

Project Title: **GEAR UP Rural Collaborative Program**

Project Lead: Joe L. LeDesma, Project Director

Performance Period: 09/01/2016 – 8/28/2024; Award Amount: \$8,332,0000

Funding Source: U.S. Department of Education, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP) Partnership Grants

Project Goal: Increase the number of at-risk students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education using a cohort model in four North San Diego County high schools beginning in 2016 with students in 6th grade.



## Goals and Achievements

- Developed and implemented a multi-component academic support framework offering tutoring, advising, college readiness, financial aid, career planning, college tours, and parent engagement.
- Successfully executed all activities, resulting in measurable gains including higher GPAs, reduced failure rates, increased FAFSA completion, and near-universal on-time promotion.



## Student Impact

- Over 21,000 unduplicated students served, building a strong foundation for academic success and college readiness.
- Improved academic outcomes, including higher GPAs, reduced F grades, increased FAFSA completion (65% for Cohort 1, 75% for Cohort 2), and greater participation in rigorous coursework.
- Postsecondary enrollment nearly doubled for Cohort 1 (95% increase) and more than doubled for Cohort 2 (127% increase) compared to baseline rates.



## Partnerships & Collaborations

- Partnered with four area school districts, serving 10 elementary/middle schools and 4 high schools.
- Maintained close collaboration with principals, teachers, and counselors to align academic support strategies and drive continuous improvement through regular stakeholder meetings.
- Engaged community and industry partners—including Big Block Realty, California Bank and Trust, San Marcos Smile Dental, and the SALK Institute—to provide financial literacy, STEM career exploration, workforce development, and internship opportunities.



## Institutional and Community Impact

Developed a comprehensive college transition program that not only raised graduation rates (88–89%, up from a 68% baseline) but also strengthened the institution’s capacity to support first-generation and economically disadvantaged students.



## What’s Next?

GEAR UP established a strong foundation for ongoing academic support and college readiness across partner schools. The relationships built through this project will continue to support students beyond the grant, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds. Palomar College and its K–12 partners will continue to seek new opportunities to expand services, scale effective practices, and strengthen programs in dual enrollment, career exploration, and college access.