



Executive Summary

Year 7 Annual Implementation Report

Texas GEAR UP State Grant
Evaluation

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Highlights

Year 7 of the evaluation focused on evaluating the implementation of the Texas Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) State Grant (SG) program when participating students were in their first year of postsecondary education. The Texas GEAR UP SG was designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education through state and local partnership grants.

Implementation

At the conclusion of Year 6, 91% of Grade 12 students completed high school, however only 4% met criterion on the SAT and/or ACT to be considered academically prepared for college. Beginning in Year 7, 46% of graduates enrolled in their first year of postsecondary education. College Preparation Advisors continued to provide support to graduates in Year 7 through one-on-one meetings, text messaging, email, and by phone. They advised graduates on topics such as the transition from high school to postsecondary education, financial aid, and course registration.

Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the Support Center also provided support to the Texas GEAR UP SG districts and schools as they developed sustainability plans based on the implementation of the grant in previous years. Planning across districts varied but was most often led by district administrators and Texas GEAR UP SG Coordinators. On school campuses, student advising, college visits, and tutoring were all activities that continued to be implemented in Year 7 for follow-on cohorts and were incorporated into district sustainability plans. These activities were most often led or coordinated by school-based community alliances and school counselors.

Potential Promising Practices

- **Offer students opportunities to participate in multiple college visits throughout middle and high school to increase students' exposure to a variety of postsecondary education options.** Opportunities for students to participate in college visits from middle school through high school will expose students to a broad range of postsecondary education options and allow them to explore options that best meet their needs. This will help to ensure that students in postsecondary education have enrolled in an institution that best fits their needs.
- **Allow College Preparation Advisors to have flexible schedules so they are able to meet evolving needs of graduates.** Given the inconsistency of graduates' availability in Year 7 of the Texas GEAR UP SG, flexible College Preparation Advisor schedules allowed students and College Preparation Advisors to meet at times and locations that were conducive to the needs of graduates.
- **Establish immediate and consistent communication with graduates.** Immediately establishing contact with graduates after graduation and maintaining consistent contact through in-person meetings, texts, phone calls, and/or emails helped College Preparation Advisors ensure all graduates in need of support in Year 7 knew how and when to reach out. The immediate establishment of contact and the continued consistent communication

between graduates and College Preparation Advisors, according to College Preparation Advisors, made students more informed of the supports available to them after high school and increased the likelihood that graduates would continue to engage with College Preparation Advisors.

Recommendations

- **Consider designing goals and objectives to promote sustainability throughout the implementation of the grant.** Designing goals and objectives related to sustaining the most effective activities and strategies may help districts and schools maintain the college-going culture fostered by Texas GEAR UP SG for future cohorts. Promotion of sustainability by state-level program staff throughout implementation may also help schools and districts to prioritize sustainability efforts.
- **Involve district and school staff in data collection and monitoring activities.** Providing school staff with data reports that demonstrate the type of participation data collected by program staff and how those data are used to inform programming may help to reinforce the value of data collection at the school after it is no longer a grant requirement.
- **Train school staff on ways to provide student support for college readiness and designate school staff to take ownership of college readiness activities.** Training school staff on information such as college entrance requirements and financial aid may help increase support for students and families regarding preparing for postsecondary education. Designating multiple school staff to take ownership of this information and its dissemination will also likely relieve school counselors as the sole distributor of this information.

Executive Summary

Overview

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) awarded the Texas Education Agency (TEA) a \$33 million federal Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant in federal fiscal year 2012. The purpose of the federal GEAR UP program is to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education through state and local partnership grants. The GEAR UP program addresses the challenges faced by low-income students in attaining postsecondary success in an early and ongoing manner by providing services, activities, and resources to students from Grade 7 through the first year of college. GEAR UP is organized around three goals: (1) increasing postsecondary awareness and aspirations; (2) strengthening academic preparation and achievement; and (3) raising postsecondary participation. The cohort of students and parents from four participating districts are provided services through the Texas GEAR UP State Grant (SG) from Grade 7 (the 2012–13 school year) through their first year of postsecondary education (the 2018–19 school year). This report focuses on implementation in Year 7 of the Texas GEAR UP SG (the 2018–19 school year), while the cohort is in the first year of postsecondary education.

The Texas GEAR UP SG program includes nine project goals and 26 corresponding objectives, provided in Appendix A of the report. Goals pertain to topics related to student services, including advanced coursework, student support services, and summer programs. Other goals intend to increase data-driven instruction (through teacher professional development [PD]), community collaboration, and access to postsecondary information. Further, goals related to outcomes include on-time promotion, improved high school completion at a college-ready level, college attendance, and college retention. In addition to meeting goals at campuses selected to participate in the program, there are objectives to provide statewide information and professional learning for educators to promote college readiness across the state.

