

Assessing the Success of Specific GEAR UP Components

Lessons Learned from a Rigorous Study in Philadelphia

Presented at the GEAR UP Capacity-Building Conference, February 2015

Background

- The Philadelphia GEAR UP Partnership initiative is a six-year federally-funded program that began in 2009-10 with a cohort of sixth- and seventh-grade students in 34 middle schools.
- Supported by a **strong network of partners**, in 2013-14, the initiative served over 4,000 eleventh- and twelfth-grade students in seven high needs high schools.
- The initiative follows evidence-based practices and offers a **robust portfolio of services** including: academic enrichment and supports, college and career readiness activities, professional development opportunities for school staff, and family workshops and one-on-one support.

Assessing AVID Implementation and Impact

- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is an elective course with a curriculum centered on the writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization and reading (**WICOR**) method.
- Targets middle and high school students who are in the middle range of achievement, come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and have a desire to attend college
- GEAR UP school **adhered to most AVID implementation best practices**; two schools met stringent AVID certification standards.
- According to teacher survey results, most teachers are using AVID instructional techniques beyond the elective course and in their content classrooms.
- Implementation challenges included: variations in principal buy-in and support and AVID staff turnover due to district budget cuts and teacher re-assignments

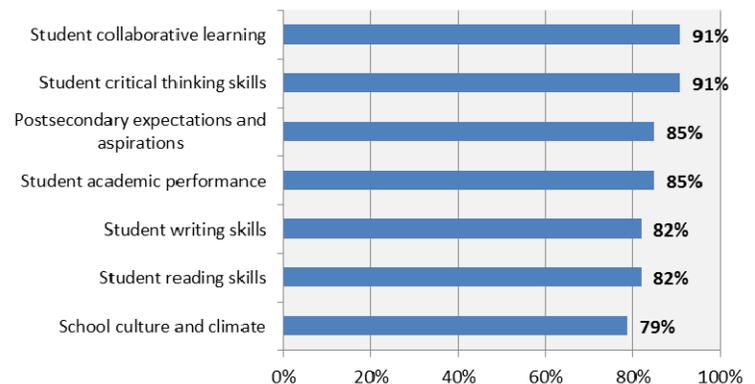
Evaluation Design

OUTCOME/IMPACT STUDY	
Purpose	Data sources and methods
1. Assess impact on academic performance and preparation 2. Assess impact on student and family knowledge about college 3. Assess impact on high school graduation and college enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student and parent surveys Participation data School district student data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dosage analyses to assess the relationship between participation and outcomes Quasi-experimental impact analyses comparing outcomes of GEAR UP students to a rigorously-matched comparison group
IMPLEMENTATION STUDY (WITH BRANCH ASSOCIATES)	
Purpose	Data sources and methods
1. Assess program fidelity 2. Document promising practices, challenges and lessons learned 3. Identify areas for growth and inform programmatic decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews with project staff and partners Case studies in participating schools (e.g., observations, interviews and focus groups with staff and students) School administrator and teacher surveys Participation data

Finding:

According to teachers and students, AVID has had a moderate to strong impact on key outcome areas such as **collaborative learning and critical-thinking skills**.

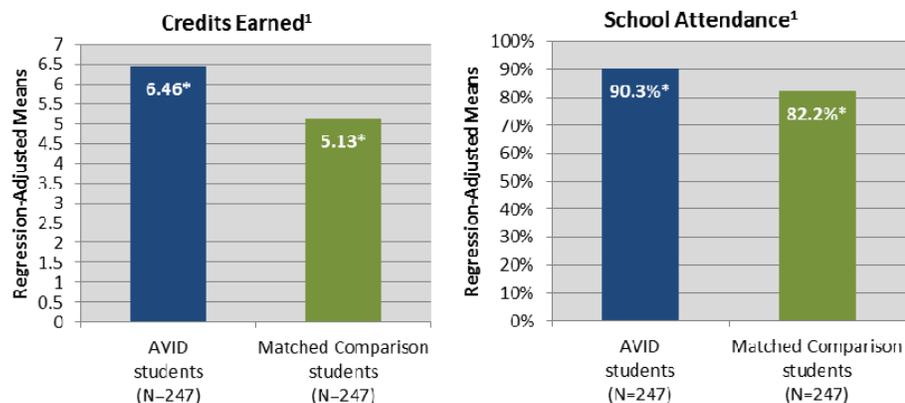
Percentage of teachers who report a moderate to very strong influence of AVID on key outcome areas (N=33)



Finding:

AVID has had a **significant impact (of moderate size) on academic achievement and attendance**, based on a rigorous quasi-experimental study.

Impact of AVID on Student Outcomes (2013-14)



¹ An asterisk denotes a statistically significant difference at the .05 level.

Assessing the Implementation and Impact of College Readiness Activities

- ◆ **Comprehensive intervention:** college advisement, college readiness workshops, college visits, school-wide events, PSAT and SAT classes, financial planning supports, parent workshops.
- ◆ In 2013-14, 3,593 students (about **91% of the GEAR UP cohort**) took part in one or more college preparation activities, with an average of 12 hours of programming per student.
- ◆ School-wide events were extremely useful for **promoting a college-going culture** in the schools, engaging a large number of students and energizing both students and teachers.
- ◆ College readiness activities, and specifically college visits, allowed students to **build stronger relationships with GEAR UP**

Findings:

Students with higher GEAR UP dosage showed better outcomes (20+ hours in college prep activities):

- ⇒ higher educational expectations,
- ⇒ stronger beliefs in postsecondary education,
- ⇒ increased knowledge of the cost of college,
- ⇒ increased likelihood of taking college access tests,
- ⇒ increased learning about postsecondary options

Parents of students who attended a GEAR UP school the previous year were more likely than their peers to report that:

- ⇒ They have spoken to someone about college entrance requirements,
- ⇒ They have spoken to their child about college,
- ⇒ They have enough information about college requirements and financial aid,
- ⇒ They are knowledgeable about costs and benefits of attending college.

LESSONS LEARNED

Challenge: Teasing out the effectiveness of specific GEAR UP components.

- ⇒ Select robust components for this analysis
- ⇒ Assess both implementation and outcomes
- ⇒ Seek input from multiple stakeholder groups
- ⇒ Collect data through a variety of methods, including observations, surveys, interviews, focus groups, school records, extant data
- ⇒ Include comparison groups
- ⇒ Choose outcome measures carefully

Challenge: Collecting accurate, complete, timely participation data.

- ⇒ Use web-enabled, user-friendly database to track student/teacher/parent participation
- ⇒ Create accountability measures for data entry tasks
- ⇒ Increase buy-in by encouraging staff to use participation data to inform programming
- ⇒ Create templates and master action plans to ensure consistency across activities

Challenge: Ensuring high response rates in student and parent surveys.

- ⇒ Multiple administration methods
- ⇒ Involve school staff in development of survey and share results with schools to promote their buy-in
- ⇒ Create accountability measures for survey administration tasks
- ⇒ Use incentives (if approved by federal regulations)

Challenge: Effectively using data to drive programmatic and policy decisions.

- ⇒ Evaluation results need to be timely, useful and reported in a format appropriate for the intended audience.
- ⇒ For program staff: frequent participation reports, quarterly evaluation meetings and reports, annual comprehensive reports
- ⇒ For partners: partner meetings
- ⇒ For USDOE: APRs, biennial reports, final performance report
- ⇒ For school community (school staff, students and families): school-based survey reports, factsheets, Newsletter
- ⇒ For policy makers: factsheets, meetings, hearings