

INTRODUCTION

The Oklahoma Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (Oklahoma GEAR UP) project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is designed to increase the number of low-income students in 24 school districts in Oklahoma prepare to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. This report is a formative evaluation report based on data collected throughout the third year of implementation of the Oklahoma GEAR UP project to coincide with the GEAR UP Annual Performance Report (April 2013-March 2014).

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

During the 2013-14 school year, the Oklahoma GEAR UP program delivered services to students, parents, and school district faculty in 50 middle and high schools throughout the state. Oklahoma GEAR UP provides services through a priority student model which allows *all* students enrolled in grades 7-12 in all 24 participating school districts to be considered GEAR UP students. Participating school districts in Oklahoma GEAR UP include: Ardmore, Caney Valley, Catoosa, Checotah, Davis, Duncan, Elk City, Guymon, Harrah, Henryetta, Hobart, Kingston, Little Axe, Luther, Madill, Marietta, McLoud, Newkirk, Okmulgee, Roland, Sapulpa, Stilwell, Tecumseh and Woodward. A total of 18,666 students were served through the Oklahoma GEAR UP Project this year, an increase of 242 from the previous year, and an increase of 398 students from the 2011 baseline year of the project.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the third year of the Oklahoma GEAR UP evaluation was collected from a variety of sources including extant data and stakeholder surveys.

Student and Parent Surveys. In collaboration with CoBro Consulting Group, Oklahoma GEAR UP staff assisted all 24 school districts in collecting student and parent GEAR UP survey results utilizing an online data collection and analysis system. These surveys were reviewed for data points and changes, and adjustments were made to the surveys in December 2013. The surveys were available online for students and parents to complete beginning January 3, 2014 - March 7, 2014. GEAR UP staff provided assistance to students and parents to complete 14,857 student surveys (80% of total students served), and 4,242 parent surveys (23% of total parents served).

School Faculty Surveys. In collaboration with CoBro Consulting Group, Oklahoma GEAR UP staff assisted 1,357 teachers, counselors and administrators in completing faculty surveys, an increase of 21 teachers from the previous year, and an increase of 274 teachers from the 2011-12 baseline year. These surveys captured the perceptions of school faculty on the implementation and impact of the Oklahoma GEAR UP program in their schools. Schools were asked about the professional development needs of staff, the culture of their learning environment, and the services GEAR UP could provide to improve student postsecondary preparation.

Aurora Learning Community Association (ALCA). The internal evaluator also monitored data entered by site coordinators and GEAR UP staff on the online data management system

maintained by CoBro and ALCA. This service data, relevant to the examination of project implementation, were downloaded from the online system for analysis to provide project staff with a comprehensive picture of services delivered during the third year of the grant project. This data is also aligned to the federal reporting year, encompassing the dates of April 1, 2013 through March 31, 2014.

SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION DATA

The GEAR UP services provided to students, parents, and teachers in participating schools were continuously recorded by site coordinators and GEAR UP staff. The categories of services included several kinds of events and activities:

- Tutoring and Mentoring
- Financial Aid Counseling
- College Counseling, Advisement, Preparation and Planning
- College Visits
- Job Shadowing
- Summer Programs
- Educational Field Trips
- Workshops
- Family/Cultural Events
- College Application Week
- Rookie Camps
- Student Activities and Events
- Parent Training
- Professional Development for Teachers and Administrators

Using service and activity data, the internal evaluator examined service delivery and participation for students, parents, and faculty during the third year of the Oklahoma GEAR UP program. Data is provided detailing statistics related to service delivery in each of the federally-defined service categories as well as instances of service delivery by participating site. Using those reports, the evaluator calculated the total instances of GEAR UP service delivery and the average hours of service delivery for each of the three groups served. Table 1 displays the student service statistics.

Table 1: Total Instances and Average Hours of GEAR UP Service Delivery to Students

Student Services	2011-12	Avg. Hours	2012-13	Avg. Hours	2013-14	Avg. Hours
Supportive Services (Tutoring & Mentoring)	5,256	40.5	6,914	26.5	9,296	28.8
Rigorous Academic Curricula	5,791	228.4	5,425	344.2	6,386	110
Financial Aid Counseling	5,498	2.2	6,934	4.5	11,349	10
Counseling/Advisement/Planning	11,726	3.4	13,832	5.6	15,977	10
College Visits	1,769	4.9	9,705	5.4	11,546	6
Job Shadowing/Visits	290	21.5	510	6.6	821	6

