



Executive Summary

# Year 6 Annual Implementation Report

Texas GEAR UP State Grant  
Evaluation

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# 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 6 of the Texas GEAR UP SG (the 2017–18 school year), the cohort's final year in high school (Grade 12).

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 report, schools are identified by letter (e.g., High School H, High School I) in order to protect confidentiality.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Program staff include College Preparation Advisors who are employed by the Support Center and embedded in the participating schools. They serve in each district alongside Texas GEAR UP SG Coordinators, who are district personnel dedicated to the implementation of Texas GEAR UP SG grant services. Texas GEAR UP SG services are intended to impact teachers through the provision of PD and schools/districts through changes

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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.

**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)
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.

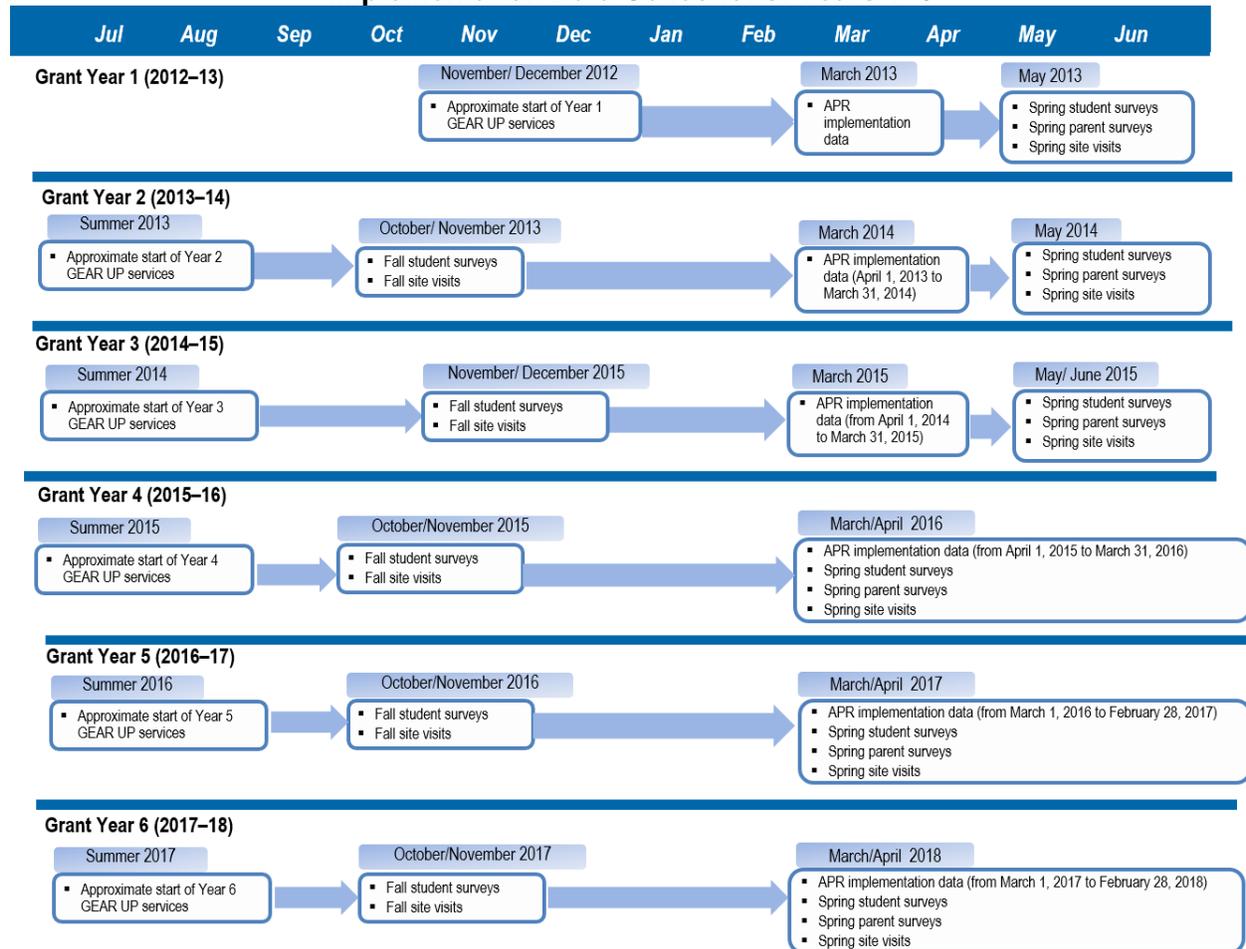
**Table ES.2. Evaluation Timeline**

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 college

This sixth implementation report focuses on formative feedback regarding Year 6 implementation and provides relevant comparisons to implementation in prior years. It 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 and parent surveys, and qualitative site visit data.<sup>3</sup> Districts submitted Year 6 implementation data in GUIDES in line with federal annual performance report (APR) reporting requirements, covering the period between March 1, 2017 to February 28, 2018.<sup>4,5</sup> 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 1–6**



<sup>3</sup> TEA’s collaborators on the Texas GEAR UP SG during Year 6 include the Support Center staffed by personnel from the University of Texas at Austin’s Institute for Public School Initiatives (UT-IPSI), AMS Pictures, GeoFORCE, Signal Vine, and FOCUS Training.

<sup>4</sup> Annual Performance Report (APR) data used in the Year 6 report are from summer 2017 and the 2017–18 school year, but only through February 28, 2018. The evaluation team made the decision to align annual performance data to the 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 2017.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

## 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 6, implementation practices included activities that have been included in prior years to promote college awareness and readiness (e.g., student support services, college visits, summer programs, workshops, SAT/ACT/TSIA participation), but also new practices to support students and parents regarding applications for college and financial aid.

**Implementation shifted to focus on tasks for planning for and enrolling in college.** The evaluation team observed a notable shift in implementation from providing opportunities to build awareness and readiness for college to working with students and parents to take concrete steps to apply for and enroll in college. During site visits, College Preparation Advisors reported that their primary advising concentrations were tasks related to planning for students' postsecondary education, such as FAFSA and application completion, enrollment decisions, and financial aid package reviews. Many of these advising activities were conducted in a one-on-one setting so that College Preparation Advisors could tailor conversations and information to meet students' specific needs.

