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December 2016

(Updated: February 2017)

Evaluation of the Oregon GEAR UP The Ford Family Foundation Initiative

Findings for Year 5 (2015–16)

Submitted to:

Stephanie Carnahan, Project Director
Oregon GEAR UP

metis associates

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SUBMITTED TO:
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GEAR UP

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Executive Summary

Oregon, rural Oregon in particular, is facing a crisis in college access and success. 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 addition, in 2011, Oregon GEAR UP received a grant from The Ford Family Foundation (TFFF) to replicate the GEAR UP program in 10 rural communities in Oregon’s Douglas, Coos and Curry counties.



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 and high schools over six or 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.

Metis Associates, an independent research firm was selected to conduct the external evaluation of this grant for 2015–16 and 2016–17. The evaluation, which includes formative and summative components, 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, including:

- ✓ promoting a school-wide college-going culture;
- ✓ increasing the rigor of instruction and students’ academic preparedness;
- ✓ promoting career relevance and awareness;
- ✓ promoting strong, supportive relationships;
- ✓ increasing students’ and families’ awareness of postsecondary options and financial aid resources; and
- ✓ increasing high school graduation rates and enrollment and completion of postsecondary education.

EVALUATION METHODS

- School data (academic performance, attendance, high school graduation)
- Student surveys
- Parent surveys
- Educator surveys
- GEAR UP coordinator surveys
- Site visits at 3 schools, which included interviews/focus groups with principals, GEAR UP coordinators, educators, students, and parents.
- GEAR UP service data

In 2015–16, the fifth year of the TFFF grant, GEAR UP was implemented in 14 middle and high schools in 10 school districts (from here on referred to as “clusters”) and served over 3,700 students in grades 7 through 11. This report presents key findings for the 2015–16 school year for all 10 Ford GEAR UP clusters (a separate report was prepared for the 21 federally-funded GEAR UP clusters).

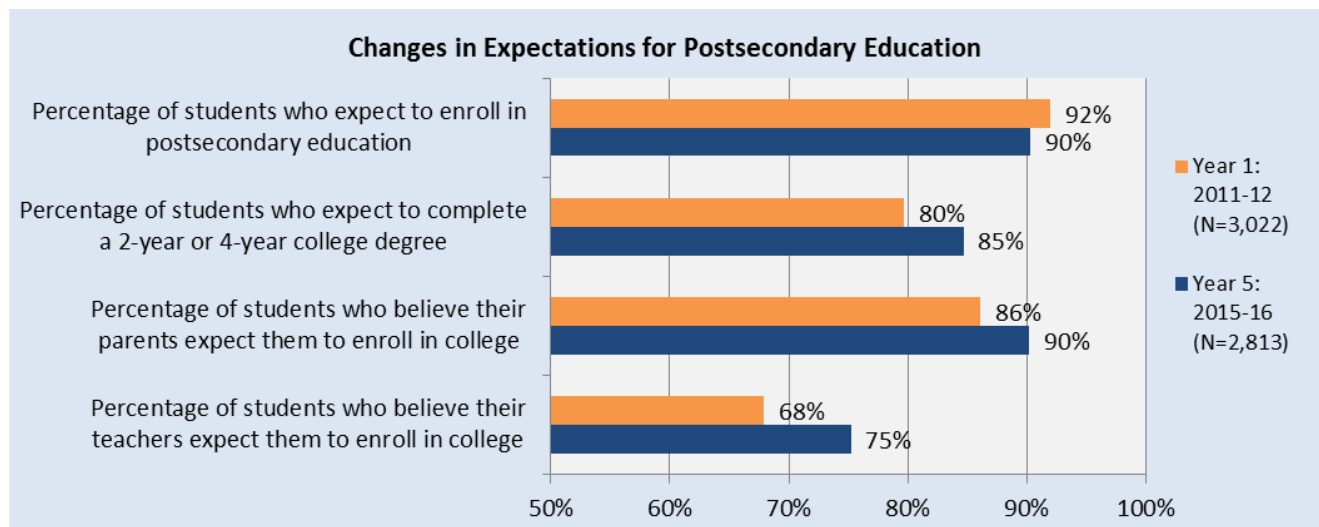
GEAR UP PARTICIPATION

- GEAR UP has a strong presence in participating schools. In Year 5, 3,716 GEAR UP students in grades 7 through 11 participated in one or more GEAR UP events, including 25% of students who participated in five or more events. On average, students participated in over 20 hours of GEAR UP programming.
- GEAR UP schools implemented a wide range of student activities, interventions, and supports for each of the key goals (“Rs”) of the Oregon GEAR UP framework. The following types of activities had the highest participation rates: academic, career, and college counseling/advising (80% of participating students), GEAR UP club or class (24%), student leadership activities (21%), and college visits (20%). Rigorous academic curricula and academic supports were the most intense GEAR UP activities, with approximately 10% of students participating for an average of 65 hours and 27 hours, respectively.

PROMOTING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE AND RAISING EXPECTATIONS

GEAR UP has played an instrumental role in promoting a college-going culture in schools, with many schools reporting positive results in this area.

- **Students’ expectations of postsecondary degree attainment have increased** over time (from 80% of students in Year 1 to 85% of students in Year 5). Furthermore, in Year 5, students were more likely to report that their teachers and their parents expect them to go to college. Gains were typically larger among students who indicated in the survey that their “immediate” family members (i.e., parents/guardians and siblings) have not attended college and students in the middle and under-performing groups.



- In interviews, principals and GEAR UP coordinators indicated that they have observed **noticeable gains in students’ and educators’ attitudes towards postsecondary education**. College décor and displays of student accomplishments, utilizing alumni in career and college events, student-led conferences, and college visits, were among the most effective practices, according to school staff and students.
- The cost of college continues to be one of the key perceived barriers that may prevent students from pursuing their postsecondary education goals. However, results show a **correlation between participation in GEAR UP-related activities and more positive perceptions about college affordability**.

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. These included: participation in a four-day Summer Institute on curriculum alignment (8 clusters); school-wide professional development on growth mindset and social emotional learning (5 clusters), and training on the impact of poverty on learning (1 cluster); tutorial classes, labs, and study skills curricula (5 clusters); afterschool tutoring and homework help (3 clusters); dual credit & online college courses, and advanced placement courses (4 clusters); and technology integration (4 clusters).

- **Five of the six clusters with complete data experienced increases in the percentage of high school students taking at least one community college dual credit course** from 2011-12 to 2014-15 (the latest year with available data).
- Seven of the nine surveyed GEAR UP **coordinators indicated that GEAR UP has supported their school in increasing the rigor** to a *moderate or large extent* (with the remaining two indicating to *some extent*). All of them indicated that GEAR UP has had a *small to moderate* role in strengthening their staff's knowledge, skills, and practices, and improving students' academic performance.
- 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 over three-quarters of teachers receiving technology describing it as *helpful* (35%) or *very helpful* (42%).
- During site visits in two clusters, parents and students were most appreciative of the **new afterschool programs**, which according to one parent “is one of the best things they have incorporated here [with GEAR UP].” Interviewed principals also offered very positive feedback, noting that **GEAR UP has improved their core programs**, which have led to gains in academic performance.
- Ford GEAR UP **schools have shown gains in students' academic performance in English language arts and mathematics**, and these gains were often larger than statewide increases.

I've seen our programs become better, especially our core programs, because of professional development. I think the overall achievement is getting better.

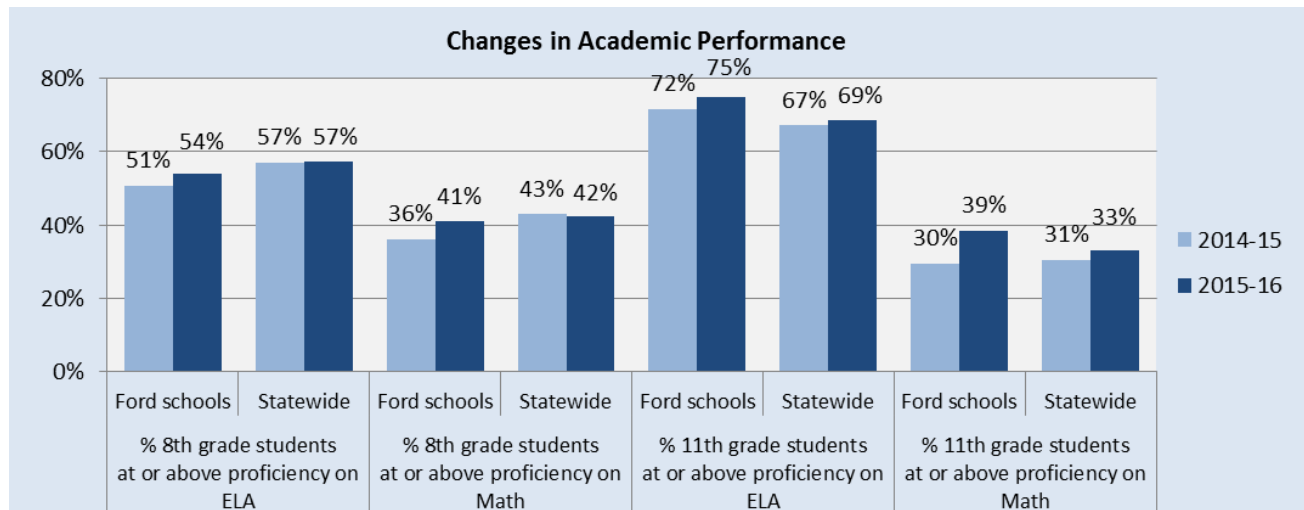
GEAR UP Principal

Technology...has been huge for us because I have teachers who want to do a flipped classroom model. So we've done things like a mobile tablet cart, we've bought tablets for teachers, we've sent them to technology conferences.

GEAR UP Principal

The afterschool program is one of the best things they have incorporated here [with GEAR UP]. [It] gives him [my son] the extra time... It's made a huge difference in his grades.

GEAR UP Parent



PROMOTING CAREER RELEVANCE

In Year 5, schools continued to develop their portfolio of career exploration opportunities for students.

- **Building career classes into the students' schedules** was seen as a particularly effective strategy, due to its far reach. Career fairs, particularly those that involved alumni, were also identified by students, parents, and educators as impactful and broadening students' horizons. **Hands-on career exploration activities**—such as work-based learning activities, worksite visits, and internships—were also described as powerful experiences and at times life-changing.
- However, over half of educators reported that their **schools need to implement or improve upon these opportunities** (55%) and indicated that strategies to assess students' postsecondary education and career readiness are *partially in place or still need to be implemented* (56%).

The mindset [in our school] is 'We are rural, we don't really have very much. What are we going to do after? There's nothing for us when we graduate.' And I think the alumni career fair showed that...wow, these people attended school here and some of them are presidents in companies, and we have doctors, nurses, state policemen ...the career fair showed that whatever you want to do, you can achieve it.

GEAR UP Educator

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.

- Educator support for and involvement in college and career readiness activities has significantly increased over time. For example, **the percentage of educators who dedicate time each month to these types of activities more than doubled**, from 37% in Year 2 to 78% in Year 5.
- **The vast majority of students indicated that their parent(s) and teachers expect them to go to college** (90% and 75%, respectively) and viewed them as their primary sources of support around college preparation (73% and 60%).
- Parents were generally supportive of students. For example, **98% of surveyed parents reported encouraging their children to go to college** and 78% of students indicated that their parents encourage them to take classes that keep them on track for college and/or their career *often or sometimes*.
- All GEAR UP coordinators indicated that GEAR UP has helped their schools increase the number of families involved in academic, college, and career planning to some extent, including 55% of them who reported it has done so to a *moderate or large extent*. However, most coordinators indicated that **family involvement continues to be a moderate (56%) or major challenge (22%)** at their schools.

RAISING AWARENESS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OPTIONS, APPLICATION, AND FINANCING

Principals and educators indicated that GEAR UP has had 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.

- For example, **all nine surveyed GEAR UP coordinators reported that GEAR UP has helped increase their students' knowledge of postsecondary options and financial aid** to a *moderate* (22%) or *large extent* (78%). "Raising awareness" was the highest-rated GEAR UP impact in the survey.

- Students spoke highly about the **college visits, often identifying these as a turning point**, and college fit has become a focus of many schools' GEAR UP work. **FAFSA nights played a key role** in helping parents navigate what they described as a complicated and often overwhelming process.
- In Year 5 of the grant, **students were considerably more likely to report they have been on campus visits** at 4-year or 2-year colleges and they have discussed college entrance requirements with adults in their schools, when compared to students in the first year of the grant. And there was a positive correlation between participation in these activities and students' self-reported knowledge of college entrance requirements and their actual knowledge of college costs.

Because of GEAR UP, more students are now aware of college opportunities and have seen college campuses, and the school has implemented weeks designated to help with scholarships and college applications. And students now have a career center available to them to sign up for standardized tests, do college research, and host talks with professionals and colleges

GEAR UP Coordinator

GEAR UP ALIGNMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Schools have made a concerted effort to integrate GEAR UP work in all facets of their everyday practices. All GEAR UP coordinators reported in Year 5 that **GEAR UP has been aligned to other initiatives** to a *moderate* (11%) or *large extent* (89%). However, there was variation across schools in the extent of school administration and staff involvement, each of which may play a key role in sustaining the work. When asked about sustainability, all nine surveyed GEAR UP coordinators were confident that their schools will be able to sustain *a few or most/all* components of GEAR UP. Five of the 10 GEAR UP clusters have applied for sustainability grants. Other schools have been looking for additional funding or have included GEAR UP activities in their annual school budget.

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 the sixth and final year.

- **Work closely with schools to help them plan and implement sustainability plans.** Suggestions: provide time and space for schools to plan around sustainability; promote sharing of promising practices; and develop materials/resources on sustainability.
- **Continue to support schools in promoting greater family involvement.** Suggestions: encourage more schools to share best practices at GEAR UP retreats, and through newsletters, and feature stories on the website; remind schools about availability of a family engagement consultant; and provide space, time, and guidance for schools to assess their own practices and review available resources.
- **Encourage schools to continue working on educator expectations, involvement, and buy-in.** Suggestions: identify schools with lower educator involvement and provide individualized guidance and supports to those schools; send reminders about the availability of resources (e.g., PD templates); ask schools to share promising practices; encourage administrators to promote staff buy-in; and, encourage schools to include strategies for promoting shared staff responsibility in their sustainability plans.
- **Continue to build schools' capacity to use data and share findings with key stakeholders.** Suggestions: continue to provide trainings to schools on how to use data to inform decision-making; and ask schools to share promising practices around using data during meetings and retreats.

I. Introduction

Oregon, rural Oregon in particular, faces a crisis in college access and success. Oregon ranks 49th in high school graduation rates in the country, and 32nd in postsecondary education attainment (Odum and West, 2016). It is estimated that by 2020, 70% of all jobs in the state will require some type of education or training after high school (Carnevale, 2013), but only 37% of adults hold a postsecondary degree (2014 American Community Survey). Oregon’s schools also have one of the highest chronic absenteeism rates in the nation and lag behind many other states in academic preparedness and performance (Chang, Ginsburg, and Jordan, 2014). Rural Oregon, especially, faces a number of challenges—including geographic isolation, under-resourced schools, declining economies, and high poverty—that deeply affect children’s educational aspirations, pathways, opportunities, and success.

In 2002, Oregon received its first statewide grant from the US Department of Education to implement GEAR UP, which stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs. 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 do this, Oregon GEAR UP works with select middle and high schools over six or seven years to create a college-going culture by providing funding and technical assistance, professional development for educators, and summer opportunities for students. Since 2002, Oregon GEAR UP has received two other statewide grants from the US Department of Education to work with additional communities.

In 2011, Oregon GEAR UP received a grant from **The Ford Family Foundation (TFFF)** to replicate the GEAR UP program in 10 rural communities. Located in Roseburg, Oregon, The Ford Family Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation that manages large programs and offers a range of scholarships and financial and program resources to promote postsecondary success. TFFF also provides grants to public charities predominantly in rural Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. TFFF’s areas of focus are: Children, Education, Arts, Engagement, Economy, and Community.¹

In 2015–16, the fifth year of the grant, GEAR UP was implemented in 14 middle and high schools in 10 school districts (from here on referred to as “clusters”) and served over 3,700 students in grades 7 through 11. In Year 6 (the final year), GEAR UP will serve students in grades 7 through 12. Through a competitive process, Metis Associates, an independent research firm was selected to conduct the external evaluation of this grant for 2015–16 and 2016–17. **This report presents findings for the 2015–16 school year for the 10 GEAR UP clusters funded through TFFF** (a separate report was written for the 21 federally-funded clusters).

The evaluation, which includes formative and summative components, is designed to:

- assess program implementation in participating schools;
- document promising practices, challenges, and lessons learned; and
- assess the impact of the project in key outcomes areas.

¹ More information on The Ford Family Foundation’s programs and grant-making efforts can be found at <http://tfff.org>.

OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What does GEAR UP implementation look like in participating schools and communities? What are the common/varying elements in implementation?
- What are promising practices, implementation challenges, and lessons learned?
- What are schools' perceptions and feedback on the supports and resources provided by GEAR UP? How have these supports helped advance schools' college and career readiness vision and work? What else could GEAR UP do to continue supporting the schools?
- What is the project's progress in:
 - raising expectations for students, parents and educators and promoting a school-wide college-going culture?
 - helping schools increase rigor and prepare students for postsecondary success?
 - promoting career relevance and awareness?
 - promoting positive school climate and strong relationships?
 - raising students' and families' awareness of postsecondary options and financial aid resources?

Guided by these questions, **the 2015–16 evaluation draws from multiple data sources and key stakeholder groups**, including:

- student, parent, educator, and GEAR UP coordinator surveys;
- site visits in two clusters (representing three schools), which included interviews with principals and GEAR UP coordinators, and interviews or focus groups with students, parents, and educators;
- analyses of program participation from the Events and Cost Share Tracker (ECST) database;
- analyses of student data obtained from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC); and
- a review of program documentation.

When possible, 2015–16 data were compared to previous years' data to assess changes over time. The evaluation design and methods, including response rates, are described in Appendix A.

While the evaluation draws from a **number of strengths in its approach and design**, including availability of longitudinal data for some of key measures, ability to triangulate findings through the use of multiple qualitative and quantitative methods and data sources, and inclusion of feedback from all key stakeholder groups, there are also a **number of limitations** that should be taken into consideration when reviewing the findings. These are described below.

- **There are some external factors outside of the control of Oregon GEAR UP that may positively or negatively influence the key outcomes of interest, including changes in context, policies, or practices at the community, regional, state, or federal level.** A clear example of this is the Oregon Promise. Created by the Oregon Legislature in 2015, the Oregon Promise seeks “to encourage Oregon residents who are graduating high school students and recent GED graduates to immediately continue their education by providing funding to attend community college in Oregon.” This statewide initiative will likely influence students' postsecondary education aspirations and choices, thus adding a confounding factor in our impact study.

