Year 4 Annual Implementation Report

Texas GEAR UP State Grant Evaluation

March 2018

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 (FY) 2012. The broad 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. Through the Texas GEAR UP State Grant (SG), four participating districts are providing services to a cohort of students and their parents 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 4 of the Texas GEAR UP SG (the 2015–16 school year), the cohort's second year in high school (Grade 10).

In order to meet the federal purpose of the grant, the Texas GEAR UP SG program includes nine project goals and 26 corresponding objectives, provided in Appendix A of the report. Three goals are related to 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. Outcome goals 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 in order to promote college readiness across the state.

Participating schools and their districts are listed in Table ES.1; throughout this report, schools are identified by letter (e.g., School H, School I) in order to protect confidentiality.[4] In these districts, program staff, including Texas GEAR UP SG coordinators and College Preparation Advisors, 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.[5] Texas GEAR UP SG services are intended to impact teachers through the provision of PD and schools/districts through changes in academic rigor (paired with student support services). Finally, 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.

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[4] 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.

[5] The term Texas GEAR UP SG staff is used throughout this report and includes the 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.

Table ES.1. Profile of Texas GEAR UP Schools

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

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 (facilitators and barriers, promising practices, and recommended corrections).
- Explore implementation status, mix of implementation, and relationships between implementation and student outcomes.
- Determine the impact on parents, school, and community alliances.
- Examine access to and use of statewide resources.
- Examine student outcomes.
- Understand cost and sustainability.

The external evaluation is a longitudinal design that 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 the evaluation focuses on primarily (primary cohort). Appendix B includes additional details about the evaluation design, including the cohort approach.

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 College

This fourth implementation report focuses on formative feedback regarding Year 4 implementation, and also provides relevant comparisons to implementation in prior years (primarily Year 3 but also Year 1 and Year 2 as relevant). Each of these annual implementation reports was informed by analysis of student- and campus-level data from statewide databases, interviews with TEA and its collaborators, review of grantee annual strategic planning reports, GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System data, student and parent surveys, and qualitative site visit data.[6]

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[6] TEA's collaborators on the Texas GEAR UP SG during Year 3 include the Support Center staffed by personnel from the University of Texas at Austin's Institute for Public School Initiatives (UT-IPSI), AMS Pictures, Community TechKnowledge (CTK), UT-Tyler T-STEM Center, Texas Guaranteed (TG), GeoFORCE (all of which were collaborators in Year 2) as well as Raise Achievement, which was added in Year 3. Districts can work with these former collaborators directly.

Districts submitted implementation data in line with federal APR reporting requirements in GUIDES. Therefore, GUIDES data reflected implementation from the date of each district's notification of grant award (NOGA) through March 31, 2013 in Year 1, from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014 in Year 2, from April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015 in Year 3, and from April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016 in Year 4.[7] Texas GEAR UP SG Year 4 implementation activities that occurred through summer 2016 are not discussed in this report in order to keep the time periods comparable. Participation in summer 2015 programs as reported on during Year 4 are discussed in this report. 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. Additionally, the length of time for program implementation for Years 2, 3 and 4 were similar; however, Year 1 length of implementation was shorter therefore comparisons to Year 1 should be made with caution. Finally, readers need to be aware that comparisons of differences from Year 1 and Year 2 which reflect implementation at the seven participating middle schools relative to implementation in Year 3 and Year 4 which reflect implementation in the six participating high schools may in part be interpreted as due to middle school versus high school differences.[8] Figure ES.1 provides an overview of the timing of implementation data collection in each grant year.
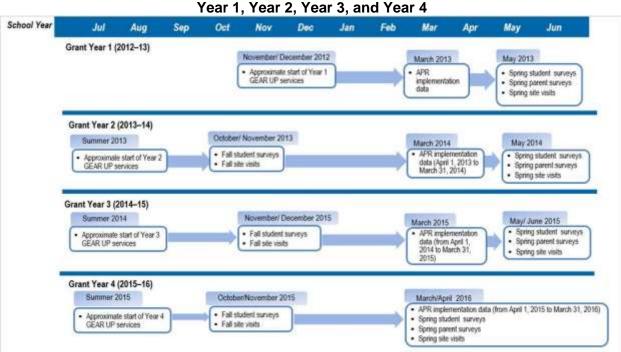
Figure ES.1. Implementation Timeline and Evaluation Implementation Data Collections: Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, and Year 4

Key Findings

Key findings presented in this executive summary are organized into two categories: (1) implementation data findings and (2) student and parent survey findings. Findings were

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[7] APR data used in the Year 4 report are from summer 2015 and the 2015–16 school year, but only through March 31, 2016, due to federal reporting requirements. Other data (such as surveys and site visits) are collected in the late spring, but still do not capture all activities occurring in the remainder of the school year or summer 2016.

