



**Family
Engagement
Toolkit**



Family Engagement Toolkit

PURPOSE

This Toolkit provides a list of considerations and recommendations, checklists, and sample documents to assist GEAR UP Staff and schools develop successful strategies to engage families in fostering their child's academic and career success.

“Students with involved parents, no matter their income or background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher-level programs, be promoted, pass their classes, earn credits, attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and graduate and go on to postsecondary education.”

Anne T. Henderson and Karen L Mapp (2002) A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement. Annual Synthesis 2002. National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools.

OBJECTIVES

- Support school's efforts to engage families in student's education
- Partner with families to support student's college-going goals

STUDENT GRADE LEVEL

This toolkit is designed for GEAR UP Staff and College Coordinators serving GEAR UP students in grades 7-12.

TARGET AUDIENCE FOR TOOLKIT

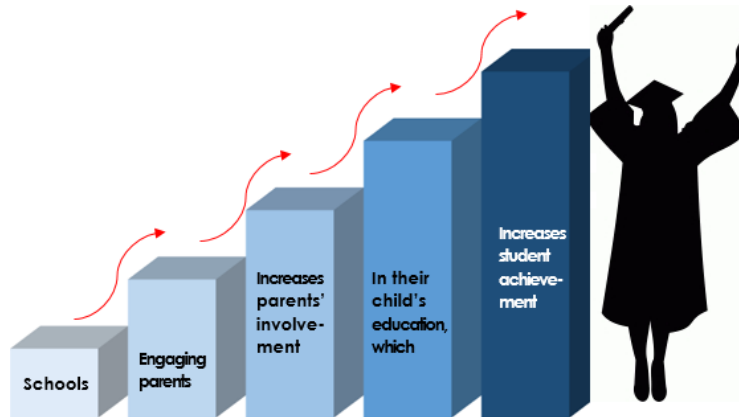
This toolkit is targeted to GEAR UP Staff, College Coordinators, school counselors, family engagement professionals (parent liaisons), college access professionals, middle and high school administrators, district-level educators who work with counseling and/or college access programs, and parent groups.

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Introduction to Family Engagement

A rich body of research has shown that when schools engage the families of their students, families get more involved in their children's education, and student achievement increases. Specifically, research has shown that this "engagement-involvement" process is correlated with students having fewer absences, showing improved behavior, earning higher grades and test scores, and even having better social skills.¹



What do we mean by "Family Engagement"?

UTAH GEAR UP defines Family Engagement this way:

- *Family* refers to a student's support network outside of school, which may include parents, grandparents, other family members, neighbors, and friends who support a student's academic goals and behaviors.²
- *Engagement* refers to the efforts the school or program sets forth to:
 - Provide information to families
 - Encourage participation at school-related events
 - Promote a home environment in a student's life that is supportive of academic success (it is important to be aware that families, with many competing demands on their time, can be invested and involved in their children's education and goals without attending school programs, meetings, or activities).

Families in Schools™ differentiates Family or Parent “Involvement” which is how parents participate at home and at school in their child’s education, from Family or Parent “Engagement”, which describes the work of the schools and organizations as they work with parents to involve them in their child’s education. Research shows family engagement increases family involvement, which brings about the positive results described above. The relationship between the two is depicted above. This toolkit relates to Family Engagement.

Why Family Engagement is a critical component of GEARUP

The positive results of effective family engagement align perfectly with GEAR UP’s goals and objectives. Therefore, family engagement is an important strategy for achieving our goals. The GEAR UP approach – that starts early and continues through high school graduation and into college – presents an ideal set up for successful family engagement. Starting outreach to parents early, in Year 1 of the grant, or the first month of a student’s enrollment, provides ample opportunity, over several years, for positive relationships to be created that will pay off each year – but perhaps most significantly, in the senior year, when parent *involvement* is critical (*For example, in completing the FAFSA, paying for college deposits, etc.*).

In this toolkit you will find tips and tools for successfully engaging your GEAR UP families:

- By phone
- In writing (mail, email, text message, flyers)
- Informally – meeting them where they are

In addition, this toolkit outlines a framework that empowers GEAR UP Staff to:

- Strategically and holistically implement a year-long plan of effective family engagement in a multi-cultural setting

Social Media (i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter) may also be effective methods for engaging GEAR UP families. However, creating an effective social media presence is beyond the scope of this toolkit. GEAR UP Staff, in communities where a large percentage of their GEAR UP families are likely to “follow” their social media accounts, and who are adept at maintaining an effective social media presence, are encouraged to use this approach as well.

Checklists for Family Engagement

1. Steps to take before beginning to engage families:

GEAR UP Specialists are encouraged to read through this list of tips and recommended best practices before beginning their efforts to engage parents and follow the recommendations as applicable to their situation (*i.e., prior experience, school demographics, and culture*).

- Communicate with your principal and/or supervisor to inform them of the GEAR UP family engagement standards and your parent engagement plans for the year.
- Read and follow your district policies and procedures, as well as FERPA, when making parent contacts.
 - Some schools require that front office staff be notified when you are making parent phone calls and/or have an auto phone message or text message scheduled in case they receive high volume return calls while you are on the phone or unavailable (many school numbers show the office phone on caller ID).
 - Most schools have specific procedures for home visits.
 - Some school districts require a parent contact log (check to see if your Student/Parent Service Sheet is sufficient).
 - There may be custody/contact orders you must abide by.
- Ask your principal/supervisor to post an introduction of you (perhaps a letter from you) and the GEAR UP program on the school's website and on the school's social media sites to inform families of your role, and where and how they can contact you. Consider creating a GEAR UP Facebook or Instagram page for your school.
- Request to be notified by administration and the counseling office when issues occur that impact any GEAR UP students so that you are always up to date on any changes in student status, such as suspensions, discipline, change in placement, or other information that might impact your parent engagement. This might entail that you attend counseling office meetings and administration meetings to establish positive working relationships with school staff so that you are valued and viewed as an important part of the team.
- Read Section 7 of this toolkit to ensure the appropriate strategic, holistic, culturally-sensitive approach is taken in all your family engagement efforts.
- If you have any issues or need support, contact the GEAR UP UTAH office. They want to ensure your success!

2. Engaging parents by phone

Personal phone calls to parents – especially when you are sharing positive news, opportunities, or valuable services – are an important and effective method for engaging parents. Started early in the program, they can lead strong, long-lasting relationships and increase the likelihood that parents will attend GEAR UP events.

Good reasons to call parents include:

- To introduce yourself and the GEAR UP program.
- To share positive updates or the potential that you witness in their child (*Example: calling right after their child's STEPPS*).
- To “specially” invite parents to an event or college visit (*even if it's not really “specially”*). When parents missed a GEAR UP event, to let them know you missed seeing them there and to provide information they may have missed.
- To address problems – Phone calls are a requirement in the GEAR UP absence intervention and drop-out retrieval standards. When calling for those purposes, refer to this checklist, as well as the applicable standards.

