

# GEAR UP MAINE

2014-2022

*Transforming Futures*



September 21, 2022



# A Celebration of Leadership

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While I had the good fortune to direct the Maine State GEAR UP program this past year as we completed our work on a No Cost Extension, all credit for the success of our seven-year program goes to Mary Callan. Mary served as the Project Director of the GEAR UP Maine State program from 2016-2021 and Project Coordinator from 2014-2016. In this column, I would like to honor Mary's long-time service as an educator and education leader in the state.

Mary's leadership as our GEAR UP director was characterized by numerous successful and innovative initiatives including three research pilots that led to an evidence base and practices that transformed the services the program provided to over 20,000 Maine students and families, schools and partners.

Mary introduced a model of shared leadership that governed our work and inspired the GEAR UP team. She was a masterful leader who brought out the best in her colleagues and partners. She led by example; her work ethic was tireless and unrelenting.

Before coming to Syntiro to lead GEAR UP, Mary was a well-known and respected educator who began her career as a teacher and teaching principal in rural Maine schools. She was a long-time middle-school principal engaged in leadership roles with the Maine Association of Middle Level Education, an adjunct professor of education leadership at The University of Maine Farmington (UMF) and Thomas College, and a professional development specialist at Apple Computer.

Mary was an innovative and deeply inspirational educational leader with a profound understanding of education, organizational culture and change. Her foundation as an educational leader in rural, remote and economically-disadvantaged communities served GEAR UP well. Her passions for ensuring educational opportunities for social justice and underserved students and communities guided her outstanding work.

Mary retired at the end of 2021. She left behind a legacy of outstanding service on behalf of Maine students, their families and the communities and educators. I am grateful to have worked alongside Mary for many years and our work will continue to be inspired by her knowledge, kindness and passion.

We are deeply disappointed that our GEAR UP application did not receive funding again this fall. Our work will continue with the five-year Supplemental Award received in 2020 to study enrollment, persistence and completion longitudinally for the Class of 2020. Please keep in touch.

Sincerely,  
Debbie Gilmer, Syntiro President



Mary Callan  
Former GEAR UP  
Project Director



Debbie Gilmer  
Syntiro President  
GEAR UP Project Director

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## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

GEAR UP Maine helped to create a sustainable college-going culture in schools by inspiring students in grades 7 through 12 living in economically-disadvantaged communities to aspire to, prepare for, enroll in, and successfully complete postsecondary education. GEAR UP Maine districts implemented data driven, system-wide college-access plans focused on targeted, measurable strategies to meet college-access goals.

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## Mission and Vision

### Mission:

GEAR UP Maine partners with schools, postsecondary institutions, educators, families, students and organizations to create, support and sustain evidence-based and data-driven college and career practices to raise aspirations and preparation for postsecondary education of students in under-resourced Maine communities.

### Vision:

A postsecondary mindset is fully embedded in Maine's culture, such that a high-school diploma is not the end of learning, but a stepping stone.

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# GEAR UP Maine Data Snapshot



Created in partnership with Xcalibur

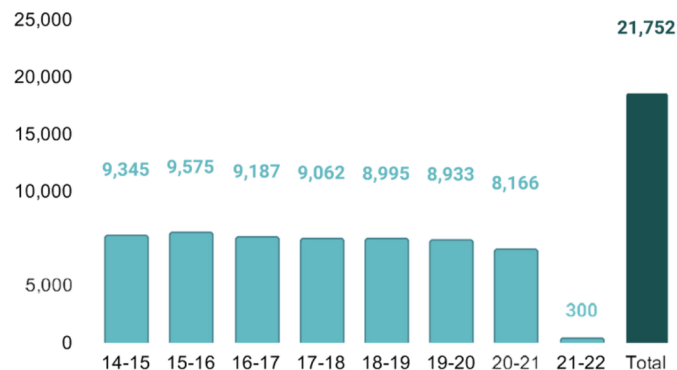
## GEAR UP Maine Students

GEAR UP Maine provided services to over 20,000 7th grade through first-year college students between 2014 and 2022.

