

From Dreams to Plans to College.



Effective practices in five diverse programs: Vancouver, West Valley (Spokane), Toppenish, Cape Flattery, and Tekoa

June 2011

**Washington State GEAR UP
Evaluation Report Series, Volume 1**

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PREFACE

Washington Governor Christine Gregoire said, “Education can lift individuals out of poverty and into rewarding careers.” In order to help all students reach their educational potential, Washington State GEAR UP, administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Board, strives to work with low-income students and families through collaborative efforts with schools and partners to create opportunities for better education attainment.

In this series of third-party evaluation reports, we share findings that evaluate the progresses we have made in GEAR UP. Applying both qualitative and quantitative data and research methods, these evaluation reports highlight best practices, delineate impactful program approaches, and summarize student education achievements and program outcomes.

The first of these reports is “From Dreams to Plans to College.” It is a study of five communities and school districts where GEAR UP has had a meaningful impact in helping develop systemic changes to level the playing field in education for students from low-income backgrounds. The voices of school administrators, teachers, parents, and students are captured, and the report features common elements of effective GEAR UP programs that can be easily replicated by schools and programs nationwide.

The Washington State GEAR UP program facilitates strategic partnerships in order to leverage funding and resources that provide direct, early intervention services to students in high-need schools in order to help them prepare for and succeed in college. These reports are evidence of how we adhere to that mission. Creating education equity is one of the cornerstones of democracy. I hope our evaluation series accents that.

Weiya Liang
Director, Washington State GEAR UP

INTRODUCTION

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a federally funded program of the US Department of Education. Washington State GEAR UP is a partnership among the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB), the Office of the Governor, local school districts, and other partners. The program provides a myriad of services to students in underserved, low-income communities to ensure they develop the academic and financial literacy skills needed for postsecondary success. In many cases, these students will be the first in their families to attend college.

GEAR UP services include:

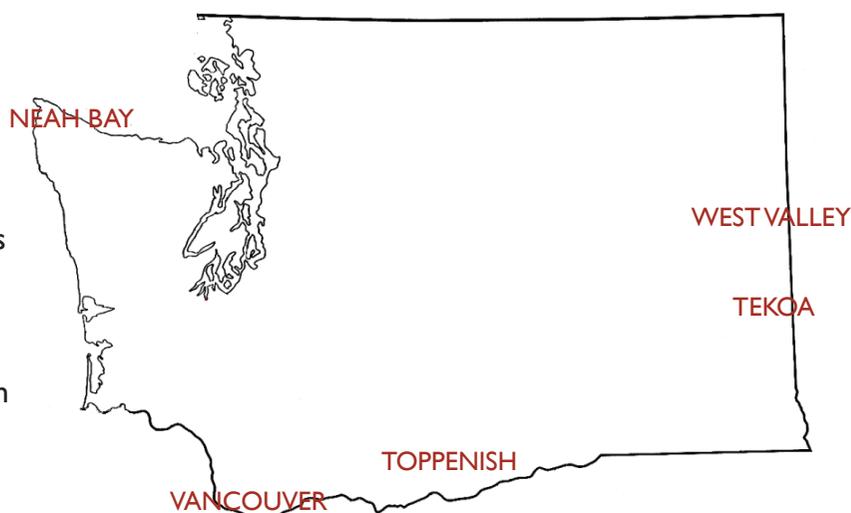
- Intensive tutoring and homework assistance
- Mentoring
- College/career planning information
- Access to financial aid resources
- Summer programs
- College campus experiences
- Professional development for school staff

This report details activities and districts served under the GEAR UP grant administered between 2005 – 2011 and is the result of an investigation conducted for the HECB by staff from Education Northwest. During this grant period, Washington State GEAR UP served more than 4,000 students through two programs: the Scholars Project and GEAR UP for Student Success. In February 2011, five sites were selected to represent the diversity of the 37 school district programs in terms of size, demographics, geography, funding, approaches to the work, and types of activities. All sites were determined by the HECB staff to have demonstrated an ability to provide comprehensive, well-organized, and effective services that appeared to have an impact on students and families. In many cases, these sites implemented activities that are unique and reflected a creative, thoughtful response to the work. These determinations were derived from program self-reports, site visits, meetings, and discussions with HECB staff.

The purpose of this investigation was to apply qualitative research methods to delineate the most impactful approaches and activities employed by these GEAR UP programs to promote college readiness and ultimately college attendance. The descriptions would include an explanation of why they were implemented, what made them effective, and how they impacted students. To accomplish this, between March and May 2011, the team conducted focus groups and interviews on-site, by phone, and by email, as well as document reviews...All programs received an on-site visit except for Neah Bay, due to time and cost restraints. Sessions were recorded where possible, and the transcripts analyzed. Detailed notes were taken in lieu of recording where necessary. First drafts of the reports were sent to the GEAR UP program staff for feedback regarding accuracy and errors of omission or commission; appropriate revisions were made.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five GEAR UP program sites from around the state were selected for an investigation into what makes their services particularly effective and impactful for students, families, and communities. Using a variety of qualitative methods, a team from Education Northwest obtained the data, analyzed it, and produced this report for the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board. The programs are the Vancouver School District, West Valley High School in Spokane, Toppenish High School, Neah Bay High School, and Tekoa Junior-Senior High School.



COMMON ELEMENTS AMONG EFFECTIVE GEAR UP PROGRAMS:

1. The program creates a unique approach to the work that is responsive to the culture and the needs of their particular community of students.
2. The GEAR UP coordinator is highly capable, dedicated, creative, organized, and hard-working.
3. There is a high degree of intentionality – there is clear sense of purpose and direction and all the activities align with the purpose.
4. There is high degree of administrative support for the program from the principals and superintendents.
5. Families are fully engaged as partners in getting the students ready for college.
6. The staff establishes strong, caring relationships with each student.
7. The curriculum is rigorous and relevant.

VANCOUVER SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Vancouver School District GEAR UP program serves several high schools, now in the last year of a six-year Scholars Project grant. From the start, Carol

Jacobson and her team decided they would give their low-income, mostly first-generation immigrant students the knowledge and skills they would need to be successful in the mainstream middle-class society. In addition to activities specifically designed to help them achieve this—trips to the ballet, opera, and plays for example—opportunities were integrated throughout all GEAR UP activities. Carol wanted to ensure that their students would not just graduate and go to college, but would be able to function effectively and feel that they belong. This would provide them with an extra “boost” and increase their likelihood of finishing college.

They also tied these cultural events to academics and life. For example, they developed a series of lesson plans around issues that emerged from the musical play, *Annie*. These included the challenges of being an orphan and the causes and impacts of the Great Depression. They held many “Networking 101” sessions, which in most other programs are called Career Fairs, to emphasize the importance of practicing the social skills to connect with adults and access them as resources, rather than simply learning about the jobs they do.

The 84 students currently in the program all have a GPA of 2.0 or better, completed their FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), are scheduled to graduate on time, and plan to enroll in college at least half time in the Fall of 2011 making them eligible to obtain the scholarship available to students in the Scholars Project. Two students, however, plan to defer college and the scholarship, which they can do for up to four years.

One plans to enlist in the military, and the other will be going on a church mission. In addition to the scholarships offered through GEAR UP, a number of students received generous scholarship packages:

- Maya Hess was accepted to University of Portland and offered a financial aid package of \$47,700 which included a \$9,000 grant from the school itself.
- Haley Richards was accepted into University of New York in Syracuse and offered a financial aid package.
- Nancy Arellano, received an Act Six Scholarship of full tuition and room and board to George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon.

WEST VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL (SPOKANE)

West Valley has been part of the federal six-year Scholars Project model. The grant began in two middle schools with 100 selected seventh graders in 2005, who all subsequently attended West Valley High School.

Over the years, GEAR UP Coordinator Rosalie Sigler developed and implemented dozens of events related to GEAR UP goals, including college visits, career fairs, and financial aid workshops. To entice students to participate and assure that they got the information they needed, she made each of these events unique,

fun, and engaging. For example, students built houses with Habitat for Humanity, participated in a “language scavenger hunt,” provided a community service to help immigrants learn English, completed simulations to learn how to handle money, and mentored children for substance abuse prevention by creating and putting on a puppet show.



TOPPENISH HIGH SCHOOL

The Toppenish High School senior class of 210 students have been GEAR UP participants since ninth grade. Served by the state funded GEAR UP for Student Success program, they received a rigorous curriculum, intensive academic support, and caring guidance in addition to a full array of GEAR UP activities—after-school tutoring, college field trips, workshops, guest speakers, career fairs, and more. Among the many unique strengths of the program are coordination and leveraging of various funding streams to meet their priorities and goals, and the

tremendous support given to students to meet high academic standards.

