

GEAR UP - New Enrollment Information

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GEAR UP is a 6-year grant, and our Maine state grant expires in 2011. Under this grant after 2005 no new students were enrolled in the program. This ensured that GEAR UP graduates would have access to a GEAR UP scholarship. As a result, the number of GEAR UP students actually enrolled in each school has been declining, which has been problematic for the following reasons:

- While the identified number of GU students is decreasing, school funding and match requirements have remained constant for the past two years. As a result, identifying allowable match dollars in the districts has proved more challenging.
- Even though students were not formally enrolled in GU, schools were expected to continue to provide the college going supports identified for all students grades 7 - 12. These efforts were continuing without the opportunity to formally acknowledge them in our federal reports. We felt this limited documentation was falling short of capturing the efforts, successes, and involvement of students in college going supports statewide.
- Additionally, in 2011 Maine will be applying for a new GU grant to continue the work already begun. If the grant is successful, Maine will have the ability to enroll these additional students in the new grant phase and they will be able to apply for the GEAR UP scholarship upon graduation.

To address these challenges and opportunities, we recently received approval from our Project Officer to enroll additional students in hopes that Maine is awarded a new GEAR UP grant when this one ends, and to acknowledge the efforts on behalf of these students at present. To accomplish these goals, we propose the following:

- Before start of 09-10 school year, enroll all students in GEAR UP schools who will be in 7th through 10th grade during the 09-10 school year.
- Liaisons will be given clear instructions about the data entry process. It will be possible for us to add new student demographic information through a data export from your school's student information system.
- Continue to enroll 7th graders each year.

Important changes to "new" GEAR UP student eligibility and scholarships:

- Newly enrolled GEAR UP students will NOT currently be eligible for a GEAR UP scholarship when they graduate. Scholarships will be contingent on receipt of a new State GEAR UP grant.
- The entire class may be enrolled, not only those that are eligible for free/reduced lunch as with our current cohort.
- Nothing will change for the current GEAR UP cohort, who next year will be 11th and 12th graders. No additional 11th and 12th graders will be enrolled, and the scholarship requirements for these students will remain the same.

We believe through the enrollment of these additional students, we will better position your schools, and Maine as a whole, to receive a third 6-year GEAR UP grant.

New Enrollment FAQs

Rationale

Q: Why are we enrolling all students when the focus of the grant has been on first generation kids that qualify for free and reduced lunch?

A: Over the last 4 years we have been transitioning from an individual student support model to a cohort model - meaning that schools have been able to use their GEAR UP dollars to create a college going culture in your schools that benefits all students. Supporting students with barriers to higher education continues to be our main goal, and the expectation is that the necessary supports are available for ALL students of any ability or income level.

Q: What will it mean now to be enrolled if there is no scholarship, what are the benefits?

A: Your schools, with your assistance, are providing an array of college and career awareness and readiness activities to all students as well as offering supports to students to ensure their academic success. GEAR UP funds and resources enable your district to work toward these goals.

Sharing of Data

Q: In some districts the K-8 schools and middle schools have been hesitant to share student information. How will this be handled?

A: In 1999 under Maine's first GEAR UP grant, middle school students were enrolled at participating schools if they met the federal eligibility requirement that 50% of their students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. These schools continue to be the GEAR UP schools even though the first group of GEAR UP students are now in 10-12th grade. GEAR UP contracts are between the Maine Department of Education and your school district. *Superintendents sign a new contract each year where they agree to release data that is required for the GEAR UP Annual Performance Report (APR) and Biennial Evaluation.*

Q: If we are enrolling all students why are we still tracking students free/reduced lunch and special education status?

A: This data is required for our Annual Performance Report (APR) and Biennial Evaluation. In addition, it allows us to slice the data in different ways so that success of low-income and students with disabilities can be assessed.

Q: Is this legal?

A: Yes, please see the above two answers.

Informing Parents

Q: Should parents be notified about their child being enrolled in GEAR UP?

