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A Qualitative Study of School Staff Perceptions of Lasting Effects after Implementation of GEAR UP in Five Rural East Tennessee Counties

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GEAR UP in Five Rural East Tennessee Counties

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A dissertation

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by

Flora Rae Craig

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Dr. Hal Knight, Chair
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ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Study of School Staff Perceptions of Lasting Effects after Implementation of
GEAR UP in Five Rural East Tennessee Counties

by

Flora Rae Craig

This study analyzed the perceptions of 13 school staff and their experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN. The primary purpose of this study was to examine how program activities and services are being sustained after funding for GEAR UP TN ceased.

Qualitative methodology guided this study. This approach allowed for the perspectives and lived experiences of the school staff to be voiced and heard. Data collected included their stories based on semistructured interviews and observations.

Findings are presented in 4 themes that pertain directly to the research questions regarding key elements that contributed to program continuation, procedures that initiated program continuation, organizations in a collaborative that were sustained after funding, and program services not continued.   In this specific case there continues to be school district support, community support, parental support, and a level of financial and technical support from other funding sources.

Recommendations based on the results of the study are (1) implement college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment classes, and parent FAFSA workshops to create a college going culture; (2) gain support from the school board, parents, and the community; (3) maintain sufficient financial and human resources for precollege access programs and services; and (4) build partnerships with local colleges and universities.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with much love to my husband Wendell for his undying patience and support, my sons Maurice and Aaron, and my sister Felicia. These individuals have had a tremendous impact upon my life and my quest for education. I love you all dearly and thank you for all of your support.

To my parents Shirley and Raymond Nelson, although you aren't here with me, I know that you were with me each step of the way during this journey; I love you both.

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The task of completing this dissertation was sometimes long and tedious and some very helpful individuals have been there to help me through. I would like to thank the members of my committee: Dr. Hal Knight, Dr. Virginia Foley, Dr. Jasmine Renner, and Dr. Robert Leger. I appreciate all of your time and help with this dissertation.

I also acknowledge and thank the individuals who trusted me with their personal stories. They made this research possible. Their insights, time, and trust are greatly valued.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The economic strength and competitiveness of our nation depend on the quality of our

workforce. Nearly two thirds of the job openings forecast to be created by 2018 will require

education beyond a high school diploma (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Our nation must

become better educated in order to thrive and prosper in the knowledge economy of the 21st

century. The federal government, national foundations, and virtually all the states have launched

many initiatives to meet this challenge (National Economic Council, Council of Economic

Advisers, and Office of Science and Technology Policy, 2011).

On July 18, 2011, President Obama hosted an education roundtable with key leaders in

both the private and public sectors to discuss ways to ensure a competitive American workforce

(The White House Blog, 2011). During the discussions, President Obama stated:

A world-class education is the single most important factor in determining not just whether our
kids can compete for the best jobs but whether America can out-compete countries around the
world. America's business leaders understand that when it comes to education, we need to up
our game. That's why we're working together to put an outstanding education within reach for
every child (The White House Blog, 2011, para. 1).

The Obama Administration released its 2013 budget providing $302 million for Gaining

Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), the nation's premier

program to prepare low-income students for the challenges and rigor of higher education (PR

Newswire, 2012). In New York City Congressman Fattah delivered opening remarks to some

1,000 attendees at the 2012 GEAR UP Capacity Building Breakfast at which he announced new

research awards to track the progress of low-income students in the nation's most successful

college readiness and awareness program (PR Newswire, 2012).

After the Obama budget was announced, Fattah said the funding shows that even in a time of tough budget choices and cutbacks President Obama agrees that GEAR UP levels the playing field for young, underserved Americans (Fattah, 2012). "The President and I are in agreement that GEAR UP is critical to assuring an equal opportunity for all Americans to pursue higher education," said Fattah, who developed the program for bipartisan 1998 enactment by Congress (Fattah, 2012, para. 5).

GEAR UP was created in 1998 as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965. As mandated by the legislation (PL 105-244, 1998), GEAR UP grantees sought to increase postsecondary access and completion through information to students and parents, individualized academic and social support to students, parent involvement in education, educational excellence, school reform, and student participation in rigorous courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

This discretionary grant program is designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides 6-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school. GEAR UP funds are also used to provide college scholarships to low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

GEAR UP offers state and partnership grants. State grants are competitive 6-year matching grants that must include both an early intervention component designed to increase college attendance and success and raise the expectations of low-income students and a scholarship component. Partnership grants are competitive 6-year matching grants that must support an early intervention component and may support a scholarship component designed to

increase college attendance and success and raise the expectations of low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Since 1998 GEAR UP has provided assistance to 12 million young people in 49 states, with an investment of almost $3 billion in federal resources (Fattah, 2012). The program offers counseling, academic and financial preparation, and inspiration for students and their parents, starting in the sixth grade who might otherwise not even consider college (Fattah, 2012).

Background of the Study

In September 2005 the state of Tennessee was awarded a $3.5 million dollar federal discretionary 6-year grant by the U.S. Department of Education, known as GEAR UP. GEAR UP provides resources to assist state efforts to increase the number of underserved students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Through the creation of early intervention programs, enhanced academic assessments, and a broad-based outreach campaign articulating the importance of postsecondary access, GEAR UP TN aim to achieve the following goals:

- Increase educational expectations of GEAR UP TN students and their families through an expanded knowledge of postsecondary access and financial aid opportunities.

- Enhance the academic preparation of GEAR UP TN students to improve high school graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment, retention, and completion.

- Provide effective professional development for classroom teachers, school, and system staff to ensure increased academic rigor and postsecondary preparation.

- Encourage community engagement through GEAR UP TN to sustain an environment that supports college access and life-long learning (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2009, p. 1).

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Partnering together in the development and implementation of GEAR UP Tennessee (GEAR UP TN) was the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Board of Regents, University of Tennessee System, along with a host of other consultants and local regional partnerships (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2009).

GEAR UP TN served 47 middle and high schools in nine rural counties; Campbell, Cocke, Grundy, Hardeman, Johnson, Lake, Meigs, Union, and Wayne (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011). In the nine counties over 6,164 students received direct services through the grant and over 44, 991 students received services through statewide initiatives in the sixth year (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011). The grant operated as a priority model and served a rising cohort within that model. GEAR UP TN served the class of 2011 cohort students and the 11th and 12th grades in the nine direct-service systems (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

The Setting: Five Rural East Tennessee Counties

The Campbell county school district is located in Jacksboro, Tennessee and includes 13 schools that serve 6,011 students in grades PK through 12. Cocke county school district is located in Newport, Tennessee and includes 12 schools that serve 4,881 students in grades PK through 12. Johnson county school district is located in Mountain City, Tennessee and includes 7 schools that serve 2,362 students in grades PK through 12. Meigs county school district is located in Decatur, Tennessee and includes 4 schools that serve 1,913 students in grades PK through 12. Union county school district is located in Maynardville, Tennessee and includes 7 schools that serve 2,943 students in grades PK through 12.

A small but growing body of research on the impact of GEAR UP includes qualitative and quantitative descriptive reports and studies at the national, state, and local levels. A review of grantee reports and other literature on the GEAR UP data website (www.gearupdata.org) indicates that GEAR UP students benefit from program activities and services by improving their academic achievement in terms of national and state assessments; completing early college credit and advanced placement classes; increasing their graduation rates from high school; making plans for college with parental support; and increasing their college enrollment rates.

GEAR UP TN key statewide initiatives included CollegeforTN.org, College Application Week, Statewide P-16 Initiatives, Statewide College Access Outreach Campaign, System Mini Grants, Statewide Professional Development, Annual GEAR UP TN Youth Summit, GEAR UP TN School Leaders Institute, Bridge Incentive Awards (for project system graduates), and Scholars Promise (for 2011 cohort students attending postsecondary). Some of the more prevalent system interventions included college visits and fairs, ACT preparation workshop and classes, dual enrollment with area higher education institutions, tutoring and mentoring, college applications, parent FAFSA workshops and assistance, job site visits and career fairs, teacher, counselor, and school leader professional development.

The results are promising from a broad policy-making perspective and also serve to inform practice in local communities. The databases created as a result of GEAR UP partnerships and state grants offer an exceptionally rich opportunity to develop the current knowledge base on program outcomes. With respect to the amount and quality of data available, only the surface has been explored. Because GEAR UP TN did not get funded in 2011, there is an opportunity to examine whether the program activities and services that were implemented

during funding and external support are sustainable. Little is known about whether program activities and services will be sustained, particularly in high-need, low-resource rural areas serving primarily low-income students.

The problem that will be addressed in this study is how program activities and services are being sustained after funding for GEAR UP TN ended. I investigated the perceptions of school staff and their experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN in five counties (Campbell, Cocke, Johnson, Meigs, and Union). Research findings will be used to enhance educators' insight about maintaining precollege access programs after funding has ended.

Research Questions

1. What were the key elements in the GEAR UP TN program (college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment, parent FAFSA workshops, career fairs, job site visits, or professional development) that contributed to program continuation?

2. Are there certain procedures that were essential for staff to initiate to ensure program continuation?

3. Assuming that collaboration with other agency and organization partners is a key influence in program continuation, were there certain combinations of organizations in a collaborative that were sustained after funding?

4. What program activities or services were not continued and why?

Significance of the Study

It is critical that programs achieve the level of self-sufficiency they need to continue once federal funding has ended. This study will add to the research by exploring school staff perspectives of GEAR UP TN and document how they sustained program activities and services

after funding ended. Research findings will be used to enhance educators' insight about maintaining precollege access programs after funding has ended.

Scope of the Study

This study is delimited to school staff (site coordinators, counselors, teachers, and principals) from five selected counties (Campbell, Cocke, Johnson, Meigs, and Union) to examine how GEAR UP TN program activities and services are being sustained after program funding ended.

Statement of Researcher's Bias and Perspective

I worked for Tennessee Higher Education Commission as the east regional coordinator for GEAR UP TN from May 2006 to October 2011. I coordinated communication among the regional GEAR UP sites in five counties (Campbell, Cocke, Johnson, Meigs, and Union), P-16 councils, and local and state agencies. I worked with site coordinators at project sites to develop and plan professional development activities for local schools and programs that promote improved retention and graduation rates, career awareness, college access and preparation, and cultural enrichment for underrepresented middle and high school students in the region. The involvement and engagement of the researcher as east regional coordinator for GEAR UP TN is critical to the success of the study. Bosk (1999) calls the privilege of being an observer or interviewer as "a gift presented to the researcher by his or her host or subjects" (p. 203). Awareness of this "gift relationship" helps the researcher deal with possible personal biases or prejudices.

Definitions of Terms

GEAR UP – a discretionary grant program designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP provides

6-year grants to States and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school. GEAR UP funds are also used to provide college scholarships to low-income students. GEAR UP is different from other federal initiatives; the program employs partnerships committed to serving and accelerating the academic achievement of cohorts of students through their high school graduation. GEAR UP partnerships supplement (not supplant) existing reform efforts, offer services that promote academic preparation and the understanding of necessary costs to attend college, provide professional development, and continuously build capacity so that projects can be sustained beyond the term of the grant (U.S. Department of Education, 2012)

College Access – suggests not only entry into postsecondary education but also the myriad challenges it poses for many students, particularly minority and low-income students. Researchers contend that tuition costs, racial discrimination, social disadvantages, and lack of adequate academic preparedness have contributed to the vast underrepresentation of these groups of students on college and university campuses (EPE Research Center, 2004).

P-16 – is an integrated system of education stretching from early childhood through a 4-year college degree. Advocates of this innovation in education governance believe it is growing in popularity because it is more responsive to society's needs. P-16 emphasizes continuity of student learning. In a time when student progress from one level to the next needs to be easily understood and widely supported, P-16 focuses on alignment across sectors not isolation within sectors (Van de Water & Krueger, 2002).

The Higher Education Act of 1965 – was legislation signed into United States law on November 8, 1965, as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society domestic agenda. The

law was intended to strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education. It increased federal money given to universities, created scholarships, gave low-interest loans for students, and established a National Teachers Corps. The Higher Education Act of 1965 was reauthorized in 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1986, 1992, 1998, and 2008. Current authorization for the programs in the Higher Education Act expires at the end of 2013. Before each reauthorization, Congress adds additional programs, changes the language and policies of existing programs, or makes other changes (The Higher Education Act, 1965).

TRIO – began with Upward Bound, which emerged out of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 in response to the administration's War on Poverty. In 1965 Talent Search the second outreach program was created as part of the Higher Education Act. In 1968 Student Support Services, which was originally known as Special Services for Disadvantage Students, was authorized by the Higher Education Amendments and became the third in a series of educational opportunity programs. By the late 1960s the term "TRIO" was coined to describe these federal programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Overview of the Study

This study includes five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the study, a statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, statement of researcher's bias and perspective, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature. Chapter 3 includes the research methodology and design. Chapter 4 includes an analysis of the data. Chapter 5 includes the findings of this qualitative analysis, conclusions, and recommendations to improve practice and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

History of Precollege Outreach Programs

The United States has a history of providing high quality public education to a privileged elite. Early in the nation's history, African American slaves and females were excluded from schools. Although a broad system of public education emerged in the 19th century in retrospect it is "clear that the system of public education that emerged in the United States was inherently unfair to Germans and the Irish, to Catholics and Jews, and, of course, to African Americans and Native Americans who were at first excluded from the common schools" (Hiner, 1998, para. 8). In the 1950s and 1960s precollege outreach programs were formally established to address these issues. Such programs were first supported by religious entities and foundations, and then, through the authorization of the Higher Education Act in 1965, also by the federal government (Cunningham, Redmond, & Merisotis, 2003).

The federal government has been a major sponsor of early intervention programs since the Johnson administration. The Higher Education Act of 1965 helped establish the federal TRIO programs, which are comprised of Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services programs. These programs support students by providing a range of services including information about financial aid, opportunities for college visits, and academic services to students already enrolled in college (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

The growth of the TRIO program continues to bring forth unique and exciting programs. Upward Bound, the first of the TRIO programs, began as a pilot project authorized by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1954 to encourage low-income youths to complete high school and prepare for college. A year later Talent Search was created as part of the Higher Education

Act of 1965 to assist students applying for newly authorized federal financial aid for postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). The TRIO name itself was created 4 years later when the Higher Education Act of 1965 was amended in 1968 to include the Special Services for Disadvantage Students program, what is now called Student Support Services. Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services formed a trio of federal programs designed to foster increased educational opportunity and attainment. Upward Bound and Talent Search focused on college preparation and admission while Student Support Services helped eligible students stay in college until they earned a college degree (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b).

Since 1968 the TRIO programs have been expanded to provide a wider range of services. Currently, nine TRIO programs are included under the TRIO umbrella. The 1972 amendments to the Higher Education Act created Educational Opportunity Centers to help adults select a postsecondary education program and obtain financial aid (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). Veterans Upward Bound was also initiated in 1972 as part of the Upward Bound program to serve returning Vietnam veterans. Amendments in 1986 added the Ronald E. McNair Post- baccalaureate Achievement Program to foster doctoral degree attainment by students from underrepresented segments of society (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). In 1990 the U.S. Department of Education created the Upward Bound Math and Science program to address the need for specific instruction in the fields of mathematics and science (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b).

In addition to these seven TRIO programs that offer direct services to program participants, the U.S. Congress also authorized two programs focused specifically on improving the design and administration of TRIO services. The 1976 education amendments authorized the

Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs, initially known as the Training Program for Special Programs Staff and Leadership Personnel (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). The 1998 amendments to the Higher Education Act established the TRIO Dissemination Partnership Program to encourage the replication of successful practices of TRIO programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). The 1998 amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965 also authorized the Child Care Access Means Parents in School program to assist institutions in providing campus-based child-care services for low-income student parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b).

The Higher Education Amendments of 1998 created the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). GEAR UP replaced the National Early Intervention Scholarship and Partnership Program (Perna & Swail, 2001). GEAR UP comprises two component programs that provide competitive grants aimed at improving early college preparation for lower-income students. The state grant component provides funding directly to states, and the partnership grant component provides funding to partnerships of colleges, local schools, and at least two community organizations or entities such as business, philanthropic organizations, state agencies, or other community-based organizations (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The GEAR UP legislation also included the 21st Century Scholars Certificate program. This program, borne out of a bill written by Congressman Chaka Fattah (D-PA) and later endorsed and retitled by President Clinton as the High Hopes program, notifies low-income 6th to 12th grade students of their expected eligibility for federal financial assistance under the Pell Grant program (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

P-16 education (preschool, K-12, postsecondary), which links all education levels into a seamless system of education, is another way states are trying to reach students at an early age and increase their chances of attending college (Van de Water & Rainwater, 2001). The P-16 movement formally began in 1995 in Georgia, and 41 states, including Tennessee, now have some form of a P-16 initiative or councils. The titles of these initiatives vary from K-16 to P-16 to P-20, but they all fall within a common definition of state level efforts to move to an integrated system of education stretching from early childhood through a 4-year college degree (Van de Water & Rainwater, 2001). P-20 councils are intended to improve education from preschool through postsecondary education. Many educational experts consider quality preschool programs the launching pads that provide children with long-term educational benefits, particularly for children from disadvantaged families (The Council of State Governments, 2009). The goal of a P-20 initiative is to create a system of education that links and coordinates each education level into a seamless system fundamentally guided by the principle that success in college begins in preschool (The Council of State Governments, 2009).

A central focus of this movement is the "governance divide" between the P-12 public education systems and higher education. According to Lingernfelter (2007) the traditional missions of K-12 and postsecondary education have been different in important ways. K-12 has emphasized universality, a common mission, and uniform standards. Higher education has emphasized selectivity, diverse missions, and standards that vary among programs and institutions. When postsecondary enrollment was optional differences such as these were relatively inconsequential. But growing aspirations for higher education have fueled the P-20 (preschool through graduate study) movement that seeks to make the transition from one level of education to the next more transparent and "seamless" (Lingenfelter, 2007, p. 5).

