

Oregon GEAR UP

College: It's not a dream, it's a plan.

Key Evaluation Findings for Year 3 (2016–17)

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

To accomplish this, Oregon GEAR UP works with select middle schools and high schools over seven years to create a college-going culture by providing funding and technical assistance, professional development for educators, and enrichment 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.

In 2016–17, the third year of the current federal grant, Oregon GEAR UP was implemented in 36 middle and high schools in 21 school districts (from here on referred to as “clusters”) and served over 5,700 students in grade 7 through grade 13 (the first year of postsecondary education immediately following high school graduation).



Conducted by Metis Associates, an independent research firm, the Oregon GEAR UP evaluation is designed to assess program implementation in participating schools and the impact on key outcomes areas, as well as document promising practices, challenges, and lessons learned.

This Evaluation Brief highlights key findings and lessons learned for the 2016–17 school year.

The Brief is organized by the following areas:

- The need and context for Oregon GEAR UP
- Raising expectations
- Increasing the rigor of instruction
- Promoting relevance and career awareness
- Fostering supportive relationships
- Raising awareness of postsecondary education options
- Conclusions and recommendations

SOURCES OF DATA

- ✓ School data (demographic, academic, attendance)
- ✓ Student surveys – target grades only (N=4,000)
- ✓ Parent surveys – all grades (N=2,627)
- ✓ Educator surveys – all grades (N=734)
- ✓ GEAR UP coordinator surveys (N=21)
- ✓ Site visits at 2 case study schools, which included interviews and focus groups with each school's principals and GEAR UP coordinators, and a total of 10 educators, 11 students, and 6 parents
- ✓ Data from the locally-developed College and Career Readiness Inventory



THE NEED AND CONTEXT FOR OREGON GEAR UP

Oregon GEAR UP is being implemented in 21 rural communities, serving 30 cohort schools and 6 priority schools.

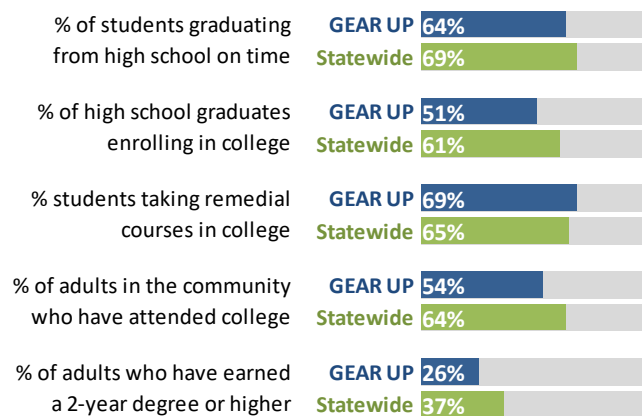
- **Cohort schools** follow a grade-level cohort approach, thus serving all students within target grades. In Year 1 (2014–15), cohort schools began serving students in grade 7; each subsequent year, they continue to serve these students while adding a new cohort of seventh-graders.
- **Priority schools**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

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

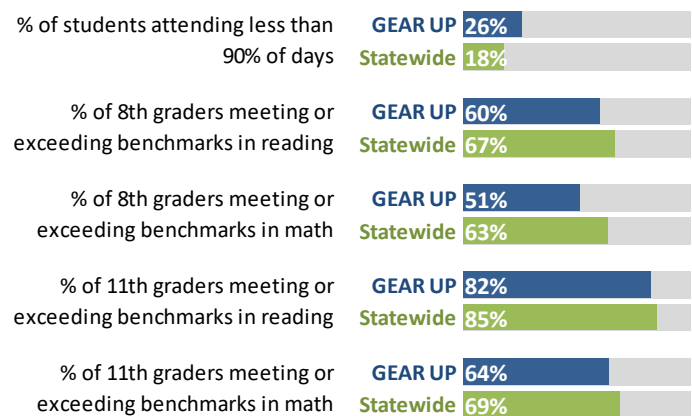
COMMON CHALLENGES IN RURAL EDUCATION

- ✓ High poverty
- ✓ Under-resourced schools
- ✓ Declining school enrollment & local employment opportunities
- ✓ Geographic isolation and transportation challenges
- ✓ High staff turnover & student mobility
- ✓ Limited availability of advanced courses and electives
- ✓ Limited exposure to postsecondary education

Baseline Educational Attainment Indicators (GEAR UP Communities vs. Statewide)

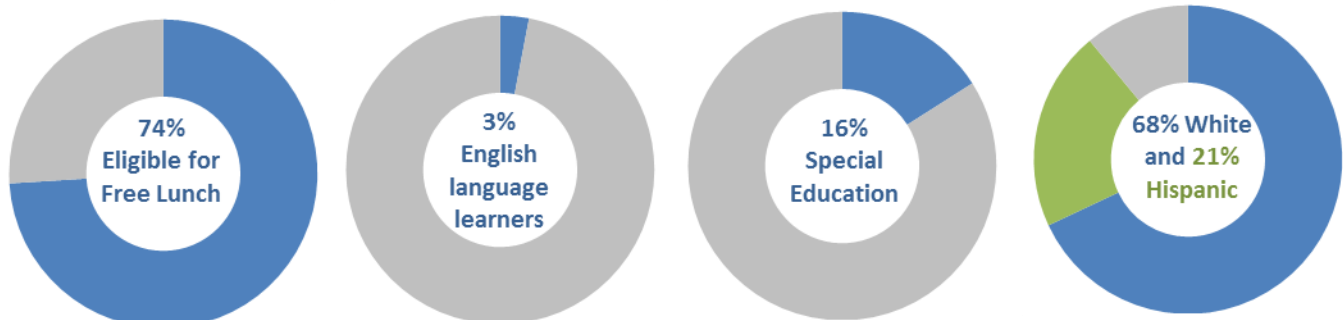


Baseline Academic and Attendance Indicators (GEAR UP Communities vs. Statewide)



*Source: Oregon GEAR UP proposal to the US Department of Education (2014)

In 2016–17, GEAR UP served 4,236 students in grades 7–9 in cohort schools and 1,557 students in grades 10–13 in priority schools; most students live in low-income households (74%).

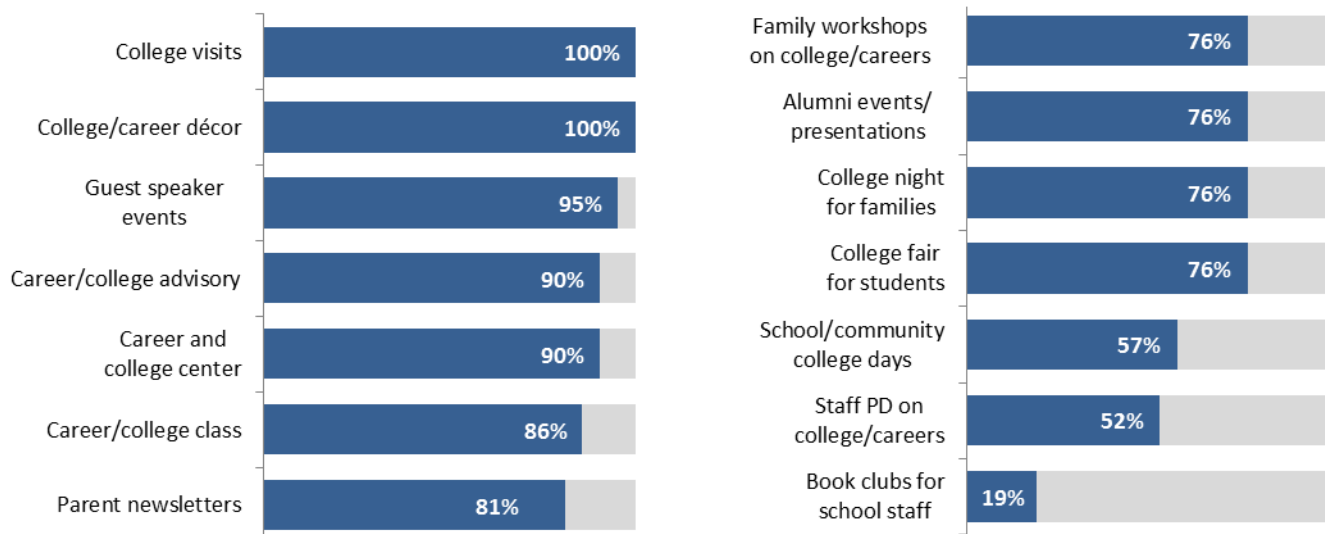


RAISING EXPECTATIONS AND PROMOTING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

GOAL: SUPPORT SCHOOLS IN BUILDING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE BY CREATING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS, POLICIES, AND TEACHER EXPECTATIONS THAT SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS' PURSUIT OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION.

