

# AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO COLLEGE, CAREER & LIFE READINESS

*A Case Study  
on  
Personalizing  
Guidance*



# Join the Conversation

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This is the first of two publications that focus on improving students' college, career and life readiness, particularly for students who have been underrepresented in higher education. Both publications frame the larger context of readiness through case studies that analyze the effectiveness of College Spark Washington's (CSW) College Readiness Initiative (CRI).

This first publication, *An Integrated Approach to College, Career & Life Readiness: A Case Study on Personalizing Guidance*, features the program Career Guidance Washington (CGW, @waOSPI), which takes a student-centered approach to college, career and life readiness by helping students understand who they are, where they're headed and how they'll get there.

The second publication, *An Integrated Approach to Academic & Social Supports: A Case Study on Increasing Access through AVID*, features the program Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID, @AVID4College), which provides strong academic and social supports that prepare students for college and create a school-wide culture of college readiness.

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# OVERVIEW

This is the first of two publications that focus on improving students' college, career and life readiness, especially students who have been underrepresented in higher education. Both publications frame the larger context of readiness through case studies that analyze the effectiveness of College Spark Washington's (CSW) primary College Readiness Initiative (CRI) programs:

- » **Career Guidance Washington (CGW).** CGW personalizes guidance and provides a student-centered approach to college, career and life readiness by helping students understand who they are, where they're headed and how they'll get there.
- » **Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID).** The AVID program provides strong academic and social supports that prepare students for college and create a school-wide culture of college readiness.

We sought to answer the following questions: What is currently known about readiness? Did the CRI achieve its goal to help more low-income students be college-ready when they graduate from high school? And most importantly, what lessons have been learned to help promote equity and increase access to college and career prep, with longevity and at scale? These driving questions center around themes of readiness, impact of initiatives and lessons learned.

## AUDIENCE & PURPOSE

Our goal is to reach people representing each aspect of readiness partnerships, including foundations and grantmakers; school leaders; teachers; counselors; state agencies and policymakers; program providers; and advocates.

The purpose of this publication is to illuminate the need for readiness, to narrate the story of one high-impact program, Career Guidance Washington, and to illustrate how partnerships can enhance college, career and life readiness initiatives by creating environments that generate the results we seek for students.

The message is multifold: Students need support. Case studies are helpful. Partnerships can work. Accordingly, this publication focuses on three main components:

- 1» **The State of Readiness.** This section details the need for access, frames current trends in college, career and life readiness, and discusses the importance of partnerships.
- 2» **Case Study on Personalizing Guidance.** This section offers a case study analysis from CSW's College Readiness Initiative, including an overview of the initiative, its partnerships and funded strategies and an impact assessment of its Career Guidance Washington program.
- 3» **Lessons Learned and Recommendations.** Recommendations for ways in which leaders from across sectors (philanthropy, business, community and education) can collaborate to create a more equitable future for all young people.

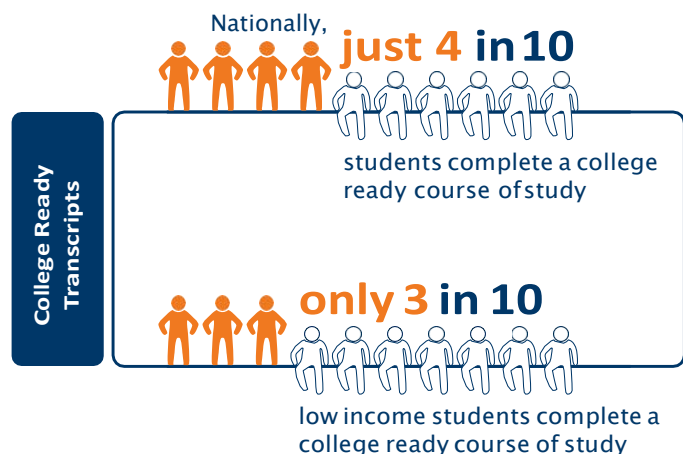
By working together, partners can ensure a personalized and student-centered approach to guidance with a focus on equity and access.

# THE STATE OF READINESS

Despite two decades of emphasis on college readiness, the majority of American youth leave high school unprepared for college and careers.

While there has been notable progress made in terms of graduation rates (marked by the highest rate to date at 83% in 2016<sup>1</sup>) along with a shift away from tracking students solely by GPA or test scores, there is still plenty of room for improvement. Graduation is not enough and a more personalized approach, including individual coaching and structured preparation, is imperative for schools to ensure all of their students are successful in college, career and life.

The sad truth is that most American students still aren't taking courses that prepare them for the future. **The Education Trust** reported that in 2013, only four of 10 students completed a course of study that made them college eligible and less than one in 10 completed a course of study that prepared them for college and careers (which includes three or more credits in a broad career field).<sup>2</sup> The data is even more disparaging for students from underrepresented populations.



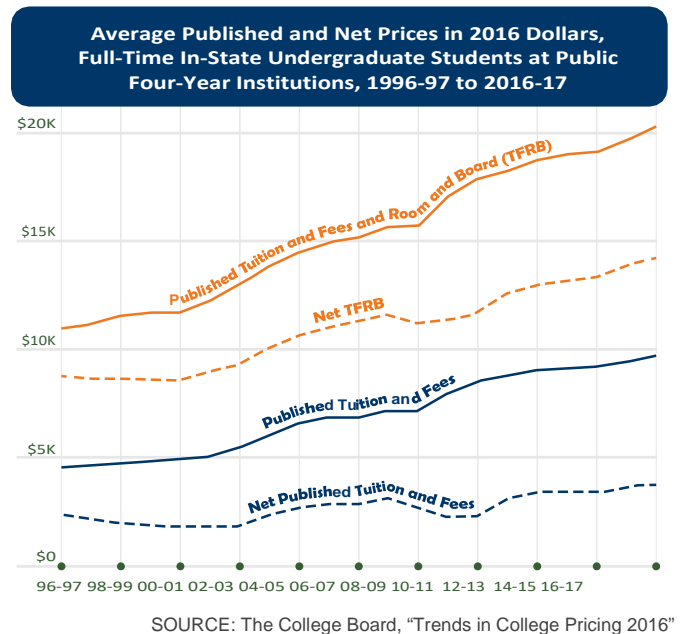
Additionally, the **Thomas B. Fordham Institute** indicates that **National Assessment of Educational Progress** (NAEP) scores in math and reading have been flat for 25 years—each year less than four out of 10 seniors rate as being “college ready.”<sup>3</sup> Because more than 10 percent of students drop out of school before even taking this test, we can conclude that, at least by traditional measures, about two-thirds of U.S. students leave school unprepared for success in college (despite a 31% increase in college enrollment from 2000 to 2014<sup>4</sup>). As Fordham’s Mike Petrilli said, “We’ve succeeded at motivating more young people to enroll, but we haven’t prepared more of them to succeed at it.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the cost of traditional college continues to escalate at about three percent per year.<sup>6</sup> The **College Board** chart on the next page reveals that much of the cost increase is due to the campus arms race (e.g., the push to build fancy dorms and upscale dining halls) while the bargain hunter will find net tuition (which takes into account financial aid, scholarships and grants) close to flat.

The combination of lack of preparation and rising costs demonstrates a need for more targeted support, including a personalized and student-centered approach to guidance. Even if more students are graduating from high school and attending college than ever before, it is irresponsible to send them off unequipped.

In today's world, the most important “exit slip” upon high school graduation is not simply the diploma students are handed as they walk across the stage, but the combination of a college-ready transcript, a work-ready resume and a portfolio of artifacts that demonstrate competence.

