



Year 2 Annual Implementation Report

# Texas GEAR UP State Grant Evaluation

Executive Summary

August 2015

Submitted to:  
Texas Education Agency  
1701 N. Congress Avenue  
Austin, TX 78701

Submitted by:  
ICF International  
9300 Lee Highway  
Fairfax, VA 22031



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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) 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), seven participating middle schools are providing services to a cohort of students and their parents from Grade 7 (2012–13 school year) through their first year of postsecondary education (2018–19 school year). In order to meet the federal purpose of the grant, Texas GEAR UP SG includes nine project goals, provided in Appendix A of the main report. Three goals are related to improved rigor in instruction, advanced coursework, and student support services. Other goals intend to increase data-driven instruction, community partnerships, and access to postsecondary information. Outcome goals include 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 Texas GEAR UP SG, there is a goal to provide statewide services 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 A, School B) in order to protect confidentiality. In these districts, Texas GEAR UP SG coordinators and College Preparation Advisors take the lead on providing 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. Texas GEAR UP SG services are intended to impact teachers through the provision of professional development (PD) and schools/districts through changes in academic rigor (paired with student support services). Finally, the Texas GEAR UP SG is intended to make a statewide impact, primarily through the provision of the website (i.e., [www.texasgearup.com](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. List of Texas GEAR UP SG Middle Schools**

Middle School	District
Brentwood	Edgewood Independent School District
Garcia	Edgewood Independent School District
Wrenn	Edgewood Independent School District
Dunbar	Lubbock Independent School District
Decker	Manor Independent School District
Manor	Manor Independent School District
Somerset	Somerset Independent School District

## Evaluation of Texas GEAR UP State Grant

The evaluation of the Texas GEAR UP SG program is being conducted to examine implementation and outcomes (including the relationship between the two) and to identify 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 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 (the primary cohort that the evaluation focuses on). This report focuses on Year 2 implementation when the primary cohort was in Grade 8. (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 second implementation report focuses primarily on formative feedback regarding Year 2 implementation, but also provides relevant comparisons to Year 1 implementation. Both reports were informed by analysis of student- and campus-level data from statewide databases, interviews with TEA and its collaborators, review of grantee action plans, GEAR UP federal annual performance reporting (APR) data, student and parent surveys, and qualitative site visit data.<sup>1</sup> In making comparisons between Year 1 implementation and Year 2 implementation, readers need to be aware that the time of implementation in Year 1 was considerably truncated. In Year 1, schools received a notification of grant award (NOGA) in October, followed by the beginning of implementation in November/December 2012, well after the start of the school year. TEA completed Year 2 NOGAs for the four districts participating in the Texas GEAR UP SG in October 2013. During summer 2013, TEA informed grantees that Texas GEAR UP SG funding would continue, but that the Year 2 NOGAs would be delayed, and encouraged districts to proceed with Year 2 implementation as planned pending NOGA. While at least one district reported that they were not able to proceed with full implementation until receipt of the Year 2 NOGA, generally, Year 2 implementation began during summer 2013, making Year 2 the first full school year that the Texas GEAR UP SG operated. One explanation for differences between implementation in Year 1 and Year 2 is that grantees had more time to implement the program in Year 2 than in Year 1.

