

Texas GEAR UP: Beyond Grad

Annual Project Outcomes Report

Evaluation of Years 1–2

Submitted to:

Texas Education Agency
William B. Travis Building
1701 North Congress
Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701-1494

Submitted by:

ICF
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031

and

Agile Analytics
1621 West 6th Street
Austin, TX 78703

Submitted on:

August 2021



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The ICF evaluation team would like to acknowledge the many members of the Texas Education Agency (TEA), site/campus staff, and collaborative organizations for their support of this evaluation. They provided valuable information and feedback to ensure that the evaluation team had a full understanding of the goals/objectives and implementation of the Texas GEAR UP: Beyond Grad program across participating sites and campuses. The evaluation team looks forward to the continued collaboration with TEA staff, site/campus staff, and other collaborators to provide a high-quality evaluation that can inform policy and practice for schools, nationally and in Texas.

ICF (NASDAQ: ICFI) partners with government and commercial clients to deliver consulting services and technology solutions in the social programs, health, energy, climate change, environment, transportation, defense, and emergency management markets. The firm combines passion for its work with industry expertise and innovative analytics to produce compelling results throughout the entire program life cycle—from analysis and design through implementation and improvement.

For additional information about ICF, please contact:

ICF

9300 Lee Highway

Fairfax, VA 22031

Phone: 703-934-3603 or 1-800-532-4783

Fax: 703-934-3740

Email: info@icf.com

Contributing Authors

Jing Sun, MA

Lauren Kennedy

Samantha Spinney, Ph.D.

Prepared for

Texas Education Agency

1701 N. Congress Avenue

Austin, TX 78701

Phone: 512-463-9734

Evaluation funded by the Texas Education Agency through funds provided by the U.S. Department of Education for the Texas GEAR UP: Beyond Grad State Grant.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

The materials are copyrighted © and trademarked ™ as the property of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and may not be reproduced without the express written permission of TEA, except under the following conditions:

- 1) Texas public school districts, charter schools, and Education Service Centers may reproduce and use copies of the Materials and Related Materials for the districts' and schools' educational use without obtaining permission from TEA;
- 2) residents of the state of Texas may reproduce and use copies of the Materials and Related Materials for individual personal use only without obtaining written permission of TEA;
- 3) any portion reproduced must be reproduced in its entirety and remain unedited, unaltered and unchanged in any way; and
- 4) no monetary charge can be made for the reproduced materials or any document containing them; however, a reasonable charge to cover only the cost of reproduction and distribution may be charged.

Private entities or persons located in Texas that are **not** Texas public school districts, Texas Education Service Centers, or Texas charter schools or any entity, whether public or private, educational or non-educational, located **outside the state of Texas** *MUST* obtain written approval from TEA and will be required to enter into a license agreement that may involve the payment of a licensing fee or a royalty.

For information contact: Copyrights Office, Texas Education Agency, 1701 N. Congress Ave., Austin, TX 78701-1494; phone 512-463-9041; email: copyrights@tea.texas.gov.

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness® (STAAR®) is a registered trademark of TEA. Other product and company names mentioned in this report may be the trademarks of their respective owners.



Table of Contents

Acronyms and Abbreviations	ii
Overview	1
Project Goal 1: Increasing Access to Rigorous Courses in Order to Reduce the Need for Remediation	3
Project Goal 3: Providing Educator Training and Professional Development for Rigorous Academic Programs	4
Project Goal 3 (cont.): Providing Educator Training and Professional Development for Rigorous Academic Programs	5
Project Goal 5: Supporting Participation in Postsecondary Education And Career Preparation	6
Project Goal 6: Providing Postsecondary and Career Preparation Information to Students and Families	7
Project Goal 7: Increasing Educational Expectations for and Awareness About Postsecondary and Career Options.....	8
Project Goal 8: Building and Expanding Community Partnerships.....	9
Project Goal 9: Enhancing Statewide College and Career Readiness.....	10
Appendix A: GEAR UP: Beyond Grad Project Goals and Objectives.....	A-1
Appendix B: Data and Analysis Methods.....	B-1

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AP	Advanced Placement
APR	Annual Performance Report
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
GEAR UP	Gaining Early Access to Undergraduate Programs
IB	International Baccalaureate
PD	Professional Development
PO	Project Objective
PSAT	Preliminary SAT
TEA	Texas Education Agency
TNTP	Formerly referred to as The New Teacher Project, the organization changed its name to simply TNTP after its mission expanded beyond only serving new teachers.

