

National GEAR UP Week

A TOOLKIT FOR SCHOOL-BASED PRACTITIONERS



Start the Year Off Right

Join thousands of students, parents, teachers, partners, and college access professionals nationwide to celebrate GEAR UP and the successes of your hard work and dedication!

During National GEAR UP Week, you can raise awareness about GEAR UP's local impact and engage your strategic partners. These include local, state, and federal elected officials, funders, partners, and local, state, and regional media. By sharing your program's achievements, you can encourage them to be more involved in your services to students and families.

- **Create awareness.**
- **Activate partners.**
- **Mobilize champions.**

Learn more: www.edpartnerships.org/nguw

Hold a GEAR UP Week at your school and get students thinking about their plans after high school! Kick off the year with fun and exciting activities while promoting a college-going culture in your school and community.

These ideas can also be used for future activities after National GEAR UP Week. This toolkit includes ideas, instructions, posters, and more to promote and celebrate GEAR UP and its mission.



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Outreach and Messaging

- [Gubernatorial Proclamation](#) - WSAC will provide you with a copy of the Governor's Proclamation in early September. Use this document to recognize the week and raise awareness in your community about the importance of postsecondary planning and the positive impact GEAR UP is having locally. You may also use our [proclamation template](#) and [a sample proclamation request](#) to request a proclamation for National GEAR UP Week from your Mayor.
- [Media Advisory](#)—This template will notify media outlets in your area to cover the event you are hosting. Media advisories are distributed before the event so that outlets can schedule and plan to cover it.
- [Press Release](#)—This template will help you create buzz about your event. You can send it out before or after the event; edit it accordingly!
- [Op-Ed: Guidelines & Talking Points](#) - Op-eds are a great way to raise awareness about GEAR UP locally and nationally. Follow the tips and use the template in this resource to submit your op-ed to your news outlet.
- **Take Pictures** - Take pictures of your students' hard work and share them with Washington State GEAR UP. Be sure to take pictures of students and staff. **Tag them: #GEARUPWorks #IHeartGEARUP**
- **Social Media** - Social media is a great way to stay connected with students. If you haven't already done so, consider creating your social media pages to remind students about upcoming GEAR UP events, deadlines, and activities you don't want them to miss. In addition, be sure to share the information WAGU posts weekly!
 - facebook.com/gearupwa
 - instagram.com/gearupwa
- **Connect with students.** Use Skyward (or your student information systems), text messages, a blog, and the website to meet students where they are—on social media. Use your school's social media accounts to share critical information about school activities, deadlines, and resources.
- **Host virtual drop-in hours.**
- **If possible, help with meal distribution to connect with students.** This is a great time to distribute paper copies of information about National GEAR UP Week and the available GEAR UP services to students and families.

- **Distribute GEAR UP Brochures or Family Newsletters.** Resource: [Family Newsletters.](#)
- **Provide phone advising.** Conduct phone counseling and advising to ensure students meet graduation requirements, have a 7th-year plan, and know how to get support through the 12th-year Campaign.
- **Announcements.** Revise the following announcements about GEAR UP Week and getting ready for college to fit your school's GEAR UP needs. If your school operates in a distance-learning mode, consider using Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, text messages, a blog, or a website, as your district allows.
 - **MONDAY:** It's National GEAR UP Week this week! There will be activities every day. Starting today, you have until Friday to decorate your homeroom door with the colors and logo of the college of your choice. The winners will get a special prize. Also, tomorrow is GEAR UP T-Shirt Tuesday! Wear your GEAR UP T-shirt or other college gear. Share what your plan is for college and career on www.facebook.com/gearupwa.
 - **TUESDAY:** Happy National GEAR UP Week! Did you know there are over 4,000 colleges and universities nationwide? There are also many options beyond high school, including apprenticeships, on-the-job training, college career and technical education, customized training, non-credit education, certificates, certifications, and associate degrees. Share what your post-high school dream is on the GEAR UP Dream Wall.
 - **WEDNESDAY:** The nationally recognized Washington Grant makes education and training beyond high school affordable. More families are eligible, and more programs and credentials are included. The program will also expand to provide support for apprenticeships.
 - **THURSDAY:** National GEAR UP Week has been fantastic! If your door is not yet decorated, you still have time. Door War Winners will be selected tomorrow. Speaking of choosing, have you investigated what scholarships are available to you? Check out theWashBoard.org and start a profile to search for scholarships you want to apply for.
 - **FRIDAY:** Thanks to everyone who has made National GEAR UP Week a huge success. We will announce the College Door Wars contest winners later today. Stay tuned!

