

Fairmont State GEAR UP Partnership

GEAR UP High School Seniors: Are You College Ready?

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Brinda Kuhn
Fairmont State University
1201 Locust Avenue
Fairmont, WV 26554
(304) 367-0436

Abstract

The Fairmont State GEAR UP Partnership located in Fairmont, West Virginia is currently in its sixth year of funding. Our inaugural seventh grade cohorts are now seniors. In an effort to evaluate the college readiness of these students, a forty-question survey was submitted to a random group of seniors at each GEAR UP high school. For comparison the same survey was given to a random group of seniors at four non-GEAR UP high schools. The GEAR UP focus is to encourage disadvantaged youth to raise educational expectations, stay in school and take academically rigorous courses in preparation for college.

The data indicates significant differences between GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP students in their preparation to enter and succeed in post-secondary education. This demonstrates GEAR UP has made a dynamic impact on the low-income, at-risk student by instilling these students with the belief that college is possible.

Even though non-GEAR UP students have more access to resources such as AP, Honors and other college preparatory classes, the data indicates that GEAR UP students take better advantage of these resources. More GEAR UP participants expect to enter a 4-year college, are enrolled in AP / Honors and other college preparatory classes, and have a higher GPA than non-GEAR UP students. In addition, a higher percentage of GEAR UP participants have taken the ACT and SAT. These students also have more access to information regarding college preparatory classes and college entrance requirements. Overall, the findings indicate GEAR UP participants have a higher level of esteem regarding their educational expectation. These findings are demonstrated in the following pages utilizing ten graphs supported with narratives.

Background

GEAR UP is an acronym meaning “Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs”. This program is federally funded, and authorized under Title IV - Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended in 1998 (P.L. 105-244), Chapter 2 - Gaining Early Awareness & Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, Section 404A. Originally, GEAR UP was intended to be a five-year program. In 2004, a sixth year was approved and funded by Congress.

The GEAR UP program is designed to significantly increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides five-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services to low income middle and high schools. Services include tutoring, mentoring, professional staff development, curriculum enhancement, summer programs, college visits, counseling and parental involvement.

The grant requires that partnerships provide GEAR UP services to at least one grade level of students, beginning not later than 7th grade, provided that at least 50 percent of the students enrolled are eligible for free or reduced price lunch under the National School Lunch Act. The grant ensures that the services are provided through the 12th grade. Unlike other federal programs, which target specific students within a school, GEAR UP partnerships must provide services to all students in a designated grade level in participating schools. These students are referred to as a cohort. The grant also requires partnerships to match the Federal contribution dollar-for-dollar, that is, the non-Federal contribution must equal at least 50 percent of the total project cost. For more information about the GEAR UP program, please visit the Department of Ed website at: <http://www.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html>.

In 1999, Fairmont State University received one of 164 partnership grants awarded throughout the United States. This was the only partnership grant awarded in West Virginia at that time. The total federal grant award for the five year period is approximately twenty-one million dollars. The Fairmont State GEAR UP Partnership currently serves approximately 16,550 students in 29 middle schools and 18 high schools within 9 counties.

The Fairmont State GEAR UP Partnership grant goals are as follows:

- Promote the academic advancement of higher education among West Virginia disadvantaged and high risk youth; raising their academic expectations to attend an institution of higher education.
 - Ensure access to college preparatory courses for all students in a cohort.
 - Increase student self-esteem and self-confidence regarding their ability to attend college.
 - Early Intervention: Provide individualized and intensive range of support services.
 - Promote the advancement of academic rigor consistent with college entrance requirements.

- Ensure that students and parents are knowledgeable concerning college preparation requirements, college opportunities, financial planning options, and scholarship / financial aid opportunities.

- Ensure that staff and parents are knowledgeable and sensitive to the unique situation facing West Virginia at-risk youth. This is accomplished by continuing staff development and training opportunities, which will enable teachers, counselors, parents, mentors, and tutors to provide quality education and support services; Thereby increasing West Virginia student participation in college preparatory classes, and raising their expectations regarding higher education goals.

- Ensure effective and efficient use of resources through the collaboration and cooperation of diverse partnerships, which are committed to the promotion of student and teacher development. Promotion of academic rigor, early interventions, and enhanced support services, which prepares our at-risk youth for higher education.

- Ensure that special students, students with physical and learning disabilities, underrepresented students, students in non-traditional career and academic fields, and bilingual students and parents have equitable access to academic courses, early intervention opportunities, and support services offered in preparation for higher education.

- Ensure the effective and efficient implementation of GEAR-UP programs and services through ongoing and comprehensive evaluation measures.
- Serve as a Model Program to advance low-income, high risk youth into higher education.

A complete list of the Fairmont State Partnership grant goals and measurable objectives can be viewed at http://www.fscwv.edu/gearup/mol_list.pdf.