Overview

As a strategy to overcome the college achievement gap for many low-income students, the Texas Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP): Beyond Grad State Grant (referred to as “GEAR UP” in this report) serves approximately 9,000–10,500 students from six Texas school districts (12 middle schools and high schools) in rural communities in West Texas, East Texas, and the Coastal Bend. GEAR UP provides services for the following two groups of students:

- The grant provides *targeted services* to a grade-specific primary cohort of students who were in Grade 7 during the 2018–19 school year (i.e., the **class of 2024**) through their first year of postsecondary education.
- The grant also provides *basic services* to **priority cohort** students consisting of all other students in Grades 9–12 attending participating high schools during each year of the 7-year grant (i.e., from school years 2018–19 to 2024–25).

The GEAR UP program team established nine goals and 31 corresponding project objectives (POs) to track the implementation and outcomes of this federal grant. This report provides an overview of program performance regarding the relevant goals and POs during the 2018–19 (Year 1) and 2019–20 (Year 2) academic years. Program performance regarding Year 2 POs was substantially complicated by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and subsequent March 2020 school closures that disrupted all aspects of schooling. Many GEAR UP activities, such as spring administrations of the SAT and ACT as well as summer 2020 programs, were canceled for the remainder of the academic year.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) reported on program performance for each PO in the Year 1 and Year 2 federal Annual Performance Reports (APRs). The findings regarding program performance shared in this report come directly from the APR—no additional analysis was conducted to determine program performance for each PO. Relevant quotes from GEAR UP program stakeholders, including district-level GEAR UP coordinators and school principals, are also included to provide additional contextual information about project performance.¹ Findings are organized by the goals that pertain to the first two years of program implementation. Findings include overall results and district-level results as long as they were reported in the federal APRs for Year 1 and Year 2.

¹ Stakeholder quotes originated from qualitative data collected for the Years 1–2 Annual Implementation Report. For more information about this report, please see <https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/program-evaluations/program-evaluations-middle-school-high-school-and-college-preparation/program-evaluation-middle-school-high-school-and-college-preparation-initiatives>

To indicate whether the project objective was fully met, partially met, or not met, the following symbols were used throughout the report as applicable:²



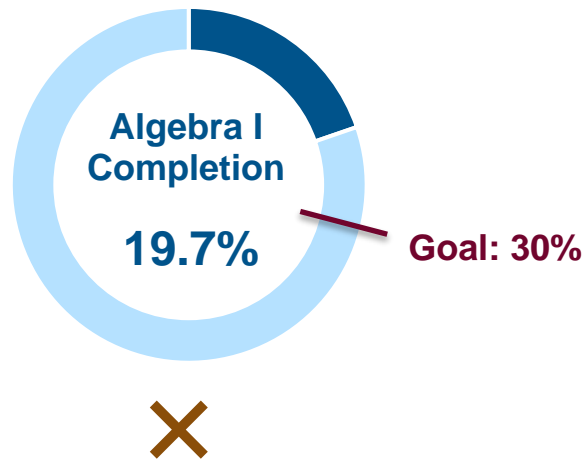
² Criteria for determining projective objectives as fully met, partially met, or not met were based on a combination of the following factors and informed by programmatic knowledge of the field: 1) The individual district performance (i.e., how many districts met the objective); 2) the percent of the total number of students that met the objective, regardless of the results of the districts (this was used when an objective was significantly missed); and 3) the impact of COVID-19 on a district's plans to meet an objective (i.e., a campus or district may have otherwise been on track to meet the objective but plans were cancelled or delayed due to COVID-19).