[8] See prior implementation reports for Year 1 (O'Donnel et al., 2013), Year 2 (Briggs et al., 2015), and Year 3 (Briggs et al., 2016) for additional information.

considered key if they were aligned to the project goals and objectives set by TEA (see Appendix A). Relevant project objectives emphasized in this report include the following:

- Project Objective 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.
- Project Objective 2.1: By the end of the project's fourth year, all participating high schools will make opportunities available for each student to complete 18 hours of college credit (through AP, dual credit, or concurrent enrollment) by the time he or she graduates from high school.[9]
- Projective Objective 2.2: By the end of the project's fifth year, 60% of the cohort, including limited English proficient (LEP) students, will complete a pre-AP or AP course.
- Project Objective 2.3: By the end of the project's sixth year, at least 50% of cohort students will be eligible to earn college credit by AP exam or through dual credit.
- Project Objective 3.1: All core content teachers will have the opportunity to participate in training regarding differentiated instruction, advanced instructional strategies, and project-based learning (PBL).
- Project Objective 3.2: Teams of teachers at the middle and high schools will complete at least five days of vertical team preparation and implementation each year.
- Project Objective 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.[10]
- Project Objective 4.3: By the end of the project's third year, the on-time promotion rate of cohort students will exceed the state average.
- Project Objective 4.4: By the end of the project's fifth year, 70% of GEAR UP students will have knowledge of, and demonstrate, the necessary academic preparation for college.
- Project Objective 5.1: By the end of the project's fourth year, all cohort students will complete the ACT Aspire or the Preliminary SAT.[11] By the end of the project's fifth year, all cohort students will complete the SAT or ACT.
- Project Objective 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.
- Project Objective 7.1: By the end of the first year, the state office will make information regarding college options, preparation, and financing available to students, parents, and educators throughout the state.
- Project Objective 7.2: By the end of the first year, information and workshops aimed at linking college attendance to career success will be available to 100% of cohort students and their parents.
- Project Objective 7.3: Each year, at least 50% of cohort parents, including parents of current and former limited English proficient (LEP) students, will attend at least three college awareness activities.
- Project Objective 8.1: All participating districts will form business alliances that support higher student achievement and offer opportunities for career exploration.

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[9] AP refers to advanced placement courses.
[10] While Project Objective 4.1 emphasizes student support services in Grade 8, the evaluation will continue to examine the level of implementation during each high school year. Similarly, data associated with Project Objectives 7.1 and 7.2 are examined each year, not only in the first year. Vertical teaming (also referred to as vertical alignment) refers to teachers from a given subject area participating in collaborative meetings in which they coordinate instruction and learning objectives across grade levels.
[11] Texas GEAR UP SG initially indicated a goal aligned with students taking ACT PLAN by the end of project's fourth year. However, ACT has replaced PLAN with ACT Aspire. Similarly, the Preliminary SAT (PSAT) has been replaced by the PSAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMSQT) and PSAT 10.

- Project Objective 8.2: Participating campuses will form alliances with governmental entities and community groups to enhance the information available to students regarding scholarships, financial aid, and college awareness.
- Project Objective 9.1: Annually increase the number of educators participating in GEAR UP professional learning, including through Texas Gateway and face-to-face trainings.[12]
- Project Objective 9.2: By the end of the project's sixth year, at least 40% of Texas school districts will have used at least one Texas GEAR UP statewide resource, such as materials or PD.

Interested readers should view the full report for additional information on all key findings. Select evaluation questions relevant to Year 4 implementation—addressed in the report—include the following:

