



# VERMONT GEAR UP

It's time again for our newsletter! When we send this newsletter out to "families," we're including every adult who takes the time to be part of the lives and education of students. We're grateful for all the adults who care for students. Contact us any time with questions or concerns. Thank you for being a youth champion!

## VSAC GEAR UP Fall Special Events

### GEAR UP Week: Sept. 20–24, 2021

GEAR UP Week is coming! Follow us on social media for daily posts that highlight our students, schools, and programming.

- Facebook: @VermontStudentAssistance Corporation
- Instagram: @gearupguide.vt

### VT Career Connect: Oct. 2021

Vermont Career Connect is a career exploration resource for Vermont students. At [vsac.org/vermont-career-connect](https://vsac.org/vermont-career-connect), you'll find:

- a career interest survey
- 100+ recorded interviews with people in a wide variety of jobs
- additional career exploration resources
- a career planning reflection activity
- information on live virtual events during the month of October

### VT Applies: Dec. 2021–June 2022

Vermont Applies is an initiative to support 12th graders and their families in applying for education or training, or entering the workforce after high school. Learn more and find a full schedule of events at [vsac.org/vermont-applies](https://vsac.org/vermont-applies).



## Getting Creative with Learning

This year was certainly a year of challenges and innovations. GEAR UP school partners were not short on ideas about how to engage their students in learning and teaching by including them in learning environments that kept them safe and provided exciting opportunities. Several of our partner schools reached out to us to get creative about their education spaces and goals for students. Together with their students, families, teachers, and communities, some clever innovations were made. Brighton Elementary School purchased and installed a Yurt for outdoor learning. Coventry Village School built a safe stairway and platform for outdoor learning near their school, and Cabot School completed their outdoor learning structure this summer with student and community input on design. We appreciate our partners' creativity and outreach to us for ideas and support. Creating strong partnerships is what we're all about!

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## Get Money for Books: Meet with a GUIDE Counselor

Did you know that your new college student can get up to \$600 for book costs just by meeting with one of our GUIDE counselors online? Have your student go to [www.vvac.org/guide](http://www.vvac.org/guide) to sign up! Look for Virtual Counseling Meetings and click on Schedule a Meeting to talk with the first available GUIDE counselor. If you'd like to meet as the parent of a new college student, please reach out to Cathy Printon at [printon@vsac.org](mailto:printon@vsac.org). And follow us on TikTok [@gearupguide.vt](https://www.tiktok.com/@gearupguide.vt).

## GEAR UP Summer 2021

Students and families enjoyed a few fun opportunities this summer! We invited students to participate in a book club to read *King and the Dragonflies* by Kacen Callender and to participate in a cartoon drawing course with The Center for Cartoon Studies ([www.cartoonstudies.org](http://www.cartoonstudies.org)) in White River Junction. And when not reading or drawing, more than 65 GEAR UP students, families, and friends are walking, hiking, or running 25 miles around Vermont (and anywhere on their travels) in our family summer hiking activity! Here's to being in the company of friends and families again!



## A GEAR UP Student's Reflection: Getting the most out of GEAR UP



Destiny Syharaj, a junior at Skidmore College and former GEAR UP student, shares her advice. The big question for a student is, "What's next"? And the answer can feel like a burden that someone has to carry their entire life, starting at 17 or 18. In truth, most students might never be confident on a certain path because there are too many unknowns, too many uncertainties to decide at once.

It's terrifying for a student to admit vulnerability because of a potential nagging fear of failure. There are those who are lucky and determined to reach their set goal, but even they experience times when they need reassurance.

As a first-generation college student and child of migrants, my family trusted that I would choose a path that equaled the sacrifices they had made to come to America. I always knew I wanted to go to college. I carried their trust, but with that came loneliness. Support services like GEAR UP provided me with confidence going forward. Recognizing the program as a resource, I found companionship in a sea of learning and self-discovery. Communicating, addressing all my doubts, and putting forward any questions I had

about life after high school helped me get the most out of the program. Developing a relationship with my outreach counselor provided me with the guidance I sought but didn't realize I desperately needed. It can be intimidating at first to ask for direction, but once comfortable, I was able to share what I really wanted and start to feel secure. GEAR UP gave me a physical and emotional presence to lean on. I encourage other students to step forward now and build that relationship, knowing you'll never be turned away. Be full of courage to show your gaps in knowledge about how to choose a path forward and be open-minded, but also acknowledge your skills for the future. Moving toward your own authenticity, you can build a stronger circle of support to rely on once you untie your gift box of potential.

To families of GEAR UP students, I encourage you to make an effort to be present for your student. Prompt them to think about pathways and avoid a suggestive approach, as it can slowly become a worry instead of encouragement. Along with the student, develop a relationship with the outreach counselor. It's okay to admit feeling vulnerable, as the education world is always changing. Reaching out will never harm any outcomes. Appreciate the program's resources and rely on them whenever needed! GEAR UP is for students and parents to get the clarity and confidence to finally answer that question, "What's next?" So always feel free to reach out to your student's outreach counselor with thoughts, concerns, or questions.

## Dianne Griggs Selected for National NCCEP Leadership Award

With 26 years at VSAC, Dianne has mentored hundreds of students and colleagues in Vermont. She creates relationships that last for decades, and the details of those relationships recalled by students and families are a testament to her care and engagement with every student and staff member with whom she's worked. Dianne carries that dedication and skill into her work with GEAR UP as she manages, cares, and develops staff and programs with an open mind and an open heart.

Dianne never rests on "the way things are done." She's always looking forward with an eye toward the best outcome and positive impact for Vermont students. She works with state partners and her staff, seeking ideas from her national colleagues and from Vermont schools and students to improve our programming. We host many formal and informal meetings and check-ins with school partners to be sure we're always on track with their requirements, student needs, and forward-thinking ideas.

