



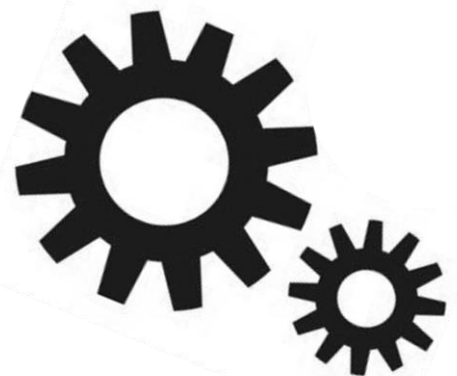
# ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT

2012/13 – 2014/15

## Hennepin Technical College GEAR UP Partnership Grant

PR No. P334A120081

Hennepin Technical College



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# Evaluation Overview

The Hennepin Technical College GEAR UP Partnership Grant (HTC GEAR UP) is structured around three primary objectives involving increasing (1) students' academic performance and preparation for college, (2) high school graduation and participation in higher education, and (3) educational expectations among students and their families. The program began serving one cohort of seventh grade students at two middle schools in Robbinsdale and Fridley, Minnesota during the 2012-13 academic year. For comparison, the present evaluation included data for a retrospective group of students at the same schools one year prior to the GEAR UP students, where appropriate. The following evaluation provides information on progress regarding the program's Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) objectives, and feedback to assist in guiding future program improvements.

Information presented in the current evaluation was compiled from data provided by participating HTC GEAR UP schools on student academic information, such as course grades, grade point averages, and absences; HTC GEAR UP participation data entered by program staff; and student survey data collected during the 2013-14 school year (January/February) and the 2014-15 school year (November/December). Parents of participating students were surveyed in the spring of 2014-15, with approximately 51% responding. The vast majority of HTC GEAR UP students completed a survey (94% in 2013-14, 86% in 2014-15), resulting in highly representative samples.

As shown in Table 1, HTC GEAR UP served more than 750 students during the most recent school year, 19% growth since the first year of the program, largely due to higher enrollment at Robbinsdale Middle and High School. The comparison group has not shown similar consistent growth over time.

Table 1. Number of HTC GEAR UP and comparison group students

	2012-13 (7th Grade)		2013-14 (8th Grade)		2014-15 (9th Grade)	
	<u>GU</u>	<u>CG</u>	<u>GU</u>	<u>CG</u>	<u>GU</u>	<u>CG</u>
<b>Number of students</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>785</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>725</b>	<b>754</b>	<b>749</b>
Fridley MS/HS	220	263	218	240	236	242
Robbinsdale (Cooper) MS/HS	416	522	475	485	518	507

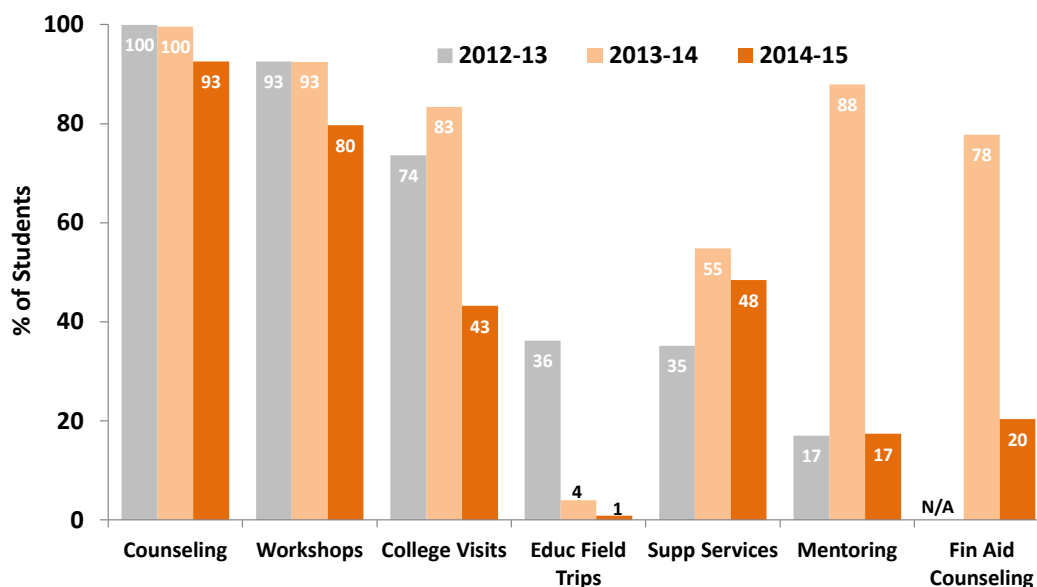
Table 2 indicates that more than half of the students are identified in school records as White, with Black/African-American students comprising the largest minority group. Between 11% and 15% of students in both the GEAR UP and retrospective comparison groups are of Hispanic/Latino ethnicity.

Table 2. Student characteristics

	2012-13 (7th Grade)		2013-14 (8th Grade)		2014-15 (9th Grade)	
	<u>GU</u>	<u>CG</u>	<u>GU</u>	<u>CG</u>	<u>GU</u>	<u>CG</u>
<u>Race</u>	%	%	%	%	%	%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asian	9	8	7	9	9	10
Black/African-American	32	32	36	35	32	39
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0	0
White	54	56	52	52	54	47
Two or more races	4	2	3	3	4	3
Unknown race	1	0	0	0	1	0
<u>Ethnicity</u>						
Hispanic/Latino	15	13	15	13	14	11
Non-Hispanic/Latino	86	88	85	87	86	89
<u>Other Student Characteristics</u>						
Individualized Education Plan	15	17	15	17	13	7
Limited English Proficiency	13	10	12	8	14	7

