

College Bound Scholarship: Washington's solution to improving completion rates for students from low-income families

Background

Washington currently ranks 40th nationally in the percentage of low-income students participating in postsecondary education (*Postsecondary Education Opportunity*, September 2010). Within 10 years, these students will represent 33 percent of the high school graduating class and, without intervention, 72 percent of students from low-income families are unlikely to aspire to college, let alone enroll.

The College Bound Scholarship supports the goals of the state's *2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* to make college more affordable and accessible, to raise educational attainment, and to create a college-going culture in Washington.

The College Bound Scholarship program was created in 2007 to provide an early commitment of financial assistance to low-income students who want to achieve the dream of a college education. The scholarship is available to students who meet income requirements for the free- and reduced-price lunch program, and who sign up in their 7th or 8th grade year.

Students pledge to graduate from high school, stay out of legal trouble, and gain admission to a participating campus. To receive the scholarship, students must meet the income standard at the time of enrollment (65 percent MFI).

Successes

Partnerships

The basis for successful sign-up and support efforts has been strong partnerships with the K-12 system, community-based and college access partners, and non-profit organizations. Statewide partners have included OSPI, SBE, AWSP, WSSDA, WASA, ESDs, CSF, WCAN, GEAR UP, TRiO, CCER, NELA, and more. A few of the strategies employed by these partners have been:

- College Success Foundation's placement of College Bound Counselors in each of the nine Educational Service Districts to assist individual schools, counselors, and teachers in reaching eligible students.
- Community-wide sign-up and support events hosted at local colleges.
- Targeted sign-ups such as a personalized letter from the school to eligible families and CB information in parent/teacher conferences.

A data-sharing agreement with OSPI allows schools and the HECB to monitor the progress of College Bound students.

Leveraged funding for support (state, federal & private)

A combination of state funding provided to OSPI and federal College Access Challenge Grant funding has provided resources for College Bound outreach and student support. Private funding has also been provided to partners to support local efforts.

Early investment will cover initial scholarship payouts

Coordinating with the State Need Grant (SNG), the College Bound Scholarship will fill the gap not covered by SNG for tuition at public rates plus a small allowance for books. In 2007, the Legislature allocated \$7.4 million which was invested in the GET pre-paid tuition program and has now grown to more than \$10 million. Those funds are anticipated to cover the first two years of payouts beginning in 2012.

Outreach & sign-up

To date, more than 88,000 students have applied for College Bound. For the first four cohorts, about 64 percent of eligible students applied. Nearly 74 percent of the most recent 8th grade cohort (in 2010-11) applied by the deadline. This trend is due in large part to the increasing number of 7th graders applying. Targeted outreach and support of schools and districts have led to more even sign-up numbers across the state.

Support for students in middle & high school

Many programs have folded College Bound into student identification and support services (TRiO, GEAR UP) across the state. There are several examples of community efforts to rally around College Bound students as a means to improve educational outcomes in their area. For example, Tacoma's "Tacoma Community Support Network" which includes the College Success Foundation, Tacoma Public Schools, and civic and community organizations, reviews data to evaluate the outcomes of College Bound students and targets support to students in need.

The Washington College Access Network of professionals has embraced College Bound as core to its mission. The Community Center for Educational Results is building a civic initiative to improve education in South Seattle and South King County and has identified College Bound as a "powerful system-changing action and strategy." These and many other examples of partnerships have recognized the importance of supporting students after they have taken the first step to apply and offer needed personalized intervention throughout the middle and high school years.

Postsecondary involvement

Many campuses have requested contact information for College Bound students to provide early outreach. Several have provided information in the "Campus Corner" section of the student newsletter JUST IMAGINE!! Campuses have also provided facilities and support to College Bound events.

In addition, 80 postsecondary support staff attended a summer workshop to discuss identifying, welcoming and supporting College Bound Students beginning in 2012. Dr. Scott Evenbeck shared lessons learned from Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis supporting twenty-first Century Scholars on campus. Sessions were presented regarding successful mentoring and retention strategies.

Suggested Solutions to Sustain Support

1) Scale successful sign up and support strategies statewide.

- Continue to develop opportunities for districts to share best practices with similar size/population districts.
- Ensure GEAR UP support is available in all schools with significant free- and reduced-price lunch populations.
- Strengthen coordinated efforts with OSPI – data sharing, nutrition services, NAV 101, alternative schools, *Readiness to Learn*, etc.

2) Address common concerns (students who do not qualify, GPA, etc.).

3) Dedicate scholarship funding.

4) Formalize support on campuses to provide a continuum of services to College Bound students

“We must couple financial support with (mandated) programmatic support and . . . supporting student success with programmatic elements that address needs beyond financial and traditional academic support such as a road map for success, campus advocate, intervention at critical points, support to participate in high-impact activities” (Evenbeck, 2011)

- Support all College Bound students regardless of the scholarship dollars received.
- Formally celebrate the success of College Bound students at each institution and statewide.
- Begin to develop a database for College Bound alums to encourage them to “reach back” to support younger students.