



# Designing and Implementing Effective Near-Peer Programs in Secondary School

U.S. Department of Education Affinity Call

March 2015



# Near Peer Models in the GEAR UP Context

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## About GEAR UP

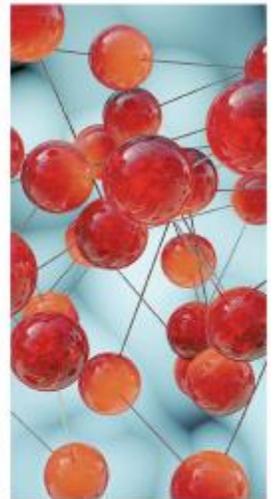
- **G**aining **E**arly **A**wareness and **R**eadiness for **U**ndergraduate **P**rograms
- A highly competitive, federally-funded initiative serving 551,000 students in 128 grants in FY 2015
- A key lever in our nation's strategy in improving college readiness and success for low-income students

# Near Peer Approaches in GEAR UP

- Sites are uniquely positioned to leverage K-12 and PSE partnerships
- 41% of GEAR UP college advising services were conducted primarily by near-peers or recent college graduates
- 91% of those services included a focus on college knowledge and “fit” within the postsecondary search and enrollment process



**Near-Peer Interventions,  
College Fit and GEAR UP**



NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR  
Community and Education  
Partnerships

December 2014



# Value Add of Near Peer Approaches

- The peer-to-peer has unique and complementary benefits
  - “Connect to students in a way that teachers often cannot.”  
(Zin and Elias, 2007)
  - Non-competitive assisted learning (Murphey and Arao, 2001)
    - Peer is not higher in status & facilitate self-disclosure
    - Younger peer sees the older peers achievements as reachable and easy to replicate
  - In difficult school and social environments, “Near-Peers” working with students to achieve academically and prepare for college may provide contrasting model of positive behavior and social responsibility



# The Emerging Research

- Research recommends that Near-Peers work directly with students to:
  - Foster a positive school climate,
  - Establish a solid school connectedness,
  - Encourage capability and commitment, and
  - Develop community/civic mindedness
- Research is fairly new and the use of Near Peers in College Preparation and Access is mostly anecdotal.
- Near-peer mentors, tutors, and advisors may add capacity to an overburdened system, but work is required to connect their involvement to student outcomes



# California State University, Fullerton- GEAR UP

**Adriana Badillo**, Director, GEAR UP  
California State University, Fullerton  
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# Near-Peer Roles

Integral part of the academic and college enrichment activities

- Engagement through more individualized and small group support
- Proactive and timely interventions that address fundamental skill building to assist students move forward through course content
- Create positive relationships and serve as positive role models
- Aid participants make educational connections to their own personal experience and their potential future careers/professions



# Near-Peer Program Model Implementation Expected Outcomes



- Increase academic performance
- Increase access to academic support and enrichment activities, through service delivery



# Productivity

## 2014-2015 academic year



- 892 student participated 1,423 hours of English Language Arts in-class support
- 815 student participated 1,098 hours of Mathematics in-class support
- 1109 students (approximately 70%) have participated in at least one college/university visit this academic year