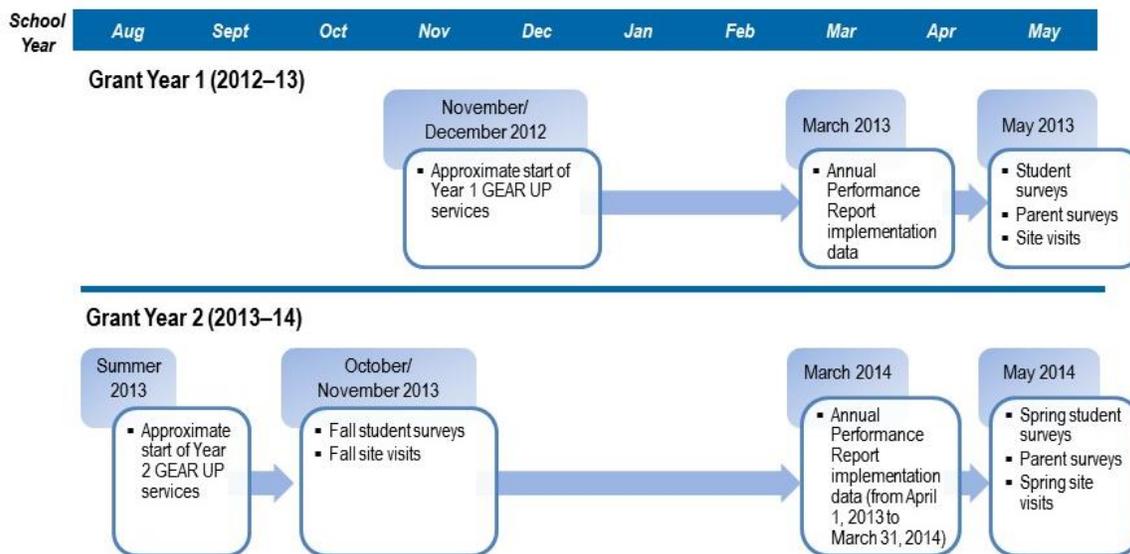
In addition, districts submitted implementation data in line with federal APR reporting requirements. Therefore, APR data reflected implementation from the date of each district's NOGA through March 31, 2013 in Year 1, and from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014 in Year 2.<sup>2</sup> In Year 1, this was approximately three months of implementation, with limited additional implementation data collected in Year 1 site visits (May 2013). Additional Texas GEAR UP SG Year 2 implementation activities occurred through summer 2014, but are not discussed in this

<sup>1</sup> TEA's service providers on the Texas GEAR UP SG during Year 2 include the Texas GEAR UP Support Center staffed by personnel from the University of Texas at Austin's Institute for Public School Initiatives (UT-IPSI) and AMS Pictures, both of which were providers in Year 1, as well as Abriendo Puertas and GeoFORCE, which were added in Year 2. TG (formerly Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation) and the College Board no longer have formalized collaborations with TEA to implement this grant.

<sup>2</sup> APR data used in the Year 2 report are from summer 2013 and the 2013–14 school year, but only through March 31, 2014, 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 2014.

report because APR data from April 1, 2014 forward will be included in the Year 3 implementation report. Readers should keep in mind the time points when data were collected while forming ideas about the program based on this report, because this report does not capture the entire school year of activities. 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 and Year 2**



## Key Findings

Key findings presented in this executive summary are organized into two categories: (1) implementation data findings and (2) survey (student and parent) findings. Findings were 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 1.1: 30% of students will successfully complete Algebra I by the end of Grade 8.
- 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.
- Project Objective 3.2: Teams of teachers will complete at least five days of vertical teams preparation and implementation each year.
- Project Objective 4.1: 75% of students will receive student support services by the end of Grade 8.
- Project Objective 4.2: 30% of students will be involved in summer programs.
- Project Objective 7.3: 50% of parents will participate in at least three Texas GEAR UP SG events each year.

Interested readers should view the full report for additional information on all key findings. Select evaluation questions relevant to Year 2 implementation, which are addressed in the report, include the following:

- How was Texas GEAR UP SG implemented overall and at each of the seven participating schools? To what extent did implementation change over time?

- What were students, parents, teachers, and school staff perceptions of Texas GEAR UP SG implementation?
- What facilitators and barriers were associated with implementation?
- What practices implemented by grantees are perceived by grantees (students, parents, and staff) to be effective, and therefore a potential best practice?
- What are students' and parents' levels of understanding regarding readiness (e.g., college aspirations/expectations, college options, being college ready at each grade level, financing college)?
- What information or opportunities do parents perceive to have been most relevant in informing them regarding college and career readiness? To what extent have these perceptions changed in Year 2?
- How did TEA and schools budget for and spend money to support implementation of Texas GEAR UP SG?

