



EVALUATION REPORT

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# College Spark Washington Mentoring Partnership Program Grant

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YEAR 1 EVALUATION REPORT

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# Executive Summary

College Spark Washington provided Mentoring Partnership Program Grants to three universities with partnerships connecting college students with low-income secondary students. The purpose of these grants is to support the activities and further the development of the three programs as they assist low-income students in becoming college-ready. College Spark awarded grants to the Bridges Project of Central Washington University, the Dream Project of the University of Washington, and the First Generation Project of Seattle University. This report summarizes the findings of an evaluation of grant progress during Year 1 (2007-2008) of the grant period. For this report, evaluators obtained information from interviews and focus groups with program staff members of College Spark and the grantees, focus groups with college mentors, a mentor survey, and published and unpublished grantee documents.

The three programs participating in the Mentoring Partnership Program Grant share basic characteristics. They are similar in targeting populations with needs and in their focus on providing support for mentors to promote college success persistence. All three programs are university-based, have strong community partnerships, and receive external support to maintain programming. However, there are a number of significant differences among the programs. These include differences in mission, program and administrative structure, and outreach mechanisms.

All grantees made progress in Year 1 of the grant period. They participated in meetings with their grantee cohort and in evaluation activities. They maintained their existing programs, implemented new activities for students at the field sites and on campus, and provided support for mentors. Two programs expanded outreach to additional schools, and one began implementation of two new outreach strategies. All three programs continued to develop infrastructure to support their projects and refined their approach to recruiting and training of mentors. In some cases, contextual factors affected full implementation of Year 1 activities. In other cases, grantees are phasing in certain activities over the three-year funding period. In Years 2 and 3, grantees intend to continue implementation of grant activities and to address specific contextual factors.

As of Year 1, there is evidence of impact in three areas. These mentoring programs have had a positive effect on their local communities through their outreach and mentor placements. There is also evidence of broader impact in Washington State and nationally. This attention is the result of outreach and publication of a strong model. All three programs reported positive outcomes for mentors, as demonstrated by strong mentor cohorts, repeated mentor participation, and partner feedback on mentor performance. Evaluation interviews and survey data support these reports. Finally, mentors and project leaders reported positive outcomes for mentored students, ranging from increased academic interest and confidence to higher college application and entrance rates. Differences in grantee access to mentor and secondary student data and differences in grantee capacity for data collection limited quantitative measurement of outcomes in Year 1. Grantees are interested in assessing mentor outcomes and are investigating accessibility of mentor data for Years 2 and 3. Some program leaders are looking into the accessibility of limited program-specific secondary student data, as well. However, given the structure and capacity of these programs, it will not be possible to fully assess secondary student outcomes over the course of this grant.

Contextual factors influencing grant outcomes include relationships with community partners, stage of organizational development, and practical issues, such as concerns around materials and

transportation. Factors related to the university context also affect program functioning and grant implementation. Finally, the lack of access to student data limits assessment of outcomes, which would be valuable for guiding program development. Positive factors include increased program recognition and access to additional funding.

By the close of Year 1, each program had successfully begun implementation of their proposed grant activities. Promising practices were evident for each program. As grant progress continues, common and shared practices will continue to emerge. Each grantee has begun considering sustainability of grant-related activities, and the promising practices will support their long-term efforts. On the basis of Year 1 evaluation findings, several recommendations are offered to support grantees as they continue implementation and to provide additional evidence for assessing grant outcomes.



# College Spark Washington Mentoring Partnership Program Grant

## YEAR 1 EVALUATION REPORT

### INTRODUCTION

College Spark Washington provided Mentoring Partnership Program Grants to three universities with partnerships connecting college students with low-income secondary students. The purpose of these grants is to support the activities and further development of the three programs as they assist low-income students in becoming college-ready. College Spark awarded grants to the Bridges Project of Central Washington University, the Dream Project of the University of Washington, and the First Generation Project of Seattle University. In addition to providing funding to these programs, College Spark implemented an evaluation process to monitor grant progress and to generate knowledge about the effectiveness of mentoring partnership programs. This Year 1 (2007-2008) evaluation report summarizes the findings of this evaluation and synthesizes the findings presented in the individual grantee Year 1 evaluation reports. During Year 1, evaluators obtained information from interviews and focus groups with program staff members of College Spark and the grantees, focus groups with college mentors, a mentor survey, and published and unpublished grantee documents. In alignment with the interests of College Spark at the inception of these grants, the evaluation questions were:

1. What are the characteristics and structure of each mentoring partnership program? In what ways are the programs similar and unique?
2. To what extent are grant expectations around program implementation being met at the three grant sites?
3. To what extent are mentored students engaging in practices and activities that prepare them to enter college? To what extent do they enter college? To what extent do they persist in college?
4. To what extent does participation in the program affect mentor growth and development and mentor persistence in college?
5. What contextual factors influence program implementation and outcomes?
6. What promising practices are emerging, and what factors influence growth and sustainability of these practices?

### MENTORING PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM GRANT OVERVIEW

College Spark Washington implemented the Mentoring Partnership Program Grant to support university-based programs in which college mentors assist low-income secondary students in preparing for and enrolling in college. They awarded grants to three programs: the Bridges Project of Central Washington University, the Dream Project of the University of Washington, and the First Generation Project of Seattle University. These grants provide funding for three years: 2007-

2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010. Throughout the grant period, grantees implement a range of program activities as detailed in their grant proposals, provide periodic reports to College Spark, and participate in periodic cohort meetings. As mentoring partnership programs, the three grantees share basic characteristics, such as direct contact between college students and mentors and a focus on low-income and first generation secondary students. However, they differ in program structure and in methods of outreach.

### **The Bridges Project – Central Washington University**

The Bridges Project of Central Washington University (CWU) builds relationships between the university and the schools and students of the communities in the surrounding region. Through fieldwork and technology, Bridges college students support teachers and students in a range of activities, such as tutoring, technology instruction, clubs, and summer camps. Currently, they work primarily with middle school students. The Bridges Project began in 1997 and has grown in both size and geographical reach since that time. Staff members at the Bridges Project sought the College Spark grant to support expansion into schools of north central Washington. Many of these schools are isolated, and there are few services for students and their families. Grant activities that address these concerns include placing college mentors in schools for tutoring and assisting with academic activities. Bridges is also implementing a technology-based long-distance tutoring program. In addition, they are establishing Bridges chapters at several colleges closer to these schools in order to more readily provide mentors directly to the schools.

### **The Dream Project – University of Washington**

The Dream Project of the University of Washington was created and developed by university students and first implemented in the 2005-2006 school year. The mission of the Dream Project is two-fold: to assist low-income and first generation high school students in attaining higher education and to raise awareness among university students about educational access and social mobility. The Dream Project builds connections with local high schools, providing college student mentors to assist juniors and seniors in preparing for and applying to college. At the start of the grant period, the Dream Project was working with three Seattle-area high schools. Mentors visit the schools weekly, working with 25 to 30 students through advisory or after-school programs. The Dream Project also holds workshops and events for the students, providing information and assistance with college and scholarship applications and SATs. College mentors develop leadership and mentoring skills and participate in a learning community of peers through a university course. Dream Project personnel sought the College Spark grant to expand their outreach to new schools and to provide students and parents a range of events that support college readiness and entrance.