Due to the nature of the grant, GEAR UP Maine served only college first-years during the final year of the grant.

In 2020, the grant served about 11% of the seniors in the state of Maine.

**GEAR UP Maine student enrollment remained between 8,166 - 9,575 throughout the first seven years of the grant**



## Services and Participation

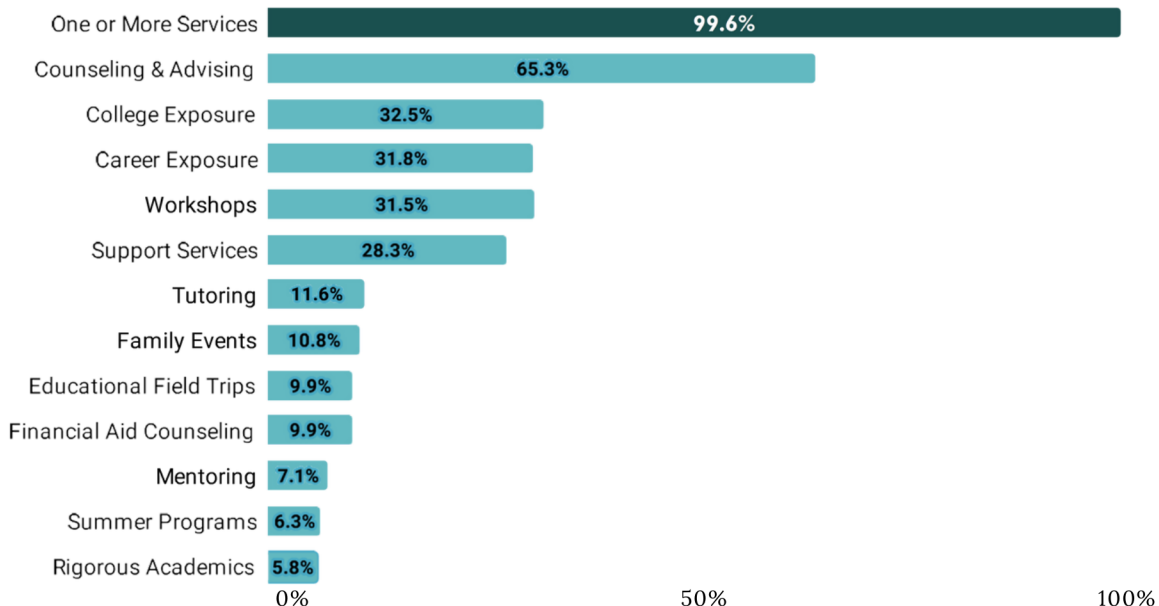
From 2014-2022, GEAR UP Maine provided over ten thousand unique services to GEAR UP students, families and educators with **over half a million hours** of service participation.

### Hours of Participation

Family Events	58,437
Parent/Guardian Services	4,286
Student Services	454,784
Staff Services	27,542
<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>545,049</b>



**GEAR UP Maine students participate in a variety of college planning services**





# GEAR UP Maine Data Snapshot

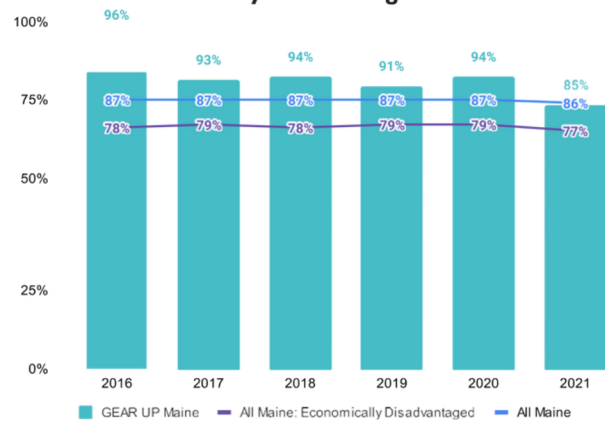
## High School Graduation Rates

One of the GEAR UP Maine goals was to prepare students who are economically disadvantaged for postsecondary education by increasing high-school graduation rates.