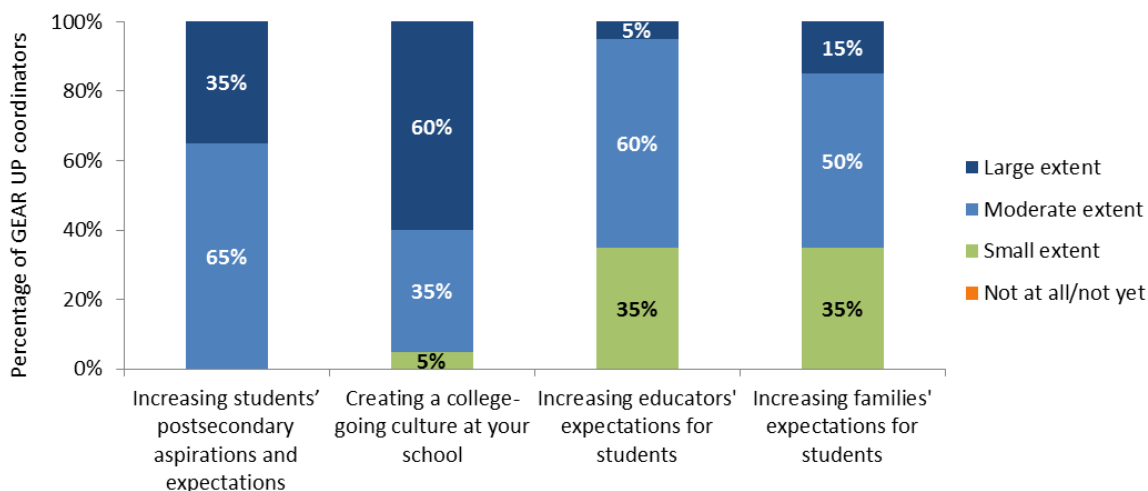
In 2016–17, GEAR UP schools offered a wide range of services and activities—many of which were funded through the grant—designed to support a school-wide college-going culture. The most frequent types of activities and strategies—used by at least 90% of GEAR UP schools—were college visits, college and career décor, guest speaker events, career/college advisory, and career /college centers.

REACHING HIGHER: WHAT GEAR UP SCHOOLS ARE DOING (COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS INVENTORY)



GEAR UP is playing a major role in helping schools promote a college-going culture with many schools reporting positive results in this area. The large majority of GEAR UP coordinators reported that GEAR UP has supported their schools to a *moderate* or *large extent* in increasing students' expectations (100%) and creating a college-going culture (95%), and to a lesser extent in increasing educators' and families' expectations for students (65%).

IMPACT OF GEAR UP ON REACHING HIGHER (COORDINATOR SURVEYS)



College visits and alumni events were mentioned by both students and staff as having been instrumental in motivating students to pursue a postsecondary education.

- During site visits at two schools, staff and students were asked to reflect on the GEAR UP activities that had most impacted their views of postsecondary education. Staff from both schools indicated that **college visits** have been one of the most critical additions from GEAR UP, with many noting that students had never been on a college campus prior to GEAR UP. Students agreed, describing the college visits as very informative and recalling specific moments or aspects of the visits that they enjoyed. As one student noted, “The college trips help a lot because they are showing you what they have and what’s appealing about each of them.” Furthermore, for many students, the college visits were “eye-opening” and transformative experiences. One student, for example, said, “We went to OSU and they showed us robotics and I was like, ‘oh this looks really fun, this looks like a job I’d like to have,’ so now I’m thinking about applying to OSU and doing robotics classes.”

OSU, actually, was my favorite part of the entire trip...it actually made me realize what I wanted to do in the future more than anything else...like it changed my mind about what I wanted to do.

GEAR UP Student

Alumni visits are very powerful when relating their stories to the underclassmen.

GEAR UP Teacher

- **Bringing alumni back** to share their experiences was identified as a promising practice in both case study schools. Staff at one of the schools noted that students were able to relate to the speakers and, after learning about the alumni’s experiences, they were more likely to view postsecondary education as a real option. The coordinator at the other school made a concerted effort to bring back alumni who had graduated within the last four years “so that these kids would know who they were. ...it went really well and I could tell with the kids’ eyes that they were really taking a lot of it in.” He added, “The best student was this young man who is going to LCC this year. He had the greatest little sound bites. Students would ask him ‘What would you do differently?’ and he said ‘grades’ and went on this rant where he said, ‘If I had kept my grades up, I would be in a totally different position now. And during my senior year, there were all these people that were trying to get me to go in and fill out my FAFSA and get scholarships and I just acted like I didn’t have time and I was too cool for it. I have no idea what was going through my mind!’” Students also found alumni events particularly helpful. As one student explained, “I found it pretty helpful because they were able to better explain what happens after high school and what we should get prepared for.”

GEAR UP students and parents have high expectations for postsecondary education; teachers hold significantly lower expectations. There were no significant changes from Year 2.

- In surveys, most GEAR UP students (86%) reported that they expect to enroll in college, including 62% who expect to complete a 4-year degree or higher.
- Parents responding to the survey also have high expectations for their students, with 89% of them reporting they expect their children to enroll in college and 70% expect them to obtain a 4-year college degree (because of a low parent survey response rate these results may not be representative).
- Teachers held lower expectations for their students, reporting that approximately 48% of students will enroll in college; this was slightly higher than what was reported the prior year, when teachers estimated that 46% of students would enroll in college.

SUCCESS STORY

GEAR UP has made a significant impact on our college-going culture. One success story that comes to mind involves a young man who graduated last year and is now finishing up his first year at Portland State University. This student is the oldest in a family of six boys, in a very low-income, first-generation family demographic. This student overcame many obstacles to graduate with a GPA above a 3.0 and be the first in his family to not only graduate from high school, but to attend Portland State University. The support and exposure from GEAR UP has been monumental in paving the way for this student!

Priority School Coordinator



The cost of college continues to be one of the main perceived barriers or concerns that may prevent students from pursuing their postsecondary education goals. Top reasons why students may not continue their education are presented in the following table.

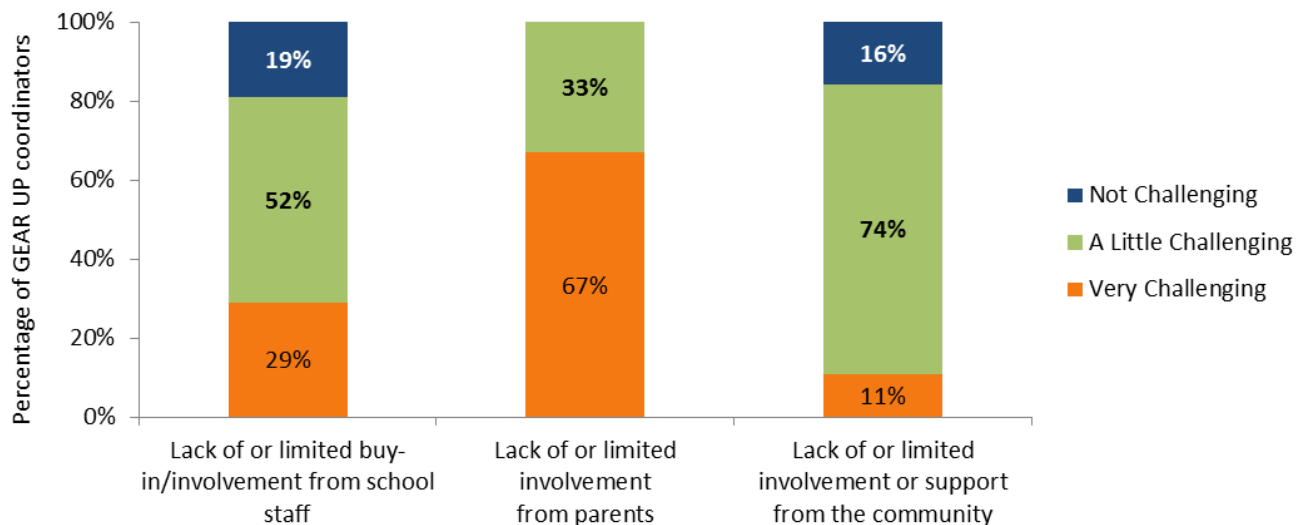
TOP MAIN REASONS STUDENTS MAY NOT CONTINUE THEIR EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL (SURVEYS)