**Participation in advising increased in Year 6 while awareness and readiness activities decreased.** As a result of the shift in programming to focus on planning for and enrolling in college, participation in many college awareness and readiness activities that were popular in previous years tended to decrease while participation in activities to support college and financial aid applications and decisions tended to increase. Specifically, participation in the following awareness and readiness activities decreased from Year 5 to Year 6: mentoring, educational field trips, college visits, job site visits, summer programs, and workshops. Additionally, the percentage of students who participated in at least four Texas GEAR UP SG activities decreased from nearly half in Year 4 and Year 5 to under one-third in Year 6. However, participation increased between Year 5 and Year 6 for counseling/advising and financial aid and support services—for both participation rates and average number of hours spent. Participation also increased for tutoring in Year 6.

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 6. While most schools implemented a majority of the strategies, only School M implemented all seventeen strategies.

**Table ES.3. Overview of Texas GEAR UP SG Implementation Strategies by School, Year 6 (Grade 12)**

	High School H	High School I	High School J	High School K	High School L	High School M
<b>Implementation Strategies</b>						
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
Financial Aid Counseling	X	X	X	X	X	X
Educational Field Trips						X
College Visits		X	X	X		X
Job Site Visits/Job Shadowing	X	X	X	X	X	X
Summer Programs	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Workshops/Events	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent Events		X	X	X		X
Parent Counseling/Advising	X	X	X	X	X	X
Teacher Professional Development	X	X	X	X		X
College Credit Completion	X	X	X	X	X	X
SAT/ACT Participation	X	X	X	X	X	X
TSIA Participation	X	X	X	X	X	X
College Application Support	X	X	X	X	X	X
FAFSA Completion Support	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Total Number of Strategies Implemented (Out of 17)</b>						
	14	16	16	16	13	17

Source: Texas Education Agency, GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System through February 28, 2018; fall 2017 and spring 2018 site visit 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.

As a result of this focus on Year 6-specific services provided to students, as of spring 2018, over two-thirds (68%) of student survey respondents reported having submitted their FAFSA—approximately twenty-four percentage points higher than the Texas state average of 44% (Helhoski, 2018). In addition, many (89%) of the student survey respondents reported having applied to college, and of those, almost three-quarters (70%) reported having already been accepted to college. Overall, over one-third (39%) of all student survey respondents had already made the decision on where to enroll in postsecondary education in fall 2018 as of the spring 2018 survey administration. Despite positive rates of college acceptance reported in the student survey, in terms of the cohort's academic preparation for college, the cohort fell below academic targets.

