

College Readiness. College Access. College Success.

For 10 years, supporting ideas to help low-income students in Washington prepare for college, get in and earn a degree.

WHAT WE SUPPORT.
WHAT WE'VE LEARNED.
THE HARD WORK AHEAD.



FOR MANY STUDENTS, a zip code too often determines their college and career options. Education is the key that unlocks opportunity for low-income students. Since 2005, College Spark Washington has funded programs across Washington state that help low-income students become college-ready and earn their degrees. We've made more than \$45 million in grants throughout Washington, to community-based organizations, schools, colleges and universities, education non-profits, and public agencies.

HOW WE WORK

SUPPORTING GREAT IDEAS THAT HELP STUDENTS SUCCEED

Community Grants

An annual competitive program that awards approximately \$1.4 million each year, in grants of up to \$150,000. Each fall, we consider proposals for Community Grants designed to influence certain key indicators of college readiness and success. More than \$15 million has been awarded to projects serving more than 55,000 students around the state.

Major Initiatives

For ten years, we supported Achieving The Dream: Community Colleges Count, a national initiative to increase the success of underserved students, at 19 community colleges in Washington. Our College Readiness Initiative funded Navigation 101 and AVID, two programs aimed at helping students prepare for and succeed in college. The initiative served roughly 60,000 students, and both programs have been widely adopted throughout Washington. We are now launching a College-Ready Math Initiative to help more students overcome this critical barrier to college entry and persistence.



COLLEGE READINESS

AT LOW-INCOME SCHOOLS, ACADEMIC SUPPORT, GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING HELP STUDENTS PREPARE

Even though most living-wage jobs require a college degree or some other post-secondary education, far too many Washington students either don't have the opportunity to go to college or face daunting challenges when they get there. More than 50% of the students who make it to college need remedial classes before they can do college-level, credit-earning work. That percentage is even worse for low-income students.

So College Spark has invested \$9.5 million over nine years to bring two promising programs—Navigation 101 and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)—to middle and high schools that serve low-income students around the state. At places like Grandview High School near Yakima and Lincoln High School in Tacoma, Navigation 101 helps low-income students understand the opportunities that college offers, and AVID helps them develop the skills they must attain to get there. With proper guidance, students choose challenging college preparatory courses instead of taking easier classes, and learn the life and study skills that will help them succeed in college. With academic support more students succeed in these college prep courses. College Spark funded the initiative at 45 schools throughout the state, and the programs grew to reach more than 700 Washington schools.



WHAT WE'VE LEARNED, AND WHERE WE'RE HEADED



DESPITE THE HARD WORK of our grantees and the schools and students they serve, the mission of College Spark Washington is far from over. Gaps in college readiness, college access and college success between low-income students and their more affluent peers remain. Low-income students are far less likely to get a bachelor's degree than high-income peers.

Through our grantees' experiences, we've learned that optional, out-of-class services don't close achievement gaps. Effective strategies need to be scalable to entire schools and districts. Persistent problems hold students down, such as low math achievement and overly harsh disciplinary policies that disproportionately keep low-income students and students of color out of the classroom. Districts need help using technology to tap data on attendance, discipline, and academic performance so educators can reach students with targeted interventions before they fall behind.

And just getting kids to college isn't enough. On campus, they need help identifying and navigating clear pathways to completion. Advising needs to reach students early and often. Support services need to be integrated into the classroom. And colleges should be encouraged to improve completion while closing achievement gaps.

As funders, we've also learned that patience and persistence are essential. Grantees need deeper, longer commitments to develop interventions, test models, and assess results. Building capacity through professional development matters. Supporting evaluation costs and opportunities to share with peers leads to more effective programs and reaching more students.

Going forward, our new College-Ready Math Initiative is tackling the persistent problem of students leaving high school unprepared for college-level math, often unaware that they are headed for remedial classes that don't earn college credit. At the college level, we're working to improve systems that help students achieve important markers of progress toward their degrees. At every level, we'll continue our search for promising new ideas and proven best practices that can help all Washington students succeed.



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COLLEGE SUCCESS

WITH SUPPORT, A STRUGGLING IMMIGRANT LEAPS THE LANGUAGE BARRIER AND THRIVES IN COLLEGE

When Laura Yanez came to the United States in 2008, she had been a poor student in Columbia, and spoke no English at all. Today she is the student body president at Highline College, a bustling and diverse two-year college that serves the blue-collar suburbs south of Seattle. But she could just as easily have become one of thousands of students—especially low-income students and students of color—who get to college but leave without a degree, burdened by debt and disappointment.

With the help of Highline's Jumpstart scholarship program for immigrants and ELL students, she was able to plow through the developmental courses that discourage so many students. At the same time, she tapped into the resources of the college's Transition Success Center that empowers ELL students to navigate the college environment through advising on education and career pathways, help with financial aid, and referral to appropriate services. The center is part of the larger Achieving The Dream: Community Colleges Count project, a nationwide push to improve community college performance supported in Washington by College Spark.



With that support, Laura was transformed. She became involved in college clubs, starting a club of her own for ELL students, and then in student government.

Laura plans to transfer to the University of Washington, where she hopes to jump into a fast-track program toward a Masters in Social Work. Armed with that degree, she plans to return to Highline to help students like herself overcome obstacles to success.



COLLEGE ACCESS

UW DREAM PROJECT HELPS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS NAVIGATE ADMISSIONS, FINANCIAL AID

When Zach Cornett was in high school in Spokane, he initially dismissed the idea of going to college. His family was low-income, and none of his relatives had gone to college. But a focused guidance program helped him navigate admissions and financial aid processes, and now he's returning the favor as a mentor in the University of Washington's Dream Project. Supported in part by College Spark's Community Grant program, the Dream Project sends hundreds of mentors into high schools in Seattle and surrounding communities, where they help students prepare academically and personally, apply for college, and get financial aid. The biggest hurdle for most students, Zach says, is the cost of college. Many of the low-income families served by the Dream Project are wary of large student loan debts and need guidance about scholarships and other financial aid resources.

COLLEGE SPARK TIMELINE

1978

Founded as student loan guarantor

2004

Converted to grantmaking foundation

2005

First Community Grants made

2006

Launched *Achieving the Dream* in Washington

2008

Supported development of TheWashBoard.org scholarship website

2009

Launched College Readiness Initiative

2012

Focused Community Grants on key indicators for college readiness and success

2013

Launched Advocacy Grants Program

2014

Launched College-Ready Math Initiative

2015

Using lessons learned from 10 years and \$45 million in grants to develop next initiative