



The August 2016 issue of *Education Connections* reports on ICF enterprises in three states: our comprehensive evaluation of West Virginia GEAR UP, technical assistance to a Virginia pilot project that has established online professional learning communities to promote formative assessment, and a parent involvement survey for Maryland that engaged ICF staff not only in survey design but promotion, outreach, and dissemination. And we announce an important new position for a senior researcher.

ICF's expertise extends from early education to K-12 schooling, to postsecondary education and workforce development. The solutions we devise with our clients enhance their capacity to achieve the outcomes they seek. Visit our [website](#) for more information about ICF in education.

ICF Assesses Impact of GEAR UP in West Virginia



West Virginia GEAR UP is a federally funded program that helps students in 50 high-poverty middle and high schools across the state prepare to succeed in education and training beyond high school, earning a college diploma or skillset certificate. ICF and subcontractor Xcalibur are conducting an external evaluation that incorporates studies of implementation, outcomes, impact (quasi-experimental design), and sustainability.

Two years into the seven-year program, ICF has reported substantial increases in the percentages of students and parents who have spoken with someone about college entrance requirements. Student knowledge of financial aid also increased from year 1 to 2,

including FAFSA, federal Pell grants and student loans, and the state's Higher Education Grant Program. The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission manages GEAR UP in collaboration with the West Virginia Community and Technical College System, West Virginia Department of Education, West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts, and other partners.

Dr. Adam Green, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and the West Virginia Community and Technical College System, was given the national "GEAR UP Professional of the Year" award during the National Council for Community and Education Partnerships conference in Washington, D.C. in mid-July.

[See details at this link.](#)

Use of Formative Assessment Progresses in Virginia Schools



Formative Assessment Pilot

Since 2014 the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has pursued expansion of formative assessment in schools across the state through an innovative pilot program. As contractor for the Appalachia Regional

Comprehensive Center, ICF has served as a technical assistance resource. Observed Holli Cook, VDOE assessment specialist and coordinator of the pilot since inception, "The support in planning and thinking ahead and making adjustments has really been instrumental." Teachers in this year's pilot, recently surveyed, agreed they had gained more understanding of using formative assessment instructional practices in their classrooms (83%) and that doing so improved student results (64%).

"The support in planning and thinking ahead and making adjustments has really been instrumental." – Holli Cook

Schools in the pilot have created teams to attend initial meetings that introduce the formative assessment modules from the [Center on Standards & Assessment Implementation](#). VDOE created Google+ online professional learning communities to enable school teams to collaborate with colleagues across the state. This September VDOE will expand the pilot to additional elementary, middle, and secondary schools.

Maryland Partners with ICF to Survey Parents

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) engaged ICF to conduct its Preschool and School-age Special Education Parent Involvement Surveys. The U.S. Department of Education requires states to report annually on the percentage of parents with a child receiving special education services who state that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities. Obtaining a reasonable response rate on the surveys posed many challenges that ICF had to address: MSDE does not maintain contact information for the stakeholders most important to data collection — parents, special education teachers, or schools. ICF's role required not only a complex data collection methodology that featured bilingual online and mailed surveys but a promotional toolkit that incorporated print, email, newsletter, website, and social media outreach to parents and special education teachers. ICF also supported MSDE in developing a dissemination and use plan.



ICF Seeks Senior Researcher



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We seek a Senior Research Methodologist to provide technical leadership on designing and implementing rigorous research and evaluation studies on a wide range of education policies and programs for federal, state, and local and nonprofit clients. You will play an active role in business development and mentoring staff. Basic qualifications include a doctoral degree in education, psychology, sociology, public policy, and related fields; 10 years of post-graduate experience in applied research; and excellent oral and written communication skills. Visit [here](#) for more details.