cfWV.com

COLLEGE DECISION DAY

2023 Guidebook

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Letter from Elizabeth A. Manuel, Senior Director of Student Services

College Decision Day Coordinators,

On behalf of College for West Virginia (CFWV), thank you for registering to host College Decision Day at your school. These events will take place in West Virginia from April 1 through June 1, but celebrations all across the country will be happening throughout the spring months.

The goal of this iniative is to celebrate high school seniors who have committed to continuing their education after graduation by going to college. When we say the word “college”, we mean any form of high-quality education or training after high school. This includes trade and professional certificate programs, career and technical programs, and two-and four-year degree programs, formalized apprenticeship programs, and military service.

It is our firm belief that every West Virginian should pursue some type of postsecondary education. Less than one-third of West Virginians currently hold an associate degree or higher, yet 60 percent of working-aged West Virginians will need one of these credentials in order to meet future work-force demans. For this reason, we are proud to host a statewide celebration that recognizes these students who have wisely chosen to invest in their futures.

As supplies last, schools that register to participate before the March 15 registration deadline should receive printed College Decision Day toolkits in the mail to help students and families prepare for their next steps. If you do not receive these guides or need to download additional guides, please visit **cfwvconnect.com/college-decision-day.**

Once you host your event, please be sure to take the post-event survey which can be accessed here: **surveymonkey.com/r/CollegeDecisionDay23.** This survey is mandatory and must be within seven days after the event, for high schools to fulfill the College Decision Day requirements to be recognized as an official CFWV Champion of College Access and Success.

Thank you again for your dedication to helping our students pursue and succeed in postsecondary education!

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Manuel

Senior Director of Student Services

About College for West Virginia

College for West Virginia (CFWV) provides FREE resources to help students and families pursue — and succeed in — education and training beyond high school. CFWV coordinates dozens of college awareness and readiness efforts, including a series of statewide college pathway events that schools can adopt to strengthen a culture of college-readiness within their school buildings and communities. These pathway events include the annual College Application and Exploration Week, FAFSA completion workshops and College Decision Day. CFWV is coordinated by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission working in partnership with the West Virginia Community and Technical College System, and the West Virginia Department of Education.

About College Decision Day

The idea for College Decision Day was inspired by sports events, such as the NCAA national signing day and NFL draft. College Decision Day events provide schools and communities with the opportunity to showcase the academic excellence of students with the same enthusiasm and pride as are devoted to sports.

West Virginia's College Decision Day initiative is part of a growing national effort to celebrate seniors for their postsecondary plans and assist them and their families in enrolling in and transitioning to college. The event was first piloted in the Mountain State by Summers County High School (SCHS). SCHS showed that College Decision Day events can inspire communities and help strengthen a college-going culture. As a result, this year's College Decision Day will be celebrated in high schools statewide.

The College Decision Day initiative is one of West Virginia's three statewide college-planning milestone events that, along with College Application and Exploration Week and statewide FAFSA completion events, help guide 12th grade students and their families in planning, applying and paying for college.

College Decision Day events recognize students who plan to pursue...

- a two-year degree or a four-year degree
- a skillset certificate
- a career and technical program
- military service
- an apprenticeship

What's in a name? What we mean by "college"...

College is important — there's no doubt about it. 70% of West Virginia's future job openings will require more than a high school diploma,[1] yet only 32% of West Virginians aged 25-64 hold a college degree.[2] On average, four-year college graduates earn 66% more than individuals who stopped their education after high school.[3] And students who complete some form of postsecondary education are far less likely to be unemployed than those with just a high school diploma.[4] But what does that mean for students?

We use the word "college" to include any type of postsecondary education or education and training beyond high school. That means students have many options when it comes to attending college... and one of the goals of College Decision Day is to help students and their families understand this. Some form of college should be the ultimate path for all West Virginia students.

