



# BIENNIAL EVALUATION REPORT

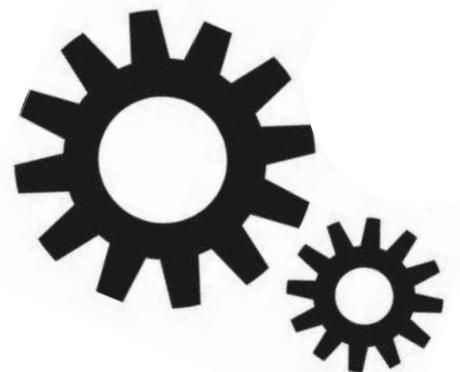
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## GEAR UP Idaho

PR No. P334S110016

Idaho State Department of Education

COBRO  
CONSULTING, LLC



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# Evaluation Overview

## Program Overview

Idaho's GEAR UP 2 program began serving one cohort of seventh grade students at 27 middle schools during the 2011-12 academic year, along with an additional cohort of seventh graders entering the program the following year. Now in its fourth year, the program currently serves two cohorts of ninth and tenth grade students at 45 schools. As shown in Table 1, the majority of the students are of White race, and 20-24% of the students are of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

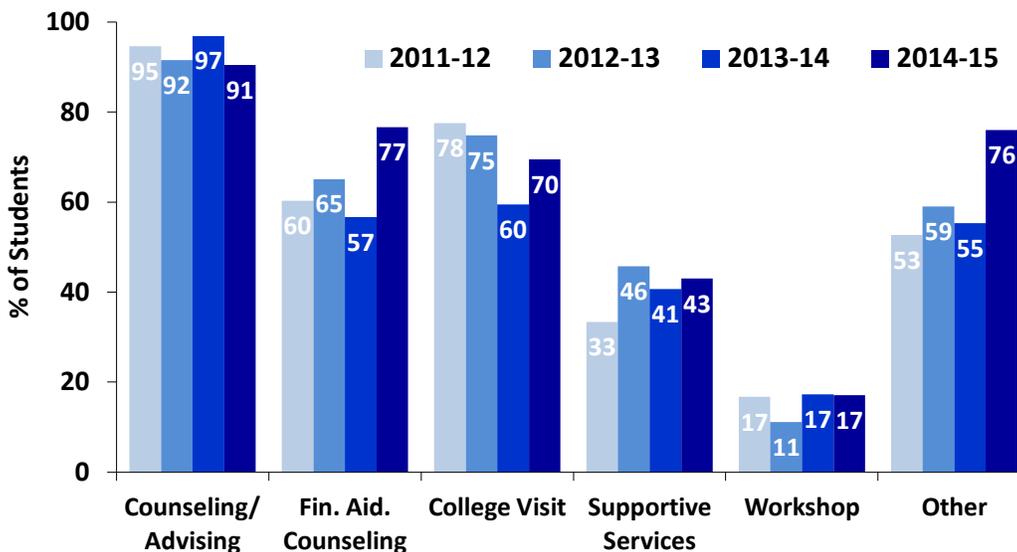
Table 1. Student characteristics

|   | 2011-12     | 2012-13     | 2013-14     | 2014-15     | 2015-16*    |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Number of students</b>                   | <b>2355</b> | <b>5070</b> | <b>5352</b> | <b>4570</b> | <b>4371</b> |
| 7th grade                                   | 2355        | 2560        | --          | --          | --          |
| 8th grade                                   | --          | 2510        | 2476        | 1           | --          |
| 9th grade                                   | --          | --          | 2876        | 2305        | 2           |
| 10th grade                                  | --          | --          | --          | 2263        | 2267        |
| 11th grade                                  | --          | --          | --          | --          | 2102        |
| <b>Ethnicity (in %)</b>                     |             |             |             |             |             |
| Hispanic/Latino                             | 20          | 23          | 24          | 22          | 23          |
| Non-Hispanic/Latino                         | 63          | 69          | 68          | 72          | 73          |
| Unknown ethnicity                           | 17          | 9           | 8           | 6           | 5           |
| <b>Race (in %)</b>                          |             |             |             |             |             |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native              | 4           | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3           |
| Asian                                       | 1           | 1           | 1           | 1           | 1           |
| Black/African-American                      | 0           | 1           | 1           | 1           | 1           |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander            | 1           | 1           | 1           | 1           | 1           |
| White                                       | 74          | 70          | 73          | 76          | 76          |
| Two or more races                           | 1           | 1           | 1           | 1           | 1           |
| Unknown race                                | 20          | 25          | 21          | 18          | 18          |
| <b>Other Student Characteristics (in %)</b> |             |             |             |             |             |
| Individualized Education Plan               | 6           | 3           | 1           | 1           | 0           |
| Limited English Proficiency                 | 6           | 3           | 7           | 6           | 11          |

Note that in this report, analyses are conducted using data that differentiated between students based on ethnicity as either Hispanic/Latino or non-Hispanic/Latino (with no reference to race), while other analyses examine students as either Hispanic/Latino or White. The difference in terminology relates to how such data was collected and recorded, which varies between sources such as schools, state agencies, and surveys.

As shown in Figure 1, GEAR UP students have participated in a variety of activities throughout the first four years of the program. Counseling/advising services remain the most utilized of all, and a large majority visited a college as well. More than half received financial aid counseling, and participated in other activities categorized as *service learning*, which includes community service initiatives such as environmental clean-up projects and participation in programming emphasizing drug awareness.

Figure 1. Percent of students participating in GEAR UP Idaho activities



### Program Baseline, and Comparison Data

Data on students' course transcripts, test scores, and attendance was obtained at the unit level from the participating school districts. GEAR UP Idaho staff recorded student and parent participation in program activities and services in their online data management system, coded to U.S. Department of Education (ED) GEAR UP service categories.

Unless otherwise noted, all baseline or target figures presented in this report were submitted with the project proposal; these figures were based on available comparison group data from previous years for the applicable grade levels referenced in each measure. GEAR UP Idaho staff also work with the state longitudinal data system to obtain some data elements for the class immediately prior to their first GEAR UP cohort. This is used as an ongoing retrospective comparison group; such comparison data is included where available and applicable.

### Survey Data

Students and parents have been surveyed every school year since the beginning of the program about their knowledge of educational options and opinions of GEAR UP services. Student survey response rates have ranged from 78% - 83%, and between 45% and 55% of students have had a parent/family member respond.

# Program Processes

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In the fall of 2015, CoBro Consulting conducted a qualitative-based evaluation of GEAR UP Idaho to gain insight into program processes and any changes in grant administration. This involved facilitating a series of in-person focus groups, and obtaining additional information via phone interviews or written responses to the focus group questions. The five on-site focus group sessions were convened at the Boise Center on the Grove during the GEAR UP West conference and subsequent GEAR UP Idaho Fall Statewide Meeting. The following participants attended the sessions.

- fourteen coordinators
- one administrator/coordinator
- one counselor/coordinator
- three school administrators (principal/superintendent)

Those who were unable to attend a focus group were later asked to send written responses to the focus group questions. The following GEAR UP Idaho staff and participating school personnel sent their feedback to the questions. It should be noted that three of the four counselors submitting written feedback were all from the same school district.

- five coordinators
- two administrator/coordinators
- one counselor/coordinator
- four counselors
- five school administrators (principal/superintendent)

A telephone interview was also conducted to obtain information on similar topics from the GEAR UP Idaho director and assistant director. The phone interview lasted approximately thirty minutes.

Findings from the focus groups, written responses, and interviews are organized below into the following sections: 1) changes to roles and responsibilities, 2) student, parent, and school staff familiarity with GEAR UP Idaho, 3) greatest challenges, 4) most effective services, 5) least effective services, 6) suggested changes and 7) GEAR UP Idaho's greatest strengths.

## Changes to roles and responsibilities

GEAR UP Idaho is a very wide-spread grant, with program sites located all throughout the state. The number of GEAR UP students served at each site varies widely, from 11 to 2060 students. While the program staff share the same grant goals and objectives, many of the staff place different levels of emphasis on the various GEAR UP services and activities, and/or they have different methods of implementing the services.

Overall, the GEAR UP Idaho personnel reported that their roles have not changed over the past year. However, the GEAR UP leadership team noted that having a new state superintendent has caused some transition given that she brought her own team into the State Department of Education. They felt that this hadn't had much impact on GEAR UP Idaho.

The GEAR UP Idaho leadership team continues to provide statewide staff training twice annually to ensure the program staff and personnel at the participating schools remain informed at the state and federal levels. They communicate with staff routinely using Edmodo, an online professional learning community.

Many coordinators observed that their responsibilities have changed as the students progress in grade level. Several of the coordinators reported that, now that they have students who are juniors, there is more pressure to make sure they will be eligible to graduate. Also, with the students now in tenth and eleventh grade, several coordinators, as well as the leadership team, observed that they are emphasizing ACT and SAT test prep more in the present year.

In terms of changes to services offered, the GEAR UP Idaho leadership team stated that next year, they will be implementing a new internship program at some of the GEAR UP schools for students interested in pursuing a career in teaching. They will have an opportunity to actually work in an elementary school classroom the first semester and prepare for the paraprofessional teacher certification the second semester. Once they pass the exam they will qualify for the certification.

Regarding changes in the role of the leadership team, they noted that they are collaborating more with the statewide College Access Challenge Grant, which has created an Educate Idaho Network with which they are involved. Also, as the students are in their last years of high school, they are collaborating with some of their grant partners, such as Wells Fargo, to work on strategies to assist with the transition from high school to college. Additionally, in the next year, the regional coordinator will play a bigger role working with the site coordinators to ensure they have adequate resources to assist students to apply for financial aid and scholarships.

A few of the coordinators noted that tutoring and improvements to tutoring services are emphasized more this year. Some also noted that they are spending more time getting the juniors focused on a field of study. Others were more focused on parent involvement than in past years. The role of one coordinator changed in that juniors are taking more dual credit classes, since they get the classes for free. Another coordinator assumed the role of counselor this past year as well, so now has more responsibility for dual credit and counseling on the Idaho Digital Learning Academy and Pathways in Technology (P-Tech) program.

### **Student, parent, and school staff familiarity with GEAR UP Idaho**

The majority of the coordinators and counselors agreed that most of the parents don't understand their role at the schools, or what GEAR UP is. Several coordinators send out newsletters every month so the parents should understand what they do. Many observed that, even when parents do meet with them, they don't realize later that they spoke with a GEAR UP coordinator. Others mentioned setting up tables at registration and open house in efforts to

inform parents about GEAR UP. Another coordinator observed that the parents aren't quite sure of his role, except that it's college prep-related.

One coordinator observed that most of the students and parents are unaware of the full range of services GEAR UP Idaho offers, noting that they are aware of tutoring, testing, and campus visits, but beyond that, their understanding is mixed. Another coordinator said that their principal instituted a huge change this year – everything at their school is “GEAR UP to Go On” as a campus-wide theme. This has helped raise awareness immensely.

