

# Oregon GEAR UP

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

### Key Evaluation Findings for Year 5 (2018–19)

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 2018–19, the fifth year of the current federal grant, Oregon GEAR UP was implemented in 34 middle and high schools in 21 school districts (from here on referred to as “clusters”) and served over 7,400 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 2018–19 school year.** The Brief is organized by the following areas:

- Summary of key findings (page 2)
- The need and context for Oregon GEAR UP (page 3)
- Reaching higher and promoting a college-going culture (pages 4–7)
- Increasing the rigor of instruction (pages 8–12)
- Promoting relevance and career awareness (pages 13–15)
- Fostering supportive relationships (pages 16–21)
- Raising awareness of postsecondary education options (pages 22–25)
- Implementation challenges (pages 26–27)
- Conclusions and recommendations (page 28)

#### SOURCES OF DATA

- ✓ School data (demographic, academic, attendance)
- ✓ Student surveys (N for 2018–19=6,496)<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Parent surveys (N for 2018–19=2,663)<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Educator surveys (N for 2018–19=754)<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ GEAR UP coordinator/administrator surveys (N for 2018–19=38)<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Site visits at 5 case study schools, which included interviews with each school’s principal and GEAR UP coordinator, and focus groups with a total of 18 educators and staff, 28 students, and 15 parents
- ✓ Data from the locally-developed College and Career Readiness Inventory (CCRI)

<sup>1</sup> Additional survey information is provided on the last page of this report, including the total number of surveys collected (and response rates, when available) by grant year.

## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

In 2018–19, the fifth year of the grant, Oregon GEAR UP served 7,419 students in grades 7–13 in 34 schools in 21 rural communities; most students live in low-income households (77%). Evaluation results show many positive successes and some areas for growth, described below.

- ➔ **GEAR UP schools have continued to expand their college and career readiness programming.** Particularly noteworthy was the increase over the last 3 years in offerings designed to increase rigor (from an average of 14 to 18 activities per school) and to build supportive relationships (from 7 to 14 activities). Other areas that were greatly expanded include family engagement events and workshops, career relevance activities such as Career Photobooths, workplace visits, and service learning projects, and supports for college alumni.
- ➔ Over the course of the grant and as a result of trainings and coaching from Oregon GEAR UP, **schools have become more intentional in using data to identify priority areas and develop GEAR UP programming** aligned to those needs. During site visits, school staff provided many examples of successful GEAR UP activities and interventions they are implementing as a result of the GEAR UP data-driven planning process, including a high school transition event that had a huge parent turnout, a Math lab initiative for students who did not score proficient on the math assessment the previous year, an expanded dual credit program resulting from the school's efforts to strengthen their partnership with a local community college, college nights for families, local industry tours, and hands-on career awareness experiences.
- ➔ The **cost of college continues to be one of the main perceived barriers** or concerns that may prevent students from pursuing postsecondary education. Yet, about one third or less of students and parents can correctly identify the cost of college. However, students who were able to identify the cost were more likely to say they can *definitely* or *probably* afford a college education than other students. Other important barriers are academic under-preparation, students wanting or needing to work, lack of motivation, and believing they do not need college for their career.
- ➔ **Educators' expectations about students completing a college degree or certificate after high school—or completing a college prep curriculum while still in high school—remain low.** For example, educators reported that less than two-thirds (55%) of their students are capable of completing a college prep curriculum, and they expect that fewer (41%) will complete it.
- ➔ **GEAR UP schools are underperforming in math and ELA, and there have been no noteworthy gains in these areas.** However, there have been small gains in the proportion of Grade 9 students on-track to graduate and school attendance.
- ➔ Over the course of the grant, there have been **significant gains in students' and parents' awareness of college requirements, and financial resources to pay for college.** For example, in 2018–19, the large majority of students reported they know *all* or *some* of the requirements to get into a 4-year university (77%) or a 2-year community college (82%).

*[Students feel] like they can go to college, which is huge... You know, they really credit GEAR UP a lot in their success with being able to navigate the financial aid process, being able to step onto college campuses... And they wouldn't have had those opportunities without GEAR UP.*

--School staff

**97%**

of administrators and GEAR UP coordinators think that GEAR UP has had a moderate to large impact on increasing students' knowledge of postsecondary options and financial aid.

As Oregon GEAR UP enters the last two years of the grant, Oregon GEAR UP and its network of schools should focus their efforts on a number of priority areas identified through the evaluation including: supporting students' academic preparation, engaging families and communities in school events and school efforts to prepare students for postsecondary life, increasing knowledge around the cost of college and financial aid resources, and creating sustainability plans.



## THE NEED AND CONTEXT FOR OREGON GEAR UP

Oregon GEAR UP is being implemented in 21 rural communities, serving 28 cohort schools and 6 priority schools.

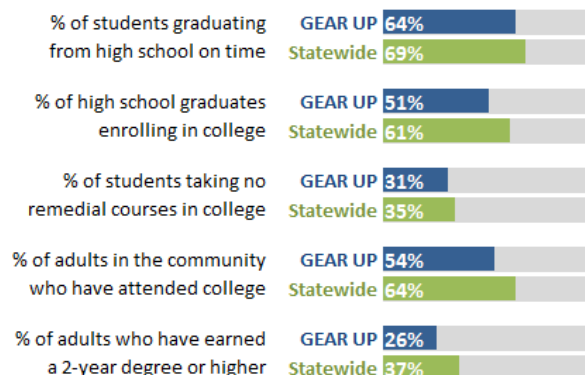
- **Cohort schools** follow a grade-level cohort approach, thus serving all students within target grades. In Year 1 (2014–15), cohort schools began serving students in grade 7; each subsequent year, they continue to serve these students while adding a new cohort of seventh-grade students.
- **Priority schools** were part of the federal grant from 2008–14 and have continued from 2014–21 under a modified direct service model that targets “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.

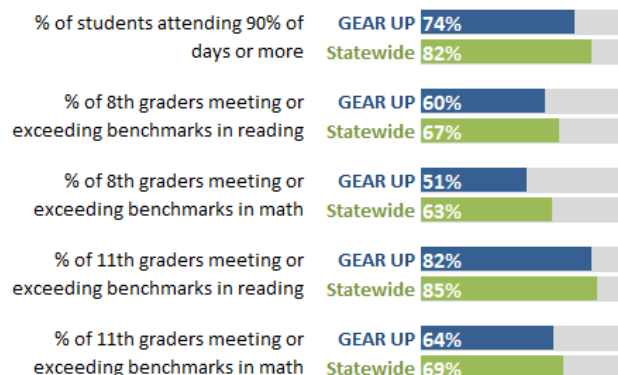
### COMMON CHALLENGES IN RURAL EDUCATION

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

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

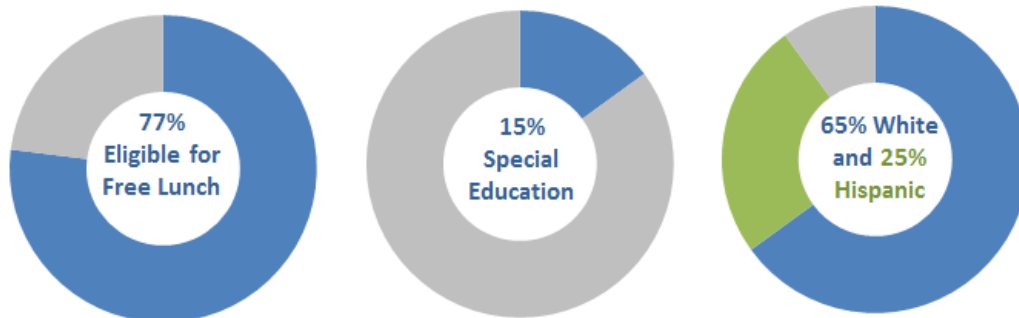


#### Baseline Academic and Attendance Indicators (GEAR UP Communities vs. Statewide)



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

In 2018–19, GEAR UP served 6,656 students in grades 7–11 in cohort schools and 763 students in grades 12–13 in priority schools; most students live in low-income households (77%).



\*Source: ODE enrollment data for the entire 2018–19 school year.



## REACHING HIGHER AND PROMOTING A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE



Bulletin boards at Bandon High School promote a college-going culture. (Credit: Oregon GEAR UP Facebook Page)

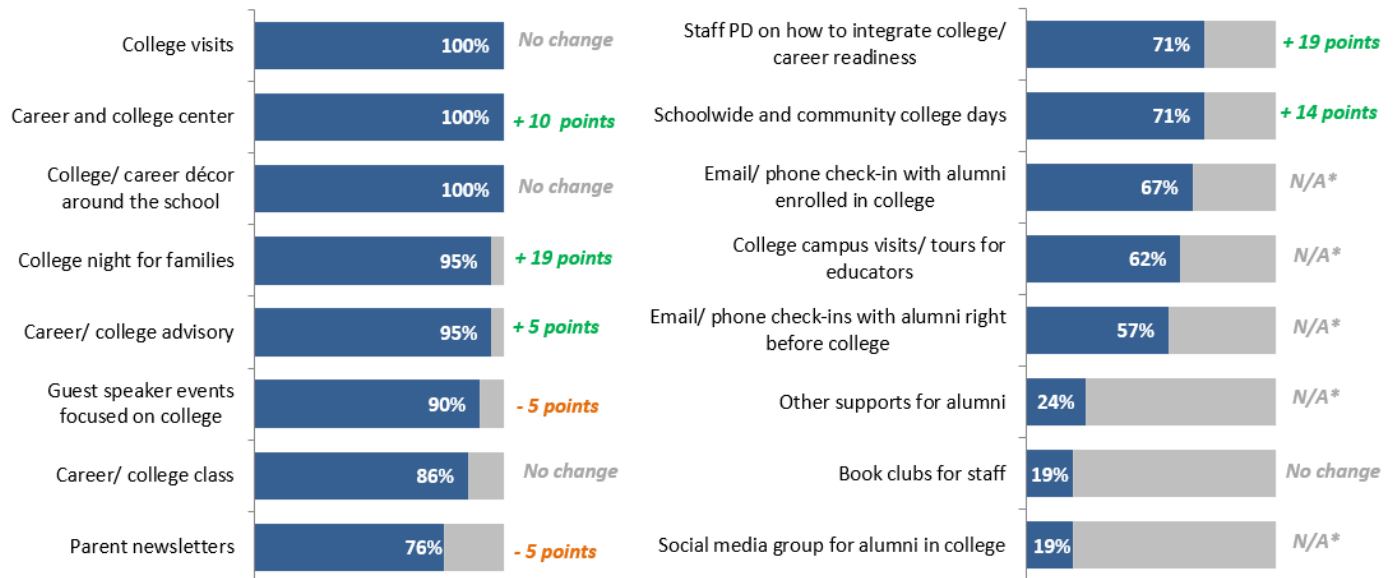
### MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- A STRONG COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE HAS TAKEN HOLD ACROSS GEAR UP SCHOOLS, AND IS LARGELY EVIDENT IN HEARING FROM STUDENTS, PARENTS, ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF DURING SITE VISITS.
- GEAR UP SCHOOLS HAVE INCREASED THE NUMBER OF REACHING HIGHER ACTIVITIES FOR BOTH STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS—ALTHOUGH SURVEY DATA SHOW ADDITIONAL EFFORTS MAY BE NEEDED TO RAISE EDUCATORS' EXPECTATIONS.

Across the years, GEAR UP schools have honed in on certain activities that have helped a college-going culture take hold at their schools, and more have offered such activities to families. Since 2016–17,<sup>2</sup> almost all GEAR UP clusters have taken students on college visits, maintained a career and college center, and included college and career décor around their buildings; in 2018–19, all of these activities were implemented by all schools. Furthermore, in 2018–19, 95% of GEAR UP clusters offered college nights for families, an increase of 19 percentage points compared with the 2016–17 school year.

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

2018–19 results (and percentage point difference with 2016–17 results)



\*Denotes activities that were not asked about in 2016–17.

In addition, overall, the average number of reaching higher activities that GEAR UP clusters implemented in 2018–19 was greater than in 2016–17 (11 compared to nine, respectively).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The 2016–17 school year was the first year that Oregon GEAR UP began using the College and Career Readiness Inventory (CCRI) tool to track schools' implementation of activities supporting college and career readiness.

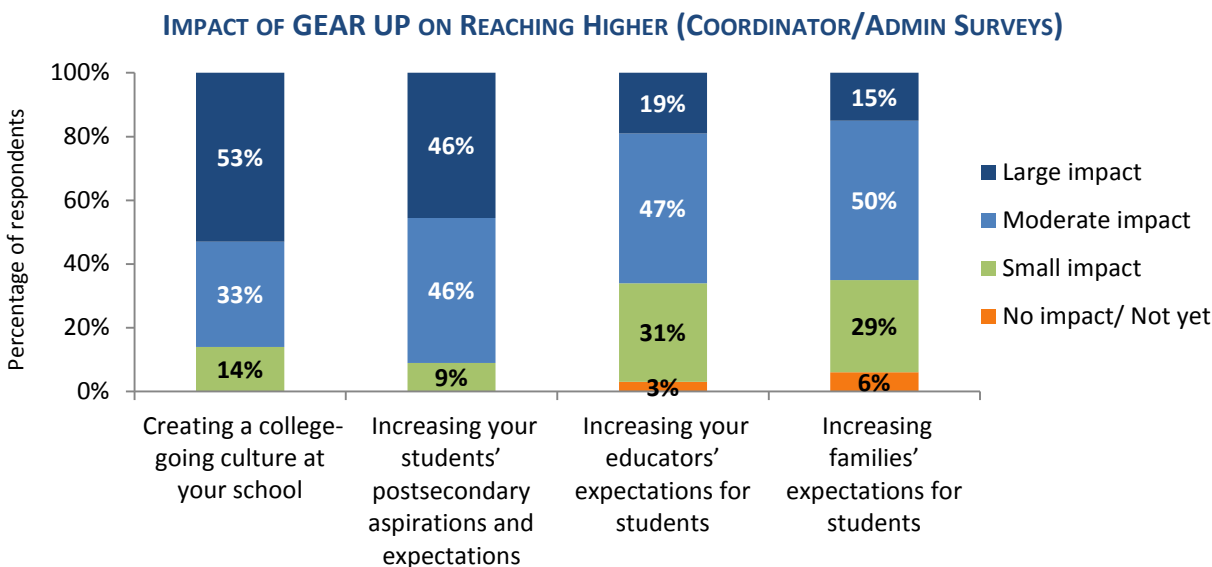
<sup>3</sup> In 2016–17, fewer GEAR UP activities were included on the CCRI compared with subsequent years.