In Year 1, implementation varied across schools, although participation by students in Texas GEAR UP SG was high across schools (39% in student support services and 81% in any activity). Districts made progress toward enrollment in advanced mathematics (22% enrolled in a pre-Algebra course), but had low levels of parental involvement (no parents participated in at least three events) and minimal teacher PD. Year 2 findings reflect overall higher implementation (with continued variability across schools), with higher levels of overall student participation in Texas GEAR UP SG (78% in student support services and 99% in any activity). Districts also reported higher levels of student enrollment in advanced mathematics courses (43%), slight increases in parent attendance (7% attended at least three events), and more teachers engaged in vertical teaming events.

## Implementation

### LEVEL AND MIX OF IMPLEMENTATION

#### Key Takeaway:

Overall, the level of implementation was much higher across all schools in Year 2 compared to Year 1, although variability in the mix of implementation among schools remained. School G continued to be successful in implementing a broad range of activities (similar to their successes in Year 1). Most of the remaining schools made progress in implementing a broader range of services compared to Year 1. School D continued to demonstrate difficulty implementing the full range of Texas GEAR UP SG strategies, implementing the lowest number of strategies in Year 2.

The federal GEAR UP program encourages grantees, including the Texas GEAR UP SG, to engage in a wide range of implementation practices in order to support project objectives, referred to here as the “mix of implementation.” Table ES.3 provides a high-level overview of the range of implementation activities engaged in to any extent by the seven middle schools in Year 1 and Year 2. In Year 2, all seven schools implemented the core Texas GEAR UP SG activity types: advanced course enrollment, student support services (e.g., tutoring, comprehensive mentoring, counseling/advising), college visits, parent events, teacher PD, and community alliances. The evaluation will continue to monitor the implementation of program components at each site in order to determine the impact of components and combinations of components on program outcomes. School D had fewer strategies in place in Year 2 than all other schools (11 compared to 14 to 16 in the remaining schools). If the remaining schools sustain or increase the level of implementation and School D continues to face challenges, then outcomes could be lower for School D. It is also possible that School D is engaging in a

sufficient range to contribute to the desired program outcomes; future reports will examine the relationship between implementation and outcomes for all schools. Notably, School D appeared to struggle with implementing parent-related involvement in Texas GEAR UP SG activities.

Table ES.3 also identifies schools that have met project objectives. Three schools were on target to meet Project Objective 1.1 (Grade 8 Algebra I enrollment  $\geq 30\%$ ), and three schools were on target to meet Project Objective 4.1 (Grade 8 students receiving student support services  $\geq 75\%$ ). None of the schools was on target to meet Project Objective 7.3 (parent attendance at three or more Texas GEAR UP SG events [annually]  $\geq 50\%$ ).

**Table ES.3. Overview of Implementation Strategies by School, Year 1 and Year 2**

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	School G
<b>Implementation Strategies</b>							
Advanced Course Enrollment	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Algebra I Summer 2013 Support*		X			X	X	X
Student Support Services: Tutoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support Services: Mentoring	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support Services: Counseling/Advising	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Student Support Services: Other Activities				X	X	X	
College Visit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Job Site Visit/Job Shadowing					X		X
Educational Field Trips*	X	X	X	X	X		
Student Workshops/Events	X	X	X		X	X	X
High School Knowledge Activity*	X		X		X		X
Parent Events	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent Counseling/Advising*						X	
Parent Event on College Preparation/Financial Aid*	X	X	X			X	X
Parent College Visit*	X	X	X		X	X	X
Parent High School Visit*	X		X				X
Teacher Professional Development <sup>a</sup>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Alliances	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Use Statewide Services	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Total Number of Strategies Implemented by Year</b>							
Year 1 (out of 12)	4	6	5	5	8	7	11
Year 2 (out of 19) based on total of number of Xs above	15	14	15	11	16	15	16