Participating schools and their districts are listed in Table ES.1; throughout this summary, schools are identified by letter (e.g., High School H, High School I) in order to protect confidentiality.¹ Program staff facilitate and provide Texas GEAR UP SG services, with support from TEA, statewide collaborators (including the Support Center, which serves as the technical assistance provider), and local stakeholders.² Program staff include College Preparation Advisors who are employed by the Support Center and serve students directly (in Years 1 – 6, they served students on their respective high school campuses; in Year 7, they served students virtually or on postsecondary education campuses). Texas GEAR UP SG Coordinators remained at the districts in Year 7 to support district and school staff plan sustainability.

¹ Texas GEAR UP High Schools are labeled High Schools H through M. The seven Texas GEAR UP Middle Schools were identified as Schools A through G.

² The term Texas GEAR UP SG staff is used throughout this report and includes the Texas GEAR UP SG Coordinators, College Preparation Advisors, facilitators, tutors, parent liaisons, and data clerks. These are staff located in the districts or at the schools who have key responsibilities to the project either for the district or at the school.

Additionally, the Texas GEAR UP SG program is intended to make a statewide impact, primarily through the provision of the website (i.e., <http://www.texasgearup.com>), where coordinated information and resources regarding postsecondary opportunities for students and their parents throughout Texas are made available.

Table ES.1. Profile of Texas GEAR UP Schools

District	Middle School (2012–13; 2013–14)	High School (2014–15; 2015–16; 2016–17; 2017–18; 2018–19)
Edgewood Independent School District (Bexar County)	Brentwood, Garcia, Wrenn	Memorial, Kennedy
Somerset Independent School District	Somerset	Somerset
Lubbock Independent School District	Dunbar	Estacado
Manor Independent School District	Decker, Manor	Manor, Manor New Tech

Evaluation of Texas GEAR UP State Grant

The evaluation of the program examines implementation and outcomes (including the relationship between the two) and identifies potential best practices over the seven-year grant period. Evaluation objectives include the following:

- Provide ongoing formative evaluation of implementation of Texas GEAR UP SG (promising practices and recommendations).
- Explore implementation status, mix of implementation, and relationships between implementation and student outcomes.
- Determine the impact on parents, schools, and community alliances.
- Examine access to and use of statewide resources.
- Examine student outcomes.

The longitudinal evaluation design spans seven years and follows a cohort model. Table ES.2 illustrates the timeline and grade level associated with the Texas GEAR UP SG cohort that is the primary focus of the program and evaluation. Appendix B includes additional information about the evaluation design.

