



TEXTING THROUGH THE GEAR UP GRANT CYCLE

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Texting GEAR UP families

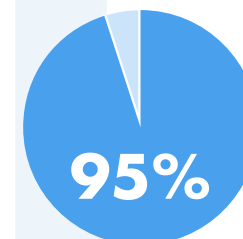
It's a well-known fact: today's students are glued to their phones. According to the Pew Research Center, 95% of today's teenagers have access to a smartphone while nearly half of these teens say they are on them "almost constantly." Similarly, their parents own smartphones. Roughly 92% of 30- to 49-year-olds own a smartphone, and nearly 80% of 50- to 64-year olds own one. As a result, many college access organizations — and even colleges themselves — are turning to texting as a primary source for outreach.

With these statistics in mind, our borrowed knowledge from our GEAR UP partners across the nation, and our expertise in software and mobile technology, we know that texting works to help GEAR UP families prepare for postsecondary education. In this book, we'll talk about texting families and students to help them prepare for postsecondary education. We'll break down some best practices and then dive right into texting from the seventh grade year to the senior year of high school.

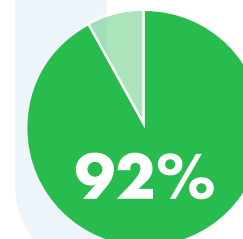
You'll note that we share messaging for students as early as seventh grade, when many GEAR UP programs begin. Because students are still rather young, you may choose to text parents instead. There is no right or wrong answer for how to set up your program; however, if you plan to text younger students, it may be a good idea to reach out to their parents for permission. Many of our GEAR UP partners text both parents and students. For the purposes of this book, we'll focus on the information that students and families should receive while leaving it up to you on message delivery.

Happy texting!

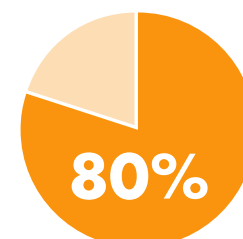
QUICK STATS



of teens have access to a smartphone



of 30- to 49-year-olds own a smartphone

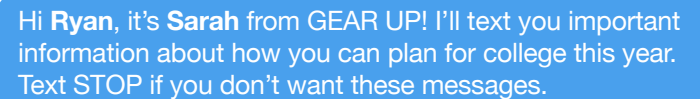


of 50- to 64-year-olds own a smartphone

Best practices

Before we dive into a timeline for texts, we've created a few texting best practices to make sure you're getting the most out of your messages.

- 1. Keep texts short and sweet.** It's easy to get carried away with messages since they're typed out on a computer rather than scheduled on a cellphone. It may help to type a message you're thinking about on your phone to gauge how long it takes to type. If it takes a while and turns into a massive text bubble, try to cut down on the text's content.
- 2. Identify a single call to action in the text.** Whether it's text back, fill out a form, or visit a website, the text should give a single action for your audience to complete.
- 3. Avoid using most "text speak," even if your audience is comprised of students.** Contrary to popular belief, students tend to dislike the use of "text speak," or the use of "c u l8r" rather than "see you later." Although typing out full words makes for a longer message, it's preferred by most students.
- 4. Adopt a consistent tone among your team.** If you have more than one person on your team working to craft messages and respond to texts, discuss the tone you want to establish through texts. Do you want to keep it casual or strictly professional?
- 5. Spend some time crafting your first message.** This message sets the tone for all of your other messages, so it shouldn't be taken lightly. We recommend covering these three components in your first text message to families:
 1. Who you are [e.g. "I'm Sarah from GEAR UP!"]
 2. Why you're texting [e.g. "I'll text you important information about going to college."]
 3. How to opt out [e.g. "Text 'STOP' if you don't want these messages."]



Hi Ryan, it's Sarah from GEAR UP! I'll text you important information about how you can plan for college this year. Text STOP if you don't want these messages.

💡 Want more texting best practices? Visit SignalVine.com to download the [Best Practices for Writing Text Messages](#) eBook!

