

Oregon GEAR UP

College: It's not a dream, it's a Plan

Key Evaluation Findings for Year 2 (2015–16)

Oregon, and rural Oregon in particular, is facing a crisis in college access and success. In 2014, Oregon was ranked 49th in the country in terms of high school graduation rates and 32nd in postsecondary education attainment (Odum and West, 2016). In light of Oregon's college attainment gap, in 2002, Oregon GEAR UP applied for and received its first statewide federally-funded Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant. Oregon GEAR UP is currently in its third grant cycle. In 2015–16, the second year of the current GEAR UP grant, GEAR UP was implemented in 25 middle and high schools in 21 school districts (from here on referred to as "clusters") and served over 4,800 students in grades 7–13¹.



The goal of the Oregon GEAR UP program is to ensure that Oregon's low-income middle school and high school students are prepared for, pursue, and succeed in postsecondary education, whether that be a college degree, certificate, apprenticeship or other career training.

To accomplish this, Oregon GEAR UP works with select middle schools and high schools over seven years to create a college-going culture by providing funding and technical assistance, professional development for educators, and summer opportunities for students. The initiative is grounded in an evidence-based framework developed by Oregon GEAR UP that relies on five research-based principles, titled the 5 "R"s: Reaching Higher, Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and Raising Awareness.

Conducted by Metis Associates, an independent research firm, the Oregon GEAR UP evaluation includes formative and summative components and is designed to assess program implementation in participating schools; document promising practices, challenges, and lessons learned; and assess the impact of the project on key outcomes areas. **This Evaluation Brief highlights key findings and lessons learned for the 2015–16 school year.** The Brief is organized by the following areas:

- The need in the Oregon GEAR UP communities
- Raising expectations
- Increasing the rigor of instruction
- Promoting relevance and career awareness
- Fostering supportive relationships
- Raising awareness of postsecondary education options
- GEAR UP alignment and oversight
- Feedback on GEAR UP supports
- Suggestions moving forward

EVALUATION METHODS

- ✓ School data (demographic, academic, attendance, and high school graduation)
- ✓ Student surveys (N=3,702)
- ✓ Parent surveys (N=1,792)
- ✓ Educator surveys (N=608)
- ✓ GEAR UP coordinator and administrator surveys (N=39)
- ✓ Site visits at 2 case study schools that included:
 - interviews/focus groups with 2 principals, 2 GEAR UP coordinators, 9 educators, 10 students, and 5 parents
 - 5 observations (career class, College Fair, high school transition dinner, assembly, and school-wide event)

¹ Grade 13 signifies the first year of postsecondary education immediately following high school graduation.

THE OREGON GEAR UP COMMUNITIES

In 2015–16, Oregon GEAR UP was in 21 rural communities. It served 2,627 seventh- and eighth-graders in 19 cohort schools and 2,182 students in grades 9–13 in 6 priority schools.² Almost two-thirds (64%) of students in these schools come from low-income backgrounds, as measured by eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL), and approximately 16% are in special education.

Oregon GEAR UP communities lag behind the rest of the state and the nation in key education indicators. Baseline data for the target communities show a strong need for GEAR UP:

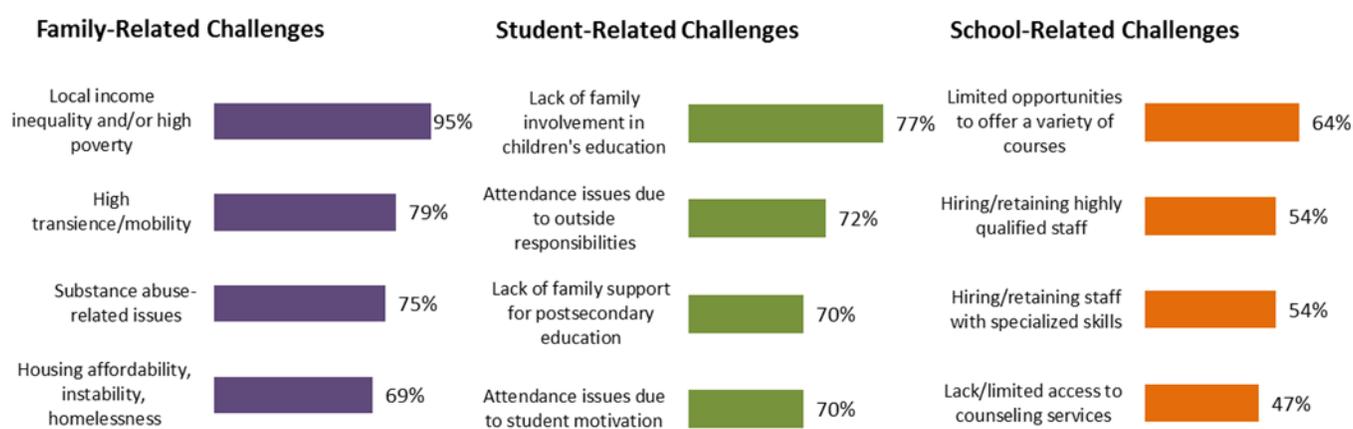
- In Oregon GEAR UP communities, 54% of adults have attended college and only 26% have a two-year degree or higher (compared to 64% and 37% in Oregon, respectively).
- Oregon has the second lowest graduation rate in the country, with only 69% of students graduating on time. Among GEAR UP communities, the 4-year graduation rate was 64% (in 2012–13).
- Oregon has one of the highest chronic school absenteeism rates, with 82% of students attending 90% or more days. Among GEAR UP communities, only 74% of students attend 90% or more days.
- Slightly more than half (51%) of high school graduates in GEAR UP communities enroll in college, compared to 61% in Oregon; two-thirds are in need of remediation.

COMMON CHALLENGES IN RURAL EDUCATION

- ✓ Under-resourced schools
- ✓ Declining school enrollment
- ✓ Geographic isolation and transportation challenges
- ✓ Truancy and chronic absenteeism
- ✓ High cost of bringing in resources and sending staff and students to outside opportunities
- ✓ High staff turnover and difficulties attracting and retaining high quality/specialized teachers
- ✓ Limited availability of advanced courses and electives
- ✓ Local cultures that have historically undervalued postsecondary education (PSE) and/or lack experience/knowledge in PSE.

