



What Matters for College Success? The Relationships between GEAR UP Participation, High School GPA, AP Participation, and ACT scores with College GPA

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What is TEAM GEAR UP?

- In 2011, MPS was awarded a 7-year, \$14.87 million federal GEAR UP grant to promote college awareness and readiness.
- Supports to students from the graduating classes of 2017 and 2018.
- School-family-community partnership strategy.
- Historically low four-year graduation rate.
- Two primary objectives of the program.

GEAR UP, Equity, & COVID-19

- Addressing many of the racial and economic inequities inherent in education.
- GEAR UP provides many unique services.
- COVID-19 has likely widened gaps.

Study Questions

1. Is there evidence participation in GEAR UP helped prepare students to succeed in college, as measured by their freshman GPA?
2. What were the most important measures of a student's high school performance for predicting their college success, as measured by their freshman year GPA?
3. Do ACT scores equalize the admissions process for students attending different schools?
4. What is lost by not including ACT scores in the college admissions process?

Methods

- MPS, UWM and MATC data were combined.
- College GPA of students with at least 12 credit hours in their freshman year.
- Bivariate correlations identified the simple, unadjusted relationships
- Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), used to measure the unique relationships of study variables with first-year college GPA.
- HLM included all study factors to determine which were the most important

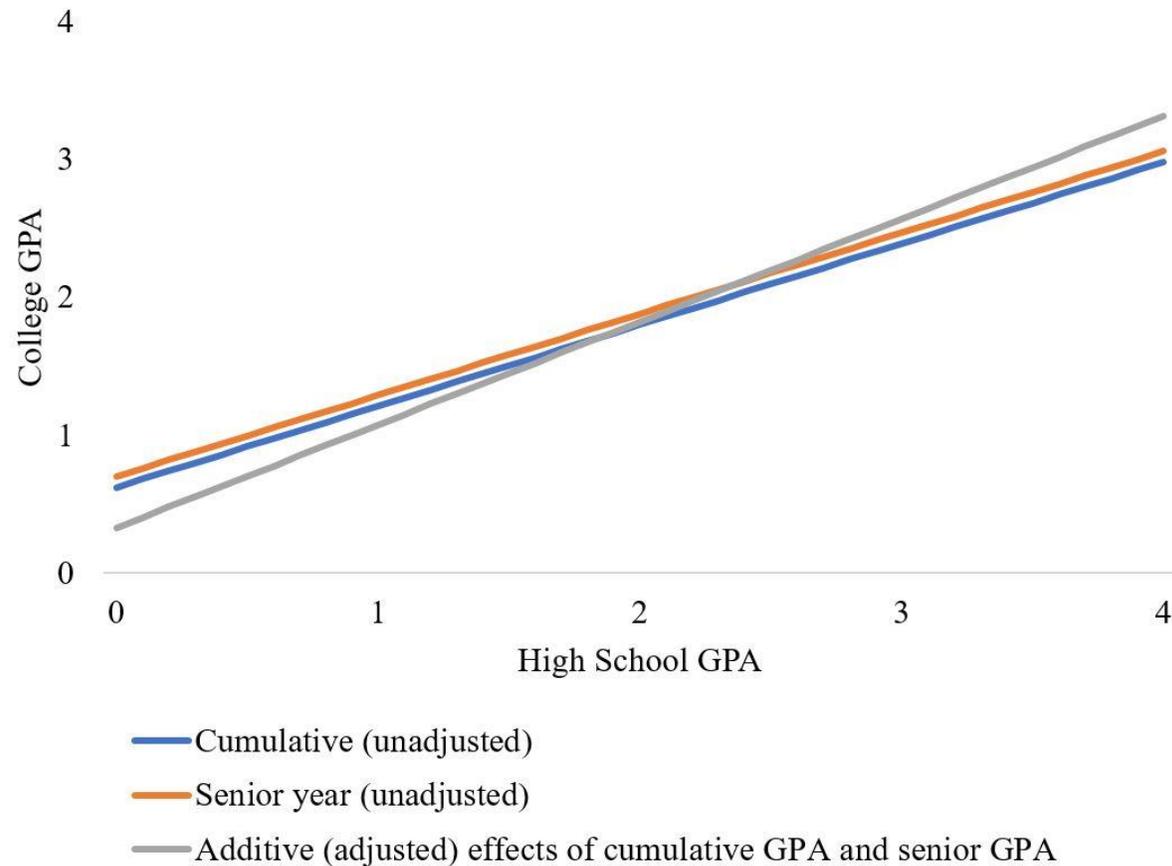
Students Included in this Study

- 446 students who graduated between 2015 and 2018 who later enrolled in either MATC or UWM and attempted at least 12 credit hours their freshman year
- Half in GEAR UP Cohort
- 70% went to MATC
- Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ were Free/Reduced Lunch
- 201 (45.1%) were African American
- 129 (28.9%) were Latinx

