

College Spark Washington announces more than \$1.1 million in Community Grants to improve college-readiness and degree completion for low-income students

SEATTLE – College Spark announced more than \$1.1 million in Community Grants ranging from helping Communities in Schools of Auburn partner with the Auburn School District to reduce early warning indicators (EWI) for middle school students to helping Everett Public Schools improve access to rigorous coursework for low-income students.

The annual, competitive statewide Community Grants Program focuses on building the effectiveness of grantees working with low-income students in middle school, high school and college by funding new and promising practices that help students be college-ready and transition successfully to college.

“The goal of the Community Grants Program is to increase degree completion rates for low-income students,” said Christine McCabe, Executive Director at College Spark. “These programs represent promising college readiness and college transition programs in Washington state.”

This year’s nine grantees will measure results using at least one of the four following indicators of future college success:

- **8th Grade Algebra:** Increasing the number of students who take and pass Algebra by the eighth grade.
- **Early Warning Indicators:** Decreasing the number of middle school students who trigger two of three early warning indicators: five or more absences per semester, course failure, suspension or expulsion.
- **Remedial Education:** Decreasing the number of students who require remedial education in college.
- **College Math and English:** Increasing the number of students who earn their first college-level credit in English or Math.

Research shows that most students at risk of falling off track could graduate if they were provided with the appropriate supports early enough and those supports were sustained. To address this, the partnership between Communities in Schools of Auburn and the Auburn School District will work to improve current intervention strategies for 7th and 8th grade students at Olympic, Mt Baker, and Cascade Middle Schools. The project includes a mix of planned, evidence-based interventions (such as requiring students to work on missing assignments during lunch to reduce course failure) and the development of new interventions.

Several of this year’s grantees strengthen a partnership between a school and a community-based organization or between the K-12 and postsecondary systems. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Snohomish County will develop curriculum and activities to reduce EWI that will be delivered in school day, group mentoring sessions at North Middle School in Everett. Seattle University will refine and improve its mentoring program to support academically at-risk 6th graders at Washington Middle School by updating training materials, aligning afterschool tutoring with classroom learning objectives, and creating parent engagement activities.

College Spark is also supporting programs that help students avoid remedial education and earn their first college-level credit. It is estimated that as many as 30 percent of students placed in remedial education could have succeeded in college-level courses and the time and money wasted in those

cases is an obstacle to degree completion. A \$150,000 College Spark grant will help Highline College enhance its current placement practices by redesigning the student experience so that students are making better informed choices.

Since 2005, College Spark's Community Grants Program has awarded more than 100 Community Grants totaling more than \$15 million.

Please see below for a full list of descriptions of grantees or visit the 2015 Community Grants webpage.

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- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Snohomish County (Snohomish) - \$49,556**
Providing supports that ensure middle school students attend school at least 95% of the time and pass every class make the difference between students that almost certainly won't graduate from high school and those that will. A \$49,556 grant from College Spark will help Big Brothers Big Sisters of Snohomish County develop, implement, and refine a curriculum designed for use by school-based volunteer mentors to reduce Early Warning Indicators of course failure, absenteeism, and disciplinary problems leading to suspension or expulsion with middle school students at North Middle School in Everett.
- **Communities in Schools of Auburn (Auburn) - \$141,228**
There is mounting evidence of the power of Early Warning Indicators to predict high school completion and college readiness. Research also shows that most students at risk of falling off track could graduate if they were provided with the appropriate supports early enough and those supports were sustained. College Spark's \$141,228 grant will foster a community/district partnership between Communities in Schools of Auburn and the Auburn School District to improve current intervention strategies for 7th and 8th grade students at Olympic, Mt Baker, and Cascade Middle Schools. The project includes a mix of planned, evidence-based interventions and work to develop new interventions.
- **Edge Foundation (Tacoma, Burien, Spokane, Yakima, and White Swan) - \$150,000**
A \$150,000 grant will help the Edge Foundation evaluate its Edge In-School Coaching program which provides students at academic risk with coaching in time management, planning, self-advocacy, and problem solving skills. The University of Washington evaluation team will use a longitudinal pre/post design to evaluate the Edge Coaching intervention with middle school students receiving the intervention and a control group of students. Lessons learned from this evaluation will be instructive to Edge Foundation, to schools, and to other community based organizations.
- **Everett Public Schools (Everett) - \$150,000**
Low-income students face barriers to college access and success, often lacking the guidance and support needed to prepare for college. Everett Public Schools will use a \$150,000 College Spark grant to improve access to rigorous course work for low-income students. This project will analyze student and survey data to identify the most important readiness, information, and expectation barriers to Advanced Placement (AP) enrollment for low-income students. The data will inform the planning and implementation strategies