TOP CHALLENGES, AS REPORTED BY GEAR UP COORDINATORS/ADMINISTRATORS

% of Survey Respondents Reporting This is a Moderate or Major Challenge

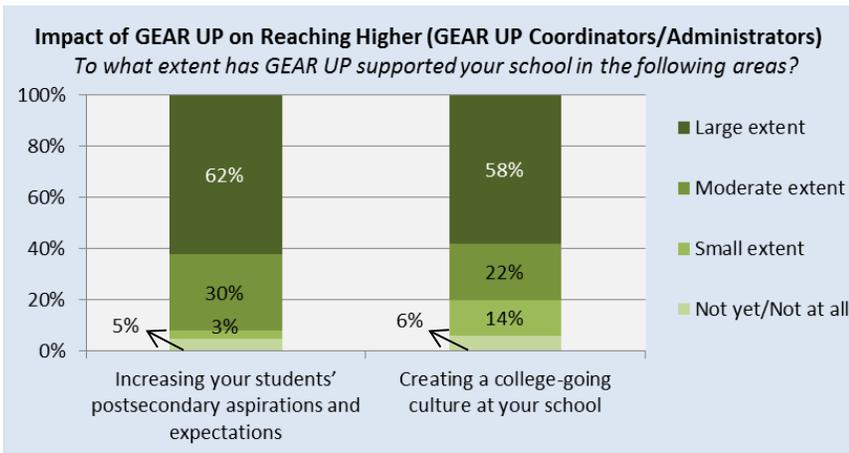


² **Cohort schools** follow a grade-level cohort approach, thus serving all students within target grades. In Year 1 (2014–15), cohort schools began serving students in grade 7; each subsequent year, they continue to serve these students while adding a new cohort of seventh-graders. In Year 7, cohort schools will serve students in grades 7–13. **Priority schools** were part of the federal grant from 2008–14 and are continuing under a modified direct service model from 2014–21 targeting “at risk” or disconnected students within target grades. In 2014–15, priority schools served students in grades 8–13. Each year, they continue serving these same students without adding a new cohort, thus, “losing” a grade level each year.

RAISING EXPECTATIONS AND PROMOTING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

One of the key goals of Oregon GEAR UP is to support schools in building a college-going culture by creating school environments, policies, and teacher expectations that support all students' pursuit of postsecondary education. In 2015–16, Oregon GEAR UP schools implemented a wide range of activities to promote high expectations among students, teachers, and families, including: college and career décor, college and career centers, college visits, college fairs, college days, family and community events, and professional development for staff around promoting high expectations. Results show that:

- **GEAR UP is playing a major role in helping schools promote a college-going culture with many schools reporting positive results in this area.** The large majority of GEAR UP coordinators and administrators reported that GEAR UP has supported their schools to a *moderate* or *large extent* in increasing students' expectations (93%) and creating a college-going culture (80%). These were two of the highest rated areas of impact in the survey.



- During site visits, interviewed principals, coordinators, and educators in the two schools indicated **seeing noticeable gains in both students' and staff's mindsets and postsecondary expectations.** For example, in the cohort school, which was only in its second year of implementation, school staff reported seeing changes in the types of conversations that students and educators are engaging in around college and postsecondary plans.
- In the priority school, school staff noted that **many students have changed their postsecondary plans** as a result of GEAR UP and provided specific examples. For example, one teacher noted, *"I had a kid the other day ...we were having a discussion about how his dad really wants him to be a landscaper but he said, 'I don't want to do that anymore. I want to go to college and be an engineer.' It was a different kid, [he] wants to do something else, and go to college, and I don't know that his eyes would have even been opened to that [before GEAR UP]."* School staff also discussed observing **positive college enrollment trends**, which they attributed, in part, to the multi-faceted GEAR UP interventions involving students, educators, parents, and community partners. As noted by the principal, *"We have seen a dramatic increase [in high school graduation and college enrollment]."*

It takes time, several years, to change a culture and a mindset but [as a result of GEAR UP] I definitely can see changes in the conversations where the students are making connections between what they're doing day to day. It's having more relevance for them because they're thinking more about how it applies to them in their future.

GEAR UP Teacher

GEAR UP has truly changed the college going culture and expectations in our school and our community. ...I have had the privilege of witnessing that trend over time, and also shared in our excitement as we see more and more students each year choosing to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities, take advantage of financial aid opportunities, secure more and more scholarships, etc. (...) The program has truly made a difference in our students' lives.

GEAR UP Coordinator

I think [GEAR UP] has become part of the culture at this school...we've had kids that have been in GEAR UP now 6 years. So it's part of the culture, an expectation that we're going to be college and career-ready.

GEAR UP Principal

School staff and students identified a number of **promising, effective practices** that have led to gains in student expectations and/or changes in school-wide culture. These are described below.

- **Using college décor and displays of student accomplishments**—for example, posters of students with their postsecondary plans and pictures of high school graduates listing the colleges they were accepted to—was seen as an effective means of reinforcing the message around the importance of postsecondary education. **“Grad walks”** were also seen as powerful way to celebrate a critical milestone and begin instilling high expectations in younger students. As one educator described, *“Last year, the seniors went and paraded through...the elementary school and they all got high-fives and it was seen as a really big thing, like this is exciting. This is a big event for these teenagers, so it does start early in our community.”*



- **Creating a College and Career Center has provided a welcoming and inviting environment** where students, families, and educators can work alongside in support of students’ postsecondary goals and success. As one principal commented, *“Another big piece [of GEAR UP] is our career center. That has made a huge impact and has forced us to realign our counseling center at the high school. ...So now we have this focus on college and careers and kids actually have a place to go to get help, to conduct events where they get every kid to go in and sign up for college.”*
- **College visits were singled out as one of the most helpful, often inspiring, GEAR UP activities** students have participated in. Students described these visits as “eye-opening,” “really cool,” and “very, very helpful” and indicated they have a better understanding of what college is as a result. Staff agreed, noting that the visits have allowed students to view college as a real possibility. **Bringing in alumni** (who are currently enrolled in college or have recently graduated) as guest speakers was also described as a very “powerful” experience for students, showing them that college can be an option for them.