The GEAR UP leadership team pointed out that it can be very confusing to schools in terms of what are GEAR UP sponsored activities because the state has introduced so many new state-funded programs. They say the teachers and school administration understand it, but the students and parents aren't clear about it. The fact that some GEAR UP services are blended with preexisting services adds additional confusion.

Most of the coordinators and counselors agree that the school staff are understanding more about what they do and the program's goals this year. Many of the coordinators reported that the staff at their schools are very supportive. The GEAR UP Idaho leadership team reported that they make a good effort to help the schools and the staff in those schools to understand the program and what its mission is. One coordinator mentioned that the school staff have a clearer understanding of his role after the district-wide training at the beginning of the year. Another coordinator pointed out that the English teachers have been very supportive and teach the students how to write cover letters and resumes and scholarship essays in their classes.

Most of the counselors reported that the students, parents, and school staff have a better understanding of their role as the GEAR UP counselor than they do of the GEAR UP program goals or services offered.

### **Greatest challenges**

All of the coordinators agreed that parent involvement remains one of the greatest obstacles. Many note that it's not that the parents don't want to be there, but they have other responsibilities such as work and other children. However, others said their communities are just not college-oriented and don't seem to care if the kids go on to college or not. Some observed that, now that the students are in high school, the parents don't feel they need to be as involved. They can check their child's grades online, so have less need to meet with a counselor. The large majority of coordinators agreed that the parents who participate in GEAR UP services/activities are the ones who don't need it.

One coordinator observed that, when she held a Spanish-speaking Parent Night, more parents attended. She also reported that participation rose substantially when they began offering day care during the events. Coordinators from the smaller schools reported that it was very difficult to get the parents together as a group, and so they meet with them individually when they can.

Several coordinators noted that there's a lot of pressure on the schools to get graduation rates up. They explained that about 40% of their students won't graduate without some sort of credit recovery program. Many of them have transient students, who need to make up out-of-class time. Some have flex-time programs for kids to make up hours absent from class, however, it is difficult getting the students to go to make up "seat time."

Many of the coordinators and some counselors mentioned the challenge of finding the time to provide all of the services they are responsible for into a school day. One noted that it was challenging finding enough time to meet with hundreds of students for individual planning sessions, which takes time away from implementing other activities. Similarly, one counselor cited meeting the various needs of all the students as the greatest challenge.

Several coordinators voiced the challenge of finding classroom time to implement services. A few observed that the high schools are much more reluctant to give them class time compared with the middle school teachers.

Several coordinators observed that, while they really like the Aspire test, the timing of ACT and Aspire testing made things very challenging. Specifically, having it in the spring after all the other tests resulted in far fewer students taking the test. Similarly, one of the school administrators observed that the requirement that the ACT be administered on a Saturday rather than a school day made it very difficult, if not impossible, to reach their 100% student participation goal. Some of the coordinators observed that the online Aspire program was very slow to take online.

A few coordinators voiced frustration that, because many of the students they serve plan to go on an LDS mission upon high school graduation, this impacts the number of students reporting in their surveys that they will go to college.

The leadership team noted the challenge of collaborating with the site coordinators, given that they are geographically so far from one another. They observed that the distance makes it difficult to get as involved as they would like to, particularly in light of the need to prepare students to apply for financial aid and scholarships next year.

Teacher buy-in, and overcoming negative attitudes towards the program were also mentioned by several coordinators as a challenge, while others voiced receiving strong support from the school staff. A few coordinators noted that school staff turnover made it difficult to maintain positive, sustained relationships. Some cited school administration staff among their biggest challenges, while others received much support from the administration but struggled with teacher buy-in. Some coordinators say the teachers don't understand how important it is for them (the coordinators) to communicate with the students.

The GEAR UP Idaho leadership team observed that a major challenge pertains to other state programs in Idaho, which offer very similar activities as GEAR UP. This has led to some confusion as to the sponsorship of each activity. They have encouraged the site coordinators to work more closely with the school administration and staff to give a clear picture of what GEAR UP provides.

## Most effective services

Almost all of the GEAR UP Idaho personnel agreed that the campus visits were very effective. However, one coordinator observed that, as the students get older, the students who take school seriously don't attend them. Many such students are already planning to attend an LDS missionary and so don't go on the college visits. Some coordinators noted that many of the students don't attend college visits because they don't want to miss sports practice.

A few coordinators pointed out particular college campuses that offered exceptionally good tours. This included Idaho State University, which offers numerous individual tracks for the students. The College of Western Idaho was also mentioned by the coordinators as one of the best tours, which included half a day at the Micron tech center and half focusing on academics. The coordinators said these campus tours were the biggest hit among the students.

College and career awareness activities were also mentioned by most coordinators and counselors as effective, and extremely important when the students are in eleventh grade. While some coordinators cited tutoring as effective, others disagreed, saying the students viewed it as academic probation. Several coordinators also observed the importance of financial literacy for students and parents, given the grade levels of the students they serve.

Some coordinators observed that the Aspire assessment has been very beneficial. However, one noted that, because they have so many tests at their school, the test was made optional, so just the high-achieving students took it. Another coordinator administered the Aspire the first day they were allowed to test, so all the students took it before taking the other tests. ACT testing was also identified by some coordinators and counselors among the most effective services.

Many of the coordinators greatly valued the professional development opportunities where they could collaborate and share best practices. Several stated how much they appreciated such occasions that allowed them to glean ideas from others on the successes of their programs. Another coordinator pointed out that the professional development over the past few years has been very valid. She observed that they are continuing to learn things that help them improve the program, and they are not going into their fifth year getting stagnant in any way. One school administrator also commented on the positive impact of the GEAR UP PD, noting that he witnessed the training excite his guidance counselor, who was eager to impact their student success with the knowledge he gained through the GEAR UP training.

One coordinator explained that her parent participation in Parent Night increased substantially this past year (from 15 to 80 in her school). This was a *mini college fair* with lots of college reps attending. She observed that, as juniors, the students were more serious about the events.

As part of their service learning activities, one coordinator mentioned they collaborated with Sources of Strength, and Idaho-based suicide prevention program. They held a *Fill Your Cup* activity featuring hot chocolate and presentations on suicide awareness, how to be a good role model, and positive interventions. She said it was very well-received and three-quarters of the students attended. Another coordinator also described their service learning program as very effective. Their high school GEAR UP students go to the elementary school and read to the

students. He said the high school kids really get into it, as do the elementary kids, and it has been very powerful.

Some mentioned the effectiveness of the individual planning sessions, noting it is a good platform to talk with students about financial aid, testing, college awareness, scholarships, and goal-setting. One counselor stated that such sessions are the most effective service of all.

Several coordinators observed that the STEM tutoring and/or exposure to STEM careers and activities has been very valuable at their schools. One held a science demo night for students and their families that was very successful; their high school and university chemistry and physics departments conducted a variety of experiments. They were shocked with the high turnout, and everyone loved it.

### Least effective services

The large majority of the coordinators and one counselor identified the Dependable Strengths program as the least effective service, considering the amount of time and effort it takes. They note that the biggest problem is finding the time in the classroom. The teachers don't want to give up that much of their class time with students. Further, many of them agreed that, while completing it as a paper curriculum is very time-consuming, the students really don't like completing it through CIS since they are so sick of CIS. They also observe that many of the students don't remember completing one the prior year, and so many students are new to GEAR UP that year and need to complete the first part just to catch up. Some of the newer coordinators explained that they haven't been working on Dependable Strengths with their students because they have not yet had the training on it. Some coordinators observed that Dependable Strengths seems below the maturity level of the students, or that they are just tired of it now that they're older. Another coordinator noted that the group format of Dependable Strengths makes it difficult/intimidating for students to "share their success" in small groups as part of that process.

A few coordinators mentioned service learning as a GEAR UP service that has not been very effective. Others noted that service learning has been part of their school activities long before GEAR UP, so it hasn't really changed what they do at all.

Some coordinators cited financial literacy among the less-effective services. Others observed that their schools have a financial literacy class so the students are already learning this. One coordinator explained that she had someone come in and present all of the financial literacy information. She noted that it was really good and the students liked it. Two coordinators mentioned that their students participated in *Stash Your Cash*, which was very good.

One coordinator mentioned that, while tutoring is important, it is difficult to implement in a manner that is beneficial to all students. Another noted that their tutoring program is faltering and has low participation because there is another tutoring program on their campus that is already well-established that many students go to.

## Suggested changes

The majority of the coordinators requested that Aspire testing be held earlier – possibly January – given the myriad of testing the students endure every spring. Also, because several of them don't have enough computers for all their students to take the Aspire online, they suggested a mac-compatible version so the kids can take it on their iPads. A few coordinators suggested that PD be offered to instruct the coordinators on how the Aspire assessment results may be interpreted and used. They stated that they would like to show the teachers at their schools how the Aspire results may be used to inform them of student needs. Several coordinators and one counselor also suggested more coordination between GEAR UP and the state regarding testing, so students don't have to take the ACT and the SAT. One school administrator suggested less testing for sophomores.

Several coordinators and a few school administrators, as well as the GEAR UP Idaho leadership team believed the program should do more branding so the students, teachers, and parents are more aware of what GEAR UP is about. Most of the coordinators agreed that the parents don't know what they do or what GEAR UP is. Some suggested that parents should be told that, without a GEAR UP program, their child would not get to visit a college campus, etc.

Many coordinators observed that there ought to be more communication among the coordinators and/or sharing of best practices. Similarly, several of the school administrators were interested in sharing challenges and best practices among other administrators of profoundly rural schools. One coordinator suggested more use of the Edmodo system, possibly requiring coordinators to submit a monthly report on Edmodo of plans, etc., to force more collaboration among coordinators. A few coordinators wanted to have more interaction with other programs to learn about and duplicate their successes. One suggested more sharing of resources (such as forms and newsletters) with one another and the rest of the group informed her that Edmodo currently serves as such a platform for such sharing out among staff.

Given the strong negative opinion the majority of the coordinators held for the Dependable Strengths exercise, many suggested that it be excluded as a service from this point forward.

Several coordinators had suggestions for changes to the annual surveys. This included changes to the wording of some items, the survey format, instructions, and administration practices. Similarly, several coordinators took issue with the pre- and post-activity surveys. This included changes to the format, questions, and frequency of administering the survey.

A few coordinators suggested more flexibility in modifying their program plan. They noted that sometimes great ideas for services or activities arise after they had finalized their annual plan and they aren't able to modify it, so they were unable to incorporate the new service/activity.

The GEAR UP Idaho leadership team would like to connect with more college ready groups and organizations to stay better informed of college access related topics outside of the Idaho State Department of Education.

## GEAR UP Idaho's greatest strengths

Many of the coordinators observed that providing opportunities for the staff to collaborate and share best practices has been a major program strength. Some observed that it often helps resolve issues for them to brainstorm ideas or talk with others about areas they struggle with.

A large majority of the coordinators and counselors observed that the overall GEAR UP mission and what they are all working towards has continued to be a major program strength. Similarly, many noted providing resources and guidance, and disseminating college and career readiness and financial aid information to students and their parents as a program strength. Others cited creating a college-going culture, and getting students involved in challenging coursework. One counselor mentioned building relationships with the kids for one-on-one college planning.

