



Director's Message

I hope you have been able to be at App State in Boone at some point recently because the campus is just beautiful. The photo on this page of the Rhododendron (called "Rodo" by the locals) in full bloom could have been taken at many places across campus. This spring also brings to an end a tumultuous school year marked by the devastating Hurricane Helene last September and a cold, snowy January. While we will be recovering for some time, much has been done to repair damaged homes, roads and bridges, and to clear debris. There is a lot of good news.

Likewise, our CAP programs have been focused on students, families and educators and this newsletter shares some of the great news stories from this spring. Read about the On Ramp experiences students are having to learn about workforce solutions, and the class of 2025 seniors who persevered through COVID and Hurricane Helene to graduate. Retrace some of the college visits made by students interested in furthering their education after high school. Imagine yourself at the Swain STEAM Expo and learning about the Science of the Storm. Get to know Susan and Erin from the CAP team, and Debra from A-B Tech. There's a lot going on across the region - I am so grateful to our CAP team and our amazing partners in education across the region for their hard work, persistence, and ingenuity. It's a beautiful spring indeed!

- Jim Beeler,
Executive Director- College Access Partnerships

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Employee Spotlights

Let's get to know **Erin West**, Navigator for ETL and GREAT STEM!

1. How long have you worked with CAP?

I have worked at CAP for almost two years.

2. What's your favorite book/movie/album/song? Pick one and explain why.

The Secret Garden. I have always loved children's literature, and this is the first book I read multiple times as a child.

3. What would your perfect/ideal day look like?

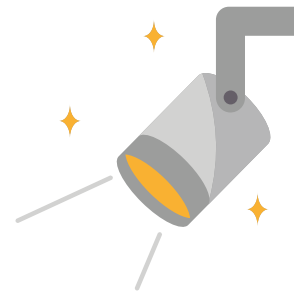
Wake up at the beach and enjoy a lazy morning with lots of coffee, spending time with my family (my husband Matt, two sons: James, 11, and Jacob, 9), and lots of time swimming. Finish the day with a good seafood dinner and a good book!

4. What fictional place would you like to visit?

Barbie land! Everything is perfect and my outfit would always look great lol!

5. What's something you'd like to do that you've never done?

I love to travel and take photos. I would love to go on a photo safari in Africa and see the big cats and elephants!



Erin pictured with her family

Let's get to know our YES Program Director, **Susan Saule**!



Susan & her husband Eric at Zion NP

1. How long have you worked with CAP?

Since July 2017.

2. What's your favorite book/movie/album/show/song? Pick one and explain why.

Pride and Prejudice is a favorite, because I appreciate and can relate to the communication breakdown between characters and the redemption of the relationship between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy in the end.

3. What would your perfect/ideal day look like?

Sleeping with the windows open on a crisp, fall Sunday and waking up whenever my eyes pop open. Enjoying a cup of coffee while cooking breakfast and enjoying it with my husband, Eric, while planning a day to explore somewhere nearby we haven't been, maybe Mt. Mitchell? Grab a quick, but tasty dinner on the way home in time to watch Washington beat Philadelphia in a Sunday night football game on the couch. The above scenario could be the same for spring but switch out the sport for hockey: Washington Capitals beating the Pittsburgh Penguins toward winning the Stanley Cup.

4. What fictional place would you like to visit?

Abbott Elementary in Philly! I want to meet Sweet Cheeks, if Ms. Schemmenti will let me; see Mr. Eddie's garden; and understand Principal Coleman's student filing system better. Who else wants to come? :)

5. What's something you'd like to do that you've never done?

- Bake a pie with perfect crust
- Travel to Japan and all of the UK with Eric
- Complete the coastal route of the Camino Portugues



Science of the Storm

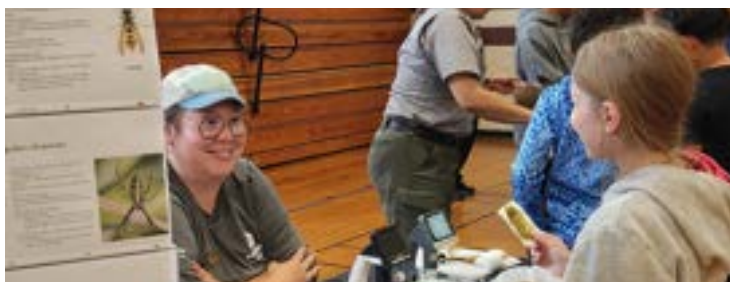
Leading up to the 6 month anniversary of Hurricane Helene, GEAR UP partners hosted a pair of events called "Science of the Storm". Across two community colleges (Wilkes Community College and A-B Tech) and seven school districts, students were presented with an opportunity to consider the impact of the hurricane and discuss hopeful and positive solutions for the future. Students left the Science of the Storm events with questions about their own future pathways and how they could impact their local communities now, as teenagers, and in the future when they enter the workforce. Read more about [here](#).