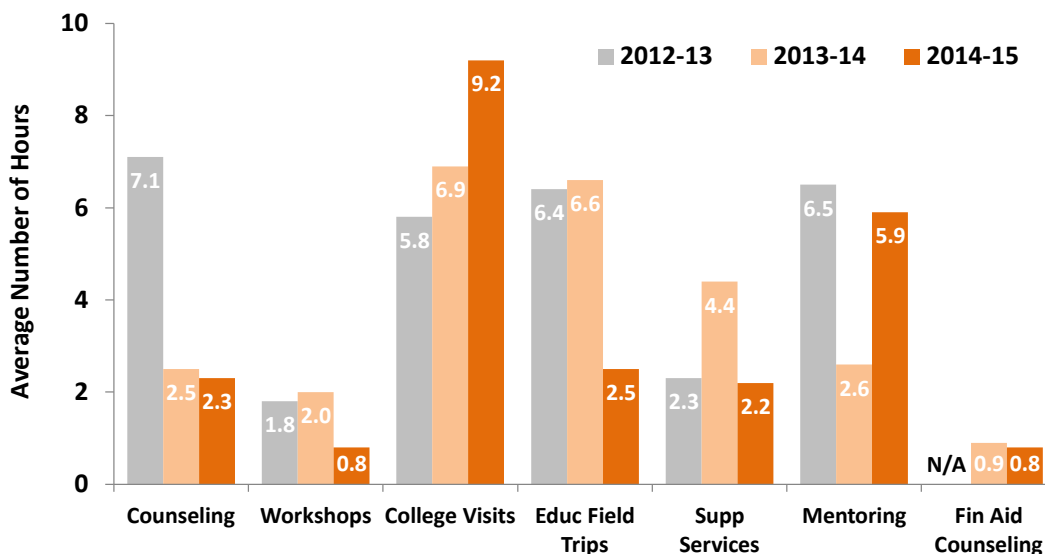
HTC GEAR UP students received a variety of services designed to help achieve the program's objectives. As shown in Figure 1, all or nearly all of the students in the cohort each year have received counseling/advising services during the first three years of the program. Student participation in all other services presented below has decreased during the most recent year reported, although workshop participation remained high. This decrease is related to the transition from middle school to high school; high school schedules are more varied, resulting in more logistical challenges to provide services to all students.

Figure 1. Student participation in HTC GEAR UP services



The following figure depicts the average number of hours students participated in various activities. While the amount of time spent participating in HTC GEAR UP services has decreased overall from the previous two years, the average length of college visits increased substantially. In addition, the average amount of time participating in mentoring activities during the 2014-15 school year was more than double that of the previous year.

Figure 2. Average hours of student participation



# Objectives, Activities, and Results

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## OBJECTIVE 1: INCREASE THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND PREPARATION FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR GEAR UP STUDENTS

### GPRA 1: Pass Pre-Algebra

Increase 8th grade Pre-Algebra completion by 15%.

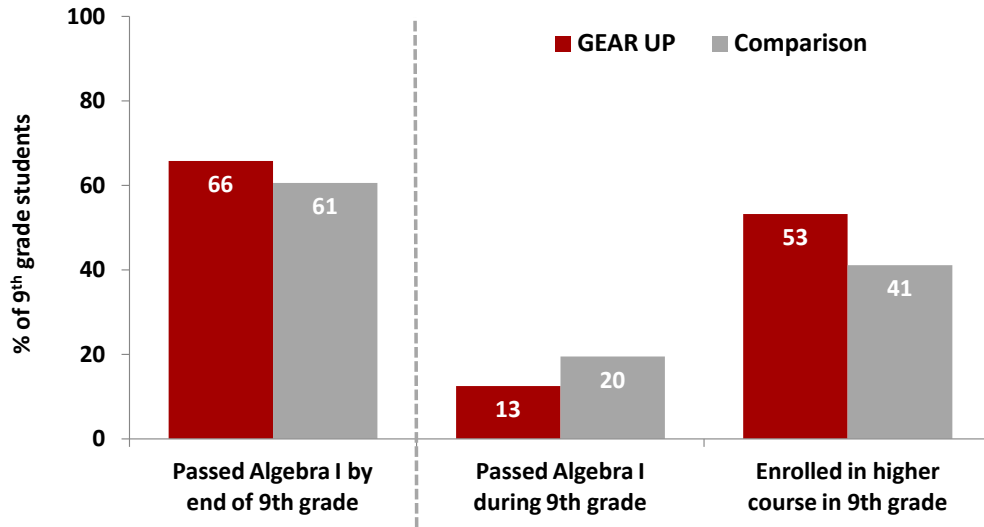
This measure is defined as the percent of eighth grade students who earned a grade of C- or better during the final term of the school year in Pre-Algebra during eighth grade or an earlier grade, or who were enrolled in a course higher than Pre-Algebra during eighth grade (implying completion of Pre-Algebra prior to eighth grade). Eighty-seven percent of HTC GEAR UP students achieved this outcome, whereas 83% of comparison group students did so. Additional information is available in a previous evaluation report, *HTC GEAR UP Biennial Report 2012/13-2013/14*.

### GPRA 2: Pass Algebra I

Increase ninth grade Algebra I completion by 15%.

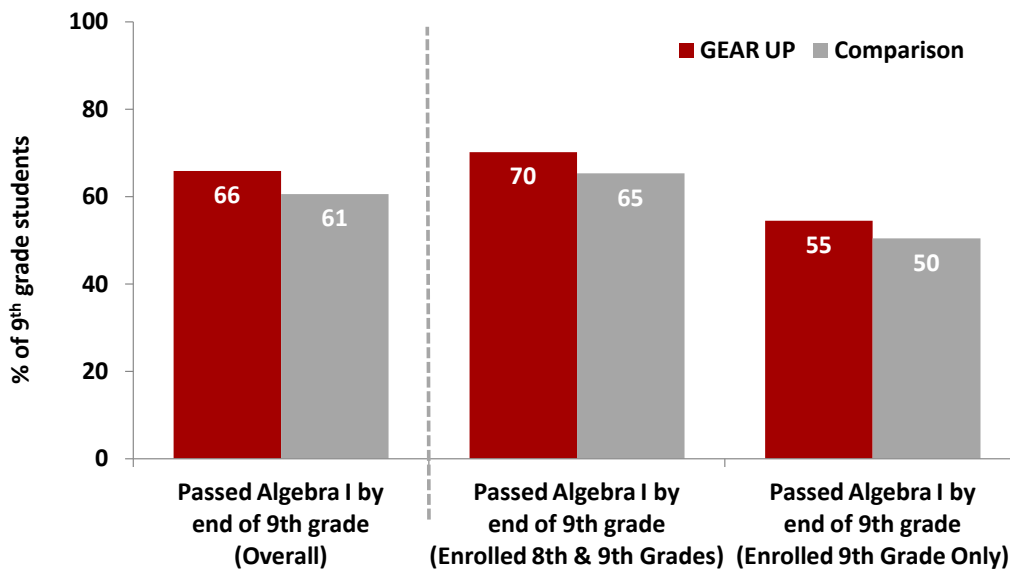
This measure is defined as the percent of ninth grade students who earned a grade of C- or better during the final term of the school year in Algebra I during ninth grade, or who were enrolled in a course higher than Algebra I during ninth grade. Overall, 66% of HTC GEAR UP ninth grade students successfully completed Algebra I by the end of ninth grade compared with 61% of comparison group students. As Figure 3 presents, analysis of the two methods by which students were included in these figures revealed that HTC GEAR UP students were substantially more likely to be enrolled in a higher course during ninth grade indicating completion of Algebra I prior to ninth grade.