As an example of leveraging funding, three different funding streams (in equal percentages), including GEAR UP, are used to fund their Graduation Specialist, Mike Romero. After hearing about this concept at a national conference, Superintendent John Cerna, Principal Trevor Greene, and GEAR UP Coordinator Lola Ceja, made this position a priority for funding. Although Mr. Romero has been in this position for only one year, staff and students agree that he is making a big difference with students during their critical last year of high school.

From school and district staff and administrators to families and communities, the active involvement and enthusiastic support for the GEAR UP program and students is a hallmark of this effective program. All have high expectations for students and challenge them to take a rigorous curriculum and achieve at high levels. Toppenish High School excels in state assessments, college preparation courses, and in having graduates enrolled in post-secondary institutions. The entire 2011 senior class—the GEAR UP cohort—graduated on time.

Among Toppenish's many scholarship recipients, Wendy Dimas will attend the University of Washington with \$131,500 in scholarships from nine different sources. The largest, \$50,000, came from a Costco Diversity Scholarship. Emmanuel Rodriguez will attend Willamette University with \$91,000 in scholarships from four sources, including a generous merit scholarship from the University. Analley Rojas Vasquez secured \$64,500 in scholarships and will attend Pacific Lutheran University.



“Prior to participating in GEAR UP, 42 percent of the students in the Neah Bay cohort identified themselves as college-bound. Today, 100 percent of cohort students believe they will attend college.”

NEAH BAY HIGH SCHOOL

Neah Bay High School received a GEAR UP Student Success grant in February 2008 to serve all students in the Class of 2011. The number of students served fluctuated between 18 and 14 over the years, but the group of 15 who graduated in spring 2011 have all been in the program since the beginning of ninth grade.

Neah Bay's program focused on helping students find the right college for their needs and interests. In addition to implementing all the usual and required GEAR UP activities thoroughly, the staff took the students on an enormous number of field trips to a wide variety of colleges. Although the small number of students made this highly individualized effort more practical, it still took a tremendous effort and careful planning as Neah Bay is geographically isolated and is far from urban areas. This approach had great results. Once students found the right college, they worked hard to get good grades and complete the numerous tasks required to apply to a postsecondary institution.

Prior to participating in GEAR UP, 42 percent of the students in the Neah Bay cohort identified themselves as college-bound. Today, 100 percent of cohort students believe they will attend college.

Other notable results:

- Fifty-seven percent of the GEAR UP cohort took the SAT during their sophomore year, whereas in previous years no sophomores took the SAT.
- Seventy-five percent of the GEAR UP students met the admission requirements at four-year colleges and universities (the rest meet the requirements to attend community college) as compared to 24 percent of the Class of 2010, 18 percent of the Class of 2009, and 35 percent of the Class of 2008.

- All 15 students from the GEAR UP cohort will attend college in the fall of 2011.

TEKOA JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Tekoa Junior/Senior High School is a small, rural school with approximately 110 students in grades 7–12. The student body is 82.7 percent white, 3.6 percent Hispanic, and 11.8 percent Native American, serving students from the nearby Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation. The free and reduced-price lunch rate at the school is 51 percent (compared to the state average of 37.2 percent). They are in the fourth year of the GEAR UP for Student Success project.

The GEAR UP coordinator hosts a wide variety of activities and has been particularly adept at harnessing technology to provide Advanced Placement courses and dual college credit options for their students, bridging the distance to resources for this rural, agricultural community. Eleven out of the 20 GEAR UP students are taking Advanced Placement courses. Laptops for the students (provided by GEAR UP) and good internet connections have helped this effort. Through similar means, securing scholarships for students has been another strength of the program. Students have also used technology in conjunction with the Navigation 101 advisory model to support student-led conferences throughout their middle and high school years.

Job shadows have been another effective strategy to engage students and motivate them to go to college. According to GEAR UP Coordinator Adrienne Madison, "Staff members believe that 18 [out of 20 GEAR UP] students are going on to college and one or two will be enlisting in the military. So far, 15 students have been accepted into college."

VANCOUVER SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Bridge to College and Beyond: Personal, Social, and Cultural Competence

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL CONTEXT

Vancouver, Washington lies just north of Portland, Oregon, with a population of nearly 170,000 people and a K–12 student population of 22,307. The Vancouver School District houses 21 elementary schools, seven middle schools, and six high schools. Clark College, a two-year community college, also lies within the city. Although increasingly diverse, Vancouver is 84 percent white, 7 percent Hispanic, 4.5 percent Native American, and 2.5 percent African American. However, the white population includes a significant number of relatively recent Russian immigrants, and as a result, 16 percent of the total population of Vancouver does not speak English at home. The city has a median household income of \$58,000. The poverty rate is 15 percent, and the child poverty rate is 22.5 percent; both are higher than the state average.

The schools involved in GEAR UP are primarily Hudson's Bay High School and Fort Vancouver High School, although some of the students who receive GEAR UP services also attend Columbia River, Skyview, and Lewis and Clark high schools. The program began in 2005 by serving seventh-grade students from Discovery and Jason Lee middle schools. Compared to district averages, these middle schools have a higher percentage of students from minority groups (37 percent versus 29 percent), a lower percentage of white students (63 percent versus 71 percent), a higher percentage of students in special education (14.5 percent versus 12 percent), and a significantly higher percentage of students from low-income families (65 percent versus 49 percent).

THE GEAR UP MODEL

Late in 2005, the Vancouver School District was awarded one of 12 GEAR UP Scholars Project grants in the state. These awards came from federal funds that were granted to Washington's Higher Education Coordinating Board in a competitive process. In addition to operating expenses, the grant provides college scholarships to students involved in GEAR UP who meet certain criteria.

In April 2006, 200 seventh-grade students from Discovery and Jason Lee middle schools were identified to participate in GEAR UP each year through their high school graduation in 2011.

In June of that year, just after school ended, they spent two weeks learning about the importance of setting high expectations and planning for college, while also engaging in physical activities and team building work. In August 2006, 100 students participated in the University of Washington Summer Institute (a GEAR UP funded partner program) for a few days to get a taste of college life, including living in dorms and going to classes.

GEAR UP IN ACTION: BEST PRACTICES

From the beginning of the program, under the strong but gentle leadership of Carol Jacobsen, the Vancouver GEAR UP program formed a cohesive approach to its work that has continued to guide its efforts. Inspired by the ideas of Ruby Payne, Donna Beegle, and others who speak to the challenges that low-income students face, Carol and her core team—Ann Marie Carlton, Jennifer Riordan, and Edward Esparza—created a comprehensive program to provide GEAR UP

“Most of the students are likely unaware of the total, cumulative impact of the GEAR UP program on their lives. The GEAR UP staff planted many seeds in the fertile soil of these young peoples’ minds and characters, including the disposition to have and pursue difficult goals... [and] an awareness of the possibilities of life beyond the economic hardships in their homes and communities...”

students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be successful in mainstream, middle-class society. For example, their well-attended career fairs were not just designed to teach students about specific jobs, but were also opportunities for these well-coached students to practice dressing appropriately (ties for boys, dresses for girls, no jeans), to use networking skills (for example, approaching someone with confidence and introducing yourself with a smile and hand shake), to create a positive first impression, to develop a social support system, and to use proper etiquette—including restraining oneself at the hors d’oeuvres table. They call these events Networking 101, to emphasize the point that it is much more than a typical career fair.

The infusion of cultural competency practices within all GEAR UP activities, from tutoring to touring colleges, and the inclusion of carefully chosen activities

such as field trips to the theatre, ballet, and opera, make this GEAR UP program unique and particularly effective. It serves as a powerful force for long-term positive change in the lives of its students.

Early in the program, the team collected clothing and gave lessons to the students (through fun events such as simulated shopping trips and a fashion show) on how to dress for various occasions, including job interviews, meetings with potential scholarship donors, and trips to cultural events such as the theater.

The GEAR UP staff found that one result of these activities was a big boost in students’ self-confidence. Donations of clothes also came from the community, from Walmart, and from a local consignment shop. Later in the year students participated in an activity called Dine for Success, in which they learned the unspoken, complex “rules” of business lunches and formal dinners: Which fork do you use? What do you do with your napkin? When and how do you pass food? And most importantly, how do you sustain an appropriate conversation throughout dinner? The activity was presented by the maitre d’ of the local Hilton Hotel, an immigrant from Mexico who grew up in poverty and is a great supporter of the GEAR UP students.