Several GEAR UP Idaho coordinators, counselors, and school administrators identified the GEAR UP staff at the local and state levels among the grant's greatest strengths. The GEAR UP leadership team also cited the quality of the program staff as a major strength to the program.

Most of the school administrators and one coordinator noted that, without GEAR UP Idaho resources and staff, they wouldn't be able to provide such services for their students. The GEAR UP Idaho leadership team also observed the critical role of the site coordinator as the on campus advocate for the program. Many school administrators spoke of the strong positive working relationship they each have with their site coordinator, and the confidence they have in the GEAR UP staff on their campus.

Some coordinators also mentioned the program's ability to create a college-going culture. They noted that, before, it was just the school counselor's responsibility to talk with the kids about college. Now they hear about college from teachers, in Advisory, etc; it is part of the culture.

One coordinator observed the flexibility in how they implement services as a strength, explaining that, given the diversity among their schools, they can adapt to make it work in their school, accomplishing the same thing in different ways.

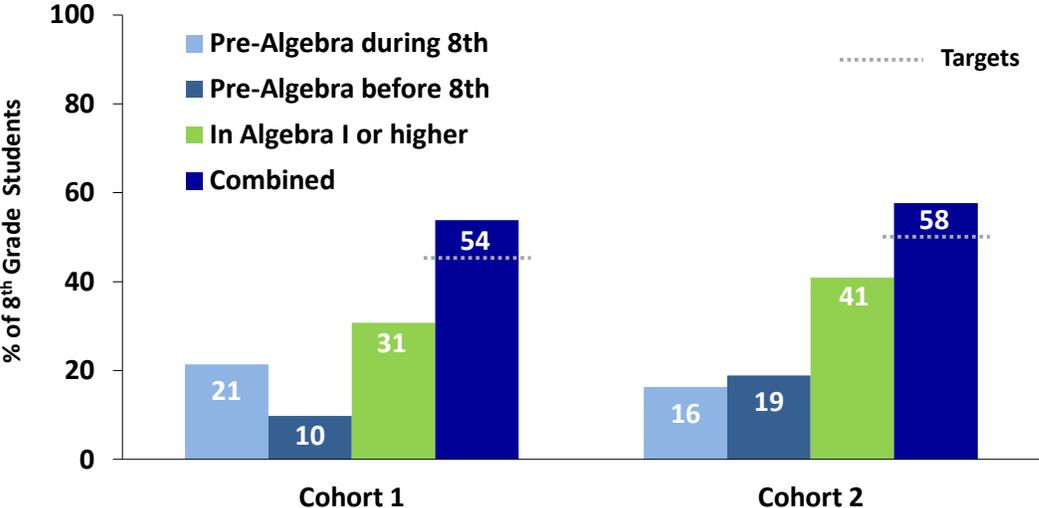
# Objectives, Activities, and Results

## Goal 1: To Increase Academic Performance and Preparation for Post-Secondary Education.

Measure 1.1: Percent of GEAR UP students successfully completing crucial academic milestones will increase 15/10/10% annually (Pre-Algebra / Algebra 1 / two years beyond Algebra 1) in relation to the comparison group.

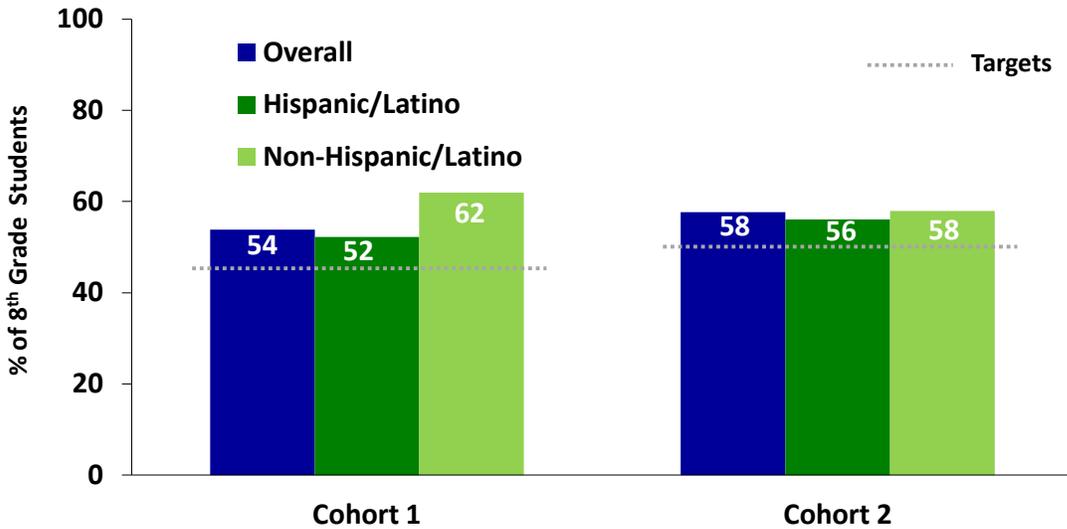
The first part of this measure is defined as the percent of eighth grade students who earned a C- or better during the final term of the school year in Pre-Algebra during or prior to eighth grade, or who were enrolled in a course higher than Pre-Algebra during eighth grade. As seen in Figure 2, 54% of Cohort 1 students and 58% of Cohort 2 students successfully completed Pre-Algebra by the end of eighth grade. The program's targets for this measure, which were developed based on examination of outcomes prior to grant implementation, were 45% for Cohort 1 and 50% for Cohort 2. Given this, program outcomes exceeded the targeted rates for each cohort. Examination of how students were achieving this rate shows that in eighth grade, most of the students who did so were enrolled in Algebra I, suggesting Pre-Algebra completion occurs more commonly prior to eighth grade. Note that data prior to eighth grade was not available for all students, which may explain why the percent shown completing Pre-Algebra prior to eighth grade is notably lower than the percent enrolled in Algebra I during eighth grade.

Figure 2. Pre-Algebra completion rates by the end of eighth grade



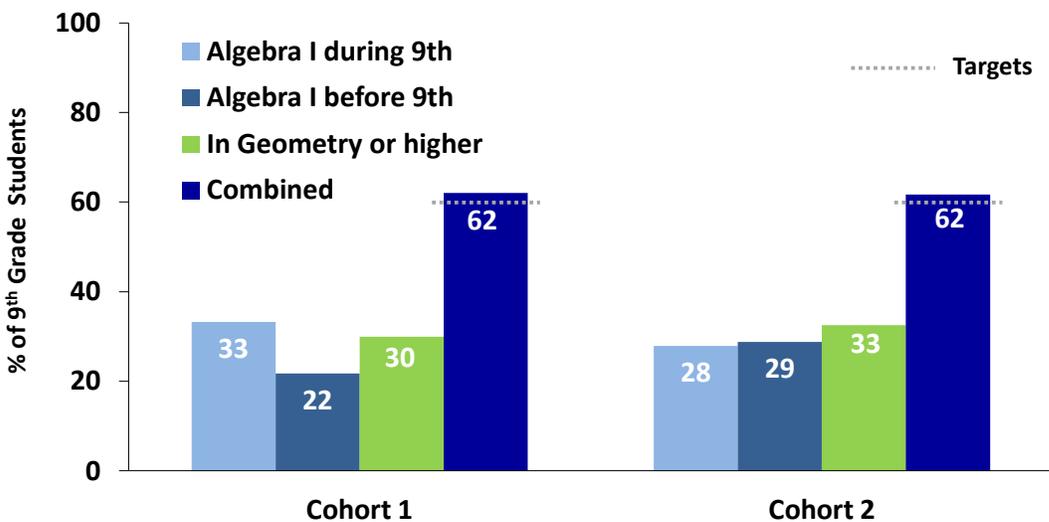
Rates were also examined separately by student ethnicity. Hispanic/Latino students in Cohort 1 were 10% less likely than their non-Hispanic/Latino counterparts to successfully complete Pre-Algebra by the end of eighth grade, though this difference was much smaller among Cohort 2 students. Both groups met the target rates, shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Pre-Algebra completion rates by the end of eighth grade, by ethnicity



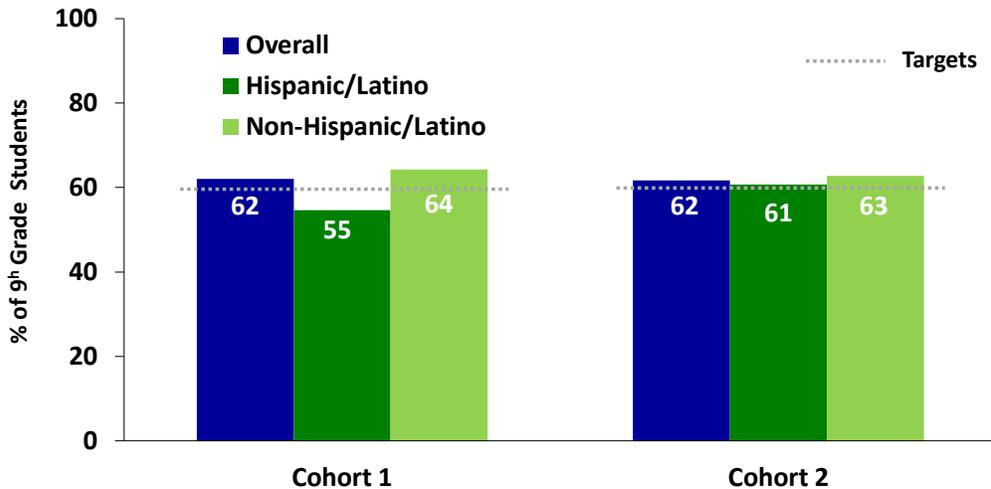
Among ninth grade students, 62% in each cohort successfully completed Algebra I by the end of ninth grade, exceeding the established target of 60% for each group. Figure 4 shows that among Cohort 1 students, one-third completed the course during ninth grade, while among Cohort 2 students, one-third were enrolled in a higher course during ninth grade.

Figure 4. Algebra I completion rates by the end of ninth grade



As with Pre-Algebra, rates of Algebra I completion were examined separately by student ethnicity, presented in Figure 5. Hispanic/Latino students in Cohort 1 were 9% less likely than their non-Hispanic/Latino counterparts to successfully complete Algebra I by the end of ninth grade, and again Cohort showed a much smaller difference across the groups.