- How was Texas GEAR UP SG implemented overall and at each of the six participating schools?
- What are student, parent, teacher, and school staff perceptions of Texas GEAR UP SG student support service implementation strategies?
- What facilitators and barriers were associated with implementation of the strategies?
- What practices implemented by districts are perceived by grantees (students, parents, and staff) to be effective, and therefore a potential best practice?
- What were students' and parents' levels of understanding regarding postsecondary focus and readiness (e.g., college aspirations/expectations, college options, financing college)?
- What were student perceptions of student support services implementation strategies?
- What information or opportunities did students perceive to have been most relevant in informing them regarding postsecondary education and career readiness?
- What practices implemented by grantees are perceived by students to be effective, and therefore potential best practices?
- What types of information did grantees make available to students?
- What facilitators and barriers were reported regarding participation in postsecondary education readiness activities?
- To what extent were demographics, time spent in Texas GEAR UP SG, and perceptions of services and activities associated with educational aspirations and expectations of attaining a college degree?
- For what services and activities do grantees use grant funds each year and over the entire time period of the grant?
- To what extent were grantees able to secure matching funds?
- For what services and activities do grantees use matching funds each year and over the entire time period of the grant?
- In what ways were trained teachers implementing data-driven strategies? Differentiated instruction? PBL?
- How many collaborations have schools formed with business alliances, government entities, and community groups? What were perceptions of those collaborations?
- In what ways and how often did collaborating organizations offer opportunities for career exploration to students or information about scholarships, financial aid, and college awareness and readiness?
- What types of information regarding college readiness were made available through the state? What steps, if any, did the state office take to communicate to schools and families about the information available?

In prior years, implementation varied across schools, although Year 3 findings reflected overall higher implementation than in previous years. This includes higher levels of overall student

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[12] Texas Gateway (formerly Project Share) provides an online, interactive learning environment for Texas teachers. See https://www.texasgateway.org/ for additional information.

participation in Texas GEAR UP SG student support services (95%). Districts also reported substantially higher levels of student enrollment in four or more advanced courses (24%), mixed progress in parental attendance (3% attended at least three events but 49% attended at least one event), and more vertical teaming events were held. Year 4 implementation continued to have a high implementation, but not much change from Year 3. Participation in advanced courses (27%), participation in student support services (91%), and parent participation in three or more events (9%) all varied less than ten percentage points from Year 3 to Year 4.

Implementation

Level and Mix of Implementation

> **Key Takeaway:**
> Overall, the Year 4 level of implementation was similar across all schools. Two Texas GEAR UP SG high schools implemented all 19 strategies and the other four high schools implemented 17 each.

The federal GEAR UP program encourages grantees, including the Texas GEAR UP SG, to engage in a wide range of implementation practices (referred to here as the "mix of implementation") in order to support project objectives. Table ES.3 provides a high-level overview of the range of implementation strategies engaged in to any extent by the six high schools in Year 4. All six high schools implemented the core Texas GEAR UP SG strategy types in Year 4: advanced course enrollment, student support services (e.g., tutoring, comprehensive mentoring, counseling/advising), college visits, parent events, teacher PD, and community alliances. Only High Schools H and I implemented fewer strategies in Year 4 than in Year 3, while High Schools J, K, L, and M implemented more strategies in Year 4 than in Year 3.

Table ES.3. Overview of Texas GEAR UP SG Implementation Strategies by School, 2015–16

	High School H	High School I	High School J	High School K	High School L	High School M
Implementation Strategies						
Advanced Course Enrollment	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pre-AP/AP Course Enrollment	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dual Credit Enrollment [a]			X			X
Summer Programs	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support Services: Tutoring	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support Services: Mentoring	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support Services: Counseling/Advising	X	X	X	X	X	X
College Visits	X	X	X	X	X	X
Job Site Visits/Job Shadowing	X	X	X	X	X	X
Educational Field Trips	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Workshops/Events	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent Events	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent Counseling/ Advising	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent Event on College Preparation/Financial Aid	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent College Visit			X			X
Teacher Professional Development	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vertical Teaming Events	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Alliances	X	X	X	X	X	X
Use of Statewide Services	X	X	X	X	X	X
Total Number of Strategies Implemented (Out of 19)						
	17	17	19	17	17	19

Source: Texas Education Agency, GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System through March 31, 2016; fall 2015 and spring 2016 site visit data.

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

[a.] Schools were marked if site visit data indicated that students were currently enrolled in dual credit courses (only Schools J and M). There were no data on dual credit enrollment reported in the data sources used to measure implementation of this strategy (i.e., GUIDES).