| REASONS | Students ¹ | Parents ¹ | Educators |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------|
| Costs too much | 36% | 38% | 25% |
| Grades or test scores are not good enough | 19% | 10% | 22% |
| Plans or needs to work | 13% | 6% | 30% |
| Student is unmotivated or undecided | 5% | 15% | 21% |
| Student does not believe they need college for their chosen career | 6% | 5% | 18% |

¹Students and parents who selected “N/A” were excluded from these analyses. Responses may not add up to 100% because only the top choices are included in this table.

Promoting staff buy-in and fostering a local culture that values postsecondary education are two areas that schools found challenging when creating school-wide college-going culture.

CHALLENGES TO GEAR UP IMPLEMENTATION (COORDINATOR SURVEYS)



These results were consistent with findings from the site visits. As one principal noted, “The expectations are quite low...our staff believe that about 30% of students will go on to college. So why is that? Is it because we’ve been conditioned to believe that it’s hard, that kids won’t have what it takes to meet the expectations? And also how does that affect the way we engage kids?” At the other school, the coordinator noted that **teacher buy-in had been particularly challenging**, resulting in difficulties implementing various GEAR UP activities such as staffing the afterschool tutoring program and finding chaperones for the summer leadership camp. Yet, during focus groups, several teachers reported being positively impacted by GEAR UP and being more purposeful in facilitating conversations around college and careers in their classes.

In both schools, administrators and teachers also reported **low family engagement and expectations**. One teacher explained, “I think one of the big challenges is it’s a pretty low-income area where a lot of people here have maybe finished high school and a lot of them haven’t gone on to college, so there’s not a really big push from their parents to go on to college, to further their education.” At this school, another teacher commented, “I’d say oftentimes parents won’t say ‘Oh, we don’t value school,’ but they’ll do things in a way that shows that, like ‘Oh, you need your hair cut, you’re going to miss a day of school.’ So, priorities and seeing the value of being here don’t always come through.”

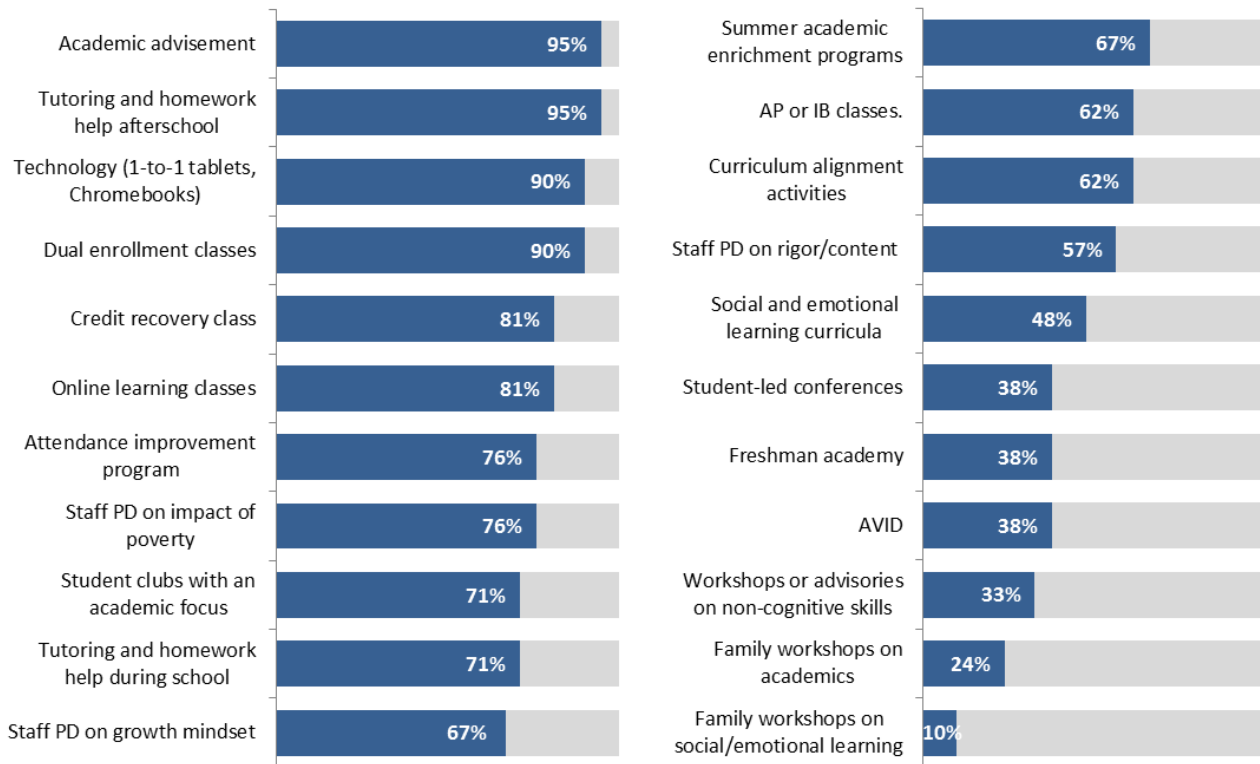
INCREASING RIGOR AND PREPARING STUDENTS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

GOAL: ACADEMICALLY PREPARE ALL STUDENTS FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION THROUGH RIGOROUS CURRICULUM AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT.

GEAR UP has played an important role in helping schools increase the rigor of instruction and provide the academic and social emotional supports that students need to succeed in school.

In 2016–17, GEAR UP schools offered a wide range of services and activities to prepare students for academic success. The most frequent types of activities and strategies—used by at least 90% of GEAR UP clusters—were academic advisement (95%), tutoring and homework help (95%), technology integration (90%), and dual enrollment classes (90%).

RIGOR: WHAT GEAR UP SCHOOLS ARE DOING (COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS INVENTORY)



During site visits, staff, students, and parents identified a number of GEAR UP-funded activities and supports as being particularly effective in increasing the rigor of instruction and helping students in their schoolwork.

- For example, both schools allocated part of the GEAR UP budget to **building their school's technology infrastructure**. According to one coordinator, the new technology “was really beneficial in a lot of areas.” Teachers agreed, noting that, “The Chromebooks are huge. I mean, that's something that's just helpful throughout the school as a whole. It's helping students get the autonomy to say, ‘I don't know what my grade is, can I check my grade?’ So, they know how to do it,

We use a lot of the GEAR UP ideas for building and increasing rigor for students, making sure that students are going to be successful when they go onto the next level. [...] So we've used the SUCCESS retreats [3-day planning and PD event organized by the central team for all Oregon GEAR UP schools] over the last few years to do a lot of planning and transformation of what we do here...to really increase the rigor, especially around professional development.