# CSUF GEAR UP- School Site Structure



## Tutors (Tutor I, 4-6 per site)

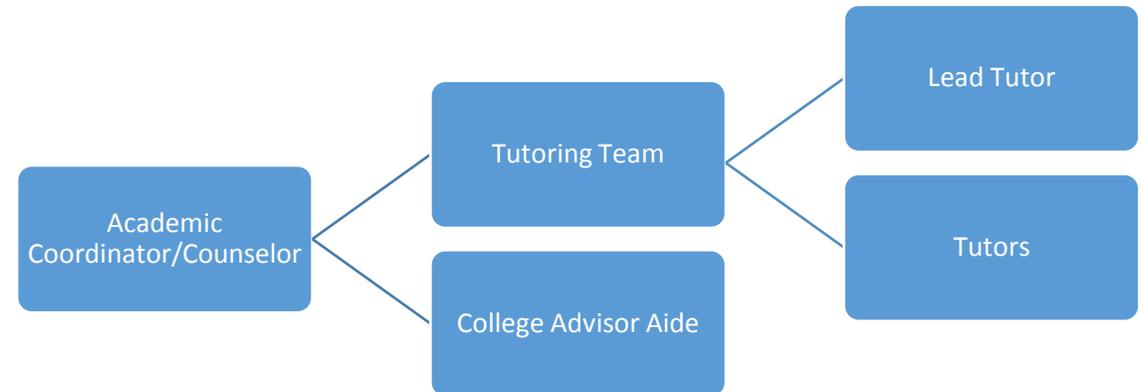
- Primary role is assist students with their academic preparation and student services

## Academic Advisor Aides (Tutor II, 1-2 per site)

- Primary role is to support the GEAR UP Academic Coordinators to conduct structured small group and one-to-one academic advising sessions

## Lead Tutors (Tutor III, 1 per site)

- Primary role is to mentor and guide other tutors in the day to day work.





# Recruitment & Training

- General campus and community advertising
- Work-Study students are highly desirable
- Screening
  - Position links directly to future career and/or personal goals
  - Flexibility/Adaptability/Availability
  - Similar backgrounds as program participants; they are first generation and/or come from low-income backgrounds.
  - GPA requirement
  - Ability to tutor students in content area (math and/or written exam)
- Mandatory Trainings
  - One week before school starts
  - Monthly during academic year

2014-2015 Tutor Monthly Meetings	
<b>Date:</b> Friday, September 26, 2014 <b>Time:</b> 1:00pm-3:00pm <b>Location:</b> LH 401	<b>Topic:</b> Strengths Finder & Concepts/Goals of Tutoring (2 hours) <b>Facilitators:</b> Diana Vasquez & Rosa Heckenberg
<b>Date:</b> Friday, October 24, 2014 <b>Time:</b> 1:00pm-3:00pm <b>Location:</b> LH 401	<b>Topic:</b> Titan Dreamers Center-AB540/Undocumented Students (1 hour) & Brave Space (1 hour) <b>Facilitators:</b> Henoc Preciado & Diana Vasquez
<b>Date:</b> Friday, November 21, 2014 <b>Time:</b> 1:00pm-3:00pm <b>Location:</b> LH 401	<b>Topic:</b> Student Health & Counseling Center- Find Your Balance General Health & Wellness (1 hour +15min) & Site meetings (45 min) <b>Facilitators:</b> Jovanny's Mejia & Darany Hoang, CSUF Student Health & Counseling Center
<b>Date:</b> Friday, December 19, 2014 <b>Time:</b> 1:00pm-3:00pm <b>Location:</b> LH315	<b>Topic:</b> Semester recap, Strengths <b>Facilitators:</b> Academic Coordinators
<b>Date:</b> Friday, January 16, 2015 <b>Time:</b> TBD <b>Location:</b> LH303	<b>Topic:</b> • Common Core: Mandatory for all tutors <b>Facilitator:</b> Dr. Pagni, CSUF Math Department
<b>Date:</b> Friday, January 23, 2015 <b>Time:</b> 1:00pm-4:00pm <b>Location:</b> LH304	<b>Topic:</b> • Counterstories <b>Facilitator:</b> Mandy Paterson
<b>Date:</b> Friday, February 27, 2015 <b>Time:</b> 1:00pm-3:00pm <b>Location:</b> LH 304	<b>Topic:</b> SHCC- Question, Persuade, Refer (90 min) & Site meetings (30 minutes) <b>Facilitator:</b> Jovanny's Mejia, CSUF Student Health & Counseling Center
<b>Date:</b> Friday, March 27, 2015 <b>Time:</b> 1:00pm-3:00pm <b>Location:</b> LH 304	<b>Topic:</b> Resumes & Interview Elevator Speech <b>Facilitator:</b> CSUF Career Center
<b>Date:</b> Friday, April 17 <sup>th</sup> & 24 <sup>th</sup> <b>Time:</b> 1:00pm-4:00pm <b>Location:</b> TBD	<b>Topic:</b> Mock Interviews w/program director, academic coordinators, and other staff.
<b>Date:</b> Friday, May 29, 2015 <b>Time:</b> 1:00pm-3:00pm <b>Location:</b> LH 304	<b>Topic:</b> End of the Year Celebration/Graduation Recap on the Academic Year