Science of the Storm addressed both the impact of the storm and the potential student opportunities across the GEAR UP service area

STEAM Expo in Swain

On Thursday, April 24, the STEAM Expo took place at Swain Middle School for the second year in a row. This event exposed students to different ideas and careers they might have not encountered on their own, with a focus on the categories of science, technology, engineering, art, and math. Read more about the Expo [here](#).



Swain County hosts STEAM Expo for local middle school students

Western Community College Leadership Academy

Debra Joseph, GEAR UP and On Ramp Coordinator for A-B Tech has recently been named to the Western Community College Leadership Academy. The goal of the Academy is to form values-driven, high-potential, high-performing leaders who think and collaborate in new and different ways with people within their colleges and across the region. The academy helps participants to pursue innovative ideas while creating attainable solutions that address the constant changing nature of higher education.

Debra says, "I'm honored to represent A-B Tech and my division in next year's cohort of the Western Community College Leadership Academy. I'm eager to learn from and collaborate with colleagues from our region as we dedicate this year to tending our capacity for leadership."



Maybe most of all, I'm proud to bring a GEAR UP perspective to this process. I look forward to the ways this position will support the advocacy and relationship-building aspects of the work we do among the communities we serve."

NCCEP Presentations

The Appalachian GEAR UP team will be well-represented at the upcoming **NCCEP Annual Conference**. Presentations include:

- Redesigning Algebra 1: Innovative Strategies for Inclusive and Engaging Math Instruction - Presented by Doug Thompson & Rachel Nave-Lewis
- The C.O.R.E. System- a comprehensive web-based resource for improving postsecondary outcomes - Presented by Wes Calbreath
- Planting SEEDS for Dreams: Empowering Families to Navigate the Education System - Presented by Yolanda Adams, Karen Norris
- Discussion Lab: Getting to Know Your GEAR UP Families - Presented by Yolanda Adams, Katie Hill, & Cathy Printon
- The GEAR UP Guarantee: Making the College Application Process More Transparent for GEAR UP Students - Presented by Corinne Smith, Kristin Wright, & Jui-Teng Li
- From Rural Roots to Digital Futures: Building a Media Lab and Certificate Program - Presented by Stefan Kunz & Lindsey Williams



On Ramp Student Experiences

As On Ramp Appalachia enters its second year, this Spring has been filled with planning and preparation for students to experience summer programming. On Ramp serves all juniors at partner high schools through Workforce Connection Breakfasts held in the Fall. This Spring, juniors at partner high schools welcomed workforce partners into their classrooms and schools to learn more about opportunities available in their home county and region. The conversations held in this classroom visits was extended at many partners through visits to the community college itself.

Wilkes Community College extended the conversation through hosting several Expo Days detailing specific programs and pathways available at WCC to the students in Ashe County. Students were bussed from the Ashe County Campus to learn more about nursing programs and Early Childhood programs at WCC. In Swain County, automotive professionals spoke to students at Swain High School and those experiences were extended by visiting the automotive classrooms of Swain Community College. Workforce visits continued at Patton High School and Madison High School providing further opportunity for students to learn about career opportunities in their home counties.

Upcoming Summer Programs

As summer approaches, juniors served by On Ramp will have the opportunity to participate in Summer Fast Lanes at partner community colleges. These mini-camps are designed to expose select students to an in-depth career exploration experience. Students were selected for these programs based on their interests and On Ramp Coordinators are signing students up now, at no cost to the student.

Senior On Ramp students who are enrolling at the Community College in the Fall have the opportunity to participate in Summer Bridge. Summer Bridge provides students a smoother transition for students from high school to college by getting students on the campus of the community college taking at least one college level course, learning about campus resources, and building connections with their fellow On Ramp Scholars.

CAP has welcomed several new staff members in the recent weeks including **Emma Shew** (CAP Digital Communications Specialist), **Dr. Kate Watson** (GEAR UP Assistant Director for Research & Evaluation), and **Shawn McNulty** (GEAR UP Data Management Specialist). We're excited to have them on the team!