West Virginia's Climb

Less than one-third of West Virginians currently hold an associate degree or higher, yet 70 percent of working-aged West Virginians will need a certificate or degree in order to meet future workforce demands. Less than half of West Virginia's high school class of 2020 enrolled in college the following fall. CFWV is proud to support West Virginia's attainment goal to equip 60% of West Virginians with a certificate or degree by 2030. To find out more about this initiative, visit **wvclimb.com**.[5]

Requirements for participation

To be recognized as an official CFWV College Decision Day participant, schools must register at **cfwvconnect.com/college-decision-day**. Additionally, the event must occur sometime between April 1 and June 1 and event coordinators must complete a brief online survey following their local event.

College Decision Day events must include two primary components:

- a celebration to recognize students who have chosen to pursue postsecondary education
- a workshop or presentation to assist students in enrolling in and transitioning to college

1. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED605044.pdf
2. https://luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/#/progress/state/WV
3. https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2021/data-on-display/education-pays.htm
4. https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2021/unemployment-rate-3-7-percent-for-college-grads-6-7-percent-for-high-school-grads-in-march-2021.htm
5. https://www.wvhepc.edu/resources/data-and-publication-center/cgr/

CFWV Champion of College Access and Success

High schools that participate in this year's College Decision Day celebration can strive to become a **CFWV Champion of College Access and Success**!

High schools that complete all the required steps will be recognized in the Fall of 2023.

To be recognized, high schools must do the following:

- Participate in College Decision Day.
- Complete the post-event survey immediately following the event.
- Participate in CFWV's two other postsecondary pathway events (College Application and Exploration Week, which occurred last fall, and the statewide FAFSA Completion Campaign).
- Complete all post-survey events.
- Meet the statewide FAFSA completion goal OR improve your school's FAFSA completion rate by 5 percentage points compared to the previous year.

You can check your school's progress toward the goal and learn more about this initiative at **cfwvconnect.com/champion**.

Post-event survey

NOTE: Following College Decision Day, the required post-event survey can be accessed at **surveymonkey.com/r/CollegeDecisionDay23**. The survey below gives site coordinators an idea of what data to collect to be able to complete the online survey.

Information collected and questions

- Coordinator name/email address/phone number
- School name
- How many students are enrolled in the senior class at your high school?
- How many seniors at your school participated in College Decision Day?
- How many parent(s) or guardian(s) participated in College Decision Day?
- Do you plan on participating in College Decision Day next year?
- Did you participate in the statewide College Application & Exploration Week campaign?
- Rank how much you agree with this statement: I believe College Decision Day positively impacts supporting a college-going culture in our school.
- How helpful was the College Decision Day toolkit in planning and implementing your event?
- What resources would you like to see added to the toolkit for next year?
- What other resources can we provide or what improvements can we make in supporting you in College Decision Day?
- Did any media outlets cover your College Decision Day event? If so, please describe the media coverage and provide links when applicable.
- What went well for you at this event?
- What could be improved for next year's event?

Planning checklist

One to three months before your event...

- ☐ Go to the College Decision Day website at **cfwvconnect.com/college-decision-day** and review the College Decision Day guidebook.
- ☐ Recruit colleagues and volunteers at your school to staff your College Decision Day planning team.
- ☐ Determine the type of event you will host (see best practices section of this guide).
- ☐ Schedule your event with your building principal and arrange for chaperones and custodians as needed.
- ☐ Work with your school counselor to distribute the student questionnaire to gauge students' postsecondary plans.
- ☐ Set up counseling sessions to assist students who need assistance finalizing their plans or who do not yet have a plan for after high school.
- ☐ Reach out to admissions officers at schools your students plan to attend. Invite them to send materials for display or to attend your event. Please note: although admissions officers may want to attend your event, their schedules may not allow them to participate. It is a good idea to let them know you are inviting them as a courtesy, but that you and your students will understand if they are unable to make it. Hanging college pennants or signs can be a very effective way to demonstrate a college's presence and support, even if a representative is unable to attend the event in person.
- ☐ Work with your planning team to determine what topics you will cover during your college transition workshop (see best practices section of this guide). Prepare materials for your workshop presentations.
- ☐ Schedule any guest speakers or presenters for your college transition workshops. Secure an appropriate space to conduct the workshop and any audio and visual equipment needed.
- ☐ If you plan to provide food or door prizes at your event, work with community members and your committee to make arrangements.

