



Diversity & Engagement

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
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California GEAR UP Schools,

On behalf of the California State GEAR UP program, I wish to express our sincere gratitude for the opportunity to collaborate with your schools. Since 2011, we have been inspired by you and your dedication to making a difference for All students. Your success has been shared broadly throughout California and with the national GEAR UP community.

As we near the end of this grant cycle, we are proud of the experiences and lessons learned on this journey with you. Because of your dedication, we have had broad systemic effect beyond the 48 schools that participated in the program. Our story is unique and it is important that we share the lessons that we have learned collaboratively with schools, partners, and other college access and community-based programs. Each of you has received a copy of *The California State GEAR UP Program: An Innovative Model for Educational Equity and Postsecondary Preparedness*. The report documents the evolution of the GEAR UP Whole School Services model for establishing a *college-going culture* at selected middle schools throughout the State. Additionally, it is available online at:

http://www.castategearup.org/media/k2/attachments/CA_GEAR_UP_Report_opt.pdf

We know that school-centered reflection is the heart of our Whole School Services model. GEAR UP School Service Coaches have established critical relationships with your school leadership teams and become integral to the school community. The attached document *Impact and Insights* highlights the actions that we have taken together and, in particular, the role of GEAR UP Coaches in your schools. These “lessons learned” underscore California GEAR UP’s impact as well as may inform future programming.

Looking forward, there is good news for GEAR UP: the United States Department of Education has formally announced a competition for 2017. Along with many other states, we have submitted an application for a new grant that would continue our efforts from 2017-2024 with announcements anticipated by Fall 2017. The State grant will remain focused on ALL students and the development and sustainability of a *college-going-culture*. If the grant is funded, the current cohort of 48 schools will be contacted and invited to apply for participation. For information on the application and activities of California GEAR UP, visit our website: www.castategearup.org or contact our office at (510) 587-5139. Additionally, many of your students have received Education Trust Awards. Please direct any questions you may have to Crystal Robinson Crystal.robinson@ucop.edu.

We are indebted to you, your school site contacts, school leadership teams, and staffs for your contributions that reflect the breadth of collaboration with schools, families and students. We know that you will continue to *Make A Difference for ALL Students* and we are proud to have collaborated with you to achieve this important goal.

With sincere gratitude,

Shelley Davis, Director
California State GEAR UP Program
University of California
Office of the President



Academic Excellence and College Access for All Students

IMPACT and INSIGHTS

Each year, the California GEAR UP Program hosts professional development workshops for school staff and community members that include approximately 1,500 participants. The program surveyed parents of GEAR UP students during the 2014-2015 school year and discovered that 70 percent of participating families expect their children will earn at least a baccalaureate degree. California GEAR UP students continue to use the CaliforniaColleges.edu platform to build pathways to postsecondary education. During the current grant cycle, over 5,700 California GEAR UP students established accounts with CaliforniaCollege.edu. In addition, approximately 5,900 California GEAR UP students have been exposed to the College Board SpringBoard curriculum to ensure that they are meeting the rigors of the Common Core State Standards.

California GEAR UP has had broad systemic effect beyond the 48 school sites that participate in the program. In establishing the California Partnership Initiative (CPI), California GEAR UP surveyed GEAR UP partnership projects across the state before the 2015 CPI Conference to determine the number of students, schools, and districts served by GEAR UP each year. These data revealed that California GEAR UP CPI services reached practitioners in 241 schools located across 22 California counties that enroll more than 200,000 students. Though a few of these GEAR UP partnership projects are now beyond their funding cycles, California was awarded several new projects in 2016 that participated in California GEAR UP CPI events.

With 18 years of experience serving California secondary schools in predominantly low-income communities, California GEAR UP and the Whole School Services program have gained insight into critical factors that impact school change and improvement and have learned much about the best way to support schools as they face the challenges of educating diverse student populations.

The following insights highlight the effective ways by which California GEAR UP coaches can collaborate with schools. These “lessons learned” underscore California GEAR UP’s impact and, too, may inform future programming.

External partners like GEAR UP play a vital role in facilitating school improvement.

Sometimes, schools are so entrenched in activities, programs, and projects that they lose sight of “the big picture” of their goals and, consequently, lose direction and focus. Other schools may be so mired in issues of safety and maintenance of order that teaching and learning become secondary concerns. A few schools may have settled into a comfortable status quo and feel no need to push forward or make changes. Irrespective of the conditions that dominate schools or their contexts, schools at times may not have the vision or sufficient time, energy, or capacity for improvement. In such cases, GEAR UP’s Whole School Services program can provide both an outsider’s

perspective and an insider, consistent support. GEAR UP's dual role of outsider/insider has proven to be an invaluable asset to schools.

The major driving force behind implementation of improvement efforts at a school is the Leadership Team and the teacher leaders who plan and fuel its actions.