Methods

A forty-question survey was given to seventeen GEAR UP high schools. For comparison, the same survey was given to four non-GEAR UP high schools. To ensure the survey was given to a heterogeneous group of students, each high school was directed to have one senior homeroom class fill out the survey. In most schools, 65% GEAR UP and 50% non-GEAR UP, students are assigned to homerooms alphabetically. Other types of homeroom assignment include random name generation or by Career Cluster. In 18% of the GEAR UP schools and 50% of the non-GEAR UP schools, the students are not assigned to a homeroom. In this case, the survey was given to the first period class. In some of the smaller schools, the survey results represented the entire senior population.

A total of 540 surveys were supplied to the GEAR UP high schools of which 355 (66%) were returned completed. Likewise, 150 surveys were handed out in non-GEAR UP high schools of which 96 (64%) were returned completed. Incomplete surveys were eliminated for consistency.

The following questions were not included in the findings: Questions regarding whether the survey participant was a GEAR UP computer scholarship winner and in which grade they decided to attend college, as well as plans to enlist in the military were posed for future research. Questions regarding gender and ethnicity were posed for demographic comparison. School districts are grouped by county. The information was compared to the West Virginia's 2000 census data, verifying that population samples were representative of each county as a whole. For ease of use direct percentages were used throughout this report.

Possible Errors

To ensure the survey was given to a heterogeneous group of students, each high school was directed to have one senior homeroom class fill out the survey. In most schools, students are assigned to homerooms alphabetically, creating a more random sampling of students. In 18% of GEAR UP and 50% of the non-GEAR UP schools, which do not have homerooms, the survey was given to a random class. In this case, possible errors in the data can be attributed to the survey being given to AP or Honors classes or to special education / learning disabled students. Another area of possible error is regarding overall GPA and course enrollment or

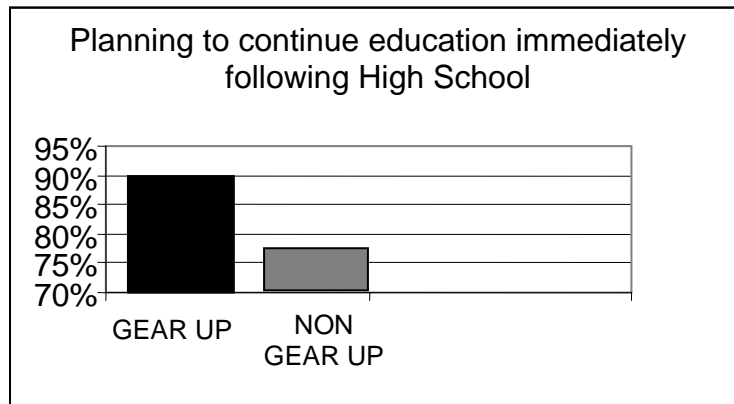
completion. Students self-reported the data, which was not verified against the student's transcript.

Findings

The survey indicates that compared to non-GEAR UP students, the GEAR UP students have higher educational expectations. They completed more rigorous classes in preparation for college and have taken the ACT or SAT. These same students have applied or plan to apply to a 4-year college rather than a 2-year school or technical institution.

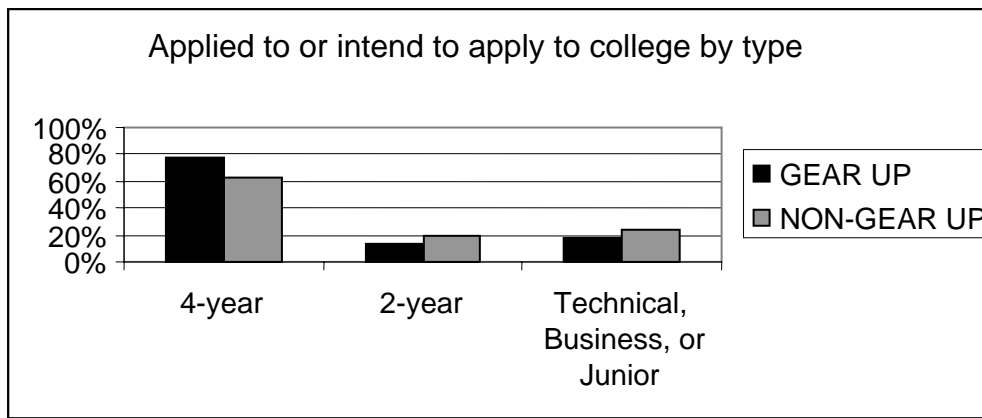
Intend to Continue Education after High School

When students were asked “Are you planning to continue your education immediately following High School?”, 90% of the GEAR UP students responded in the affirmative compared to 77% of the non-GEAR UP students.