Tips and Recommended Best Practices for Parent Phone Calls

- **Schedule Carefully**
 - Schedule at a time when you won't be interrupted.
 - Pick a time and date when you feel focused, positive, and ready to handle wherever the conversation may go.
 - Try to pick dates, days of the week, and times of the day when parents are most likely to be available. Make notes if you learn time preferences about your parents, as some parents work nights.
 - Even when using the school's “all-call” to call parents, for example, to remind them of an upcoming event, think carefully about the time of day you want that call to go out
 - the time that most parents are likely to listen to it.
- **Prepare**
 - Check school records to determine what language is spoken at home; arrange for an interpreter if needed.
 - Notify front office staff of your plans (This can also be helpful for you as they might make you aware of a possible interruption such as a fire drill).
 - Have all information needed for the conversation at hand.
 - Check your school's student information system and the Compass database so you are aware of:

- The student's most recent grades, attendance, and behavior
- The relationship between the person you are contacting and the student (i.e. parent, grandparent, guardian, stepparent, foster parent, etc.), and for any non-contact orders
- If the parent/guardian has provided any communication instructions or preferences (best phone number, when to call, preferred mode of communication, etc.)
- The extent to which the student and parent have already participated in GEAR UP services and activities
- Have at hand a list of resources/phone numbers that parents might need (such as your school's counseling office, attendance office, or community resources such as food pantries, social service agencies, etc.)
- Prepare a script or call outline if needed (*See samples in Attachment 1*)

- **During the Call**
 - Generally, GEAR UP = good news for parents and families! Parent contact should be positive and supportive of students and the GEAR UP goals, even when you are calling about a problem (i.e., when calling for absence intervention, or because their student is at risk of losing credit). Your purpose for the call is to offer resources to help get the student on track, so be prepared with those resources.
 - Solicit questions and give your parents time to ask them.
 - If you do not have an answer to a parent's question, it is always okay to say, "Let me find out and get back to you." This is always better than giving out misinformation and having to correct it later. It is helpful if you can give them a time frame, so they know when to expect an answer.
 - Some of our families may have a negative association with the school. If you encounter an upset or angry parent, be prepared to stay calm and listen to them. You might be the first professional that they have been able to talk to about their concern. Even though you might not be able to address their complaint, listening to them can help them feel heard, which can help you develop rapport with them.
 - Provide parents with your contact information and procedures for getting in touch with you.

- **Follow Up**
 - If you give out information that you discover has been changed or updated, be sure to call and let the parent know as soon as the error or update has been discovered.

- If you promised to get back to parents with a resource, an answer, or information, be sure to do so.
- After the Call**
 - Log the contact/call with the parent, using the appropriate service type.

3. Engaging parents through text messaging

Technology has greatly changed the way people communicate. Fortunately, these technological changes have, in some ways, made it easier for school personnel to stay in touch with busy parents. For many parents (as well as students) today, text messaging is their preferred mode of communication. The vast majority of American adults own a cell phone, including 90% of households with children and 80.9% of Americans living below the poverty threshold. If/when you need to communicate with a parent about a topic that will require a lengthy, or in-depth conversation, a text message is often the first step to finding a convenient time for that conversation to happen in person or over the phone.

Many schools have their own text messaging system, perhaps embedded in the district student information system. Inquire to see what options are available for you to use with your families, and if the school prefers that you use their system – as opposed to your own.

Good reasons to text parents include:

- To welcome parents or students who enroll mid-year, to introduce yourself and invite them to call you to learn about GEAR UP.
- Sample: *"Hi, this is [name], and I'm the GEAR UP Staff at [name] high school. I just learned that [child's name] has enrolled at our school [today/this week], and I want to tell you about the GEAR UP program at our school, and let you know what we have to offer you and [child's name]. You can call me at ###-###-####. I hope to hear from you soon."*
- To share a quick or positive update or something positive you see in their child (Example: texting right after their child's first STEPPS).
- Sample: *"Just saw [child's name] receive his attendance award this morning. I'm so proud of him! OR "Just finished talking with [child's name] about his/her future plans. What a great kid! I'm so excited to help him/her achieve his/her dreams!"*
- To "specially" invite parents to an event or on a college visit (even if it's not really "specially").
- Sample: *"The GEAR UP FAFSA Fiesta is this Saturday – from 8 to 3. I really hope to see you and [child's name] there, so we can help him/her apply for more money to pay for college next year!"*
- When parents missed a GEAR UP event, to let them know you missed seeing them there and to invite them to call you to get the information they missed.
- Sample: *"I missed you at our Financial Aid Workshop last night. Sorry you couldn't make it. Call me so I can give you the info you missed!"*
- To invite the parent to set up a time to talk with you, in person or over the phone, about their child (perhaps a problem – phone calls are a requirement in the GEAR UP Absence Intervention and Dropout Retrieval standards. Texting to set up these calls is a good way to help you meet that requirement).

Sample: I'd like to talk to you about [child's name]. When would be a good time to call?"

Tips and recommended best practices for parent text messages

- Coordinate your efforts with the appropriate school staff to prevent duplication of content information.
- Be strategic about the time of day you send messages to families – picking times that are best for them, but also so that you'll be available to handle their responses.
- Keep your messages clear and brief.
- Limit the number of messages you send so that parents do not become overwhelmed or bothered.
- If the texts back and forth with parents constitute a service (i.e. counseling and advising), document the service in GEARS, using the appropriate Service Type.

More text messaging samples

- This is [your name], the GEAR UP Staff at [school name]. I hope to see you at our [name of event] on [date] at [time] in/at the [location]. For more details, call [phone number].
- Tutoring is available after school, Monday – Thursday. Please encourage your child to take advantage of this great resource.
- The GEAR UP Summer Bridge Program will be hosted at [location]. Students will be given parent information packets and applications tomorrow in their English class. Watch for it, and don't miss the deadline to apply!
- GEAR UP wants to share great news! Over 605 of parents indicated on our recent survey that childcare would make it easier for them to attend more GEAR UP events. In response, we're adding this service when we host our next Parent Night! Details to follow.

4. Engaging parents in writing

While contact by text and phone is likely to be the form of family engagement you use the most – because of its ease and convenience for both you and the parents you are trying to engage – written materials are still an important and sometimes necessary way to reach parents. Written materials may be:

- Mailed to the family’s home or P.O. Box.
- Sent home with students.
- Posted on your website; and/or sent by mail

Situations when written communication is preferred or necessary include:

- Information you want to share is lengthy and details may need to be referred to later (See Attachment 8 – Sample Parent Intro Letter)
- Parent/guardian signature is required
- Parent hasn’t responded to phone calls or text messages You want the communication to seem “special”
- “Recurring” communications, such as quarterly newsletters or monthly postcards, that parents come to expect on a regular basis

The checklist below provides steps to take and things to consider as you reach out to your GEAR UP families in writing:

- Formatting matters**
Think about the purpose of the document and format accordingly. For example, print “official” information on letterhead; make flyers about upcoming events attractive and attention-grabbing and worthy of hanging on the fridge (See example in Attachment 4); documents that require a signature should make that requirement in bold and be clear (See example in Attachment 5).
- Information should be clear, and easy to read**
Keep sentences simple and short; get to the point. If it’s too long, it won’t be read.
- Proofread**
Spell check helps, but don’t rely on it only. Make sure all needed information is included. For example, if you’re communicating about an event, ensure it includes the name of the event, the date, time, and location, and a brief description or purpose. Ask your colleagues to proofread for you!
- Print in color**
It increases the likelihood that parents will read the material.
- Personalize when possible**
Even when you’re doing a mass-mailing to all GEAR UP families, there are ways to make the document seem personal. Use the mail merge function in MSWord or your email application.

- **Always include your contact information**
Parents need to know who they can contact if they have questions about the written information. Always include your phone number, at minimum, and email address as well if there's room.
- **Include photos of students, if appropriate to the material**
Even if it's not "their kid", it might be their kid's friend, or they might be motivated to attend the next event so their kid's photo will appear in the next issue. (See sample GEAR UP Newsletter in the GEAR UP Handbook).
- **Bundle mailings strategically**
Including important GEAR UP documents with report cards when they are mailed home increases the potential that parents will read your handout. Talk to your principal early if this idea sounds like it would be effective at your school.
- **PDF**
If you're attaching a document to an email, convert it to a PDF. Formatting of word documents is dependent on the computer on which the document is opened. All of your nice fonts and artistic formatting could be lost when opened on a different computer.
- **Document all mailings in your Implementation Plan, per Data Documentation standards.**

5. Engaging parents at events

Face-to-face interactions at GEAR UP events are an important way to engage families. It may even be the most effective method – but only for those parents who attend. This is why engaging parents in writing, over the phone, by text message, and through social media is also so important.