Giving real decision-making power to the Leadership Team that include teachers may convince them that they are not merely rubber-stamping administrative directives and may reinforce teacher ownership of decisions and ideas. At some schools, the Leadership Team provides cohesion and coherence, as the staff attempts a multi-faceted approach to building a *college-going culture*. Rather than engage in an array of disconnected activities, coaches help schools focus their efforts. They provide the time and space for teachers to take risks, explore, and learn in a safe environment. Leadership Teams learn to enhance and improve their college-going activities by building a network of external partners to support student outcomes, strengthening parent and community participation, and integrating and connecting activities that result in greater impact on students and families. Importantly, the most effective Leadership Teams learn to identify the school's capacity to sustain and maintain significant activities and those activities that they need to cast aside or eliminate.

The Leadership Team may be the glue that binds the school together. In times of turmoil and unexpected upset, the Leadership Team may serve as the ballast that keeps the school from tipping over into unrest and chaos. Schools may suffer from myriad traumas or crises: Inept leadership, frequent changes in administration, financial hardships, labor issues, safety concerns, personnel cutbacks, legal actions, school and personal tragedies, to name a few. Teacher leaders, acting together, can raise staff morale, lift it from demoralization, and, by the strength of their leadership, provide direction and stability. Additionally, the coach can provide a steadying hand and "can-do" spirit that helps the school survive the rough times and find equilibrium.

Developing a college-going culture requires focused effort and a clear vision and purpose. The Whole School Services program challenges educators to be progressive and innovative agents for positive whole school change. This forward movement may require shifting mindsets about the capacity of all students to learn and the responsibility of teachers to activate and improve that learning. Building a *college-going culture* means not only raising the bar about possibilities, but changing structures, instruction, expectations, and belief systems so that possibilities become reality.

Coaches promote regular conversations to highlight successes and recognize challenges as well as streamline and focus improvement efforts. They provide time and opportunity for schools to meet off-site to reflect on current practices and identify areas for improvement. Generally, schools have moved from a culture of complaint to a more activist culture of problem solving. For example, one school created their own scholarship program when GEAR UP no longer offered the Educational Trust Awards. Other schools made the bold move of eliminating remedial courses and examining grading policies and grade inflation. Many schools made concerted efforts to improve relationships and connections at all levels: Student-to-student, student-to-adults,

adult-to-adult. GEAR UP has prompted schools to widen and deepen their understanding of *college-going culture* and of the changes necessary to include all students in that culture.

Schools must focus on high-level instruction and critical thinking. Integral to developing a *college-going culture* is high-level, rigorous instruction for all students. In addition to all the external indicators of *college-going culture* -- banners, college clothing, career and college nights/days/weeks, college trips and tours -- schools must address classroom instruction. The questions about academic preparation and opportunity are many:

- What is “rigor” in instruction?
- How do we provide the academic foundations necessary for high school and college/university?
- What do we mean by equity and access?
- What are the ramifications of educational equity?
- How do we increase access?
- How do we support students who may have access to more challenging courses, but lack the skills necessary for success?
- What professional development is needed to support high-level instruction?

Schools are only beginning to probe for answers to these questions.

Coaches encourage staffs to turn their attention to the difficult issue of improved instruction in all classes and in all disciplines. The School Self-Assessment Rubric (SSAR) helps schools assess current instructional practices and areas of need. As a result of their collaboration with teachers and administration, coaches have connected schools with outside consultants and agencies to focus on instruction, e.g., MDTP math consultants, SpringBoard coaches, Instructional Rounds experts. These consultants support students, teachers, and departments inside and outside classrooms. Additionally, Whole School Services provides professional development opportunities to strengthen classroom instruction and expand the repertoire of teachers with regard to strategies and deepen their pedagogy at Institutes, Forums, and individual school sites. The Math ACCESS program, MDTP math workshops, SpringBoard trainings, and AVID conferences are just a few of these professional development offerings.

WSS coaches develop relationships and build trust that is foundational to school improvement. Much of the evaluation of the Whole School Services program emphasizes activities and actions. While it is important for schools to plan and implement change -- that is, do something -- perhaps more important is to build the foundation of trust to support deep change and to develop a network of relationships to sustain lasting commitment to the improvement process. Essential to the optimal impact of the program, coaches must develop positive relationships with teachers and administrators and nurture trust to ensure open discussions and courageous conversations. Coaches learn to honor confidentiality, accentuate the positive, and listen rather than dictate.

The manner in which each coach develops trust and relationships depends on the personality and strengths of the coach. Some coaches use the approach of a critical friend and ask probing questions and critique decisions and actions. Others become cheerleaders and advocates. And, some can connect the important goals of schools to their own personal histories of low socio-economic backgrounds, being the first in their families to graduate from college, fear of failure, and diminished confidence. The significance of making multiple and sustaining human connections in GEAR UP work cannot be understated or underestimated.