

1. Question: What is GEAR UP?

Answer: GEAR UP is a competitive federal grant program, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, that provides six- and seven-year grants to education and community partnerships to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

2. Question: What is the purpose of GEAR UP?

Answer: GEAR UP's vision is that all students are academically, socially, and financially prepared to enter and complete the postsecondary program or institution of their choice.

GEAR UP's three objectives are:

- Increase academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education.
- Increase high school graduation and postsecondary participation rates.
- Increase students' and their families' knowledge of postsecondary options, preparation, and finances.

3. Question: What does the Washington State GEAR UP program do?

Answer: Washington State GEAR UP, administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), provides funding to 26 high-poverty school districts across the state, serving approximately 5,500 students and their families annually. Funds are used to provide early college awareness and preparation activities such as visits to college campuses, homework assistance, family events, and mentoring and counseling services.

4. Question: What is the program's funding level?

Answer: WSAC has received four consecutive GEAR UP state grants, most recently in 2017. The seven-year funding total is \$24.5 million. With the program's mandatory dollar-for-dollar cost-share requirement, the total annual program investment is \$49 million. Since 2007, the Legislature has contributed funds toward the match requirement, which is currently \$1 million per year.

5. Question: Does GEAR UP work?

Answer: According to a 2019 report, students in Washington State GEAR UP are surpassing statewide rates for high school graduation and college enrollment. Most of the students served by the program are from low-income households, so Washington State GEAR UP is proving effective at closing opportunity gaps.

GEAR UP helps schools prepare students for success in education and careers after high school. The program enables schools to offer direct services that include:

- Building a school culture of college and career readiness.
- Engaging families to participate in college and career planning.
- Hiring and training school-based staff.

RGI Corporation produced the report using data collected by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC). They found that GEAR UP students are meeting college and career readiness benchmarks at higher than average rates. These benchmarks include applying for financial aid, graduating from high school on time, and enrolling in postsecondary education.

- Applying for financial aid. Graduates in the class of 2017 who received GEAR UP services applied for financial aid at a rate of 72 percent, surpassing the statewide average of 54 percent.
- High school graduation. The average on-time cohort graduation rate for the GEAR UP class of 2017 was 83 percent. This exceeded the statewide rate for all students, at 79 percent. It was also close to 13 percentage points higher than the statewide on-time cohort graduation rate for low-income students.
- Postsecondary enrollment. The most recent statewide data on postsecondary enrollment is from 2016, when 62 percent of high school graduates and 50 percent of low-income students enrolled by the fall after graduation. In 2017, GEAR UP students enrolled at a rate of 58 percent by the fall after graduation. Their postsecondary enrollment rate increased to 68 percent by the following year.

6. Question: How can my school get a GEAR UP grant?

Answer: The next competitive grant cycle will be in 2024. Eligible school districts (those with at least 50 percent free and reduced price lunch eligibility) will be invited to apply to participate at that time. Notification will go to school superintendents and principals.