Utah GEAR UP has developed minimum Standards for Events. These standards address requirements for working with outside speakers/presenters, scheduling and logistics, event promotion, materials for events, event feedback/evaluation, and required data documentation. GEARUP staff should read these documents at the beginning of the year, and review again in preparation for each event.

Parents are busy people. They may hold more than one job; have several children, and numerous other commitments. If they don't attend your events *do not* assume that it is because they don't care about their child's education. When busy people must choose between conflicting demands, they consider many factors such as: Which event was scheduled first? Which one will meet their needs the most? Which is the most convenient (date, time, location)? Which one sounds more fun or interesting? Who invited them and how much do they care about their relationship with that person?

This section of the Family Engagement Toolkit supplements the GEAR UP Minimum Standards for Events by providing suggestions on how to increase attendance at your events.

What are Gear Up Family Events?

Each GEAR UP school has specific, required parent/family events included in its Implementation Plan. Each event has an associated budget (where applicable). Examples of GEAR UP Parent/Family Events include:

- GEAR UP Parent and Student Kick-Off Event: Provides an orientation to GEAR UP the first year and provides an overview of what's to come each subsequent year.
- GEAR UP Parent Financial Literacy Workshop: Provides information about the value and cost of postsecondary education and options for paying for it.
- GEAR UP Summer Bridge Informational Meeting: Provides information about the GEAR UP Summer Bridge programs from grades 8 to 9 and 12 – college.
- GEAR UP Academic Success Workshop: Provides information on ways parents can support and encourage their child through high school.
- College and Career Fair: Provides families with direct access to admissions representatives and job recruiters, so participants can learn about options available for their child after high school.
- FAFSA Workshops: Provides hands-on assistance to seniors and their parents in completing the FAFSA.

Strategies to increase attendance at GEAR UP Family Events

Set, and communicate the date as early as possible

Read through your Implementation Plan and figure out your overall approach/master plan. Referring to the school's calendar, schedule all your events for the semester – or even year – as early as possible. Then send out "Save the Date" emails, texts, postcards, etc. If you're the first event on a parent's calendar, they may be more inclined to work around it as other invitations come their way later.

- **Develop relationships with GEAR UP parents well in advance of your events**
Once they know you and know how much you care about their child, parents will be less likely to say "no" when you invite them to an event.
- **Ask for input beforehand and feedback afterwards**
Early in the school year – even before school starts – reach out to parents (by phone, at other school events, etc.) to tell them about the kinds of events (topics/content) you have scheduled for the year and ask them about their needs/preferences. Consider sending an e-survey to solicit planning input. For example:
 - Question: Which of the following would attract you to attend a GEAR UP event?
 - a. **Childcare**
 - b. **Food**
 - c. **Guest Speaker**
 - d. **Student panel**
 - e. **School administrators**

Read every completed event/workshop evaluation form after the event and follow up with parents either in general or specifically to let them know their concerns and/or suggestions have been read and are being taken into consideration (See Attachment 7 for a Sample Parent Feedback Form).

- **Call parents to find out why they didn't attend**
This can give you insights into adjustments you could make in the future to increase parent attendance and participation. For example: Would on-site childcare have allowed more parents to attend? If you had joined with another school event, could you have "caught" more parents?
- **Personalize invitations**
You can use the mail merge feature in MSWord but adding a handwritten note to form your letter or flyer (i.e., "I really hope to see you there. Emily is such a great kid!") can create a bigger response.
- **Have students make presentations at the event**
If parents must get their students to the event to make a presentation, they are likely to stay for the event themselves. Moreover, parents usually enjoy student-led presentations.
- **Ask parents to call other parents to ask them to attend**
Peer pressure can work on adults too. If their friend is calling to invite them and will be there too – that parent is more likely to show up.

- **Speak their language**
Ensure all communications about your event are in the languages of your GEAR UP families and that information will be presented in their native language at the event.
- **With approval, and within federal guidelines, provide food**
And make sure your invitations and reminders mention it!
- **Provide multiple reasons for attending**
Include in your invitations, emails, and marketing materials (including on your website) the valuable take-aways of the event. For example: What will the attendees learn? Who are the speakers or distinguished guests? What is the schedule or agenda? Photos and quotes from past events; any “extras” such as food, door prizes, or games (See flyer in Attachment 4 as an example).
- **Multiple reminders**
If you start with a “Save the Date” email, text, or postcard early in the semester, follow up with multiple invitations and reminders. The initial invitation should go out 4 weeks in advance and it is recommended that you email reminders 14 days, 7 days, and 3 days prior to your event. One last reminder, the day before your event is best provided by “All Call” or text messaging. Always provide information about how parents can contact you with questions.
- **Use incentives if possible and tell parents about them when you’re promoting the event** You may use GEAR UP funds to purchase certain types of incentives, check with your supervisor regarding budget and/or you may solicit donations from local businesses for items that could be used as door prizes/incentives. When you’re notifying parents about the event be sure to include information about anything they might “win” by attending.

6. Engaging parents informally, meeting them where they are

As noted in Section 5, GEAR UP parents, like everyone else, are busy. It would be unreasonable to expect they could make it to every GEAR UP event, or even be available every time you call them. For some parents, attending even one school event is challenging. Therefore, to the extent possible, GEAR UP Staff are encouraged to engage GEAR UP families in a variety of ways outside of formal GEAR UP events. To help ensure the connection that begins during these informal meetings continues, always have a supply of your business cards with you at these events. Two examples are provided below, but there may be other opportunities unique to your community

□ Attend school events to engage with families

Parents may attend school events such as required registration events, parent-student-teacher conferences, and award ceremonies. Be visible and present as families arrive at these events to greet them, check-in, and talk briefly. Approach these interactions purposefully, with the aim to get to know your families, not just to deliver your content or information.

□ Seek opportunities to participate in informal/social activities in the broader school community

Parents may attend social events at school, such as after-school sporting events or tournaments, academic competitions, performances, and art shows with which you are not formally involved, and other community celebrations, fairs, or events. Attending such school and community activities can support your family engagement efforts in several ways:

- It can increase your awareness of community norms so you can better relate to your families
- It can create shared experiences that can serve as conversation starters or learning opportunities
- It provides opportunities for you to chat with your families in a comfortable, non-threatening setting
- It helps to build trust, as families see you as part of their communities

7. A framework for strategic, culturally sensitive family engagement

The considerations and recommendations listed below are intended to help schools successfully and effectively engage parents from any background, with the goal of improving student achievement.

- Create a team that focuses on family engagement schoolwide/districtwide
Working as a team can enable you to reach more families and help ensure that family engagement strategies can be sustained after the grant ends. To form your team, consider a diverse group of individuals such as parents/guardians, counselors, teachers, administrators, students, parent liaisons, school-based social workers, district-level staff, and other community members.

Effective family engagement must be part of a schoolwide effort and must involve district leadership or school principals. Therefore, GEAR UP Staff may serve on the school's family engagement team to ensure GEAR UP efforts are coordinated with the school's efforts and that the school's family engagement team considers college awareness and preparation as priorities for their schoolwide efforts. However, the focus of GEAR UP Specialist's efforts toward family engagement should be on directly serving the GEAR UP families.