# Challenges

- Addressing on-going challenges with professional development trainings (monthly)
- Assessing effectiveness in student gains from interventions
- Expanding true mentoring opportunities outside of academic activities



# Advantages

- Participants' responsiveness
  - Building positive supportive relationships (also with teaching and other school site staff)
  - Increased retention (tutors follow up with students, parents, and teachers)
- Service delivery
  - Most visible service component
  - Assist with direct recruitment and all program activities
  - Program curriculum and activity feedback
  - Aid with more intentional, real time academic interventions
- High competitive application process
  - Provides selectiveness of college students
  - Targeted recruitment in various students provides diversity in applicant pool





# Texas GEAR UP State Grant Near-Peer College Preparation Advisors

**Matt Orem**, Director, College Access  
Institute for Public School Initiatives  
The University of Texas at Austin  
[morem@ipsi.utexas.edu](mailto:morem@ipsi.utexas.edu)

# Productivity 2014-2015 academic year: 7 Advisors, 6 high schools

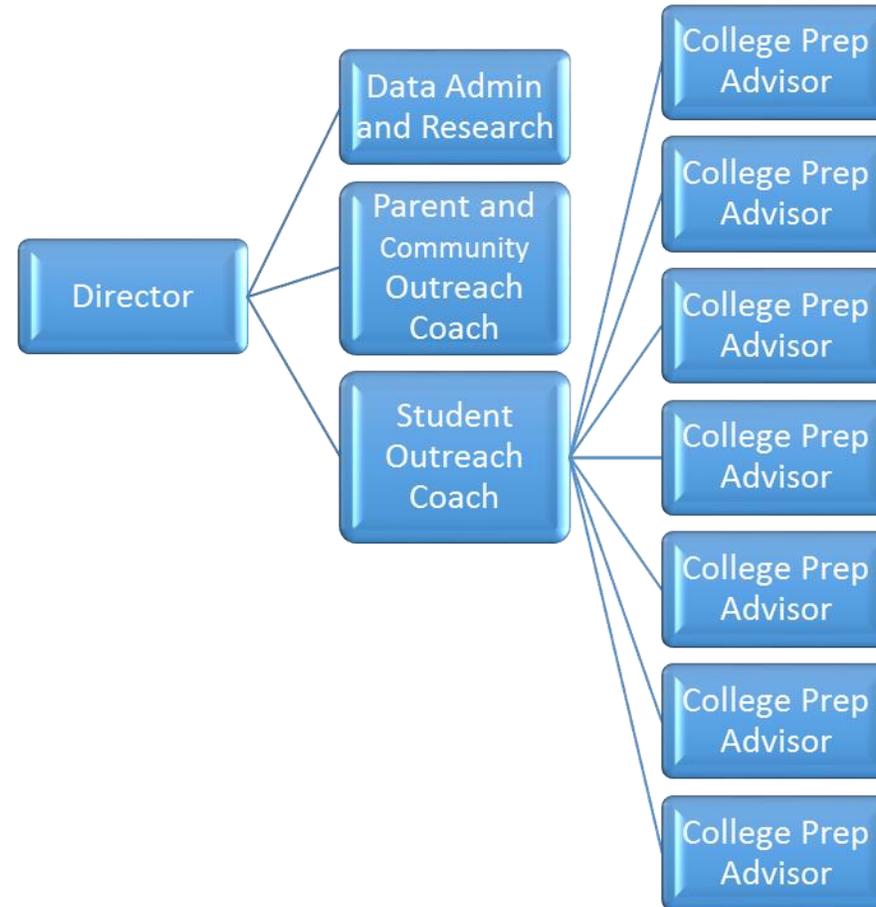


- 918 students (average 131 per advisor) received 1,423 hours of advising
- 491 students received information about financial aid
- 946 students (53.4%) participated in summer programs



# Texas GEAR UP State Grant

- Near-Pears recruited, hired and trained summer before 8<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - “Paraprofessional Title”: College Preparation Advisor
    - Assigned 1 Per School, remote staff with offices on school campuses