In 2018–19, more GEAR UP schools turned their focus toward providing supports for alumni to ensure they are supported as they transition to their first year of postsecondary education, and for school staff to continue to raise their expectations for students. Compared with previous years, there was a substantial increase in the percentage of schools providing email and phone check-ins with alumni enrolled in college (from 43% in 2017–18 to 67% in 2018–19), as well as other supports for alumni (from 10% in 2017–18 to 24%). In addition, more GEAR UP schools have offered college campus visits for educators (from 33% in 2017–18 to 62%) and PD on how to integrate college and career readiness (from 52% in 2016–17 to 71%). On the other hand, the percentage of schools offering book clubs for staff was cut in about half compared to 2017–18 (from 43% to 19%, although it remained unchanged compared with 2016–17).

One of the schools Metis visited in spring 2019 exemplified how GEAR UP activities have helped a college-going culture take hold. At this school, activities had been scaffolded from grade to grade such that students’ understanding and exposure to postsecondary opportunities is built upon and deepened as they progress from grade to grade during college and career advisories and classes, and are enhanced by out-of-school opportunities tailored to student interests, such as college visits and related activities. As a result of the scaffolded exposure, students have higher expectations for themselves, according to staff: *“I have less and less kids that tell me ‘I’m going to go work fast food’ or ‘I’m going to work in the fields.’ They are challenging themselves more to find something that they’re passionate about, and can do well.”*

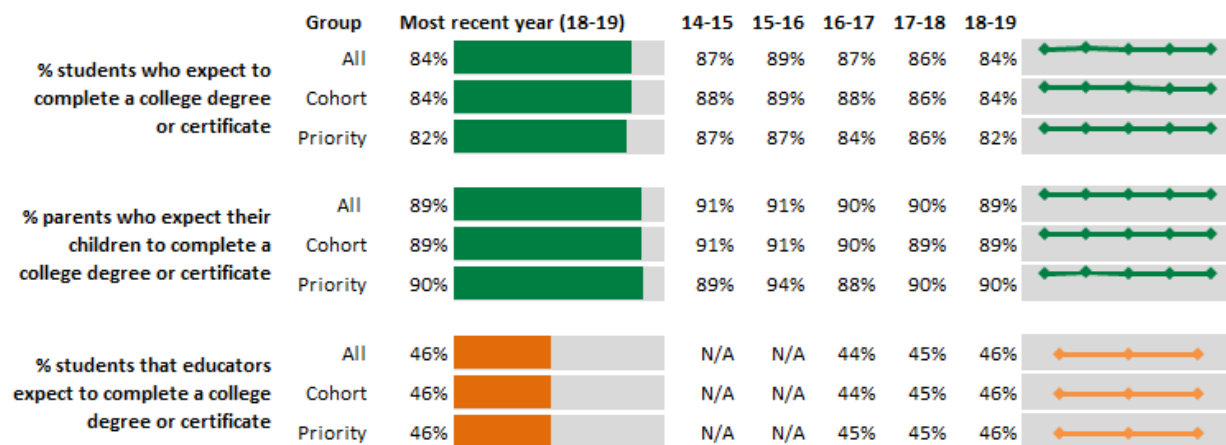
Across the years, GEAR UP coordinators and administrators have observed a *large or moderate impact* of GEAR UP in helping students reach higher. In 2018–19, the large majority of surveyed GEAR UP coordinators and administrators reported that GEAR UP supported their schools to a *large or moderate extent* in increasing students’ postsecondary aspirations and expectations (92%) and creating a college-going culture (86%), and a majority also reported a similar impact on increasing expectations among educators (66%) and families (65%).



Compared with the previous year, there was a slight increase in the percentage of GEAR UP coordinators and administrators who saw a *large or moderate impact* in their schools in terms of creating a college-going culture (a two percentage-point increase). On one site visit, an administrator told us that he felt his school *“had the college part down,”* and at another school, an administrator shared: *“if you walk in the building, you see the visible college-going culture. We have banners, we’ve got things, we talk about college all the time.”* However, there was a 10 percentage-point decline from 2017–18 on perceived impact on educators’ expectations for students.

The development of a strong college-going culture is evident in the high expectations and awareness shared by students and parents, which have remained high across the years of GEAR UP. The majority of GEAR UP students and parents consistently reported that they expect students to complete a 2-year or 4-year college degree or certificate program (84% in 2018–19 and 89% in 2018–19, respectively).

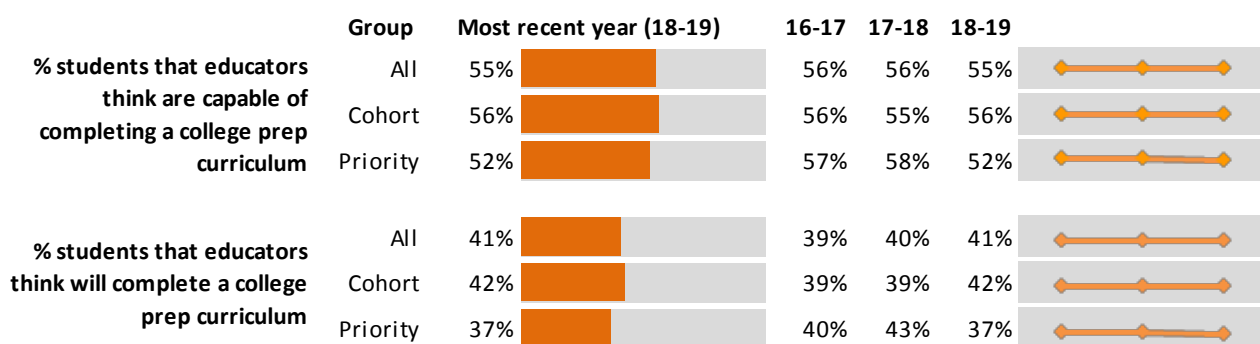
#### STUDENT, PARENT, AND EDUCATOR EXPECTATIONS (SURVEYS)



High expectations and high levels of awareness were also evident during site visits and conversations with students and families. In many schools, parents also shared how they felt GEAR UP activities had positively impacted their students' and their own expectations: *"those college visits just are so helpful to get you into that culture, and to get you thinking ahead, and this could be me, and, 'Okay, I kind of like the vibe of this place...' And a lot of those kids, this is their first time out of [the area]."* At another school, one parent described the college and career classes offered at his child's school as *"essential for this community."* At one school we visited, staff also shared how they saw the extent to which GEAR UP activities had impacted students' expectations: *"[students feel] like they can go to college, which is huge... You know, they really credit GEAR UP a lot in their success with being able to navigate the financial aid process, being able to step onto college campuses... And they wouldn't have had those opportunities without GEAR UP."*

Although more GEAR UP schools held activities and events focused on educators and raising their expectations in 2018–19, educator expectations about students completing a college degree or certificate after high school—or completing a college prep curriculum while still in high school—remain low. In 2018–19, 46% of educators said they expect their students to complete a 2-year or 4-year college degree or certificate program (see above). In addition, educators reported that less than two-thirds (55%) of their students are capable of completing a college prep curriculum, and they expect that fewer (41%) will complete it. Among educators at priority schools, there was a notable decline in 2018–19 compared with the previous years.

#### EDUCATOR EXPECTATIONS ABOUT STUDENTS COMPLETING A COLLEGE PREP CURRICULUM (SURVEYS)



Based on conversations with educators, it is possible that when answering this question, many try to estimate what actually happens (once students need to face the cost and other barriers) rather than what they wish students would do or think students are capable of doing, which might explain the discrepancy. Indeed, based on site visits, it appears some schools have started to benefit from increased efforts to focus on educators and their expectations. In one school we visited, students shared with us that not only did they feel like staff had high expectations for them and would help support them, but that they had also seen staff do this for other students, including some who might be struggling: “[staff here will] recognize some of the kids who have kind of been troubled in the past. They’ll recognize them by giving them student of the month, or [by] not singling them out [for the fact that they had been struggling]. If anything, they encourage them, so that they could continue to do good.”

**The cost of college continues to be one of the main perceived barriers or concerns of students and parents that may prevent students from pursuing their postsecondary education goals; on the other hand, the percentage of educators perceiving cost as a barrier for their students has decreased.** In 2018–19, the top reasons students cited as why they may not continue their education after high school was that postsecondary education costs too much (34% of students), that their grades or test scores are not good enough (20%), or that they plan or need to work (14%). When parents were asked, the top reason they cited was also cost (47%), but they also thought that students’ motivation or indecisiveness would be a factor (17%), followed by grades and test scores (8%). Educators saw their students’ plans or need to work as the top reason (26%), followed by cost (16%) and motivation (13%).

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

REASONS	Students <sup>1</sup>	Parents <sup>1</sup>	Educators
Costs too much	34%	47%	16%
Grades or test scores are not good enough	20%	8%	11%
Plans or needs to work	14%	6%	26%
Student is unmotivated or undecided	11%	17%	13%
Student does not believe they need college for their chosen career	8%	6%	12%

<sup>1</sup>Students 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.

Additional analyses show that students who can correctly identify the cost of college were more likely to report that they can *definitely* or *probably* afford to attend a 4-year college/university (59% compared to 47%), yet they were also more likely to cite “cost” as their main barrier than other students (38% compared to 32%).

Compared with previous years, the percentage of students reporting cost to be the top reason they may not continue their education beyond high school has stayed fairly consistent. However, the percentage of educators perceiving cost to be a barrier has decreased by nine percentage points in that same time frame. The percentage of educators citing students’ motivation or indecisiveness as a top reason, and the percentage citing students’ not having good enough grades or test scores, has also decreased (by eight percentage points and 11 percentage points since 2016–17, respectively). These trends might indicate that educators indeed do have increased positive expectations for their students.

## INCREASING RIGOR AND PREPARING STUDENTS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS



Educators after completing a professional development session in math and engineering at the Oregon GEAR UP 2019 Summer Institute. (Credit: Oregon GEAR UP Facebook Page)

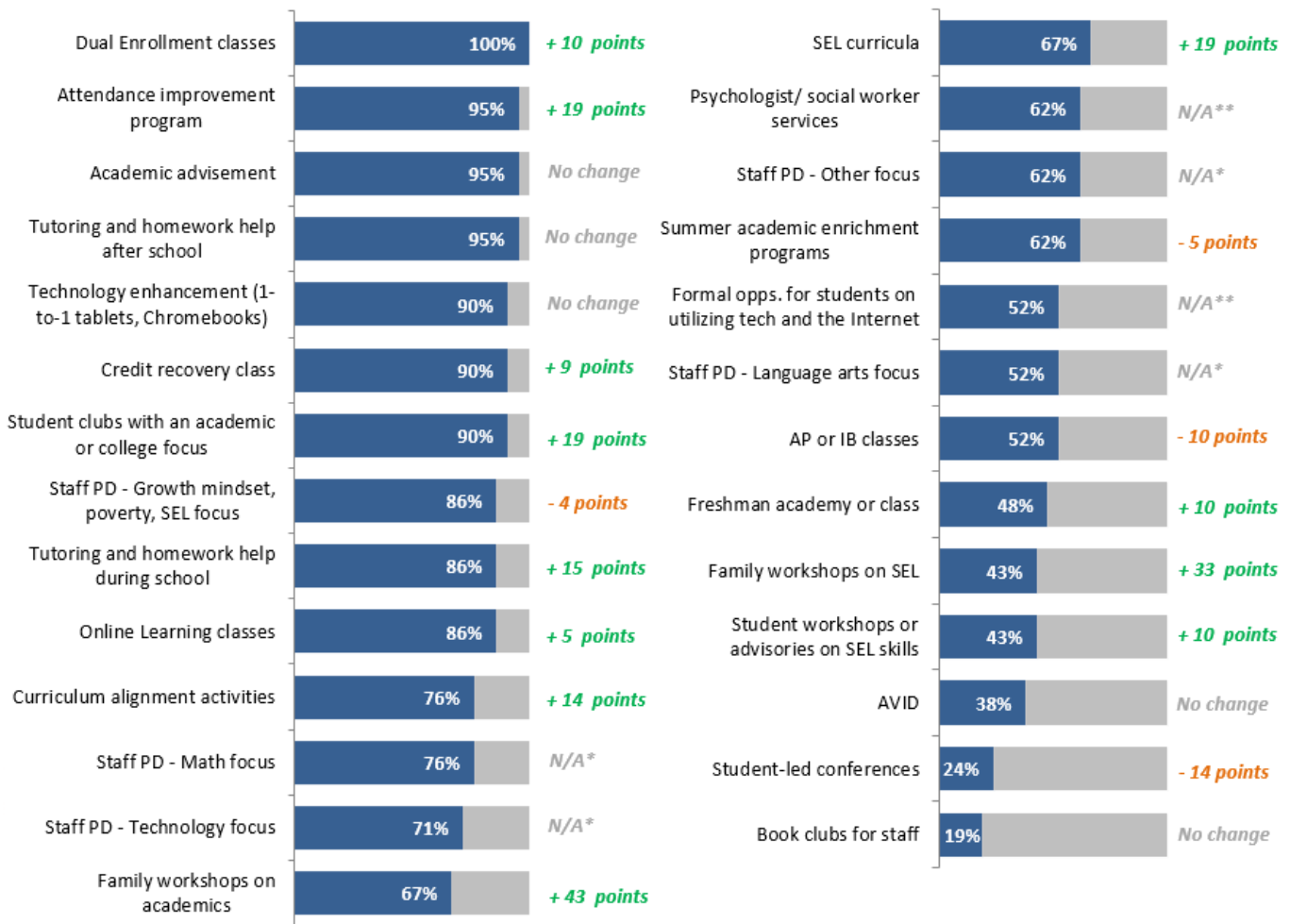
### MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- SCHOOLS HAVE INCREASED PROGRAMMING OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS, AS WELL AS FOR THE EDUCATORS AND FAMILIES WHO SUPPORT THEM, IN AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE ACADEMIC OUTCOMES.
- OVERALL, GEAR UP SCHOOLS ARE STILL FACING ACADEMIC UNDERPERFORMANCE, ALTHOUGH SOME GEAR UP SCHOOLS EXPERIENCED ACADEMIC GAINS.