Two to three weeks before your event...

- ☐ Invite students, parents and family members, faculty and staff, and community members to your College Decision Day event.

- ☐ Work with your counselor to confirm that all seniors have returned the postsecondary plans questionnaire and that you have notes on each student in the senior class. Reach out to any students you feel are still struggling to make or follow through on their postsecondary plans.
- ☐ Post information about College Decision Day on your and/or your school's social media channels and websites. Consider engaging community partners in generating buzz online.

Seven to ten days before your event...

- ☐ Distribute the press release announcing your College Decision Day event to local media representatives.
- ☐ Print students' certificates and organize college signs, pennants, etc.

One to two days before your event...

- ☐ Distribute the media alert to remind reporters about your event.
- ☐ Make announcements encouraging students to post their college decisions online using the hashtags #CollegeBoundWV and #WVClimb. Students planning to enter the military may want to use variations such as #ArmyBound, #NavyBound, etc.
- ☐ Email Kaci Foster at **Kaci.Foster@wvhepc.edu** to let her know about any media coverage you expect for your event.
- ☐ Check in with volunteers and staff and remind them of details.
- ☐ Schedule an "all call" home reminding students and families of your upcoming event.

The day of your event...

- ☐ Post photos of your event online using the hashtags above and encourage students to do the same. Tag @cfwv (and @wvgearup if your school is a West Virginia GEAR UP school) so that we can find and share your photos! Be sure to follow your school's media release and image publication policies before posting, and do NOT post photos without participants' permission.
- ☐ Remind seniors to update their CFWV.com account to indicate the schools at which they've been accepted. Remind them to change their status from "high school" to "college" student and link their accounts to the schools they plan to attend.

After your event...

- ☐ Email photos and links to media stories to Kaci Foster at Kaci.Foster@wvhepc.edu. Only send photos that are "ok" for publication and distribution, according to your school's media and image release policies.
- ☐ Send thank you notes to individuals who helped make your event success. Consider sending a note to any media representatives who attended.

Sample College Decision Day agendas

We have provided a sample agenda below for each of the two required components (a celebration activity or event and a college transition workshop). These are merely suggestions. School coordinators are welcome to be as creative as they'd like in planning their celebration and workshop activities, and coordinators should build a game plan that will fit the needs and interests of school staff, students and families.

Celebration event agenda

Welcome and overview
Suggested speakers include the principal, superintendent, or member of the school board.

Guest speaker
Remarks from an individual highlighting the importance of postsecondary education and/or inspiring students to continue their education. Suggested speakers include motivational speakers, community leaders who have graduated from college, alumni from the school who benefited from postsecondary opportunities and/or overcame obstacles to pursue their dreams...

Recognition of students who are college bound
Make sure all students are recognized individually... for example, by calling their names and having them walk across stage, sign a letter of intent at a signing booth, etc. It is also a nice touch to set up photo ops allowing each student to pose for pictures with family members and/or admissions staff or college gear.

Group photo
Taking a group photo of your college bound students with their college gear, signs and certificates is a great way to highlight your school's commitment to a college-going culture. Hang these photos with pride around school and send them to CFWV staff members to post online and showcase statewide!

Transition workshop agenda

Welcome and overview
Congratulate students on their college plans and their decision to continue their education. It is important that students understand that there are many steps that students need to complete during the summer months to transition to college. Use College 101 as a reference guide.

