

# Accepted! College Ready

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**Grade Level** 12th – Undergraduate Grade

## Summary

The Accepted! College Ready initiative is a program that takes students, their families, and core high school staff members to a college campus to which the student applied and was accepted. This event will provide the students and their caregivers with a focused opportunity to explore the campus as a community member, gain access to college swag for themselves and their family members, eat a luncheon with school and college representatives, and learn more about a college bridge opportunity and what to expect the first days of the fall semester. Some events may elect to identify a motivational speaker to work with these families on the transition from HS to college.

## Overview

## Attachments

- Human Bingo—Accepted College Ready.docx
- Human Bingo—Accepted College Ready.pdf
- Presentation Slides—Accepted! College Ready.pptx

## Materials

- Presentation slides (attached)
- Human Bingo cards (attached; optional)
- Beach ball (optional)
- Certificates (optional)
- Stoles (optional)

# What to Do

Organizing an event like Accepted! College Ready requires thoughtful coordination between high school staff, college partners, and community organizations. Key planning steps include developing a list of students in cohort schools who have been accepted to college, working with the colleges to which they have been accepted to set a campus venue and date for the celebration, and inviting students and their families to attend. Additionally, you'll want to confirm a guest speaker and order and prepare materials such as certificates and stoles.

# Introduction

### Facilitator's Note

**Facilitation Note:** Decide how you want to collect responses to the questions and modify the slide # to give participants the information they need to participate. Something like Mentimenter or Padlet would work well.

- What are you most excited about going to your new school?
- What are going to be your most challenging obstacles?
- What will be the most significant challenge for you?
- What is the biggest unknown you are worried about?

If you wish to use Padlet, you can make a copy of the one we have set up here: https://padlet.com/k20center2/a-cr-engage-az3evtcy59v20w5d

Welcome students and families to the Accepted! College Ready event. Acknowledge the achievement and excitement that comes with college acceptance — and also name the uncertainty and mixed emotions that often show up at this stage.

Display slide 2, "How are you feeling about your next school adventure?" Allow 3–5 minutes for students and parents to write their responses. Then, share out some of the responses with the whole group. Let participants know that this event aims to connect them, inform them, and make them feel supported for their first semester of college.

# Activity #1

In the first part of the event, choose an activity that will help participants relax and get to know each other a little better. This will engage them socially and reduce anxiety about attending this event, as well as about going to college, since they will have met some other people who will be on the same campus. Choose one of the activities below as an icebreaker; hide the slides for any activity you choose not to do at your event.

1. Human Bingo

Hand out a Human Bingo card to each participant. Give them instructions on **slide 3**.

- Move around the room and find a person who has or can do something written in one of the squares.
- Have each person write their first name legibly in the BINGO square they claim.
- You can only have someone write their name ONE TIME on your BINGO card.
- Be prepared to share out for each square you sign.

The first person to have all the squares in a row signed by different participants can call BINGO!

2. Beach Ball Talk and Toss

Form groups of 5-10 and provide a beach ball for each small group. Have students stand in a circle in each group. Students will take turns tossing the beach ball to others. As the ball is caught, the color on which the student's right thumb lands will determine the prompt or questions they answer. Once the student has answered the prompt or question, they will toss the ball to another student. Repeat until each person has had at least one chance to answer one of the questions on **slide 4**.

3. Roundabout Conversations

Give them instructions on **slide 5**. Divide participants into two groups. One half forms an inside circle (almost shoulder to shoulder), facing right; the other half forms an outside circle, facing left. Play music and have participants walk in a circle in the direction they are facing. Stop the music. Participants turn toward the person closest to them in the other circle, shake hands with their new partner, and introduce themselves. Pose one of the following questions for participants to talk about with their partner.

- Would you rather have a rewind or pause button in life?
- Would you rather make a big difference in one person's life or a small difference in many lives?
- Would you rather be able to talk to animals or speak any human language?
- Would you rather wear a costume every day or never have a Halloween again?
- Would you rather always know the truth, even if it hurts, or remain blissfully unaware?
- Would you rather experience a zombie apocalypse or a robot takeover?
- Would you rather lose all memories or never be able to make new ones?
- Would you rather have access to unlimited pizza or unlimited ice cream
- Would you rather be super strong or super fast?

