

Texas GEAR UP: Beyond Grad

Annual Project Outcomes Report

Evaluation of Year 3

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Submitted on:

July 2022



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

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

Overview

As a strategy to overcome the college achievement gap for many low-income students, the Texas Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP): Beyond Grad State Grant (referred to as “GEAR UP” in this report) serves approximately 6,500–9,000 students from six Texas school districts (12 school campuses) in rural communities in West Texas, East Texas, and the Coastal Bend. GEAR UP provides services for the following two groups of students:

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

The GEAR UP program team established nine goals and 31 corresponding project objectives (POs) to track the implementation and outcomes of this federal grant. This report provides an overview of program performance focusing on the relevant goals and POs during the 2020–21 academic year (Year 3). For POs that were also applicable in the 2018–19 (Year 1) and 2019–20 (Year 2) academic years, longitudinal trends are presented. Program performance regarding Year 2 and Year 3 POs was substantially complicated by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and subsequent March 2020 school closures that disrupted all aspects of schooling. Many GEAR UP activities, such as spring administrations of the SAT and ACT in 2020 as well as a variety of programs and services, were canceled in some or all schools in 2020 and 2021.

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) reported on program performance for each PO in the federal Annual Performance Reports (APRs). The findings regarding program performance shared in this report come directly from the APRs for Years 1–3. Relevant qualitative summaries and quotes from GEAR UP program stakeholders, including district-level GEAR UP coordinators and school principals, are also included to provide additional contextual information about project performance.¹ Findings include overall results and district-level results as long as they were reported in the federal APRs.

¹ Stakeholder quotes originated from qualitative data collected for the Year 3 Annual Implementation Report. For more information about this report, please see <https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/program-evaluations/program-evaluations-middle-school-high-school-and-college-preparation/program-evaluation-middle-school-high-school-and-college-preparation-initiatives>

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



Fully Met Goal



Partially Met Goal



Not Met Goal

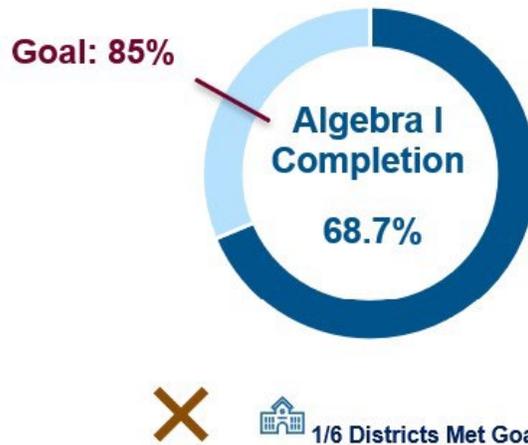
² Criteria for determining projective objectives as fully met, partially met, or not met were based on a combination of the following factors and informed by programmatic knowledge of the field: 1) The individual district performance (i.e., how many districts met the objective); 2) the percent of the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

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



GEAR UP academic initiatives reported in the 2020–21 school year focused on supporting Algebra I enrollment among class of 2024 students in Grade 9. Although students generally felt prepared for Algebra I, according to TNTP, virtual learning was a very hard shift and academics were not very rigorous in Year 3.³

Objective 1.1: By the end of the class of 2024’s third year (Grade 9), 85% of class of 2024 students will complete Algebra I.



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



Tutoring services were adapted in Year 3 to be available both in person and virtually. However, some coordinators explained that it was difficult to notify students of the availability of virtual tutoring and ensure that students showed up to the virtual sessions.



³ Founded originally as the New Teacher Project (TNTP) in 1997, TNTP is an organization that helps educators improve effectiveness in classroom teaching: <https://tntp.org/>. The organization changed its name to simply TNTP after its mission expanded beyond only serving new teachers.

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



Personnel survey respondents who participated in a professional development (PD) activity agreed that the pandemic had encouraged more PD focused on virtual education and learning. Respondents also had low levels of agreement that COVID-19 made it more difficult for them to fully engage in PD.

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



A district GEAR UP coordinator reported that the virtual format of vertical teaming may not have been as effective as previous in-person sessions. Many teachers did not receive breaks during the day and were unable to get substitute teachers to cover their classes, which presented challenges for participation in vertical teaming.