ETL Conference Presentations

The ETL team has been busy this spring! In April, the team presented at both AERA and the CLASS InterAct Conference, sharing the work of ETL with national audiences. As the team prepares for the 2025-26 school year, they have also designed and launched two new opportunities to extend ETL and GREAT STEM participants' knowledge of self-directed learning (SDL) and microcredentials (MCs).

Upcoming Launch of ETL PRIME and ETL Innovation Cohort

The ETL Innovation Cohort will launch in July and will coach experienced ETL participants as they learn to transfer their knowledge of SDL to their classroom practices with students. ETL PRIME will also launch in July of this year and will support previous ETL and GREAT STEM participants as they write and pilot new and innovative microcredentials. Through this project, the team hopes to add several new MC offerings for teachers by Spring 2026.



ETL team members Dr. Erin West, Heather Childress, and Janet Johnson presenting at AERA



Seniors Recognized

Upward Bound Seniors have been hard at work all year! They have written countless essays for college admissions and scholarships, attended multiple workshops on financial aid and the transition from high school to college, and finally, have gotten their college acceptances! To celebrate their individual and collective accomplishments, Upward Bound families, students, and staff all gathered on the campus of App State on May 3, 2025 to honor our seniors. Each senior received a special black and gold graduation cord to commemorate their experience with Upward Bound throughout their high school journeys.

These students are headed off to so many incredible colleges across North Carolina. We are proud of their persistence, their drive, and their motivation to move into this next chapter of their lives. Congrats, Class of 2025!



Upward Bound class of 2025



Touring University of Richmond

In February, Carly and Susan took ten 7th graders on an overnight trip to visit the University of Richmond, one of the schools with a need-blind admission policy and will meet 100% of demonstrated need. Our tour was thorough including seeing the mummy in the Department of Classical Studies and included a VR experience for all of us. We each went up in an elevator, walked out on a creaky wooden log, reached for a slice of cake, then jumped!

Jack Kent Cooke Young Scholars

Carly and Lex worked hard this spring to guide 7th grade Scholars to complete their Jack Kent Cooke Young Scholars application for six weeks after school. We were at Ashe County High School on Tuesdays and Cove Creek on Thursdays with the support of any available high school students. Eight families completed the financial and family portions and submitted completed applications in April. Jack Kent Cooke recognized Carly's dedication with a digital badge.



YES scholar Julietta graduates from UNC Charlotte (top); Carly helps scholars with Jack Kent Cook Scholar applications; students view mummy during Richmond tour; student participates in VR activity during Richmond tour (bottom)

Scholar Highlights

YES is busy celebrating many milestones in May & June! Two Scholars we want to highlight include:

- Holden P. graduated from Colorado College from our **first** YES Appalachia cohort.
- Julietta G. graduated from UNC Charlotte in two years after completing her associate's degree at the Ashe County Early College and has been accepted to Elon University's law school.



YES Scholars tour University of Richmond

Upcoming CAP Events:

June

- June 4: Counselor Network Showcase
- June 10-11: GEAR UP Academic Innovation Conference
- June 15: UB Summer Program Begins
- June 16-20: GEAR UP Bus Tour
- June 19: YES Summer Program Begins
- June 23-27: GEAR UP Bus Tour

July

- July 7-11: GEAR UP Bus Tour
- July 13-16: NCCEP Conference
- July 21: CAC Adviser Training Begins
- July 29-Aug 1: ETL & GREAT STEM Summer Convening

College **Advising** Corps
Appalachian State University

ADVISER PERSPECTIVE

Building Futures: A Journey of Identity, Education, & Discovery

Growing up in a biracial middle-class family was a blessing and a challenge that profoundly shaped my identity and aspirations. My parents, each from a different cultural background, worked tirelessly to provide for my siblings and me, instilling in us the values of resilience, and hard work. Despite the financial struggles we faced, they never



LaCodia Reid-Jackson, Adviser
St. Stephens HS

allowed those challenges to dampen our dreams. Instead, they emphasized education as a powerful tool to rise above our circumstances. Their unwavering belief in the importance of learning ignited a fire within me—a determination to pursue higher education and create a brighter future not only for myself, but for others who would follow in my footsteps...

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Latest Feature Stories



GEAR UP Alumni Spotlight:
Peyton Cline
May 14, 2025

Peyton Cline always knew that she was going to attend college.

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2025 Swain County STEAM
Expo
Apr 28, 2025

On Thursday, April 24, the STEAM Expo took place at Swain Middle School for the second year in a row.

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College Adviser Meets
Students Where They Are
Apr 9, 2025

On September 24, 2024, Hurricane Helene made landfall in Ashe County, North Carolina.

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