

Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Education approved funding to the Council on Postsecondary Education for the new GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) state award in September 2005. A larger grant than the first in 2000, this was approved for \$21 million over six years to provide college awareness and preparation activities for secondary school students. GEAR UP partnered with postsecondary institutions, education agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses across the state that are to provide \$21 million in matching funds for a total program support of \$42 million. The grant currently funds a partnership of 81 middle and high schools and nine postsecondary education institutions and community organizations.

The purpose of the GEAR UP programs is to provide resources and support activities that ensure that all students have access to, and participate in, early intervention activities beginning in the seventh grade. GEAR UP provides services to three cohorts of seventh grade students. The first cohort began high school in September 2007 and is continuing to receive support from the program.

In GEAR UP Kentucky, there are specific early intervention activities identified as necessary because they offer promise to change the outcomes of student educational experiences. These activities (*essential activities*) address the five *strategic priority areas* of the program—college awareness, rigor in educational experiences, engagement of parents and family, access to financial aid, and academic and personal support. Each student in a cohort is assured access to these activities. Furthermore, program objectives will measure the impact of essential activities on student performance and college participation. The essential activities are:

- GEAR UP Program Orientation—seventh and ninth grades.
- College Awareness Event—Career Expo, *KnowHow2GoKy* communication campaign, and *GoHigherKY* Web resources.
- Structured Campus Visit—at least one in middle school and one in high school.
- College Readiness Assessment—EPAS¹ assessments administered at in grades 7 and 9.

¹EPAS (Educational Planning and Assessment System) is an ACT product and is comprised of a suite of assessments at the secondary level—EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT. GEAR UP Kentucky monitors these assessments at each level from seventh to eleventh grades when students take the ACT.

- Academic Planning—advising conferences to select/track course enrollment in ACT core curriculum.
- College Planning—financial aid/financial literacy (workshops and advising).
- College Planning—college admissions procedures/applications process (workshops and advising).

The goal of the GEAR UP program is to encourage students to take the right courses to prepare them for college, to study hard, and to enroll in postsecondary education.

EPAS is the key indicator for GEAR UP Kentucky when measuring improved academic performance. The EPAS provides a longitudinal, systematic approach to educational and career planning, student assessment, and instructional support and, thus, enables GEAR UP Kentucky schools to focus on integrated, higher-order thinking skills that students must develop for success both during and after high school. In the 2007-08 reporting period, EXPLORE was administered to grade 7 and 8 students, and the PLAN assessment was administered to grade 9 students².

Project Highlights

Student Interventions. The EPAS is the driver for all student level college preparatory interventions in GEAR UP Kentucky. Schools are increasingly more responsive to student academic needs and readiness for high school and after graduation. The Kentucky *Program of Studies* requires that each student be supported through transitions during their secondary experience with an Individual Learning Plan. Students must be supported through advising and guidance that fosters meaningful supportive relationships that promotes success beyond high school. Mentoring in GEAR UP Kentucky therefore will be integrated as a part of the academic and career awareness, exploration, and planning process in participating schools.

In partnership with Eastern Kentucky University, GEAR UP Kentucky has developed a comprehensive guidance strategy to support students through the academic planning and career exploration processes. Initially conceptualized with curriculum and mentor training that can be replicated, this is an e-mentoring program.

- *Mentoring with a Focus* was initially piloted by ECU in a limited number of middle schools. It is designed specifically as a college planning curriculum with training for mentors. The mentor training is currently an in-person workshop format but is being transformed into a Web-based training so that mentors anywhere in the Commonwealth can be trained off-site, not just at ECU. The curriculum is offered online for students using the Blackboard discussion platform and is being expanded to be used with grades 9 and 10 students. (The curriculum also has successfully been used in an in-person mentor program.)

²When KDE administers the EPAS assessments at grades eight and ten, they are not duplicated but instead integrated into the GEAR UP program.

There are many other noteworthy student activities that are occurring at the regional and local school level. These are two examples.

