Leveraging GEAR UP
A District Self Assessment

The federal GEAR UP grant program can play a powerful role in boosting a culture of college, career, and life readiness (CCLR) by fostering coordination across internal and external partners.[1] In recent years, leading researchers from Stanford, Brown, and the University of Chicago have reviewed the literature, studied effective practices, and worked with leading practitioners from around the country to identify key elements that district leaders need to attend to in order to ensure all students graduate prepared for postsecondary success.[2]

To help districts fully leverage the potentially powerful impact of GEAR UP to advance these goals, FourPoint Education Partners designed a four-point review to:

1. Assess how GEAR UP is defined and operationalized in a district.
2. Identify which CCLR best practices are being implemented.
3. Identify barriers to GEAR UP having its intended impact.
4. Recommend ways in which a district can maximize its GEAR UP implementation.

We use our full review framework to understand – and increase – the impact of GEAR UP in districts across the country. We invite you to use this sampling of our review tools to reflect on how GEAR UP is structured and operating in your district – and what changes you might make to leverage it fully.

For more information about our full program review and district support options, contact Rudy Ruiz, Partner and Director of College, Career, and Life Readiness Support: rudy@fourpointeducation.com or 414-841-6031.

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[1] See National Coalition for Community and Education Partnerships (NCCEP), www.edpartnerships.org/about-gear-up
[2] Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University. (2014). District self-assessment tool. College Readiness Indicator Systems Resource Series. Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

GEAR UP Dashboard — Sample Enabling Conditions

INDICATOR	#	%
1. Partnerships • How many community partners are indicated in the grant and for what percentage of those are memoranda of understanding (MOUs) in place?		
2. Principals Who Understand and Value GEAR UP • How many GEAR UP principals understand and value the role of GEAR UP? • What percentage of principals include GEAR UP efforts in school improvement plans?		
3. Parent Engagement • How many parents are involved in planning outreach for GEAR UP activities and services? • What percentage of school activities open to parents promote awareness of GEAR UP supports and services?		
4. Dedicated Space for GEAR UP • How many schools are involved in the grant? • What percentage of the schools have a dedicated physical space for GEAR UP staff and have GEAR UP as a standing staff meeting agenda item to share updates?		

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Sample District Indicators of Success

INDICATOR	1 Not Evident	2 Emerging	3 Effective	4 Exemplary
1. The district has a clear theory of action for increasing CCLR through GEAR UP. • Does the district and its stakeholders have a clear understanding of the program's focus areas and how GEAR UP aligns with the district's strategic plan and key initiatives? • Do principals, school counselors, and identified partners understand what the district's non-negotiables are and for what they will be held accountable?				
2. GEAR UP activities are clearly defined to be integrated into district and school structures and efforts. • Are the GEAR UP activities clearly defined and show how they will support the grant cohort of students, their teachers and parents; school culture; and ensure that schools are actively aiming to achieve the designated student, teacher, and family outcomes?				
3. GEAR UP reporting structures are clear, established, and manageable. • Are systems in place for internal and external partners to submit needed information on their contributions (time, effort, and resources) to the grant, easily and on time? Are data structures in place to assess the cohort's progress toward identified grant goals and objectives?				
4. A high-quality performance management process is used to facilitate implementation of key initiatives. • To what extent are district non-negotiables monitored for implementation and impact based on pre-determined metrics for success? • To what extent are the collected data used in some type of data consult, professional learning community, or performance management routine to ensure continuous improvement?				

Additional Discussion Questions

1. What are some of your district's strengths with regards to how it leverages GEAR UP to build a CCLR culture in schools and, ultimately, to improve outcomes for all students?
2. What are some of the key challenges?
3. What will be your first priority to increase the leverage of GEAR UP?
4. What additional supports do you need in order to be successful?