- Identify previous and current successful family outreach at your school and build on this. Build on success. Talk to staff members and community members to learn about existing efforts and systems that are effectively engaging families at your school. You'll earn respect by showing others you respect and value them and their experiences.
- Coordinate and communicate with school staff regarding family engagement
Communicating with school staff about your family engagement plans, especially those who work directly with GEAR UP students, can help you achieve your family engagement goals. Suggestions for communicating with staff about your parent engagement plans and goals include:
 - Meet with staff and plan a parent engagement calendar for the year. (See attachment 5 for examples). Make sure information is being shared via e-mails, newsletters, website, face to face, texting, posters, flyers, etc. well ahead of time. Find out what your families' needs, and concerns are. Conduct a needs assessment, such as a quick survey (available in different languages) Have practices been implemented to involve uninvolved families?
 - Reach out to the school and families to collaborate and build relationships.
 - Remind teachers periodically throughout the year to encourage parents to contact you as a resource.
 - Utilize the standard ways that your school communicates updates and information with one another to inform your family engagement plans *and* *outcomes*. For Example: "First Tuesday of the month is next week, and you know what that means – GEAR UP Taco Tuesday! Our topic this month will be "College Fit". Please encourage your students to attend with their parents." *OR* "Over 100 people attended the GEAR UP Kick-Off on August 27th! Parents seemed very enthusiastic and eager to be involved." Some schools communicate these types of messages during regularly scheduled staff meetings. Others use email or interoffice mail (notes left in mailboxes), or more formal written reporting processes.

- Coordinate with your counseling office on an ongoing basis to avoid duplication of services and conflicts in schedules.
 - Teachers might consider offering extra credit to students for presenting at GEAR UP parent events. You could even work collaboratively with a teacher, having students complete career exploration projects throughout the quarter that culminate in presentations by students at a parent event.
 - As your relationships with teachers, administrators, and staff at your school develop, don't be afraid to ask for their support, as volunteers or speakers at your family events.
- Actively value and build on families' strengths
- Acknowledge and value knowledge – In working with families, it is important to value the skills/knowledge the families you serve come with and build upon those experiences and view them as assets.
 - Strengthen parent networks – it is common for parents who may know each other from the neighborhood or because their children are friends, to advise one another, help each other navigate new situations and address school issues, and support one another's goals. During events, workshops, etc., allow time for parents to network, facilitate activities that support relationship-building among parents, and create spaces at your school that are family/parent friendly – such as hallways with photos of families at events or graduations, office waiting areas with inviting visuals in languages spoken in the community you serve, and when possible, toys or books for younger children.
 - Ask parents to volunteer at your family events – in varying capacities depending on their unique strengths. You could have some parents help with the sign-in sheets as people enter, to ensure the sign-in sheets meet GEAR UP's data documentation standards (legible; student name associated with each parent name, etc.). Other parents might help with technology or present about their careers. Some may be willing to make phone calls to encourage parents to attend your events. Most often people are flattered to be asked, as it shows you value and trust them.
 - Consider having a Parent Advisory Board – the board members can support you with ideas, strategies, and support for getting other parents involved. Again, parents you ask to serve on this board are likely to be flattered. It will be important to listen to and heed the advice of this board if you want them to stay active and involved. Communicate with your supervisor prior to setting this up to solicit their suggestions and find out any requirements for establishing such a body within your district, and to ensure administrative support.
 - Avoid "othering" – "othering" is to view or treat a person or group of people as intrinsically different from oneself. Examples include describing families you work with using phrases

like “they don’t understand” or pointing out that someone’s ethnic name is *different*. Instead, use inclusive language, such as “some of our families may not yet be familiar with...”, or “I have not heard that name before”.

Practice awareness of deficit-model thinking, and replace it with empathy, asset-based thinking, unconditional positive regard, goal-oriented thinking.

Examples of deficit model thinking may include	Consider a different perspective:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Parents didn’t attend our event because they’re not interested” ▪ “Parents don’t understand the education system/values because they’re from a different country/community” ▪ “Parents don’t speak English, so they can’t communicate with the school” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The times we are available to meet with parents don’t work well with their schedules. Let’s find an alternative. ▪ Parents have experience in a different education system. What goals and values for their child do we have in common? ▪ It must be difficult to be unable to express your questions and concerns about your child’s education. Who in our program, school, or community can help translate and interpret so that we can communicate with families?

□ **Build Relationships and Rapport**

Generally, people are more willing to believe information and accept advice from a trusted source with which they have a relationship, as opposed to a stranger. This is particularly true when it comes to advice about their children. When parents feel that the source of information truly knows and cares about their children, they are more willing to listen. Therefore, begin engagement efforts with the goal of establishing a relationship first – then share information and discuss outcomes. These efforts should start as soon as possible upon a student’s enrollment in the GEAR UP school, as it takes time to develop meaningful relationships. Some ways to establish authentic relationships with families are:

- Make positive calls – at the beginning of the school year, semester, or quarter, call families to share positive updates on their students. Make the first call they receive from you a positive one – rather than one of concern about the student.
- Conduct home visits – visit family’s homes to learn about them, to get to know who they are, and to see how many family members are supporting the child at home. Discuss their aspirations for their child and identify any challenges that you can support them with. Always schedule your visit in advance and always conduct home visits with a colleague.

□ **Communication and Messaging**

- Always practice two-way communication – use every interaction you have with a family to not only provide information, but also to solicit information from them about their expectations, hopes, goals, and concerns. Find out what their expectations are of you,

for GEAR UP, or for the school. Invite their participation by asking questions during in-person or phone conversations or solicit input through surveys or evaluations (See Attachment 7 for an example). Be sure to have a “Comment Box” in your office or the school’s designated family space. Consider conducting polls or surveys via text (See examples related to soliciting input in Section 5).

- Make information and opportunities for communication accessible – to ensure all families receive the same type and frequency of information and to ensure your outreach is equitable. Communicate with families via all platforms available to you: Telephone (Auto calls AND personal calls); text messaging (programmed AND personalized); emails; website announcements; social media; newsletters mailed or sent home with students (See GEAR UP Handbook for a Sample Newsletter, and Attachment 6 for Sample Newsletter Mailing Cover); informational letters/mailers (See Attachment 8 for Sample Letters); workshops (one-time and series); one-on-one meetings; small group meetings; and home visits.
 - Translate all content to other languages spoken/read in your community.
 - Always follow through with parent questions, concerns, or information you commit to researching or sharing.
 - In every communication, inform parents of the best times and ways to reach you. Provide alternate contacts or numbers outside of those times.
- **Ensure Your Engagement Strategy is Culturally Informed**
- Every person and family have customs, beliefs, and experiences that shape their perspectives. While it’s not possible to become an expert in every culture, it is important to learn about the culture of the communities, schools, students, and families we serve. Learn about others by asking with authentic interest and neutral language (note the previously listed tips in this toolkit relate to relationship-building and communication). It is through the foundation of relationships and communication with families that culturally informed practices can grow.
- Some examples of culturally informed practices include:
- Scheduling events to avoid conflicts with cultural holidays
 - Using inclusive language – consider diversity of races, ethnicities, abilities, gender identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic experiences.
 - Selecting a room/space on the school campus for events that is accessible – close to parking with access to ramps or elevators.
 - When appropriate, selecting meeting places for school meetings or workshops that are located closer to where most of your families live, or close to public transportation stops. These places can include elementary schools, public libraries, community centers, etc.
 - Collaborating with community members who can inform culturally relevant practices in your community.
 - For more detailed information on Cultural Awareness practices, visit: [Guide to Cultural Awareness for State and Local PTAs](#)
- **Link Every Interaction to a Goal**
- Ensure that every conversation, event, or activity with and for families – outside of relationship-

building conversations which have their own goals – has a clear goal and includes three components:

1. Share what you would like families to know. For example, the importance of education, career pathway information, financial aid/literacy information, admission requirements, need for the student’s improvement, the student’s accomplishments, etc. In other words, your objective is to provide specific content: “the major courses your child should complete in high school are...”
2. Inform families that their involvement is important and key to their child’s success. Demonstrate that you value them, and affirm their importance: “as a parent, you play the biggest role in ensuring your child is successful in their academic career...”
3. Inform families as to what they can do specifically at home to support their child in achieving the desired outcomes. Your objective is to make a call-to-action by the parent, and to clearly outline their role: “here’s list of the major courses. Your child will register for classes in February, so after that date, check in with him/her to see if they picked the ones that I’ve highlighted on the list. Call me if you have any questions...”