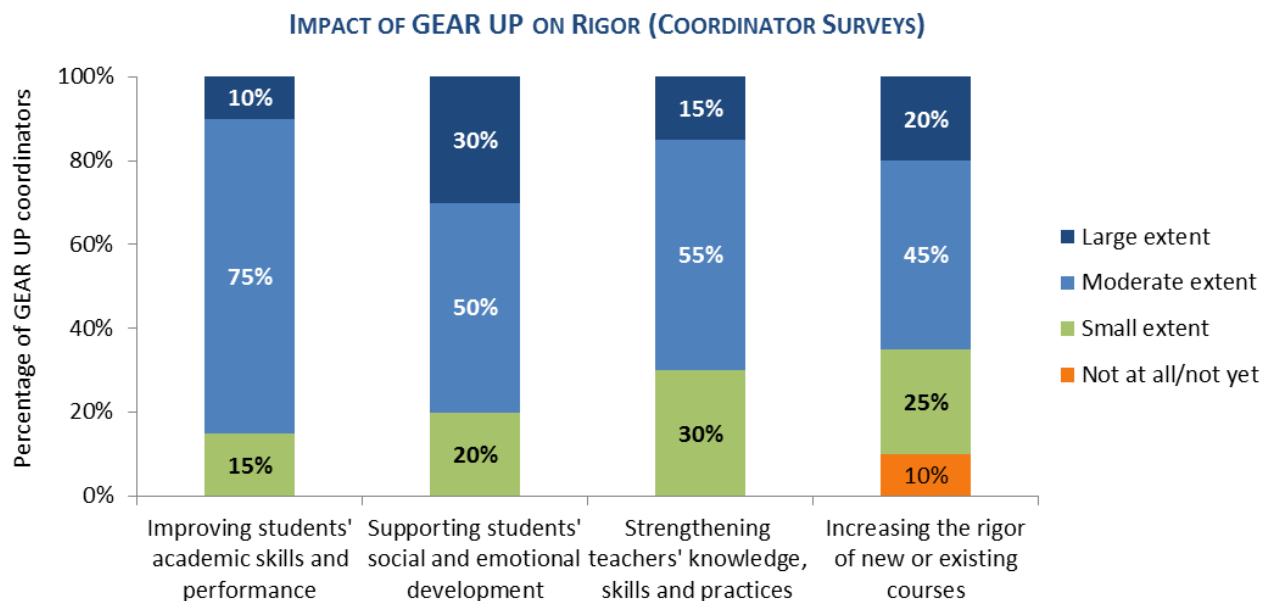
GEAR UP Coordinator



they know how to get it. Before there was a real disconnect. And now we have a Google classroom, so kids are all working on an essay and while they're typing it up, I can read it and give feedback. So, really powerful tools that I would say have helped us in the classroom as a whole.” Echoing this sentiment, one student said, “It’s helped a lot because the desktops we have tend to be really slow or just don’t work. The Chromebooks work really nicely and it’s a lot easier because you can have all your docs at the same time too. ...it also has emails, and the assignments that teachers put in there. ”

- Through GEAR UP, one of the schools was also able to re-introduce **dual enrollment classes**. As a coordinator of a small school described, “We have been struggling with having challenging course work for our higher grade levels and through GEAR UP we were able to resurrect a dual enrollment program. Next year we will have four students from the 11th and 12th grades attending Lane Community College at college-level courses. This has created an excitement with students and parents about their student's possibilities at our school.”
- Staff in one school also identified various **afterschool academic supports**—such as Freshman Focus, Sophomore Success, and their credit recovery program—as key GEAR UP activities that “have been instrumental in us increasing our graduation rate.” Reflecting on the afterschool program, one student commented, “I go there a lot of times and it’s really helpful because there aren’t as many distractions as there are at home. You can just focus on your work and get stuff done easier.”

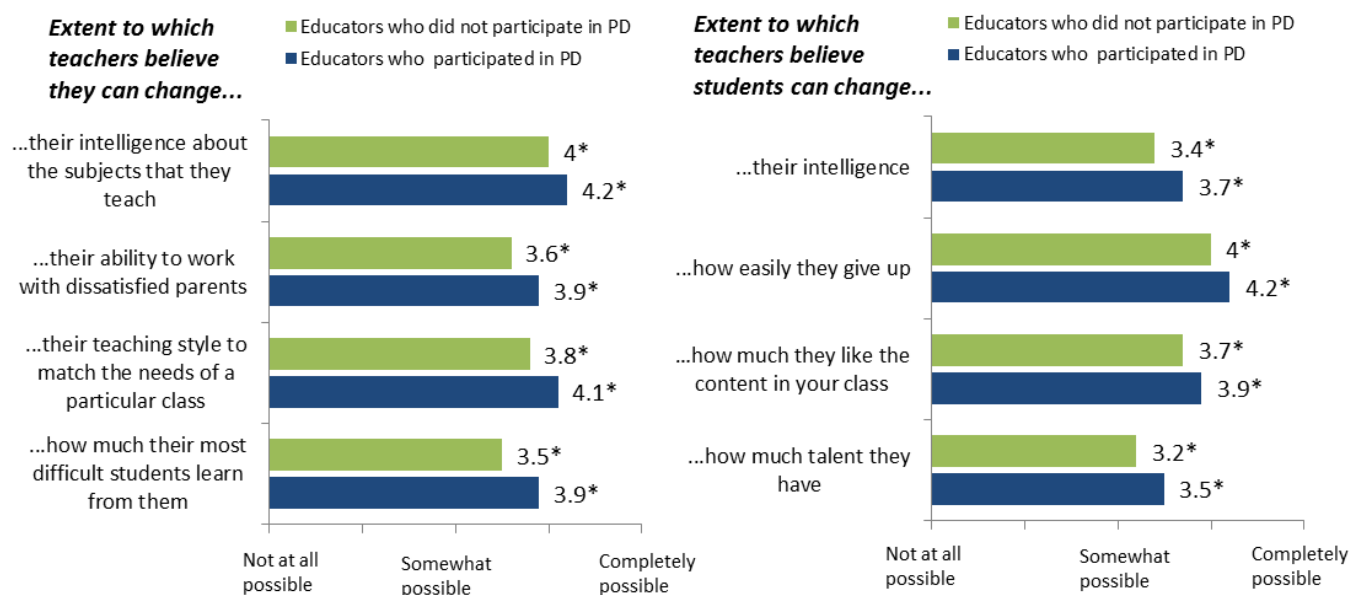
Most GEAR UP coordinators believe that GEAR UP has supported their schools to a *moderate or large extent* in increasing students’ academic skills and performance (85%). GEAR UP has also had a moderate to large impact on schools’ ability to support students’ social and emotional development (80%); strengthen their staff’s knowledge, skills, and practices (70%); and increase the rigor of new or existing courses (65%). Furthermore, coordinators rated all of these areas more positively than in prior years, an indication that GEAR UP is deepening its impact on key outcome areas.



Additional results suggest that GEAR UP-sponsored PD has resulted in growth mindset gains among educators. Educators who were trained reported greater use of growth mindset strategies in their classrooms and provided anecdotal evidence of successes to date.

- In the annual surveys, almost half (45%) of educators indicated having participated in GEAR UP-sponsored growth mindset training. Surveyed educators who were trained exhibited more positive attitudes and perceptions around their own and their students’ ability to change, learn, and grow than educators who did not receive the training. Differences were statistically significant and of a moderate magnitude. While the two groups were not matched on any a priori characteristics, these results are promising.

