Webinar: College Signing Day

Hosting a College Signing Day Event
April 7, 2020

PRESENTERS:
Stephanie Sprow Owens, director of programming, Reach Higher at the Common App
Kathy DeKeyser, school counselor, Whitmore Lake Middle & High School
Laura Ross, school counselor, Five Forks Middle School
Housekeeping

- Webinar is being recorded
- PPT will be made available
- How to ask a question
- Tech Support
Agenda

• Introductions
• College Signing Day overview
• School Spotlight: Whitmore Lake High School
• School Spotlight: Five Forks Middle School
• Q&A
• Reminders
Today’s Presenters

Stephanie Sprow Owens  Kathy DeKeyser  Laura Ross
Stephanie Sprow Owens
Director of programming
Reach Higher at the Common App
Former First Lady Michelle Obama launched the Reach Higher initiative to inspire students – particularly first-generation college students and students from low-income families – to go to and complete higher education, whether at a four-year college, a two-year community college, through an industry-recognized certification program, or through the military.

Better Make Room is the student-facing campaign supporting Reach Higher that speaks to students in their own language. Better Make Room aims to elevate college students and says to the world, “These young people are about to do something great. We Better Make Room.”

Reach Higher and Better Make Room are now part of Common App, a non-profit membership organization dedicated to access, equity, and integrity in the college admission process.
What is College Signing Day?

College Signing Day is an opportunity to celebrate students committing to pursue their education past high school, whether to obtain a two-year degree, a four-year degree, a certificate or industry-recognized credential, as well as students entering the military. Traditionally we celebrate on May 1st. You should celebrate on a date that works best for your community and your students, especially online.

Reach Higher was launched at a College Signing Day event in San Antonio, Texas in 2014.

The community there celebrated all of their students’ goals for higher education. Mrs. Obama joined them and made sure to continue the celebration in schools and districts all across the country for years to come.
How to Celebrate College Signing Day

Host a College Signing Day Celebration.

Register at BetterMakeRoom.org/collegesigningday
Let us know that you’re going to celebrate, including online!

Download the guides.
Use our templates to help you plan the details, especially the social media guide.

Set the date.
You can celebrate your College Signing Day event any day that works for your students. Be sure to post on social media on May 1st and throughout the month as students make their commitments.

Celebrate!
Share your excitement on social media with #CollegeSigningDay and #BetterMakeRoom
How to Host a Digital College Signing Day

Using social media is a fun way to highlight your students and their accomplishments.

Encourage students to share photos of themselves wearing college gear and holding signs to celebrate the day. Post them on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat with the hashtags \#CollegeSigningDay and \#BetterMakeRoom. Tag us in your posts so that everyone can follow along with your celebrations!

Get your juniors involved, too! Ask them to create a [Common App](#) account and add at least five colleges to their list to start researching schools. This will help them get ready to complete college applications in the future.

**Twitter:** @ReachHigher @BetterMakeRoom

**Instagram:** @ReachHigher @BetterMakeRoom

**Facebook:** ReachHigher BetterMakeRoom
Can’t host an in-person event? Here’s how you can also celebrate College Signing Day online.

Post photos on social media of alums in college gear or throwback photos from their days on campus. Describe your fondest college memories in social media posts, showing school spirit, and reminding new students that making the commitment to higher education is worth it. Officially congratulate and welcome all the students committing to attend by reposting their photos, too.

Twitter: @ReachHigher @BetterMakeRoom
Instagram: @ReachHigher @BetterMakeRoom
Facebook: ReachHigher BetterMakeRoom

Future members of #RetrieverNation- one of your first orders of business when you get here will be to stock up on as much black & gold as you can carry. Thanks to our friends at @umbcbookstore for welcoming AND modeling 🖤❤️ #CollegeSigningDay
Toolkit + Resources

The resources and ideas on BetterMakeRoom.org/collegesigningday will help you plan your College Signing Day event. You can share these resources with your students, too.

- Event Cards
- Hashtag Signs
- #CollegeSigningDay Gear
- Social Media Guide
- Social Profile Graphics
- Social Post Graphics
Need More Inspiration?

The best ideas come from the field!

Thousands of high schools, universities, and communities celebrate their graduating students every year. We get the best ideas about how to host celebrations from the field. You should, too!

Search #CollegeSigningDay to see best practices from school counselors, educators, and students for how you can celebrate your graduates in no- and low-cost ways.
What’s Next?

In short, here’s what you need to do:

1. Register your College Signing Day event at BetterMakeRoom.org.
2. Celebrate with your community on a day that works best for you.
3. Share photos from your celebrations on social media, especially on May 1st and throughout the month. Tag @BetterMakeRoom and @ReachHigher, and use #CollegeSigningDay!
4. Email us if you have questions at info@reachhigher.org.
For Updates and More Information

BetterMakeRoom.org | ReachHigher.org

@BetterMakeRoom | @ReachHigher
@BetterMakeRoom | @ReachHigher
BetterMakeRoom | ReachHigher

Email: info@reachhigher.org

#BetterMakeRoom | #ReachHigher | #CollegeSigningDay
Whitmore Lake High School

The Evolution of Our Decision Day

Recipient of grant from Michigan College Access Network (MCAN)

Money had to support statewide campaigns: College Month, College Cash Campaign, and Decision Day

WLHS criteria for Decision Day:

- Includes the entire student body
- Honors seniors but engages underclassmen
- Establishes a new tradition
- Allows for unique flair to be added each year
Our Decision Day Decision?