- Plan Events with Families’ Needs in Mind – Their time, schedule, interests, etc.

Incentivize family participation by including student involvement as presenters, greeters, volunteers, etc.

- Schedule events during a time of day that works best for your community. Some families may work in the daytime so evenings might be best. Other communities may have a large population of adults that work nights. Consider hosting the same meeting/ events at multiple times. Another consideration is for those communities where seasonal work is common. If families typically have work seasons, try to schedule most major meetings/events around those months.
- Consider the length of time families might be available. If time is limited, schedule short check-ins during drop-off or pick-up times.
- When hosting events on campus:
 - Reserve a space that is appropriate in size that includes necessary technology and is accessible to all.
 - Reserve and clearly mark parking that is close to the meeting place and create and display posters or signs that guide parents to the right room/location.
 - Solicit support from greeters to guide families to the meeting room.
 - Arrange childcare by student volunteers with an approved teacher/advisor.
 - Serve food if the event extends over a long period of time or if the event occurs during typical mealtimes. Be sure to get GEAR UP approval for all food costs ahead of time.

- Share Relevant College and Career Readiness Content with Families

For example: The college and career-readiness topics that are most important for families to be familiar with when their child is in 8th and 9th grade are:

- ▶ GEAR UP defines “college” as any type of education after high school, and may include trade school, community college, or university
- ▶ The importance of postsecondary education
- ▶ The admission requirements for public universities in Utah and that the classes students

take in high school matter

- ▶ The various forms of financial aid available, emphasizing that college can be affordable, while also covering the cost of college
- ▶ Grades and attendance are important because they may help a child get into the school of their choice, and may help them to earn more scholarships
- ▶ The meaning of GPA, and how to calculate it

Most importantly, share with families that:

Regardless of how much or little parents know about school or college requirements, it is important that parents share with their child every day that they value education and that they have high expectations – that they believe in their child’s abilities, that their child will accomplish their goals, and that they’re certain their child will have a positive impact in their school and community now, and in the future.

When sharing college access information, be sensitive and aware that parents might not be excited about their child going to college until they understand the process and the motivation behind this goal and more importantly, how this aligns to their values and customs. Remember that parents have various jobs and careers, so be aware when using examples of jobs that may be more or less desirable. Refrain from expressing the idea that college graduates are “better” than others. Use facts to encourage a college-going culture and do not minimize experiences and contributions of those without college degrees.

□ **Get More Ideas**

An effective family engagement strategy that supports a college-going culture is unique to every community. For an example of an 8th or 9th grade family engagement plan for the year, see the Outline in Attachment 9.

Appendix 1:

Sample Forms, Letters, & Documents

Attachment 1: Sample GEAR UP Phone Script: Initial Contact

Attachment 2: Sample GEAR UP Phone Script: Positive Updates

Attachment 3: Sample GEAR UP Phone Script: Attendance /Credit Loss

Attachment 4: Sample Event Flyer

Attachment 5: Sample Letter or Form Requiring Signatures

Attachment 6: Sample Cover for Newsletter Mailings

Attachment 7: Sample Parent Event Feedback Form

Attachment 8: Sample Letters to Parents

Attachment 9: Family Engagement Services/Events –
Minimum Standards

[Download Attachment 1](#)

Sample Phone Script: *Initial Contact*

**Feel free to use your own scripts or change to one that best serves your parents and school.*

Student Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Date of Contact: _____

Start and End Times: _____

Duration: _____

Hello –

This is **Name** and I'm the GEAR UP Staff from **Name** High School. May I please speak with **Parent Name**? Is this a good time to talk to you for a few minutes about **Student Name** and how they can benefit from GEAR UP?

**If "no"*

"What is the best time to call you back, or would you like me to call you when you are available?"

Follow Up Notes:

**If "yes"*

I want to let you know that **Student Name** is part of an amazing program at our school. It is called GEAR UP and it will allow your child the opportunity to receive additional resources and information about planning and preparing for education options after high school. Hopefully, you have been able to read the letter I sent you describing the program, but if not, detailed information about GEAR UP is available on the school website. As the program GU Staff, I wanted to let you know I'm here to support you and your child. Do you have any insights or things that you would like to share with me that could help me best support **Student Name**?

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

**If "no"*

Thank you for allowing me to talk with you about GEAR UP. We are hosting a family event on Date about Topic and we will have (**resources, experts, childcare etc.**) I'll be sending reminders (by text/flyers. Info sent home with students, etc.) so watch for those!

**If they have questions, listen to them and if needed, you can always call them back with answers. You can also have a list of phone numbers if you think it would be better for them to call directly.*

Again, thank you for taking my call. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me.

[Download Attachment 2](#)

Sample Phone Script: *Share Positive Student Updates*

Student Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Date of Contact: _____

Start and End Times: _____

Duration: _____

Hello –

This is **Name**, the **Name** High School GEAR UP Staff. May I please speak to **Parent Name**? Is this a good time for you to talk with me for a few minutes about **Student Name**?

**If “no”*

When is a better time to reach you?

**If “yes”*

The reason for my call today is that I wanted you to know...**(that I’m so proud...I’ve been very impressed...that I noticed that...that I just met with [Student Name] to discuss his future plans, and...)**.

We really appreciate your child and this type of **(achievement, improvement, behavior)**. I just wanted to say thank you **(or to congratulate you)** and to see if you have any questions for me today about GEAR UP or about...

Thank you for taking my call. I also wanted to remind you that the next GEAR UP family event is scheduled for **Date and Time**. I hope you can make it!

[Download Attachment 3](#)

Sample Phone Script: Attendance Issues/Credit Loss

Student Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

Date of Contact: _____

Start and End Times: _____

Duration: _____

This is **Name**, the GEAR UP Staff at **Name** High School. May I please speak to **Parent Name**? Is this a good time to talk for a few minutes about services that are available to support **Student Name** with **Problem or Concern**?

**If “no”*

When is a good time for me to call back, or would you like to call me back when it’s a good time for you?

Follow Up Notes:

**If “yes”*

Great! First of all I want you to know that I enjoy working with **Student Name** (or start with a strength, achievement, or potential: “I’m proud of Student Name perseverance in their math class”). *Pause for parent’s response.*

I really want **Student Name** to be successful this school year and one thing I did notice is that **Student Name** has **XX** of absences this semester, and at **XX** absences, students lose credit. If that happens, **Student Name** might have to attend summer school or a special credit recovery class before or after school. Worst case scenario, **Student Name** wouldn’t graduate on time. I would prefer that didn’t happen, and I imagine you feel the same.