Table ES.4 includes indicators regarding whether each school has met or is on track to meet relevant project objectives in Year 6. Specifically, only High School L had more than 70% of students meet the criteria for having knowledge and academic preparedness for college as stipulated by Project Objective 4.4. In addition, no school was on track to meet TEA's criteria for graduating college ready. However, approximately three-quarters (74%) of students had completed Algebra II and were pursuing an endorsement as of February 28, 2018—suggesting that by the end of Year 6 those students will have fulfilled at least one of the requirements for graduating at the distinguished level of achievement.

**Table ES.4. School Progress Meeting Project Objectives, Year 6 (Grade 12)**

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 Program plus Endorsement or at the distinguished level of achievement, will meet or exceed the state average. <sup>6</sup>	X	X	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.						
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
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.						
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
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
4.4: By the end of the project's fifth year, 70% of GEAR UP students will have knowledge of, and demonstrate, necessary academic preparation for college.					X	
5.1: By the end of the project's fourth year, all cohort students will complete the ACT Aspire or the PSAT. By the end of the project's fifth year, all cohort students will complete the SAT or ACT.						
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.						
5.5: More than 50% of cohort of students will enroll in postsecondary education in the fall after high school graduation.			X			
7.3: Each year, at least 50% of cohort parents, including parents of current and former LEP students, will attend at least three college awareness activities.						
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.						
	<b>Statewide Completion</b>					
9.1: Annually increase the number of educators participating in GEAR UP professional learning, including through Texas Gateway and face-to-face trainings.	ND					
9.2: By the end of the project's sixth year, at least 40% of Texas school districts will have utilized at least one Texas GEAR UP statewide resource, including materials and PD.	X					

Source: Texas Education Agency, GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System through February 28, 2018; fall 2017 and spring 2018 site visits; and Texas GEAR UP SG Student Survey (Spring 2018).

Note: An "X" indicates that a school is making progress toward an objective, although it does not capture the completion or attainment of an objective. An "ND" indicates that the evaluation team did not receive data to measure progress toward the objective. AP = advanced placement.

<sup>6</sup> For additional information on the Foundation High School Program and Texas high school graduation requirements, please see <http://tea.texas.gov/graduation-requirements/hb5.aspx>.

Overall, by February 28, 2018, Texas GEAR UP SG was not on track to meet most Year 6 objectives; however, it should be noted that most data for the Year 6 objectives were not yet available for the analysis as the objectives fell outside of the Year 6 reporting period for GUIDES. The full report includes additional details about progress—including successes achieved and challenges faced in implementing the grant in the final year of high school. More definitive findings regarding Year 6 objectives will be reported in the Year 7 Annual Implementation Report.

## Summary of Implementation: Year 1 through Year 6

In the report, differences in implementation from across timepoints are highlighted. Table ES.5 summarizes some of the key implementation data comparisons across Years 3 (Grade 9), 5 (Grade 11), and 6 (Grade 12) of Texas GEAR UP SG.

**Table ES.5. Summary Comparison of Year 3 (Grade 9), Year 5 (Grade 11), and Year 6 (Grade 12) Implementation Data**

Implementation Area	Year 3	Year 5	Year 6
<b>Level and Mix of Implementation</b>	District 3 continued to implement a broad range (and have high percentages of student participation) but additional districts also demonstrated successful mix of implementation.	Districts 1, 3, and 4 implemented and engaged students in the broadest range of services, but the overall level and mix of services across districts continued to be successful.	School M implemented and engaged students in the broadest range of services, but the overall level and mix of services across districts continued to be successful at Schools I, J, and K.
<b>Student Participation in Texas GEAR UP SG Student Support Services</b>	81% of students participated.	93% of students participated.	94% of students participated.
<b>Student Participation in Any Texas GEAR UP SG Activities</b>	95% of students participated.	97% of students participated.	96% of students participated
<b>Number of Advanced Courses</b>	24% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.	14% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.	7% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.
<b>Enrollment in an Advanced Mathematics Course</b>	45% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics, including Pre-AP Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry.	33% 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., Calculus),	32% 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., Calculus),
<b>Enrollment in Other Advanced Courses<sup>a</sup></b>	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.	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.
<b>Student Knowledge of and Academic Preparation for College</b>	85% of surveyed students plan to graduate with a distinguished level of achievement.	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.
<b>Endorsement Selection</b>	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.	96% of student had chosen an endorsement and 62% reported that they are on track to graduate with an endorsement.	93% of student had chosen an endorsement and 64% of students reported that they expected to graduate with an endorsement
<b>Parental Attendance at Three or More Texas GEAR UP SG Events<sup>b</sup></b>	3% of parents attended three or more events; 49% of parents attended at least one event.	17% of parents attended three or more events; 21% of parents attended in one to two events.	13% of parents attended three or more events; 24% of parents attended one to two events.
<b>Teacher Professional Development and Vertical Teaming</b>	Two high schools held five days of vertical teaming events.	One high school held at least five days of vertical teaming events.	No high school held at least five days of vertical teaming.

