



GEARUP
TENNESSEE

**GUIDE FOR SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATORS
2023 - 2024**

GEAR UP TN

In September 2017, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) was awarded a Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant by the United States Department of Education (USDOE). GEAR UP, a seven-year discretionary grant program, aims to increase the number of low-income, first generation students who graduate from high school and enroll in college. Tennessee's GEAR UP project, GEAR UP TN, will provide direct services to a cohort of 3,500 students, the Class of 2023, beginning in the 8th grade and continuing through the cohort's first year of postsecondary education. Each year, GEAR UP TN also will provide assistance to approximately 3,250 seniors with college enrollment and financial aid processes. GEAR UP TN anticipates that it will serve 23,000 students over the seven years of the grant.

Driven by the belief that every student has the potential to attend and thrive in postsecondary education, GEAR UP TN aims to dramatically increase the number of Tennesseans accessing and succeeding in higher education.

GEAR UP Goals

- Increasing the academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education for GEAR UP students
- Increasing the rates of high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education for GEAR UP students
- Increasing GEAR UP students' and their families' knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing

GEAR UP TN's Programmatic Objectives

- Increase student academic achievement and course completion.
- Increase student performance on college entrance exams.
- Increase student high school graduation.
- Increase student postsecondary participation and success.
- Increase student and family educational expectations.
- Increase student and family knowledge of and access to financial assistance for postsecondary education.
- Increase parent and community engagement in activities associated with student preparation for college.
- Increase educator content-area knowledge and understanding.

GEAR UP TN works with community-based sites in fifteen counties across the state in order to accomplish these goals. Through the sites (Collaboratives), GEAR UP TN provides students with direct services, including mentoring, tutoring, college visits, and financial aid counseling.

This is the third GEAR UP grant awarded to THEC from the USDOE, and the average growth in the college-going rate for the schools that participated in those grants are listed below. Some schools have experienced growth in their college-going rate greater than 20 percentage points during the seven-year period, and the average FAFSA submission rate has increased over 20 percent across GEAR UP schools over the past 5 years.

2005 – 2011 GEAR UP TN Grant

- 10.7 percentage point increase in college-going rate across all GU schools

2012 – 2019 GEAR UP TN Grant

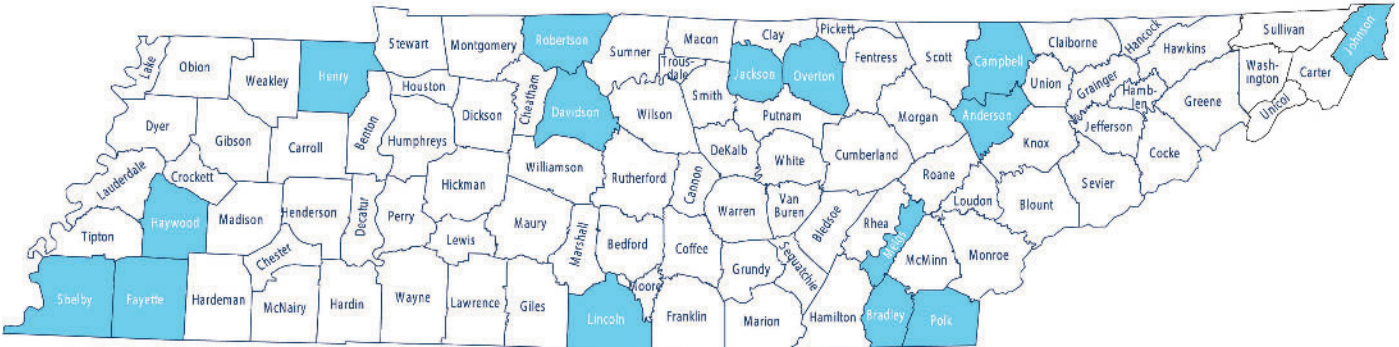
- 9 percentage point increase (2015 data) in college-going rate across all GU schools

In the Spring of 2018, THEC awarded these matching grant awards through a competitive proposal process. To be eligible for a GEAR UP TN grant, high schools had to meet two requirements:

- 1) have a college-going rate at or below the state average, based on the most recent three years of data; and
- 2) have at least 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Over 100 high schools in Tennessee qualified, and through a competitive process that included an external evaluation of the applications from each Collaborative and in-person interviews, 17 high schools were selected. The amount of funding that each Collaborative will receive was determined by the number of students served, the size of the participating schools, and the resources needed to fully and successfully implement a college access, readiness, and success program. Over 10 million dollars will be awarded to these selected high schools throughout the life of the grant.

Schools and Counties Served by GEAR UP TN



High Schools

Clinton High School • Bradley Central High School • Campbell County Comprehensive High School • Jellico High School • Fayette-Ware High School • Haywood High School • Henry County High School • Jackson County High School • Johnson County High School • Fayetteville High School • Meigs County High School • Whites Creek High School • Livingston Academy • Copper Basin High School • Polk County High School • Springfield High School • Kingsbury High School

GEAR UP TN Framework

GEAR UP TN implementation is driven by a theoretical framework that is founded on current college access and success research, experience in implementing successful college access programs, and replication of effective practice gleaned from the state and nation. The GEAR UP TN framework is organized around six focus areas: Rigor, Reach Higher, Relevance, Relationship, Raise Awareness, and Reinforce Action.

Rigor: Academically prepare all students for postsecondary education through rigorous curriculum and academic support.