Figure 5. Algebra I completion rates by the end of ninth grade, by ethnicity



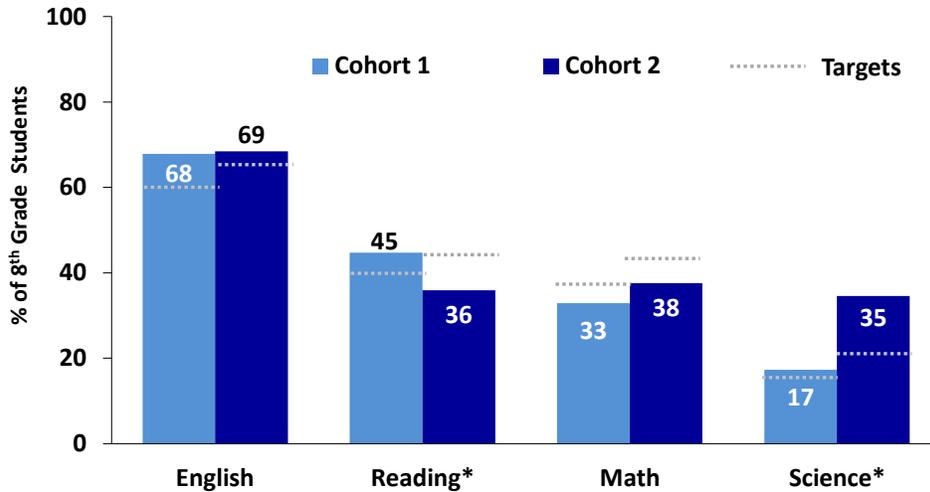
Cohort 1 students have completed tenth grade; their progress towards completing two courses above Algebra I (typically Algebra II) by the end of twelfth grade was examined. Among Cohort 1 tenth grade students, 10% have already completed Algebra II, and another 13% have completed Geometry, suggesting progress toward this goal. Targets were not set for this measure, and will be examined among graduating classes prior to Cohort 1 to understand comparison rates of this achievement.

Measure 1.2: Percent of students on-track for academic success in grades 8, 10, and 11, and prepared for college will increase 5% annually in relation to the comparison group.

Approximately 86% of Cohort 1 students and 68% of Cohort 2 students took EXPLORE tests during the eighth grade. Figure 6 presents students' EXPLORE college readiness rates by cohort along with target rates for each subject. Both cohorts showed college readiness rates which exceeded the target in English and science, but did not meet the targets in math. Cohort 1 met the target in reading, though Cohort 2 did not.

Note that reading and science EXPLORE benchmarks were revised by ACT during the year that Cohort 2 participated, resulting in percentages that differ substantially from those of the previous cohort and from the data used to set targets. Among Cohort 1 students, who took the EXPLORE prior to the benchmark changes (and for whom the targets are applicable), college readiness rates exceeded the target rate for reading, English, and science, but did not meet the target for math (5% below target).

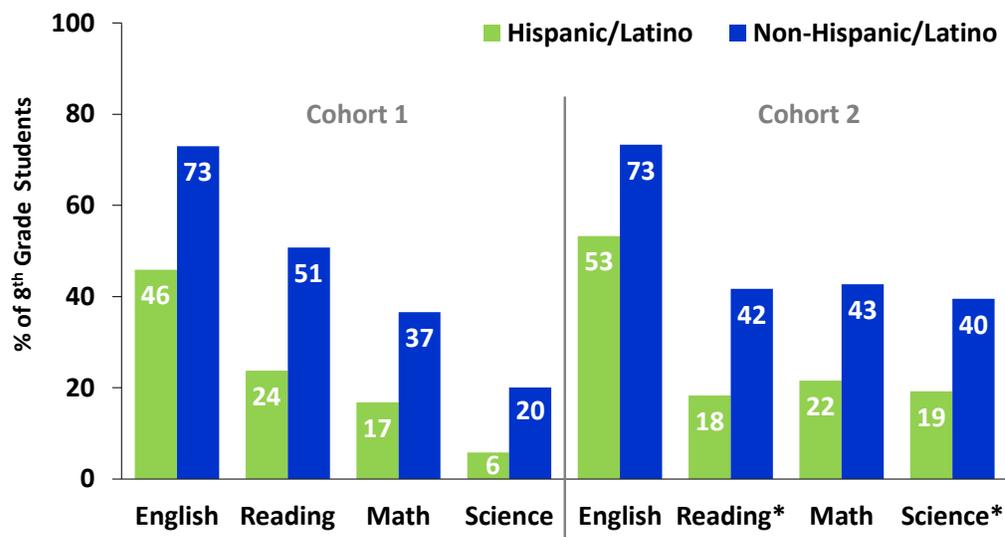
Figure 6. EXPLORE college readiness rates, by cohort



\*Benchmark scores were changed in Fall 2013, impacting Cohort 2 college readiness rates in reading and science.

Figure 7 presents college readiness rates for both cohorts by ethnicity. A large disparity exists between Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino students in all subjects, with Hispanic/Latino students showing substantially lower rates than non-Hispanic/Latino students. The disparity between groups was lower among Cohort 2 students in English and reading, but higher in math and science.

Figure 7. EXPLORE college readiness rates, by cohort and ethnicity

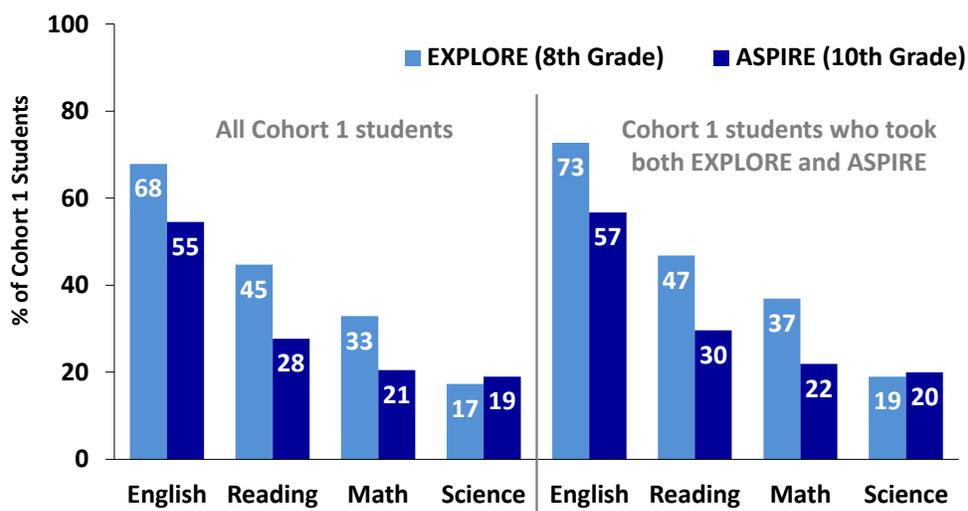


\*Benchmark scores were changed in Fall 2013, impacting Cohort 2 college readiness rates in reading and science.

Cohort 1 students in tenth grade during 2014-15 participated in the new Aspire test from ACT, Inc. Aspire is replacing EXPLORE and PLAN and can be administered as early as third grade through tenth grade (after which students would take the ACT test). Idaho GEAR UP students have taken both the EXPLORE and Aspire tests. College readiness rates for Cohort 1 students on EXPLORE and Aspire are presented in Figure 8.

The left side of the graph presents rates for all who took EXPLORE, and all who took Aspire. Rates on the Aspire English, reading, and math tests were all lower than they had been two years earlier on the EXPLORE test, while science college readiness was slightly higher. The right side of the graph presents rates for the subset of students who were part of Idaho GEAR UP in both eighth and tenth grades, and took both tests. More than 1,100 Cohort 1 students took both EXPLORE and Aspire, slightly more than half of all Cohort 1 tenth graders. Among these students, both EXPLORE and Aspire college readiness rates were higher than those of the eighth and tenth graders overall.

Figure 8. Cohort 1 EXPLORE and Aspire college readiness rates



**Measure 1.3:** Percent of students who enroll in AP, IB, or dual enrollment courses will increase 5% annually in relation to the comparison group.

This measure is not yet applicable for GEAR UP Idaho students, as such courses are typically taken during eleventh and twelfth grades. Approximately 2% of Cohort 1 tenth graders have taken at least one AP course.

**Measure 1.4:** Percent of students who demonstrate necessary academic preparation for college will increase 5% annually in relation to the comparison group.

This measure will be assessed using the following three indicators.

- a. The percent of students on track for graduation at the end of each grade (defined as earning a C or better in all courses in ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades).

Courses resulting in a grade of A through F are included in this examination of students earning a successful grade in all classes taken during ninth through eleventh grades. Both cohorts of ninth graders exceeded targeted rates of course completion to be defined as *on-track to graduate*, as shown in Table 2, as did Cohort 1 tenth graders. , When these data are disaggregated by ethnic group, however, a substantial disparity is seen among students. The disparity is less severe among tenth graders served to date than among both cohorts of ninth graders.

Table 2. Percentage of students on-track for graduation, by cohort

| School Year | Cohort               | Targets | Actual | Hisp/Lat | Non-Hisp/Lat |
|-------------|----------------------|---------|--------|----------|--------------|
| 2013-14     | Cohort 1: 9th Grade  | 38%     | 48%    | 32%      | 53%          |
| 2014-15     | Cohort 2: 9th Grade  | 43%     | 48%    | 32%      | 52%          |
|             | Cohort 1: 10th Grade | 45%     | 46%    | 35%      | 49%          |

- b. The percent of students who take the PLAN/PSAT by the end of tenth grade and the ACT/SAT by the end of eleventh grade.

Cohort 1 targets for this indicator were set for 86% of students to take the PLAN/PSAT by the end of tenth grade and 58% of students to take the ACT or SAT by the end of eleventh grade. Cohort 2 targets were 5% higher than those set for Cohort 1. The PLAN is no longer offered and PSAT is not commonly taken among Idaho students, therefore, participation in the new ACT Aspire assessment is reported. Among Cohort 1 tenth graders, 65% took the Aspire during 2014-15. Examination of these rates by school revealed that 11 of the 26 schools serving Cohort 1 tenth graders met the target rate of 86%. All but three of the 26 schools had participation rates of at least 70%.

- c. The percent of students with an unweighted GPA of at least 3.0 by the end of eleventh grade.

This indicator is not yet applicable. Preliminary examination of any term GPA on record for students in ninth and tenth grades to date show that 39% of Cohort 1 ninth graders had achieved a GPA of 3.0 or higher; this figure increased to 49% among Cohort 2 ninth graders. Cohort 1 students also showed an increase to 47% during tenth grade.

**Measure 1.5:** Percent of students who meet proficiency on ISAT tests will increase 3% annually in relation to the comparison group.

The Idaho Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT) were administered to students in grades three through ten throughout Idaho during the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years. Both seventh and eighth grade students in Cohort 1 exceeded the target rates for all tests, and Cohort 2 seventh grade students met or exceeded the target rates for all but the math test. Additionally, rates for Cohort 1 students exceed those of the comparison group for all tests except eighth grade math, while rates for Cohort 2 students were higher than all comparison group rates except seventh grade science. Figures 9 and 10 present these results. More detailed information on GEAR UP Idaho students' ISAT proficiency rates is available in the *GEAR UP Idaho Biennial Report 2011/12-2012/13*.