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A Defined Federal Role in Providing Educational Opportunity

President Barack Obama identified education as one of the most important issues facing America. America's economic future, the path to achieving the American dream, and the ability to compete in a global 21st century economy will depend on providing children with a high quality education that fosters critical thinking, problem solving, and the innovative use of knowledge (Education/The White House, 2009). President Obama committed to provide every child in America with access to a complete and competitive education from cradle through career. He also set forth an ambitious goal for the country to regain its lost ground by producing the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020 (Education/The White House, 2009). According to President Obama this goal necessitates a concerted focus on early education, significant reforms and investments in K-12 education, and dramatic increases in higher education access and completion. Understanding the significant challenges, the Federal government has provided significant investments and continues to unveil funding opportunities for both public and private educational stakeholders (Education/The White House, 2009).

In 2008 the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-315) was overwhelmingly passed by Congress and signed into law in August 2008. The Higher Education Act was last reauthorized in 1998 and had expired in 2003, making P.L. 110-315 5 years overdue. The Higher Education Opportunity Act aims to improve higher education by addressing the issues of affordability, quality, and accountability, reforming the federal financial aid application process, enhancing transparency in the student loan sector, helping more military veterans and their families attend college, increasing grant aid for the neediest students, enhancing programs to strengthen the college pipeline, and promoting teacher preparation programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a).

Another important piece of legislation to improve education is the American Recovery and Reinvestment ACT (ARRA) (P.L. 111-5) enacted by Congress and signed into law in February 2009. The ARRA invested heavily in education allocating $48.6 billion to stabilize state education budgets and encourage states to make improvements in teacher effectiveness and qualifications, make progress toward college and career-ready standards and rigorous assessments, improve low-performing schools through intensive support and effective interventions, and gather information to improve student learning, teacher performance, and college and career readiness through enhanced data systems (U.S. Department of Education, 2009a).

The ARRA provided $4.35 billion for the Race to the Top Fund, a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform; achieving significant improvement in student outcomes, including making substantial gains in student achievement, closing achievement gaps, improving high school graduation rates, and ensuring student preparation for success in college and careers; and implementing ambitious plans in four core education reform areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b).

The Administration awarded the first two rounds of Race to the Top Grants to states that demonstrated success in raising student achievement and offered the best plans to accelerate their reforms in the future (U.S. Department of Educa2tion, 2010a). On March 29, 2010, Secretary Duncan announced that Delaware and Tennessee had won grants in the first phase of the Race to the Top competition, totaling approximately $600 million to implement their comprehensive school reform plans over the next 4 years. On August 24, 2010, Secretary Duncan announced that Massachusetts, New York, Hawaii, Florida, Rhode Island, the District of Columbia,

Maryland, Georgia, North Carolina, and Ohio were awarded nearly $3.4 billion in the second round of Race to the Top to implement their programs that will directly impact 13.6 million students and 980,000 teachers in 25,000 schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a).

The Investing in Innovation Fund (i3), established under section 14007 of the ARRA, provided funding to support local educational agencies (LEAs) and nonprofit organizations in partnership with consortia of schools that have a record of improving student achievement and attainment in order to expand the implementation of, and investment in, innovative practices that are demonstrated to have an impact on improving student achievement or student growth, closing achievement gaps, decreasing dropout rates, increasing high school graduation rates, or increasing college enrollment and completion rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2009c). These grants will allow eligible entities to expand and develop innovative practices that can serve as models of best practices, work in partnership with the private sector and the philanthropic community, and identify and document best practices that can be shared and taken to scale based on demonstrated success (U.S. Department of Education, 2009c).

On September 20, 2010, the Department of Education announced the award of approximately $600 million in i3 grants to 49 organizations (out of nearly 1,700 applicants) representing a cross-section of school districts and nonprofit education organizations, including one to the Niswonger Foundation for North East Tennessee and institutions of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010b).

The Department of Education views the GEAR UP program as a critical component in the effort to improve the quality of secondary schools so that more students are well prepared for college and careers (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011). On March 13, 2010, the Administration released its blueprint for revising the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The blueprint seeks to overhaul the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and challenge the nation in embracing education standards that would put America on a path to global leadership. It provides incentives for states to adopt academic standards that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and create accountability systems that measure student growth toward meeting the goal that all children graduate and succeed in college (U.S. Department of Education, 2010c).

Precollege Program Models and Evaluation

GEAR UP is part of a growing trend in using cohort program models focused on college access (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011). Although, like GEAR UP, most of these programs are not purposefully built around the social dynamics of the cohort, a few community-and institution-based programs intentionally build peer processes into their services. Because these programs may have valuable information for GEAR UP, and GEAR UP in turn has an opportunity to inform these programs moving forward, its models are worth describing (Romer, Jones, & Bouffard, 2010).

In 1999-2000 The College Board conducted a national survey of precollege outreach programs to find out what programs were in operation around the United States and also gain important information about how and where they operated, what they did, and whom they served (The College Board, 2001). According to results from the national survey an estimated two million or more students are served in outreach programs across the United States each year (The College Board, 2001). Two thirds of the programs surveyed offer services to students beginning in ninth grade or earlier, with the remaining one third focusing on the later years of high school (The College Board, 2001). These programs most commonly target low-income, first-generation, and minority students. The majority of programs are sponsored by colleges or

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universities, although they may also be sponsored by K-12 schools or community organizations (The College Board, 2001). The most frequent program goals include promoting college attendance, college awareness, and college exposure, followed by improving academic skills, building student self-esteem, and providing role models. The most common service provided is college awareness, followed by social skills development, campus visits, and cultural activities. Sixty-nine percent of programs offer a parental component, and 22% require parental participation (The College Board, 2001).

In 2010 Educational Policy Institute received a public benefit grant from TG, a Texas-based nonprofit, to conduct both a follow-up to the 2000 study as well as take an in-depth look at 10 case studies of successful programs around the United States (Educational Policy Institute, 2012). The 10 successful programs that were identified are: Bottom Line, Breakthrough Saint Paul, Bridges to a Brighter Future, College Bound St. Louis, The College Road, College Track, Education is Freedom, Foundation for a College Education, Hispanic Youth Institute, and The Partners Program (Educational Policy Institute, 2012).

The programs share a high level of intentionality about what they do. Through their missions and goals they are focused on trying to achieve success for their students. They empower parents and guardians to proactively partner with their students toward college success (Educational Policy Institute, 2012). Each of these programs is data-driven. These programs collect data about their students and their instructors or facilitators that are, in turn, used regularly to inform the decision-making process. With data as a tool, the programs are focused on continually improving their processes and services (Educational Policy Institute, 2012). The programs work very intrusively with students. What has been learned over the years is that at-risk students need someone inside their box in order to get them to focus and work toward their

goals. This only happens when the strategies and practices are designed specifically to be

intrusive in nature (Educational Policy Institute, 2012). These programs have high expectations

for everyone involved, from students to staff to board members and advocates. They expect

everyone to deliver in order for the programs to be successful (Educational Policy Institute,

2012).

Bottom Line is an example of a successful data-driven program that helps high school

students apply for, get accepted to, and graduate from college. It uses data to track everything

from student participation in program events to SAT scores, where they get accepted to college,

and course grades. Student demographic data are relied upon to "hone in on the right population

for our services" (Bottom Line, 2012). Furthermore, college-level data are closely monitored by

counselors working with students to ensure timely interventions and provision of services to

facilitate student success. The program has evolved to focus beyond college completion to

career readiness, providing students with internship opportunities to enhance their preparation for

careers after college (Bottom Line, 2012).

Breakthrough Saint Paul represents a relatively new program that has developed

additional supports for its cohorts of students as they advanced through the K-12 pipeline and

then into college (Breakthrough Saint Paul, 2011).   Intentional, data-supported improvements

and new programmatic components have been brought online yearly as the program has

developed in parallel to the students it serves (Breakthrough Saint Paul, 2011). By documenting

the process, including data collection protocols, student outcomes data, and program

implementation details, Breakthrough Saint Paul has been able to develop a guide book for

successful program development to support students from middle school through to college.

Breakthrough Saint Paul is currently developing a program to support the cohort in college to ensure college graduation (Breakthrough Saint Paul, 2011).

Bridges to a Brighter Future is a comprehensive college access program for Greenville County high school students "whose potential outdistances their circumstances" (Bridges to a Brighter Future, 2012). The mission is to break the cycle of poverty and low-educational attainment by equipping students with the tools and support needed to graduate from high school, enroll in postsecondary education, and graduate with a postsecondary degree (Bridges to a Brighter Future, 2012). Bridges to a Brighter Future accomplishes its mission by engaging students in an intensive 7-year program that begins in ninth grade and ends after college graduation. The program includes a 4-week summer residential program at Furman University, year-round monthly support through Bridges Saturday College, and Crossing the Bridge, a transition program to ensure students successfully start and graduate from college. This comprehensive program transforms lives by building academic success, self-confidence, resiliency, leadership, and character (Bridges to a Brighter Future, 2012).

College Bound St. Louis provides promising high school students with underresourced backgrounds with the academic enrichment, social supports, and life skills needed to apply, matriculate, and succeed in 4-year colleges (College Bound St. Louis, 2012a). The College Bound St. Louis program begins with students in their freshman year of high school and remains with students until they graduate from college. It has a daily presence in participating high schools and works closely with families, high school staff, and university partners to ensure alignment between high school preparation and college success (College Bound St. Louis, 2012a). By the time College Bound St. Louis students graduate from high school, they have

invested approximately 800 hours in addition to school and work to prepare for success in college and career (College Bound St. Louis, 2012).

Boys Hope Girls Hope was founded in 1977 in St. Louis, Missouri. Since its inception, the organization has provided homes, educational opportunities, and family-like support to young people whose potential was best developed in an out-of-home placement. The organization's success has let to its replication across the country with program affiliates in 16 states and locations abroad throughout Latin America (Boys Hope Girls Hope, 2012a).

With the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer in 2001, the Boys Hope Girls Hope experienced changes to support new organizational and scholarly outcome goals. Specifically, board members and the new CEO put resources and energy into helping scholars finish college (Boys Hope Girls Hope, 2012a). They established a new set of goals: 100% of Boys Hope Girls Hope scholars in residence would graduate from high school, and 75% of collegians would complete their college degrees. This latter goal was an effort to drastically increase the organization's college graduation rates from 46%. Thus, the concept of The College Road was created in 2000 to work with students are early as sixth grade and prepare them for postsecondary access and success (Boys Hope Girls Hope, 2012a).

The College Road is a comprehensive college access, persistence, and completion program for students in the Boys Hope Girls Hope organization. Participants, called Boys Hope Girls Hope scholars, are first generation college aspirants, often also the first in their families to graduate from high school (Boys Hope Girls Hope, 2012b).

The Boys Hope Girls Hope College Road is a model of a comprehensive program that supports students from sixth grade through college (and in some cases, graduate school) completion. In addition to local supports for students, a core element of the program involves

bringing students together from across the nation for summer events and campus visits (Boys Hope Girls Hope, 2011).

College Track was founded by two volunteer college counselors who discovered that many students were motivated but lacked the necessary resources to pursue a college degree. They noticed that it was especially difficult for first generation students, specifically first in family, as they often had little or no guidance about the college application process at home and many times attended underresourced public schools that lacked sufficient college preparation tools (College Track, 2012).

College Track serves low-income, ethnically-diverse students who reflect the communities in which they live and who are drastically underrepresented at colleges and universities across the country. Forty-two percent of College Track students are African American, 37% are Latino, 12% are Asian, and 10% are either multi-racial or "Other." Ninety percent of students are from low-income households and 85% will be the first in their families to graduate from college (College Track, 2011).

College Track is an educational nonprofit organization working to increase high school graduation, college eligibility and enrollment, and college graduation rates among populations underrepresented in higher education. The goal is to create college-going cultures by engaging a critical mass of underserved students in College Track programming, partnering with schools and community agencies, and influencing lasting change by raising awareness for college readiness and access initiatives (College Track, 2012).

Education is Freedom was founded in 2002 by a visionary corporate CEO who envisioned a world where every young person could pursue a college education and was committed to creating an educated workforce that could build effective companies and strong communities in

today's knowledge-based economy (Education is Freedom, 2010). To achieve these goals Education is Freedom initially offered renewable scholarships to first-time college students. However, it was soon revealed that financial support alone was insufficient to ensure college success, especially for students with profound social or economic barriers (Education is Freedom, 2012).

In 2003 Education is Freedom launched a program to provide comprehensive, school-based college planning services to students in the Dallas Independent School District (Education is Freedom, 2012). Targeting Dallas Independent School District was of particular importance given the lack of college-going orientation in the area and the population demographics. Schools in Dallas Independent School District are mainly in urban settings with many transient students. Eighty-seven percent of Dallas Independent School District is low-income, 95% are racial or ethnic minorities, and many are the first in their family to attend college (Education is Freedom, 2010). In addition to the high school-based services, Education is Freedom provides college integration services to high school graduates and has recently incorporated a middle school component to begin raising college awareness in students' lives (Education is Freedom, 2012).

Foundation for a College Education works to increase the number of students of color from East Palo Alto and surrounding communities who graduate from a 4-year college or university (Foundation for a College Education, 2012). Foundation for a College Education provides a comprehensive college access and retention program through academic tutoring, leadership training, and college counseling that enables students to graduate from high school and enroll in and graduate from college (Palo Alto Unified School District, 2012). One key component of the program is parental involvement, which helps families advocate for their

children and work to create a community where higher education is attainable (Palo Alto Unified School District, 2012).

The Hispanic Youth Symposium began in 2004 as an initiative of the National Council of Hispanic Employment Program Offices and the Hispanic College Fund. The purpose was to fill a void of information and support for a rapidly expanding Hispanic student population in the Greater Washington area and create a pipeline for the workforce in the area including corporations, the federal government, and education/nonprofits (HispanicPro, 2009). The program was modeled after the Idaho Hispanic Youth Symposium, which was a successful high school dropout prevention program. College access programming and career programming were added. Partnerships and volunteers were key to the programmatic effectiveness and cost effectiveness of the program. Although it is national in scope, it has always been a community-driven program (Educational Policy Institute, 2012).

To address the high school drop-out crisis and low college enrollment rates in the Latino community, the Hispanic College Fund created the Hispanic Youth Institute to educate and motivate high school students to go to college, pursue professional careers, and give back to their communities (Hispanic College Fund, 2012a). The Hispanic Youth Institute is a national program operating in eight communities that aims to help students graduate from college, become professionals, and give back to the community (Hispanic College Fund, 2012b). The program kicks off with a 4-day, 3-night college empowerment program on a college campus where students learn to overcome real and perceived barriers to college access. Students participate in workshops, connect with local professionals, meet college admissions officers, and interact with near-peer mentors. Upon completion of the kick-off program, students are enrolled

into year-round programming that reinforces the key themes of college, career, and community (Hispanic College Fund, 2012b).

The Partners Program was founded in 1986 and incorporated in 2006. The organization's mission is to create relevant and responsive programs that bolster students' academic success and improve access to high quality college preparatory educational opportunities, while engaging students and supporting them in making a commitment to educational equity (Idealist, 2011).

In its expanded form, The Partners Program is designed to provide a pipeline to college graduation, starting with programs for middle school students and continuing through college graduation. The final pieces of this pipeline are still being developed (The College Preparatory School, 2012).

The Creation of GEAR UP

The blueprint of the GEAR UP program was the result of a variety of considerations and interests. The most prominent influence was a legislative initiative spearheaded by Chaka Fattah, a Democratic congressman from Philadelphia with White House support (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011). Called High Hopes for College, the original plan envisioned a large-scale mentoring program that would link elementary and middle school students from low-income families with adults from colleges and communities (philly.com, 1998). Students would learn about opportunities to attend college, receive tutoring and other academic support as needed, and would learn (along with their parents) the amount of financial aid they could count on for college (grants and loans) if they completed high school (philly.com, 1998).

President Clinton, in his White House remarks on January, 7, 1998, described Fattah's vision of GEAR UP. Clinton observed that many students from poor families don't get the "push" to go to college.

> That's why we have to make mentorship a way of life in America. The High Hopes initiative will enlist colleges and community groups to form partnerships with thousands of middle schools and give more than a million students both the information and the inspiration to seize the opportunity of college. Our balanced budget for 1999 includes $140 million to help these groups harness the power of citizen service and reach out to students, no later than 7th grade, and work with them all the way to high school graduation. Trained mentors and role models will help children pick challenging courses, tutor them when they need extra help, take them on college visits and other academic field trips, and help them during the college application process (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998, para. 1).

Implanted in the High Hopes initiative was the idea of using financial incentives to motivate students to attend college. In the 1980s and 1990s there were several well-publicized private efforts that promised students in a particular class or school that their college costs would be paid if they stayed in school and graduated (Educational Policy Institute, 2012). The I Have a Dream Foundation was probably the most prominent entity supporting this approach, linking individual sponsors with entire schools or individual grades, and offering academic support, counseling, and activities as well as the promise of scholarships (I Have a Dream Foundation, 2012). In his White House speech, President Clinton noted that he was a friend of Eugene Lang, who gave birth to the idea of motivating a class of children by promising to pay for their college attendance (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998). Fattah also argued for the importance of the financial incentive in motivating students to attend college (Fenno, 2003, p. 155-157).

At the same time the GEAR UP legislation that emerged from consultations between Fattah and the White House also reflected other education reforms then popular (Fenno, 2003, p. 155-157). Aimed at improving education and increasing college attendance by low-income

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students, these reforms were often labeled "systemic," in that they sought major changes in curriculum and organization of public schools (Vinovskis, 1996). These reforms were undertaken by urban partnerships of school districts, colleges and universities, and other community agencies. Urban partnerships were supported by several private foundations, most notably the Ford Foundation (Bodilly, Karam, & Orr, 2011). The Urban Partnership Program along with similar reform efforts inspired the GEAR UP initiative. The urban partnership approach was adopted and expanded through the GEAR UP legislation (National Opportunity to Learn Campaign, 2012).