College & Career Exploration

Virtual College Visits

Just because students can't physically visit campuses at this point doesn't mean they can't learn about what college might be the best fit. Take advantage of virtual campus tours (many can be found through [Common App's Explore Colleges profiles](#)) and scan colleges' websites and social media feeds to learn more about each school's offerings.

Resources:

- [Get Ready for Virtual Visits](#) includes best practices and resources to help plan meaningful virtual experiences for two—and four-year schools. It also contains replicable, customizable tools.
- [Pathways and Exploration Tools](#). This resource includes best practices and resources to help plan meaningful in-person and online exploration. It also contains replicable, customizable tools.

Virtual College and Career Learning

These activities from NCCEP's Career & College Clubs have been modified for students to complete individually.

Resources:

- [The College Advantage](#). In this activity, you will learn about some of the advantages of a college education and can reflect on those advantages.
- [College Life](#). This activity will help you dream about your future in college and identify your preferred college lifestyle.
- [Dream Board](#). This activity helps you to visualize your future success and dream life. Share your dream boards on social media and tag @edpartnerships.
- [Financial Aid Fact or Fiction](#). This activity informs you about your financial aid options and when and how to apply for college financial aid.

Virtual Events

Student/Family Workshop

Consider hosting online events or workshops. For example, invite a local employer to serve as a guest speaker or host a virtual employee panel to discuss their job sector, specific work skills essential to the career path, and the background needed to pursue that path. These events could be pre-recorded or hosted live on YouTube, Zoom, Facebook Events, or Instagram Live.

Additionally, Washington State GEAR UP schools must offer at least three yearly family workshops. These workshops focus on financial literacy, college preparation, planning, and financial aid. Consider hosting one during National GEAR UP Week.

Resource: [GEAR UP Family Night Workshop Templates](#). These templates come pre-loaded with info and areas to personalize for your school.

Scholarship Workshop

Host a workshop to assist students in their scholarship hunt. Help students find and apply for scholarships. Share tips on how to write essays. Encourage students to check out [Big Future](#), [Unigo](#), [theWashboard.org](#), and [gearup.wa.gov](#) for scholarship opportunities. Talk about strategies and play [Zombie Apocalypse! A Scholarship Activity on gearup.wa.gov](#).

Sign Up Drives

Otterbot

Promote Otterbot. Otterbot is WSAC's free texting service designed to help Washington high school seniors navigate financial aid for college and career education. Students can access Otterbot via text message 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by texting "Hi Otter" to 360-928-7281. For more information on Otter, visit wsac.wa.gov/otterbot

Games

College Knowledge Games & Activities

Check out this updated collection of icebreakers, college knowledge, and cooperative learning games. Adapt for remote learning.

Resource: [GEAR UP College Knowledge Games & Activities](#)

College Knowledge Passport

Get your students, staff, and parents involved in this activity that can take place the whole week! Provide your students with their College Knowledge Passport. Think of this activity as a treasure hunt meets trivia. You will need to get your school staff on board - think of the teachers in this activity as the countries that students need to visit. Provide your staff with the College Knowledge Passport Questions/Statements (consider assigning specific staff-specific questions to avoid staff asking students the same trivia questions).

Students take their passports and visit different school staff, where they will be asked a College Knowledge Question. If the student answers the question correctly, the school staff person will sign the student's passport in the space provided. There are three websites that students and families need to visit together to get families involved in the game. When the student and family have completed this, the family member signs the student's College Knowledge Passport. Have students turn in their College Knowledge Passports at the end of the week to be eligible for a drawing to win a prize.

Resources: [College Knowledge Passport](#) and [Passport Questions/Statements](#)

Door Wars

Students and teachers work together and decorate their homeroom or advisory classroom door with a college theme. The winning door(s) get a special classroom prize. Be sure to have enough supplies to meet the needs of all participating teachers and students. Set a start date and an end date. Consider having different "Best Of" categories: Out of State 4 Year, In State 4 Year, and 2 Year College. Consider inviting an elected official or local news reporter to help judge the doors and select the winners.

Draw Your Way to College

Use this game to help students become familiar with college lingo. Divide students into teams. Teams should designate one person to draw per round. Each team member should have the opportunity to draw at least once. The designated “artist” picks a clue/term from the moderator (GEAR UP staff). The artist should draw that clue for their team without speaking or hand gestures. The teams not drawing are not allowed to guess and should refrain from yelling out hints. If the drawing team successfully guesses the clue within the time limit, they get a point. Briefly discuss the term afterward to ensure students understand the meaning and relevance of that term as it relates to college. Play continues with the next team, and the same format is followed. At the end of the game, the team with the most points wins!

