

Case Study

2014

Region One Education Service Center GEAR UP Uses ACT Engage® to Help Underserved Students

The Region One Education Service Center GEAR UP partnership is a federally funded program that works with students and families to help more students achieve college readiness and postsecondary success. Region One serves seven southern Texas counties—27 school districts and seven charter school systems from Laredo to Brownsville—along the United States–Mexico border. This includes approximately 10,500 traditionally underrepresented students, of whom:

- 99% are Hispanic
- 90% are economically disadvantaged
- 39% are English language learners
- 6% are from migrant families
- 78% are considered potential first-generation college-bound students

THE CHALLENGE

Targeting resources to students who need it most

Region One leaders needed an assessment to help evaluate program impact and effectiveness around student engagement and academic behaviors. They introduced ACT Engage assessments to students in 2012 in an effort to:

- Identify at-risk students early
- Diagnose student strengths and needs
- Connect students to appropriate interventions
- Monitor changes and begin assessing intervention effectiveness

ACT Engage provided Region One some unique and actionable insights on student engagement—insights relevant to students and schools that needed it most. Region One was also able to integrate ACT Engage results with data from its own internal survey, state-mandated testing results, and student information from schools, such as grades and demographics. This helped the group build a custom dashboard, creating a more complete picture of student behaviors that lead to academic success.

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THE RESULTS

Students benefit from data-driven decisions and collaborative solutions

ACT Engage insights and recommendations gave Region One the tools to help students and families in new ways.

If we could have all of these components where we look at the whole child—the student is connected, is doing well academically, has those academic behaviors—we’re going to make sure all students graduate on time and are prepared for the world they want after high school.

Norma McCormick
GEAR UP coordinator,
Region One Education
Service Center



- Region One gained data to evaluate program impact and effectiveness on student behaviors and engagement at individual, school, district, and program levels, allowing year-to-year comparisons and data-driven decision making.
- The information was shared with district leadership teams consisting of superintendents, principals, GEAR UP facilitators, teachers, and counselors to identify individual and schoolwide trends. This provided direction for leadership development, continuing education, community development, and policies affecting issues like commitment to school and family attitudes.
- Districts gained a tool to compare their students' academic behaviors to the general population, organized by geography and demographic criteria, offering concrete feedback of the overall performance of Region One programs.
- Students who seemed to have a low risk of dropping out had concerns and needs that might otherwise have been unaddressed.
- Districts reallocated student participation to programs designed to address their “red flag” issues, creating a bigger impact with the same level of resources.
- The ACT Engage Academic Success Index provided a tangible measure of whether programs could “move the needle.”
- Region One worked with schools to develop a “Crosswalk” of programs and activities connecting student engagement and academic behaviors to preexisting classroom programs (e.g., linking school safety behaviors and student self-regulation with conflict resolution sessions with the school counselor). This helped students quickly find activities of the most impact to them.
- Region One helped develop interventions for parents of potential first-generation college students, with the goal of increasing the odds that those students will transition successfully to college.
- Region One attained measurable results to use in government reporting.