Source: Texas Education Agency, GEAR UP Integrated Data Entry System through February 28, 2018; Texas GEAR UP SG Student Survey (Spring 2018).

<sup>a</sup> ELA refers to English Language Arts.

<sup>b</sup> Parental attendance is defined as any adult household member attending an event associated with the given student.

## Potential Promising Practices

Based on an analysis of implementation in Year 6, the evaluation team has identified the following set of potential best practices:

- **Disseminate college information and resources in multiple modes and formats.** One school disseminated college information both online and via print, which students specifically referenced as a helpful practice. Texas GEAR UP SG staff felt that distributing the information in multiple modes contributed to more students accessing and taking advantage of the information.
- **Provide opportunities for students to have one-on-one conversations regarding postsecondary education with staff.** One-on-one conversations on college applications and financial aid forms provided students and families with privacy, confidentiality, and the opportunity to have conversations that were more specific to their needs and questions.
- **Allocate a shared space for postsecondary education information.** Five of the six schools housed their Texas GEAR UP SG staff with other staff from college access programs at the school, which created a central space in the school for information on postsecondary education. This provided easy access to college resources for students and facilitated collaboration across college access staff.
- **Provide opportunities to visit colleges each year for all students.** Opportunities to visit campuses with Texas GEAR UP SG helped students determine schools that were not the right fit for them, which streamlined their college application process and eased their college enrollment decision making.
- **Provide multiple opportunities for students to participate in college entrance examinations.** Multiple opportunities helped students feel comfortable and confident to succeed on college entrance examinations and helped many students increase their scores.

## Recommendations

In addition, the evaluation team has identified the following recommendations for grant implementation—both in terms of continued activities to sustain the grant and support the cohort in Year 7 and in terms of how to implement similar programming in contexts outside of the Texas GEAR UP SG:

- **Provide training for all school staff on college entrance requirements and financial aid.** Providing all school staff with training on college entrance requirements and financial aid may increase the awareness of postsecondary education among students and their families, continue to facilitate the college going culture at the school, and sustain the dissemination of college information after the Texas GEAR UP SG—and the grant-funded positions—come to an end.
- **Designate school staff across all grades to take ownership of college advising tasks to increase opportunities for one-on-one conversations.** One-on-one conversations about college admissions or financial aid during Grade 12 have been shown to contribute to postsecondary enrollment (Dunlop Velez, 2016). Because counselors are often overwhelmed with existing workloads, schools may want to consider designating multiple staff as college advisors or mentors.

- **Provide trainings to help teachers incorporate SAT, ACT, and TSIA preparation into coursework.** By integrating test preparation strategies into regular coursework, more students will receive test preparation, which may lead to increased scores for these important college entrance assessments.
- **Encourage all families to submit a FAFSA and to seek financial aid.** School and college access staff should consider encouraging all families and students to seek out financial aid and submit a FAFSA, despite their perceptions of eligibility for financial aid or a student's plans to enroll in a postsecondary institution, so that a lack of financial assistance is not a barrier to college enrollment.

**Establish regular check-ins among administrators, counselors, and staff leading postsecondary education awareness initiatives.** To facilitate engagement and buy-in for college access among school leadership, schools may want to consider establishing regular check-ins among principals, counselors, and any other school or district staff that lead, oversee, or track college and career readiness initiatives. Such check-ins may provide the principal and other administrators with information about how to promote college and career readiness among the rest of the school staff, students, families, and community partners.