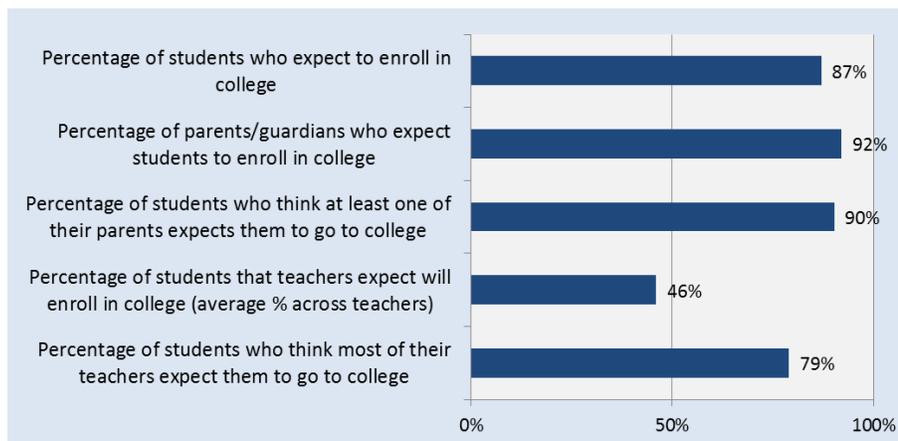
PROMISING PRACTICES

- ✓ College and career décor and displays of student accomplishments
- ✓ Graduation walks
- ✓ College and career centers
- ✓ College visits
- ✓ Using alumni as guest speakers
- ✓ Embedding college and career readiness milestones in high school graduation requirements
- ✓ Field trips and cultural experiences in and outside the community

- **Embedding college and career readiness milestones in high school graduation requirements** has played a key role in promoting high expectations for all students in one case study school. For example, students in this school need to fulfill the following requirements to graduate from high school: 1) submit one college application (as the coordinator explained “even if they don’t plan on going to college, it’s just for the experience...so that at some point in their life, hopefully they can decide to continue education somewhere, and they know how to fill out an application”); 2) complete the OSAC or some other scholarship; 3) apply for FAFSA; 4) complete a 16-hour job shadowing experience; and 5) apply for the Oregon Promise (if applicable).

School staff also noted that **GEAR UP has brought critical resources and has provided invaluable experiences for students to visit places**—including small and large cities, colleges, and educational or cultural institutions and locales—that they would have not seen otherwise, thus **expanding their horizons and further building their cultural and social capital**. As one teacher commented, *“being a rural school, you have to bring a lot of things to the school because it’s hard for a lot of our population to get out and about and have experiences, and so that’s been something that GEAR UP has been really helpful with.”*

- Survey results indicate that **GEAR UP students have high postsecondary education expectations**, with most of them (87%) reporting that they expect to enroll in college, including 64% who expect to complete a 4-year degree or higher. **Parents responding to the survey also have high expectations for their students**, with 92% of them reporting they expect their children to enroll in college and 74% expecting them to obtain a 4-year college degree (because of a low parent survey response rate these results may not be representative). **Teachers held lower expectations for their students**, reporting that approximately 46% of students will enroll in college (slightly higher than the 41% fall 2015 college enrollment rate across GEAR UP high schools). In focus groups, school staff discussed how surprised they were with the educator results and noted that educators may be equating expectations with predictions.



My parents are very motivated. They say it's your choice if you want to go to college, and they say they will support me the entire way through college, if I decide to go. I really want to go because college sounds like it will give me more opportunities in life ... My dad didn't finish college himself, and he says it was one of the worst decisions of his life because he says he would probably have a better job if he finished college.

GEAR UP 8th Grade Student

I have seen close friends who at the beginning of freshman year, they were 'Oh I don't want to go to college. I'm just going to go into the workforce right after high school' and then now they are applying to colleges and are ready to start school in the fall. So definitely, I would say that GEAR UP helps give students opportunities and it takes away the barriers of why students wouldn't go to college.

GEAR UP Senior

- The cost of college continues to be one of the main perceived barriers or concerns that may prevent students from pursuing their postsecondary education goals.** One student commented about his peers, "...kids, they see the money barrier and they automatically think, I'm going to be stuck in college loans...but there are so many ways that you can get your college paid for if you sit down and take the time to fill out the scholarships, and I think a lot of kids just don't really think of that." Other top reasons why students may not continue their education are presented in the following table.

Top Reasons Students May Not Continue Their Education Beyond High School	Students	Parents	Educators
Does not apply - will continue education	25.4%	60.5%	N/A
Plans or needs to work	9.0%	2.7%	28.6%
Grades or test scores are not good enough	14.5%	6.1%	10.2%
Student does not believe they need college for their chosen career	9.0%	2.1%	23.7%
Costs too much	36.4%	13.7%	25.4%
Student is unmotivated or undecided	N/A	7.7%	N/A

- However, results show a **positive correlation between participation in GEAR UP-related activities and positive perceptions about college affordability.** For example, 63% of students who have discussed the availability of financial aid with someone from their school or GEAR UP also believe they can definitely or probably afford a 4-year public university in Oregon, compared to only 49% of students who have not discussed financial aid. Students who have attended campus visits at 4-year colleges were also more likely to believe they can afford college than those who have not (65% compared to 47%). Similar results were found for parents. These findings were corroborated by comments in focus groups. As one student commented, GEAR UP "takes away the barriers of why students wouldn't go to college."