**GEAR UP clusters have continued to offer a wide range of activities and supports to prepare students for academic success through increasing the rigor of instruction and addressing both their social-emotional and academic needs.** The most frequent of these were dual enrollment classes (100%, increased from 90% in 2016–17), attendance improvement programs (95%, increased from 76%), academic advisement (95%), and tutoring and homework help after school (95%).

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

2018–19 results (and percentage point difference with 2016–17 results)



\*Denotes activities what were not asked in 2016–17. \*\*Denotes activities that were not asked in 2016–17 or 2017–18.

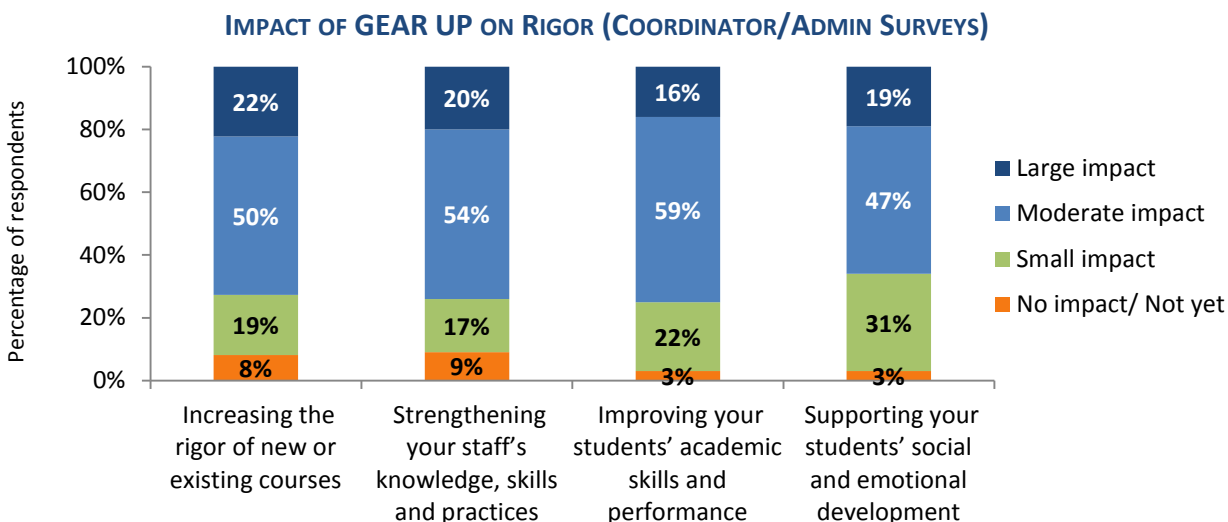




In 2018–19, the percentage of GEAR UP clusters implementing various activities increased compared with previous years for almost every activity, especially those that focused on involving families. For example, there was a substantial increase in the number of GEAR UP clusters implementing family workshops on social emotional learning and family workshops on academics (an increase of 33 percentage points and 43 percentage points compared to 2016–17, respectively). One GEAR UP cluster we visited in 2018–19 had offered such family engagement events, and had great successes. For example, the GEAR UP coordinator, administration, and staff held a high school transition event for families that focused on high school academics (as one staff noted, the event explained *“the rigor”* of the courses at the high school, as well as *“why freshman year is important”* for students’ success) in addition to other topics. One staff member described how they felt the event had been successful in involving families in students’ academic success: *“this was an opportunity for us to say, ‘Come meet us. We’re really interested in your child. Let’s see what we can create together. Let’s create the best model we can. Let’s get them started on the right foot.’ And I think that that outgoing message, I think it was powerful.”*

In addition to increases across activities, on average in 2018–19, GEAR UP clusters implemented 18 activities focused on increasing rigor, one of the largest increases compared with 2016–17 when clusters implemented an average of 14 activities. For the first time, clusters were asked to document if they offered psychosocial/social worker services or formal opportunities for students on utilizing tech and the internet, which over half do implement: 62% and 52%, respectively.

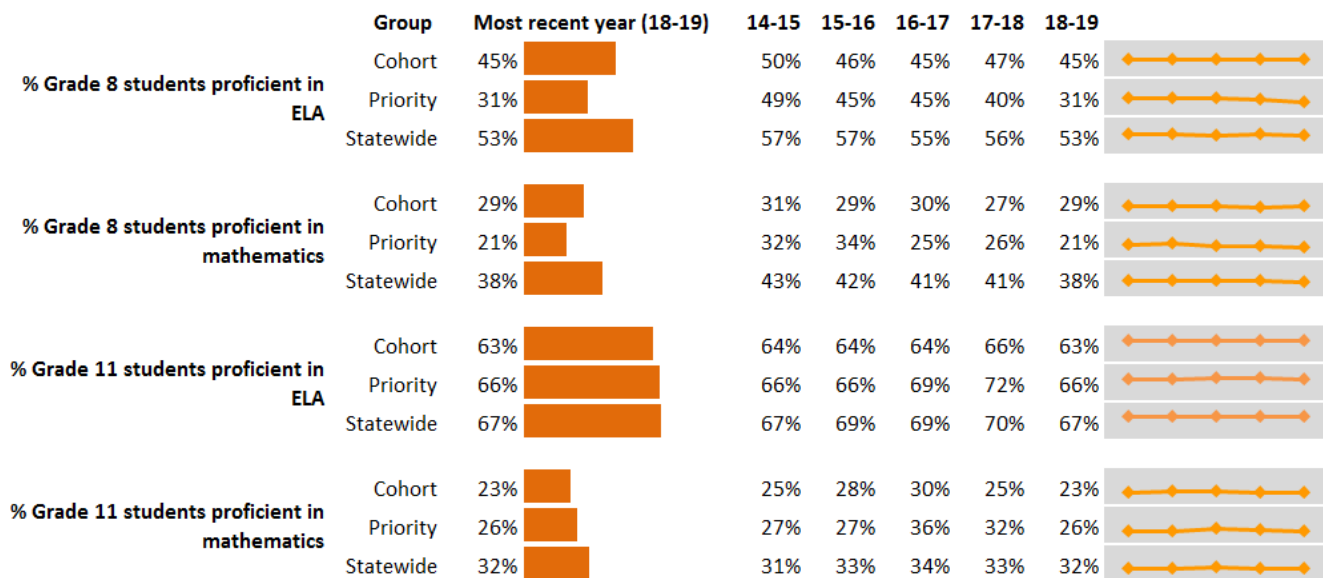
Across the years, a majority of GEAR UP coordinators and administrators have consistently said that their GEAR UP programs have had a *large or moderate impact* in this area, and the percentage who reported this has increased compared with previous years. The percentage of coordinators and administrators who saw a *large or moderate impact* in increasing the rigor of new or existing courses was substantially higher in 2018–19 compared to the previous school year (a 12 percentage-point increase). The same was true for their perceptions of the impact of GEAR UP on improving students’ academic skills and performance, where there was a nine percentage-point increase compared with the previous year. While there was no increase compared with *last* year in the percentage who said they saw a *large or moderate impact* on strengthening staff’s knowledge, skills, and practices, compared with the 2015–16 school year there has been an 11 percentage-point increase.



The impact that school staff and administrators see of GEAR UP in the area of rigor was evident during our site visits. For example, one staff noted: *“GEAR UP helped us [do] growth awards this year...not just honoring kids who are proficient, but those who grew. We looked at GPAs...SBAC scores...kids taking advanced coursework. It was a lot of kids, which was amazing; when you have a population like we do, low SES, high poverty, and high trauma—those kids aren't going to perform the same way as maybe some of their affluent peers. But one of my big things is, ‘I can't control where I get them but I sure as heck control where I'm taking them.’”*

Overall, GEAR UP clusters are still facing the challenge of academic underperformance, as measured by state assessments, and have even seen declines across the years; however, some clusters have implemented successful practices and have seen improvements in students' performance. 2018–19 results presented below show that Grade 8 students in priority schools fared worse on ELA and Math state assessments compared with the previous year (a decrease of nine and five percentage points, respectively), as well as compared with 2014–15, the first year of the grant (an overall decrease of 18 percentage points in ELA and 11 in math). There was also a decline among Grade 11 students in priority schools compared with the previous year (a decrease of six percentage points in each ELA and math). Cohort schools have experienced smaller academic declines, often mirroring statewide declines.

### STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE (ODE DATA)



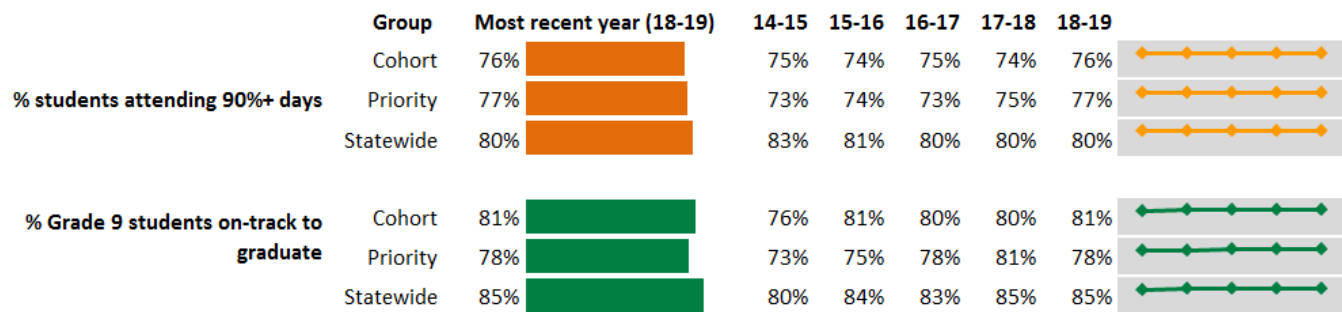
However, there are GEAR UP schools and clusters—including ones we visited this school year—where academic performance improved. Specifically, over the last two years, a considerable proportion of GEAR UP schools saw improvements in Grade 8 ELA performance (41%), Grade 8 math performance (43%), Grade 11 ELA performance (44%), and Grade 11 math performance (59%). Furthermore, a majority (62%) of GEAR UP schools performed better than the state average in Grade 11 ELA (in terms of the percentage of students scoring proficient or above), and a small percentage of GEAR UP schools also performed above state average in Grade 8 ELA and math (17%), and Grade 11 math (26%). Among the schools we visited, the Grade 8 proficiency rates in math rose by eight percentage points in one GEAR UP cluster, 11 percentage points in another cluster, and 13 in another.<sup>4</sup>

These results indicate that several GEAR UP schools and clusters are implementing promising practices for academic improvement and finding success. For example, staff in one of the schools we visited praised their Math Lab initiative, which was an additional math course required for students who did not score proficient on the math assessment the previous year. This new course was planned by the administration and GEAR UP leadership team after reviewing student performance data. That school also benefited from the GEAR UP coordinator's invaluable role coordinating course scheduling for all students, encouraging students to take dual credit courses, and making sure they meet requirements for the postsecondary options they are interested in.

<sup>4</sup> Oregon Department of Education, At-A-Glance School and District Profiles, <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/>.

Over the course of the grant, GEAR UP clusters have experienced increases in the proportion of students who attend regularly and in Grade 9 students who are on-track to graduate. Student regular attendance (i.e., attending 90% or more days out of the school year) stayed consistent across the years for Cohort schools. Priority schools have seen an overall gain of four percentage points compared with 2014–15. In addition, the proportion of Grade 9 students on-track to graduate has remained relatively consistent for Cohort schools, following an increase in the 2015–16 school year of five percentage points over the first year of the grant; for Priority schools, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of students who are on-track to graduate, although there was a slight decline in 2018–19 compared with the previous school year. (See graph on the following page.)

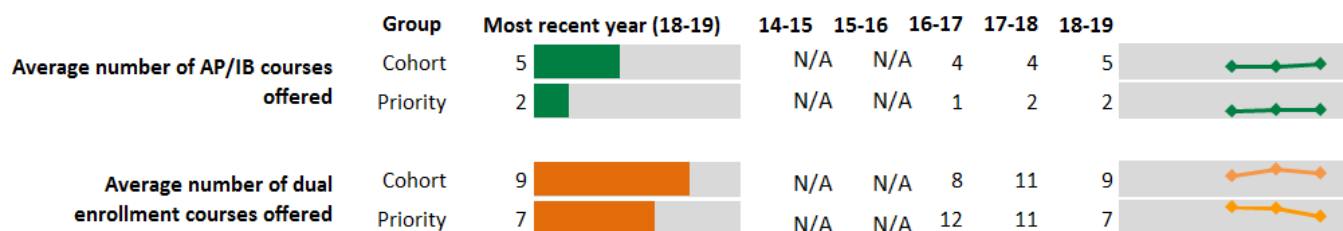
### STUDENTS' ATTENDANCE AND ON-TRACK GRADUATION (ODE DATA)



One school we visited used an “On-Track Advisory” program that has been very successful. The program targeted struggling Grade 9 students by placing them in the on-track advisory as a daily class period. This year, the school had 94% of their Grade 9 students on-track to graduate, nine percentage points higher than the statewide average.<sup>5</sup> One school staff member noted the importance of the program: *“it changes the direction of an entire class of kids.”*

GEAR UP clusters saw mixed progress in terms of increasing the number of rigorous courses offered to students. While all GEAR UP clusters (100%) offered dual enrollment courses (see graph on page 8), the average number of dual enrollment courses offered by all clusters dropped slightly: for Cohort clusters, the average number decreased to nine from 11 in the previous year, and for Priority clusters, the average decreased to seven<sup>6</sup> from 11 in the previous year. And, while there was a decline in the percentage of clusters offering AP and IB classes (from 62% in 2016–17 down to 52% in the past year, see graph on page 8), the average number of AP and IB courses offered by Cohort clusters increased to five from four in the previous years (and remained the same for Priority clusters from the previous year).