7th grade



Students who are in 7th grade can already begin preparing for college in a number of ways, from saving money to pay for college to discovering their interests and researching careers based on them. We recommend using texting to nudge students and families to take the following actions:

- ☑ **Develop strong study habits.**
- ☑ **Work hard to improve grades.**
- ☑ **Open a college savings account, like a 529 plan.**
- ☑ **Explore extracurriculars and volunteer.**

SAMPLE MESSAGES

STUDENTS

Hi **[first name]**, let's start your 7th grade year on the right foot! Developing good study habits now will help you later. Visit signalvineu/studyhabits for some studying tips!

Hi **[first name]**, believe it or not, the grades you make now will help you in high school & beyond! Study hard and work to keep your grades up. Reach out if you need help!

[first name], have you considered volunteering in the community? It's a great way to learn important work skills - and to help others!

PARENTS

[first name], did you know you can start saving now for your child's college education? 529 plans exist for this very reason. Check them out: signalvineu/529.

Hi **[first name]**, how are your child's grades? Do they need a little extra help? You can reach out to the school counselor for tutoring resources.

8th grade



Students who are in 8th grade can continue the steps outlined for 7th grade students. Additionally, they can be encouraged to take the following actions:

- ☑ **Test their knowledge in science, reading, English, and math to prepare for college entrance exams.**
- ☑ **Begin the scholarship search.**
- ☑ **Take an interest profiler.**
- ☑ **Reach out to professionals who work in their field of interest for job shadowing opportunities.**

SAMPLE MESSAGES

STUDENTS

Hi **[first name]**, to go to college you'll need to take tests for science, reading, English, and math. It's not too early to take practice tests! Visit [signalvineu/testprep](https://signalvineu.com/testprep) to get started.

[first name], did you know you can start applying for scholarships now? Let's get some money for college! Visit [signalvineu/scholarships](https://signalvineu.com/scholarships) to get started!

Hey **[first name]**, do you know what type of job you want to have someday? You can take an interest profiler and be matched to careers! Visit [signalvineu/interestprofiler](https://signalvineu.com/interestprofiler).

[first name], what were the results of your interest profiler assessment? You can work with your school counselor to find job shadowing opportunities with pros in the field!

PARENTS

Hi **[first name]**, 8th grade year is an important one as students prepare to transition to high school. Be sure to keep in touch with your child's teachers/counselor for this pivotal year!

9th grade



Students in 9th grade can be encouraged to take more steps toward getting to college. We recommend nudging toward the following outcomes:

- ☑ **Take challenging courses in science, reading, English, and math.**
- ☑ **Take AP/honors courses.**
- ☑ **Pursue activities that allow them to explore their interests.**
- ☑ **Practice the SAT/ACT exams.**
- ☑ **Continue saving for college/finding scholarships.**

SAMPLE MESSAGES

STUDENTS

Welcome to high school, **[first name]**! This year is a new start. The grades you make from now til graduation will be visible to college admissions counselors. Make them count!

[first name], this is the year to begin showing college admissions reps you're up for the challenge! Talk to your school counselor about AP/honors courses.

Hey **[first name]**, what activities really make your excitement levels go through the roof? Spend this year exploring them and matching careers based on your interest profiler results!

DYK we offer FREE ACT/SAT test prep resources on our website? You can take practice tests to find out where you need to study up before the actual exams. Visit signalvineu/testprep to get started!

PARENTS

Hi **[first name]**, how's saving up for college funds for **[student name]** going? You can learn more about saving for college here: signalvineu/529. Questions? Text us!

10th grade



We recommend nudging 10th grade students and families toward the following outcomes:

- ☑ **Take an interest profiler again.**
- ☑ **Meet with the high school counselor to discuss colleges/universities based on interests.**
- ☑ **Research colleges with matching programs of study.**
- ☑ **Practice the SAT/ACT exams.**
- ☑ **Use summer break to take on a job, volunteer, job shadow, and research college opportunities.**
- ☑ **Continue saving money for college/applying for scholarships.**

SAMPLE MESSAGES

STUDENTS

Do you remember your interest profiler results **[first name]**? We encourage you to take it again and see if your interests have changed. Visit [signalvineu/interestprofiler](https://signalvineu.com/interestprofiler).

