

# College Application Week:

*A Toolkit for Increasing Access to Higher Education*



A How-To Guide on Launching a College Application Week in Your State,  
With Case Studies of Successful College Application Week Programs

Presented by  
The Southern Regional Education Board's



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# College Application Week:

## *A Toolkit for Increasing Access to Higher Education*

### Introduction

#### *The Need*

Students, including ones from low-income families, begin school with big dreams for the future. They realize by the middle grades that education beyond high school can lead to a better quality of life, and most believe they can achieve it. Middle grades students report an optimistic picture of their plans for college and careers. Yet the percentages of students who actually stay in high school, graduate and enroll in college are much lower than their optimism would predict.

About 90 percent of middle grades students say they want to go to college, but only about two-thirds of them actually do. So what happens along the way to the one-third of them who do not go? Students say they lower their goals because they don't think they can afford college, they aren't academically prepared, or they don't believe they are likely to be accepted. Some believe that college is too far away, or they aren't ready to go because they haven't defined their career interests. (For information on teen aspirations, see the References.)



College Application Week can open the door for students by encouraging them to take a significant step toward college in their senior year. It is particularly important for students who would be first in their families to attend college and students who have not yet seriously considered going to college. Application to nearby, open-admissions colleges — and even more distant and more selective institutions — gives students the confidence and encouragement that college is possible.

#### *What It's All About*

College Application Week began as “College Application Day,” a pilot program of GEAR UP North Carolina that helped all seniors at one public high school apply to various postsecondary institutions in the state on the same day. The program was modeled on an event many North Carolina students already knew — FAFSA Day, during which they and their families received help from trained professionals in completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid.

What began as a single day at one high school today has evolved into several statewide campaigns to help students — particularly those who would be the first in their families to go to college or those not planning to attend college — to apply to at least one postsecondary institution during their senior year. Some of the statewide campaigns use public service announcements, billboards, print ads, TV/radio spots and digital media to urge students to apply to college during a specific time frame. In many states, the governor publicly proclaims a “College Application Week” in the state to promote the opportunity statewide.

A critical component of College Application Week is the one-on-one support provided by trained volunteers who help students fill out college applications at school. Volunteers may include high school staff, registrars and admissions officers from nearby postsecondary institutions, and representatives from the community.



Since the first pilot in 2005, the program has grown, not only in North Carolina but throughout the South, with the help of the Southern Regional Education Board's *Go Alliance*, a network of college access programs in SREB states, through which the concept was shared. As a result, North Carolina began working with Georgia, Tennessee and South Carolina to help replicate the program. These states have helped other *Go Alliance* states, including West Virginia, start College Application Week programs. Some others, including Florida, have started programs as a result of the *Go Alliance* network. Funding in each of these states currently is provided largely through the College Access Challenge Grant, awarded through the U.S. Department of Education. Profiles of college application programs in these early-adopting SREB states are included in this guide.

For many students, particularly those who do not have an immediate family member who attended college, applying to college can seem a daunting task. For those students, not having someone who can help them navigate the college application process can be enough to prevent them from pursuing postsecondary education. By implementing a College Application Week program, states can provide high school seniors with the opportunity to receive hands-on assistance as they take the first big step toward continuing their education following high school.

### *How to Use This Guide*

This *Toolkit* is designed for state leaders who want to establish a College Application Week. Representatives from North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee developed an early edition of this guide for their *Go Alliance* colleagues. As interest in the program has spread nationwide, SREB's *Go Alliance* is pleased to publish the *Toolkit* as an important resource for others who want to promote access to higher education.

As you think about launching a College Application Week program, keep in mind these “**big ideas**” that created success in the states that have led the way:

- ◆ Participating high schools should urge **every senior** to complete at least one college application and ensure that *all* students have the opportunity to participate.
- ◆ **Engage postsecondary institutions, including technical, two- and four-year colleges, as active and prominent partners** in planning and carrying out events. Ensure that postsecondary partners are among the volunteers (such as financial aid advisors and admissions counselors) to assist students from nearby high schools during the application process so that students see that colleges are interested in them.
- ◆ **Designate a space at the event site** that is used only for completing applications, and ensure that students are not penalized for taking time out of the school day to complete applications.

- ◆ School counselors should **help students with a demonstrated need obtain a fee waiver for college entrance exams** as well as application fee waivers to institutions in the state.
- ◆ **States should start by piloting** College Application Week in a single school or small number of schools, then gradually increase the number of participating schools annually until the program is statewide. When selecting pilot sites, consider schools that have a demonstrated commitment to preparing students for postsecondary education and that also have a significant population of students who would be the first in their families to go to college.
- ◆ **States should provide as much support for College Application Week sites as possible, including how-to materials and volunteer training prior to the event.**
- ◆ Education agencies should **track data** on the number of applications at the school, district and state level in order to **evaluate the impact** of College Application Week over time.

Case studies and a complete how-to guide are on the following pages for your use.

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# College Application Week:

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## Case Studies:

### College Application Week Programs in SREB states

#### *North Carolina*

In working with North Carolina high schools, staff from GEAR UP North Carolina noticed that many students planned to apply to college but never did. Some students were simply unaware of their postsecondary options. Others began filling out applications but stopped because they felt intimidated or did not understand certain academic jargon, thus forgoing their dreams of a college education.

In response, staff from GEAR UP North Carolina began a “College Application Day” at a school with a high proportion of students who would be the first in their families to attend college. The purpose was to encourage every member of the senior class to apply to at least one institution and to provide them with the personal support to do so. Taking advantage of opportunities provided by open-enrollment institutions, the event aimed for all participating seniors to receive a college acceptance letter before the end of the school year.



Today, College Application Week provides every high school senior in North Carolina the opportunity to apply to college.

College Application Day was highly successful in encouraging the majority of the senior class to apply to college; in 2006, it was expanded to 15 GEAR UP high schools throughout the state. In 2007, the program was piloted **statewide** for the first time as “**College Application Week**.” By 2009, 421 high schools — at least one from every district in the state — participated, and in 2010, **more than 25,000 students representing 470 high schools submitted applications to all 110 of North Carolina’s colleges**. Sixty-six percent of North Carolina public school districts had 100 percent participation from their high schools in 2010.

