Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) is a public comprehensive university with multiple locations in the Chicagoland area serving approximately 9,000 students. NEIU is committed to transforming students' lives by engaging them in an educational experience that empowers them to graduate with the skills and knowledge to effectively participate and lead in personal, professional and civic realms.

The Center for College Access and Success (CCAS) is an academic educational center for Northeastern Illinois University. CCAS creates support systems that help first-generation students make their dream of a college education a reality. We are wholly funded by state, federal and private grants.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is the largest program at CCAS. Working with Chicago Public Schools (CPS), GEAR UP engages all the partners: parents, teachers, and students within their communities. Through exploration and support, we increase student educational expectations to include graduation from both high school and college. This program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education.
The GEAR UP Program at the Center for College Access and Success/Northeastern Illinois University believes that effective family partnerships are essential to creating and sustaining high quality schools. Our approach to building family partnerships is based on collaborative work with schools and communities, is informed by a body of research on the relationships between parental involvement and student success. The belief that adult learners are self-directed, goal-oriented, and capable (Moll, et al., 2001) is the cornerstone of CCAS/NEIU’s approach to valuing parents’ experiences and knowledge.

Our programming builds upon parents’ knowledge to address their self-identified goals for the future. Staff meet the parents as learners, acknowledging that adults possess a myriad of experiences or funds of knowledge to contribute and to build upon. Defined by Moll (2001) and other researchers, “funds of knowledge” refers to the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being”.

Our parent model is asset-based, adhering to Freire’s belief that adult learners/parents are not receptacles to be filled with information; rather they have a deep reservoir of experiences that can be tapped into in order to optimize learning. (Freire, 1970) In this way, we build and sustain social capital.

Parents want what is best for their children and their communities and they respond positively to this collaborative learning process. Research in parent engagement establishes that no matter their income level, social status, language, culture, or race; when parents are actively involved in
their children’s learning the outcomes are dramatic. Student attitudes improve, attendance goes up, and they have higher test scores, graduation rates, and enrollment rates in post-secondary education. (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002)

Parent Advocate Model

One of the key strategies CCAS/NEIU uses to increase parental engagement and involvement is our parent training model. We hire Parent Advocates to take leadership roles in: (a) identifying needs/interests of parents in participating schools, (b) recruiting parents, (c) organizing and facilitating workshops, and (d) leading presentations at local and national conferences on effective roles for families in education.

By supporting and training Parent Advocates, the program increases the presence of parents in the schools. Parent advocates are insiders who are leaders in their local communities, and know first-hand the struggles of families in low-income neighborhoods with low school completion rates. This familiarity is comforting and builds trust so they can educate other parents about issues in the education pipeline -- from early childhood learning to college preparation.

This grassroots connection is at the heart of our successful parent program because it provides parent advocates with an avenue for personal and professional growth. The result is a highly effective team of deeply committed individuals from school communities who work cooperatively toward achieving goals with measurable results.

As the direct result of the camaraderie among parents and staff, parents’ perspectives are transformed. (Mezirow, 1995) Mothers who were once too shy to leave their homes or congregate with other parents in front of the school, are now participating in book clubs, leading college tours, and facilitating workshops. Others are enrolling in expanding their own educations by getting their ESL, GED, or enrolling in college courses. They perceive themselves and their communities in new and more powerful way. Parents’ leadership capacity will remain long after CCAS/NEIU funded programs are gone. By building and sustaining parent networks, we ignite a legacy of a strong parent presence and an enhanced support system for students in Chicago’s diverse communities.

Wendy Stack, Ph.D.
Executive Director,
Chicago GEAR UP
Center for College Access & Success

Margaret Boyter-Escalona
Associate Director, GEAR UP

Rene Diaz
Parent Resource Manager

Rhonda Thomas
Program Manager (retired)
Education Consultant
Parent Involvement vs Parent Leadership

Adapted from the Fayette County Public Schools website www.fcps.net/fcs/
Parent Involvement Toolkit for School Leaders

Whether a school or a GEAR UP Program limited parents to traditional roles or embraces parent leadership often depends on the attitudes of school and GEAR UP program leaders. Which set of attitudes about parent engagement more closely resembles those at your school or your GEAR UP program?

Place a check mark in the box(es) that characterize your school. Are you satisfied with the way your school or GEAR UP program is portrayed? How can your program adapt?