Student Services	2011-12	Avg. Hours	2012-13	Avg. Hours	2013-14	Avg. Hours
Summer Programs	448	33.1	701	32.5	254	36.0
Educational Field Trips	4,164	5.7	5,264	6.4	5,355	11
Workshops	675	7.5	3,874	3.6	11,667	10
Family/Cultural Events	1,408	34.8	3,413	4.8	2,889	14.0
College App Week	-	-	1,605	1	1,719	2
Rookie Camp	50	2	2,777	2	5,628	4.5

Service delivery to students increased in 10 areas of services provided to students, with three areas more than doubling the number of direct services to students. The areas that decreased in Year 3, compared to Year 2, were summer program participation and family/cultural events. Although these two areas went down in student participation, the average hours offered to students increased. All services increased from the Year 1 baseline year.

During Year 3, the greatest number of students participated in workshops – including grade-level college information workshops, leadership development workshops, study skills training, and student support workshops – with 11,667 students participating in those services on an average of 10 hours per session. Students spent the greatest amount of time –110 hours per year – participating in tutoring and mentoring programs on their school campuses.

Table 2 displays services provided to parents during Year 3 of the Oklahoma GEAR UP Project. Three of four areas of services provided to parents increased in Year 3 compared to the previous year with the average hours of participation increasing in all areas of service delivery. The number of parents who went on college visits with their student decreased in Year 3 of the project as well as the total number of participants in workshops for college preparation and financial aid.

Table 2: Total Instances and Average Hours of GEAR UP Service Delivery to Parents

Parent Services	2011-12	Avg. Hours	2012-13	Avg. Hours	2013-14	Avg. Hours
Workshops on College Prep/Financial Aid	1,214	3.2	2,062	1.7	2,034	2.1
Counseling/Advising	3,637	3.6	3,691	1.6	4,174	1.9
College Visits	624	2.8	322	4.5	353	3.8
Family Events	1,392	1.4	2,728	2.2	4,689	4.4

As in previous years, parents tended to participate most in family/cultural events. Services in the family events category accounted for 42% of all service hours provided to parents; counseling/advisement services accounted for 37% of all parent service hours offered. Participation rates in family events and workshops on college preparation and or financial aid were relatively stable in Years 1 and 2 while increasing in Year 3.

The total number of services provided to teachers, counselors and administrators in the Oklahoma GEAR UP Project can be found in Table 3. Service delivery increased in Year 3 in the number of teachers participating in GEAR UP professional development with the number of hours of participation decreasing from Year 2. Training was provided in the following areas: Data Training, Counselor Training, Core Content Training, AP Training, Grantwriting and Grant Management Training, and Leadership Training.

Table 3: Total Instances and Average Hours of GEAR UP Service Delivery to Faculty

Faculty Services	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Number of Teachers of GEAR UP Students	1,288	1,387	1,507
Number Who Participated in GEAR UP Professional Development	960	743	1,045
Percent of Teacher Participation	75%	54%	69%
Avg. Hours of PD/ Teacher	4.0	17.9	10.5

EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS OF GEAR UP STUDENTS

Various activities and services are provided through the GEAR UP program to students to assist them in improving their educational progress in middle and high school to better prepare them for postsecondary success. These activities include, but are not limited to: ACT Prep courses, AP training for teachers, AP materials for students, AP awareness training for students and parents, summer STEM educational program opportunities for students, tutoring and mentoring at the individual school sites, and student leadership training and development. In addition, all students enrolled in the 24 GEAR UP districts take two practice ACT assessments given in the 8th (EXPLORE) and 10th (PLAN) grades and a national ACT assessment provided to all 11th grade students.

Oklahoma GEAR UP students are making educational progress in the areas of English/Reading and Math in high school as demonstrated in Table 4. In middle school, students are declining slightly in English/Reading and Math while unexcused absences are declining. In addition, student unexcused absence rates decreased at nearly every grade level, and ACT participation rates for 11th and 12th grades increased dramatically in Year 3.

