

## OREGON GEAR UP TOOLKIT

---



# Parent Engagement

strategies and resources  
to communicate with families

REACHING HIGHER

RIGOR

RELEVANCE

**RELATIONSHIPS**

**RAISING AWARENESS**

---

**7 8 9 10 11 12 13+**

**Parents** Community Teachers



[oregongearup.org](http://oregongearup.org)

© 2014 Oregon GEAR UP

# RELATIONSHIPS

Foster relationships that encourage students' academic success.

# RAISING AWARENESS

Promote early awareness of college preparation, selection, admissions, financial aid and other critical steps for college entry.



**DOWNLOAD PRINT-AND-USE RESOURCES:** [bit.ly/1TORwum](http://bit.ly/1TORwum)

*Look for the printer icon and green text throughout the toolkit!*

- Administrator Resources
- Donation Request Letter
- Nametags
- Parent Event Checklist
- Event Evaluation
- Sign In Sheet
- Parent Information Form
- Event Flyer
- Thank You Letter to Volunteers

**Parent Workshops:** [bit.ly/1Y36UDa](http://bit.ly/1Y36UDa)

**Parent Newsletters:** [bit.ly/24jqHVk](http://bit.ly/24jqHVk)

**Spanish Parent Newsletters:** [bit.ly/1PkVXex](http://bit.ly/1PkVXex)

## Table of Contents

What the Research Says	3
What Parents Need to Know	4
How to Involve Parents	5
How to Communicate	6
Parent Engagement Calendar	8

## Sources & More Information

Practical Leadership, [Family Engagement](#)

Practical Leadership, [Partnering With Parents to Promote Postsecondary Enrollment](#)

Texas Comprehensive Center, [Parent Involvement in a College/Career-Ready Culture](#)

The Bridgespan Group, [Reclaiming the American Dream](#)

# WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS



Parents care about their children and want them to succeed. Parents would like more information from schools so they can be good partners. Teachers and administrators would like to involve parents, but may lack the strategies to maintain positive and productive relationships. And students (believe it or not!) would like their parents more involved and informed about school.



Students with involved parents, no matter their income or background, are more likely to earn high grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs; pass their classes, earn credits and be promoted; attend school regularly; and graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

## IT'S A TEAM EFFORT

The Harvard Family Research Project has found that the most effective parent engagement programs stem from district and school leadership. Although this toolkit focuses on specific strategies and resources, this work should ideally be part of a broader effort spearheaded by administrators and carried out as a team.

See our additional resources for administrators to help with this work, including [Educating Staff](#)  and [Assessing Climate](#) .

### ► INTRO TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

A free, online, self-paced course from Harvard University. Learn about successful collaborations between families and educators and why they lead to improved outcomes for students and schools.

[online-learning.harvard.edu/course/introduction-family-engagement-education](https://online-learning.harvard.edu/course/introduction-family-engagement-education)

## IT TAKES ALL KINDS

There are many ways that parents can be involved, all of which benefit students, parents and schools.


There are many different ways that parents and families can be involved with their student's learning. These include obvious practices such as volunteering with the school or attending conferences, as well as less conspicuous ways like supporting learning at home with dedicated time and space for homework or holding high expectations for their student.

Schools should **recognize and encourage all types of parent involvement** by providing regular, two-way communication to families and involving parents in ways that embrace their expertise.



# WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

## The school welcomes them.

Parents can be reluctant to be involved at school if they do not feel welcome or comfortable with school staff. Therefore, ensure that families from all cultural, social, linguistic, and community backgrounds are included in outreach efforts. Obtain input from families regarding information and resources they need to support their children's college aspirations. See our [Assessing Climate](#)  resource for more information.

## Why college is important.

Don't assume that all parents believe that postsecondary education is a good thing. Promote positive attitudes towards postsecondary education with parents by sharing facts that are relevant to them like that college graduates have lower unemployment, higher job satisfaction, and higher salaries. Provide specific examples of people they know or careers that might be needed in your community.

## Their attitudes & expectations matter.

Let parents know that their attitudes towards education and academic expectations have one of the biggest impacts on their student's success. Encourage parents to have regular conversations with their student about school, careers, and financial considerations for college.