GEAR UP Bingo

A. People Bingo: Download a blank GEAR UP Bingo Card. Type the descriptions into a blank BINGO card (be sure to mix them on each card), or have your students write the descriptions on their cards themselves. To play, have students mingle and write the name of a classmate who fits a description on the card.

B. College Logo Bingo: Write the name of each college on a ping pong ball. Provide each student with a College Logo Bingo Card. Ask questions from the College Logo Bingo Trivia Sheet. Allow participants to guess the answer but be sure all students know the correct answer before moving on.

Resources:

- [Blank GEAR UP Bingo Card](#),
- [College Logo Bingo Cards](#)
- [College Logo Bingo Card Images](#)
- [College Logo Bingo Trivia Sheet](#)

Reality Fair

Reality or life simulations are educational, interactive events for high school students. They involve staff and often community members. Students are given scenarios that place them in the future after they complete a form of secondary education. The simulation allows students to experience what life looks like on their own, with financial responsibilities.

Resources: [TXGU's Get a Life Game](#) or [WSECU's Digital Reality Fair](#)

Resources to Make Your Own Game

- **Word Searches and Crosswords:** <https://crosswordlabs.com/>
- **Game-based learning platforms** that students can access via web browsers.
 - **Kahoot:** <https://kahoot.com/>

- **Gimkit:** <https://www.gimkit.com/>
- **Quizlet:** <https://quizlet.com/latest>
- **Quizizz:** <https://quizizz.com/>

Scavenger Hunt

Create a scavenger hunt throughout the school. Have GEAR UP students locate necessary college planning resources. Announce winners at a pep rally at the end of the week. Variation: Hide GEAR UP logos with college facts printed on the back all over the school. Give a prize to the student who finds the most.

SWAT College Readiness Game

Split into teams. Divide the whiteboard or poster paper into sections. Assign each team a section. Write college terms randomly on each side of the board or paper. Both teams should have the exact words, but in different locations. Teams should choose a team name and pick one player to start as the “swatter.” Put a piece of masking tape on the floor several feet from the board/paper. All team members except the “swatter” must stay behind the tape line. Give a fly swatter to each team’s starting player. Ask a college knowledge question. The first to swat the correct answer wins a point. Discuss to reinforce understanding. Teams choose a new “swatter” and repeat play. Continue until all questions have been answered. The team with the most points at the end wins.

College Spirit

#OneInAMillion Campaign

Answer a prompt below on a social media site and use #OneInAMillion in the post. Take a picture or a selfie to use in your post. Sample prompts:

- How has GEAR UP inspired you?
- What are your plans after you graduate from high school?
- Who inspires you to be the best person you can be?
- What challenges did you overcome while in school?
- What about your future makes you excited?
- Why is getting an education important to you?
- Why is GEAR UP an essential program for you and your family?
- How has GEAR UP changed your outlook on education?

Don’t want to use any of the above prompts? That’s okay! Come up with your own and share it with us!

Resource: [#OneInAMillion Sign](#)

GEAR UP in 1 Word

Using a piece of poster board or other large paper, ask students and teachers to share what GEAR UP means to them in one word. Share a photo with students with the GEAR UP office and elected officials.

GEAR UP or College Gear Day

Encourage students and teachers to wear their GEAR UP t-shirts, other college clothing, or colors. Pass out shirts to new GEAR UP students. Have students decorate a small paper shirt with the college they want to attend, then tape it to the front of their locker.

Resources: [Cut Out Shirt Option 1](#) and [Cut Out Shirt Option 2](#)

Dream Wall

Create a GEAR UP Dream Wall. Cover the wall of a school hallway with butcher paper. Place a large National GEAR UP Week logo in the center with “Our GEAR UP Dreams” written underneath. Have students write their academic, professional, and personal goals on the wall or on a cutout to stick to the wall.

Additional Information: Set up a “College Dreams” photo booth! Have dry-erase boards that students can write their College Dreams on and hold during the photo.

Show & Tell

Have students contact a college of their choice and request materials. Open the materials as a class or group and share the information received. Students should also complete a college fit worksheet and share their findings with classmates.

Motivation

Pep Rally

Invite a guest speaker from a local college, apprenticeship program, or the community to share their educational journey and explain why education beyond high school is so important.

Community Success Stories

Host a “Community Success Stories” breakfast, coffee gathering, or potluck luncheon as a thank you to dedicated GEAR UP partners, volunteers, and parents. Consider inviting GEAR UP school administrators, teachers, parents, partners, student leaders, local businesses, a service club or chamber of commerce, and individuals from non-GEAR UP schools to discuss college access and GEAR UP's success in your school district!