for student outreach, recruitment, and academic support. Additionally, Everett Public Schools will work on increasing the effectiveness of teachers with low-income youth in high-rigor courses through professional learning communities focused on teaching AP strategies and developing growth mindset.

– **Gateway to College National Network (Spokane, Kirkland, Des Moines) - \$121,700**

Gateway to College National Network offers a college-based dual enrollment program for youth that have left high school or are extremely credit deficient and in danger of leaving high school. Students in the program have the opportunity to complete their high school requirements and transition to college courses on campus at Spokane Falls Community College, Lake Washington Institute of Technology, and Highline College. Grant funding from College Spark will support a “Schools to Jobs” intervention program for dual credit students to help them build a sense of identity and tie that identity to academic and career planning.

– **Highline College (Des Moines) - \$150,000**

Research has indicated that placement tests used by community colleges are not reliable predictors of student performance in college. It is estimated that as many as 30 percent of students placed in remedial education could have succeeded in college-level courses and the time and money wasted in those cases is an obstacle to degree completion. A \$150,000 College Spark Washington grant will help Highline enhance its current work by improving their existing placement practices for credit-bearing math courses. This project focuses on redesigning the placement experience so that students are engaged and educated about their math pathway, understand the connection between placement and degree length, and have opportunities to refresh and strengthen math skills. This new sequence of placement activities will require increased student participation, pre-placement advising, multiple measures for assessment, and requiring students with a remedial placement to attend a workshop and retest.

– **Northwest Indian College (Bellingham) - \$114,864**

At Northwest Indian College, the rate of students passing their first college-level English and math courses is much lower than is typical at other two-year colleges. In part, this is because of the common obstacles faced by the Native population and the shared negative K-12 experiences these students have had. A \$114,864 College Spark grant will provide funding to develop and pilot non-cognitive interventions in the classroom, including the integration of cultural topics and experiences in order to make academic content more relevant to students’ lives, interests, and cultural identities. Forging a greater sense of cultural identity in a classroom setting may influence important markers of degree progress for students.

– **Seattle University (Seattle) - \$150,000**

The Seattle University Youth Initiative launched in 2011 with the goal of improving academic achievement for low-income youth by providing academic and family support at Bailey Gatzert Elementary School. In 2013, the project expanded to Washington Middle School and currently includes individualized mentoring support for academically at-risk 6th graders. A \$150,000 College Spark grant will help Seattle University refine and improve its

program by updating training materials for volunteers, aligning tutoring with classroom learning objectives, and creating parent engagement activities. This project explores how to deepen the partnership between a school and a community partner.

– **University of Washington (Seattle) - \$149,995**

Low-income students are more likely to arrive at college having met the requirements for high school completion but falling short of meaningful college readiness than their higher income peers. A \$149,995 College Spark grant will help a collaborative effort between University of Washington faculty and high school English teachers to develop and implement a supplemental curriculum for 10th and 11th grade students to improve their readiness for a UW in the High School English class. The goal of the project is to prepare a more diverse range of students for success in a UW in the High School English course and increase the rate of students earning their first college credit in high school.

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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.