- Several Oregon GEAR UP TFFF schools are very small in size; because of this, **school data**—including academic achievement, attendance, high school graduation, and college enrollment **results may change considerably from year to year**. To address this limitation, multiple years of data and trends will be used, particularly in Year 6, to assess changes in outcomes.
- The **Year 5 evaluation does not include a comparison group design** to assess impact on key measures, but instead, relies on a cohort design in which outcomes are tracked over time (before and after the intervention takes place). This means that we cannot show whether positive changes in schools are caused by GEAR UP or by extraneous factors, or how much those factors influenced the changes. When possible, data for the TFFF schools are compared to Oregon averages to provide additional context for the results. If and when data are available, the final evaluation (2016–17) will include a comparative group analysis for key outcomes using a more refined comparison group (similar schools—geographic and demographic composition—that have not participated in GEAR UP).
- Student, parent, and educator surveys provide critical information and insights from the perspective of key stakeholder groups. While student and educator surveys have consistently shown strong response rates (often 80% or higher), **parent surveys** have not. Therefore **results from these surveys should be interpreted with caution as they may not be generalizable**. Furthermore, survey respondents are not matched across years and may represent somewhat different groups of individuals; therefore longitudinal analyses of survey data should be interpreted with caution.
- **Qualitative data were gathered from a small number of schools and students**, parents and educators within those schools. While these data may not be generalizable to the entire population, they may help explain statistical trends and provide critical insights on school context and how specific practices are affecting students' educational experiences.

REPORT CONTENTS

Section II – Why Oregon GEAR UP? This section provides an overview of the context and need for this program, a description of the ten rural communities receiving this grant, and an overview of how the program model addresses the needs of participating students and schools.

Section III – Oregon GEAR UP Participation. This section provides a synthesis of services and activities provided through GEAR UP to students, families, educators, and schools in the fifth year of implementation.

Section IV – Promising Practices and Outcomes by “R”. Drawing from multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data, this section highlights promising practices in implementing GEAR UP, and discusses the project's progress in meeting its intended outcomes. Results are organized by each component (“R”) of the Oregon GEAR UP framework: Reaching Higher, Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and Raising Awareness.

Section V – Additional findings. Additional evaluation findings (not specific to each R) are discussed in this section, including: school leadership and staff buy-in, sustainability, centralized GEAR UP supports, and the use of data.

Section VI – Conclusions and Recommendations. The report concludes with a summary of key findings and recommendations for the sixth and final year of this grant.

II. Why Oregon GEAR UP?

The Context and Need for Oregon GEAR UP

Oregon is the 27th most populous state in the nation but the ninth largest geographically with over 98,000 square miles. Seventy percent of the population lives in Portland and other metropolitan areas, while the remaining 30% lives in suburban or rural, often very remote areas. The primary economic drivers in rural Oregon have traditionally been resource-based – agriculture, timber, and fishing. These industries are in serious decline and as a result unemployment and poverty are highest in rural Oregon, including the communities served by Oregon GEAR UP. Furthermore, Oregon has one of the highest chronic school absenteeism rates and lowest high school graduation rates in the country (Odum and West, 2016; Chang, Ginsburg, and Jordan, 2014) and also trails in postsecondary educational achievement (2014 American Community Survey).

Education is one of the most powerful means to upward social mobility, and educational attainment has been linked to better life outcomes, including income, health, mental health, and general well-being. Yet, low-income students—the target population for Oregon GEAR UP—may experience a number of challenges that can influence their chances of enrolling and succeeding in postsecondary education. These may include socio-emotional, health, and learning difficulties stemming from the negative impact of poverty on students' lives; poor academic preparation; lack of resources for enrichment and extra-curricular activities; and limited experiences and knowledge about the college selection, application, and financing options (Byun, Meece, and Irvin, 2012; Bastedo and Jaquette, 2011; Roderick, Coca, and Nagaoka, 2011). Rural schools may also face additional obstacles stemming in part from their geographic isolation, including:

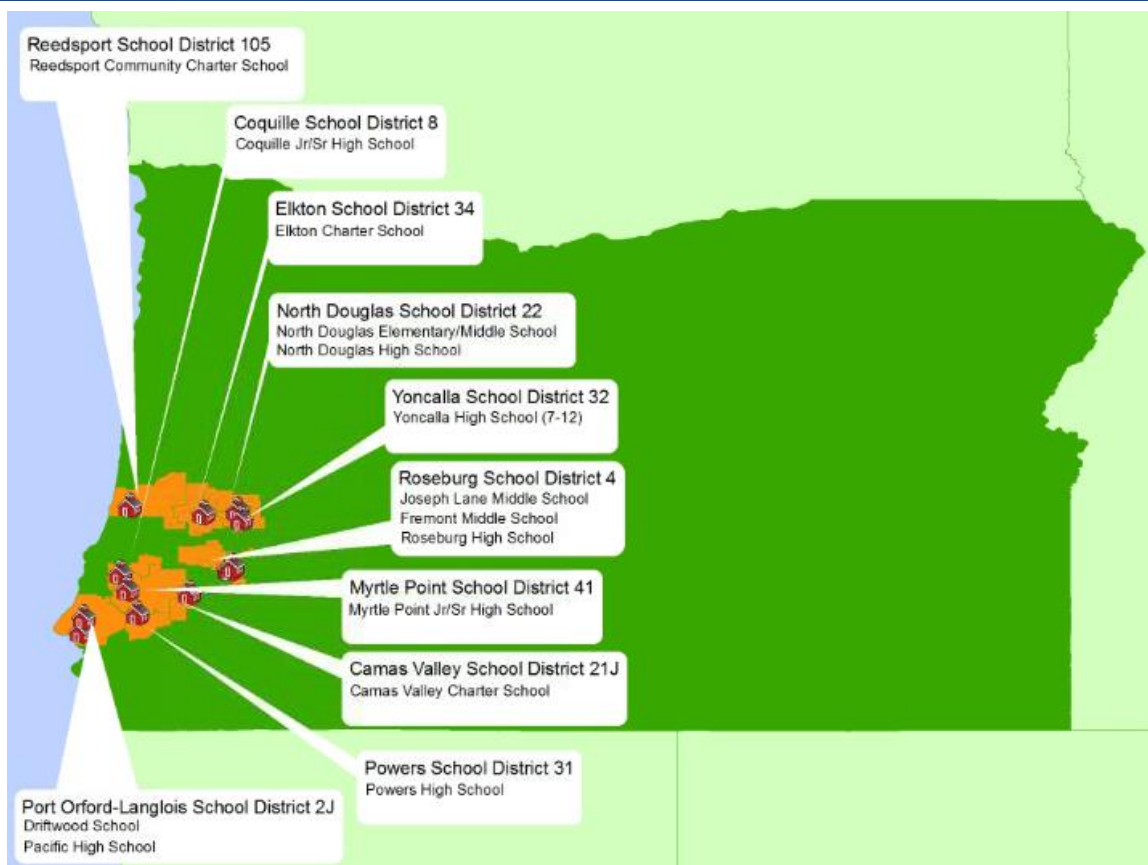
- High staff turnover and difficulties attracting and retaining high quality/specialized teachers (Goodpaster, Adedokun, and Weaver, 2012; Monk, 2007);
- Attendance issues and chronic absenteeism, sometimes associated with transportation challenges (Balfanz and Byrnes, 2012);
- High cost of bringing in resources (such as speakers and professional development), sending staff to other areas for training, and exposing students to out-of-school experiences (Markow, and Cooper, 2008; Weitzenkamp, Howe, Steckelberg, and Radcliffe, 2003; Rude and Brewer, 2003);
- Declining school enrollment, which results in under-resourced schools (Schwartzbeck, 2003);
- Limited availability of advanced courses and electives due to limited staffing in small schools and/or staffing without the needed credentials (Gagnon, & Mattingly, 2015; Graham, 2009); and
- Local cultures that have historically undervalued postsecondary education and/or are unfamiliar with college selection, application, and financing processes (Provasnik et al., 2007; Cunningham, Erisman, and Looney, 2008).

However, it is also important to recognize existing assets in rural communities, which may include smaller school size, close-knit communities, greater role of schools as a community hub, stronger relationships among students and between students and adults in the school, more opportunities for individualized attention, and a greater sense of belonging (NASBE, 2016; Jimerson, 2006; Freeman, Hughes, & Anderman, 2001). GEAR UP is designed to strengthen schools' capacity to prepare students for careers and college and can capitalize on these important assets while helping schools overcome some of the barriers that low-income rural students may experience.

The Oregon GEAR UP TFFF Communities

In 2015–16, supported by funding from TFFF, Oregon GEAR UP worked in 14 middle and high schools in 10 rural communities in Douglas, Coos and Curry counties (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Oregon GEAR UP TFFF Districts and Schools



Poverty and unemployment are very high in these communities, often the result of declining economies in areas where traditional industries once flourished. As shown in Table 1, the poverty rate in 2014 was 21% across all 10 communities, ranging from a low of 13% in North Douglas to a high of 34% in Camas Valley. The average across all of these communities was higher than the state (17%) and national (16%) averages. Poverty rates among children were even higher—31% across all 10 communities and as high as 61% in Port Orford—compared to 22% both statewide and across the nation. Unemployment follows a similar pattern. These communities also lag in terms of educational achievement, with only 27% of adults residing in these areas holding an Associate, Bachelor, or higher degree, compared to 38% in Oregon and 37% nationwide. GEAR UP’s goal of promoting higher educational achievement in these communities could help reduce poverty and unemployment rates and contribute to community revitalization.

When I was growing up we had 4 mills in just a 5-mile radius and now we have one, and so we’ve seen a lot of students move away. When I was in high school, our enrollment was about 120 or 130 and we had about 32 or 34 kids in a class and now we’re down to 11 with the juniors... And poverty is obviously a bigger issue now than it ever was... it affects a lot more kids in a lot more drastic ways now.

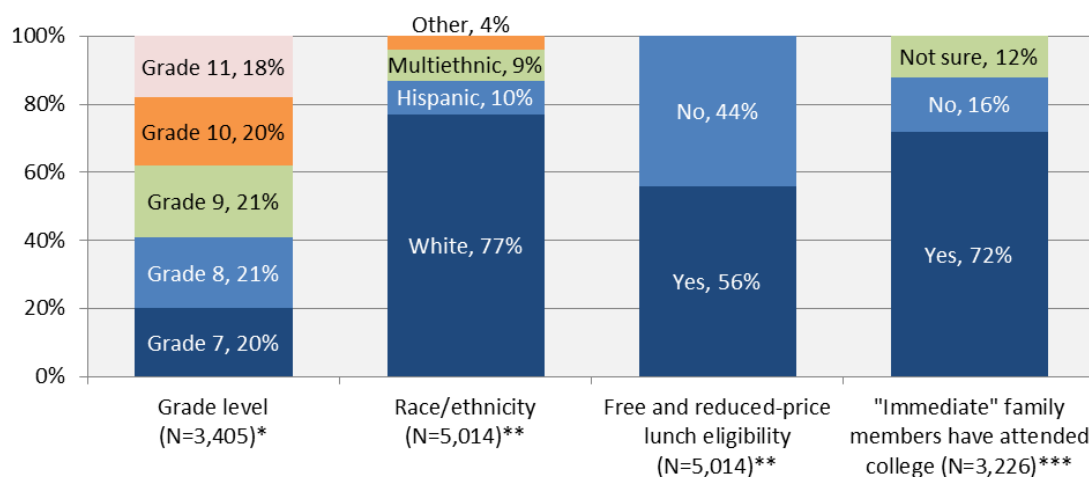
GEAR UP Teacher

Table 1: Ford Community Statistics

Ford Communities	Key Statistics			
	% of individuals living in poverty	% of children living in poverty	Unemployment rate	% of adults aged 25+ with 2-year+ college degree
Camas Valley	34%	48%	20%	18%
Coquille	14%	12%	13%	26%
Elkton	22%	43%	17%	20%
Myrtle Point	15%	14%	12%	21%
North Douglas (Drain)	13%	15%	23%	9%
Port Orford	32%	61%	11%	30%
Powers	31%	44%	18%	17%
Reedsport	25%	35%	17%	22%
Roseburg	21%	32%	14%	31%
Yoncalla	23%	39%	9%	10%
Ford Communities	21%	31%	15%	27%
Oregon	17%	22%	11%	38%
United States	16%	22%	9%	37%

Source: 2014 American Community Survey

In 2015–16, the fifth year of the grant, Oregon GEAR UP schools served over 3,700 students enrolled in grades 7 through 11 in 14 middle and high schools. Slightly over three-quarters (77%) of the students in the GEAR UP schools identify themselves as White, 10% are Hispanic or Latino, 9% are multiethnic/multiracial, and 4% identified with other racial groups/ethnicities. Over half (56%) of students come from low-income backgrounds, as measured by eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL). Of surveyed students, about 16% reported that none of their “immediate” family members (i.e., parents/guardians or siblings) have attended college and another 12% are not sure. (It should be noted that this survey question is vastly under-reporting the number of first-generation students, defined as having parents who have not achieved a bachelor’s degree). Figure 2 shows these data.

Figure 2: Student Characteristics

Source: Oregon Department of Education and 2015–16 student surveys

*Based on grades 7-11 enrollment; **Based on total school enrollment; ***Based on 2015–16 self-reported student survey findings

The Oregon GEAR UP Model: Response to the Need

After extensive research and data gathering, Oregon GEAR UP developed an evidence-based framework to help participating schools prepare their students for postsecondary education. The framework—which has been revised over time—relies on five research-based principles, titled the 5 “R”s, which include: **Reaching Higher, Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and Raising Awareness** (see description in Figure 3). These principles serve as a comprehensive framework for the project’s benchmarks; strategies, activities and programming; and assessment and evaluation.

Figure 3: Oregon GEAR UP’s 5 Rs and Definitions

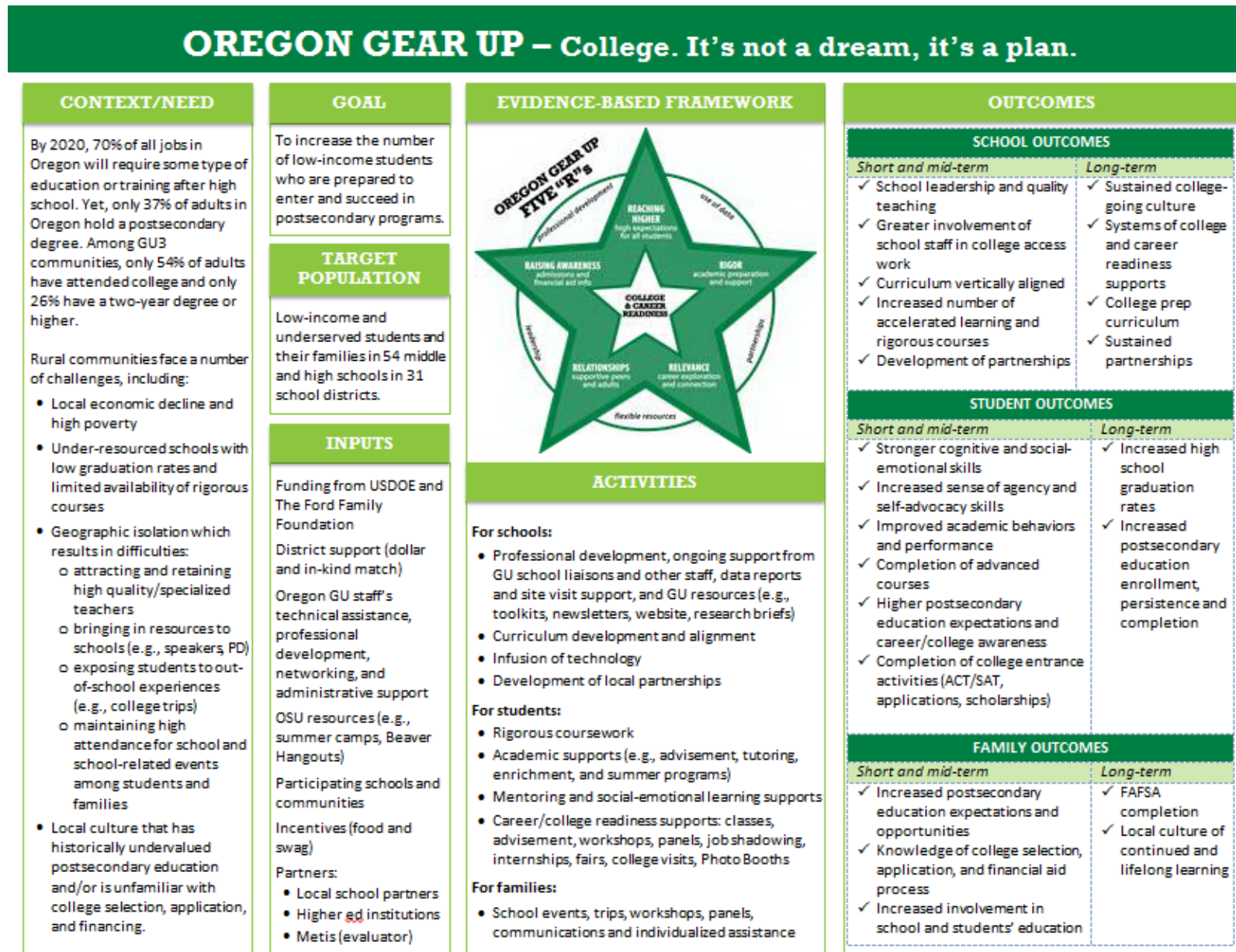
Reaching Higher	• Create a school environment, policies, and teacher expectations that support all students’ pursuit of a postsecondary education
Rigor	• Academically prepare all students for postsecondary education through rigorous curriculum and necessary academic support
Relevance	• Link students’ career aspirations with their educational goals
Relationships	• Foster relationships that encourage students’ academic success
Raising Awareness	• Promote early awareness of college preparation, selection, admissions, financial aid and other critical steps for college entry

The Oregon GEAR UP model also includes five key strategies 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 professional development** of educators and school staff on the latest research and strategies related to college and career readiness.

Each year, Oregon GEAR UP schools are provided with a budget and asked to create and implement a **GEAR UP school plan** that meets the needs of their school. The plan—which is reviewed and approved by Oregon GEAR UP staff—must include strategies, activities, and supports that build school capacity in each “R.” A GEAR UP school-based team, headed by a GEAR UP coordinator (often a teacher or administrator), oversees the implementation of the plan. In addition, Oregon GEAR UP provides a number of **centralized resources to all schools**, which include professional development resources, summer programming for selected students (e.g., leadership camps), individualized support from school liaisons (who are part of the central Oregon GEAR UP team), toolkits, research briefs, weekly bulletins, and cluster reports with survey findings. In addition, Oregon GEAR UP convenes participating schools multiple times a year—for example through a kickoff meeting, regional meetings, and a statewide SUCCESS retreat in the spring—for schools to network, plan, and advance their learning through professional development and sharing of best practices.

Schools also have access to **Oregon GEAR UP’s statewide initiatives**, including Oregon Goes to College, which provides important information and materials (e.g., welcome kits, checklists, planning resources) and organizes events, including College Application Week, College Cash Campaign, and Decision Day. The logic model in Figure 4 provides a visual depiction of the project’s context, goals, target population, inputs/resources, framework, activities, and outcomes.