Figure 3. Rates of successful Algebra I completion or higher level math enrollment, overall



Further examination revealed a notable difference between students who had been at an HTC GEAR UP middle school in eighth grade compared with those who entered the program in ninth grade. Completion rates were examined separately for these groups to understand the impact. As shown in Figure 4, continuing HTC GEAR UP students were more likely than new HTC GEAR UP students to have completed Algebra I, while completion rates among comparison group students showed nearly no difference. This finding suggests that Algebra I completion rates were influenced by exposure to the program.

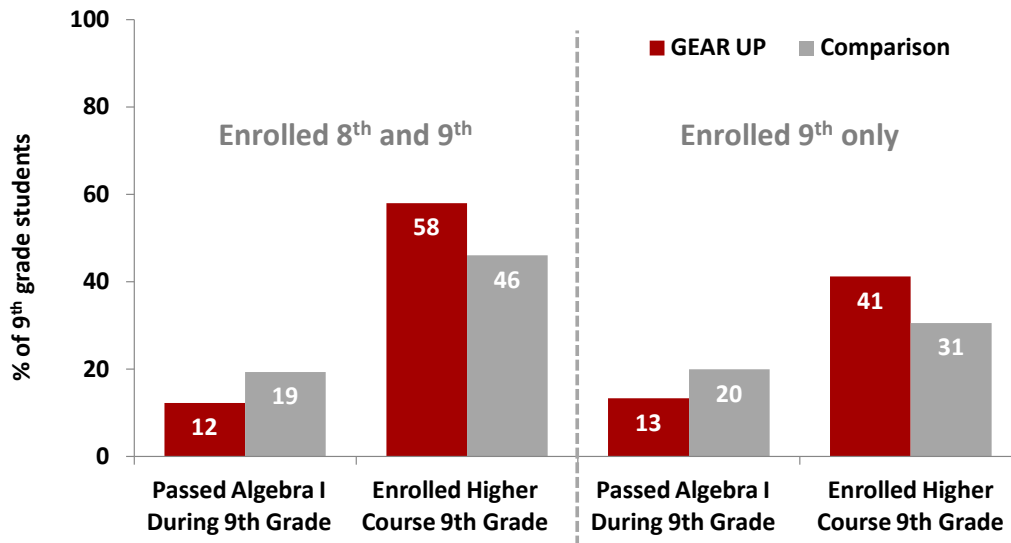
Figure 4. Rates of successful Algebra I completion by the end of ninth grade, by program continuity status





The following graph presents additional findings indicating the impact of HTC GEAR UP. Students new to HTC GEAR UP in ninth grade (presented on the right side of the graph) were more likely than comparison group students to enroll in a higher course during ninth grade, which may reflect a change in policy/graduation requirements in between the HTC GEAR UP cohort and the retrospective comparison group. However, continuing GEAR UP students (left side of graph) showed even higher rates than those of new HTC GEAR UP students, underscoring an additional impact of prior HTC GEAR UP participation.

Figure 5. Rates of successful Algebra I completion or higher level math enrollment, by program continuity status



**GPRA 3: Pass 2 years beyond Algebra I**

Increase students completing two years of math beyond Algebra I by the twelfth grade by 10%.

This measure is not yet applicable.

**GPRA 6: Place into college-level math without remediation**

a: Increase students using Accuplacer A+ Advancer or My Student Lab by 10% per year.

Participation in Accuplacer and My Foundations Lab began during the 2014-15 school year. By the end of that year, 21% of students had completed the Accuplacer Math Diagnostic and 16% of students had participated in My Foundations Lab. Participation rates during the 2014-15 school year will serve as baseline figures to measure progress toward this objective.

b: Increase students placing into college-level courses by 15%.

This measure is not yet applicable.

**GPRA 9: Student knowledge of, and academic preparation for, college**

a: Increase students promoted on time to successive grade levels by 15%.

All 2012-13 and 2013-14 students in HTC GEAR UP were promoted on time, defined as enrolling at school the following year in a grade level higher than the prior year. Likewise, all corresponding comparison group students were also promoted on time.

