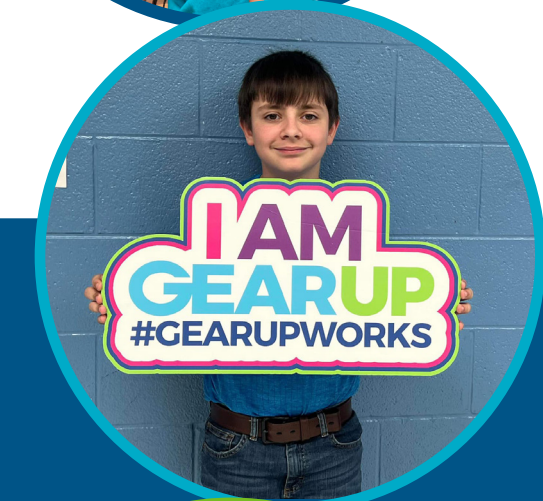




NATIONAL GEAR UP

WEEK 2026

SEPTEMBER 21 - 25, 2026



National GEAR UP Week is a chance to highlight GEAR UP's positive impact in your community.

It's a time to engage all your stakeholders (local, state and federal elected officials, funders, partners and media), share accomplishments, and encourage involvement with your services to students and families.



Hold a GEAR UP Week at your school to kick off the year with activities that encourage a college-going culture in your school and community. Use these materials during National GEAR UP Week or any time that works for you. This booklet has ideas designed to get the word out about GEAR UP and the importance of going to college.

Choose to do some, or all, of the activities or create your own traditions.



Remember to share your events on social media and with GEAR UP staff so we can help celebrate around the state (and country)!

Be sure to tag WV GEAR UP and use these hashtags on social media: #GEARUPworks and #GUWeek

📷 WVGearUP

✂ WVGearUP

📘 WVGearUP

West Virginia
GEAR UP

Who is the audience?

- High school students (class of 2027)
- 11th and 12th graders
- Families
- Educational professionals
- Policymakers

Ways to reach out:

- **Gubernatorial Proclamation:** Keep a lookout for the Governor's Proclamation of National GEAR UP Week in West Virginia on the West Virginia GEAR UP social media pages and be sure to share it out.

- **Media Advisory:** The template attached to this toolkit is to notify media outlets in your area to cover the event you are hosting.
- **Press Release:** The template attached to this toolkit will help you create some "buzz" about your event. You can send it out before or after the event takes place, just make sure you edit it accordingly!
- **Op-Ed:** Op-eds are a great way to raise awareness about GEAR UP at the local and regional level.
- **Send Thank You Cards to Congress:** Thank your United States Senators and Representatives for supporting GEAR UP and other programs with an oversized card or individual letters.
- **Social Media:** This is a great way to stay connected to students and share out information.

BUILDING AN ONLINE PRESENCE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Commit. If you are going to establish a presence for your school on a social network like Facebook or X, someone will need to post regularly. A Facebook page that has been ignored for months can look even worse than no social media presence at all. Even quick, casual photos can be enough to keep your account active.

Address social media posts in your enrollment contract. Many schools already include a media release in their contracts that allow for the use of pictures, likenesses, and art created by students. This release should include a social media provision if you plan to use student images on your social networks. If some families don't want pictures of their child used online, make sure that your social media account manager is aware of these restrictions.

Encourage online involvement. The quickest way to build your social media presence is to connect with current and former students and staff. Start by asking students, parents and teachers to "Like" your school's page on Facebook and setting up an alumni page for your graduates to reconnect.

Engage your community. Social networks are designed for connecting, which means that active participation will lead to better results for your school. Be sure to check out what other schools and organizations are doing for ideas and liking, commenting and sharing education-related news articles, blogs and even valuable posts from competing schools.

Use images. Social network posts based on photos or videos get more clicks and shares than posts with just text.

Keep your branding/messaging consistent across online platforms. Your social posts should include a link to relevant information on your website that engages users through official channels. This also makes sure that those who

find your website first can see your community in action on social media.

With so many social media platforms at our fingertips, it may be difficult to know which one(s) to choose. The basic premise of all social media sites is to post, view and share content while interacting with other users. Although their purposes may be similar, these popular social media sites are best suited for the following uses:

- **Instagram:** Post pictures and short clips of your classroom ideas while browsing specific content via hashtags and following others who share your interests.
- **Facebook:** Dialogue with other users by joining Facebook groups and sharing content – such as articles, videos and pictures – with your own personal network.
- **X:** Stay up-to-date on the latest trends and ideas in education by browsing and posting brief snippets of inspiration or information with others.
- **YouTube:** Post and browse original videos, such as model lessons or video tutorials, which can be archived and viewed on your personal channel.
- **Pinterest:** Browse, share and save visual images that can then be categorized in user-created "boards."

Create and design content to add to your social media.

- **Canva:** Great for slide decks and infographics.
- **Adobe Spark and Powtoons:** Great for videos.
- **Snapseed, PicsArt and Light Room:** Apps to edit photos on hand-held devices.

Morning announcements. Get students excited about GEAR UP during morning announcements. Let students know what GEAR UP is and how they can get involved. Examples of morning announcements include fun facts about West Virginia colleges, upcoming GEAR UP events, and information on financial aid.

Show your GEAR UP pride with a video!

Videos are a great way to show off your school, engage your students and show your GEAR UP spirit!