In addition, Table ES.4 includes indicators regarding whether each school has met or is on track to meet relevant project objectives. That is, based on available data is it likely that the school will meet the given project objective within the expected timeframe given their current progress. Overall, all schools were on track to meet most objectives. Specifically, all schools were on track to meet project objectives regarding college credit opportunities (2.1), completion of a pre-AP or AP course (2.2), participation in teacher trainings (3.1), involvement in student support services (4.1), involvement in summer programs (4.2), academic preparedness (4.4), availability of information regarding college (7.1), information workshops (7.2), business alliances (8.1), and governmental and community alliances (8.2). Some schools struggled to meet project objectives regarding graduating with college credit (2.3), vertical teaming (3.2), on-time promotion (4.3), and training for teachers and counselors on the college admissions and financial aid process

(7.4). No schools were able meet project objectives related to parental involvement (7.3) or participation in the PSAT (5.1).[13]

Table ES.4. School Progress Toward Meeting Project Objectives, 2015–16

Project Objectives	High School H	High School I	High School J	High School K	High School L	High School M
2.1: By the end of the project's fourth year, all participating high schools will make opportunities available for each student to complete 18 hours of college credit (through AP, dual credit, or concurrent enrollment) by the time he or she graduates from high school. [a]	X	X	X	X	X	X
2.2. By the end of the project's fifth year, 60% of the cohort, including limited English proficient (LEP) students, will complete a pre-AP or AP course.	X	X			X	X
2.3: By the end of the project's sixth year, at least 50% of cohort students will be eligible to earn college credit earned by AP exam or through dual credit.	X	X	X	X	X	X
3.1: All core content teachers will have the opportunity to participate in training with regard to differentiated instruction, advanced instructional strategies, and PBL.	X	X	X	X	X	X
3.2: Teams of teachers at the middle and high schools will complete at least five days of vertical teams preparation and implementation each year.				X	X	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	X	X	X	X	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
4.3: By the end of the project's third year, the on-time promotion rate of cohort students will exceed the state average.					X	X
4.4: By the end of the project's fifth year, 70% of GEAR UP students will have knowledge of, and demonstrate, the necessary academic preparation for college. [b]	X	X	X	X	X	X
5.1: By the end of the project's fourth year, all cohort students will complete the ACT Aspire or the Preliminary SAT. By the end of the project's fifth year, all cohort students will complete the SAT or ACT. [c]						
7.3: 50% of parents will participate in at least three Texas GEAR UP SG events each year.						
7.4: By the end of the project's fifth year, teachers and counselors will complete training in the college admissions and financial aid process.		X	X			X
8.1: All participating districts will form business alliances that support higher student achievement and offer opportunities for career exploration.	X	X	X	X	X	X
8.2: Participating campuses will form alliances with governmental entities and community groups to enhance the information available to students regarding scholarships, financial aid, and college awareness.	X	X	X	X	X	X

Source: Texas Education Agency, GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System through March 31, 2016; fall 2015 and spring 2016 site visit data.

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] AP = advanced placement. Near-term objectives also related to Project Objective 2.1 include the following: Projective Objective 2.2: By the end of the project's fifth year, 60% of the cohort, including LEP students, will complete a pre-AP or AP course; Project Objective 2.3: By the end of the project's sixth year, at least 50% of cohort students will be eligible to earn college credit by AP exam or through dual credit.. Schools rated as being in progress toward Project Objective 2.1 are assumed to also be making progress toward these objectives in the later years of Texas GEAR UP SG implementation.

[b.] High schools were marked as making progress toward Project Objective 4.4 if the school reached 70% on any of the following indicators: Participation in college visits, participation in financial aid counseling, participation in GEAR UP workshops/events, or enrollment in advanced courses. This was a preliminary calculation. The final calculation will be discussed in the Annual Implementation Report #5.

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[13] PSAT/NMSQT is offered in October and is used to determine if students will qualify for a National Merit Scholarship. PSAT/NMSQT is considered the same test as the PSAT 10 which is offered in the spring of each school year, although the PSAT 10 is not used to qualify for a National Merit Scholarship. Participating students all took the exam in October. The exam will simply be referred to as the PSAT for the remainder of the report. See https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsqt-psat-10 for additional information on the PSAT tests.

ADVANCED COURSE, AP AND DUAL CREDIT ENROLLMENT

> **Key Takeaway:**
> Texas GEAR UP SG schools are helping students to be academically prepared for college. In Year 4, 27% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses, an increase of three percentage points from Year 3 in which only 24% of students were enrolled in that many advanced courses. In Year 2, only 10% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.