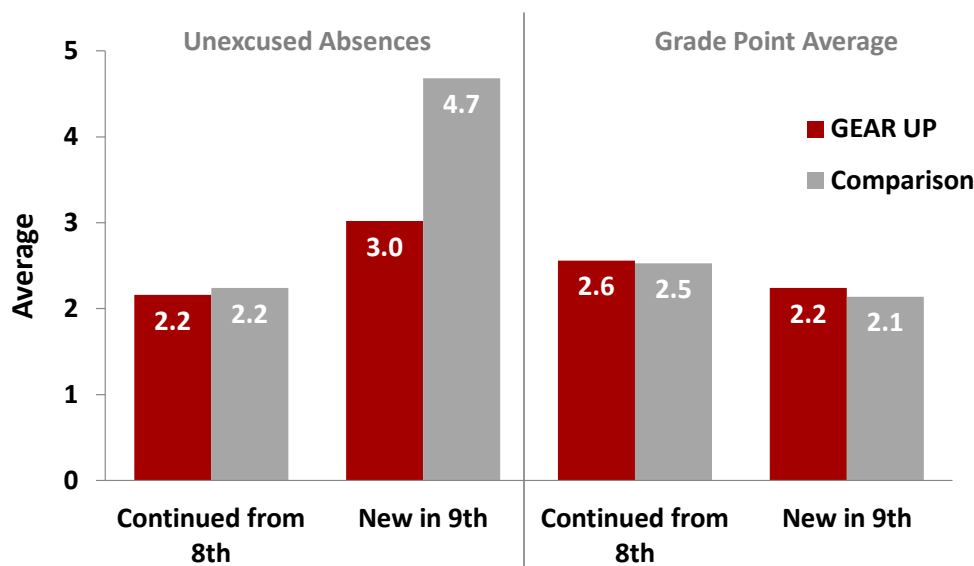
Other indicators of student performance were examined in relation to student promotion as well. The following table presents the percent of students in HTC GEAR UP and the comparison group who completed all of their courses with a C- or higher in their final term (i.e., earned no D or F grades). Course completion was determined using the highest of either the final semester grade or any annual course grade on record, depending on availability. Average numbers of unexcused absences and average grade point average (GPA) for each group are also presented. As shown in Table 3, successful course completion rates for both groups decreased substantially as students entered high school. Though HTC GEAR UP students achieved a higher rate of successful course completion than that of the comparison group during middle school, this trend reversed once they entered high school. Additionally, the average number of unexcused absences for HTC GEAR UP students was less than that of comparison group students during 2014-15, a reverse in the trend from the previous two years. Furthermore, the average GPA among HTC GEAR UP students during 2014-15 not only increased from the previous year, but was also higher than that of the comparison group. Note that a new grading system was implemented at the schools for the 2014-15 school year, impacting the GEAR UP cohort ninth grade outcomes but not comparison group ninth grade outcomes (tenth grade will be the first high school year that both groups will reflect the same system). The grading system was modified from primarily formative grading methods to primarily summative grading methods.

Table 3. Academic indicators of grade-level progress

	2012-13 (7th)		2013-14 (8th)		2014-15 (9th)	
	<u>GU</u>	<u>CG</u>	<u>GU</u>	<u>CG</u>	<u>GU</u>	<u>CG</u>
% successfully completed all classes	96.5	84.2	92.5	91.7	34.6	48.7
Average unexcused absences	1.6	0.7	2.4	1.6	2.4	3.0
Average GPA	2.83	2.77	2.44	2.63	2.47	2.42

Figure 6 examines differences in two academic indicators according to whether students were continuing or new to the HTC GEAR UP program in ninth grade. On average, HTC GEAR UP students had fewer unexcused absences and a higher GPA than did comparison group students, regardless of prior program participation. Beyond this, students who had continued with HTC GEAR UP since eighth grade had fewer unexcused absences and a higher GPA than did students new in ninth grade. The most notable finding, however, is seen when examining HTC GEAR UP and comparison group students who were new in ninth grade. New HTC GEAR UP students showed substantially lower average numbers of unexcused absences than did comparison group students, suggesting that even one year of HTC GEAR UP during ninth grade impacts attendance rates.

Figure 6. Unexcused absences and GPA by continuation status



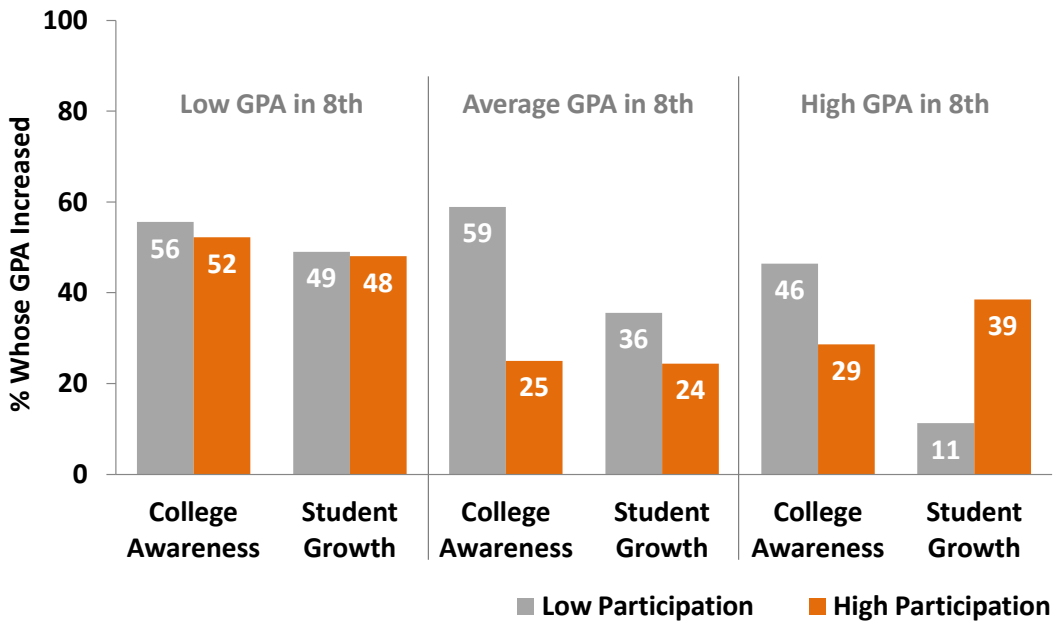
Among continuing ninth graders, change in GPA was examined according to level of participation in GEAR UP services during ninth grade, as shown in Figure 7. For analysis purposes, students who participated in various services sharing the same general intent were combined into groups. *College Awareness* services were defined as counseling, workshops, and college visits, and *Student Growth* services were those associated with mentoring and supportive services such as tutoring. Note that various *Student Growth* services target students for participation based on low performance, such that those services recruit and thus serve more academically struggling students.

Students were also examined separately based on their eighth grade final term GPA. *Low GPA* was defined as 1.99 or lower, *Average GPA* ranged from 2.00 to 2.99, and *High GPA* consisted of 3.00 or higher. This allows for examination of students based on whether they were likely targeted for particular types of activities based on prior performance. *Low* and *High Participation* were defined based on the frequency of student participation hours in the services during ninth grade. For *College Awareness* services, this resulted in high participation defined as four or more hours; for Student Growth services, high participation was greater

than 2 hours. Note that group sizes ranged from 20 to 50 students each, so these types of more in-depth analyses must be interpreted with caution due to smaller sample sizes.

