

Texas GEAR UP: Beyond Grad

Annual Implementation Report

Evaluation of Year 3

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Executive Summary

Now in its third year of program implementation, the Texas Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP): Beyond Grad program (referred to as “GEAR UP” in this report) made important progress during the 2020–21 school year to support college and career readiness for students from low-income schools in Texas.

Program Overview

GEAR UP 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 (i.e., through the 2024–25 academic year). GEAR UP also provides basic services to a priority cohort of students consisting of all other students in Grade 9–12 attending participating high schools in the grantee districts during each year of the 7-year grant (i.e., from school years 2018–19 to 2024–25). The core strategies conceptualized in GEAR UP to close the college achievement gap include increasing academic rigor, preparing middle school students, expanding college and career advising and resources for high school students, leveraging technology to expand advising capacity, and developing local alliances (the full description of GEAR UP strategies is listed in Appendix A).

The Texas

Evaluation of Texas GEAR UP: Beyond Grad

This report presents findings from the implementation study during the third year—school year 2020–21 (Year 3)—when the class of 2024 students were in Grade 9 and the priority cohort students were in Grade 10–12. Findings were derived from data collected via stakeholder surveys, virtual site visits, and telephone interviews (see Appendix B for full methodological details). The report highlights how GEAR UP is being implemented, promising practices, how the program is being sustained and what activities should be sustained, and how program activities are being scaled across the state (see Appendix B for the list of evaluation questions used to guide the implementation study).

There are some limitations regarding the Annual Implementation Report for Year 3. Given the varied challenges with school operations as a result of the coronavirus d6 0 T7941546.9411.1 T38361.207 0 To

three-quarters believed that the test preparation they received helped them to prepare for the test.

Advising services. In Year 3, non-profit GEAR UP advisors began working with class of 2024 students and continued working with priority cohort students using in-person and virtual advising services and spaces to offer college and career information. Zoom meetings, newsletters, and texting were used to disseminate information and provide advising. Student survey respondents reported that college plans, grades, and career plans or interests were the most frequently discussed topics in individualized advising sessions, with parents indicating that their child's course selection and scheduling, child's grades, and dual credit opportunities were the most discussed topics in the parent individualized advising sessions.

College and career readiness activities. College visits, college and career fairs, and work-based learning activities were offered in addition to advising in Year 3. With most of these activities being offered virtually, both cohorts reported in the survey that college visits consisted mostly of virtual campus tours and virtual speaker sessions. According to GEAR

advisors and high school counselors may consider incorporating these topics in a grade-appropriate manner in one-on-one advising sessions, other activities and events, and information dissemination efforts to help increase student and parent awareness and understanding of options to fund college.

Use data to inform how successful GEAR UP services and activities may be sustained. Progress-monitoring meetings were well received by TEA and most coordinators in Year 3. Looking ahead to Year 4, TNTP, TEA, and GEAR UP coordinators may find it helpful to build time into these meetings to reflect on successful GEAR UP activities