Project Goal 1: Increasing Access to Rigorous Courses in Order to Reduce the Need for Remediation



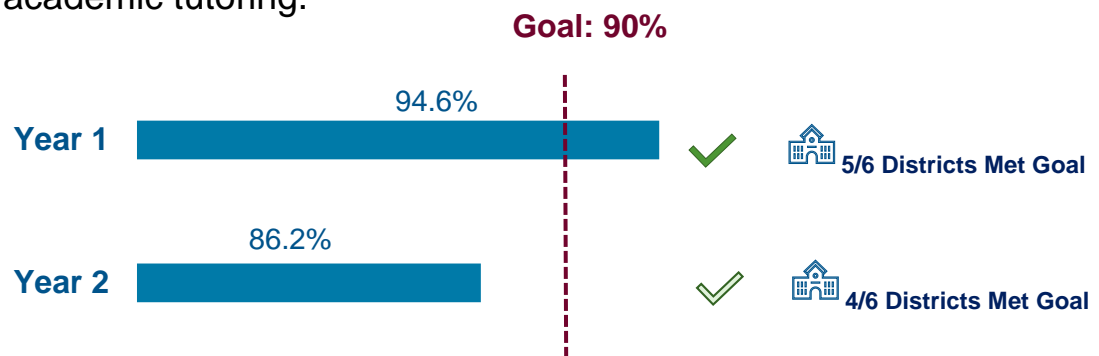
Objective 1.1: By the end of the class of 2024’s second year (Grade 8), 30% of class of 2024 students will complete Algebra I.

“One of the other things that...we are working very hard to meet [is] the Algebra I threshold goal in the eighth grade. And we’ve made strides toward that goal, but we do still have some work to do.” – Year 2 curriculum director (PO 1.1)



Objective 1.3: Each year, 90% of class of 2024 students who receive a failing grade on a progress report will receive targeted academic tutoring.

“So, right now we’re also in the process of kind of reframing how the tutor is going to move forward to next year...in what areas do we need to concentrate in tutoring the students.” – Year 2 GEAR UP coordinator (PO 1.3)

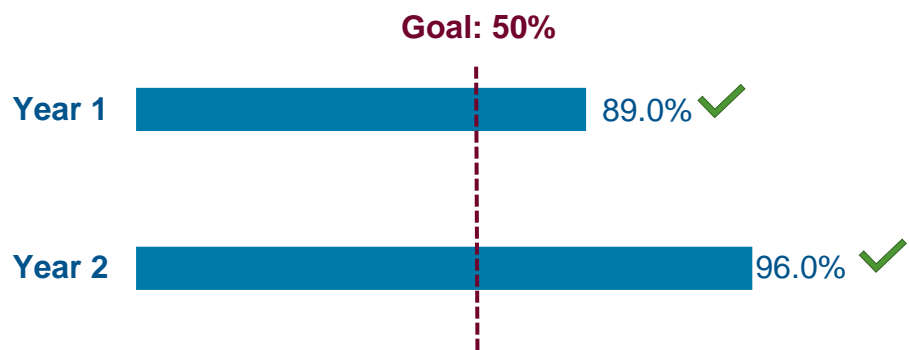


Project Goal 3: Providing Educator Training and Professional Development for Rigorous Academic Programs



“Yes. So we’ll do professional development for the whole high school and part of the junior high, middle school, and sometimes district-wide we share some of the same strategies that we’re doing PD [professional development] with the secondaries, so if elementary wants to know about that as well” – Year 2 curriculum director (PO 3.1)

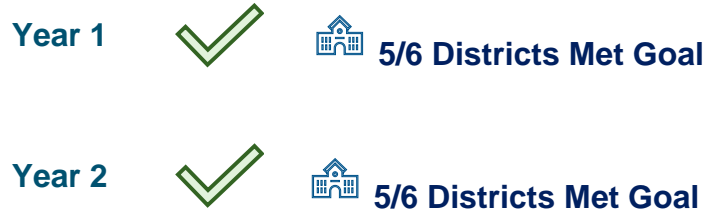
Objective 3.1: Each year, 50% of high school core content teachers will participate in professional development that supports a rigorous curriculum (e.g., project-based learning, advanced instructional strategies, teacher externships, student engagement, etc.).



