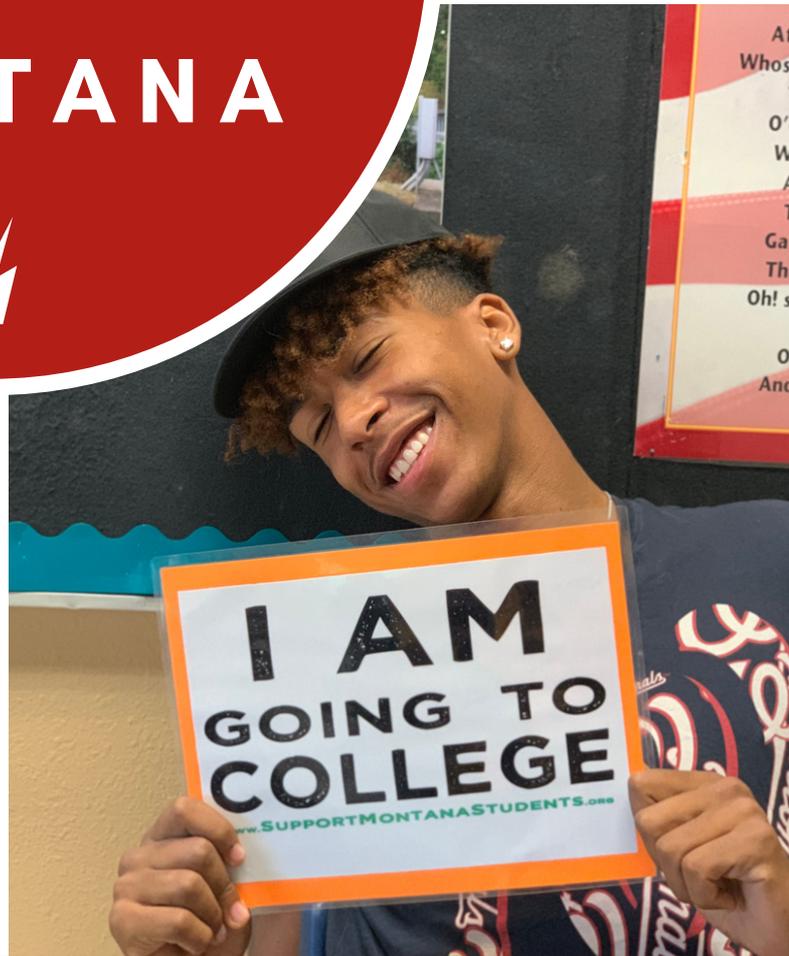
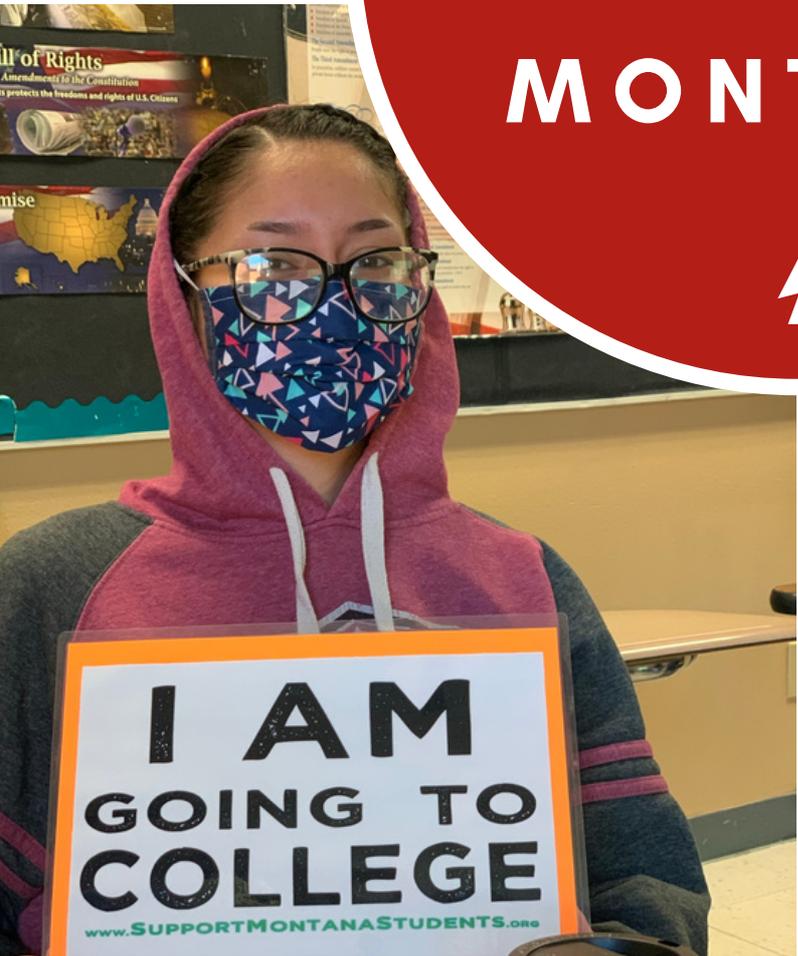




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DECISION DAY MONTANA

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A TOOLKIT FOR CELEBRATING THE POST SECONDARY
PLANS OF MONTANA'S GRADUATING CLASS

My Ideas

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ACT



AID



AID



CELEBRATING OUR GRADUATES

Decision Day celebrates all graduates as they launch into their next step in life. For some this may be a two year program, a four year program, an apprenticeship, military service, or entering into the workforce with the skills and preparation they attained in High School. Completing high school and pursuing a dream, while overcoming obstacles, is worthy of a special celebration for our graduates.