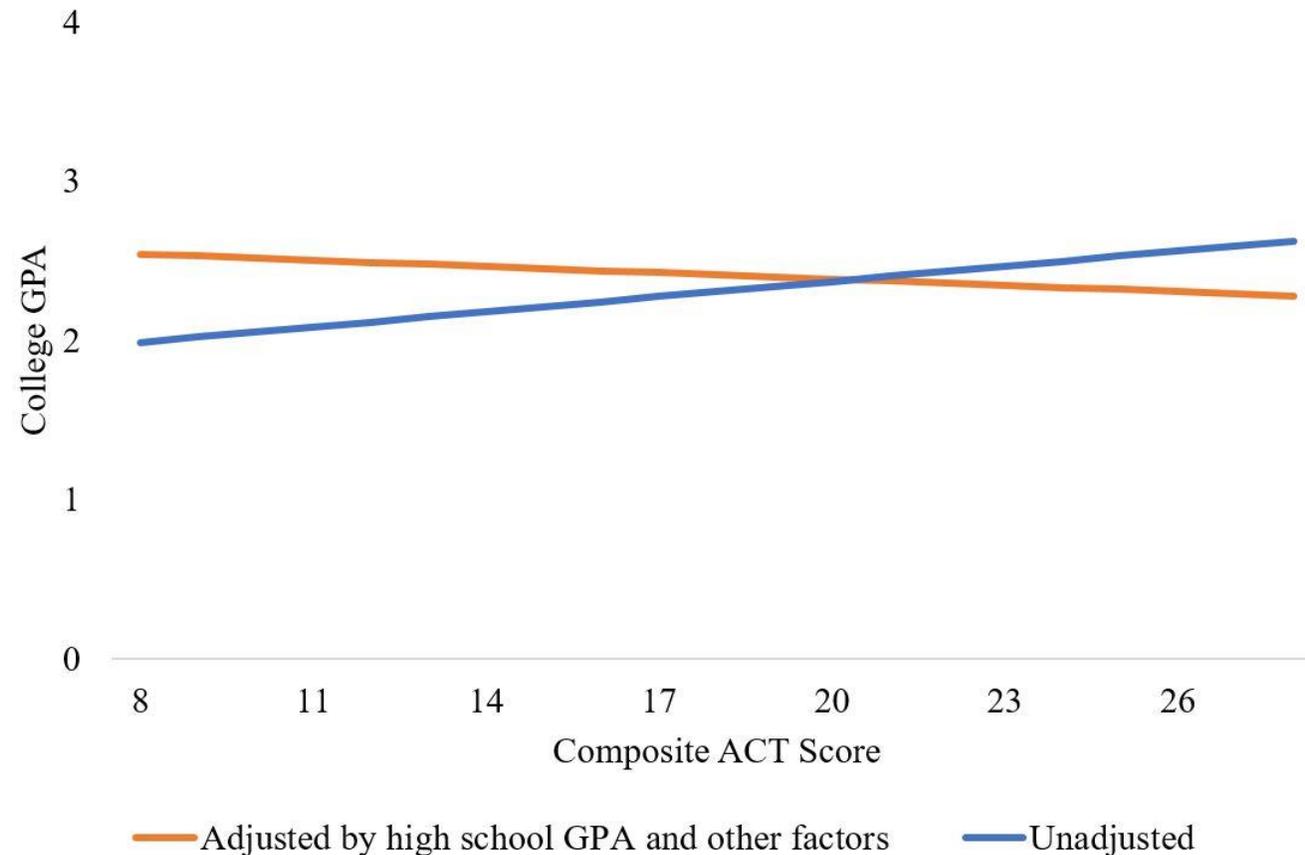
1. Is there evidence participation in GEAR UP helped prepare students to succeed in college, as measured by their freshman GPA?

- GEAR UP participation was ubiquitous; measuring the impact of participation was difficult.
- GEAR UP programming was valued by nearly all students
- GEAR UP provided students access to postsecondary opportunities many would not have otherwise had.