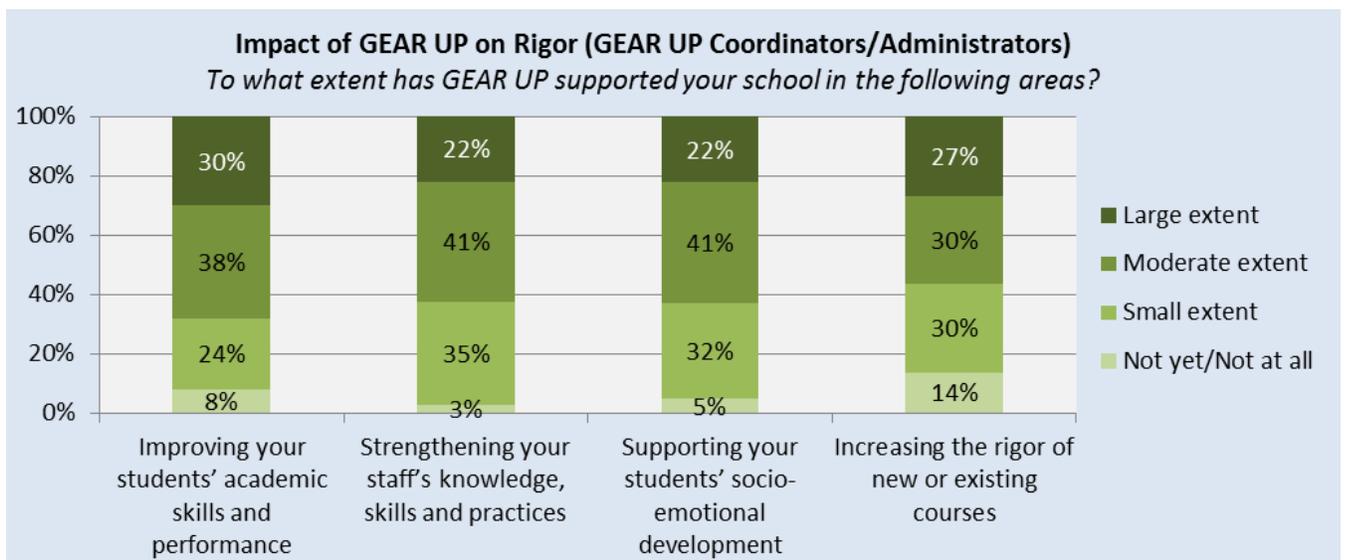
INCREASING RIGOR AND PREPARING STUDENTS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

In 2015–16, GEAR UP schools continued to engage in efforts designed to increase the rigor of instruction and prepare students for academic success (see box for examples).

- The large majority of **GEAR UP coordinators and administrators believe that GEAR UP has had an impact on improving students' academic skills and performance**, strengthening their staff's knowledge, skills, and practices; supporting students' socio-emotional development, and increasing the rigor of new or existing courses.

2015–16 SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

- ✓ Academic enrichment and supports (e.g., advisories, tutoring, afterschool programs, summer camps)
- ✓ Dual credit and advanced courses
- ✓ Professional development opportunities, including four-day Summer Institute on curriculum alignment (7 clusters); school-wide PD on growth mindset and social emotional learning (3 clusters), and training on the impact of poverty on learning (6 clusters)

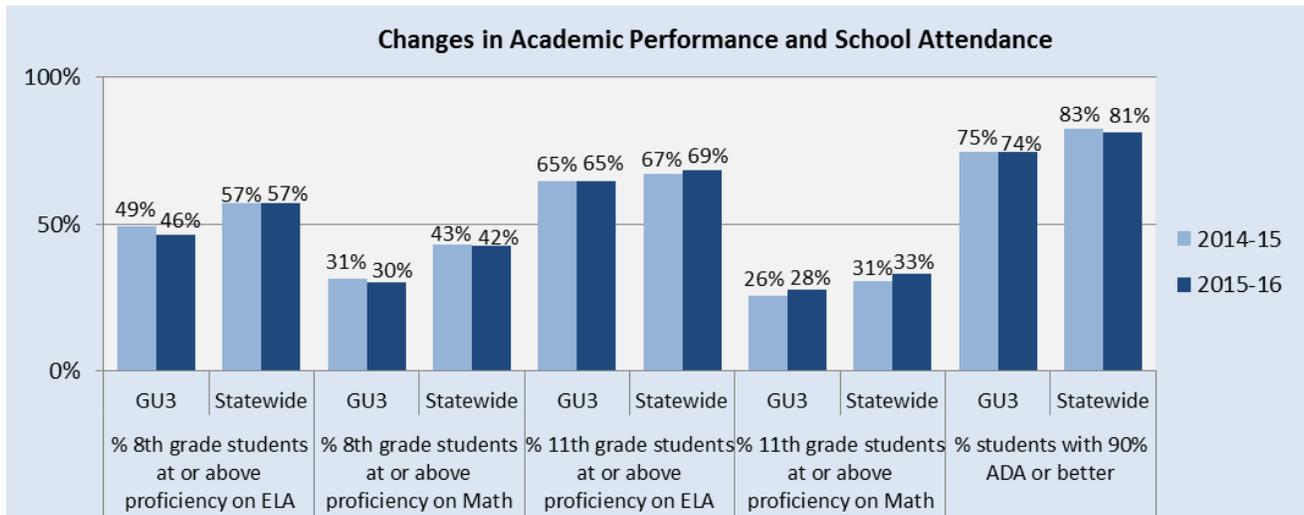


- In surveys, educators reported that **the professional development offered through GEAR UP and the integration of technology have both played a role in enhancing their teaching practices**. In fact, technology was the highest rated GEAR UP support, with 85% of educators receiving technology describing it as *helpful* or *very helpful*.
- **At the case study schools**, GEAR UP has funded summer academic enrichment programs (where students worked with solar robots and built their own windmills to learn about electricity), advisories and tutoring, and one-on-one technology initiatives (i.e., Chromebooks and professional development for teachers). According to students, staff, and parents at these schools, **these opportunities have led to increased student motivation, enhanced learning experiences, and improved academic performance**. In addition, at one case study schools, three of the interviewed students were very enthusiastic about their experiences in the student leadership summer camp and provided examples of what they learned, including *“how to challenge both sides of your brain...not just your thinking brain but your creative brain... how to have an open mindset, a growth mindset and how to communicate better with other people.”*

GEAR UP has been the catalyst for our one-to-one Chrome initiative. [GEAR UP] funded it for 7th and 8th graders and the district got on board and now they are funding it so we can have it 6th through 12th grade. We thought we would do it year by year, but when we saw how much it impacted our students' learning and their access to things, we decided to do it for all of our kids at once.

GEAR UP Principal

- **Students in GEAR UP schools continue to struggle academically**, and had lower school attendance, when compared to statewide averages. Specifically, 74% of students in GEAR UP schools had 90% average daily attendance or better (a strong predictor of future academic success), compared to 81% statewide.