Today, College Application Week provides every high school senior in North Carolina the opportunity to apply to college through the College Foundation of North Carolina’s Web portal, **CFNC.org**, a website that provides information on how to plan, apply and pay for college. Students are asked to complete a career assessment on

CFNC.org prior to the week to help them decide what they might want to study after high school and to identify a postsecondary institution that offers degrees in that field. CFNC.org then enables students to use a single application platform to send applications and high school transcripts electronically to any postsecondary institution in the state.

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*How It Works in North Carolina*

To participate in College Application Week each year, high schools must register with CFNC.org and **appoint a site coordinator** who is responsible for managing the event locally. Site coordinators (typically, school counselors) are asked to ensure that seniors complete the High School Planner and the College Application Week Checklist on CFNC.org prior to the event. Because North Carolina's College Application Week is focused on students who may be the first in their families to apply to college, coordinators are encouraged to reach out to students prior to and during College Application Week to make students aware of available fee waivers. Site coordinators also ensure that parents and school staff are informed of the event and encourage them to become involved.



Currently, the North Carolina Community College System, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, and the University of North Carolina System participate as official postsecondary partners. (Any North Carolina institution of higher education that is listed on CFNC.org is able to receive applications during the weeklong event.) Representatives from partner institutions are asked to volunteer in local high schools during College Application Week and to either waive their application fees for the dates of College Application Week or to accept the College Board fee waiver. **During College Application Week 2008, 2009 and 2010, all 110 North Carolina colleges and universities accepted the College Board fee waiver for students with financial need.**

It is essential for staff from the network of partner organizations to provide one-on-one support to students. In North Carolina, the Carolinas Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (CACRAO) publicizes the event among its members to solicit on-site volunteers to help students fill out their applications. In addition, the North Carolina Business Committee for Education helps to recruit volunteers, and North Carolina State Employees' Credit Union branch employees help students prepare their PIN numbers for completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online.



Another key partner is the Carolina College Advising Corps, a near-peer mentor program that serves 55 high schools across the state with a significant proportion of students from low-income families. Carolina College Advising Corps aims to increase the number of first-generation and underrepresented students from low-income families who enter and complete higher education. Recent graduates of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill serve as mentors in these high schools throughout the year to provide the advising and encouragement that students need to navigate the college planning and application process.

The University System of North Carolina General Administration employs two key staff people who specifically are assigned to help College Application Week sites prepare for and run their events. The CFNC.org training director provides webinars for site coordinators and other volunteers on how to use CFNC.org. In addition, a College Access Coordinator provides print materials, such as the *College Application Week Site Resource Guide* (which includes templates, outlines, worksheets, suggestions and timelines) to participating sites for use in planning and implementing program activities.

Prior to the event, CFNC.org promotes the event statewide via radio and TV advertisements — with specific focus on the program's target student population. A key partner in promoting the event across the state is the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Also integral to statewide success

have been e-mail contact with high school counselors, presentations at statewide education conferences, and a proclamation from the governor every year since 2007.

During the week, CFNC.org sends e-mail blasts to students reminding them to complete their applications. Analyses show that these outreach efforts are successful in recruiting high schools with student populations in financial need. In 2010, approximately 63 percent of participating public high schools in the state had a free and reduced-price lunch student population of 35 percent of higher.

The National Student Clearinghouse, which maintains a comprehensive electronic registry of student records, provides North Carolina with important data about the impact of College Application Week on postsecondary enrollment. Of the students who participated in College Application Week 2008, for example, 80 percent enrolled in college the following fall, and of those who enrolled, 90 percent attended school in North Carolina.

## Georgia

Georgia's "Apply to College Week" initiative began in late 2007 with the help of CFNC.org staff. During the planning phase, Georgia established a cross-agency committee that has grown over time and now includes representatives from the University System of Georgia, the Technical College System of Georgia, the Georgia Independent College Association, the Georgia Department of Education, the Georgia Student Finance Commission, Communities in Schools, and the Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. While the University System of Georgia administers the program, the Apply to College committee makes decisions regarding program direction and is responsible for selecting the participating high schools each year. The committee also encourages community and postsecondary volunteers to support the high school events, provides promotional materials to participating high schools, and provides site coordinator and volunteer training. In addition, the Georgia Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers helps encourage volunteer participation from Georgia's colleges and universities.

### *How It Works in Georgia*

Georgia's first Apply to College Week was held in November 2008. Eight high schools were selected from a pool of 50 submitted applications based on a number of criteria, including the percentage of first-generation, underrepresented and economically disadvantaged students enrolled in each school, graduation and college-going rates, school size and geographic location.



Georgia has since expanded its program each year and will continue to do so until every high school in the state has the opportunity to participate. During the events, students receive hands-on assistance from the volunteers as they complete at least one college admissions application using GAcademy411.org, Georgia's portal for planning, applying and paying for college.

Like North Carolina, participating high schools must designate a site coordinator, who is asked to undergo a brief online site coordinator training program. In Georgia, all volunteers, whether from a postsecondary institution or the community, are asked to complete a brief training session prior to the event. The Apply to College committee clearly communicates to postsecondary institutions that Apply to College is not a recruitment event; rather, by volunteering they are agreeing to help high school seniors apply to college, regardless of where they might be applying.



In 2009, 97 percent of the seniors who completed an evaluation of Apply to College indicated that the event helped them apply to college, and 98 percent recommended that their high schools continue to offer the event in the future. In addition, 98 percent of the volunteers who completed an evaluation indicated that they would support future events. In 2010, 74 percent of participating students indicated that the event influenced their decision to apply to college, and 77 percent indicated that it encouraged them to apply to a college that they would not have considered otherwise.

In 2011, the Georgia College Application Week program was expanded to the entire month of November, and it is now referred to as “Georgia Apply to College” (without reference to “week”). This change was made to give high schools more flexibility to hold their Apply to College event on a day that works best with their school schedule. In addition, the change provides the opportunity for interested volunteers to support more high schools than was possible when events were held during a single week.

### Florida

Florida’s “Go Higher — Get Accepted” campaign targets seniors from high schools serving significant proportions of low-income students who have not yet committed to a post-graduation plan. The goal of this statewide campaign, which occurs over several months, is to have 100 percent of students at participating high schools *accepted* by a postsecondary institution — typically nearby community colleges that have open-enrollment policies — before graduation.

