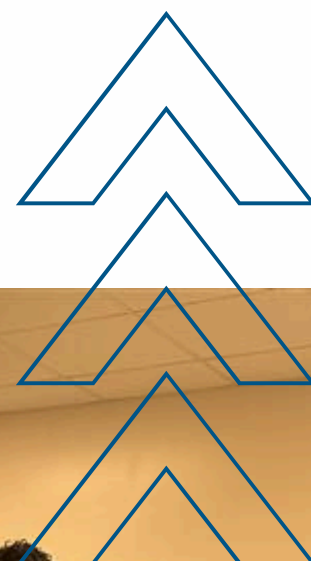


West Virginia GEAR UP



STUDENT SUCCESS DIGEST

SHAPING FUTURES

CHANGING LIVES

West Virginia GEAR UP strives to bring meaningful programming to students, schools and communities that foster an environment of success, learning and postsecondary attainment. Through partnerships with schools, educators, community organizations and higher education institutions, West Virginia GEAR UP provides diverse learning opportunities to students and helps them reach their goals of future success.





AN UPDATE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF WEST VIRGINIA GEAR UP

Elizabeth Manuel, Senior Director of Student Services
West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission



As we enter the spring season, I am thrilled about the continuing growth for GEAR UP programming. As we end year three of the grant cycle and enter into year four, our team is hard at work refining and creating resources and programming to engage students and inspire goals for postsecondary attainment.

GEAR UP's presence is a lifeline of resources and opportunities for both students, parents, and educators. As the job market continues to evolve, it's increasingly evident that a college education is essential for success. GEAR UP equips our students with the tools and guidance they need to navigate this changing landscape and pursue their dreams with confidence.

To our site coordinators: your tireless efforts in bringing GEAR UP programming to our students do not go unnoticed. You are the driving force behind our success, and we owe a debt of gratitude to your unwavering commitment.

Together, let's continue to inspire and empower our students to reach for the stars. As this academic year ends and we move into summer, we will continue to provide professional development and student programming. I believe I speak for all GEAR UP staff when I say that it is truly an honor and privilege to help West Virginia GEAR UP students succeed!

SPECIAL MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENTS AT OUR PARTNER INSTITUTIONS



"Education is the cornerstone of progress, and at Glenville State University, we are proud to join forces with the West Virginia GEAR UP project to amplify our impact on the educational landscape of West Virginia. This partnership symbolizes our unwavering commitment to providing students with the tools and opportunities they need to succeed in higher education and beyond."

DR. MARK A. MANCHIN

PRESIDENT, GLENVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY

"By providing essential resources, mentorship, and opportunities through GEAR UP, we are empowering our youth to break barriers, achieve their fullest potential, and contribute meaningfully to the progress of West Virginia and the United States. Our partnership with GEAR UP encourages students to be lifelong learners and realize that there are multiple options for them to create the future they want."

DR. BRAD D. SMITH

PRESIDENT, MARSHALL UNIVERSITY



Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College prides itself on providing a pathway for our students toward a brighter tomorrow. We are proud to partner with WV GEARUP to make a powerful impact on our students' journeys. This partnership gives our students the resources to achieve success in college and in life.

DR. PAMELA ALDERMAN

PRESIDENT, SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA
COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

LEADING WITH HEART



HILLARY GORE
MINGO CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

Hillary Gore is not your average student. Despite suffering a stroke at infancy, she has emerged as a beacon of hope and inspiration in her community. As a stroke survivor, Hillary's journey of recovery has not only shaped her resilience but also ignited her passion for advocacy.

As an active member of her community, Hillary dedicates herself to supporting fellow stroke survivors and raising awareness for heart health. Her involvement with the American Heart Association as a National Youth Heart Ambassador has earned her local and national recognition, including prestigious awards like the Youth Heart Award and the Hometown Hero Award.

