



Year 3 Annual Implementation Report –
Executive Summary

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 (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), six participating high schools 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 3 of the Texas GEAR UP SG (the 2014–15 school year), the cohort’s first year in high school (Grade 9).

In order to meet the federal purpose of the grant, the Texas GEAR UP SG program includes nine project goals and 27 corresponding objectives, provided in Appendix A of the report. Three objectives 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.¹ 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.² 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.

Table ES.1. Profile of Texas GEAR UP Schools

District	Middle School (2012–13; 2013–14)	High School (2014–15)
Edgewood Independent School District	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

¹ Texas GEAR UP High Schools are labeled High Schools H through M, as Year 3 implementation reflects the transition of the Texas GEAR UP SG primary cohort from seven middle schools to six high schools. The seven Texas GEAR UP Middle Schools were identified as Schools A through G.

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

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 the 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 third implementation report focuses on formative feedback regarding Year 3 implementation, and also provides relevant comparisons to implementation in prior years (primarily Year 2 but also Year 1 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 federal annual performance reporting (APR) data, student and parent surveys, and qualitative site visit data.³ In making comparisons between Year 2 implementation and Year 3 implementation, this reflects the same general length of time for program implementation. However, readers need to be aware that comparisons to Year 1 should be interpreted with caution due to differences in the length of implementation.⁴

Readers should also use caution in interpreting findings associated with the transition from middle schools to high schools. Year 3 was the first year that Texas GEAR UP SG was in the high schools, therefore it was an adjustment for teachers and administrators. In addition, the high school environment differs from middle school with regard to how students move through the schools and course expectations. Additionally, some high school students entered the Texas

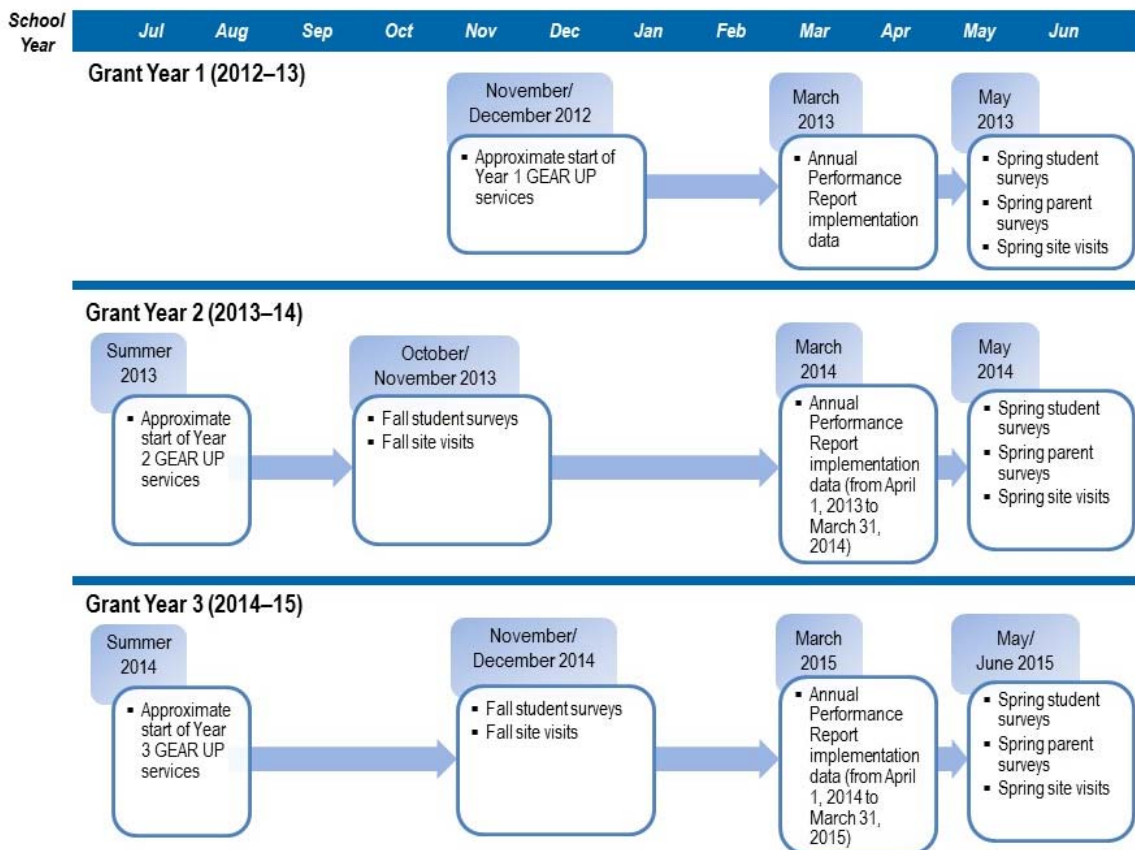
³ TEA’s collaborators on the Texas GEAR UP SG during Year 3 include the Support Center staffed by personnel from the University of Texas at Austin’s Institute for Public School Initiatives (UT-IPSI), AMS Pictures, Community TechKnowledge (CTK), UT-Tyler T-STEM Center, TG, GeoFORCE (all of which were collaborators in Year 2) as well as Raise Achievement, which was added in Year 3. Abriendo Puertas and the College Board no longer have formalized collaborations with TEA to implement this grant. Districts can work with these former collaborators directly.