Members of Toastmasters were invited to give presentations on how to speak in public. A volunteer Clark College student who sells cosmetics as a side business recruited her friends and did a make-over session for the young women, while a photography student took “before-and-after” pictures. To provide these extensive cultural enrichment field-trip activities, the team leveraged GEAR UP funds to obtain a Community Development Block Grant, as well as a grant from the Vancouver School District Foundation. Jacobsen explains :

“None of the students have resources to attend these costly events. When the grant started in 2005 we targeted low-income students from Jason Lee Middle School, which has a 63.8 percent free- and reduced-price lunch rate, and Discovery Middle School, which has a 65.9 percent free- and reduced-price lunch rate. Both schools have much higher rates of low-income families than the district average, which is 48.8 percent. In addition, Jason Lee is an English language learner (ELL) magnet school. For the majority of students, they also do not have information about the arts or the family encouragement to attend such events. Even the students who participate in band, choir, or orchestra often did not have the resources to attend professional performances.

We purposely chose events that would introduce students to a variety of visual and performing arts, as well as events that would support their cultural backgrounds. It was our hope that this would increase pride in their own cultures as they saw the value it contributed to the body of work worldwide.

For example, we chose the Nutcracker Ballet and specifically invited the Russian-speaking youth we served. We chose ‘The Color Purple’ play and specifically invited the African-American youth we served. We invited the Ballet Folkloric Dancers to perform for our parent meeting and also attended bilingual plays at the Milagro Theatre, in order to help students see the cultural richness of the Hispanic community.

We attended Shakespeare in the Park because the students started studying Shakespeare in high school and we wanted to show them that it is possible to attend some cultural events for free. We provided both classical and modern musical experiences, including opera and ballet and performances such as ‘STOMP’ and ‘Billy Joel’s Movin’ On Up.’ We chose a balanced introduction to theater, including plays performed by local high schools and plays presented by professionals at Portland Center Stage and

other venues. We tried to choose plays that they are likely to encounter in college courses or that would support a deeper understanding of U.S. or world history.”

Edward Esparza expands on the multiple lessons students learned from these cultural events:

“When these students were in the eighth grade we went to see the musical ‘Annie,’ we developed lesson plans around the issues raised in the play: the Great Depression and its causes and consequences; the Roosevelt administration’s response; the emotional challenges faced by orphans and how that related to our students’ own life challenges; and the capitalist system as embodied by Daddy Warbucks. Even ‘STOMP’ had great lessons to offer our students, such as how art can be created from almost nothing but found objects and can still develop into a very profitable hit show.”

Jacobsen continues:

“During the 10th-grade summer program we connected an art project of making masks to all the literature and writing assignments given that summer, as well as relating the masks to the students’ cultural backgrounds. Through daily entries in their journals, students also explored the different ‘masks’ people wear in life and why they wear them. In August we attended a performance of Phantom of the Opera where a mask plays a major role in understanding the lead character.

GEAR UP students who attended the University of Washington Summer Institute in Seattle also visited local cultural and educational attractions such as the Experience Music Project, the Seattle Art Museum, and the Museum of Flight, among others. We also connected our visits to the Portland Art Museum with visits to two different art colleges in Portland.”

In recalling the highlights of their involvement with GEAR UP, many students talked about the

college visits, the University of Washington Summer Institutes, and the cultural enrichment activities. Tiffany Elvrum remembered the discussions she had at the Networking 101 sessions because she found out firsthand what skills and knowledge are needed for certain jobs. She was thrilled that many of the community participants were more than willing to give her a reference.

Megan Elvrum, Tiffany's twin sister, talked about the many plays they attended and about the museum visits. At the Nutcracker Ballet, they were given a backstage tour, which they found particularly exciting and memorable.

As a junior, Nancy Arellano submitted an essay to the statewide GEAR UP contest in response to the theme: What Does GEAR UP Mean to Me? In her essay she wrote:

“GEAR UP (also) gives me and I believe many others, hope. The reason why it gives me hope is because GEAR UP motivates us so much. We go to many important places like the Keller Auditorium. Going to the Keller helped me know that not only rich people go there, but I can afford to go there in the future too. Going to performances at the Keller motivated me to join one of my school's musicals. Being in that musical helped me a lot to become more involved in school and it also helped me lose my stage fright.”

With information and encouragement from Edward Esparza, student Xisen Tian applied for an internship at Portland State University. After working in the chemistry department there for two summers, the faculty recommended that he present his original research at the American Chemical Society conference in Washington, DC, which he did two summers in a row. He was able to travel to Washington, DC, with financial support from one

of Vancouver GEAR UP's key partners, the Vancouver Sunrise Rotary Club.

IMPACTS

The Vancouver GEAR UP team recruited an impressive array of community leaders who, over the past six years, gladly volunteered to participate in activities for the students time and time again. Among them was the president of Clark College, the state senator from Vancouver, a Clark County judge, the owner of a large tech company, the head of a real estate agency, a police lieutenant, the financial advisor of a local credit union, several prominent local lawyers, and the aforementioned maitre d' of the Hilton Hotel. Nearly all of the volunteers expressed their admiration for the character of the students—their poise, positive attitudes, confidence, and social skills—and the GEAR UP team believes that most of these community leaders did not realize that the



students were from low-income families and that many were first-generation children of immigrants. The community leaders came to know and care about these students and have expressed their willingness to continue their support in any way they can. In their interactions with the students they freely offered their advice and assistance. The GEAR UP team has intentionally and systematically created a long-term support system for its students. At various points in their lives—as college students, job seekers, and when starting careers and families—they will continue to have wise, successful mentors and role models they can turn to for guidance.

Eighty-four students have completed the program and are currently a few weeks from graduation. The primary reason for the attrition from the original group of 200 seventh-graders is that their families moved from the area, although some could not keep up their grade point average (GPA) or dropped out of school.

All 84 students Vancouver Scholars Project participants have a GPA of 2.0 or better, have completed their Free Application for Federal Student Aid forms, are scheduled to graduate on-time, and plan to enroll in college at least half time in the fall of 2011, making them eligible to apply for the GEAR UP/GET scholarship. Two students, however, plan to defer college (and the scholarship, which they can do for up to four years). One student plans to enlist in the military, and the other will be going on a religious mission.

More than half of the GEAR UP students plan to attend Clark College to obtain an Associate Degree or to meet academic requirements before transferring to a four-year college. There are a number of compelling reasons for this: it is close to home and familiar, the college has been very supportive of the

students during their high school careers, and the GEAR UP/GET scholarship will cover the full cost of tuition for two years at Clark College.

A number of these students plan to work during these two years, save their money for tuition, and transfer to a four-year college after completing an Associate Degree. The remainder of the students will be attending four-year colleges, and several have obtained impressive scholarship packages. For example:

- Nancy Arellano, received an Act Six Scholarship of full tuition and room and board to George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon.
- Xisen Tian, was accepted into several colleges and offered large incentive packages. He chose the U.S. Naval Academy, which he visited with his father the summer of his sophomore year when he traveled to Washington, DC, to present at the American Chemical Society conference. The total value of this scholarship is \$286,000.
- Vidi Manriquez was awarded a \$4,000 Rotary Scholarship and Megan Elvrum was awarded a \$2,000 Rotary Scholarship.
- Maya Hess will attend the University of Portland with a financial package of \$47,700, which included a \$9,000 grant from the school itself.
- Haley Richards was accepted into Syracuse University in New York and offered a financial aid package of \$30,000.

In all, Vancouver GEAR UP students were offered scholarships totaling \$1,520,427.

Most of the students are likely unaware of the total, cumulative impact of the GEAR UP program on their lives. The GEAR UP staff planted many seeds in the fertile soil of these young peoples' minds and

characters, including the disposition to have and pursue difficult goals, the ability to appreciate the value and joy of art and music, an awareness of the possibilities of life beyond the economic hardships in their homes and communities, the knowledge that they can be self-sufficient and access numerous resources, and the skills and confidence to interact in cultures very different than their own. Many of these skills will not fully bear fruit for many years to come. In the words of student Nancy Arellano, “GEAR UP has encouraged me to go to college, follow my dreams, and reach my goals. It’s motivated me to do things I never thought I would do. GEAR UP has opened my eyes to look above and beyond what’s around me and to believe that I can do it.”

WEST VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Creativity and Fun Engage Students in College Prep Activities

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL CONTEXT

West Valley High School is one of three high schools in the West Valley School District (WVSD). The school's annual enrollment is slightly more than 900 students in grades 9–12. In 2001, West Valley High received a five-year Washington State Achievers Scholarship grant, during which time the school transformed into three separate learning academies. This redesign and reinvention of the school helped to create its current focus on preparing all students for success in college and postsecondary careers.