    - Full-time benefit eligible employees of The University of Texas at Austin
    - Funded 100% through the State GEAR UP grant





# Recruitment and training

- Recent college graduate with 1-2 years of experience serving students
- 4 weeks “boot-camp” style training in summer before 8<sup>th</sup> grade
  - College prep
  - College access
  - Student development
  - Financial aid
  - Case management
  - Data collection and management
  - School culture and organization
  - Relevant laws and ethics
  - School curriculum and degree plans
  - Standards of service and protocols
  - Goal setting and strategy
  - Wellness, handling difficult situations and stress



# Challenges

- Protecting their role in schools
  - Access to students during the school day
- Titles, compensation
- Off-site supervision
- Summer activities when schools are closed



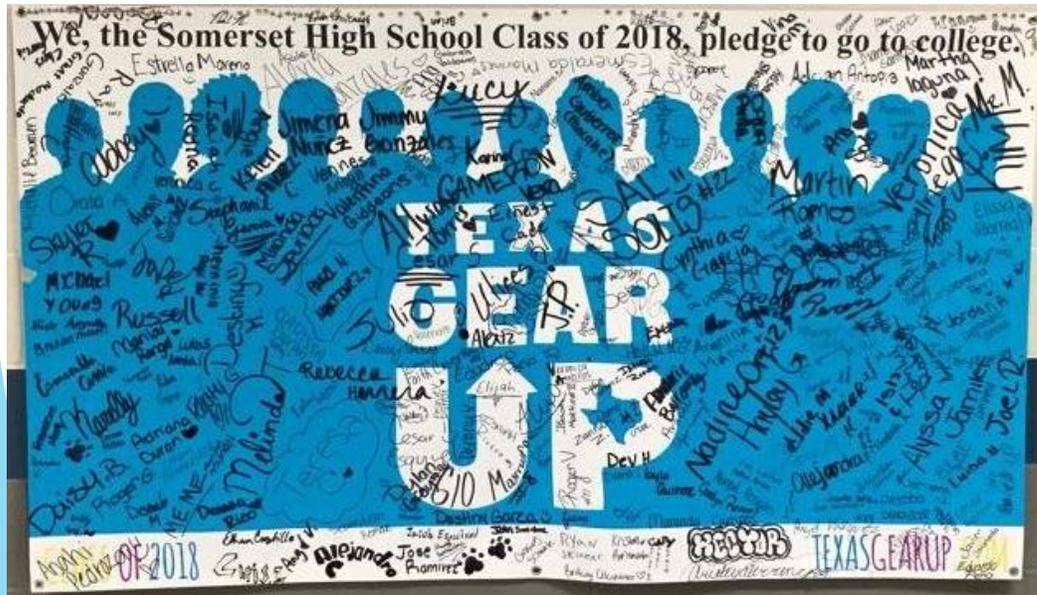
# Advantages

- Add capacity to the grant and the school
  - Administrator “The advisor is a great support system to these 8<sup>th</sup> graders. This position has been a great addition to our school.”
- Connection with the University
- Recent college experience
- Eager to try new ideas to reach students
- Positive role model for students
  - “The GEAR UP advisor encourages us to go to college. He is always around in the hallways and in lunch.”
- Supportive resource for parents
  - Parent: The advisor “has always been there whenever I needed her. I like that she returns calls or emails right away. She has been great and very informative. She provides information to me, and I go to her when I have questions.



