WHAT IS GEAR UP?

Learn about the importance of college and career readiness, our goals, objectives and strategies of our research-based model and our values.

College & Career Readiness

Oregon has recently defined college and career readiness as the following:

Oregonians who are College and Career Ready have the academic and workplace knowledge, reasoning and analytical abilities, as well as transition skills and professional behaviors necessary to be successful in the workplace and in postsecondary education and as contributing members to their communities and Oregon's economy.

The skills required for a successful career are for the most part very similar to the skills and attributes necessary for college entrance and success. Quite simply, **college and career readiness is the knowledge, skills and behaviors necessary to be successful in postsecondary education, career and life.[i]**

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Higher education is critical for a strong economy: **70% of jobs in Oregon[ii] will require some postsecondary education by 2020**, yet just 61% of Oregon's 32,361 high school graduates in 2011 enrolled in college within a year.[iii] Our state has set a goal for 80% postsecondary educational attainment by 2025[iv], yet just 40% of Oregon's adults held a degree or certificate in 2012.[v]

In addition, individuals who continue their education after high school profit from higher wages, increased job security, better health, and a multitude of other benefits.

What is GEAR UP?

Oregon GEAR UP is a federally-funded program that supports rural, low-income middle and high school schools to help students prepare for and succeed in education after high school. GEAR UP stands for **G**aining **E**arly **A**wareness and **R**eadiness for **U**ndergraduate **P**rograms. Oregon GEAR UP also receives support from community partners such as The Ford Family Foundation and is administered by Oregon State University.

We partner with specific schools to help create a college-going culture that produces students who are college and career ready. GEAR UP uses research-based principles to inform our systemic school-wide improvement model that is easily adapted to local needs.

The research on the populations we serve shows the need:

- o **Low-income students are less likely to access higher education.[vi]** In 2011, the immediate college enrollment rate for high school completers from low-income families was 52 percent, 30 percentage points lower than the rate for completers from high-income families (82 percent).
- o **Low-income students are less likely to complete higher education.[vii]** After six years, only 11 percent of low-income, first-generation college students earned a bachelor's degree compared to 55 percent of their more advantaged peers. High-income youth are six times more likely to earn a four-year degree than are low-income students and the gap between them has nearly *doubled* in the last 35 years.

- **Rural students have less access to college prep classes and educational counseling** resources than their urban counterparts.[viii] Their parents tend to be less educated and less likely to encourage their children to attend college. Rural students are less than half as likely to earn a bachelor's degree as their urban peers.
- **Students from rural Oregon are 24% less likely to attend a 4 year-college** compared to their urban peers[ix] and more likely to attend community college than a 4-year university.[x]
- **Just 28.3% of adults in Oregon's rural counties hold an associate's degree or higher**, compared to 38.9% in urban counties.[xi]

These grim statistics and belief in the benefits of higher education inspire and inform our work. For example, we know that **college readiness starts in middle school** (at least!). Students who take a challenging curriculum beginning in middle school tend to perform better academically in high school and are better prepared for college than those who take less rigorous courses.[xii] Research also indicates that eighth-grade academic achievement and being on target for college and career readiness in eighth grade have a significant impact on students' ability to become college and career ready by the end of high school.[xiii] Similarly, we know that supporting students through the transition to college[xiv] and the first-year of postsecondary education is critical to their ultimate success.[xv]

Our Values

Anchored by a foundation of respect, Oregon GEAR UP believes in five core values that influence how and why we do our work.

Education
We believe in the transformative power of education for individuals and communities. College (which for us means any kind of postsecondary education or training) opens doors by giving people the knowledge and skills needed for personal and professional success.

Equity
Our work aims to level the playing field for all students in access and opportunity. We have high expectations and believe in the potential of every student. We affirm all students' right to explore and pursue postsecondary education that meets their physical, social, emotional, and educational needs.

Empowerment
We build collaborative relationships to enhance the culture around going to college. Our model is not one-size-fits-all; rather, we encourage creative, adaptable solutions that empower schools and students.

Growth
We support our colleagues, partners and students in personal and professional growth and provide opportunities that encourage perseverance and possibility.

