



Maine Parent Federation
Empowering families and increasing
parent involvement for 25 years.

GEAR UP

PARENT NEWS

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Down East News from Sherrie!

Hi! My name is Sherrie Metcalf and I'm your GEAR UP Regional Parent Involvement Coordinator for Washington and Hancock Counties. I am excited to be doing this work for Maine Parent Federation, because I believe that my story is not unlike yours.

I was born and raised in Eastport and, like many of you; I was a first generation college student and graduate. My family struggled with money and we had just enough to get by. I knew my family could not afford to send me to college, however, I also knew there had to be other ways to pay for college. When I discovered the

different kinds of financial aid available, I knew that was my ticket to a higher education. At different times while I was working towards my college degree, I was a traditional student living on campus and a non-traditional student, raising my daughter by myself, while commuting to classes at the University of Maine at Machias. Going to college was very difficult at times and I felt like giving up, but I stuck with it. With hard work, family support, and financial aid, I was able to graduate.

I love working with GEAR UP where I can assist families and students in accessing higher education

opportunities. I get to work with families whose lives and experiences are similar to mine. I can relate to how you are feeling, what you worry about, and what you hope the future can be.

My personal message to other "Down Easters" is that getting a higher education is NOT just for the wealthy. It is possible to go on to higher education and it doesn't matter where you live. It is possible to find a career and remain on our beautiful east coast. I graduated and I know your children can do it too!

Please let me hear from you. I am happy to answer your questions or provide assistance.

Upcoming Events

Coming **VERY SOON**
to a Location near
you!

A **FREE** workshop for
Parents of 10th and
11th graders
**"Get 'Em Ready
for Higher
Education"**

A **FREE** workshop for
Parents of 12th graders
**"Goodbye High
School, Hello
College"**

See the enclosed flyer
for dates, times and
locations.

Parents Go To School: 4 Good Reasons to Go Inside

To gain more insight into the educational world of your son or daughter and to show your continued commitment to their school success, here are four easy and effective ways to get involved.

- Attend academic events such as student-led conferences, senior nights, workshops on higher education, and financial aid.
- Meet with the Guidance Counselor (call for an appointment) to discuss your teen and their future, classes he or she needs to take, talk about financial aid, colleges, and career choices.
- Schedule a meeting with the GEAR UP Liaison to find out how your teen is doing with the criteria for GEAR UP and your role as a GEAR UP parent.
- Pick up useful materials and resources from the GEAR UP display, GEAR UP Liaison or Guidance Counselor.



**Have you
filed your
FAFSA?
Save Time!
File Online!**

Contact MPF's GEAR UP Staff

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For more information on GEAR UP:
www.mpf.org/projects/gearup.htm

Finding Financial Aid: **MAZE?** or **AMAZING?**

Did you know that low and moderate income students enter higher education each year with Financial Aid paying *some, most, or all* of the cost? Many financial aid programs are based on income and a general rule of thumb is: the greater your financial need, the more financial aid available.

Last month we shared information about the parent response to the first question on the GEAR UP Parent Survey. This month we continue to share your responses and also offer some information to help you navigate the maze of higher education.

The second question: ***"Has anyone from your school or GEAR UP ever spoken with you about the availability of financial aid to help pay for college?"***

generated a response of "Yes" from less than half of you. Clearly, we need to do a better job of making that information available to you.

The cost of higher education has continued to increase in recent years and many students and parents may feel discouraged. *Don't!* There really is a lot of financial aid available from federal, state, and private sources that can help make a higher education

affordable to every student who wants one.

The sooner you begin looking into financial aid resources, the better, whether your child is a 9th grader or a senior. The major sources of financial aid start with the US government's *Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)*.

The FAFSA is easier to complete online, but if you don't have access to the internet, you can complete the application on paper. The FAFSA requires student and parent information that you already provide on your federal income tax return. Information provided on the FAFSA is

used to calculate the financial need and provides an Expected Family Contribution (EFC).

There are some terrific resources available to help you navigate the financial aid process. We would be happy to send you a "Financial Aid Tool Kit" from the Finance Authority of Maine. It contains all the information you need to get started. Another useful resource is the FAFSA Worksheet. You can use this tool to practice for the real thing when your student is ready to go.

Call 1-800-870-7746 or email rcook@mpf.org for assistance or to request materials.