We bought a gong!

Why?

• One-time purchase that we would have forever
• Quirky and fun

How would it be used?

• Decided to capitalize on the timing and structure of an existing tradition: Step Up
• Seniors would touch their school on the gong and strike it on the way to their graduation seats

Irony?

• Only after purchasing the gong and preparing for our first event did we realize how perfect it is. Touching a gong is believed to bring a person good luck, health, and happiness.
• Only seniors are allowed to touch the gong.
2016—Year 1

**Sparty On**

- Introduced new tradition and unveiled the gong
- Invited college reps to attend event
- Sparty handed off mallet to seniors
- Orchestrated a competition for other students to keep them engaged
  - Class presidents pulled name of a school from a hat to represent that class
  - Class with winning school (most tally marks) won free sundae at local ice cream shop
- Used a t-shirt shooter to launch college shirts into the crowd
- Decorated graduation chairs with balloons (bad idea) and swag bags (better idea); swag bags filled with t-shirts from school
- Pretty basic, but its novelty was a hit
2017—Year 2

The Mascot Olympics

Not too many changes

Switched from balloons to pennants on the back of chairs; reached out to colleges for these

Invited mascots from five schools—one to represent each grade level from 7-11 (mascots were free except Sparty)

Mascots competed in games on behalf of their class

Winning class got prize (free jump at SkyZone)
2018—Year 3

Build A Blockbuster Future

Decided to carry over theme from College Month into Decision Day

• Each senior had his/her own star on Walk of Fame
• Added popcorn balloon arch
• Local movie theater donated movie passes for swag bag
• Local business donated popcorn for swag bag

Had an “intermission” where reps from each grade level competed in movie trivia competition; winning class got snack-sized wings from Buffalo Wild Wings
2019—Year 4

Welcome to the Big Leagues

Opened the event with a student singing the National Anthem

Invited two recent graduates who play college baseball to throw out ceremonial first pitch

Hired Detroit Tigers mascot Paws

Announced seniors in groups of 10-12; had underclassmen play games in between each group

• Cap Scramble—winning row got hot pizza

• Minute-to-Win It games—gave out ball park prizes like cotton candy and Big League chew

Before Step Up, we had the “7th inning stretch” and sang Take Me Out to the Ballgame; winning class got BWW; Paws voted
2020—Year 5

Your Future: Level Up

Details are still under wraps!! Come back in June.
Lessons Learned

• Dream big
  • Jeff Daniels, Dax Shepherd and Kristen Bell, and former Tiger Brandon Inge

• Tailor event to your school’s culture

• Solicit help of creative, hard-working people
  • Colleagues, parents, alumni

• Ask colleges what they can do on behalf of your students
  • Swag, mascots, certificates, presence at event

• Look for free money/gifts
  • Grants (MCAN, Reach Higher/Better Make Room, local district)
  • Senior Class Gifts (ask classes to pay it forward)
  • Businesses with school rewards programs (BWW Blazin’ Rewards program, SkyZone School Reward program)
  • Local businesses (on a selective basis)
  • Denim for Degrees/Mascot Mondays (teachers paid $20 to wear jeans in October and were encouraged to wear college gear on Mondays)

• Have fun
Laura Ross
School Counselor, Five Forks Middle School
ASCA’s 2020 School Counselor of the Year
Reaching Higher in Middle School

Educator Participation

- College T-shirt Day
- My College Journey
  - I went to college because...
  - My favorite college experience was...
  - The hardest thing about college was...
  - Advice about college I would give...
- Door Decorating = Jeans Pass!
Reaching Higher in Middle School

Student Participation

• Pennant & Poster Display w/ QR Codes & Fact Finding Sheets
  • Grand Prize Drawing for completed Fact Finding Sheets

• Word Wall

• Media Center Biographies Display
  • Used list of Biographies in Media Center

• College T-shirt Day

• Google Expeditions Virtual Visits

• College Fight Songs as intro/exit music for announcements

• Morning Announcement Videos & Reach Higher Lingo Bingo
  • Bingo winners get prize bag with college swag
Reaching Higher in Middle School

Year Round

- Mini Pennants
- College & Career Connection Displays
- College Spotlight
- STEAM Night Display
- Reach Higher Report onAnnouncements
Save the Date: Twitter Chat

#CollegeSigningDay
April 21, 2020
3:00 p.m. EDT/12:00 p.m. PDT
For Updates and More Information

BetterMakeRoom.org | ReachHigher.org

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Email: info@reachhigher.org

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