Finally, the GEAR UP legislation incorporated an earlier federally-supported state-level effort to increase college access. The 1992 amendments to the Higher Education Act included the National Early Intervention Scholarship and Partnership program that offered matching grants to states for programs that guaranteed low-income students at all grade levels sufficient financial assistance to attend college and provided a variety of support services (Perna et al., 2000).

Services GEAR UP Programs Provide

GEAR UP programs seek to strengthen the quality of instruction in cohort schools by providing professional development for teachers, counselors, administrators, and school staff. Programs of this type commonly seek to strengthen teacher quality, infuse innovative pedagogy (through technology, new equipment, or new approaches) to increase classroom engagement, educate teachers about diverse learning styles, and provide counselors, administrators, and staff with knowledge and tools to provide accurate information regarding college access (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

To ensure that GEAR UP students are exposed to a curriculum that is engaging, standards-based, and rigorous, many sites seek to revamp and align their course curricula. Programs of this type focus on ensuring that courses are engaging, rigorous, and culturally appropriate; are well-aligned to K-16 standards; and introduce new courses that were previously unavailable (e.g., AP courses). (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

GEAR UP programs provide early and sustained interventions to ensure that students are progressing academically. Programs range from providing remedial and accelerated instruction to offering discipline-specific content. Common supplemental academic offerings include after-school programs, weekend programs, summer bridge programs, and, increasingly, dual enrollment programs (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

GEAR UP provides tutors and/or mentors to students with additional academic and support needs. Tutors and mentors are drawn from education professionals, high-achieving or older peers, and volunteers from the community and business sector. Implementation details of these activities vary widely but are most effective when students are engaged in a sustained way over the long term, work is aligned with academic standards, and management of these programs is effective (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

With guidance counselors at low-income schools carrying heavy caseloads, many GEAR UP partnerships provide school-based or rotating academic counselors to help students select the right courses, improve their proacademic behaviors (such as note-taking), and provide workshops on specific issues pertaining to student engagement (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

Ensuring that students, parents, and community members understand the importance and value of education is a critical early step in any GEAR UP project. GEAR UP sites use a blend of strategies to raise awareness of such critical college readiness issues including, one-on-one meetings, small-group meetings and workshops, print and electronic communication, media engagement, and college access marketing campaigns (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

For many GEAR UP students, a college visit or tour can be a transformational personal experience, one that is particularly helpful in encouraging students to set high expectations early in their academic careers. GEAR UP college visits may be aligned with an academic project, expose students to campus life, and introduce students to potential educational role models. As GEAR UP students mature, college visits focus on developing specific knowledge and skills needed for the college search, application, and enrollment process (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

Many GEAR UP sites help students and their families set high educational aspirations by helping students identify and articulate their career goals. This often takes the form on one-to-one counseling, classroom activities, mentoring programs involving members of the public and private sectors, and internships that familiarize students with the world of work (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

To complement academic and college planning activities, GEAR UP partnerships seek increasingly to motivate and empower students to assume leadership in their own lives, among their peers, and in the community. By exposing students to inspiring individuals, improving self-efficacy through leadership programs, and connecting students to community renewal efforts,

GEAR UP programs are building a generation of resilient peer leaders (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

The cost of attendance is a significant barrier to higher education. Through GEAR UP states and partnerships are implementing programs that demystify the financial aid process, dispel myths about the cost of attendance and available resources, negotiate tuition reduction programs for GEAR UP students at local colleges, and provide direct aid through scholarships and one-time awards (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

Working in conjunction with outreach programs that seek to impress the value of education on students, families, and the community, GEAR UP college awareness programs seek to educate audiences on the specific issues associated with applying to and financing postsecondary education. To accomplish this goal GEAR UP sites use a blend of strategies including, one-on-one meetings, small group meetings and workshops, parental engagement and training, print and electronic communication, and college access marketing campaigns (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

Many GEAR UP partnerships provide direct counseling to secondary school students to aid them in their college search process; college-aged mentors to encourage students through the application process; and assistance with SAT/ACT test preparation, writing admissions essays, and completing financial aid and scholarship forms (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

Increasingly, GEAR UP sites are providing students and families with "financial literacy activities" to help them make sound financial decisions, to encourage behaviors that promote saving, to manage credit wisely, and to develop strategies for financing higher education. Financial literacy programs frequently take place within the classroom or in out-of-school

programs, during parent engagement or "Parent University" programs, and as stand-alone workshops (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

Beyond providing opportunities for parents to learn about the education system, college readiness, and the college enrollment process, many GEAR UP sites are seeking to create empowered parent leaders. Parents are provided with professional-level training to become education advocates, thereby bridging the education system to the larger community. Often, parent advocates provide direct services to students, other families and the community at large; lead training efforts (such as Parent Universities, where positive parenting skills are taught); reach out to students and families of recent dropouts (who may have unfavorable opinions about the education system); and work with school and district leaders to ensure that community needs are met (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

Many GEAR UP partnerships are working to strengthen the relationship between their schools and the broader community. By working within the framework of broader community revitalization efforts (sharing leadership and experience, resources, meeting space, etc.) and in consort with community leaders, partnerships are helping schools become active community participants. Community-building activities are particularly important in areas where the relationship between schools and the community is weak, is in need of repair, or has been (historically) nonexistent (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

Emboldened by their accomplishments as a partnership, members of GEAR UP community-education partnerships often seek out new and complimentary initiatives that advance their collective goals. This sometimes means increased collaboration in areas outside the scope of the existing GEAR UP grant; seeking additional funding from public and private sources to implement supplemental, jointly administered programs; and collaborating on

developing a shared policy agenda to promote college readiness at the district, state, or regional

level (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships, 2011).

Evaluation of GEAR UP Programs

To understand what is known about GEAR UP's effectiveness, studies were conducted to

determine the program's impact on intermediate student outcomes. The first major report

prepared for the U.S. Department of Education *Early Outcomes of the GEAR UP Program: Final*

Report (Standing, Judkins, Keller, & Shimshak, 2008) was a 5-year contract supporting the

evaluation, started at about the same time when the first grants were awarded in 1999. Because

the GEAR UP program was new, the evaluators were given the task of describing the projects as

they existed as well as evaluating key student and parent interim outcomes (Standing et al.,

2008). There were two major goals of the evaluation. The first was to provide descriptive

information on the early implementation of the program and the second was to observe the

association between GEAR UP participation and student and parent outcomes (Standing et al.,

2008). The study conducted site visits to a sample of 20 of the initial partnership projects. From

these partnerships, a sample of 18 middle schools and 18 matched comparisons schools was

selected and up to 140 seventh-grade students were randomly selected from each school

(Standing et al., 2008). Student and parent surveys were administered about midway through the

seventh grade and near the end of the eighth grade. Student school records and GEAR UP

participation records were also obtained (Standing et al., 2008). The results of this study

produced the following key findings:

Attending a GEAR UP school as measured near the end of eighth grade was positively

associated with parents' having higher academic expectations for their children. However, there

was no evidence of an association between attending a GEAR UP school and the strength of

student intentions to attend college, expectations for postsecondary education or overall orientation toward college (Standing et al., 2008).

GEAR UP middle school staff participating in the study focus groups reported that GEAR UP middle schools were more likely than non-GEAR UP middle schools to offer honors and above-grade-level classes. They perceived that some of these changes took place with the implementation of the GEAR UP projects in 1999 (Standing et al., 2008).

Projects reported some difficulty transitioning into high schools such as inadequate staffing and administrative barriers, which were similar to those reported 2 years earlier when the grants were just starting out in middle schools. Projects reporting the smoothest transitions tended to provide services to high school students that were similar to those provided to middle school students (Standing et al., 2008).

Early evidence suggests that some aspects of GEAR UP will be sustained in middle schools beyond the period of federal funding. About half of the projects studied were optimistic about continuing, and one third had made specific plans to do so as they neared the third year of their grants (Standing et al., 2008).

Another study conducted was *Using EXPLORE and PLAN Data to Evaluate the GEAR UP Program* (ACT, 2007). ACT is an independent, not-for-profit organization that provides a broad array of assessment, research, information, and program management solutions in the areas of education and workforce development (ACT, 2012). The EXPLORE program is designed to help eighth and ninth graders explore a broad range of options for their future. It prepares students not only for their high school coursework but for their post-high school choices as well (ACT, 2012). The PLAN program helps 10th graders build a solid foundation for future academic and career success and provides information needed to address school districts' high-

priority issues. It is a comprehensive guidance resource that helps students measure their current academic development, explore career or training options, and make plans for the remaining years of high school and postgraduation years (ACT, 2012).

In 2005 and 2006 ACT and the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships collaborated to collect data for evaluating student gains in academic achievement, course planning behavior, and commitment to college plans (ACT, 2007). ACT compared changes in academic readiness and college intent for a sample of students from GEAR UP schools to a comparable sample from Non-GEAR UP schools. ACT used assessment data from their EXPLORE and PLAN programs to measure students' academic readiness and college intent at grade 8 and grade 10 (ACT, 2007). Since GEAR UP programs begin no later than grade 7 and continue on past grade 10, they were only able to measure GEAR UP's effect for a portion of the intervention period (ACT, 2007). ACT analyses suggested that the students from GEAR UP schools were slightly better than their Non-GEAR UP counterparts with respect to changes in academic readiness and college intent from grade 8 to grade 10 (ACT, 2007). ACT reported the following findings:

Students from GEAR UP schools had slightly greater changes in overall academic performance from grade 8 to grade 10. Relative to the Non-GEAR UP comparison group, students in the GEAR UP group gained 0.16 more composite scale score points on average for one of the cohorts studied. For the other cohort there was no significant difference in change in overall academic performance (ACT, 2007).

Students from GEAR UP schools were slightly more likely to be on track to be college-ready in English and reading. Relative to the Non-GEAR UP comparison group, the odds of being college-ready were 16% and 27% higher for the GEAR UP group in English and reading,

respectively, for one of the cohorts studied. For the other cohort, there was no significant difference in the odds of being college-ready in English or reading (ACT, 2007).

Students from GEAR UP schools were slightly more likely to take the core high school curriculum and have plans for college at grade 10. These findings applied to just one cohort studied; for the other, there was no significant difference in taking the core high school curriculum or having plans for college (ACT, 2007).

In *The Dream Deferred: Increasing the College Preparedness of At-Risk Students* Terenzini, Cabrera, Amen, and Lambert (2005) determined GEAR UP's impact on intermediate student outcomes. This research was funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (formerly OERI) for the purpose of documenting the impact of GEAR UP supported activities in preparing economically disadvantaged eighth graders for college (Terenzini et al., 2005). The researchers examined the impact of multifaceted, coordinated, and collaborative interventions that target students and parents as cohorts and at a stage in students' educational development when important changes can be made (Terenzini et al., 2005). They focused on impact, the extent to which multiple interventions make a difference and sought to estimate not only the overall impact of these comprehensive intervention programs and partnerships, but also the relative effects of the various programmatic components (Terenzini et al., 2005).

Terenzini et al. (2005) sought to advance current knowledge about the educational attainment process that will benefit all sectors of the partnerships (i.e., colleges and universities, school districts, community groups, and corporations and businesses), providing information on the effectiveness of integrated, coordinated, and collaborative efforts (and the relative

effectiveness of the various components of the current design) to guide future program and policy planning implementation (Terenzini et al., 2005).

They focused on two groups (students and parents) and two outcomes (each group's awareness of and readiness for college), and it rested on two distinct analytical efforts, each complementing the other (Terenzini et al., 2005). The first was a series of analyses of the U.S. Department of Education's GEAR UP Program "Annual Performance Report (APR) for Partnerships" database for the 2000-01 and 2002 school years (Terenzini et al., 2005). These reports contained information on partnership enrollments, activities, programs, staffing, and selected outcomes. These analyses examined the effects of varying degrees of exposure to selected and aggregated GEAR UP Program activities over time (Terenzini et al., 2005).

The second data source was developed from the world-wide web site of the California Department of Education's Policy and Evaluation Division. Using information on 47 California GEAR UP Partnership schools and 133 "peer" schools, time-series hierarchical linear modeling analyses examined changes in student performance over a 3-year period (sixth through eighth grades) on the Stanford-9 tests of reading and mathematics (Terenzini et al., 2005). The study also contained a statistical profile of the GEAR UP partnerships, their students, and the services they provided (Terenzini et al., 2005).

The results of the analyses summarized above provided moderate-to-strong support for the conclusion that such programs do, indeed, bring about both changes in students' awareness of college as a real possibility in their future and increased readiness for college in the form of stronger mathematics (and, perhaps, reading) proficiencies (Terenzini et al., 2005). The gains in both areas appeared to be modest, if statistically significant, but these analyses examined changes occurring in only the first 2 years of one comprehensive

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intervention program, the U.S. Department of Education Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) project (Terenzini et al., 2005).

Although the results of this study were more suggestive than conclusive in answering that policy question regarding whether such programs have any appreciable impact, the findings provided evidence that comprehensive and coordinated intervention programs may, indeed, be more effective than traditional, atomistic approaches to promoting the college awareness and reading and math skills of low-income students as they progress toward college entry (Terenzini et al., 2005).

According to Muraskin (2010) the findings of these studies, while possibly important to Congressional oversight and continued federal support, would seem to be of little practical use to the people who work in GEAR UP or other comparable precollege programs. They tell us little, if anything, about what occurs in typical GEAR UP projects, let alone whether or not those activities are successful.

Effective GEAR UP Models and Strategies

On April 20, 2012, the U.S. Department of Education released the FY2012 slate of states and partnerships that will receive funding this year from the federal GEAR UP program. In 2011 the Department received 296 GEAR UP program applications, of which 19 states and 47 partnerships received funding. For 2012 the Department did not hold a new competition but instead funded the next highest scoring applicants from the FY'11 competition. This most recent round of GEAR UP awards includes seven states (Arizona, Connecticut, North Carolina, Nevada, Texas, Tennessee, and New Mexico) and four partnership grants (Utah State University, Hennepin Technical College, IDEA Public Schools, and South Carolina State University) (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Arizona GEAR UP activities and services delivered over a 7-year project period feature all of those required under HEOA (Higher Education Opportunity Act) and many permissible, including: academic mentoring; outreach; financial aid information; rigorous, and challenging curricula; common core state standards; data-based professional development; career exploration; college visits; credit recovery, College-and Career-Readiness System assessments; parental involvement; scholarships; student workshops; Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) enrichment; summer programs; transition programs; and tutoring and test preparation (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The 7-year Connecticut State GEAR UP project is designed to serve 3,200 students attending 12 middle schools using the cohort of students approach during middle school and through high school. The project will initially serve both sixth and seventh graders at the three target middle schools in Waterbury and seventh graders only at the target middle schools in East Hartford and New Haven. The program will also provide professional development to teachers in the schools and college awareness and financing (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education, which is the governing body for the three partner institutions of Higher Education, coordinates the project, while the partners Manchester Community College, Naugatuck Valley Community College, and Southern Connecticut State University will develop, provide, and evaluate services to students, parents, teachers, and schools. This project design represents a more decentralized approach than in the previous State GEAR UP grants carried out in Connecticut with the intent of greatly enhancing the organic nature of service development and administration to fit localized needs and specific provider strengths. It also has the advantage of significantly

emphasizing GEAR UP as a collaborative partnership that will strengthen over the period of the grant and beyond as the partners capitalize on their mutual interdependence (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

GEAR UP New Mexico, administered through the New Mexico Higher Education Department, includes a 7-year, statewide priority-select program that will implement research-based practices significantly impacting student learning and school improvement. Twelve districts and 25 schools have targeted interventions with direct services being provided to approximately 11,000 students in grades 7-12 across the state. Further, high school graduates receive support with their enrollment, transition, and engagement in their first year of college (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

During their prior successful project, GEAR UP New Mexico identified effective practices and policies for systemic school improvement focused on increasing the college- and career readiness of students. They augment this work through an annual New Mexico Best Practices in Education Conference and online Educational Practices Network, establishing structures and processes for statewide dissemination of proven practices identified locally and nationally (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

GEAR UP Tennessee expands statewide services such as the public outreach campaign and the state's college and career exploration Web portal, CollegeforTN.org. The project serves a cohort of 7,500 students beginning in the seventh grade, for a period of 7 years-through the cohort's first year of postsecondary education. GEAR UP Tennessee also provides financial aid and college enrollment services to senior students in each year in direct-service high schools. GEAR UP Tennessee uses a research-based collaborative model for direct-service implementation (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Previous GEAR UP Tennessee Grant

The U.S. Department of Education awarded the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) a state GEAR UP grant in September 2005. This was a 6-year grant that ended August, 2011. The grant served 47 middle and high schools in nine rural counties across Tennessee. In the nine counties over 6,164 students received direct services through the grant and over 44,991 students received services through statewide initiatives in the sixth year. The grant operated as a priority model and served a rising cohort within that model. GEAR UP Tennessee (GEAR UP TN) served the class of 2011 cohort students and the 11th and 12th grades in the nine direct-service systems. In the sixth and final reporting year, GEAR UP TN served the Class of 2011, the cohort, and 11th grade students in the nine participating counties (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

According to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (2011), the GEAR UP TN project accomplished considerable results. The program was implemented through a two-tiered project design-both statewide and direct services to students in the nine participating counties. The two-level implementation design successfully enabled Tennessee to build statewide infrastructure while implementing school-based interventions to cohort and priority students in high-need systems across the state. As a result the GEAR UP TN project generated significant impact on student outcomes, primarily student participation in postsecondary education.