There are signs of progress indicating that we are undertaking important efforts to better prepare students for success in their postsecondary endeavors and life in general—and to provide them with meaningful engagement during middle and high school—through a personalized system that serves students more effectively.



## SIGNS OF PROGRESS

There are at least 10 positive trends leading to better college, career and life preparation. These signs of progress reflect the kind of work being conducted in forward-thinking schools.

- 1 **Personalized learning.** Learning can be personalized both from the inside-out (strengths, interests, skills) and the outside-in (developing new tools). Inexpensive devices and ubiquitous broadband means most K-12 students in the United States benefit from blended environments and some level of personalized learning. If this works as hoped, it should lead to more equitable access to readiness support.

### Personalized Learning Definition

*Tailoring learning* for each student's strengths, needs and interests—including enabling student voice and choice in *what, how, when and where they learn*—to provide flexibility and supports to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible.<sup>7</sup>

### Why Personalized Learning Matters

When each student has the opportunity to be supported and guided in a personalized way, their engagement and ultimate success will increase. In a personalized environment, students pursue their learning in meaningful ways rather than school being something “done to them.”

- 2 **Deeper student-centered learning.** Education foundations and networks have been promoting learning experiences that develop critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration (the “4Cs”). This effort began with the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a collaboration between education, business, community and government leaders established in 2002 to ensure students were equipped with skills they would need to thrive in a changing world, has developed broad support and renewed relevance and has been granted new license in federal policy.

- 3» **Growth mindset.** Thirty years of research makes it clear that a growth mindset (i.e., an appreciation of the importance of effort and persistence) is critical for college and career success. Similarly, the ability to manage yourself, collaborate with others and make good decisions (often called social-emotional learning or SEL) is widely recognized as a key to success in life. Mindset and self-management is being taught in advisory periods, incorporated into culture and climate and integrated across curriculum through extended challenges and project-based learning.

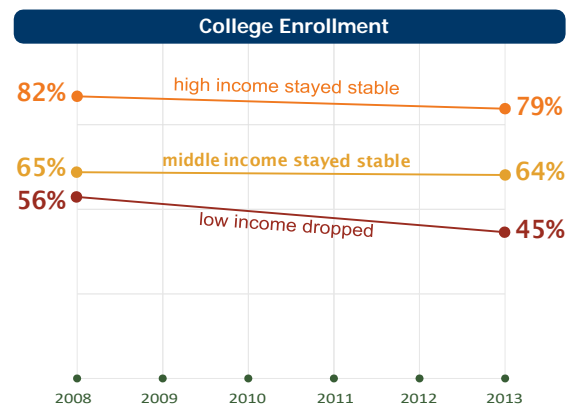
These broader aims of skills and dispositions are being expressed in updated high school graduate profiles (e.g., Next Generation Learning Challenges, “MyWays” and “Profile of a Graduate” examples from EdLeader21). These aspirations also focus on the ability to make good decisions, an increasingly important skill in school and life.

- 4» **Access to college preparatory and dual enrollment courses.** Many states, districts and networks have better aligned graduation requirements with college eligibility requirements and are improving access to dual enrollment opportunities.

- 5» **Higher graduation rates.** High school graduation rates increased from 71 percent in 1995 to 83 percent in 2015.<sup>8</sup> Some of the improvement is real while some is due to beneficial state record keeping, but nonetheless there has been steady improvement for 15 years.

- 6» **College enrollment.** There is a long-term trend toward increased participation in postsecondary education.<sup>9</sup>

However, low-income enrollments saw a big drop during the Great Recession between 2008 and 2012.<sup>10</sup> According to a report by the American Council on Education, “The rapid price increases in recent years, especially in the public college sector, may have led many students—particularly low-income students—to think that college is out of reach financially.”<sup>11</sup> Great Recession state divestment made the costs at public institutions grow faster than private colleges. The decline, primarily at the community college level, is also a function of the improving job market. Add the millions enrolled in new postsecondary options referenced in item 10 below and it is evident that participation in higher learning is exploding.



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

- 7» **Focus on college completion.** A decade ago, leading school networks observed that even though they were sending nearly all of their students to college, completion rates were disappointingly low. In addition to focusing on deeper learning and building persistence skills, new programs increased efforts to improve the college match process and support systems while in college (such as Aspire Public School’s College for Certain and Achievement First Alumni Support).

Higher education has also sharpened the focus on college persistence, using student data to improve support and communication to improve completion. Higher ed networks such as Complete College America and Achieving the Dream are focused on improving completion rates.

8» **Show what you know.** The world is moving toward demonstrated competence. In K-12, teachers and students are earning **badges** and **microcredentials**. Portfolios are increasingly being utilized to showcase artifacts of learning. Profiles, resumes and references provide evidence of work experiences.

9» **Readiness support structures, services & tools.** High achieving high schools have an **advisory system** that includes success monitoring, guidance, culture building activities and links to student supports. More than 50 **college access and success** organizations are making an impact. Schools like those featured in the accompanying case study have led the way with providing systematic processes for support.

Information systems that support high school scheduling, guidance and advisory systems are enabling better postsecondary choices.

10» **Rise of lifelong learning.** About 58 million people took free online courses last year.<sup>12</sup> While most were management courses, the top enrolled class was a **Learning How to Learn** course from Coursera. Add career and technical options, code schools, open education resources and educational apps to available online classes and there's an explosion of lifelong learning opportunities.

The economy demands more postsecondary learning. While these 10 trends are improving preparation for and access to postsecondary and lifelong learning, there is still a need for students, particularly those from underrepresented populations, to receive more personalized support.

## NEXT STEP: PERSONALIZING GUIDANCE

"The only thing more expensive than going to college is not going to college," said Georgetown's Tony Carnevale, noting that virtually all 12 million post-recession jobs created have gone to degree holders.<sup>13</sup> It's clear that degrees still matter, but there appears to be declining return on investment given increased cost and lingering employment uncertainty. With \$1.3 trillion in student debt, the new worst case scenario is to accumulate loan debt, but leave college before earning a degree.

Following a two-year investigation about young people charting a course to a career, **Generation Do It Yourself**, surfaced three very important lessons for students: earn as much free college credit as possible in high school, don't go to college without a focus and don't leave college without a degree.

In **Getting the Right Data to the Right People in the Right Way**, co-founder of Civitas Learning, Mark Milliron states that "Certifications matter and we know that 40 percent of enrolling students do not finish college — that's disproportionately hitting the poor who can least afford to take on debt." Milliron observes that mobile/modular learning and open resources are extending access but adding complexity to the higher education agenda. Yet he's still optimistic about engineered pathways like **Life Map** at **Valencia College** (where it's not about finding a major, it's about finding a purpose) and regional ecosystems that streamline transfers while promoting completion, and he's happy to see more credentials that count toward degrees.

Valuable postsecondary learning is more important than ever. However, the rising cost of college along with an increasingly complex postsecondary landscape has made navigating difficult and thoughtful decision-making critical.



Personalized guidance systems take on a more comprehensive and integrated approach than traditional models and contribute to all aspects of college and career readiness. In practice, the best student guidance systems are blended (leveraging technology), distributed (leveraging staff in addition to school counselors), scheduled (utilizing an advisory period) and employ many of the 10 functions of guidance below to ensure effective implementation and attainment of outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

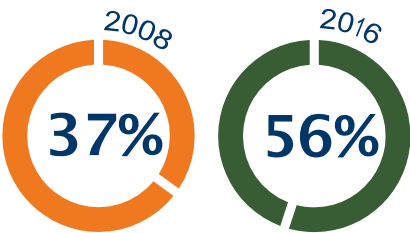
## 10 FUNCTIONS OF STUDENT-CENTERED GUIDANCE

These 10 functions form the spine of a next generation advising system. When done well, these functions are interconnected and enhance all aspects of readiness.