**Table ES.3. Overview of Implementation Strategies by School, Year 1 and Year 2 (continued)**

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	School G
<b>On Target to Meet Project Objectives</b>							
Project Objective 1.1: 30% of students will successfully complete Algebra I by the end of Grade 8.	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Project Objective 4.1: 75% of students will receive student support services by the end of Grade 8.	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Project Objective 7.3: 50% of parents will participate in at least three Texas GEAR UP SG events each year.	No						

Source: Texas Education Agency, Texas GEAR UP SG Annual Performance Report Data Through March 31, 2014; fall 2013 and spring 2014 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. Asterisks note new implementation categories captured in Year 2. Grey-filled cells are strategies that schools implemented in Year 2 but not in Year 1. <sup>a</sup> School D did not report any vertical teaming or Texas GEAR UP SG-specific teacher professional development (PD). School A and School C did not report providing any training on project-based learning using grant funds. In all other cases, PD provided at the school included advanced instructional strategies, vertical teaming, differentiated instruction, Texas GEAR UP SG-specific training, and project-based learning (PBL).

**ALGEBRA I: ADVANCED COURSE TAKING, TUTORING, AND ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS**

**Key Takeaway:**

Overall, the Texas GEAR UP SG schools have succeeded in enrolling students in Algebra I and, with the supports that are in place, including tutoring and afterschool programs, it is reasonable to expect that Project Objective 1.1 (30% of students completing Algebra I by Grade 8) will be met at the project level. Specific to this goal, the seven schools collectively enrolled 43% of Grade 8 students in Algebra I or an equivalent course. Given that supports and enrollment in Algebra I varied across schools, some schools may not reach the goal.

Successful completion of Algebra I is a key early outcome; Project Objective 1.1 is to have 30% of students by the end of Grade 8 and 85% of students by the end of Grade 9 complete Algebra I. On average, across all primary cohort students, 43% were enrolled in advanced mathematics (including Algebra I and other advanced mathematics courses), an increase from the 22% of students enrolled in Pre-Algebra in Year 1.<sup>3</sup> Student enrollment in advanced mathematics in Grade 8 was above 30% at three schools and only slightly less than 30% at the remaining four schools. Grade 7 advanced mathematics enrollment in Year 1 led to enrollment in Algebra I in Year 2 for most students. However, some students who were not enrolled in an advanced mathematics course in Grade 7 were enrolled in Algebra I in Grade 8.

Tutoring efforts in Year 2 also emphasized mathematics tutoring, an emphasis that is likely to contribute to meeting Project Objective 1.1. Across all schools, 44% of students received tutoring in mathematics at the end of Grade 7 and at the beginning of Grade 8, indicating that, in

<sup>3</sup> The percentage of Grade 8 students enrolled in Algebra I or an equivalent course reported in the APR was lower (33%) than this report (43%), because this report includes mathematics courses that are considered to be advanced for the grade level, although not equivalent to Algebra I, such as Pre-Algebra or Introduction to Algebra.

general, schools are prepared to provide this support service to students. However, the full report explains in more detail how some schools are engaging a higher percentage of mathematics-related student support services with students than other schools. For example, at School B, only 7% of students received mathematics tutoring. In addition, in summer 2013, four schools indicated that 10% of combined primary cohort students participated in programs intended, in part, to support preparation for Algebra I, and received, on average, 20 hours of mathematics focus. It is likely that these student support services and other strategies (e.g., afterschool mathematics) helped participating students enroll in and potentially complete Algebra I by the end of Grade 8.

### STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

#### Key Takeaway:

Collectively, Texas GEAR UP SG schools met Project Objective 4.1 with 78% of Grade 8 students participating in student support services. When taking into account other strategies, nearly all Texas GEAR UP SG students participated in at least one Texas GEAR UP SG implementation activity.