Figure 4: Oregon GEAR UP Logic Model

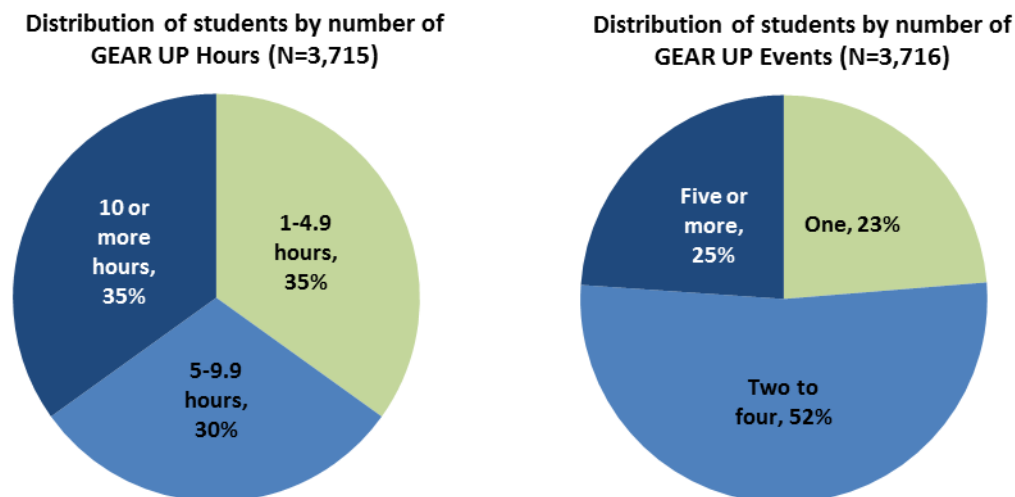


III. Oregon GEAR UP Participation

In 2015–16, the fifth year of the grant, Oregon GEAR UP schools served students enrolled in grades 7 through 11 in 14 middle and high schools. GEAR UP schools implemented a wide range of activities, interventions, and supports that addressed each of the key goals of the Oregon GEAR UP framework. Results from GEAR UP participation data show that:

- **GEAR UP has a strong presence at the schools** and is reaching almost all, if not all, students enrolled in the target grades. Specifically, in 2015–16, 3,716 GEAR UP students in grades 7 through 11 participated in one or more GEAR UP events; thus exceeding the number of students enrolled in October in the target grades (N=3,405). This is likely due to the fact that the participation database captures participation for students who enrolled in the schools after October and this is a highly mobile/transient population.
- **On average, students participated in over 20 hours of GEAR UP programming over the school year** (approximately two hours per month). Results show large variation across clusters with the average number of hours per student ranging from a low of 6 hours in one cluster to a high of 144 hours in another cluster. This variation is in part due to the fact that some schools had GEAR UP-funded classes (e.g., college/career classes, tutorials, dual credit or advanced courses, etc.), which were very time-intensive, while other schools may have focused more of their resources in systemic improvements and enhancements such as professional development and technology integration.
- As shown in Figure 5, almost two-thirds (65%) of the students participated in 5 or more hours of programming. Over three-quarters took part in at least two GEAR UP events, including **25% who participated in five or more events**.

Figure 5: Student Participation in GEAR UP Activities



Source: ECST participation data

Year 5 GEAR UP participation data were also disaggregated by type of activity. Table 2 shows the detailed findings. It should be noted that these data represent events that have been funded through GEAR UP. Students could have participated in similar activities but not captured in this table if the activities were not funded through GEAR UP or provided as a match. Key findings are discussed next.

- **Eight of every ten GEAR UP students participated in academic, career, and college planning/advisement, for an average of 6 hours per student.** This included: college and career fairs, guest speaker events, workshops, and FAFSA and college nights.
- Almost one-fourth of all students took part in a **GEAR UP club or class focused on college and career readiness**, for an average of 6 hours per participating student.
- Approximately two of every ten GEAR UP students participated in **student-led and/or leadership activities**, which included: leadership conferences, the Student Leadership summer camp, Link Crew, and student-led conferences. And a similar percentage (20%) participated in one or more college visits.
- **Rigorous academic curricula** (which included AP courses and college credit classes) was the most intense GEAR UP activity, with 9% of students participating for an average of 65 hours per student. **Academic supports** (e.g., tutorials, homework assistance, enrichment activities) were the next most intense activity, with 11% of the students participating for an average of 27 hours per student.
- In Year 5, **883 parents² participated in 57 GEAR UP events**, including: college visits, awards ceremonies, open houses, high school transitional activities, and FAFSA nights and college nights). And approximately **634 community² members participated in 80 GEAR UP events**, which included: mentoring, guest speaker events, career fairs, tutoring, pride night, field trips, and community events.

Table 2: Student Participation by GEAR UP Activity Type

Activity Type	Total Number of Students Participating	Percentage of Students Participating	Average Number of Hours Per Student
Academic, career, and college planning	2,958	80%	5.9
GEAR UP club or class	888	24%	6.2
Student leadership activities	767	21%	8.2
College visits	726	20%	7.6
Tutoring, homework assistance, and academic enrichment	408	11%	26.9
Rigorous academic curricula	338	9%	64.5
Educational field trips	321	9%	9.1
Workshops	316	9%	5.3
Family and cultural events	274	7%	3.1
Job site visits and job shadowing	255	7%	4.1
Mentoring	244	7%	4.5
College entrance/placement test prep	167	4%	5.6

Source: ECST participation data

² Participation figures for parents and community members may include duplicate counts since data were collected at the event level and not the individual level.

IV. Promising Practices and Outcomes by “R”

This section presents key findings on promising practices (as reported by principals, coordinators, and educators) and outcomes for each of the “Rs” in the Oregon GEAR UP Model: Reaching Higher, Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and Raising Awareness. Table 3 provides a synthesis of key findings and is followed by an in-depth discussion of these results. Other findings—including results related to sustainability, the use of data, and the role of central GEAR UP supports—are discussed in section V.

Table 3: Key Findings by “R”

Component	Successes	Challenges
Reaching Higher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promising practices: college décor and displays of student accomplishments, alumni events, student-led conferences, and college visits Student, parent, and teacher expectations have risen over time Correlation between participation in GEAR UP-related activities and positive perceptions about college affordability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expectations are lower among educators, than among students and parents The cost of college is one of the most prevalent perceived barriers for students, and can negatively impact their postsecondary education expectations
Rigor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promising practices: curriculum alignment efforts, professional development, technology integration, and academic supports such as afterschool programs Small gains in students’ academic performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small declines in school attendance
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promising practices: career classes, alumni career fairs, and hands-on work-related experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many educators think schools should offer additional career exploration opportunities
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educators support for and involvement in college and career readiness efforts has increased significantly Students rely primarily on parents and teachers for college-related support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family involvement in school activities continues to be a challenge in many schools
Raising awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promising practices: college visits, FAFSA nights for families, College Application Week Correlation between participation in GEAR UP-related activities and knowledge of college entrance requirements and cost of college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most students and parents do not know what the actual cost of college is (and often overestimate it)

Building a college-going culture (Reaching Higher)

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. Oregon GEAR UP TFFF communities have implemented a wide range of activities to promote high expectations among students, teachers, and families, including: college and career décor, college visits, career and college fairs, college days, family events, and professional development for staff around promoting high expectations.

REACHING
HIGHER

Evaluation findings indicate that GEAR UP has played an instrumental role in promoting a college-going culture in participating schools, and many schools are reporting positive results in this area.

In interviews and surveys, school staff—including school administrators, GEAR UP coordinators, and educators—indicated they have observed noticeable gains in students’ and educators’ attitudes towards postsecondary education. Furthermore, although GEAR UP was only implemented in grades 7 through 11 in 2015–16, GEAR UP coordinators and administrators reported that students in non-GEAR UP grades (e.g., sixth graders in middle schools and seniors in high schools) are also benefitting from GEAR UP and the school-wide college-going culture it promotes. When asked about GEAR UP’s impact in this area, one of the coordinators highlighted their higher college enrollment rate as an accomplishment of having GEAR UP in the school,

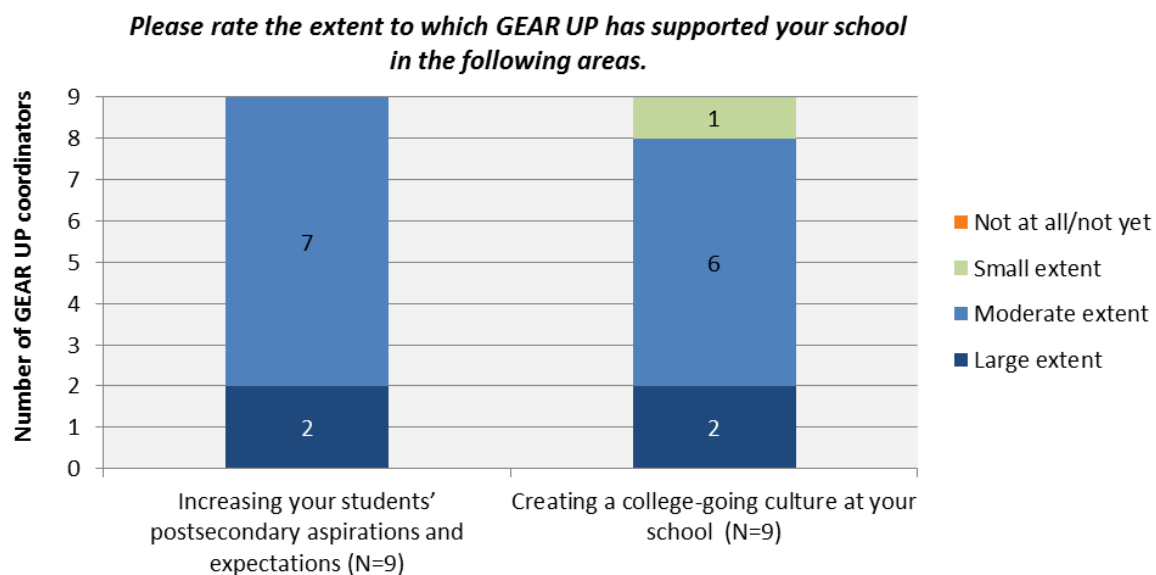
The “college-going culture” is something that’s difficult to quantify, but it is here. It is still developing, but the feeling that students have about going to college is much different than it was five years ago.

GEAR UP Coordinator

In relation to the college-going culture, our current senior class has approximately 80% already enrolled in some form of post-secondary education. Numbers are great, but the names attached to those numbers are what I think are most impressive. This is not an overly talented or motivated class, so to have those kinds of numbers is an accomplishment for our school and our GEAR UP program.

In fact, all nine GEAR UP coordinators who completed a survey indicated that GEAR UP has supported their school in increasing their students’ postsecondary aspirations and expectations to a *moderate* or *large* extent. All but one also reported that GEAR UP has supported their school in creating a college-going culture to a *moderate* or *large* extent (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Perceived Impact of GEAR UP on Reaching Higher



Source: 2015–16 GEAR UP coordinator survey

REACHING
HIGHER

Interviewed staff, students, and parents say that college décor and displays of student accomplishments, alumni events, student-led conferences, and college visits are among the most effective strategies in promoting high expectations.

During site visits, school staff, students, and parents were asked to identify specific activities or strategies that they found most effective in raising expectations and creating a college-going culture. The following promising and effective practices were identified:

- **College and career décor and displays of students’ achievements.** Since the beginning of the grant, schools have become more deliberate in creating visual displays about postsecondary education, including the posting of GEAR UP messaging, college banners, college door wars, teachers’ alma maters, and students’ postsecondary plans. Students may be highly involved in these activities, for example by designing the visual displays, conducting research, and/or interviewing the educators. This influx of visual cues helped raise early awareness of GEAR UP and the importance of postsecondary education throughout the schools. For example, when asked to reflect on the first time she learned about GEAR UP, a high school junior said “I learned about GEAR UP since 6th grade...we’d see their signs and other stuff all over our school, so I knew it was a pretty big deal going on.”

As another example, in Year 5, one of the schools asked eighth-grade students to prepare posters of themselves highlighting their interests, hobbies, skills, and postsecondary plans. According to staff, “that’s one of the neatest things that we’ve picked up ...the shock of going by and saying, ‘Wow I had no idea that kid was interested in that!’ And I love looking at the 7th graders going by and saying, ‘I want one of those!’, so that’s another thing that we’ve implemented that has been effective.” These posters are then shared with the school community and families, and can become important conversation-starters. Schools have also started prominently showing the colleges that seniors have been accepted to around the school, as well as pictures of all their high school graduates. According to staff, this has been very effective in creating an environment where students’ accomplishments are recognized, celebrated, and encouraged.

- **Alumni events.** Schools have been using school alumni in career fairs and/or guest speaker events “to show the possibilities” of what students can achieve and for students to hear about alumni’s college experiences and career choices. According to staff, hearing from individuals who came from the same community, attended the same school, and are often closer in age to the students themselves, has had a huge impact on the students, making their goals seem more achievable, and expanding their horizons. One principal explained, “The career fair was really powerful. It helped them [students] with a vision, like ‘I can go do that and I can come back if I want, but I need to do something else besides this.’” Parents agreed, stating that “having them [alumni] come down even if it’s just for one afternoon [has been very successful]... and these kids know them, they went to school with them, they live in the neighborhood with them, and they’ll listen to them. And when they tell them the reality of what it’s like when you get into college, they’ll listen to them instead of us old people saying, you need to go to college.”

The mindset [in our school] is ‘We are rural, we don’t really have very much. What are we going to do after? There’s nothing for us when we graduate.’ And I think the alumni career fair showed that...wow, these people attended school here and some of them are presidents in companies, and we have doctors, nurses, state policemen—I mean there’s tons. Anything is possible. I think that’s what the career fair showed, that whatever you want to do, you can achieve it.

GEAR UP Educator

- **Student-led conferences.** Many schools have been implementing student-led conferences, during which students discuss their goals and future plans in front of their teacher and parents. According to staff and parents, these conferences have been very effective in:
 - ✓ generating conversations around students’ post-secondary plans (in school and at home),
 - ✓ identifying the steps students need to take to achieve their goals (e.g., what courses they should take, what postsecondary education options and colleges may be a good fit), and
 - ✓ bringing parents into the school, and encouraging their involvement and support for their students’ goals.

As one educator explained,

“I want to hear what the kids have to say, and I want to see the looks on the parents’ faces when they’re going...’I had no idea you wanted to do that’ and it’s like ‘Yeah, listen. That’s what they want to do.’ And then we get to go, ‘Oh, you want to be a doctor ...you’ve got to make some choices because if you want to be a doctor, you’re going to have to take lots of math and lots of science.’ And that way we can start matching them up with their goals.”

- **College visits.** There was unanimous agreement among educators, students, and parents that college visits have been one of the most successful strategies to help students develop a college-going identity and envision themselves as college students. As one principal explained, “So this year, they have visited U of O, OSU, and OIT, and some community colleges to give kids a flavor, to plant the seed early. Because it’s one thing to talk about college and it’s another thing to be on a college campus. And we found that to be really effective. It really motivated the kids.” In the interviews, many students recalled attending specific college visits and several have made decisions about programs and colleges they are planning to attend as a result of these visits.

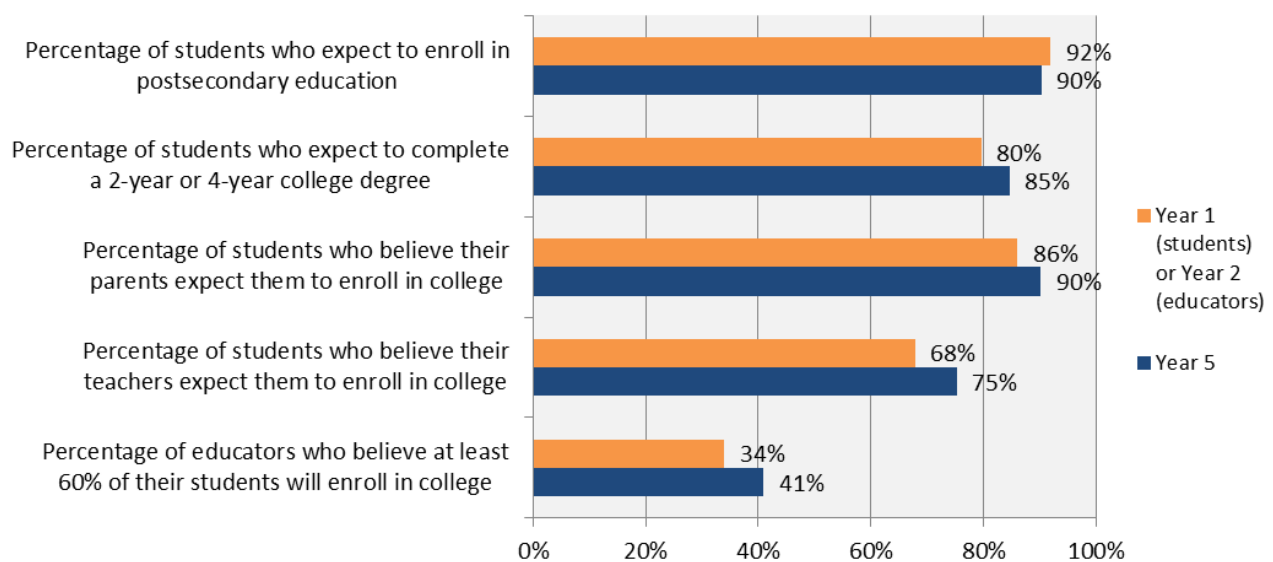
**REACHING
HIGHER**

Student expectations of college degree attainment have risen over time, and more students indicate their teachers and parents think they will pursue a college education. Furthermore, although educator expectations remain lower than those of students and parents, they also seem to have increased over time.

As shown in Figure 7 below, the proportion of students in GEAR UP schools who reported that they will obtain a 2-year or 4-year college degree has steadily increased from 80% in Year 1 to 85% in Year 5; yet, the proportion of students who indicate they will pursue any postsecondary education option (including 1-year trade school degrees or certificates) has slightly decreased from 92% in Year 1 to 90% in Year 5. Student perceptions of their parents’ expectations were very high at the start of the grant, and yet have slightly improved over time. Specifically, the proportion of students who think their parents expect them to go to college increased from 86% in Year 1 to 90% in Year 5.

Results also indicate gains in teachers’ expectations, according to students and educators alike. As shown in Figure 7, the percentage of students who think their teachers expect them to go to college increased from 68% in Year 1 to 75% in Year 5 and the percentage of educators who reported that at least 60% of their students will enroll in college also increased from 34% in Year 2 to 41% in Year 5. However, educators’ expectations remain considerably lower than those of students and parents. In 2015–16, educators who completed the survey reported that they expected 48% of their students (average across teachers) to enroll in college, a stark contrast to the 94% of students who indicated they will enroll. To address this disconnect, Oregon GEAR UP has created a number of resources that are available to schools, including professional development materials for school staff to discuss and raise educator expectations, and research briefs highlighting best practices in this area. In addition, several school teams have shared survey data with their entire staff to begin discussions around these expectations.