Table 4: Educational Progress of GEAR UP Students

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Grade 7			
# of Students Performing at or Above in English	1,703	1,935	1,933
# of Students Performing at or Above in Math	1,733	1,829	1,820
# of Students With 5 or More Unexcused Absences during 1st Semester	360	536	461

	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Grade 8			
# of Students Performing at or Above in English	1,813	2,215	2,198
# of Students Performing at or Above in Math	1,605	1,977	1,836
# of Students With 5 or More Unexcused Absences during 1st Semester	453	602	443
Grade 9			
# of Students Performing at or Above in English	1,766	1,450	1,454
# of Students Performing at or Above in Math	1,885	1,794	2,284
# of Students With 5 or More Unexcused Absences during 1st Semester	461	528	373
Grade 10			
# of Students Performing at or Above in English	1,930	2,114	2,413
# of Students Performing at or Above in Math	2,024	1,973	2,370
# of Students With 5 or More Unexcused Absences during 1st Semester	405	406	409
Number of Students Taking PLAN	2,783	2,667	3,087
Grade 11			
# of Students Performing at or Above in English	2,260	2,191	2,473
# of Students Performing at or Above in Math	1,469	1,564	1,755
# of Students With 5 or More Unexcused Absences during 1st Semester	410	405	406
Number of Students Taking PLAN	228	388	860
Number of Students Taking ACT	767	862	2,401
Grade 12			
# of Students Performing at or Above in English	1,915	1,158	1,274
# of Students Performing at or Above in Math	1,427	860	1,020
# of Students With 5 or More Unexcused Absences during 1st Semester	388	416	422
Number of Students Taking PLAN	24	24	251
Number of Students Taking ACT	1,267	1,393	1,778

Year 3 marked the first year all students enrolled in the 11th grade in an Oklahoma GEAR UP districts were required to take a national ACT assessment. Districts tested 85% of their 11th grades, with student absences and other school related functions contributing to 15% of students not participating. Three districts elected not to test their students but have indicated full participation of their students in the Fall 2014 testing date of September 30, 2014. Results of the fall 2013 ACT assessment scores are found in Table 5.

Table 5: ACT Assessment Results – Fall 2013

Juniors ACT Oct. 2013 % Meeting Benchmark	# of Juniors	# of Students Tested	% of Students Tested	English	Math	Reading	Science	Met All Four
GEAR UP Average	2,646	2,260	85%	40%	15%	25%	18%	8%
ACT Score				English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
GEAR UP Average	2,646	2,260	85%	16.4	17.5	18	18.2	17.7

SUMMARY OF OUTCOME DATA

Student and Parent Surveys

Findings from the student and parent surveys present a promising picture of continuing successes and a few persistent challenges for the Oklahoma GEAR UP program. Highlights of the progress and challenges reported by students and parents include the following:

- High percentages of GEAR UP students continued to report discussing college entrance requirements and financial aid opportunities with school or GEAR UP staff - 66%; compared to 64% in Year 2 for students and 45% compared to 42% in Year 2 for parents.
- The majority of students expected that they would earn at least a four-year college degree (68% compared to 69% in Year 2), while 75% of parents reported they expect their child to achieve a four-year degree or higher compared to 77% in Year 2, a slight decrease in college expectations on behalf of GEAR UP students and parents compared to the first two years of the grant.
- Student perceptions of college affordability declined slightly in Year 3 (64% compared to 65%), while parent perceptions remained constant at 67%.
- Student data regarding the information that GEAR UP provided to them regarding high school preparation, financial aid awareness, college costs increased in Year 3 (70%, 66%, and 65% compared to 69%, 63%, and 63%). Parent data indicated a slight increase in parents who stated someone from GEAR UP had spoken to them about college entrance requirements (45% compared to 42% in Year 2). In addition, 76% of students reported attending a college campus tour in Year 3, compared to 63% in Year 2 and 40% in Year 1.
- Student surveys results remained constant in Year 2 and 3 in regards to the number of students who enrolled in an AP course (27%), and number of students who took an AP End of Course exam (13%).

- Students strongly continued to agree in Year 3 that their coursework is not challenging to them (94%).
- Parents reporting they have discussed with their student about going to college – a 94% constant percentage in the past two years.

School Faculty Survey

Findings from the School Faculty Survey indicated that the Oklahoma GEAR UP Program experienced a successful implementation and made improvements in many areas in the third year. Highlights of the successful implementation and improvements include the following:

- Oklahoma GEAR UP resources were distributed in schools and were being used by school personnel. School personnel continued participating in various GEAR UP activities. Throughout the three years, respondents reported fairly similar involvement in GEAR UP activities.
- Between Year 2 and 3, school personnel reported a slight increase in the number of teachers who participated in GEAR UP professional development, while the number of hours of participation slightly decreased.
- School personnel believed that the services provided for themselves, their students and parents were useful, relevant and of high quality.