Project Objective 4.1 of the Texas GEAR UP SG is to have at least 75% of Grade 8 students in Year 2 be involved in student support services, including comprehensive mentoring, counseling, and/or tutoring. Collectively, the seven schools met this project objective, with 78% of Grade 8 students involved in these student support services in Year 2 in comparison to 39% in Year 1. When the mix of implementation includes workshops/events, parent events, a college visit, or other academic support, 99% of students across schools in Year 2 had participated in some Texas GEAR UP SG implementation activity, which is an increase from 81% in Year 1.

### PARENT ENGAGEMENT WITH TEXAS GEAR UP STATE GRANT

#### Key Takeaway:

Schools offered more Texas GEAR UP SG parent events in Year 2 than they did in Year 1, and more parents attended events; however, parent engagement still proved to be challenging for schools. None of the schools met the annual Project Objective 7.3 of having 50% of parents attend at least three Texas GEAR UP SG events.

As was the case in Year 1, no school met the annual Project Objective 7.3 of having 50% of parents attend at least three Texas GEAR UP SG events annually. As of March 31, 2014, 7% of parents from all schools had participated in at least three events. Schools offered more parent events in Year 2 than they did in the limited Year 1 implementation period. The Texas GEAR UP SG will need to continue to work on overcoming the challenges in engaging parents in order to meet the project objective by the end of Year 2 and in each of the coming program years.

### TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND VERTICAL TEAMING

#### Key Takeaway:

Schools improved the amount of teacher PD offered in Year 2, but only two schools had held the five planned vertical teaming events by March 31, 2014.

Schools improved the amount of teacher PD offered in Year 2 and followed through on their plans related to Project Objectives 3.1 and 3.2 by offering teacher PD in summer 2013 and into fall 2013, when all schools offered teacher PD. However, in Year 2, only two schools had held the five planned vertical teaming events by the APR submission of data through March 31, 2014, the end of the evaluation period. Texas GEAR UP SG schools are required to offer

teacher PD each program year on the topics of advanced instructional strategies, vertical teaming, and college access/preparation. Some teachers had clear suggestions, conveyed during site visits, regarding how teachers could motivate students, enhance student social skills, improve organization, and manage time effectively in reinforcing Texas GEAR UP SG strategies. These suggestions indicate that teachers could benefit from training that reinforces collaborative efforts to motivate and impact Texas GEAR UP SG students.

**SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION: YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2**

In the report, differences in implementation from Year 1 to Year 2 are highlighted. Table ES.4 summarizes some of the key implementation data comparisons between the first two years of Texas GEAR UP SG.

**Table ES.4. Summary Comparison of Year 1 to Year 2 Implementation Data**

Implementation Area	Year 1	Year 2
<b>Level and Mix of Implementation</b>	Varied across schools. School G implemented the widest range of activities.	Variability remained; however, overall, implementation was higher. School G continued to implement the widest range of activities, as did School E. School D implemented the smallest range of implementation activities.
<b>Student Participation in Texas GEAR UP SG Student Support Services</b>	39% of students participated.	78% of students participated.
<b>Student Participation in Any Texas GEAR UP SG Activities</b>	81% of students participated.	99% of students participated.
<b>Enrollment in an Advanced Mathematics Course</b>	22% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics.	43% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics, including Algebra I.
<b>Parent Attendance at Three or More Texas GEAR UP SG Events</b>	No parent at any school attended three or more events.	7% of parents attended three or more events.
<b>Teacher Professional Development and Vertical Teaming</b>	Most schools had already designed and scheduled PD for the school year.	Two schools held five vertical teaming events.

## Student and Parent Surveys

### Key Takeaway:

Although the gaps between educational aspirations and expectations narrowed from Year 1 to Year 2, both students and parents continued to have aspirations that exceeded their educational expectations. That is, students and parents do not expect to achieve as high of an educational outcome as indicated by their aspirations. Student aspirations and expectations both significantly increased from spring 2013 to spring 2014.