For all years of the grant, the graduation rate of GEAR UP Maine students exceeded the state rate for economically-disadvantaged students.

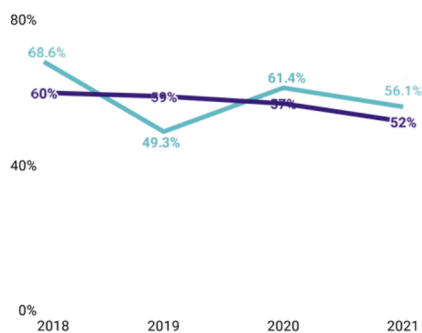
Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the graduation rate of GEAR UP Maine students exceeded the state high-school graduation rate.

### GEAR UP Maine students graduate high school at a higher rate than economically-disadvantaged students in Maine

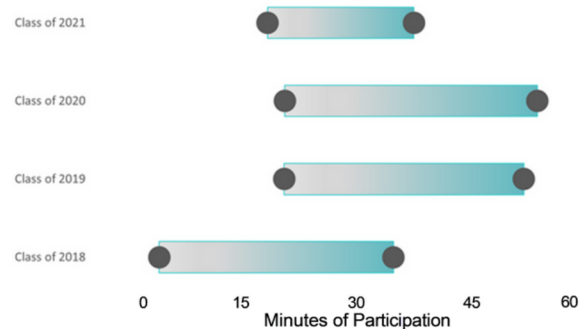


## FAFSA

FAFSA submission rates for **GEAR UP Maine graduates** exceeded the **Maine state rate** all years except 2019



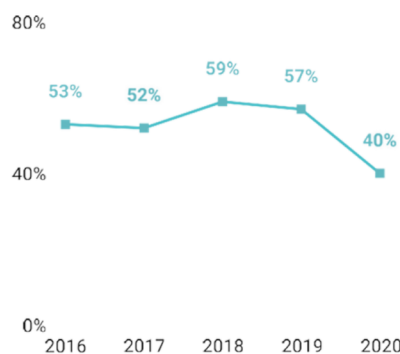
Families with students **who completed the FAFSA** participated in GEAR UP services at higher rates than those **who did not complete the FAFSA**.



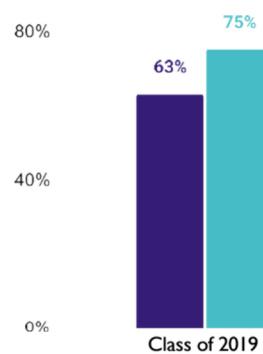
## Postsecondary Outcomes

According to a recent evaluation, GEAR UP Maine students demonstrated a **positive significant relationship between participation and postsecondary enrollment**. For every one hour of participation, the likelihood of postsecondary enrollment increases by one percent.