In Georgia, 74 percent of participating students indicated that the 2010 Apply to College event influenced their decision to apply to college.



### How It Works in Florida

In Florida, postsecondary institutions are asked to identify nearby high schools that might serve as potential partners for Go Higher — Get Accepted events, then contact the schools and invite them to participate. Higher education institutions are advised, but not required, to focus their efforts on schools with large numbers of students from low-income families or students who would be the first in their families to go to college. In addition, colleges are asked to sponsor, plan, promote and conduct all college-application events and to collect and provide data on their events afterward.

Go Higher — Get Accepted events are held between February and April each year to help seniors set career goals, learn about financial aid and the application process, and apply to community colleges using the online application at the state’s Web portal, [www.FACTS.org](http://www.FACTS.org). Events may occur at the high school or college campus, or both. Some are lecture format and cover the application process, college majors and career information. Others are practical computer labs where students can complete admissions applications on site with the help of college counselors. Some colleges also elect to organize college-placement testing for students.

Postsecondary institutions often provide incentives for students to participate in events by awarding promotional items like T-shirts and pens. Occasionally, raffles are drawn for high-end items such as scholarships or laptops. In most cases, colleges provide incentives for attendees by waiving the admissions application fee.

During the 2010 campaign, **more than 10,000 students participated in Go Higher — Get Accepted events**, more than 6,000 students completed admissions applications, and more than 1,500 of these enrolled in local colleges. In 2011, 26 community colleges throughout Florida organized and implemented college admissions events, and **students from 241 high schools participated** by completing applications on FACTS.org.

Go Higher — Get Accepted is promoted by the Florida Center for Advising and Academic Support (FCAAS), a division of the Florida Department of Education, in partnership with the Division of Florida Colleges. FCAAS markets Go Higher — Get Accepted by creating and hosting campaign



Web pages that list college-sponsored events, creating posters with blank spaces for colleges to write in events, creating student postcards and brochures, conducting a direct-mail campaign to parents of seniors at targeted schools, writing and distributing news releases, and creating banners that can be displayed at event sites.

## Tennessee

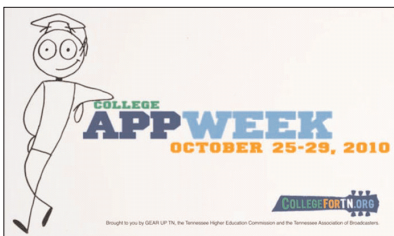
Tennessee's **College Application Week**, managed by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), is a dedicated week in the fall (typically, late October) in which students are encouraged to apply to any postsecondary institution, including technical, two-year and four-year colleges.

Any interested high school or college access organization in Tennessee may participate as a College Application Week site by registering for the event. Sites are asked to **partner with a nearby postsecondary institution**, and both are expected to recruit and provide volunteers for the event.

Tennessee piloted its first College Application Week in fall 2008 in 14 rural high schools participating in the state's GEAR UP TN program; in total, 973 GEAR UP TN students submitted 1,396 applications. In 2009, Tennessee expanded College Application Week to include 93 high school sites statewide. Participating GEAR UP TN high schools realized a 15 percent increase in college applications during the second year of program implementation. In 2010, Tennessee expanded sites to include both high schools and college access organizations, resulting in 129 College Application Week sites and more than 5,000 submitted applications.

### How It Works in Tennessee

As in North Carolina, participating sites are asked to **designate a coordinator** who is responsible for managing the event on a school/community level. High schools must agree to set aside time during the school day for seniors to complete at least one application to college. Upon completion of the event, participating sites are asked to provide feedback to state coordinators, using a standardized form.



Tennessee's TV spot

Tennessee markets College Application Week through a combination of grassroots, traditional and social media channels. THEC staff members regularly promote College Application Week in presentations and e-mail blasts to the state's school counseling organizations and college access programs. In October 2010, Tennessee aired an animated College Application Week **30-second television spot** in more than 213 high schools through the state's Channel One News, a short news program for teens broadcast via

satellite to middle grades and high schools across the state. The spot aired four times before and during the week. It is posted on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/user/gearuptn#p/u/7/211We85XdZE>.

THEC provides participating high schools with materials to help plan for and promote their events, including a Site Coordinator Manual that details best practices and reporting procedures, “I Applied” stickers for students to wear, classroom fliers that list educators’ names and their higher education alma maters, and College Application Week wall clings. College Application Week information also is posted on Tennessee’s college access Web portal, [CollegeforTN.org](http://CollegeforTN.org), and [Mind2it.com](http://Mind2it.com), the Tennessee college access campaign’s social media site. Students are encouraged to help promote the event through their personal social media accounts.

Tennessee schools have found the week to be very helpful in encouraging students to apply to college. As one site coordinator noted, “This proved to be a wonderful week at our school. Our faculty were very involved and ... the emphasis on College Application Week really prompted my senior students who had not yet taken the initiative to complete an application to do so. This is a wonderful program!”

### *South Carolina*

The goal of South Carolina’s **College Application Month** is to provide all seniors at targeted high schools with the opportunity to apply to college, show students that college is possible, and assist seniors with completing and filing college applications. While much of the focus of College Application Month is geared toward first-generation college students and students who may not otherwise apply to college, participating high schools are encouraged to provide college planning activities for *all* students, including freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors who have already applied to college.

#### *How It Works in South Carolina*

Throughout the month of October, high schools across the state host a designated **College Application Day** — **one specific day during College Application Week** — on which students are assisted with the college application process. The first College Application Week was held in 2009 and included 12 high schools; approximately 1,000 students submitted more than 2,000 applications.

College Application Week has expanded to College Application Month due to the growing number of high schools that want to host a College Application Day. In 2010, 57 high schools participated in the program throughout the state, enabling 15,000 students to receive assistance in completing and submitting college applications. On average, each student completed two applications, and **more than 30,000 applications were submitted to colleges throughout South Carolina.**

“This proved to be a wonderful week at our school. Our faculty were very involved and ... the emphasis on College Application Week really prompted my senior students who had not yet taken the initiative to complete an application to do so. This is a wonderful program!”