Cohort student enrollment in and completion of advanced courses (including AP and dual credit courses) is an important benchmark toward accomplishing Project Objectives 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. The goal of these project objectives is to increase academic preparedness as well as the number of opportunities to earn college credit while in high school. School L had the highest AP or pre-AP course completion rate in Year 4 (100%) while School K had the lowest completion rate (51%). Schools have demonstrated progress towards achieving these objectives, but will need to increase the enrollment percentage of students in advanced courses in forthcoming years by targeting the 45% of Texas GEAR UP SG students not enrolled in advanced courses in Grade 10.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES: TUTORING, MENTORING, AND COUNSELING

> **Key Takeaway:**
> In Year 4, 91% of students participated in tutoring, mentoring, and/or counseling (95% in Year 3). The average amount of time spent in tutoring decreased in Year 4 (9.4 hours, compared to 12.6 hours in Year 3), and 51% of students participated in tutoring (compared to 51% in Year 3). The majority of the students participated in counseling (87%), an increase of nearly twenty percentage points from Year 3 (69%). Almost one-third (32%) of Grade 10 students received comprehensive mentoring in Year 4 (compared to 10% in Year 3).

Each of the schools met or exceeded Project Objective 4.1, to have at least 75% of students participating in tutoring, mentoring, or counseling. More cohort students participated in counseling and mentoring services during Year 4. The percentage of students who participated in tutoring remained the same, while the average number of hours of tutoring received decreased. Mentoring continued to be the least utilized student support service.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN COLLEGE VISITS AND JOB SITE VISITS

> **Key Takeaway:**
> Overall, 38% of Texas GEAR UP SG students participated in a college visit in Year 4. This activity occurred at all six of the Texas GEAR UP SG high schools. Across schools, there were 31 college visits in Year 4 (compared to 34 in Year 3). Additionally, all six high schools also participated in job site visits, which included 21% of students overall and a total of 12 job site visits/job shadowing events (compared to 9 in Year 3).

In addition to student support services, college visits and job site visits represent other successful activities offered to the Texas GEAR UP SG primary cohort students in Year 4. All six high schools engaged in college visits in Year 4 and site visit data revealed that college visits

are a high priority for school administrators. A 14 percentage point increase in job site visits may also demonstrate an increased prioritization for school administrators to facilitate college and career readiness. Year 4 survey data indicated that students found these activities to be, on average, *mostly effective*, a perception consistent with students' views on other Texas GEAR UP SG activities.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT WITH TEXAS GEAR UP SG

Key Takeaway:
Only 9% of parents were involved in three or more events in Year 4, compared to 3% in Year 3. However, all six high schools had at least some parents attending three or more events. Additionally, 28% of parents attended at least one event, a decrease of 21 percentage points since Year 3.

As was the case in prior years, no school met Project Objective 7.3 of having 50% of parents attend at least three Texas GEAR UP SG events annually, though schools made more progress on this goal in Year 4 (9%) than they did in Year 3 (3%). In Year 4, Texas GEAR UP SG high schools implemented 90 parent activities, compared to 159 in Year 3. In addition to offering more activities, the Texas GEAR UP SG will need to continue to work on overcoming the challenges in engaging parents, including challenges consistent with prior years and those that have emerged in the high school setting, in order to meet the project objective by the end of Year 4 and in each of the future program years. There is some indication that Texas GEAR UP SG high schools have begun making plans to boost parent engagement; two schools hired a parent liaison in Year 4 and four schools discussed plans to conduct home visits with parents that had not yet participated in a Texas GEAR UP SG event. The full impact of such initiatives may not be seen until Year 5 data is available, however.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND VERTICAL TEAMING

Key Takeaway:
All districts offered GEAR UP-supported PD in Year 4. A total of 517 teachers received PD in at least one of the 207 PD sessions offered. All schools held vertical teaming events, but only three high schools held at least five events.

Overall, Texas GEAR UP SG improved the amount of teacher PD offered in Year 4, reflecting progress towards Project Objectives 3.1 and 3.2. Texas GEAR UP SG schools are required to offer teacher PD each program year on the topics of advanced instructional strategies, vertical teaming, PBL, differentiated instruction, and college access/preparation. All Texas GEAR UP SG schools provided some GEAR UP-supported PD in Year 4, ranging from 9 offerings at High School L to 80 at High School M. In Year 4, all six schools also held vertical teaming PD.

SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION: YEAR 1 THROUGH YEAR 4
In the report, differences in implementation from across time points are highlighted. Table ES.5 summarizes some of the key implementation data comparisons among the first four years of Texas GEAR UP SG.