Objective 3.2: Each year, teams of educators and administrators (middle school, high school, and institutions of higher education) will complete at least five days of vertical teaming in order to align curriculum and reduce the need for remediation at the postsecondary level.



“[TNTP] puts everything together for you [for vertical teaming sessions]. Everything. I mean, word for word. If you don’t understand something, they put everything together for you.” – Year 2 GEAR UP coordinator (PO 3.2)

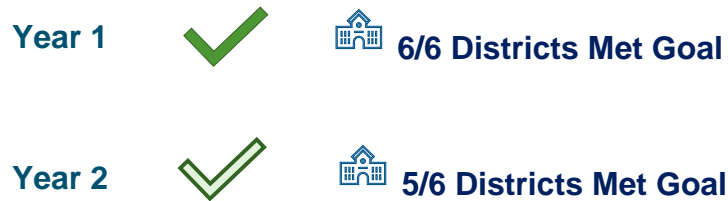


Project Goal 3 (cont.): Providing Educator Training and Professional Development for Rigorous Academic Programs

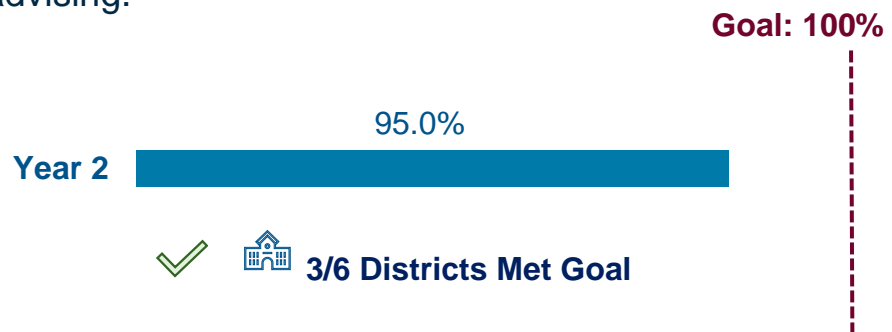


“I do have a sense [that] the teachers are open [to educator coaching]. We have a lot of first year teachers, so, they're actually very open to the suggestions that [TNTF is] making. They take the constructive criticism well...they're taking it on. They know exactly what some of the issues are, and they're open to learning their craft.”
 – Year 2 high school principal (PO 3.3)

Objective 3.3: Each year, 20% of high school class of 2024 core content teachers will participate in at least three individualized educator coaching and/or mentoring sessions.



Objective 3.4: By the end of the project’s second year, all high school counselors will complete training in college and career advising.



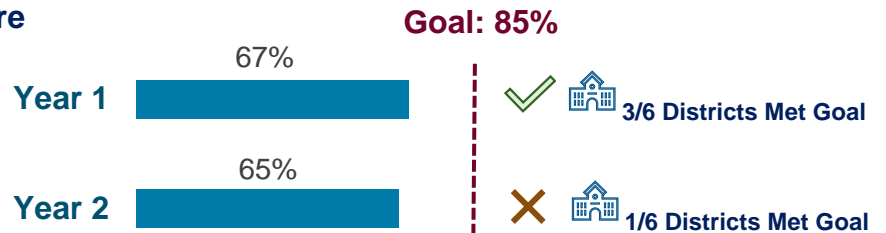
Project Goal 5: Supporting Participation in Postsecondary Education And Career Preparation