In fall 2011, 57.6% of the GEAR UP TN Class of 2011 cohort students enrolled in postsecondary institutions. The GEAR UP TN cohort postsecondary enrollment rate demonstrates substantial program impact when compared to enrollment rates of prior cohorts from the same high schools and the 2010 state average (56.8%). The Class of 2011 cohort

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students enrolled in postsecondary opportunities at the highest rate in the history of the GEAR UP TN direct-service counties, and, for the first time, surpassed the state average (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011). GEAR UP TN cohort postsecondary enrollment increased by 22.8% (10.7 percentage points) over the 2005-06 GEAR UP TN county average of 46.9%. Individual counties saw the postsecondary going rate for GEAR UP cohort students increase by as much as 47.6 percentage points since the beginning of the project. Such a significant increase in higher education attendance is highlighted by the incremental movement in the postsecondary going rate at both the state and county levels. Notably, the state average saw a decrease in postsecondary attendance over the life of the grant, as did the GEAR UP TN comparison counties (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

In the sixth and final year of program implementation, GEAR UP TN focused strategically on ensuring that the project's activities and outcomes are likely to be sustained over time. At the local level, many GEAR UP TN initiatives are now integrated practices that will outlive the grant. Through strong partnerships developed with local higher education institutions, ACT Prep, tutoring, dual enrollment, and mentoring services have become valued practices at the local level and are now integrated into school systems (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

School and community leaders in the nine GEAR UP TN districts acknowledged the value a school-based staff member focused solely on college access and readiness counseling adds to the school culture, community, and student success; many GEAR UP TN districts remain committed to maintaining a position similar to that of the GEAR UP TN site coordinator and that position remains in the local budget as a part of district staff. Five

GEAR UP TN site coordinators continue to work as college access counselors in the GEAR UP TN direct-service systems (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

Over the 6 year grant period, THEC's GEAR UP office, currently titled the Office of P-16 Initiatives, expanded to administer the state's GEAR UP grant, College Access Challenge Grant, Lumina Foundation for Education's KnowHow2Go and Latino Student Success grants, and the College Access and Success Network program within First to the Top. The division bridges K-12 and higher education policy and practice within a college access, readiness, and success focused framework (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

Throughout the 6 years of grant implementation, GEAR UP TN's work and influence moved college access and success into a prominent and permanent place in the state's secondary and postsecondary education agendas. This effect is visible in the numerous grants and additional resources the state and the Office of P-16 Initiatives received since 2005. Overall, GEAR UP TN enabled the Office of P-16 Initiatives to build sustainable partnerships, capitalize on existing resources, and leverage opportunities to address postsecondary access and success in a comprehensive, strategic, and collaborative manner (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

During its 6-year history, GEAR UP TN grew in its role as the foundational college access program in the state, celebrating numerous successes, both statewide and locally.

Through robust implementation of both statewide and direct-service initiatives, GEAR UP TN accomplished its proposed goals and objectives and fulfilled the mission of the national program. Throughout grant completion, GEAR UP TN focused on enhancing its most successful efforts to ensure project sustainability through the statewide policy environment and at the system level to better serve the cohort and future Tennessee students (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011, p. 5).

GEAR UP TN's strategic partnerships promoted college access, readiness and success at the state and local levels through education reform initiatives and the state's public agendas. GEAR UP TN partnerships extended beyond education and state agencies and reached other community organizations, foundations, federal programs, and private foundations. Partners of note included: Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE), Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation (TSAC), the Governor's Office, First to the Top (FttT), Oasis Center, Ayers Foundation, Niswonger Foundation, tnAchieves, Southwest Tennessee Development District, the Tennessee College Access Challenge Grant (CACG), Volunteer Tennessee, the State of Tennessee Treasury Department, the Tennessee Association of Broadcasters, and the Lumina Foundation for Education (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011). In addition to state and local partners, the GEAR UP TN office expanded to include oversight of the CACG, the Lumina KnowHow2GO grant, and the Tennessee College Access and Success Network (TCASN) program of Race to the Top. GEAR UP TN capitalized on the newly redesigned structure by strategically leveraging and aligning the goals of each program to build upon each other to better meet the needs of the students and schools in Tennessee (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

Several statewide project elements were successfully and strategically implemented to positively impact Tennessee's college access infrastructure. GEAR UP TN conducted a successful statewide outreach campaign to educate the public on college access, readiness, and success through a public outreach campaign "Higher Education…Put Your Mind to It." The campaign raised awareness of GEAR UP TN and the importance of earning a postsecondary degree through social media, television and radio announcements, and collateral materials for school counselors (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011). As of June 2011,

the campaign received almost $3 million in free media time and from November 2008 to December 2011, the campaign's television and radio ads have aired 7,651 and 83,000 times, respectively. The public awareness campaign continued until the end of the grant. Additionally, the campaign's online and social media outreach had garnered over 583,626 Mind2it.com site visits and over 12,929 visits to CollegeforTN.org (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011, p. 5).

Statewide implementation of CollegeforTN.org, a partnership among TSAC, TDOE, and THEC, continued throughout GEAR UP TN implementation. CollegeforTN.org, Tennessee's college access web portal provides career, high school, college, and financial aid planning resources to all Tennesseans. With 283,566 student and 2,280 educator accounts created during grant implementation, CollegeforTN.org was and will continue to be a vital tool in disseminating college access and success information in Tennessee (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011, p. 5).

Throughout grant implementation THEC staff members conducted training across Tennessee with particular emphasis on implementing CollegeforTN.org resources to expand access to higher education and build college-going school cultures. GEAR UP TN site coordinators, educators, and students all received in-depth training on the site and can now train others on using CollegeforTN.org resources. In the last year of the grant implementation alone, "THEC staff conducted 52 CollegeforTN.org trainings providing professional development to 831 school counselors and college access professionals" (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011, p. 5).

In 2008 GEAR UP TN implemented Tennessee's first College Application Week initiative as a means of providing low-income, first-generation students with targeted assistance in completing postsecondary applications. College Application Week was designed to build excitement around the college application process and provide graduating Tennessee high school seniors with the opportunity and assistance needed to complete at least one application to postsecondary education during the school day (Tennessee Higher Education Commission,

2011). Since the initial pilot in the nine GEAR UP TN direct service counties, the annual

College Application Week event continued to expand in size and scope.

In 2008, 14 schools participated in the pilot, growing, to 93 in 2009, 129 in 2010, and 196 schools organizations in 2011-an increase of 1,300 percent since the first year of the program. With 56.6 percent of the 196 sites reporting, students submitted over 7,500 applications during the 2011 College Application Week event (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011, p. 6).

GEAR UP TN hosted three successful Youth Summit programs in which the grant

partnered with postsecondary institutions to host cohort students on campus for a 3-day college

immersion experience. Summit activities included college-life simulations challenging students

to register for classes, navigate student orientation tasks, and participate in college classes. The

curriculum focused on challenges students face during the admissions process and the first

semester of college. Approximately 200 students and 50 chaperones attended each Youth

Summit (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

GEAR UP TN remained committed to providing targeted and strategic professional

development for teachers, administrators, counselors, and school leaders due to the systemic and

sustainable changes it creates at the school, system, and community level. In partnership with

the Tennessee Department of Education, the Tennessee State Board of Education, and Peabody

Professional Institutes at Vanderbilt University, GEAR UP TN hosted three School Leaders

Institutes to provide professional development opportunities to teams from participating GEAR

UP TN counties. Content experts provided targeted professional development on sustainability,

Race to the Top, system change management, and strategic leadership. Participants were able to

receive credit hours from the Tennessee Academy for School Leaders and Chief Executive

Officer (Director of Schools) credits (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

GEAR UP TN resulted in systemic cultural shifts at the local level. The one-on-one

support of system site coordinators and the constant follow-up with students were

particularly effective elements of the program. During focus groups and interviews

conducted by the University of Tennessee Institute for Assessment and Evaluation (UT IAE)

team, students expressed appreciation for GEAR UP TN events and information (Tennessee

Higher Education Commission, 2011). Many were especially grateful for the time and

commitment from the GEAR UP TN site coordinator at their school (Tennessee Higher

Education Commission, 2011). GEAR UP TN school leaders acknowledged the critical

value the site coordinator brought to their systems, students, and community, and, as a result,

five direct-service counties have dedicated the resources to hire and sustain the GEAR UP

TN site coordinator in a college access counselor position after the close of the grant

(Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

College visits, summer programs, and assistance with college and financial

applications, such as FAFSA nights and College Application Week, were among the most

influential direct-service interventions often cited during student focus groups. Parental

involvement was also important and recognized by students (Tennessee Higher Education

Commission, 2011).

GEAR UP TN prioritized the successful work plan structure as a means to foster

strategic and collaborative planning and data-driven interventions. Since year 1 of the grant

implementation, THEC required counties to submit a work plan and budget for approval at

the beginning of each academic year; in grant year 6 staff updated benchmarks to revise the

work plan form and completion process to focus more strategically on the needs of cohort

students in their senior high school year. Using ACT scores, course of study weaknesses,

and student self-reported data, grant staff and county site coordinators effectively allocated

services according to each student's demonstrated academic needs. The work plan process

helped GEAR UP TN counties focus work and initiatives using data-driven interventions designed to fit and best serve the individual needs of students, parents, and school systems (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

GEAR UP TN excelled at developing data-driven interventions based on students' educational aspirations, standardized test scores, and course completion information. Services such as test preparation, tutoring, mentoring, high school transition programs, dual enrollment and dual credit classes, academic counseling, academic credit recovery programs, and virtual learning programs are all based on the individual needs of the students. Using ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS), site coordinators worked with each student individually to create a plan for success. As the grant progressed data analysis from CoBro Consulting and UT IAE allowed GEAR UP TN to institute programmatic changes and academic intervention as necessary (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

The Bridge Incentive Award was a $750 award provided to students graduating from GEAR UP TN high schools for use in their first year of higher education. Students completed an online application through the same web portal used to apply for other state offered scholarships, grants, and assistance for postsecondary education. Participation rates over the course of the grant were: 2007-08: 804 students; 2008-09: 1,036 students; 2009-10: 606 students; 2010-11: 675 students (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

The diverse and far reaching initiatives noted above will continue to influence the success of Tennessee students for years to come as each not only provided end-users with an experience but left participants with the knowledge and resources needed to change lives and foster college-going cultures (Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2011).

Evaluation of GEAR UP Tennessee

The University of Tennessee's Institute for Assessment and Evaluation (IAE) was contracted to provide ongoing annual evaluation of the GEAR UP Tennessee (GEAR UP TN) project over the life of the 6-year grant program. In its fifth and final evaluation report, the IAE team presented its findings and conclusions regarding the overall progress of the 6-year GEAR UP TN project as of September 30, 2011, the end of the project.   (Skolits, Boser, Robinson, French, & Morrow, 2011). Since the first year of the project was used to accommodate a formal targeted needs assessment in the initial project year, an evaluation report was not required for Project Year 1 (2005-06). Therefore, while this final evaluation report was prepared at the end of Project Year 6, it represents the fifth annual project evaluation (Skolits et al., 2011). The evaluation team offered the following highlights regarding the findings of this report.

The GEAR UP TN project has been engaged and highly active in statewide and school system initiatives since its inception in accordance with the intent of the grant award. The two-level implementation design of this project (state and the nine pilot systems) successfully provided the state with opportunities to build statewide infrastructure as well as implement and assess school-based college access interventions with students in high-needs school systems across the state (Skolits et al., 2011). "In the final project year alone, over 6,100 students were served in project systems and over 44,000 students received services through statewide initiatives" (Skolits et al., 2011, p. 1).

The statewide results of the project demonstrates just how important a role GEAR UP can have in embracing and establishing a statewide college access infrastructure. Project staff was able to strategically leverage the GEAR UP TN project to support new, related P-16 college

access initiatives based on strategic partnerships of organizations and institutions sharing a college access mission (Skolits et al., 2011).

Since the beginning of the project, students and their parents or guardians reported a growing awareness of college financing and a belief that their child could afford a higher education institution (Skolits et al., 2011). 2011 cohort parents/guardians reported an increase in their awareness of postsecondary options. "By the end of the grant, over two-thirds of the parents and guardians reported knowledge of the entrance requirements of technical/trade schools and community colleges" (Skolits et al., 2011, p. 2). "More than half (57%) reported knowledge of the entrance requirements for four-year institutions" (Skolits et al., 2011, p. 2).

The students in the 2011 cohort reported high levels of participation in the college application process. "Approximately two-thirds of the cohort reported applying to one or more colleges during college application week alone" (Skolits et al., 2011, p. 2).

Statewide project elements were strategically implemented to make major changes in the college access infrastructures in Tennessee. These initiatives can be expected to have a major influence on the college-going rate for years to come (Skolits et al., 2011). CollegeforTN.org provided the state's first web portal for linking parents or guardians, students, teachers, counselors, and other college access professionals with Tennessee colleges and related resources on college planning, college costs, college application and financial aid applications, as well as instructional resources for Tennessee teachers (Skolits et al., 2011). "Given that over a quarter of a million accounts that have been created on this system, the effectiveness and long-term impact of this system cannot be overstated" (Skolits et al., 2011, p. 3).

Three statewide project elements deserve particular attention for their effectiveness.

Professional development for teachers and school leaders (including counselors, college coaches, career coaches, etc.) reflected the project's commitment to improvement. The School Leaders' Institutes were especially helpful in support of project system leaders' effort to create a college-going culture. Reviews of these events were always extremely positive (Skolits et al., 2011). The Youth Summits sponsored by the project provided a new approach to sharing the college access message with high school students. The effectiveness of bringing students from different schools to college campuses and having targeted, strategic curriculum to advance their knowledge of higher education was very effective according to the students, parents or guardians, and school personnel. Students' engagement on a college campus in a strategically structured manner has been proven to be an effective and viable strategy in Tennessee (Skolits et al., 2011).

College Application Week, which received assistance and support by GEAR UP TN, has been well-received across the state. Having a week focused on college applications, along with the supports in place during the week was very helpful. The GEAR UP TN project staff as well as school systems and higher education representatives supported a single event that alone made a tremendous contribution toward high school students' transition to college in Tennessee. The growth in the participation in this event reflects how effectively this intervention was viewed by school leaders (Skolits et al., 2011).

The financial support provided by the project's Bridge Incentive Award ($750 a semester for the first year of college) was extremely well-received by students, parents, and school system officials in the project schools. Students from lower-income communities found this incentive to be very helpful, and it was well-appreciated. The Scholars Promise Award implementation occurs after the project is over (when 2011 cohort students attend college), and it is, therefore,

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not possible to determine the potential impact of this project element at this time. However, there was much excitement and interest in this project element since the grant began, and it is reasonable to assume that it had an impact on some students' and parents' thinking about postsecondary affordability (for 2100 cohort students) (Skolits et al., 2011).

Students indicated appreciation for the benefits of the GEAR UP TN project and rated it highly in surveys and interviews. They found the college visits to be especially helpful and the ongoing support and encouragement of the system coordinator to be very beneficial to their development. As the project progressed, the ratings increased and students began to realize just how much they received in terms of encouragement, preparation, and support from the project (Skolits et al., 2011). Parents or guardians offered extremely positive perspectives of the project. They especially appreciated the active support of the coordinator with regard to college and financial aid applications, and this was reflected in their focus group comments and survey ratings on the project's effectiveness (Skolits et al., 2011). Teachers viewed the GEAR UP TN project as being effective. They indicated that cohort students were better prepared academically and more focused on preparing for college. They thought that 2011 cohort students would be more likely to participate in postsecondary education than students from previous classes (Skolits et al., 2011). System leaders (school directors) indicated that the college-going culture of their school system had favorably changed due to the project. They described a current college-going culture where students, teachers, parents, and school leaders believed that college was an expectation for all. Cultural change, to be so efficient and obvious and to occur in such a short period of time, is a tremendous accomplishment (Skolits et al., 2011). School counselors indicated that the project enabled them to accomplish elements of the counseling program that they had not been able to address given their workload. They especially viewed the one-on-one

support of the system coordinator and the constant coordinator follow up with students as effective elements of the project (Skolits et al., 2011).

The state should recognize and share information on the success of this project. Several best practices in college access in the school systems are clearly evident, and they should be chronicled and distributed widely across Tennessee. This is an important form of sustainability, and the lessons learned from this project can be valuable to all school systems in the state (Skolits et al., 2011).

Creating Sustainability

The federal government and private foundations typically support grantees or contractors for 3 to 5 years and then expect them to secure other funding to continue project activities (Scheirer, 2005). Grantees or contractors that rely on grant funding are concerned about sustaining the services they offer and finding resources and revenue to continue long-term success (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013). There is an increasing call for recipients of federal funds to sustain their programs after initial funding ends and a need to fill a substantial gap in knowledge regarding strategies for identifying and measuring the key components of sustainability (The Altarum Institute, 2009).

Some practitioners are concerned that cohorts of students subsequent to those supported through GEAR UP will not have the same advantages as those supported by grant funds. Projects start in middle schools but usually move on to high school within a couple of years. One of the intentions of GEAR UP was to transform practice in schools that participated in the program, especially middle schools, but without additional resources it will be a challenge to maintain any level of service (Skolits et al., 2003).

GEAR UP grants are viewed by some as seed money (Standing et al, 2008). As a result questions arise about what aspects of the project will remain once federal funding ends. The legislation authorizing GEAR UP intended that the reforms begun with federal assistance would be continued by the partnerships (Standing et al., 2008). In the national evaluation individuals involved with GEAR UP voiced their opinions about the likelihood of sustaining GEAR UP once federal support ends for the projects. Evidence suggested that the facets of GEAR UP would remain in some middle schools, but only time will tell. Individuals involved with the GEAR UP projects had some ideas about which components were likely to remain and why (Standing et al., 2008).

Individuals at about 9 projects out of 20 were optimistic that at least some of the GEAR UP services would continue in the middle schools. At several of these projects those involved in GEAR UP had different opinions on exactly which services would continue. School staff at one project, for example, was optimistic about sustaining GEAR UP, but their partners were skeptical (Standing et al., 2008). Three factors were considered in making an early assessment of the sustainability of the GEAR UP projects participating in the national evaluation. These were:

- Strength of partnerships

- Level of planning and preparation for the future, and

- Level of institutionalization in schools (Standing et al., 2008).