⁴ See prior implementation reports for Year 1 (O’Donnel et al., 2013) and Year 2 (Briggs et al., 2015) for additional information.

GEAR UP SG for the first time, having transitioned to a participating high school from a non-Texas GEAR UP SG middle school.

Districts submitted implementation data in line with federal APR reporting requirements. Therefore, APR 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, and from April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015 in Year 3.⁵ Texas GEAR UP SG Year 3 implementation activities that occurred through summer 2015 are not discussed in this report in order to keep the time periods comparable. Data gathered during late spring 2015 and data associated with participation in summer 2014 programs 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. 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, and Year 3



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

⁵ APR data used in the Year 3 report are from summer 2014 and the 2014–15 school year, but only through March 31, 2015, 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 2015.

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: By the end of the project's second year, 30% of cohort students will have completed Algebra I in the 8th grade. By the end of the project's third year, 85% of students will have completed Algebra I.
- 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.
- 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 teams 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.⁶
- Project Objective 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.
- 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 7.1: By the end of the first year, the state office will make information regarding college options, preparation, and financing will be made 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.
- 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.

In addition, there are several near-term objectives relevant to Year 3 Texas GEAR UP SG implementation to some extent. These objectives are referenced as appropriate and will take on a more prominent focus in forthcoming implementation reports. Near-term objectives are as follows:

- 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.

⁶ 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.

- 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 graduate with college credit earned by AP exam or through dual credit.
- 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.^[1] 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.

Interested readers should view the full report for additional information on all key findings. Select evaluation questions relevant to Year 3 implementation—addressed in the report—include the following:

- How was Texas GEAR UP SG implemented overall and at each of the six participating schools? To what extent has implementation changed over time?
- What were student, parent, teacher, and school staff perceptions of Texas GEAR UP SG implementation?
- What facilitators and barriers were associated with implementation?
- What practices implemented by grantees were 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 readiness (e.g., college aspirations/expectations, college options, being college-ready at each grade level, financing college)?
- What information or opportunities do parents perceive as most relevant in informing them regarding college and career readiness? To what extent have these perceptions changed in Year 3?
- In what ways were trained teachers implementing data-driven strategies? Differentiated instruction? PBL?
- How many collaborations have schools formed with business alliances, government entities, 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?
- How did TEA and schools budget for and spend money to support implementation of Texas GEAR UP SG?
- To what extent did grantees sustain activities initiated with the Texas GEAR UP SG cohort with follow-on cohorts of students?