Application to College

78% of the GEAR UP participants have applied or intend to apply to a 4-year college. 63% of the non-GEAR UP students have the same ambitions. When queried regarding application to a 2-year school, 20% of non-GEAR UP students reported they have applied or intend to apply to such an institution. This is compared to GEAR UP student responses, which totaled 14%. In addition, 24% of non-GEAR UP students have applied to or intend to apply to a technical, business or junior college compared to 17% of GEAR UP Students.

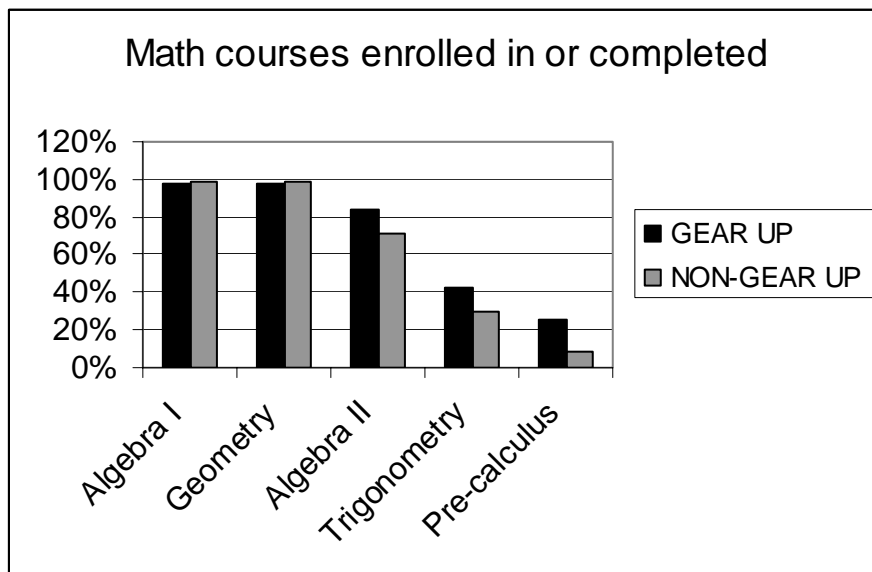


Math

The next set of questions gathered data regarding enrollment and completion of math courses. All schools, both GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP, offer Algebra I & II and Geometry. 94% of the GEAR UP schools offer Trigonometry and Pre-calculus while 100% of the non-GEAR UP schools offer these two classes.

The results show that a majority of both GEAR UP (98%) and non-GEAR UP (99%) students have completed Algebra I or equivalent. In Geometry, 98% GEAR UP and 99% non-GEAR UP are enrolled in or have completed the course. The enrollment or completion of Algebra II reveals a shift that continues through Pre-calculus. The numbers for Algebra II indicate 84% of GEAR UP students are enrolled in or have completed the course compared to 71% of non-GEAR UP students.

All non-GEAR UP schools offer both Trigonometry and Pre-calculus; however, only 94% of the GEAR UP schools offer these classes. The data demonstrates a higher percentage of GEAR UP students take advantage of these classes. 43% of GEAR UP students are enrolled in or have completed Trigonometry, versus 30% of non-GEAR UP students. The enrollment in or completion of Pre-calculus demonstrates a larger divide between the GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP schools. 25% of the GEAR UP students are enrolled in or have completed Pre-calculus compared to only 8% of non-GEAR UP students.



English, Science and History

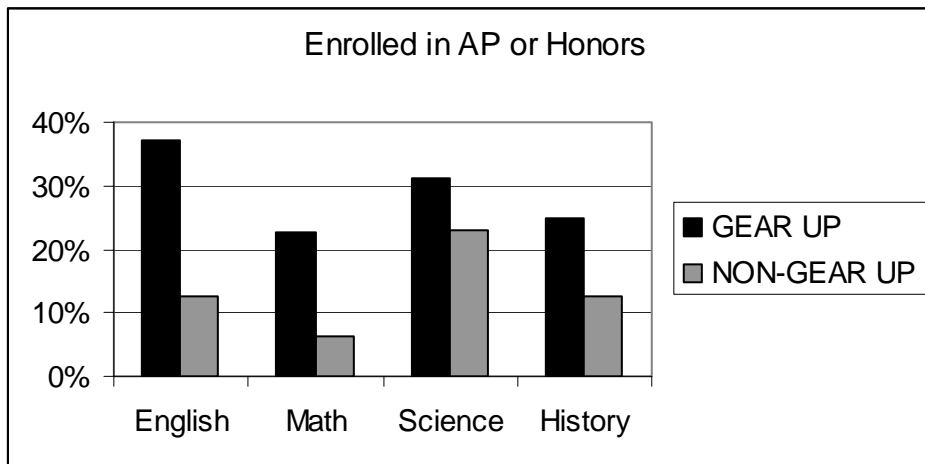
The questions regarding enrollment in or completion of English, Science and History for 9th through 12th grades indicate that nearly all students in both GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP schools have completed these classes.