The strength of the partnerships, as well as the level of commitment and communication among the partners, is likely to affect the partnerships' ability to sustain GEAR UP without federal support (Standing et al., 2008). Common characteristics among those partnerships that appeared most effective included involvement in the decision-making process and

communication among partners. These seem to be related to the partnerships' outcomes and strength (Standing et al., 2008).

At several projects partners other than the one or two key partners also played a role in decision-making and implementation, which strengthened their commitment to the project. At least one project's decisions were made as a group, not unilaterally (Standing et al., 2008). Another project emphasized that collaboration and input should occur at all levels. These partners felt their partnership approach was essential for institutionalizing GEAR UP for future cohorts. In addition, partners in these strong partnerships tended to communicate well with one another. The partners at a number of these projects met regularly and maintained ongoing telephone and e-mail communication (Standing et al., 2008).

The projects varied in terms of how much they had planned and prepared for the continuation of GEAR UP beyond the grant period. During spring 2002 site visits GEAR UP staffs were asked about their plans for continuing to operate their projects (Standing et al., 2008). For the most part the more planning for the future that had taken place by that point, the more optimistic the individuals were regarding the sustainability of the project. Some projects had developed concrete plans for sustaining parts of GEAR UP, while a number of other projects were just beginning to formulate their plans (Standing et al., 2008). The most common strategy mentioned for sustaining GEAR UP was to find additional funding through other grants, new partners, existing partners, or the schools (Standing et al., 2008).

At the time of the last visit, about one third of the projects had not developed concrete plans for the future of GEAR UP. Individuals at these sites who were not optimistic about the sustainability of GEAR UP mentioned various reasons why they believed GEAR UP would not continue (Standing et al., 2008). They cited reasons such as schools not having taken ownership

of GEAR UP, lack of staff to coordinate GEAR UP once funding ends, the disintegration of the partnerships and lack of available funding from other sources (Standing et al., 2008).

One of the projects furthest along in the planning efforts was part of an informal alliance with other GEAR UP projects in the region. The alliance was formed to address the very issue of how to continue GEAR UP once funding ends. The alliance was planning to conduct a needs assessment to identify which GEAR UP services to preserve and how much money was needed (Standing et al., 2008).

Another tactic for maintaining GEAR UP cited by several projects was the institutionalization of GEAR UP in the schools and school districts. At these projects staff felt GEAR UP had been integrated into the schools, or there were plans to more fully integrate GEAR UP to ensure its continuation (Standing et al., 2008). These projects noted that building a strong foundation of GEAR UP's goals among school staff aided in the institutionalization. At a few schools, GEAR UP staff was allowing school staff to assume more responsibility in the administration of the project by having them plan and implement services (Standing et al., 2008). Another indication of institutionalization was apparent through the actions of school principals. The principals at schools in four different projects were committed to the goals of GEAR UP enough that they built GEAR UP into either the school's budget or long-term plans (Standing et al., 2008).

Teachers' buy-in or their commitment to GEAR UP objectives, as well as changes in teachers' expectations because of GEAR UP, may increase a project's chances of continuing because there is a greater likelihood that teachers will continue to include aspects of GEAR UP in their teaching (Standing et al., 2008). In addition, curriculum reforms initiated by GEAR UP and successfully implemented in the schools are likely to remain in the schools once funding

ends. In particular, reforms initiated by GEAR UP in the GEAR UP schools that spread to other

schools in the district is evidence of the sustainability of GEAR UP because they show the

district's commitment to the project (Standing et al., 2008).

Sustainability is a challenge for all programs and initiatives that serve children, youth, and

families. Many programs that show promise in the start-up phase eventually fade away because

they are unable to tap into and make the best use of the fiscal and community resources that

could enable them to flourish (The Finance Project, 2002). However, among the programs that

do flourish there are several common elements that lead to their success; a well-articulated vision

of what initiative leaders want to achieve; the ability to document and demonstrate an initiative's

success; the ability to adjust to changing social, economic, and political trends in the community;

support from policymakers and the public; the ability to identify and tap into necessary monetary

and in-kind resources; the existence of strong administrative and fiscal management systems; the

involvement of community-based organizations, parents, or other stakeholders; and the existence

of a clear, sensible, and convincing plan for putting together the key resources that are necessary

for an initiative to continue (The Finance Project, 2002).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to provide an account of school staff perceptions and their experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN and document how they sustained program activities and services after funding had ended. GEAR UP TN system interventions included college visits and fairs, ACT preparation workshop and classes, dual enrollment with area higher education institutions, tutoring and mentoring, college applications, parent FAFSA workshops and assistance, job site visits and career fairs, teacher, counselor, and school leader professional development. The research design for this study was drawn from the tenets of qualitative research and qualitative interviewing. Qualitative research methods emphasize the researcher's role as active participant in the study (Creswell, 2005). For the present study I was the key instrument in data collection, and the interpreter of data findings (Stake, 1995).

Tierney and Dilley (2002) suggested that interviewing in the field of education has four primary purposes: to explain policies, plans, or strategies within an educational system; to understand the social context of learning; to develop case studies of particular individuals or groups of individuals; and to specify how educational practices may be reformed. This study was primarily involved with the fourth purpose, the acquisition of information through interviews that will ultimately reveal how early intervention programs may be reformed or improved. Systematic intervention efforts directed at low-income students have the potential to impact social and economic inequalities in our society.

This chapter outlines the methodology of this study and begins with a statement of the specific research questions that guided this study. Additionally, the specifics of qualitative inquiry, participants, data collection, data coding and analysis, and credibility are discussed.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study were:

Research Question 1. What were the key elements in the GEAR UP TN program (college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment, parent FAFSA workshops, career fairs, job site visits, or professional development) that contributed to program continuation?

Research Question 2. Are there certain procedures that were essential for staff to initiate to ensure program continuation?

Research Question 3. Assuming that collaboration with other agency and organization partners is a key influence in program continuation, were there certain combinations of organizations in a collaborative that were sustained after funding?

Research Question 4. What program activities or services were not continued and why?

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is an appropriate approach to study the experiences of school staff for several reasons. First, qualitative studies "facilitate study of issues in depth and detail" (Patton, 2002, p. 14). Second, one of the key qualities of qualitative research is the absence of specific testable hypotheses. Rather, qualitative researchers formulate studies to investigate topics in all their complexity (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998). In this case I was less interested in quantifying or measuring aspects of early intervention programs and more interested in the essential qualities of the school staff experiences with the continuation of program activities and services after funding had ended. Third, this study was specifically designed to gather information and perspectives directly from school staff. This reflects the qualitative researchers' interest in understanding behavior from the subjects' own frame of reference. Finally, as stated previously, this study was designed to influence practices and policies to ultimately increase college access.

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In this regard a qualitative look at the experiences of school staff provided a foundation for future quantitative and quasi-experimental qualitative designs by uncovering potential independent and dependent variables, which are currently unknown.

Constructivism

This qualitative study is constructivist in nature. It is recognized in the constructivist paradigm that there are multiple realities and the researcher and participant create meaning together in the natural environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Denzin and Lincoln explain, "Most of us would agree that knowing is not passive….but active….In this sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it" (p. 197).

Knowledge and interpretation in a constructivist research paradigm are thus the result of a collective, not an individual process. Constructivists assume that there are many possible interpretations of the same data, all of which are potentially meaningful. Constructions are therefore not separate from those who make the constructions; they "are not part of some 'objective' world that exists apart from their constructors," according to Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 143). Guba and Lincoln further argued that a "malconstruction" would be an analysis that is "incomplete, simplistic, uninformed, internally inconsistent, or derived by an inadequate methodology." (p. 143).

Constructivist researchers see method differently than empirical scientists. While scientists attempt to limit or eliminate personal, subjective judgment, constructionists see it as an important aid in good judgment and understanding. The researcher is the research instrument, and thus the goal is not to remove the researcher's perspective but to refine it so that the

researcher is as equipped as possible to make a sophisticated analysis and argument about the phenomena observed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In the constructivist paradigm the validity of a study is not determined with reference to scientific methods or a study's replicability but on how a given interpretation may be judged. Is it thorough, coherent, and comprehensive? Does it make sense or ring true? Is it useful? In particular, is the interpretation provocative and generative of further inquiry? If a study meets these criteria, it may be said to be valid (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A valid qualitative study is one that takes into consideration the context of those who are the subject of inquiry and offers a promising analysis of why an event occurs or how events, symbols, and narratives are made meaningful for people.

Constructivist researchers recognize that data collection is a discovery process. While positivist and postpositivist research tends to focus on verification or falsification of hypotheses, constructivists recognize that their hypotheses may change as their study evolves. Through their interactions with people, they may come to learn that their original hypothesis was too narrow, too broad, or simply inconsistent with the ways in which people actually experience themselves and their practices. In simple terms, while quantitative researchers begin with a hypothesis, constructivists are more likely to end their study with a working hypothesis.

I used a constructivist paradigm to examine and understand school staffs' perceptions and experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN and how school staff sustained program activities and services after funding had ended. For this study I conducted interviews with 13 school staff members and continually analyzed these data in an attempt to understand and construct meaning of participants' perceptions and experiences with GEAR UP TN.

There is no literature that discusses school staff perceptions and their experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN. I chose to use the constructivist framework because I did not want to make assumptions about the experiences of school staff. By using this paradigm I attempted to remove as much bias as possible and engage in creating knowledge with the participants. However, bias can never be truly eliminated from this type of inquiry, so constructivist researchers are more interested in the coconstruction of knowledge between researcher and the researched.

Participants

The uniqueness of this study was the focus on school staff and their perceptions and experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN. This study interviewed site coordinators, counselors, teachers, principals, and a school director to provide insight into their perceptions and experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP an early intervention program. The participants included 13 school staff from five east Tennessee counties, including four principals, two counselors, one teacher, one school director, and five site coordinators. School staff were selected by me or referred by the appropriate director of schools. Participants were eager to participate in the study. I did not observe any reticence from any of the participants. None of the school staff selected declined to participate in the study.

Substantial research addresses predictive and descriptive analyses of early intervention programs, yet rarely do these studies include the perspective of school staff. Tierney and Dilley (2002) defined "absent respondents" as those who have been historically absent from educational interviews. These authors posited that students, faculty, and administrators of lesser status are among those absent respondents and are often overlooked for a particular reason. The conspicuous absence of school staff experiences in the literature, despite research pointing to

their influence, suggests a need to ask questions directly of them. In fact, Tierney and Dilley (2002) implied that by simply incorporating new respondents in a study, the researcher has already begun to answer some of the larger research questions.

Participant Recruitment

Purposeful selection was used to select school staff to participate as key informants in this study. Key informants are individuals who possess special knowledge or status, who are willing to share their knowledge and skills with the researcher, and who have access to perspectives or observations denied to the researcher (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Key informants therefore are not to be selected randomly but have to be chosen on the basis of "theory and or data driven" criteria first (who has access to the data), and "personality" criteria second (who is able, willing, etc.) (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). In this case I identified school staff from selected counties in rural East Tennessee who had participated in the implementation of GEAR UP TN. The participants represented an array of experiences and provided a wide range of information. The rationale for using purposeful selection was to seek information-rich cases for in-depth study, which helped answer the research questions.

School District Selection

The schools selected for this study were from the GEAR UP TN east counties, which are Campbell, Cocke, Johnson, Meigs, and Union. My role in this project was the regional coordinator for GEAR UP TN. I was responsible for the east region that consisted of these five counties. I was interested in finding out what were the key influences in the GEAR UP TN program that contributed to program continuation after funding ended in these five counties.

Key Informant Selection

The second level of selection consisted of purposefully inviting the key informant school staff from the identified school districts. The decision to interview school staff is to use purposeful sampling for the selection of the interview sample. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). The participants were school staff who had been involved in various ways with this project. The 13 participants interviewed were: (a) four principals, (b) five former site coordinators, (c) two counselors, (d) one teacher, and (e) one director of schools. I originally planned on interviewing 20 school staff, which would have included five principals, five counselors, five teachers, and five site coordinators, but due to changes in personnel at the local school districts some of the school staff that was previously involved with GEAR UP TN were no longer available.

Ethical Protocol

The director of schools from each school district granted written permission on school district letterhead prior to the commencement of the study. Prior to conducting the interviews, an Informed Consent Document (see Appendix A) that clearly detailed the special purpose of the research, the research method, and recording instruments and goals was distributed to each participant. The document emphasized their right to refuse participation, to withdraw from the study, or to extract their words at any time with impunity.

Data Collection

In order to provide a full account of school staff perceptions and experiences with GEAR UP TN, I employed a qualitative interview research design. I selected interviewing as the primary data collection vehicle because I was interested in other people's stories. Telling stories

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is essentially a meaning-making process. When people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their stream of consciousness (Seidman, 1998). This section outlines the data collection process this researcher used for this study. The use of qualitative interviews and field notes are each described in detail.

Qualitative Interviewing

The most basic rational for employing interviews as a means to collect data is their usefulness in understanding respondents' experiences. Seidman (1998) said that interviewing is a powerful way to gain insight into a particular educational experience through the process of understanding the experiences of those professionals whose lives constitute education. Interviews allowed me to gather information and perspectives about the perceptions and experiences of school staff. The best way to understand a practice or an organization is through the experience of the people who carry out the process (Seidman, 1998). By interviewing site coordinators, counselors, teachers, principals, and director of schools, I was able to develop an understanding of the details of their experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN.

A second component of qualitative interviewing is the importance placed on the respondent as a knower. The basic principle behind interviewing is a belief that the stories told by the respondents are of worth (Seidman, 1998). This resonated well with the purpose of this study. Finally, the ultimate goal of this study revealed potential areas for innovative intervention, educational reform, and social policy. Interviews are "sites for discourse and social analysis, for gathering data about educational practices and identities, and for the production of these practices and identities" (Tierney & Dilley, 2002, p. 454). Interviews increase the likelihood that data will reveal potential sites for future study, intervention, and policy changes. Each of these tenets of qualitative interviewing corresponded to the goals and purpose of this

study. These interviews allowed me to obtain direct response and perspectives from participants.

Data from these interviews assisted in answering questions regarding the continuation of the

GEAR UP TN program after funding had ceased. Participants were chosen because they

participated in the implementation of GEAR UP TN in various ways. Their opinions were based

on direct knowledge regarding the GEAR UP TN program.

Interview Questions

The interview protocol used a semistructured approach that used predetermined questions

as well as allowed for new issues to be brought up during the interviews. Three of the five

county school systems included in the study were awarded a new GEAR UP TN grant in October

2012. As I interviewed participants I made it clear that my questions would pertain to the

previous GEAR UP TN grant that was awarded in 2006 and ended in 2011. It was difficult to

keep some of the participants focused on the previous grant during the interview process;

participants kept referring to activities and services that were being provided by the new grant.

Qualitative interviews typically use various kinds of questions to encourage clarity on the part of

the interviewer and to facilitate clarity and appropriateness on the part of the appropriateness on

the part of the respondent. Patton (2002) suggested that six kinds of questions may be used in

qualitative interviewing: experience and behavior questions, opinion and value questions, feeling

questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions, and background questions. In this study

experience and behavior questions were used to elicit responses on the key informants'

experiences, behaviors, and actions. Opinion and value questions and feeling questions were

used to gather information about how the key informants' perceived and made meaning out of

their experiences.   Background and demographic questions were used to complement the data

and distinguish experiences for analysis.

Interview Process

By interviewing the staff at their home schools I was able to gather relevant observational data during the interview, including actions, conversations, and descriptions of the locale and persons observed. For each interview I used a tape recorder to capture the key informant's voice. Although disadvantages to using a tape recorder include altering the nature of the conversation and the potential for technical difficulties, tape recording the staffs' responses enabled me to note unrecorded data, such as nonverbal expressions, and to take focused and strategic notes throughout the interview. Furthermore, tape recorded interviews allowed me to use direct quotes to support analysis, which is considered the "prize sought by the qualitative inquirer" (Patton, 2002, p. 380).

I believed that 13 interviews were a feasible number that would enable me to gain sufficient insights into the perceptions of school staff to satisfy the purpose of this study. Most of the interviews ran a little over an hour in length, with the shortest lasting 40 minutes and the longest running 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants with the exception of two that were conducted at their choice of outside locations.

Field Notes

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) defined field notes as "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (p. 108). Field notes consist of two types of material: descriptive and reflective. Descriptive field notes objectively record a description of the setting and people. Conversely, reflective field notes record the subjective side of the researcher's experience.

Field notes taken during the interviews promote the formulation of new questions and consideration of possible themes prior to transcription, enhance future analysis and information

location, and serve as backup in the event of technical difficulties (Patton, 2002). With

participant approval I audio recorded the interview to ensure accurate transcription. I also took

handwritten notes during each interview, which enabled me to track key points to return to later

in the interview or to highlight ideas of particular interest or importance. I remained open to the

possibility that the concepts and ideas that emerge may be different from those that might have

been predicted at the outset. I created follow-up questions based on what the interviewee said.

The follow-up questions were about clarification and probing for details. Some new and

unexplored areas or ideas may be introduced (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Conducting the

interviews in the key informants' home schools provided rich data through field note

descriptions of the settings in which the key informants worked.

Data Coding

Each taped interview was transcribed and coded. The transcription process began after

the first interview on May 23, 2013, and was completed by June 9, 2013. To ensure transcript

accuracy, I reviewed each transcript while listening to the audiotapes. Additionally, the

transcripts were presented to each interview participant for his or her review to further ensure

accuracy. Data collected from the interviews were line coded by using Weft QDA computer

software, which assisted with the organizing, indexing, and retrieving of data. Coding the

interview data allows a researcher to condense the bulk of "data sets into analyzable units by

creating categories with and from our data" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 26). I used this coding

process to identify themes throughout the data collection, to refine current interview protocol,

and to generate new questions.