In prior years, implementation varied across schools, although by Year 2 participation by students in Texas GEAR UP SG was high across schools. For example, 78% of all Texas GEAR UP SG students in Year 2 received student support services. Schools made progress toward enrollment in the number of advanced courses, with 10% of students enrolled in four or more advanced courses in Year 2. Parent involvement was more challenging, with only 7% of parents participating in at least three events and 38% attending at least one event in Year 2.

^[1] 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.

Schools have shown varied levels of teacher PD implementation (in Year 2, two of seven schools held five vertical teaming events). Year 3 findings reflect overall higher implementation (with continued variability across schools); this includes slightly higher levels of overall student participation in Texas GEAR UP SG student support services (81%). 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.

Implementation

LEVEL AND MIX OF IMPLEMENTATION

Key Takeaway:

Overall, the Year 3 level of implementation was similar across all schools to implementation in Year 2, but was much higher than in Year 1, although variability in the mix of implementation among schools remained as the Texas GEAR UP SG primary cohort transitioned from middle school to high school. Three high schools implemented all 18 strategies tracked in Year 3.

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 activities engaged in to any extent by the six high schools in Year 3. All six high schools implemented the core Texas GEAR UP SG activity types in Year 3: advanced course enrollment, student support services (e.g., tutoring, comprehensive mentoring, counseling/advising), college visits, parent events, teacher PD, and community alliances. High schools in District 2 had fewer strategies in place in Year 3 than all other schools (15 and 16 compared to 17 to 18 in the remaining schools). One school from District 3 continued to show overall high levels of implementation in Year 3 (School G demonstrated successes in Years 1 and 2 and High School M demonstrated success in Year 3), and mix of implementation improved across all schools.

Table ES.3. Overview of Implementation Strategies by School, 2014–15

	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
AP Course Enrollment	X	X	X	X	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 Visit	X	X	X	X	X	X
Job Site Visit/Job Shadowing	X	X	X			X
Educational Field Trips	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
Parent Event on College Preparation/Financial Aid	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parent College Visit	X	X	X	X	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 18)						
	18	18	17	16	15	18

Source: Texas Education Agency, Texas GEAR UP SG Annual Performance Report Data through March 31, 2015; fall 2014 and spring 2015 site visit data.

Notes: 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. Asterisk indicates a new implementation category captured in Year 3.

In addition, Table ES.4 includes indicators regarding whether each school was on target to meet relevant project objectives. At least some schools were on track to meet each objective, except for parental involvement in which all schools were far from meeting the project objective in Year 3. Most schools (all except for High Schools H and I) were on track to meet Project Objective 1.1 regarding Algebra I completion in Grade 9. Only School L was on track to meet Project Objectives 2.2 and 2.3, based on student enrollment in pre-AP and AP courses. Although all schools met Project Objective 3.1 regarding teacher training, only two schools (High Schools K and M) met the annual objective for five days of vertical alignment (Project Objective 3.2). Four of the Texas GEAR UP SG high schools met the objective related to student support services (Project Objective 4.1) and summer programs (Project Objective 4.2). In order to meet near-term objectives (Project Objectives 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 5.1 and 5.2), each Texas GEAR UP SG high school will need to increase its emphasis on advanced course enrollment/completion and preparation for college entrance exams (both test-taking and successful scores).