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



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



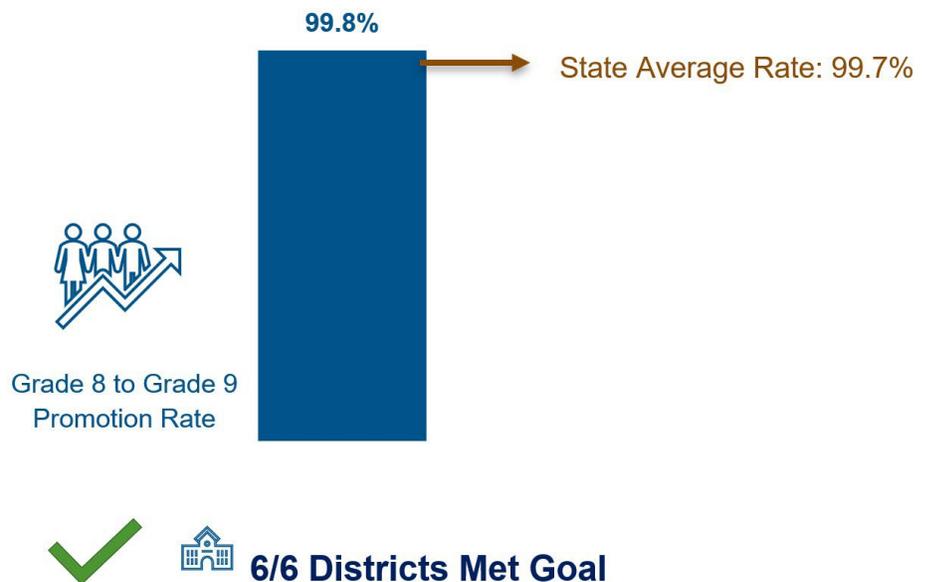
In Year 3, personnel survey respondents agreed that the teacher mentoring/coaching they received from TNTP helped them to increase the academic rigor in their courses.

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

Year 1		6/6 Districts Met Goal
Year 2		5/6 Districts Met Goal
Year 3		6/6 Districts Met Goal

Project Goal 4: Increase High School Graduation

Objective 4.2: At the end of the class of 2024’s second year (Grade 8), the on-time promotion rate will exceed the baseline state average promotion rate.



Project Goal 5: Support Participation in Postsecondary Education and Career Preparation



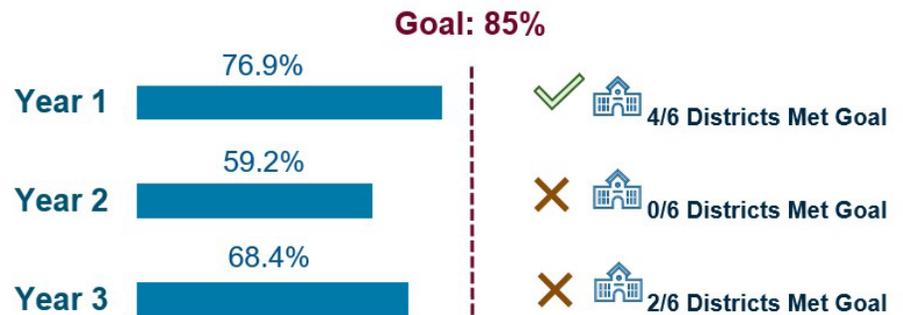
The College Board and ACT canceled their test administrations that were scheduled after March 2020 during the 2019–20 school year. As a result, several colleges and universities in Texas waived their testing requirements for 2020–21 admission. While it is unknown whether these waivers may have impacted attitudes toward or participation in college entrance examinations, this context may be helpful for understanding student participation in and perceptions of college entrance examination preparation in Year 3.

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

Tenth Graders Who Took PSAT or ACT Aspire



Eleventh Graders Who Took SAT or ACT



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



A non-profit advising organization reported that in Year 3 they provided the students and parents within their districts with an online monthly newsletter, which advised on what to focus on that month (e.g., college application preparation in March/April and financial aid in October) as well as announcements regarding deadlines or upcoming webinars.