The primary goal of the school has been to raise achievement levels and college-going rates of students based on existing models of high-performing schools. To ensure their students are prepared to thrive after graduation, high school leaders and teachers committed to infusing each of the academies with the new three “R”s: rigor, relevance and relationships. West Valley defines these as:

- Rigor — challenging curriculum.
- Relevance — offering coursework and projects that relate clearly to students' lives and aspirations.
- Relationships — fostering strong relationships between adults and students to create a college-going culture.

Community and school leaders have fully embraced this mission and have created a school-wide culture devoted to the idea that all students graduate from high school ready for college and work. This mission has integrated seamlessly with the goals of the GEAR UP program.

THE GEAR UP MODEL

West Valley High received a six-year GEAR UP Scholars Project grant in 2005. The program started in WVSD middle schools, serving a small cohort of 100 specially selected low-income seventh-graders. This cohort of students entered West Valley High School as freshman in 2007, and the grant has continued to support them as they moved toward graduation in spring of 2011.

One of the ways that Washington State GEAR UP has fostered the success of these students is by creating 20 annual benchmarks. This includes 10 mandatory benchmarks, such as visiting a college campus and updating the high school portfolio, as well as 10 optional benchmarks from which students can choose the five that best fit their goals and personal interests.

The West Valley program helps students and their families keep track of their progress toward these benchmarks via an online account. Students can log in to their private account and view their profile which shows them how many benchmarks they have met in the current year. Both students and parents have expressed that the benchmarks and the website are valuable tools in helping students stay on track toward meeting their long-term goals.

The program has focused on preparing students for college success by providing tutoring, mentoring, and college/career planning information throughout the six years of the program. The University of Washington has also offered professional development activities for teachers and Summer Institutes for the GEAR UP students.

GEAR UP IN ACTION: BEST PRACTICES

The West Valley High GEAR UP office is a warm and welcoming place, located next to the school library and a large, modern computer lab. The GEAR UP Homework Center, located in the computer lab, is staffed Monday through Thursday from 2:45–4:30 p.m. GEAR UP Coordinator Rosalie Sigler says that the Homework Center serves as a valuable resource for the entire school: “We have many services to offer now, including chemistry, math, and Spanish tutors, in addition to college mentors to assist with college and scholarship applications and essays. These services are open to all students in the school, not just the GEAR UP cohort students.” Two Gonzaga University work-study students provide support for the GEAR UP advisory class and homework center.

“The goal of these daily discussions [between students and school staff] is to create a deep, personal connection between each student and the school staff. They believe that such a connection helps keeps students in school by personalizing the educational experience.

The West Valley GEAR UP program also maintains a website, westvalleygearup.com. Here students and parents can find an up-to-date activities calendar, resources, student and program scrapbooks, as well as access to their Skyward account. In addition to face-to-face and online support for students, the program

draws much of its power from the commitment of Sigler, who keeps a close watch on every student in the cohort. As one GEAR UP student said, “If you don’t have all your benchmarks in, you need to walk all the way around the school, because Rosalie has radar—she will catch your eye and get you in here to talk about it!”

Relationship Building and Mentoring

A touchstone of both the previous Washington State Achievers Scholarship program and the GEAR UP program has been the focus on helping students build relationships, both with adults and with each other, and on learning how to proactively advocate for themselves and their futures.

For GEAR UP this has meant that students meet in a designated class with a mentor teacher, who “loops” with the cohort group, following them from grade to grade throughout their high school years. Other program staff members meet with small groups of students daily to discuss issues in the students’ lives. The goal of these daily discussions is to create a deep, personal connection between each student and the school staff. They believe that such a connection helps keeps students in school by personalizing the educational experience.

The school uses a solid foundational curriculum for the mentoring work, which Sigler has refined by providing grade-level-appropriate materials to all staff members. John Custer, the principal of one of West Valley High’s three academies, says: “The faculty has really bought into the mentoring concept and is carrying through by building strong, supportive relationships with the students.”

Creative Events Involving Strong Community Partnerships

“Have you ever wanted to be a ‘GEAR UPaire’ earning points for answering critical questions about applying for college, or conduct the “Amazing Race” in downtown Seattle to learn about careers and what it takes to have one?” These are just two examples of Rosalie Sigler’s approach to making GEAR UP fun and interactive for the varied learning styles of her GEAR UP students.

In “The Amazing Race” students were sent to several locations in downtown Seattle to gather clues and find the right piece of the puzzle that would lead

them to the next station in the race—much like the contestants in the popular television show. At each location students met with business professionals, each representing a career that required a unique skill set. The activity gave students a chance to learn more about specific careers, from an inside perspective. “I coached all the business leaders beforehand so that they would provide fun, hands-on activities that were appropriate for the students,” says Sigler. “It was a great success.”

Offering activities in this way—actively engaging and relevant to students’ individual interests and needs—is at the heart of West Valley High’s GEAR



“ All the students interviewed for this report had chosen a college to attend next year. The students were obviously thoughtful in their postsecondary choices and credited their GEAR UP experience with helping them find the right college.

UP program. Sigler has created a wide variety of activities from which students can choose, and has created an enticing brochure that describes them for the students, providing a “menu” of possibilities for learning about college and careers. Sigler then discusses the options with students, helping them choose the ones that are most likely to match their needs and interests. The activities range from a commitment of five hours to a four-day camp at the University of Washington.

Students can choose from activities that expose them to careers in such areas as biomedicine and aeronautics, learn financial literacy, develop a portfolio, gain leadership skills, or engage in community service activities such as volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, helping immigrants learn English, or mentoring younger students. Other activities expose the students to theatre arts from both sides of the curtain. Perhaps the most exciting opportunity is for students to live on campus for four days at the University of Washington, taking academic seminars and exploring the museums and other cultural sites in Seattle.

IMPACTS

This is a six-year cohort of students, which began in the seventh grade with 100 students. There are now 62 students in the cohort. The primary reason for the student number declining is that students have moved out of the district or have been dropped because their GPA fell below the required 2.0 in spite of intensive tutoring and counseling provided by the GEAR UP staff and teachers.

At least two students in the GEAR UP cohort will be entering college with enough Running Start credits to be admitted as juniors—an incredible achievement and a significant financial savings for those students and their families.

All the students interviewed for this report had chosen a college to attend next year. The students were obviously thoughtful in their postsecondary choices and credited their GEAR UP experience with helping them find the right college. The parents of these students were well informed about their student’s goals and progress and they had also bonded as a group. One parent expressed her enthusiasm for the program this way: “[GEAR UP] is all about having the right coordinator who can empower both the students and the parents. Having the early awareness [about postsecondary opportunities] was huge—it helped our students set goals to accomplish each year, while making long-range plans for the future. And now it is all happening!”

TOPPENISH SCHOOL DISTRICT

Academic Rigor and Creative, Supportive Adults Foster College Readiness

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL CONTEXT

Toppenish is located in Washington's south central valley inside the boundaries of the Yakima Indian Reservation. The population of 9,256 includes 78.8 percent Hispanic or Latino, 10 percent White, 4.8 percent Native American, 3.8 percent Black or African American, and 2.6 percent from two or more races. The median household income is \$29,423 and 35.3 percent live in poverty.

The child poverty rate, however, is 44.3 percent. The economy is largely agricultural, including many fruit orchards and vineyards and the Hispanic population primarily derives from the large demand for farm workers. Toppenish also draws tourists who come to see its 73 public murals depicting western and historic scenes, its three museums, an annual pow-wow, and an annual rodeo.

The Toppenish School District serves 3,692 students in its preschool program, four elementary schools, one middle school, one mainstream high school (Toppenish High School), and one alternative high school (E.A.G.L.E.). All 688 students at Toppenish High School are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Hispanic students make up 85 percent of the student population, while 14 percent are Native American, and 1 percent are White, of multiple races, or other.

THE GEAR UP MODEL

Toppenish High School is in its fourth year of a state-funded GEAR UP for Student Success grant. It serves 210 students in a cohort model. The students in that cohort graduated in the spring of 2011. The grant began in the spring of 2008 and was fully implemented that fall. The school has actually been involved

with GEAR UP for 11 years, having received two Partnership Grants from the University of Washington that concurrently served two different cohorts of students.

GEAR UP IN ACTION: BEST PRACTICES

Toppenish provides an array of activities and services under the banner of GEAR UP, all of which serve to promote college attendance. These include an afterschool program that provides tutoring four days a week and transportation home, as well as many field trips, college visits, guest speakers, financial aid workshops, family events, SAT and ACT preparation activities, and much more. However, there are two aspects of the program that make it particularly unique and effective: the leveraging and coordination of various funding streams to meet their priorities and goals, and the tremendous support for students to succeed in an academically rigorous program.

“Having a dedicated staff person with the job title of graduation specialist sends a strong message to students, families, and the community that the school expects everyone to graduate, and that there is dedicated support for it.”