Table ES.4. Evidence of School Progress Meeting Project Objectives, 2014–15

Project Objectives	High School H	High School I	High School J	High School K	High School L	High School M
1.1: 85% of students will complete Algebra I by the end of Grade 9. ^a			X	X	X	X
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. ^b	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	
2.3: By the end of the project's sixth year, at least 50% of cohort students will graduate with college credit earned by AP exam or through dual credit.					X	
3.1: In each grant year, all core content teachers will have the opportunity to participate in training regarding differentiated instruction, advanced instructional strategies, and project-based learning.	X	X	X	X	X	X
3.2: In each grant year, teams of teachers at the middle and high schools will complete at least five days of vertical teams preparation and implementation.				X		X
4.1: 75% of students will receive student support services by the end of Grade 8.			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
4.3: By the end of the project's third year, the on-time promotion rate of cohort students will exceed the state average. ^c						
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.	X	X	X	X	X	X
5.1: By the end of the project's fourth year, all cohort students will complete ACT Aspire or the Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) or Preliminary SAT10 (PSAT 10). By the end of the project's fifth year, all cohort students will complete the SAT or ACT. ^d					X	X
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.	X	X	X	X	X	X
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.	X	X	X	X	X	X
7.3: 50% of parents will participate in at least three Texas GEAR UP SG events each year.						
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, Texas GEAR UP SG Annual Performance Report Data through March 31, 2015; fall 2014 and spring 2015 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 Progress toward the earlier objective related to Project Objective 1.1 (30% of students will successfully complete Algebra I by the end of Grade 8) are in Chapter 2.

^b AP = advanced placement. Near-term objectives 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 students identified as LEP, 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 graduate with college credit earned 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.

^c Middle Schools D, F, and G are expected to exceed the state averages for Grade 8 to Grade 9 on-time promotion. Eligibility data on anticipated promotion from Grade 9 to Grade 10 were not yet available from Texas GEAR UP SG high schools. State averages for retention and promotion typically lag by at least one year and are not yet available.

^d ACT Aspire is the preliminary ACT and PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 are preliminary to the SAT. PSAT 8/9 is also preliminary to the SAT and while not in the project objective is tracked in the data. The following near-term objective also relates to Project Objective 5.1: 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. Schools rated as being in progress toward Project Objective 5.1 are assumed to also be making progress toward this objective in the later years of Texas GEAR UP SG implementation.

ALGEBRA I AND OTHER ADVANCED COURSE ENROLLMENT

Key Takeaway:

Texas GEAR UP SG schools are helping students to be academically prepared for college. In Year 3, 92% of Grade 9 students were either currently enrolled (61%) or had already completed Algebra I (31%). Additionally, 24% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses, an increase of 14 percentage points from Year 2 in which only 10% of students were taking that many advanced courses. In Year 1 no students were taking four or more advanced courses.

Successful completion of Algebra I is a key early outcome; Project Objective 1.1 is to have 85% of students complete Algebra 1 by the end of Grade 9 and the Texas GEAR UP SG schools are on track to meet this objective.⁷ Another reason for the importance of focusing on advanced course enrollment in Year 3 is Project Objective 2.2, which states that 60% of Texas GEAR UP SG primary cohort students are to have successfully completed a pre-AP or AP course (i.e., advanced course) by the end of Year 5 of the grant. Only School L was on track to meet Project Objective 2.2 with 87% of students enrolled in a pre-AP or AP course. Texas GEAR UP SG primary cohort students have continued to make progress in advanced mathematics in Year 3 with the addition of increased enrollment in advanced courses in subject areas other than mathematics (namely, English language arts [ELA], science, and social studies). This is a key step toward meeting multiple Texas GEAR UP SG project objectives, including helping students to be academically prepared for college and meeting the necessary entrance criteria.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES: TUTORING, MENTORING, AND COUNSELING

Key Takeaway:

In Year 3, 81% of students participated in either tutoring, mentoring, or counseling (78% in Year 2). The average amount of time spent in tutoring was much greater in Year 3 (12.6 hours, compared to 9.2 hours in Year 2), but only 51% of students participated in tutoring (compared to 63% in Year 2). The majority of the students participated in counseling (69%), nearly double the percentage from Year 2 (36%). Only 10% of Grade 9 students were receiving comprehensive mentoring in Year 3 (compared to 14% in Year 2).