Traditional Parent Involvement:

- It is the school’s job to determine how parents should be involved.
- Only well-educated parents should be involved in the classroom.
- Parents’ primary role is to reinforce at home what the school is teaching.
- Most parents want to leave their children’s education to the experts and don’t want to intrude in school matters.
- Parents are interested primarily in their own children.
- Schools know best about students and their needs. Parents should let educators do their jobs.
- Families should make their homes more like the school.
- Few parents want to take leadership responsibility.
- Problems at school should be resolved within the school. Involving families might undermine community support that could damage the school’s reputation.

Parent Leadership:

- Parents should be involved in deciding how to engage the school’s families.
- Every family has something important to contribute to children's learning.
- Parents and teachers share responsibility children’s learning.
- Most parents want to be actively engaged in their children's learning and to be consulted about school policies.
- Parents are concerned about the success of all children.
- Schools should recognize that all parents are experts about their children and have much to offer educators.
- A school should reflect its families' cultural backgrounds and traditions.
- Parents can be at different stages of readiness for leadership. Many want more responsibility.
- When problems arise, the principal and/or GEAR UP director should reach out to all who are affected. Many problems cannot be resolved without active community support and cooperation.
### Best Practices: Parent Climate in Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Already Implementing</th>
<th>Considering this Activity</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hold beginning of school kick-off events</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Make home visits or walks for success</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey parents with a needs assessment to find out their needs, interests, concerns, skills, and talents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite parents to go on college visits/tours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide meaningful incentives for parents to attend meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hire and train parent advocates who have the responsibility to communicate with other parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use a variety of communication vehicles and formats</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make sure information is disseminated in the parents' language of choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish a &quot;safe haven&quot; parent resource center where parents can meet and have access to information and each other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide educational opportunities and workshops for parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reach out specifically to fathers</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop strong, personal relationships with families</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schedule meetings at times that parents can attend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take advantage of opportunities where parents are already in attendance to provide important GEAR UP information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage parents and students to attend meetings together</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask students to encourage their parents to attend meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solicit the help of other parents to encourage their friends and neighbors to attend GEAR UP and other school events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help educators learn the dominant local language</td>
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<tr>
<td>Include a celebratory component to all meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issue personal invitations to parents to attend events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have parents be a part of the school decision-making process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop strong, trusting relationships with school administration and staff</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Discuss your results with your small group and jot down any ideas you learn, strategies you would like to try, and/or successes you have achieved.**

Adapted from the Fayette County Public Schools website, *Parent Involvement Toolkit for School Leaders* [www.pcps.net/fcs/](http://www.pcps.net/fcs/)
Conducting a Parent Needs Assessment

Whether you are working closely with your school to engage more families or you are working with a group of concerned GEAR UP parents, you should conduct a needs assessment before planning your next steps. A needs assessment is a systematic process of gathering information about the current situations and specific needs of parents, families, the school and staff, of the services and programs currently offered to parents and the activities and programs that might potentially be provided. A needs assessment allows you to:

- Learn more about the needs and interests of parents and families.
- Discover what skills, talents and abilities parents might have and be willing to contribute to GEAR UP activities.
- Determine a baseline from which changes can be monitored over time.
- Begin to garner support for parent involvement activities and programs.
- Make an informed decision about future actions around family involvement.

There are six basic steps to conducting a needs assessment; however, the way your needs assessment will be conducted will vary based on the time, funds, and human resources available to you. Although the steps outlined below seem very formal, keep in mind what you already know about your community. You might pick up a great deal more information about the needs of your parents through informal chats and meetings than through a formal survey process.

1. Establish a needs assessment team. Solicit the help of your parent leaders, as well as some members of the school staff (such as the GEAR UP parent liaison, coordinator, director). Be sure to discuss roles and responsibilities of committee members and how you will ensure that you will be able to get input from all parents on what they need or are interested in learning about through your work.

2. Look at data and information that is already available. Perhaps you have had conversations with parents already about what they need in terms of information, activities, programs and/or services. Or maybe a survey of parents has already been conducted. Review this data before moving forward – there is no point in asking parents questions they have been asked before.

3. Determine what other information you need to have before moving forward with your family involvement plans. Family involvement activities and programs can only be effective if they address the needs of the community they serve. Part of understanding these needs are to learn more about parents’ backgrounds, concerns and interests. Understanding these factors will help ensure that activities and services are relevant, responsive and make use of the resources parents and families can bring to your efforts.