Leveraging Funds for a Graduation Specialist

While attending a national drop-out prevention conference, Superintendent John Cerna, Principal

Trevor Greene, and GEAR UP Coordinator, Lola Ceja heard the idea of hiring a staff person whose sole job function is to help students graduate. They quickly made this idea priority for the 2010-2011 school year and leveraged three funding streams, including GEAR UP, to pay for the position. With Graduation Specialist Mike Romero now on the job, the staff believes that a 100% graduation rate can be achieved and sustained.

Mr. Romero works with students and their parents to make sure that every student is on track to graduate and take advantage of postsecondary opportunities. An amiable, easygoing guy, Mr. Romero is perfect for the job. He is trusted and respected by the students and he is a well-known member of the local community. His 14 years as a mental health specialist with the University of Washington prepared him well to deal with just about anything the students can throw at him.

As part of his unusual job description, Romero does a good deal of “hanging out”—making himself available to the students, eating lunch with them, and talking with as many as possible on a daily basis. The students are probably unaware of it, but Romero’s method of hanging out includes making frequent assessments about each student’s progress toward graduation, in addition to providing subtle encouragement and gentle prodding. Romero describes his approach to working with students as “tough love.” Because the students know he cares, many of them approach Romero and ask to see him—in many cases, several times a week.

Teachers also turn to him. Several of them told him about a senior who had been doing very well and was on track to graduate, but suddenly stopped applying himself and had fallen behind on his senior project. The senior project at Toppenish is a significant undertaking and is a graduation requirement. When

Romero met with him, the young man broke down and cried. He revealed that he had a new girlfriend who was distracting him from his studies. “I just talked with him and tried to encourage him,” says Romero, “and afterwards he said to me, ‘Thank you for caring.’ He now seems to be back on track.”

Having a dedicated staff person with the job title of graduation specialist sends a strong message to students, families, and the community that the school expects everyone to graduate, and that there is dedicated support for it. Having the right person in the job ensures that the message will translate into results. Although Mr. Romero has been in this position for only one year, the staff of Toppenish High School is seeing positive results already: many fewer students are failing classes than previously.

Supporting Students to Excel

Ms. Ceja, the GEAR UP Coordinator, describes one way that Superintendent John Cerna and Principal Trevor Greene support the goals of GEAR UP and integrate them throughout the school:

“The administration has helped to focus our advisory class periods on GEAR UP goals. This way, during the school-day timeframe, GEAR UP is able to present college awareness activities, and bring in guest speakers to talk with all the students about careers and college paths. They encourage teachers and staff members to have at least two to three college pennants in their classrooms or offices.”

In regard to faculty support, student Angelica Zuniga states:

“GEAR UP has helped me throughout my middle school years and continues to help with college preparation throughout high school. I’m very fortunate to have GEAR UP and their cooperative faculty. Our Site Coordinators truly care about my future. They’re willing to sacrifice some of their time to help students like me, who, before GEAR

UP, didn't know what they had to do to go to college, or what college they'd like to attend. Because of GEAR UP, now I know."

The administration has arranged for students to have the opportunity to take accelerated classes that earn them dual credit toward high school graduation and from the University of Washington. Currently, there are two classes offered (although more are being planned): English Composition and Exposition, and first-year College Spanish. A number of teachers received special training at the University of Washington in order to qualify to teach these courses. The \$185 fee, although inexpensive for the college credit, is beyond the means of most of the students, so GEAR UP helps to pay the cost. These classes have replaced the Advanced Placement English and Spanish classes at the high school, as they have the added benefit of providing college credit.

The administration and teachers have high expectations that students can handle academically rigorous curriculum and that doing so is an important way to create a college-going culture in the school.

Leveraging funds from a variety of sources, students are offered an array of challenging courses, including aeronautics and engineering. To help students meet these high expectations, they are provided a variety of supports, including after-school tutoring. A large number of students take advantage of this supplemental service and it is not unusual to find nearly 100 students working hard on assignments at 4:30 in the afternoon on any given school day. The tutoring is conducted by certified teaching staff, which provides students with consistency of instructional methods and assures that they will get high quality assistance.

In looking back over the impact of GEAR UP on her success in school, student Emily Blackeagle focused on

after-school tutoring:

"Every Monday to Thursday afternoon I would go to our cafeteria. I believe I was one of about 75 students who attended after-school tutoring through GEAR UP. We would start by working on assignments for 30 minutes. This always helped me because I usually had a difficult time finishing my homework at home. Then, for the next hour and a half, we would attend a variety of clubs that helped increase our educational knowledge in things such as robotic, computer technology, mathematics and journalism. GEAR UP got me into the habit of doing my homework right after school until I completed all my assignments. This routine I had gotten into improved my grades and I was able to keep straight A's throughout the school year. My parents were so proud of me, especially when they received a letter saying that I had made the Principal's honor roll list."

The GEAR UP Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) is a very active and effective group, supporting and advocating for their children to be college ready and ultimately attend college; many will be the first in their families to do so. The PAC members get to know and honor the students of the month—one for each major subject area—at their meetings and hear speakers on topics of interest to them. Among the many support activities they conduct, parents set up a GEAR UP table at the annual, very popular "Cinco de Mayo" community event. Here they talk with other parents and provided information about how they can help their children to be college ready.

Parents also talk about GEAR UP on the local Spanish language radio station. At their request, Ms. Ceja set up an email list so that parents can communicate more readily with each other and the school. Parents are invited to join faculty and students on all college visitation field trips and typically three or four parents do so.

Community partners are numerous and fully engaged with the school and the students. For example, the Yakima Chamber of Commerce facilitates job shadows for the students. This is a graduation requirement for students so they would all have the opportunity to learn about specific jobs in the community first-hand. Many GEAR UP students find this to be a meaningful experience that helps them to focus on career goals.

IMPACTS

Toppenish High School excels in state assessments, college preparation courses, and in having graduates enrolled in postsecondary institutions. During the most recent school year, many students were recognized for their talents and accomplishments.

GEAR UP Coordinator Lola Ceja enthusiastically describes an important but less tangible impact:

“The GEAR UP program, our students’ successes, and the rigorous curriculum we offer give our students a sense of pride and a sense that they can compete with other kids from wealthier areas,” she says. “They understand the relevance and importance of public speaking and persuasive speaking. They know they can take these skills to any field. It also is helping them with soft skills, such as

“ For the 2010-2011 school year, all 141 seniors graduated - 100 percent of the class, for the first time in the school’s history. 83 percent were accepted to postsecondary institutions.

using proper etiquette and dressing appropriately.”

Principal Greene summarizes, “GEAR UP has given us the means and the impetus to make a complete paradigm shift from where we were to where we are going—for the students, for the parents and what they expect, and for the teachers who have gone from working in isolation to working collaboratively and publically.”

Myers adds, “It does exactly what GEAR UP is supposed to do and what its name stands for: We are giving students an early awareness and readiness for undergraduate programs. It’s everything from those soft skills that Lola [Ceja] discussed to the hard, rigorous, relevant content.”

In 2011, all 141 seniors graduated—100 percent of the class, for the first time in the school’s history. 83 percent were accepted to postsecondary institutions.

Of these students, 66 percent will attend four-year colleges, 18 percent will attend community colleges, and 3 percent will attend military, technical, or vocational schools. 13 percent will enter the job market.

A total of \$509,050 in scholarships was offered to the senior class:

- Wendy Dimas will attend the University of Washington with \$131,500 in scholarships from nine different sources. The largest, \$50,000, came from a Costco Diversity Scholarship.
- Emmanuel Rodriguez will attend Willamette University with \$91,000 in scholarships from four sources, including a generous merit scholarship from the University.
- Analley Rojas Vasquez secured \$64,500 in scholarships and will attend Pacific Lutheran University.

NEAH BAY HIGH SCHOOL

Small Town, Big Plans: Creating a College-Going Culture

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL CONTEXT

Neah Bay is part of the Cape Flattery School District, located at the northwest tip of the Olympic Peninsula on the Makah Indian Reservation. The population of 2,300 people includes 77.1 percent Native American, 12.1 percent white, 9.7 percent from two or more races, 7 percent from other races, 5.42 percent Hispanic or Latino of any race, and 0.2 percent African American. The median household income is \$21,635, and 29.9 percent of the population is below the poverty line, including 32.6 percent of those under age 18. The economy is sustained primarily from fishing and tourism, and the excellent Makah Museum is a major attraction. The Coast Guard also maintains a base in Neah Bay, primarily for search and rescue purposes.