## College admission & career requirements.

Parents need to know about college admission or career requirements so they can help their child choose appropriate courses and activities that will enable him/her to meet these requirements. They

must understand the application process, including required testing, various deadlines, and what is included on the application. Our [Parent Workshops](#), [College 101](#) and [102](#) helps with the basics.

## The cost of college & how to pay for it.

Parents need to understand the difference between sticker price and net price when they look at college costs, as well as the

importance of college savings. They also need to know what financial aid is available for college or training expenses and how to receive it. You can share this information with our [Parent Workshops](#), [Financial Aid 101](#) and [102](#).

## It's ok to have questions or fears.

Acknowledge specific fears directly such as taking on debt or having your student move far away. Utilize other parents to share their experiences and address key concerns. Be available to answer questions privately, too.

## Where to get help.

Familiarize families with services that provide academic support and college planning and provide these services in a family-friendly environment.






# HOW TO INVOLVE PARENTS

Engage parents by asking for their expertise and giving specific ways to be involved. Be sure to provide ways that all parents can be supportive of their students, even if they can't take on a traditional volunteer role.



## Provide Volunteer Opportunities

Partner with existing parent-teacher organizations to mobilize volunteers like the Booster Club or the Alumni Association. Consider ways that parents can be involved that don't require a presence at school or a major time commitment, such as making phone calls to other parents or providing treats for a parent workshop. Parents can chaperone [college campus field trips](#), volunteer at career days or serve as [ASPIRE](#) mentors to learn more about the college process. Recognize and honor all volunteers for their efforts with our [Thank You Letter for Volunteers](#) .

## Provide Leadership Roles

Find ways for parents to share their culture/knowledge with the school. Utilize existing parent groups like Site Councils or Booster Clubs or create parent groups such as leadership committees or advisory groups. Invite parents to join your GEAR UP/College and Career Readiness Team.

## Invite the Family

Encourage parent engagement by inviting the students, too—plus siblings and extended family. Make it a learning experience for the whole family.

## Build Peer Networks

Tap the power of peers for parents, too. Use parent leaders to connect and educate other parents. Create a parent group or club that encourages parents to support each other throughout the college process. Bring in parents who have students who have gone through college to share their story and allay fears.

### ► ALUMNI & PARENT PANEL

Agenda for hosting a discussion with current college students and their parents.

[oregongoestocollege.org/itsaplan/educators/downloads](http://oregongoestocollege.org/itsaplan/educators/downloads)

## Encourage Conversations at Home

Give parents specific strategies they can implement to help support their student's success (for example, our monthly [Parent Newsletters](#) list key action items). Provide conversation starters, activities or homework assignments that engage parents. Have parents and students sign [a learning contract](#) that outlines expectations for student success.



# HOW TO COMMUNICATE

**Communication between schools and families should be regular, purposeful and a two-way conversation.**

A few key strategies to engage parents:

- **Go to where the parents are.** Find the communication methods that work for your parents whether it be texting or places outside of the school. Poll your parents on the communication methods they prefer and don't hesitate to discontinue communication strategies that aren't working.
- **Engage early and often.** Maintain regular communication about college readiness starting in middle school. Collect contact numbers and e-mails in a [Parent Information Form](#) .
- **Anticipate different needs.** Recognize the different needs of students and parents—from language barriers to work schedules to homelessness—and try to accommodate them as much as possible.

## IN PERSON

**School Events:** Set up a booth at registration and athletic events to take advantage of opportunities to talk with parents and families and provide handouts with information about college and financial aid. Offer free coffee or a treat to encourage parents to stop by.

**Workshops/Information Nights/Events:** Use our [Parent Event Checklist](#) to help plan your parent/family workshops for the year and maximize attendance. Always offer childcare and food (and translators as needed). Our [Parent Workshops](#) give you an outline for five workshops for parents and students in grades 7-12: **GEAR UP 101**, **College 101** and **102**, and **Financial Aid 101** and **102**.

### ► PARENT INFORMATION NIGHTS

Believing the College Dream (*Section H*) &  
Realizing the College Dream (*Section C*)

[ecmc.org/students/educator-resources.html](http://ecmc.org/students/educator-resources.html)

Be sure to advertise well in advance through all of the communication channels you have available, including distributing [Event Flyers](#) . At the end of the event, be sure to distribute an [Evaluation](#) to assess the impact and determine what can be improved. Other useful tools: a [Sign In Sheet](#) , [Nametags](#) and a [Donation Request Letter](#) .