## Willie Castrejon

- ▶ College Preparation Advisor
- ▶ Somerset High School
- ▶ Somerset, Texas



# Background

- ▶ Born and raised in Houston, Texas
- ▶ Proud son of two, once immigrant, parents seeking a better life in the United States
- ▶ Oldest of five siblings
- ▶ Product of inner-city schools in the Houston Independent School District - Waltrip High School Class of 2006 Valedictorian
- ▶ First-generation college student (also first in my family to earn a High School Diploma and a Master's Degree)
- ▶ Earned a Bachelor's Degree from UT-Austin in 2010
- ▶ Earned a Master's Degree from UH-Main Campus in 2013



# Why do I do what I do?

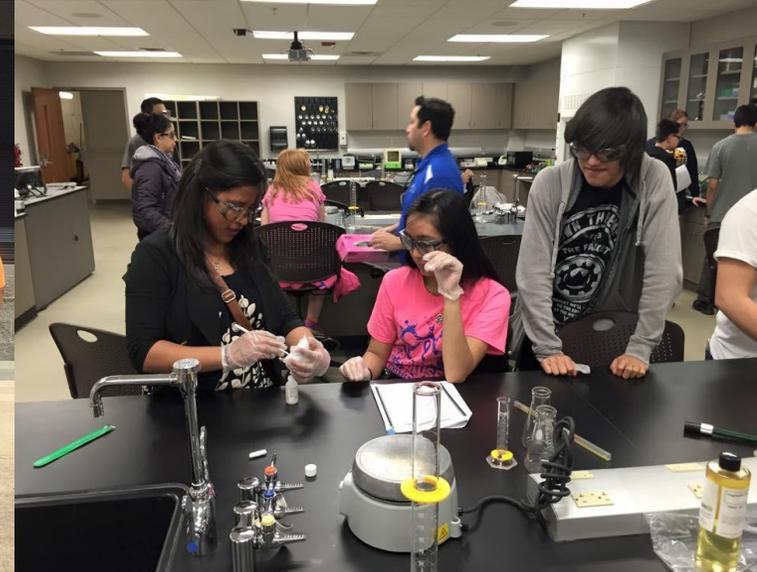


- ▶ I want all hard-working students to get the opportunity to experience college.
- ▶ I want students to believe that hard work pays off just like it did for me.
- ▶ College access and success is my calling. Because I love what I do I go above and beyond for the students I serve.
- ▶ A college degree is my version of the American Dream.
- ▶ I want to help others achieve my version of the American Dream.



# Hopes for students

- ▶ Be college-ready by:
  - ▶ Self-advocating
  - ▶ Being involved inside and outside the classroom
  - ▶ Learning from mistakes
  - ▶ Celebrating small and big victories
  - ▶ Not giving up easily
  - ▶ Not taking no for an answer
  - ▶ Asking for challenges
  - ▶ Not being afraid to ask for help
  - ▶ Taking ownership and pride in what they do
  - ▶ Giving back
  - ▶ Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs!



# How do I make a difference?

- ▶ By being my students' number one advocate
- ▶ By being the first one to celebrate my students' successes
- ▶ By being the first one to let my students know if they need to do something better
- ▶ By getting to know my students at a closer level (yes, all 300 of them) to push them to be their best
- ▶ By being eager to try new ideas to reach my students
- ▶ By listening to my students when they have something to say
- ▶ By showing up to their events
- ▶ By constantly educating myself to meet their needs
- ▶ By being honest
- ▶ By never giving up on them





# Questions & Answers