These findings show both positive and negative trends regarding the implementation of student support services in Year 3. Data reflect consistency in the overall percentage of students participating in at least one type of student support service even as implementation shifted to high schools. Although the percentage of participation in tutoring was lower in Year 3, the higher average number of hours may indicate an increased focus on providing comprehensive services for those who needed it most. Mentoring continued to be the least utilized student support service.

⁷ APR data were used to calculate these percentages. The data do not provide an update on Grade 8 students who completed the course but are no longer in the Grade 9 cohort. As reported in the second annual implementation report (Briggs, et al., 2015), 43% of Grade 8 students were enrolled in Algebra I, suggesting that schools will meet Project Objective 1.1 that 30% of Grade 8 students complete Algebra I.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN COLLEGE VISITS AND JOB SITE VISITS

Key Takeaway:

Overall, 35% of Texas GEAR UP SG students participated in a college visit in Year 3. This activity occurred at all six of the Texas GEAR UP SG high schools. Across schools, there were 34 college visits in Year 3 (compared to 20 in Year 2). Additionally, four schools also participated in job site visits, which included 7% of students overall.

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 3. Given that all six high schools engaged in college visits in Year 3, it seems that high schools continued to support college visits (all seven middle schools engaged in this activity in Year 1 and Year 2). This may reflect district-level support for this type of activity. Although overall participation was relatively low for job site visits, more districts began to implement this strategy in Year 3. For instance, Districts 1 and 4 did not engage in this activity in Year 1 or Year 2 but began doing so in Year 3. 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 3% of parents were involved in three or more events in Year 3, compared to 7% in Year 2. However, all of the six high schools had at least some parents attending three or more events. Additionally, 49% of parents attended at least one event, an increase of 11 percentage points since Year 2. High schools offered more events in Year 3 as well.

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. As of March 31, 2015, 3% of parents from all schools had participated in at least three events. In Year 3, Texas GEAR UP SG high schools implemented 159 parent activities, compared to 51 in Year 2. 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 3 and in each of the future program years.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND VERTICAL TEAMING

Key Takeaway:

Schools improved the amount of teacher professional development offered in Year 3, but only two high schools had held the five days of planned vertical teaming events by March 31, 2015.

Overall, Texas GEAR UP SG improved the amount of teacher PD offered in Year 3, 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, and college access/preparation. All Texas GEAR UP SG schools provided some GEAR UP-supported PD in Year 3; ranging from 8 offerings at High School L to 32 at High School M. In Year 3, only two high schools had held the five days of planned vertical teaming events by the APR submission of data through March 31, 2015, the end of the evaluation period. It is important to note that all schools held at least some vertical teaming events.

SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION: YEAR 1 THROUGH YEAR 3

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 three years of Texas GEAR UP SG.

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

Implementation Area	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Level and Mix of Implementation	Varied across districts. One middle school (from District 3) implemented the widest range of activities.	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 additional districts also demonstrated successful mix of implementation.
Student Participation in Texas GEAR UP SG Student Support Services	39% of students participated.	78% of students participated.	81% of students participated.
Student Participation in Any Texas GEAR UP SG Activities	81% of students participated.	99% of students participated.	95% of students participated.
Number of Advanced Courses	0% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.	10% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.	24% of students were enrolled in four or more advanced courses.
Enrollment in an Advanced Mathematics Course	22% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics.	43% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics, including Algebra I.	45% of students were enrolled in advanced mathematics, including AP Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry.
Enrollment in Other Advanced Courses	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.	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.
Student Knowledge of and Academic Preparation for College	N/A	N/A	85% of surveyed students plan to graduate with a distinguished level of achievement.
Endorsement Selection	N/A	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.

Implementation Area	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Parental Attendance at Three or More Texas GEAR UP SG Events^b	No parent at any middle school attended three or more events; 5% of parents participated in at least one event.	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.
Teacher Professional Development and Vertical Teaming	Most middle schools had already designed and scheduled PD for the school year.	Two middle schools held five days of vertical teaming events.	Two high schools held five days of vertical teaming events.