— Site coordinator





South Carolina does not have a statewide college access Web portal with one-stop-shop technology that allows for online applications. The state created [www.sccango.org](http://www.sccango.org), a website that provides information to students and their families, as well as teachers and mentors, about planning for, paying for and selecting a college. College Application Month organizers

built a page on that website that provides detailed event information for students, teachers and site volunteers.

To apply to college online, students can click on the SCHOLAR tab of [www.sccango.org](http://www.sccango.org) to access South Carolina's SCHOLAR Web application system. The SCHOLAR application is designed to ease the application process to multiple South Carolina schools by automatically copying all application information entered by students, then pre-populating multiple applications that can be sent online to participating colleges. SCHOLAR allows students to create and use a single username and password when applying to multiple institutions. In providing the website, online application system and dedicated College Application Month Web page, South Carolina is able to bring together nearly all of the information that site coordinators, parents, students and volunteers need to ensure the success of its College Application Month in much the same way that states do that have comprehensive Web portals with one-stop-shop technology.

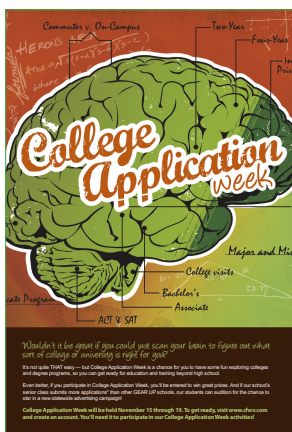
### West Virginia

West Virginia's College Application Week program is managed by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (HEPC). With the help of other Go Alliance states, West Virginia piloted its first College Application Week in November 2011 in schools served by the state's two GEAR UP programs, which are all considered to have significant percentages of students from low-income families (i.e., 50 percent or more of the student body qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch). Approximately 1,600 students in 24 counties applied to college during the week. All of West Virginia's public two- and four-year colleges, and several private postsecondary institutions, participated.

### How It Works in West Virginia

In order to participate, high schools are asked, at a minimum, to allocate computer lab time for students to explore and apply to colleges through the state's Web portal, [CFWV.com](http://CFWV.com), which provides information about planning, applying to and paying for college. Like similar Web portals in other Go Alliance states, [CFWV.com](http://CFWV.com) allows students to apply online using a single application that can be sent digitally to all nonprofit institutions of postsecondary education throughout the state.

At present, College Application Week is marketed only in participating high schools. Prior to the event, West Virginia HEPC provides each participating school with a toolkit that includes posters, fliers, facilitator guides and an activity guide. The activity guide provides suggestions of fun, explorative activities schools can offer, such as college scavenger hunts, college trivia contests, door decorating contests, and a college-colors fashion show. The toolkit also includes stickers for students who participate that say "I applied to [blank space for institution] and I'm awesome!" as well as



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prizes such as T-shirts and college pennants to be given away to students who complete an online evaluation of College Application Week.

Initial analyses of College Application Week 2011 data show that the impact the program had on students was positive: 396 out of 589 participants (67 percent) surveyed indicated that they had not applied to college prior to College Application Week. One student stated: “I didn’t plan on going to college — I didn’t think I could. But I applied during College Application Week because we were trying to get 100 percent [of the senior class] to apply. A few weeks ago, I got [an acceptance] letter from Glenville [State College], and now I’m going.”

West Virginia plans to implement the program statewide, following North Carolina’s model of open participation in which any interested school may participate by completing a brief registration form. Partners for its current College Application Week include West Virginia GEAR UP, the Fairmont State University GEAR UP Partnership program, West Virginia TRiO programs, the Education Alliance, 4-H extension programs, and the West Virginia Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.

“I didn’t plan on going to college — I didn’t think I could. But I applied during College Application Week ... and now I’m going.”  
— WV student participant



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### How to Launch a Statewide Program

State leaders who are considering launching a statewide College Application Week should first consider forming a broad-based **state advisory committee** to oversee all aspects of the campaign. This committee should begin working months in advance of the campaign launch and continue months afterward. It should plan the event, ensure resources are available, recruit the staffing that is needed, coordinate activities among multiple campaign sites, evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign after it is complete, and begin preplanning for the next year's activity.

SREB's Go *Alliance* sponsors a national website, [www.collegeaccessmarketing.com](http://www.collegeaccessmarketing.com), which provides helpful general information for undertaking college access campaigns. State leaders considering launching a College Application Week or other campaign are encouraged to **visit the site**. This *Toolkit* is posted there.

#### *State Leader Checklist*



**Form an advisory committee or team**, including representatives from all appropriate state education agencies and other key stakeholder groups within your state. Involving all appropriate agencies, organizations and groups can help legitimize the event and encourage buy-in across the state. The committee or team also can help inform programming, mobilize volunteers, publicize the event and serve as the high school selection committee. Consider the following entities for your state's committee:

- colleges and universities (public, private and technical; two- and four-year)
- the state department of education
- the state student finance commission
- the state and local school counseling associations
- the state Chamber of Commerce
- the collegiate registrars and admissions officers association
- representatives from the state's college access Web portal
- the state PTA
- community-based organizations, and
- the state's Public Broadcasting System(s).



**Investigate funding resources** such as federal grants (including the College Access Challenge Grant and GEAR UP Grant), state grants and philanthropies. While a college application initiative can be started with minimal funding, additional resources will allow your state to make the event stand out. You can provide participating high schools with items such as banners, posters, buttons and stickers. Grants and philanthropies also can fund College Application Week essentials such as training videos for staff and volunteers.



**Appoint a statewide coordinator** for the program who will be responsible for carrying out the plan of the advisory committee. The person will manage the program throughout the state and will work closely with site coordinators at each event site. Most of the tasks in this list will become the responsibility of the statewide coordinator, in cooperation with the advisory committee and the state leader.



**Get an endorsement for the event from the professional organization of collegiate registrars and admissions officers in your state.** Receiving the endorsement of the college registrars and admissions officers helps to ensure buy-in from the colleges and universities in your state — which leads to more successful volunteer recruitment. A designee on the state advisory team should write to the executive committee of the state organization seeking the endorsement. Registrars and admissions officers can spread the word at various admissions fair events throughout the fall that high schools will need volunteers at College Application Week. The endorsement request should be specific about what the event coordinators want these officials to do for the event.