PROMOTING RELEVANCE AND CAREER AWARENESS

In Year 2, schools continued to develop their portfolio of career exploration opportunities for students.

- **Incorporating GEAR UP advisories and career classes into students' schedules** was seen as a particularly effective strategy for reaching large numbers of students and working with them for extended periods of time on career awareness. Interviewed students participating in these classes described learning about their interests and new career paths. School staff emphasized the importance of **encouraging students to build their own identity and “to think about what they’re really passionate.”** As described by an educator, students were asked to teach their peers about those passions “so that they’re not only students but they’re also teachers in the classroom, ...it gives them an opportunity to take ownership of their learning which is really important for going on to college.”
- Bringing **new community partners** into the schools was also identified by school staff as a powerful tool to broaden students' career horizons, bring in critical (and often more sustainable) resources into the schools, and help change the culture of not just the schools but their entire community. In fact, **79% of GEAR UP coordinators and administrators reported that their schools have developed new partnerships as a result of GEAR UP.**
- Almost three-quarters of GEAR UP students reported that their school provides practical experiences to help them learn about careers *sometimes* (42%) or *often or in many ways* (33%). However, over half of educators believe that **career exploration opportunities need to be implemented or improved upon** (62%) and indicated that strategies to assess students' postsecondary education and career readiness are *partially in place or still need to be implemented* (64%).

[Because of GEAR UP] there's been a lot more connections in the community than in the past, ... bringing industry partners to really change the mindset of the kids that it's just these walls and that's it, so they can see how this connects to the outside world and possible career opportunities.

A lot of businesses came and spoke to the kids, ...[and] whether they're from our community or just outside, they've brought in new language, new ways of thinking, new reasons to go to college.

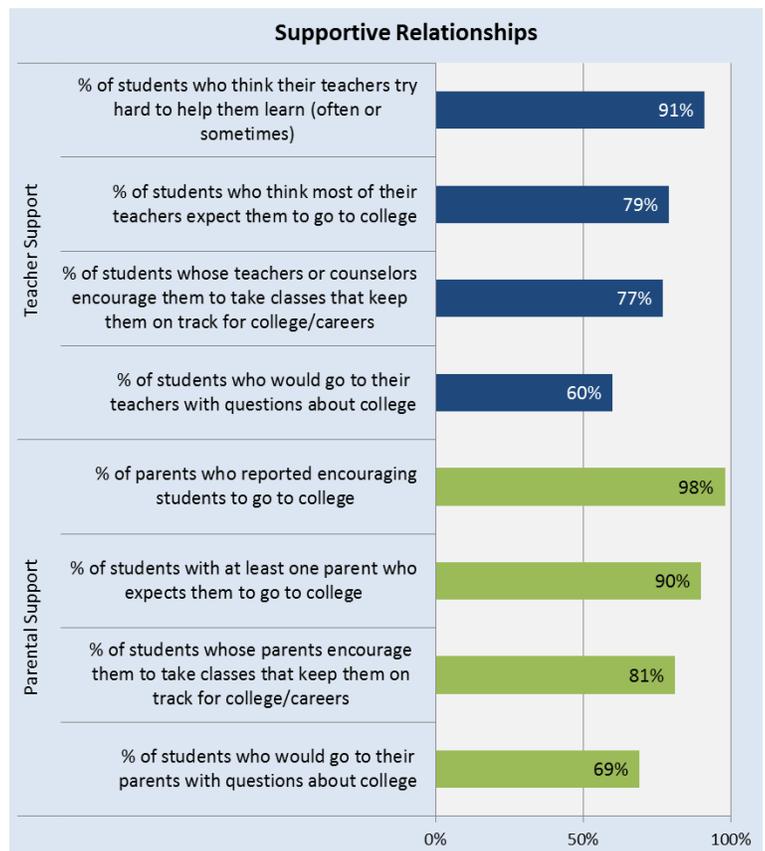
I think some of the students don't see the relevancy of education, of being at school, and so when they are given permission and time to really think about their own identity and what is relevant and meaningful for them, then that helps them with the rest of their school day and to be able to think outside the box in their other classes.

GEAR UP Educators

FOSTERING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

To create supportive environments, GEAR UP schools have focused their efforts on promoting educator involvement in college and career readiness activities; implementing student-focused activities—such as clubs and other organized groups—to encourage positive relationships and peer support; and facilitating events designed to increase parental involvement in academic, career, and postsecondary planning efforts.

- Most teachers in cohort and priority schools are involved in college and career readiness efforts, and students feel generally supported by their teachers.** For example, over two-thirds (68%) of educators dedicate time each month to college and career readiness activities, including 21% who dedicate five or more hours. At the case study schools, educators described their schools as caring and supportive environments. As one principal noted, *“Our kids are very appreciative for all the things our staff does for them. They are eager to learn, rise to the challenge. And the GEAR UP program has definitely given them a focus, as far as that college readiness piece.”*
- Parents were also found to be generally supportive of students,** even though some may have concerns about their children attending college and/or may not know *how* to support them in this area, according to interviewed students and educators.



- Most GEAR UP coordinators and administrators (86%) believe that **GEAR UP has helped their schools increase the number of families involved in academic, college, and career planning to some extent.** However, most staff indicated that **family involvement continues to be a moderate or major challenge (77%)** at their schools. The few parents who were interviewed were very appreciative of their school’s efforts to involve them in their children’s education. As one parent commented, *“I feel really well supported by Ms. ___ and Ms. ___ [GEAR UP coordinators] and the other people that I’ve worked with ... I think starting in middle school was a great idea. They [students] were already forward-thinking before they even set foot in this door. And it helped me as a parent forward-think also.”*