DECISION DAY BEGINNINGS

DID YOU KNOW?

Decision Day began in the spirit of "college signing day" where high school athletes signed their intent letters with colleges.

GOALS OF DECISION DAY

Celebrate the work students put into graduating and taking steps to future success.

Lift up and highlight students and what they did to get admitted to college (Apply. Aid. Act.), military, apprenticeships, etc.

Especially celebrate those who will be the first in their family to go to college.

FIRST WEEK OF MAY

THIS TOOLKIT IS DESIGNED TO HELP SCHOOLS JOIN OTHERS ACROSS MONTANA IN HOSTING LOCAL SIGNING DAY EVENTS.



MONTANA
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Introduction

Decision Day is the fourth event in the academic year facilitated by programs within the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education, *Educational Talent Search*, *iGraduate*, and *GEAR UP*. These programs are designed to help students graduate with the tools and skills they need to succeed in post-secondary education, career, and life.

The first three events occur early in the academic year, College Application Week, FAFSA Month, and 1st Generation Day. **The fourth event is a celebration held the first week of May, called Decision Day.** Collectively the events are known as *Apply, Aid, and Act*.

Decision Day is designed to celebrate students' plans for post-secondary education, military service, or career.

For the students who have *applied* for college and secured financial *aid*, they still need to *act*. Decision Day celebrates the act of signing college acceptance letters.

Decision Day is a week set aside where schools celebrate all students who made it to graduation and are going to college, serving their country, starting a career, or embarking on other adventures.

State Contact for Assistance

If you are receiving this toolkit, it is because your school is registered to participate in College Application Week, FAFSA month, 1st Generation Day, and Decision Day. We know planning a spring event can sometimes be difficult. That is why we set a week aside for Montanans to celebrate our seniors. Pick a day, or do something every day during the week. Personalize it to match your needs.

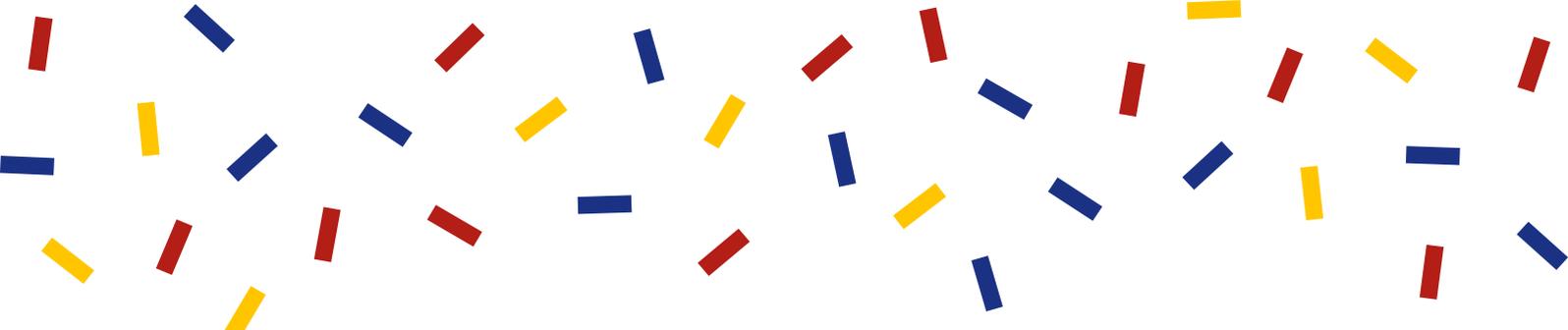
If you need ideas or have questions, help is available through our office. Please contact:

- OCHE College Access Team
collegeaccess@montana.edu
406-449-9138

Suggested Flow of Decision Day Event(s)

In Montana, we have set aside the first week of May for Decision Day events. This allows the school to pick a day that works best for them. Here is a suggested flow of events:

- *The Friday before:* Introduce Decision Day week, its purpose (i.e. to celebrate seniors and their plans, including college, career, military service), and invite your community to participate with you and with schools across Montana (and the Nation).
- *Monday:* Mayoral Proclamation for the week, raise Awareness through social media, begin high lighting seniors.
- *Tuesday:* Continue with events and social media.
- *Wednesday:* Decision Day main event(s).
- *Thursday:* Continue with awareness and social media presence.
- *Friday:* Wrap up the celebration with a school-wide message of congratulations.