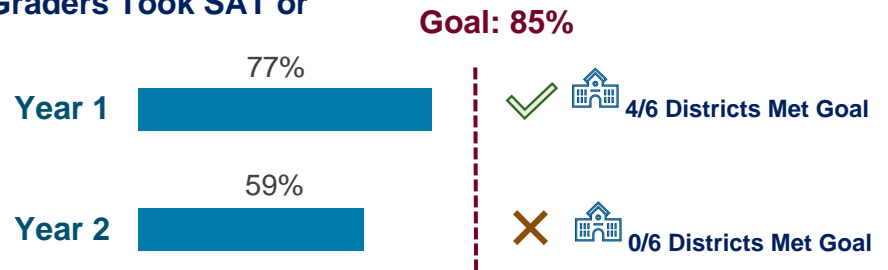
“I don't think we ever provided access to an online PSAT program as early as we have now. So, for example, we've already started putting [a] PSAT prep course together for freshmen for next year's PSAT— it's going to appear on campus soon— and just to get them kind of in that mindset of this is what we do. We have supports in place and the expectation is that you utilize them so that way you find success.” – Year 2 academic dean (PO 5.1)

Objective 5.1: Each year, 85% of tenth graders will take the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) or ACT Aspire exam. Each year, 85% of eleventh graders will take the SAT or ACT exam.³

Tenth Graders Took PSAT or ACT Aspire



Eleventh Graders Took SAT or ACT



³ As a result of the COVID-19 school closures in spring 2020, spring administrations of the SAT and ACT tests were canceled in Year 2. The cancellations likely contributed to the project objective not being met in Year 2.

Project Goal 6: Providing Postsecondary and Career Preparation Information to Students and Families

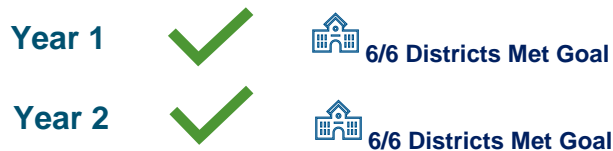


“I think that GEAR UP has done a very good job with preparing [students] as far as for registration purposes. So, talking about the endorsements that we offer, the career pathways, kind of helping them to explore before the high school counselor has to go and sit down with them and do a four-year plan. So it’s like they know about that information before they get to us.” – Year 2 high school counselor (PO 6.1)

Objective 6.1: Each year in ninth grade, students will receive information about the school’s high-quality pathways and programs of study that align to postsecondary programs and high-demand careers available to them.



Objective 6.2: Each year, students and parents will receive information about postsecondary and career options, preparation, and financing.



Objective 6.3: Each year, 90% of class of 2024 students will receive at least one comprehensive, individualized college and career counseling session. **Goal: 90%**



“Well, increased parent participation, which is a problem district-wide with or without GEAR UP. Getting the information out to parents on the importance of GEAR UP and what it’s doing for the community.” – Year 1 GEAR UP coordinator (PO 6.5)



Objective 6.5: Each year, class of 2024 parent attendance at Texas GEAR UP events and services will increase.



Project Goal 7: Increasing Educational Expectations for and Awareness About Postsecondary and Career Options

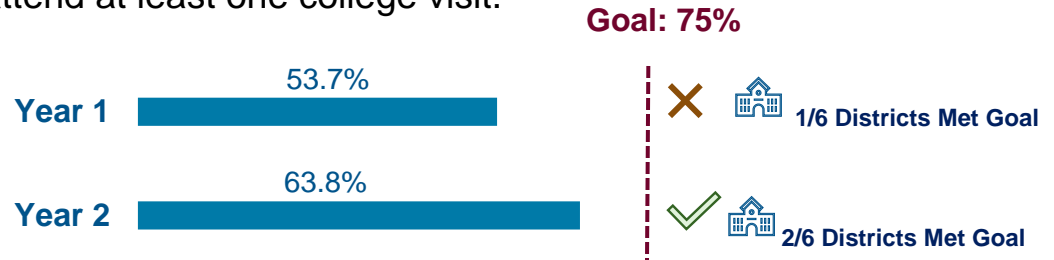


“So college visits are coming up. Would we like to do more college visits? Of course. But it's hard. We're a small district, and we share our kids. So right now, spring is the worst time to do anything, because there's baseball, softball, track, golf, tennis.” – Year 2 GEAR UP coordinator (PO 7.1)