Among the lowest-performing students in eighth grade, any level of participation appears to be associated with increased GPA by the end of ninth grade; more than half the students with a low GPA in eighth grade showed an improvement regardless of participation, and rates were higher among those with lower participation. Among students with average and high eighth grade GPAs, low participation was substantially more associated with improvement than was high participation in almost all cases.

Figure 7. Change in GPA and level of participation in GEAR UP services



b. Increase student PLAN or PSAT completion by the end of tenth grade by 20%.

This measure is not yet applicable.

c. Increase student SAT or ACT completion by the end of eleventh grade by 20%.

This measure is not yet applicable.

d. Increase students with at least 3.0 GPA by the end of eleventh grade by 15%.

This measure is not yet applicable.

## **GPRA 10: Parents' active engagement in academic preparation for college**

Increase parent engagement in student assistance activities by 20%. Baseline figures will be provided after Year 1.

For this indicator, *parent engagement in student assistance activities* is defined as the percent of students with a parent or relative participating in HTC GEAR UP events requiring attendance or interaction with HTC GEAR UP staff. Thus, the figures cited below do not include program mailings such as welcome letters or newsletters, or other such outreach activities/materials. During 2014-15, approximately 12% of GEAR UP students had at least one parent actively engaged in HTC GEAR UP activities, compared with 18% of GEAR UP students during the previous year. The average amount of time parents spent participating, per student, also decreased from 4 hours in 2013-14 to 2.4 hours in 2014-15. These figures underscore some of the challenges inherent in the transition from middle school to high school related to parent involvement.

**OBJECTIVE 2: INCREASE THE RATE OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND PARTICIPATION IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OF GEAR UP STUDENTS.**

**GPRA 4: High school graduation**

a. Increase high school graduation rates by 15% at the end of the grant.

This measure is not yet applicable.

b. Increase on-time successive grade level promotion by 15%.

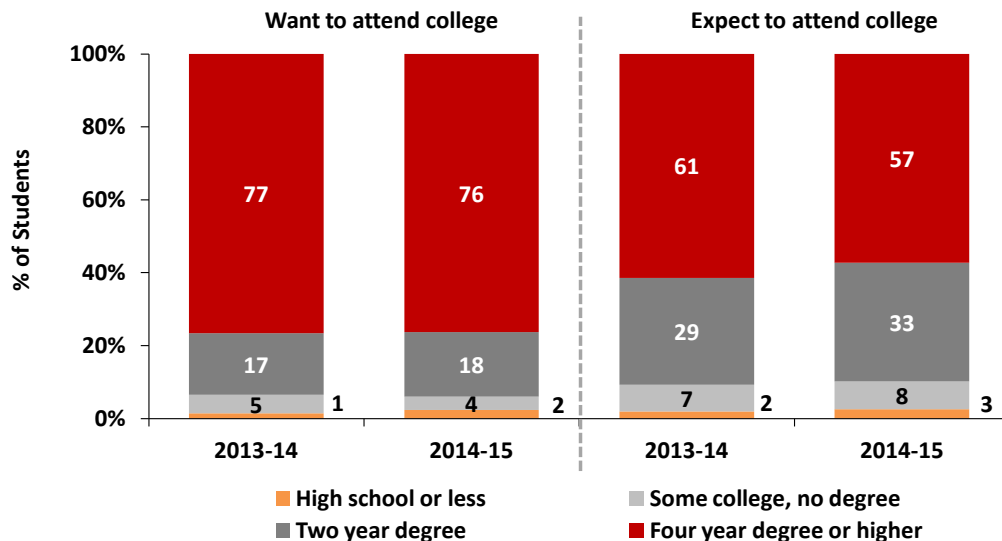
All HTC GEAR UP students were promoted from seventh grade in 2012-13 to eighth grade in 2013-14. In addition, all HTC GEAR UP students in eighth grade in 2013-14 were promoted to ninth grade in 2014-15. More detail and measures pertaining to this outcome can be found under GPRA Indicator 9a.

**GPRA 5: College enrollment**

a. Increase students' educational aspirations/expectations as measured by increasing the percentage of students who expect to attend college by 10% per year.

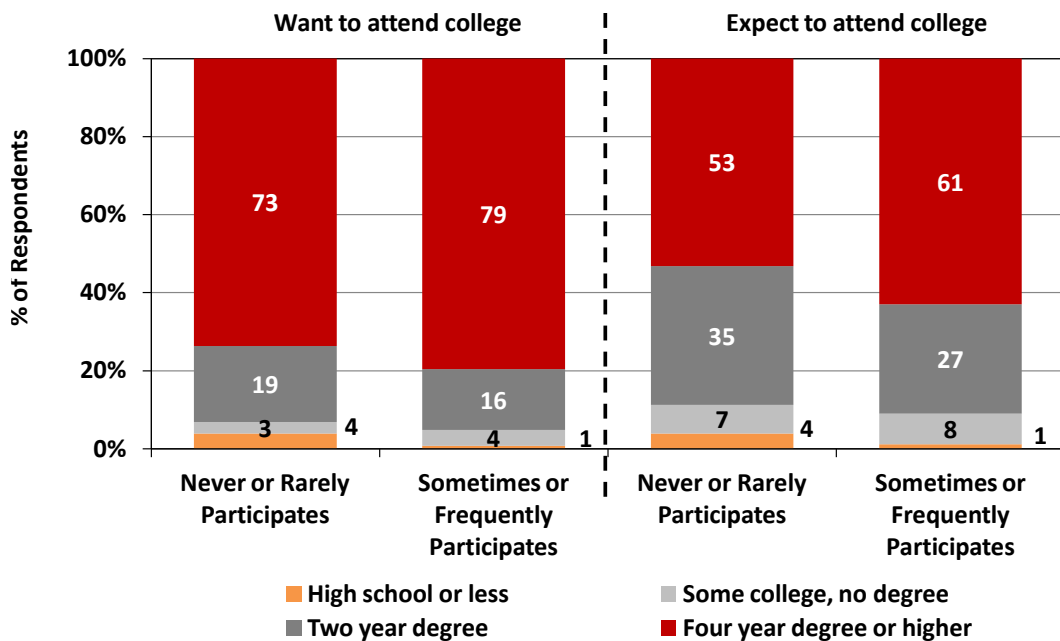
Students' educational aspirations and expectations over time are shown in Figure 8. In general, students' desire to attend college surpassed their expectations to do the same. Nonetheless, almost all aspired and expected, at minimum, to attend college. Aspirations and expectations to earn a four-year college degree decreased from 2013-14 to 2014-15, while those for a two-year college degree increased somewhat over the same time period.