Figure 9. Seventh grade ISAT proficiency

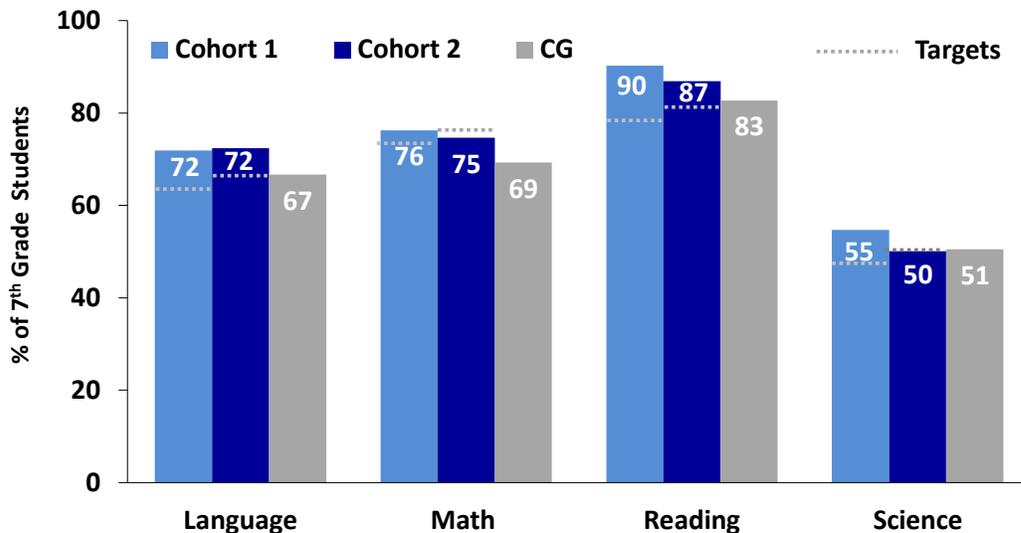
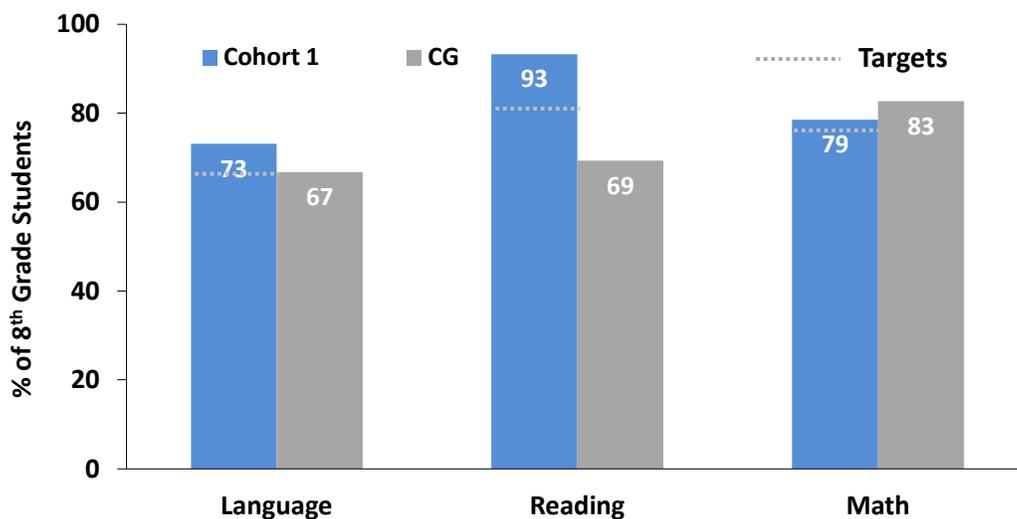
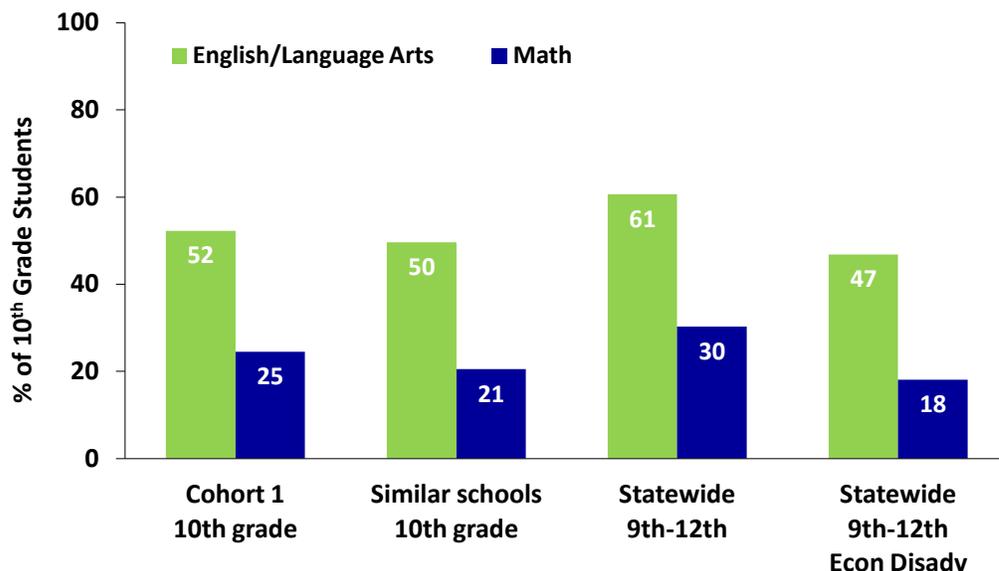


Figure 10. Eighth grade ISAT proficiency



During the 2014-15 school year, the state transitioned its assessment tools. A new ISAT assessment program was developed by Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) Consortium, and was administered to GEAR UP Idaho ninth and tenth graders during Spring 2015. In order to gauge GEAR UP Idaho student outcomes, comparison data from ninth and tenth grade students at demographically similar schools in Idaho was examined, and available statewide proficiency rates are presented. Note that statewide rates are available only for all high school grade levels combined. Figure 11 presents proficiency rates in English/language arts (ELA) and math. GEAR UP Idaho tenth grade students achieved proficiency in both ELA and math at higher rates compared with tenth graders at similar schools and compared with economically disadvantaged high school students statewide, but lower than statewide rates overall.

Figure 11. ISAT SBA 2014-15 proficiency rates



## Goal 2: To Increase the Rate of High School Graduation and Participation in Post-Secondary Education of Participating Students.

Measure 2.1: Average daily attendance will be 3% higher than that of the comparison group.

Progress toward this measure is assessed for high school years only. Attendance data is obtained directly from school districts, with varying levels of ability to provide timely student-level attendance data. As of the time of this report, attendance data was available for 40% of Cohort 1 ninth graders, 26% of Cohort 2 ninth graders, and 26% of Cohort 1 tenth graders. Attendance rates calculated from this data show attendance rates of 91%, 96%, and 95%, respectively. Program staff are in the process of collecting attendance data on the comparison group as well, and will report findings in later evaluation reports.

Measure 2.2: Percent of students on track for graduation each year will increase 5% annually in relation to the comparison group.

Note that this measure uses the same definition as the first component of Measure 1.4.a, therefore, complete results are presented within that section. Targets were exceeded for this measure among Cohort 1 and 2 ninth graders and Cohort 1 tenth graders.

Measure 2.3: Percent of students promoted on time to the next grade level will be 95% or higher for each grade level.

Nearly all students in both cohorts have been promoted to the next grade each year, defined as students enrolled during two school years and in a higher grade during the second of the two years, and presented in Table 3. Note that there is a possibility that some students who were at risk of non-promotion either transferred to a non-GEAR UP school or dropped out of school; these students would not have enrollment data for the second of the two years examined, and so are not included in the analysis.

Table 3. Percent of students promoted

| Promotion    | Cohort 1 | Cohort 2 |
|--------------|----------|----------|
| 7th to 8th   | 99.5     | 100.0    |
| 8th to 9th   | 99.4     | 100.0    |
| 9th to 10th  | 99.7     | 99.9     |
| 10th to 11th | 98.1     | --       |

Measure 2.4: Percent of students who graduate from high school will increase 3% annually in relation to the comparison group.

This measure is not yet applicable. No targets were set for this measure because the Idaho State Department of Education (SDE) method for determining graduation rates was modified in 2013-14. Future progress will be assessed based on a retrospective comparison group.

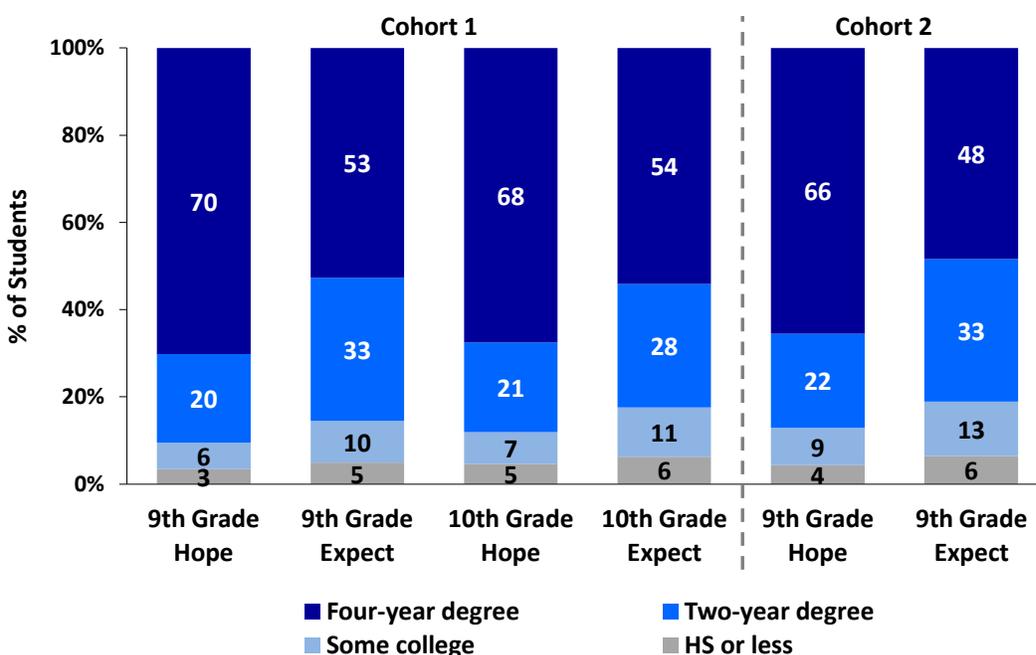
**Measure 2.5:** Percent of students who apply for postsecondary programs will increase 6% annually in relation to the comparison group.

This measure is not yet applicable.

**Measure 2.6:** Percent enrolled in college will increase 3% annually in relation to the comparison group.

This measure is not yet applicable. In order to gauge progress in this area, survey data was examined regarding the level of education that high school students indicated they hoped to obtain and that they expected to obtain. As shown in Figure 12, the vast majority of all students hoped and expected to obtain either a two- or four-year college degree. All students were more likely to aspire to obtain a four-year college degree than to expect to do so, and more likely to expect to obtain a two-year degree than to aspire to do so. When comparing the same grade level across the two cohorts, the college degree aspirations and expectations of Cohort 2 students were somewhat lower than those of Cohort 1 students.

Figure 12. Students' educational aspirations & expectations, by cohort



**Measure 2.7:** Percent of students who placed in college-level math and English will increase 5% annually in relation to the comparison group.

**Measure 2.8:** Percent of students who are on track to graduate college will increase 4% annually in relation to the comparison group.

These measures are not yet applicable.