Some of the important factors you should try to understand about your parents include:

- Language background of students and their parents.
- Cultural values and practices of different groups.
• Parents’ attitudes towards school, teachers and administrators.
• Work schedules of parents.
• Childcare needs.
• Special skills, talents and interests of parents.

Some important concerns and interests you should understand about your parents include their:

• Level of comfort monitoring their child’s academic progress through traditional channels of communication including report cards and parent-teacher conferences.
• Ability and willingness to become involved in school-based decision making.
• Ability and willingness to provide academic assistance to their children at home or at school.
• Interest in the school as a possible venue for enhancing their own educational pursuit.

4. Determine the best methods for collecting data. Some methods for collecting data include surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviewing. The method you choose will be determined by the number of people you are intending to reach, as well as their level of comfort responding to a written survey and/or sharing their views in a group. Think carefully about your parent population before deciding on the best way to collect data.

5. Collect and analyze the data. This is the time to implement your survey, conduct your focus groups and speak with local GEAR UP parents. Be sure to collect information from GEAR UP and school staff if possible; they will have tremendous insight into how they are already working to involve parents or plan to involve parents in the future.

When analyzing data, look for trends in the responses you have received. Summarize and categorize the responses to help determine the priorities of your parents and community. Do they want to learn more about the school system and how it operates? Are parents concerned that their children are not on a “college track”?

Perhaps families perceive that the contributions they are making to their child’s education at home are not valued or appreciated by the school system. These trends and responses will help you and your parent leaders decide what steps to take next. Discuss your findings with the team you have gathered and the other parent leaders in your community.

6. Determine your next steps. Based on your analysis of the data collected, begin to determine how to move forward. Consider the responses you received during the data collection process in the context of what you know about what is already going on in the school and the community around family involvement. The strategies and activities you consider implementing need to respond to the information you have collected and the needs you now understand.

Adapted from D. Ellis and K. Hughes, Partnerships by Design: Cultivating Effective and Meaningful School-Family-Community Partnerships by D. Ellis and K. Hughes (Portland: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2002).
GEAR UP PARENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Please take a moment to fill out this survey indicating your interest in workshops and parent program activities.

Name: ____________________________________ School: ____________________________
Address: ___________________________________ Email: ___________________________
Telephone: _________________________ Emergency Telephone: _______________________
Student Name ___________________________ Grade ___ School ________________________ Room _______
                  ___________________________ Grade ___ School ________________________ Room _______

Technology and Communication:

Which of the following do you use?
□ Computer Desktop □ Laptop □ Tablet □ Smartphone □ Other_________________

Which is the best way for GEAR UP to contact you regarding future opportunities?
□ Text message □ Phone call □ Email □ Other_________________

Your involvement in school:

a. How often are you available to participate in parent activities? (Indicate One)
   □ Weekly (day___________) □ Monthly □ __________ Other  Time of day [ ] A. M. [ ] P.M.

b. Currently how many times a year do you attend school activities?
   □ Less than 1 □ 2 - 3 □ 4 - 6 □ 7 or more

How would you describe your interest for activities on the following topics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Not interested</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Very Interested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Book Club</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Computer Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. High School Transition</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Parent Portal</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. College Readiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>(FAFSA, preparation for Post-Secondary Options)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Career Readiness (STEM)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Socio-Emotional Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Supporting children with exceptional needs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Field trips / College Visits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>j. Financial Literacy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As we continue to enrich the GEAR UP parent program content, parent advocate input serves as a sounding board for change. To increase the number of parents who attend workshops each month, we now focus on five topic/touches per school. Our goal is to recruit a greater number of parents from each cohort to attend each session. This will keep presentors from repeating the same material in a shorter cycle.

We are introducing a more targeted approach for our parent advocates to use when interacting with parents. One-on-one meetings will be scheduled with parents that will accomodate their schedules and personalize the interaction. If they can’t meet face-to-face, advocates will start calling.

While calling to invite parents to workshops, we soon realized that even though they were not available to attend the workshop, they were willing to spend time on the phone. We've created phone scripts and talking points for each of our topics. Parent advocates are able to get high quality information to more parents in a short period of time. They also direct parents to watch our short videos/soaps on college readiness topics on their phone or computer.