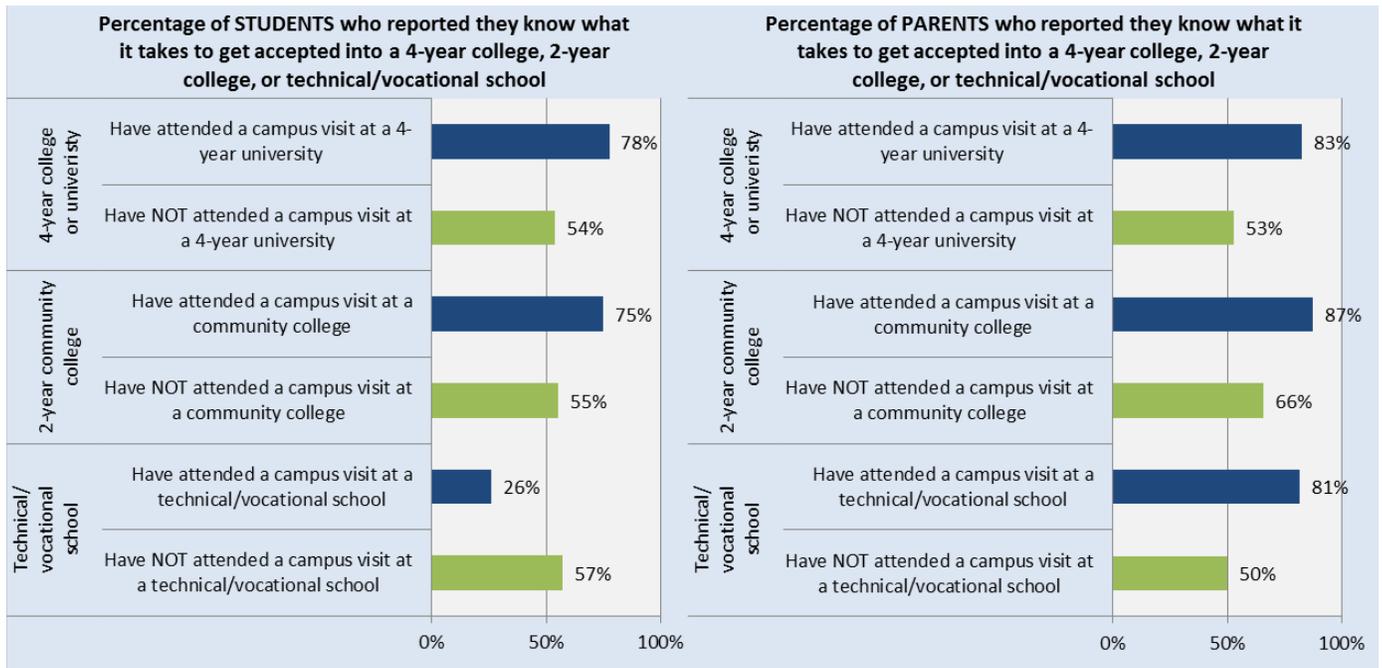
PROMISING PRACTICES FOR INCREASING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- ✓ Organizing **community events** where students showcase their work and “parents can come in and see the great things that are taking place at the school,” thus overcoming the “intimidation” factor.
- ✓ **Using students as “ambassadors”** as one principal commented, “It’s not necessarily us having to reach out to the parents. It’s the kids saying, ‘We need to do this’ and the parents are getting on board with that, and I think every parent wants the best for their kid.”
- ✓ **Shifting away from placing blame** or responsibility on parents to a school culture where everyone is welcome and a partner/advocate for student success.
- ✓ **Tapping into parents’ interests and skills**, for example, one case study school administered a short survey asking parents about their interests/ skills, and ideas for how they’d like to get involved.

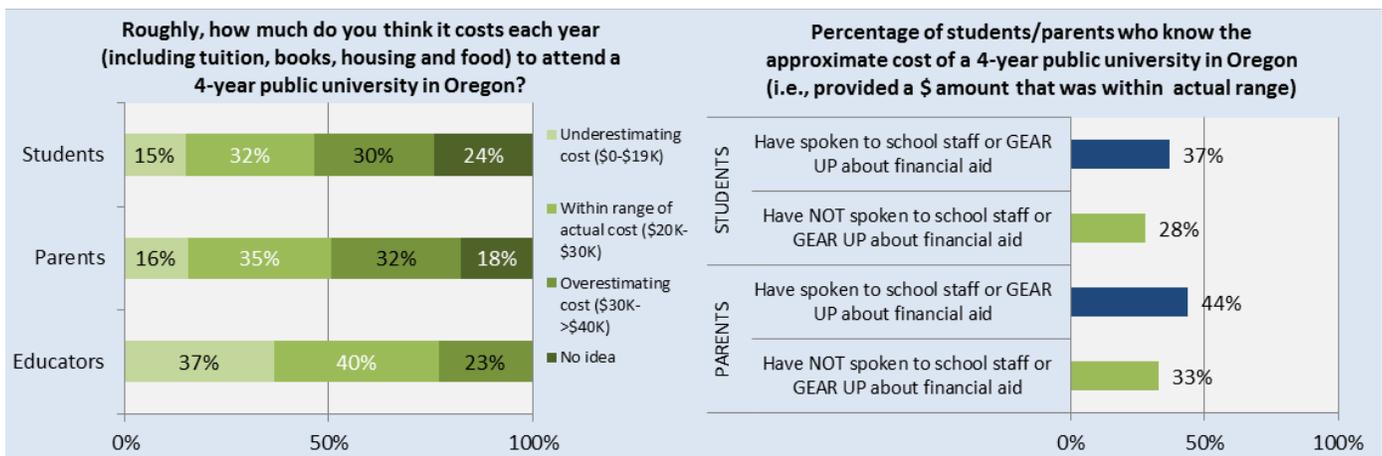
RAISING AWARENESS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OPTIONS, AND THE APPLICATION AND FINANCING PROCESS

Principals and educators believe that GEAR UP is having its strongest impact in raising awareness about the steps that students and families need to take in order to help students pursue and achieve their postsecondary education goals, and supporting them through that process.

- For example, 87% of surveyed GEAR UP coordinators and administrators reported that **GEAR UP has helped increase their students' knowledge of postsecondary options and financial aid** to a *moderate* (19%) or *large extent* (68%). "Raising awareness" was the highest-rated GEAR UP impact on this survey.
- Furthermore, there was a **positive correlation between participation in GEAR UP-related activities, such as college visits, and students' and parents' self-reported knowledge of college entrance requirements.**



- The large majority of students and parents, and many educators, do not know the actual cost of attending a 4-year public university,** with students and parents often overestimating the costs. However, students and parents who have discussed financial aid with school staff or GEAR UP were more likely to report an accurate estimate of the costs than those who have not.