Table ES.5. Summary Comparison of Year 1, Year 2, Year 3, and Year 4 Implementation Data

Implementation Area	Year 1 and Year 2 (Middle School)	Year 3	Year 4
Level and Mix of Implementation	**Year 1:** Varied across districts. One middle school (from District 3) implemented the widest range of activities. **Year 2:** Variability remained; however, overall, implementation was higher. Two middle schools (Districts 1 and 3) implemented a wide range of activities.	District 3 continued to implement a broad range (and have high percentages of student participation) but other districts also demonstrated successful mix of implementation.	District 3 continued to implement and engage students in the broadest range of services, but the overall level and mix of services across districts was successful.
Student Participation in Texas GEAR UP SG Student Support Services	**Year 1:** 39% of students participated. **Year 2:** 78% of students participated.	81% of students participated.	91% of students participated.
Student Participation in Any Texas GEAR UP SG Activities	**Year 1:** 81% of students participated. **Year 2:** 99% of students participated.	95% of students participated.	98% of students participated.
Number of Advanced Courses	**Year 1:** 0% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses. **Year 2:** 10% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.	24% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.	27% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.
Enrollment in an Advanced Mathematics Course	**Year 1:** 22% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics. **Year 2:** 43% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics, including Algebra I.	45% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics, including Pre-AP Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry.	43% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics, including courses that were taken at the honors, pre-AP or AP level (e.g., pre-AP Algebra II) or courses that were taken ahead of schedule (e.g., pre-Calculus),
Enrollment in Other Advanced Courses	**Year 1:** 20% of students were enrolled in advanced ELA/writing; 21% of students were enrolled in advanced science.[a] One middle school had no students in advanced ELA/writing or science courses. **Year 2:** 21% of students were enrolled in advanced ELA/writing; 21% of students were enrolled in advanced science; 20% of students were enrolled in advanced social studies. Two middle schools had 0-1% of students in advanced ELA, science, or social studies courses.	39% of students were enrolled in advanced ELA/writing; 38% of students were enrolled in advanced science; 35% of students were enrolled in advanced social studies. All high schools had at least 19% enrollment in each content area.	45% 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. All high schools had at least 16% enrollment in each content area.
Student Knowledge of and Academic Preparation for College	**Year 1:** N/A **Year 2:** N/A	85% of surveyed students plan to graduate with a distinguished level of achievement.	86% of surveyed students plan to graduate with a distinguished level of achievement.

Implementation Area	Year 1 and Year 2 (Middle School)	Year 3	Year 4
Endorsement Selection	**Year 1:** N/A **Year 2:** N/A	Most students (82%) selected one endorsement while 8% selected two or more endorsements. 71% of surveyed students understand how their endorsement will help them prepare for college.	93% of students had chosen an endorsement and 83% of surveyed students understand how their endorsement will help them prepare for college.
Parental Attendance at Three or More Texas GEAR UP SG Events[b]	**Year 1:** No parent at any middle school attended three or more events; 5% of parents participated in at least one event. **Year 2:** 7% of parents attended three or more events; 38% of parents attended at least one event.	3% of parents attended three or more events; 49% of parents attended at least one event.	9% of parents attended three or more events; 28% of parents attended at least one event.
Teacher Professional Development and Vertical Teaming	**Year 1:** Most middle schools had already designed and scheduled PD for the school year. **Year 2:** Two middle schools held five days of vertical teaming events.	Two high schools held five days of vertical teaming events.	Three high schools held five days of vertical teaming events.

Source: Texas Education Agency, GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System through March 31, 2016; Student Surveys (Spring 2016).
Note: Texas GEAR UP SG implementation in Year 1 and Year 2 occurred in seven middle schools. In Year 3 and Year 4, implementation occurred in six high schools within the same four districts. N/A reflects areas that the evaluation did not specifically focus on, but are topics of interest for Year 3 or Year 4 implementation.
[a] ELA = English Language Arts. In Year 1, evaluation data did not include advanced course taking for social studies.
[b] Parental attendance is defined as any adult household member attending an event associated with the given student.

Student and Parent Surveys

> **Key Takeaway:**
> Students' aspirations remained at the same level in Year 4 as in Year 3, and the gap between aspirations and expectations narrowed slightly. Students still do not expect to achieve as high of an educational outcome as indicated by their aspirations. However, students' reported knowledge of college-related terms/concepts, especially the SAT and ACT, increased from Year 3 to Year 4.
>
> Consistent with prior years, there continued to be multiple indicators in Year 4 that students continue to need and want financial information as it relates to postsecondary education. With continued implementation of Texas GEAR UP SG activities, students may gain knowledge and information about the financial aspects of college and may view affordability as less of a barrier to educational aspirations.