**Start small but think BIG!** Starting as a pilot program and planning for incremental growth each year allow you to learn important lessons before expanding the event to more high schools. Consider starting with fewer than 10 high schools, expanding to 20 to 40 high schools the second year, to 100 high schools the third year, and to 200 to 300 in the fourth year. Try to open the program to all public high schools in the fifth year.



**Decide upon a method for selecting high schools to participate in College Application Week in the early years.**

- Consider how to select the initial schools for the program.
  - **Pre-select** the schools by inviting high schools with significant populations of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches or high proportions of students who would be first in their families to attend college, or
  - **Invite** *all* high schools to apply and use a review process to select the desired number of schools.
    - Send an invitation to each high school principal and head of school counseling and ask those interested to submit an online application to participate. (Note: An online application can be built quickly and easily using free online survey tools.)
    - Request school demographic information on the application to assist with the selection process and to facilitate reporting on selected schools; choose schools with profiles indicating a greater proportion of students who would likely be first in their families to go to college.
    - Ask schools to select three event dates within the designated College Application Week on the application. (This allows your state's College Application Week committee to schedule events evenly throughout the week. You can move volunteers from school to school.)
    - Inform schools of their selection prior to the summer break so they can return in the fall ready to start their planning and preparation. Ensure that the designated site coordinator, school principal and system superintendent know about the event and the assigned dates to ensure support at all levels.

- Require schools, whether pre-selected or chosen by application, to confirm participation after they are notified of their selection. Ask the high school to identify a site coordinator and to send contact information to the statewide coordinator.
- Once the event has grown large enough, provide opportunities for open registration through your state's college access Web portal, if available. Save-the-date postcards (mailed to every public high school in the state) can encourage schools to register.



**Request that your state's governor or other high-ranking official proclaim** your state's designated week as "College Application Week." Extend an invitation to your governor to participate as a speaker or volunteer at one of your events. This involvement will increase the draw to your event, and it will provide newsworthy headlines for press releases to local media. The following are examples of College Application Week proclamations in two SREB-Go *Alliance* states.

- Georgia: [http://www.usg.edu/apply-to-college/docs/gov\\_proclamation2009.pdf](http://www.usg.edu/apply-to-college/docs/gov_proclamation2009.pdf)
- North Carolina: <http://www.governor.state.nc.us/NewsItems/UploadedFiles/dd53ca59-a665-4267-93e8-f5d416f566cb.pdf>



North Carolina Governor Perdue designates the week.



**Request that the state superintendent of K-12 education** formally announces College Application Week to your state's district superintendents, principals and high school counselors. Encourage all schools in your state, even those not selected for "official" participation in the early years, to consider holding a "mini" college application event for their students. (See "unofficial" events, below.)



**Take advantage of one-stop-shop Web portal technology, if available in your state.** While not essential to holding a successful College Application Week event, one-stop-shop Web portal technology can enable students to plan, apply to and pay for college through a single location online. The following are examples of one-stop-shop technology:

- Florida — [FACTS.org](http://FACTS.org)
- Georgia — [Gacollege411.org](http://Gacollege411.org)
- North Carolina — [CFNC.org](http://CFNC.org)
- Tennessee — [CollegeforTN.org](http://CollegeforTN.org)



**If your state has one-stop-shop technology and uses a third-party online application provider, involve that party in the planning process.**

- Make sure that the Web portal is capable technically of handling a high volume of applications during a single week.
- Inform your application provider of your event dates and let them know that additional technical assistance may be needed for the duration of the week. If they are located in a different time zone, be sure they are aware that they should have someone on hand to assist with any technical issues during your state's event hours.

- Work with the application provider to make sure that all colleges and universities are able to accept applications for a future class term from incoming first-year students. Without an upcoming term available on the application, students may experience difficulty applying to that institution.



If your state does **not** have one-stop-shop Web portal technology, create a website to provide students with quick access to information about planning for and applying to college. The following is an example of a state college information website: South Carolina — [www.sccango.org](http://www.sccango.org).

- Make sure that your campuses know to expect an increase in applications during College Application Week/Month, and do not schedule any site maintenance during that time frame.



On your state's college information site (whether a comprehensive Web portal or a website), create a **College Application Week** section where high schools and volunteers can go to obtain information and materials related to College Application Week. The following are examples of College Application Week Web pages:

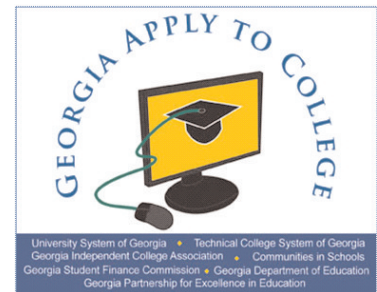
- Georgia — [usg.edu/apply-to-college](http://usg.edu/apply-to-college)
- North Carolina — [CFNC.org/CAW](http://CFNC.org/CAW)
- South Carolina — [sccango.org/college-application-week-for-educators.html](http://sccango.org/college-application-week-for-educators.html)
- Tennessee — [CollegeforTN.org/home/college\\_app\\_week/college\\_app\\_week.asp](http://CollegeforTN.org/home/college_app_week/college_app_week.asp)



**Brand your event** by creating a College Application Week logo. The logo should be on your website and all other materials.



**Create a College Application Week e-mail address** that reflects your event name and is easy to remember. Ensure that at least one person (or a designated staff team within the organization who administers College Application Week at the state level) is responsible for monitoring incoming e-mail and answering questions quickly and thoroughly.



**Make plans to publicize the event.** Encourage partnering education agencies to help spread the word about the event by issuing press releases and providing information about the event on their websites. Also, provide a press release template to participating high schools so they can spread the word quickly and easily about their event. Highlight any news media focusing on your College Application Week on the College Application Week section of your state's college information website, if you develop one. Encourage schools to include information about their event in their school newsletters and on their school calendars. Having community “buzz” about the event is important. It makes recruiting volunteers easier; it also helps influence students to take the event seriously. Students need encouragement to apply to college from community leaders — and from their parents. Many people in the community need to know about the event. If students get encouragement from outside the school to apply to college — as well as inside — they are more likely to research possible institutions, prepare for the application sessions and complete applications.