Figure 7: Changes in Postsecondary Expectations (School-Wide Survey Analyses)



Sources: 2011–12 student survey (N=3,022), 2015–16 student survey (N=3,232), 2012–13 educator survey (N=168), and 2015–16 educator survey (N=242)

**REACHING
HIGHER**

Evaluation findings suggest that GEAR UP has been successful in raising expectations among students with no family exposure to college and students in the academic middle or under-performing group.

Longitudinal survey results show that students with no family exposure to college³ and students in the middle and under-performing groups typically experienced greater gains than their peers.

- The percentage of students with no family exposure to college who expect to complete a 2-year or 4-year college degree increased from 71.4% in Year 1 to 75.8% in Year 5 (6.2% increase). Similarly, a higher proportion of students in this group indicated that their teachers and their parents expect them to enroll in college in Year 5 than in Year 1 (13.2% increase and 8% increase, respectively).
- Middle-performing students (who self-reported earning mostly “Bs” and “Cs”) experienced moderate gains in their expectations to complete a 2-year or 4-year college degree (7.8% increase), and in their belief that their teachers and parents expect them to go to college (15.5% and 5.5% increase, respectively). Changes were much larger for the under-performing group (who self-reported earning mostly “Ds” or lower).

Table 4: Changes in Postsecondary Expectations, by Subgroup (School-Wide Surveys)

Survey Item	Student Group ⁴	Year 1 (2011–12)	Year 5 (2015–16)	Percentage Change Difference
Percentage of students who expect to complete a 2-year or 4-year college degree	Middle school students	80.6%	87.3%	8.3
	High school students	79.3%	83.3%	5.0
	Students with no family exposure to college	71.4%	75.8%	6.2
	High-performing students	93.2%	94.2%	1.1
	Middle-performing students	74.1%	79.9%	7.8
	Under-performing students	46.6%	59.4%	27.5
Percentage of students who indicate their teachers expect them to enroll in college	Middle school students	70.0%	76.2%	8.9
	High school students	67.1%	74.7%	11.3
	Students with no family exposure to college	57.6%	65.2%	13.2
	High-performing students	87.1%	86.4%	-0.8
	Middle-performing students	59.9%	69.2%	15.5
	Under-performing students	26.1%	49.9%	91.2
Percentage of students who indicate their parents expect them to enroll in college	Middle school students	86.6%	90.5%	4.5
	High school students	85.9%	90.1%	4.9
	Students with no family exposure to college	77.5%	83.7%	8.0
	High-performing students	95.6%	95.8%	0.2
	Middle-performing students	82.9%	87.1%	5.1
	Under-performing students	48.4%	79.2%	63.6

Source: 2011–12 student survey (N=3,022) and 2015–16 student survey (N=3,232)

³ This term refers to students who indicated in surveys that their “immediate” family members (i.e., parents/guardians and siblings) have not attended college.

⁴ Year 1 student subgroups: middle school (N=833), high school (N=2,189), students with no family exposure to college (N=659), high-performing (N=975), middle-performing (N=1,845), and low-performing (N=93)
 Year 5 student subgroups: middle school (N=1,168), high school (N=2,064), students with no family exposure to college (N=529), high-performing (N=1,678), middle-performing (N=1,063), and low-performing (N=406)

REACHING
HIGHER

Although expectations for postsecondary education were quite high, there are a number of perceived barriers that may prevent students from achieving their postsecondary goals. The cost of college is the most prevalent reason among students and parents, and one of the top three reasons cited by educators.

The top three reasons students think they may not pursue postsecondary education are: the cost of college (33%), grades or test scores not being good enough (19%), and not needing college to be successful in their chosen career (14%). Among surveyed parents, the most common concerns were: cost of college (15%), lack of motivation or indecisiveness (9%), and grades or test scores not being good enough (7%). And according to educators, the top reasons include: planning or needing to work (33%), students believing they do not need college to be successful in their chosen career (30%), and the cost of college (18%).

Table 5: Reasons Students May Not Continue their Education Beyond High School

Main Reasons	Students (N=3,108)	Parents (N=776)	Educators (N=220)
Does not apply - definitely plans to continue education	34%	67%	N/A
Plans or needs to work	13%	3%	33%
Grades or test scores are not good enough	19%	7%	9%
Student does not believe they need college to be successful in chosen career	14%	2%	30%
Wants to start a family (or needs to take care of family)	6%	0%	0%
Costs too much	33%	15%	18%
Student is unmotivated or undecided	N/A	9%	N/A
College is too far from home	3%	N/A	1%
Wants to stay close to family	5%	1%	1%
Wants to join the military service	10%	4%	2%
Some other reason	5%	4%	6%

Source: 2015–16 student, parent, and educator surveys

Notes: Top 3 responses from each group (students, parents, educators) are bolded and shaded; N/A indicates this response category was not available; Respondents could select all categories that applied, therefore percentages may add up to more than 100%.

Qualitative findings revealed that majority of parents—regardless of their education or income level—were supportive of the idea of their children going to college or getting postsecondary training or a certificate. Several interviewed parents, who had never attended college and were only making ends meet, viewed postsecondary education as an opportunity for their children to “get ahead,” and not “get stuck” in traditional, low-paying industries. However, while generally supportive, many parents expressed concerns about the cost of college and students dropping out before completing a degree. One parent commented, “I don’t have any worries about them going to college. I have more worries about them staying here.” And one student explained, “I think all moms are a little worried about cost, but my mom said that if I’m serious about it and really want to do it, then go for it. So we’re just worried about the money issue. I’d have to pay for my own books, get my own dental equipment, but... at the end, it’d be worth it.”

My fear is the motivation factor. Yeah, she has plans and direction, but is she going to stay motivated to do what she has intended to do as her major? Will she accomplish it? And can I afford to make that dream happen?

GEAR UP Parent

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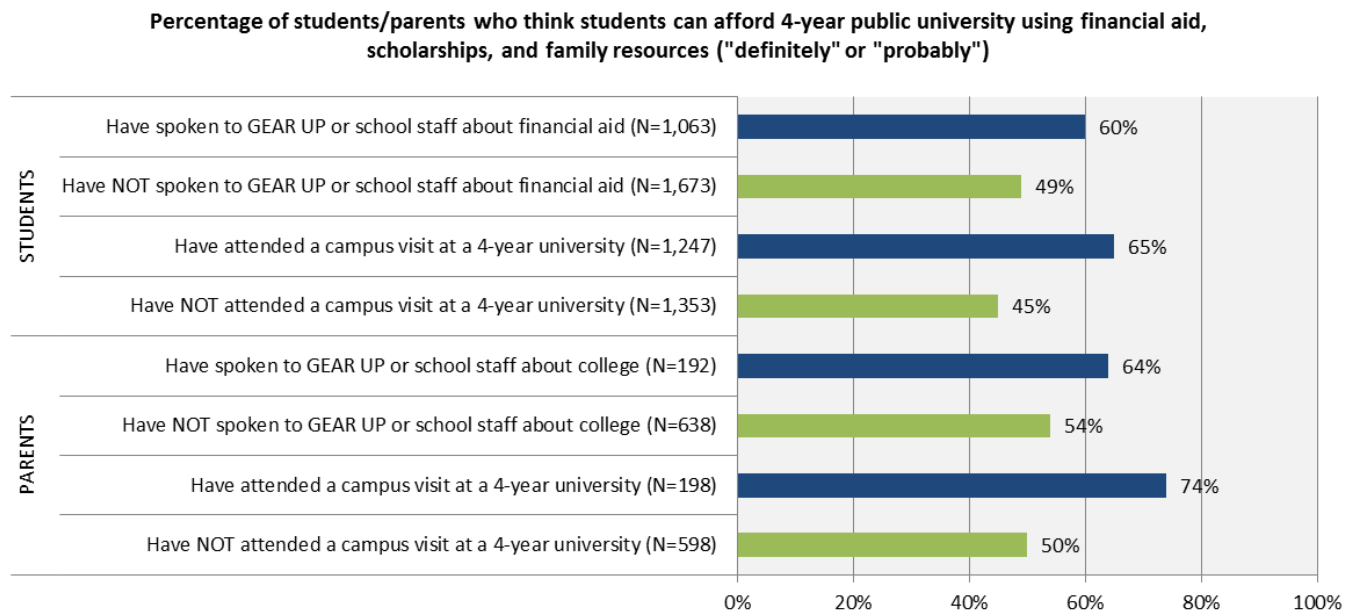
Findings suggest that GEAR UP is helping to alleviate some of the concerns that students and families have about attending college, particularly around college affordability.

Furthermore, survey findings revealed a correlation between participation in GEAR UP-related activities and positive perceptions about college affordability. For example, students and parents who have discussed financial aid availability with GEAR UP or school staff are more likely to report that they think they can afford a 4-year public university than those who have not (61% compared to 50% among students, and 64% compared to 54% among parents). And differences in perceptions of college affordability were even larger between students and parents who have attended a college visit and those who have not. During the site visits, interviewed parents highlighted the college and FAFSA nights as particularly helpful for them to understand the availability of financial aid and scholarships to help pay for college. Figure 8 presents the detailed findings.

I think a lot of parents are afraid to go into debt, to invest in something that may not be beneficial, at least in the short term, for their children. I think the cost is really prohibitive for a lot of people, so I think emphasizing the financial aid, the opportunities that are out there, really helps parents overcome that concern.

GEAR UP Parent

Figure 8: Perceptions of College Affordability and Participation in College Readiness Activities



Source: 2015–16 student and parent surveys

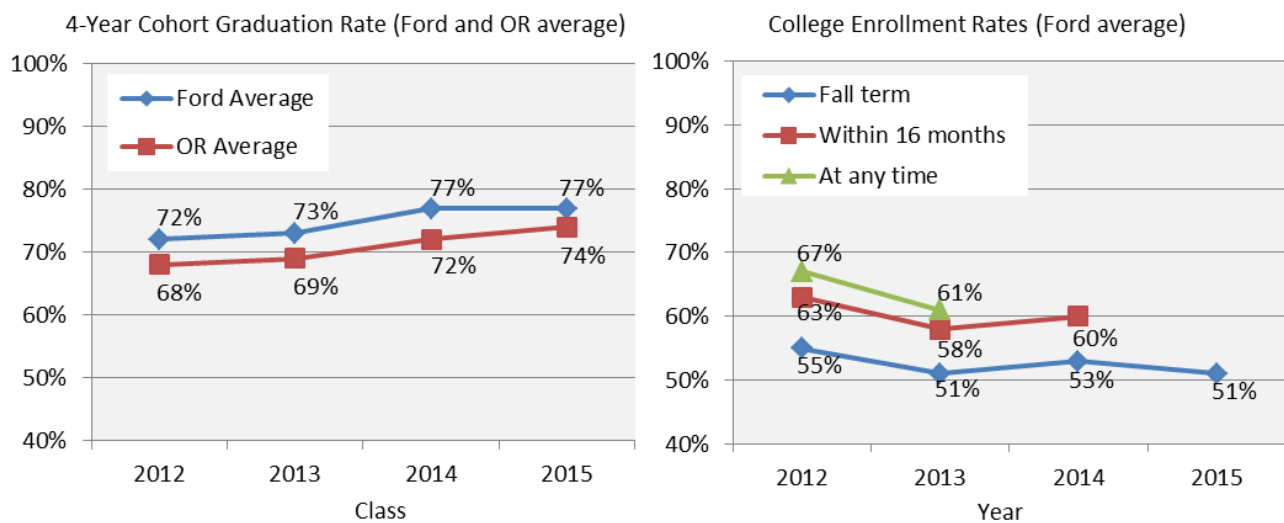
REACHING
HIGHER

Preliminary high school graduation and college enrollment data show upward trends in high school graduation and small declines in fall college enrollment.

High school graduation data from the Oregon Department of Education and college enrollment data from the National Student Clearinghouse are collected each year for participating schools. At the time this report was written, data on students who attended target schools in 2015–16 were not yet available; results for this past year will be reported in an addendum. As shown in Figure 9, there seems to be an upward trend in 4-year high school graduation rates (from 72% in 2011–12 to 77% in 2014–15).

Fall college enrollment rates, however, have declined slightly over the same period of time. This mirrors nation-wide declining trends (i.e., undergraduate college enrollment decreased by 4 percent between 2010 and 2014⁵) and; may be due—in part—to the fact that students who may not have graduated from high school before (and are now achieving this important milestone) may not be as prepared to enroll in college. Furthermore, as GEAR UP moves into the 11th grade (in 2015–16) and 12th grade (2016–17), we may see more positive trends in college enrollment. In Year 6, the evaluation will include in-depth analyses of high school graduation and college enrollment data; data will be disaggregated by key variables (e.g., academic performance, race/ethnicity, gender) to better understand trends for specific subgroups of students. To the extent possible, outcomes for GEAR UP students will be compared to those of similar students attending similar non-GEAR UP schools.

Figure 9: 4-Year High School Graduation Trends



Source: Oregon Department of Education

Note: “Anytime college enrollment” is naturally inversely related to the passage of time. Also, it is too soon to report college enrollment rates “at any time” for 2014 and 2015, as well as enrollment “within 16 months” for 2015, therefore these numbers were not included in the graph.

⁵ Available at: http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cha.asp

Increasing academic preparation for postsecondary education (Rigor)

A central goal of Oregon GEAR UP is to prepare students academically for postsecondary education. To achieve this goal, schools have engaged in a number of efforts including: curriculum alignment, implementation/expansion of rigorous curricula, technology, afterschool tutoring, academic enrichment opportunities, and professional development for staff. Although schools have some flexibility in devising the interventions that best meet their needs, there were a number of common initiatives that schools implemented in 2015–16 with GEAR UP funding, described below. It should be noted that schools may be implementing similar activities on their own (without funding from GEAR UP); however, only GEAR UP-funded activities are included in the descriptions below.

- **Curriculum alignment.** In summer 2016, 25 middle and high school teachers from eight of the ten GEAR UP TFFF clusters participated in a four-day Summer Institute on secondary to postsecondary curriculum alignment. Facilitated by Education Northwest, the Summer Institute was a professional development opportunity for middle and high school teachers to focus on critical student learning challenges in the Common Core State Standards through collaboration with writing and math faculty from 2-year and 4-year colleges across the state. Participants examined and developed instructional solutions to improve the college readiness of students.
- **Academic courses and supports.** In 2015–16, schools used GEAR UP funding to implement a wide range of academic interventions and supports to improve students’ cognitive and non-cognitive skills and academic performance. Sample activities from the 2015–16 GEAR UP school plans include: tutorial classes, labs, and study skills curricula (5 clusters); dual credit, online college courses, and advanced placement courses (4 clusters); tutoring and homework help (3 clusters); technology, including software for advanced technology classes, materials for robotics classes, CIS and CIS Jr., Chromebooks, tablets, and Kindle readers (4 clusters); middle school and high school reading strategies classes (2 clusters); middle school and high school math interventions, such as foundations class, professional development and support from math coaches (3 clusters); and other professional development, e.g., proficiency-based grading, writing across the curriculum, increasing rigor of existing courses (3 clusters).
- **Growth mindset training.** As of October 2016, five GEAR UP TFFF clusters have participated in professional learning focused on growth mindset and social and emotional learning (SEL); and others are scheduled to participate in Year 6. Single and two-part workshops included: Introduction to Mindset and SEL; Translating Mindset and SEL into Practice; Engaging Families through Mindset and SEL; and Mindset CAFE Conversation. During the workshops, which were typically 4 hours long, participants engaged in a variety of processes and activities including design thinking, partner talk and small group discussions, reflection, challenges, media exploration, games, and purposeful planning. A total of 102 participants received training.
- **Poverty training.** From April 2015 through October 2016, educators from seven GEAR UP clusters (one of them in the TFFF cohort) received professional development on the impact of poverty on student learning. Held at a community center, the training for the TFFF cluster was six hours long and was attended by 30 educators and community members. This professional development opportunity was designed to establish a common language among staff and examine practices, policies and procedures for creating an equitable school environment that engages students and families living in poverty. Participants engaged in self-reflective activities that examined their own biases, views, and worldview. Discussion topics included: the realities of living in poverty in the United States (including different kinds of poverty) and how our country responds to people who are struggling; what people in poverty learn from their experiences and how it impacts student learning; the deficit (and highly ineffective) approach towards helping people in poverty that perpetuates inequity, yet is deeply ingrained in our society; and, tools for educating students and connecting with families.

RIGOR

Five of the six clusters with available, complete data experienced an increase in the proportion of high school students taking dual credit courses from 2011-12 to 2014-15.

Community college dual credit data were obtained and analyzed by Education Northwest for the period from 2011-12 to 2014-15. Because of small numbers, data were suppressed for four of the ten Ford school districts (for one or more of these years). Results show that the proportion of high school students taking at least one dual credit course increased from 2011-12 to 2014-15 in five of the six clusters with available and complete data, including: Coquille (from 13% to 16%), Myrtle Point (from 5% to 14%), North Douglas (from 33% to 71%), Port Orford (from 18% to 20%), and Yoncalla (from 11% to 16%). In Roseburg, the proportion of students taking at least one dual credit course slightly declined from 14% to 13%.

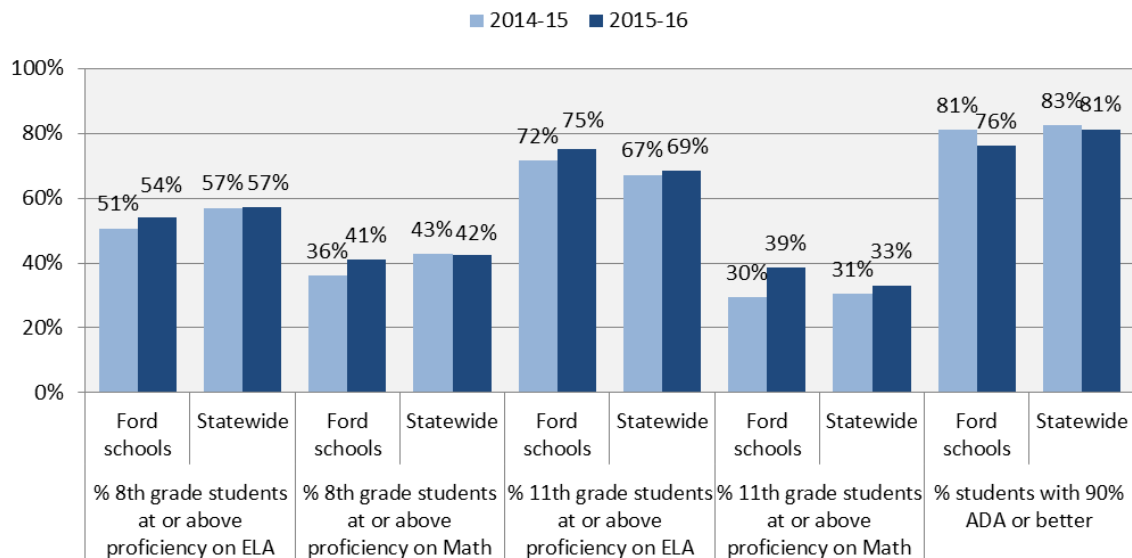
RIGOR

GEAR UP schools have shown gains in students’ overall academic performance in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics; gains were often larger than statewide increases.