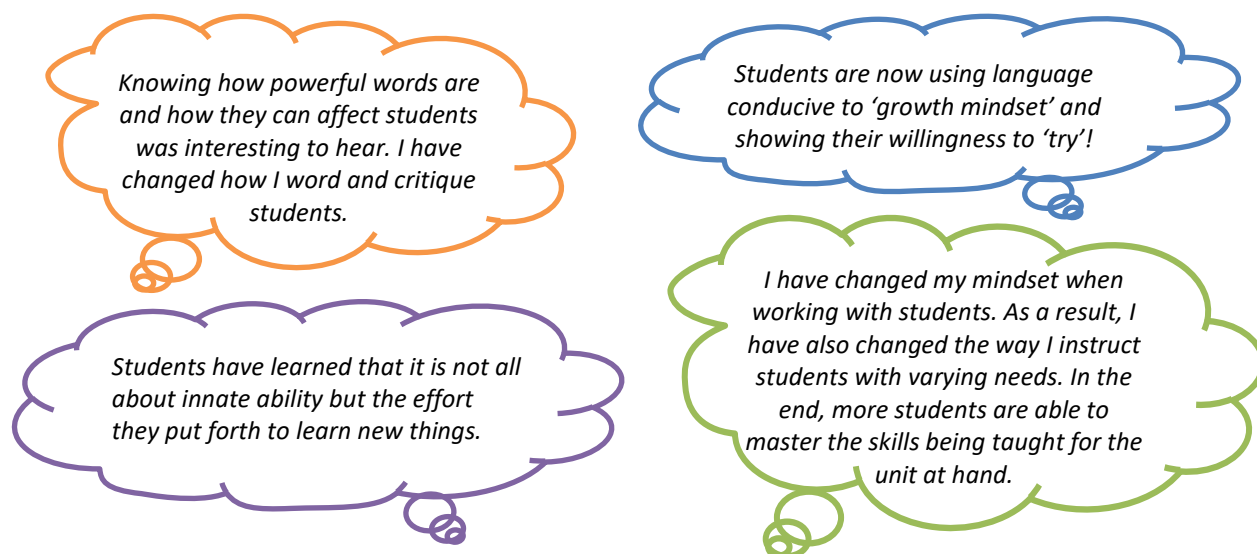
EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS AROUND GROWTH MINDSET (EDUCATOR SURVEYS)



*An asterisk denotes a statistically significant difference at the .05 level.

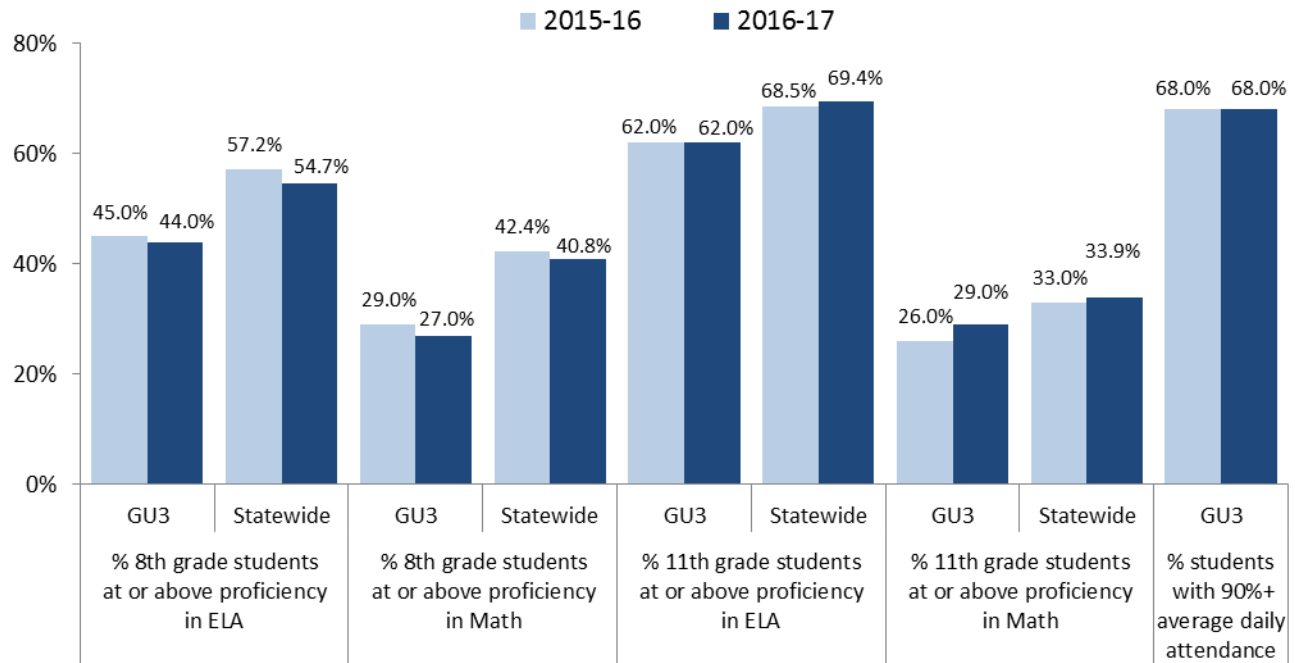
- Furthermore, 76 educators from 8 schools completed feedback forms before and three months after the training. Results show that, overall, educators were satisfied with the training, with 89% describing it as *good* or *excellent*. Furthermore, **the proportion of educators who have begun implementing growth mindset strategies increased** from 49% prior to the training to 75% three months after the training. Teachers also provided feedback on changes they and their students have made as a result of the training.

WHAT EDUCATORS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE GROWTH MINDSET TRAINING



In 2016–17, a substantial proportion of students in GEAR UP schools continued to struggle academically, particularly in math. And close to a third (32%) of the students had an average daily attendance lower than 90%, a critical threshold that is strongly correlated with school success; therefore indicating that this continues to be an area for growth.

CHANGES IN SCHOOL-WIDE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND ATTENDANCE

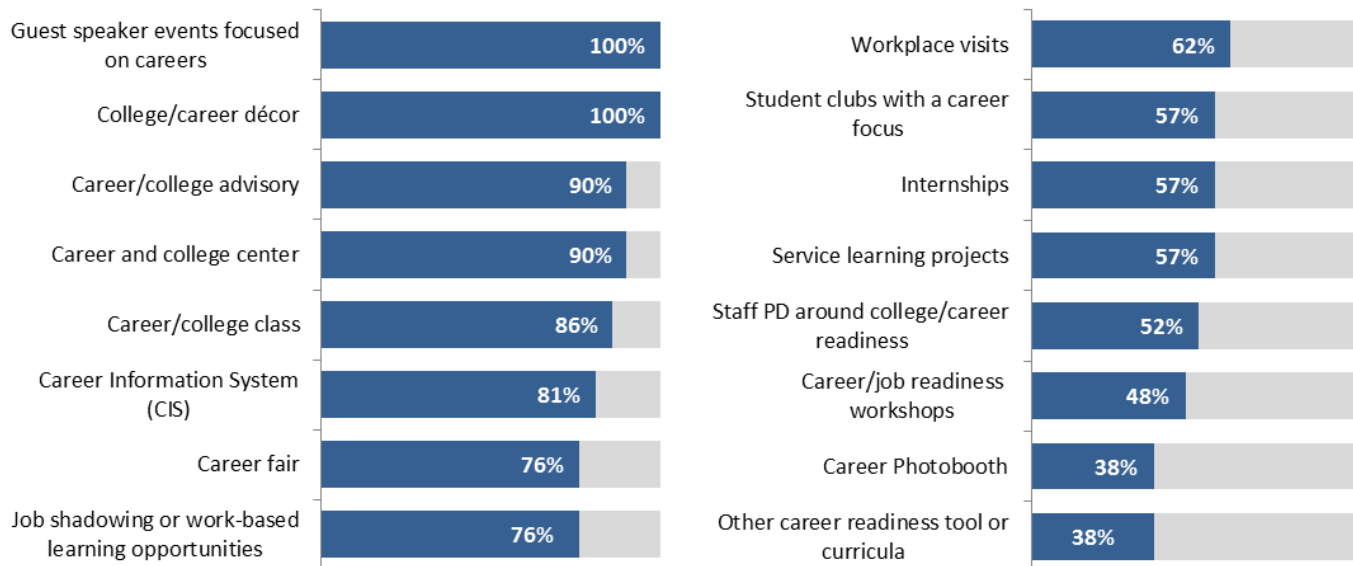


PROMOTING RELEVANCE AND CAREER AWARENESS

GOAL: LINK STUDENTS' CAREER ASPIRATIONS WITH THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS.

In 2016–17, GEAR UP schools offered a number of activities and interventions to help students learn about careers, develop career goals, and better understand the educational pathways towards these careers. The most frequent types of activities reported by schools were guest speaker events focused on careers (100%), college and career décor (100%), career/college advisory (90%), and career/college centers (90%).