Getting Started

What are the top 3 reasons we should participate in Decision Day?

These reasons will help when asking others to help with planning.

Who would help me plan this?

Students, teachers, parents, school staff, community leaders, etc.

What else is going on during the first week of May?

What days are available and will work best?

What funding might we need?

What resources are available if we raffled items or gave incentives?

Initial Planning Meeting Agenda

Purpose: To Plan Our School's "Decision Day" Celebration

1. Goals of our celebration are:
 - a. Celebrate all our graduates' future plans
 - b. Especially promote and celebrate those who will pursue higher education

2. Brainstorm ideas for our celebration
(Remember all ideas are valid during brainstorming.)
 - a. What ideas do we have that will cost nothing?
 - b. What would we like to do that might have financial costs?
 - c. How will we maximize participation for people who cannot celebrate in person?

3. What 3-5 ideas do we want to pursue?

4. How will we find out the future plans of our graduates?

5. What day/time(s) will our event(s) happen? What space/location will be used?

6. How will we get others involved?

7. What do we need to fund?

Sample Task Chart

Task	Who/what	Due Date
Reserve Location, Speakers e.g. rooms, bulletin boards		
Secure Supplies/Funding e.g. identify sources of support or donations, ask, provide donation records, send thank you		
Advertising e.g. posters, flyers, banners, press releases, mayoral proclamation, newsletters, social media, website, daily announcements		
Work with Seniors e.g. get plans, ask how they want to be recognized, wear clothing to represent college, military, technical schools, make posters, etc.		
Recruit/Train Volunteers e.g. explain purpose of Decision Day, and their role		
Host Event e.g. set up, sign in sheets, photographer, clean up, thank you notes, guest speakers		

Sample Donor Letter

Asking for Support: You may have local businesses or philanthropists who support higher education. Be specific in your ask. Have a budget of all expenses. You also may reach out to the University or College where your students will be attending and ask for promotional items. Be polite.

[School Name]
[School Address]

[Date]

Dear [Name of Organization or Individual],

We are pleased to announce our participation in Montana's Decision Day events. The goal of Decision Day is to celebrate all students and their commitment to continue their education beyond high school. Our event is part of a statewide effort organized by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

Our Decision Day event will be [insert date] and with your help, students will have the opportunity to proudly represent their postsecondary plans to all students at [name of school]. This event will further promote a college going culture at our school; peers will be able to see high school graduation is not the end, but merely the beginning. We would welcome [insert request of assistance, donations, etc.]. Our students would benefit and appreciate your help and support as they take the next step in their lives; whether that is going to college, enrolling in a technical or certification program, or enlisting in the military.

If you are able to assist us in making our Decision Day event a success, please contact [name, contact info]. Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Thank you,

[Name]
[Title]

Sample Family Letter

Asking for Support: Parents and caregivers are a great resource for getting the word out about Decision Day. Their promotion via social media, or word of mouth, can drive the success of your event(s). Adapt the letter below to fit the needs of your event.

[School Name]
[School Address]

[Date]

Dear [Parent or Caregiver],

We are pleased to announce our participation in Montana's Decision Day. The goal of Decision Day is to celebrate graduating seniors and their decision for after graduation. We especially lift up those whose plans include getting more education. Our event will be [date] and is part of a statewide effort organized by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

Decision Day is meant to be inclusive. We will celebrate the post-graduation plans of our [year] graduates, whether they are enrolling in a certificate or technical program, two-year degree, four-year degree, enlisting in the military, or starting a career.

We are encouraging all students to participate in our Decision Day event. We believe you are an integral part of your student's success beyond high school. We are inviting families to participate in [describe event].

If you would like to volunteer for this event, please let me know. Volunteers can greet students, sign up students, or assist in the production of the event. If you are unable to volunteer, you can help celebrate the students by participating via social media, by reposting from our site and by using the hashtag #MTDecisionDay to share your student's plans after graduation.

If you have any questions please call [name, title, phone number]. Thank you for your support of this important initiative to celebrate students' plans for after high school.

Sincerely,

[Name, Title]

Sample Local Press Release

[Insert School Logo or Letterhead]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: [Name of site coordinator]
[Title of site coordinator]
[School name]
[School address]
[Phone number]
[Email of contact person]
[High school website]

Decision Day to be held [date] at [name of school].

[Name of school] will be hosting a Decision Day event on [date] to celebrate the post-secondary plans of our graduates. Decision Day is part of Montana's college access initiative and an extension of College Application Week held in the fall.

The goal of this program is to highlight all students who make plans to continue their education after high school. During this event, students will be recognized for choosing to enroll in community colleges, technical programs, private colleges, public universities and enlisting in the military. [Could enter an example of a student or list of graduates?]