Hillary's impact doesn't stop there. While tirelessly giving back to her community, she is also diligently laying the groundwork for her future. She is currently enrolled in Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College through Mingo Central's early college dual enrollment program. Hillary is set to graduate high school this spring with not one, but two associate degrees in Science and Art.

Looking ahead, Hillary has her sights set on Marshall University, where she plans to major in Business with the ambition of becoming a small business owner. With her unwavering determination and compassionate heart, Hillary Gore is destined to leave an indelible mark on both her school and community.

GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND: FEATURED WEST VIRGINIA GEAR UP SITE COORDINATORS



MELISSA COLE
Richwood Middle School

Melissa Cole at Richwood Middle school is known as a go-getter in her community. She is in-tune with the school's culture as well as the diverse needs of her students. As a math teacher, Ms. Cole has been utilizing GEAR UP provided TI equipment to diversify classroom instruction and teach students valuable coding skills. As a site coordinator, she goes above and beyond the required workplan activities. She has spearheaded various GEAR UP activities for students and families including financial literacy and internet safety events. She is a valued member of our GEAR UP team and we appreciate all the work she does to serve the students of Richwood Middle.



Bill McCloud from Lincoln County High School started his involvement with West Virginia GEAR UP nearly 20 years ago when he volunteered as a mentor for the first grant. As a mentor he enjoyed spending time helping students learn about their postsecondary options and exposing them to new experiences. He decided to be a coordinator to help make a difference in how students acclimate to a high school setting. Additionally, as math teacher, Mr. McCloud appreciated GEAR UP's focus on proficiency in algebra. Mr. McCloud's HEROs group is incredibly active in his school They meet weekly in order to carry out their special projects. Mr. McCloud has helped host career fairs and taken students on trips throughout the state. His enthusiasm for GEAR UP and for his students is palpable, and West Virginia GEAR UP is lucky to have him as a team player.



BILL MC CLOUD
Lincoln County High School



SPRING VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL: FOSTERING A COMMUNITY OF EXCELLENCE AND SUCCESS

Spring Valley High School has earned the prestigious American College Application Campaign (ACAC) School of Excellence Award, recognized for its exceptional efforts in promoting college readiness and accessibility. This national honor underscores Spring Valley's commitment to supporting first-generation and low-income students in pursuing higher education.

Under the motto "Limitless possibilities, boundless horizons," Spring Valley has implemented state-wide initiatives and resources to foster a college-going culture. From College Application and Exploration Week to College Decision Day and FAFSA registration events, the school ensures comprehensive support for every student's postsecondary journey.

Unique programs like Aviation Maintenance Technology and Entrepreneurship and Innovation courses enrich students' career prospects. Dual enrollment options, readiness assessments, and utilization of Txt-4-Success further empower students to navigate the path to higher education confidently.

Spring Valley's impact is tangible, with over 5,671 hours dedicated to GEAR UP programs last year alone. Notably, during College Application and Exploration Week, seniors submitted 350 applications—a testament to the school's transformative efforts.

Amid national trends of lower college enrollment rates, Spring Valley High School shines as a champion for college access and success, poised to inspire more students to embrace the promise of higher education.





“As a GEAR UP high school, Spring Valley High School fully commits itself to our program’s dedication to preparing students for college readiness. Their school has realized that student success is a team effort, and staff, administration, and teachers all play a role in setting students up to reach their fullest potential. I am continually impressed at their creativity and commitment to quality college-readiness programming for their students.”

Mallory Carpenter

College Access and Success Program Director



INSIGHTS FROM STUDENT VOICES



As part of West Virginia GEAR UP's efforts to provide meaningful, engaging and enriching programming for students that increases their knowledge and excitement about postsecondary programs, West Virginia GEAR UP regularly surveys students about their thoughts on GEAR UP, their postsecondary plans and their thoughts on college. Their voices give us valuable insight into what students are looking for when thinking about their education and career plans after high school and what sort of activities persuade them to start planning for their future success.