1. *Academic mindset and culture.* How students think about their learning matters. A sustained relationship with an advisor can improve student motivation and engagement.
2. *Understanding assessments.* In addition to knowing what will be expected of them under new assessments aligned with standards, students need explicit support to understand and successfully complete assessments such as the PSAT, ACT, SAT, ASVAB, state assessments and more. Advisory periods are perfect places to help prepare for and debrief after assessments.
3. *Academic monitoring.* Checking grades and assignments and engaging students in the review process at least weekly sets the stage for intervention when necessary.
4. *Homework help.* The advisory period can be a place for students to receive extra help or connect with opportunities for help.
5. *Course selection and transcript management.* A critical prerequisite for college and career readiness is a transcript that reflects readiness. Given increased personalization through the growth of course options and online learning, helping students build a thoughtful pathway and secure transcript is critical.
6. *Self-management.* Developing self-management habits can be discussed in advisory and reinforced with curriculum and productivity apps.
7. *Social emotional learning.* Closely related to self-management skills and mindset, social and emotional learning can help students understand who they are and how to interact effectively with others. The [Aspen Institute](#) summarizes this new set of expectations well with its [National Commission Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#). In partnership with [CASEL](#), the Aspen Institute recently launched the commission to build consensus around a lexicon, metrics and strategies. The goal is to more fully embrace and support academic goals and not be viewed as separate or optional.
8. *College guidance.* Good schools build college talk into their culture, college knowledge into their curriculum and arrange many college visits.
9. *Career guidance.* New tools (including video and virtual reality platforms) are helping to boost awareness of career options. Advisory periods can be used to prepare for internships and other work experiences.
10. *Student counseling and referrals.* In a distributed counseling model, teachers and advisors are often the first to spot potential problems, provide first-line support and refer students to a school counselor.

Half of these functions will soon be aided by artificial intelligence which will help advisors spot problems, make course recommendations, identify resources, match work-based learning opportunities and suggest postsecondary options.

Some schools and programs, like those featured in the College Spark Washington case study portion of this paper along with many others, have made measurable progress and serve as a beacon for others to follow. As an example of this progress, schools that were part of the CRI initiative (all of which are considered low-income schools) increased college-ready transcripts from 37 percent to 56 percent of their student populations while national averages hovered around only 30 percent for low-income students.<sup>15</sup> Note: national averages included a three year science requirement, while Washington only had a two-year requirement.

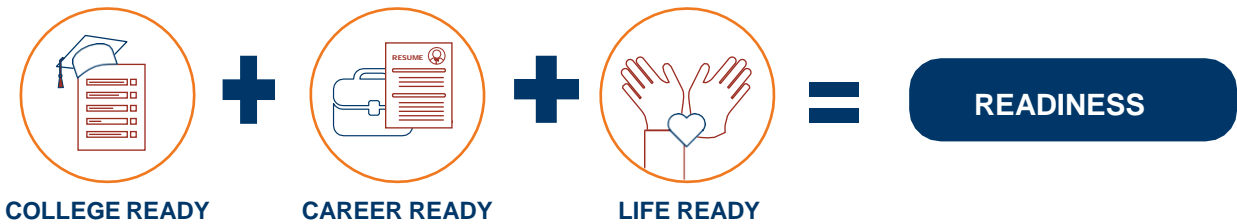


Additional data points such as college enrollment, college going culture and others have also shown improvement. Schools and students need support to reach these broader aims; what students need to know and be able to do is as expansive as ever.

## GUIDING TOWARD A BROADER DEFINITION OF READINESS

As Bob Wise, former governor of West Virginia, indicated: **ten years ago, a more narrow definition of readiness prevailed** with a heavy focus on standards. But now we are working to personalize all of education, including guidance. Along with the signs of progress noted above, the shift to personalized guidance will help students integrate—not separate—their core academic preparation, soft skills and future planning. As the science of learning evolves, we have a better understanding of how academic mastery, applied experience and social-emotional skills are essential components of **really ready** students.

Accordingly, the definition of readiness has expanded and the need to provide adequate support for students is more important than ever. The **American Association of School Administrators** (AASA) has launched an initiative called **Redefining Ready** to include three main indicators:



**College Ready.** AASA College Ready components include academic indicators and standardized testing benchmarks. Academic indicators include a combination of 2.8 GPA threshold along with AP, IB and/or Dual credit options. Standardized testing benchmarks are set by minimum scores on the SAT and ACT (ranging from 18 to 23).<sup>16</sup> Students are considered college ready if they meet the criteria for either benchmark.

**Career Ready.** Components include identification of a career interest or cluster and meeting certain behavioral and experiential benchmarks such as 90 percent attendance, 25 hours of community service, a workplace learning experience, an industry credential, a dual credit career pathway course, military options and/or two or more co-curricular activities.<sup>17</sup>

**Life Ready.** Being life ready means having the grit and perseverance to accomplish goals. Life ready students have a growth mindset that enables them with the confidence to both dream and achieve big in the future and the social emotional skills to self-manage and work effectively with others.<sup>18</sup>

## PARTNERSHIPS MATTER

The rise of an automated economy means communities must make increasing the percentage of adults ready for skilled employment and continued learning a critical priority. Yet in most communities, there is no one who owns that metric. Schools and colleges play an important role, but often require a partnership with business and civic and philanthropic leaders to mobilize resources around a shared objective. Chambers of commerce (like the **LA Chamber of Commerce**) and business and education compacts (like the **Boston Private Industry Council** and **UNITE-LA**) serve an integral role by advocating for job-ready skills and creating work-based learning experiences. Civic and philanthropic leaders can facilitate shared employment goals, drive emerging job clusters and help ensure a thick web of youth and family support services.

School design partners like **New Tech Network** help schools form a culture, curriculum and supports that prepare students for college and careers. Talent development partners support educator preparation with an adopted learning model. Curriculum networks like **Project Lead The Way** (PLTW) deliver blended learning experiences in STEM subjects. Program partners like **AVID** provide guidance and system support.

Personalized learning is promising but challenging to implement. Most schools require **inspiration and intermediation** to make the transformation. Some of the potential school partnership roles are shown on next page. Many functions can be provided by local partners although additional support may need to come from regional or national providers. The **XQ Super School initiative** is one example of a national partner seeking to rethink high school. All XQ-selected schools showed structures for taking a personalized and student-centered approach to student engagement.

#### Local Partners

- Supports for family and youth
- Funding for experiments, extra support, scaling
- Service delivery and implementation support
- Tech support of hardware/ infrastructure
- Advocacy for children, programs, schools
- Incubation for people, tools, and schools
- Conveners of ecosystem players
- Harbormaster: coordinates efforts
- College access and dual enrollment

#### Regional & National Partners

- Leadership development (**EdLeader21**)
- Program design and delivery (**AVID**)
- Curriculum design and support (**PLTW**)
- School design and platform networks (**New Tech Network**)
- Professional learning and microcredentials (**Bloomboard**)
- Research, evaluation or research-based advice (**BrightBytes**)
- Feedback from short cycle trials (**LEAP Innovations**)
- Seed funding for innovations (**REACH, Kapor, Owl**)
- Talent recruitment and development (**Relay GSE**)

With all of these partnership categories, it is important to align partner efforts around common goals and metrics—an effort often called collective action. Such effort requires a rich learning ecosystem to produce and scale innovations.<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that a gap exists between students being ready to graduate from high school and students being ready to succeed in college, career or life. To close that gap, readiness must become a function of how students see themselves as learners in addition to their knowledge, skills and dispositions. What follows is an example of how one organization embraced this broader definition of readiness and leveraged collective action to bridge the gap for students in the state of Washington.