RELEVANCE: WHAT GEAR UP SCHOOLS ARE DOING (COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS INVENTORY)



During site visits, job shadowing, career fairs, and CIS were identified as effective strategies for teaching students about careers and promoting relevance; yet results suggest that students would benefit from additional opportunities to learn about careers.

- Almost all GEAR UP coordinators believe that GEAR UP has helped their school promote relevance to a *moderate* (45%) or *large extent* (50%) by connecting students' career aspirations to their educational goals.
- In case study schools, there was strong agreement across educators, students, and parents that **job shadowing and workplace visits** are a powerful way to raise awareness of various career fields, providing hands-on experiences and information that, as noted by a student, "cannot be learned on a screen." These experiences were very impactful on the students, helping them further define their career goals. As one parent commented, "[My student] got to go to a field trip to Wildish and to Delta Sand and Gravel – he's kind of gearing towards that field because he really enjoyed the field trip and it struck interest in him."
- **Career fairs** were also identified as successful, although staff emphasized the need to prepare students beforehand so "they feel less intimidated and know what questions to ask." Students would like to see more information about jobs and internship opportunities, as well as a broader spectrum of careers represented.
- The **Career Information System (CIS)** was also seen as a helpful resource to learn about careers and educational pathways and options. However, several students pointed out that CIS was helpful to some extent only, as CIS activities often felt repetitive and didn't provide the hands-on, real information they could obtain through campus visits, job shadowing, and workplace visits.
- Although findings suggest that schools are implementing a number of successful career awareness and readiness activities, only 38% of surveyed students and 56% of educators think that their school helps students figure out which careers match their interests and abilities, indicating an area of need. In some schools, staff noted it was difficult to engage a variety of professionals from the community in career readiness activities (such as pizza with professionals or career fairs) due to the limited local representation of industries and local employment opportunities.

The job shadows make a huge difference in students and especially this time of year I'm hearing all sorts of things from students. Like 'Oh this is my job shadow and this is what I did, this is what I really want to go into, and this is what helped me get there.'"

GEAR UP Educator

Evaluation results also indicate that schools are struggling to make learning relevant for students.

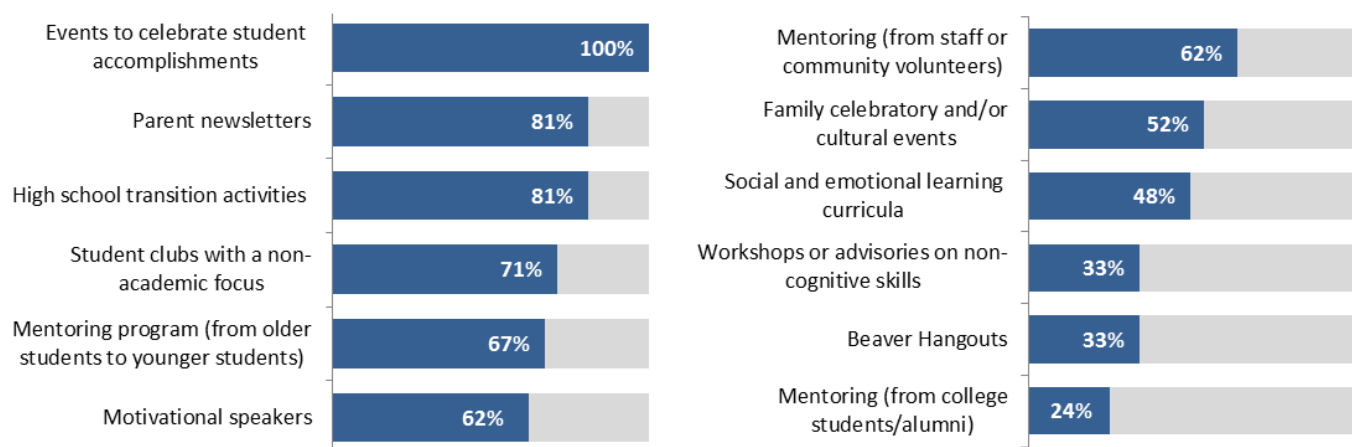
- Less than one-fourth (21%) of surveyed students believe that what they learn in school *often* helps them outside of school, and 41% said *sometimes*.
- During the focus groups, staff spoke about the **importance of making learning relevant to students, an area they felt they were struggling with**. Specifically, educators noted that many students are generally disengaged from school because they do not see how it relates to their life and future goals. Cognizant of this, the principal from one of the case study schools noted, "We are trying to shift more towards project-based and place-based learning...to get kids into college but also to get kids more excited about going to work. There are a lot of kids that don't necessarily see that directly modeled day-to-day, being excited about a career."
- **Encouraging students to take ownership over their learning** came up during staff focus groups as a best practice for increasing student motivation. Students felt similarly, noting that they really enjoyed class projects in which the teacher let them choose their topics, their group, their test dates, and their own place to work. They also reported that these projects also taught them how to use their time more efficiently. Reflecting on these experiences, one student commented, "It was a lot of fun but definitely stressful...it shocked us into the fact that we need to learn more about time management and how to best use our time."
- When asked what would keep them engaged in school, students suggested schools offering a **broader spectrum of elective courses** and classes that are responsive to their personal interests and career goals and/or that teach them relevant skills that they can apply to everyday life.

FOSTERING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

GOAL: FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS THAT ENCOURAGE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SUCCESS.

In 2016–17, GEAR UP schools implemented strategies and interventions to foster positive learning environments and supportive relationships. The most frequent types of activities and strategies—used by at least 80% of GEAR UP clusters—were events to celebrate student accomplishments (100%), parent newsletters (81%), and high school transition activities (81%).

RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT GEAR UP SCHOOLS ARE DOING (COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS INVENTORY)

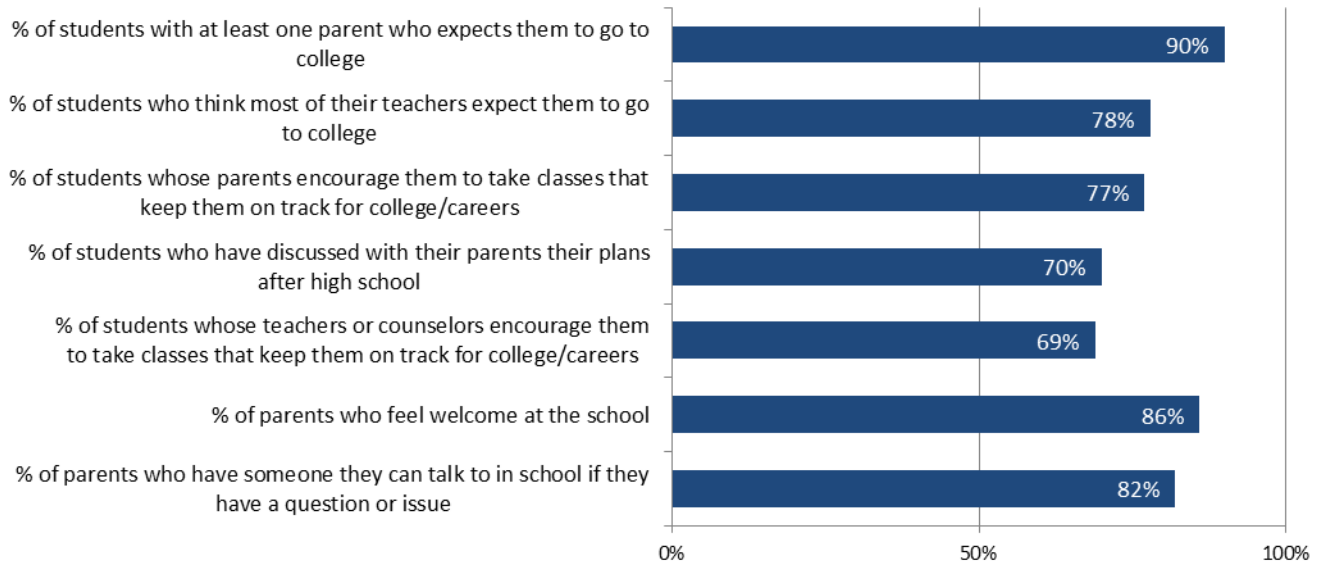


There is agreement among educators, students, and parents that, overall, schools provide a welcoming environment where students can develop nurturing relationships with adults and peers.