Figure 8. Students' educational expectations, by school year



Expanding further on these findings, educational expectations were also examined according to students' self-reported level of participation in HTC GEAR UP services. Students were categorized into groups of participation levels - *Never/Rarely* and *Sometimes/Frequently* - based on their responses to the survey question *How often did you participate in GEAR UP activities last year (e.g., tutoring, meetings with GEAR UP advisors, classroom presentations)?* As shown in Figure 9, students who reported participating *Sometimes* or *Frequently* were more likely to aspire to and expect to obtain a college education than those students who reported participating *Never* or *Rarely*. Students with greater levels of self-reported HTC GEAR UP participation were more likely than their less active counterparts to aim for higher educational attainment, and also slightly more likely to demonstrate a smaller gap between aspirations and expectations. Because only a very small percentage of students do NOT expect to attend at least some college, room for growth with respect to the targeted increase for this objective is limited. Aspirations and expectations for various levels of education will continue to be monitored via future surveys of program participants.

Figure 9. Students' 2014-15 educational expectations, by level of participation in GEAR UP



b. Increase college enrollment rates by 20%.

This measure is not yet applicable.

**GPRA 7: College graduation readiness**

Increase college on track to graduate rates by 15%.

This measure is not yet applicable.

**OBJECTIVE 3: TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS FOR GEAR UP STUDENTS AND STUDENT AND FAMILY KNOWLEDGE OF POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS, PREPARATION, AND FINANCING.**

**GPRA 8: Student and parent knowledge of financial aid and costs/benefits of postsecondary education**

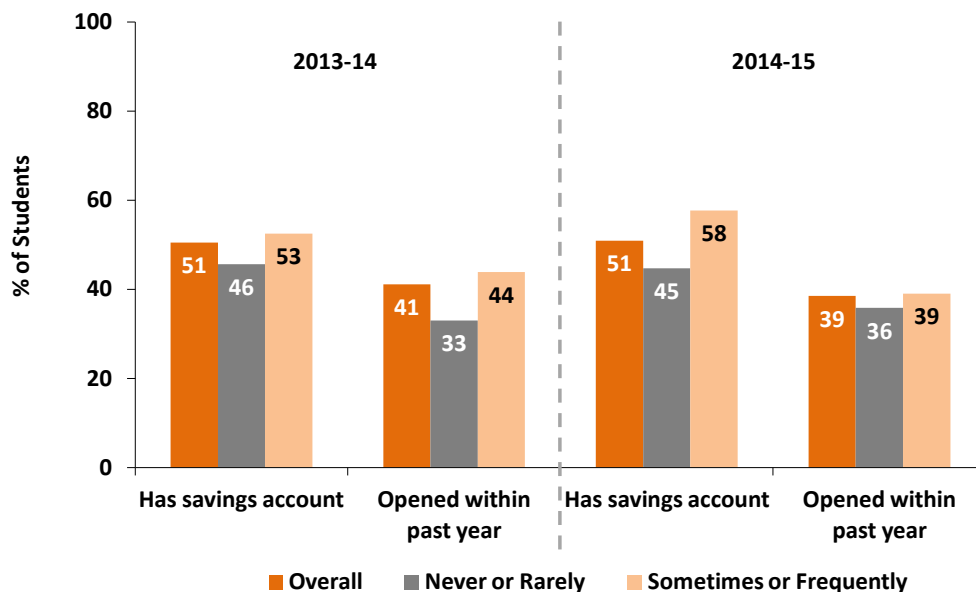
a. Increase students completing Free Application for Federal Student Aid by 20%.

This measure is not yet applicable.

b. Increase student/family savings accounts opening rate by 10% per year.

Approximately half the students reported that they have a savings account during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 surveys. Of those students, the percent who said they opened their account within the past year decreased slightly from 2013-14 to 2014-15, possibly because some of them had opened the accounts the prior year. Additional analyses revealed differences based on self-reported level of participation in HTC GEAR UP services as shown in Figure 10. Overall, students who participated *Sometimes* or *Frequently* were more likely than those who participated *Never* or *Rarely* to report having a savings account, and the difference between the two groups reporting this way almost doubled in 2014-15. Students who reported active participation in GEAR UP were also more likely to have opened these savings accounts within the past year - after HTC GEAR UP had been implemented.

Figure 10. Percent of students who reported having a savings account, by level of HTC GEAR UP participation





Parent survey results from the spring of 2014-15 (not shown) present a different picture: only 29% of parents reported that their child has a savings account for college, and of those, 28% had been opened within the past year. Note that this question was asked only of a subset of parent survey respondents (representing approximately one-fourth of HTC GEAR UP students). It is unknown if this is reflective of all parents of HTC GEAR UP students.

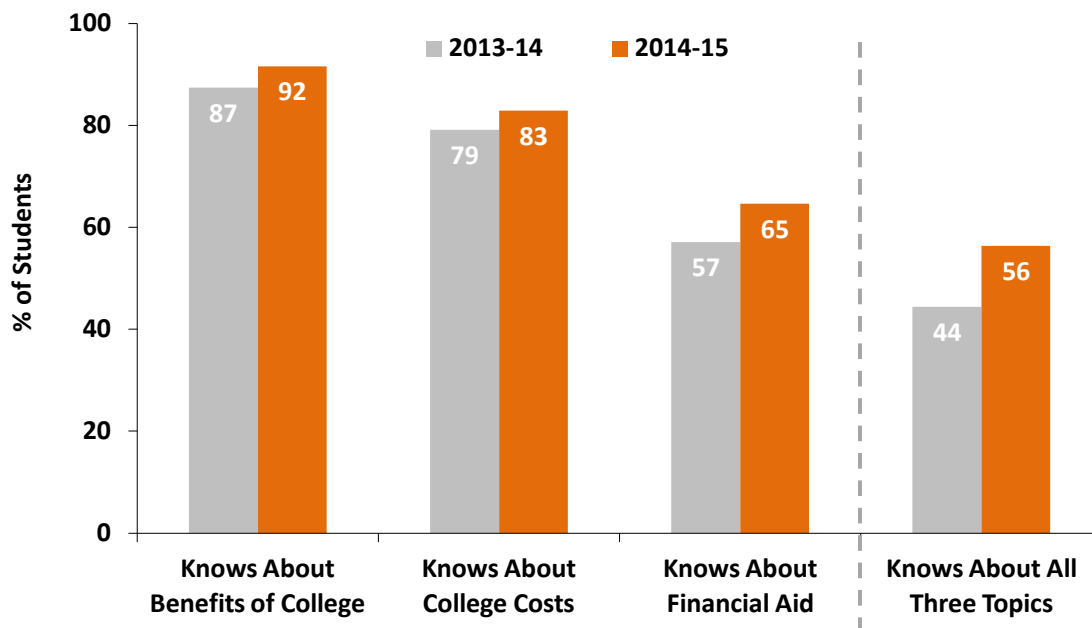
c. Increase student/family savings account deposit activity by 10% per year.