Source: Texas Education Agency, Texas GEAR UP SG Annual Performance Report Data through March 31, 2015; Student Surveys (Spring 2015).

Note: Texas GEAR UP SG implementation in Year 1 and Year 2 occurred in seven middle schools; In Year 3, 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 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.

Key Takeaway:

Although students’ educational aspirations and expectations increased in Year 3, the gap between aspirations and expectations widened from Year 2 to Year 3. Students 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 2 to Year 3.

Consistent with prior years, there continued to be multiple indicators in Year 3 that students both 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.

Student Surveys

Texas GEAR UP SG cohort students completed surveys in fall 2014 and spring 2015. 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. Although parent surveys were administered in spring 2015, low response rates prohibit the use of these data in this report.

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Students’ aspirations continued to increase on a similar path from prior years with a four percentage point increase from spring 2014 to spring 2015 (compared to a five percentage point increase between spring 2013 and spring 2014). Students’ educational aspirations were significantly higher than educational expectations and the gap between them widened from Year 2 to Year 3.⁸ Of students who do not plan to go to college, the greatest percentage selected *concerns about cost* as a main reason for not continuing onto postsecondary education (46% across schools); this was also the case in Year 2 (48% of students selected this option).

⁸ The term significant is used in making comparisons to refer to statistical significance.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT COLLEGE

Evaluation survey data indicated that Texas GEAR UP SG served schools where the students generally understood the importance of college (65% of students rated themselves as *knowledgeable* or *extremely knowledgeable*) more than the requirements to get accepted (50% 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 46% indicated they were *knowledgeable* or *extremely knowledgeable* about the SAT (38% for the ACT). Students' average perceived knowledge of each of the relevant items differed significantly across schools. Only 34% of students selected GEAR UP staff or events as a source for college information (compared to 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

Concerns about the ability to afford postsecondary education remained the most common reason reported for not expecting to pursue postsecondary education, and only 13% of students reported feeling *extremely knowledgeable* about financial aid and the costs and benefits of pursuing postsecondary education. However, the percentage of students who reported that they had conversations with someone from GEAR UP or their school increased in Year 3 (67%, compared to 61% in Year 2). On average, students reported that they were *slightly knowledgeable* or *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; this should include information about specific financial aid terms 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 3 was the second year that College Preparation Advisors worked with Texas GEAR UP SG primary cohort students, and 62% 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 3 (18%), although this was a slight increase from Year 2 (15%). Summer programs continued to be perceived by students as valuable; 85% of students who participated in a summer 2014 GEAR UP program indicated that they had a better understanding of the benefits of college after attending the program.

Key Facilitators and Barriers: Implementation

Connecting Texas GEAR UP SG to Existing Efforts

Key Takeaway:

Situating Texas GEAR UP SG in the context of existing school/district efforts and the priorities of other programs is a way to strengthen the implementation of Texas GEAR UP SG through strategic collaboration.

The shift to high schools in Year 3 introduced new opportunities for Texas GEAR UP SG to integrate their programming with other school/district priorities, as well as related initiatives occurring with their local collaborators. It may be that the notion of college preparation resonates with more stakeholders in the high school setting. This included efforts to align goals and create opportunities to “divide and conquer,” such as how Texas GEAR UP SG staff worked with school counselors to perform complementary supports to students regarding endorsements.

Barriers of Communication and Advanced Planning

Key Takeaway:

Barriers in Year 3 were similar to prior years, including the need to have clear, frequent communication about expectations and program details, as well as the challenge of implementing various program components (such as teacher professional development) with sufficient advanced notice.