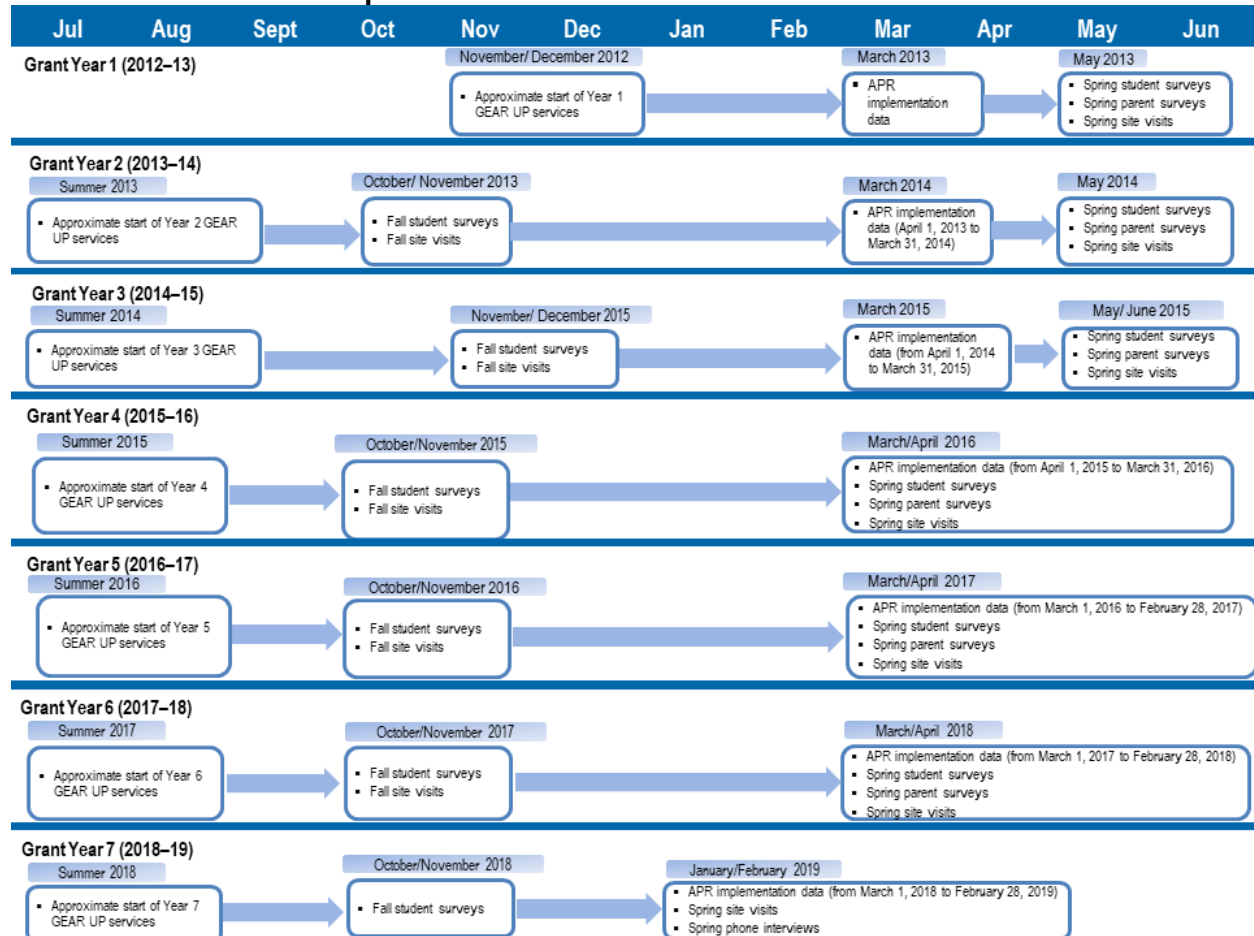
Table ES.2. Evaluation Timeline

Grade in School by Grant Year							
	Grant Year 1 2012–13	Grant Year 2 2013–14	Grant Year 3 2014–15	Grant Year 4 2015–16	Grant Year 5 2016–17	Grant Year 6 2017–18	Grant Year 7 2018–19
Primary Cohort	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	First year of post-secondary

This seventh implementation report focuses on formative feedback regarding Year 7 implementation. Because service delivery in Year 7 was so different from previous years, longitudinal comparisons between Year 7 and previous years have not been made. The Year 7 report was informed by analysis of student- and campus-level data from statewide databases, interviews with TEA and its collaborators, data reported through the GEAR UP Integrated Data

Entry System (GUIDES), student surveys, and qualitative interview and focus group data. Year 7 implementation data was submitted in GUIDES in line with the original federal annual performance report (APR) reporting requirements, covering the period between March 1, 2018 to February 28, 2019.^{3,4} Figure ES.1 provides an overview of the timing of data collection in each grant year.

Figure ES.1. Implementation Timeline and Evaluation
Implementation Data Collections: Years 1–7



Key Findings: Implementation

The federal GEAR UP program encourages grantees to engage in a wide range of implementation practices to support project objectives. In Year 7, support was provided to the

³ GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System (GUIDES) data used in the Year 7 report are from summer 2018 and the 2018–19 school year, but only through February 28, 2019. In Year 1, the evaluation team made the decision to align annual performance data to the federal reporting requirements. Although the APR reporting timeline has since changed, the evaluation team made the decision to keep the reporting timeline the same for consistency and to make meaningful comparisons across years.

⁴ While forming ideas about the program, readers should keep in mind when data were collected because this report does not capture the entire school year of activities.

Texas GEAR UP SG cohort who graduated high school in spring 2018 (the cohort is referred to as graduates in Year 7) as well as the Texas GEAR UP SG high schools as they developed sustainability plans.⁵

Grade 12 students completed high school with mixed levels of readiness. At the conclusion of Year 6, 91% of Grade 12 students completed high school, one percentage point higher than the state average the year prior. Upon completion, less than one-fifth (19%) had earned college credits by graduation. Additionally, 83% participated in the SAT and/or ACT by the end of Grade 12, however only 4% met criterion to be considered academically prepared for college, compared to almost one-quarter (22%) of Texas graduating examinees from the 2016–17 school year.⁶ After high school, National Student Clearinghouse data showed that almost half (46%) of graduates were enrolled in their first year of postsecondary education. For comparison, the Texas statewide average for college enrollment was 54.7% for graduates from the class of 2016 (TEA, 2019).