At this time, there are no data available on savings account deposit activity. Such information may be pursued through future parent surveys.

d. Increase student/family financial knowledge by 20% as measured through pre- and post-testing of financial literacy concepts, defining goals, and college financing.

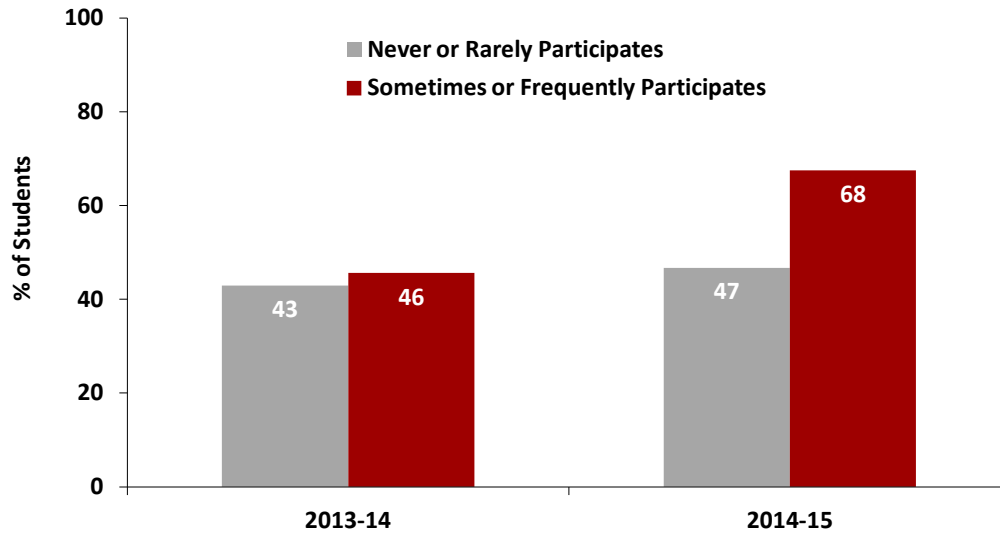
Overall, a higher percentage of students reported having knowledge about the benefits of college and about the costs of attending college during both 2013-14 and 2014-15, as shown in Figure 11. Perceived knowledge of financial aid was the lowest of the three topics, although it showed the greatest increase across both years. Also during 2014-15, parents were surveyed for the first time and 54% of them indicated that they were knowledgeable about all three topics (not shown).

Figure 11. Perceived knowledge of financial aid, college costs, and benefits of college



Students' perceived knowledge of these three topics was also examined according to their reported level of HTC GEAR UP participation, presented in Figure 12. Those who indicated that they participated in GEAR UP *Sometimes* or *Frequently* were more likely to report having such knowledge than those who indicated that they *Never* or *Rarely* participated in HTC GEAR UP. This finding was particularly salient during 2014-15, when HTC GEAR UP students entered high school, perhaps suggesting the increasing relevance of having such knowledge.

Figure 12. Perceived knowledge of financial aid, college costs, and benefits of college, by level of GEAR UP participation



# Conclusions

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Findings from this evaluation illustrate the steady progress the Hennepin Technical College GEAR UP Partnership Grant has made since its inception, three years ago. The following summary addresses these results, with respect to the grant objectives and corresponding indicators examined. Note that only those objectives relevant to the HTC GEAR UP students at this point in time are included; those remaining will be examined as they become relevant.

## **OBJECTIVE 1: INCREASE THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND PREPARATION FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION FOR GEAR UP STUDENTS**

### **GPRA 1: Pass Pre-Algebra**

Increase 8th grade pre-Algebra completion by 15%.

Findings from analyses revealed that, while pass rates for both groups were high, the GEAR UP students were slightly more likely to successfully pass Pre-Algebra than were comparison group students (87% and 83%, respectively). However, although the GEAR UP students achieved higher rates of Pre-Algebra completion than did comparison group students, the target goal of a 15% increase was not met.

### **GPRA 2: Pass Algebra I**

Increase ninth grade Algebra I completion by 15%.

Two-thirds of GEAR UP ninth grade students successfully completed Algebra I, or were enrolled in a higher math course than Algebra I in ninth grade, compared with 61% of comparison group students. Given these findings, although HTC GEAR UP students outperformed the comparison group, this target goal was not met.

Further analyses revealed that the HTC GEAR UP students were substantially more likely than comparison group students to be enrolled in a math course higher than Algebra I in ninth grade. Moreover, additional analyses compared outcomes of the HTC GEAR UP students who were enrolled in the program for two years (since eighth grade) with those of students who were new to the program at the start of ninth grade. Findings revealed that students who were in the program for two years were substantially more likely to be enrolled in a math course higher than Algebra I than were students who entered the program in ninth grade (enrollment rates of 58% and 41%, respectively). This suggests that exposure to HTC GEAR UP had positively impacted the completion rates.

### **GPRA 6: Place into college-level math without remediation**

a: Increase students using Accuplacer A+ Advancer or My Student Lab by 10% per year.

Both Accuplacer and My Student Lab were implemented at the HTC GEAR UP schools during the first part of the 2014-15 school year. By the end of the year, completion rates for the Accuplacer Math Diagnostic and My Foundations Lab were 21% and 16%, respectively. These rates will serve as baseline figures for this indicator.