### **The First Generation Project – Seattle University**

The Center for Service and Community Engagement (CSCE) at Seattle University (SU) provides college students with hands-on learning experiences in the local community. The center is the umbrella for several programs, including the First Generation Project, which was launched during the 2006-2007 academic year in response to requests from community service organizations and educators. The First Generation Project connects college student mentors with low-income



students through partnerships with several community organizations. Although mentorships are open to all college students, staff members hoped to also serve first generation college students through the program. These community organizations provide mentors training and sites for field work at schools and in other settings. First Generation Project staff members sought the College Spark Mentoring Partnership Program Grant to continue development of this new program by supporting mentor activities and programming for mentored students.

### **Year 1 Evaluation Data Sources**

During Year 1, the following data sources were used to answer the evaluation questions.

***Document collection and analysis.*** Various documents pertaining to grantees were reviewed, including websites and published and unpublished documents.

***Focus Groups and Interviews.*** During the 2007-2008 academic year, evaluators met with College Spark personnel. They also held focus groups with grantee staff members at the beginning and end of Year 1. Focus groups with college mentors occurred at two of the three programs at the end of the grant year.

***Mentor Survey.*** Evaluators created a mentor survey to obtain feedback on program implementation and impact. The survey was published online to the three programs at the end of the year for circulation to mentors.

***Observations.*** Evaluators observed a sampling of Year 1 program activities across the three grantees.

## EVALUATION FINDINGS

The following information is a synthesis of findings from the Year 1 evaluation activities. Details of grantee progress are provided in individual grantee reports. In this report, “mentor” refers to college students providing mentoring, and the term “student” refers to mentored secondary students.

## EVIDENCE OF IMPLEMENTATION

### Evaluation Question 1: What are the characteristics and structure of each mentoring partnership program? In what ways are the programs similar and unique?

The programs of the three grantees are based on the mentoring partnerships model and share certain characteristics. However, there are a number of differences among the programs. These shared and unique characteristics are key to understanding grant implementation and impact. For detailed information about individual programs, please see grantee reports.

#### Shared Characteristics

As mentoring partnership programs, each grantee partners college student mentors with secondary students. These partnerships share the following characteristics.

- **Target population** – Each grantee focuses on providing services to secondary students who may be less likely to achieve and to enter college. They target students who are low-income, first generation, and/or have limited access to resources.
- **Direct mentoring** – College students serve as mentors for secondary students, working directly with them onsite and/or through technological means.
- **Support for mentors** – Each grantee emphasizes the role of the program in promoting retention of college mentors and actively supports college completion of their mentors.
- **Community partnerships** – All programs have strong partnerships in the community that connect them to secondary students and provide field work sites for college mentors. These partners include secondary schools and community service organizations.
- **University context** – All three programs are university-based and have clear affiliations within the university system. All compete for resources within the university.
- **External support** – All three programs receive external support, whether through grants, partnerships with other organizations, or philanthropy.

#### Unique Characteristics

The three programs differ in significant ways. These unique characteristics are valuable within the Mentoring Partnership Program grant, as they provide exposure to alternate models. The differences also present challenges to common quantitative data collection.

- **Mission** – While the missions of these programs focus on helping students achieve and target underserved populations, they vary in their emphasis on college readiness.
- **Student age** – Two programs target high school students, while one primarily targets middle school students.
- **Contact with students** – Mentors work with secondary students one-on-one and in groups. While most work on-site with students, some use long-distance technology. They may have ongoing relationships or single meetings.
- **Mentor recruitment, training, hours worked, and compensation** – Grantees use different approaches to mentor recruitment, with strategies ranging from informal word-of-mouth to formalized presentations. Trainings may be delivered from project personnel or on-site supervisors and may be ongoing or session workshops. The hours spent mentoring vary across and within programs. Some programs provide no financial compensation for mentors' time, whereas others may provide stipends or salaries. None of the programs provide compensation for all mentors.
- **Mentor activities** – Mentor activities vary significantly across programs and include but are not limited to assisting students with college applications, academic tutoring, leading non-academic activities in the schools, leading collaborative student projects, serving as camp counselor, hosting school-based workshops and family nights, and leading campus-based tours and workshops for students. Opportunities for leadership and level of responsibility also vary across field sites.
- **Community partners** – Grantee programs differ significantly due to the partnerships that provide access to secondary students. In some cases, the grantee partners with a community or service organization, which connects the grantee to a school. In others, community or service organizations work directly with students, connecting the grantee to these students independent of a school.
- **Administrative structure** – University personnel administer two programs, and students administer the other.
- **Data collection** – Grantees differ in data collection strategies and practices. Grantees differ in access to mentor data, including demographics, grades, and course-taking records. Similarly, grantee access to student data varies widely. In some cases, grantees have access to student data. This is more likely to occur when there is a direct relationship between the grantee and a school or a when third party is charged with data collection. Collection of student data is less likely to occur when partnerships occur through community agencies.

## **Evaluation Question 2: To what extent are grant expectations around program implementation being met at the three grant sites?**

The three grantees made progress implementing grant activities during Year 1. They participated in two cohort meetings, both of which were viewed positively by the participants. Program leaders were also readily available for evaluation focus groups at the beginning and end of the grant year. Implementation progress varied with grantee capacity and with the focus of grant activities. In addition to maintaining their existing programs, all grantees implemented new activities for students or sustained pre-existing activities through grant support. These included activities at the field sites and on the university campuses. They also provided support for mentors through compensation, assistance with transportation, and/or mentor activities designed to improve skills and/or retention. Two programs expanded outreach to additional schools, and one began

implementation of two new outreach strategies. All three programs continued to develop infrastructure to support their projects and refined their approach to recruiting and training of mentors. In some cases, grantees are phasing in certain activities over the three-year grant period. In other cases, contextual factors affected full implementation of Year 1 activities. Overall, all three grantees made progress in Year 1 of the grant. They intend to continue implementation of grant activities and to address specific contextual factors in Years 2 and 3.

## **EVIDENCE OF IMPACT**


Year 1 evaluation activities focused on three areas for determining grant impact: general program impact on the local and extended community, impact on college mentors, and impact on mentored students.

During Year 1, grantees have had an impact on the communities local to their universities, on their partners, and on communities beyond their universities. They have served neighboring schools and students, raising awareness and expectations around college attendance. They have also supported and influenced their partner organizations, encouraging them to raise college awareness and support. Two programs have also had broader impact, reaching communities and schools beyond their local area. In addition, the model of one program has drawn interest nationally and is being considered for adoption elsewhere.

### **Evaluation Question 3: To what extent are mentored students engaging in practices and activities that prepare them to enter college? To what extent do they enter college? To what extent do they persist in college?**

Most grantees do not have access to student-level data that indicates college preparation and entrance. Typically, these data include student transcripts, SAT scores, college and scholarship applications, evidence of college acceptance, and college tracking data. Most of these data points require formal relationships with schools, parent permission or releases of information, and data collection over time. In some cases, grantee partnerships with field sites involve absolutely no affiliation with a school; they are community or service organizations. Some partners have programs based on drop-in models, and contact with students is often limited to one event. In addition, the age of intervention with students varies from middle school through all four years of high school, which leads to different outcome measures. Because of these factors, collecting cohort-wide quantitative outcomes data for mentored students was not possible during Year 1. College Spark personnel have engaged grantees in discussions around student outcomes data, and some grantees may be able to provide limited program-specific data for some of their students. However, given the structure and capacity of these programs, it will not be possible to fully assess student outcomes over the course of this grant.