Activity/Discussion/Speaker
To assist students and their families in making the transition to college please ensure your workshop includes topics associated with the transition to college like, next steps, understanding financial aid award packages or any other special topics. For example, you could host a workshop or a student alumni panel where students share their stories about transition to college. For more ideas on topics to cover during your workshop refer to the College Transition Workshop Topics page in this guide.

Provide resources
Make sure students and parents walk away with resources that will assist them through the transition process. Provide resources about financial aid award packages and next steps. CFWV has many great resources like the College 101 and the Transition 101 guide.

There are people here to help
Students and parents need to know that there are people to help them during this process. Provide students and parents with the contact information for CFWV staff (and GEAR UP staff if your school is a West Virginia GEAR UP school or other professionals who can assist them in the summer months.

Senior Questionaire

FULL NAME (PRINTED):

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

☐ **Attend a college or university**

Which college? Have you been accepted? ◯ yes ◯ no

What is your intended major and/or minor?

☐ **Complete a skillset certificate or career and technical training program**

Where will you complete your program?

☐ **Enlist in the military**

Which branch? Has your enlistment been confirmed? ◯ yes ◯ no

☐ **Become an apprentice**

Please describe your apprenticeship:

☐ **Go directly to the workforce**

Do you have a job lined up? What will you do?

☐ Other:

☐ Not sure or don't know

WOULD YOU LIKE TO THANK ANYONE?

Is there a teacher or other staff member that you would like to recognize for helping you along the way in school? This could be anyone who helped you, past or present, from pre-K through high school.

Can we share your "thank you" publicly? ◯ yes ◯ no

Senior Questionaire, Continued

HOW CAN WE HELP?

We want to make sure you succeed in the future. What questions do you have about preparing for your next step? Can the counseling office or school staff help you in any way?

CAN WE CONTACT YOU NEXT YEAR TO SEE HOW YOU'RE DOING? ◯ yes ◯ no

Contact person:

Phone: Email:

Mailing address:

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO COME BACK TO TALK TO OTHER STUDENTS ABOUT LIFE AFTER GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL? ◯ yes ◯ no

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOUNGER STUDENTS?

Can we share your advice publicly? ◯ yes ◯ no

COLLEGE-BOUND SENIOR

CONGRATULATIONS TO

FOR COMMITTING TO PURSUE
EDUCATION AND TRAINING BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL
AT

cfWV.com
College for West Virginia

SIGNATURE

COLLEGE-BOUND SENIOR

CONGRATULATIONS TO

_____

FOR COMMITTING TO PURSUE
EDUCATION AND TRAINING BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL
AT

_____

cfWV.com College for West Virginia

West Virginia GEARUP

_____

SIGNATURE

MILITARY-BOUND SENIOR

CONGRATULATIONS TO

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College for West Virginia

SIGNATURE

MILITARY-BOUND SENIOR

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AT

cfWV.com College for West Virginia

West Virginia GEARUP

SIGNATURE

COLLEGE DECISION DAY

JOIN US TO CELEBRATE!

To celebrate the senior class of 2023 and students' commitments to pursue education and training beyond high school, our school is hosting a "College Decision Day" on <insert date/time> at <insert location>.

Seniors who have been accepted to college, a trade, career or certificate program, apprenticeship program or the military are invited to attend College Decision Day to declare their intent to continue their education. Students and family members will have the opportunity to <insert details here, such as photo ops, recognition ceremonies, transition workshops, financial aid counseling, etc.> Additionally, students may choose to recognize a teacher or staff member — past or present — who helped them along the way.

College Decision Day Program
<insert agenda here>

All <school name> students are invited to attend the event to celebrate the successes of their classmates and friends.

If you wish to be recognized at College Decision Day, please fill out the form below and return it to <insert name> no later than <insert deadline>.

Student name: _____

What college, program or military service branch will you enter after high school?