Aggregate student academic achievement and attendance data were collected from ODE for each school in the GEAR UP cohort. Results shown in Figure 10 indicate that eighth-grade and eleventh-grade students’ academic performance on the state assessments improved from 2014–15 to 2015–16; school-wide attendance seem to decline over this same period of time.

- From spring 2015 to spring 2016, the percentage of eighth-grade students scoring proficient or above increased from 51% to 54% in ELA and 36% to 41% in mathematics; in comparison, statewide percentages remained constant in ELA and slightly decreased in mathematics.
- Over the same period of time, the percentage of eleventh-grade students scoring proficient or above increased from 72% to 75% in ELA and 30% to 39% in mathematics; statewide percentages also increased in both subjects, but the increase in statewide math proficiency was smaller than the increase in GEAR UP schools.
- The percentage of students with 90% attendance or better decreased from 81% in 2014–15 to 76% in 2015–16. Average daily attendance (ADA) also declined statewide, but to a smaller extent.

Figure 10: Academic Performance and School Attendance Results



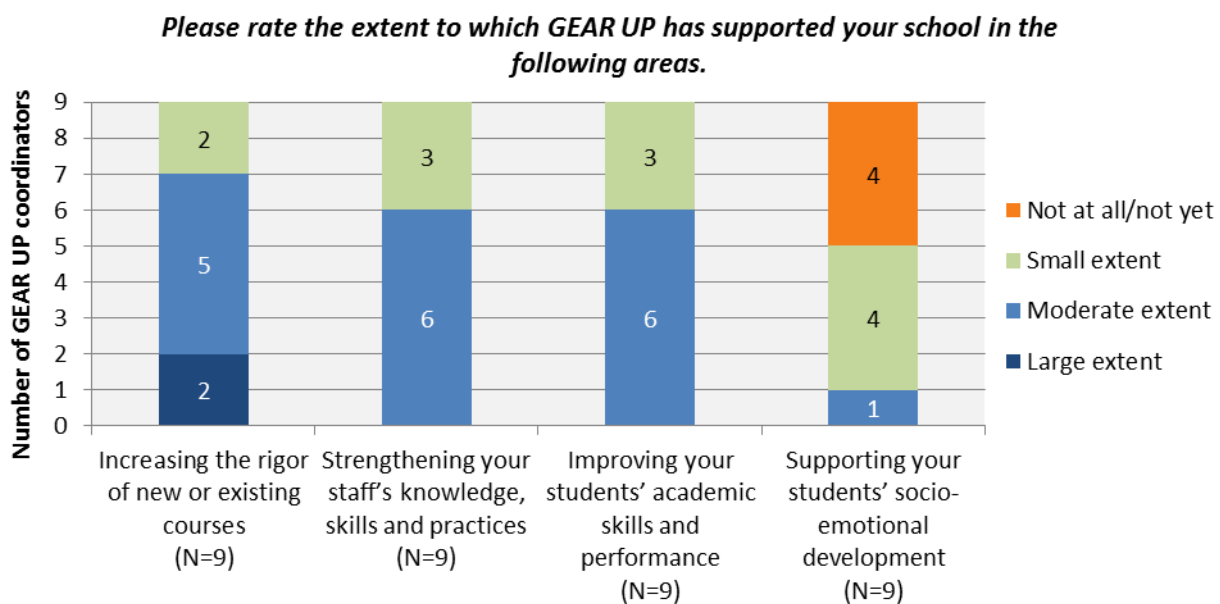
Source: Oregon Department of Education

RIGOR

Overall, GEAR UP coordinators and administrators are satisfied with the role that GEAR UP has played in helping schools increase the rigor of their classes, through curriculum alignment efforts, professional development activities, and the addition of new classes.

As shown in Figure 11, seven of the nine GEAR UP coordinators indicated that GEAR UP has supported their school in increasing the rigor of existing and new courses to a *moderate* or *large extent* (with the remaining two indicating to *some extent*). All of them reported a *small* to *moderate* role of GEAR UP in strengthening their staff’s knowledge, skills, and practices, and improving students’ academic skills and performance. A smaller number of coordinators reported that GEAR UP has also helped their school support students’ socio-emotional development.

Figure 11: Perceived Impact of GEAR UP on Rigor



Source: 2015–16 GEAR UP coordinator survey

During one of the site visits, the principal spoke highly of the curriculum alignment efforts that GEAR UP has funded, which started three years ago with math in grades 7-12. As described by the principal, “So we really have been looking at our data. When I first came [and GEAR UP started], our math scores were not spectacular so we made a really conscientious effort to do some vertical aligning 6-12 with math because I only really had 2 teachers, and then we did some PD, so we sent them to conferences, we sent them to school visits, to see what other people are doing, because really and truthfully, if you can’t do math, you can’t graduate from high school which means you can’t go to college, so we really bolstered that piece up.” The school is now focusing on vertically aligning the English courses from middle to high school.

I’ve seen our programs become better, especially our core programs, because of professional development. I think the overall achievement is getting better. We have one of the higher test scores. ... We have one of the higher graduation rates.

GEAR UP Principal

RIGOR

Professional development has been a key component of the GEAR UP model. Administrators were very appreciative of these opportunities; principals and teachers reported positive gains in educator practices and the overall rigor of instruction.

In 2015–16, educators in participating schools participated in numerous professional development opportunities, some specific to each school and others offered more centrally, such as a Summer Institute in curriculum alignment, poverty training by Lynda Coates and growth mindset training by Kendra Coates. Overall, educators expressed appreciation for these opportunities, with 90% of participants indicating they were *very helpful* (22%), *helpful* (42%) or *somewhat helpful* (25%). Principals also offered positive feedback, reporting that they have seen positive changes in educator practices and an increase in the rigor of instruction at their schools. Principals also reported that GEAR UP has helped offset the high cost of sending teachers out for professional development, explaining that “[With GEAR UP] we’ve done PD for our teachers because especially being in a rural area, when you do PD, it costs money. It’s not like you’re in Portland and you’re going to drive to Portland State to do a meeting with all your colleagues. A lot of times our closest PD is at minimum 55 miles away, so that costs money.”

RIGOR

With support from GEAR UP, schools are integrating technology into their classrooms and instruction; students and educators alike have noticed improvements in motivation and learning as a result.

Over three-quarters of surveyed teachers who reported receiving technology for the classroom (e.g., Chromebooks, iPads, CIS/CIS Jr, Odysseyware, etc.) through GEAR UP described it as *helpful* (35%) or *very helpful* (42%). In fact, of all the GEAR UP supports listed on the survey, technology was the highest rated. In focus groups, staff were also enthusiastic about the impact that technology is having on students. At one school, the coordinator explained, “A lot of our teachers are now doing the flipped classroom, so everything is on the tablets and the computers. Being able to have enough of those tablets per student [through GEAR UP] is miraculous because we do have students that ...can’t do anything at home because there’s no internet, no computer, so just giving them access to the equipment that they need is wonderful.” A principal at another school noted, “We’ve done technology. That’s been huge for us because I have teachers who want to do a flipped classroom model. So we’ve done things like a mobile tablet cart, we’ve bought tablets for teachers, we’ve sent them to technology conferences. We’ve bought apps, we’ve bought different things because I really want them to use it. For us, what’s been successful is when you let the teachers try it out and you have those people come and say, ‘Could we get some more of that?’”

RIGOR

Afterschool tutoring programs were singled out by students and parents as one of the most helpful academic supports implemented in the schools with the support of GEAR UP funding.

During site visits at two of the schools, principals and educators strongly agreed that the afterschool tutoring programs, which have been implemented through GEAR UP, are meeting a critical need in their schools. This type of support is particularly important for low-income students, who may not have the guidance they need at home to work on difficult material or assignments (e.g., from personal tutors or parents) and/or who may have other responsibilities afterschool (e.g., taking care of younger siblings, working part-time). In the focus groups, students agreed, with many of them discussing how they have benefited from these programs. One student explained, “Tutoring has been very helpful: It’s nice to be able to do that. When we didn’t have it, I fell behind a few times and it was really hard, but every Wednesday I can come in here and get help on things that I don’t understand. I think it’s really cool.”

Almost all interviewed parents at the two site visit schools agreed that the afterschool program has been one of the most helpful GEAR UP activities, by allowing their students to complete their homework consistently, “avoiding distractions at home,” getting additional help in subjects they are struggling with, and bringing their grades up. Parents, however, were worried that without GEAR UP paying for transportation once the grant ends, their students would not be able to attend. Principals at both schools, cognizant of the benefits of such programs, are committed to sustaining these programs and are looking for other funding mechanisms. One principal explained, “And then we did our afterschool tutoring program, which I think has been hugely successful, so when we get the new superintendent next year, my goal would be...how can I bring that into our school budget? What sort of grants can we get? What kind of community support can we get? And I think we’ll be able to do it with very little.”

The afterschool program is one of the best things they have incorporated here [with GEAR UP]. My son is now doing school work rather than leaving it in his backpack or not turning it in. The afterschool program gives him the extra time to build the focus on what has to be done, and there are also instructors so when he has questions he has someone who can help him. It’s made a huge difference in his grades.

GEAR UP Parent

Fostering career exploration and connections (Relevance)

The Oregon GEAR UP model also focuses on the importance of making learning relevant to students and linking students’ career aspirations with their educational goals. To do this, Oregon GEAR UP schools have implemented the following activities: career fairs, guest speaker events with professionals, worksite visits and work-based learning opportunities, internships, service-learning projects, and career classes and advisories. Many schools are also using Career Information system (CIS) or other software to engage students in career exploration activities and develop postsecondary plans as early as middle school. These activities typically encourage a better “fit” between students’ chosen postsecondary plans and education paths; thus leading to higher retention and completion of postsecondary education.

RELEVANCE

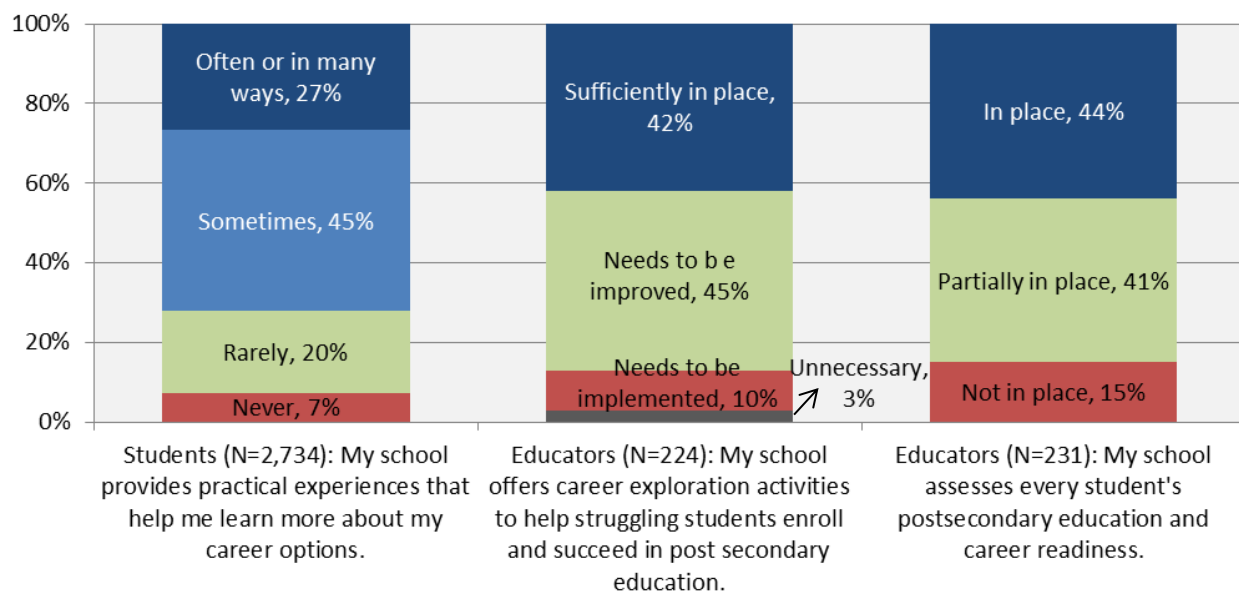
Career classes, career fairs, and work-related experiences were found to be particularly effective in helping students learn about careers that interest them; yet, results suggest students would benefit from more of these opportunities.

According to educators, building career classes into the students’ schedule has been a very effective strategy, allowing schools to ensure that all students participate in career exploration activities. Career fairs were also well received by students, who noted they were able to learn about interesting careers and careers they did not even know existed. Parents also provided examples of careers their children learned about that made a long-lasting impression on them. As one parent explained, “So my second, a boy, he actually went to last year’s career fair, and he decided he wanted to do an apprenticeship from the career fairs because he’s more of a hands-on. ...So from that career fair, he has been researching electrician and plumbing apprenticeships. ...My youngest through the career fair, I don’t know who he talked to, but he’s thinking petroleum engineer.” And, as noted earlier, using alumni in career fairs was seen by staff as an extremely beneficial strategy for broadening students’ horizons, “showing them what is possible,” and expanding their career choices.

Finally, although less frequently offered, hands-on career exploration activities—such as work-based learning activities, worksite visits, and internships—were also described as powerful experiences, and at times life-changing. One parent, for example, appreciated the fact that, after participating in a job shadowing activity, her son had decided that the career he had been interested in for a long time was not a good fit. She said, “Michael did a ride-a-long with a police officer for an afternoon. It was impressive enough to him that he realized that police work was not really what he wanted to do. So it let him know, ‘Hey this is great. It was fun. But this isn’t for me.’ So it saved him a lot of time. And it was a great experience for him, being able to meet somebody from a specific field and really get that inside information. I think that is probably the most impressive display from Careers that I have seen, impressing the boys’ minds because they actually get to see that inside perspective.”

In addition to expanding schools’ portfolio of career exploration activities, GEAR UP has supported the development of partnerships with local businesses, organizations and individuals, and institutions of higher education (as reported by eight of the nine GEAR UP coordinators completing a survey). These new partnerships have strengthened the schools’ capacity to expose students to various careers and professional fields and to better understand the steps they need to follow to achieve their postsecondary goals. These partnerships will also play a key role in helping schools sustain their efforts in this area and encourage local community participation and support of educational opportunity. However, results show that students may benefit from offering additional career exploration opportunities. As shown in Figure 12, almost three-fourths of surveyed students reported that their school provides practical experiences for them to learn more about career options *sometimes* or *often/in many ways*. However, over half (55%) of educators reported that their schools need to implement or improve upon these opportunities and about as many (56%) indicated that strategies to assess every student’s postsecondary education and career readiness are only partially in place or still need to be implemented.

Figure 12: Students’ and Educators’ Feedback on Career Exploration Efforts



Source: 2015–16 student and educator surveys

Building positive relationships in school communities (Relationships)

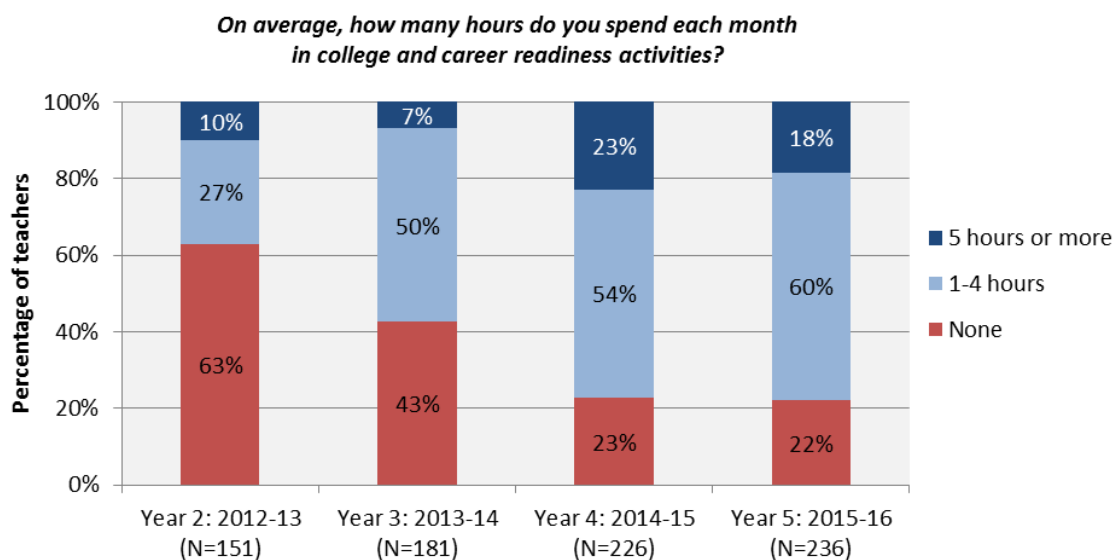
Under Relationships, the Oregon GEAR UP model seeks to foster relationships that encourage students’ academic success. To promote the creation of supportive environments, GEAR UP schools are focusing efforts on: 1) increasing teacher expectations and their involvement in college and career readiness activities; 2) providing student-focused activities—such as clubs and other organized groups—to encourage positive relationships and peer support; and 3) facilitating parent events and activities to foster stronger parental involvement in academic, career, and postsecondary planning efforts.

RELATIONSHIPS

Educator support and involvement in college and career readiness activities has significantly increased over time and students’ perceptions of educator expectations have improved.

As noted earlier, the percentage of students who indicated their teachers expect them to continue their education after high school has increased from 68% in Year 1 (2011–12) to 75% in Year 5 (2015–16); this increase was even greater among students with no family exposure to college as well as students in the middle or under-performing groups. Results also show that educator involvement in college and career readiness activities has expanded considerably over the course of the grant. For example, as shown in Figure 13, the percentage of educators who dedicate at least some time each month to these types of activities has increased from 37% in Year 2 (the first year the educators were surveyed) to 78% in Year 5. The percentage of educators who spend 5 or more hours also increased from 10% to 18% over the same period of time. During site visits, several students spoke very positively about their teachers’ involvement and provided examples of how they have helped them think about careers and college. One student said: “Mr. [name], our history teacher, he talks about college quite a bit because he wants us to get out of [town name] and go experience [new things]. He calls our high school years our first life, and then after it, he calls it our second life. It’s the real deal then.”

