

## **Early warning indicators help educators spot struggling students**

SEATTLE – While all schools keep track of key indicators of struggling students, many don't use that information in a coordinated way to identify and help students early.

Research indicates that three key indicators in middle school identify students who are most likely to eventually leave school without a diploma: missing more than 5 days in a semester, being suspended or expelled from school, or receiving a failing grade in any course.

Over the next three years, 11 school districts in King and Pierce counties will use a \$670,000 investment from College Spark Washington to train and coach their staffs on Early Warning Indicator Systems that allow them to track those key indicators in a coordinated and systematic way. Those staffers will then share what they learn with educators across Washington.

Washington's statewide graduation rate of 76 percent is lower than the national average, and students from low-income backgrounds and communities of color are disproportionately likely to leave school without a diploma.

"That is a lot of young people that we are not serving, that's just unacceptable," said Linda Filley Bentler, program manager for the Puget Sound Educational Service District. "EWIS is using data in a smart way to reach students earlier."

Using a comprehensive Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS) can identify students who are at or approaching danger levels in one or more of those key areas. Educators can then use that data to choose correct strategies to help that student get back on track to success.

The PSESD recently completed an inventory of how the four districts in Pierce County track and use such information. It revealed widely differing systems even within districts, many of which required already overburdened staff to compile labor-intensive reports.

"This information often exists in separate databases that aren't integrated with one another, so it's difficult for schools to identify students that may be beginning to struggle in more than one area," said Christine McCabe, Executive Director of College Spark Washington. "This investment will help districts and schools build systems that let them help kids early, when the help will do the most good."

Seven school districts in South King County that are part of the Road Map Project began their work on these systems two years ago, and have seen positive results. They will use College Spark's investment to develop targeted interventions for students, implement them and evaluate their effectiveness based on continuing analysis of the EWIS data.

In Pierce County, the four districts are developing and implementing Early Warning Indicator Systems. The districts are reviewing their current practices for tracking this information, forming and training EWIS team, choosing software systems, and developing interventions that are designed to reduce the number of students that trigger Early Warning Indicators. College Spark's investment will help them design and implement the best strategies to keep students on the pathway to graduation and success.

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[College Spark Washington](#) funds programs across Washington state that help low-income students become college-ready and earn their degrees. Grantees include community-based organizations, K-12 schools and districts, community and technical colleges, four-year colleges and universities, educational nonprofits, and public agencies. College Spark began supporting access to higher education in 1978 and, since 2005, has awarded more than \$45 million to college readiness and degree completion programs throughout the state.