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

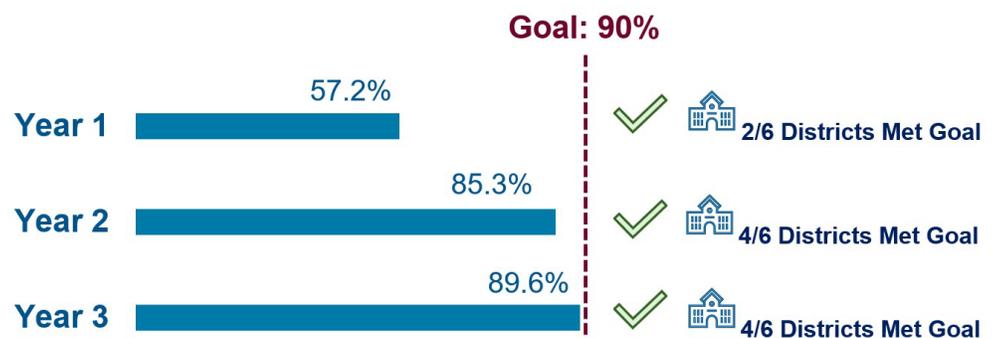


Objective 6.2: Each year, students and parents will receive information about postsecondary and career options, preparation, and financing.



Personnel survey respondents described the knowledge of advisors regarding college education and career readiness, noting that they effectively supported students’ and parents’ needs.

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



Project Goal 6 (cont.): Provide Postsecondary and Career Preparation Information to Students and Families



Personnel survey respondents provided suggestions on increasing parent involvement in advising services. An example: "Perhaps more information regarding career and postsecondary options for students can be relayed directly to the parent."

Objective 6.4: By the end of the third year, 50% of class of 2024 parents will receive at least one individualized college and career counseling session.



4/6 Districts Met Goal



Class of 2024 parents from a district noted that "it was very difficult for [them] to make it to the time meetings were scheduled." The parents explained that even when the parent/family events were virtual, they were still offered during their workday and thus they were not able to attend.

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

Year 1 Attendance 154 parents ✓

Year 2 Attendance 383 parents ✓

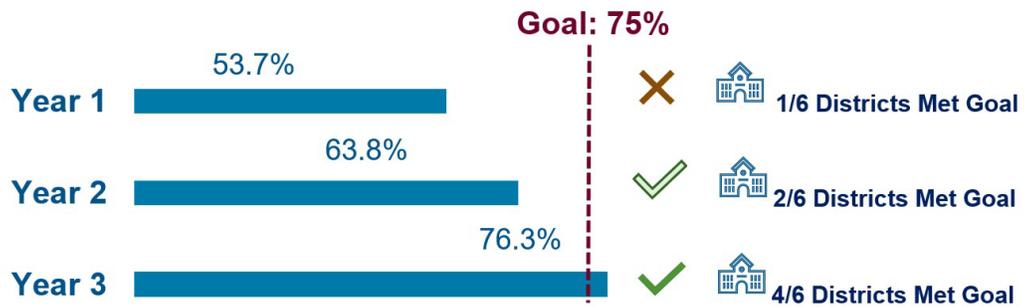
Year 3 Attendance 243 parents ✗

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



Although COVID-19 disrupted some student activities, such as college visits, summer programming, and individual advising, districts were able to adapt programing for virtual learning through virtual events and sessions.

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



Objective 7.4: Each year, 30% of class of 2024 students will attend a summer program (academic acceleration, enrichment, college exploration, etc.).⁴



It was challenging for the districts to provide summer activities because of COVID-19 this year.