There have been critiques of technology used in qualitative research due to its

resemblance to quantitative research, separation from the creative process, inclination to restrict

data analysis, and potential loss of confidentiality when using mass media (Hess-Biber, 1995).

However, despite these disadvantages, there are several advantages to computer usage aiding

qualitative research. According to Fielding and Lee (1991) computer software programs reduce

the laborious process of coding. The traditional process of cutting, pasting, highlighting, and

indexing is time consuming, especially with large and diverse sources of data. Second, the

computerized organization enables the researcher to code, delete codes, recode, and collapse

codes and has the capability to affect all cases in a single study. Therefore, in addition to

lessening the time spent coding, this feature allows for the evolution of coding and theme

development (Fielding & Lee, 1991).

The coding process is an attempt to "link different segments or instances in the

data" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 27). This allows a researcher to use specific instances, or

responses, to generate ideas about the data. The coding process may also include simplification

or reduction of the data. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggested that coding data may also

include data complication, which is the process of opening up data to ask questions while

generating theories and frameworks. In this case, rather than aggregate instances, coding can

also disaggregate instances by speculating about additional features from the responses. In sum,

the coding process facilitates future analysis and the formation of comparisons and contrasts of

the views expressed by the key informants. In regard to this study, the initial coding process

provided foundation from which I asked the key informants to make meaning out of

their experiences during the interviews.

Data Analysis

Although the coding process is part of the analysis, it is not the analysis in itself. Data

analysis of qualitative research involves "making sense out of what people have said, looking for

patterns, putting together what is said in one place with what is said in another place, and

integrating what different people have said" (Patton, 2002, p. 380). I began analyzing data following the first interview to begin identifying patterns and to facilitate subsequent data collection. Primarily, analysis involves examining the codes and the relationships among the codes in order to generate meaning.

Miles and Huberman (1984) offered several tactics for generating meaning from data. Noting patterns and themes, clustering codes, making metaphors, counting, and making contrasts and comparisons may be employed to build meaning from the data. During the analysis I read chunks of data associated with particular codes to identify common themes. I identified whether or not specific codes were present across school staff and school districts. In addition to identifying common themes and patterns for specific question areas, I searched for larger overarching themes in the key informants' responses. Once meaning was generated, I employed techniques to test or confirm findings. Miles and Huberman (1984) suggested that checking for representatives, considering researcher effects, triangulating the data, checking the meaning of outliers, looking for negative evidence, and replicating a finding are all useful ways to confirm an analysis as close to accurate as possible. Once the data from this research were examined thoroughly through the coding process, I reviewed the codes for emerging themes in the data. I identified common themes out of the experiences of the staff. Themes that were not relevant to the research questions or not relatively consistent with other key informants were discarded. I collapsed codes into common areas or larger themes. Creswell (2005) recognizes that a researcher's own background plays just as important a part of the meaning-making process as a researcher's fidelity to a theoretical lens. During my own interpretation process, my experience as a regional coordinator for GEAR UP TN informed my understanding of the participants' stories. As well, to convey the participants' perceptions of their experiences accurately, I

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focused specifically on what they were saying and the conclusions they drew. The themes that emerged from this study came directly from my awareness of the healthy tension between my own biases and the participants' own meaning making process.

Credibility

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) provided several methods to enhance the credibility or trustworthiness of qualitative data collected with the key informant interview method. The more of these criteria that are used in a study, the more the data collected can be trusted and deemed valid. The methods I used in this study to increase credibility were member checking, triangulation, thick description, and an audit trail.

Member Checking

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that member checking is a technique used to establish the truthfulness of qualitative research. This process tries to tackle the pitfall of unchecked interpretation. During the interview it consists of restating, summarizing, or paraphrasing the information from the key informant, making sure that the researcher's perception of the key informants' responses is accurate. At the end of the information gathering process, member checking consists of recycling the preliminary findings to the key informants.

For this study I employed member checking to increase the validity of my findings. This was accomplished in three ways. First, follow-up interviews provided an opportunity to check my data with the key informants. I conducted eight follow-up interviews by telephone with participants. Second, I sent a copy of the interview transcripts and the preliminary findings to the key informants requesting that they confirm the accuracy of the transcripts and asked to comment on whether my interpretations rang true and were meaningful to them. I received 12 of the 13 confirmations. They offered comments on whether or not they felt the data were

interpreted in a manner congruent with their own experiences. All participants rated the findings

of the data analysis as a moderately to strongly credible interpretation of the reality they

experienced in the project. In addition, all 12 participants made comments that directly

connected the findings to one or more personal experiences they had in the procedure. Third, I

requested peer and colleague review of my findings as they emerged. Peer and colleague review

were conducted by staff at East Tennessee State University and University of Tennessee who

have doctorate degrees in educational leadership and policy analysis. They followed the trail,

starting with the transcripts and ending with the emergent themes. Differences in our

perspectives were easily resolved. It was only when my peer and colleague and I reached overall

agreement about my analysis, that I was satisfied that my study was sound with respect to the

findings and conclusions. Member checking has two benefits. One, it assured the key informants

that I accurately interpreted their responses. Second, this practice provided me the opportunity to

substantiate the validity of my findings. Furthermore, in addition to checking factual and

interpretive accuracy, some researchers suggest that this step increases the credibility of the

study (Glense & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seidman, 1998).

Triangulation

Another method is called triangulation, which means the use of multiple data sources,

multiple informants, and multiple methods in order to seek agreement (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Triangulation is based on the wish to obtain multiple perspectives on a phenomenon to see it

from different angles in order to create a more complete understanding. Triangulation is most

often thought of as obtaining information from multiple sources. Denzin (1978), however,

asserted that one may also employ multiple and different methods, investigators, and theories.

For this study the 13 key informants were multiple data sources that provided varying perspectives on the same topics. In addition to the informant interviews, I also collected data through field notes. Use of these multiple methods further increased my ability to triangulate the data and enhance credibility.

Thick Description

Thick description is a thorough description of the way in which the data were collected, including the context and the processes observed that might be relevant to the issue (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Originally used by Geertz (1973), the term refers to a detailed description of the context and process of a qualitative investigation so as to allow the reader to consider whether the product of the inquiry-the interpretation of the data- may be relevant in another context. I provided a thick description about the setting, the participants, the method of data collection, and analysis methods and how decisions were made throughout the study to enable other researchers to make decisions about transferability of results.

Audit Trail

An audit trail is a documentation of the methods, procedures, and decisions made in a qualitative research study including the sample selection and explanation of the coding categories used (Hull, 1997; Merriam, 2002). Auditing in qualitative research is analogous to a fiscal audit. Schwandt (1997, p.6) stated that auditing is "a procedure whereby a third-party examiner systematically reviews the audit trail maintained by the inquirer." Although replicability of the findings may be impossible, if researchers study the same community of research participants at a similar time, the data sets obtained by these researchers and their interpretation should be largely comparable (James & Mulcahy, 1999). More simply stated, an

audit trail allows someone to challenge or confirm the interpretation of the data made by the researcher. Consequently, the audit trail lends credibility to a study.

To increase dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of study findings, I provided an audit trail, a detailed explanation of the data collection and analysis methods and how decisions were made throughout the study (see Appendix B). This audit trail will allow the reader to determine if the results of the study are consistent with the data collected and if there are sufficient accounts of the data and the analysis.

Preliminary Interview Questions

1. What is important for me to know about the community your school serves?

2. How do you perceive your role as it relates to sustaining the program?

3. If this program were replicated in another school, what would be important for the principal and staff to know?

4. What have you observed that is different for the school since the GEAR UP TN program?

5. Tell me ways in which central administration supports the program.

6. What is the future plan for this program?

7. How is the program funded?

8. How did the school culture affect sustaining the program?

9. What effect, if any did external factors have on sustaining the program?

10. Do you know of anything that would prevent the program from continuing at the school? If yes, please tell me more.

11. Do you have any other comments? Is there anything that you consider important regarding the GEAR UP TN initiative that we have not covered?

Data Analysis Procedures

During this qualitative study, I had each interview tape transcribed after the actual meeting and read the transcripts as they were produced. After the transcripts of the taped interview sessions were generated, I studied the transcripts and field notes, seeking to organize the data topically, going back to the original research questions in order to devise a list of appropriate themes for sorting out the findings. My interpretation of the data became a part of the process at this point. Conclusions for the findings followed the interpretations.

Analysis During Data Collection

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) offered nine specific suggestions for analysis of data collected. I made considerable use of these suggestions such as (a) making decisions that narrowed the focus of the case study to reduce the amount of data gathered, (b) developing analytical questions in the initial phase of the case study, (c) using what was learned from previous sessions for data collection, (d) writing observer comments to generate critical thinking about what was being observed and studied, (e) taking notes about personal learning in the process, (f) exploring and utilizing related literature, and (g) experimenting with "metaphors, analogies, and concepts that offered insight for processing the data being gathered" (p. 154). Some of the above suggestions were used because I could not anticipate what would be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis would be like. The data that were collected and the analysis that accompanied the entire process shaped the final product of this case study.

Intensive Analysis

Making sense of the data that were collected was obviously the most important aspect of the research project. Intensive analysis involved a careful study of the data collected, including consolidating, reducing, and interpreting the findings (Merriam, 1988).

Devising Themes

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the process of theme generation involved noting regularities in the setting or people chosen for study. As categories of meaning emerged, I searched for those that had "internal convergence and external divergence" (p. 115). That is categories that were internally consistent but distinct from one another. Participants did not respond the same on all questions asked during the interview. That is, categories were internally consistent but distinct from one another. Patton's (2002) method was to exploit clues in ordinary discourse for what they tell us about shared cognition, to glean what people must have in mind in order to say the things they do. Many hours of interviews were analyzed to discover concepts underlying school staff perceptions of GEAR UP TN and how they sustained program activities and services after funding had ended. Therefore, I studied the transcripts and notes to identify themes to use in sorting the data. Each of the transcripts was read separately for regularities and patterns as well as topics the data cover. Words or phrases used by the participants were used to represent the topics or patterns identified. These words or phrases provided a set of initial coding topics. As themes were discovered they were underlined and then coded in the margins of the interview transcripts.

Ethics

Merriam (1988) stated that interviewing for a qualitative study, whether it is highly structured with predetermined questions or semistructured and open-ended, carries with it both risks and benefits. Merriam also indicated that in-depth interviewing may have unanticipated long-term effects. She stated that observation, a second means of collecting data in a qualitative study, has its own ethical pitfalls, depending on the researcher's involvement in the activity.

Observation conducted without the awareness of those being observed raises ethical issues of privacy and informal consent.

The aim of the investigator was communicated to all participants. I did not relate specific information about participants to others and throughout the research, participants were treated with respect and their cooperation was expected. I did not use hidden mechanical devices or be untruthful to participants during the collecting of data. I made it clear during the negotiation for permission to do a study what the terms of the agreement were and I followed the contract agreement.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology used to research, compile, report, and evaluate data collected regarding the perceptions of school staff and their experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN and how program activities and services are being sustained after funding for GEAR UP TN ended. Qualitative study is appropriate when the objective of evaluation is to develop a better understanding in order to enhance educators' insight about maintaining precollege access programs after funding has ended.

Further data and analysis determine effectiveness of the GEAR UP TN initiative on education reform for the five rural East Tennessee counties and inform future decisions and strategies for maintaining precollege access programs after funding has ended. It was my intention to "study it to achieve as full an understanding of the phenomenon as possible" (Merriam, 1998, p. 28). Chapter 4 provides an in-depth review of developed themes.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of school staff and their experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN in five counties (Campbell, Cocke, Johnson, Meigs, and Union) and how program activities and services are being sustained after funding for GEAR UP TN ended.

In this chapter the researcher presents a summary of the findings from the qualitative analyses of the interview responses. Information rich data were collected from 13 school staff who participated in and were knowledgeable about the GEAR UP TN initiative. Individual teachers, counselors, site coordinators, principals, and director of schools were asked to reflect on their experiences. Pseudonyms are used to identify the participants and the location of the study sites to ensure confidentiality.

During in-depth interviews participants described their perceptions and experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN. They also discussed how program activities and services are being sustained after funding for GEAR UP TN had ended. The research findings that this chapter reports are based on analysis of semistructured interviews and the researcher's observations.

The final section of this chapter presents a summary of overall findings. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the findings of the study to include conclusions and recommendations.

The following research questions informed this study:

- What were the key elements in the GEAR UP TN program (college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment, parent FAFSA workshops, career fairs, job site visits, or professional development) that contributed to program continuation?

- Are there certain procedures that were essential for staff to initiate to ensure program continuation?

- Assuming that collaboration with other agency and organization partners is a key influence in program continuation, were there certain combinations of organizations in a collaborative that were sustained after funding?

- What program activities or services were not continued and why?

Participants contributed differing amounts of information to the four themes that comprise the narrative. Site coordinators had more knowledge and gave more detailed information than the other participants; this was due to site coordinators having more hands-on experience with the day-to-day operation of the implementation of GEAR UP TN. The teacher focused on the technology that GEAR UP TN provided to the counties and suggested how having new technology in the classrooms helped teachers to be more efficient in teaching students.

Principals focused on program activities that helped to increase parent involvement in their schools. Counselors focused on the benefits of having a site coordinator working with students which enabled counselors to offer more services to students. The director of schools focused on the professional development that GEAR UP TN provided for staff. Some participants talked at length on one or two themes; some participants made nearly equal contributions across all four themes. Thus, all participants' voices and views are represented in this study.

The relationship of the research questions to the findings is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Research Questions and Findings

Research Questions	Findings
1. What were the key elements in the GEAR UP TN program (college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment, parent FAFSA workshops, career fairs, job site visits, or professional development) that contributed to program continuation?	• Established parent/school partnership already in place • Increased parent involvement • Collaborative culture • Leadership roles of principals, parents, and teachers • Time to implement, plan, and collaborate • On-going training for staff and parents • In-kind support from school districts, colleges, and local businesses • Continued funding from Tennessee College Access and Success Network, Tennessee Appalachian Center for Higher Education, and Title 1
2. Are there certain procedures that were essential for staff to initiate to ensure program continuation?	• Communicating the benefits of GEAR UP to stakeholders • Gaining support from the school board • Support from parents • Support from the community • Keeping key personnel in place
3. Assuming that collaboration with other agency and organization partners is a key influence in program continuation, were there certain combinations of organizations in a collaborative that were sustained after funding?	• In-kind support from colleges and local businesses • Continued support and funding from Tennessee College Access and Success Network, Tennessee Appalachian Center for Higher Education, and Title 1 • Collaborative support from Tennessee Achieves and Talent Search
4. What program activities or services were not continued and why?	• Bridge Incentive Award • GEAR UP TN Scholarship • High cost • Lack of funding

Study Findings

Four themes emerged from the data:

1. Key elements in the program that contributed to program continuation.

2. Procedures essential to initiate program continuation.

3. Organizations in a collaborative that were sustained after funding.

4. Program activities or services not continued.

While the themes are reported as being discrete, there is considerable overlap among them. Further, participants' responses to interview questions often addressed more than one theme. In those cases the interview data are described where they appear to fit most logically.

Theme 1: Key Elements in the Program that Contributed to Program Continuation

When asked about the key elements in the program that led to program continuation, participants reported that college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment, and parent FAFSA workshops were instrumental in program continuation. Participants reported that this was possible due to the implementation of the first GEAR UP grant; these services were easier and cost effective to keep going because they were already in place.

Principal 3 stated:

We have more kids aware of college, more kids taking the ACT, more kids taking dual enrollment classes in order to get college credit. We have more kids wanting to come to tutoring for the ACT, take the ACT class that we have. There's more understanding about financial aid and they take advantage of the FAFSA nights. And that is something else that we have continued are FAFSA nights. We use to do that, GEAR UP started that but we continued. Everything that we learned and were positive things, we have continued.

Director 1 expressed:

We've seen an improvement in our ACT scores; we've seen an improvement of our college readiness scores, although GEAR UP played a major role in that, that's a piece of the puzzle, we have some preparatory classes for them more advanced placement classes, we have dual enrollment classes, GEAR UP played a role in us being able to implement and continue. I feel we were able to keep some of the strategies in place and some of the visits; we were able to work some of that out as far as the college visits.

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Site coordinator 2 stated:

Through college readiness they sustained me, we actually wrote a model grant and that helped us to sustain the college visits, college survivor weekend and we also provided a summer bridge program from Walter State to ETSU to take the kids on campus to stay.

Coordinator 4 reported:

More interest with college process, more parent involvement, more college related activities with the senior night and senior summit, the field trips showing them that college is doable, filling out the financial aid showing assistance with that having all the different nights that we had working with the students and parents one on one to complete the financial aid and scholarships.

Counselor 2 reported:

Since GEAR UP there's a lot more awareness of financial aid for sure. They've dedicated themselves to helping kids fill out the FAFSA just as much as they can, getting them on top of that, making sure that they know that they can afford school. The FAFSA nights, college app weeks, wearing your college alma mater shirts on Friday, a lot of those things they sustained, incorporating colleges into their field trips, not everyone continued that, but several of them did. Where they could, they would try to make sure they visited a college campus when they were out.

Principal 1 stated:

We see the parents coming in to fill out FAFSAs that ordinarily wouldn't do it. I forget the exact number but it was astounding how many people of the senior class had actually visited with our coordinator, how many parents came in and actually visited with her and filled out FASFAs. I don't think it's weekly but it's probably monthly, she meets with them discusses whether it's FASFA, whether it's applying to college, it might be going over ACT and those kinds of things.