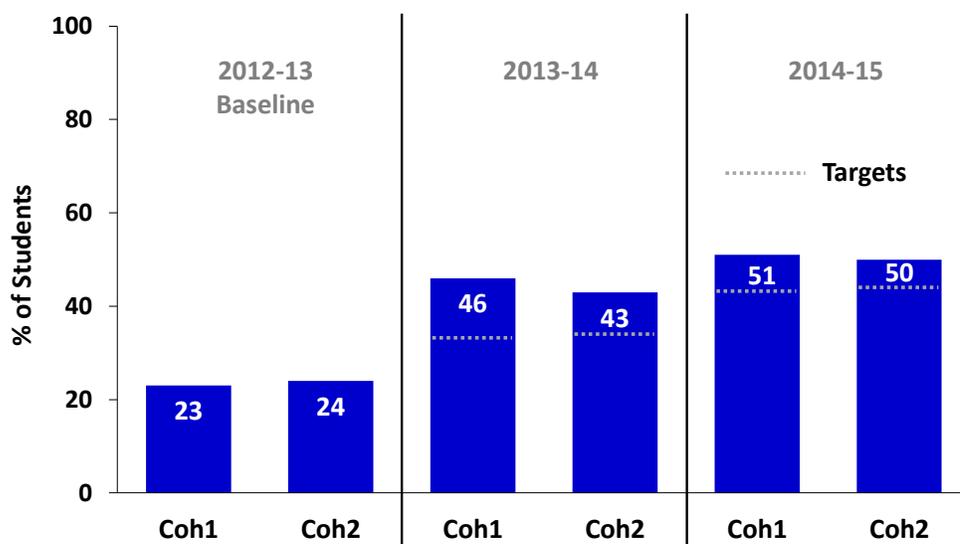
**Goal 3: To Increase Educational Expectations for Participating Students and Student and Family Knowledge of Postsecondary Options, Preparation, and Financing.**

**Measure 3.1:** Percent of students who demonstrate knowledge of financial aid and the costs and benefits of pursuing postsecondary education will increase 10% each year.

Figure 13 shows students' self-reported knowledge of financial aid and the costs and benefits of postsecondary education during the last three survey administrations. Overall, both cohorts exceeded target rates, which were determined by the baseline rates from the first time the question was asked. Cohort 1 students were slightly more likely than Cohort 2 students to indicate that they possessed knowledge of this topic. Although targets were met, note that 2014-15 rates did not increase 10% from the previous year.

Additional differences were observed between the cohorts according to race/ethnic group (not shown). With the exception of Cohort 1 eighth graders, White/Caucasian students were more likely than Hispanic/Latino students to report having knowledge about financial aid and the costs and benefits of college.

Figure 13. Students' perceived knowledge of financial aid & costs/benefits of college\*

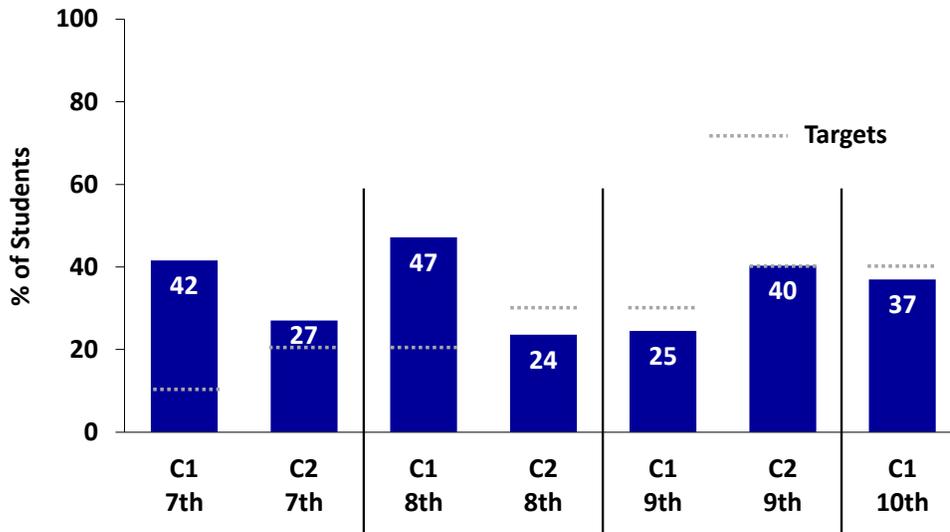


**\*Notes:** Percentages for 2012-13 reflect the proportion of students who chose a response of 4 or 5 in response to the following item: *On a scale of 1-5, to what extent are you knowledgeable about financial aid and the costs and benefits to you in pursuing postsecondary education?* In subsequent years this is asked as three separate questions; the percent of respondents answering Yes to ALL three is reported.

**Measure 3.2:** Percent of parents of GEAR UP students who actively engage in activities associated with academic preparation for college will increase 10% each year.

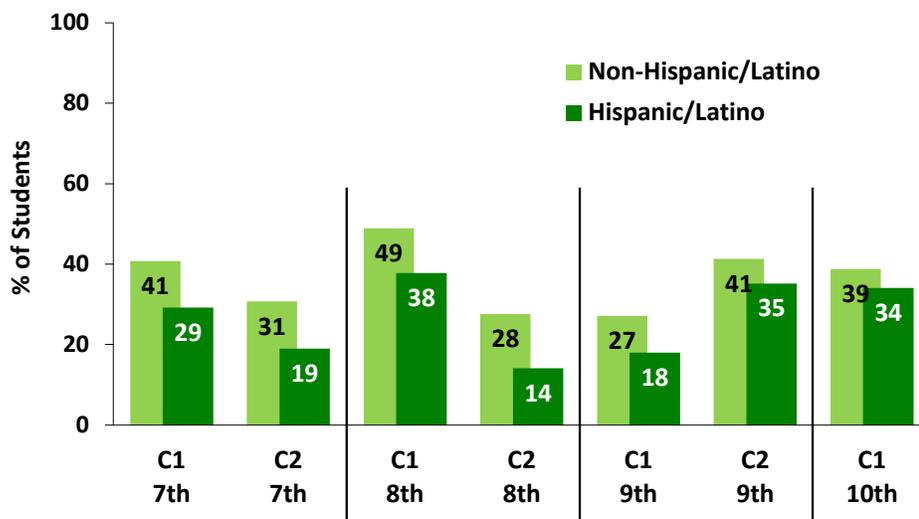
Figure 14 presents the percent of students who had a parent or guardian actively participate in GEAR UP activities. Results across the years are mixed: parent participation rates surpassed targets among seventh graders and Cohort 1 eighth graders, though fell short of the target among Cohort 2 eighth graders. Among ninth graders, only Cohort 2 students met the parent participation target, while Cohort 1 tenth graders did not meet the target.

Figure 14. Percent of students with active parent participation in GEAR UP services



Ethnic differences in parent participation are shown in Figure 15. Among seventh and eighth grade students, there is a substantial difference in parent participation rates between Hispanic/Latino and non-Hispanic/Latino students. However, this disparity diminishes beginning in ninth grade, though parents of non-Hispanic students were still more likely than parents of Hispanic students to actively participate in GEAR UP activities.

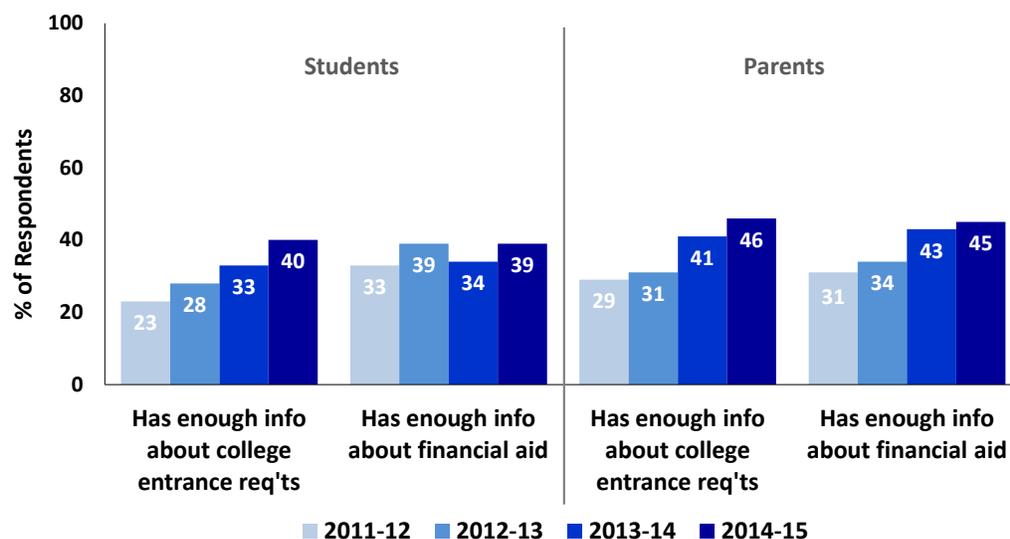
Figure 15. Percent of students with parent participation, by ethnicity



Measure 3.3: Students' and families' self-reported knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing will increase 10% each year measured (biennially).

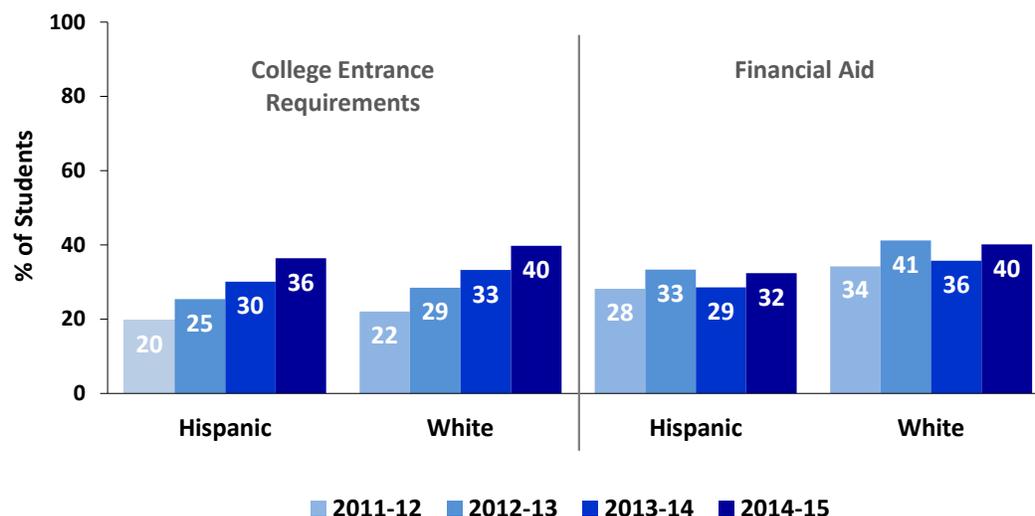
Figure 16 shows the percentage of students and parents who reported that they have sufficient information about college entrance requirements and financial aid. Note that, although targets were established in the project proposal for this measure, they were based on different questions asked of similar students due to ED revisions in survey questions. Therefore, the targets do not apply to these survey items. Instead, the GEAR UP Idaho 2011-12 survey responses are used as baseline figures. Percentages for both students and parents have increased every year of the program but one (2012-13 students reporting on financial aid), though neither group has met its respective target (10% increase measured biennially). In general, students and parents were more likely to indicate that they have adequate information about financial aid than about college entrance requirements.