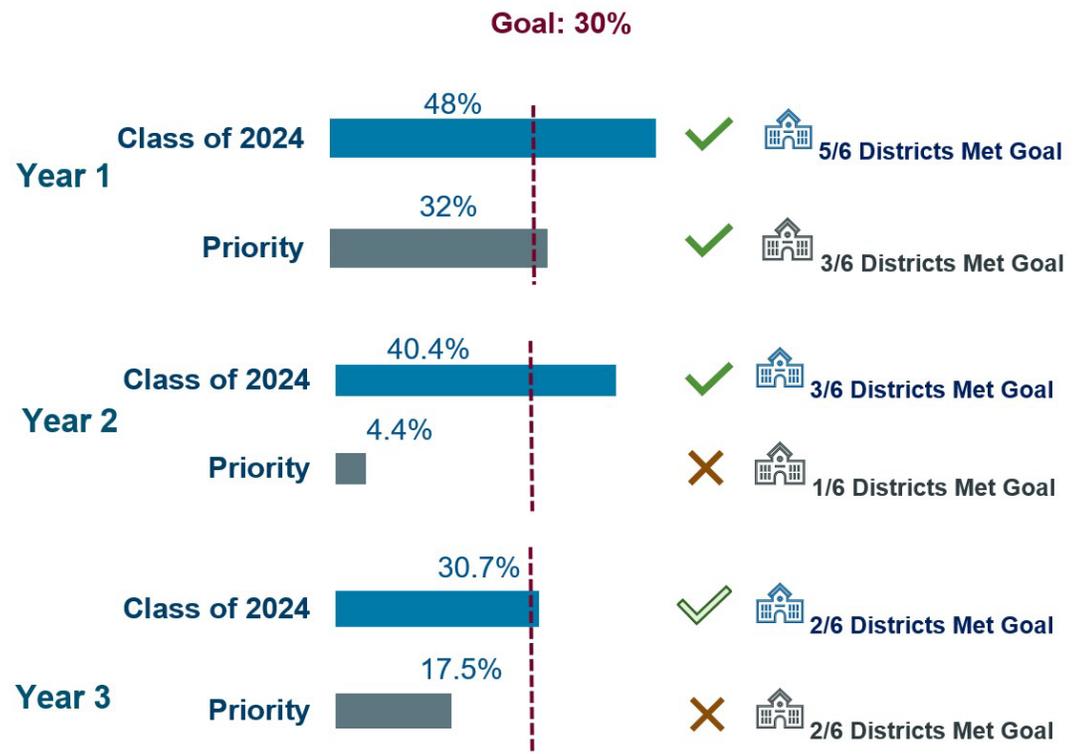
⁴ It was challenging for the districts to provide summer activities because of COVID-19 this year. TEA will continue to work with the districts to provide summer programs for their students.

Project Goal 7 (cont.): Increase Educational Expectations for and Awareness About Postsecondary and Career Options



Objective 7.5: Each year, 30% of class of 2024 and priority cohort students will participate in a work-based learning opportunity.⁵

Although most work-based learning opportunities were canceled as a result of COVID-19, a GEAR UP coordinator from one district described that work-based learning opportunities offered to students in Year 3 were not impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the support offered by their work-based learning coordinator and their efforts to maintain a relationship with local businesses.



⁵ As a result of COVID-19, most jobsite and on-site business tours were canceled for the protection of the employees and the students.

Project Goal 8: Build and Expand Community Partnerships

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

Year 1		 6/6 Districts Met Goal
Year 2		 6/6 Districts Met Goal
Year 3		 6/6 Districts Met Goal

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

Year 1		 6/6 Districts Met Goal
Year 2		 6/6 Districts Met Goal
Year 3		 6/6 Districts Met Goal

Project Goal 9: Enhance Statewide College and Career Readiness

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

Year 1  Year 2  Year 3 

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

Year 1 NA Year 2  Year 3 

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

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) established the following goals and objectives for GEAR UP:

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

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

Project Goal 2: Graduating prepared for college and career

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

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

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

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

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

Project Goal 4: Increase high school graduation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Project Goal 8: Build and expand community partnerships

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

Project Goal 9: Enhance statewide college and career readiness

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

Appendix B: Data and Analysis Methods

Data for the report were collected by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) from six participating school districts, including five high schools and one K-12 school with the class of 2024 cohort of Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) students (Grade 9 in 2020–21) and the priority cohort of GEAR UP students (Grades 10–12 in 2020–21). For the class of 2024, data were collected at the individual level and the data elements included student demographics, advanced courses participation, student services received, student/family events provided and attended, and professional development events for teachers. The priority cohort data were collected through a school survey in which each participating school reported aggregated information on student demographics, services received, and event attendance.

TEA analyzed data for the purposes of submitting the GEAR UP Annual Performance Report to the U.S. Department of Education. ICF used these metrics and added additional contextual data based on some of the qualitative data collected for the Year 3 Annual Implementation Report.⁸

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