Qualitative data and anecdotal reports suggest positive outcomes for mentored students. According to grantees, the schools and partner organizations value the presence of mentors and their work with students. The presence of mentors extends their capacity, provides positive role models, and raises interest in future goals and achievement. According to grantees, formal and informal feedback from some of the mentored students reflects increased awareness in college and greater



knowledge of college application procedures. Mentors described changes in attitudes and goals of individual students. Some students improved their grades, while others changed their post-high school plans to include college. Increased academic interest and confidence were also reported. Mentors generally believe the most important factor to success is the personalized and consistent attention they give the students.

#### **Evaluation Question 4: To what extent does participation in the program affect mentor growth and development and mentor persistence in college?**

In each of the grantee programs, there is a strong focus on mentor growth and development and on supporting college persistence of mentors. Each program actively recruits and supports mentors who are first generation college students or from populations under-represented at the university. Grantees see value in a mentor pool that is diverse in ethnicity, in social history, and in economic background. This value extends to both mentors and students. Grantees provide training to support development of mentoring and leadership skills. They also formally or informally cultivate a learning community for the mentors. Leaders of the one program currently collect a range of quantitative data to monitor their program and use this data to assess outcomes and understand their program.

Qualitative data from grantees and mentors suggests that participation in these programs has a strong impact on mentors. Mentors reported positive training experiences that build confidence, create a knowledge base, challenge their thoughts and beliefs, and strengthen decision-making. Mentors truly value the community of mentors. For many, their mentor community is also their main social network. Mentors also reported that serving as a role model for students and their participation in the mentor community keep them focused, motivating them to set short- and long-term goals and to work hard. Mentors also reported important personal growth through these programs. Several reported discovering leadership skills they did not know they possessed. Others spoke of developing new awareness of issues pertaining to learning, to diversity, and to the politics of education. Many expressed a sense of gratitude for their own opportunity to obtain college education. All referred to the responsibility of being a role model and the ways in which that challenges and encourages them.

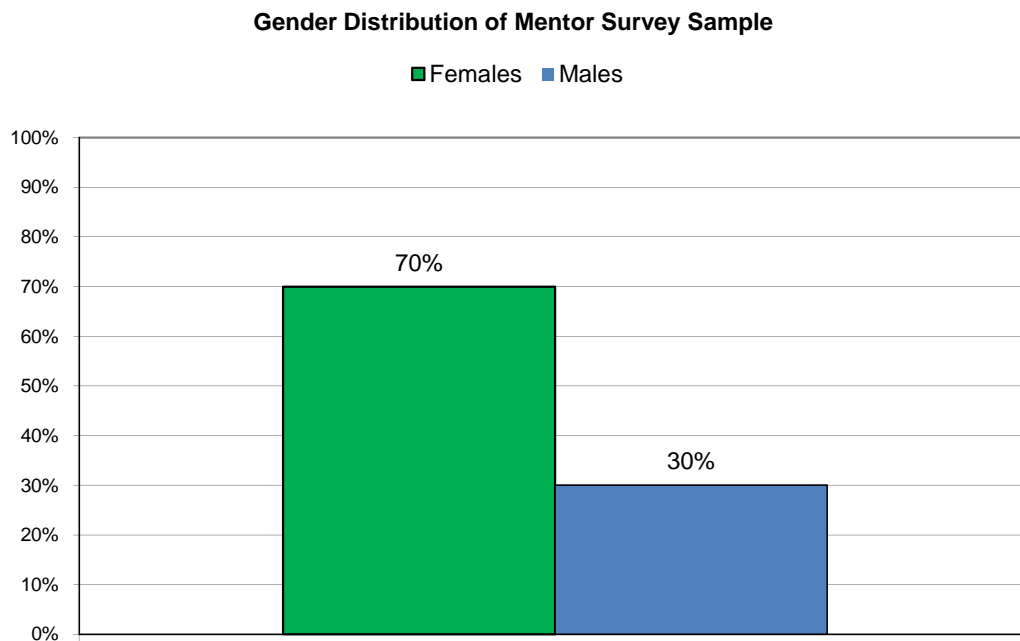
#### **Mentor Survey Results**

Fifty-three mentors completed an online survey implemented through this evaluation near the end of the school year. Respondents were not evenly distributed across grantees, with the number of respondents per program ranging from two to 47. Therefore, the results do not accurately represent a composite of the three programs. The survey collected data pertaining to characteristics of the mentor pool and to preparation for mentoring. Two open-ended questions also queried about the relationship between mentoring and college persistence and solicited suggestions for program improvement.

Figures 1 through 4 reflect demographics and other characteristics of the sample of mentors who completed the survey. Figures 5 through 7 show data pertaining to involvement in the mentor program, including length of participation, financial compensation, and training time. Figures 8

through 12 show data pertaining to time spent with students. Because of the highly skewed nature of this sample, these results may not be viewed as broadly representative of the grantee cohort and will not be interpreted here.

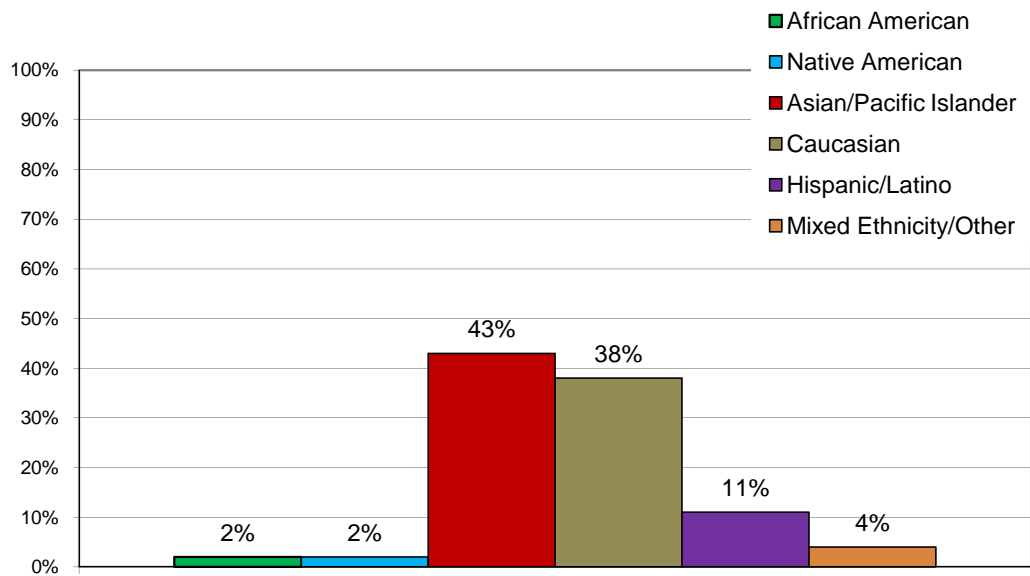
Respondents' answers to the open-ended questions regarding the relationship between mentoring and college persistence and to the question pertaining to program improvement are presented in their entirety in the Appendix. Several themes emerged in the responses to the question query about the relationship between mentoring and college persistence. Mentors reported increased awareness of issues pertaining to education access. They also wrote of increased appreciation for the opportunity to attend college, growth in leadership skills, and enhanced inspiration and motivation. In addition, they mentioned the positive role of participating in a learning community of mentors. The survey item regarding suggestions for program improvement elicited eight responses, half of which reflected positively on the mentors' experiences. Mentors also suggested increased communication and outreach with schools, as well as increasing the number of mentors.



*Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Mentor Survey Sample*

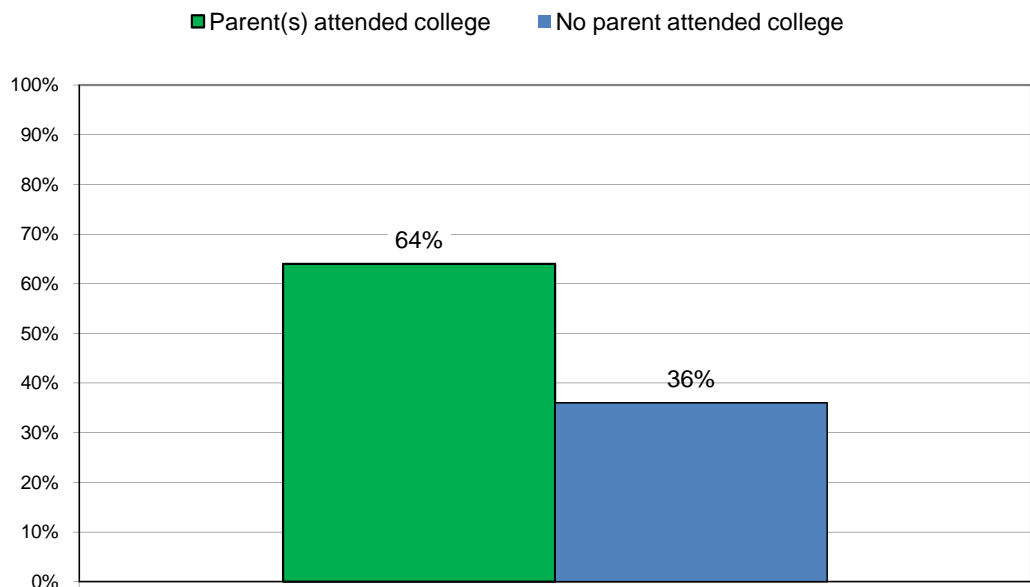


**Ethnicity of Mentor Survey Sample**

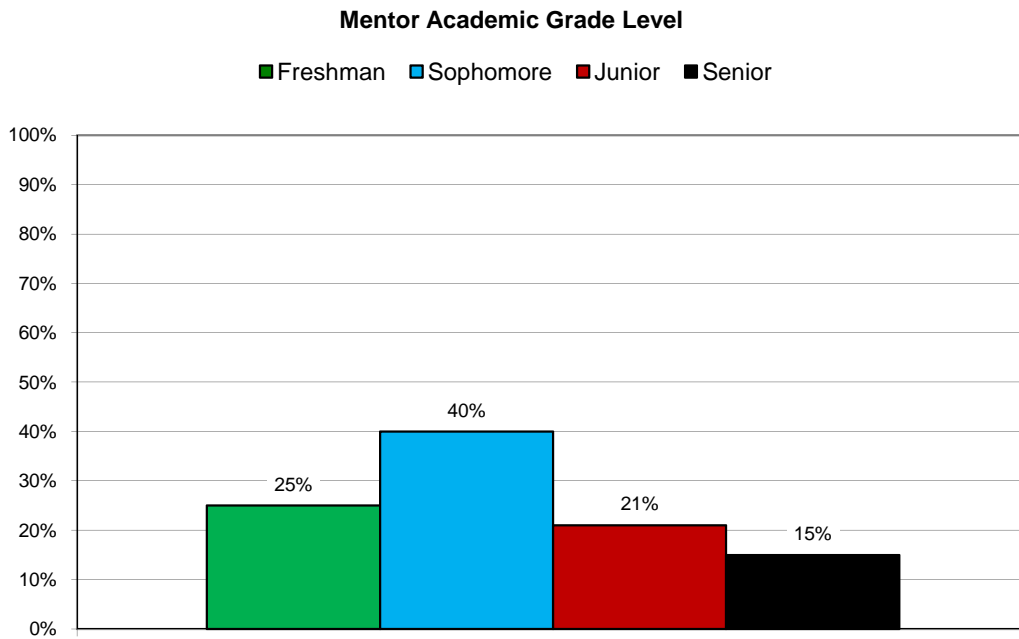


**Figure 2. Ethnicity of Mentor Survey Sample**

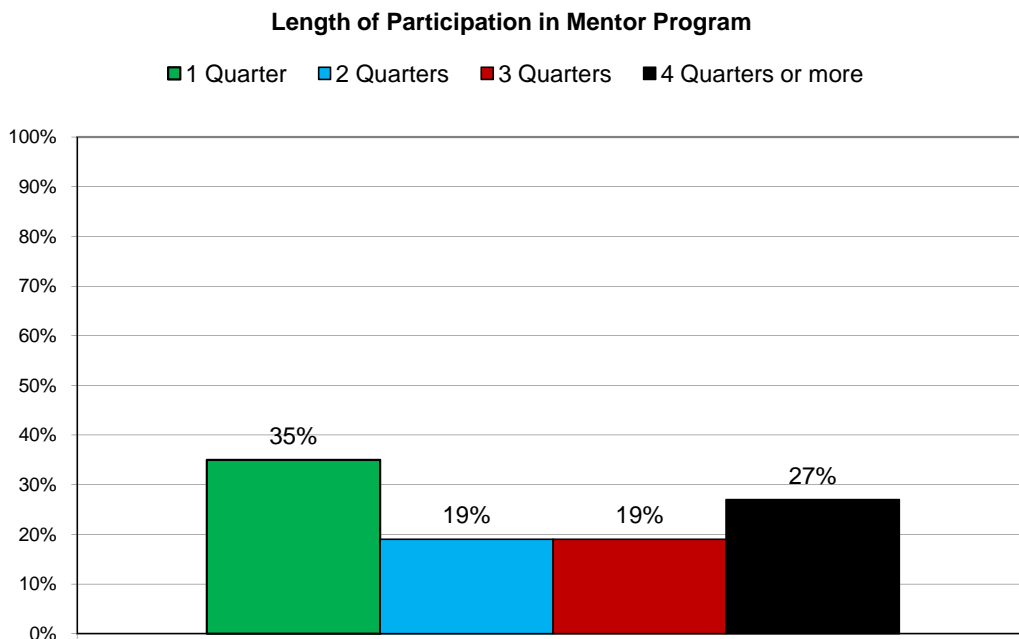
**Mentor Parent College Attendance**



**Figure 3. Mentor Parent College Attendance**



*Figure 4. Mentor Academic Grade Level*



*Figure 5. Length of Participation in Mentor Program*



### Financial Compensation for Mentoring

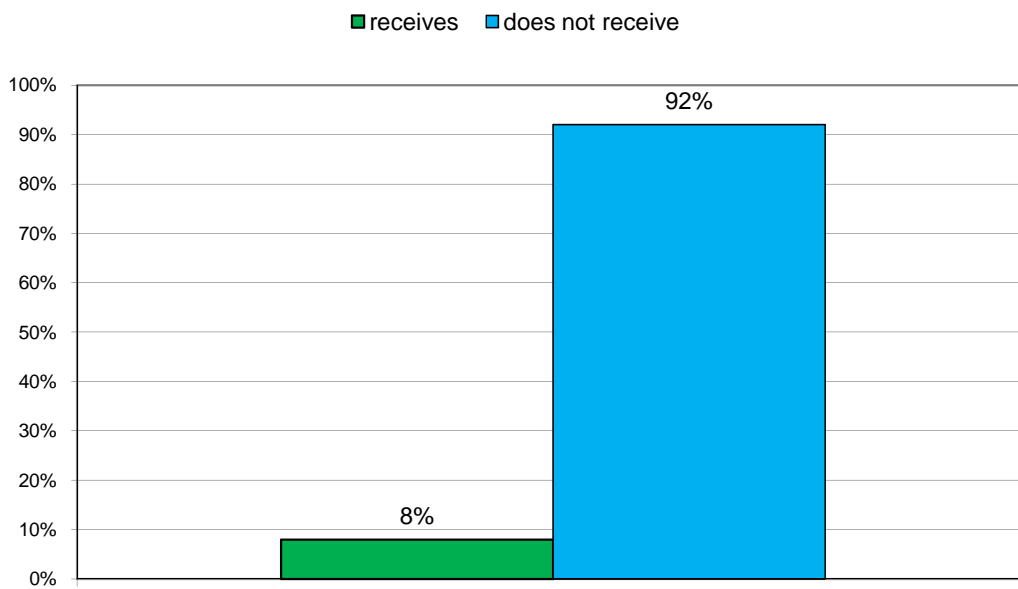


Figure 6. Financial Compensation for Mentoring

### Hours of Mentor Training

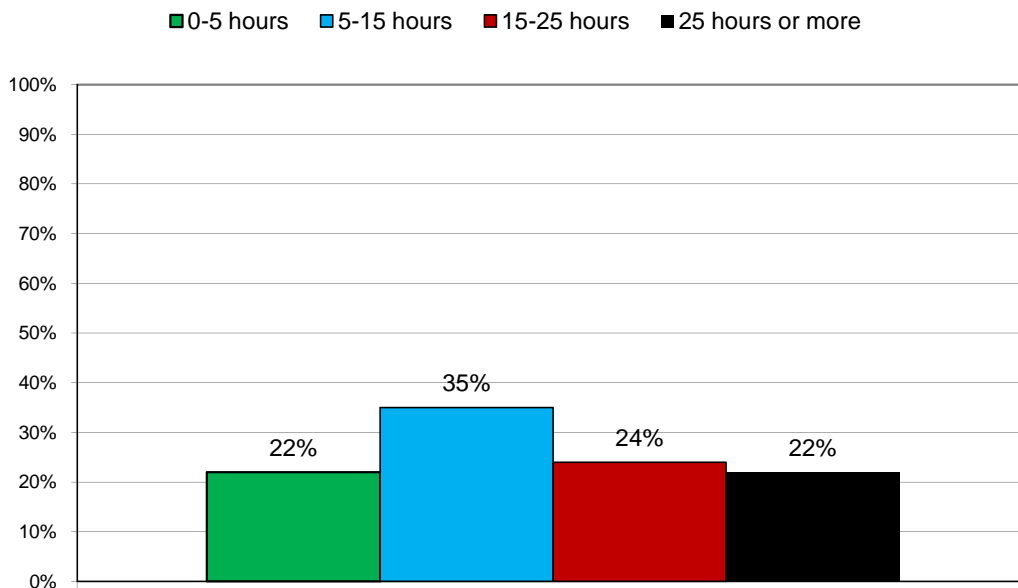


Figure 7. Hours of Mentor Training

### Number of Individual Students Mentored per Quarter

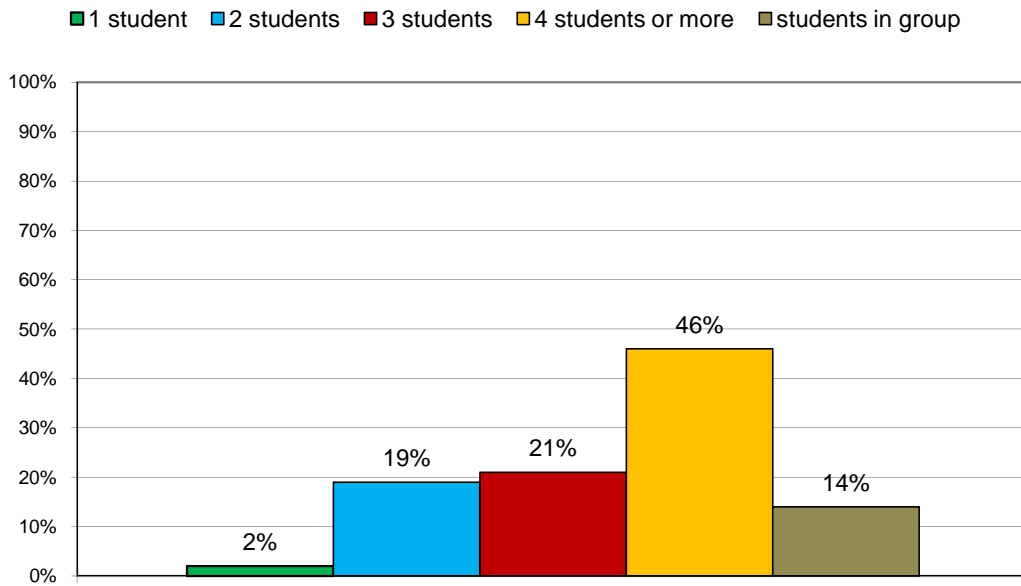


Figure 8. Number of Individual Students Mentored per Quarter

### Number of Times Expected to Meet With Student per Quarter

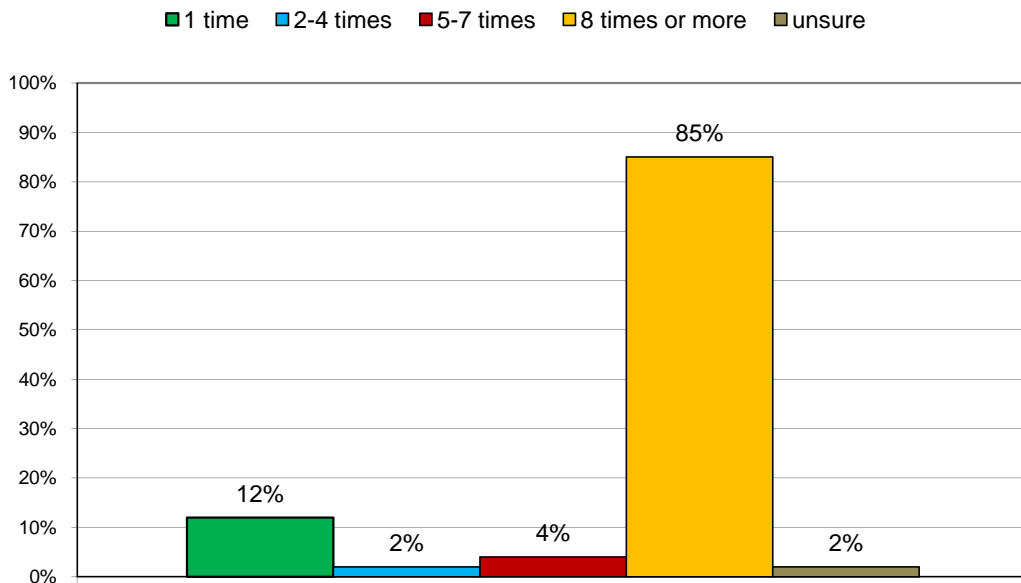
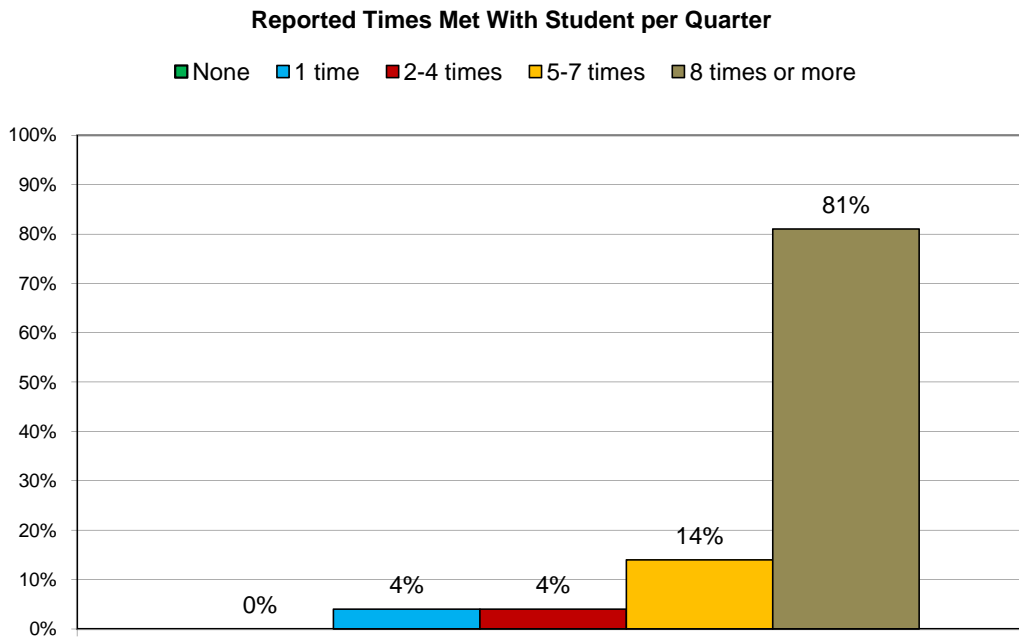
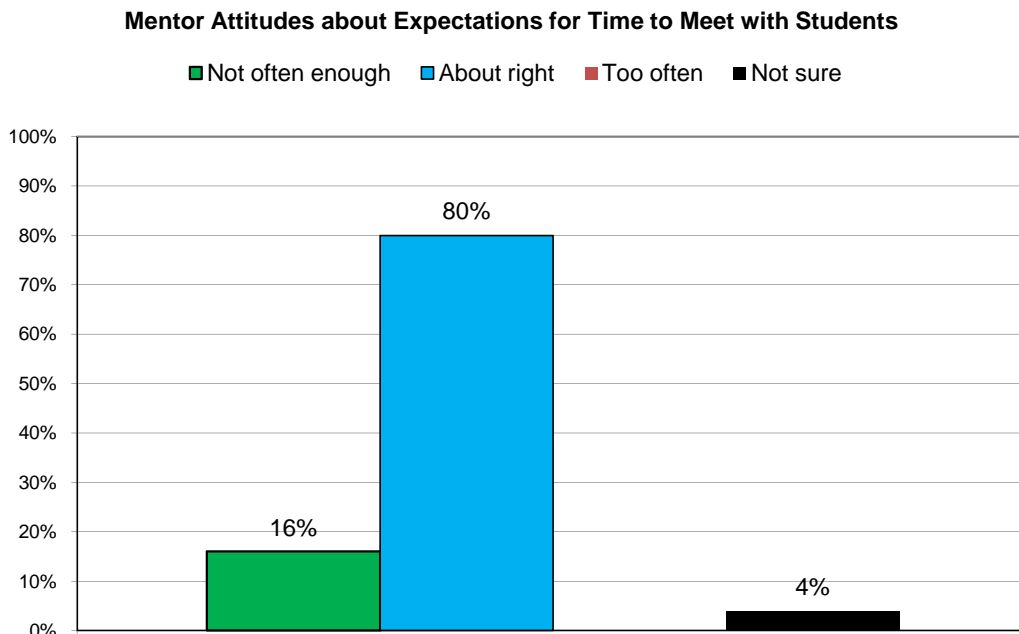


Figure 9. Number of Times Expected to Meet With Student per Quarter

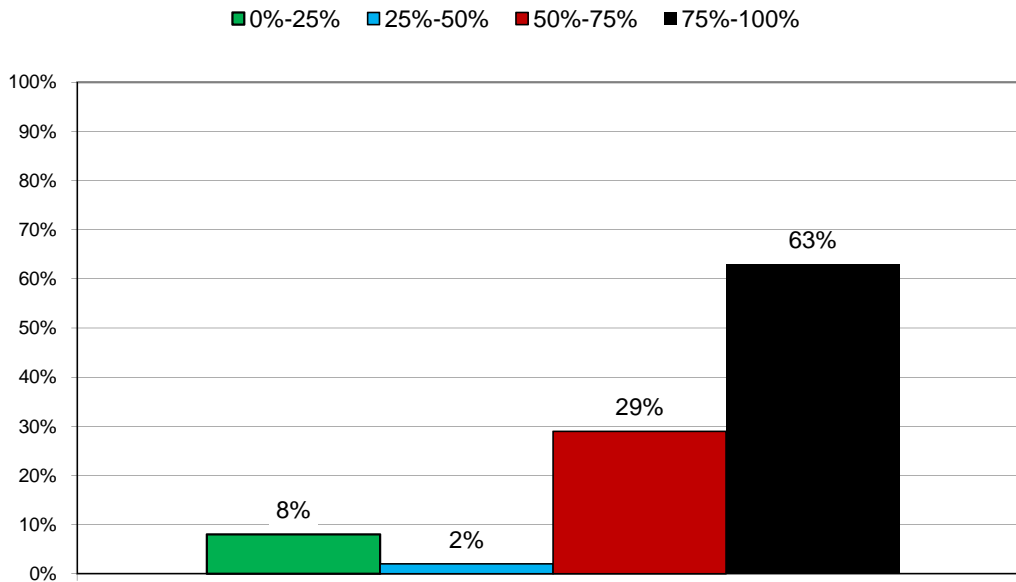