Qualitative findings from the site visits also revealed that GEAR UP has played an instrumental role in increasing students' and families' knowledge of postsecondary options and financial aid, helping students make connections between their goals and career interests and the steps they need to take to achieve these goals, getting rid of barriers and misconceptions around college, and promoting college fit. Through GEAR UP funding, for example, case study schools have implemented or enhanced a wide range of interventions that were seen as driving these positive outcomes. For example:

- Students and school staff spoke highly about the **college visits, often identifying these as a turning point**, and emphasized their role in promoting college fit. As one student explained, *"I think it's great [to go on college visits] because then you learn where you need to go and what school offers the best programs so you can really excel in your area, and ... there's kids that are like, I want to go to wherever and then they go there and they realize they don't like the environment at all or maybe they realize that they love it and it reassures them, so I think the visits really help a lot."*
- **FAFSA and College Nights played a key role** in helping parents understand (and plan for) the college application and financial aid processes. One educator said, *"I have noticed that since she [the GEAR UP coordinator] started doing college night and FAFSA night, there definitely has been a lot of people coming to those, so I think they [families] just need to know that there's help available and that there are people here that will help their kids and help them. ... GEAR UP hosting events has been really good for our community, because those parents don't even know necessarily what to do for their kids."*
- **Having a college and career class was seen as a particularly effective strategy**, allowing the GEAR UP coordinator (who also teaches the class) to work closely with all students in the school for an extended period of time. At one case study school, the GEAR UP team developed a college and career readiness curriculum that was implemented by teachers during their advisory periods. However, implementation has varied considerably, with the coordinator explaining that *"the challenging part is getting the buy-in from the students. Without having an actual class, it's difficult to convince them of the importance of it, and that this is a state graduation requirement. I would love to have a class where they all come through me."*

I, myself, didn't go to college and neither did their dad, so they [my children] didn't have much family background on what college is like, what are the opportunities. So I thought it [GEAR UP] was a great way to get my kids the information that I wasn't able to give them. [...] Being able to visit the colleges was a big deal because it helps us [parents] see what life there is—especially if we didn't go to college ourselves. ... The first time I got to visit a university was with GEAR UP and it changed me a lot. College was this far off place of uncertainties. Being able to go and check things out was like 'Oh this is what it's like. This could be really cool for you!' ...you know talking with my child.

GEAR UP Parent

I'd say the careers class is pretty helpful just to learn what's needed if you do want to continue education after high school, but if you actually go on a [college] trip, I think the trip itself is the value. ... You can't just learn that on the computer or in a book. You have to see it physically, I think. So the trip was very, very helpful.

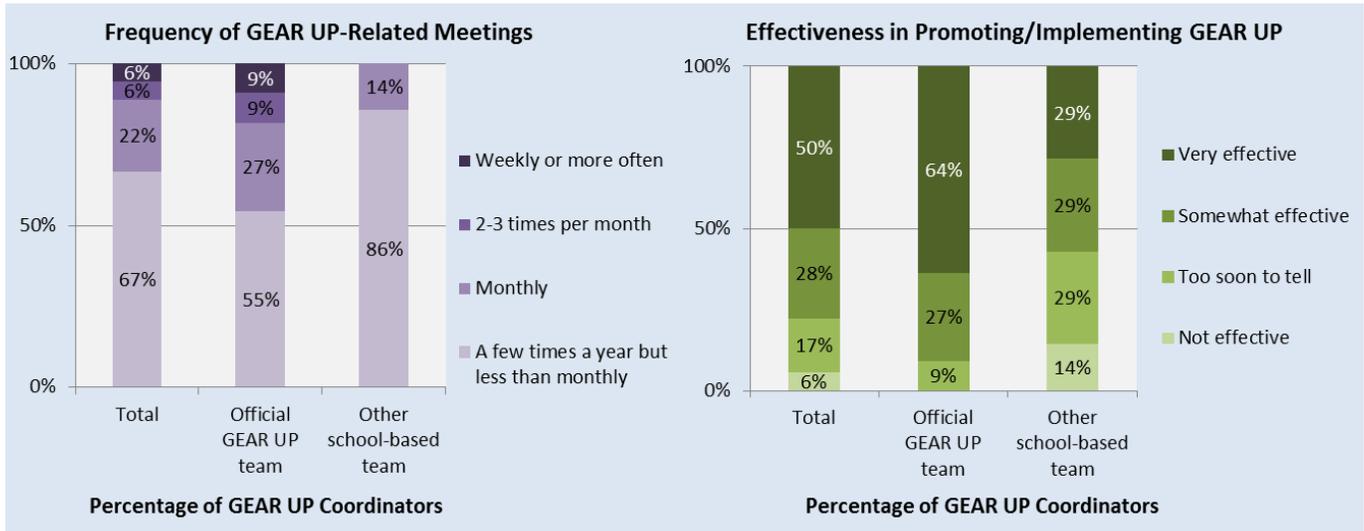
GEAR UP Student

GEAR UP has also helped educators gain important knowledge about the college application, selection, and financing process, that they can convey to their students, for example, through GEAR UP meetings and college visits. Also, in summer 2016, 16 educators from 6 participating schools attended the Oregon Private College Week Camp. According to one participating teacher, *"I've been in education for 26 years ...and getting out and getting on campuses like that is like the best thing—there's things I still learned, and I've been in it a long time, so I think they do a really good job of being progressive in that way."*