College Preparation Advisors continued to provide advising and counseling services to graduates in Year 7. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of graduates received advising services in the summer and 45% received advising services during the school year from College Preparation Advisors; College Preparation Advisors reported that advising services were offered via in-person meetings, text messaging, phone calls, and emails. Topics discussed during advising sessions included financial aid, course registration, and general transition from high school to postsecondary education. Overall, most (83%) of student survey respondents who met with their College Preparation Advisor reported that they were satisfied with the interaction and communication with their College Preparation Advisor in Year 7.

Texas GEAR UP SG districts and high schools worked with TEA and the Support Center to develop sustainability plans. TEA and the Support Center worked with district staff and Texas GEAR UP SG Coordinators to develop sustainability plans based on the Texas GEAR UP SG implementation practices used in previous years. Site visit participants provided insight on the activities sustained through Year 7 or planned to be sustained in future years, including student advising, college visits, and tutoring. Minimal funding for activities and staff as well as staff turnover were cited as challenges to sustaining initiatives.

⁵ The Year 7 cohort excluded individuals who did not graduate high school in spring 2018. The cohort included all individuals who graduated high school—those who enrolled in postsecondary education in fall 2018 (i.e., postsecondary education students) and those who did not (these individuals are no longer considered students). Accordingly, “graduates” is the most technically accurate description of the individuals receiving Texas GEAR UP SG services in Year 7. Also, while some individuals who were originally part of the Texas GEAR UP SG cohort may have dropped out of school and then later graduated high school and enrolled in postsecondary education, those individuals are excluded from the cohort as the evaluation team does not have access to data regarding their progress.

⁶ For more information, see the 2016–17 SAT and ACT results in the 2017-18 Texas Academic Performance Reports (TAPR) at <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/2018/state.pdf>.

Table ES.3 provides a high-level overview of the range of implementation strategies engaged in, to any extent, in Year 7. Graduates from all schools received support from all strategies.

Table ES.3. Overview of Texas GEAR UP SG Implementation Strategies by School, Year 7 (Grade 12)

	High School H	High School I	High School J	High School K	High School L	High School M
Implementation Strategies						
Student Support Services: Counseling/Advising	X	X	X	X	X	X
Summer Programs	X	X	X	X	X	X
FAFSA Completion Support	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total Number of Strategies Implemented (Out of 4)						
	3	3	3	3	3	3

Source: Texas Education Agency, GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System through February 28, 2019; Spring 2018 interview data.

Note: An "X" indicates that a school reported implementing the strategy, although it does not capture the level or quality of implementation (such as the number of students served) for each strategy.

Table ES.4 includes indicators regarding whether each school has met or is on track to meet relevant project objectives in Year 7. All schools met Project Objective 4.2, related to summer programming. No schools met Project Objectives 5.2 and 5.3 which were related to SAT/ACT criterion and college readiness, respectively. Project Objectives 6.1 and 6.2 related to retention and completion of college could not be reported on reliably due to limitations with the available data.

Table ES.4. School Progress Meeting Project Objectives, Year 7 (Postsecondary)

Project Objectives	High School H	High School I	High School J	High School K	High School L	High School M
1.2: By the end of the project’s sixth year, the percentage of cohort students graduating on the Foundation High School Plan plus Endorsement or at the distinguished level of achievement, will meet or exceed the state average. ⁷		X		X	X	X
2.3: By the end of the project’s sixth year, at least 50% of cohort students will graduate with college credit earned by AP exam or through dual credit.					X	
4.1: By the end of the second year, at least 75% of the 8th grade students will be involved in a comprehensive mentoring, counseling, and/or tutoring program based on results of teacher/counselor input and diagnostic data.						X
4.2: Beginning in the second year, at least 30% of the students will be involved in summer programs and institutes designed to help them work at or above grade level, ease transitions, and increase college awareness.	X	X	X	X	X	X
5.2: By the end of the project’s sixth year, the percentage of students meeting criterion on the ACT/SAT will meet or exceed the state average.						
5.3: The number of students who graduate college ready in mathematics and English will meet or exceed the state average.						
5.4: The cohort completion rate will meet or exceed the state average.		X	X		X	X
5.5: More than 50% of cohort of students will enroll in postsecondary education in the fall after high school graduation.					X	X
6.1: The student retention rate for the second semester and the second year of college will meet or exceed the state average.	–	–	–	–	–	–
6.2: At the end of the project’s seventh year, the number of students on track to complete college will exceed the average postsecondary completion rate.	–	–	–	–	–	–

Source: Texas Education Agency, GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System through February 28, 2019 and Texas GEAR UP SG Graduate Survey (Fall 2018).
 Note: An “X” indicates that a school is making reasonable progress toward an objective, although it does not capture the completion or attainment of an objective. A “–” indicates that achievement of the objective could not be reliably determined. The full report includes additional details about progress—including successes achieved and challenges faced in implementing the grant in the final year.