Site Coordinator 1 shared:

Well the first year what was different for us was that we operated trying to provide the same services with no money (laughs). That was definitely different. I sold coupon books at football games every week. The proceeds went toward trips, went toward funding our college trips and things like that. What the principal and staff have done here to make our program successful is just completely jump on board with the idea of college access, creating the college culture; creating the college going culture came from the top down here at this school from the principal encouraging the faculty to incorporate ACT prep and college access stuff into their curriculum. I'm happy to say that through our FAFSA days and other workshops we are still getting about 80% of parents involved in their senior year at least, it is amazing. There was a year between GEAR UP and TCASN that we had to go out and beat the bushes for everything, with having TCASN we were able to implement

back almost everything that we had before with GEAR UP because we had a pretty large sum of money there to provide our direct services, our tutoring services during the day, some dual enrollment grant help and then the trips and things like that.

Counselor 1 reported:

I think TnACHE has picked up and is helping out with some funding now, to help some of our students pay for dual enrollment classes so they can take college classes while in high school. The school culture is ever changing here, the younger students by seeing the older students visit these colleges and go outside of our county, it has changed the thought process of the students here.

Teacher 1 shared:

A lot of things like the college trips were deemed by the community by the school board and by the upper management, the director of schools, they saw that it was very important and the impact it was making on the student, their wants and desires to go to school, they saw the importance of the school trips, they have sustain those they funded those. We make the trips and they get to see them first hand, they get to see a little bit of what's it about, they get an insight to what's it going to be like to make that transition which is so hard for a lot of students.

Principal 2 stated:

What was hard about funding that especially the money that came in from GEAR UP where we could take the kids on college visits, the high school funded a, I don't know where exactly they found the money, but they did have a graduation coach. Somebody that helped with FAFSA and those types of things but didn't do a lot of college visits at all. Last year was my first year here, I think we did a college visit to LMU, we did do that.

Site Coordinator 3 reported:

The GEAR UP grant that stopped a couple of years ago many of the things are still in place at our high school. The guidance counselors that were there knew all the basics, they knew about the FASFA's, they knew about the timelines, they knew about college application week, college 101 for parents, all the foundations we laid during that grant, they kept those intact. Parents need to know all about the FASFA. Many of our parents do not have internet access or at least high speed internet so that they can go online and complete those FASFA's on time. Part of the carryover from our last GEAR UP grant is Tennessee Achieves. We had 161-162 seniors last year at our high school; approximately 160 of them qualified and got their FASFA's filled out for Tennessee Achieves. And all this is part of the old GEAR UP grant.

Principal 4 shared:

We had to pay for things out of our general fund in our schools; we had to ask for board

approval of certain things that normally GEAR UP took care of so we were limited. Up here at this school last year I had to pay for us to go on a couple of trips to colleges that GEAR UP would normally have been able to take care of. So the funding side of it mostly fell on the schools, the individual schools which is a hardship for the schools to be able to give all the experiences that GEAR UP enabled our students to have.

Site Coordinator 5 stated:

My role for the past couple of years has been to try to sustain those parts of the program; those aspects that we thought were very effective. Some of the things that we couldn't sustain were those that cost a lot of money to keep them going but we did sustain some of the things like the college application week, we did the college fair the really big college career fair at our high school, we're signing all their students up for CollegforTN.org that's the website that was established during the GEAR UP program, so we want all of our students to still be a part of that. We're still doing some college visits which I thought was a very effective part of the GEAR UP program getting the students out aware of the opportunities the colleges, and what's available to them I think helped tremendously.

Participants reported that after GEAR UP ended they were able to sustain some college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment, and parent FAFSA workshops. The level of sustainability of these key elements varied across the participating school systems, some systems obtained funding from Tennessee College Access and Success Network (TCASN) and Tennessee Appalachian Center for Higher Education (TnACHE), and some systems used their general fund. Most systems have moved towards sustainability of key people and elements of the program, and several have made major gains toward sustainability.

Theme 2: Procedures Essential to Initiate Program Continuation

In their responses to interview questions, participants identified the importance of communicating the benefits of GEAR UP to stakeholders, gaining support from the school board, support from the parents, support from the community, and keeping key personnel in place as procedures that were essential to initiate program continuation.

Site coordinator 1 stated:

My role which is assistant principal/college access coordinator is the main way that we have been able to sustain the efforts that we began in GEAR UP. When the GEAR UP grant was

going away I did a presentation before our school board and we presented a lot of the statistics that we had gathered through GEAR UP. They had seen the benefits throughout the years of GEAR UP, they had witnessed first-hand with their own children some of the direct services that we provided and they felt very much so that this was worthwhile to keep someone in a position where they could continue a lot of the efforts that we had begun. My role is to continue coordinating those projects and making sure that we're still providing the same type of services that we started under the GEAR UP program.

   Principal 1 stated:

Our program obviously the GEAR UP program was wonderful and since it's gone away, the funding has gone away for GEAR UP in the way that it was funded. Our board has passed well I won't call it resolutions, but they have helped us keep the program to some degree.

   Site coordinator 2 stated:

The director at the time was a huge GEAR UP supporter; he was always concern [sic] and asked about the kids. As GEAR UP was winding down, they were trying to figure out how they could sustain the program in a way that it could affect the most students. We are a very poor system, and so that was done through sustaining me. They kept my position at the high school and they kept me as the college and career readiness coach. They paid my salary immediately after GEAR UP and supported any activity that I might want to take the kids on.

   Site coordinator 3 stated:

We did a lot of work in the community, we attended rotary meetings, churches that would have us come in and speak to them. We would set up college application week, college 101 for parents after school, we would go to ball games and set up booths and tables to have parents to pick up literature and talk to us about all the things about going to college.

   Principal 3 reported:

What we have done since we went that year without GEAR UP, we did not want to give up and we did not want to lose any positions that we already had. We used some funds from another source to sustain the GEAR UP coordinator. She worked as the college and readiness coach; she still performed the same role as she did with she was in GEAR UP and she worked with the students. It's just that we were using different funding source to do so. We thought it was important that we keep that out there. It really hasn't been a break, just what we call it. Instead of GEAR UP for a year, it was College and Readiness Coach, but it had the same functions as GEAR UP.

   Director 1 shared:

We used current personnel that were in place, a lot of those folks had been trained with a lot of the GEAR UP strategies. I think the stakeholders as far as the parents, community need

to be brought in, we would have like a GEAR UP kickoff things like that to make them aware of this opportunity and what was taken place. I feel like that was very beneficial. And the board was very supportive, we provide a lot of transportation, some of the supplemental stuff along those lines, but the board was very supportive, they felt that it was a very good program that they could see a lot of benefits from.

Counselor 2 reported:

My role in sustaining the program was to advocate keeping the site coordinator type position at our high school and we actually expanded it to the middle school so that we can continue working with students and parents. I was an advocate to our director and to our school board for trying to sustain that position and then just trying to promote the same activities that we were doing along the grant, college app week, signing them up for College for Tennessee, a lot of things that we were doing as part of the grant keeping those things going.

Principal 2 stated:

The high school funded a, I don't know where exactly they found the money, but they did have a graduation coach. Somebody that helped with FASFA and those types of things. We're trying to get parents involved. If parents demand things and if we look and know about it, that's where things start to happen. I think what we're trying to do is get parents more involved. Cause they need to know about those things.

Site Coordinator 4 reported:

The school counselors have continued events such as the senior summit that we would have for all the seniors and have colleges come in and speak to them about their school and do activities and show them that college was doable, so they're still doing that each year.

Counselor 1 shared:

First thing that came to mind is the community is always supportive, school board they're extremely on board with anything that we can do to encourage students to go to college and to be successful, and the administration, they all are really good to do anything we ask them that's within their means.

Teacher 1 stated:

What they have done so far is to keep our coordinator in her job since GEAR UP is no longer at our county. They have redirected funding from other sources to keep her in place as the GEAR UP coordinator and that way she pretty much continues to do this job as half of her job.

Principal 4 reported:

Personnel wise and not having a GEAR UP person in our schools really made it much more cumbersome to achieve the same things that we did while GEAR UP was intact.

Site Coordinator 5 shared:

I know we have full support from the administration, staff in both high schools, we have full-support from the director and those people in the central office, we have parental support and we have community support through business leaders.

Participants reported making presentations on the benefits of GEAR UP and showing data that supported the benefits to their school boards was essential to gain support for program continuation. Keeping key personnel in place to continue program services was also essential for program continuation. Communicating the benefits of GEAR UP to stakeholders such as speaking to Rotary clubs and churches was essential for program continuation. Setting up booths and tables at school sports events to pass out literature to parents and talk to parents about the importance of going to college was essential in gaining parental support that helped program continuation.

Theme 3: Organizations in a Collaborative That Were Sustained After Funding

When asked what organizations in a collaborative that were sustained after funding, participants reported that universities, community colleges, technology centers, Tennessee Achieves, and local businesses that worked with them during the first GEAR UP TN grant were eager to continue their partnership after funding had ended.

Site coordinator 1 reported:

Cleveland State is like one of our biggest partners and they keep coming to us wanting to do more for us and I'm like YES! I can't speak highly enough of what all they've done for our school that we haven't even asked for, whatever we ask they usually give us but then they're giving us more than we asked. Our local businesses of course, they help with our career day every year they know it's coming every year so they're happy to be here. Something else that's an external factor I guess the technology center of Athens and the mayor's office, they partnered together and came to talk to different groups of our CTE

students about businesses in this area that are hiring and the programs that are offered at the tech center. We've formed a lot of partnerships and they just keep coming to me now, I use to back in the day have to call and write and call again but they're calling me now wanting to come. They know that we are open to programs like that and anxious to provide as many services to our students as we can get our hands on, so they're here, it's been great.

Counselor 1 stated:

The community is always willing to come in and talk to students, mentor them, the chamber of commerce has tried to help with some programs and some different activities, industry what little bit we do, they're willing to help. I know that Volkswagen has a Volkswagen academy at Chattanooga State and they've come out a couple of times and talked with our students about that, and so has Wacker, Wacker has been here. That has expanded the students idea of what's out there also, the student who might just want to go into the work force they see what's available at Wacker and Volkswagen, which requires training beyond high school and the financial end of it and how well it pays and that has encourage some of those students to go on, that has been a real good support and then our career day, we have people from all different areas that will come in and talk to the students, from veterinarians to engineers to hair dressers.

Site coordinator 2 stated:

As GEAR Up was ending we wrote for the model grant and got it. That was through the Tennessee College Access and Success Network. They had a series of grants to come out, there were three different types and we wrote for a model grant. It was a one year grant, it was based on something that worked in our county that we wanted to enhance, so we enhanced the GEAR UP program. It started in January 2012 and ran through December 2012, so we were able to sustain major programs. We also have the chamber of commerce, Tennessee Achieves, Talent Search, local radio station, Walter State, UTK, and Pellissippi.

Principal 2 reported:

Some businesses, a couple of the banks, First Volunteer Bank, Peoples Bank, chamber of commerce, they help a lot because they help with the career fair usually in the fall. We have Roane State, ETSU, MTSU, UT, a lot of different colleges that come in too. We still partner with Roane State, we do dual credit with them. A lot of my seniors you don't even see them during the day because they're at Roane State instead of here. We partner with the tech school too, technical school. We have a lot of students that will be here half of the day and then they go to tech school the other half of the day.

Site coordinator 3 shared:

Some of our partners that were left over in the grant such as our local newspaper will still place any educational academic information into that free of charge. Our local television station, we have a local community station, any academic educational college access, college information, they will put all of those items free. Tennessee Achieves is a last

dollar scholarship I guess you would say, if you do not qualify for lottery money and you want to go to college, you can attend any of our community colleges and they will pay approximately $2000 and your GPA is not the determining factor, the determining factor is do you want to go to school, have you taken the credits you need to take, so Tennessee Achieves is huge. Because of our success in the previous grant, Lincoln Memorial University is offering a free ACT prep class in January, February, Tennessee Technological University, as soon as we contacted them about dong some STEM in-service and PD not only for teachers but for students allowing them to go to the STEM center in Cookeville, their arms were wide open. So being successful in the last grant opens doors and opportunities in this grant. And anytime we go to one of the local businesses, they will either give us donations or go 50:50 with us on materials and supplies. The last GEAR UP grant has long reaching benefits.

Principal 4 reported:

We were very fortunate in having Roane State in county and so close to our high school and the director of Roane State believed in and supported GEAR UP from the inception. That was probably our first college trip for our 7th graders all the way back in 2006, 2007 whenever that time frame was, was to Roane State. They accepted them with open arms. For a dual benefit, I think their enrollment went up based on what GEAR UP been able to do as a benefit to what GEAR UP done have also helped Roane State.

Principal 1 stated:

The city government in our county here helps but we're in a pretty tough area they help with what they can but it's not a lot, same with the county commission.

Teacher 1 shared:

Cleveland State, maybe TWC, or just the locals, it opens it up to where its I think we even had Austin Peay come, we had some colleges come from quite a distance to our little county to show the kids what they might want. And it's not just the colleges; we go to the technological center over here where they do certificate type employment. We do have local businesses, how much they put it, like I said, it's a rural community we don't have a lot of businesses.

Site coordinator 5 shared:

Like I said earlier some influence on some of the program especially external factors such as the TnACHE grant and some of the other grants that we used to get that funding. Other external factors would be that were positive would be the continuous support of the parents, also continued support through our local chamber of commerce, we're doing a partnership with them using some of the TnACHE funds to help us to set up a website called Aspire Advance Achieve and through this website we hope to have several different apps for the students, information about colleges and college preparation and things like this, so there's been several external factors that have been positive. We used funds from some smaller

grants, one of them being the TnACHE grant that's the Tennessee Appalachian Center for Higher Education; we received a $10,000 grant from them so we've used a lot of that money to sustain some of the things that we thought were effective in the GEAR UP program. It's helped us and we've also used some funds from our parent leadership coordinator, funds that he had available to also help us to sustain some of those things.

Counselor 2 stated:

Our P-16 council has been very supportive in sustaining that college and career readiness program and so is our chamber of commerce. Our chamber of commerce has put education as their top priority the last two years. They sit on our P-16 council and then they also sit on our GEAR UP advisory committee for this new grant. The chamber president has been very supportive. We sustained our program by placing a college and career readiness coach through Federal programs. Our Title 1 monies paid for it. We partnered with Clinch Powell and their talent search counselor that we have, so our coordinator worked with our talent search counselor, she worked with her so and where we needed buses and things they would tie their programs in together and Clinch Powell would pay for the buses, and still allow for some of those, not as many, we would have one in the fall and one in the spring.

Participants indicated that a variety of organizations in a collaborative were necessary to implement and sustain the GEAR UP TN program. Participants perceived that the partnerships they formed during the first GEAR UP TN program with universities, community colleges, technology centers, Tennessee Achieves, and local businesses were essential to program continuation.

Theme 4: Program Activities or Services Not Continued

After reviewing my field notes this researcher observed that none of the five counties sustained the Bridge Incentive Award or the GEAR UP TN Scholarship, which were program activities previously funded through the first GEAR UP TN grant. My observations indicate that these program activities were not sustained due to the high cost and lack of funding.

Continued funding is the one external factor that seemed to have the most influence on the sustenance of the program. However, through my observations participants said that even if funding posed a threat to the sustenance of the program there is the willingness among them to continue the program.

Summary

In this chapter I presented the findings of the study. These findings are based primarily on analysis of interview transcripts and are supported by observations during the course of the study. Findings were discussed in four parts that correspond with the major themes that emerged from the data. Data in the first section focused on school staff perceptions of the key elements in the program that contributed to program continuation. In the area of key elements, participants described (a) college visits, (b) ACT workshops, (c) dual enrollment, and (d) parent FAFSA workshops.

The second section focused on school staff perceptions of procedures that were essential to initiate program continuation. Participants described (a) communicating the benefits of GEAR UP to stakeholders, (b) gaining support from the school board, parents, and community (c) keeping key personnel in place.

The third section focused on school staff perceptions of organizations in a collaborative that were sustained after funding. Participants described (a) universities, (b) community colleges, (c) Tennessee Achieves, (d) technology centers, and (e) local businesses that worked with them during the first GEAR UP TN grant were eager to continue their partnership after funding had ended.

The fourth section focused on program activities or services that were not continued. After reviewing my field notes this researcher observed that none of the five counties sustained the Bridge Incentive Award or the GEAR UP TN Scholarship.

The level of sustainability of key GEAR UP TN program efforts varies across the participating school systems, but all systems have an interest in sustaining some elements of the

program. To that end, Chapter 5 is a discussion of the themes that emerged from this study, and

includes recommendations of future practice and research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of school staff and their experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN in five counties (Campbell, Cocke, Johnson, Meigs, and Union) and how program activities and services are being sustained after funding for GEAR UP TN ended. Their stories and perspectives as presented in Chapter 4 were the primary focus of this study. Research was conducted through semistructured face-to face interviews with 13 school staff and observations. This chapter is an analysis of and a discussion of the findings of this study and concludes with suggestions for further research.

Discussion

Four fundamental questions framed this research:

1. What were the key elements in the GEAR UP TN program (college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment, parent FAFSA workshops, career fairs, job site visits, or professional development) that contributed to program continuation?

2. Are there certain procedures that were essential for staff to initiate to ensure program continuation?

3. Assuming that collaboration with other agency and organization partners is a key influence in program continuation, were there certain combinations of organizations in a collaborative that were sustained after funding?

4. What program activities or services were not continued and why?

The research questions were answered by themes that emerged from the interview data and were reported in Chapter 4.

Theme 1: Key Elements in the Program That Contributed to Program Continuation

The data suggest that school staff perceived that college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment, and parent FAFSA workshops were instrumental in program continuation.   There are numerous influences on the educational aspirations of rural youth, and a number of strategies may be used to encourage these rural youth to pursue higher education. College campus visits provide students, some of whom have never experienced a college campus, with a glimpse of what they are like and may help make students feel more at ease about attending college. ACT preparation workshops and other assistance with taking the test may help students increase their test scores and may prod reluctant or procrastinating students to sign up for and take the ACT test (King, 2012).