GEAR UP ALIGNMENT AND OVERSIGHT

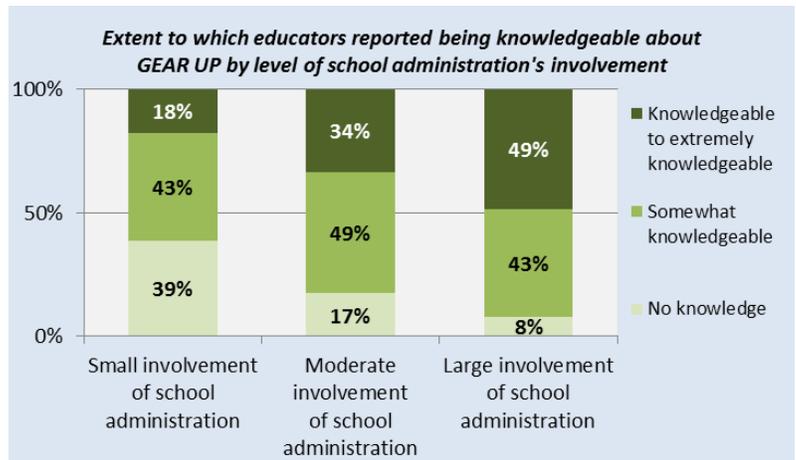
Oregon GEAR UP gives schools some flexibility in how they oversee, plan for, and implement the grant. However, it does encourage schools to create “GEAR UP teams” that include administrators, coordinators, and educators, and also emphasizes the importance of involving the larger staff in delivering GEAR UP services. GEAR UP schools have adopted a variety of models that have resulted in variations in administrator and educator involvement.

- Almost two-thirds (64%) of schools have an official GEAR UP team; the remaining schools discuss GEAR UP-related matters during other school-based team meetings. **Official GEAR UP teams met more frequently and were seen as being more effective in promoting GEAR UP and overseeing its implementation.**



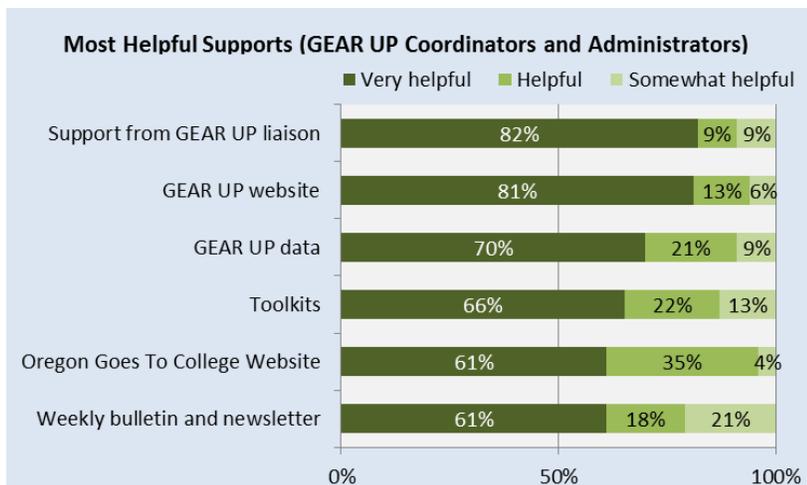
- According to **almost all (91%) GEAR UP coordinators and administrators in priority schools, GEAR UP has been aligned to other academic, career, and/or college readiness initiatives in their schools to a large extent.** For example, as explained by one of the principals, “We consider the five R’s in our yearly planning, PD, and school-improvement. We use our GEAR UP plan as a driver to provide opportunities to students.” Another principal noted, “Our mission statement and school improvement plans have been built around the GEAR UP R’s.” Cohort schools, which were in their second year of implementation, are still working on alignment (with only 62% reporting GEAR UP has been aligned to a large extent).
- Results also show **variation across schools in school administration and staff involvement**, each of which may play a key role in sustaining the work. Specifically, slightly over half (53%) of the coordinators reported that their school administrators were involved to a large extent, and smaller percentages said moderate extent (35%) or small extent (12%). School administrators at priority schools were more involved than administrators at cohort schools.

- There was a **significant, positive correlation between the level of administrator involvement** (as reported by coordinators) **and staff awareness of GEAR UP** (as reported by educators). This was further confirmed by comments from several coordinators who wished their school administration had a more prominent role in promoting GEAR UP, and increasing staff buy-in and involvement.



FEEDBACK ON GEAR UP SUPPORTS

- **GEAR UP coordinators and administrators offered very positive feedback on all Oregon GEAR UP supports.** During site visits, they highlighted the **SUCCESS retreat** as another critical support that has provided them with much needed time to plan for new activities, network with other schools, and share ideas.



- Case study schools were also extremely appreciative of the **flexibility that GEAR UP offers them in designing a program that works for them.** As one coordinator explained, “*The idea of GEAR UP saying...here are some funds and here are some tools and people ...was really appealing and that was probably the major selling point for us, in terms of convincing our administration to get on board because it was able to be tweaked to our needs.*”
- **Coordinators’ and administrator’s suggestions for additional support** included: providing more time and space to familiarize themselves with available resources; more support on how to engage families and promote staff buy-in; ideas on how to sustain key activities (e.g., college visits); and more guidance from school liaisons and GEAR UP in general on activities and interventions that have been successful in other, similar schools.

I would say one of the biggest improvements is hiring somebody like [SCHOOL LIAISON] that, when I have a question and I email, it’s literally that day that [THEY] get back to me.

GEAR UP Coordinator

I’ve gone to every SUCCEED retreat, it’s probably one of the more exciting conferences or retreats I go to. It’s so positive, a lot of time for collaboration. And the other thing I really like is that we’re doing a lot of great things here and it just affirms that we’re on the right track when people really acknowledge and are excited about what we’re doing at this school.

GEAR UP Principal

We have been able to use the [GEAR UP] data to help drive decisions and see what’s working and what’s not working.

GEAR UP Principal

MOVING FORWARD

Evaluation results to date are very promising and have demonstrated a number of important successes and lessons learned. The following are key priority areas and suggestions for next year’s implementation.

- ✦ Continue to support schools in **promoting greater family involvement** by providing time and space for GEAR UP teams to assess their own practices, share successes, and familiarize themselves with available resources (e.g., toolkits, family engagement consultant).
- ✦ Encourage, train, and support schools in their efforts to **increase educator expectations, involvement, and buy-in**, and encourage school administrators to assume a greater role in ensuring staff buy-in and shared responsibility for implementing GEAR UP programming.
- ✦ Help schools identify additional **opportunities to increase the rigor of instruction**, prepare students academically, develop their non-cognitive skills, and **increase school attendance**.
- ✦ Continue to **develop schools’ capacity to use data** to inform their efforts and share findings with key stakeholders, including staff, students, and parents.
- ✦ Provide more guidance and resources related to **sustainability**.