I’m calling you now because if we act now, he/she still has the chance to catch up and stay on track. **Student Name** is passing **XX** classes currently, but his/her absences are affecting **XX** classes. What are your thoughts and/or insights about the reasons they are missing school (or this class/these classes)?

Possible answers and possible solutions (check with your district to customize your script):

- *The student has chronic medical issues – give the parent the school’s policy and procedure for this situation.*
- *The student is babysitting younger siblings – give parent resources for community assistance. You might say, “Let me talk with the counseling office to see if they have any other suggestions or ideas”. Some schools are able to allow a later start for students with special situations if they are on-track credit wise.*

- *The student does not like school – explore more with the parent to see what the root issues are and if the issues are extensive, consider scheduling a meeting with the parents and the student’s guidance counselor.*
- *Academic Struggles – inform parents of tutoring availability; help them to resolve any time conflicts. Suggest that the parent encourage the student to talk to their teacher or teachers and if need, have you or the parent follow up. Inform the parent about the school process for parent meetings.*
- *Student is not connecting with school – provide information about school support groups, mentoring, or peer mentoring, or counseling office, and give students a list of clubs and extra-curricular activities and organizations. Tell the parent their child is always welcome in the GEAR UP room.*
- *The parent is at a loss as how to motivate their child to attend school – provide understanding and empathy towards the parent – “what can I do to help?”, “would you like for me to talk with him/her on the phone to see if we can come up with a plan?” Provide parents with as many GEAR UP resources and school opportunities as possible so they can encourage their child and support them as they take advantage of the opportunities. For example, “Did you know that **Student Name** can eat his/her lunch in the GEAR UP room?” Offer other applicable GEAR UP or school supports.*

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I will be sure to follow up with **Student Name** this week, but your support makes all the difference!

GEAR UP

Freshman
Kick-off

TACO Tuesday
Sept 4th
6-8pm

**Come join us and hear from students
and administrators about how to make
it a great 4 years!**

Presentations by students * Door prizes

**Taco Bar catered by Provo Culinary Arts
students**

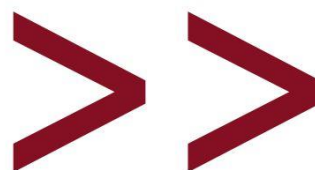
GEAR UP

More info on our Website: uvu.edu/gearup
Contact Madeline@uvu.edu



Do you need help with

FAFSA?



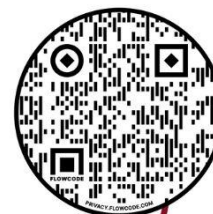
Parents- Please join our FASFA night! It is a FREE event to learn about what FASFA is and step-by-steps on how to complete the FAFSA form and get college financial Information

October 21, 2022

7 -8:30 pm

West High School Caffeteria

Register for this FREE event



801.863.6000 gearup@uvu.edu

Contact: XXXX @ XXXXX

[Download attachment 5](#)

Sample Letter/Form Requiring Signatures

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

**SIGNATURES REQUIRED BELOW*

Our school is taking part in the 2019 Student Aspirations Survey sponsored by the GEAR Up Utah program. The survey will ask about student perception about college and their postsecondary aspirations. The survey will ask about knowledge of college admissions, costs associated with college, and college preparation. It will also ask about student participation, student’s evaluation of current GEAR UP services in their school, and parental support for postsecondary education.

Students will be asked to fill out a questionnaire that takes about 45 minutes to complete.

Doing this paper and pencil survey will cause no risk to your child. The survey has been designed to protect your child’s privacy. Students will not put their names on the survey and no school or student will ever be mentioned by name in the results report. Your child will get no benefit right away from taking the survey. However, the results of this survey will help GEAR UP students in the future, by improving the program to meet student and parent needs. We would like all the GEAR UP students in the school to take the survey, but the survey is voluntary. Students can skip any questions they choose not to answer.

Please read the section below. If you approve of your child taking the survey, check the box and return the form to the school no later than Date. Please call or email me with any questions you may have: **Name, email, phone number**.

Thank you.

Student’s Name: _____ Grade: _____

I have read this form and know what the survey is about. My child will take part in this survey

Parent’s Signature: _____ Date: _____

Phone number: _____



[Download attachment 6](#)

Sample Cover for Newsletter Mailings

Dear Parents,

Your students are *juniors!* We can hardly believe how fast the time passes.

As you know, we meet with every single GEAR UP student each year to check that they are on track for graduation and their own postsecondary plan.

This year, we are talking to students about applying to colleges, universities, and vocational schools, placement testing/ financial aid, taking college courses before graduation, scholarships, and so much more.

As we do every year, we are also planning and hosting many different activities with the goal of exposing students and families to postsecondary options and other opportunities. Students have participated in college and career fairs, university field trips, financial aid workshops, and a college informational workshop held in the evening at UVU, so families could attend.

We will continue to work with students throughout this year to provide information and services they need to successfully transition to postsecondary education programs after high school. See "Upcoming Events" in this newsletter.

As always, our door is open to parents and students. If you have any questions, please feel free to call us at XXX.XXX.XXXX. We are always happy to help you and your student with any questions.



Sincerely,
GEAR UP Specialist(s)
Name

----- Fold Here

School Name
Mailing Address



[Download Attachment 7](#)

GEAR UP Parent Event Feedback Form

For Internal Use Only: School: Event: Date:
--

Thank you for attending this GEAR UP event. Your involvement makes a meaningful difference in your child's success. Please give us your feedback so we can keep improving the services and events we provide.

1. Please evaluate the quality of this GEAR UP event by circling the number that corresponds to your response or by filling in the corresponding bubble like this: •

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
A. This event gave me some help or information I needed.	5	4	3	2	1
B. This event helped me to prepare my child for entering and succeeding in college or a career.	5	4	3	2	1

C. Overall, the quality of this GEAR UP event was...	Excellent 	Good 	OK 	Poor 
--	---	--	--	--

2. What did you find most helpful at this event?

3. How could this event be improved?

4. What additional information do you need from us to support your student's success?

Your student's name (Optional): _____

Thank you! Please return the form before you leave.

[Download attachment 8](#)

Sample Parent Letters

Sample letters include:

- ▶ Welcome Letter (English & Spanish) – Describes the GEAR UP Program
- ▶ Postsecondary Plan Letters (English & Spanish) – These inform parents what their child’s postsecondary plans are:

Workforce
Continuing
Education

Welcome Letter

School Letterhead

To: Parent or Guardian of **Student Name**

From: **Name**, GEAR UP Staff

Date: **Date**

The Utah Department of Education and GEAR UP Utah are pleased to welcome you and your child to the GEAR UP Class of **Year** at **School Name**!

GEAR UP, which stands for, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, is a free program that helps students succeed in school, and learn about choices for education after high school, and how to pay for it. GEAR UP believes that every student should have the opportunity to continue their education after high school, and that every student should receive the support and information needed throughout middle and high school to successfully pursue those opportunities after graduation. As your student enters the Class of **Year**, we welcome you to the GEAR UP family.

What kind of services does GEAR UP provide?

GEAR UP provides GEAR UP Staff at each school. My job as the GU Staff at **School Name** is to help students succeed. A signature service of GEAR UP has been a Student Transcript Evaluation and Postsecondary Planning Session (STEPPS) for every student, every year. This year, the STEPPS and STEPPS Follow-Ups will focus on **Name the objectives for this year**. I will be meeting with new students as soon as possible to help them evaluate their school progress, help them identify their postsecondary plans (University/College, Trade School, Military, or Workforce), and to assist them in taking the steps necessary to reach their goals. If you would like more information about STEPPS, please contact me.