The Cape Flattery School District serves 455 students at four sites: Clallam Bay High School and Elementary schools, Neah Bay Elementary, and Junior/Senior High School (grades 6–12), which houses the GEAR UP program. Neah Bay Junior/Senior High School serves 166 students, nearly all of whom are Native American (93 percent). Sixty-two percent are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, 14.5 percent receive special education services, and 15 percent are transitional bilingual. Last spring (2010), 95 percent of the 10th-grade students met reading benchmarks and 100 percent met writing benchmarks. High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE) scores for tenth-grade students in 2010 were above the state average in math and science, and students passed math at twice the success rate for other Native American students in the state.

THE GEAR UP MODEL

Neah Bay Junior/Senior High School received a GEAR UP Student Success Program grant in February 2008 to serve all ninth-grade students through their graduation in 2011. The grant was designed to follow these students as they moved up through the grades, providing them with an array of services, and with the ultimate goal of preparing all students to attend college. The number of students served fluctuated over the years, between 18 and 14, but the group of 15 who graduated in spring 2011 have all been in the program since their ninth-grade year. Robin Arnold, the school counselor, has been the GEAR UP coordinator since the program started.

GEAR UP IN ACTION: BEST PRACTICES

Senior student Ida McCarty is an artistic person who does not speak up easily. However, she becomes enthusiastic when the subject is the GEAR UP program at Neah Bay Junior/Senior High School. One of the many field trips to colleges that she participated in over her four-year involvement with GEAR UP took her to the Art Institute of Seattle. There she found the college that was just right for her. College was now no longer something abstract or for “others.” It was tangible, not terribly far away, and obtainable ... except for the high tuition of this private college.

Nonetheless, with the help of the GEAR UP coordinator Robin Arnold and her caring teachers, Ida’s dream became a plan. As with all the students, the first step in the plan was to involve the family. Many parents and extended family members want to keep their young adult children close to home where they are safely surrounded by loved ones and

their own culture and also to ensure that this small community does not become even smaller. Robin, in her wisdom, knew that if family members were part of the plan and supportive of the student's goals—in this community families are very close-knit and often include a large extended family network—success was highly likely. It was Ida's beloved aunties who drove her to the Art Institute of Seattle and, with Robin's help, secured a place for her in an upcoming summer workshop. Seeing for themselves Ida's joy at being at her dream school, they became part of her support team to help carry out her plan. They drove her back again that summer so she could participate in Studio 101, where, with other high school students from around the country and the world, she was able to sample classes and get in-depth information about what it takes to be a professional artist—a sound recording engineer in Ida's case.

Now, almost ready to graduate, Ida's plan has been

revised. Because of the challenge of paying the high tuition, her goal has been delayed, but by no means abandoned. Her plan now includes attending Shoreline Community College in Seattle in the fall, while saving money and seeking scholarships so she can attend the Art Institute of Seattle in the near future. Living in Seattle will help ease her transition logistically, psychologically, and culturally.

Unlike Ida, Antonio (Tony) DeBari has no trouble speaking his mind and making himself heard. As the youngest of six children of a single mother, perhaps this is a necessary survival skill. Like Ida, Tony found the college that is perfect for him. He is so enthusiastic about Western Washington University in Bellingham that he can sound like its marketing director. He is convinced it will provide the best possible education he needs to reach his career goal of becoming a kindergarten teacher. Tony found his calling in life while working on his Senior Project,



teaching judo to young children. He realized he had a talent for teaching and that it brought him pleasure and satisfaction.

Tony's mother, Polly, couldn't be happier about this. She could never have provided Tony with the opportunity to see all these schools, help him to find the right one, or have taken him to other enrichment activities such as plays. As a single mother working full-time, she does not have the time or the money. Polly will never forget Tony's excitement after seeing the Lion King stage play (a GEAR UP event) and how she had to listen to the songs over and over. She was able to participate in one field trip, which she recalls as a fantastic experience. In one full, action-packed day they visited three universities, saw a youth pow-wow, and went to an improv show. She sighed wistfully at this recollection, "That is something I have never seen before." Polly credits the GEAR UP program with helping Tony to focus on what he wants to do and to have the motivation to achieve it.

Tony agrees. "I was not the best student in middle school. I probably had a 2.1 grade point average. But, I really wanted to go on the GEAR UP field trips and I had to have a 3.0 average for that. Now I'll graduate with about a 3.3 grade point average." True to his dream and plan, Tony will be attending Western Washington University in the fall.

Synon Allen had her sights on attending the University of Washington since she was in elementary school, along with her career goal of being a pediatrician. Seattle was associated with good things and warm memories for Synon—the pow-wow her family attended each summer and visiting her auntie in Marysville. For Synon, GEAR UP did not provide her with the opportunity to find the right school for her; she already knew that coming into the program. Instead, it provided her with the means to make it a

“In spite of her tremendous capabilities and drive, Synon did not think she could achieve her dream of going to the University of Washington. That goal seemed just out of her reach until she started participating in the GEAR UP program. With the resources and supports of GEAR UP, it became a reality.

reality and to help ensure that she will be successful as she pursues a rigorous course of study.

During numerous visits to and workshops at the University of Washington, Synon was able to schedule meetings with faculty and administrators to discuss her goals and to learn as much as she could about the University, in particular the pre-med program and the supports available for Native American students. As a result, she will be entering the University of Washington ahead of the game. She will already have a cadre of caring adults who are dedicated to her cause and can help ensure that she succeeds.

In addition to being goal-oriented and hard working, Synon is a natural leader who is well respected by her peers. She was an active participant in all GEAR UP activities and would often motivate her classmates to keep trying and not lose site of the goal of attending college. She was usually the first to volunteer, and her enthusiasm was contagious.

Robin Arnold describes Synon as, “really the heart of our program when it comes to students and a driving force to get the students, especially Ida, to take risks and challenge themselves. She has networking skills that would amaze the CEOs of major corporations and has probably collected more business cards from executives, deans of colleges, and other professionals all over the state than any other person her age. Synon was always the first to introduce our group on visits and she really served as a role model for her peers when it came to being gregarious and making important connections with people we met.”

In spite of her tremendous capabilities and drive, Synon did not think she could achieve her dream of going to the University of Washington. That goal seemed just out of her reach until she started participating in the GEAR UP program. With the resources and supports of GEAR UP, it became a reality.

How did Ida, Tony, Synon, and other students become so excited about going to college that nothing could stop them? It was because Robin Arnold and her team took the concept of college visits three steps beyond expectations. They knew it was not enough to just visit a college and observe what campus life is like. It was necessary for the students to experience it: to hear directly from former Neah Bay students who were now in college about the challenges and joys and to visit many, many colleges because each is so different and every student must find one that is good match.

Over the course of the GEAR UP program, students and staff traveled 11,828 miles, visiting colleges and educational programs across the northwest. Ten staff members donated a total of 1,154 unpaid volunteer hours in this effort. Students visited 13 four-year colleges in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, and seven community and technical colleges in Washington.

Prior to participating in GEAR UP, 50 percent of the student cohort had never visited a college campus before. In addition, visits were made to seven cultural and educational museums, and they saw three major theater productions. Before participating in GEAR UP, 70 percent of the cohort students had never attended a professional theater performance.

The link between education and careers was clearly made for the students during visits and, for some, job shadows at Seattle Children’s Hospital, Boeing, and Microsoft. Networking relationships built during these experiences resulted in GEAR UP students’ participation in five different competitive summer programs, including the aforementioned Studio 101 at the Art Institute of Seattle. Synon Allen attended the U-DOC Summer Program at the University of Washington for high school students interested in healthcare professions; Thomas Lawrence was accepted to the very competitive BioQuest Academy—the summer program of the Seattle Biomedical Research Institute at the University of Washington. Also at the University of Washington, Thomas Burlingame attended the MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement) Science and Engineering Summer Program, as well as Studio 101, where he studied digital filmmaking, which culminated in writing and directing a short film for his senior project.

IMPACTS

Fifty-seven percent of the GEAR UP cohort took the SAT during their sophomore year, whereas in previous years no sophomores took the SAT. Seventy-five percent of the GEAR UP students met the admission requirements to apply to four-year colleges and universities (the rest met the requirements to attend community colleges), as compared to 24 percent of the class of 2010, 18 percent of the class of 2009,

“ But perhaps the most significant impact of this program is how the culture of the entire student body—from sixth-graders on up—has dramatically changed at the school.

and 35 percent of the class of 2008. Before GEAR UP, 25 percent of the students reported that they did not know how to pay for college or what financial aid was available; today 100 percent report they are well-versed on financial aid. Prior to participating in the GEAR UP program, 42 percent of the students identified themselves as college-bound students. Today 100 percent of cohort students identify themselves as college-bound, while the school average is 62 percent. In fact 100 percent of the senior class will be attending college.