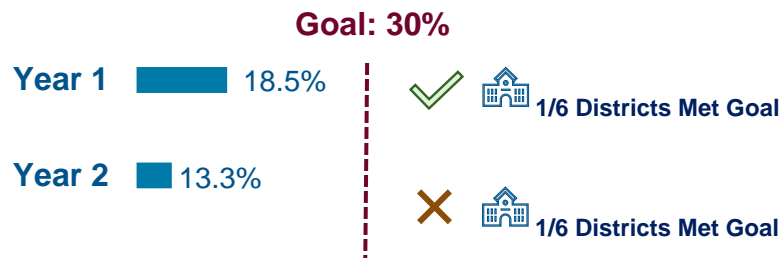


“Several GEAR UP activities had to be canceled due to [the COVID-19] school closures. The primary focus was academic instruction and assuring all students had access to learning platforms. We canceled university tours and summer program.” – Year 2 GEAR UP coordinator (POs 7.1 and 7.4)

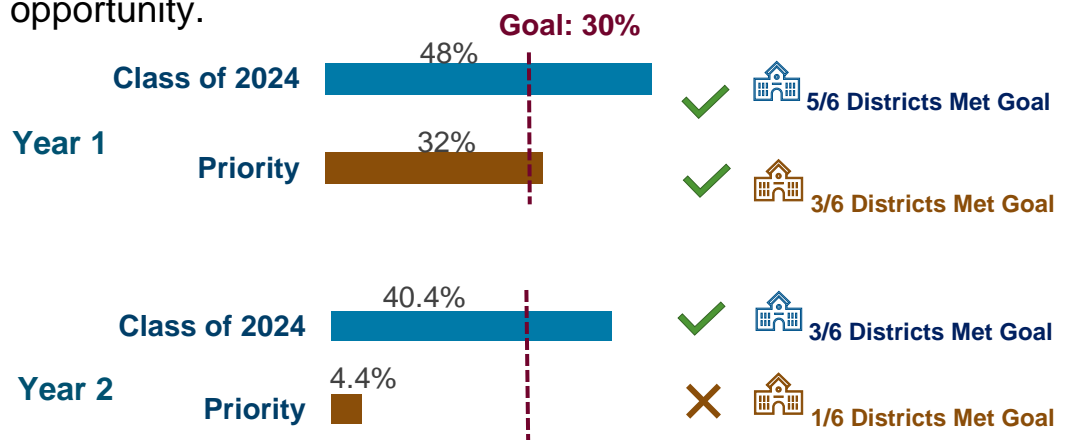
Objective 7.1: Each year, 75% of class of 2024 students will attend at least one college visit.⁴



Objective 7.4: Each year, 30% of class of 2024 students will attend a summer program (academic acceleration, enrichment, college exploration, etc.).⁵



Objective 7.5: Each year, 30% of class of 2024 and priority cohort students will participate in a work-based learning opportunity.



⁴ Many spring 2020 large college tours were cancelled in Year 2 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which contributed to the project objective not being met in Year 2.

⁵ Most summer 2020 programs were cancelled in Year 2 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These cancellations are the primary reason why the project objective was not met in Year 2.

Project Goal 8: Building and Expanding Community Partnerships



“[The district] has built partnerships with local businesses and have been fortunate to bring those opportunities to [the high school]. Business partners have been willing to work with the district to continue providing students with opportunities while complying with district safety policies. During COVID-19 we have been able to build new partnerships that offer resources for students and teachers during this time.” – Year 2 GEAR UP coordinator (PO 8.1)

Objective 8.1: All participating districts will form business alliances that support higher student achievement and offer opportunities for career exploration.