Various stakeholders indicated they hoped to improve lines of communication in future years of Texas GEAR UP SG implementation. This includes TEA and state collaborators setting clear expectations of Texas GEAR UP SG coordinators and College Preparation Advisors. Parents and school staff also would like Texas GEAR UP SG staff to provide them with information about events with more advanced notice; this is particularly the case for teachers who select their PD early in the year and may not be able to commit to additional PD on short notice.

Potential Promising Practices

The following six potentially promising implementation activities were identified in Year 3.

NEAR-PEER MENTORING

At High School I, two activities were exemplary opportunities for Grade 9 students to be mentored by Grade 12 students at their school. The Senior Panel provided an opportunity for successful Grade 12 students to share with Grade 9 students about what it was like to apply for college and what they wish they would have known when they began high school. A teacher at this school also shared the activity of having her Grade 12 students write letters to Grade 9 students to offer advice about what they did right and wrong throughout their time in high school. Similarly, High School M worked with students at a local university to provide mentoring services and plans to solicit support from upperclassmen to sustain mentoring going forward.

PARENT UNIVERSITIES AND SYMPOSIA

High School K offered Parent University—a learning experience for parents to gain information on a specific topic (such as financial aid). In some cases, Texas GEAR UP SG staff coordinated the Parent University with the college access organization at the school. The format of these parent events (which included having rotations of discussion items related to the topic) was more interactive compared to parent events in the past; Texas GEAR UP SG staff received positive feedback from many parents. High School M held a parent symposium on a Saturday that included a speaker from the Texas GEAR UP conference and various sessions that parents could attend. Because of parents' previous feedback about a lack of variety in information presented at parent events, this symposium provided new and different information that parents chose.

REPORT CARD DRIVE-THROUGH

High School H tried out a unique approach to parental involvement by doing a report card drive-through in which they met parents in the parking lot to distribute report cards and have a quick conversation about student progress specifically and Texas GEAR UP SG events/programs more generally. This was well received as a way to reach many parents in a manner that was convenient and accessible for them. Conducting the activity as a drive-through did not take up much of the parents' time, nor did it require them to find childcare.

STRATEGICALLY DESIGNED TUTORING

High School K strategized a few approaches to offer tutoring. Six tutors provided support across multiple subjects (mathematics, ELA, and science) in the classroom. Teachers reported the usefulness of having “an extra hand” in the classroom for students. They indicated that the

tutors were most effective when they worked with students who needed remediation or extra support during class time. Additionally, the school hired a student teacher as the afterschool tutor because the individual was already familiar with the students and the course content, and had a demonstrated ability to work with a larger group of students. Similarly, at High School M, providing content-specific tutors proved to be a useful approach to help bolster students' areas of need, specifically related to ELA, in preparation for state exams.

GEAR UP CONFERENCE ENHANCEMENTS

Each year, the Texas GEAR UP SG hosts a Texas GEAR UP conference that brings together GEAR UP programs from across the state to network and share best practices. In Year 3 of Texas GEAR UP SG implementation, there were added components of the statewide conference that site visit participants and collaborator interviewees noted as being particularly effective. For example, involving parents in the conference was an effective approach to helping them become more invested in the program and aware of how they can support the GEAR UP mission at their school. Additionally, many parents and educators liked the GEAR UP Lounge as a central location to network, share ideas, learn first-hand about newly created statewide resources, and seek out supports. AMS Pictures set up the GEAR UP Lounge to introduce statewide resources to attendees.

EXTENDED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Instead of a typical one-day PD session that may not be sufficient to help teachers to sustain changes in their instructional practice, High Schools H and I had curriculum specialists available to support teachers' implementation of PBL. Site visit participants spoke about how it was a useful complement to the three Saturdays of PBL training they received. It was also anticipated to be a way to sustain the practices they learned over time by having the curriculum specialists provide feedback, guidance, resources, and ideas regarding the application of PBL in teachers' classrooms.