### SCHOOLS' COURSE OFFERINGS (CCRI)



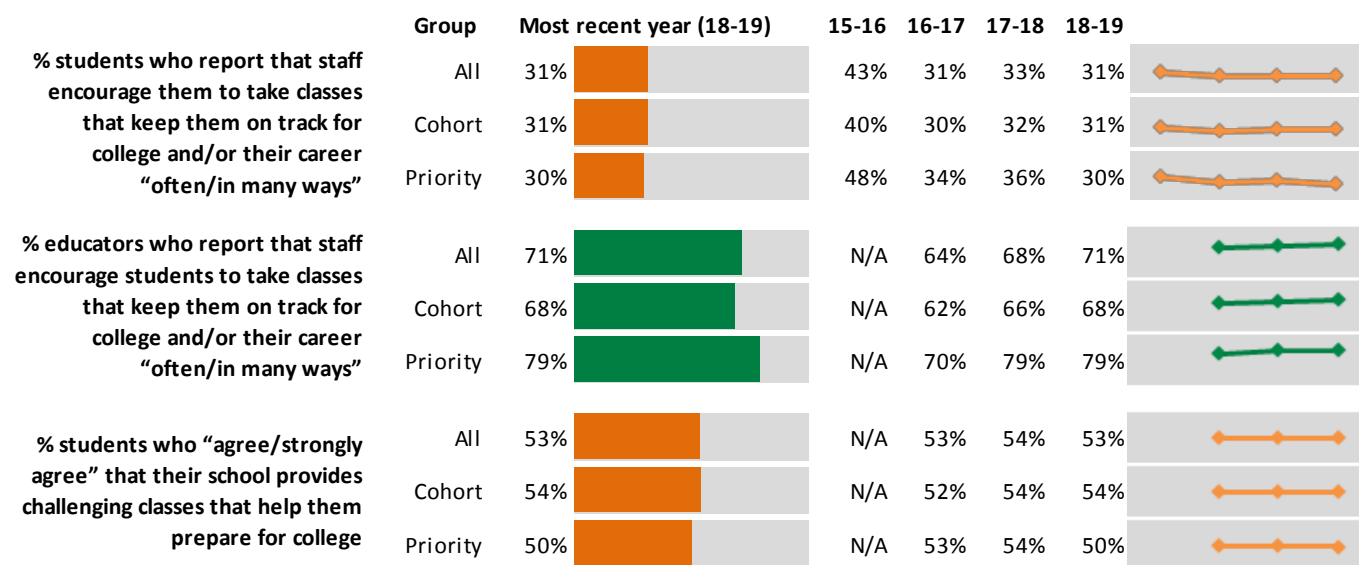
<sup>5</sup> Oregon Department of Education, At-A-Glance School and District Profiles, <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/>.

<sup>6</sup> It is possible the average is underreported, given that only three of the five priority schools who offer dual enrollment classes also reported the number they offer.

One school we visited during the 2018–19 school year exemplified success in expanding rigorous course offerings: it offers a strong dual credit program and has strengthened its partnership with a local community college, thus allowing students to take courses for free. They had over 250 students earn more than 1,500 college credits, and have had students graduate from their high school with an Associate’s degree. A staff member shared, *“I think that we have a culture in our school that getting college credits is definitely something kids strive for, and part of that is GEAR UP, and a lot of the education and conversation that we have with kids.”*

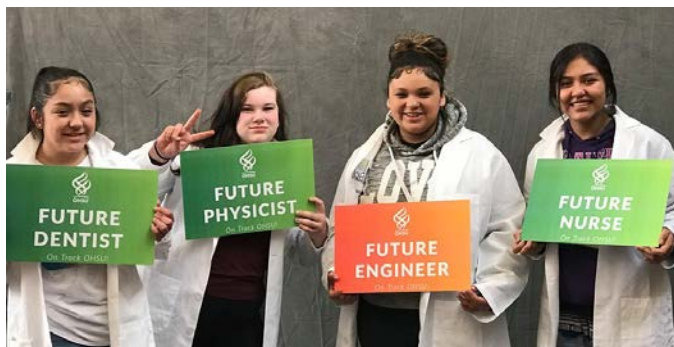
However, a perception gap is growing between GEAR UP students and educators in regards to the offerings of rigorous courses at their schools. Across the years, there has been a decline in the percentage of GEAR UP students who report that staff are encouraging them to take classes to keep them on track for college or career (an eight percentage-point decline from 2015–16 to 2018–19), while at the same time there has been a seven percentage-point increase in the percentage of educators who report this.

#### STUDENT AND EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS AROUND RIGOR (SURVEYS)



During our site visits, we saw examples both of higher levels of awareness of the availability of rigorous courses and take-up of those courses—particularly dual credit and college courses—among students, as well as of schools where staff recognized this as an area for improvement. At the same school that expanded its rigorous course offerings through dual credit programs, there was a high level of staff support and buy-in, which included providing a lot of support and encouragement to students. One staff member said he felt more students took advantage of the program because school staff and the administration are helping them to *“see they can be successful in the classroom.”* On the other hand, another school we visited also provided their students with many great opportunities to get college credits and even graduate with an associate’s degree, yet several staff members noted that many students and their families may not be aware of the opportunity, may not understand that the courses are all paid for, or may not feel they are capable of completing these courses successfully. One staff identified it as a priority: *“[we need to get] kids to realize that they can make it happen.”*

## PROMOTING RELEVANCE AND CAREER AWARENESS



Chiloquin Junior/Senior High School students explore careers in healthcare with OHSU's On Track! program. (Credit: Oregon GEAR UP Facebook Page)

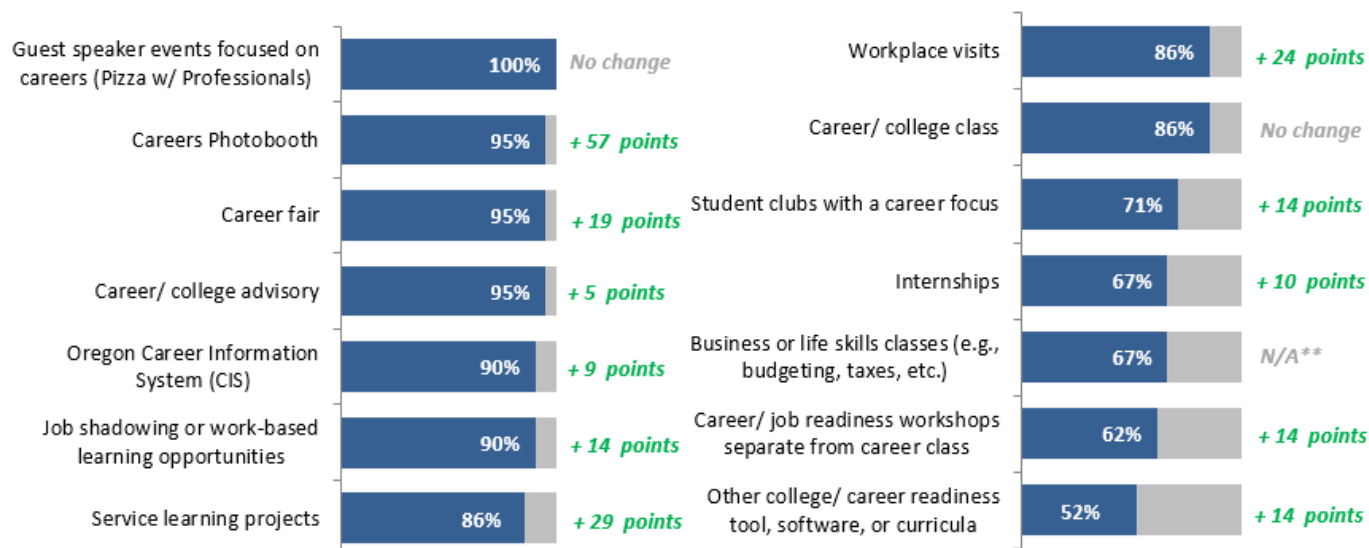
### MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- GEAR UP SCHOOLS HAVE EXPANDED THEIR CAREER AWARENESS PROGRAMMING AND THEIR LOCAL INDUSTRY CONNECTIONS.
- EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOLS' ABILITY TO HELP GUIDE CAREER CHOICES HAS IMPROVED CONSIDERABLY, WHEREAS STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS REMAINED LOW.

In 2018–19, the percentage of GEAR UP clusters implementing activities designed to promote relevance and career awareness saw the largest increases compared with previous years. The activities that saw the most notable increases in 2018–19 compared to 2016–17 were: Careers Photobooths (a 57 percentage-point increase), service learning projects (a 29 percentage-point increase), and workplace visits (a 24 percentage-point increase). For the first time this year, clusters were asked to document if they offered business or life skill classes, which about two-thirds did (67%). In addition, on average, the number of relevance activities increased from nine in 2016–17 to 11 in 2018–19.

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

2018–19 results (and percentage point difference with 2016–17 results)



\*\*Denotes activities that were not asked in 2016–17 or 2017–18.

The expansion of these efforts might have been based on schools' reviewing their activities data, or based on requests from parents. At one school we visited, the GEAR UP Coordinator shared that based on reviewing data in their GEAR UP data dashboard, the school leaders and their staff realized that they should be *"trying to target"* more activities around trade and technical careers and local industry. At another school, parents made it clear that this was a priority for them as well.

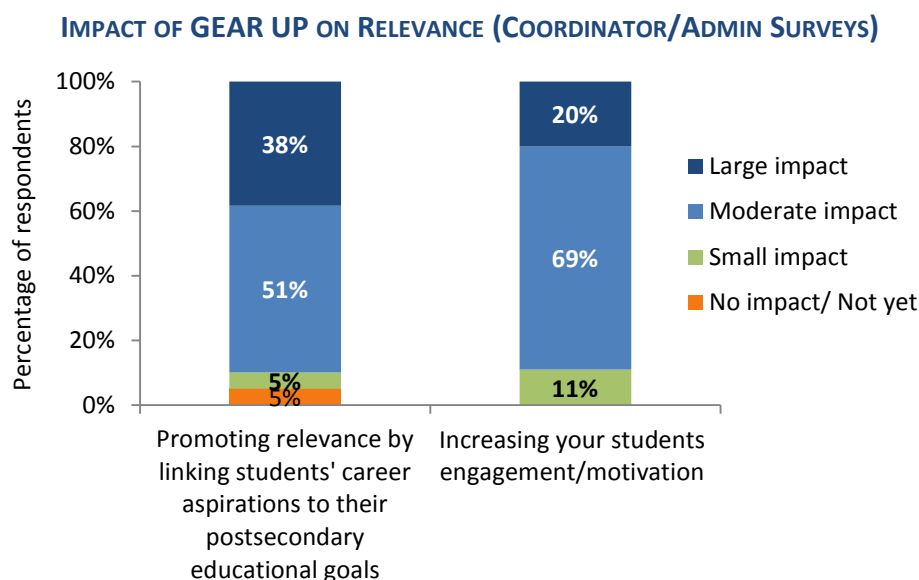


In conversations during site visits, GEAR UP coordinators and administrators elaborated on the efforts they took throughout the year to both improve and expand their career-focused programming, including:

- ✓ Acquiring additional funding streams to create new internships and in-school business opportunities for students
- ✓ Cultivating new and more meaningful connections with local industries
- ✓ Incorporating industry tours for educators into the orientation schedule to better help them guide students down the road
- ✓ Inviting guest speakers and asking them to outline the steps needed to access various careers in their fields and to share the challenges they found along the way
- ✓ Reimagining career fairs guided by student interest (as reported on the GEAR UP surveys) and ideas gained from model school visits
- ✓ Creating interactive experiences, such as job training opportunities, resume workshops and networking with career professionals.

These improvements and expansions have been well-received; as one student reflected on her school's Senior Career Fair: *"it exposed us to how to create resumes [and connect] to jobs in the area. We also got to meet with business owners, talk to them about their experiences. We got business cards, we got their information, their names. It just really helped us make connections. It was really helpful."* Staff at another school recalled that their college and career fair was *"probably one of our best events this year."*

**Almost all GEAR UP coordinators and administrators believed GEAR UP has improved the relevance of their school by connecting students' career aspirations to their postsecondary educational goals and by increasing students' engagement and motivation.** In 2018–19, 89% of GEAR UP coordinators and administrators said they saw a *large or moderate impact* of GEAR UP on their schools' successes with promoting relevance, which is largely unchanged from prior years (91% said this in both 2016–17 and 2017–18). Coordinators and administrators were also asked for the first time this year to assess the impact GEAR UP has had on students' engagement and motivation, and 89% saw a *large or moderate impact* in this area.