[first name], have you talked about college with your school counselor? Now is a great time to do that! Make an appointment by calling **[counselor_number]**.

Hey **[first name]**, now's a great time to closely evaluate colleges. Make a list of colleges of interest and write down why you're interested, the avg. cost of attendance, avg. financial aid award, etc. It'll help you make a decision!

How did you do when you practiced the ACT/SAT last year? Let's improve your scores this year since you'll take the test for real next year! Visit [signalvineu/testprep](https://signalvineu.com/testprep).

It's almost summer break, **[first name]**. Whatever your plans, consider getting a job, volunteering, job shadowing, and researching college opportunities. By preparing now, you'll be less stressed later!

Let's get some money for college, **[first name]**! Visit [signalvineu/scholarships](https://signalvineu.com/scholarships) to be matched to scholarships based on your interests.

11th grade



We recommend nudging 11th grade students and families toward the following outcomes:

- ☑ **Attend college fairs.**
- ☑ **Schedule campus tours for colleges of interest.**
- ☑ **Talk to the high school counselor about college admissions requirements.**
- ☑ **Gather letters of recommendation from school staff.**
- ☑ **Research careers, including salaries, education required, and skillsets.**
- ☑ **Take the ACT/SAT.**

SAMPLE MESSAGES

STUDENTS

College fairs are a great way to learn about colleges because they come to you! Check out our calendar for college fairs happening in your area: [signalvineu/fairs](https://signalvineu.com/fairs).

Hey **[first name]**, the best way to get a feel for a college campus is to experience it firsthand. Check out the college tour schedules of your colleges of interest!

Hi there **[first name]**, have you reached out to your high school counselor about college admissions requirements? They can help you research them!

Now is the perfect time to gather letters of recommendation for college from your teachers and high school counselor. Reach out to them!

Have you checked out the O*NET website **[first name]**? The site has great information on careers, from average salaries to the skillset you'll need. Check it out: onetonline.org.

Now is the time to put your knowledge to the test. It's time to take the ACT/SAT! Find test dates online at our website: [signalvineu/testdates](https://signalvineu.com/testdates).

12th grade



We recommend nudging seniors toward the following outcomes:

- ☑ **Avoid “senioritis.”**
- ☑ **Check with colleges of interest to learn about programs, scholarships, etc.**
- ☑ **Check in with the school counselor.**
- ☑ **Apply to 3-5 colleges.**
- ☑ **File the FAFSA.**
- ☑ **Retake the ACT/SAT.**
- ☑ **Make a final decision on a college and confirm choice by May.**
- ☑ **Speak to a college student.**

SAMPLE MESSAGES

STUDENTS

Welcome to your final year of high school **[first name]**! We know you might be feeling a bit burned out, but the finish line is near! Hang in there!

Hey **[first name]**, you’ve already narrowed your college choices quite a bit. Narrow them even more by checking with ones you’re considering to learn about programs, scholarships, etc.

Hi **[first name]**, have you kept in touch with your school counselor? Now is a great time to check in and make sure you’re progressing well!

It’s time to apply to colleges, **[first name]**! We recommend applying to 3-5 colleges. Need help? Reach out to your school counselor - or attend a college application event!

Want some free money for college **[first name]**? Of course you do! You can get it by filing the FAFSA. Attend a FAFSA workshop near you: [signalvineu/FAFSA](https://signalvineu.edu/FAFSA).

We know senior year is super busy **[first name]**. We’re just reaching out to make sure you’ve registered to retake the ACT/SAT. Studies show students who test more than once improve their scores.

By now, you should have heard back from the colleges you’ve applied to! Remember to confirm your college choice by the end of May, **[first name]**.