A: Yes, it is a requirement that GEAR UP parents are given information about GEAR UP. We have a template letter available that you can include in a mailing to parents.

Q: What are the ramifications of not notifying parents?

A: It is a requirement, so it would be a breach of contract to not notify parents.

Q: What should we tell parents and students that are newly enrolled?

A: You may use the language in the letter to parents template, and personalize it for your school.

Q: When should information go out to parents?

A: In the fall at the beginning of the school year.

Q: Will this new cohort of students be required to sign a compact?

A: No, it is not a requirement that students/parents sign a compact.

Q: We know parent contact is important, what are the implications when we are now adding all students? How will we be able to maintain contact with parents?

A: The expectation is not that the liaison alone will maintain contact with all parents but rather the liaison is part of a team or group of school staff including guidance and teachers that are in contact with all parents.

Expectations of Liaisons

Q: What are the expectations for liaisons?

A: The expectations remain the same with the addition of entering data. Some districts have been successful in hiring an administrative assistant in their district to enter the data so that the liaison is overseeing the process but not physically entering the data.

Q: How does this change what we are currently doing?

A: If your school is focused on providing college and career awareness and supporting the academic achievement of all students then this change supports what you are already doing, except for overseeing the enrolling and tracking of the additional students.

Q: Are we going to be able to focus on the eligible kids if we are spending a lot of time entering data on all students?

A: Your time is structured by your supervisor at your school, as long as your work falls within the GEAR UP annual plan and expectations your school has a lot of flexibility here. If you feel your time is not well spent, please contact us so that we can brainstorm with your team ways to more effectively employ a liaison.

Q: What is the expectation of liaisons regarding contact with this new cohort of students?

A: The expectation is not that the liaison alone will maintain contact with all parents but rather the liaison is part of a team or group of school staff including guidance and teachers that are in contact with all parents.

Q: Should liaisons be working with students in the 7th and 8th grade? If so, how often should we be making contact?

A: Your district plan should address supports for the middle school GEAR UP students and schools. Your district should also develop a plan for collecting the necessary data. It is not a requirement that the liaison is the person making the contact, but it must happen in some way.

Specifics Regarding Gathering the Data and Enrolling Students

Q: Are we enrolling students from all the K-8 and elementary schools in our district or just the ones identified in the grant?

A: Just the schools identified in the grant. This group of schools were enrolled in GEAR UP because 50% of their students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Although the statistics may have changed, these schools are still the schools written into the GEAR UP grant.

Q. If the intent is to enroll an entire grade, what happens when the students enter 9th grade from sending schools that are not GEAR UP? Do we then enroll them in GEAR UP in the 9th grade?

A: Any student in a GEAR UP school is eligible to be enrolled (if they are in 7th through 10th grade for 2009-2010, 7th through 11th grade for 2010-2011.) That being said, we understand the burden of data entry and all we ask is that schools do their best to enroll all eligible students after the initial enrollment has taken place. GEAR UP high schools are identified as the school where the majority of students enroll from the sending GEAR UP elementary/middle schools.

Q: What about the RSUs/consolidation? Are we keeping only the students from the schools currently receiving GU funds?

A: GEAR UP enrollment is school-based so the students in these schools would remain the GEAR UP students regardless of district consolidation. The consolidation would change the district contract with the MDOE to reflect the new RSU.

Q: Are we keeping data on all the new students or just GEAR UP students?

A: Data should be collected and entered for all GEAR UP students - "old" and "new."

Q: What about the time needed to enter the data on all these students? It isn't just the initial enrollment it is the activity data that takes time to enter. If the expectation is that we have this completed by July 3rd, we will have to work during the summer. We have to write proposals requesting summer work and those have to be submitted soon.

A: The initial file that is due July 3rd is only demographic data (as outlined in the Excel template you were sent.) We do NOT need grades or activity data for these students until the 09-10 school year. You should NOT be entering this data by hand - it should be possible to do an export from your school's data system. This data export should be a quick process and one that only someone with export privileges from your information system can accomplish.