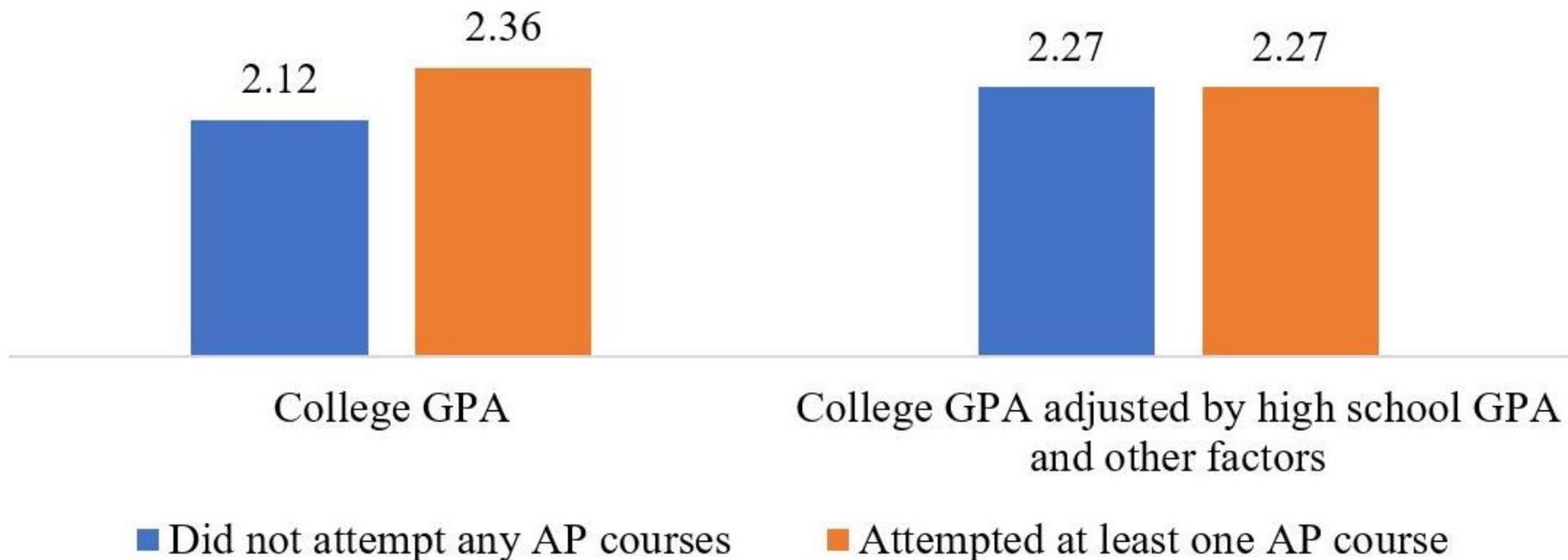
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3. Do ACT scores equalize the admissions process for students attending different schools?

- Even after accounting for ACT scores, participation in AP, and high school GPA, the high school a student attended remained a significant predictor of their college success;
- ACT, AP, & high school GPA did not explain any of the differences in college GPA attributable to what high school they attended
- Findings consistent with recent research out of Chicago

4. What is lost by not including ACT scores in the college admissions process?

- Excluding ACT scores in the admissions process would not have subtracted from the ability of college admissions offices to predict the success of students.
- High school GPA only significant factors that predicted college success

Discussion

- Our previous studies of MPS GEAR UP have found participation to be associated with increased AP course participation and improved on-time graduation rates (Jones & Gilman, 2019).
- No proof that access to GEAR UP impacted student college success directly; but nearly all students who attended college full-time participated in several GEAR UP-sponsored activities on their path to college.

Discussion – Beyond GEAR UP

- Should colleges continue to require students to submit standardized test scores?
- Advocates for equity argue:
 - ACT and SAT are biased
 - former GEAR UP students identified ACT prep as a critical service of GEAR UP; without it unprepared
- Other side of the argument
 - necessary for measuring aptitude independent of the local quality of schooling and course grading policies.
- Results of this study question whether the ACT should be as important as it generally is for college admissions.
- Our findings are consistent with a growing body of evidence suggesting individual results of the ACT or SAT may be of limited use for identifying students likely to succeed

Contact Information

- For more information on this report or about the evaluation of the GEAR UP initiative, please contact Curtis Jones (jones554@uwm.edu) or visit www.uwm.edu/sreed