[Name of site coordinator], Site Coordinator for [name of school], expects more than [number of graduates] graduates to participate with the help of [number of volunteers] volunteers from [insert school staff, administration, college and community resources, and others who are assisting].

For more information: Montana GEAR UP website (<http://mus.edu/GearUp>)
Contact: [Name of coordinator]
Phone and/or email: [phone and/or email]

Please note: The State office of the Commissioner of Higher Education will issue a press release statewide. Please use this for local coverage only.

Sample Mayoral Proclamation

Mayoral Proclamation [Name of City], Montana

WHEREAS the youth of Montana are our strongest asset for the future of Montana, and will become future leaders driving economic growth, innovation, and stability for all Montanans;

WHEREAS Montana is committed to providing quality education to help all students achieve graduation and their highest potential;

WHEREAS the senior Class of [insert year] has overcome many obstacles to reach graduation;

WHEREAS graduation is the completion of one goal and the beginning of many other goals;

WHEREAS graduation is cause to celebrate, we also celebrate the decisions and commitments students are making for their future;

WE THEREFORE NOW celebrate our students who are going to college, the military, starting a career, or are embarking on some other new adventure.

I, [insert name], mayor of [name of city], Montana declare the first week of May to be known as Decision Day week, and urge all citizens to congratulate and celebrate the senior class of [insert year].

Signed this day of [insert Month, Day, Year]
[insert name], Mayor of [insert name of city], Montana

Maximizing Social Media

The next few pages will provide social media posts whether you use Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

General Tips:

Make it visual (i.e. graduate's photos)

The 3 C's – Color, Contrast, Clarity

Videos attract traffic

Tailor your content (e.g. Go Cats!)

Educate, Inspire, Entertain

Advertise before, during, and after the week.

Ask parents/caregivers/students to repost.

Hash Tags to Use

Encourage Students to Use:

#iDecidedMT, #CollegeSigningDay

#DecisionDay, #MTDecisionDay, #iGraduateMT

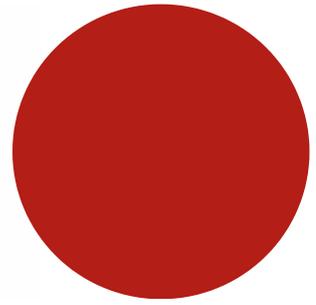
Tag Us On Facebook & Twitter:

@AccessMUS

Tag Us On Instagram:

@Access_MUS

Social Media Posts



BUILD INTEREST BEFORE THE EVENT

If you want to encourage seniors to participate by submitting a video, making a poster, or sharing a photo with their future plans, use social media to announce contests ahead of Monday. Daily drawings can generate excitement.

Learn what our seniors are doing after graduation.
#MTDecisionDay the first week of May.

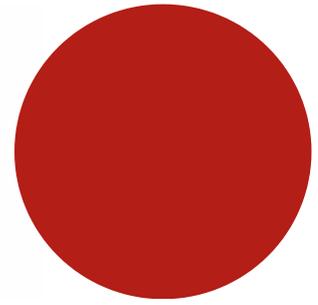
You watched them grow up, find out where they're going next. May [insert dates]. #CollegeSigningDay

Acceptance letter? ✓ FAFSA? ✓ Signing your college acceptance letter? Priceless. #MTDecisionDay

Going to college? Enlisting in the military? Entering the workforce? Let us know! #iDecidedMT

Celebrate!

Social Media Posts



DURING THE EVENT

Learn what our seniors are doing after graduation.
#MTDecisionDay

See what the future holds for this year's graduates.
#CollegeSigningDay [link to video, photo, event date]

These students have worked hard to get here.
Let's celebrate! #MTDecisionDay

A special shout out to our seniors who are signing their college acceptance letters this week. #MTDecisionDay

Congratulations to our seniors who will be starting military service. #iDecidedMT

Today we celebrate our graduating class and all the different paths they will take after graduation.
#iGraduateMT

.....
After the Week Remember to thank people and close the event

- Thank you to all the students who participated! #MTDecisionDay
- To all the parents, families, loved ones of this year's graduates - thank you for the support! #iGraduateMT
- Thank you to the volunteers who helped make our #DecisionDay a success!

Daily Announcements

Daily announcements can be used at the Middle/High School to help students who are not seniors begin thinking about their future.

Friday before the first week in May: Starting next week we will be celebrating our Senior Class and highlighting their future plans. We are proud of our graduating class.

Monday: This week we are celebrating our senior class and what they will be doing after high school. Here are some opportunities you can join in as part of our celebration: [List of activities]

Tuesday: As we continue to celebrate our senior class and their plans for after graduation, we would like to mention the following students who are going to college: [Student Name; Where they are going]

Wednesday: This week we are celebrating our senior class and what they will be doing after high school. Today we would like to recognize those who are going into the military: [Student Name; Military Branch]

Thursday: This week we are celebrating our senior class and what they will be doing after high school. Today we would like to recognize those who are going to start a career, get on the job training, or pursue other opportunities: [Student Name; Plans]

Friday: This week we were celebrating our senior class and what they will be doing after high school. Today we would like to encourage all students to begin thinking of your future. If you hope to go to college please talk with your advisor to make sure you take the right classes and know how to afford it. Congratulations to our senior class!