Reach Higher: Create school and community environments characterized by expectations, policies, and initiatives that support all students' pursuit of postsecondary education.

Relevance: Connect career aspirations and skills to students' educational goals.

Relationship: Foster connections that strengthen students' postsecondary success.

Raise Awareness: Promote early awareness of the steps necessary to prepare for, apply, pay for, and succeed in postsecondary education.

Reinforce Action: Assist students in completing critical steps of the college-going process.

GEAR UP TN Services

THEC will work with GEAR UP TN Collaboratives to foster a college-going culture, devise creative approaches to reach and connect with students, and, most importantly, assist students and their families as they learn about, prepare for, and navigate the college-going process. GEAR UP TN programming will supplement, not replace, existing efforts to improve students' academic and social preparedness for postsecondary education. At its core, GEAR UP TN is a partnership between THEC and the GEAR UP TN Collaborative.

GEAR UP TN Collaboratives have made the following commitments:

1. Hire a qualified program coordinator, hereafter referred to as "site coordinator," to implement and coordinate the GEAR UP TN project within direct-service schools. The site coordinator must be approved by THEC and must be no less than an 11-month employee.
2. Participate in required program evaluation activities and programmatic agreements such as a Data Sharing Agreement between the LEA, high school, Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), and THEC.
3. Collect and report student- and school-level demographic and academic data in a timely and accurate manner.
4. Foster the development of a GEAR UP TN Steering Committee made up of, at minimum, representatives from each GEAR UP TN Collaborative member organization, one student, and one parent. The GEAR UP TN Steering Committee will meet two times a year, provide assistance in developing the annual GEAR UP TN work plan, provide community support to grant initiatives, and assist in project sustainability planning.
5. Implement all required service activities each year of the grant as directed by THEC in accordance with GEAR UP TN implementation guidance.

GEAR UP TN services will include an array of interventions addressing the six GEAR UP TN focus areas. GEAR UP TN services will include academic interventions, career exploration, college awareness and readiness work, and postsecondary transition services. Each cohort student will participate in annual one-on-one advising sessions to map out their academic, career, and postsecondary plans. GEAR UP TN schools will create an annual work plan that outlines GEAR UP TN services and how services are aligned with GEAR UP TN goals, objectives, and metrics. Collaboratives will be provided the opportunity to design interventions that address GEAR UP TN goals and objectives and that meet their specific needs. GEAR UP TN services must supplement and not supplant existing services currently offered at selected direct-service schools.

Developing a Sustainable College-Going Culture

For the seniors, GEAR UP TN services will primarily focus on helping them meet college-going milestones such as the completion of TN Promise applications, college applications, and the FAFSA. However, the GEAR UP model focuses on the work with the cohort students because this is the group of students that the program follows for the entire grant. The cohort group is also used to develop the college-going culture at each GEAR UP school and to develop partnerships and strategies that will lead to sustaining the outcomes and services of GEAR UP once the grant ends. For these reasons, a majority of each site's time, funds, and resources should be focused on the cohort group each year. As a guide, about 60 percent of a site's time, effort, and resources should be spent on the cohort and about 40 percent on the seniors.

Evaluation and Data Sharing

GEAR UP TN Collaboratives will commit to participating in the evaluation of the GEAR UP TN project by sharing student-level academic and demographic data and collecting student service participation data. Collaboratives also commit to administer student surveys, participate in evaluator-led focus groups, and complete an annual performance report (APR). The APR will provide an update on program implementation and progress towards meeting program metrics.

Schools are required to sign a data sharing agreement between the Collaborative, THEC, and the TDOE to share student-level data of participating students. Data will be used to evaluate the GEAR UP TN program and to allow the program to better target interventions and support to meet students' individual needs. Furthermore, THEC will provide outcomes data such as FAFSA completion and college enrollment with participating schools to assist Collaboratives in meeting their goals. Schools must commit to providing the program with student-level data from the local student information system as needed. The GEAR UP TN site coordinator will track all students' progress towards meeting established benchmarks.

Duration of the Partnership

GEAR UP TN Collaboratives will be awarded annual grants starting June 1, 2018 through June 30, 2024. In total, the partnership will last six years.

Award Conditions

The amount of funding awarded to each Collaborative may vary based upon the number of students served, size and number of the participating schools, and resources needed to fully and successfully implement the program requirements. GEAR UP TN is funded through a discretionary grant program administered by the USDOE. Awards are contingent upon THEC receiving funding from the USDOE, availability of funds within the grant budget, and upon THEC's evaluation of funded programs for compliance with program requirements and effectiveness of project activities.

Grant Match

GEAR UP TN grant contracts require that awardees match 20 percent of the annual grant amount in year one of implementation. Thereafter, awardee matching contributions will increase by 20 percent of the annual grant award amount each project year and reach 100 percent matching contribution during grant years five and six. Matching dollars can be contributed through actual dollars or eligible in-kind contributions and must support the project's goals and objectives.



We are fortunate to be partnering with you! If you have any questions or need further information, please reach out.



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Establish program goals and priorities

Program oversight

Manage program Implementation



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Expenditure allowability

Match guidelines, documentation

Annual work plan and budget

Monthly Activity Plans (MAPs) and Completed Activity Reports (CARs)



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Expenditure allowability

Match guidelines, documentation

Annual work plan and budget

Monthly Activity Plans (MAPs) and Completed Activity Reports (CARs)



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