**Make it easy for schools to participate** by providing planning and implementation materials, including:

- Online site coordinator training, such as a webinar
- Online or in-person volunteer training

- Site coordinator handbooks or resource guides that include the following:
  - planning timeline with step-by-step implementation plan
  - sample communications, including a volunteer recruitment letter/e-mail, volunteer confirmation letter or e-mail, parent notification letter, press release, and
  - supplemental activities to help make the event special.
- Volunteer handbook
- Materials such as:
  - posters and banners
  - “I Applied to College” buttons and stickers for students, and
  - “I Can Help” buttons/stickers for volunteers.



**Allow unofficial events** to be held at schools not selected for official participation, but encourage them to undertake only what they think they can do well and to follow the state’s overall guidelines. Post all state resources on a College Application Week section of your state’s college information website so that all high schools have access to the planning and implementation documents. Encourage these schools to publicize the unofficial event to the local media and to send success stories and photos to the College Application Week team/committee for inclusion on the website. Consider also recognizing these schools on the College Application Week section of your site.



**Help recruit volunteers for the participating high schools.** Involve admissions and financial aid representatives from colleges in your state. Consider other potential sources of volunteers, such as community groups, Chambers of Commerce, political leaders, and staff from the education agencies in your state. Consider providing a central online volunteer registration form and link to the form from the College Application Week section of the college information website, if one is developed.



**Provide online training to both site coordinators and registered volunteers** to be sure everyone understands expectations and is prepared to have a positive College Application Week experience.



**Plan to evaluate program effectiveness.**



**Collect feedback** from participating students, volunteers and high school counselors by using online or paper evaluations. Feedback received in the first few years of your event will provide valuable insight to guide changes that can be made to improve your program.



**Track college enrollment data** from the applications submitted during the week by using the National Student Clearinghouse, if funding is available to do so. The clearinghouse provides access to enrollment databases that represent over 90 percent of U.S. college enrollment in more than 3,300 college and universities through a subscription service. (See [www.nationalstudentclearinghouse.org](http://www.nationalstudentclearinghouse.org).) These data will help you measure the overall effectiveness of your state’s program by providing information about whether students actually enrolled in colleges in your state or other states.



**Hold a site coordinator debriefing session** following the week to obtain additional feedback from the participating high schools and to allow high schools to share lessons learned with each other.



**Provide individual school reports** that outline the number of college applications submitted from a particular high school to colleges and universities within the state.



# College Application Week:

## *A Toolkit for Increasing Access to Higher Education*

### Preparing High Schools for College Application Week

Statewide coordinators for College Application Week need to ensure that all participating high schools are ready for the event and have the resources they need for success. They will need information as well as help identifying and training volunteers. The following recommendations will help statewide coordinators prepare the high schools or other sites that will hold official College Application Week events.

#### *Checklist for Each Participating High School*



**Identify a site coordinator** (typically, a counselor or advisor) who will be responsible for planning and implementing the event at his or her school. It is also recommended that each school designate a back-up site coordinator as the second in command.



**Build a school-wide team** of counselors, teachers and other staff to help plan and implement the event. Forming a team will spread the work across multiple individuals and help ensure the entire school is supportive of the event.



**Encourage school-wide involvement** to get the entire school enthusiastic about the event and ensure more students apply to college. Encourage all students (even those in ninth through 11th grades) and staff members to participate in activities like daily trivia contests, wearing college shirts, sharing college stories, or decorating classroom doors with college logos, photos or other mementos. It is never too early to get students thinking about college!

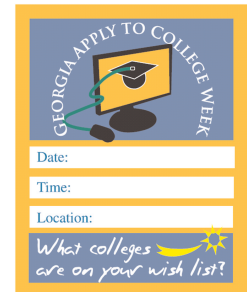


**Reserve your event location(s)** well in advance of the event. Choose one that is equipped with a sufficient number of networked computers and printers. (If computers are not available on site, consider borrowing a set of laptops for the event day or week.) Typical locations are the school's media center, computer labs or classrooms with computers.

- Ensure that enough computers are available to allow adequate time for each student to participate. Typically, **each student requires one hour** to complete one college application successfully.
- Work with technology support staff in advance of the event to ensure that school Internet firewalls or other access restrictions will not prevent students from accessing online applications the day of the event.



**Promote the event early and often** through e-mails, letters, one-on-one conversations, school announcements, school newsletters, posters, press releases and the school's social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. As the event approaches, announce it on the school's outdoor sign, if possible. Also, be sure it is listed on the school calendar and invite local media to attend.





**Encourage English teachers to incorporate college essay assignments into the curriculum** to help prepare those students who are applying to colleges. The essays should be completed during the junior year or early in the fall term of the senior year so students finish them well before College Application Week.



**Encourage teachers to dedicate class time for college-related activities**, such as researching the earning potential of college graduates in the weeks leading up to College Application Week.



**Prepare students prior to the event** to ensure they can make the most of their College Application Week experience. Have meetings with seniors early in the school year to allow them to become familiar with state resources for applying to college, including college information websites or one-stop-shop Web portals, so the day goes more smoothly.



**Recruit volunteers** from the local area to help with the event. If available, use sample letters provided by the College Application Week state committee to recruit parents, college representatives and community members to volunteer. Potential sources of volunteers include:

- teachers and school staff
- district superintendents
- retired educators
- local colleges and universities, including representatives from admissions, financial aid and registrar offices, as well as current students
- your local Chamber of Commerce
- local business leaders and political representatives
- faith-based and community organizations (especially youth-focused and retired citizen organizations)
- previous graduates of your high school who went to college, and
- parents and guardians.



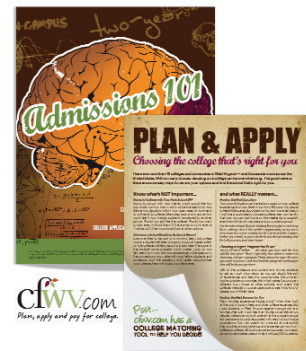
**Give all seniors access to the event.** Develop a schedule that will provide all seniors with the opportunity to participate. *Requiring that seniors sign up to participate beforehand is strongly discouraged.* Those who could benefit the most may not sign up, but they may become interested in considering an application to college once the event begins. *Evening events are strongly discouraged.* Transportation difficulties have prevented students from remaining after school or returning to school in the evening; turnout has been too low to warrant the effort. Also, if participation in the event is perceived as optional — as evening events often are — the event is less likely to attract the students who need it the most.