AP or Honors Classes

The enrollment in or completion of AP or Honors classes illuminates a divide between the GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP students:

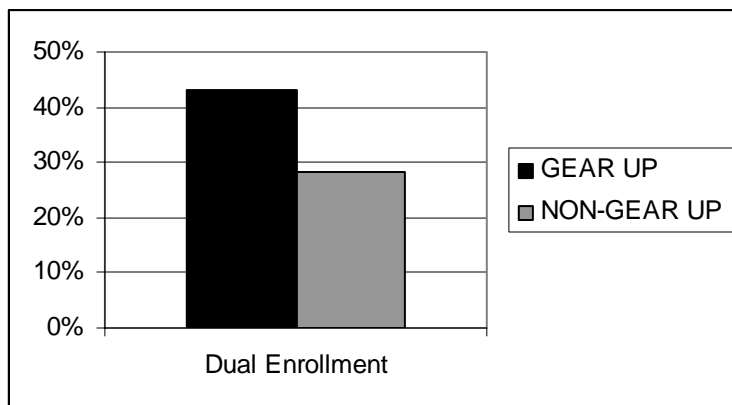
- **English:** 82% of the GEAR UP schools offer AP or Honors English, while 100% of the non-GEAR UP schools offer these classes. 37% of the GEAR UP students are enrolled in or have completed AP or Honors English compared to 13% of non-GEAR UP students.
- **Math:** 53% of the GEAR UP schools offer AP or Honors Math, while 75% of the non-GEAR UP schools offer these classes. 23% of the GEAR UP students are enrolled in or have completed AP or Honors Math compared to 6% of non-GEAR UP students.
- **Science:** 41% of the GEAR UP schools offer AP or Honors Science, while 75% of the non-GEAR UP schools offer these classes. 31% of the GEAR UP students are enrolled in or have completed AP or Honors Science compared to 23% of non-GEAR UP students.
- **History:** 41% of the GEAR UP schools offer AP or Honors History, while 75% of the non-GEAR UP schools offer these classes. 25% of the GEAR UP students are enrolled

in or have completed AP or Honors History compared to 13% of non-GEAR UP students.



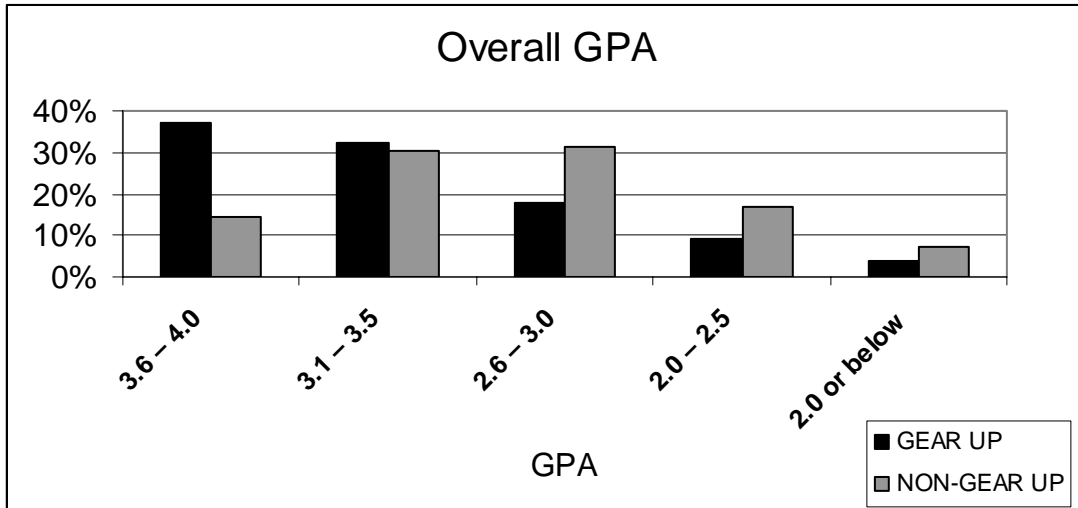
Dual Enrollment

Students are offered the opportunity to earn dual credits in college-level courses, which fulfills both high school and college requirements. Dual credit classes are offered by 100% of GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP schools. The data indicates a higher percentage of GEAR UP students (43%) are taking advantage of these classes compared to 28% of the non-GEAR UP survey participants.