Year 1   6/6 Districts Met Goal

Year 2   6/6 Districts Met Goal

Objective 8.2: All participating districts will form alliances with governmental entities and community groups to enhance the information available to students regarding high school pathways, scholarships, financial aid, and college awareness.

Year 1   6/6 Districts Met Goal


Year 2   6/6 Districts Met Goal

Project Goal 9: Enhancing Statewide College and Career Readiness

Objective 9.1: Each year, tri-agency partners (TEA, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Texas Workforce Commission) will convene quarterly to ensure alignment of statewide initiatives around college and career readiness.

Year 1  Year 2 

Objective 9.3: Annually increase the number of educators, counselors, and community members that complete specialized college and career readiness training.

Year 1 NA Year 2 

Appendix A: GEAR UP: Beyond Grad Project Goals and Objectives

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) established the following goals and objectives for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP):

Project Goal 1: Increase access to rigorous courses in order to reduce the need for remediation

- ▶ Objective 1.1: By the end of the class of 2024's second year (Grade 8), 30% of class of 2024 students will complete Algebra I. By the end of the class of 2024's third year (Grade 9), 85% of class of 2024 students will complete Algebra I.⁶
- ▶ Objective 1.2: By the end of the class of 2024's fifth year (Grade 11), 60% of class of 2024 students will complete a Pre-Advanced Placement (AP), Pre-International Baccalaureate (IB), AP, or IB course.
- ▶ Objective 1.3: Each year, 90% of class of 2024 students who receive a failing grade on a progress report will receive targeted academic tutoring.

Project Goal 2: Graduating prepared for college and career

- ▶ Objective 2.1: By the end of the project's sixth year, 60% of class of 2024 students will be eligible to earn college credit through achievement of a passing score on the AP exam, IB exam, or completion of a rigorous dual credit course.
- ▶ Objective 2.2: By the end of the project's sixth year, the percentage of class of 2024 students graduating on the Foundation High School Program with an endorsement and/or receiving the Distinguished Level of Achievement will meet or exceed the baseline state average.

Project Goal 3: Provide educator training and professional development for rigorous academic programs

- ▶ Objective 3.1: Each year, 50% of high school core content teachers will participate in professional development that supports a rigorous curriculum (e.g., project-based learning, advanced instructional strategies, teacher externships, student engagement, etc.).
- ▶ Objective 3.2: Each year, teams of educators and administrators (middle school, high school, and institutions of higher education) will complete at least five days of vertical teaming in order to align curriculum and reduce the need for remediation at the postsecondary level.
- ▶ Objective 3.3: Each year, 20% of high school class of 2024 core content teachers will participate in at least three individualized educator coaching and/or mentoring sessions.

⁶ The goals and objectives originally referred to the class of 2024 as the "primary cohort." These have been edited here to use "class of 2024" for consistency with the rest of the report and to clearly distinguish this cohort from the priority cohort.

- ▶ Objective 3.4: By the end of the project's second year, all high school counselors will complete training in college and career advising.

Project Goal 4: Increase high school graduation

- ▶ Objective 4.1: The class of 2024 completion rate will meet or exceed the baseline state average completion rate.
- ▶ Objective 4.2: At the end of the class of 2024's second year (Grade 8), the on-time promotion rate will exceed the baseline state average promotion rate.⁷

Project Goal 5: Support participation in postsecondary education and career preparation

- ▶ Objective 5.1: Each year, 85% of tenth graders will take the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) or ACT Aspire exam. Each year, 85% of eleventh graders will take the SAT or ACT exam.
- ▶ Objective 5.2: By the end of the class of 2024's sixth year (Grade 12), 50% of class of 2024 students will meet the college readiness criterion on the SAT, ACT, or the Texas Success Initiative Assessment.
- ▶ Objective 5.3: At least 60% of class of 2024 students will enroll in postsecondary education in the fall after high school graduation.
- ▶ Objective 5.4: At least 60% of class of 2024 students who enroll in postsecondary education will place into college-level courses without the need for remediation.
- ▶ Objective 5.5: The number of class of 2024 students who complete the first year of college will meet or exceed the baseline district average.