Over half of **GEAR UP Maine** students enrolled into college prior to COVID-19



**GEAR UP Maine** college persistence rate is higher than the **Maine rate**.



# GEAR UP MAINE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

## Western/Central Districts

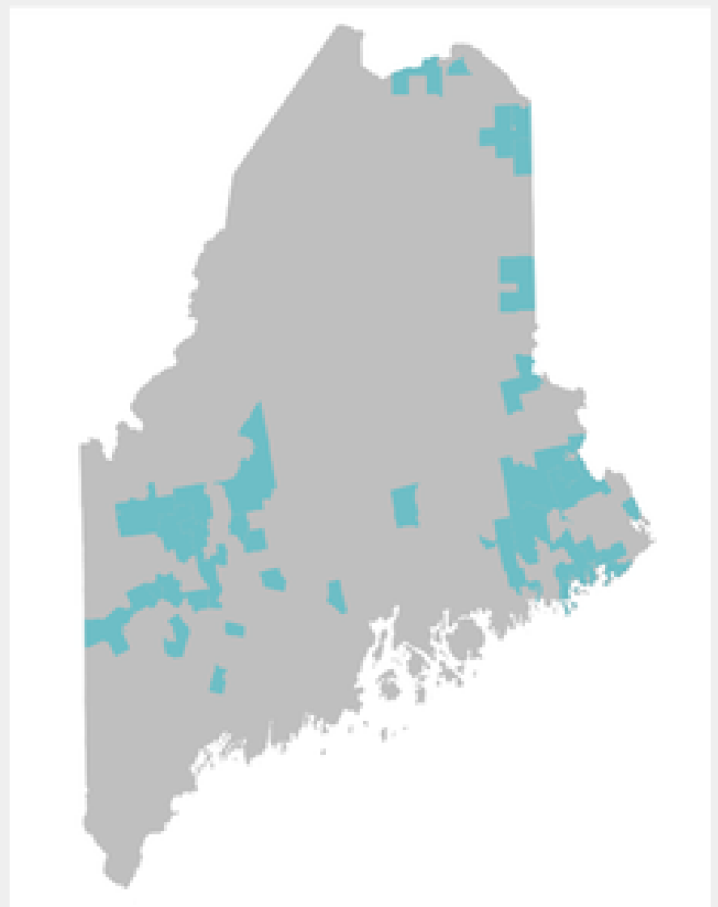
Maine Academy of Natural Sciences  
MSAD 44 (Telstar)  
MSAD 58 (Mt. Abram)  
MSAD 74 (Carrabec)  
Overman Academy (Skowhegan/Cornville)  
RSU 3 (Mt. View)  
RSU 4 (Oak Hill)  
RSU 9 (Mt. Blue)  
RSU 10 (Mtn Valley/Buckfield)  
RSU 38 (Maranacook)  
RSU 56 (Dirigo)  
RSU 59 (Madison)  
RSU 73 (Spruce Mountain)  
RSU 78 (Rangeley)  
Winthrop Schools (Winthrop)

## Northern Districts

MSAD 27 (Fort Kent)  
MSAD 33 (Wisdom)  
MSAD 70 (Hodgdon)  
RSU 39 (Caribou)  
RSU 84 (East Grand)  
RSU 86 (Fort Fairfield)  
Limestone Community School (Limestone)

## Downeast Districts

AOS 90 (Woodland)  
AOS 96 (Machias Bay)  
Maine Indian Education  
RSU 37 (Narraguagus)



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## UMF SUMMER EXPERIENCE

The University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) supported three types of summer programming serving GEAR UP students. Through a partnership with the Tri-Valley United Way, middle-school students participated in a weeklong program focused on the development of leadership and growth through service. Students visited United Way partner sites, learned about needs and services in their community, visited a college campus (UMF) for presentations by community partners, and participated in a “Day of Impact” after identifying a community need, developing a service project to address it, and putting it into action.

Rising high-school juniors and seniors from all GEAR UP schools were invited to participate in a residential weeklong program held at UMF during the summers of 2017, 2018, and 2019; plans for 2020 and 2021 were interrupted by the pandemic. During the summer experience, students experienced a residential college experience: studying interesting and engaging



topics, working collaboratively with faculty and peers, building community, and participating in co- and extracurricular activities. Students engaged in interdisciplinary coursework taught by university faculty, studying topics such as crime-solving chemistry, positive psychology, design thinking, coding, writing in nature, and apps construction. Work within the classroom was balanced with many opportunities to engage in the natural environment including hiking in the woods, canoeing and kayaking on a nearby lake. Throughout the experience the students were challenged to think about how they might capitalize on their areas of strengths as they developed their areas of growth and considered paths to college and careers.

GEAR UP funds also supported student participation in the annual UMF Summer Experience program, a residential campus program designed for students entering their first semester of college. In this program, students participated in a seminar-style one-credit course, learned about resources available at UMF and other college campuses, participated in community-building activities, and experienced residential life.