Balance
We recognize the numerous demands on our colleagues and partners and therefore are positive, practical and flexible in order to achieve balance in work and life.

The "Five Rs": Our Theoretical Model

Oregon GEAR UP's model to achieve college and career readiness relies on five research-based principles, affectionately and alliteratively titled "The Five Rs". These principles serve as the basis for our benchmarks and key objectives; strategies, activities and programming; and evaluation.

Reaching Higher: Create a school environment, policies, and teacher expectations that support all students' pursuit of a postsecondary education.

- When teachers have high expectations for students and provide tasks that are engaging and of high interest, students build self-esteem, increase confidence and improve academic performance.[xvi]

Rigor: Academically prepare all students for postsecondary education through rigorous curriculum and necessary academic support.

- A rigorous high school curriculum has greater impact on bachelor's degree completion than any other pre-college indicator of academic preparation, regardless of socioeconomic status or race.[xvii]

Relevance: Link students' career aspirations with their educational goals.

- High school graduates who expect they will need a college degree for the career they are interested in are more than *six times* as likely to earn their bachelor's degrees.[xviii]
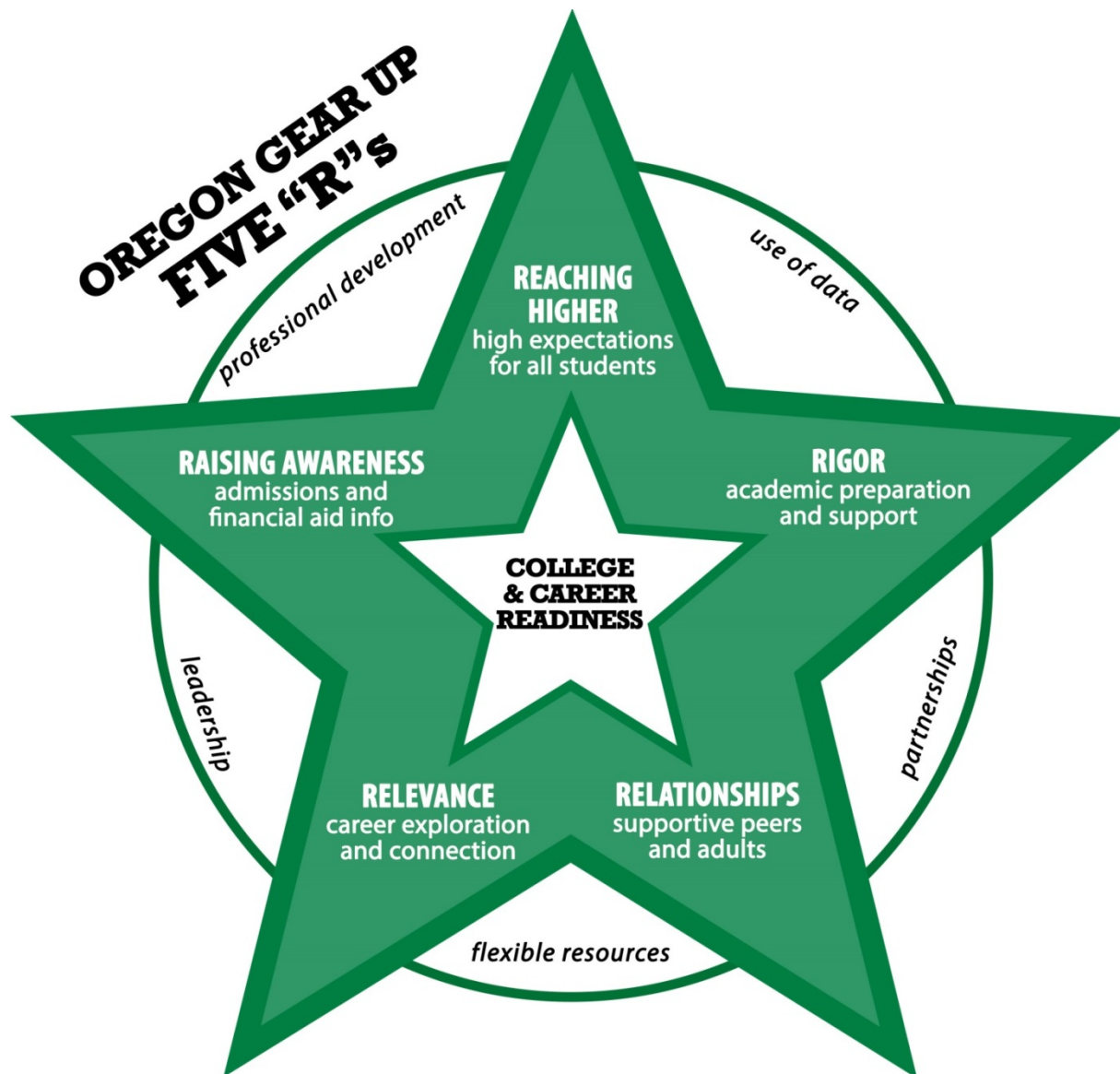
Relationships: Foster relationships that encourage students' academic success.