Participants share their responses to the question. Allow 2–5 minutes. When time is up, play music again and stop so that everyone has a new partner. Pose another question. This can be repeated until you have posed all questions or as long as your agenda allows.

4. Walking Vote

To start the activity, have participants stand in the middle of the room. Then, display one at a time, **slides 6-14**, with options to choose from. For the question on each slide, give participants 30 seconds to consider the options and walk to the side of the room that corresponds to the option they want to select. You can decide if it may be appropriate to use the middle of the room to indicate selecting neither option, or both options. At the end of 30 seconds, instruct participants to discuss why they chose that option with others on the same side.

# Activity #2

Display **slide 15** with introductory information for the keynote speaker of this event.

**Preparation Note:** Invite someone from the campus to give an inspiring and encouraging speech at this event, preparing students and families for college life through a personal story and practical advice. This can be a student leader on campus, an advisor, dean, vice president, admissions officer, or someone in a similar role. Who you find to speak will likely vary by campus. If possible, look for someone who reflects the student population — for example

- Was a first-generation college student
- Overcame personal or academic obstacles
- Can speak directly to the transition from high school to college

If speakers ask you what they might bring to support your students in attendance, ask them to offer 3–5 pieces of advice students and families can remember and to consider sharing parts of their own story that will help the students to know, “You’re not alone,” “You belong here,” and “Keep showing up.”

Optionally, leave time for Q&A with the speaker and/or offer “Table Talk” time afterward so participants can reflect on what stood out with those nearby.

# Activity #3

Display **slide 16**. Set the tone as both formal and joyful. This is a moment of recognition for not just the students but also for their families and supporters. Take a moment to honor students' college acceptance, vocally and publicly affirming their next step in a celebratory and meaningful way.

Call each student's name aloud. As they walk onto the stage, hand them a certificate. Present each student with a stole to wear at graduation that represents their acceptance and future college journey.

When every student has been recognized, ask families to stand and be applauded for their support.

# Evaluate

Display **slide 18**. Ask students and parents to answer a few brief questions. This can be conducted as an exit ticket, as a whole group conversation, or you could build and share a Google Form or a similar platform to collect responses after the event. Some questions you might use:

- What part of today was most helpful?
- What questions do you still have?
- What kind of support do you need during your first semester of college?
- Would you like GEAR UP to check in with you this summer and next fall? If yes, how can we best reach you?

# Rationale

Research has shown that interventions that build confidence and provide information guard against "summer melt," the phenomenon in which students accepted to college fail to matriculate. Studies by Castleman and Page (2014) suggest that among students of lower SES (socioeconomic status), 22 percent who are accepted to college fail to matriculate. These students have motivational barriers including lack of confidence and lack of preparation (Gilstrap, 2016). College-intending students, both rural and urban, non-white, and first-generation, benefit from efforts to form interpersonal and institutional relationships (Rall, 2016). More recent literature suggests that interventions of the following kind are most effective in helping this student population transition to college.

Parent (2017) highlights how real-life experiences, like campus visits, help students transition to college by fostering institutional identification and belonging (Strayhorn, 2023) and building a college-bound identity (Ober et al., 2020). Campus visits offer experiential knowledge (Rall, 2016) and are among the most impactful GEAR UP services (Smith, Gosky, & Li, 2022; Kim et al., 2021). Universities also use AI chatbots to nudge students, improving first-generation students' success (Nurshatayeva et al., 2021). Role models from similar backgrounds further strengthen belonging, especially when students form positive intergenerational connections within the university (Parent, 2017).

When higher education institutions use activities like campus tours, city tours, and social volunteering to ease first-year students' integration into the academic and social environment of the HEI (higher education institution), dropout rates decrease (Sampaio de Sá, 2021). Within high school students' communities, the dynamic interplay of interpersonal and institutional care, expressed through innovative rites of passage (Curry, 2016), contributed toward a sense of comradeship and promoted students' social, emotional, and academic growth. Research on the transition process from high school to higher education cited anthropological studies on rites of passage showing the importance of symbols that "physically marked the territorial passages" (Gregersen, 2021). Community partnerships with schools, such as with faith-based organizations, also play a role in students' transition, through the annual recognition and celebration of high school graduates (Alleman & Holly, 2013)

# Resources

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