The survey results also revealed some challenges in implementation within the schools. School personnel reported that GEAR UP programs and events would be less effective for students in many proposed activity/training areas such as summer programs, workshops on financial aid availability, workshops for preparing students for college, computer assisted labs, mentoring programs while they indicated that programs and events such as college tours, job shadowing, and cultural events would be more effective for students. GEAR UP staff will take these faculty survey results into consideration when planning Year 4 GEAR UP program activities and events. See the three-year survey results in Appendix A.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Oklahoma GEAR UP project is being implemented throughout the state at each of the 24 districts. Site coordinators at the school sites, in addition to GEAR UP Education Specialists, are planning and hosting a variety of services and activities for students, parents and teachers in their schools during the school year and summer events. These services and activities are included in annual implementation plans created at each district site for each project fiscal year GEAR UP funds are also being used to purchase classroom materials, technology, and other resources to enhance instruction and academic capabilities of the schools.

Service Reach. Thousands of students, parents and teachers have received services through GEAR UP. It appears that school personnel awareness of GEAR UP and buy-in to the goals and objectives of the program continue to increase. Several key indicators (including the proportion of

students and parents who have spoken with school personnel about financial aid and college entrance requirements) have continued to show sustained or positive growth over time, indicating that parents and students are receiving services. Although participants in GEAR UP events – whether students, parents, or teachers – appreciate the information and assistance they receive, attendance levels for many GEAR UP services and activities continue to fall short of expectations. Site Coordinators and GEAR UP staff are providing services, events, and resources for students, parents and teachers; however, it is not clear whether the services are reaching as many people in each group as GEAR UP staff may hope. Data from student and parent surveys, school personnel surveys and sign in sheets suggest that stakeholders may not make as much use of GEAR UP services as they could. Large portions of students and parents report not participating in specific GEAR UP services, and school personnel continue to express concern that attendance at GEAR UP events does not always rise to the level of their expectations. Faculty, students and parents, although generally familiar with the GEAR UP program, may not always be certain about what services and resources are provided by GEAR UP and which are provided by other sources. Students seem to be very familiar with the program, although parents' level of familiarity with GEAR UP is unclear.

Quality. Activities and services are being very well received by students, parents and teachers and are perceived to be of high quality, relevance and utility. Recipients of GEAR UP services are generally satisfied with the services they receive and appear to find the services helpful. Parents and students showed high levels of satisfaction with the GEAR UP services in which they participated, with college visits and rookie camps being viewed as high quality and beneficial. School personnel agreed that GEAR UP services were of high quality. They also found GEAR UP-sponsored professional development to be helpful in preparing them to deal with various college access, instructional, and other issues.

Challenges and Resolutions. Although the program is experiencing some success in implementing required activities, sites continue to struggle with persistent challenges in providing services and activities and achieving the desired results. To deal with the challenge of low attendance at GEAR UP events, site coordinators and GEAR UP Educational Specialists try to schedule events at times that are most convenient for participants. For instance, professional development events may be scheduled during existing professional development days set aside by the districts, or in the summer when school is not in session. In addition, teachers receive a stipend for professional development attendance when they are not under school contract. GEAR UP events continue to be scheduled simultaneously with other, well attended events (i.e., sporting events, parent conference) to boost the likelihood that families will be able to attend.

Site coordinators should consider setting up and calendaring GEAR UP events prior to the start of the school year, and post these events on their schools' websites to enhance public communication for these events. In addition, schools should consider involving students and parents on planning committees for their various events which will assist with communication. Schools are also encouraged to have their calendar and events posted on their district's School Connect iPhone app to inform students, parents and other stakeholders of their event dates and times. In addition, GEAR UP related events should be connected to required activities where appropriate. For example, Freshmen Rookie Camp should be held in conjunction with students picking up their high school schedules as a required student activity to ensure participation.

PRELIMINARY OUTCOMES

Student Interest and Involvement in School. Although student interest and involvement in school may be increasing, the evidence at this point is slightly mixed. School personnel report that student involvement and interest in school has improved slightly since the previous school year. They also report that parent involvement and interest in school has improved since the previous year. However, the challenges that school personnel and site coordinators both mentioned in getting parents engaged and involved suggest that substantial difficulties in raising parental involvement still remain. Student survey results, however, suggest that student interest and involvement in school has not changed substantially. These survey results, coupled with Gallup Student Interest Survey Results that measure students' hope, engagement and wellbeing also indicate that students lack engagement and hope.