- *GEAR UP Ambassadors* is a student leaders' model that has been implemented in three Louisville and Green County middle schools. Students participating in this activity serve as ambassadors for the program in the school. Typically students selected to participate are those who have not been involved or singled out for positive achievements but are recognized in their peer groups as leaders. The ambassador program engages these students in positive leadership building and self awareness activities that have resulted in changes in their behavior and performance, including decreased disciplinary infractions, better school attendance, improved attitude towards school, and improved grades.
- *Campus visitation programs* for middle level students continue to have an impact on the aspirations of students and attitudes towards college. Middle schools associated with the EKV, Morehead State University, Murray State University, and the University of Louisville can organize structured campus visits to the universities. Many also visit local community and technical colleges. These visits feature high involvement activities to stimulate interest within a targeted age group and sessions with college students to help them experience what it is like to be a college student. These campus programs generate much discussion among students, teachers, and parents as reported by teachers. Teachers indicate that students who never thought they could finish high school return to school and initiate conversations with their teachers about going to college.

School Improvement and Teacher Development. With more than 532 hours of professional development logged during the reporting period, GEAR UP Kentucky continues to work with schools enabling them to create the conditions necessary to prepare more students for postsecondary education and build on existing school improvement efforts to ensure students are on track for college. Teacher development activities cover an array of strategies and skills building, including implementing a new mathematics curriculum, using research-based instructional strategies, developing student benchmarks to measure readiness for transitioning to high school, and increasing understanding of the classroom practices that create a culture of achievement. Three programs offered include:

- The *Math and Science Partnership Project* (for middle and high school teachers) is in partnership with UofL. It is an 18-month program designed to enhance teachers' knowledge in mathematics content (algebra) and expertise in teaching algebra. The program includes implementing Carnegie Learning's *Bridge to Algebra* or *Algebra I* curriculum and use of Carnegie Learning's *Cognitive Tutor* (academic intervention) software with students.
- The *Mathematics Coaching* (for middle school teachers in Knott and Hart counties only) is a 12-month intensive program with one-on-one site-based technical support to help teachers improve specific teaching strategies in mathematics. The program addresses both content and pedagogy.

- The *Institute for a College-going Culture* (for middle and high school personnel) was held as a special session of the Kentucky Conference on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and was exclusively for Kentucky GEAR UP programs. It was designed as two-day workshop and focused on middle school student transition to the ninth grade. Presented in three strands of instruction and networking opportunities, the institute also included video presentations of three different ninth grade transition program models.

Overall, all programs and activities were implemented as planned during the reporting period, except for the planned parent summit, which is now scheduled for fall 2008.

GEAR UP Kentucky: 2007-08

Essential Activities

Priority	Activity	No. Served	Avg. Hrs
REQUIRED Per Application	1. GUK Orientation	6,699	49.5
	2. College Awareness Event	14,383	63.5
	3. College Campus Visits	9,706	57.0
	4. Skills Assessment	5,205	NA
	5. Academic Planning/Advisement	14,383	63.5
	6. College Planning—financial aid	2,209	43.0
	7. College Planning—admissions requirements	14,383	63.5
		NA	NA

Project Profile

Total Enrollment: 16,059

Male -- 8,401

Female -- 7,658

49 Middle Schools

32 High Schools

Enrollment by Ethnicity

Ethnic Background	Percent Enrolled	No. Students Enrolled
White	80%	12,878
African American	14%	2,255
Hispanic	4%	565
Asian/Other Minorities	2%	361

Performance at 9th Grade (cohort I students)

Subject Tests	EXPLORE		PLAN	
	National Benchmark Score	% GUKY Students = Nat'l. Benchmark	National Benchmark Score	% GUKY Students = Nat'l. Benchmark
		7 th Grade (2005)		9 th Grade (2008)
English	13	36.2	15	39.9 ↑
Reading	15	18.1	17	23.6 ↑
Mathematics	17	9.7	19	6.8 ↓
Science	20	3.1	21	5.1 ↑

No. Students tested

4,536

3,253