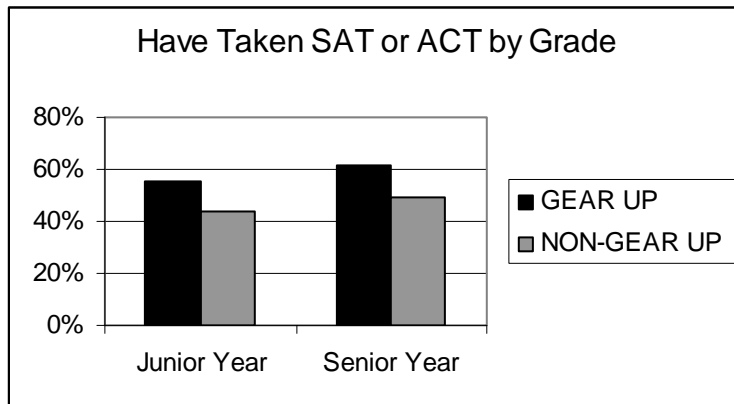
Overall GPA

Overall GPA as reported by the students indicates the GEAR UP students achieve a higher overall GPA than the non-GEAR UP students. 37% of the GEAR UP students report a GPA of 3.6 or above compared to 15% of non-GEAR UP students. On the other end of the spectrum, GEAR UP students (31%) reported a GPA of 3.0 or below while 54% of non-GEAR UP students claim a GPA of 3.0 or below.



ACT or SAT Participation

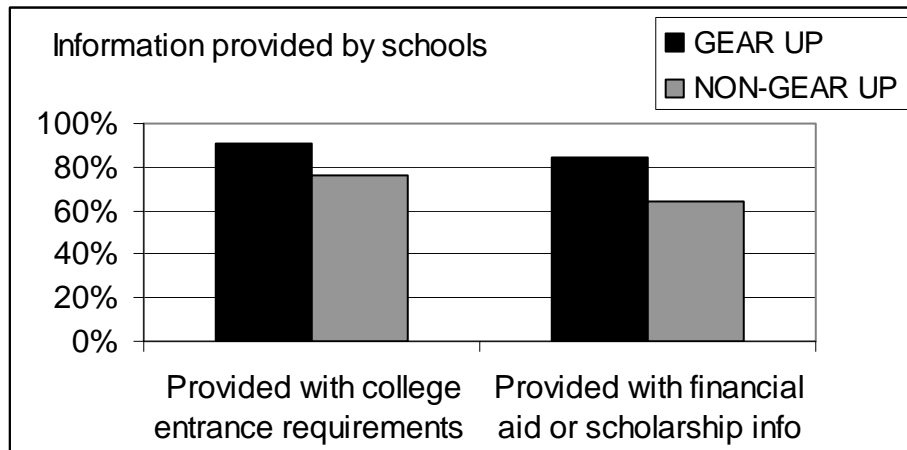
It is not uncommon for students to take the ACT or SAT more than once. 55% of GEAR UP students have taken the ACT or SAT in their junior year compared to 44% of non-GEAR UP students. 62% GEAR UP and 49% non-GEAR UP report taking the ACT or SAT in their senior year.



College Entrance Information

Beginning in the 7th grade, one of the GEAR UP grant goals is to ensure students are knowledgeable regarding college preparatory requirements. This includes college opportunities, financial planning options and scholarship / financial aid opportunities. Pertinent details are presented by teachers and/or counselors, guest speakers, tutors and mentors. College tours are also scheduled. When asked whether information regarding college preparatory classes and college entrance requirements were provided, 91% of GEAR UP

students responded in the affirmative. This is compared to 76% of non-GEAR UP students. When the same question was posed concerning financial aid, 85% of GEAR UP students indicated they had been given this information compared to 65% of non-GEAR UP students.