Figure 13: Educator Involvement in College and Career Readiness Activities



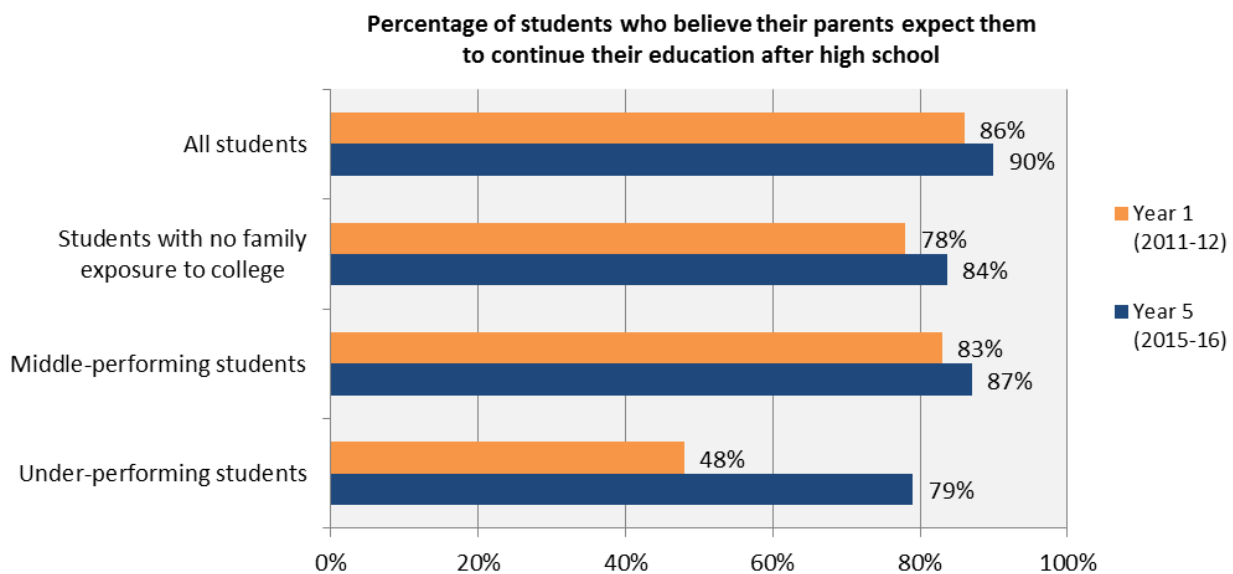
Source: 2012–13 through 2015–16 educator surveys

RELATIONSHIPS

Students’ perceptions of parental support are very positive and have improved over time. Furthermore, according to GEAR UP coordinators, with the support from GEAR UP, parent involvement in their children’s education has increased in many schools; however, family engagement in school activities continues to be a significant challenge.

Survey results indicate that there is strong parental support and encouragement, but their actual involvement in school activities remains a challenge for most schools. For example, the percentage of students who indicated their parents expect them to enroll in college has increased from 86% in Year 1 to 90% in Year 5 (and 98% of surveyed parents reported they have encouraged their students to go to college). In addition, in Year 5, most students reported that their parents/guardians encourage them to take classes that keep them on track for college and/or their career *often or in many ways* (55%) or *sometimes* (23%). Additional analyses also show that perceptions among students with no family exposure to college and students in the middle and lower-performing groups have improved more than those of their peers, as shown in Figure 14. For example, the percentage of lower-performing students who reported that their parents expect them to continue their education after high school increased by 65%, from 48% in Year 1 to 79% in Year 5.

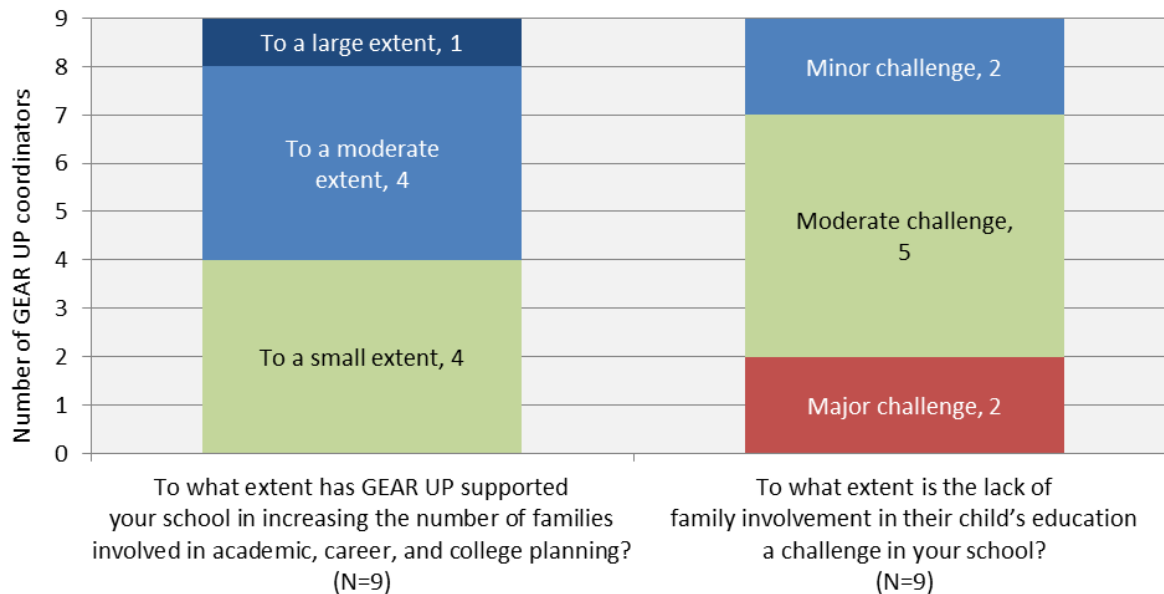
Figure 14: Student Perceptions of Parent Support (School-Wide Survey Analyses)



Source: 2011–12 surveys (N=3,022) and 2015–16 student surveys (N=3,232)

Furthermore, since the beginning of the grant, schools have seen some success in their efforts to promote greater family involvement in academic, career, and college planning efforts. Many schools, for example, have implemented or strengthened high school transition activities for students and families, and are now offering college and financial aid events for parents to attend. In addition, as described earlier, student-led conferences have been well attended and have encouraged families to begin conversations about postsecondary planning. In fact, all surveyed GEAR UP coordinators indicated that GEAR UP has helped their schools increase the number of families involved in academic, college, and career planning to some extent, including 55% of them who said this was done to a *moderate* or *large* extent. Yet, according to the coordinators, family involvement continues to be a challenge; for many, it constitutes a *moderate* (56%) to *major* challenge (22%).

Figure 15: Perceptions of Family Engagement



Source: 2015–16 GEAR UP coordinator survey

During site visits, principals and educators agreed that perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of their GEAR UP work has been involving families in school activities. Staff provided a number of reasons why they think parents are not involved, including: work conflicts, transportation issues, and resistance or weariness from some parents who may not have had positive high school experiences, themselves. One educator said, “That’s been the hardest... For us, what makes it hard, I think, is the isolation. We’re 7 miles from town. We send out mailers, we’ve done some senior and junior meetings, we’ve sent information home about colleges and scholarships and smarter balance testing and SAT... It’s just really hard. You just see the same parents over and over again and sometimes it’s not the ones who need the information the most.” Another staff member explained, “I think one of the problems with getting the parents here, and I’ve had one tell me this, is that they don’t feel comfortable here because they didn’t have a good experience when they were in high school and for some, it’s getting over that hurdle... It’s a very negative place for them to be and unfortunately a lot of them have passed that on to their kids.”

Parents were also asked to discuss their thoughts about the possible reasons behind their school’s low family engagement. Lack of time and lack of motivation were the two reasons parents cited as contributing factors. As one parent described, “I work so much that I don’t have the ability nor do I have the desire to sit there and rag my children. Their education is theirs and they have to take responsibility. If the children don’t find the importance in their education then it’s not going to matter what you do as a parent. They have to see their own value and what it’s feeding them and that they have a place that they can go to for help.” However, others disagreed and described how they stay involved in and aware of their children’s educational progress. As one parent noted, “I’m onto my daughter every day. That’s why she gets so mad at me. It’s probably too much, overprotective.”

There are a lot of families out there that are relying on the teachers to do everything. Too many of them, they drop their child off, and [expect teachers to] teach them everything, ...[but] you can’t do that. You have to be a part of it and a lot of these people either don’t want to or don’t have the time, the know-how.

GEAR UP Parent

When asked to provide suggestions to increase family engagement at their schools, parents said:

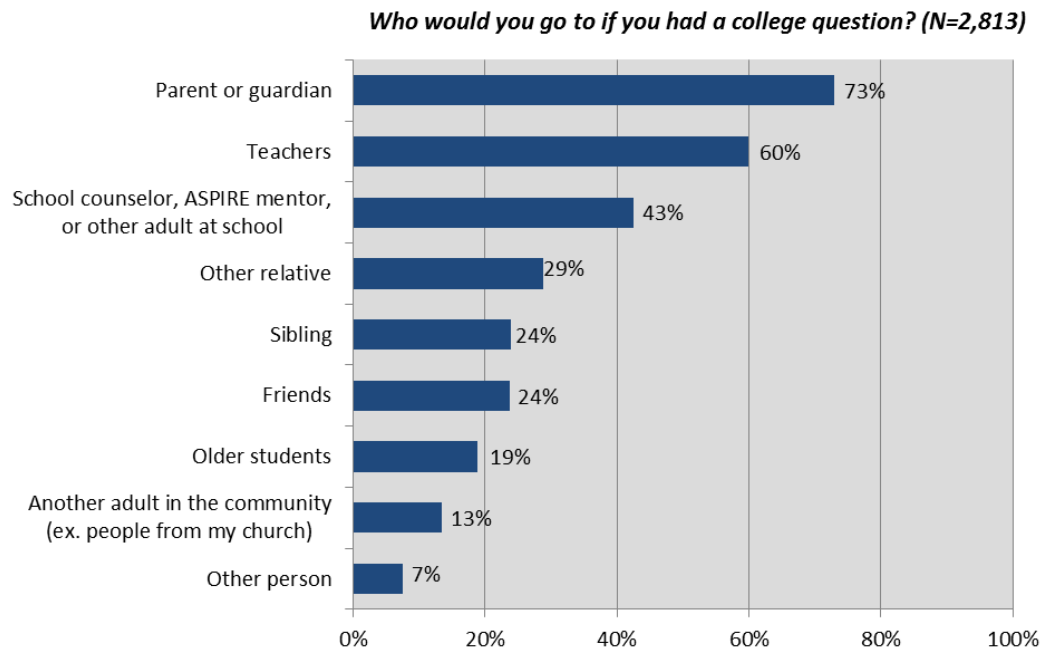
- Using sporting events to infuse the GEAR UP message. As one parent explained, “I noticed when the basketball game was here, you couldn’t find a seat in there. They were even sitting on the floor. Hey, half-time, let’s bring this up to the parents, and this is something that may be a good idea. That’s what one school did... They did it during the football intermission when everybody is sitting around waiting for the kids. They brought it up and said, we’re going to have a little conversation here other than football.”
- Use the students to raise awareness about GEAR UP among parents. “Having the kids go [to school and community events] and say what GEAR UP has done. So have the kids come and do presentations for us and explain the benefits like when they went to Ashland [a GEAR UP-funded field trip], it helps the community understand the benefit of it, what they got out of it, rather than just a flyer or something. They want to hear it from the kids.”
- Be more mindful in the wording used in parent communications. One parent said: “As a parent ...it’s all how you word something to get people to come in. For example, my kids were in Head Start and they would say it was a parenting class, and people don’t go because nobody wants to be told how to parent, so it’s just how you present it, too. So if you present something with the word Free, Free is a key word. ...or have a spaghetti night. Everybody likes that.” Another parent agreed stating that, “Sort of just like marketing it differently. If it’s presented as one more thing you have to do after work, then I’m not going to want to go. If it’s presented as fun, informational, something that’s going to benefit you in the long run...and free food...that always works.”
- Use mailings instead of having students hand fliers to parents, which many times they end up not doing.

RELATIONSHIPS

Students in GEAR UP schools feel generally supported by teachers, parents, and other students. “Close-knit” communities and the presence of caring adults in school were both seen as assets that are often present in small, rural communities.

As noted earlier, the large majority of students think their parents and teachers expect them to go to college. In surveys, students were also asked about their sources of support when it comes to college. As shown in Figure 16, the large majority of students reported they would go to their parents (73%) and/or their teachers (60%) if they had a question about college, and another 43% would also go to school counselors, ASPIRE mentors, or other adults in school. Students with no family exposure to college, however, are more likely to rely on teachers (61%) than parents (53%).

Figure 16: Students’ Sources of Support for College



Source: 2015–16 student survey

Note: Multiple responses accepted; therefore, percentages do not add up to 100%

Educators from both schools participating in site visits discussed the notion that a great asset in small rural schools is the presence of tight-knit communities, where educators—who are aware of students’ personal circumstances and struggles—can serve as a stable source of support, and where students “genuinely care about each other” and help each other through difficult times. Representative comments gathered from educators during site visits included:

“Because we’re a small community, everybody knows everybody’s business, but it helps the teachers, the staff to work with the students, knowing what their backgrounds are and some of the hurdles that they have to get over in order to make sure they get good grades, that they’re here in school every day.”

“I think the kids respect their teachers ... the kids here look up to their teachers because they see us as part of that together group of adults that are here, doing something for their future.”

“And students seem to genuinely care about each other. They all know each other. We’ve been pretty lucky with the bullying...there hasn’t been a whole lot. ... And I think that’s a big asset for our kids. They care about each other. So GEAR UP is focused on what’s their next step, what’s their next thing, so if they’re already caring, already comfortable with each other, it’s easier for them to make that next step and say, ‘I want to go to college,’ and not have everybody in the class laugh or say ‘Yeah, right.’ They’re going, ‘Well what college are you going to go to?’ or ‘Oh! I need to fill that paperwork out too, thanks for reminding me.’”

Providing information on postsecondary education and financial aid (Raising Awareness)

Research shows that low-income and first-generation students and their families often lack sufficient information on the necessary steps for college entry such as taking admissions exams, choosing the right college, submitting applications, and paying for their education, all of which strongly influence students' postsecondary enrollment outcomes (Schneider, 2003; Perna, 2004). To address this barrier, Oregon GEAR UP seeks to promote early awareness of postsecondary education preparation, selection, admissions and financial aid through a wide range of activities, such as college visits, college fairs, college and career classes, FAFSA and college family nights, and College Application Week, among many others.

RAISING AWARENESS

GEAR UP schools have implemented a wide range of college readiness activities that have resulted in increases in students' and families' knowledge of postsecondary education options. College visits were singled out as one of the most impactful, eye-opening experiences for students. FAFSA nights were particularly helpful to parents.

GEAR UP coordinators, principals, and educators indicated that GEAR UP has had 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. For example, all nine GEAR UP coordinators reported in the survey that GEAR UP has helped increase their students' knowledge of postsecondary options and financial aid to a *moderate* (22%) or *large extent* (78%). “Raising awareness” had the highest-rated GEAR UP impact in the survey. A coordinator explained, “Because of GEAR UP, more students are now aware of college opportunities and have seen college campuses, and the school has implemented weeks designated to help with scholarships and college applications. And students now have a career center available to them to sign up for standardized tests, do college research, and host talks with professionals and colleges.”

Qualitative feedback from site visits confirmed that GEAR UP is positively impacting students' and families' knowledge of postsecondary education and financing options, and helping them navigate the system of college and financial aid applications. Students spoke highly about the college visits, often identifying these as a turning point for them. College fit has also been a focus of many schools' GEAR UP work. As one principal said, “I don't think you should pick a college based on what you can pay for. And I don't want to send all my kids to a 2-year. I think when you go to your postsecondary, you need to go to a place that's starting to be more specialized, that will challenge you not only mentally but as a person. And so we've really been trying to push this notion of not only going to college but going to the best fit.” In fact, several students mentioned the notion of college fit when asked about their college visit experiences, reporting that being able to see college campuses first hand and hearing from college students in those campuses had influenced their decisions of where to go and what programs to seek.

“I'm going to Oregon State. With GEAR UP I got to see the campus and that really helped me figure out if that was where I really wanted to go. So GEAR UP allows you to get out. Normally, you wouldn't just pack up and take a trip to a college, but with GEAR UP, we get to ultimately visit a different college campus every year.”

In addition to college visits, workshops, and family events, GEAR UP coordinators and counselors have been able to provide individualized support to students exploring various postsecondary options, for example by setting up college tours for individual students with specific interests. One student explained,

“So I enjoyed when I took Careers, my sophomore year, she [the coordinator] made us do this activity where you compared colleges, so you would write colleges that you liked or had an interest in and then you would get online and look at tuition costs, what they offer, different programs, ... and figure out what you liked/didn’t like, so that was really helpful for me. I plan to go to Oregon State and major in equine studies, I want to be a horse trainer. ...Going to OSU and seeing their animal program, that was really cool. [The coordinator] personally set me up with a tour last year of their veterinary college and it was really awesome to get to see that personally, so that really helped me figure things out.”

FAFSA nights and College Application Week were identified by staff as some of the more helpful events that allow students and parents to go through a complicated and tedious process they may not be able or willing to complete on their own. By allowing former students to attend as well, staff noted, they are sending a strong message that the school really cares about them and is a place they can return to for help years after they have graduated. Educators from two different schools said,

“I think with the FAFSA night, one of the things I really like to see is that it’s an open event not just for high school seniors but kids who have graduated from here 2, 3, 4 years ago. I think that sends a really strong message to not just those kids but to the seniors that we’re going to be here for them even after high school.”

“Well, kids showed up ... because they understood the value of filling out the FAFSA, which ...is connected with senior projects and filling out the scholarships when we have the college application week. When we can get every kid in the senior class to fill out an application whether it’s a tech school or a community college or a 4-year college, they’re all getting that experience with an application and thinking about ‘Man, I really want to go to that school.’ Or ...‘This one is a long shot but I’m going to see if I can get in anyway’.”

Parents agreed, noting that FAFSA nights provided them with new information about scholarships and help navigating FAFSA, which they described as a complicated and often overwhelming process. Parents were also very appreciative of GEAR UP in general, indicating that it has really helped students view college as a real possibility. The following is an illustrative comment from a parent.

“I found the FAFSA night really helpful because it can be very confusing working through all the financial aid and scholarship applications and knowing what’s available. I didn’t realize there was so much financial aid out there for kids, so that was really helpful. And I think this program has been really good about reinforcing the idea that going to college is an option. I think for a lot of kids, they don’t think it’s an option, but this program helps them see that it is within their reach.”

One parent also appreciated GEAR UP for viewing the process of preparing for college as a “whole-family experience versus just the student doing it.” And, engaging parents in the process can also contribute to sustainability in the short-term by enhancing parents’ ability to support younger children who are not in the GEAR UP cohort.

I didn’t go to college. I graduated with a 2-month old, and I didn’t know about the FAFSA, about the Oregon Opportunity grant—so it’s been helpful having these people [GEAR UP coordinator and other school staff], just educating the parents as well, from the beginning of high school and saying, these are things you’re going to need to be prepared for and things you’re going to need to work with your kid on because it is a whole family experience versus just the student doing it.