*Figure 10.* Reported Times Met With Student per Quarter



*Figure 11.* Mentor Attitudes about Expectations for Time to Meet with Students

**Percentage of Mentoring Time on College Readiness Activities**



*Figure 12. Percentage of Mentoring Time on College Readiness Activities*

**Table 1.**  
*Mentor Survey Responses*

Survey Question*	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel comfortable going to the high school to contact my student(s).	2%	0%	4%	26%	68%
The school works to facilitate my access to the student(s).	2%	0%	6%	52%	40%
I feel I have time to adequately mentor my student(s).	0%	12%	20%	52%	16%
I feel comfortable answering questions about the free application for federal student financial aid (FAFSA).	0%	4%	8%	64%	24%
I know who to refer my student(s) to for questions about FAFSA.	0%	4%	8%	44%	44%
I feel comfortable answering questions about the college application process.	0%	0%	0%	33%	67%
I know who to refer my student(s) to for questions about the college application process.	0%	0%	2%	29%	70%
I feel comfortable answering questions about the financial aid package received from a college.	0%	4%	4%	59%	33%
I know who to refer my student(s) to for questions about the financial aid package received from a college.	0%	2%	4%	37%	57%
I am getting the support that I need from the university program.	0%	0%	0%	37%	63%



<b>Survey Question*</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
<b>I am satisfied with the clarity of information I have received from the university program staff.</b>	0%	2%	6%	45%	47%
<b>I am satisfied with the quality of training I have received from the university program staff.</b>	0%	2%	12%	47%	39%
<b>I feel that my participation in the mentor program has increased my desire to persist in college.</b>	0%	0%	10%	29%	61%

\*totals may not equal 100% due to rounding or to mentor omission of a question

## CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

### **Evaluation Question 5: What contextual factors influence program implementation and outcomes?**

When considering progress of any grant, it is important to consider contextual factors influencing that progress. Each grantee is developing plans to address specified contextual factors in Year 2. Several common contextual factors emerged across programs, including relationships with partners, program development and the university context, practical issues, and program recognition.