Travel and Exposure:

For many students in West Virginia, the world beyond their immediate surroundings can seem distant and inaccessible. Yet, as one insightful eighth-grader articulated, opportunities to travel provide a window of boundless opportunities available beyond their hometown and serve as a motivator.

"We live in a fairly small town. We don't have a lot to do. So, I feel like whenever kids get these opportunities to see the big world, what lies out there, I feel like it definitely gives them motivation."

These experiences not only broaden perspectives but also instill a sense of ambition and possibility.



Pursuing Dreams through Higher Education

The promise of a brighter future often drives GEAR UP students to aspire to higher education. From trade schools to community colleges, the desire to further their education is palpable. As one eighth-grader expressed,

"I'd like to do something after high school – like trade school, a community college, whatever it is, an online college, something."

Their aspirations are not only driven by personal ambition but also by familial pride, as one eighth grade student highlighted,

"[My family] said that's a good idea [to pursue a degree] and that they're proud of me because I'll be the first college graduate out of them."

Sparking Interests through Various Pathways

A key component of West Virginia GEAR UP is exposing students to a variety of career pathways and opportunities they may not have discovered yet. Visits to technical and vocational schools provide invaluable insights into potential career trajectories outside of the traditional four-year college mold. One eighth grader expressed enthusiasm after visiting a trade school on a GEAR UP sponsored college visit.

"We went to the trade school and there were people that would explain different types of careers. I learned what it was like being in a trade school. I've been to a college before, but I haven't been [to a trade school] before. I liked what it was."



The Importance of Security and Opportunity

When choosing what to do after high school, GEAR UP is finding that today's students are thinking about their future job opportunities as well as potential income. One West Virginia GEAR UP senior explained why she decided to pursue a degree as a lab technician over a degree in education,"

"[The] program is 2 years, and it has a 100% hiring rate. Most of the people that are graduating from that program right now already have jobs. So, I won't ever have to really worry about job security."

Additionally, students favor earning money while also obtaining a degree or certificate. One 12th grade student stated that,

"I can get a degree in welding and also make money while doing it. So, trade school really caught my eye."

Understanding Student Needs

For students, the appeal of higher education lies in the prospect of acquiring skills that will lead to a stable career that earns them a suitable living. Insights gained from listening to students allows us to better understand what drives students towards postsecondary education. From this information we can provide more opportunities for students to explore the various pathways available to them right here in the Mountain State. It is imperative that students not only understand the avenues available to them, but that they can also see themselves attending school and being in a career that brings them life-long success.



Supporting Students on their Road to Postsecondary Achievement:

WEST VIRGINIA TXT-4-SUCCESS



In the bustling landscape of college preparation, West Virginia's TXT-4-Success Program stands out as a beacon of guidance for college-bound students. Initially conceived as a pilot initiative for West Virginia GEAR UP, it has now evolved into a statewide endeavor, offering invaluable support to all high school seniors across the state.

Through this program, students receive timely text messages tailored to their journey towards higher education. These messages cover essential college deadlines, offer valuable advice, and provide regular check-ins to ensure a smooth transition into college life. Moreover, students attending partner institutions receive personalized messages pertinent to their specific college experience.

One of the program's standout features is its accessibility. Students and parents can opt-in to receive these informative texts, and they have the liberty to reach out with any college-related queries at their convenience, knowing that a college access advisor is just a text away.

“At the heart of this initiative lies the commitment of West Virginia GEAR UP to empower students on their educational path,” stated Heather McChesney, Director of Statewide Access Initiatives. “Through organized in-school events and activities, students gain easy access to sign up for these messages, with a targeted goal of enrolling 75% of each senior class—a testament to the program's dedication to student success. With TXT-4-Success, West Virginia is paving the way for a brighter future for its aspiring college students.”