There continued to be multiple indicators in Year 2 that parents and students both need and want financial information as it relates to postsecondary education. With proper implementation of planned Texas GEAR UP SG activities, students and families will gain knowledge and information about the financial aspects of college and will view affordability as less of a barrier to educational aspirations.

Texas GEAR UP SG cohort students and parents completed surveys in spring 2014. 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

For both parents and students, educational aspirations were significantly higher than educational expectations. However, the gaps between educational aspirations and expectations narrowed from Year 1 to Year 2, and student aspirations and expectations both significantly increased. School G, where the implementation mix was the most broad, particularly in Year 1 but also in Year 2, had the highest percentage of students who indicated that participating in Texas GEAR UP SG activities had positively influenced their decision to go to college (58%). That is, these students suggested that before Texas GEAR UP SG participation, they were not committed to attending college, but now expected to do so. Across schools, the greatest percentage of students who do not plan to go to college selected *concerns about cost* as a main reason for not continuing onto postsecondary education (48%).

### KNOWLEDGE ABOUT COLLEGE

Evaluation survey data indicate that the Texas GEAR UP SG is serving schools where the parents and students generally report that they do not perceive themselves to be extremely knowledgeable about postsecondary education. Students reported being significantly more knowledgeable than did parents about general requirements for college acceptance and the importance/benefit of college. In Year 2, it may be that schools emphasized Algebra I as a critical step toward college acceptance. That is, schools exposed students to more information about college requirements through their discussions to encourage Algebra I enrollment. Parents appear to need information on requirements for college (particularly ACT, SAT, and general requirements for acceptance). Students and parents did not differ on their knowledge about ACT or SAT, which was generally low for both groups. Students' average perceived knowledge of each of the relevant items were statistically significantly different across schools. As noted, parent participation in Texas GEAR UP SG activities remained generally low. Therefore, addressing how to engage parents will likely contribute to changes in knowledge going forward.

### FINANCIAL UNDERSTANDING OF COLLEGE

Concerns about the ability to afford postsecondary education remained the most common reason reported for not expecting to pursue postsecondary education. However, the percentage

of students reporting this concern decreased from spring 2013 to spring 2014.<sup>4</sup> In general, there is low knowledge and high interest regarding strategies for paying for college. Most parents and students fell somewhere in the middle on feeling knowledgeable about financing college. Continuing efforts to increase parents' and students' knowledge of the financial aspects of college, such as specific financial aid terms and the actual costs of attending, remains an important area of focus.

### PERCEPTION OF TEXAS GEAR UP STATE GRANT ACTIVITIES

On average, both parents and students found each type of activity that they participated in to be *mostly effective*. Average levels of student perceptions of effectiveness were lower than parent perceptions for all activities.<sup>5</sup> College Preparation Advisors were a resource new to schools in Year 2, and about 40% of students met with a College Preparation Advisor in Year 2. Most students and parents found meeting with a College Preparation Advisor to be *mostly effective* or *very effective*. Both parents and students continued in Year 2 to report low use of the Texas GEAR UP website as a source of information, even though the program released a newly designed website (launched in November 2013). In Year 2, student-reported use of Texas GEAR UP SG staff/events as a source of information significantly increased from Year 1. A greater percentage of parents also reported use of Texas GEAR UP SG staff/events as a source of information.

## Key Facilitators and Barriers: Implementation

### College Preparation Advisors

#### Key Takeaway:

College Preparation Advisors helped facilitate students' participation in student support services, as well as implementation of Texas GEAR UP SG program activities.

A key facilitator for implementation progress in Year 2 was the addition of the College Preparation Advisors to the Texas GEAR UP SG staff. Each school was assigned a College Preparation Advisor. Grant coordinators continued to provide oversight on program implementation, but now had support at each school. In particular, the College Preparation Advisors, even in the absence of regularly scheduled times to engage with students one-on-one, were able to increase individual student counseling in Year 2.