Relationships with partner organizations strongly affect these programs. In some cases, strong relationships and clear alignment with partner goals create positive mentoring experiences and effective programming for students. In other cases, however, differences in goals and needs or unclear expectations have challenged implementation and effectiveness.

The three grantees are at different stages of program and organizational development. One program has existed for only two years while another has existed for 10. However, all three programs are growing and, like other developing non-profits and service organizations, resources for business planning are needed. One staff member said, “No one demands a business plan from us – just a budget. We could really use a course in entrepreneurship for non-profits.” The university setting of each program provides a strong base for mentoring partnerships. However, each grantee competes for university resources and none have a full-time, permanent staff position.

There are several practical issues that either enhance or impinge on success. These include access to materials in the schools, availability of transportation for mentors and students, and technology where needed. In addition, most programs do not have access to student data, limiting assessment of outcomes.

Each grantee is actively cultivating awareness of their program on their campus and more broadly, and recognition both within and beyond the university has had positive effects. Program leaders report opportunities to partner with other campus departments, requests for expansion, and increased funding opportunities.



## PROMISING PRACTICES AND SUSTAINABILITY

### **Evaluation Question 6: What promising practices are emerging, and what factors influence growth and sustainability of these practices?**

Personnel of the three grantees are hoping to maximize the impact of College Spark funding by developing new and sustainable practices during the three-year grant period. Each grantee has taken steps to identify areas they wish to develop through the grant. During Year 1, they have focused primarily on implementation. However, each grantee has already considered issues of sustainability. Some are using the College Spark grant to leverage additional funding. Some are refining their leadership and organizational structure to accommodate expansion or to promote sustainability. There are also efforts to build in feedback loops for program evaluation, which will strengthen the program. In addition, they are clarifying program goals as they add new programs or continue to develop existing partnerships.

Two grantees have implemented the practice of providing financial compensation for some mentors. The purpose is to promote participation among college students who must work. According to program staff members, the compensation did enable a few students to participate who would not have been able to participate otherwise. However, the number of those students did not increase significantly. Staff members believe this is most likely because there are limitations in the number of paid hours available. Several people observed that paid mentor positions remove the service component, changing the relationship between the mentor and their work. Some mentors participate simply for the compensation. According to staff members, these mentors appear less likely to “go the extra mile” to work with students.

Mentors offered their beliefs pertaining to promising practices and sustainability. They believe the key component of their programs is having one-one-one relationships with students. “It’s because we show them we care,” said one. They also believe the closeness in age and the diversity of the mentor pool are critical to success. A mentor commented, “We share a similar culture. They see that we can make it, and so can they. We have perseverance. We did it too.” Another commented, “It helped letting them know this is our first time doing this [mentoring]. It showed them we struggle too.” Mentors also believe that providing new opportunities for students is critical. Finally, they underscored the importance of solid mentor training to program success.

The opportunity for the cohort of grantees to meet has been received positively. Personnel from all programs expressed interest in sharing best practices and resources. Several people would like to develop relationships that readily support conversations among the programs around specific issues, such as mentor training and supervision. One person commented, “There was a lot of value in getting together and we would like to see it continue. It’s a good way to develop best practices in mentor training, recruiting, and retention, which are key to delivering the services.” There was also some interest in collaborating on a mentors’ day, in which mentors from all three programs share experiences and learn from one another. “They don’t have role models. Many are first generation college students. We need to think about getting these kids through college,” observed one person. Several people suggested these collaborations would promote sustainability of the

activities specific to the College Spark grant and lead to longer term connections among the programs.

In Year 1, grantees have focused on implementation while considering sustainability issues. Each grantee has promising practices in place, and a few common promising practices were beginning to emerge. In Years 2 and 3, it will be important to monitor implementation strategies and outcomes in order to determine promising practices. In addition, it will be helpful to encourage development of sustainability strategies during Year 2, which can then be implemented in Year 3.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Year 1 evaluation of the College Spark Mentoring Partnership Program Grant investigated the characteristics of the three programs receiving grant support: the Bridges Project of Central Washington University, the Dream Project of the University of Washington, and the First Generation Project of Seattle University. These mentoring partnership programs are similar in the type of populations they target and in their focus on supporting mentors. All three are university-based, have community partnerships, and receive external support. However, there are a number of significant differences among the programs. There are differences in mission, program and administrative structure, and outreach mechanisms.

All grantees made progress in Year 1 of the grant period. They participated in cohort meeting and evaluation activities. They maintained their existing programs, implemented new activities for students, and provided support for mentors. Two programs expanded outreach to additional schools, and one began implementation of two new outreach strategies. All three programs continued to develop infrastructure to support their projects and refined their approach to recruiting and training of mentors. In some cases, contextual factors affected full implementation of Year 1 activities. In other cases, grantees are phasing in certain activities over the three-year grant period. In Years 2 and 3, grantees intend to continue implementation of grant activities and to address specific contextual factors.

As of Year 1, there is evidence of impact in three areas. These mentoring programs are having a positive effect on their local communities through their outreach and mentor placements. There is also evidence of broader impact in Washington State and nationally. All three programs report positive outcomes for mentors as demonstrated by strong mentor cohorts, repeated participation, and partner feedback. Evaluation interviews and survey data support these reports. Finally, mentors and project leaders report positive outcomes for mentored students, ranging from increased academic interest and confidence to higher college application and entrance rates. Differences in grantee access to mentor and student data and differences in capacity for data collection limited quantitative measurement of outcomes in Year 1. In conversations with College Spark personnel, some grantees have indicated they may be able to provide some mentor data, as well as limited program-specific student data. However, given the structure and capacity of these programs, it will not be possible to fully assess student outcomes over the course of this grant.

Contextual factors influencing grant outcomes include relationships with community partners, stage of organizational development, and issues pertaining to practical concerns, such as access to materials and transportation. Factors related to the university context also affect program functioning and grant implementation. Finally, the lack of access to student data limits assessment of outcomes, which would be valuable for guiding program development. Positive factors include increased program recognition and access to additional funding.

By the close of Year 1, each program had successfully begun implementation of their proposed grant activities. Promising practices were evident for each program. As grant progress continues, common and shared practices will continue to emerge. Each grantee has begun considering

sustainability of grant-related activities, and the promising practices will support their long-term efforts.