Evan Bowchop became only the third student in the past 20 years from Neah Bay to be accepted to an Ivy League school. He will attend Stanford in the fall, although he was accepted to Yale, Dartmouth, and, conditionally, to Harvard.

Morgan Goodrich became a mother in her junior year. In many tribal communities, young mothers are valued and supported by their extended families. But even with this support, the responsibilities of young parenting can make remaining in school challenging, if not impossible. Morgan is overcoming the odds with her plans and will not only graduate, she will attend college in the fall. It takes great determination and the support and guidance of many caring adults for a young parent to finish high school on time, take college prep classes, and go to college on schedule.

The resources and activities of the GEAR UP program are among the important supports that Morgan credits for her success. Morgan's goal has been to study environmental science at a four-year college. However, with a baby in her future, she could not be so far from her family support network. Undaunted, Morgan researched her options, met with Robin Arnold and her teachers, and put in place a thoughtful alternative plan. When she was pregnant, in addition to her regular high school classes, she enrolled in the Running Start program through Peninsula College in nearby Port Angeles. Running Start gave her access to online classes where she earned dual credit (high school and college) with free tuition, giving her a lighter course load in her senior year in order to better balance school and her parenting responsibilities. Although the load was lighter, the rigor was not; she took calculus and physics during that year. Her research also revealed a great option for her: Western Washington University has a branch campus at Peninsula College in nearby Port Angeles, where Morgan can earn a four-year degree in environmental science. That is where she will enroll in the fall of 2011.

But perhaps the most significant impact of this program is how the culture of the entire student body—from sixth-graders on up—has dramatically changed at the school. As the GEAR UP students grew older and moved up, they influenced the younger students and served as positive role models. Now, nearly all the students in the school see college as a desirable and obtainable goal. The younger students often ask the GEAR UP students about college and what they need to do to get in and pay for it. With every current senior in the school going to college, a new norm has been established. The students of the Class of 2012 are very likely to follow the example set by these capable and hard-working GEAR UP students.

TEKOA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Technology and High Expectations: The Foundation for College Readiness

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL CONTEXT

Tekoa has a rich heritage and history, having played a key role in the development and support of neighboring communities and farms for more than 100 years. Tucked away in a scenic portion of Whitman County, Tekoa is situated at the base of Tekoa Mountain (elevation 2,490 feet), on the extreme eastern end of the rolling hills known as the Palouse, and to the west of the Benewah Range of Idaho. With a population slightly over 800, Tekoa retains its small town size and charm—there are no stop lights, although it does have an outdoor swimming pool and three churches that provide community activities for both youth and adults.

Surrounded by mountains and farms that grow wheat, barley, bluegrass, and lentils, Tekoa was once the busy hub of the area's railroad industry. Despite its relative isolation, the town is located just 39 miles south of the Spokane Valley, 48 miles north of Pullman, and about 55 miles from the Spokane International Airport.

Tekoa High School includes grades 7–12 with approximately 110 students. The student body is predominately white (82.7 percent), 3.6 percent Hispanic, and 11.8 percent Native American, predominately from the nearby Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation. The free- and reduced-price lunch rate at the school is 51 percent (compared to the state average of 37.2 percent). The annual dropout rate for 2008–2009 was 3.6 percent, below the state average of 5.1 percent. Most of the students' family members are working in the farming industry or related business. Only about 35 percent of the parents have attended college. A majority of Tekoa's graduates will be first generation college students.

The school has had very little staff turnover in the past decade. In fact, the last person added to the staff was hired nearly 10 years ago. The current high school principal began as the principal of the district's elementary school in 1970.

THE GEAR UP MODEL

Tekoa is in the fourth year of the GEAR UP for Student Success project. This project is state funded and started with a cohort of 27 ninth-grade students. The cohort now has 20 students. Over the years 4 students have moved and three have left the program, not meeting the annual benchmarks in spite of intensive support efforts.

“GEAR UP has enabled more students to take online learning classes to expand the course offerings not otherwise available in a small school.”

GEAR UP IN ACTION: BEST PRACTICES

In the first year, GEAR UP funds were used to purchase a mobile computer lab with 20 computers. The lab is still running strong, with all 20 computers in operation. Each student was assigned a laptop—a big help for students who otherwise may not have been able to afford one. One student stated: “As a junior we were given laptop computers. It made things a lot easier.”

College site visits have also been an important part of GEAR UP. Students have made site visits to the University of Idaho, Washington State University,

Central Washington University, and Lewis and Clark College in Clarkston. The entire GEAR UP cohort group has made all of the visits together. When there is room on the bus, other students from the school are also included. These visits have had a major payoff. Adrienne Madison, the GEAR UP coordinator (also a half-time Special Education teacher), notes that “Students have been accepted to a wide variety of schools, including: Lewis and Clark in Oregon; Washington State University; Eastern Washington University; Carroll College in Helena, Montana; Spokane Falls Community College; the Cornish Arts Institute in Seattle; and Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. All the acceptances will be announced at graduation.”

According to Principal Wayne Roellich: *College application fees are also something that GEAR UP pays for. Each application costs around \$50, so the student pays the first \$15 and GEAR UP pays the remainder, for up to three applications—one application for a college they know they can get into; one they think is a good match and they are likely to get in to; and one for their dream college. This has really opened the students’ eyes to more choices.”*

The students were also able to take a three-day trip to Seattle and Olympia. In addition to the college visits, students were able to see the state capitol in Olympia, where they met with their state representatives, and visited the Experience Music Project museum in Seattle.



Tutoring is offered to students before school, after school, and sometimes even during school, primarily provided by Ms. Madison, but many teachers donate their time as well. Most of the students live in town, so they do not have an issue with needing after-hours transportation. The library is also available after school five days a week, where students can get informal academic help and tutoring.

GEAR UP has enabled more students to take online learning classes to expand the course offerings not otherwise available in a small school. The classes are paid for with GEAR UP funds, and the school uses RedComet.com, primarily for credit retrieval, as well as a Brigham Young University program for electives. Psychology and philosophy have been popular subjects. The school also offers the Running Start option, in which students can earn dual high school and college credit. Typically, students can earn credits from Eastern Washington University, Washington State University, or Spokane Community College.

Two classes offered at Tekoa are unique. In 12th grade all students take Survival Education where they learn to plan for postsecondary responsibilities, such as creating a personal financial budget. This is a required course. They also work on a senior project in this class, coordinating this effort with their student portfolio. Prior to this, in the ninth grade, they take a class called Personal Choices, which is about preparing them for the remainder of their high school careers.

Job Shadows

Job shadows have been an important part of the GEAR UP program. Students are matched with a particular occupation of their own choosing that they have researched. Tekoa is in equal proximity to Spokane, Pullman, Moscow, and Coeur d'Alene, and

students are typically taken individually to one of these communities for their job shadows. Juniors and seniors do further research on careers of interest. This research, along with formal reflection on the job shadow experience, becomes a part of each student's culminating project which is presented during their senior year. Job shadows are typically four to eight hours long, although one student did a 10–12 hour nursing shift just to experience the reality of the job. This was the student's choice, and she was thrilled to have the opportunity.

Earl Gaines, another student, described how his job shadow experience has led him to consider a new career path:

"I was able to do a job shadow with some private engineers, working all day with them from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. It was very interesting. They were building a battery that would store energy. They were doing a pilot to be able to develop this for the Chinese market. They then offered me a summer internship job in Libby Lake. Now I am considering studying engineering."

Parent And Community Involvement

About 90 percent of families are connected on the Internet, where they have access to their students' grades. If they do not have Internet access, then staff

“ Maria Haxton, a student in the GEAR UP cohort, says that the support and information provided by the program has been empowering and has allowed her to realize her college plans.

members contact them directly. Tekoa has a long history of very good attendance at family events. These events are often catered by the student group FCCLA (Family, Community, Career, and Leaders of America). By all accounts, the food is very good and the students take great pride in preparing it. The events also have other incentives for the parents to attend, including free raffle drawings. These events provide parents with detailed information about postsecondary opportunities for their students.

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) nights and scholarships have also been an important part of the GEAR UP experience. Maria Haxton, a student in the GEAR UP cohort, says that the support and information provided by the program has been empowering and has allowed her to realize her college plans:

“I have been given the largest scholarship at Franciscan University, which is \$8,000,” she says. “I have been offered a total of \$106,000 from several schools, but [Franciscan] is the best match for me. The tuition is \$19,000 a year; the \$8,000 is for the four years, so the balance is \$17,000. Then I have a grant of \$4,000. So there will be a balance of \$13,000. My father is a veteran and he has a GI bill that can be transferred. So combined I am very close to meeting my goal. They have pre-dentistry classes at Franciscan, and then I can transfer to the University of Washington for dentistry school. It will be an easy transition.”