Daily Announcements

Celebrating those who are going to college is a part of building a college going culture at your school.

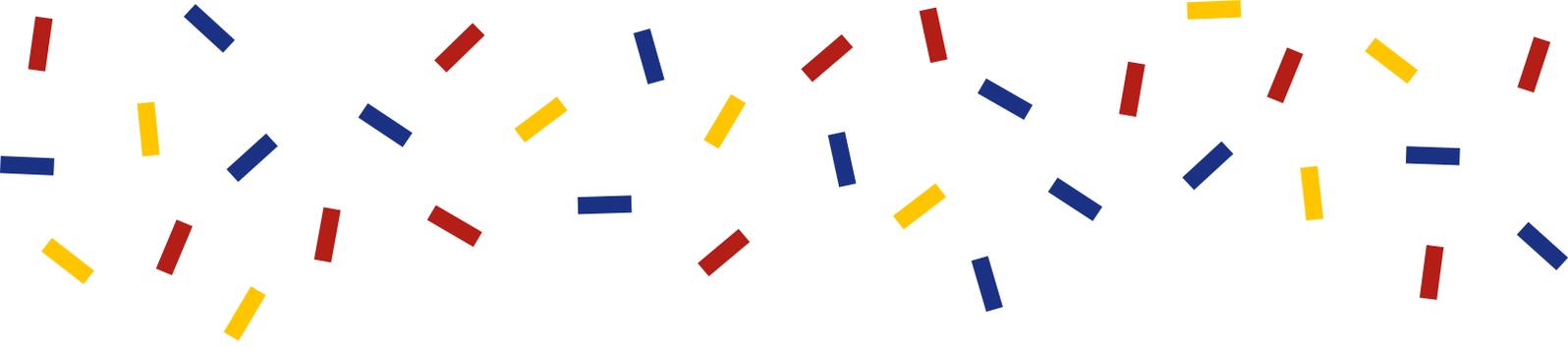
Optional Announcement: As part of our celebration of our senior class, we would like to ask that tomorrow you wear clothing to represent your future plans. For example, if you are thinking about attending college, wear something that shows the college you want to attend.

Optional Announcement: Our senior class is signing a banner to show their future plans. If you are senior, please stop by and add your plans. The banner is located [identify where]. We hope you will take a minute to stop and what our seniors will be doing. Congratulate them if you see them in the halls.

Optional Announcement: Our seniors who are going onto college, studied, took the right classes, applied for college, applied for financial aid, and today they are going to sign their college acceptance letters. Please join us [Location, Time] to watch them take this exciting step.

Optional Announcement: As we celebrate our seniors' decisions to go to college, we've asked our teachers to wear a shirt that represents where they went to college. We encourage you to ask them a question about how college was.

Optional Announcement: All week we are celebrating our senior class and what they are doing after they graduate. If you are unsure of what you want to do, we want to tell you about MCIS. Montana Career Information System is a website you can use to explore your strengths and interests and learn about careers. MCIS is a good tool to help you understand what you'd be good at.



In-Person Options

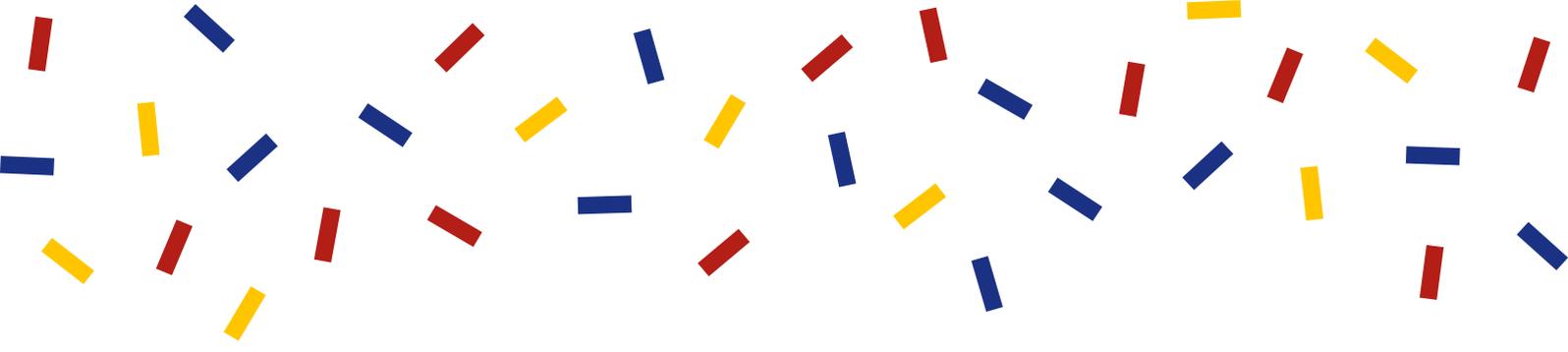
Host an assembly, use an open mic for seniors to tell other students what they are doing after high school. Afterwards, have students sign their college acceptance letters.