- As reported in surveys, the large majority of students believe that **their parents and staff at their school are supportive**, and expect them to pursue postsecondary education (see chart on the next page). During student focus groups, students also spoke positively about feeling supported by school staff. As one student said, “A lot of the teachers want us to succeed and try to help us succeed. ...and some teachers are excited about telling us about the colleges they went to or about what they are teaching in general. They are not just droning on like, ‘Hey I’ve been 15 years here and I want to leave.’” Another student said, “What I found useful is just talking to my teachers about it.” Staff agreed, with one educator noting that “I think what works well in this school is one-to-one relationships. There are students who come in to talk to certain people. I think probably any student who wants it has a good relationship with somebody on staff. And that is something that because we’re so small, we can do really well.”
- Parents also feel generally welcome at the school**, as reported by 86% of surveyed parents¹. Most parents (82%) also indicated that if they have a question or an issue, they have someone they can talk to at the school. As one parent explained, “All the teachers are very supportive. Any time we’ve had an issue or felt there was an issue, we’ve been able to either call or email and we get a response back.” Another parent commented, “I think this is a great community...when it comes to children, it really stands up and comes together.”
- Overall, the majority of coordinators reported that GEAR UP has helped promote positive relationships between students, educators, and families to a *moderate* (65%) or *large extent* (10%); however, **this was one of the areas in the survey with the lowest ratings**. During the site visits, when asked to describe promising practices in this area, most educators spoke about having staff who are dedicated and who care about students, rather than specific GEAR UP activities.

¹ Parent survey results should be interpreted with caution due to low response rates.

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS (SURVEYS)

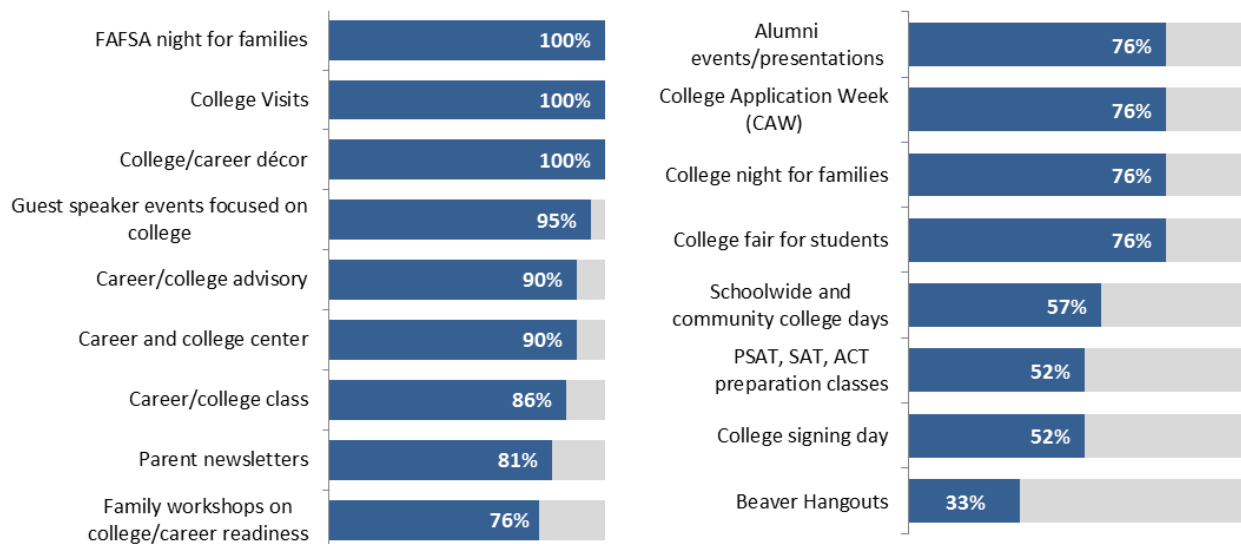


RAISING AWARENESS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OPTIONS, AND THE APPLICATION AND FINANCING PROCESS

GOAL: PROMOTE EARLY AWARENESS OF COLLEGE PREPARATION, SELECTION, ADMISSIONS, AND FINANCIAL AID.

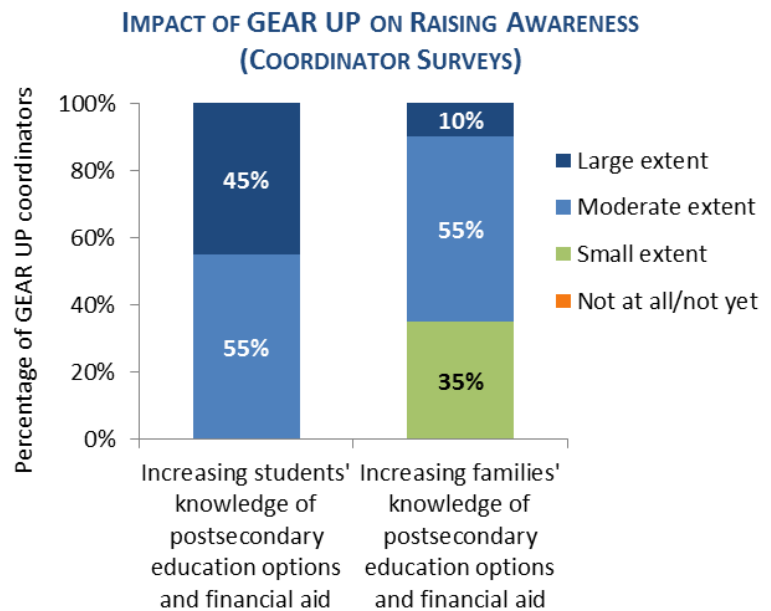
In 2016–17, GEAR UP schools offered varied activities designed to increase students' and families' knowledge of and preparation for postsecondary education. The most frequent types of activities and strategies were FAFSA nights (100%), college visits (100%), college/career décor (100%), guest speaker events focused on college (90%), career/college advisories (90%), and career/college centers (90%).

RAISING AWARENESS: WHAT GEAR UP SCHOOLS ARE DOING (COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS INVENTORY)



Raising awareness of postsecondary education options and financing was one of the areas where GEAR UP has had the strongest impact, according to all respondent groups.

- In surveys, all GEAR UP coordinators reported that GEAR UP has helped their schools **increase students' knowledge of postsecondary education** to a moderate (55%) or large extent (45%). To a lesser extent, GEAR UP has also been helpful in raising awareness among families, primarily through FAFSA, college, and scholarship nights and other events.



- As noted earlier, **college visits were singled out as one of the most impactful experiences** students are able to have through GEAR UP. Many students in the focus groups talked about being inspired by what they saw or heard during campus visits. For example, one student commented, “At first I wanted to be a graphic designer because I thought I could draw. Then we went for a field trip to Western Oregon and they had a lot of teaching opportunities and courses. I’ve always been interested in foreign language and so this year we went to Eastern Oregon and they had a lot of courses in foreign language and their grade point average was one I could actually make. So it was really appealing.”
- In one case study school, educators and students spoke very highly of the **GEAR UP-sponsored SAT class**. One educator commented, “I was shocked at how many kids signed up for the SAT prep class and came every Saturday. There were tons of kids taking advantage of that and hopefully they all benefitted from taking the SAT. That seemed to work well.” Students agreed, noting that “It was extremely helpful in explaining how the questions were structured and how you could most efficiently use your time.”
- In one case study school, another promising practice was **hiring a college liaison** to work with students during senior year, and especially during the summer months and their transition to college. As the coordinator explained, “Having somebody that then follows the kids, especially over the summer, that's connected with the community college, that will work with the kids on ‘Okay, did you get registered, do you need help buying books, do you need help navigating this?’ So, really having a person through the summer months work with kids, I think, is very helpful.”
- At this school, **having a dedicated class for seniors to focus on their postsecondary plans** was also seen as “huge.” The counselor added, “We meet with seniors every single week and we're able to work with them. So in the fall, they're now doing FAFSA, and every student is working on college applications, financial aid, scholarships, and then we also have tried to put in a really good piece for kids going into apprenticeships. We had the employment department come, so that piece has been really helpful to be able to work with seniors on a regular basis.” Students agreed this class was extremely helpful but suggested starting to work on these things earlier, possibly in their junior year. A senior commented, “During the senior year, everything is just like boom, and you feel really rushed for time. You don’t have time to prepare for all these scholarships because you are also trying to focus on classwork. So starting earlier would be great.”