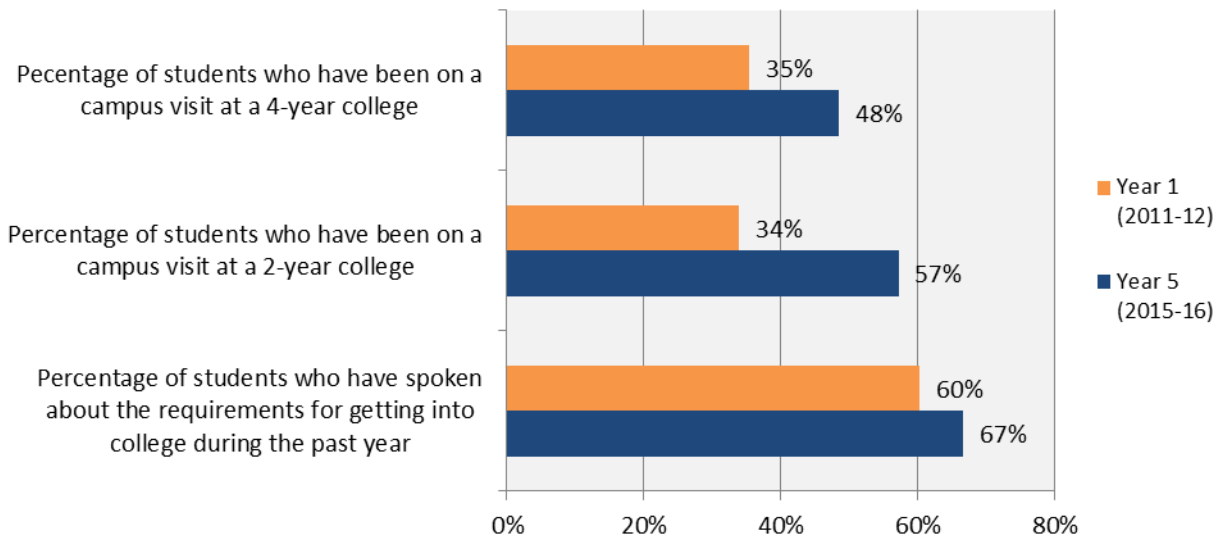
GEAR UP Parent

**RAISING
 AWARENESS**

There has been an increase in the number of students who have been on college campuses and have discussed college options with school staff; results also show a positive relationship between participation in these activities and students’ perceived knowledge of college entrance requirements.

An analysis of survey data shows that in Year 5 of the grant students were considerably more likely to report they have been on campus visits at 4-year or 2-year colleges and they have discussed college entrance requirements with adults in their schools, compared to students at the beginning of the grant. For example, as shown in Figure 17, the percentage of students in GEAR UP schools who have ever visited a 2-year college campus increased from 34% in Year 1 (2011–12) to 57% in Year 5 (2015–16).

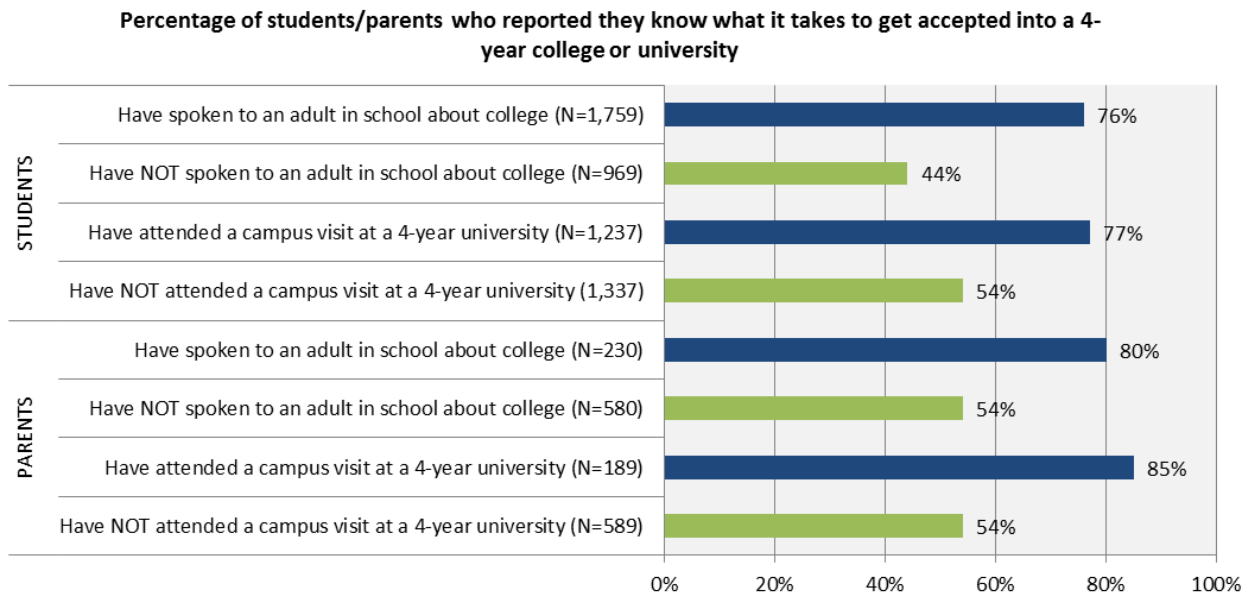
Figure 17: Student Participation in College Awareness Activities (School-Wide Survey Analyses)



Source: 2011–12 student surveys (N=3,022) and 2015–16 student surveys (N=3,232)

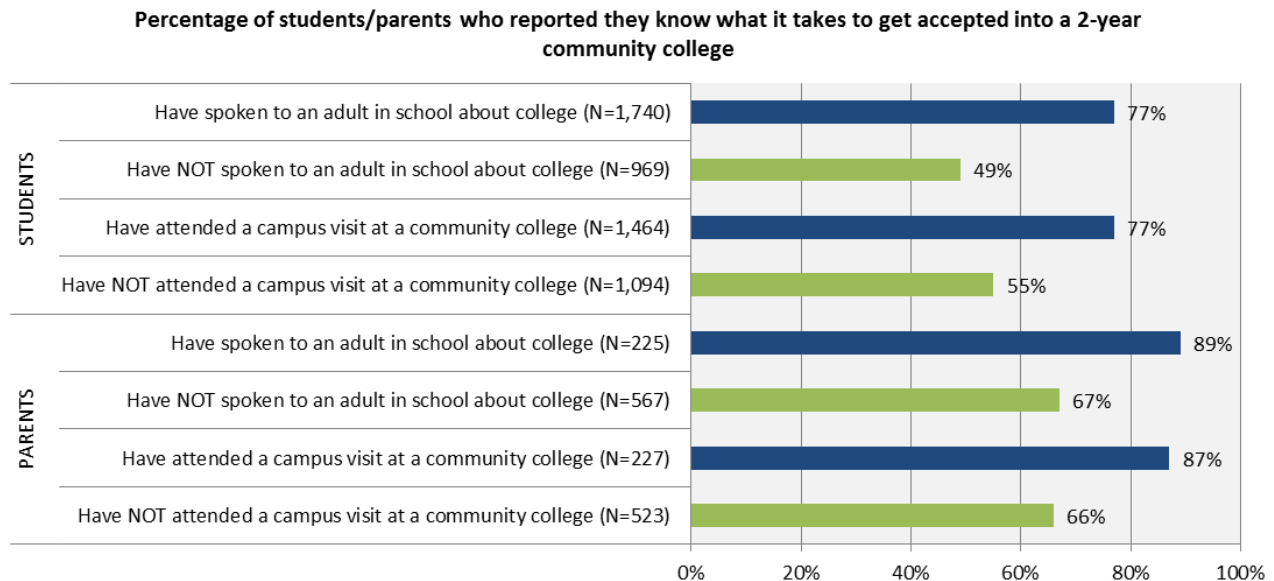
Overall, about two-thirds of students and parents indicated in surveys that they are aware of college entrance requirements for 4-year colleges and community colleges; fewer students and parents are aware of technical schools and certification programs. Additional analyses suggest that going on college visits and/or discussing college entrance requirements with a GEAR UP staff or other adult in school have resulted in students and families being more knowledgeable about what it takes to enroll in college. Figures 18 and 19 display these results.

Figure 18: Self-Reported Knowledge of 4-Year College Entrance Requirements



Source: 2015–16 student and parent surveys

Figure 19: Self-Reported Knowledge of 2-Year College Entrance Requirements



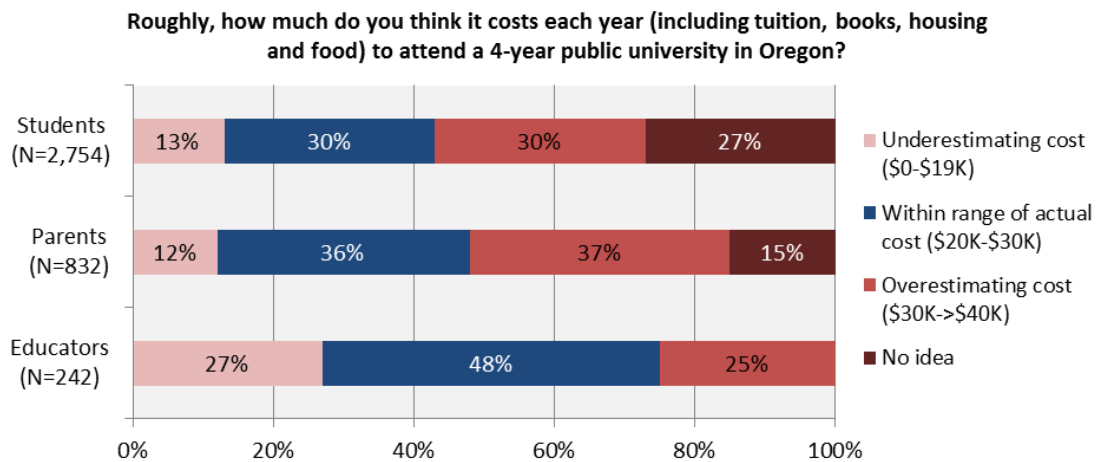
Source: 2015–16 student and parent surveys

RAISING
AWARENESS

Although a majority of students and parents do not know what the actual cost of college is (and often overestimate it), results suggest that GEAR UP is helping students and families learn in this area.

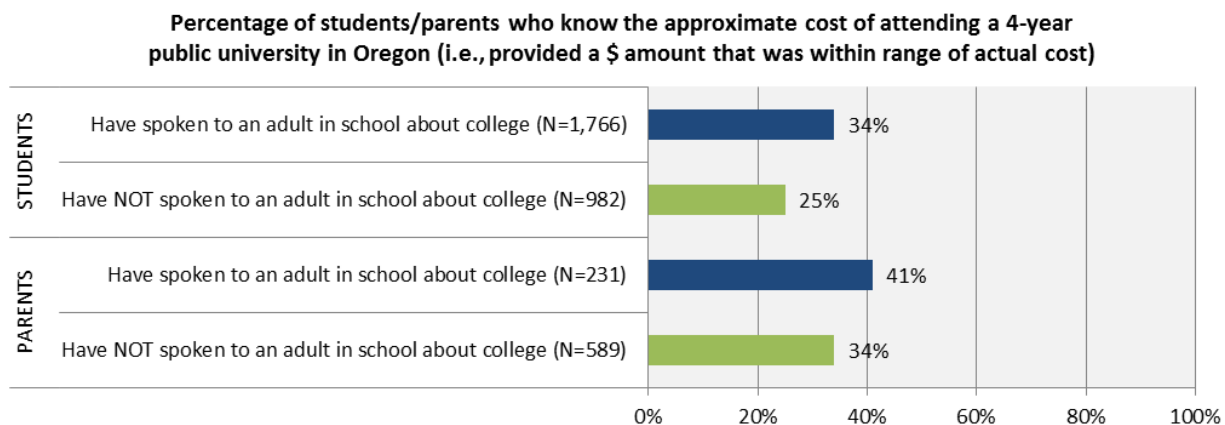
Students, parents, and educators were asked to report what they think it costs to attend a 4-year public university in Oregon. Their answers were re-coded into one of four categories: underestimating the cost, within range of the actual cost, overestimating the cost, and “I have no idea.” Results show that the majority of students (70%) and parents (64%) do not know how much college typically costs, and most of them are either overestimating the actual cost or “have no idea.” Interestingly, slightly more than half of the surveyed educators also do not know what the average cost is, with similar proportions underestimating or overestimating the cost. Figure 20 displays these results. However, as shown in Figure 21, students and parents who have spoken to someone in school about college were more likely to know the actual cost of college than those who have not spoken to someone in school, a good indication that GEAR UP—which promotes those types of discussions—can result in increased knowledge.

Figure 20: Knowledge of the Cost of College



Source: 2015–16 student, parent, and educator surveys

Figure 21: Relationship between Knowledge of the Cost of College and College Discussions



Source: 2015–16 student and parent surveys

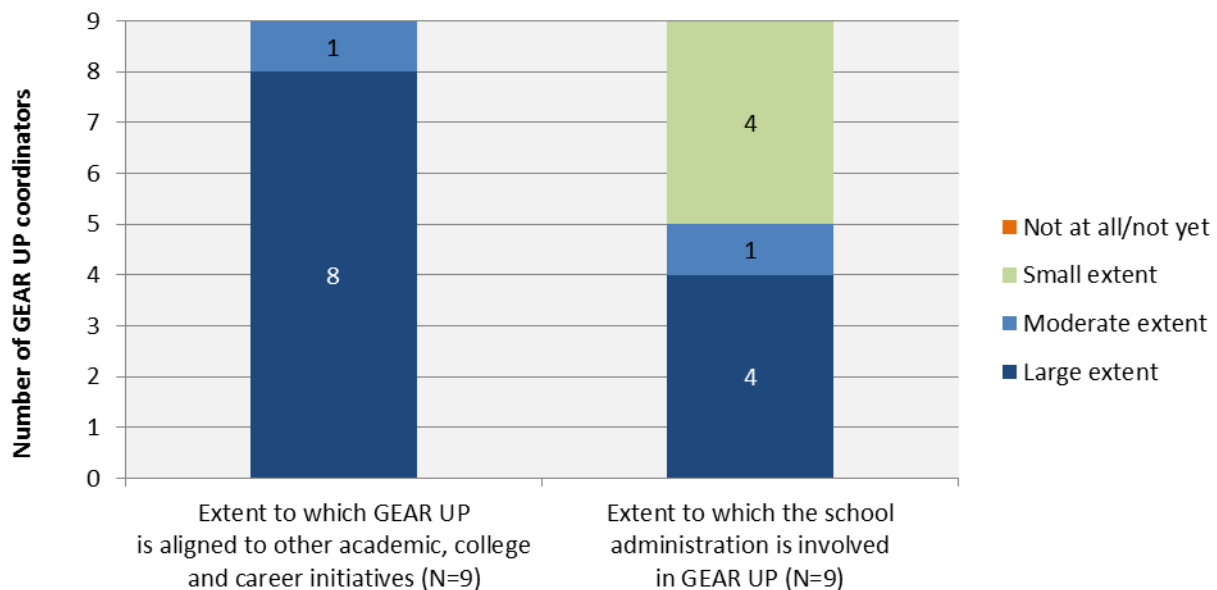
V. Additional Findings

TAKEAWAY

GEAR UP is well aligned to other academic, college and career-related efforts in the schools, a critical factor in promoting long-term sustainability. However, there was variation across schools in school administration and staff involvement, each of which may play a key role in sustaining the work.

Schools have made a concerted effort to integrate GEAR UP work in all facets of their everyday practices. All GEAR UP coordinators reported in Year 5 that GEAR UP has been aligned to other initiatives to a *moderate* (11%) or *large extent* (89%). At one cluster, the coordinator indicated that “we have taken the title of ‘GEAR UP School’ and use that title for any postsecondary activity or event we do.” School administration involvement, however, varied widely across schools, with some (44%) reporting very strong involvement and others (44%) reporting minimal involvement.

Figure 22: GEAR UP Alignment and Involvement of School Administration



Source: 2015–16 GEAR UP coordinator survey

In schools with minimal school administration involvement, the responsibility for promoting GEAR UP has fallen primarily on the coordinator, with support from other staff. Some coordinators did not feel they needed more involvement from school leaders, while others indicated they would benefit from a more involved administration, which they believed would generate greater staff buy-in. In interviews, principals praised the energy, commitment, and strong leadership qualities of their coordinators, noting these were key factors in the successful implementation of GEAR UP. For example, one principal explained,

“I think having an energetic and organized coordinator is crucial and [NAME] is all of that. She came on later. We tried different coordinators before and it did not work. They were on staff, they were teachers, and it did not work. She—because of her position and her flexibility of time and her nature and organization, and the fact that she knows people in the community and can make connections—that’s been super helpful. That’s super important.”

However, principals and coordinators also identified the strong reliance on these staff members as detrimental to staff buy-in and involvement and a potential barrier to sustainability. As one coordinator explained,

“I’m not a good delegator. I’m one of those people, it’s just easier for me to do it but that comes back to kick me because now I have staff members who think, ‘Well she will just take care of it. I don’t have to worry about it.’ If I made them all responsible for a piece of it, then I think they would talk more about it in the classroom.”

In fact, there was strong agreement among principals and coordinators that involving and relying on other school staff or a team/committee to implement GEAR UP activities is a promising practice that has led to stronger buy-in and to positive changes in school-wide practices and mindsets, all of which are likely to be sustained once the grant ends. Educator survey results show that, by Year 5, almost all (89%) of staff in the schools felt knowledgeable about GEAR UP; however, their involvement in GEAR UP activities varied considerably from school to school. For example, the percentage of educators who dedicate at least 1 hour or more each month to college and career readiness activities ranged from a low of 48% of staff at one school to 100% of the surveyed staff at two other schools. And the percentage of staff with 5 or more hours of involvement ranged from 0% in two schools to 44% in another school. Results also show strong, positive, statistically significant correlations between staff participation in college and career readiness activities (number of hours) and their self-reported knowledge of GEAR UP in general (Spearman’s rho of 0.530), the cost and benefits to their students of pursuing postsecondary education (Spearman’s rho of 0.314), and financial aid (Spearman’s rho of 0.291).

TAKEAWAY

Overall, schools are confident they will be able to sustain GEAR UP to varying extents and have made progress in this area. Sustainability will be a priority for the schools as they enter the final year of the grant.

GEAR UP coordinators in five of the nine clusters (56%) reported in Year 5 that their schools will be able to sustain most or all activities once the grant ends; the other four coordinators (44%) think they will be able to sustain a few key components. Some of the challenges they identified included: securing more funding to continue specific activities (4 respondents), keeping the momentum going (1 respondent), and lack of support in the community (1 respondent). When asked about their plans for sustainability, two of the three interviewed principals indicated that efforts are underway. For example, schools have been using many GEAR UP resources to fund aspects of the work that will remain in place once the grant ends without the need for additional funding, including curriculum alignment efforts, infusion of technology in the classroom, and professional development for teachers. In addition, successful GEAR UP activities—such as the afterschool programs and some field trips—will be sustained by including them in the school’s annual budget. As one principal confidently declared, “We’re planning on continuing a big chunk of this because it’s worked and honestly, if it didn’t work, I would just tell you. But it truly has worked and the culture [has changed].”