When the weather is nice, we facilitate what we call walks for success. When a parent comes out onto their front step, stands with friends at the corner, or visits a local park or cafe, we bring the material to them.

We also email or mail newsletters focusing on the information/topics at hand.
Parent Advocate training conducted on 10/14/15

**Topic I/Test Scores**
*Objectives/Goals*
- Parents to know what scores are needed for high school
- Dates for test
- Helping at homework

[ ] Workshops  [ ] One on One  [ ] Phone calls  [ ] E/mail  [ ] Walks for Success  [ ] Other

**Topic II/High School Selection Process**
*Objectives/Goals*
- Public vs. Charter and other schools
- Choosing a high school
- Resources for H.S. info
- Requirements

[ ] Workshops  [ ] One on One  [ ] Phone calls  [ ] E/mail  [ ] Walks for Success  [ ] Other

**Topic III/High School Application Process**
*Objectives/Goals*
- Deadlines
- Knowing where to go and who?
- Reading letters
- Using school district website (test dates, open house)

[ ] Workshops  [ ] One on One  [ ] Phone calls  [ ] E/mail  [ ] Walks for Success  [ ] Other

**Topic IV/Transition to High School**
*Objectives/Goals*
- High School Graduation Requirements
- How to calculate GPA
- Rights, Responsibilities and Freedoms of a High School Student

[ ] Workshops  [ ] One on One  [ ] Phone calls  [ ] E/mail  [ ] Walks for Success  [ ] Other

**Topic V/Summer Enrichment Programs**
*Objectives/Goals*
- Summer Academy
- Freshman Connection
- After-school Matters

[ ] Workshops  [ ] One on One  [ ] Phone calls  [ ] E/mail  [ ] Walks for Success  [ ] Other
GEAR UP Parent Outreach Plan: Group 11th

Parent Advocate training conducted on 10/14/15

**Topic 1/On Track for Graduation**
*Objectives/Goals*
- Graduation requirements
- Understanding and calculating GPA
- Credit Recovery (night/Saturday school/On-Line classes)

- Workshops
- One on One
- Phone calls
- Email
- Walks for Success
- Other

**Topic II/Why is ACT Important?**
*Objectives/Goals*
- Why is the ACT important?
- Preparation
- Dates
- Opportunity to retake and fee waiver

- Workshops
- One on One
- Phone calls
- Email
- Walks for Success
- Other

**Topic III/College Match and Fit**
*Objectives/Goals*
- Knowing test scores and GPA requirements for admission
- In-State/Out-of-State options for colleges
- Majors and Careers

- Workshops
- One on One
- Phone calls
- Email
- Walks for Success
- Other

**Topic IV/Financial Aid Options**
*Objectives/Goals*
- Scholarships (Need-Merit Based)
- Private Organization - Institutional
- FAFSA4Caster - FAFSA
- Work Study

- Workshops
- One on One
- Phone calls
- Email
- Walks for Success
- Other

**Topic V/Support for Undocumented Students**
*Objectives/Goals*
- Eligibility for DACA
- DACA Process
- Scholarship Opportunities
- University/College Undocumented Friendly

- Workshops
- One on One
- Phone calls
- Email
- Walks for Success
- Other
# GEAR UP Parent Outreach Plan: Target 100% of Parents to Receive Information

**Coordinator:** ___________________________

**Date:** ___________________________

**Site:** ________________________________

**Number of total parents at site:** ____________

**Parent Advocate(s):** ________________________________

## Topic/Workshop/Event I: Objectives/Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Completed by:</th>
<th># of parents reached:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>One on ones</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Phone calls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email/mail out</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Walks for success</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>

**TOTAL Number of Parents Reached:** ____________

## Topic/Workshop/Event II: Objectives/Goals

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Completed by:</th>
<th># of parents reached:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
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<td>One on ones</td>
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<td>Phone calls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email/mail out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walks for success</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>

**TOTAL Number of Parents Reached:** ____________

## Topic/Workshop/Event III: Objectives/Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Completed by:</th>
<th># of parents reached:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>One on ones</td>
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<td>Phone calls</td>
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<td>Email/mail out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walks for success</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>