# SUCCESSFUL CASE STUDY: COLLEGE READINESS INITIATIVE

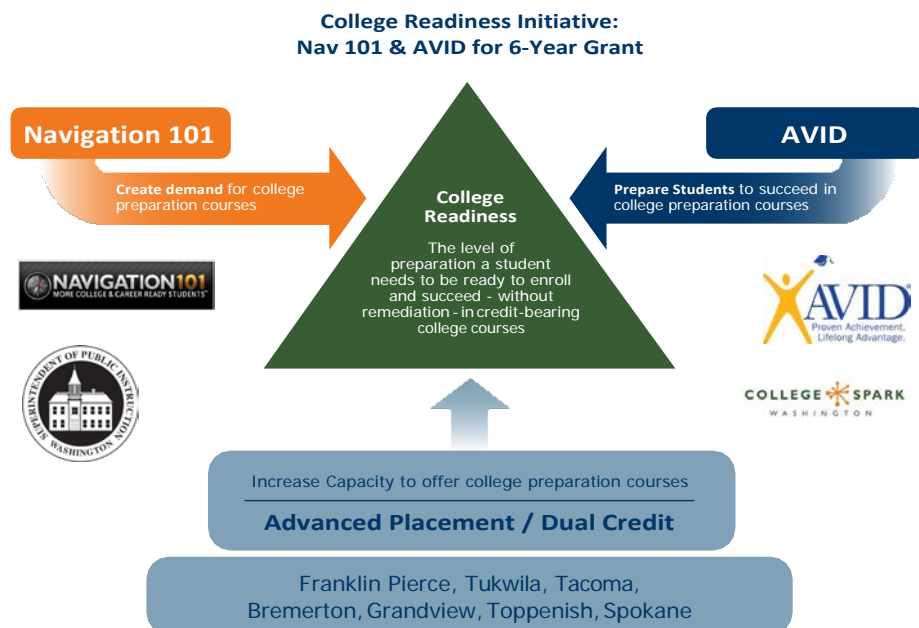
## BACKGROUND

Almost 10 years ago, **College Spark Washington** (CSW) was troubled by data that is all too familiar today. Specifically, the board was concerned about postsecondary attainment and remediation rates, which were indicating that many students were ill-equipped to overcome barriers to their career goals. They also noticed that students from underrepresented populations were particularly disadvantaged. At the time, only 21 percent of low-income students were considered to be adequately prepared for college-level work compared to 54 percent of students in higher socioeconomic brackets.<sup>20</sup>

## What Is the College Readiness Initiative?

To address these issues and to help more low-income students graduate high school “college-ready,” CSW invested \$9.5 million in 2006 to fund a nine-year **College Readiness Initiative** (CRI). Working in partnership with Washington State’s education agency, the **Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction** (OSPI), the CRI provided six-year grants to 39 low-income schools in an effort to prepare more students for college and career.

College Spark Washington’s theory of change (as captured in the following image) asserted that by providing the right supports through implementation of Career Guidance Washington and/or AVID and emphasizing the importance of rigorous coursework, college readiness rates would increase. The Initiative changed cultures and drove metrics by equipping students to focus on who they were, where they were headed and what it would take to get there. Throughout the CRI, College Spark collected data that supported valuable insights into improving school cultures and implementing large-scale readiness programs within.



## CRI Partnerships

After determining the problem with the current state of readiness and developing desired outcomes, College Spark conducted research to identify solutions and potential partners. Wanting to make an impact in their home state of Washington, CSW staff researched over 50 programs that were being utilized throughout the state.

After identifying the state's lead agency (OSPI) as the intermediary partner and AVID and Career Guidance Washington (CGW) as program partners, College Spark launched a competitive grant process to identify implementing partners. Details about these and other CRI partners are outlined below.

### KEY PARTNERS FOCUSED ON COMMON GOALS

#### **Funder & Lead Partner: College Spark Washington**

College Spark Washington funds programs across Washington state that help low-income students become college-ready and earn their degrees. College Spark makes grants to organizations and institutions that are helping low-income students improve their academic achievement, prepare for college life and graduate from college.

College Spark has awarded more than \$45 million to college readiness and degree completion programs since becoming grantmakers in 2005. In addition to the CRI, some examples of CSW-supported initiatives include Guided Pathways (pathway to a degree), the College-Ready Math initiative, Community Grants Program, Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count and more.

#### **Intermediary Partner: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction**

Working in partnership with Washington State's education agency, the Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI), College Spark's CRI initiative provided six-year grants to 39 low-income schools in order to prepare more students for college and career.

#### **Implementing Partners: Low-Income Schools**

Ranging from urban to rural, there were 39 low-income schools (16 high schools, 19 middle schools and 4 combination schools) from 13 districts. Participating schools received funding to implement CGW or AVID (or both). Additionally, schools could apply for additional funds to increase dual credit access and success through programs such as Advanced Placement, Project Lead the Way, and College in the Schools.

#### **Program Partner: OSPI & Career Guidance Washington**

Career Guidance Washington or CGW (formerly called Navigation 101) is a college and career readiness initiative which includes advisory curriculum, student-led conferences and personal learning plans.

#### **Program Partner: AVID**

AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) is a California-based, but internationally implemented academic support program that helps students prepare for college and succeed in challenging college prep courses.

#### **Advocacy Partners**

In addition to the formal partners listed above, numerous advocacy partners were part of College Spark's CRI process. Such partners include, but are not limited to: Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, Partnership for Learning, Ready Washington, League of Education Voters, Washington School Counselors Association, Grantmakers for Education.

## COLLEGE SPARK STORY

In 2004, College Spark Washington became a grant-making foundation with a focus on improving college readiness and success for Washington's low-income students. The College Readiness Initiative was one of our first major investments. A great deal of thought and planning went into the decision to support an initiative centered around AVID and Career Guidance Washington; we wanted to invest in programs that had a strong evidence base and were gaining traction in Washington.

The issue of college readiness is complex. It encompasses academic and social-emotional readiness; expectations and support; helping students develop meaningful goals; and helping them understand the difference between various postsecondary options. One of the things that excited us about Career Guidance Washington was the way it addressed each of these aspects of college and career readiness. CGW utilizes a cohesive advising system that creates opportunities for teachers to mentor students and provides all students with the information they need to make the most of high school while preparing for college.

Our experience with this initiative has shown what is possible when we make long-term investments in partners and schools that share our vision. It wasn't until the fourth year of the initiative that we started to see progress in student outcomes. If we hadn't made a long-term commitment to Career Guidance Washington we wouldn't have been around long enough to see those gains, which were possible only because everyone involved in the initiative was able to be honest about what was working versus what wasn't and each partner was willing to make changes along the way. Ultimately, it was the work of the school principals, counselors and teachers that drove the improvement in college readiness, which was demonstrated throughout the initiative. Their commitment to preparing students for college and delivering guidance in a more equitable way is what made the difference.