**Student-Led Conferences/Sharing Student Projects:** Encourage participation in parent-teacher conferences by asking the [student to lead their parents](#) through their education and career goals and the steps they're taking now to achieve them. Additionally, provide a forum for students to [share something they have learned or produced](#) to their parents and community members.

### ► STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

Scripts, sample letters, and other resources to implement student-led conferences from NASSP.

[mlei.pbworks.com/f/SLCPP.pdf](http://mlei.pbworks.com/f/SLCPP.pdf)

**Home Visits:** Take the opportunity to [meet with the families of every student](#); divide the task among staff to cut down on the time commitment.





# HOW TO COMMUNICATE

## PHONE

**Personal Phone Calls:** Making individual [phone calls](#) can be very effective, especially if you use them to share [positive news](#), too. Divide up phone lists among staff or use parent volunteers to check in with each parent at least once a semester.

**Group Text Messages:** Services such as [Remind](#) offer a free way to send group text messages. Set up separate groups for different grades to quickly send reminders or share info.

## IN PRINT

### Newsletters/Handouts:

Printing information can be expensive and wasteful, so it's important to make sure any printed material actually gets to parents. Mail monthly [Parent Newsletters](#) home or give to parents directly during workshops, sporting events, or other school events.

**Checklists:** Oregon Goes To College has [It's A Plan checklists](#): one page yearly to do lists for parents of students in middle school through 11th grade as well as monthly checklists for seniors.

**Posters & Bulletin Boards:** Show off your school's college-going culture with displays in the hallways and in classrooms. Use our [posters](#) to get started.

## ONLINE

**Website:** Make sure your school has a dedicated page for college/career readiness on your school's website that's easily found by students and parents alike. Free website tools such as blogger.com or wix.com makes it easy to have a dedicated website that can be linked to the school website, too.

**E-mail:** Collect parents' e-mail to be able to connect with group e-mail newsletters or individual concerns or successes.

**Facebook:** Set up a [Facebook page](#) for your school, counseling office and/or GEAR UP program that anyone can "like" and receive updates in their newsfeed. [Alternatively](#), set up a group specifically for parents (you can set up

multiple groups based on grade, or one group for all parents). You can make the group open (anyone can join, no approval necessary) or closed (members must be approved before they can join). Group members receive alerts and can share files and ask questions.

**Pinterest:** Create an account for your school and provide information for parents on anything from college admissions requirements to scholarships.

**Twitter:** Provide updates and reminders in 140 characters-or-less.



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR

	7th & 8th	9th & 10th	11th	12th
<b>August</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registration: Welcome Booth, Cell Phone # Collection, Volunteer Interest Form</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registration: Welcome Booth, Cell Phone # Collection, Volunteer Interest Form</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registration: Welcome Booth, Cell Phone # Collection, Volunteer Interest Form</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Registration: Welcome Booth, Cell Phone # Collection, Volunteer Interest Form</li> </ul>
<b>September</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Intro Phone Calls, invite to workshop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Workshop: Making a Plan</li> </ul>
<b>October</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Homcoming information booth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Homcoming information booth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>
<b>November</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Workshop: College 101</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Workshop: College 101</li> </ul>	<div>EXAMPLE</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Homcoming information booth</li> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Workshop: College Applications</li> </ul>
<b>December</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>
<b>January</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Workshop: FAFSA4Caster Night</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Workshop: FAFSA Night</li> </ul>
<b>February</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Workshop: Paying for College 101</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Workshop: Paying for College 101</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>
<b>March</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Career Day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Workshop: Planning for Senior Year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Workshop: Financial Aid &amp; Student Loans (Credit Union)</li> </ul>
<b>April</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Student-Led Conference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Student Career Presentations to Parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>
<b>May</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>College Visit with students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Family college campus visit &amp; athletic event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>
<b>June</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>8th Grade: Transition Night</li> <li>Graduation/Promotion Ceremony</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newsletter, Weekly Text Message</li> <li>Graduation Ceremony</li> </ul>



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR

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



[oregongearup.org](http://oregongearup.org)

© 2014 Oregon GEAR UP

**COLLEGE.** It's not a dream, it's a plan.