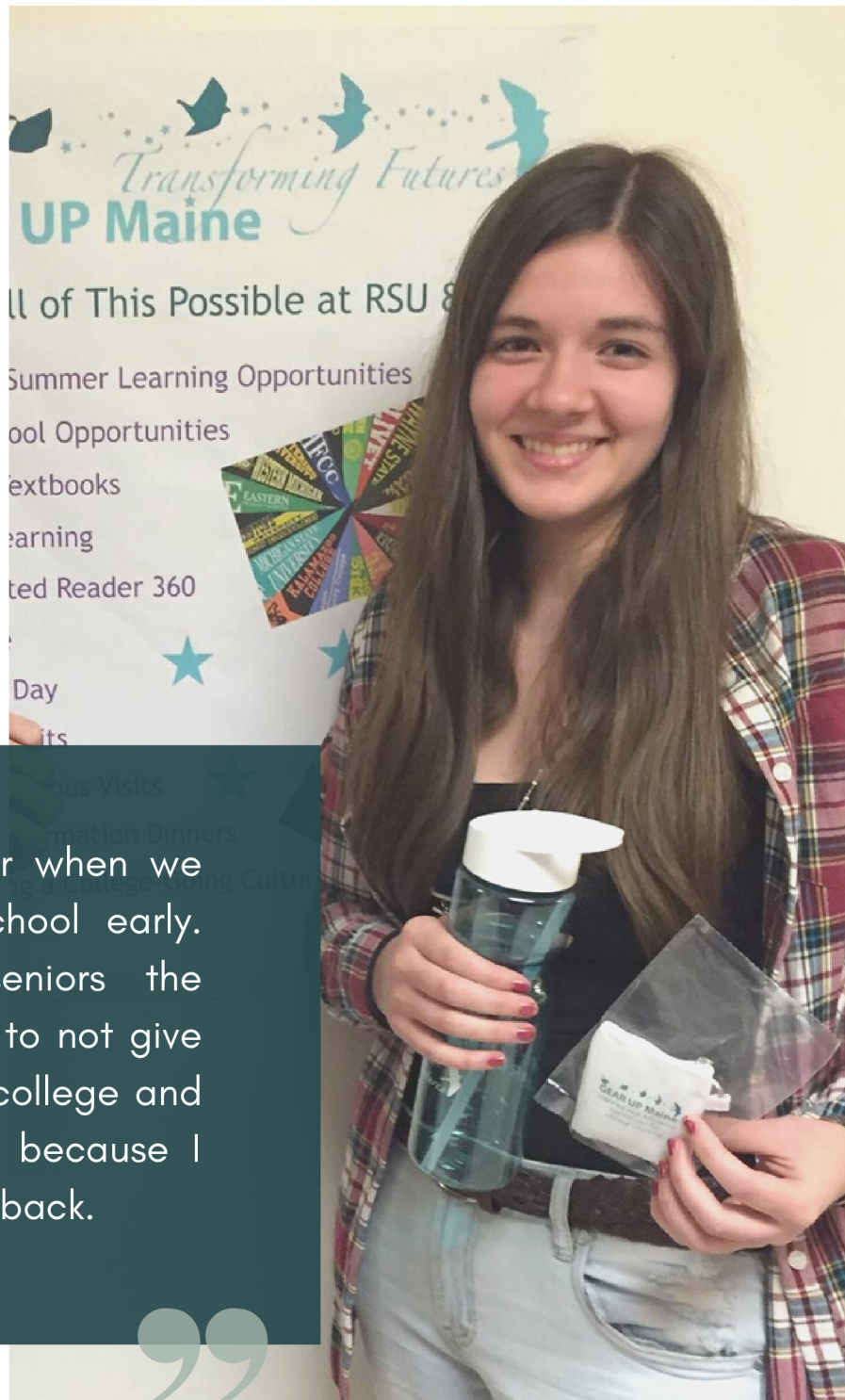
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## SCHOLAR SPOTLIGHT

In 2019, GEAR UP Maine implemented the Maine Scholar program to support students in 12th grade during the spring of their senior year and continuing through the end of their first year of postsecondary education. GEAR UP students who elected to be in the program were assigned a College Access Coach who helped them access and navigate resources, financial aid, textbook purchasing, and much more at their postsecondary campuses.

Although the pandemic hindered the opportunities for GEAR UP coaches to support the class of 2020 face-to-face, coaches were able to support scholars through text, email, and Zoom.