—College Spark Washington Executive Director Christine McCabe  
& Senior Program Officer Heather Gingerich

## Desired Outcomes

The desired long-term outcomes for the CGW initiative can be organized by the following three themes:

- » **Culture of College Readiness.** *Goals:* Increase school emphasis on college preparation for all students, including aspirations, student culture and staff culture.
- » **Credentials for College Readiness.** *Goals:* Increase preparation for college, as reflected in advanced course enrollment, completion of dual enrollment courses, transcript readiness and graduation rates.
- » **College Enrollment reflecting Readiness.** *Goals:* Improvement in student college-going, remediation, persistence and completion rates.

To achieve these outcomes, College Spark provided implementation support over the course of six years in order to maximize student impact and lay the foundation for sustainability. This case study is part of a two-year impact study that assesses outcome data, implementation status, and sustainability success efforts.



## FEATURED PROGRAM: CAREER GUIDANCE WASHINGTON

The CRI funded two unique but complementary programs in order to maximize and compare their impact. This paper focuses on the Career Guidance Washington (CGW) program, which emphasized personalizing guidance and planning for postsecondary options.

### Career Guidance Washington (CGW)

**Goal:** To foster student agency and prepare students for college and career.

**What:** A personalized college, career and life guidance program, complete with advisory curriculum, student-led conferences and personalized learning plans for high school and beyond.

**Where:** Washington State, led by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Other states can access the curriculum by completing a simple form online.

**Who:** Of the 39 grant-funded CRI schools, 19 schools (9 high schools and 10 middle schools) from 7 districts implemented the CGW program. Due to OSPI's whole-state adoption of the CGW curriculum, the number of schools utilizing CGW in Washington State grew to more than 500 middle and high schools across the state during the CRI period.



#### Student-Centered Targets

The Career Guidance Washington learning experience focuses on the following themes. Graduates are:



#### ACADEMICALLY ELIGIBLE

transcript readiness, requirements, Dual Credit, personalization



#### FINANCIALLY LITERATE

understanding credit, personal finance, and responsibility



#### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNERS

growth mindset, student agency, collaboration, communication and relationships



#### SELF-AWARE

strengths and interest inventories



#### PREPARED FOR COLLEGE

college awareness, admissions, financial aid



#### PREPARED FOR CAREER

options, pathways, certifications, skills, internships



## KEY ELEMENTS



### Design Components

All students in Career Guidance  
Washington experience the following:

A small group advisory for each student. Ideally, students are in the same group for 3-4 years and meet once per day or once per week led by a teacher, counselor and/or administrator.

30 lessons per grade for grades 6-12 with a focus on the following themes, which help guide education, career and life decisions:

- + Career and College Development
- + Learning Techniques
- + Ownership of Learning
- + Metacognitive Skills
- + Transition Skills
- + High School & Beyond Plan
- + Academic Eligibility
- + Financial Literacy

**ADVISORY**  
1:1 relationship  
to personalize  
readiness

**STUDENT-LED  
CONFERENCES**  
to share progress,  
goals, and plans.

**CURRICULUM**  
projects promoting  
college, career, and  
life readiness

**STUDENT-  
DRIVEN  
SCHEDULING**  
to ensure transcript  
readiness

**PERSONALIZED  
LEARNING PLAN**  
focused on strengths,  
goals, and action  
steps

**DATA AND  
EVALUATION**  
ongoing metrics

Students lead an annual conference between themselves, an advisor and parents. Conferences serve to link a discussion about career interests and postsecondary plans with registration for the following year's classes.

Schools assist students with course selection planning. School counselors encourage students to select rigorous and dual credit courses and consider student choice.

Students fulfill a state graduation requirement by completing a High School and Beyond Plan, a portfolio-based plan that reflects strengths, experiences and goals that evolve each year, which is shared at student-led conferences.

These elements are best implemented with strong program management, including an emphasis on evidence-based evaluation process with a focus on student progress; vertical teaming structures for middle and high schools to establish transition plans and early warning systems; and strong guidance counseling leadership that is integrated with the school's counseling program.

## Impact: Making Progress Toward Outcomes

In order to gauge CGW's impact, we organized and collected dozens of indicators and data points related to the program's central themes:

- » Creating a school culture of college readiness
- » Ensuring all students earn credentials for college readiness
- » Increasing college enrollment and persistence

### CULTURE OF COLLEGE READINESS

One goal of the CRI was to increase emphasis on college preparation for all students within participating schools, including school culture, student aspirations and parent engagement. And as data will show, the Career Guidance Washington program succeeded at making significant gains in precisely these three areas.

School culture. The CRI Program's positive impact on the college-going culture of grantee schools has consistently been cited as a key outcome. Following the conclusion of the grant period, Getting Smart conducted two surveys of program stakeholders. Survey responses indicate significant changes in the college-going culture of CGW schools. In fact, 91 percent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the "Implementation of CGW has changed the college-going culture of students at my school."

#### Grandview High School: College-going Culture

At Grandview High School in Grandview, Washington, all students have advisory. All students create a plan and share academic progress and exemplar work through regularly scheduled student-led conferences. Numerous aspects of the initiative are integrated with core subjects. For example, in Language Arts students work on a personal statement for college essay and in Social Studies students conduct a civic volunteer project that connects to their interests. Kindness matters, too. Grandview emphasizes social awareness through community service projects.

Grandview believes that this change in school culture is positively impacting student readiness. The school has seen the number of students with college-ready transcripts increase from 21 percent in 2011 to 72 percent in 2016.<sup>21</sup> Their success is also illustrated by personal student experiences:

***"We had a young man who came from Mexico at the start of his freshman year. He spoke no English. Through building a college-going culture he ended up being a National Honor Society student who took multiple AP classes."***

—Steve Long, Principal at Grandview High School

Student aspirations. In Washington, one indicator of how many students aspire to attend college is the number of students that sign up for the College Bound Scholarship on an annual basis. The number of students signing up for the scholarship in Career Guidance Washington schools has steadily increased every year, leading to a 30 percent jump between the 2007-2008 school year and the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>22</sup>

Parent engagement. One of the most compelling pieces of data regarding CGW's impact on school culture is represented by The Group's (BERC) parent participation data on student-led conferences (SLCs). Student-led conferences are a unique component of CGWs programming for good reason. It turns out that when students are not only actively involved in their conference, but are actually in charge of leading them, a much greater number of parents show up to participate. When looking at the difference in parent participation between 2009-2010 (which represents a combination of traditional and SLC conference participation) and 2010-2011 (for SLCs only), the numbers jump 10 whole percentage points, increasing from 64 percent to 74 percent participation.<sup>23</sup>


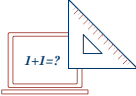



## **CREDENTIALS FOR COLLEGE READINESS**

As previously stated, the details of a student's transcript are an even more important measure of readiness than a diploma. A transcript is a reflection of course taking patterns, academic rigor, persistence and much more. The ticket to a college education starts with a transcript, but before showing the data, it's important to know what is meant by a transcript "college ready."

## Transcripts 101

Generally speaking, college admission requirements are more rigorous than high school graduation requirements. Washington State's graduation requirements are not atypical, so we'll use them as an example.

As you'll see in the chart below, Washington has four core subject areas in which the high school requirements are below admission requirements (Language Arts, Science, Social Studies and World Language). This discrepancy can lead to a false sense of security for many students. In response, Washington State has proposed a new set of requirements so that more students reach the **Washington College Academic Distribution Requirements** (CADRs).