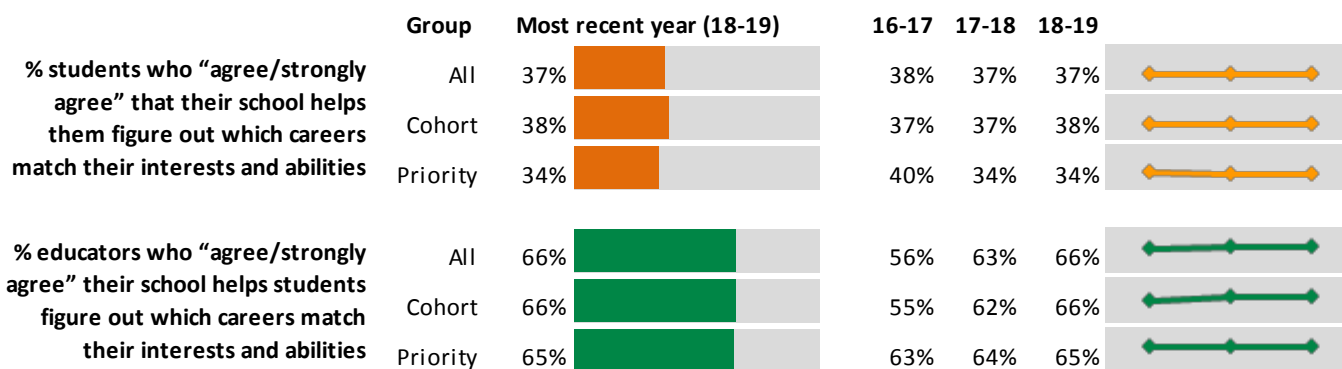
The positive impacts of GEAR UP career-focused activities are exemplified by the story of one student we met during a site visit, who was inspired by his school's industry tour visit to a local airport to turn a previously fleeting career interest into an active goal. The student shared in our conversation that he was not aware there was an airport so close to home until the industry tour and had not thought becoming a pilot was truly possible for him.

He connected with pilots during the visit, though, who explained the process and education necessary to make the idea become a reality. Since that trip, he has gone back to the airport weekly to get training and is planning on becoming a commercial pilot in the future. This represents the great success of the industry tours according to educators: exposing students to opportunities they might not know about, but which they could pursue while staying fairly close to home.

**During site visits, parents across multiple schools indicated that this expanded focus on developing career awareness had a positive impact.** Parents were grateful for the growth in career-based programming, given their long-held desires for a greater focus on local industries, and “hands-on” and more technical careers. They believed the career-driven activities complemented existing college-focused opportunities and created more well-rounded support and guidance for their children. Staff echoed this sentiment as one explained, *“now we’re preaching to everybody, and not just the kids who are going to go to a four-year university.”*

**Despite these indications of success, survey results show that still few students report positive perceptions of their schools’ successes in this area, indicating there is still room for improvement in GEAR UP schools’ career- and trade-focused programming.** The percentage of students who *agree* or *strongly agree* that their schools help them figure out which careers match their interests and abilities has remained relatively unchanged over the past three years in Cohort schools (from 37% in 2016–17 to 38% in 2018–19), and has declined by six percentage points in Priority schools (from 40% in 2016–17 to 34% in 2018–19). On the other hand, educators’ perceptions have remained consistently higher than students’ (66% of educators across all schools said they *agree* or *strongly agree* with the statement in 2018–19), and have considerably improved over time among Cohort schools (an 11 percentage-point increase since 2016–17).

#### STUDENT AND EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS AROUND RELEVANCE (SURVEYS)



These results might indicate that while many schools are doing more activities in this area, they might still be struggling to figure out the best implementation model for them. For example, at one school we visited, the administration and the GEAR UP team had begun to develop a job shadowing program, but they reported that it had been challenging to get it off the ground, especially in terms of figuring out how to fit the program into students’ schedules while balancing in and out-of-class time. At another school, educators shared a desire to make learning more relevant for students interested in trades by demonstrating how subjects—like algebra—relate to their area of interest—like mechanics—but felt limited in opportunities to do so.

## FOSTERING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS



GEAR UP students at the summer Student Leadership Event, hosted at Oregon State University and led by Seeds Training. (Credit: Oregon GEAR UP Facebook Page)

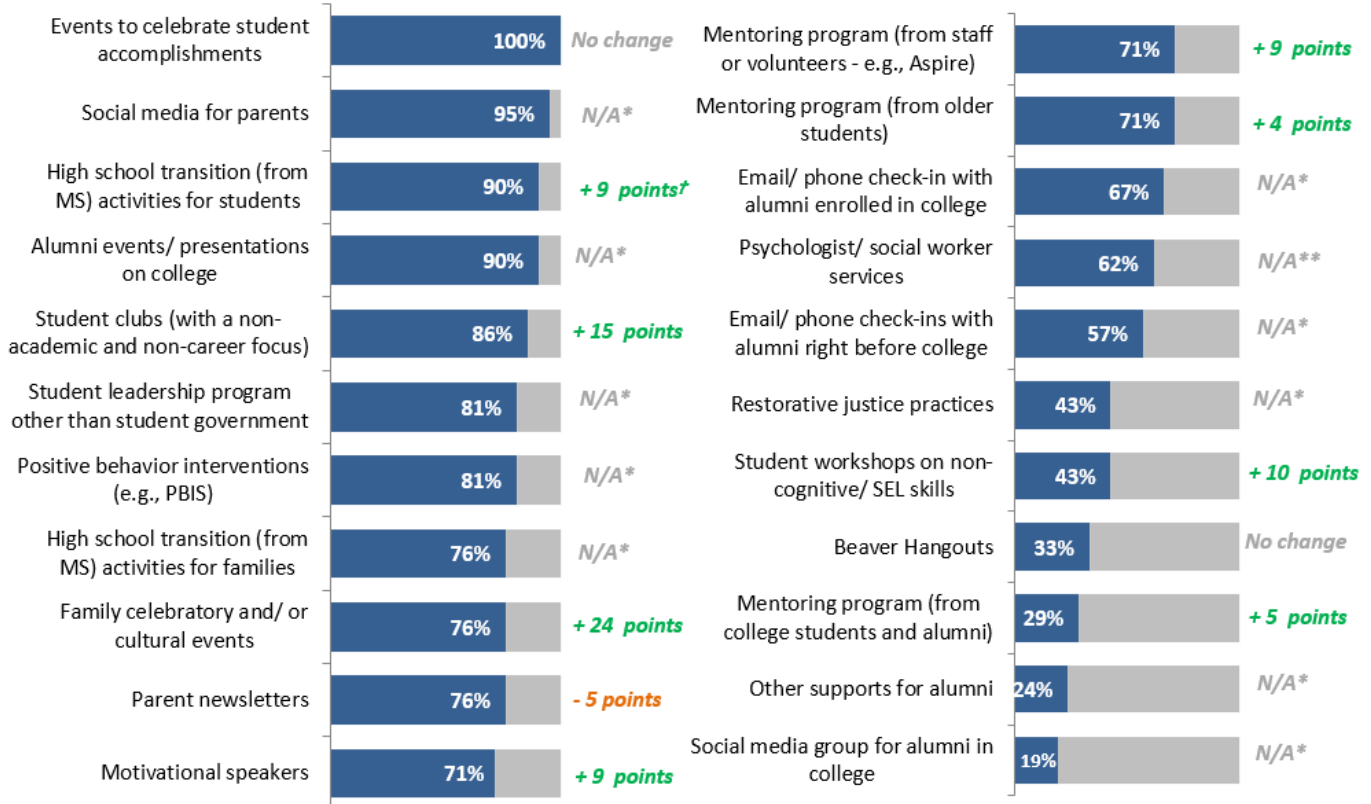
### MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- SCHOOLS HAVE ALMOST DOUBLED THE NUMBER OF RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING ACTIVITIES OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS, PARTICULARLY THOSE FOR FAMILIES. EDUCATOR INVOLVEMENT IN COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ALSO HAS INCREASED.
- HOWEVER, STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AROUND RELATIONSHIPS (SUCH AS STUDENTS HELPING EACH OTHER AND STAFF CARING ABOUT THEM) REMAINED LOW.

In 2018–19, the percentage of GEAR UP clusters providing relationship-building activities increased for nearly every offering, and the average number of activities they offered has doubled over time. The percentage of clusters offering family celebratory and/or cultural events saw the largest increase during this time period (an increase of 24 percentage points), highlighting GEAR UP schools' interest in and commitment to improving family engagement. In addition, the average number of activities focused on fostering relationships increased from seven in 2016–17 to 14 in 2018–19 (this was the largest increase of all five “R” areas in the Oregon GEAR UP framework).

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

2018–19 results (and percentage point difference with 2016–17 results)



\*Denotes activities that were not asked in 2016–17. \*\*Denotes activities that were not asked in 2016–17 or 2017–18.

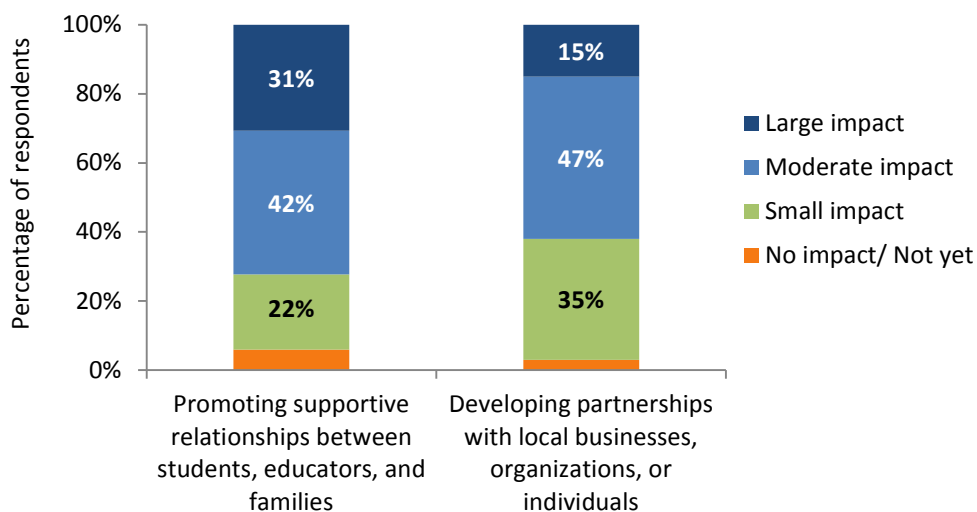
† The 2016–17 CCRI asked only about “High school transition (from MS) activities” and did not differentiate between activities for students and for families.



More GEAR UP clusters implemented other family engagement activities as well, compared with the 2017–18 school year: there was a 38 percentage-point increase in the use of social media for engaging parents and a 28 percentage-point increase in implementing middle school to high school transition activities for families. As noted earlier in this report (under Reaching Higher), there were also substantial increases in the percentage of clusters engaging in activities to support alumni—a 24 percentage-point increase in email and phone check-ins for alumni while enrolled in college, a 19 percentage-point increase in check-ins for alumni right before attending college, and a 14 percentage-point increase in “other” alumni supports compared with the previous year—which together indicate schools’ commitment to creating long-lasting, genuine support systems for high school graduates. Finally, more clusters implemented activities focused on creating safe, encouraging environments that allow whole-child growth: compared with the previous school year, there was a 33 percentage-point increase in student leadership programs other than student government, a 14 percentage-point increase in incorporating positive behavior interventions, and a 14 percentage-point increase in restorative justice practices.

**The majority of GEAR UP coordinators and administrators indicated their GEAR UP efforts had a *large or moderate impact* on promoting supporting relationships between students, educators, and families and developing partnerships with the local community; however, fewer reported this when compared with previous years.** In 2018–19, 73% of GEAR UP coordinators and administrators said the program had a *large or moderate* impact on encouraging supportive relationships, yet this was a decline from 88% who said this the previous year. And, while 62% said GEAR UP had a *large or moderate* impact on their partnerships in 2018–19, this also represents a decline from 75% in 2017–18 and from 81% in 2016–17.

**IMPACT OF GEAR UP ON RELATIONSHIPS (COORDINATOR/ADMIN SURVEYS)**

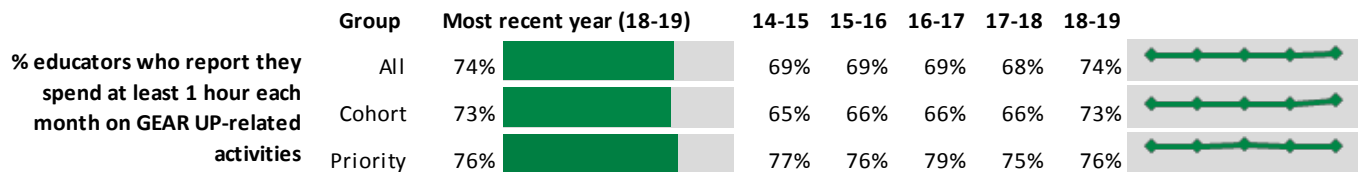


Administrators and staff during one site visit explained that fostering healthy relationships between students and school staff was central to their overall philosophy, to students’ academic success, and to the success of GEAR UP. At another school, a staff member said that actions initiated under GEAR UP to foster relationships have become ongoing practices integrated to their mission: *“It’s so aligned to the school’s mission now that it’s taken (for granted). Sometimes I don’t remember that it started with GEAR UP, because it’s so essential.”*

At another school, the administrators and staff mentioned that one of their greatest successes was in leveraging connections in the community to create greater partnerships outside of the school, and intentionally focusing on making connections with local industries. According to the GEAR UP Coordinator, their program receives a lot of support from community members, including their time—they are never without volunteers for events such as the Senior Career Fair, mock interviews for seniors, and more. At another school, administration shared that they were learning from model school visits how they could incorporate community mentors as well; they also planned to draw lessons for how to improve the relationships between their own departments.

Across the years, there has been an increase in educator involvement in GEAR UP activities; some schools we visited shared that staff involvement has been an important factor in their programs' successes in deepening relationships within and outside their schools. In 2018–19, 74% of educators said they spent at least one hour per month on GEAR UP-related activities, an increase of five percentage points across all schools since the 2014–15 school year. Educators at Priority schools have consistently reported more involvement in GEAR UP activities, but there still was a seven percentage-point increase in involvement of educators at Cohort schools.