Figure 16. Percentage of students and parents with perceived adequate information about college and financial aid



Data on students reporting to have enough information about college entrance requirements and financial aid is disaggregated by ethnic group in Figure 17. Note that the ethnicities shown reflect students who marked only one demographic category, though they had the option to indicate more than one. Overall, White students were somewhat more likely to report having higher levels of knowledge about financial aid than about college entrance requirements, while findings for Hispanic/Latino students were mixed. However, for both groups, although the figures for the perceived adequacy of financial aid information fluctuated each year, those for the perceived adequacy of information about college entrance requirements consistently increased every year.

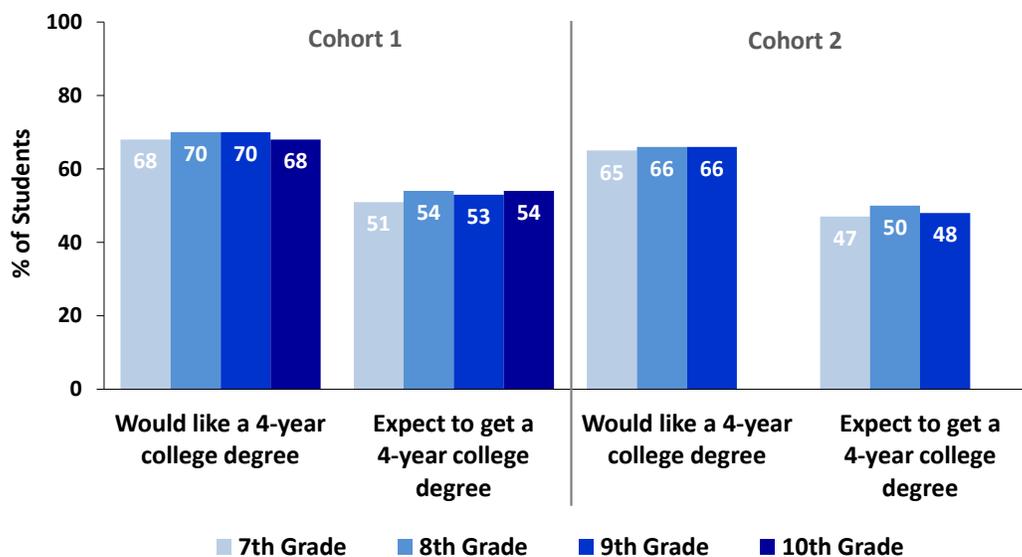
Figure 17. Percentage of students with perceived adequate information about college and financial aid, by race/ethnicity



**Measure 3.4:** Students' educational aspirations/expectations of earning a four-year college degree will increase 10% each year.

Students' aspirations and expectations to earn a four-year college degree are presented in Figure 18. Note that Cohort 2 students have not yet completed tenth grade. Baseline rates of students reporting to want to attain a four-year degree are 68% and 65% for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, respectively. Students were more likely to indicate that they would like to earn a four-year college degree than to expect to do so. In addition, Cohort 1 students were more likely than Cohort 2 students to indicate that they aspired and expected to obtain a four-year college degree. The target for this measure is a 10% increase in these figures from year to year. Target rates were not met, to date.

Figure 18. Students' aspirations & expectations to earn a four-year college degree or higher, by cohort



The following two figures present students' educational aspirations and expectations by cohort and ethnicity. As discussed previously, the ethnic groups shown reflect those students who reported only one ethnic group. Among White students, rates of students who wanted to attain a four-year degree were slightly *lower* among Cohort 2 students than those in Cohort 1, counter to the goal of increasing 10% each year. Similar results are evident among Hispanic students with the exception of ninth graders.

Both Hispanic/Latino and White students were more likely to report that they would like to obtain a four-year college degree or higher than that they expected to do so. However, both aspirations and expectations to earn a four-year college degree were substantially lower for Hispanic/Latino students in comparison with their White counterparts.

Figure 19. Students' *aspirations* to earn a four-year college degree, by cohort and ethnicity

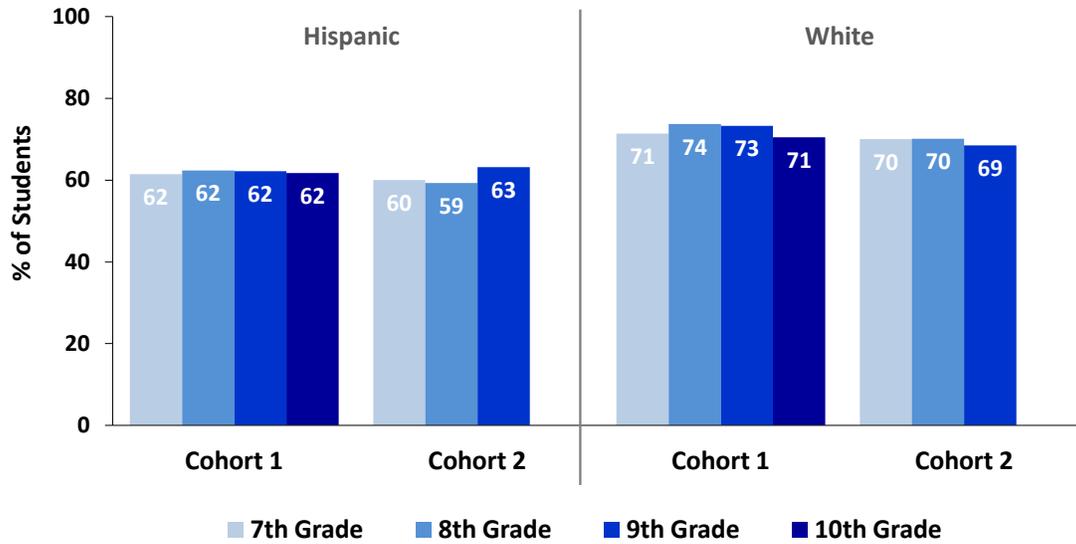
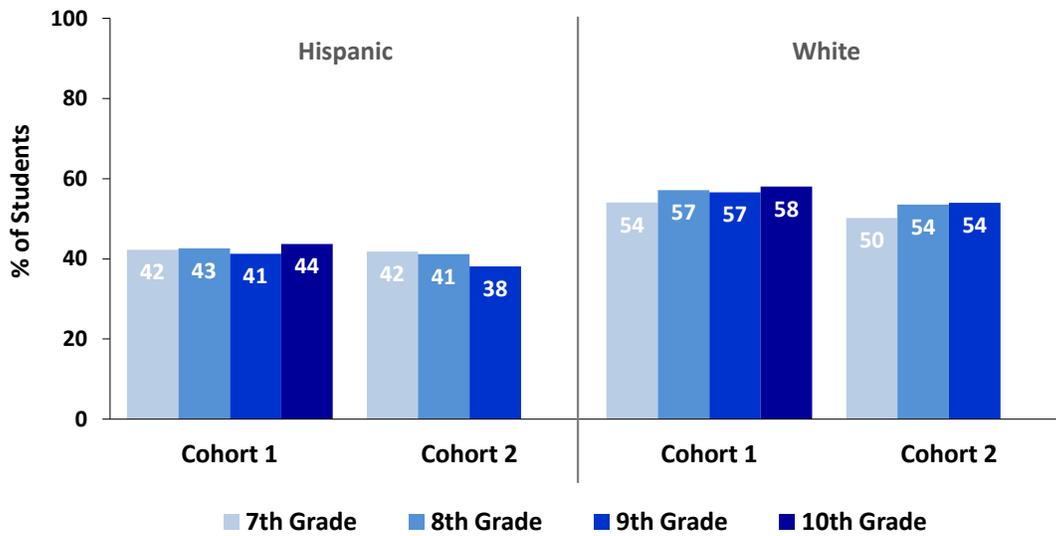


Figure 20. Students' *expectations* to earn a four-year college degree, by cohort and ethnicity



# Conclusions

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Findings from the present biennial evaluation illustrate the solid progress GEAR UP Idaho has made towards its grant goals, to date. Results of the study are summarized below, according to their corresponding program measures. Note that only those measures currently applicable to the GEAR UP Idaho students are presented. Additional information is also presented, where relevant.

## **Qualitative Evaluation Findings**

In the fall of 2015, a qualitative evaluation of GEAR UP Idaho was undertaken to gain a better understanding of the program context and insight into program processes. In total, 36 program stakeholders provided feedback as part of the evaluation, including coordinators, counselors, principals, superintendents, and the director and regional coordinator. The information was gathered via a series of in-person focus groups, phone interviews, and written responses to the focus group questions.

Findings from the qualitative evaluation indicated few changes to GEAR UP Idaho staff roles and responsibilities over the past year. Also, although most students and school staff seem to be familiar with the program, parents were viewed as much less knowledgeable about it. By far, the greatest challenge voiced by the stakeholders was increasing parent participation. The most effective service voiced most often was campus visits, and Dependable Strengths was cited most often among the least effective services. The most frequently cited suggested changes pertained to the ACT/Aspire test administration processes and eliminating the Dependable Strengths project from their program plans. When asked about GEAR UP Idaho's greatest strengths, the most common responses were the program staff, sharing best practices, and working towards such a beneficial overarching goal of helping prepare more students to enroll, and succeed in college.

## **Goal 1: Increase Academic Performance and Preparation for Post-Secondary Education.**

Measure 1.1: Percent of GEAR UP students successfully completing crucial academic milestones will increase 15/10/10% annually (Pre-Algebra / Algebra 1 / two years beyond Algebra 1) in relation to the comparison group.

Over half of all Cohort 1 students (51%) and Cohort 2 students (56%) successfully completed Pre-Algebra by the end of eighth grade, thus surpassing the target goals of 45% and 50%, respectively. Additionally, nearly two thirds of Cohort 1 students (62%) successfully completed Algebra I by the end of ninth grade, therefore exceeding the target of 60% for this measure as well.

Examination of these outcomes by ethnicity revealed that Hispanic/Latino students in both cohorts were less likely than their non-Hispanic/Latino counterparts to successfully complete Pre-Algebra or Algebra. This disparity in rates ranged from 3% to 13% for the two subgroups. Additional examination of these outcomes also showed differences in Pre-Algebra and Algebra success rates by gender, with females more likely than males to successfully complete the courses (with rates differing by 7% to 8%).

Among ninth grade students, 62% in each cohort successfully completed Algebra I by the end of ninth grade, exceeding the established target of 60% for each group.

Measure 1.2: Percent of students on-track for academic success in grades 8, 10, and 11, and prepared for college will increase 5% annually in relation to the comparison group.

Eighth grade EXPLORE rates for both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 students exceeded the targets set for English and Science college readiness. Both cohorts fell short of the target for Math by 5%. Cohort 1 students also surpassed the Reading target goal. Note that ACT revised the cut scores associated with benchmarks for the EXPLORE Reading and Science tests during the year that Cohort 2 participated. Cohort 2 students taking the test prior to the change in benchmarks had exceeded the Reading target, though Cohort 2 students taking the EXPLORE after the benchmark adjustments did not meet the Reading target goal.