Tips for a great video

- Take videos of your GEAR UP community (students, families, teachers, counselors, principals, etc) stating why GEAR UP is important to helping students prepare for their future.
- Feel free to use social media trends such as dances or other popular video trends to make your video more engaging to students and your community.
- Filming your video vertically on a smart phone rather than horizontally will make it more adaptable for Facebook and Instagram Reels.
- Once you have collected your videos, post them to social media and share the faces of your GEAR UP community. Additionally, we ask that you send the MP4 files to the West Virginia GEAR UP communications team so they may add them to a GEAR UP Week video montage. You can send the videos to Emily Hammond at emily.hammond@wvhepc.edu.

Pro tip: keep the video less than 3 minutes!

- Post the videos to your social media accounts and tag us at @WVGearUP. Be sure to use #GEARUPworks and #GUWeek.



Sample general posts

- It is National GEAR UP Week, and @wvgearupstudents are all celebrating at [school name]! #GEARUPWorks #GUWeek
- Students at [school name] are celebrating National GEAR UP Week this week! #GEARUPWorks #GUWeek
- Students at [school name] are representing @wvgearup during National GEAR UP Week! #GEARUPWorks #GUWeek

Examples for posting to state representatives

- @handle, thank you for supporting GEAR UP! Here is how our students are celebrating National GEAR UP Week! #GEARUPWorks #GUWeek
- #GEARUPWorks thanks to support from folks like @handle. Happy #GUWeek!
- Happy #GUWeek, @handle! Thanks for supporting GEAR UP! Here's how [school name] has been celebrating.

Virtual college visits. Just because students can't physically visit campuses at this point doesn't mean they can't learn about what college might be the best fit. Take advantage of virtual campus tours and scan colleges' websites and social media feeds to learn more about what each school has to offer.

Student and family workshops. Consider hosting in-person or online events or workshops. For example, invite a local employer to serve as a guest speaker or a host a virtual employee panel to share about their job sector, specific work skills important to the career path, and what background was needed to pursue that path. Virtual events should be pre-recorded or hosted live on YouTube, Zoom, or Event Facebook or Instagram Live.

Social Media Prompts. Have students answer a prompt below on a social media site. Ask them to take a picture or selfie to use in their post. Sample prompts include:

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

THROWBACK THURSDAY!

Two words: Throwback Thursday! Use this day to post pictures of school staff from when they were in college. Have staff members wear college gear and snap pictures for your school's social media. Post throwback tunes of a song that was popular when school staff were in college.

HIGHLIGHT TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Celebrate all of the wonderful people who are part of your local and school communities. Take time to highlight teachers, have students interview local businesses who have worked with you during the year, and more! Post to all your social media outlets!

DON'T FORGET THE PARENTS AND GUARDIANS!

Remember to include the parents or guardians in your outreach! Have your students interview their parents or guardians and ask them to post their pictures and their responses on social media.

RECAP THE WEEK'S EVENTS

On Friday, use social media to post the highlights of National GEAR UP Week and encourage your stakeholders to stay connected with you throughout the year. Make sure to mention upcoming events and ask for volunteers.

#IAMGEARUP CAMPAIGN

Ask your students to write letters to their future-selves about what they hope to achieve in school, college and beyond and then posting it to social media.

CLASS SHOW AND TELL

Have a "show and tell" for students. The students can reach out to a college of their choice and request materials. They can open the materials and share out what information they received on social media.

INCLUDE YOUR ALUMNI

Encourage your school's alumni to share their experiences with GEAR UP using templates and posting on social media.



VIDEO COMPETITIONS

Create a video competition and ask your students to make videos on why college matters. Also, have students tag WV GEAR UP in videos talking about why and how GEAR UP works.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

Media Contact

[Insert contact information]

[Insert the name of your school] Celebrates National GEAR UP Week Starting September 21

[Insert dateline] – This week commemorates the continuing success of Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), a college access program providing students and families the support and resources they need for college access and success. Since its inception in 1999, GEAR UP has improved educational outcomes for millions of students across the United States.

[Insert the name of your school] will celebrate National GEAR UP Week 2026 by [Insert a paragraph with information specific to your GEAR UP Week 2026 event(s)]

Students like [Insert highlights or success stories from your program]. [Insert a quote from a student, parent, or other community member about the value of your GEAR UP Program]. National GEAR UP Week is a time to celebrate these accomplishments in our community.

For more information about the GEAR UP program at [Insert the name of your school], contact [Insert GEAR UP contact's name]. To learn more about the statewide GEAR UP program, please contact Jason Luyster, Director of the West Virginia GEAR UP program at (304) 558-0655, or by email at jason.luyster@wvhepc.edu.

About: West Virginia GEAR UP is a federally funded program that helps students in eleven counties prepare to succeed in education and training beyond high school. “GEAR UP” stands for “Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs,” and the program’s goal is to help more students pursue their dreams of earning a college diploma or skillset certificate. West Virginia GEAR UP is managed by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission, in collaboration with the West Virginia Community and Technical College System, the West Virginia Department of Education and many other community partners.

For more information, visit www.wvgearup.org.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact

[Insert contact information]

- Planning Purposes Only -

[Insert Title of Your Event]
Celebrating National GEAR UP Week

When: [Insert date of event]
[Insert time of event]

Where: [Insert location of event – name of building]
[Insert street address]
[Insert Town, State and Zip Code]

Note: Members of the media will be asked to sign in upon arrival. Crews may begin setting up at [Insert crew set-up time].

[Insert any other relevant information, i.e., “Satellite truck parking is available on site.”]

#GEARUPworks because...



@WVGearUP

THANK YOU

FOR YOUR SUPPORT OF



#GEARUPworks #CUWeek

   @WVGearUP