#### EDUCATOR INVOLVEMENT IN COLLEGE/CAREER READINESS (SURVEYS)

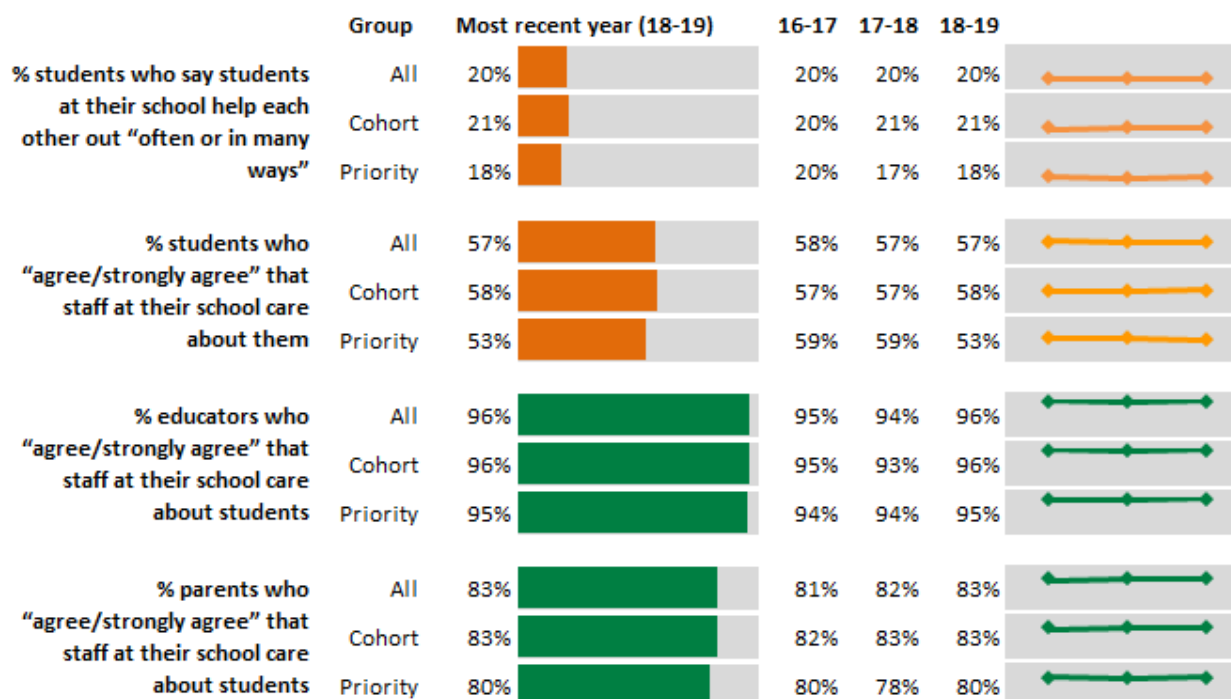


GEAR UP coordinators and administrators at different schools shared how the incorporation of more staff into GEAR UP programming helped them create a broad base of support for and investment in students and their postsecondary success. One school, for example, has created an active GEAR UP Leadership Team that includes classroom teachers and other school staff; another school has also involved educators in the planning and implementation of GEAR UP-funded activities such as their Academic Improvement Committee. And at another school, the GEAR UP team has been working closely with many partners, community members, and families to this end. According to staff, these efforts have resulted in the school being a “happy place” for their students.

**Educators and parents had more positive impressions than students about the extent to which GEAR UP schools have created caring environments for students.** In 2018–19, 20% of students agreed that other students at their school help each other out *often or in many ways*, and 57% *agree or strongly agree* that staff at their school care about them. By contrast, almost all educators (96%) and the large majority of parents (83%) *agree or strongly agree* with the same statement, indicating a clear disconnect. Notably, respondents from Priority schools had slightly less favorable perceptions than respondents in Cohort schools for all items in 2018–19.



## PERCEPTIONS ON SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH EDUCATORS (SURVEYS)

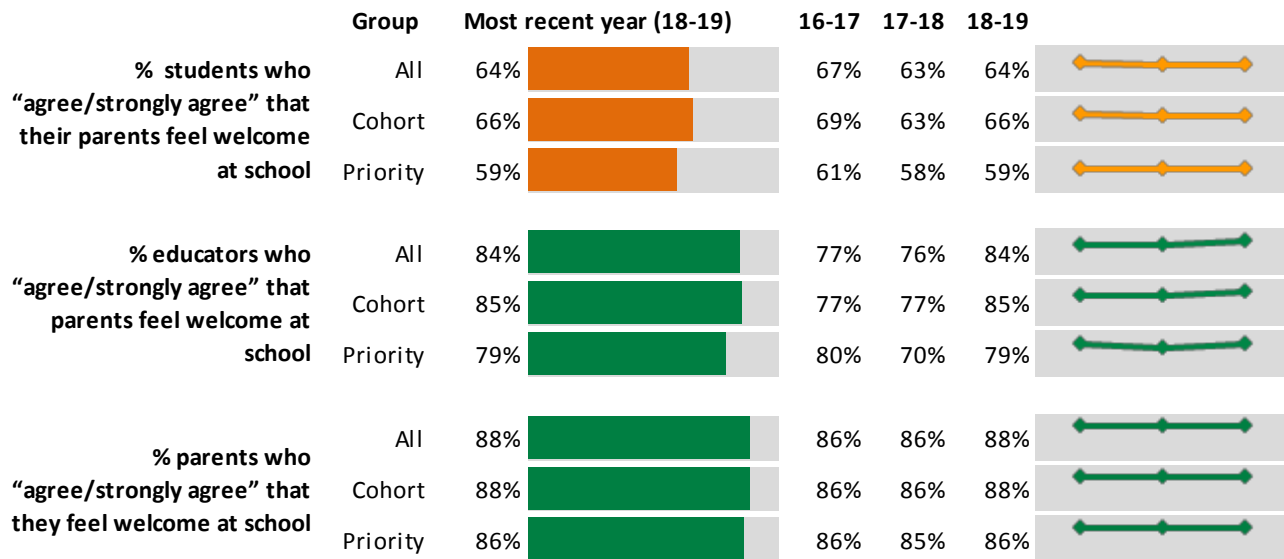


It is possible the disconnection between students', parents', and educators' perceptions may exist because students are considering the larger picture at school—including teachers and students they are not necessarily connected to, when responding to surveys—more so than the treasured relationships they share with individual staff at their school. Despite these findings, during a site visit at one school, students reported that they felt supported by staff, and many identified multiple staff members, not just one person, who they go to for help. In this conversation, students also helped elucidate what staff caring about them might look like: the students said they can trust staff who give genuine advice, not just general encouragement, which by contrast the students did not feel was as supportive or helpful. Students saw staff's ability to give genuine advice as evidence of their care and support: *"they want just to see you succeed, and do the best you can do."*

Conversations during site visits with parents, educators, GEAR UP coordinators, and administrations, on the other hand, revealed that they may be focusing more on the meaningful, individual relationships they created within the schools, and generalizing outward. Parents at one school agreed they had a *"pretty amazing staff"* to whom they can turn for questions and always support their students. Educators in another school discussed how the advisory periods they taught were designed to *"maximize the human connection"* between students and teachers, which imparted in them a sense of personal responsibility for helping their students. They also noted how the relationships they built during advisory allowed students to be more comfortable with asking questions about their own personal and career journeys, and that the personalized nature and honesty in those conversations have motivated their students even more to think about postsecondary options for themselves.

**The vast majority of parents reported a welcoming environment at schools.** The percentage of parents who *agreed or strongly agreed* that they feel welcome at school increased slightly in the 2018–19 school year; the percent of educators saying this also increased, by eight percentage points compared with last year. A majority of students (64%) also *agreed or strongly agreed* that their parents feel welcome at their schools.

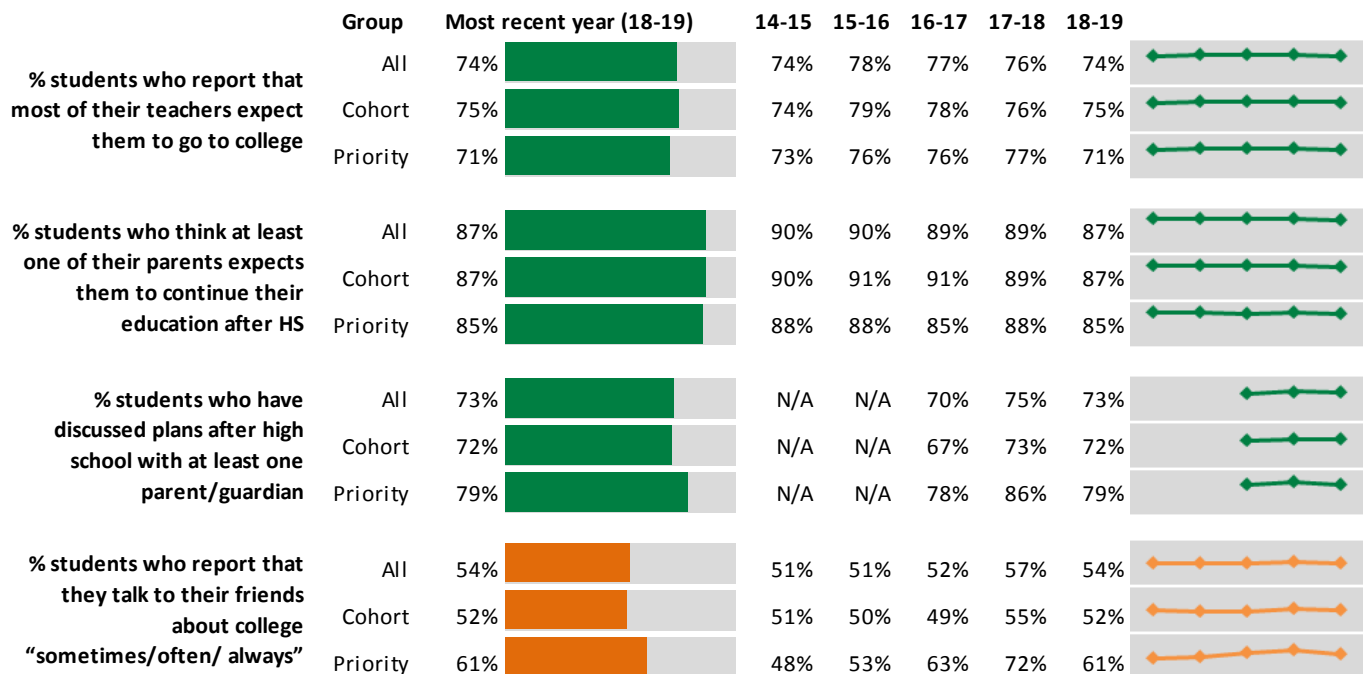
## PERCEPTIONS OF HOW WELCOME PARENTS FEEL AT CHILD'S SCHOOL (SURVEYS)



GEAR UP schools focused more efforts on family engagement this year, shown by the increase in family events, outreach methods, and efforts to build relationships. One school we visited mentioned they offered registration events at four separate times to accommodate families' schedules, and advertised the event through postcards, emails, phone calls, texts messages, and social media, all of which was well-received by parents. At another school, a parent highlighted how staff had built relationships: *"they've done a good job...letting us know what's going on. [The GEAR UP coordinator and other staff] are available if we need to talk to them. And they know our kids pretty well. I think that's one of the benefits of being in such a small district."*

The majority of students continued to report that their teachers and family members have expectations for them to go to college, and that they have discussed their postsecondary plans with family; across the years, more students have reported speaking with their friends frequently as well. In 2018–19, 74% of students believed that most of their teachers expected them to go to college, and 87% said the same about their parents. The percentage of students who talk about their postsecondary plans with their parents and discuss college with friends has increased slightly over the years. The most significant increase occurred in the percentage of Priority school students talking to their friends about college, from 48% in 2014–15 to 61% in 2018–19.

## STUDENT PERCEPTIONS ON SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS (SURVEYS)



In addition to other activities already discussed, GEAR UP coordinators, administrators, and educators also highlighted how student leadership opportunities and award ceremonies have helped create a school-wide culture of support. Staff members at one school described how their Student Leadership Team helps foster relationships by mentoring incoming freshmen and organizing attendance and academic award ceremonies to celebrate student achievement. At another school, staff shared that they have started to involve older high school students on their leadership team in their high school transition event, who help out by giving tours to their younger peers and answering families' questions. Staff described the impact these practices have had on relationships at their school: *"leadership students really help transform the culture of the school, because of their excitement, enthusiasm to make it a family, truly. Because for a lot of kids, this is their family."*

Students also mentioned how they are motivated by these efforts, particularly the academic and attendance awards, although they also worried that having awards focused only on absolute measures of achievement might have an unintended negative effect on the morale of students who work really hard but aren't meeting the grade or attendance target just yet. As one student shared: *"I remember freshman year, I'm not going to lie, I was kind of bitter towards the people who got [attendance or academic awards]—you feel embarrassed, like, 'there's so many students standing up because they got awards,' and you're just sitting there, like, 'I didn't get none. Out of all my eight classes, I didn't get none.' So that made me want to work hard in my next year."* Other GEAR UP schools we visited that were implementing growth-focused awards emphasized that these had been very successful in positively motivating and supporting students' success.