Summer after graduation



During the summer following high school graduation, students are prone to the summer melt phenomenon, or not enrolling in college even though they planned to. Nudging toward the following outcomes may decrease this risk:

- ☑ **Check their email regularly for correspondence from colleges.**
- ☑ **Register for orientation/placement tests.**
- ☑ **Complete housing forms.**
- ☑ **Complete the FAFSA (if they haven't already).**
- ☑ **Reach out to colleges of interest with questions.**

SAMPLE MESSAGES

STUDENTS

We hope your summer break is off to a great start, **[first name]**! Remember that your college will be in touch with you this summer. Check your email regularly!

Have you registered to attend an orientation session at **[college choice]** yet, **[first name]**? Here's the link in case you need it: **[college choice orientation link]**.

Some colleges require you to take placement tests before enrolling, **[first name]**. Reach out to **[college choice]** to make sure you're good to go this fall!

Plan to live on campus this fall at **[college choice]**? You'll need to complete housing forms! Log onto your college portal to find them: **[college choice portal link]**.

Your record shows you didn't complete the FAFSA during your senior year. It's important you do that before July to get FREE money for college! File at fafsa.gov. Questions? Text us!

Have you been in touch with **[college choice]** this summer, **[first name]**? Remember that college staff are there to help you get settled into your first semester! Reach out to them if you have questions.

💡 Want more summer melt resources? Visit SignalVine.com!

Texting Through the GEAR UP Grant Cycle

Freshman year of college



Texting students through their first year of college can help bridge the final gap to postsecondary education. It can also be used to nudge students to go to the right person or people on their college campus for further help. We recommend texting students on the following topics:

- ☑ **First day of college checklist.**
- ☑ **Wellness checks.**
- ☑ **FAFSA reminders.**
- ☑ **Tutoring resources.**
- ☑ **Retention check.**

SAMPLE MESSAGES

STUDENTS

You've come a long way since being a GEAR UP student, **[first name]**! We're so proud that you're just weeks away from your first day of college! Are you excited?

You might be wondering what to bring for your first day of college. We recommend folders, paper, and something to write with. Your instructors will tell you the specifics on your first day of class!

Your first day of college is just around the corner, **[first name]**! How are you feeling about it? (If you're nervous, don't worry - that's totally normal!)

Hey **[first name]**, did you know that you'll need to refile the FAFSA? You'll need to do that yearly to continue to receive financial aid. (The good news is it's easier to file the second time around!) The FAFSA opens October 1!

How are classes going, **[first name]**? Remember that **[college choice]** offers FREE tutoring resources. Check them out online: **[college choice tutoring link]**.

You've made it through your first year of college! We couldn't be more proud of you, **[first name]**. Way to show **[college choice]** what GEAR UP alumni are made of. Are you planning on coming back next year?

In action: West Virginia GEAR UP



PROFILE

Type of Program:

State Grant

Managed By:

West Virginia Higher
Education Policy
Commission

High Schools Served:

14 (during this texting
intervention)

Staff from the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission worked with Signal Vine to text GEAR UP students. These students, who were largely from rural areas, opted in to receive text messages as they approached high school graduation. Prior to the texting intervention, survey results showed...

- ✗ 34% of 11th and 12th grade students did not know what the FAFSA was.
- ✗ 54% of students hadn't thought about completing a college application.
- ✗ Students were uncomfortable about their college knowledge and where to go for resources and information.

As a result of the texting intervention, GEAR UP students who received texts were...

- ✓ more likely to attempt more credit hours in their first year of college than their peers who were not texted.
- ✓ more likely to complete more credit hours in their first year of college than their peers who were not texted.
- ✓ more likely to earn higher fall semester GPAs than their peers who did not receive texts.

Source: Benjamin Castleman & Katharine Meyer, "Can Text Message Nudges Improve Academic Outcomes in College? Evidence from a West Virginia Initiative"



Signal Vine is the leading higher education AI messaging platform transforming how you reach, support, and engage students throughout their life cycle. With more than 50 million student interactions, Signal Vine's Blended Messaging™ personalizes engagement using AI, workflow automation, and one-to-one messaging to keep students on the path to success. Signal Vine has been improving enrollment and retention outcomes with a proactive approach across the entire campus and student life cycle.

www.signalvine.com