1,741

**GEAR UP STUDENTS
OPTED IN**

28K+

**TEXTS SENT TO
STUDENTS STATEWIDE
DURING THE 2023-2024
ACADEMIC YEAR**

1,462

**TEXTS RECEIVED FROM
GEAR UP STUDENTS**

The Power of Positive Thinking

GEAR UP STEM ACADEMY

West Virginia GEAR UP, in collaboration with the Science, Technology & Research (STaR) Division, proudly hosted Dr. Scott Barry Kaufman at the West Virginia Culture Center on the State Capitol complex for the 2024 GEAR UP STEM Academy. This event empowered over 700 GEAR UP students to explore the depths of their potential through cognitive psychology and positive thinking.

Dr. Scott Barry Kaufman, a distinguished psychologist and acclaimed author, captivated the audience with his profound insights into human potential. Delving into his personal journey and professional expertise, Dr. Kaufman challenged conventional notions of success, highlighting the inherent capabilities within every individual, irrespective of background, neurodivergences or circumstances.

With a focus on nurturing creativity and resilience, Dr. Kaufman's presentation resonated deeply with the GEAR UP community, reaffirming the belief that everyone has the capacity to transcend obstacles and achieve greatness. His message of hope and empowerment echoed through the halls of the West Virginia Culture Center, inspiring students to embrace their unique talents and pursue their dreams with unwavering determination.

J.R. Luyster, Assistant Director of GEAR UP, emphasized the importance of programming like the STEM Academy, stating, "We know that the mission of GEAR UP is to help all students and their families prepare for enrollment and success in education beyond high school. Our West Virginia GEAR UP team prides itself in taking that mission a step further. Our calling is to identify those students, who for whatever reason, may be unprepared, overlooked, or underrepresented and help them to realize their full potential. Just as Dr. Scott Barry Kaufman emphasized during the STEM Academy, and something that we here at WV GEAR UP have always known, is that all students are capable of reaching their goals and achieving success if they invest in themselves, work hard, believe in their capabilities and make smart decisions. Dr. Kaufman closed his presentation with the statement 'I Believe in You!' And that statement perfectly sums up WV GEAR UP's message to our students!"

During their time at the Capitol complex, students were also treated to enriching experiences, including tours of the State Museum and the Capitol Building. These immersive outings further enriched their educational journey, providing invaluable insights into the rich history and cultural heritage of West Virginia.



COLLABORATION AND LEADERSHIP: EMPOWERING GEAR UP EDUCATORS WITH MEANINGFUL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



West Virginia GEAR UP is committed to nurturing not only the academic growth of students but also the professional development of its dedicated staff, particularly site coordinators who serve as leaders within their schools. Recognizing the tremendous role these coordinators play in fostering a culture of college and career readiness, GEAR UP has integrated robust professional development into its regular staff meetings.



In a recent session during the March staff meeting, GEAR UP staff and site coordinators delved into an enriching professional development experience facilitated by Paradigm Shift, renowned for its innovative leadership training. Through interactive workshops and insightful discussions, participants gained valuable insights into effective leadership strategies tailored to the unique context of GEAR UP programming.



The significance of professional development cannot be overstated, especially in a field where professionals are entrusted with guiding students toward expanded possibilities. By equipping site coordinators with enhanced leadership skills, GEAR UP empowers them to not only fulfill program objectives but also to cultivate a supportive environment conducive to student success.

Moreover, these sessions fostered collaboration and knowledge-sharing among coordinators from different schools within West Virginia GEAR UP, enabling them to learn from each other's experiences and approaches to tackling complex issues facing today's students.

As GEAR UP continues to prioritize professional development, it reinforces its commitment to excellence and innovation in preparing students for the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.



West Virginia
Student Success

Summit

NAVIGATING NEW HORIZONS
EMPOWERING EDUCATORS & STUDENTS IN
A CHANGING LANDSCAPE



**JULY 17 &
18, 2024**



**CHARLESTON
COLISEUM AND
CONVENTION CENTER**

**Register for the Student
Success Summit here:**



June 26-29





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