## Recommendations

On the basis of the Year 1 evaluation, recommendations are offered in the following areas:

- **Cohort learning** – Grantees expressed interest in sharing practices and resources. It is recommended that time be allocated to address some of the areas of most interest to grantees. This replicates the successful practices of Year 1 meetings.
- **Sustainability** – In Year 2, grantees should develop sustainability plans. In Years 2 and 3, grantees can lay the foundation for sustainability efforts.
- **Mentor outcomes** – Enhance the evaluation focus on mentors by collecting and analyzing quantitative data on mentor outcomes and through mentor surveys. Continue to collect qualitative data from mentors.
- **Mentored student outcomes** – Collect data on program impact from a sample of mentored students using surveys and focus groups. While these are not long-term outcome measures, they can provide valuable information pertaining to program implementation and perceived impact on the student sample.
- **Partner programs** – To add to the knowledge of the needs for and benefits of mentoring partnership programs, interview partner programs and affiliated schools about their goals and expectations for the secondary students they serve. This will provide insight into the extended impact of the College Spark grants.
- **Promising practices** – Common and individual practices will become more fully evident in Years 2 and 3 of this grant. It is recommended that implementation strategies and their outcomes be monitored to identify promising practices.

## APPENDIX

The mentor survey asked respondents if participation in the mentor program increased their desire to persist in college and, if so, to explain the reason. Their responses are provided in Table 2. The survey also asked respondents to provide suggestions for program improvement, and these responses are provided in Table 3.

**Table 2.**

***Mentor Survey Responses – Reasons the Mentor Program Increases Persistence***

<b>Survey Question:</b> If you feel your participation in the mentor program has increased your desire to persist in college, please explain the reason:
"Mentoring other high school first generation students is beneficial to my success in college for it helps to motivate me to continue with my success."
"The [program] has not only opened my eyes about current issues in US education, but has also helped me shape my academic plan and even my future career goals."
"I have seen students who lack the support they should have to even make it through high school and yet they are driven to achieve an even higher education which has shown me the value of college."
"Sometimes I wonder why it is that I go to college, or rather what I am going to get out of it. Then I realize that education in itself is the most important thing I can give to myself and others."
"It has been truly amazing to be a part of a program that I can really identify with. It has helped me grow as both a leader as well as an individual."
"It helps to not take college for granted; when you see the desire in someone else's eyes, it's hard to complain about all-nighters and term papers."
"It has given me a sense of purpose in life, and I want to do everything I can to ensure that I am doing my best to help others get to this campus (or others)."
"The [program] is much more than just a mentoring program. It is a community of dedicated college students and high school students. We all support each other with encouragement. Witnessing each other's growth and accomplishments always inspires me to go further. I want my students and friends to succeed so I can take pride in them and I want them to take pride in themselves and me as well."
"Reflecting on my own experience of being in a variety of positions of both academic privilege and disadvantage, I recognize the importance of my own education as it relates to its role in social mobility, opportunity and access"
"I feel like I have a purpose in school. Rather than just learning I can help someone else because I've been through the same thing not too long ago."
"It has showed me how lucky I am to have the opportunities that I have."
"It has helped me to feel a part of a community on our campus, which has made me value my college experience so much more. It also has lead me to realize the small subset of the population who are students at a university; it isn't something everybody does or something that everybody can do. I have re-learned the processes that are involved in becoming a college student."
"I am currently applying to dental school right now. Mentoring these high school students is like mentoring myself on how to gain admission to dental schools. It motivates me more."

<b>Survey Question:</b> If you feel your participation in the mentor program has increased your desire to persist in college, please explain the reason:
"The students that I have worked with are inspiring. Generally the students have a very different life that I have had so I love learning about them and they are what inspires me to keep pushing through my hardships."
"I have felt a greater appreciation for college, since for me it was easy to get here, and these kids have to work very hard sometimes"
"Because of my participation in the [program], I feel more thankful that I have been allowed the support and financial means to attend college. My students want to attend college so badly, but have sometimes been put at a disadvantage. I, fortunately did not have to deal with an disadvantage, so I treasure my chance to an education even more."
"The whole purpose of the [program] is to mentor our students to help them achieve higher education. As mentors, it is our responsibility to help [students] as much as we can and to serve as resources and role models. If we weren't serious about our own education and advocating to make higher education more accessible for everyone, we wouldn't be here."
"I think that I would persist in college regardless, but being in the [program] has pushed me to work hard to be a good role model for my students."
"I've always had a passion for education and I see myself possibly becoming a teacher in the future. I think the [program] can really help me gain experience in mentorship and the art of teaching students. I'm developing my personal skills as instructor while simultaneously passing my knowledge to younger students."
"Hearing the stories of the students we work with and seeing how their work ethic and drive still pushes them to be the best they can inspires me to be the best I can and to be a great mentor and role model for them."
"Seeing things from a perspective I had never thought of before has opened my eyes to a whole new world."
"Seeing how motivated the students are to participate in the program and seeing how students react to us shows me how important they view education and put it on a high pedestal."
"I have a greater understanding of the tremendous opportunity I have being at the [university] and do not want to give up the chance to better myself while so many others would love to be in my position."
"Working with various high school students you hear many different kinds of stories. Some are more grandiose than others and there are the typical personal statements that can be true for whatever name you put on them, but sometimes you come across a really passionate person with an amazing story behind them. I have listened to a few and to hear about what they went through and how they have ended up where they are makes me question my priorities and what I have taken for granted. College is an amazing opportunity that most don't get. It can be a portal to whatever you want depending on how you work with it."
"It has given me a chance to give back to my community through the convenience of having access to this program on campus."
"I'm strongly considering graduate school and/or working for a university once I receive my undergraduate degree because I feel that help accessing to higher education is needed. Furthermore, even when students arrive to an university, they still have questions and concerns. Often times, they are not sure where to go or who to turn to."



<b>Survey Question:</b> If you feel your participation in the mentor program has increased your desire to persist in college, please explain the reason:
"By helping these students achieve their goal in attending college and pursuing their careers, it has made me realize that in order for me to pursue my dream, obtaining and continuing my college education is the first step."
"I just see how incredible it is to be given the opportunity to learn and grow as a person in college."
"It helps high school students with college applications and I was also a part of this program when I was in high school and it has helped me out a lot and I am really grateful. That is also a reason why I joined the [program] to help others as the [program] has helped me. As I help high school students I see how much effort and time we put in to helping them and so I wouldn't want to give up for the effort that others has put in for me."
"It makes me realize how important a college education is concerning my choice of career."
"It has made me realize that coming and getting to college isn't anything to be taken for granted. I come from a very privileged background out of a very good high school and financially high area. Working with students with very different backgrounds and experiences as me has made me realize how important and valued the education I am getting at this university is."
"Seeing the student's desire to make it to college and realizing I am already here and almost done makes me strive to do better."
"Mentoring other high school first generation students is beneficial to my success in college for it helps to motivate me to continue with my success."
"I feel like I will be a good example for them."

**Table 3.**

***Mentor Survey Responses – Suggestions for Program Improvement***

<b>Survey Question:</b> Please use the space below to add any comments that will help improve the mentor program. We would especially appreciate your comments on any item you marked “strongly disagree.”
"Communications with high school counselors/liason could be improved."
"The mentor program is very well organized. I would change the guest speakers. They have been a little dull this quarter. Maybe we can invite more lively speakers to class."
"None. The [program] has prepared me in all ways. I have also had many chances to grow and learn both in our [campus] classroom setting and with our students."
"I love [program]! It's perfect!"
"More time slots to visit the schools."
"Our program does a great job reaching a large number of underprivileged high school students yet I feel we could advertise more effectively and bring in even greater numbers."
"I think that the program would benefit from a greater integration into my college community."
"Schools need more mentors since the number of drop out is increasing as well as teen pregnancy. The number of students failing is also high and need mentors to help these students out."

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