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LEADER Initiative Launches, Aims to Tackle Educator Diversity Gaps in Washington through Community Engagement

Seattle, WA – Educators are central to the work of supporting the postsecondary dreams of students and dismantling racism. “Students of color, who are exposed to teachers who reflect their race and ethnicity have higher graduation rates,” said Dr. Warren Brown, Executive Director at College Spark Washington. “When adults in schools reflect communities, authentic school and community partnerships are better positioned to transform schools in ways that dismantle racism and benefit from the wisdom and vision of families.”

Yet, racism has led to an education workforce that does not reflect the diversity of Washington’s students and many educators are underprepared to teach and lead in ways that honor all learners, respect communities, and challenge inequitable practices.

A new initiative, supported by College Spark Washington and led by the Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), called Leaders in Education Advancing Diversity Equity and Racial Justice (LEADER) aims to tackle these issues. The LEADER Initiative, with \$13.8 million invested over eight years, will focus on increasing community representation in teaching, supporting the systems changes needed to sustain these educators and leaders, and supporting the transformation toward just and equitable educator preparation programs, districts, and schools.

The LEADER Initiative prioritizes four approaches in advancing these goals:

- **Focusing on systems change** with an understanding that educational systems that support students of color benefits all learners.
- **Championing community-driven change** to ensure the work reflects and is guided by the voices and needs of communities in Washington.

- **Prioritizing racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion** in the work it supports and the voices it engages.
- **Collaborating with partners to bring people, resources, and ideas** together from across government, local communities, and the private and philanthropic sectors.

“The path toward educational equity must be inclusive, bringing together diverse perspectives from educators, learning and development experts, and students and their communities to inform meaningful change,” said Alexandra Manuel, Executive Director at the Professional Educator Standards Board. “We’re excited to partner with College Spark Washington on this journey to create a more equitable path for all students.”

PESB will provide resources, support, and technical assistance to regional collaborations of teacher and principal preparation programs, ESDs, schools, districts, principals, and community organizations including tribes. During the first implementation year, stakeholder groups will engage in regional and state-wide learning communities while working together to map assets, engage in an analysis of local needs and opportunities, and develop collaborative strategies to build an education workforce that reflects local school communities.

A subset of regions will receive additional grant funding to implement plans developed through this process. Supported strategies will vary by region based on their priorities, needs, and opportunities. Local examples of effective strategies will be shared with the larger learning community and built upon through state-level systems.

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College Spark Washington supports the postsecondary dreams of students and their communities through grantmaking focused on dismantling racism in the education system. Grantees include community-based organizations, K-12 schools and districts, community and technical colleges, educational nonprofits, and public agencies. College Spark began supporting access to higher education in 1978 and, since 2005, has awarded nearly \$70 million to college readiness and degree completion programs throughout the state.

The Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board works to ensure each and every student learns from well-trained, equity-minded, professional educators. Guided by the expertise of two governing Boards, PESB supports this vision through innovative policies that strengthen educator quality, support workforce development, and expand equitable pathways into the profession.