### Limited Support From School Administrators

#### Key Takeaway:

A key barrier was limited support from school administrators. Long approval processes were a particular barrier for one of the schools.

Texas GEAR UP SG staff at one school reported that services were delayed and, in some cases, eliminated due to the complexity of the local approval processes that staff needed to navigate prior to implementing the activities. This serves as a reminder that as school administrators change, TEA, in collaboration with the Support Center, needs to leverage opportunities to educate and engage campus staff regarding key grant initiatives. School D experienced initial resistance from school administrators regarding the Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation (TG) modules, but a new school administrator allowed Texas GEAR UP SG staff to plan an assembly to present the TG modules to students.

<sup>4</sup> These changes were statistically significant. Additional details are provided in Chapter 3.

<sup>5</sup> These changes were statistically significant. Additional details are provided in Chapter 3.

## Parents' Perceived Facilitators and Barriers

### Key Takeaway:

Parents reported that encouragement from their child facilitated their own engagement in Texas GEAR UP SG program activities; however, work schedules and other barriers continued to inhibit parent engagement.

For parents, encouragement from their child was the most commonly identified facilitator for participation. Texas GEAR UP SG should consider ways to leverage students with regard to encouraging their parents to participate in program activities, and perhaps offer more activities in which both groups can participate together. The most common parent-reported barrier to participation was work schedule. These trends are consistent with parent-reported facilitators and barriers during Year 1 of implementation. As such, ensuring that parent activities have a clearly articulated purpose/value, as well as scheduling them at times that are appropriate to parents and engaging students in bringing parents to events, remain key to successful engagement with activities.

## Potential Promising Practices

The following four potentially promising implementation activities were identified in Year 2.

### COLLEGE PREPARATION ADVISORS

College Preparation Advisors were a new resource to schools in Year 2. College Preparation Advisors were able to offer counseling and financial aid advisement—practices that were difficult to implement in Year 1. Various stakeholders indicated positive reactions to College Preparation Advisors. Students and parents who had met with a College Preparation Advisor had more knowledge of college, knowledge of financial terms, and higher educational expectations.

### SUMMER PROGRAMS

An emerging promising practice for a few schools were programs offered in summer 2013. In summer 2013, four schools indicated that primary cohort students participated in programs intended, in part, to support preparation for Algebra I, and received, on average, 20 hours of mathematics focus. Participants in summer programs positively perceived their experiences, and indicated that participation in these programs improved knowledge about college enrollment requirements and financial literacy, as well as feeling better prepared to succeed in Algebra I. Much like the afterschool programs discussed in the Year 1 report, summer programs engaged students with mathematics in fun and challenging ways.

### CAREER EXPLORATION

Career exploration and career-to-education alignment activities were a focus of events at several schools.<sup>6</sup> These activities were positively perceived by participants, and given their

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<sup>6</sup> These activities included, for example, Reality Check, an interactive game in which students explore real-life scenarios to help them understand what it might take to achieve the life they desire for themselves in the future. Students describe the lifestyle they would like for themselves. Careers associated with achieving the desired lifestyle are identified for the student to explore. Activities also included exposing students to adults with careers in a range of fields and Career Cruising, a career interest survey (used by School E to help students find careers based on their interests). Details about

direct focus on connecting future life with a career, may be contributing to general changes in the educational aspirations and college readiness perceptions of parents and students.

### LEADERSHIP CLUB

Finally, a leadership club at one school provided opportunities for the students in Grade 8 to become involved with volunteer opportunities and to mentor peers. Participants reported that they enjoyed their experiences with the club. This club provides both short-term opportunities for personal growth and the long-term opportunity to build content that may distinguish the students when applying for postsecondary education, potentially increasing the likelihood of successful postsecondary enrollment.