# College Application Week:

*A Toolkit for Increasing Access to Higher Education*

## Preparing Students for College Application Week

Most states focus the application-completion process on a few days, but they host a week — or several weeks — of events beforehand. The preliminary events help prepare students for completing the application. Students need to know what the application calls for, what paperwork they need to bring with them, whether they need to have an essay prepared, and whether they need money for fees. The following tips and strategies can help ensure that students are better prepared to make the most of their College Application Week experience.



### *Checklist for Preparing Students*



**Encourage students to complete their college research prior to the event.** Students who arrive at the event with a list of colleges they have determined would be a good match for them and to which they would like to apply can complete the process quickly. Consider developing a worksheet or online activity to help guide students through the process of researching colleges. College characteristics students should be encouraged to consider include:

- location
- size
- available majors
- cost and available financial aid, and
- admissions requirements.



**Ensure students have all of the information they need to complete a college application.**

Create a basic worksheet to help students collect the information, and give it to them in advance. This might include the following:

- student's full legal name
- social security number
- citizenship status
- state residency information (such as the date he or she moved to the state, state in which parent(s) filed taxes, driver's license number and vehicle registration information)
- test information (such as SAT/ACT test dates and scores), and
- college essays and/or personal statements, if required by the college. Encourage students to write their college application essays well in advance of the event and bring a final, proofed electronic copy on a flash drive for quick and easy access.



Encourage students to become familiar with application fee payment options prior to the event. Students should be ready to pay any applicable fees for colleges to which they plan to apply.

- Students should be familiar with the college fees and fee waiver documents in the states. Students should know which, if any, colleges and universities in the state have decided to waive their application fees during the week.
- Students should be encouraged to meet with their high school counselor to determine if they are eligible for a College Board test fee waiver based on family income status. Eligible students should investigate whether their chosen college(s) accepts application fee waivers based on the College Board test fee waiver.
- Students not eligible for a College Board test fee waiver should determine what the fee is for the colleges to which they plan to apply. They should also investigate payment methods accepted by the college (for example, credit card, online payment or mailed check).
- For colleges requiring that payment information be entered online to complete the application submission process, students should:
  - come prepared with either a credit card (including possibly a prepaid credit card in the amount of the application fee so that the credit card information can be entered into the online application) or online check information, or
  - save the application and submit it later when they have access to a payment method.



# College Application Week:

## *A Toolkit for Increasing Access to Higher Education*

### Coordinating Volunteers

Volunteers are critical to a successful event. Statewide and local recruitment of volunteers is needed to provide sufficient staff for each local event — but careful coordination is required. The following tips and strategies can help ensure that state leaders are ready to provide hands-on assistance to students during the event.



#### *Volunteer Coordinator Checklist*



**Never underestimate students' need for help.** Exit surveys of similar events have shown — overwhelmingly — that students considered the event a major factor in their decision to apply to college. Volunteers are crucial to providing one-on-one support that will have a positive impact on students.



**Hold volunteer registration centrally** and create an online volunteer registration form, possibly using one of several free online survey tools. Provide a list of schools and site coordinators on your statewide College Application Week website and encourage volunteers to reach out to a specific school at which they would like to help. Consider asking a partner organization that is on the state planning committee — perhaps a business “roundtable” or education committee of a Chamber of Commerce — to facilitate larger-scale volunteer recruitment and placement, rather than attempting to recruit volunteers one by one. As volunteers sign up, collect the specific information you need to make placement and follow-up easier:

- the volunteer's name
- e-mail address and telephone numbers
- affiliations (name of postsecondary institution, company, nonprofit or government agency)
- areas of expertise related to College Application Week
- school events the volunteer wishes to support
- dates and hours the volunteer is available, and
- how he or she heard about the College Application Week.



**Encourage the high school to assign each volunteer a specific responsibility, taking into account areas of expertise.** Assignments might include greeting students, helping students complete their applications, or answering financial aid questions. Consider providing a checklist of needed expertise in the volunteer registration process so that volunteers have a specific idea of what skills are needed that they may have to offer.



**Provide the high school with the option to receive assistance from the College Application Week committee/team in locating volunteers.** Some high schools have sufficient resources and will prefer to locate their own volunteers.





**Recognize that many schools and districts require background checks for external volunteers.**

Either follow the policy of the local school district when recruiting volunteers, or provide the list of volunteers to the high schools and allow them to complete the checks required by their system or administration.



**Invite student leadership** in the school to volunteer for the event.

- Student ambassadors from all grade levels can help share ideas, distribute materials, decorate the school and promote College Application Week/College Day events through Facebook, MySpace and Twitter accounts. Be sure to invite students with a wide variety of interests, representing a diversity of ethnicities, including those from honors programs, career/technical programs and others, to communicate that College Application Week is for everyone.
- Consider using seniors who have already completed the college application process to assist other students during the event.



**Enlist teachers to help students complete college applications.**



**Identify other contacts in the community** who may be interested in helping make the event a success by donating time or resources. Your prospects include: school alumni; parents and families of students; PTA members; senior citizens; church groups; college students; college representatives; business, community and political leaders; and youth organizations such as the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, 4H, Boy Scouts of America, etc. Use press releases or other publicity efforts to promote the need for volunteers. Ask the organizations that agree to participate to issue press releases on your behalf.



**As you recruit, be sure everyone involved in College Application Week understands that the campaign is *not* a recruitment opportunity for individual colleges.** Local colleges and universities are highly encouraged to attend; however, they should not be allowed to use the event as a recruiting tool. Volunteers should assist students during the application process to apply to whichever colleges the students choose. Ardent graduates of one college may find themselves helping students complete applications to other colleges; they should not use the contact with the students to communicate information about their alma mater *unless the student specifically asks, and even then, they should be discreet.*



**Be sure each participating high school has enough volunteers to support its event. Each school should plan to have one volunteer for every four or five computers** available to students during the event. Information Technology specialists from the school or community, or individuals with solid computer experience, should be on hand in case a technical problem occurs. Additional volunteers at each school should assist with sign-in, printing and other duties as may be associated with the specific event. Plan for opportunities for the volunteers to take breaks. If volunteer registration is handled centrally by the statewide College Application Week committee, high schools should be encouraged to monitor their local volunteer registration and let the statewide committee know as soon as they have sufficient registered volunteers. High schools also should inform the committee ahead of time if they are concerned that they do not have enough volunteers, so that the committee can assist.



