

Unlocking the Magic of Student Engagement: Making High Impact Programming (HIP) Work for You

IDEAS FROM GEAR UP WEST 2025

Workshop by Carlos Ojeda Jr.

At the 2025 GEAR UP West Conference, educators came together in the Unlocking the Magic of Student Engagement workshop to take on a challenge: **design a powerful, student-centered college-going event.**

Carlos Ojeda Jr. asked participants to consider every part of the experience: how to set the vibe at the start, break the ice, energize the group, and create activities that would leave a lasting impact.

The ideas collected here are the result of that collaboration, showcasing the creativity and commitment of educators who believe in keeping students motivated, engaged, and inspired about their futures.

STARTING CHECK LIST (SET THE VIBE)

“The moment students walk in, they should feel it’s different. That’s the vibe. That’s the start.”

- Let students help choose a school-appropriate playlist in advance (ownership = buy-in).
- Create a Soul Train style welcome line / red carpet where ambassadors cheer and hype students as they enter.
- Ambassadors hold posters that reinforce college/career themes (e.g., majors, clubs, “Ask me where I’m going!”).
- Option: balloon cannons/confetti moment as students arrive (if allowed).



ICEBREAKERS (BREAK THE ICE)

"Icebreakers aren't just games, they are the bridge to trust, comfort, and connection."

- **College Bingo:** Distribute bingo cards w/ prompts (visited a college, wants to major in X, etc.). Students circulate and fill with real interactions.
- **College Matching:** Cards with college logo on one side and fact on the other; find your match.
- **Mascot Charades:** Mascot taped to backs; partners act it out.
- **This or That:** College Fit Edition - Stand left/right for dorm vs. home, big vs. small campus, etc.
- **Career HeadBandz:** Guess the career on your forehead by asking yes/no questions.
- **Dream Job Sorting:** Students group themselves by industry (STEM, arts, trades, etc.).
- **College Balloon Toss:** Balloon w/ a college or major on it; match w/ partner's topic when caught.
- **Gravity Game with PVC Pipe:** Pass ball through pipe pieces without dropping.

ENERGIZERS (KEEP THE ENERGY HIGH)

"Energizers aren't fillers. They're sparks. Use them to bring the room back to life and remind students this is supposed to be fun."

Find Someone Who... → Grow Your Group

- Students walk around to find someone who meets a prompt (e.g., "wants to be first-gen college grad," "is considering a community college").
- Once they find one, they join together as a group of 2 → 4 → 6 → 10.
- Stop when groups are large and cheering for themselves.



ACTIVITIES (DEEP ENGAGEMENT)

"Ordinary games turn into extraordinary lessons when you remix them with purpose."

"College Commercial Challenge" Directions

- **Groups are assigned a specific college (preferably ones students can actually access).**
- **They collect these required details:**
 - Tuition (especially FAFSA/aid info)
 - Top majors
 - Housing / campus life
 - Clubs & student organizations
- **They create a 5-minute commercial to "sell" the school:**
 - Funny, dramatic, or creative encouraged
 - Required props or visuals (poster, chant, skit, jingle)
- **Groups present; judges or peers vote on:**
 - Most Information
 - Most Creativity
 - Best School Spirit

"Campus Scavenger Hunt" Directions

- **Small teams receive a mission list with recordable challenges:**
 - "Find the tutoring center and record someone sharing one resource offered."
 - "At the cafeteria, capture a 10-sec clip of someone dancing with a chicken nugget."
 - "Take a picture in a dorm hallway — everyone must be in it!"
 - "Interview a student: 'Why did you choose this school?'"
- **Use GooseChase or photo/video submission to track.**