Dianne is an amazing supervisor, colleague, and professional for GEAR UP. She's a leader deeply committed to student success. She digs in to understand all of the opportunities that our students, families, and partners can access. At VSAC and in GEAR UP, we're so proud of Dianne's leadership, friendship, and dedication to the future aspirations of Vermont students.



GEAR UP is a federally funded program supported in part through grants from the U.S. Department of Education.

### GEAR UP Outreach Counselors

- Dylan Bertolini
- Norma Gregory
- Nathan Hickey
- Jessi Krause Herron
- Michelle Legere
- Matt Mitchell
- Rose Reynolds
- Tia Stillman
- Patricia Turner
- Sara Vargo

Ask your child who their VSAC Outreach counselor is—we're available to help you too!

### VT GEAR UP Staff

- Dianne Griggs  
*Director*
- Amy Dodge  
*Outreach Counselor Supervisor*
- Adriana Eldred  
*Outreach Communications Specialist*
- Dr. Anita Long  
*Academic Support*
- Jessica Smith  
*GUIDE Program Coordinator*
- Anna Telensky  
*Special Events*

### Questions?

Cathy Printon  
*Parent & School Partnership Coordinator*  
802-542-2293  
printon@vsac.org

## VSAC's Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) Program

Parents and guardians, there are great education opportunities out there for you too! The EOC program at VSAC serves adults who don't yet have a 4-year degree. Most adults served are the first in their families to enroll in education after high school, and some have financial barriers to reaching their goals. In 2021-2022, there are significant financial supports and opportunities for training, re-training, and education. Connect with one of our EOC counselors for a one-on-one phone or Zoom check on your financial aid options. To schedule a meeting, call 877-961-4369.

- Last dollar scholarships
- Employer benefits
- Critical occupations
- Registered apprenticeships
- Advancement Grant
- I-CAN
- FAFSA
- Pell grants
- VA benefits
- VT state agencies
- EOC
- Other scholarships
- 802 Opportunity Grants
- Program provider benefits
- Best Bets
- Welcome Home
- Curtis Training Scholarship
- VT degree grant
- Degree completion scholarships

## VSAC GEAR UP Trivia

Who's partnering with VSAC to provide VT graduating classes of 2020 and 2021 with a Green Mountain Grad gift of one tuition-free class at:

- the University of Vermont
- Middlebury College
- Vermont State Colleges

If you know the answer, e-mail Cathy at [printon@vsac.org](mailto:printon@vsac.org) to enter a drawing for a GEAR UP travel mug!



## Financial Literacy Video Contest

Congratulations to students at Lamoille Union Middle School for their winning video on "Saving for a Rainy Day"! How much glitter could you buy with 71¢ per day? Watch their video at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6usVkJySjXA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6usVkJySjXA).



## Green Mountain Grad & Welcome Home scholarships

To the parents of the classes of 2020 & 2021 Vermont high school graduates!

The Green Mountain Grad program allows your student to check out college by taking one course entirely tuition free this year! Students already enrolled in a program at one of the four Vermont state colleges are also eligible.

Students from the classes of 2020 and 2021 simply need to enroll in the course of their choice at any school in the Vermont State Colleges System:

- Northern Vermont University at Johnson or Lyndon
- Vermont Technical College
- Castleton University
- Community College of Vermont

VSAC will pay the tuition for your student for the fall of 2021 or the spring of 2022 — one college course of your student's choosing — *tuition free!* For information on available courses and links for enrollment, visit [www.vvac.org/grad](http://www.vvac.org/grad).

A gift for 2020 & 2021 Vermont high school grads.



And don't forget the Welcome Home Scholarship for Vermonters who are either transferring to a Vermont state college from an out-of-state school OR who left college between March 1, 2020, and May 1, 2021.



We provide scholarships of up to \$5,000 for full-time students and up to \$3,000 for part-time students next year to help you work toward earning your degree at a Vermont state college. Terms and conditions may apply. Visit <https://yourfuture.vsc.edu> to learn more or contact the Vermont State College admissions offices at:

- **Northern Vermont University** at Johnson or Lyndon  
[www.northernvermont.edu/admissions-and-aid](http://www.northernvermont.edu/admissions-and-aid)
- **Vermont Technical College**  
[www.vtc.edu/office/admissions](http://www.vtc.edu/office/admissions)
- **Castleton University**  
[www.castleton.edu/admissions](http://www.castleton.edu/admissions)
- **Community College of Vermont**  
<https://ccv.edu/find/administrative-offices>

## It's Financial Aid Application Season

Fall is the time to submit your FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and apply for a Vermont grant. Whether you're planning on college or training after high school, the FAFSA is the first step to getting financial aid — from the federal government, your school, VSAC, or private scholarship programs. Every year, millions of dollars in financial aid go unused because students don't complete the FAFSA, so plan to apply.

To learn more about the FAFSA and to find links to the online application, visit [www.vvac.org/fafsafirst](http://www.vvac.org/fafsafirst).

And don't forget about the Vermont grant through VSAC. A grant is free money that doesn't have to be repaid, so remember to apply after October 1 at [www.vvac.org/grants](http://www.vvac.org/grants).

### Need help?

For FAFSA questions, call VSAC's toll-free FAFSA helpline at 833-802-VSAC (Monday–Friday, 8:00 am–4:30 pm) or go to

<https://studentaid.gov/apply-for-aid/fafsa/filling-out/help>.

To schedule a virtual appointment for FAFSA help with a VSAC counselor, visit [www.vvac.org/events](http://www.vvac.org/events) to find an available appointment through January 2022.

And check with your counseling office to find out whether your high school has scheduled a Forms Night workshop, where you can get assistance filing both the FAFSA and the Vermont grant application.