**Create a system for communicating with volunteers** early and often. Even if assistance with volunteer coordination is available at the state level, each local site coordinator should be responsible for staying in touch with the volunteers for a particular school to provide them with specifics. In addition to training about their duties, volunteers need to know about parking, event times, shift times for each

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volunteer, appropriate attire, location within the school for various activities, options for lunch, and contingency plans in case of inclement weather or an emergency.



**Provide volunteer training (online or on site)** in advance of the event, and strongly encourage all volunteers to participate. The training should provide an overview of the college application process, recommendations for working with your target population, an overview of the role of the College Application Week volunteer, and where to refer questions students ask that the volunteer cannot answer. (If your training is on site only, it also may be helpful to record the training and make it available to those volunteers who are unable to attend.)



**Create an accessible, easy-to-use volunteer handbook or handout** to accompany the training.



**Encourage each high school to conduct a quick volunteer orientation the morning of the event** to familiarize all volunteers with the specific details of the day. The school should consider providing a printed schedule with set lunch times and breaks when no students will be completing an application in the lab/media center/classroom.



**Follow up with a letter of appreciation** to all volunteers, thanking them for their dedication and support in making the event a success. This is a great way to leave volunteers with a positive feeling toward the event and to increase the chances that they will volunteer again in future years. It is helpful to provide a volunteer thank you letter template in a College Application Week Site Coordinators' Guide.

# College Application Week:

## *A Toolkit for Increasing Access to Higher Education*

### Getting Ready for ‘Application Day’

Site coordinators find that it is very helpful to have a script for each day of College Application Week, particularly the day students complete their applications. Too many small details can go unattended and ruin an otherwise carefully planned event. The following tips and strategies can help site coordinators write a script to ensure the events run smoothly.



**Take steps the day before “Application Day” to remind students to arrive prepared to apply.**



**Welcome the volunteers.**

- Thank them for their participation.
- Inform them of the game plan for the day, including:
  - locations where they will be assigned
  - when there will be breaks
  - when they can break for lunch
    - If lunch will not be available at the high school, consider providing a list or map of local restaurants. (Note: Providing lunch is a nice way to say “thank you.”)
  - where the restrooms are located, and
  - who can help with computer problems, including resetting student passwords.



**Welcome each group of students and explain their task. Explain:**

- the importance of applying to college
- that the goal for the event is for them to complete and submit at least one application for admission to college
- that they should feel free to request the assistance of the available volunteers if they need help while working on their applications, or if they have any questions about applying to or attending college
- what they should do when they have completed an application
- that they should plan to complete their admissions application by mailing (or sending electronically) the appropriate documents to the college, and
- that they need to print their application-submission-confirmation page when done.



**High school staff should remain available throughout the event and should not expect volunteers to ensure students stay on task.** Remember, the volunteers are there to help students complete the application process, but not to discipline students!

# College Application Week:

## *A Toolkit for Increasing Access to Higher Education*

### Making College Application Week Special

Creating *buzz* around an event multiplies the positive effect. It makes students feel good about their accomplishment and helps carry over the effect into the future. Completing and submitting a college application is the beginning of a journey. Anything coordinators can do to emphasize the importance of the overall mission of the campaign can help students move to the next stage of the journey.

In some schools, the week involves dividing the seniors into five groups and having one group complete applications each day of the week. In others, the early part of the week is filled with “lead-up” events and all seniors complete their applications on Friday. The lead-up activities can include pep rallies, college trivia events and door-decorating contests. In many schools, teachers, counselors, staff, administration and volunteers are encouraged to wear shirts with college logos from their alma maters during College Application Week. The following are tips and strategies for site coordinators to help make their College Application Week special.



**Invite educational and community leaders** such as school board members, district administration, local officials and state representatives to speak to students prior to the event about the importance of attending college and to motivate them to participate.



**Contact local media** (print, television, radio), and invite them to cover your event. Encourage them to attend with cameras and reporters to fuel student excitement. Appoint a spokesperson in advance who can speak on-camera, if needed, about the event and what it achieves.



**Contact local businesses** that may be interested in donating snacks for participating students and/or volunteers or even lunch. Finding a local business willing to provide a pizza lunch for participating students can be a fun and exciting way to wrap up a morning of applying to college! Providing lunch for participating volunteers is a nice way to say “thank you” for their assistance and offers the merchant the benefit of increasing customer loyalty.



**Ask local colleges and universities to consider providing college paraphernalia** that can be raffled off to students participating in the event.



**Hold a senior assembly or pep rally in advance of the event** to communicate expectations for the event, and to celebrate academic achievements and college aspirations.



**Dress the part!** Encourage all faculty and staff to wear clothing from their colleges in the days and weeks leading up to the event. Students should be encouraged to ask all faculty and staff about their college experiences.





**Encourage teachers to incorporate college-planning activities** into their lesson planning as part of the event. English teachers may want to organize writing workshops for personal statements or essays to encourage students to work on admissions or scholarship essays. Math teachers can challenge students to calculate their lifetime earnings with/without a college degree.



**Recognize students for their accomplishment.** Provide “I applied” stickers or use other creative ways to acknowledge the important step they have taken.



**Follow up with students after the event** to be sure they have taken the necessary steps to complete the application process.

- If they were unable to submit their applications during the event, be sure they submit them later.
- Be sure all students send the appropriate supporting documentation to the college, such as:
  - fee waiver forms
  - high school transcripts, and
  - official test scores.



These action steps are intended as guidance to help you, your school and your state launch a successful College Application Week event. They are not exhaustive, and your steps may differ in some details.

SREB’s *Go Alliance* encourages you to get started now to create your own success.



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The **Southern Regional Education Board** (SREB) is an Atlanta-based nonprofit organization that works with legislators and educators in its 16 member states to advance public education and improve the social and economic life of the region.

**Go Alliance** is an SREB interstate cooperative that brings state leaders together to share ideas and resources that can increase students' academic achievement, high school completion and access to postsecondary education, particularly for underrepresented minority and low-income students.

**For More Information**  
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