high school, your main challenges, and successes as a 9th grade student, and what the high school or GEAR UP can do to help you to prepare for your career goals after graduation.

[For new participants, if applicable]: Today we are going to talk about your experiences as a 9th grade student, your aspirations for high school, 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. How is the year going so far? How do you feel about being a high school student?

2. What is the best thing about being a high school student so far? And the worst thing?

3. Last year, you mentioned that you were a bit concerned about [*to adapt to each participant: academic rigor/social life/not making friends/possible bullying*]. What can you tell me about that? Were your concerns justified? What have you experienced?

4. Turning to academics, what classes are you taking? Are these the classes you wanted to take?

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

5. Do you think that your middle school prepared you for the demands of high school? Why or why not?

    a. What would have been good to know during middle school that would have prepared you better for high school?

6. What services does your high school offer to help you academically? Do they have tutoring, study clubs?

    a. What do you do specifically when you need help with your classes?

    b. What else can the school do to help you academically?

7. Let's talk about your classmates. How is your relationship with them? Are they friends or simply classmates? How do you interact with them?

8. What about friends? What do you do together? What do you talk about? Is it easy or difficult to make friends in high school? Why?

9. 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*). Are you still involved in those activities?? Do you have any new interests since we spoke last year?

10. What does the high school offer as co-curricular or extra-curricular activities? Do they have any clubs or student organizations? Are you interested in participating in any of those? Which ones? Why or why not?

11. What about your community and your family/home arrangements? Anything new or different since the last time we talked?

12. 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. Probe for their willingness to move back to the community later if they think about leaving it]*

II. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS (5 minutes)

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

13. 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. STUDENT FUTURE (20 minutes)

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

14. What classes are you planning to take next year? How did you make that decision?
    a. Did you check with your family, other students, teachers, counselor? What did they say about your decisions?

15. Tell me about your plans and goals for the rest of high school.

    [Probe for academic, personal, and extracurricular activity goals.]

16. Have you already met with your counselor one-on-one?
- If yes:
    a. How many times so far?

      b. What were the reasons to meet him/her?

      c. What do you talk about with him/her in each of the meetings? *[Probe for courses orientation, career orientation, college orientation]*

      d. How did these discussions help you, if at all?

      e. Which other questions do you still have to ask your counselor or another staff member?

- If no:

      a. What were the reasons for not having met him/her?

          a. [*If student doesn't think these meetings as relevant*]: When and why would it be beneficial for you to meet him/her?

17. What have you learned specifically about career paths in high school, from your counselor or other resources?

    [Probe if student attended any information session or talked with teachers, counselors, GEAR UP activities.]

18. Are you interested in a specific career path in high school? Which one? Why or why not?

19. Last year, you said you were thinking of [going to college, being a XXX, etc.] after graduating high school. Are you still interested in this path?

    a. *[Probe for new interests]* What are your reasons for considering this career now? What do you know about the education level required for that career?

    b. 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.)

20. Who do you talk with about your plans for your future? What are your conversations about specifically?

    [Probe for discussions at home and at school. Probe for discussion of college and career.]

21. What support or resources do you think you might need to achieve your goals for high school?

22. How can your high school help you to achieve your career and life goals after graduation?

IV. GEAR UP AND CLOSING (15 minutes)

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 7th grade and will continue to be part of the program for the next 4 years.

23. Have you participated in any GEAR UP activities this year, such as career exploration activities, college, and career fairs, the HEROs program, college representative visits, college tours, the Student Leadership Academy, the Student Success Society? Why or why not?

24. Which ones did you like the most? And the least? Why?

25. What did you learn through these activities?

26. Compared to the GEAR UP activities in middle school, what is the high school doing differently?

    [Probe for emphasis on college and college prep, financial aid awareness.]

27. Has your family been invited to any of the GEAR UP activities or are they only for students? Which GEAR UP activities should have family/community participation?

28. Please describe what will be the ideal GEAR UP activity for you and why.

29. Thinking about families, what would be an ideal GEAR UP activity for families to participate in? *[Probe for area of interest, location, best times]*

30. What is the best way to keep students and families informed about the GEAR UP activities and services at your high school? *[Probe for email, phone, letter home, social media, etc.]*

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

Thank you for your time.

HEROs Focus Group Protocol

West Virginia GEAR UP Evaluation
HEROs Focus Group Guide – March/April 2024

Facilitator Guidelines:

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

➢ <u>Briefly discuss the focus group's purpose:</u> *As you may know, your county is one of only 11 in the state selected to participate in the West Virginia GEAR UP program. The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC) is responsible for this program, and it is interested in knowing more about one specific component of the program: the Higher Education Readiness or HEROs. 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 40–45 minutes.*

➢ <u>Convey to each participant our confidentiality policy:</u> *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.*

➢ <u>Ask if they have any questions before you begin.</u> 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.

➢ <u>Ask permission to record the focus group:</u> *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.* **<u>START RECORDER NOW!</u>**

I. STUDENT INTEREST IN HEROS (10 minutes)

1. First, tell us your name and grade, and how long you have been in HEROs.

2. How did you first hear about HEROs?

3. Why did you want to participate in HEROs?

    a. What do you think is the HEROs mission?

    b. Was there something you found particularly interesting about HEROs?

4. Are you part of other student or community organizations?

    a. If yes, what organizations? Why did you join them?

    b. If not, why not?

    c. How is HEROs similar to or different from other activities at your school?

5. Do you typically seek leadership positions in your school or is this new to you since becoming a HERO?

    a. Do you see yourself as a leader among your peers? How? At your grade level? How? *Probe why or why not.*

    b. What does being a leader mean to you?

II. HEROS IMPLEMENTATION (5 minutes)

6. How would you describe the HEROs meetings and activities? Are they fun?

    a. Do you look forward to meetings and activities? Why?

    b. What, if anything, might make these meetings better?

7. How do HEROs students decide what activities to do?

    a. Who comes up with ideas?

    b. Have you faced any challenges in doing HEROs activities?

III. HEROS OUTCOMES AND IMPACT (15 minutes)

8. What is the best part of being a HERO? What are the challenges, if any?

9. How does HEROs support the idea that college is possible for students? [For college, we mean any kind of education after graduation—2- or 4-year college or trade school.]

10. What impact has HEROs had on you? (Probe for impact on belonging/transition to high school, interest in leadership roles, college plans/interest).

    a. Who do you go to for help and support when you have questions about school or your future career?

    b. Do you rely on fellow HEROs for support? Why or why not?

11. How can you use this HEROs leadership role to make others aware of important issues related to education?

    a. Are other students aware of the support HEROs provide them and the student body?

    b. Do other students want to join HEROs?

12. What more do you think HEROs could do to help students at your school?

    a. Are there specific activities you are interested in doing?

13. What is GEAR UP not doing for HEROs that you think would be beneficial?

IV. HOPE AND BELONGING (10 minutes)

14. What are your plans after graduation?

    a. When and how did you make that decision?

    b. How are your plans similar to or different from your classmates' plans?

15. Do you feel hopeful about your future? Why or why not?

16. Do you believe you are a valued member of the school community? Why?

17. Will you continue in HEROs next year? Why or why not?

    a. If yes, are there goals you would like to accomplish in HEROs next year?

Thank you very much for your time.
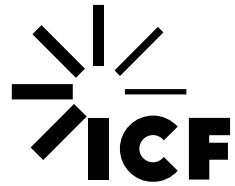
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and part-time employees, but we are not your typical consultants. At ICF, business analysts
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