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



Cottage Grove High School showcased seniors' postgraduate plans and their advice to younger students. (Credit: Oregon GEAR UP Facebook Page)

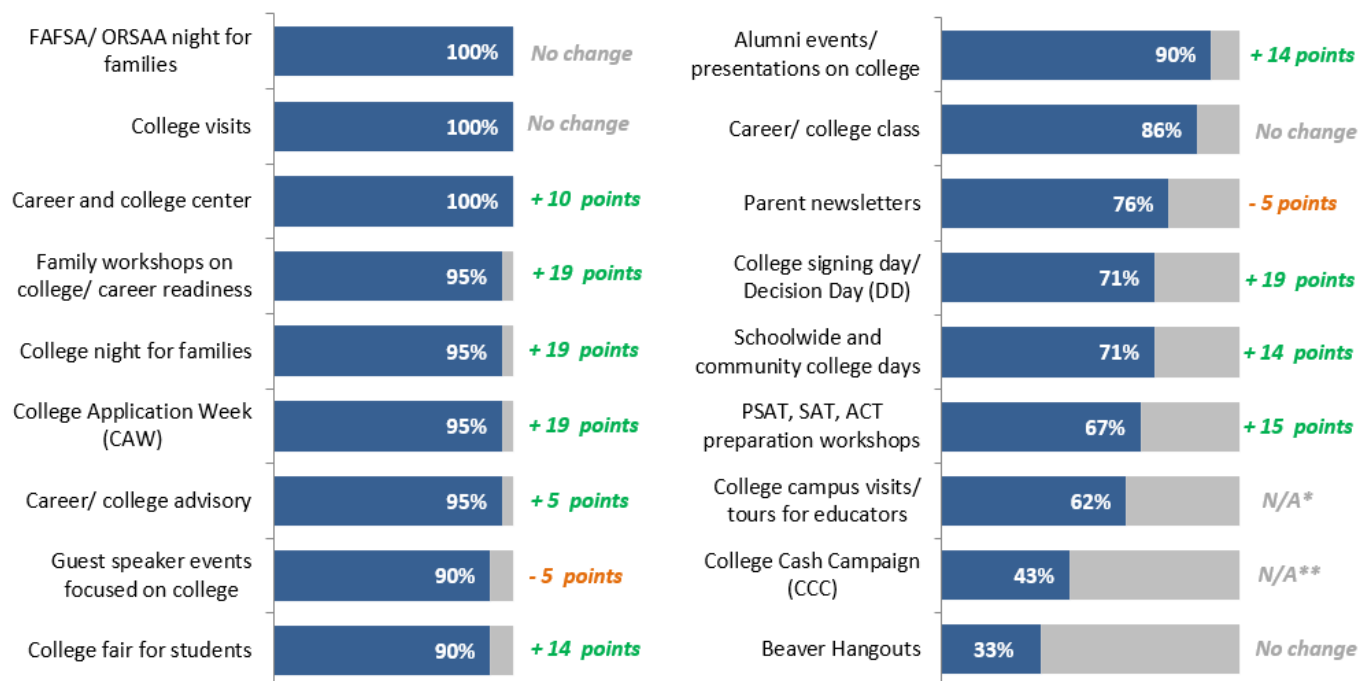
### MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- GEAR UP SCHOOLS HAVE INCREASED PROGRAMMING IN THIS AREA, WHICH HAS HELPED IMPROVE STUDENTS' AND FAMILIES' KNOWLEDGE OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OPTIONS, APPLICATION, AND FINANCE OPTIONS.
- WHEN STUDENTS AND PARENTS ARE ASKED MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS ABOUT POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS AND FINANCING, THOUGH, IT IS EVIDENT THERE IS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT.

The percentage of GEAR UP clusters offering various activities designed to increase students' and families' knowledge of and preparation for postsecondary education increased in 2018–19. Compared to 2016–17, four types of activities saw a 19 percentage-point increase in clusters offering them, and another four saw a 14 or 15 percentage-point increase. In addition, just as with the other “Rs” in the GEAR UP framework, the average number of activities focused on raising awareness increased from 12 activities in 2016–17 to 15 in 2018–19.

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

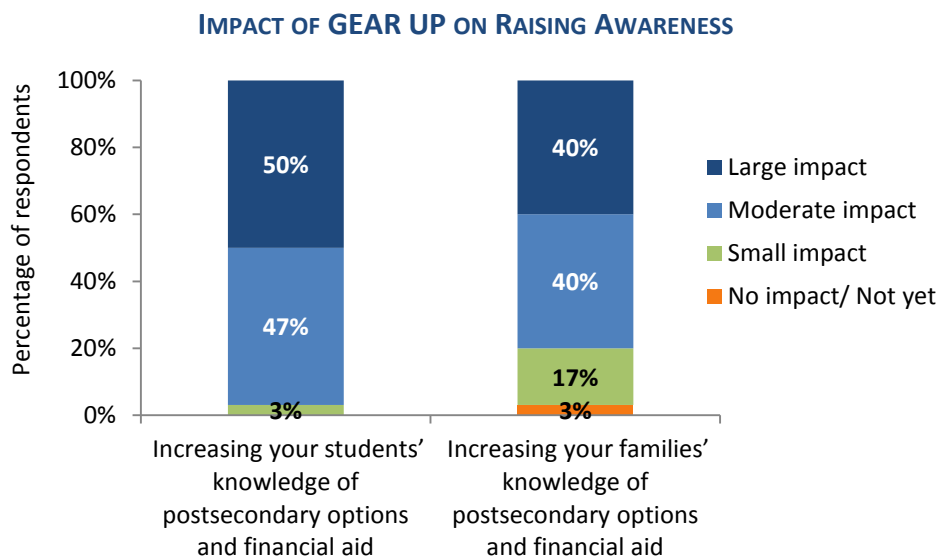
2018–19 results (and percentage point difference with 2016–17 results)



\*Denotes activities that were not asked in 2016–17. \*\*Denotes activities that were not asked in 2016–17 or 2017–18.

Some of the greatest gains were seen in the number of activities focused on families: family workshops on college and career readiness, college night for families, and schoolwide and community college days. This emphasis was also evident during site visits with schools and conversations with parents: one parent reflected on GEAR UP's success in raising awareness early on, sharing that he was happy to see the array of promotional materials and hear middle school students identify the program goal of *"going to college."* Another parent shared that she benefited from attending a family workshop put on by AVID (with support from GEAR UP), even though her daughter was not enrolled in AVID: *"[the students] all made the poster boards of different colleges, and had a cost analysis per year, and it was really great. We could walk up to a board and say, 'Okay, you want to go to this college. This is kind of how much it costs, and what you're going to look for, for scholarships.' And also what the schools offer. Like, the kids had to research the school, and then present it. And I thought it was great."* School leadership also mentioned that they included conversations about career pathways and GEAR UP college initiatives in their registration nights, helping to spread the message to the community.

As in previous years, almost all GEAR UP coordinators and administrators saw GEAR UP as having had a *large or moderate impact on increasing students' knowledge of postsecondary options and financial aid*; this year, more reported this about impact on families' knowledge as well. In 2018–19, 97% of GEAR UP coordinators and administrators said they saw a *large or moderate impact* of the program on increasing students' knowledge, consistent with previous years; and 80% said this about the program's impact on families' knowledge, which represented a 15 percentage-point increase from 2016–17.



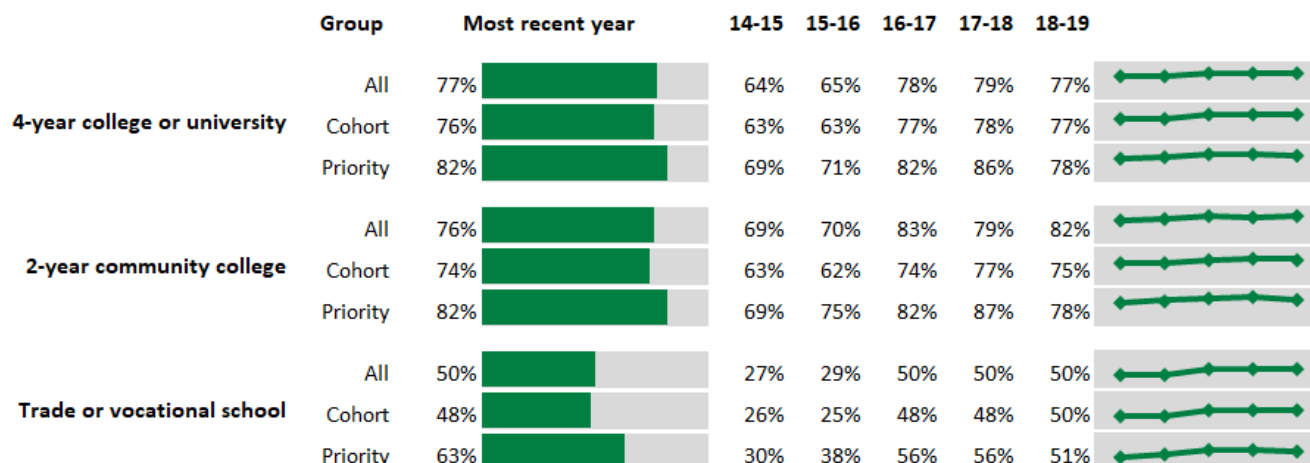
One parent shared how much she felt she had learned through GEAR UP events such as Senior Night at her children's school: *"that's something I appreciate about GEAR UP, is just the educating about those kinds of things [how financial aid works]. [During senior night] they say it over and over and over. I mean, obviously you have to look at the price of what it is. But don't let that be a barrier, you know? Because there are so many opportunities out there for you to help fund it. And [the GEAR UP coordinator] is absolutely fantastic at helping you find all those things, too."*

The percentage of students who reported they know *all or some* requirements to be accepted into various postsecondary institutions has increased significantly since 2014–15. In 2018–19, 77% of students said they knew *some* or *all* of the requirements to be accepted to a 4-year university, a 13 percentage-point increase compared with the first year of the grant; 82% said this about a 2-year community college, also a 13 percentage-point increase; and 50% said this about trade or vocational schools, which saw the largest increase at 23 percentage points.



## STUDENT KNOWLEDGE OF COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS (SURVEYS)

% of STUDENTS who report they know "all" or "some" requirements to be accepted to...\*

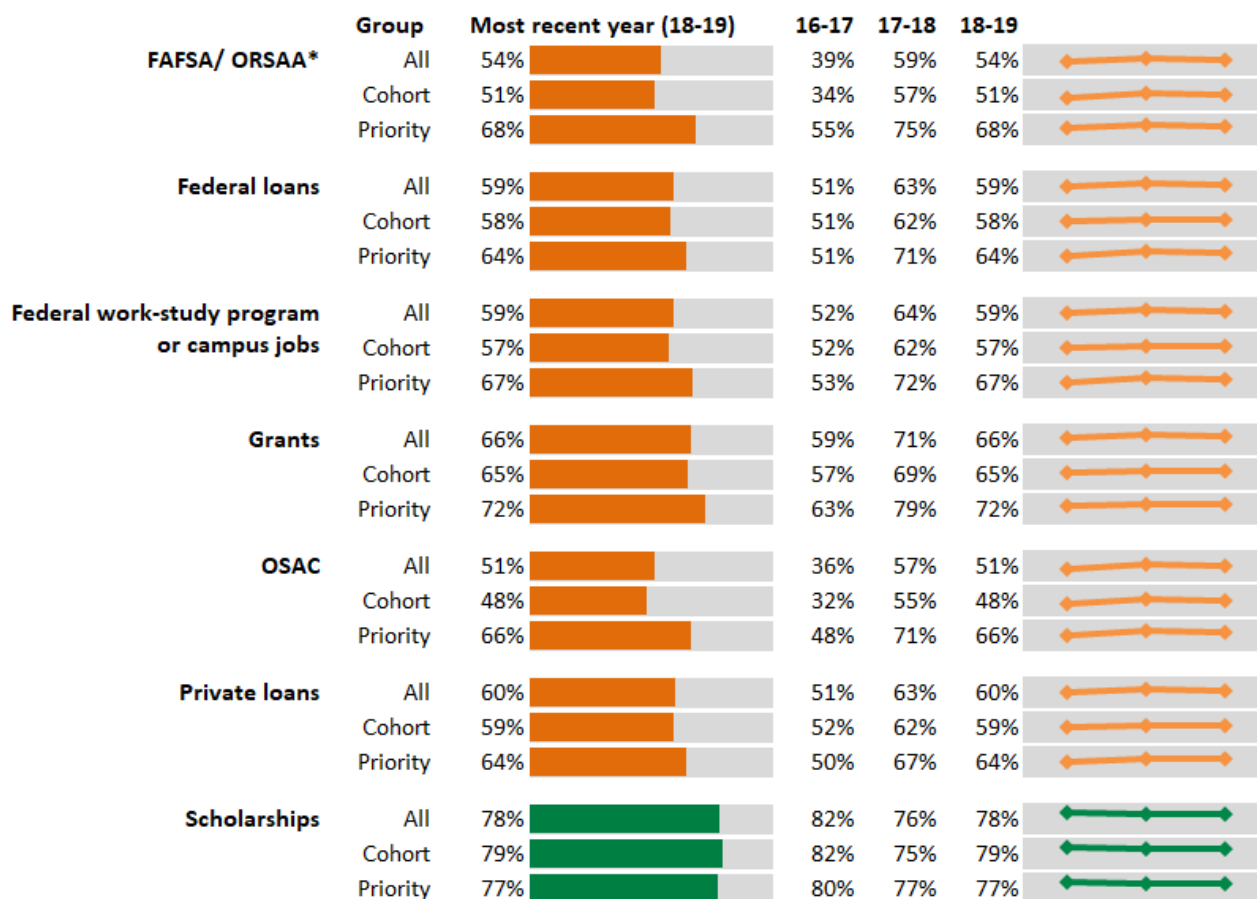


\*The response scale for this question changed from 2015–16 (yes/no) to 2016–17 (all/some/none).

Overall, students' self-reported knowledge of resources to help pay for postsecondary education has also increased over the years, but decreased from last year's peak. In 2018–19, the majority of students reported knowing a *little* or a *lot* about all financial resources asked about; the most said this about scholarships (78%).

## STUDENT KNOWLEDGE OF FINANCIAL SOURCES (SURVEYS)

% of STUDENTS who report they know "a little" or "a lot" about...