Five of the 10 GEAR UP clusters have also received sustainability grants, ranging from \$11,000 in one cluster to over \$50,000 in another cluster. These grants are funding diverse initiatives, including: a student-run store and concession equipment, a student-run radio station, a student-run coffee shop and college center, an electronic reader board for school announcements, and a revamped counseling and college/career office. Some of these projects will generate revenue for years to come so schools can continue to fund college and career readiness activities. As one principal described,

“For Ford schools, we can apply for a sustainability grant. Now some schools bought Reader Boards like at [NAME]. To me, we wanted something that was going to provide some funds to sustain us, so we purchased brand new concession equipment ...and [with the resulting funds] we’ve given kids money for uniforms, for camps, so it’s going to sustain the leadership camp that GEAR UP has.”

As the schools enter their final year of the grant, their focus has been shifting to sustainability plans. During last year’s retreat and the October 2016 kickoff meeting, school administrators were encouraged to share promising or effective sustainability practices. Sustainability will continue to be the focus of upcoming Oregon GEAR UP meetings and supports for schools.

TAKEAWAY

Critical to the success of Oregon GEAR UP has been a constant and purposeful effort to use data effectively to manage the grant and build schools’ capacity to integrate sound data practices into their GEAR UP work.

Using data is one of the key strategies in the Oregon GEAR UP framework. To encourage schools to make greater use of data, GEAR UP has implemented a number of successful strategies and supports in place, described below:

- Sharing relevant research and data through research briefs and monthly bulletins;
- Providing schools with cluster-based data reports, which include survey results for that year, and longitudinal school data (e.g., academic achievement, attendance, high school graduation, and college enrollment figures);
- Requiring schools to develop measurable objectives for each activity in their school plans, and collect and analyze data to assess their progress on those measures;
- Encouraging schools to use annual evaluation data (from the measurable objectives they created) and cluster data to plan for GEAR UP and inform school-wide efforts;
- Providing training, and space and time, during the SUCCESS retreats for schools to review their data and plan accordingly; and
- Attending staff meetings to present cluster-specific data (e.g., survey findings) and facilitate school-based discussions on how to use data to inform school efforts.

In addition, Oregon GEAR UP exhibits a high level of organizational self-reflection, as demonstrated by their strong commitment to internal assessment and subsequent improvements to centralized programming. The central Oregon GEAR UP team also uses data—gathered through event feedback forms, site visits, school liaisons, student, parent, and educator surveys, and the external evaluation—on an ongoing basis to modify existing supports and devise new strategies, materials, and resources for schools.

TAKEAWAY

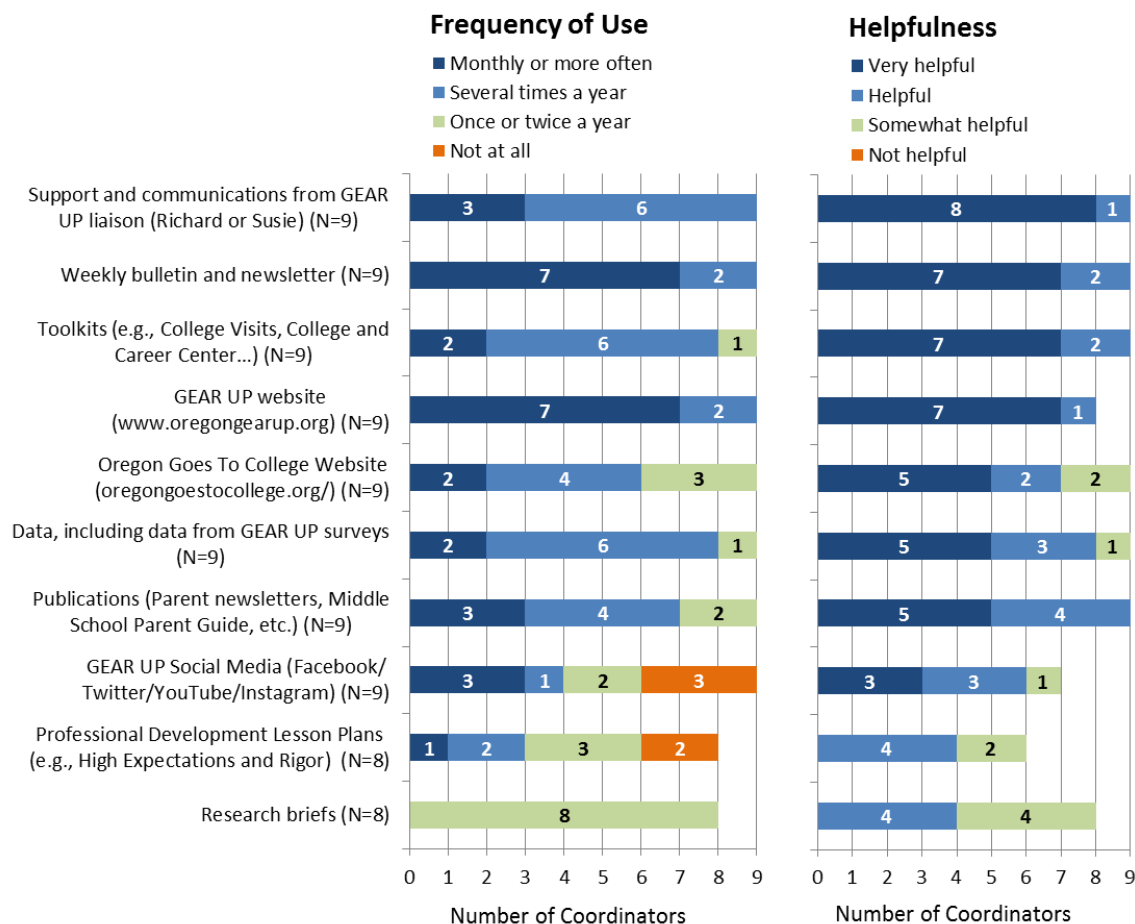
The GEAR UP meetings (e.g., SUCCESS retreat, regional meetings) have been particularly effective in helping schools share best practices, network, and plan. GEAR UP coordinators also rely on other supports such as the weekly bulletins, the Oregon GEAR UP website and assistance from school liaisons.

As shown in Figure 23, Oregon GEAR UP coordinators provided very positive feedback on all the supports they have received. The highest-rated supports were: support and communications from the Oregon GEAR UP school liaisons, the weekly bulletin and newsletter, the toolkits, and the GEAR UP website. During the site visits, both coordinators and all three principals highlighted the GEAR UP meetings, and in particular the SUCCESS retreat, as another critical support that has provided them with much needed time to plan for new activities, reflect on past implementation, network with other schools, and share ideas and best practices. As one principal commented, “[the GEAR UP coordinator] and I go to these meetings all the time and we come back like, Oh my God, we’re going to do that!”

This last retreat was good because it gave us a lot of team time. That was so important...because in school a lot of times we don’t have that time to sit quietly and plan. [The sharing of best practices] was really great. And then the [PD] sessions we go to, you always learn something.

GEAR UP Principal

Figure 23: Frequency of Use and Helpfulness of GEAR UP Supports



Source: 2015–16 GEAR UP coordinator survey

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

Year 5 Successes

In 2015–16, Oregon GEAR UP TFFF schools continued to implement a wide range of activities and supports to: promote high expectations; prepare students academically through cognitive and non-cognitive skills-building interventions; make learning more relevant through career exploration; encourage supportive relationships among students, parents, and educators; and increase students' and families' knowledge and preparation for postsecondary education.

Evaluation findings indicate that schools have made progress and are demonstrating important successes in each of these areas. For example, participating schools are beginning to see stronger college-going cultures at their schools. In Year 5, students had higher expectations of achieving a college degree and were more likely to report that their parents and their teachers expect them to enroll in college, when compared to the year the grant started. Furthermore, educators' involvement in college and career readiness activities has sharply increased over the course of the grant, thus reinforcing the idea that readiness for postsecondary education is a shared responsibility among all staff.

Professional development, curriculum alignment efforts, and academic supports have been put in place to raise the rigor of instruction, and analyses of academic data show small gains in students' academic performance. And, college visits, career fairs (particularly those involving alumni), and school-wide and family events, such as College Application Week and FAFSA nights, were seen as effective interventions. These and other GEAR UP interventions have helped students develop postsecondary education plans that are relevant to their interests, and supported them and their families in completing the steps they need to take to achieve their goals.

Year 5 Challenges and Recommendations

The evaluation also shed light on a number of challenges and priority areas that schools should focus on during the final grant year and beyond. Work is already underway to address many of these challenges. These priority areas, actions taken, and additional recommendations are described below.

Educator expectations and involvement. School leadership's involvement and support for GEAR UP, as well as educator involvement in college and career readiness efforts, are both key factors in promoting strong buy-in and ensuring the future sustainability of GEAR UP efforts; yet results show that schools are achieving these with varying degrees of success. Furthermore, teacher expectations continue to be generally lower than those of students and parents. Thus, Year 6 work should focus on continuing to help schools understand the importance of embedding postsecondary education readiness work in their mission and policies, and ensuring that all educators—administrators, teachers, counselors, and support staff—understand the significance of having high expectations and contributing towards this goal.

Actions taken:

- ✓ During the October 2016 GEAR UP kickoff meeting, Oregon GEAR UP staff facilitated a number of sessions dedicated to this important topic. For example, during the best practices portion of the meeting, one school shared their successful experience, providing ideas and suggestions on how to organize the work and delegate responsibilities effectively.

- ✓ Over the last few months, Oregon GEAR UP created a new research brief on promising practices and the importance of high expectations, and a new professional development template for schools to build upon previous work around educator expectations. These new resources were reviewed and discussed with school administrators in one of the sessions at the kickoff meeting.

Suggestions for further action:

- ✓ Send reminders to GEAR UP administrators and coordinators about the availability of these resources through bulletins and in person during group meetings or site visits from school liaisons.
- ✓ Identify schools that have used these resources and/or implemented other effective strategies in this area (such as integrating GEAR UP fully into their school mission and aligning it to all other work), and ask them to share their experiences and results during the SUCCESS retreat.
- ✓ When schools are crafting their sustainability plans, encourage them to think of and include specific strategies for continuing to promote shared responsibility among school staff for college and career readiness.

GEAR UP Sustainability. Sustainability should be the main focus of Oregon GEAR UP’s work in TFFF schools in Year 6. Evaluation findings show that schools have already begun planning for sustainability, but their progress and perceived future success vary widely across districts. Most administrators and coordinators indicated they will be able to sustain some or many of the GEAR UP components, but they all think they would benefit from continued support and guidance in this area.

Actions taken:

- ✓ Each year, schools are asked to report in their GEAR UP school plans how they plan to sustain the activities in future years without GEAR UP funding. This strategy has encouraged schools to begin thinking about sustainability strategies throughout the grant period.
- ✓ Five of the ten GEAR UP clusters have already applied for sustainability grants. These have helped fund resources that will remain in place once the grant ends (e.g., technology infrastructure) or will generate revenue to fund future college and career readiness activities.
- ✓ The Oregon GEAR UP team facilitated a session during the kickoff meeting that focused on sustainability. Promising practices and strategies were shared with schools at that time.

Suggestions for further action:

- ✓ If not already underway, it may be helpful to ask schools to craft a comprehensive sustainability plan, that includes specific actions/strategies, timeline, and staff responsible. Since time constraints have been one of the main GEAR UP implementation challenges, providing GEAR UP teams with the space and time to develop this plan in a collaborative manner (for example at SUCCESS retreat) can significantly improve the quality and completeness of these plans.
- ✓ Promote schools’ sharing of sustainability practices at GEAR UP events and retreats, through newsletters, and feature stories on the Oregon GEAR UP website.
- ✓ Develop a toolkit or materials on sustainability (e.g., promising practices, research and resources around crafting sustainability plans, and lists of potential resources).
- ✓ Encourage schools to continue collaborating and partnering with each other (particularly those in close proximity) beyond the end of the grant.

Family Engagement. GEAR UP coordinators and administrators voiced appreciation for the resources, ideas, and support they have received from GEAR UP to help them think of effective strategies to involve families and they reported positive progress; however, this area continues to be one of the more challenging aspects of their GEAR UP work.

Actions taken:

- ✓ School liaisons have continued to work with schools to provide guidance and share ideas about family engagement activities.
- ✓ Schools have shared successful family events and their experience about what has and hasn't worked so far.
- ✓ During the October 2016 kickoff retreat, Oregon GEAR UP introduced a new resource: individualized support from an experienced consultant—Patty Fleming—on how to devise creative solutions to increase family engagement.

Suggestions for further action:

- ✓ Remind schools—through the weekly bulletins and guidance from the school liaisons—about the availability of support from the family engagement consultant.
- ✓ Continue to encourage schools to share best practices around family engagement at GEAR UP retreats, through newsletters, and feature stories on the website; ask schools who use the services of the family engagement consultant to share their experiences with the rest of the cohort.
- ✓ Provide space and time for schools to reflect on their own family engagement practices, and familiarize schools with available resources (for example, the Parent Engagement toolkit).

Evaluation and Data Practices. Oregon GEAR UP is strongly committed to using evaluation findings to inform their efforts and to building schools' capacity around data use. As the grant comes to an end, Oregon GEAR UP should continue to work with schools to strengthen their data practices and share lessons learned.

Actions taken:

- ✓ Evaluation and data findings are shared back with the schools on an ongoing basis, for example through site visits and cluster-based data reports, and schools are asked to use these data to inform their GEAR UP planning efforts.
- ✓ Training was provided during the last SUCCESS retreat on how to use data following a theory of change approach (e.g., identifying needs, successes, and anticipated outputs and outcomes) and how to develop measurable objectives for each GEAR UP activity included in their plans.

Suggestions for further action:

- ✓ Continue to provide training to schools, for example during regional meetings and the SUCCESS retreat, around effective uses of data.
- ✓ Ask schools to share their progress and successes in using data during meetings and retreats.
- ✓ Encourage administrators and coordinators to share the cluster site visit reports with the GEAR UP teams and the larger staff and engage them in conversations about key implications from these data.
- ✓ Once the Year 6 evaluation is finalized, prepare a user-friendly, engaging "Evaluation Brief" highlighting promising practices and outcomes, and share this with key GEAR UP stakeholders, including schools, families, other grantees, and funders.

Appendix A: Methodology

The 2015–16 evaluation, which included both formative and summative components, was guided by the following overarching research questions:

- What does GEAR UP implementation look like in participating schools and communities? What are the common/varying elements in implementation?
- What are promising practices, implementation challenges, and lessons learned?
- What are schools' perceptions and feedback on the supports and resources provided by GEAR UP? How have these supports helped advance schools' college and career readiness vision and work? What else could GEAR UP do to continue supporting the schools?
- What is the project's progress in:
 - raising expectations for students, parents and educators and promoting a school-wide college-going culture?
 - helping schools increase rigor and prepare students for postsecondary success?
 - promoting career relevance and awareness?
 - promoting positive school climate and strong relationships?
 - raising students' and families' awareness of postsecondary options and financial aid resources?

To answer these questions, the evaluation used multiple sources of quantitative and qualitative data from key stakeholder groups. These are described next.

- ✓ **Surveys of GEAR UP coordinators.** In spring 2016, Metis developed and administered a survey for school-based GEAR UP coordinators. This survey was used to collect critical information about each school's context (e.g., challenges/needs and assets), program implementation successes and challenges, and perceived impact of GEAR UP on key outcome areas. Nine of the ten GEAR UP coordinators completed the survey (90% response rate).
- ✓ **GEAR UP student, parent/guardian, and educator surveys.** Student and parent surveys were designed to: 1) assess the extent to which the initiative meets its objective of increasing students' and families' knowledge of postsecondary options, preparation and financing, as well as postsecondary aspirations/expectations; 2) obtain critical data on student and parent needs; and 3) gather feedback on college and career readiness activities. In order to maximize response rates, student and parent surveys were administered online and on paper, and were available in English and Spanish. Parent surveys were administered between August and December 2015; whereas student surveys were administered between January and March 2016.

Schools were allowed to administer the student and parent surveys using different methods (online versus paper). Surveys were available in English and Spanish. For the parent survey, schools used a variety of methods and venues, including: registration, school events, through mailings, and through social media. Schools that sent out the parent survey with the registration package over the summer were more successful in getting higher response rates. Student surveys were often administered

during advisories or classes. Coordinators overseeing the survey administration efforts had access to an automated report of survey response counts using Qualtrics software to keep track of their progress. The educator survey, which was administered online in January and February 2016, was designed to assess schools' efforts in building a college-going culture, to identify school needs and staff professional development needs, and gather educators' feedback on the GEAR UP activities being conducted at their schools, including the impact of these activities on teachers, students, parents, and schools.

Table A1 shows the number of completed surveys by respondent group (and when available, response rates).

Table A1: Survey Participation Rates

Surveys	Number of Surveys Completed (Response Rate)	
	Baseline ¹	Year 5 (2015-16)
Student Surveys	3,022 (79%)	2,813 (83%)
Parent/Guardian Surveys	Not used	849 (25%) ²
Educator Surveys	168 (--) ³	242 (--) ³

¹ Year 1 (2011–12) student surveys were used as baseline for longitudinal survey analyses; Year 2 (2012–13) educator surveys were used as baseline for longitudinal survey analyses (educators were not surveyed in Year 1); due to low parent survey response rates, 2015–16 parent survey results were not compared to previous years' surveys.

² Parent survey response rates are underestimated since parents may have more than one student in the GEAR UP schools.

³ Educator survey response rates were not calculated because information on the total number of educators was not available.

- ✓ **Site visits.** Site visits were conducted in three Ford schools representing two clusters in 2015–16. These site visits were used to better understand how different efforts and processes within varying contexts can lead to specific outcomes, as well as to identify critical success factors and barriers to implementation that can inform program development efforts. During these visits, the Metis evaluator conducted individual interviews with the principal and the GEAR UP coordinator, as well as focus groups with school staff, students, and parents. Metis also collected and reviewed relevant school documentation and, when feasible, observed relevant school activities. The following table shows the number of activities and participants.

Table A2: Overview of Site Visits

Activities	Total	Cluster A	Cluster B
Number of schools visited	3	1	2
Number of interviewed principals	3	1	2
Number of interviewed coordinators	2	1	1
Number of interviewed staff	10	8	2
Number of interviewed students	12	4	8
Number of interviewed parents	11	5	6

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- ✓ **Analyses of program participation data.** Metis analyzed program participation data from the program’s web-enabled Events and Cost-Share database. Analyses were conducted to assess how the program is being implemented in participating schools, including types of activities conducted, intensity of participation, and similarities and variations across schools.
 - ✓ **Analyses of student data.** Metis obtained student data from ODE for the target cohort, including information on students’ demographic characteristics, academic performance, daily school attendance, grade promotion, and SAT/ACT and FAFSA completion. Analyses were conducted to assess the initiative’s progress towards meeting its project objectives and to measure changes over time. In Year 6, Metis will also analyze high school graduation data and college enrollment data obtained from the National Student Clearinghouse, as well as information on the creation of students’ Individual Development Accounts from the fiduciary organization. To the extent possible, results in Year 6 will be disaggregated by key variables to better understand if and how outcomes vary for sub-groups of students, including students whose parents/guardians have not attended college and lower to middle performing students who may not have considered postsecondary education prior to GEAR UP.

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