Project Goal 6: Provide postsecondary and career preparation information to students and families

- ▶ Objective 6.1: Each year in ninth grade, students will receive information about the school's high-quality pathways and programs of study that align to postsecondary programs and high-demand careers available to them.
- ▶ Objective 6.2: Each year, students and parents will receive information about postsecondary and career options, preparation, and financing.
- ▶ Objective 6.3: Each year, 90% of class of 2024 students will receive at least one comprehensive, individualized college and career counseling session.
- ▶ Objective 6.4: By the end of the third year, 50% of class of 2024 parents will receive at least one individualized college and career counseling session.
- ▶ Objective 6.5: Each year, class of 2024 parent attendance at Texas GEAR UP events and services will increase.

Project Goal 7: Increase educational expectations for and awareness about postsecondary and career options

⁷ Project objective 4.2 was not reported in the Year 2 Annual Performance Report (APR); however, it will be reported in the Year 3 APR. Findings will be presented in the Year 3 Annual Project Outcomes Report.

- ▶ Objective 7.1: Each year, 75% of class of 2024 students will attend at least one college visit.
- ▶ Objective 7.2: By the end of the class of 2024's sixth year (Grade 12), 85% of class of 2024 students will complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- ▶ Objective 7.3: By the end of the class of 2024's sixth year (Grade 12), 85% of class of 2024 students will complete at least two college applications.
- ▶ Objective 7.4: Each year, 30% of class of 2024 students will attend a summer program (academic acceleration, enrichment, college exploration, etc.).
- ▶ Objective 7.5: Each year, 30% of class of 2024 and priority cohort students will participate in a work-based learning opportunity.

Project Goal 8: Build and expand community partnerships

- ▶ Objective 8.1: All participating districts will form business alliances that support higher student achievement and offer opportunities for career exploration.
- ▶ Objective 8.2: All participating districts will form alliances with governmental entities and community groups to enhance the information available to students regarding high school pathways, scholarships, financial aid, and college awareness.

Project Goal 9: Enhance statewide college and career readiness

- ▶ Objective 9.1: Each year, tri-agency partners (TEA, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Texas Workforce Commission) will convene quarterly to ensure alignment of statewide initiatives around college and career readiness.
- ▶ Objective 9.2: By the end of the project's fourth year, class of 2024 and priority cohort students will have access to a student-focused online resource to assist them in making informed decisions about their education and career pathway options.
- ▶ Objective 9.3: Annually increase the number of educators, counselors, and community members that complete specialized college and career readiness training.

Appendix B: Data and Analysis Methods

Data for the report were collected by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) from six participating school districts, including six middle schools and one K-12 school with the class of 2024 cohort of Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) students (Grade 7 in 2018–19 and Grade 8 in 2019–20), and five high schools and the same K-12 school with the priority cohort of GEAR UP students (Grades 9–12 in 2018–19 and 2019–20). For the class of 2024, data were collected at the individual level and the data elements included student demographics, advanced courses participation, student services received, student/family events provided and attended, and professional development events for teachers. The priority cohort data were collected through a school survey in which each participating school reported aggregated information on student demographics, services received, and event attendance.

TEA analyzed data for the purposes of submitting the GEAR UP Annual Performance Report to the U.S. Department of Education. ICF used these metrics and added additional contextual data based on some of the qualitative data collected for the Years 1–2 Annual Implementation Report.⁸

⁸ For more information about this report, please see <https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/program-evaluations/program-evaluations-middle-school-high-school-and-college-preparation/program-evaluation-middle-school-high-school-and-college-preparation-initiatives>