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College Spark Washington announces nearly \$10.4 million in new grants to help low-income students successfully transition to college and earn their degrees

SEATTLE – College Spark Washington announced nearly \$10.4 million investment in two initiatives to increase college completion. Many first-generation, low-income students enter school without a support network of friends or family members familiar with college life. That leaves them with nowhere to turn when they struggle with the transition to college and navigating through the college system.

Together Through College, led by Degrees of Change, will receive nearly \$3.4 million over five years to help low-income students stay on track and graduate from college. Guided Pathways, led by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), will receive more than \$7 million over eight years to make system-level changes that will provide more clarity on how to navigate the path to a desired degree.

Together Through College is a cohort-based program in which groups of students graduating from the same community and heading off to the same college receive a range of services including peer and adult mentoring, college readiness and academic supports, help in navigating college-based services, and leadership training. This model calls on a collaborative effort between colleges and community organizations to work together to improve the success of local college students.

As students transition from high school to college, peer relationships become increasingly important. “A key feature of cohort-based programs is that participating students develop a close network of peers who provide mutual support and accountability,” said Tim Herron, President at Degrees of Change. “This program helps students develop a sense of purpose that incorporates the goal of earning a college degree and giving back to their communities.”

Guided Pathways is an evidence-based approach that simplifies choices about college courses, informs and supports those choices, and directs students into an intentional, comprehensive program of study that leads to a credential. “The process from college entrance to program selection to degree completion is streamlined, providing students with a much clearer, more efficient path to completion,” said Jan Yoshiwara, SBCTC Deputy Executive Director for Education Services. “We believe that the changes in programs and services being undertaken by our colleges with the support of this grant, will boost completion rates for our students and increase the number of educated and skilled people to support our state’s economy.”

“We are supporting organizations and ideas that are making progress on postsecondary persistence and completion rates for low-income students,” said Christine McCabe, Executive Director at College Spark Washington. “Both programs have shown evidence of effectiveness, and these organizations have track records of success with innovative and bold strategies.”

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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.