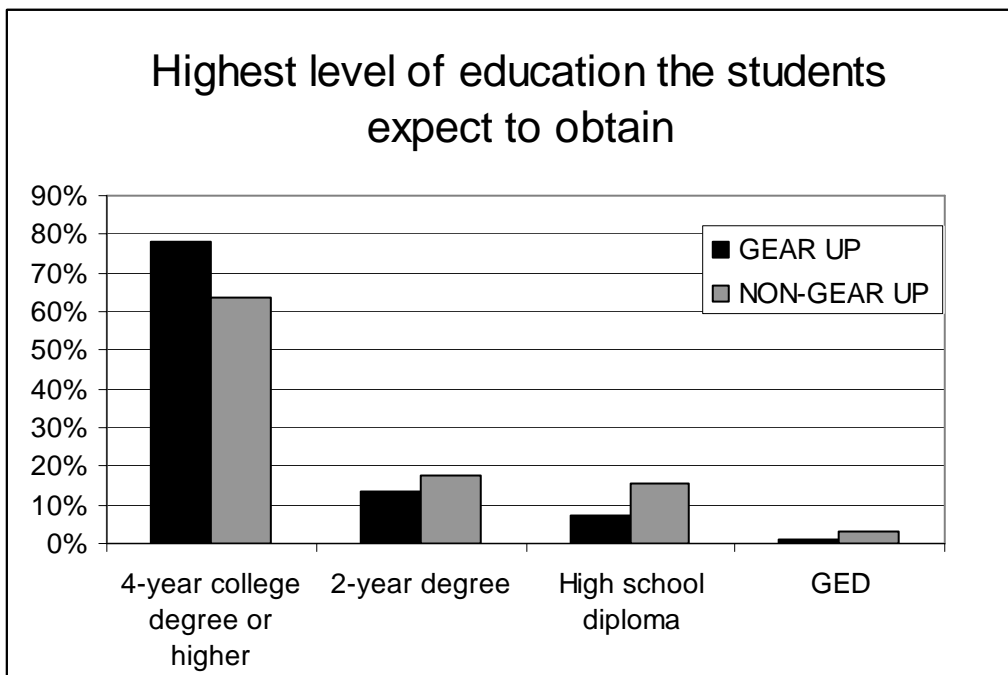


Discussing College

The survey reveals that most families, 89% GEAR UP and 81% non-GEAR UP, communicate with their children concerning college. The data also indicates most students, 89% GEAR UP and 86% non-GEAR UP, discuss the possibility of college with their friends.

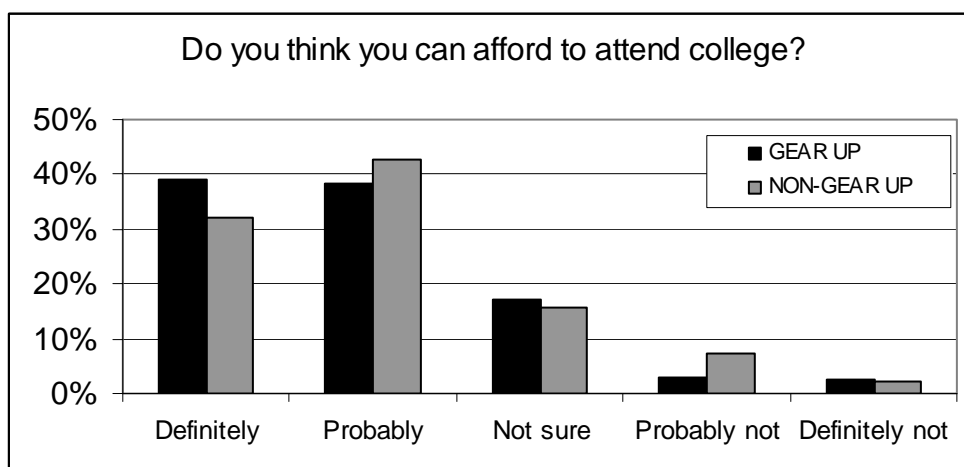
Higher Education Expectations

Regarding the level of education the students expect to obtain, the GEAR UP students show a higher level of expectation than the non-GEAR UP students. 78% of the GEAR UP students expect to complete a 4-year degree or higher compared to 64% of non-GEAR UP students. In contrast, 7% of GEAR UP students do not plan to continue their education after high school compared to more than double (16%) of non-GEAR UP students. The survey indicates all students surveyed expect to graduate high school or obtain a GED.



Paying for College

By procuring financial aid, scholarships, loans, grants, and/or family's resources, most students, 77% GEAR UP and 75% non-GEAR UP, believe they probably or definitely could afford post-secondary education. In contrast, 6% of GEAR UP and 9% of non-GEAR UP students report they probably or definitely will not be capable of paying for higher education despite these resources.



Conclusion

The purpose of GEAR UP is to promote the academic advancement of higher education among West Virginia disadvantaged and high risk youth. This is accomplished by raising their academic expectations regarding higher education. The means employed are ensuring access to college preparatory courses and increasing student self-esteem / self-confidence. Academic rigor consistent with college entrance requirements is promoted for all students in a cohort.

The collected data supports the supposition that GEAR UP produces a dynamic impact on the low-income, at-risk students in West Virginia. The findings indicate GEAR UP students have a higher educational expectation than non-GEAR UP students. GEAR UP students expect to enter a 4-year college and therefore take advantage of college preparatory classes. They also report a higher GPA than non-GEAR UP students. The GEAR UP participants are better prepared to enter and succeed in post-secondary education as indicated by the significant difference in the data when compared to non-GEAR UP students. It is interesting to note that even though non-GEAR UP students have greater access to advanced classes, GEAR UP students take greater advantage with fewer resources.

Most GEAR UP students are first generation college bound and from economically disadvantaged families. These students and their families often find the preparation and application to post-secondary education daunting. While the quantitative impact can be graphed and measured, the qualitative can be surmised by the success stories and thank-you's posted on the Fairmont State GEAR UP web site. GEAR UP not only provides support in the schools, it also provides support and encouragement within the home and community. Students are inspired to become contributing members of society knowing their efforts are celebrated and supported. These students show their appreciation for the GEAR UP program through their enthusiasm and accomplishments. Participation in the GEAR UP program brings the realization that it is not where you come from but where you are going.