Such detailed plans speak to the success of the GEAR UP program. Few low-income, 18-year-old students from a small town in eastern Washington have such clear plans for their future.

According to Adrienne Madison, parents frequently call with questions about the college admission process and about scholarships:

“I think that parents are more aware of what they need to do now. And they have learned that it’s important to have long-term goals. Most of these parents also have younger children, so this knowledge will impact more than just the 20 students in this cohort.”

The Tekoa GEAR UP model does not include scholarships, but the school does offer support to help meet students’ college tuition needs: “We do have local scholarships, and we’re part of the fundraising group called Dollars for Scholars,” says Roellich. “This group works to match dollars at some of the local Washington colleges. They have fundraisers and bring volunteers out into the community to organize fundraisers. They host auctions and bring in volunteers to play music.”

This is an activity that will ensure that the school’s college-going culture is sustainable in the future.

Another success cited by the school counselor, Scott Eaton, has been the use of the Navigation 101 advisory model: “We have used this to train the students to do student-led conferences,” says Eaton. “Students have been doing these for six years; parent attendance has been outstanding. The students make videos of their presentations and then have rehearsals. This model makes the students very accountable. Students send out a letter to their parents to invite them to come, and the parents are given choices of times, and then make appointments to attend. Individual appointments are set during the day and evening.”

Teacher advisors guide the students in the process and volunteer their time to make this all happen.

During their senior year, students make a 20–25 minute presentation, during which they talk about their “fifth-year” plans and present their senior projects. The senior project is evaluated by five or six community members and a faculty member. The

presentations are made during the regular school day and typically include a PowerPoint presentation. The students bring an assortment of things to the school to demonstrate their culminating project—motorcycles, combines, etc. All students are evaluated on their SCANS skills (Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) and what they will do for their fifth year. The entire school often attends these presentations.

GEAR UP Coordinator

According to Principal Roellich: *“Adrienne and her predecessor, Lisa Leathers, have done a fantastic job. We really need someone in this position to focus on the college-going activity and the job shadows. This position is something we will try to keep in our budget. We are hoping for another grant to continue this work in the school.”*

School Counselor Scott Eaton adds: *“Adrienne has the magic of having a great rapport with the kids and parents. Having just taken 10 years to finish her degree, she knows there has got to be an easier way for the students she works with.”*

Rural Community Coordination

As a small, close-knit school, Tekoa has extremely dedicated staff members who often volunteer one or two nights each week. Staff members have also been able to form learning communities with staff of neighboring schools in their content areas and meet twice a year. In addition, the school has created its own learning communities. These groups have been studying the work of widely respected educational researcher and trainer Robert Marzano this year. Also, all the counselors in the county meet periodically and have created a network for problem-solving.

IMPACTS

As a result of GEAR UP, Tekoa has seen a big increase in the number of students taking SAT and ACT

tests. Because GEAR UP paid for the testing, the entire cohort class took the tests. They also have 11 students in the cohort taking Advanced Placement (AP) tests this year. The school offers AP Calculus, Composition and Literature, and Language Arts. Calculus was offered this year for the first time. The math teacher did the AP Calculus training for the entire district. The Literature and Composition training was provided by GEAR UP this past summer.

The school was honored as a Blue Ribbon School for 2010. The Blue Ribbon Schools Program honors public and private elementary, middle, and high schools that are either high-performing or have a high level of improved student achievement, especially among disadvantaged students.

The program is part of a larger U.S. Department of Education effort to identify and disseminate knowledge about best practices in school leadership and teaching. Each year since 1982, the U.S. Department of Education has sought out schools where students attain and maintain high academic goals, including those that beat the odds. “It has really helped us that we have high test scores, in winning this recognition,” says Roellich. “Tekoa has never had a student that did not meet the WASL requirements. With the GEAR UP program in place, there has been a lot stronger connection for students between getting better grades and being able to attend the institutions like the University of Washington.” Students are starting to see that better grades mean more options.

CONCLUSION

Each of the five GEAR UP programs described in this report has taken a unique and thoughtful approach to its work—one that is responsive to the culture and the needs of its particular community. Each provides the required array of GEAR UP services in a thorough and well-planned way, but each goes far beyond what is required.

Under the leadership of a highly dedicated, capable, creative, and hard-working coordinator (and a team of them in some cases), each of the five programs has a clear sense of purpose and direction—intentionality—and their activities and actions directly reflect and support those intentions. There is complete congruence between their ideas and their actions.

A third-party observer does not need to see a logic model or read a proposal to determine each program's theory of action—it is clearly evident in everything they do. Yet, this sense of purpose is also broad enough to allow the program to be flexible and responsive as the students grow, circumstances change, and challenges arise.

Among other commonalities across these programs are:

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT.

The principal and superintendent are active members of the team, promoting the program, providing ample staff time and resources to ensure its success, and trusting in the leadership of the program coordinator. One example of this hands-on involvement and commitment took place in Toppenish, where the GEAR UP focus group rescheduled its meeting because the superintendent was out of town and insisted on being present to provide his input.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT.

Each of the programs involves family members as

much as possible and provides some services directly to and for them. Many provide parent-only field trips in addition to inviting parents on student-focused field trips. All make phone calls to parents and many do home visits, as well. Every program has family members on its advisory committee, to help shape and improve the program. In addition, these programs all go beyond what is required—they respect, listen, and respond to family members' concerns and questions. They make themselves available to family members at all hours and establish close, trusting relationships with them.

RELATIONAL APPROACH.

The GEAR UP coordinator (and his or her team in larger programs) and key staff members know each student in the program very well and care deeply about each as an individual. These staff members are adept at building on a student's strengths to address his or her weaknesses, and they are able to do this in an individualized, personal way. Their understanding of each student allows them to know just how far they can push or challenge an individual, while making it feel more like encouragement than punishment. In turn, the staff members are respected by the students and have a rewarding sense of being cared about as individuals in their own right. In some cases, students have expressed near adoration for the staff during evaluations. "If it wasn't for Ms. _____, I would have probably dropped out by now," and "I wouldn't be here today without Mr. _____'s help," were common refrains heard from students.

RIGOROUS AND RELEVANT CURRICULUM.

Each program has its own curricular approach, but they all can be characterized as rigorous and relevant. Toppenish High School focuses on STEM—engineering in particular—and the Vancouver School District on the arts. Every GEAR UP high school offers and encourages students to take college-level

classes or Advanced Placement classes. The GEAR UP coordinators know that they must not only prepare students to get into college, but to be successful once they are in college. The best way to do this is to make sure that students are sufficiently challenged while in high school and have opportunities to think critically and engage in complex problem-solving through rigorous curriculum.

Programs make the rigorous curriculum relevant to the students by focusing on the practical application of knowledge, working in teams, and connecting ideas with the lives of the students. The percentage of GEAR UP funds that are used for curricular purposes varies across programs, but all use some funds for this purpose, as it contributes directly towards achieving GEAR UP goals.

GEAR UP Overview

Who We Are

Washington State GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is a college access program administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Board in partnership with the Governor's Office, the University of Washington, the College Success Foundation, the Washington State Employee Credit Union, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Northwest Education Loan Association, and a number of local, state, and national organizations.

Washington was awarded its third consecutive state GEAR UP grant by the US Department of Education in September, 2011. The six-year, \$27 million award will be used to provide direct services to 6,000 students in 28 high-poverty school districts statewide. With the program's dollar-for-dollar cost share requirement, the total program investment will be \$54 million.

In addition to the state program, Washington is home to 10 GEAR UP partnership programs funded individually by the US Department of Education. Combined, all 11 programs bring in a total of \$23.5 million per year and serve nearly 32,000 students in 75 school districts statewide.



This program has also taught me to be a better person. It has taught me to be more dedicated to my education and more responsible in my decision making. I have also seen improvement on my work ethic.

This program means everything to me.

*Javier Corona
Washington State GEAR UP*

What We Do

- We promote equal access to education and educational excellence through concerted partnership efforts on behalf of low-income students.
- We encourage student enrollment in rigorous and challenging curricula and coursework in order to reduce the need for remedial coursework at the postsecondary level.
- We provide information about financial aid to students and their families.
- We improve the number of participating students who obtain a secondary school diploma and enter postsecondary education.
- We promote reforms and improvements in the school curriculum as well as in teaching and learning methods.
- We build local and state efforts to encourage investment that will sustain GEAR UP activities and services beyond the federal grant period.
- We develop regional and national partnerships to build program capacity to serve low-income students academic, financial, and social support needs statewide.



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