Texas GEAR UP SG cohort students completed surveys in fall 2015 and spring 2016. Although parent surveys were administered in spring 2015, low response rates prohibited the use of these data in the Year 3 Annual Implementation Report. Parent surveys were administered again in fall 2015 and findings are included in this report. In addition to learning about perceptions of Texas GEAR UP SG implementation, the surveys provided important information about educational aspirations and expectations, knowledge of college financial issues, and knowledge of college-related concepts.

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS
Students' aspirations remained at the same level in Year 4 as in Year 3 (72% aspire to obtain a 4-year degree or higher) (compared to a four percentage point increase between spring 2014 and spring 2015). Students' educational aspirations were significantly higher than educational expectations, but the gap between them narrowed from Year 3 to Year 4 by one percentage point. Of students who do not plan to go to college, the greatest percentage selected *I want to work* as a main reason for not continuing onto postsecondary education (56% across schools); this is a change from Year 2 and Year 3 when students selected *concerns about cost*.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT COLLEGE
Evaluation survey data indicated that Texas GEAR UP SG served schools where the students generally understood the importance/benefit of college (64% of students rated themselves as *knowledgeable* or *extremely knowledgeable*) more than the requirements to get accepted (53% of students rated themselves as *knowledgeable* or *extremely knowledgeable*). Students also reported that they continued to need information on specific aspects of college requirements, as only 56% indicated they were *knowledgeable* or *extremely knowledgeable* about the SAT (46% for the ACT). Students' average perceived knowledge of each of the relevant items differed significantly across schools. Only 38% of students selected GEAR UP staff or events as a source for college information (compared to 34% in spring 2015 and 46% in spring 2014). This implies that Texas GEAR UP SG may need to provide more information to a higher portion of students (and perhaps with greater frequency) in order to get students the information they need about college requirements.

FINANCIAL UNDERSTANDING OF COLLEGE
Only 11% of students reported feeling *extremely knowledgeable* about financial aid and the costs and benefits of pursuing postsecondary education. The percentage of students who reported that they had conversations with someone from GEAR UP or their school increased in Year 4 (69%, compared to 67% in Year 3). On average, students reported that they were *slightly knowledgeable* or *not knowledgeable* about specific financial aid terms. Continuing efforts to increase students' knowledge of the financial aspects of college (through conversations with students, events, and other activities) remain an important area of focus, especially as students become closer to postsecondary education enrollment; this should include information about specific types of financial aid available to them, how to obtain financial aid, and the actual costs of attending.

PERCEPTION OF TEXAS GEAR UP SG ACTIVITIES
On average, students found each type of activity that they participated in to be *mostly effective*. Year 4 was the third year that College Preparation Advisors worked with Texas GEAR UP SG primary cohort students, and 71% of students found them to be either *very effective* or *mostly effective*. A small percentage of students reported using the GEAR UP website in Year 4 (22%), although this was a slight increase from Year 3 (19%). Summer programs continued to be perceived by students as valuable; 74% of students who participated in a summer 2015 GEAR UP program indicated that they had a better understanding of the benefits of college after attending the program.

Key Facilitators and Barriers: Implementation

Strong Stakeholder Engagement

> **Key Takeaway:**
> In Year 4, it was often reported that strong engagement from all stakeholders facilitated successful implementation, particularly school administrators and students.

Texas GEAR UP SG staff and Texas GEAR UP SG collaborators indicated that strong administrator engagement fostered investment in a college-going culture among program and school staff. In addition, it was noted in Year 4 that long-term student participation in the grant fostered a stronger interest in postsecondary education. Teacher engagement with the grant is also important, as recognized by the PD requirements. The increased PD opportunities in Year 4 was facilitated by the new Educator Outreach Coach hired by the Support Center. Survey data also indicated that participation in Texas GEAR UP SG activities may have increased student academic readiness as well as parent and student knowledge of financial aid and the benefits of college. In addition, 71% of students found their College Preparation Advisor(s) to be mostly or very effective, which may have also contributed to increased student academic readiness.

Barriers of Poor Communication, Decreased Levels of Rigor, and Limited Financial Aid Information

> **Key Takeaway:**
> Difficulties communicating effectively within Texas GEAR UP SG teams and between Texas GEAR UP SG teams and school staff challenged successful implementation. A decrease in rigor in advanced classes to meet the needs of all students in the courses and a perceived lack of motivation was also a barrier preventing progress towards college readiness. Students continued to lack knowledge about financial aid which may have contributed to students' perceived lack of affordability of college as well as a decrease in students who felt that college is important to their future career.