_____

Will your parents/guardians attend? ☐ yes ☐ no

If so, parent/guardian names: _____

Estimated number of other family members or friends who will attend: _____

Teacher or staff member you would like to invite and recognize:

_____

Media Outreach Guide

Inviting local reporters to your College Decision Day event is a great way to recognize the successes of your students and increase awareness of your school's work to promote a college-going culture. Here are some tips for working with the media.

Send a news release: Use the news release template in this kit to develop a news story about your school's College Decision Day event. Send the news release to local media outlets seven to ten days in advance of your event. If your local newspaper or outlet publishes once a week, send the release ten days in advance. If they publish or air stories daily, a week is sufficient.

If you or someone on staff at your school has a relationship with a media outlet or a specific reporter, have that person reach out when sending the release. Also try contacting reporters who have covered stories about your school in the past.

When you send the release, make sure you note in the body of your email that media representatives are invited and encouraged to attend! It is also a good idea to copy and paste the release into the body of your email instead of sending it as an attachment. This will help you avoid spam filters and allow the reporter to scan your news story quickly without having to download and open an attachment.

Follow up: A day or so after you've sent your news release, call the media outlet to confirm that they received it and ask if they have any questions. You can ask them if they think they will be able to send someone to cover the event, but avoid pushing for a firm commitment. News rooms are often short staffed, so be understanding of their time constraints.

Send a media alert: Use the template in this guide to write a media alert. Your media alert will serve as a reminder of the key details for your event. Send the media alert one to two days in advance of your event.

Designate a media point-of-contact: Ask a staff member or volunteer to keep an eye out for any reporters who come to your event. The point-of-contact should greet the reporter, provide him or her with a copy of your news release, offer to arrange interviews and direct reporters to key activities.

Prepare your staff and students: Consider in advance staff members, students and family members who might represent your school well in a media interview. Ask their permission to refer reporters to them. Make sure they understand key information about College Decision Day, including its purpose and who is being recognized. You may also want to provide them with information about why education and training beyond high school is important, your school's current college-going rates and the number of students who are participating in College Decision Day.

Send a "thank you": After your event, send a thank you note to reporters who provided media coverage. This will help your school maintain a good relationship with media outlets.

Share your success: Send information, pictures, and any links to any media coverage to Kaci Foster at Kaci.Foster@wvhepc.edu. We'd love to share your successes on our CFWV and GEAR UP websites and social media channels!

For Immediate Release Send date

Contact:
Name, Title
Organization
Phone
Email address

NEWS RELEASE

<High School> to celebrate graduating seniors during 'College Decision Day'

<CITY>, W.Va. – <High school> will recognize seniors who plan to pursue some form of education or training beyond high school as part of a statewide "College Decision Day" campaign. College Decision Day is organized by College for West Virginia (CFWV), an initiative coordinated by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (Commission) to help students go to college and succeed.

The event, which is inspired by sports events such as the NCAA national signing day and the NFL draft, ensures that students who commit to pursuing education or training beyond high school are celebrated and praised for their efforts. In 2014, the first College Decision Day event was piloted in West Virginia.

Elizabeth A. Manuel, Senior Director of Student Services at the Commission stated, "These students have made the important decision to further their education. College Decision Day not only celebrates the decisions these students have made, but it serves as an opportunity for students and families to learn about the financial aid resources available to them, and also serves as an encouragement to younger generations.

<High school's> College Decision Day event will be held <insert date, time and location>. School staff, students and families will recognize and celebrate each senior who plans to pursue some form of postsecondary education, including certificate programs, workforce training and apprenticeship programs, two-year degree programs, four-year degree programs and military service. Additionally, <insert other activities that are occurring, such as transition workshops, financial aid counseling, or specifics regarding how you will honor your students.>

The College Decision Day initiative is one of West Virginia's three statewide college-planning milestone events that, along with College Application and Exploration Week and statewide FAFSA completion events, help guide 12th grade students and their families in planning, applying, and paying for college. To learn more about College Decision Day, visit cfwvconnect.com/college-decision-day.