⁷ For additional information on the Foundation High School Plan and Texas high school graduation requirements, please see <http://tea.texas.gov/graduation-requirements/hb5.aspx>.

Summary of Implementation: Years 5–7

Table ES.5 summarizes some of the key implementation data comparisons across Years 5 (Grade 11), 6 (Grade 12), and 7 (postsecondary) of the Texas GEAR UP SG.

Table ES.5. Summary Comparison of Year 5 (Grade 11), Year 6 (Grade 12), and Year 7 (Postsecondary) Implementation Data

Implementation Area	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7
Participation in Texas GEAR UP SG Student Support Services	93% of students participated.	94% of students participated.	Since fall 2018, 45% of graduates met with their College Preparation Advisor.
Student Completion of Courses with Potential to Earn College Credit (AP, Dual Credit, or College)	38% of students were enrolled in advanced ELA/writing; 41% of students were enrolled in advanced science; 36% of students were enrolled in advanced social studies.	27% of students were enrolled in advanced ELA/writing; 18% of students were enrolled in advanced science; 23% of students were enrolled in advanced social studies.	By the end of Year 6, 19% earned college credit through completing a dual credit course and/or earning a three or higher on an AP exam
Knowledge of and Academic Preparation for College	22% of students were on track to graduate college ready in mathematics and English	17% of students were on track to graduate college ready in mathematics and English	16% of Grade 12 students graduated college ready in mathematics and English.
Graduation on the Foundation High School Program	55% of surveyed students reported that they plan to graduate with a distinguished level of achievement.	47% of surveyed students reported that they plan to graduate with a distinguished level of achievement.	87% of Grade 12 students graduated with a distinguished level of achievement.
Postsecondary Education Enrollment	57% of students expected to obtain a four-year degree or higher	39% of surveyed students had decided where to enroll in postsecondary education in fall 2018.	46% of graduates enrolled in postsecondary education after high school.

Source: Texas Education Agency, GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System through February 28, 2019; Texas GEAR UP SG Graduate Survey (Fall 2018) and National Student Clearinghouse (October, 2018).

Potential Promising Practices

Based on an analysis of implementation in Year 7, the evaluation team has identified the following set of potential best practices:

- **Offer students opportunities to participate in multiple college visits throughout middle and high school to increase students' exposure to a variety of postsecondary education options.** Opportunities for students to participate in college visits from middle school through high school will expose students to a broad range of postsecondary education options and allow them to explore options that best meet their needs. This will help to ensure that students in postsecondary education have enrolled in an institution that best fits their needs.
- **Allow College Preparation Advisors to have flexible schedules so they are able to meet evolving needs of graduates.** Given the inconsistency of graduates' availability in

Year 7 of the Texas GEAR UP SG, flexible College Preparation Advisor schedules allowed students and College Preparation Advisors to meet at times and locations that are conducive to the needs of graduates.

- **Establish immediate and consistent communication with graduates.** Immediately establishing contact with graduates after graduation and maintaining consistent contact through in-person meetings, texts, phone calls, and/or emails helped College Preparation Advisors ensure all graduates in need of support in Year 7 knew how and when to reach out. The immediate establishment of contact and the continued consistent communication between graduates and College Preparation Advisors, according to College Preparation Advisors, made students more informed of the supports available to them after high school and increased the likelihood that graduates would continue to engage with College Preparation Advisors.

Recommendations

In addition, the evaluation team has identified the following recommendations for future grants and similar programs implemented in the future.

- **Consider designing goals and objectives to promote sustainability throughout the implementation of the grant.** Designing goals and objectives related to sustaining the most effective activities and strategies may help districts and schools maintain the college-going culture fostered by Texas GEAR UP SG for future cohorts. Promotion of sustainability by state-level program staff throughout implementation may also help schools and districts to prioritize sustainability efforts.
- **Involve district and school staff in data collection and monitoring activities.** Providing school staff with data reports that demonstrate the type of participation data collected by program staff and how those data are used to inform programming may help to reinforce the value of data collection at the school after it is no longer a grant requirement.
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