- **Parents were very appreciative** of the opportunities their students have had to learn about postsecondary education. One parent, for example, said, “He’s come home a few times being interested in talking about... ‘I need to get my grades up if I want a scholarship to go to these colleges.’ He’s showing some kind of interest that somebody is talking to him about it, which as a freshman, I think is good.”

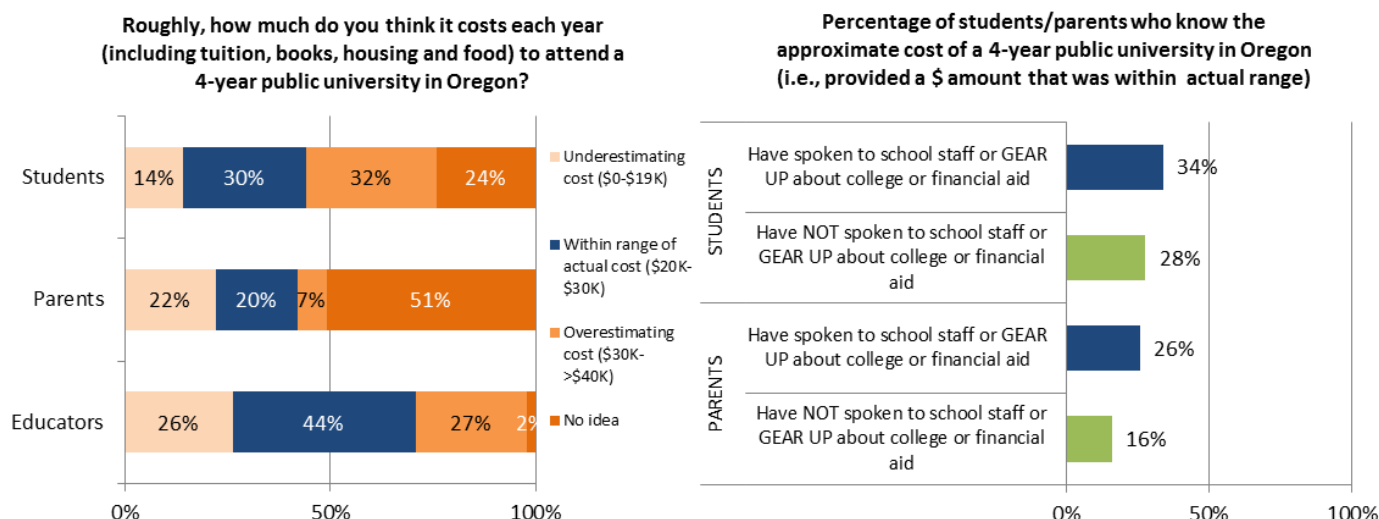
[This school] has already talked to him more about what he wants to do in college and all of that than [his prior high school] did the whole time he was there. And he’s only been here about four weeks.

GEAR UP Parent

Most students (including seniors), families, and educators do not know the actual cost of attending a 4-year public university. In surveys, only 30% of students, 20% of parents, and 44% of educators estimated the cost of college correctly, and most of them overestimated it (compared to 32% of students, 35% of parents, and 40% of educators the prior year). As one may expect, students in the upper grades were more likely to provide a correct estimate of the cost; yet as many as 55% of seniors did not know the actual cost of college at the time of completing the survey (in winter/early spring).

However, students and parents who have discussed college or financial aid with school staff or GEAR UP were more likely to report an accurate estimate of the costs than those who have not, an indication that GEAR UP is helping increase their knowledge in this area.

STUDENT, PARENT, AND EDUCATOR KNOWLEDGE OF THE COST OF COLLEGE



Additional findings revealed a positive correlation between other GEAR UP activities and students’ self-reported knowledge of college entrance requirements. For example, students who have visited a 4-year university were much more likely to report they know *some* or *all* of the 4-year college entrance requirements than students who did not attend a campus visit (73% compared to 46%). Similarly, those who participated in college fairs, college nights and guest speaker events were also more likely to say they know about college entrance requirements (63% compared to 46%). Similar correlations were found for students who participated in campus visits at 2-year community colleges and technical schools. Furthermore, students who participated in campus visits to 4-year universities were more likely to know the actual cost of attending college than those who did not participate (33% compared to 26%, respectively).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, evaluation findings for Year 3 of the grant indicate that GEAR UP schools are making progress, particularly around creating a college-going culture and raising students' and—to a lesser degree—families' awareness of postsecondary education options and financing. GEAR UP is also providing critical resources for schools to implement academic, and social and emotional interventions. The large majority of surveyed educators reported that GEAR UP has had a *beneficial* (61%) or *very beneficial* (33%) impact on the majority of their students. And almost all students (94%) reported that the college and career readiness activities offered at their school have helped them prepare for school and postsecondary education, including 60% who said *a medium amount* or *a lot*. Several hundred teachers provided examples of how GEAR UP has impacted their school. Representative comments are included next.

WHAT EDUCATORS SAY ABOUT THE IMPACT OF GEAR UP

GEAR UP has significantly supported our efforts to promote college-knowledge, as well as first hand exposure to college campuses. The GEAR UP scholarships have provided financial support by alleviating the financial burden of attending college. Finally, GEAR UP's annual report and SUCCESS conferences help our building monitor our progress and develop fresh solutions that remove barriers for those interested in college.

GEAR UP has improved our technology use for students, helped improve our student college and career center, made it possible for students to go on college visits, improved opportunity for scholarships, helped kids meet local and state-wide assessments for graduation, increased academic rigor and academic relevance, helped students learn about grit and Growth Mindset, and helped teachers learn how to work with students in poverty.

GEAR UP provides a view of future possibilities and hope of a means to achieve them. Students minds are opened and encouraged to reach for more than they may have previously thought possible. GEAR UP thus gives families and our school overall permission to dream outside the box.

I think our school and community are starting to see college as "what we do next" instead of just a dream. We have been given several high level learning opportunities that we could not otherwise afford without GEAR UP, opportunities that are helping our students feel accomplished and giving them skills to get ahead.

A number of challenges were also identified, including limited staff involvement (in some schools), low educator expectations, and difficulties engaging parents. Academic underpreparation and low school attendance are also important obstacles that many GEAR UP schools are facing. The following are key priority areas and recommendations moving forward.

MOVING FORWARD

- ✦ Identify resources and promising practices that schools can employ to **make the curriculum and the content more relevant and engaging** for students, such as utilizing a project-based or place-based learning approach, seeking curriculum input from students and empowering them during the learning process, providing electives and/or online courses aligned to students' varied interests, and increasing the number of experiential career/college-related opportunities such as job shadowing, internships, and career-related field trips.
- ✦ Continue to work with schools around **educator expectations and buy-in** and provide further professional development on how to embed college and career readiness work in their classes.
- ✦ Continue to support schools in their efforts to **increase students' academic preparation and overall school attendance**, for example by encouraging schools—particularly those struggling the most in these areas—to include sustained, intensive, and purposeful interventions in their GEAR UP school plans (and closely monitor the implementation and outcomes of such efforts).
- ✦ Continue to provide resources and supports **around family involvement**, for example by asking schools to share promising practices on how they may have applied what they learned during the Summer Institute (which focused on family engagement), and providing time and space for school teams to review available resources (e.g., Family Engagement toolkit) and reflect on their efforts.