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For Planning Purposes Send Date

Contact:
Name, Title
Organization
Phone
Email

<High School> to recognize graduating seniors during 'College Decision Day'

When: **<Date and time>**

What: **'College Decision Day' celebration**
<High school> will recognize seniors who plan to pursue some form of education or training beyond high school as part of a statewide "College Decision Day" campaign. These students have made the important decision to enter trade and professional certificate programs, career and technical programs, and two-and four-year degree programs, formalized apprenticeship programs, and military service. Additionally, students and families will have the opportunity to participate in workshops and counseling sessions to help them make the transition from high school to college.

Who: **<High School> students, family and staff**
Members of the community and the media also are invited to join us in celebrating the success of our students!

Where: **<School Name>, <Room # or Location (e.g. Auditorium)>**
<Physical Address>
<City, State, Zip>

Context: High schools statewide are participating in College Decision Day events. The campaign is organized by College for West Virginia (CFWV), an initiative coordinated by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission. In 2014, the first College Decision Day event was piloted in West Virginia.

College Decision Day events, which will occur between April 1 and June 1, will celebrate seniors who have committed to pursuing an education or training beyond high school in the same way that national signing day events celebrate students who wish to commit to playing sports after graduation. College Decision Day events ensure that students who plan to continue their education or training beyond high school.

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Social Media Guide

Social media is an excellent way to recognize your students and share your school's work with the community. You can also use social media to engage students and families and build excitement for your event. Here are a few tips for maximizing your social media efforts. Also, be sure to check out our College Decision Day Virtual Guidebook for even more great ideas and suggestions on ways to reach out!

Tag it! Just like an in-person conversation, it's hard to participate if you can't follow what's happening. Hashtags and mentions make it possible to find and follow posts from a wide variety of sources and link together the conversation. For College Decision Day, the following hashtags can be used:

- **#CollegeBoundWV:** Students across the country are using this hashtag to share their college-going plans.
- **#MyClimbWV:** This hashtag is used by students to describe their "climb" to pursue postsecondary education.
- **#ArmyBound**, **#NavyBound**, **#AirforceBound** (etc.): As with #CollegeBound, students across the nation are sharing their pride in enlisting in the military using these hashtags.
- **@CFWV** and **@WVGEARUP**: Students can mention CFWV and West Virginia GEAR UP on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook to share their stories with us.
- It's important to remember to check your privacy settings on your social media accounts if you want your posts to be seen and shared by others. For us to retweet and share your stories, remember to make your posts public!

Encourage students and parents to share: Students often love to share info about themselves — and parents love talking about their kids! Here are a few ideas to get students and parents talking online:

- Ask students to post their postsecondary plans.
- Ask students to post pictures of their college acceptance letters.
- Ask students to share why they chose the pathway they plan to pursue.
- Encourage parents to brag a little about their student's successes and future plans.
- Ask students to share a bit of advice to help younger students prepare for the future.

Sample Social Media Posts

Seniors! <Insert date> is College Decision Day at <insert school>! Tell us where you're going to college!

On College Decision Day, we're recognizing your hard work and decision to pursue a postsecondary education. Look out for our <insert school> grads as they continue to shine! #CollegeBoundWV

Today is College Decision Day! Cheer on our <insert school mascot/nickname> grads as they embark on their post-high school journey! #CollegeBoundWV

Seniors, our school is celebrating all students who are planning to enroll in some type of education and training after high school! What are your plans? Tell us using #CollegeBoundWV or #MyClimbWV!

Those long nights of studying and planning for the future were worth it. Check out where our <insert school> students are headed! #CollegeBoundWV

Get ready because College Decision Day is <Insert date>, and we're pumped! Let's celebrate all your hard work to get to this point, you deserve it. Share your big plans for next year in the comments!