Additional studies for following these students through college are needed and recommended.

Appendix:
GEAR UP vs. Non-GEAR UP Summary

GEAR UP vs. Non-GEAR UP Summary

High School Seniors: Are you College Ready?

# of GEAR UP Students	# of NON- GEAR UP Students	% of GEAR UP Students	% of NON- GEAR UP Students
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Total Students Surveyed 355 96

1) Gender

a. Male	161	51	45%	53%
b. Female	194	45	55%	47%

2) Ethnicity

a. White, Caucasian	334	96	94%	100%
b. Asian	2	0	1%	0%
c. Black or African American	4	0	1%	0%
d. Hispanic or Latino	5	0	1%	0%
e. Other	10	0	3%	0%

3) Are you a GEAR UP Computer Scholarship Winner?

a. Yes	73	1	21%	1%
b. No	282	95	79%	99%

4) Are you planning to continue your education immediately following High School?

a. Yes	319	74	90%	77%
b. No	36	22	10%	23%

5) Have you applied for or do you intend to apply for admission to a 4-year College?

a. Yes	277	60	78%	63%
b. No	78	36	22%	38%

6) Have you applied for or do you intend to apply for admission to a 2-year Community College?

a. Yes	50	19	14%	20%
b. No	305	77	86%	80%

7) Have you applied for or do you intend to apply for admission to a Technical College, Business College, or Junior College?

a. Yes	61	23	17%	24%
b. No	294	73	83%	76%

8) Are you planning to enlist in the military?

a. Yes	39	13	11%	14%
b. No	316	83	89%	86%

High School Seniors: Are you College Ready?

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9) In which grade did you decide to go to college?
(By college we mean education after high school. This includes 2-year community or junior colleges, business schools and vocational technical schools, as well as, 4-year colleges and universities.)

a. Always wanted to attend	221	38	62%	40%
b. 1st – 6th Grade	22	6	6%	6%
c. 7th or 8th Grade	32	4	9%	4%
d. 9th, 10th or 11th Grade	59	31	17%	32%
e. Never wanted to attend	21	17	6%	18%

10) Have you completed Algebra I or Applied Math I & II?

a. Yes	348	95	98%	99%
b. No	7	1	2%	1%

11) Are you enrolled in or have you completed Geometry?

a. Yes	347	95	98%	99%
b. No	8	1	2%	1%

12) Are you enrolled in or have you completed Algebra II?

a. Yes	297	68	84%	71%
b. No	58	28	16%	29%

13) Are you enrolled in or have you completed Trigonometry?

a. Yes	151	29	43%	30%
b. No	204	67	57%	70%

14) Are you enrolled in or have you completed Pre-calculus?

a. Yes	90	8	25%	8%
b. No	265	88	75%	92%

15) Have you completed or are you enrolled in AP or Honors Math?

a. Yes	81	6	23%	6%
b. No	274	90	77%	94%

16) Have you completed 9th Grade English?

a. Yes	352	94	99%	98%
b. No	3	2	1%	2%

17) Have you completed 10th Grade English?

a. Yes	352	95	99%	99%
b. No	3	1	1%	1%

High School Seniors: Are you College Ready?

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18) Have you completed or 11th Grade English?

a. Yes	346	94	97%	98%
b. No	9	2	3%	2%

19) Have you completed or are you enrolled in 12th Grade English?

a. Yes	337	92	95%	96%
b. No	18	4	5%	4%

20) Have you completed or are you enrolled in AP or Honors English?

a. Yes	132	12	37%	13%
b. No	223	84	63%	88%

21) Have you completed 9th Grade Science?

a. Yes	350	95	99%	99%
b. No	5	1	1%	1%

22) Have you completed 10th Grade Science?

a. Yes	350	96	99%	100%
b. No	5	0	1%	0%

23) Have you completed 11th Grade Science which includes a lab?

a. Yes	327	89	92%	93%
b. No	28	7	8%	7%

24) Have you completed or are you enrolled in 12th Grade Science which includes a lab?

a. Yes	194	57	55%	59%
b. No	161	39	45%	41%

25) Have you completed or are you enrolled in AP or Honors Science?

a. Yes	111	22	31%	23%
b. No	244	74	69%	77%

26) Have you completed 9th Grade History?

a. Yes	353	95	99%	99%
b. No	2	1	1%	1%

27) Have you completed 10th Grade History?

a. Yes	351	95	99%	99%
b. No	4	1	1%	1%

High School Seniors: Are you College Ready?