Offer an **open house**, where community member can come in and observe posters seniors have made to represent their future plans

Use media students to **take photos of seniors** with a background representing the school where they are enrolling (e.g. photo of the college, mascot, logo). Younger students can also pose and declare their intention.

Invite seniors to **parade through the Middle/Elementary school** while in graduation clothes and carrying a poster showing their future plans.

Host a **student panel** of seniors talking with younger students about their path to college, technical school, military, or career.



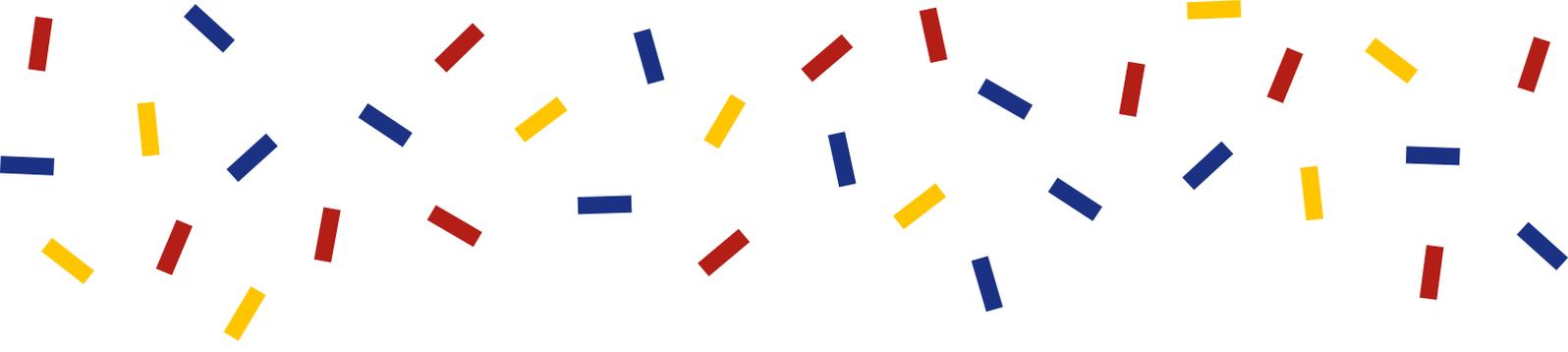
In-Person Options

Encourage all students to decorate doors or lockers with their future plans.

Ask staff to wear clothing from their college and to talk about how they decided to go to college. Talking points might be: how they chose a college to attend, who encouraged them to go, and why they are glad they attended college.

Give away college gear (pennants, hats, t-shirts, key chains, etc.) from various in-state colleges and technical schools, and give a few facts about the school the item represents.

Have an alumni day, using local "celebrities" to interview students about the student's plans and offer advice on how to get started.



Hybrid Options

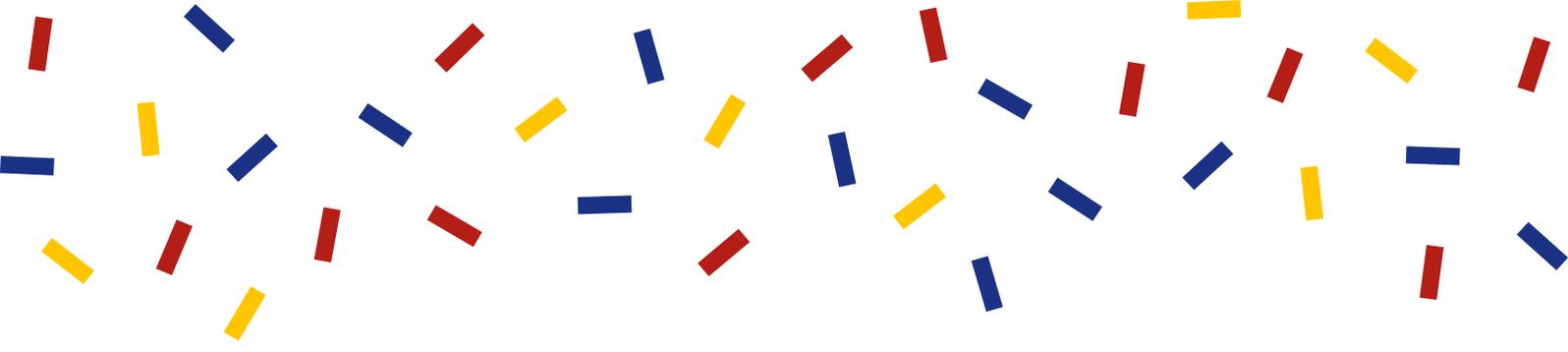
When seniors are at the school, have them **host a virtual signing celebration** for students at home.