Lack of appropriate Texas GEAR UP SG staff, poor communication among Texas GEAR UP SG staff, and poor communication between Texas GEAR UP SG staff and school staff were among the barriers to implementation in Year 4. In addition, pre-AP and AP teachers of cohort students reported that they felt that they needed to decrease the rigor of their curricula to meet the needs of all students in the courses, including those who were not prepared for the rigor and higher expectations. In addition, 66% of students reported that they were only slightly knowledgeable or knowledgeable of financial aid, over half (54%) reported no knowledge of Federal Pell grants, and almost half reported no knowledge of FAFSA and Federal work-study options (43% and 45%, respectively). This lack of knowledge may speak to the perceived lack of college affordability some students reported (only 43% of students reported they will probably or definitely be able to afford to attend a public 4-year college). Additionally, the increased desire or need to work may have contributed to the decrease in students who reported on the spring 2016 survey that college is important to their future career.

Potential Promising Practices

Four Texas GEAR UP SG activities/initiatives implemented during Year 4 were identified as potential promising practices worthy of continued follow-up in the future. School M held their

third annual parent symposium during Year 4 and again received positive feedback from school staff and parents. The symposium provided parents with a wide selection of sessions to attend that catered to their interests and allowed parents to select sessions to attend based on those interests. The extended professional development provided by the Support Center's Educator Outreach Coach provided schools the opportunity to tailor the trainings and resources for teacher PD based on the needs of the teachers and school. School administrator investment in the college readiness of students and engagement in the Texas GEAR UP SG was reported by program staff as necessary for implementation and sustainment of grant initiatives. Finally, an administrator from a previous Texas GEAR UP SG middle school reported that school staff continued conversations with students in Grade 8 regarding endorsement selection and have incorporated strategies into the conversations to help identify students at-risk of not finishing high school as early as possible.

Recommendations

Based on the range of data analyzed to date, several recommendations with regard to program implementation are made. These include the following:

- **Offer a Variety of Academic and Emotional Support Platforms to Ensure College Readiness.** Academic support, such as tutoring, and emotional supports, such as mentoring, for students may improve their perceived lack of motivation in advanced classes and aid students who were academically unprepared and enrolled in advanced classes. While the percentage of students who aspire to obtain a 4-year degree or higher has steadily increased over time, these supports may better prepare students for success and increase persistence in postsecondary education and increase the number of students who expect to obtain a 4-year degree or higher.
- **Provide Additional and Varied Opportunities for Parent Engagement.** As all six Texas GEAR UP SG schools continue to struggle with parent engagement, Texas GEAR UP SG staff should consider hosting parent and family events that allow parents to discuss their child's postsecondary plans and readiness in groups and space that are more intimate. College Preparation Advisors reported in site visits that parents seem to be more engaged and ask more questions when they are able to receive information in smaller groups or in one-on-one counseling sessions. Parents also suggested on site visits that some cohort parents have negative associations with the school staff and campus based on personal experiences. Events and counseling sessions in locations within the communities, neighborhoods, or even homes of the parents may make parents feel more comfortable to ask more questions and participate in more events.
- **Broaden Participation in Student Events Held on College Campuses.** Students rated their experiences with Texas GEAR UP SG activities as mostly effective and correlational data suggests that participation in college visits and summer programs was positively related to the educational expectations and knowledge of college related terms. It was reported by students and program staff that endorsements and pathways are used to organize events, including college visits and recommendations for summer programs by Texas GEAR UP SG staff. Several students across all six schools reported that they do not plan to study their endorsement during postsecondary education or are not interested in the subject; additionally, 30% of students reported they plan to drop their endorsement as soon as they are able to after grade 10. By allowing students to participate based on self-identified interests instead of their endorsement, the number of students interested in participating in these activities may increase as well as improve their perception of Texas GEAR UP SG and appeal of postsecondary education.
- **Continue to Expand Sustainability Efforts.** Some districts were able to speak to sustainability efforts that have been planned for or already implemented. TEA, the Support

Center, and Texas GEAR UP SG staff on the high school campuses should work with school and district staff to identify strategies and initiatives that demonstrated measurable success in increasing postsecondary education readiness and awareness. Stakeholders should consider facilitating discussions to determine how the strategies and initiatives may be funded via other sources, replicated through innovative and less costly means, and prioritized among other school and district goals. The entire range of Texas GEAR UP SG initiatives, including student supports, parent supports, teacher professional development, and community alliance relationships, should be considered in these discussions to foster a college-going culture throughout their school.