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28) Have you completed 11th Grade Social Studies (History, Government, Civics...)?

a. Yes	338	92	95%	96%
b. No	17	4	5%	4%

29) Have you completed or are you enrolled in 12th Grade Social Studies (History, Government, Civics...)?

a. Yes	104	42	29%	44%
b. No	251	54	71%	56%

30) Have you completed or are you enrolled in AP or Honors History?

a. Yes	88	12	25%	13%
b. No	267	84	75%	88%

31) Have you completed or are you enrolled in any Dual Enrollment classes where you are receiving college credit?

a. Yes	153	27	43%	28%
b. No	202	69	57%	72%

32) What is your overall GPA

a. 2.0 or below	14	7	4%	7%
b. 2.0 – 2.5	32	16	9%	17%
c. 2.6 – 3.0	63	30	18%	31%
d. 3.1 – 3.5	115	29	32%	30%
e. 3.6 – 4.0	131	14	37%	15%

33) Did you take the ACT or SAT in your junior year?

a. Yes	197	42	55%	44%
b. No	158	54	45%	56%

34) Did you take the ACT or SAT in your senior year?

a. Yes	219	47	62%	49%
b. No	136	49	38%	51%

35) Since 7th grade has your school or GEAR UP (for example: college tours, assembly, speakers, A.A. or Homeroom, teacher or counselors) provided you with information about college entrance requirements or the courses that you needed to take in high school in order to prepare for college?

a. Yes	324	73	91%	76%
b. No	31	22	9%	23%

High School Seniors: Are you College Ready?

	# of GEAR UP Students	# of NON- GEAR UP Students	% of GEAR UP Students	% of NON- GEAR UP Students
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36) Since 7th grade has your school or GEAR UP (for example: college tours, assembly, speakers, A.A. or Homeroom, teacher or counselors) provided you with information about the availability of financial aid to help you pay for college?

a. Yes	301	62	85%	65%
b. No	54	34	15%	35%

37) Since 7th grade has anyone in your family spoken with you about going to a 4-year College, 2-year Community College, Business or Technical school?

a. Yes	317	78	89%	81%
b. No	38	18	11%	19%

38) Since 7th grade have any of your friends spoken with you about going to a 4-year College, 2-year Community College, Business or Technical school?

a. Yes	316	83	89%	86%
b. No	39	13	11%	14%

39) What is the highest level of education that you expect to obtain?

a. High school diploma	26	15	7%	16%
b. GED	4	3	1%	3%
c. 2-year degree	47	17	13%	18%
d. 4-year college degree or higher	278	61	78%	64%
e. Will not finish high school this year	0	0	0%	0%

40) Do you think that you could afford to attend a public 2-year or 4-year College using financial aid, scholarships, loans, grants, and/or your family's resources?

a. Definitely	138	31	39%	32%
b. Probably	136	41	38%	43%
c. Not sure	61	15	17%	16%
d. Probably not	11	7	3%	7%
e. Definitely not	9	2	3%	2%

Follow-up Questions for High Schools Regarding Homeroom Assignment and Course Offerings

GEAR UP School Name	Are	Are	Are	Are	Are	Are	Are	Are	How Are
	Dual Enrollment Classes Offered?	Any AP/Honors Classes Offered?	AP English Classes Offered?	AP Math Classes Offered?	AP Science Classes Offered?	AP History Classes Offered?	Trigonometry Classes Offered?	Pre-Calculus Classes Offered?	Homerooms Assigned?
Grafton HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Alphabetically by Grade
East Fairmont HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Career Cluster
Tucker County HS	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes	Alphabetically
Philip Barbour HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Homeroom
South Harrison HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Alphabetically by Grade
Tygarts Valley HS	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes	Alphabetically by Grade
Fairmont Senior HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Career Cluster
North Marion HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Alphabetically by Grade
Preston HS	Yes	Yes					Yes	Yes	No Homeroom
University HS	Yes	Yes					Yes	Yes	Randomly
Harman School	Yes							Yes	No Homeroom
Elkins HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Alphabetically by Grade
Doddridge County HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Alphabetically
Lincoln HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Alphabetically
Liberty HS	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	Alphabetically
Robert C. Byrd HS	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes	Alphabetically
Clay Battelle HS	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Alphabetically
Total Yes	17	16	14	9	7	7	16	16	
% Yes	100%	94%	82%	53%	41%	41%	94%	94%	
Non-GEAR UP School Name	Are	Are	Are	Are	Are	Are	Are	Are	How Are
	Dual Enrollment Classes Offered?	Any AP/Honors Classes Offered?	AP English Classes Offered?	AP Math Classes Offered?	AP Science Classes Offered?	AP History Classes Offered?	Trigonometry Classes Offered?	Pre-Calculus Classes Offered?	Homerooms Assigned?
Calhoun County HS	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	Alphabetically
Lewis County HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Homeroom
Upshur County HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No Homeroom
Braxton County HS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Alphabetically
Total Yes	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	
% Yes	100%	100%	100%	75%	75%	75%	100%	100%	