A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF NORTH CAROLINA'S STATEWIDE GAINING EARLY AWARENESS AND READINESS FOR UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS (GEAR UP)

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

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This study evaluated GEAR UP North Carolina, a federal grant program providing pre-college services in 20 low wealth school districts. The evaluation, conducted at the midpoint of a 6-year grant cycle, assessed the program’s progress in increasing the college preparation levels and enrollment rates of low-income students. The purpose of the evaluation was to identify differences in student performance as a function of exposure to GEAR UP; determine if school districts were adhering to the program model; and examine the relationship between program fidelity and GEAR UP goals. Unique to this study was the development of an instrument measuring program fidelity, the GEAR UP North Carolina Program Fidelity Index (FI). Overall, student performance outcomes indicated limited progress in meeting the program goals. Most school districts were not implementing the key components of the GEAR UP model. The relationship between program fidelity and GEAR UP goals was weak with only one goal having a statistically significant correlation with the FI. Recommendations for the current GEAR UP North Carolina program are included, as are suggestions for future research and evaluation.