Dual enrollment programs and experiences are rapidly becoming a popular and highly effective strategy for engaging disadvantage, underserved, and first-generation youth and for promoting higher educational aspirations among students from communities and families with little or no college-going history. As one of many available strategies for promoting higher aspirations, stronger postsecondary preparation, and more equitable outcomes in public high school, dual enrollment can become a lever for promoting more systemic changes in a school or district. Like cultural expectations and values, the educational standards and foundational principles of a school community can influence student perspectives, self-images, and life choices (Barnett & Stamm, 2010).

Workshops for students, parents, and school personnel are important to provide understanding of college entrance requirement and procedures for obtaining financial aid. Involving the community through long-term relationships such as mentoring, as well as more short-term encounters such as career fairs or job shadowing, are also important components to

help rural students connect to professionals who can encourage and assist them as they make decisions (King, 2012).

Researchers agree that students access information about postsecondary options through college fairs, college visits, brochures, websites, and workshops. These supports are provided by teachers and school counselors and through participation in outreach and community-based programs. Other informational support programs engage families in the college planning process by providing them with information to support their children's aspirations and help them navigate the college admissions and financial aid processes. Policies and practices that integrate a range of support strategies hold the most promise for increasing student achievement and success. Students need a network of individuals and resources embracing multiple strategies to provide them with effective academic and social supports. Such supports must be developmentally appropriate, integrated, coordinated, and cohesive. By fostering self-confidence, resiliency, and internal motivations, social support creates the conditions that allow students to take advantage of effective academic support strategies and develop the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary for them to realize their hopes and dreams (Romer, Hyman, & Cole, 2009).

Theme 2: Procedures Essential to Initiate Program Continuation

The data produced in the study suggest that school staff perceived that communicating the benefits of GEAR UP to stakeholders, gaining support from the school board, parents, and the community, and keeping key personnel in place as procedures that were essential to initiate program continuation. Participants described a current college-going culture where students, teachers, parents, and school leaders believed that college was an expectation for all. Research highlights that a culture of high expectations shared by the principal, teachers, staff, and students

is the dominant theme in enabling high-poverty schools to become high-performing (Center for Public Education, 2005).

The high expectations for students and staff should be rooted in tangible, measurable goals, what one study of high-performing, high-poverty schools calls high expectations communicated in concrete ways. One goal that has been adopted in many school reform efforts is the expectation that every student will go to and be prepared for college. Evaluations find that school reform initiatives centered on college readiness can improve student achievement and increase enrollment in postsecondary education (Martinez & Klopott, 2005a). According to Pathways to College Network, an alliance of organizations committed to advancing college access and success for underserved students, key components of successful college readiness programs include: access to rigorous academic curriculum for all students, personalized learning environment for students, strong academic and social support for students, and alignment of curriculum between various levels of education (Martinez & Klopott, 2005b).

Studies have found that students who are from one or more of the following groups: low achievers, middle to low-income levels, underrepresented minorities, disabled youth, and families where no one has attended college before are more likely to face college planning obstacles. This is due to social and language barriers, less access to information and guidance, less exploration because of low expectations, decreased access to the Internet, and underestimation of the amount of financial help available. The result is that the education gap in our country increases. Changing culture is a daunting task but one that is necessary if we want to prepare students of all backgrounds for success in today's world. A college-going culture builds the expectation of postsecondary education for all students not just the best students. It inspires the best in every student, and it supports students in achieving their goals (College Board, 2006).

An effective college culture necessitates a systemic approach to serving students. All stakeholders within a school community need to be actively engaged in developing and realizing college goals. Coordinated activities offered throughout the campus yield better results than those occurring in isolation. Partnerships with postsecondary institutions can be invaluable, offering resources and expertise to address the challenges facing a school, such as how best to help students transition from high school to college (Corwin & Tierney, 2007).

Theme 3: Organizations in a Collaborative That Were Sustained After Funding

The data show that school staff perceived that universities, community colleges, Tennessee Achieves, technology centers, and local businesses that worked with them during the first GEAR UP TN grant were eager to continue their partnership after funding had ended. Educational partnerships between public schools and institutions of higher education provide a powerful means for enhancing student achievement and cultivating college-going cultures. School-university partnerships are greatly enhanced when community programs and organizations and local businesses join in the collaboration. Outreach to community and business is an important aspect of good partnership work. Partnering with existing community programs can save time and resources while expanding the opportunities and programs available to support students. Building partnerships with local businesses is an effective strategy for acquiring program resources and creating powerful student opportunities such as internships and job shadows (MacDonald & Dorr, 2006).

In this time of economic crises facing both higher education and community organizations, heightened discussions around how to create curricular efficiencies in our postsecondary institutions and the reality in our communities of large reductions in revenues for essential educational, health, and human services, partnerships will likely become essential to the

health and well-being of our communities. Institutions of all sorts will be called upon to share

their resources for the common good. Research shows evidence that expansion of partnerships

between postsecondary institutions and community organizations has the potential to positively

transform all participants and make learning more relevant for students while preparing them to

be effective participants in our diverse communities (Kerrigan & Reitenauer, 2012).

Theme 4: Program Activities or Services Not Continued

The data suggest that the Bridge Incentive Award and the GEAR UP TN Scholarship

were not continued due to the high cost and lack of funding. Participants said that even if

funding posed a threat to the sustenance of the program, there is the willingness among them to

continue the program.

Sustainability is a challenge for all programs and initiatives that serve children, youth, and

families. Many programs that show promise in the start-up phase eventually fade away because

they are unable to tap into and make the best use of the fiscal and community resources that

could enable them to flourish. Among the programs that do flourish, there are several common

elements that lead to their success; a well-articulated vision of what initiative leaders want to

achieve; the ability to document and demonstrate an initiative's success; the ability to adjust to

changing social, economic and political trends in the community; support from policymakers and

the public; the ability to identify and tap into necessary monetary and in-kind resources; the

existence of strong administrative and fiscal management systems; the involvement of

community-based organizations, parents, or other stakeholders; and the existence of a clear

sensible and convincing plan for putting together the key resources that are necessary for an

initiative to continue (Bryant, 2002).

Despite the numerous challenges that rural communities face, leaders of successful programs view their rural circumstances as an asset rather than a disadvantage. They do not presume their program's small size or remote location will keep it from securing funds. They find ways to promote the benefits of their unique situations and circumstances. Strengths embodies a mindset that assets do exist in a particular rural community and that creatively assessing and exploiting these strengths will enable a program to sustain itself (Sandel & Bhat, 2008).

One asset in rural communities is that everyone tends to know everyone else. Leaders of successful programs take advantage of these connections. They use every tool and opportunity to persuade the community about the importance of their programming, including regularly submitting articles to the local newspaper, giving updates at community forums or civic group meetings, and using parents and other stakeholders as spokespersons throughout the community. Many also host a community event or activity to increase their visibility, engage community members, and celebrate the contributions of participating youth. Initiatives with broad support often find that community members will rally if the program is at risk of losing resources (Sandel & Bhat, 2008).

Recommendations for Practice

Educators at high schools across the country see the current trends toward the necessity of college, evaluate their students, and ask: How do we make our school and our community one where students are expected to attend college? This is the first and most crucial question of any school desiring to shift its school's culture to a college-going culture where students appreciate academics, have a desire to succeed and a drive to attend college, and become lifelong learners.

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The findings of this study point to four recommendations: (1) implement college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment classes, and parent FAFSA workshops to create a college going culture, (2) gain support from the school board, parents, and the community, and keep key personnel in place to ensure program continuation, (3) maintain sufficient financial and human resources for precollege access programs and services, and (4) build partnerships with local colleges and universities.

Recommendation 1: Implement College Visits, ACT Workshops, Dual Enrollment Classes, and Parent FAFSA Workshops to Create a College Going Culture

All 13 participants reported that these key elements were essential in ensuring program continuation and creating a college-going culture in their schools. As site coordinator 1 commented, "One of my main things that when we first started GEAR UP that this wasn't just going to be a program but it was an initiative, a school wide initiative to change the culture of our school and I feel like we were successful in that and I think that's why it's also been sustained".

Recommendation 2: Gain Support from the School Board, Parents, and the Community and Keep Key Personnel in Place to Ensure Program Continuation

All 13 participants in the study stressed the importance of gaining support from the school board, parents, and community and keeping key personnel in place to ensure program and continuation. As site coordinator 5 commented, "I know we have full support from the administration, staff in both high schools, we have full support from the director and those people in the central office, we have parental support, we have community support through business leaders, I think I had around 35 business partners, community partners in our GEAR UP grant."

Recommendation 3: Maintain Sufficient Financial and Human Resources for Precollege Access

Programs and Services

Ten of this study's 13 participants reported that building partnerships plays a key role in

financing and sustaining programs in rural communities. Although fewer business and

foundations can be found in the immediate area of rural communities, many different private

partners can help support programs. Potential business partners include hospitals, restaurants,

manufacturers, retail stores, banks, chambers of commerce, and large national chains with a

history of giving. As counselor 1 commented,

The community is always willing to come in and talk to students, mentor them, the chamber of commerce has tried to help with some programs and some different activities, industry what little bit we do, they're willing to help. I know that Volkswagen has a Volkswagen academy at Chattanooga State and they've come out a couple of times and talked with our students about that, and so has Wacker. That has expanded the students idea of what's out there also, the student who might just want to go into the work force they see what's available at Wacker and Volkswagen, which requires training beyond high school and the financial end of it and how well it pays and that has encourage some of those students to go on, that has been a real good support and then our career day, we have people from all different areas that will come in and talk to the students, from veterinarians to engineers to hair dressers.

Despite limited funds, business and organizations in rural communities are often able to

make valuable contributions to programs in the form of meals, space, staff, or supplies.

Recommendation 4: Build Partnerships with Local Colleges and Universities

All 13 participants reported that establishing active links between schools and local

colleges and universities provided opportunities for field trips, college fairs, and academic

enrichment programs. These types of activities are important because they provide high school

students with tangible connections to college life. As principal 4 commented, "We were very

fortunate in having Roane State in county and so close to our high school and the director of

Roane State believed in and supported GEAR UP from the inception. That was probably our

first college trip for our 7th graders all the way back in 2006, 2007 whenever that time frame was, was to Roane State."

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study was an attempt to increase the understanding of how program activities and services are being sustained after federal funding ended for GEAR UP TN. The qualitative study methodology used in this study offered a detailed examination of the experiences of 13 school staff and the ways they sustained programs activities and services after funding ended. Although this study represents a start for developing a larger body of research on maintaining precollege access programs after funding has ended, further research is necessary.

- A future study should focus on program characteristics that have sustained themselves after federal funding expired and the factors associated with sustainability.

- It would be prudent to investigate how school staff in rural communities cultivate relationships with community and business leaders and build a broad base of community support to help develop financing strategies to sustain program initiatives.

- Research should be conducted to determine what capacity building measures are needed to make precollege access programs in rural schools sustainable and how those measures would be implemented.

- A future study should be conducted on the experiences of students who participated in GEAR UP.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Forms

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Flora Craig

TITLE OF PROJECT: A Qualitative Study of School Staff Perceptions of Lasting Effects after Implementation of GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) in Five Rural East Tennessee Counties

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT (ICD)

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this research study is to fulfill the requirements for completing a doctorate degree in education. The intent of the study is two-fold: (a) to describe the perceptions of schools staff and their experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN in five counties (Campbell, Cocke, Johnson, Meigs, and Union); and (b) to examine how program activities and services are being sustained after funding for GEAR UP TN ended.

DURATION

Participation consists of a one-on-one interview that should last approximately one hour. If clarification of your initial interview is necessary, you may be asked to participate in a follow up conversation only to confirm the accuracy of the transcript of the interview and not to collect new data. Clarification of information will be done by telephone and should last approximately thirty minutes.

 PROCEDURES
One-on-One Interviews: The researcher will meet with a minimum of five different staff on an individual basis regarding their experiences with the implementation of GEAR UP TN and how program activities and services are being sustained after funding for GEAR UP TN ended. You may also be asked to participate in follow-up conversations, if clarification of your initial interview is necessary. Email may also be used to contact you throughout the study, however clarification of information will be done by telephone, unless you have a private email account that you are willing to use for this purpose.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS
There are no alternative procedures except non-participation.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Flora Craig

TITLE OF PROJECT: A Qualitative Study of School Staff Perceptions of Lasting Effects after Implementation of GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) in Five Rural East Tennessee Counties

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The potential benefit of your participation is to contribute key information to educators' as they plan, implement, and maintain pre-college access programs after funding has ended.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling Flora Craig at 423-542-4806 or by email at Craig@etsu.edu. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any research-related questions or problems at any time, you may call me Flora Craig at 423-542-4806, or my doctoral research chairman, Dr. Hal Knight at 423-439-7616. You may also call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423-439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423-439-6055 or 423-439-6002.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in the Clemmer College of Education, Warf-Pickel Hall, Room 501 for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, ETSU, and personnel particular to this research who are members of my doctoral research committee have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Flora Craig

TITLE OF PROJECT: A Qualitative Study of School Staff Perceptions of Lasting Effects after Implementation of GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) in Five Rural East Tennessee Counties

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

_____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

_____

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

_____

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR   DATE

_____

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable)   DATE

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APPENDIX B

Audit Trail

April, 2012	Identified list of school districts for case study research.
May-August, 2012	Made methodological determinations through dissertation seminar and began preparations for literature base and IRB documentation.
September, 2012	Worked with peers doing similar qualitative research to share and complete peer review of qualitative procedures.
October, 2012	Established face-to-face communication with the selected school districts to inquire about their interest in study participation.
March, 2013	Followed communication with directors of schools to obtain letter granting permission to conduct research in the school district.
April, 2013	Received letters from school districts with permission to proceed and conduct research.
May 22, 2013	Received IRB approval to conduct research.
May 22, 2013	Conducted follow-up conversation and emails with 13 participants confirming their willingness to participate in the study.
May 23, 2013	Explained the informed consent form and process to participant 1; conducted face- to-face interview.

May 23, 2013   Explained the informed consent form and process to
                                participant 2; conducted face-to-face interview.

May 23, 2013   Explained the informed consent form and process to
                                participant 3; conducted face-to-face interview.

May 24-27, 2013   Performed transcription and analysis process of three
                                interviews.

May 29, 2013   Explained the informed consent form and process to
                                participant 4; conducted face-to-face interview.

May 29, 2013   Explained the informed consent form and process to
                                participant 5; conducted face-to-face interview.

May 29, 2013   Explained the informed consent form and process to
                                participant 6; conducted face-to-face interview.

May 30, 2013   Explained the informed consent form and process to
                                participant 7; conducted face-to-face interview.

May 30, 2013   Explained the informed consent form and process to
                                participant 8; conducted face-to-face interview.

May 30, 2013   Explained the informed consent form and process to
                                participant 9; conducted face-to-face interview.

May 30, 2013   Explained the informed consent form and process to
                                participant 10; conducted face-to-face interview.

May 31, 2013	Explained the informed consent form and process to participant 11; conducted face-to-face interview.
May 31, 2013	Explained the informed consent form and process to participant 12; conducted face-to-face interview.
May 31, 2013	Explained the informed consent form and process to participant 13; conducted face-to-face interview.
June 1-9, 2013	Performed transcription and analysis process of remaining ten interviews.
June 10-15, 2013	Conducted follow-up communications with thirteen participants providing them the opportunity to review transcripts.
June, 2013	Data analysis through transcript review.
June, 2013	Requested peer and colleague review as findings and themes emerged with staff from East Tennessee State University and University of Tennessee Knoxville.

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Name of Participant_____Location_____Date_____

A. **Research Q #1: What were the key elements in the GEAR UP TN program (college visits, ACT workshops, dual enrollment, parent FAFSA workshops, career fairs, job site visits, or professional development) that contributed to program continuation?**

1. What is important for me to know about the community your school serves?
2. If this program were replicated in another school, what would be important for the principal and staff to know?
3. What have you observed that is different for the school since the GEAR UP TN program?
4. Do you have any other comments? Is there anything that you consider important regarding the GEAR UP TN initiative that we have not covered?

B. **Research Q #2: Are there certain procedures that were essential for staff to initiate to ensure program continuation?**

5. How do you perceive your role as it relates to sustaining the program?
6. How did school culture affect sustaining the program?
7. Tell me ways in which central administration supports the program?

C. **Research Q #3: Assuming that collaboration with other agency and organization partners is a key influence in program continuation, were there certain combinations of organizations in a collaborative that were sustained after funding?**

8. What effect, if any did external factors have on sustaining the program?
9. How is the program funded?

D. **Research Q #4: What program activities or services were not continued and why?**

10. Do you know of anything that would prevent the program from continuing at the school? If yes, please tell me more.
11. What is the future plan for this program?

E. **Closing and Thank You**

12. Is there anything else that you would like to offer that I did not specifically ask about?

Thank you for your time today. As mentioned earlier, I have procedures in place to keep this information confidential and it only will be used for this research project. You will receive a copy of the written transcript from this interview for your review.

VITA

FLORA RAE CRAIG

Personal Data:	Place of Birth: Los Angeles, California
Education:	San Diego Mesa College, San Diego, CA; A.A. Business Management; 1982
	Shaw University, Raleigh, NC; B.S. Business Administration Management; 1997
	East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN; M.S. Public Management; 2002
	East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN; Ed.D. Educational Leadership; 2013
Professional Experience:	

	Project Coordinator
	  Family Services Center of Buncombe County, Asheville, NC;
	  1997-1999

	Director of Community Development
	  ETSU Center for Community Outreach and Family Services,
	  Johnson City, TN; 1999-2006

	Regional Coordinator GEAR UP TN
	  Tennessee Higher Education Commission, Nashville, TN;
	   2006-2011

	Adjunct Faculty
	  East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN;
	  2006-present

Community Activities:	Member: Mid-East Tennessee Regional P-16 Council Member: Northeast Tennessee Workforce Investment Board Youth Council Member: Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) Board