SUBJECT	Typical HS Graduation Requirements <sup>24</sup>	EdTrust Standard for College Ready Requirements <sup>25</sup>	Typical WA College Requirements (CADRs <sup>26</sup> )*	Proposed 2019 Washington State HS Graduation Requirements <sup>27</sup>
 Language Arts	3	4	4	4
 Math	3	3	3	3
 Science	2	3	2	3
 Social Studies	2.5	3	3	3
 World Language	N/A	2	2	2

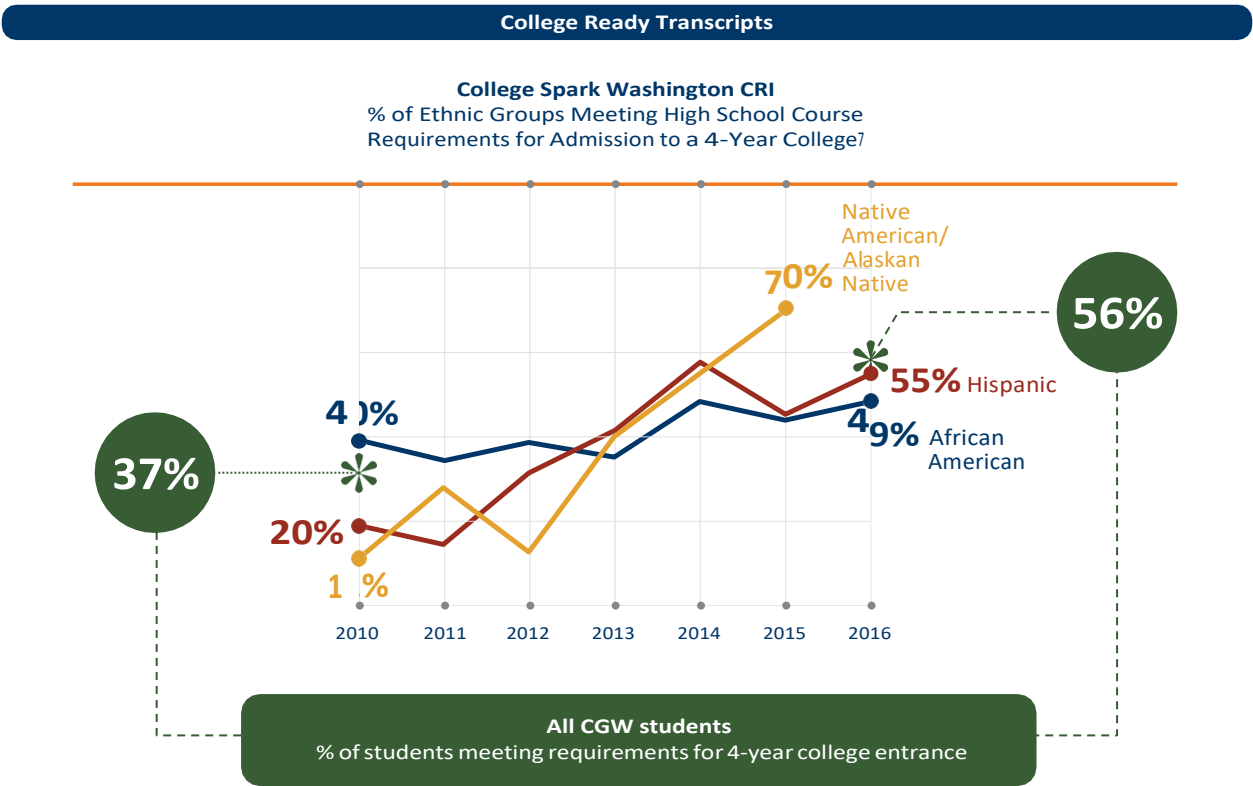
*\*basis for transcript readiness in this study.*

There are typically also physical education/health courses, elective credits and other requirements (such as completing a state assessment, project or personalized learning plan) that are not reflected in this table.

Understanding and navigating high school graduation requirements in addition to college admission requirements is not a simple task. The CRI was built upon the belief that demystifying this process through student-informed scheduling, including education regarding GPA, transcripts, requirements and academic eligibility, would provide clarity and reduce confusion. Judging by the changes in transcript data for CGW schools, the belief was accurate.

**Transcript Data.** At the beginning of the initiative, CGW school data around transcript readiness indicated that, on average, only 37 percent of students had a college-ready transcript. Considering that all CGW schools are classified as low-income (with some up to 99 percent free or reduced lunch), this starting point is very similar to data from the Education Trust’s Meandering Toward Graduation report, which shows that only three out of 10 low-income students complete a college-ready course of study.

However, by the end of the grant, 56 percent of students achieved college-ready transcripts, with even greater gains and gap-closing amongst certain populations.



Another example of how a change in school culture can drive positive change in transcript readiness comes from Toppenish High School in Toppenish, WA.

### **Toppenish High School: A Positive Impact on Student Performance**

Toppenish is a STEM-focused, rural school district in eastern Washington. Their mission is that all students will graduate as lifelong learners, productive citizens and problem-solvers. To achieve this mission, the school implemented CGW in middle and high school and participates in **Project Lead the Way**. With these initiatives and advisories, the school far outperforms comparable schools in college-ready transcripts and college-going rates.<sup>28</sup>

When students are explicitly taught about course requirements starting in middle school, the success rate of college-ready transcripts increases. Toppenish HS increased transcript readiness rates from **21 percent in 2012** to **57 percent in 2016**.<sup>29</sup>

***“Students come to our school with major credit deficiencies and low success levels in traditional educational settings. CGW has not only changed the way that our students approach their future lives, but also the way that they conduct themselves in the now. Through the support of advisory and the guidance from our counselor, the materials help students grow as individuals and sort out their struggles in their daily lives that have interfered with their academic performance.”***

—Shawn Hayden, Teacher at Toppenish High School

Graduation rates. CGW graduation data speaks for itself. In CGW grant-funded schools, graduation rates were 20 percent higher on average than in comparable schools.<sup>30</sup> Some individual schools showed even more remarkable gains. For example, Rogers High School in Spokane, WA showed a graduation rate increase of 34 percentage points between 2008 and 2014.

### **Rogers High School: Leaders Say Yes**

Lori Wyborne from John R. Rogers High School in Spokane was named Washington State’s 2015 High School Principal of the Year because of the school’s significant turnaround under her leadership. She credits advisory as being one of the reasons that student college and career readiness increased.

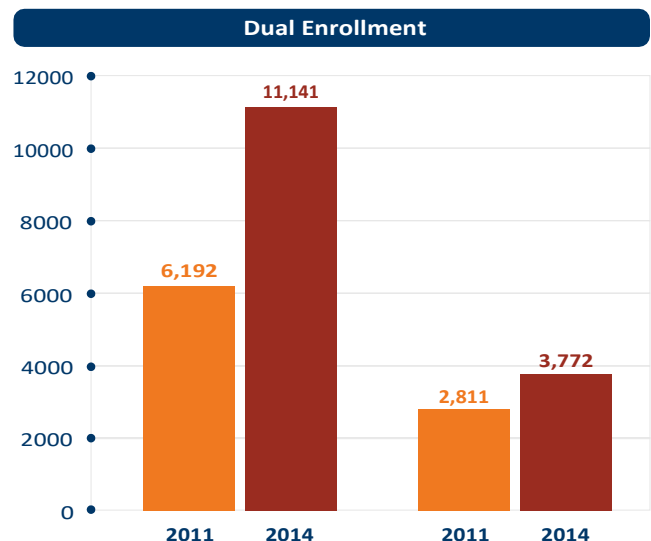
It is crucial for school leadership to be engaged in student guidance and counseling. It’s not unusual for Wyborne to meet 1:1 with a dozen students in one day. When students see that their principal cares about their social and emotional health and feel supported on multiple levels, they take notice and are more likely to succeed.