## Recommendations

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

- **Increase Awareness of Summer Programs.** A primary reason given by parents and students for not attending summer programs was that they were either not aware of or they did not feel encouraged to attend the programs. Given the potential for summer programs, schools should increase student and parent awareness regarding planned summer programs, engage as broad a range of students as possible, and continuously encourage participation.
- **Continue Progress With Regard to Student Perceptions.** Early successes included improved perceptions regarding students' desire to go to college and their awareness of financial options in order to be able to do so. In order to reach their goals related to these important aspects of the program, additional activities regarding college requirements and enrollment, as well as the financial costs associated with secondary education, are needed.
- **Seek to Better Understand and Potentially Model School G Implementation.** In both Year 1 and Year 2, School G had engaged in the full range of implementation expected by the Texas GEAR UP SG program. A few of the other schools, particularly School E, began to demonstrate clear improvements in Year 2; however, School G built capacity to engage in a large number of activities much more quickly. Overall, School G held the greatest number of events and boasted the greatest percentage of mentored students. Notably, School G also had parents and students with the highest rates of knowledge about college readiness in many cases (see Chapter 3 for a full list of findings regarding success at this school). School G had the highest percentage of students who indicated that Texas GEAR UP SG participation was influencing their college plans and that they had engaged in discussions with Texas GEAR UP SG or school staff about college entrance requirements. They were also the school whose students reported the highest level of engagement with the Texas GEAR UP website. While there were some exceptions to these generally favorable findings, collectively, the findings suggest that School G may serve as an example for replicating specific aspects of Texas GEAR UP SG, as well as an overall case of success. However, it is important to note that there may be external factors in addition to Texas GEAR UP SG at play, such as an environment that is particularly receptive to Texas GEAR UP SG services, related programming that reinforces Texas GEAR UP SG project objectives, and so forth. During future site visits, the evaluation team will continue to seek to understand why Texas GEAR UP SG appears to be so successful at this school.

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these programs emerged from site visits. Additional information about Reality Check is available at <http://www.texasrealitycheck.com>. Additional information about Career Cruising is available <http://public.careercruising.com/en>.

- **Focus on Targeted Support From the Support Center to Schools.** Schools were generally positive about their interactions with the Support Center, although teachers and administrators at some schools reported minimal engagement with the Support Center staff. TEA should encourage the Support Center to examine some of the implementation challenges identified through the evaluation to identify ways to target activities based on prior school challenges in order to assist schools in overcoming these challenges. Schools who faced the most challenges in Year 2 with regard to implementing activities across the range of activities seem to be in particular need of targeted support. For those schools that were effectively implementing programs in both Year 1 and Year 2, ongoing support can help to maintain those efforts, especially to facilitate the transition to high school.
- **Intensify Strategies to Reach Out to Parents.** All schools need intensive strategies to improve parent engagement with Texas GEAR UP SG activities and TEA should work with the Support Center to continue providing leadership in this area. This may include adjusting activities based on the facilitators and barriers to participation identified by the evaluation.
- **Continue to Support Grant Coordinators and College Preparation Advisors.** The College Preparation Advisors appear to have made positive contributions to the Texas GEAR UP SG programs. Based on consistent feedback, it is recommended that appropriate times and locations for one-on-one interaction between students and College Preparation Advisors be identified. TEA, in collaboration with the Support Center, should provide the College Preparation Advisors with additional training and supports as they move from the middle school to the high school environment.
- **Increase Statewide Implementation Efforts.** While the statewide efforts have made significant resources available through the website, use by Texas GEAR UP SG schools continues to be low (although TEA reported that website hits and retweets are increasing overall). Similarly, Project Share (a tool intended for delivering statewide teacher PD) was allocated funds in the budget but (as of March 31, 2014) was not implemented. TEA and its collaborators will want to continue to focus efforts on these statewide project objectives. More success was associated with implementation of the statewide coalition and conference opportunities; TEA should continue to use these outlets to communicate and educate about additional statewide resources as they become available.