Further examination of these EXPLORE outcomes by ethnicity revealed substantial disparities, such that college readiness rates for Hispanic/Latino GEAR UP students in both cohorts were substantially lower than those of non-Hispanic/Latino students. These gaps ranged from 14% to 27%.

Cohort 1 tenth grade students also took the new ACT Aspire test. College readiness rates on English, reading, and math tests were all lower than they were two years earlier on the EXPLORE test, while science rates were slightly higher. Further analyses revealed that, those students who had taken both the EXPLORE in eighth grade and Aspire in tenth grade achieved higher rates in comparison with eighth and tenth grade GEAR UP Idaho students taking each test overall.

Measure 1.4: Percent of students who demonstrate necessary academic preparation for college will increase 5% annually in relation to the comparison group.

This measure is assessed using the following indicators.

- a. The percent of students on track for graduation at the end of each grade (defined as earning a C or better in all courses in ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades).

Both cohorts of ninth graders exceeded targeted rates of course completion to be defined as *on-track to graduate*, as did Cohort 1 tenth graders. When these data are disaggregated by ethnic group, however, a substantial disparity is seen among students.

- b. The percent of students who take the PLAN/PSAT by the end of tenth grade and the ACT/SAT by the end of eleventh grade.

The PLAN is no longer offered and PSAT is not commonly taken among Idaho students, therefore, participation in the new ACT Aspire assessment is reported. Among Cohort 1 tenth graders, 65% took the Aspire during 2014-15. Examination of these rates by school revealed that nearly half of the schools (11 out of 26) serving Cohort 1 tenth graders met the target rate of 86%. All but three of the 26 schools had participation rates of at least 70%.

Measure 1.5: Percent of students who meet proficiency on ISAT tests will increase 3% annually in relation to the comparison group.

Because the ISAT had been in transition from 2012-13 until 2014-15, test outcomes are currently only available up to seventh grade for Cohort 2 students, and up to eighth grade for Cohort 1 students.

Seventh grade GEAR UP proficiency rates for Cohort 1 students surpassed the target goals for all four of the ISAT subtests, greatly exceeding those with respect to reading proficiency. Cohort 2 students met or exceeded target goals for three of the four tests, and fell just below the target for Math. Eighth grade proficiency rates for Cohort 1 exceeded the targets for each ISAT subtest, most notably with respect to the reading test (surpassing this target by 12%). Further analyses reveal consistent gaps in proficiency rates based on ethnicity, with Hispanic/Latino students rates falling below those of non-Hispanic/Latino students. This was evident for seventh and eighth grade outcomes for each ISAT test and for both cohorts.

During the 2014-15 school year, the state transitioned to ISAT assessment program, which was administered to GEAR UP Idaho ninth and tenth graders during Spring 2015. Examination of these outcomes revealed that over half of GEAR UP Idaho tenth grade students (52%) achieved proficiency in math, and one quarter achieved proficiency in ELA. These rates are higher than math and ELA proficiency rates for tenth graders at similar schools (50% and 21%, respectively) and economically disadvantaged high school students statewide (47% and 18%), but lower than statewide rates overall (61% and 30%).

**Goal 2: To Increase the Rate of High School Graduation and Participation in Post-Secondary Education of Participating Students.**

Measure 2.1: Average daily attendance will be 3% higher than that of the comparison group.

As of the time of this report, attendance data was available for 40% of Cohort 1 ninth graders, 26% of Cohort 2 ninth graders, and 26% of Cohort 1 tenth graders. Attendance rates calculated from this data show attendance rates of 91%, 96%, and 95%, respectively. Program staff are in the process of collecting attendance data on the comparison group as well, and will report findings in later evaluation reports.

Measure 2.2: Percent of students on track for graduation each year will increase 5% annually in relation to the comparison group.

Note that this measure uses the same definition as the first component of Measure 1.4.a, therefore, complete results are presented within that section. Targets were exceeded for this measure among Cohort 1 and 2 ninth graders and Cohort 1 tenth graders.

Measure 2.3: Percent of students promoted on time to the next grade level will be 95% or higher for each grade level.

Nearly all students in both cohorts (98.5% to 99.7%) promoted to the next grade during each school year. This exceeds the target goal of 95% for each grade level.

Measure 2.6: Percent enrolled in college will increase 3% annually in relation to the comparison group.

This measure is not yet applicable. In order to gauge progress in this area, survey data was examined regarding the level of education that high school students indicated they hoped to obtain and that they expected to obtain. The vast majority of all students (86% to 90%) hoped and expected to obtain either a two- or four-year college degree. All students were more likely to aspire to obtain a four-year college degree than to expect to do so, and more likely to expect to obtain a two-year degree than to aspire to do so. When comparing the same grade level across the two cohorts, the college degree aspirations and expectations of Cohort 2 students were somewhat lower than those of Cohort 1.

**Goal 3: To Increase Educational Expectations for Participating Students and Student and Family Knowledge of Postsecondary Options, Preparation and Financing.**

Measure 3.1: Percent of students who demonstrate knowledge of financial aid and the costs and benefits of pursuing postsecondary education will increase 10% each year.

Findings from both the 2013-14 and 2014-15 survey administrations show that both cohorts exceeded the target rates, which were determined from 2012-13 baseline rates. However, less than one quarter of the students reported to be knowledgeable in this manner in the baseline year, therefore, while target rates were surpassed, the latest survey findings (2014-15) showed that approximately half of the students reported to be knowledgeable of these topics. Further analyses revealed that, for all groups except Cohort 1 eighth graders, non-Hispanic/Latino students were more likely than Hispanic/Latino students to report having such knowledge.

Measure 3.2: Percent of parents of GEAR UP students who actively engage in activities associated with academic preparation for college will increase 10% each year.

In the first and second grant years, parent participation rates for both cohorts exceeded the target goal, with Cohort 1 substantially surpassing the targets. However, during the third grant year, parent participation rates dropped to approximately one quarter, thus missing the target

goals. During the fourth year, while Cohort 1 and 2 students were in tenth and ninth grade, respectively, Cohort 2 met this target goal while Cohort 1 fell just three points below the goal.

Ethnic differences in parent participation were also examined. Participation rates for parents of non-Hispanic/Latino students were substantially higher than those of parents of Hispanic/Latino students during the first three grant years (with disparities ranging from 9% to 14%). However, during the fourth grant year, when Cohorts 1 and 2 were in tenth and ninth grade, respectively, the gaps decreased markedly (reducing to 5% and 4%, respectively).

Measure 3.3: Students' and families' self-reported knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing will increase 10% each year measured (biennially).

Findings for each of the past four survey administrations show consistent increases in the percent of students and parents indicating to have enough information about college entrance requirements. Likewise, parents were increasingly more likely each year to indicate having enough information about financial aid, while this same pattern held for all but one survey administration for students (2012-13). Although the large majority of these findings reflect increases in such college topics, these gains did not reach the target goals for each year.

Examining the findings by ethnicity, non-Hispanic/Latino students are slightly more likely than Hispanic/Latino students to report having enough information on these topics. However, while the figures for knowledge of financial aid fluctuated each year for these ethnic groups, those for adequacy of information about college entrance requirements consistently increased each year.

Measure 3.4: Students' educational aspirations/expectations of earning a four-year college degree will increase 10% each year.

Findings for each of the four survey administrations reveal a large majority of Cohort 1 students (ranging from 68% to 70%) reporting that they would like to earn a four-year college degree. Cohort 2 students were somewhat less likely to report in this manner (approximately two-thirds). Consistently across survey administrations, for both cohorts, the percent of students who expect to obtain a four-year degree was lower than the percent of those who would like to obtain this educational level; slightly more than half of Cohort 1 students expect to earn a four-year degree, while approximately half of Cohort 2 students responded in this way.

Further analyses showed that, for both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 students, non-Hispanic/Latino students were more likely to both want and expect to obtain a four-year degree than were Hispanic/Latino students. In general, findings for each year of the four survey administrations, disparities between aspirations and expectations of this educational level were larger for Hispanic/Latino students (18% to 25%) in comparison with non-Hispanic/Latino students (13% to 20%). It is also noted that these ethnic disparities were more pronounced for Cohort 1 than for Cohort 2, specifically because, for each survey administration, figures for non-Hispanic/Latino students in Cohort 2 were consistently lower in comparison with their counterparts in Cohort 1 (decreases ranging from 3% to 7% each survey year). Meanwhile, figures for Hispanic/Latino students remained very similar for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2.

# Recommendations

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Given the findings from this biennial evaluation, the following recommendations are provided with the aim of continuing the progress GEAR UP Idaho has achieved, to date.

- ◆ Increase Aspire test preparation. Although the percent of GEAR UP Idaho students successfully completing Pre-Algebra and Algebra exceeded the target goals, EXPLORE Math college readiness rates fell below the targets set for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2. Additionally, GEAR UP Idaho students tested after the new ACT benchmark adjustments to the EXPLORE Reading test, rates for these students fell markedly below the target goal. Moreover, results from the Cohort 1 tenth grade 2014-15 Aspire test reveal substantial decreases in college readiness rates in comparison with the students' eighth grade EXPLORE scores from two years prior. Given this, it is suggested that greater emphasis is placed on test preparation for the subsequent Aspire assessment tests.
- ◆ Address disparities in outcomes shown for Hispanic/Latino students. Progress has been clearly made in raising the academic achievement and college going aspirations and expectations of GEAR UP Idaho students as a whole, and the large majority of target goals were met or surpassed for both cohorts. However, with respect to virtually every indicator examined in the present study, Hispanic/Latino students consistently showed lower academic achievement, aspirations, and expectations in comparison with non-Hispanic/Latino students. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that services aimed to increase academic achievement, as well as activities to increase college aspirations and expectations are examined to ensure optimal effectiveness across race/ethnic subgroups. Moreover, where appropriate, such services should be targeted to particular subgroups that would benefit most, in an effort to diminish the noted gaps.
- ◆ Explore strategies to increase parent participation. While parent service participation has increased notably during the most recent year examined in this study, the actual participation rates remain low, as pointed out by many GEAR UP Idaho program staff during the process evaluation. Thus, it is suggested that additional strategic efforts are made to increase parent involvement. Such efforts should include determining and overcoming barriers to such involvement, working with program partners or community organizations to assist with reaching parents, sharing best practices among GEAR UP Idaho program staff as well, as practitioners from other GEAR UP programs, to ensure use of the most effective techniques, and using technology in any way that can help parents receive *face time* and interaction with program staff.

- ◆ Expand services that increase postsecondary knowledge and expectations. Although the percent of students and parents who reported to have enough information about college entrance requirements and financial aid generally increased each year, still, less than half of the students and parents reported in this manner in the most recent survey administration. Additionally, approximately half of the students reported that they expect to earn a four-year degree. Therefore, it is recommended that the program increase efforts to build a college-going culture and provide related information, targeting recipients as needed to ensure more comprehensive coverage of students.