Get to Know GEAR UP/ Teacher Time Profile

This activity is designed for school staff to learn more about GEAR UP and how their support and involvement can positively impact students. Invite staff and educate them on what GEAR UP is all about. Explain the different services that GEAR UP will provide to students and families and the programs and activities that GEAR UP will host. Have teachers fill out a profile they can hang outside their classroom for students to read. Consider sending out the Teacher Time Profile to teachers through e-mail and having some printed for staff to look at and possibly fill out at the Get to Know GEAR UP staff event.

Resource: [Teacher Time Profile](#)

Fail Forward

This activity is designed to help students embrace their failures and use them to move forward rather than give up in defeat.

Provide large poster boards or banners. Place in the school hallways. Encourage fellow staff, students, family, and community members to write, share, and view failures they have experienced. This activity can be anonymous. Later, at an assembly, a panel was hosted where panelists, who consisted of faculty, shared their stories of failure and how they overcame them. For example:

- I lost a scholarship because I did not do well in school and didn't get help.
- I failed my Algebra class the first time I took it.
- I changed my major four times.
- I got rejected from my dream college.
- I didn't manage my money and spent too much on credit cards as a freshman.
- I waited too long to fill out the FAFSA.
- By sharing stories, you bring people together and begin a conversation that failure is essential to growth and learning, especially for first-generation students.

Resource: [Freedom to Fail Forward](#)

Additional Activity Ideas

- Watch a TED Talk.
- Bring a guest speaker to talk with students, staff, and parents.
- Use daily trivia questions during morning announcements. Students submit an answer to be entered into a drawing to win a prize.
- Have teachers talk about their educational and career journey during advisory to students.
- Hold a GEAR UP Family Orientation night with students, family, and staff.
- Invite college representatives to speak at orientation.
- Set up a GEAR UP table in the commons during lunch and recruit students to sign up for upcoming campus field trips.
- Create a GEAR UP video presentation to explain what GEAR UP is. Announce what GEAR UP activities will take place throughout the week.
- Host a Community Advisory Committee meeting. Include community, professionals, staff, and parents in student-led small group discussions. Ask students how GEAR UP helps them.
- Hold a College Panel. Invite alumni or school staff. Have students ask teachers questions about their time in college.
- Host a Student Orientation Assembly as a kick-off assembly to discuss plans for the year. Get all the GEAR UP students together and build enthusiasm for the program.
- Create posters to decorate the commons/halls promoting different things related to higher education.
- Encourage students to interview faculty about their educational and career paths.
- Create a raffle for participating students to win college gear (hats, hoodies, t-shirts, etc.).
- Host a College Fair. Include military, 2-year, 4-year, and technical schools.
- Create an online scavenger hunt.
- Share selfies in college gear or college colors! Host a trivia contest and award prizes.
- Highlight staff's education and career pathways through spotlights or profiles on social media.
- Place banners throughout the town or in a frequented area.

Resources

GEAR UP Resources

- [GEAR UP College Knowledge Games & Activities for Students and Families.](#) An updated collection of icebreakers, college knowledge, and cooperative learning games. Adapt for remote learning.
- [WA State GEAR UP Student Resources.](#) Share our resources with school staff, students, and families. Covers a variety of topics, including:
 - Preparing for college (any education beyond high school).

- Pathway exploration.
- Campus visits.
- Exam preparation.
- College admissions.
- Financial aid.
- Scholarships.
- Support and transitions.

Planning Tools

- Surveys: [Google Forms](#), [Qualtrics](#), and [SurveyMonkey](#) to gather information
- Calendar scheduler: [Calendly](#) includes a questionnaire during registration and syncs with calendar systems
- Note Taking: [Evernote](#), [Google Drive](#), and [OneNote](#) for pre-meeting notes

Meeting Platforms

- [Cisco Jabber](#) (phone)
- [Voice](#) (phone)
- [Zoom](#) (audio, video)
- [Bluejeans](#) (audio, video)
- [Microsoft Teams](#) (audio, video)
- [Skype](#) (audio, video, instant message)

Creating Online Content

- [Canva](#) for slide decks and infographics
- [Adobe Spark](#) or [Powtoons](#) for videos

Tech Tools and Distance Learning

- [Flipgrid](#) offers a platform for recording and sharing videos (free for educators)
- [Loom](#) lets you capture your screen, voice, and face and instantly share your video (free for educators).
- [My Blueprint](#) offers a platform for students to create portfolios (free access)
- [Nearpod](#) provides a platform for live lessons.
- [Talking Points](#) lets you translate your messages for students and families in any language (free access)
- [Wevideo](#) provides a platform for student-created videos (free to schools closed due to COVID-19).
- [Zoom](#) offers free resources for educators during school closures.