Film a virtual tour of your campus showing parents the posters students prepared with their future plans. Students who prepared posters can give mini interviews during the virtual tour.

Over the course of a few days **have a portion of the senior class visit students** in the classrooms and share their future plans after graduation.

Host an open house in shifts. Assign a time for families to visit and watch their child sign their college acceptance letter. Use Facebook live for people who cannot otherwise come in.

Use incentives to entice virtual attendance. College t-shirts, mugs, or other gear can reinforce the theme. Encourage parents of seniors to share invites.



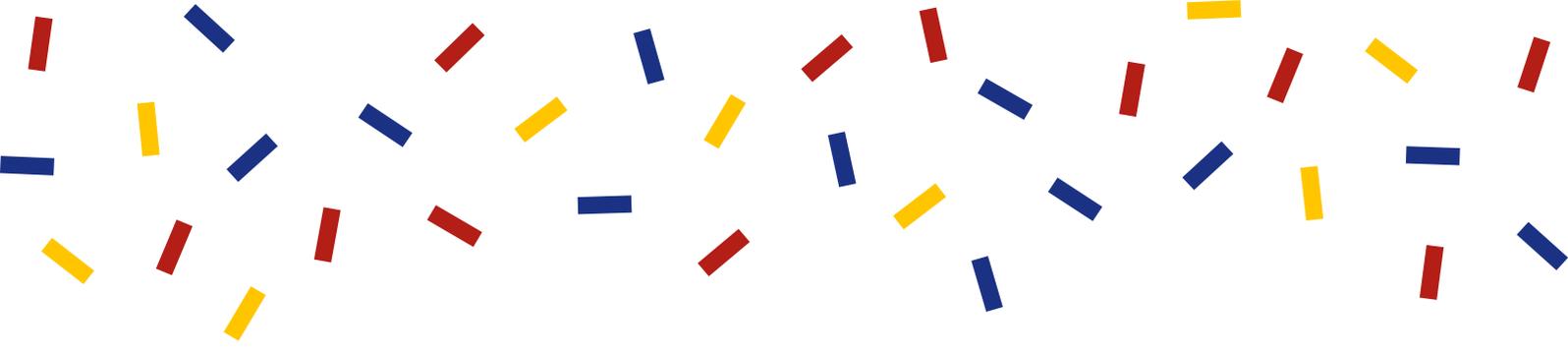
Hybrid Options

Encourage students be creative about revealing their plans (YouTube.com has videos of students using props, poems, gear, etc.).

Seniors can **write a thank you letter** to people who supported their plans to go into college, military, or a career. Read these on Facebook live throughout the day.

Go to **bettermakerroom.org** and download a toolkit from the national college signing day. They also offer a \$500 scholarship for hosting events.

During Klein Tools SkillsUSA National Signing Day **students wore clothing from their trades**, were given a small set of tools, and signed their trade school or apprenticeship acceptance letters.



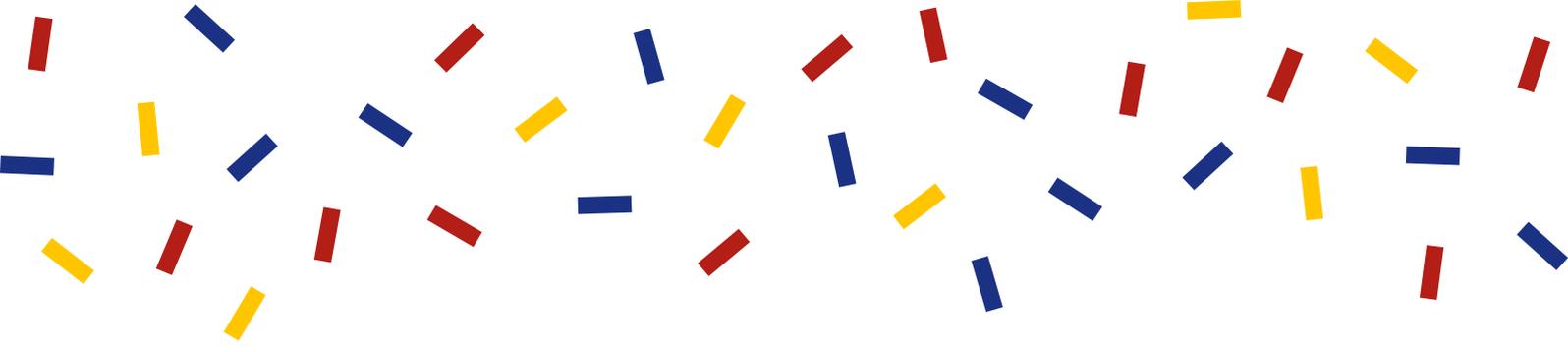
Remote Options

Ask **seniors to prepare a 10-20 second video, or provide a picture**, where they share their future plans. Share the videos on the school's social media page or host a viewing on a specific "decision day." Use the hashtags provided earlier in this toolkit to share with others in the State.