How can families be involved in GEAR UP?

According to experts, when parents are involved in their child's education, student's grades, attendance, and behavior improve. GEAR UP is always interested in hearing from you about what your needs are and how the program is benefiting your child. We welcome any suggestions you may have to enhance our program to meet your student's needs. We are all part of a team dedicated to your child's success!

I look forward to working with you and your **XX** grader throughout this year. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have, or if you would like more information. I can be reached by phone at **Phone Number**, or by email at **Email Address**.

Sincerely,

Name
GEAR UP Staff

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs

Welcome Letter

School Letterhead

Para: Padre o Tutor del **Name of Student**
 De: **Name**, Especialista en GEAR UP
 Date: **Date**

¡El Departamento de Educación de UTAH y GEAR UP UTAH se complacen en darle la bienvenida a usted y a su hijo a la Clase del **Year** de GEAR UP en **School Name**!

GEAR UP, que significa obtener conocimiento y preparación temprana para los programas de pregrado, es un programa gratuito que ayuda a los estudiantes a tener éxito en la escuela y a aprender sobre las opciones de educación después de la escuela secundaria y cómo pagarla. GEAR UP cree que cada estudiante debería tener la oportunidad de continuar su educación después de la escuela secundaria, y que cada estudiante debería recibir el apoyo y la información necesarios en la escuela intermedia y secundaria para aprovechar esas oportunidades después de la graduación. Cuando su estudiante ingrese a la clase del **Year**, le damos la bienvenida a la familia GEAR UP.

¿Qué tipo de servicios proporciona GEAR UP?

GEAR UP proporciona especialistas en GEAR UP en cada escuela. Mi trabajo como Especialista en **School Name** es ayudar a los estudiantes a tener éxito. Un servicio exclusivo de GEAR UP ha sido una evaluación de transcripción de estudiantes y una sesión de planificación postsecundaria (STEPPS) para cada estudiante, cada año. Este año, los pasos STEPPS y STEPSS se centrarán en **Name the objectives for this year**. Me reuniré con los nuevos estudiantes lo antes posible para ayudarlos a evaluar el progreso de su escuela, ayudarlos a identificar sus planes postsecundarios (Universidad / Colegio, Escuela de Comercio, Fuerzas Armadas o Fuerza Laboral) y ayudarlos a tomar los pasos necesarios para alcanzar sus objetivos Si desea más información sobre STEPSS, contácteme.

¿Cómo pueden participar las familias en GEAR UP?

Según los expertos, cuando los padres participan en la educación de sus hijos, las calificaciones, la asistencia y el comportamiento de los estudiantes mejoran. GEAR UP siempre está interesado en saber de usted cuáles son sus necesidades y cómo el programa está beneficiando a su hijo. Agradecemos cualquier sugerencia que tenga para mejorar nuestro programa para satisfacer las necesidades de su estudiante. ¡Todos somos parte de un equipo dedicado al éxito de su hijo!

Espero con interés trabajar con usted y su estudiante de **XX** durante este año. No dude en ponerse en contacto conmigo si tiene alguna pregunta o si desea obtener más información. Me pueden contactar por teléfono al **Phone Number** o por correo electrónico a la **Email Address**.

Sinceramente,

Name
 Especialista en GEAR UP

Student's Plan - Workforce:

School Letterhead

Dear Parent of **Student First and Last Name**,

The GEAR UP mission at **School Name** is to increase the number of students who continue their education beyond high school. A signature service of GEAR UP is a Student Transcript Evaluation and Postsecondary Planning Session (STEPPS) for every student, every year. I have worked with each student to help them decide their specific plans for after high school. This year, I will meet with **Student Name** to provide assistance with the necessary steps to achieve **Student Name** plan.

According to our records, **Student Name** plans to enter the workforce full-time after high school graduation. I can help **Student Name** prepare a resume or fill out job applications if that would be helpful. Or, if **He/She** has changed plans and would like to combine work with community college, vocational school, or to attend a postsecondary education program full-time, please contact me as soon as possible, and I will be happy to provide financial aid information and assist with college applications.

Sincerely,

Name
GEAR UP Staff

Gaining **E**arly **A**wareness and **R**eadiness for **U**ndergraduate **P**rograms

Student's Plan – Workforce (Spanish):

School Letterhead

Estimado padre del **Student First and Last Name**,

La misión de GEAR UP en **School Name** es aumentar el número de estudiantes que se gradúan de la escuela secundaria y continúan su educación más allá de la escuela secundaria. Un servicio exclusivo de GEAR UP es una evaluación de transcripción de estudiantes y una sesión de planificación postsecundaria (STEPPS) para cada estudiante, cada año. He trabajado con cada estudiante para ayudarlos a decidir sus planes específicos para después de la secundaria. Este año, me reuniré con el **Student Name** para brindar asistencia con los pasos necesarios para lograr **Student Name** plan.

Según nuestros registros, el **Student Name** planea ingresar a la fuerza laboral a tiempo completo después de la graduación de la escuela secundaria. Puedo ayudar a **Student Name** a preparar un currículum vitae o completar solicitudes de empleo si eso fuera útil. O, si **He/She** ha cambiado de planes y quisiera combinar el trabajo con un colegio comunitario, una escuela vocacional o asistir a un programa de educación postsecundaria a tiempo completo, comuníquese conmigo lo antes posible y con gusto le brindaré ayuda financiera. Información y asistencia con solicitudes para la universidad.

Sinceramente,

Name

Especialista en GEAR UP

Gaining **E**arly **A**wareness and **R**eadiness for **U**ndergraduate **P**rograms

Student's Plan – Continuing Education:

School Letterhead

Dear Parent of **Student First and Last Name**,

The GEAR UP mission at **School Name** is to increase the number of students who continue their education beyond high school. A signature service of GEAR UP is a Student Transcript Evaluation and Postsecondary Planning Session (STEPPS) for every student, every year. I have worked with each student to help them decide their specific plans for after high school. This year, I will meet with **Student Name** to provide assistance with the necessary steps to achieve **Student Name** plan.

According to our records, the **Student Name** plans to attend **First Choice College** after high school graduation. High school years can be very busy for students and parents, and I want to be as helpful as possible to guide **Student Name** through the application process and help explore financial aid opportunities. If **Student Name** has changed education plans after high school, contact me immediately so I can provide adequate assistance.

To be considered for financial aid, you and **Student Name** must complete a "FAFSA" (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Federal grants cannot be awarded until the FAFSA has been submitted, so it is extremely important. In order to access certain U.S. Department of Education websites, students and parents are required to create an FSA (Federal Student Aid) ID, consisting of a username and password. If you and/or your student have not yet created the FSA ID, please visit [Filling out the FAFSA form](#) to create one. Please contact me if you are unable to create an FSA ID. I will be in contact with you in the coming weeks and months with more information about the FAFSA.

Please contact me if you have any questions. I look forward to working with you and **Student Name** throughout the year.

Sincerely,

Name
GEAR UP Staff

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs

Student's Plan – Continuing Education (Spanish):

School Letterhead

Estimado padre del **Student First and Last Name**,

La misión de GEAR UP en **School Name** es aumentar el número de estudiantes que se gradúan de la escuela secundaria y continúan su educación más allá de la escuela secundaria. Un servicio exclusivo de GEAR UP es una evaluación de transcripción de estudiantes y una sesión de planificación postsecundaria (STEPPS) para cada estudiante, cada año. He trabajado con cada estudiante para ayudarlos a decidir sus planes específicos para después de la secundaria. Este año, me reuniré con el **Student Name** para brindar asistencia con los pasos necesarios para lograr **Student Name** plan.