Rogers High School had a graduation rate of **49 percent at the start of the CGW grant (2008)**, but in response to these changes, the rate jumped to nearly **89 percent in 2015**.<sup>31</sup>

*“Students need to build relationships with adults. They need a lot of support. It takes all of us working with all our kids. We need social workers that can help families navigate the system. We can talk all day about all the statistics that come to the building and we could let every one of those be a barrier. We are not the NFL. We do not get to pick our team. We have to do whatever it takes to make students win....How many kids will be successful in your school? Every year at graduation their stories just stun me. Their stories amaze.”<sup>32</sup>*

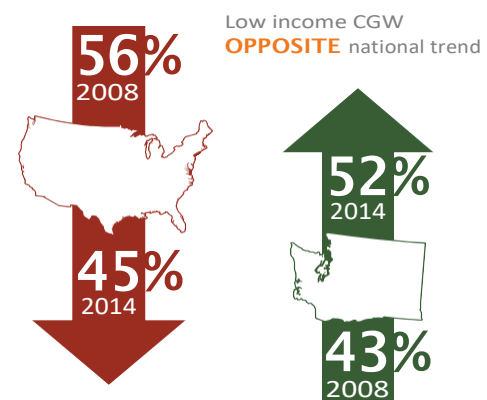
— Lori Wyborney, Principal at Rogers High School

**Dual Enrollment.** Dual enrollment (i.e., any dual credit on a high school transcript from Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Running Start, College in High School or Tech Prep) is an important indicator of college readiness. CGW Dual credit data from BERC for 2010 to 2014 indicates an increase in both the number of students earning dual credit and the total number of dual credits earned. Between the 2010-2011 and 2013-2014 school years, the number of students earning dual credit showed a 31 percent increase (from 2,811 to 3,772 students) and the total number of dual credits earned almost doubled (nearly an 80 percent increase from 6,192 to 11,141 credits). In total, the average number of credits per student went from just above two to almost three. Not only are more students earning dual credits, but on average, each student is earning more credits.<sup>33</sup>



## COLLEGE ENROLLMENT REFLECTING READINESS

**College Enrollment.** While national data showed that college enrollment for low-income students decreased significantly from 2008 to 2013 (over 10 percent),<sup>34</sup> data from CGW schools did exactly the opposite. College enrollment rates for low-income students at CGW schools increased from 43 percent in 2008 to 56 percent in 2013.



HS graduates who **ATTENDED EITHER A 2 OR 4 YEAR COLLEGE** in the academic year immediately following their high school graduation.

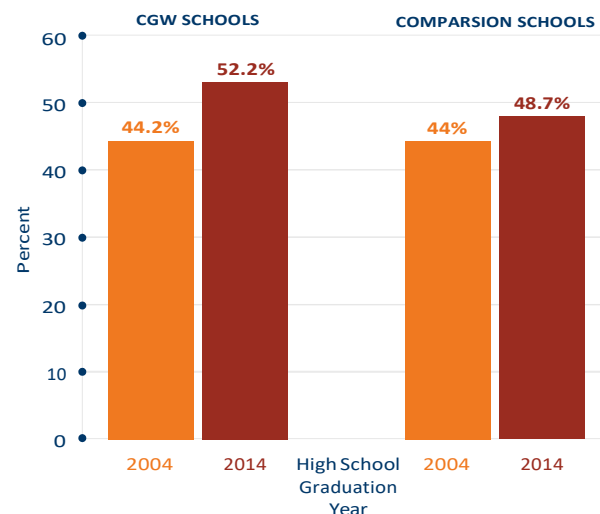
### The Three Keys to College Persistence

College persistence requires thoughtful planning to sustain success. Persistence rates can be accelerated through different tools, including motivation builders, markers of ability and momentum attainments.

- » Motivation: According to an [Inside Higher Ed](#) article, universities must take the time and make the effort to understand how a student's experience shapes their motivation to persist and then figure out ways in which the university can enhance that motivation. Student motivation is most strongly influenced by three factors: self-efficacy, a sense of belonging and perception of the value of curriculum.<sup>35</sup>
- » Markers: Every student has a unique set of indicators that impact his or her ability to persist. An [American Institutes for Research study](#) identified three categories of student-level indicators affecting college persistence:
  - » Pre-college indicators—preparation for college
  - » College indicators—academic behaviors and social experience
  - » Life experience indicators—other ancillary factors<sup>36</sup>
- » Momentum: The [Community College Research Center](#) (CCRC) produced a report on the importance of students building “momentum points” through specific college prep experiences and attainments leading to higher likelihood and ability to persist through college. Momentum is built in three areas: Academic Knowledge and Skills, Noncognitive Skills and College Cultural Capital.<sup>37</sup>

College Direct. When looking at the immediate college enrollment rate (or college-direct rate) as defined by the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), data for the entire U.S. shows that 68 percent of students who completed high school in 2014 enrolled in college for the fall immediately following graduation.<sup>38</sup>

When looking at BERC's data on CGW college-direct rates (defined as high school graduates who attended either a two or four-year college any time in the academic year immediately following their high school graduation), schools increased their college-direct rates from 2004 to 2014 by 8.2 percentage points (44 percent to 52.2 percent) as opposed to comparison schools whose rates increased by only 4.7 percentage points during the same time period.<sup>39</sup>





Persistence. Again at the national level, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported that the 2013 to 2014 average persistence rate from the first to second year of college is 59 percent for students returning to the same institution and 69 percent for students returning to any U.S. institution.

Looking at College Spark Schools, persistence rates of students from CGW schools are significantly higher than their comparison schools. BERC found “there are differences between the [CGW] CRI schools and the comparison schools.”<sup>40</sup> Additional data on persistence will be available in 2018.

## Implementation

### **Critical Design Components for Successful Implementation**

All students in Career Guidance Washington experience the following:

- » Advisory: 1:1 relationship to personalize readiness
- » Curriculum: projects promoting college, career, and life readiness
- » Personalized Learning Plan and Portfolio: focused on strengths, goals, and action steps; fulfills High School and Beyond Plan graduation requirement
- » Student-Led Conferences: to share progress, goals, and plans
- » Student-Driven Scheduling: to ensure transcript readiness
- » Data and Evaluation: ongoing metrics

According to stakeholder survey responses, incorporating and embedding the CGW components above has directly benefitted participating schools. When asked about the strengths of their CGW implementation, responses across schools were often very similar and represented four central themes:

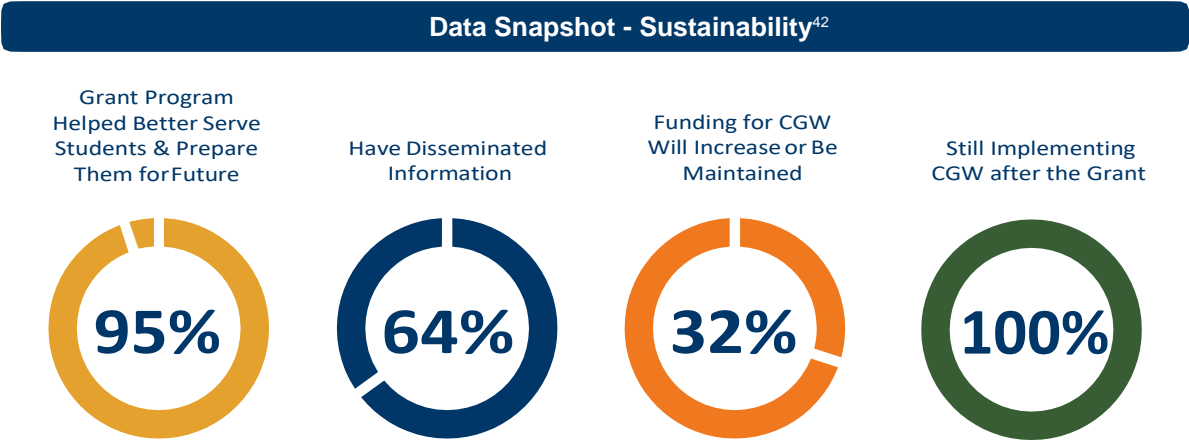
- » The impact on school culture
- » The ability to customize curriculum to meet needs
- » Staff commitment to the programming and the community built
- » The consistency provided