“It was a challenging senior year when we found out we had to leave school early. GEAR UP Maine gave us seniors the confidence to push forward and to not give up. I am now in my first year of college and my experience has been easier because I know GEAR UP Maine has got my back.  
-2020 GEAR UP Maine Scholar”



## CONFERENCES & EVENTS

### SEEDS Leadership Training

In October of 2016, over 100 GEAR UP Maine students, parents, and staff traveled to Bangor, Maine to attend a three-day leadership summit directed by GEAR UP Maine and Seeds Training. New friendships were started, new memories were made, wooden boards were broken and lives were forever changed. Students, staff and parents were challenged to leave their "Fimage"(Fear of Image) at the door and spend three days learning about emotional capacity, how to work in teams, and solving complex problems.



### ALL IN! Student Leadership Training

GEAR UP Maine, in partnership with FOCUS Training, held the GEAR UP Maine Student Leadership Conference: ALL IN! in October of 2018 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Bangor.

Each schools' college access team (CAT) selected two students and a faculty member to participate and to bring the lessons learned back to the schools.





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## CONFERENCES & EVENTS

### GEAR UP Maine College Bus Tour

GEAR UP Maine, in partnership with FOCUS Training, took students on a New England college visit bus tour in September 2019. The first day included a tour of The University of New Hampshire (UNH) in Durham and a visit to the JFK Museum. Students ate at an Italian restaurant, and then stayed overnight in Brockton, Massachusetts. The next day started with a tour at Wheaton College, followed by lunch on campus and then an afternoon at Boston College. The final day was spent at the University of Vermont (UVM) in Burlington, Vermont. Many students had never been out of our state before this tour.



## Aroostook Scholars Pilot

The Aroostook Scholars Pilot served 26 students from the class of 2019. A suite of interventions was offered to students who graduated from Aroostook County GEAR UP Maine schools who volunteered to participate in the study. These interventions were delivered by a coach, through a combination of in-person meetings, text reminders, Facebook posts and email correspondence. Additional data was collected through focus groups conducted in December 2019 and March 2020.

Students identified text and face-to-face meetings as the most valuable and easiest means of communicating with their coach. Students clearly acknowledged that establishing a relationship with the coach eased their transition and adjustment into postsecondary education. That relationship building began in the spring of their senior year and continued throughout the duration of their involvement. This pilot was minimally affected by COVID-19 as the bulk of the interventions and data collection were complete before postsecondary institutions closed their campuses.

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As prepared as you think you are for college, nothing will prepare you for the actuality of this! Aroostook Scholars is a community in which you feel as if people are checking up on you constantly; it's a great feeling for a freshman in college.

-2019 Aroostook Scholar

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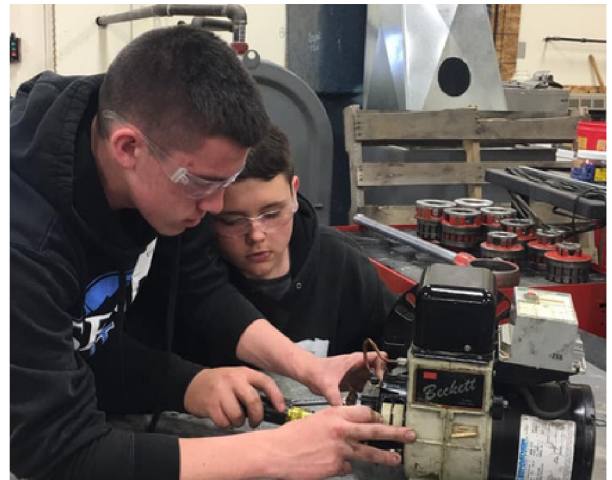


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## 37/EdGE Pilot

The 37/EdGE Pilot focused on creating a postsecondary culture in the Jr/Sr high school, developing mentorships between 9th graders and older high-school students, and implementing a postsecondary immersion experience for more days, further away from home, and at a larger institution than the previous two years. Data was collected through participation in events and activities.