Recommendations

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

- **Continue Progress on Student Perceptions.** Data from Year 3 indicated minimal changes in students' educational aspirations and expectations, agreement that college is important, disagreement that it is too early to think about college, and plans to attend college. In order to progress on these important aspects of the program, TEA and its statewide collaborators are encouraged to provide districts with additional strategies related to increasing awareness and knowledge of college opportunities available to students. Efforts that include targeted outreach to those most at risk might also be a useful strategy. Ongoing attention to helping students set high aspirations and gain confidence that they can expect to achieve will help accelerate progress in this area.
- **Seek to Better Understand and Potentially Model High School M Implementation.** In Year 3, High School M engaged in the full range of implementation encouraged by the Texas GEAR UP SG program. Student survey data reflected the ways in which these actions may be positively influencing students' perceptions. Successes included strong implementation of mentoring, counseling, college visits, student events, and parent events. High School M had high levels of involvement, high percentage of involvement, and high amounts of time in these areas (see Chapter 2 for details). Notably, High School M also had high rates of student self-reported understanding about the importance of college and knowledge about college readiness in many cases (see Chapter 3 for a full list). High School M also had the highest percentage of students indicate 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. Although there were some exceptions to these generally favorable findings related to High School M, collectively, the findings suggest that this school may serve as an example for specific aspects of Texas GEAR UP SG, as well as being an overall case of success. However, it is important to note that there may be external factors to consider, such as an environment that is particularly receptive to Texas GEAR UP SG services or related programming that reinforces Texas GEAR UP SG goals. During future site visits, the evaluation team will seek to better understand why Texas GEAR UP SG appears to be so successful at this school.

- **Identify Strategies to Reach Out to Parents.** Similar to prior years, all schools need to identify strategies to improve parental engagement with Texas GEAR UP SG activities, and TEA needs to encourage the Support Center to provide additional leadership in this area based on what was learned regarding why parents do and do not attend events.⁹ Additionally, there was minimal attention devoted to the Parent and Community Engagement Coordinator, a Support Center staff member intended to support schools in this effort. The evaluation team will continue to collect data on these efforts and about parents' perceptions to inform how they might be engaged differently going forward.
- **Increase Statewide Implementation Efforts.** Although statewide efforts have made significant teacher and student resources available through the Texas GEAR UP website, use within at least the Texas GEAR UP SG cohort continues to be low.¹⁰ Similarly, TEA has identified its Texas Gateway for online resources as a strategy for providing GEAR UP-related teacher PD statewide, but has not yet fully implemented this strategy.¹¹ TEA and its collaborators will want to continue to focus efforts on these statewide project objectives. Consistent with prior years, TEA has experienced some success with implementing the statewide coalition and conference opportunities, and TEA and Texas GEAR UP SG staff should use these conferences as an outlet for communicating and educating about other statewide resources as they become available. One Texas GEAR UP SG coordinator suggested having a section of the website dedicated to GEAR UP parent activities that have occurred nationwide so the staff can get an idea of what has worked well for other school districts then tweak it to fit their own.
- **Expand and Deepen Sustainability Efforts.** Throughout this report, some early progress toward sustainability emerged, such as how some schools intended to bolster their collaboration with a university to continue mentoring programs in the long term and change the college-going culture so that teachers continue to have high expectations and academically rigorous instruction. The early practices of District 3 in their approach to involving the city council in their advisory council may be a particular practice to monitor as an example of how to gain local support for continued funding and buy-in for efforts initiated through Texas GEAR UP SG.

⁹ The University of Texas at Austin's Institute for Public School Initiatives (UT-IPSI) Office for College Access manages and staffs the Support Center, which provides a range of services to the Texas GEAR UP SG through a contract with TEA.

¹⁰ See <http://www.texasgearup.com/>

¹¹ TEA's Texas Gateway was previously referred to as Project Share and provides an online, interactive learning environment for Texas teachers. See <http://www.texasgateway.org/> for additional information.