- When parents provide support and encouragement, as well as assist with planning, the probability of attending and graduating from college increases.[xix]
- Students are four times more likely to enroll in college if a majority of their friends also plan to attend than if their friends do not.[xx]

Raising Awareness: Promote early awareness of college preparation, selection, admissions, financial aid and other steps for college entry.

- Informing and assisting students and families with the college application and financial aid process increases college enrollment.[xxi]

The model also includes five key ways to put the 5 "R"s into practice including **using data** to implement and evaluate programs, building and maintaining **partnerships** in the community, utilizing varied and **flexible resources** from trusted sources, involving school **leadership**, and encouraging the **professional development** of educators and school staff on the latest research and strategies related to college readiness.

OREGON GEAR UP FIVE "R"s

professional development

use of data

REACHING HIGHER
high expectations for all students

RAISING AWARENESS
admissions and financial aid info

RIGOR
academic preparation and support

COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS

leadership

partnerships

RELEVANCE
career exploration and connection

RELATIONSHIPS
supportive peers and adults

flexible resources

Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Sample Activities

Overall Outcomes:
1. Increase percentage of students who graduate high school.
2. Increase percentage of students who enroll in college.

GOAL 1	**REACHING HIGHER**
	Create a school environment, policies, and teacher expectations that support all students' pursuit of a postsecondary education.

Measurable Objectives:
1. Increase percentage of students with expectation of achieving a postsecondary degree or certificate.
2. Increase percentage of parents/families who expect their students to achieve a postsecondary degree or certificate.
3. Increase percentage of students that school staff expects to achieve a postsecondary degree or certificate.

Strategies:

1. Create college-going identities among students.

   Sample activities:
   - Host small group discussions with students to allow them to explore who they *hope* to become, *expect* to become, and *fear* becoming; help them develop strategies for moving beyond their fears.
   - Implement the "My Story" project where students write essays and create posters describing who they are and who they want to become. Invite family and community members to a celebration to view student work.
   - Host college student/alumni panel to discuss the obstacles they faced in accessing postsecondary education and how the overcame those barriers.
   - Strength-based asset mapping –encouraged students to identify their gifts, specifically in areas that inform their self-concept using questions such as "What makes you feel successful?" or "What have you done to support your own success?"
   - Have students "try on" the role of college student through on-college-campus experiences and using college-like practices in high school activities, such as creating syllabi and course websites for high school courses.

2. Develop a college-going culture in schools.

   Sample activities:
   - Incorporate preparing students for postsecondary options into school mission statements.
   - Sponsor activities such as college door wars.
   - Post information about colleges attended by teachers and other staff.
   - Prominently display postsecondary plans of all graduating seniors.
   - Celebrate academic achievements as much as athletic ones.
   - Create partnerships with postsecondary institutions that help to create high expectations and clear pathways to postsecondary education.
   - Incorporate postsecondary education themes in lessons and homework assignments.