Of all the studies, this one was the most negatively impacted by COVID-19. The area of the state where the participants live has limited high-speed internet access. Therefore, planning virtual school climate events and mentoring activities was not a possible solution. As fall approached, we realized a postsecondary immersion was also not going to happen due to visitor restrictions on postsecondary campuses. Ultimately, we had to cancel the immersion program and the focus groups.



## Multiple Pathways Pilot

In 2016, GEAR UP Maine initiated a pilot with four school districts intended to support the transition to a Proficiency-Based high-school diploma. In 2012, the Maine legislature adopted a new law which would require high schools to provide Proficiency-Based high-school diplomas. Districts were charged with providing multiple pathways to meet graduation requirements beginning with the class of 2021. This new law replaced the previous statute, which was exclusively “time-based, credit based graduation requirements” (Johnson & Stump. 2018). In 2018, the Maine legislature relaxed the graduation requirements, allowing districts to choose to continue using a Proficiency-Based approach to their diploma requirements, or to return to the traditional credit-based requirements. This change in the statute impacted the evaluation pilot because districts were no longer mandated to offer multiple pathways to meet graduation requirements. These districts responded to the modification in the law in different ways. One district chose to continue to offer students multiple pathways to meet standards, as if the law hadn’t changed, while three reverted back to credit-based graduation requirements.

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## GEAR UP Maine Testimonials

“When I think of the **many benefits** that Woodland Junior and Senior High School students have received **because of GEAR UP**, I tear up because, as the guidance counselor for grades preK-12 (over 350 students), **I cannot do it all** and GEAR UP helped to fill those holes,” said former Baileyville Schools Guidance Counselor Janice E. Rice.

“They **believed in us** when we didn't believe in ourselves. GEAR UP is there when you need them the most; they are just a text, call or email away and they are willing to help you in any way they can. **We need GEAR UP** to continue to be a thing for as long as it can so it can continue **helping generations** to come. Please keep GEAR UP running for us students; we need it more than you'll ever know.”

“GEAR UP has helped me so much this past year and I will **forever** be **thankful** for them. I had so many fears and questions about college that I didn't know who to ask. Then, GEAR UP **showed up** at my school and answered all of them and more,” said Nicholas DiBuono, a GEAR UP Scholar from Woodland High School and a Loring Job Corps Student.

“I've been part of GEAR UP for **many years**, and the people I've been able to meet **because of this program** are **invaluable**,” said Antonio Gomez, a GEAR UP Scholar from Caribou High School and a first-year student at the University of Southern Maine.

I  **GEAR UP**

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On behalf of the Maine students, educators and communities served, we extend our gratitude to those who contributed to our work over the years.

## Staff

Leigh Alley  
Sally Beaulieu  
Jan Brackett  
Mary Callan  
Suzanne Caron  
Alyssa Cropley  
Cynthia Drake  
Noelle Federico  
Dori Fellman  
Stephanie Ferland  
Donna Freeman  
Mary Freeman  
Debbie Gilmer  
Kayla Hopkins  
Curt Jack  
Aislinn Keefe  
Corda Kinzie  
Joyce Lang  
Kate Leveille  
Eleni Margaronis

Kathryn Markovchick  
Frank McElwain  
Michael Muir  
Brittany Rumery  
Judy Sanders  
Coleen Souza  
Monica Spatafore  
Sylvia Thistle  
Rick Wilson  
Chris Young  
Rebecca Young

## UMF

Katherine Yardley  
Laurie Gardner  
Michelle Fisher

## Partners

Community College System of Maine  
EdGE Seacoast Mission  
Finance Authority of Maine  
FOCUS Training  
iTutor  
Jobs for Maine Graduates  
Let's Get Ready  
Maine DOE-MLTI  
Maine Math Science Alliance  
Maine Resilience Building Network  
MELMAC Education Foundation  
Northern Maine Education Collaborative  
Rural Aspirations  
SEEDS Training  
Thomas College  
University of Maine System  
VirtualJobShadow.com  
Washington County Consortium  
Western Maine Education Collaborative  
Xcalibur

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