Over a year after the end of the grant, all schools were implementing personal learning plans, and all but one school was still implementing advisory, including enhancements such as student-led conferences, student-driven scheduling and personalized learning plans. However, schools did indicate that the most difficult component to implement was the portfolio portion of personalized learning plans.<sup>41</sup>

The most successful schools embedded all components as part of a Comprehensive Guidance Program. The podcast [Why Guidance Matters for College and Career Readiness](#) speaks to the critical role of school counselors in the process. Advisory and guidance are essential for students navigating career-focused decisions. The role in supporting students in figuring out their values and aspirations is crucial. The program is designed to prepare students for their future with support from an advisor and/or counselor with guidance curriculum and tools to develop a High School & Beyond Plan.

# Sustainability

Ultimately, College Spark’s CRI had its eye on the future, wanting to not only make an impact on the students served directly by the grant, but to impact future students as well. The goal was that schools be able to sustain the CRI programs on their own following the end of the grant period. Despite the fact that funding for CGW has decreased and we are two years beyond the end of the grant period, 100 percent of CGW schools continue to sustain the majority of the program components.



In summary, data around the impact on preparing students is both conclusive and positive. The biggest challenge, as with most initiatives, is how funding will be secured after the grant period.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the status of readiness in America and the lessons of CRI—many of which are articulated in this related [podcast](#)—the following recommendations are offered.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS AND SUPPORT PROVIDERS

- » **Visit schools.** Visiting high performing schools can be the best way to learn about the culture, practices and systems that prepare young people for college, careers and life. Getting Smart prepared a list of [100 Middle & High Schools Worth Visiting](#). Included in the list are several of the CGW schools from this initiative.
- » **Visit systems.** Getting Smart compiled a [list of 30 school districts](#) that are changing the trajectory of both education and their communities by working on blended, personalized and competency-based learning.
- » **Partner with organizations.** There are numerous organizations boosting college access and success, see:
  - » [12 SEL Organizations Making a Difference](#)
  - » [50 Organizations Boosting College Access and Success](#).
- » **Encourage mutual responsibility.** “Get every educator in your building involved in advising.”<sup>43</sup>
- » **Make it schoolwide.** A whole school model shifts the school culture.
- » **Embed SEL.** Integrate social-emotional learning across the curriculum.<sup>44</sup>
- » **Model resilience.** Challenges will include funding, time and full faculty involvement in advising.
- » **Use tools.** There are a growing number of guidance platforms and applications. Some are reviewed in this report: [Personalizing and Guiding College and Career Readiness](#).

*“College Spark Washington was brilliant in doing a sustained multi-year initiative to enhance opportunities for sustainability. Continued partnership with OSPI to continue funding is key.”*

—Dana Foster, School Leader

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVOCATES AND POLICY MAKERS

The **National College Access Network** (NCAN) provides a comprehensive policy framework.<sup>45</sup> Highlights and additional examples are included below.

- » **Goals.** Set a state attainment goal for the population and include both traditional and nontraditional students in the goal.
- » **Aligned aid.** Ensure state financial aid programs are aligned with state economic goals to expand postsecondary and economic opportunities for all students.
- » **Completion-focused.** Design state financial aid programs to promote college and career readiness, access and completion for all students.
- » **Funding.** Encourage/establish funding strategy for higher education that helps achieve the state attainment goal and is aligned with workforce needs.
- » **Dual enrollment.** Make college credit and dual enrollment opportunities available to every student through college in the high school, high school students on college campuses and online courses. Make course funding portable and avoid double payments to make the program scalable and sustainable.
- » **CTE.** Make high-quality certificate programs that meet state workforce needs available to all students.
- » **Alignment.** Ensure high school graduation requirements align with college acceptance requirements.
- » **Credit transfer.** Make community college credit transferable to any state institution of higher learning.
- » **Data.** Implement a statewide longitudinal data system that links postsecondary outcomes to K-12 education.

*“The best policy is leveraging good practice. How do you leverage that to work for the millions of traditionally underserved students in policy? Use good practice is the lever to do it and to demonstrate what the policy ought to be; don’t just try to enact the policy to get you the practice.”*

— Bob Wise, Former Governor of West Virginia and  
President of the Alliance for Excellent Education (All4Ed)

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

- » **Set clear goals.** Be clear on goals and objectives and continue to circle back to those when conditions change or results aren't as hoped.
- » **Know your students.** Know the student population you're working with.
- » **Know the community.** Understand the unique strengths and challenges within the community that intersect with your goals.
- » **Approach with humility and respect.** Form a true partnership (i.e., everybody as an equal). "People don't want to have something imposed on them."<sup>46</sup>
- » **Recognize roles.** According to Governor Wise, capitalize on what each partner brings to the table, what they do well and what part of the mission they can carry.<sup>47</sup>
- » **Research.** Conduct front-end research to ensure selection of quality programs.
- » **Create opportunities.** Constantly seek to broaden partnership opportunities. Create opportunities for others to join.
- » **Teamwork.** Provide deep implementation support. "We all need each other. We can't accomplish what we want to accomplish without each other."<sup>48</sup>
- » **Invest.** Take the long-term view.
- » **Diversify partnerships.** Establish a diverse set of partnership relationships up front (public, private, government) and realize that things can change. Connect to both local and national initiatives for a combination of grassroots and research-based support.
- » **Manage data.** Emphasize both quantitative and qualitative measures. Establish a process to disseminate learnings.

*"You have to take the long view [regarding readiness]. Focusing on the things you can change and connecting the work you're doing with the work that others are doing in the same area is a way to eventually get there."*

—Heather Gingerich, Senior Program Officer, College Spark Washington

# CONCLUSION

Postsecondary learning matters more than ever. Making a good postsecondary decision is likely to determine whether and how a young person participates in the innovation economy or is stuck in the service economy.

Because higher education has become so expensive, high schools must help young people make informed decisions. Students should go to college with a sense of purpose in order to persist and finish a degree.

- » **We are supporters of a personalized and student-centered approach to guidance** as we believe it is the key to engaging students and overcoming barriers, such as lack of preparation, rising costs and challenges to persistence.
- » **We have seen incredible examples** of personalized and student-centered approaches from College Readiness Initiative schools in Washington State and from many others across the country.
- » **We are hopeful** that all communities will work together to build upon the College Readiness Initiative model by moving toward a student-centered approach while building mindsets and support, all of which will help increase access, improve graduation rates, boost transcript readiness, enhance the focus on college completion and encourage lifelong learning.
- » **We believe that partnerships** are key to making this vision a reality. By working together, partners can ensure a personalized and student-centered approach to guidance with a focus on equity and access.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, **we believe that each student has unique contributions to make in the world** and deserves an opportunity to be at the center of his or her learning process.

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## STATE LEVEL LEADERSHIP

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[Bremerton High School](#), Bremerton Public Schools

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