3. Consistently communicate the expectation of postsecondary education for all students.

   Sample activities:
   - Require staff and school messaging to expressly communicate expectation of excellence, high performance, and ability to achieve postsecondary education for all students.
   - Prepare all school personnel to coach students to take the right classes necessary for their postsecondary goals.
   - Explore differences in expectations among students, parents and teachers; work to right discrepancies.

4. Emphasize goal-setting, while also finding short term benefits.

   Sample Activities:
   - Develop educational plans that include postsecondary options with all 8th grade students.
   - Work with students to break long-term and large goals into smaller sub-goals.
   - Teach youth to become adept at developing alternative or multiple pathways to the same goal.
   - Help students envision future goals in the context of current realities, including their challenges and needs, then help them develop strategies for overcoming potential obstacles.

GOAL **2**	**RIGOR** Academically prepare all students for postsecondary education through rigorous curriculum and necessary academic support.

Measurable Objectives:

1. Increase performance on standardized test scores.
2. Reduce percentage of students with failing grades.
3. Increase percentage of students who pass pre-algebra by the end of 8th grade.
4. Increase percentage of students who pass Algebra I by the end of 9th grade.
5. Increase percentage of students who take two years of math beyond Algebra I by the end of 12th grade.
6. Increase percentage of students who are on track to graduate at the end of each grade.
7. Increase number of AP/IB and dual credit classes offered and taken.

Strategies:

1. Ensure that students have necessary academic content knowledge and support for success in postsecondary education.

   Sample Activities:

   - Align curriculum with state standards, including Common Core, as well as across grades to eliminate gaps and overlapping in courses.
   - Provide equitable opportunities for each and every student to access college preparation courses, particularly those from low-income backgrounds.
   - Provide access to additional support for each and every student through regular tutorial periods before, after, and/or during school, as well as summer school for enrichment and remediation.
   - Provide access to academically challenging courses such as a default college-prep curriculum for all, dual enrollment programs, and online or other distance media.
   - Uphold rigorous performance standards for all students in all classes.
   - Ensure that students understand what constitutes a college-ready curriculum.
   - Utilize performance data to identify and inform students about their academic proficiency and college readiness.

2. Develop students' learning skills, techniques, behaviors and character; provide just enough assistance for them to learn to do tasks themselves.

   Sample Activities:

   - Use advisories, ninth-grade academies, and senior seminars to cover goal setting, persistence, self-awareness, motivation, self-efficacy, time management, study skills, and other key non-cognitive skills.
   - Encourage families to support college-going behavior by helping their children be organized, setting aside dedicated time and space for academic and college-related activities, and being intentional and mindful about the future.
   - Help students develop their cognitive skills such as research, interpretation of data, communication, etc.

3. Provide professional development to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

   Sample Activities:
   - Offer professional development opportunities that explicitly address issues of equity in the classroom.
   - Provide time for teachers to align grading policies across same classes/subjects.
   - Provide opportunities to learn innovative and effective teaching strategies such as differentiated instruction, project-based learning, proficiency-based teaching and grading, etc.
   - Offer professional development in social and emotional learning, and growth mindset.
   - Ensure all educators understand the elements necessary for college readiness (i.e. the GEAR UP model, non-cognitive skills, developmental approach to college readiness, etc.)

GOAL 3 · RELEVANCE

Link students' career aspirations with their educational goals.

Measurable Objectives:
1. Increase percentage of students with a personal education plan that includes some form of education beyond high school.
2. Increase number of opportunities available for students to explore career options through career fairs, job shadows, internships or other career-related learning experiences.
3. Increase number of businesses and community partners that collaborate with the school.

Strategies:
1. Provide opportunities for students to learn about a wide array of careers.

   Sample Activities:
   - Utilize Oregon Career Information System or similar resources to create personal education plans for each student that include postsecondary options.
   - Partner with community partners, businesses and professionals to offer a career fair or guest speaker series, or attend a career fair.
   - Offer service-learning and work-based learning opportunities.

2. Build on youths' interests and passions to tap into intrinsic motivation for college, helping them see the value of learning for its own sake and for the purpose of pursing interesting work later.