2013 8th GRADE STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS Percent of Students Reporting They Are Hopeful, Engaged, and Thriving

SCHOOL DISTRICT	HOPE	ENGAGEMENT	WELL BEING
ARDMORE	46%	40%	64%
*CANEY VALLEY	51%	49%	63%
CATOOSA	40%	40%	58%
CHECOTAH	48%	45%	69%
DAVIS	49%	73%	80%
DUNCAN	47%	49%	62%
ELK CITY	57%	52%	66%
GUYMON	55%	54%	68%
HARRAH	46%	41%	65%
HENRYETTA	47%	37%	67%
HOBART	52%	67%	65%
LITTLE AXE	35%	49%	53%
KINGSTON	49%	56%	71%
*LUTHER	46%	47%	57%
MADILL	47%	47%	61%
MICLOUD	39%	57%	65%
NEWKIRK	42%	52%	55%
OKMULGEE	61%	51%	59%
ROLAND	38%	55%	58%
SAPULPA	45%	38%	61%
*STILWELL	37%	54%	58%
*TECUMSEH	54%	66%	68%
WOODWARD	64%	60%	74%
AVERAGE	47.6%	51.2%	63.7%

**Tested other grade levels in addition to 8th grade.*

Students' College Knowledge. The GEAR UP project does seem to be having a positive impact on some aspects of students' college awareness and knowledge. Site coordinators and GEAR UP Education Specialists and College Liaisons report that students who attend college visits find them to be very valuable experiences in learning what life on a college campus is like. Student campus evaluations corroborate these perceptions that college visits are very helpful for students. Students who participate in such activities, then, seem to be developing knowledge about college life (in addition to the application and admission processes and requirements, financial aid, and so on).

The majority of students (66% compared to 64% last year) reported having conversations with someone from their school or from GEAR UP about college entrance requirements and the availability of financial aid. Nearly all students in each year of the program have planned to continue their education beyond high school (68% in Year 3); however, only 64% (down from Year 1 & 2) report they are unsure about college affordability. In addition, most students (82%) continue to overestimate or do not know the cost of one year's tuition at a public college or university in Oklahoma.

Parent Knowledge. Parents' awareness of postsecondary issues may be increasing. A greater percentage of parents in Year 3 reported having conversations about college entrance requirements and the availability of financial aid than in either of the two previous years. In Year 3, more than in previous years, 23% of parents stated they expected their child to achieve a four-year degree of higher, compared to 17% in Year 2, while 53% of parents indicated knowledge of the OK Promise state scholarship program and its requirements. In addition, 31% of parents have indicated they have spoken to someone from GEAR UP about financial aid for college, up from 26% in Year 2. These findings suggest that parents' awareness and expectations may be increasing as a result of GEAR UP services.

Activities' Relation to Goals. Activities and services provided during Year 3 appear to be focused on promoting the goals of the Oklahoma GEAR UP project. Site Coordinators, Education Specialists, and College Liaisons provided data that revealed Year 3 services and activities relate well to the goal of increasing students' and parents' awareness and familiarity with postsecondary topics. Activities and resources are also designed and intended to enhance student's academic performance and preparation. Structures and processes established by Oklahoma GEAR UP staff are also designed to ensure efficient and effective use of resources.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability of GEAR UP activities is already coming to fruition through stakeholder commitment to the GEAR UP mission, partnership development, and grant development of district teachers and faculty. In Year 3, \$505,254 has been raised through additional grant funding to

Oklahoma GEAR UP Objectives:

Objective 1: Increase the academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education for GEAR UP students.

Objective 2: Increase the rate of high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education for GEAR UP students.

Objective 3: Increase GEAR UP students' and their families' knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing.

support GEAR UP related activities and projects. Sustainability efforts will continue as districts work toward building a college-going culture in their schools.

Dissemination of Oklahoma GEAR UP efforts are being provided to various audiences, including local stakeholders (i.e., site coordinators, district and school personnel, state advisory board, other agency staff) and national GEAR UP stakeholders (i.e., those attending the national GEAR UP conference). Dissemination efforts have included convening meetings for advisory board members and other local audiences such as local school boards and the Oklahoma College and University President's Council, sharing information, reports, and announcements via a newly constructed GEAR UP website; sharing updates and reports with district and school personnel via e-mail, phone calls and an annual GEAR UP conference; and attending and presenting at national conferences for GEAR UP project staff and other college access project personnel. Conference presentations seem to be well attended and received; advisory board members and local stakeholders also appear to be receptive to the information shared with them.