

## Introduction

The AISD (Austin Independent School District) evaluation team conducted student focus groups with GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) participants in the fall of 2018. Student participants in focus groups were 7<sup>th</sup>- grade students at six GEAR UP campuses: Bedichek, Burnet, Covington, Garcia YMLA, Martin, and Sadler Means YWLA. In total, 52 students participated in the focus groups. On average, nine students participated in each focus group.







**Career goals motivated college aspiration.** Almost all student participants indicated they planned to attend college, based on their career goals. Desire for getting a good job appeared to be the reason students wanted to attend college. When asked to define a good job, students described various professions they wanted to pursue, including engineer, doctor, teacher, athlete, construction superintendent, FBI agent, baker, executive officer, anesthesiologist, scientist, police officer, journalist, artist, and veterinarian. Other reasons for attending college included helping their family, inspiring people, and being a first-generation college student.

Students suggested the program provide more career-related activities. Students liked the activities that helped them think about colleges and careers. They also said talking with college students or professionals was helpful for college preparation. Some students were particularly interested in culinary schools. Excerpts of students' comments about their college aspirations included:

*I do want to go to college so I can get a job and help my family.*

*I want to go to college because I want to show people that is the right way to go, and I just want to inspire people (be a role model).*

*I want to go to college. I want to study medicine. I really like helping people.  
I want a career.*

*More meetings with professionals to talk about what they do and how they went to college, etc.*

*I don't want to be like most of my family members not completing college, I want to do something I want to do and I want to finish college.*

*More information about culinary school.  
Could they take us to culinary arts schools?*



## Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, students who participated in focus groups across six GEAR UP campuses understood the GEAR UP program. They knew the program would support them through high school graduation and prepare them for college. Students consistently recognized the positive role of their facilitators in both their school and personal lives. Students described strong, trusting relationships with their facilitators. Students regarded college visits as the most helpful GEAR UP activity to prepare them for college. Students expressed their desire to attend college and specific careers they would like to pursue. Students' career plans provided a motivation to pursue a college degree. Almost all students thought their teachers expected them to attend college.

Additional student comments provided suggestions for program implementation. For example, students requested more college visits; career-related activities; and information about scholarships, college majors, and college preparation steps (e.g., classes to take, grade requirements, and admission tests).