Según nuestros registros, el **Student Name** planea asistir a **First Choice College** después de la graduación de la escuela secundaria. Los años de la escuela secundaria pueden ser muy ocupados para los estudiantes y los padres, y quiero ser lo más útil posible para guiar a **Student Name** a través del proceso de solicitud y ayudar a explorar oportunidades de ayuda financiera. Si **Student Name** ha cambiado los planes de educación después de la escuela secundaria, comuníquese conmigo de inmediato para que pueda brindarle la asistencia adecuada.

Para ser considerado para recibir ayuda financiera, usted y **Student Name** deben completar una "FAFSA" (Solicitud gratuita de ayuda federal para estudiantes). Las subvenciones federales no pueden otorgarse hasta que se presente la FAFSA, por lo que es extremadamente importante. Para acceder a ciertos sitios web del Departamento de Educación de EE. UU., Los estudiantes y los padres deben crear una identificación de la FSA (Ayuda Federal para Estudiantes), que consiste en un nombre de usuario y contraseña. Si usted y / o su estudiante aún no han creado la ID de la FSA, visite [Filling out the FAFSA form](#) para crear una. Comuníquese conmigo si no puede crear una ID de FSA. Estaré en contacto con usted en las próximas semanas y meses con más información sobre la FAFSA.

Por favor, póngase en contacto conmigo si tiene alguna pregunta. Espero con interés trabajar con usted y con el **Student Name** durante todo el año.

Sinceramente,

Nombre
Especialista en GEAR UP

Gaining **E**arly **A**wareness and **R**eadiness for **U**ndergraduate **P**rograms

[Download Attachment 9](#)

Family Engagement Activities, Services, and Events – Minimum Requirements

Name of Outreach Effort	Description	Purpose	Target Audience	Date(s) it will be Offered	Responsible Person/Group
Registration Stop	Tabling: Display photos, books, college-going materials; hand out snacks and magnets with contact info	Relationship Building	GEAR UP Families - all grades	Jul/Aug 2020	GEAR UP Staff
Absence Intervention Letters (Optional, upon parent's request)	Tiered approach per GEAR UP Minimum Standards; personal calls, mailings	Promote attendance, provide resources and support to resolve issues causing absences, relationship building	GEAR UP families of students who have 3,5, or 10 consecutive absences or chronic absences	Aug - May	GEAR UP Staff
College-Knowledge Workshops	Series of 4 consecutive Workshops covering: Intro/value of education + intro to GEAR UP and our school; College pathways and college admissions; College affordability, cost, return on investment, financial aid; Guest speaker (parent of a first gen) and graduate	Share college knowledge info; help parents see their importance in the process; build parent network	All GEAR UP families will be invited. Workshops are for families who sign up	One offered each quarter and one in summer	GEAR UP Staff
5-Minute Presentation and Greet	Give 5-minute presentations on GEAR UP and greet parents at parent-teacher conferences	Relationship building	Families who attend parent-teacher conferences	Once in fall, and once in spring	GEAR UP school staff
Newsletters	Articles on college-going topics and GEAR UP students	Disseminate event info; showcase GEAR UP program and students; provide college-related info	All GEAR UP families with email addresses on file	Monthly during the school year	GEAR UP school staff

Family Engagement Toolkit

Name of Outreach Effort	Description	Purpose	Target Audience	Date(s) it will be Offered	Responsible Person/Group
Emails	Quick monthly emails that include three tips, and a list of upcoming events at school that month	Share tips on "One thing to do with your child this week to promote college readiness"	All GEAR UP families with email addresses on file	Monthly, starting in Aug	GEAR UP Staff
Social Media Posts	Posts on student stories; college visits; GEAR UP mission; college-readiness tips; career ideas; parent tips to support college readiness; GEAR UP events, etc.	Relationship building; share information; encourage a college-going culture; showcase accomplishments	All GEAR UP families will be encouraged to follow social media pages	Twice per week	GEAR UP Staff
Positive Calls	Advisory teachers make 3 calls per week during first 10 weeks of school to share one positive skill, ability, trait, improvement for a student	Relationship building and family involvement	All GEAR UP families	First three months of school	GEAR UP Staff, and Interpreter as necessary
Course Registration Check-In	Mailer and phone calls home after high school course registration; share "required" course info and how/if the student's prior year classes meet/do not meet requirements; add actionable tips to letter/call	College readiness info	Mail all GEAR UP families; make calls to any families whose mail is returned to sender	Mar/Apr	High school counselor and GEAR UP school staff
Student "Shows"	Students present their goals for their future, career, purpose, or educational aspirations by way of art, paintings, drawings, photography, spoken word, dance, song, instruments, essays, or any appropriate presentations	Relationship building; celebrate students; college-going culture	All GEAR UP families with special invitations to families of students presenting work	Apr	GEAR UP school staff

PARENT ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR

7th & 8th 9th & 10th 11th 12th

[Download Attachment 10](#)

	7th & 8th	9th & 10th	11th	12th
August	Registration: Welcome Booth, Cell Phone # Collection, Volunteer Interest Form	Registration: Welcome Booth, Cell Phone # Collection, Volunteer Interest Form	Registration: Welcome Booth, Cell Phone # Collection, Volunteer Interest form	Registration: Welcome Booth, Cell Phone # Collection, Volunteer Interest Form
September	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Intro to Phone Calls, invite to workshop	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Freshman Kickoff	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Family Kick off Event	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Workshop: Making a Plan Family Kick off Event
October	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message
		Homecoming information	Homecoming information booth	Homecoming information booth
November	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Workshop: College 101	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Workshop: College 101	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Workshop: College Applications
December	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message
January	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Workshop: FAFSA4Caster Night	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Workshop: FAFSA Night
February	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Workshop: Paying for College 101	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Workshop: Paying for College 101	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Workshop: Planning for Senior Year	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Workshop: Financial Aid & Student Loans (Credit Union)
March	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Career Day	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message
April	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Student-Led Conference	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Student Career Presentations to Parents	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message
May	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message College Visit with students	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Family college campus visit & athletic event	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message
June	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message 8th Grade: Transition Night Graduation/Promotion Ceremony	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message	Newsletter, Weekly Text Message Graduation Ceremony

EXAMPLE

PARENT ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR

7th & 8th 9th & 10th 11th 12th

	7th & 8th	9th & 10th	11th	12th
August				
September				
October				
November				
December				
January				
February				
March				
April				
May				
June				

The GEAR UP community across the nation is dedicated to student success, and generously shares information and resources among programs. This toolkit was created from wisdom and experience shared by many GEAR UP projects, We'd like to thank Nevada GEAR UP whose College Toolkits inspired us.

¹ See for example: **1) Đurišić, Maša; Bunjevac, Mila.** Parental Involvement as an Important Factor for Successful Education. Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal, [S.l.], v. 7, n. 3, p. 137-153, sep. 2017. ISSN 2232-2647. Available at [Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal](#) , Date accessed:

March 29, 2019. **2) Hogg, L. (2011).** Funds of Knowledge: An investigation in coherence within literature. Teaching and Teacher Education, 27, 666-677, **3) Rodriguez, G. (2011).** Power and Agency in Education: Exploring the pedagogical dimensions of fund knowledge. Review of Research in Education, 37(1), 87-120. And **4) Vélez-Ibáñez, C.G., & Greenberg, J.B. (1992).** Formation and transformation of funds of knowledge among U.S. Mexican households. Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 23(4), 313-335.

² For ease of reading, the term "parent" or "parents" and the term "family" or "families" are used interchangeably throughout this toolkit. Both refer to the caregivers, raisers, and support network of children, whoever that may be.