### **GPRA 9: Student knowledge of and academic preparation for college**

a: Increase students promoted on time to successive grade levels by 15%.

All 2012-13 and 2013-14 HTC GEAR UP students were promoted on time, as were all corresponding comparison group students. Given this, it has not been possible for the grant to increase the rates of promotion further than its exceedingly high rate of 100%.

Examination of additional academic indicators showed that, although HTC GEAR UP students achieved higher course success rates than did comparison group students while in middle school, this trend reversed during their first year in high school. However, in the most recent year examined, the GEAR UP students had fewer unexcused absences than the comparison group students. Moreover, during the 2014-15 year, the average GPA among HTC GEAR UP students not only increased from the previous year, but was also higher than that of the comparison group.

The above additional academic indicators were also disaggregated based on whether the student was new in ninth grade or had been at the school for eighth and ninth grades. The most notable finding was revealed when examining HTC GEAR UP and comparison group students who were new in ninth grade. New HTC GEAR UP students showed substantially lower average numbers of unexcused absences than did comparison group students (3.0 and 4.7, respectively), suggesting that even one year of HTC GEAR UP during ninth grade impacts attendance rates.

### **GPRA 10: Parents' active engagement in academic preparation for college**

Increase parent engagement in student assistance activities by 20%. Baseline figures will be provided after Year 1.

Over the first few years of the program, parent engagement had increased. However, parent participation rates for the most recent year show a decline (from 18% to 12%). Likewise, the average amount of time parents spent participating, per student, also decreased from 4 hours in 2013-14 to 2.4 hours in 2014-15. These figures underscore some of the challenges inherent in the transition from middle school to high school related to parent involvement.

## **OBJECTIVE 2: INCREASE THE RATE OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND PARTICIPATION IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OF GEAR UP STUDENTS.**

### **GPRA 4: High school graduation**

#### **b. Increase on-time successive grade level promotion by 15%.**

As noted above, under GPRA Indicator 9a, all HTC GEAR UP students were promoted from seventh grade in 2012-13 to eighth grade in 2013-14, and from eighth grade to ninth grade in 2013-14.

### **GPRA 5: College enrollment**

#### **a. Increase students' educational aspirations/expectations as measured by increasing the percentage of students who expect to attend college by 10% per year.**

Examination of survey findings showed that, in general, students' desire to attend college surpassed their expectations to do the same. Nonetheless, almost all (ranging from 97% to 99%) students examined aspired and expected, at minimum, to attend college. Given these findings, it is impossible to increase upon such high figures 10% annually.

Among those students who reported to want/expect to obtain a degree, educational aspirations remained relatively stable from 2013-14 to 2014-15. In contrast, student educational expectations to earn a four-year college degree decreased across the two years, while expectations to earn a two-year degree increased.

The survey results were further examined in light of student reported levels of participation in HTC GEAR UP activities. Findings revealed that students who reported higher participation levels were more likely to aspire to, and expect to, obtain a college education than students reporting no or low program participation. Further, those with higher reported participation were also more likely to aim for higher educational attainment than their less active counterparts.

**OBJECTIVE 3: TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS FOR GEAR UP STUDENTS AND STUDENT AND FAMILY KNOWLEDGE OF POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS, PREPARATION, AND FINANCING.**

**GPRA 8: Student and parent knowledge of financial aid and costs/benefits of postsecondary education**

b. Increase student/family savings accounts opening rate by 10% per year.

Approximately half the students reported that they have a savings account during the 2013-14 and 2014-15 surveys. Of those students, the percent who said they opened their account within the past year decreased slightly from 2013-14 to 2014-15, possibly because some of them had opened the accounts the prior year.

Additional analyses revealed differences based on self-reported level of participation in HTC GEAR UP services. Overall, students with higher participation levels were more likely to report having a savings account than were students with no or low participation, and the difference between the two groups reporting this way almost doubled in 2014-15. Students who reported active participation in GEAR UP were also more likely to have opened these savings accounts within the past year - after HTC GEAR UP had been implemented.

d. Increase student/family financial knowledge by 20% as measured through pre- and post-testing of financial literacy concepts, defining goals, and college financing.

A large majority (ranging from 79% to 92%) of the HTC GEAR UP students reported to know about the benefits of college and about college costs during 2013-14 and 2014-15. Meanwhile, in both years, less than two-thirds of the students reported that they know about financial aid. However, the percent of students reporting to have knowledge on these topics increased in 2014-15. Additionally, the percent of students reporting to know about all three topics increased substantially (from 44% to 56%) during the two years. Also during 2014-15, the majority of parents (54%) indicated that they were knowledgeable about all three topics.

Further analyses examined students' perceived knowledge of these three topics with respect to their reported level of participation in HTC GEAR UP. Those with higher participation levels were more likely to report being knowledgeable about financial aid, college costs, and the benefits of college than those reporting no or low participation. While this difference between students reporting no or low participation and those reporting higher participation was slight during 2013-14, it increased substantially in during 2014-15 (i.e., 47% and 68%, respectively).

# Recommendations

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Given the results of this biennial program evaluation, the following recommendations are offered in an effort to continue the ongoing progress HTC GEAR UP has achieved, to date.

**Increase financial aid counselling.** While the large majority of the students report knowing about college benefits and college costs, less than two-thirds reported to know about financial aid. Additionally, student participation in financial aid counseling dropped from 78% to 20% over the past two years, and the average hours of such counseling dropped to 0.8 hours per student this past year. Given this, it is recommended that HTC GEAR UP increase student participation in financial aid counseling services.

**Bolster academic support services.** Although HTC GEAR UP course success rates and GPA were higher than those of the comparison group in the most recent year, these achievement indicators declined sharply from HTC GEAR UP baseline figures two years prior. Meanwhile, fewer than half of the students participated in support services during the past school year, and the average hours of participation in such services reduced by half (from 4.4 to 2.2 hrs.). Therefore, it is recommended that greater efforts are made, and resources are provided, to increase student participation in support services.

**Increase parent participation.** Over the past two years, the percent of students with at least one parent actively engaged in GEAR UP activities has declined from 18% to 12%. Given these low rates of participation, it is recommended that additional resources and efforts are focused on parent outreach in general, and that additional strategic efforts are made to increase parent involvement.