Set up a parade route for seniors to drive through. They can decorate their cars to represent their plans.

Set up a **virtual campus tour** of the schools where students are going for their freshman year. Ask for a college rep to join in and have the students sign their acceptance letters at the end of the tour. Ask alumni to join the virtual tour and talk about how college is. Encourage attendees to wear college wear.

Use **newsletters or local media** to highlight students who are graduating and going to college, starting apprenticeships, or military service.



Remote Options

Teachers can assign essays for middle school students on the topic, "What I want to do after graduation and things I will need to do to get there."

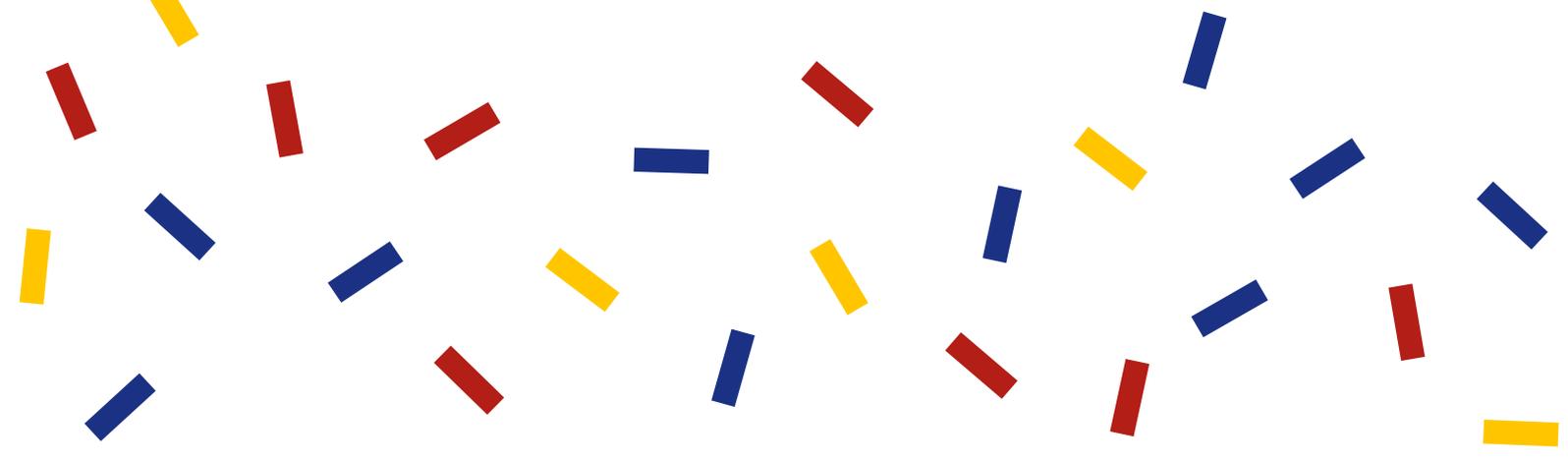
Students can focus **school newspaper** articles on the senior class, and showcase those who are going to a college or technical school right after graduation.

Use a local or college **radio station** to do a student showcase, where they name students and what they are doing after graduation. Students could call in or deejays could do on-air interviews.

Advertise in advance, then hold a **Facebook live** event where seniors can share their plans. Offer incentives for people randomly through the event.

Resources

- www.reachhigher.org is the national group promoting college signing day.
- www.bettermakerroom.org is a campaign within the national reach higher initiative, and encourages students to take the next step. Students can sign up for a text service to help them through the college going process.
- <https://www.kleintools.com/blog/skillsusa-national-signing-day-honors-next-generation-skilled-professionals> shows how students going into trades may be celebrated.
- <https://advisingcorps.org/blog/decision-day-celebrations/> shows how nearby colleges can help celebrate decision day.



Decision Day Playlist

Something Big, Shawn Mendes
Fight Song, Rachel Platen
Don't stop, Fleetwood Mac
I got a feeling, Black Eyed Peas,
Happy, Ferrell Williams
Beautiful Day, U2
Don't Stop Believing, Journey
This Girl Is on Fire, Alicia Keys
I'm on top of the World, Imagine Dragons
Best Day of my Life, American Authors
Graduation, Vitamin C
It's the End of the World, REM
I Hope You Dance, Lee Ann Womack
Good Feeling, Flo Rita
The Climb, Miley Cyrus
Unwritten, Natasha Bedingfield
I Can See Clearly Now, Jonny Nash
Celebrate, Kool and the Gang
Long Live, Taylor Swift
We Are Young, Fun and Janelle Monae

Thank You

To all who helped organize Decision Day celebrations at your school: **We sincerely thank you.** Our team cannot do this without you and your team. We'll be sending a survey after the events. We'd love to hear how it went and we'd love it if you share your innovative ideas. We'd like to collect feedback to help us track progress and improve future events. Please watch for the survey in your inbox.

Celebrate!