It's College Decision Day and our seniors are telling the world where they're headed! Join us in our celebration. #CollegeBoundWV

Tomorrow is College Decision Day at <insert school>. Don't forget to wear your favorite college gear or colors!

<Insert number> of seniors at <insert school> are heading on to some form of education or training beyond high school! Congrats, #classof2023!

They said it. They did it. Now, they are headed to college and beyond! Congrats, #classof2023! #CollegeBoundWV

Cheer on our grads at <insert school> as they embark on the next step of their educational journey during College Decision Day!

We couldn't be prouder of our seniors at <insert school> who have committed to pursuing an education or training beyond high school!

The future is here and these <insert school> grads are going to college! We can't wait to see what great things they accomplish! #CollegeBoundWV

CFWV and West Virginia GEAR UP Social Media Channels

CFWV

- **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/collegeforwv
- **Twitter:** www.twitter.com/cfwv
- **Instagram:** www.instagram.com/collegeforwv
- **YouTube:** www.youtube.com/user/collegeforwv

West Virginia GEAR UP

- **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/wvgearup
- **Twitter:** www.twitter.com/wvgearup
- **Instagram:** www.instagram.com/wvgearup
- **YouTube:** www.youtube.com/c/wvgearuporg

Activity and event ideas

We encourage schools to have fun with this event and make it their own. There's no right or wrong way to host College Decision Day — as long as you incorporate a celebration of ALL college bound students and provide them with resources to transition and succeed! To get your creative juices flowing, here are a few bright ideas!

Activities:

- **Display a "where are you going?" map:** Post a map of West Virginia (or the U.S.) and let your students mark where they are going. You can leave the map up next year to inspire younger students!
- **Ask students to pledge to go:** Hang a "College Bound" banner in a prominent area of the school and have seniors who are planning on furthering their education sign it.
- **Post college acceptance letters:** Hang copies of your students' college acceptance letters around school or post them on your school's social media pages.
- **Create a "college wall":** Hang banners or signs for each college that students from your school plan to attend. Put students' names alongside their intended college.
- **Dress the part:** Encourage students and staff to wear their favorite college gear leading up to College Decision Day.
- **Invite a panel of past students:** Invite alumni from your school to come back and share their experiences in college.
- **College slideshow:** Play a slideshow on your school's televisions that highlights each college bound student and his or her postsecondary plans.
- **Giveaways and contests:** These items can be something from the school's office like college swag, money, or even scholarships!
- **Photo booths:** Design a backdrop and adopt college-themed props for seniors to use to take photos.
- **"Real world" preparation:** Plan activities around your College Decision Day event that will help students prepare for life beyond high school. Some examples might be a chance to learn dining etiquette, professional networking, and financial literacy.
- **Door decorating contests:** Have students work together to decorate doors based on the college or university they plan to attend. Have staff and faculty vote for their favorites.
- **TikTok challenges:** Start a TikTok Challenge focused on college fight songs or an "I've Decided" reveal.

- **Car parades:** Have a car parade! Teachers can celebrate seniors' plans for after high school by decorating their vehicles with signs, balloons, and window chalk and drive a specific route to pass by seniors' home.
- **Twitter chats:** Host a Twitter chat and pick a topic related to the senior's transition into college.
- **Baby photos:** Have seniors send in a baby photo saying what they wanted to do when they were younger - and a current photo saying what they are thinking about now. You can post them on social media or put them on a bulletin board.

