



**GEAR UP** SOUTHERN  
WEST VIRGINIA  
CONCORD • NEW RIVER CTC

## News Release

### For Immediate Release

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### **GEAR UP SWV Kicks Off Empowering Initiatives in Southern West Virginia with Student Success Agency**

**Athens, W.Va.** - GEAR UP SWV is proud to announce the launch of empowering initiatives in southern West Virginia with a series of kick-off events. These events mark the beginning of a comprehensive effort to provide vital support to students in the region, reinforcing GEAR UP SWV's commitment to fostering academic success and personal growth by partnering with Student Success Agency (SSA).

"Student Success Agency is ecstatic to partner with GEAR UP Southern West Virginia program to support SWV students through their journey of becoming their best selves and independent economic contributors to society. Today, as eighth graders, they cannot see the peaks they will summit, and the goal for this partnership is to connect students with a near-peer mentor who can relate but engage in a way that allows students to develop and improve their personal belief system of themselves and their ideas.

West Virginia has a rich history, and we at SSA are confident that the GEAR UP SWV students in the state will have an even brighter future due to the extended opportunities these students receive, allowing them to write the next chapter for the communities that have supported their growth," SSA CEO E.J. Carrion said.

Carrion has traveled across the region to meet 8th grade students in GEAR UP SWV schools.

### **Key Highlights:**

- **Kick-Off Events:** Student Success Agency is hosting a series of kick-off events across various locations in southern West Virginia to introduce the community to its mission and services. These events will serve as a platform to engage with students, parents, educators, and community members.
- **Mission and Vision:** The Agency's mission is to provide holistic support to students, by providing individualized mentorship to address a variety of needs and support to 8th grade students in GEAR UP SWV. Through mentorship programs, workshops, and community partnerships, Student Success Agency aims to create a nurturing environment that fosters educational success.

- **Community Engagement:** The kick-off events will provide an opportunity for students to learn more about the Agency's initiatives and how they can get involved. Students will create accounts during the kickoff events but need parent/guardian consent to gain full access. Representatives from Student Success Agency will be present to answer questions and share information about upcoming programs.
- **Collaboration with Schools:** The Agency is collaborating with GEAR UP SWV schools to ensure a coordinated effort in supporting students. By working closely with educators and administrators, Student Success Agency aims to complement existing educational initiatives and fill crucial support gaps.

SSA will serve 8th grade students in Mercer, Wyoming, and Summers Counties. SSA representatives have already visited Princeton, Oceana, Pineville, Montcalm, PikeView, Mullens, Herndon, Road Branch, Summers County and Glen Fork Middle Schools.

Annabella Frazier, an eighth grade student and Student Council President at Pineville Middle was excited to learn about the opportunity not only for herself but for her classmates as well.

“Most of the people (students) here have a lot of siblings and play a lot of sports,” Frazier said. “It can be hard on the parents, to help them with their time management. I think this is going to be a great opportunity for them to be able to have somebody to rely on.”

The tour continues through Tuesday Dec. 5. The media is invited and encouraged to attend the remaining events. Media should call Jessica Lilly before arriving on site.

- **Monday, December 4 - Wyoming County**  
Huff Consolidated Elm & Middle School – 9:00 am-10:00 am  
Baileysville Middle School – 1:00 pm-2:00 pm
- **Tuesday, December 5 - Mercer County**  
Bluefield Middle School – 9:00 am-10:00 am  
Glenwood Middle School – 1:00 pm-2:00 pm

“As an educator, I know the load that teachers are currently carrying. Student Success Agency is a powerful mentoring tool that will empower students in the critical after school hours. As a mom, this would have been a huge benefit to have as an extra person helping to stay on track,” GEAR UP SWV Partnership Coordinator Tracy Puckett said.

About Student Success Agency:

Student Success Agency partners with schools to provide a bridge between the short school day and afterschool so that your team can ensure students receive holistic support that improve their academic, emotional, and economic well-being. With SSA, you guide students around the clock from their electronic devices to ensure that their school time success is not derailed due to out-of-school factors.

GEAR UP stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs and is part of a national grant program funded through the U.S. Department of Education. GEAR UP Southern West Virginia (GEAR UP SWV) is a Concord University program, in partnership with New River Community and Technical College, that helps students graduate from high school and succeed in postsecondary education. GEAR UP SWV is helping the classes of 2028 and 2029 in Mercer, Monroe, Summers, Raleigh, and Wyoming Counties to ensure high school graduation. The program also informs students and families of ways to succeed in a postsecondary education and ways to help fund it. GEAR UP SWV supports teachers, administrators, students, and families on this educational journey. GEAR UP SWV; securing a legacy of strength and resilience in Appalachia. Find more information on GEAR UP SWV social media pages and on our website, conord.edu/gearup.