   Sample Activities:
   - Ensure that all students understand early what courses are necessary to prepare them for college-level work needed to fulfill career goals.
   - Help students draw a connection between their interests /passions and college-going.
   - Provide a balanced set of reasons why young people would want to go to college, e.g., finding interesting work, financial stability, meeting others with similar interests, quality of life, making positive contributions to their community, etc.
   - Provide opportunities for youth to hear from their peers or near peers about how their future goals align with their cultural traditions and values.

Measurable Objectives:
1. Increase number of recognized student clubs/organizations focused on academics, careers, and/or college.
2. Increase number of families involved in academic, career and college planning.
3. Increase percentage of students who report that their teachers expect them to go to college.

Strategies:
1. Draw on the power of peers.

   Sample Activities:
   - Develop student organizations focused on academics and college attendance.
   - Show youth that people who share their racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other characteristics can and do succeed in college, through carefully 'matched' motivational speakers, alumni panels, and/or mentors.
   - Lead discussions (in safe, comfortable spaces) about whether and why youth believe that "people like me" can and do go to college.
   - Host transition activities as students move to new schools, such as transition camps, Link Crew, or similar programs.
   - Facilitate student relationships with peers who plan to attend college through a structured program or extracurricular activities, such as building networks among youth bound for the same colleges or types of programs.

2. Provide opportunities for every student to develop positive mentoring relationships with older students and adults.

   Sample Activities:
   - Ensure that every student has meaningful connections with at least three staff members.
   - Partner with community agencies and organizations with staff more likely to share identity and characteristics with youth.
   - Utilize current college students as mentors for younger students.

3. Engage families.

   Sample Activities:
   - Provide staff with tools for working /communicating with students and families from diverse backgrounds.
   - Include families in college access activities.
   - Reduce language barriers by translating all school communications into different languages.
   - Involve parents in school governance bodies, college visits, and college and career days.
   - Host student led conferences.
   - Visit the homes of incoming 9th grade students to welcome them to the high school.
   - Conduct projects in which youth interview their parents or other adult family members about the family's hopes and goals for the young person's future.
   - Reach out to underrepresented parent and community groups, gather their views, and use these to improve programming and outreach.

GOAL 5	**RAISING AWARENESS**
	Promote early awareness of college preparation, selection, admissions, financial aid and other critical steps for college entry.

Measurable Objectives:

1. Increase percentage of students and parents who are aware of entrance requirements for 2-year, 4-year, trade and technical schools.
2. Increase percentage of students and parents who are familiar with various forms of financial aid.
3. Increase percentage of students and parents who can correctly identify the cost of attending a public 4-year university.
4. Increase percentage of students and parents who believe they can afford some form of postsecondary education using financial aid and their family's resources.
5. Increase percentage of seniors submitting college applications.
6. Increase percentage of seniors submitting FAFSAs.
7. Increase percentage of seniors submitting OSAC applications.

Strategies:

1. Promote college awareness to students and families.

   Sample Activities:
   - Include family members in the college planning process.
   - Organize workshops for parents and students to inform them prior to 12th grade about college affordability, scholarships and aid sources, and financial aid processes.
   - Provide mentors and parent volunteers to coach their peers on the importance of college and choosing the right classes.
   - Take students and their families on college visits.
   - Invite recent graduates now attending college and their parents to serve on panels to inform students and parents of the importance of academic preparation for college.
   - Develop partnerships with colleges to provide assistance to students and their families.
   - Inform students at early ages about college entrance requirements in order for them to make good choices about the courses they take.

2. Demystify paying for college.

   Sample Activities:
   - Build financial literacy and financial aid activities into math courses.
   - Present financial planning information to parents and students.
   - Partner with college financial aid offices to offer workshops and act as resources for families.
   - Build local scholarship endowments.
   - Provide savings opportunities such as Individual Development Accounts.

3. Aid in the college application process.

   Sample Activities:
   - Provide help with college applications, financial aid forms, and scholarship applications.
   - Use scholarship questions for essay prompts in ELA classes.
   - Embed college admissions, affordability and financing into school curriculum.
   - Host special events such as College Application Week.

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