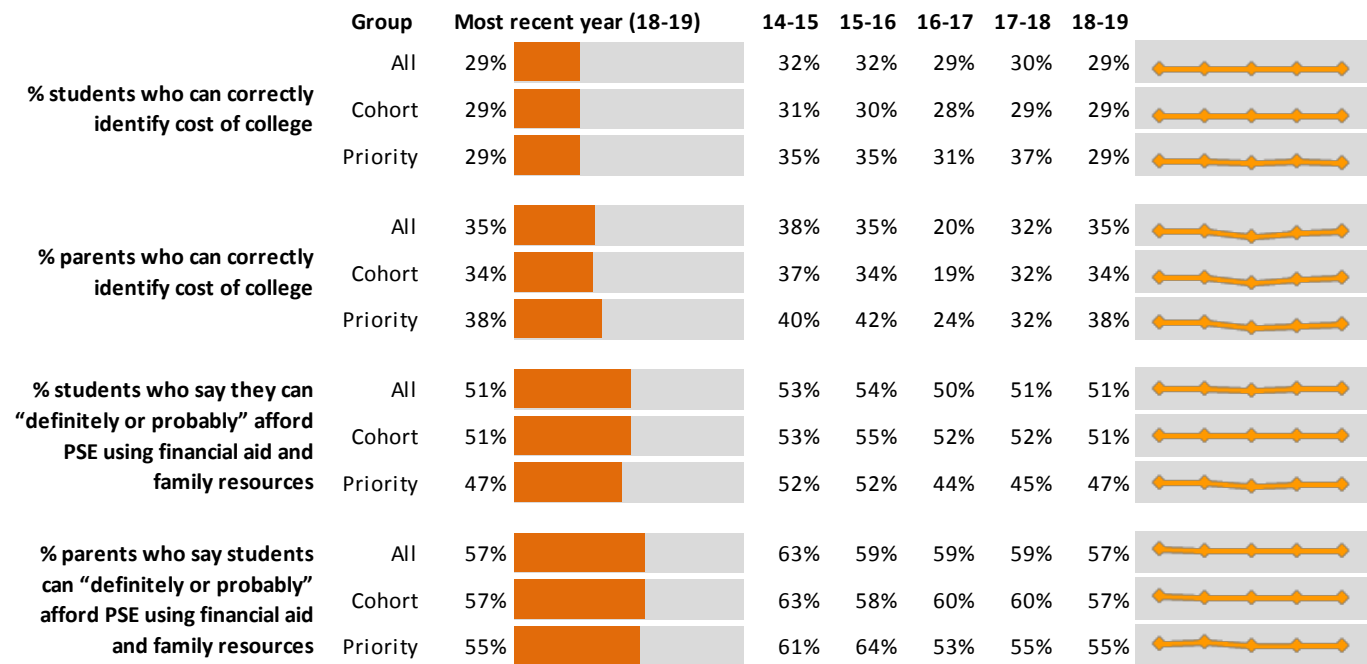
\*The question was changed in 2018–19 from "FAFSA" to "FAFSA/ORSAA".

However, while the percentages have increased compared with 2016–17, there were slight declines in students' knowledge of certain resources compared with the previous year. In addition, more students in Priority schools reported knowing *a little* or *a lot* about every financial resource; this is not surprising, since GEAR UP served primarily the 12<sup>th</sup> grade in Priority schools and Priority schools have been implementing GEAR UP for a lot longer.

Students reported knowing more about scholarships than any other financial resource perhaps as a result of the scholarship research many schools have incorporated into their curriculum. In conversations during site visits with staff and students, it was clear that many staff and students were primarily focused on scholarships as a means of paying for postsecondary education. At one GEAR UP school, students mentioned how grateful they were to their GEAR UP coordinator for preparing a detailed scholarship packet for all juniors that has all the deadlines and requirements for various scholarships outlined in detail. One student said, *“that's really helpful, because scholarships pay for your college, essentially.”* At another school, some staff shared frustration that their students haven't had success in being awarded *“the kinds of scholarships that pay for everything.”*

**However, still only about one third or less of students and parents can correctly identify the cost of college; and just about half of students and parents feel confident in their ability to pay for postsecondary education.** The percentage of those who can correctly identify college costs and who believe they can afford postsecondary education has decreased slightly for both groups.

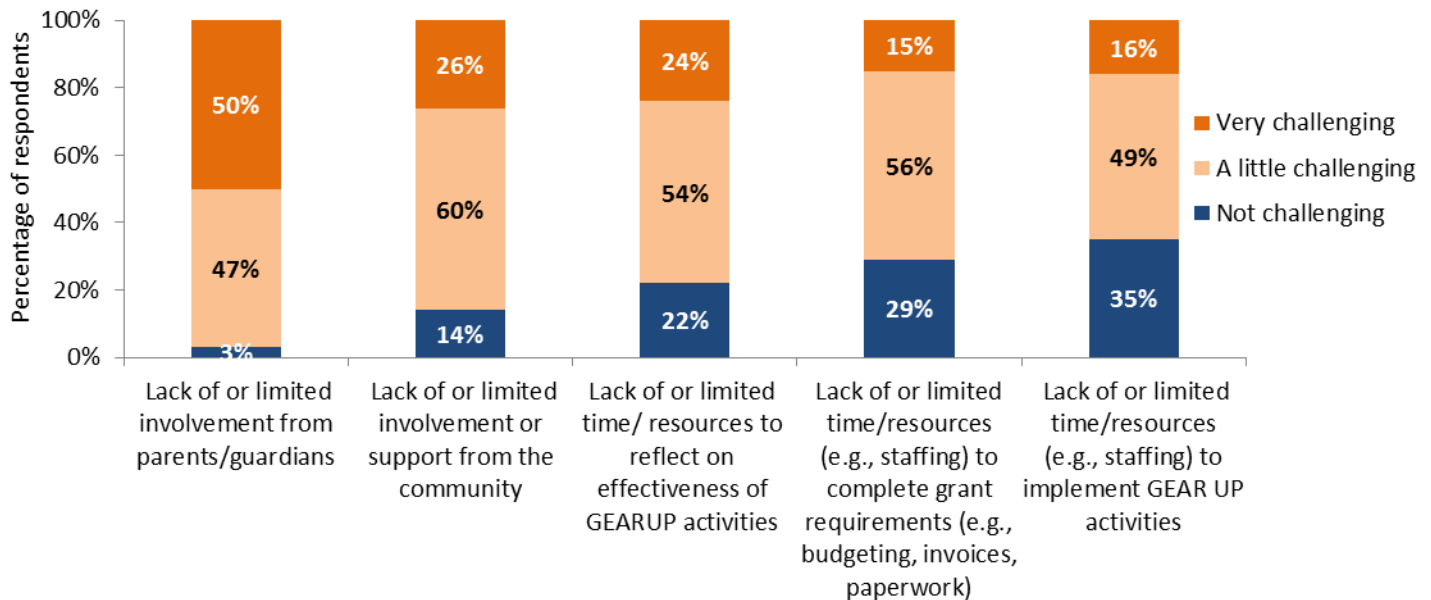
#### STUDENT AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS ON COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY (SURVEYS)



## IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND IMPROVEMENTS

In 2018–19, GEAR UP coordinators and administrators said the lack of or limited involvement from parents/guardians and from the community were their greatest challenges. Furthermore, the percentage of GEAR UP coordinators and administrators who said these were *very challenging* increased by 15 percentage points and five percentage points, respectively. In contrast, the other challenges—lack of or limited time or resources for reflection on the grant’s effectiveness, for completing grant requirements, and for implementing activities—saw a decrease in the percentage of GEAR UP coordinators and administrators who report them as *very challenging* compared with the previous year (a decline of three, nine, and eight percentage points, respectively).

CHALLENGES TO GEAR UP IMPLEMENTATION (COORDINATOR/ADMIN SURVEYS)



During site visits, we heard more about these challenges from administrators and coordinators, as well as staff, parents, and students; we also learned from schools that were finding success in addressing these challenges. For example, in conversations with administrators about their efforts to expand career awareness programming this year, some schools elaborated how community engagement has been a challenge, while others explained their successes in regards to establishing new partnerships and internships. For example, as noted earlier in this report, staff in one school mentioned their interest in developing a job shadowing program, and explained how they have struggled with striking a balance between the need to allow students to shadow during the day when many businesses operate, and at the same time ensuring students did not miss too much time in the classroom. On the other hand, another school shared that they succeeded in developing new and deepening existing partnerships in their community, including with local industry—providing tours for students and educators—as well as with their local community college and other community and family volunteers.

In terms of parent engagement, we heard administrators describe similar barriers as they had in the past; for example, the administration at one school said that they feel they have made progress, but were still encountering resistance, with some parents skeptical about the benefits of postsecondary education outweighing the costs. They talked about how a less than favorable attitude toward education exists in the community, which creates feelings of self-doubt in students. This lack of support for their college-driven goals has also led to smaller turnout than desired at related events.

In addition, at multiple schools, parents emphasized their desire for GEAR UP programming to expand further into career awareness for trades and other postsecondary options. One parent, for example, suggested that changing central messaging may improve buy-in: *“What about, ‘Your future: it's not just a dream, it's a plan.’ ...That's going to embrace everything. That's going to embrace if somebody chooses military, college, community [college], trade school... It would really embrace that whole piece. Because there are supports no matter what you want to do in your future. This program has supports to educate you and help you move forward.”* At another school, some parents also shared their perceptions that select students benefit more from existing college and career readiness opportunities than others. For instance, it was noted that AVID students were able to go on many more college trips than their peers and that internships were now being offered primarily to students attending particular academies; from the parents’ perspectives, all students in the school would benefit from these opportunities. One articulated that they worried *“students in the middle”*—meaning academically or financially—are overlooked in GEAR UP programming as they often are in other initiatives meant to supply additional resources, supports, and encouragement.

Another implementation (and sustainability) challenge that some schools face is their overreliance on GEAR UP coordinators. At several schools, coordinators operate as the point person for most, if not all, GEAR UP programming. It is a challenging job for one person to handle the many moving parts. As one coordinator shared *“I feel like I would be more effective if there was more of me.”* Staff explained during interviews that while they would like to give more time to support coordinators and GEAR UP initiatives, they feel they are too busy already with the many different hats they wear at school. Coordinators face the same challenge, though, as several also work as school counselors. Thus, during times when counselor responsibilities have to come first, especially to help support students in crisis, it can be challenging for other students to access GEAR UP resources and for programming to run smoothly.

Several school leaders also noted the lack of coordination between middle and high schools as a challenge. Administrators and coordinators reported less buy-in from middle school staff than high school staff, despite their efforts at relationship building and coordination throughout the year. Some believed the issue stemmed from the fact that GEAR UP coordinators primarily worked out of the high schools. In contrast, one school was able to promote better coordination with their middle school, and staff highlighted this as one of the year’s overarching successes. This improved coordination was the direct result of intentional efforts to align the middle school and high school college and career readiness programming, and including middle school educators in GEAR UP planning activities and the SUCCESS retreat.

Another topic of discussion was the less than desired level of student participation in GEAR UP programming. In some instances, various activities occur at the same time, thus forcing students to choose between college tours and other program commitments (most notably, sports) that they may think will help their college applications. Some students are also involved in multiple and/or time-consuming extracurricular activities, and may decide not to take advantage of some college and career trips over concern they cannot afford to lose more class time. Staff and administrators also shared concerns over the low involvement of students taking advantage of after school tutoring and dual credit and online college course opportunities. Some staff noted that many students and their families may not be aware of the opportunity, may not understand that the courses are all paid for, or may not feel they are capable of completing these courses successfully.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the course of the grant, Oregon GEAR UP schools have greatly expanded and improved upon a wide range of college, career, academic, social and emotional, relationship-building, and family engagement activities and interventions designed to prepare students for success in school, postsecondary education and careers. Furthermore, evaluation findings for Year 5 of the grant indicate that GEAR UP schools have continued to make steady progress in creating a college-going culture at their schools and raising students' and families' awareness of postsecondary education options and financing. During site visits, school staff, students, and parents identified a number of promising practices and interventions funded through GEAR UP and described how these have resulted in positive impacts in a number of key areas.

A number of challenges were also identified through the evaluation, including low academic performance, challenges in engaging parents and community members, a shortage of time to reflect on the effectiveness of GEAR UP activities, and lack of knowledge about the cost of college and low perceptions around college affordability, among others. The following are recommendations moving forward.

### MOVING FORWARD

- **Provide additional supports to increase the rigor of instruction and prepare students academically.** Strategies may include: organizing additional model school visits in schools demonstrating academic gains and/or implementing innovative strategies; encouraging schools to share promising practices at central events; and providing professional development opportunities for educators, either centrally or by encouraging schools to add additional activities in their GEAR UP school plans.
- **Redouble efforts to engage families and communities in preparing students for college and careers.** Strategies may include: encouraging schools to share promising practices at central events (including one school we visited that had a great parent turnout at their transition to high school event); and increasing awareness and encouraging schools to access and use available materials and resources such as the Toolkit.
- **Focus college readiness efforts on increasing students' and families' knowledge around the cost of college and financial aid resources.** Strategies could include: sharing available resources; demonstrating possible student/parent activities at central events, and identifying schools with the greatest gains or strongest performance in this area and asking them to share their practices.
- **Continue to provide time, space, and supports for schools to engage in reflection, particularly around assessing impact of GEAR UP.** Strategies may include: continuing to provide dedicated time at central events for team planning and discussion, and adding a session at a central event and/or providing materials/resources/examples on how to measure the success of GEAR UP activities.
- **Further engage schools in creating sustainability plans.** As Oregon GEAR UP enters the last two years of the grant, it is suggested that the initiative and the schools focus their efforts in planning for sustainability. Strategies may include: adding required sessions at SUCCESS retreat on how to plan for sustainability, asking schools to share promising practices in this area, and creating materials and resources to guide schools' sustainability efforts.



## ADDITIONAL SURVEY INFORMATION

Population	N/%	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19
Students	Total N Surveyed	7174	5474	4529	5665	6496
	Response Rate	69%	55%	49%	63%	74%
Educators	Total N Surveyed	574	560	734	738	754
	Response Rate	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Parents	Total N Surveyed	1394	3352	2653	3372	2663
	Response Rate	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Coordinators and administrators	Total N Surveyed	--	--	21 <sup>1</sup>	35	38
	Response Rate	--	--	88%	52%	63%

<sup>1</sup>In 2016-17, only GEAR UP coordinators responded to the survey.

## ABOUT METIS ASSOCIATES



Metis Associates is a national research and consulting firm headquartered in New York City, bringing over 40 years of experience in evaluation, information management, and grant development to its work with a wide range of organizations committed to making a meaningful difference in the lives of children, families, and communities.

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