Event ideas:

- Recognize each student who plans to pursue some form of education and training beyond high school on stage. Present them with a certificate and have them sign a commitment to finish their degree or program.
- Have each student pose for a photo at a "signing" booth, similar to those used when student athletes sign a letter of intent to play a sport. Decorate the booth with signs and gear from the student's chosen college and have them sign a letter of commitment to complete their degree or program.
- At a school pep rally, call students down from the stands by the name of the college or program they plan to attend. Have them sign a banner with the name of their intended college or program. Display the banners around school.
- Host a pep rally with the band, cheerleaders, etc. Call each student's name over the microphone and announce his or her college plans. Ask the band to crash symbols and the cheerleaders to cheer for each student.
- Host a "red carpet" event for students prior to a senior awards ceremony. Have a backdrop where students can pose for pictures with their family and friends and gear or signs from the college they plan to attend. Instead of asking students "who are you wearing?," ask them "where are you going?"
- Host a picnic, breakfast or lunch for students and their families. Seat students according to their intended college or plans after high school so they can get to know other students pursuing the same path.
- In addition to recognizing the student and his or her family, ask each student to recognize a teacher or staff member — past or present — who inspired them or helped them along the way.
- In addition to recognizing students, ask them to share a bit of advice for younger students or share why they chose their intended pathway.
- Plan a senior walk around your College Decision Day event. Have seniors visit their former elementary or middle school so the graduating class can feel nostalgic and the younger class can get excited about graduation!
- Allot time before your event begins for undecided students to speak with college representatives who attend your College Decision Day event.

Encouraging Community Collaboration

Getting the community involved in the celebration is a great way to make your students feel special. Here are a few ideas for encouraging community collaboration.

- Work with your local newspaper to include seniors' postsecondary plans alongside published senior photos.
- Ask local business leaders to post signs congratulating college bound seniors and wishing them luck.
- Ask local businesses to post your school's college-going rate or the number of students pursuing some form of education and training beyond high school on their marquees.
- Ask community leaders to "adopt" a college bound student for the next year. Ask them to check in with their adopted student to see how they're doing in college and offer to help them with any issues they're having. Ask them to send cards or care packages to their adopted student to encourage them to keep pursuing their dreams!

College Transition Workshop Topics

Many students graduate high school with intentions of pursuing postsecondary education but fail to enroll in a college program the following fall. To help combat this issue, known as "summer melt," we ask that all College Decision Day sites provide workshops or counseling sessions to assist students and their families in making the transition to college. Here are some ideas for topics you may want to cover:

College 101: Utilize CFWV's College 101 guide to walk students and families, step-by-step, through the process of enrolling in and preparing for college. You should have received some of these guides in the mail if you registered to participate in College Decision Day prior to March 15. If you need additional guides, they are available for download at **cfwvconnect.com/request-resources**.

Financial aid: Applying for financial aid is only the first step. Students often need help understanding financial aid award letters or finding additional money to close gaps in college funding. It can be useful to bring in a financial aid counselor to discuss these issues with students and families.

Study skills and time management: Set expectations that students will need to study more in college and provide them with strategies to study smarter (and harder!)

Self-advocacy and networking: Set expectations that students must take a proactive approach to managing their education, build relationships with professors and administrators on campus, and take responsibility for their own learning. Students arriving on college campuses are often afraid to ask questions or ask for help — talk to them about strategies for navigating this new environment.

Life skills: Paying bills, setting a budget, living with a roommate... doing laundry! Many students will be living on their own for the first time in college. Host workshops to have conversations about these topics.

Individual rights and safety: Students often do not understand the legal and social environments they are entering when they enroll in college. For example, many students are expelled for academic misconduct that may not seem like "a big deal" to them. Additionally, students often do not understand their rights to privacy or the judicial procedures available to them if they find themselves in trouble. Finally, students may lack "street smarts" in navigating a new city or area. Remind students of basic safety concepts such as traveling in groups at night. Make sure students are aware of campus safety procedures and resources.

Responsible lifestyles: Many students are overwhelmed by the social aspects of college, and, as a result, fall into negative situations such as engaging in drug or alcohol abuse, developing sedentary habits, entering into abusive or unhealthy personal relationships, or failing to manage their emotional and physical health. Discuss these issues with students and parents and point them toward resources to help them stay on track.

Contact

If you have questions about this toolkit or West Virginia's College Decision Day effort, please contact:

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