**TOTAL Number of Parents Reached:** ____________
Targeted Flow Chart - Working Through Parent Plan

SOPHOMORE PARENTS

On Track

Celebratory Phone Call

Off Track

Intervention Phone Call

Credit Recovery

• Summer School
  • Night School
  • Online Recovery

GEAR UP Workshops

Extracurricular Activities

Login / Update Parent Portal

Maintaining GPA

• College Overnights
  • Scholarships (Posse, Dell, Questbridge)

Celebratory Phone Call

Tutoring

Summer Opportunities

• Early College Credit
  • Enrichment/Career Exploration Programs

Credit Recovery

• Summer School
  • Night School
  • Online Recovery

Tutoring
Sample Script - Intervention Phone Call

Hello, my name is ______________________ from _________________________ (name of High School) GEAR UP Program. Are you the parent/guardian of _________________________ (student name)? We are calling the parents of freshman and sophomores students that have been identified as needing academic support in order to ensure a timely graduation. We would like to invite you to this important workshop/event at your child's school on ________ (date) ________ (time) (a.m./p.m.) at ________________________(place).

Are you aware of your child's current academic standing?

Do you know what are some resources you or your child can use or receive to help work through some of the issues that might be affecting your child's academic performance?

Does the above date work for you?

Yes

Ok, good then we will see you on _________________(date/time) at ______________(room).

No

• When is a good time for you to come/meet and discuss your child’s options one on one?
• Do you have a few minutes so I can provide you with a summary of what we will be providing parents with at this meeting? (workshop over phone)
• Do you have an email address where I can forward you more information?

__________________________________

Hola, Buenos días/tardes mi nombre es ______________________ del Programa GEAR UP en las escuela _________________________ sted es el padre/guardian de _________________________ (nombre de estudiante)? Estamos llamando a los padres de estudiantes de noveno y decimo grado que han sido identificados como estudiantes con necesidad de apoyo académico para lograr graduarse a tiempo. Nos gustaría invitarles a este importante taller en las escuela de su hijo el __________ (dia) __________ (hora)

Esta usted enterado/o del estado academic de su hijo/a?

Conoce usted recursos que su hijo/a podria acudir usar para recibir ayuda para apoyar a su hijo/a?

Funciona esta fecha para usted?

Si

Bueno entonces le esperamos _________________(dia/hora) _________________(salon).

No

• Cuando es un buen dia para que usted venga para compartir estas opciones con usted? (1 a 1)
• Tiene unos minutos hoy para poder darle un resumen de la reunion sobre el telefono?
• Tiene usted una direccion de correo electronico para poder mandarle mas informacion?

__________________________________
Hello, my name is ________________ from __________________________ (High School name) GEAR UP Program. Can I speak to the parent/guardian of ________________________ (student name)?

Congratulations! Your student was selected to participate in the GEAR UP Freshman Connection Program at (High School name). The program will be 4 weeks long, Monday through Friday starting June 30 and ending July 25. Preparing for high school is the most important thing your students can do this summer. Participating in GEAR UP Freshman Connection will not only prepare you for the 9th grade but for success all four years. The program is an ideal combination of intensive academic preparing and real life experiences at their high school. Your student will receive a scholarship of $2500 to cover the cost of their participation. To register your student, please come to (name of High School) on (date).

Hola. Mi nombre es ________________ (persona hacienda llamada) del Programa GEAR UP de __________________________ (nombre de secundaria). Puedo hablar con el/la Padre/Madre Guardian de ________________________ (nombre de estudiante)

Felicidades! Su estudiante ha sido seleccionado para participar en el programa de Freshman Connection de GEAR UP en la (nombre de secundaria). El programa sera 4 semanas de lunes - viernes iniciando del 30 de junio al 25 de julio. La cosa mas importante que deberia de hacer su estudiante este verano es prepararse para la secundaria. Participando en este programa no solo prepararia a su estudiante para el 9no grado sino para exito en las secundaria y mas. El programa ofrece una combinacion ideal de contenido academico y experiecias reales de un estudiante en secundaria. Su estudiante recibira una beca ($2,500) para cubrir el costo de su participacion. Para registrar a su estudiante favor de asistir a la (nombre de secundaria) en dia (fecha).
Family engagement is a shared responsibility among families, schools, and communities, and is the essential ingredient that ensures the success of all children. GEAR UP programs that view and treat parents and guardians as assets to their work see the results!

Betty Paugh-Ortiz
Vice President, NCCEP