

RESILIENCE IN RESIDENCE: EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH HOUSING AND LEARNING PATHWAYS

Barriers to educational attainment

Intersecting systemic barriers, including housing instability, food insecurity, caregiver incarceration, racial bias, punitive school climates, and unmet basic needs, contribute to King County youth disconnection from education and opportunity (Crumé et al., 2020; Hodara et al., 2023).

These challenges are especially acute for marginalized youth **navigating fragmented pathways** from K12 (or GED completion) to community college. In King County, BIPOC students are disproportionately placed in pre-college courses, increasing their risk of leaving without a credential. One in five Black and Pacific Islander students were under-placed in pre-college English despite meeting high school criteria for college-level coursework (Chu et al., 2021).

Even after enrollment, institutional gaps persist: community colleges often lack adequate support services, and statewide data show that **half of Washington college students experience basic needs insecurity, with 10% facing homelessness**, factors linked to lower academic persistence and attainment (WSAC, 2025; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2024).

Responding through collaboration and action

The Center for Education and Career Opportunities' (CECO) Equitable Housing Pilot is a first-of-its-kind initiative in King County, **designed to address housing and basic needs barriers for students reconnecting to education**.

Developed through a cross-sector partnership between King County DCHS, Shoreline Community College, and other agencies, the pilot supports students pursuing secondary and postsecondary credentials on campus. The pilot is embedded in the CECO and funded by the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account, adapting elements from comparable models like Tacoma's College Housing Assistance Program.

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It wasn't possible to think about [GED completion] because I didn't have my ID for the longest, I had an hour-long commute, and my situation was stressful.

With housing, I was able to get my feet on track and attend my classes on a regular basis. You know, be more in tune with my community and participate in events helped me very much personally ...The case managers and teachers helped me not to give up. It paved the way and made things a little brighter.”

Participating young person who earned their GED

“

The program develops awareness and connection to student resources. A lot of participants step into leadership positions on campus.”

Guru Dorje, Program Director

About this Brief

This program brief was developed by the Children Youth and Young Adult Division (CYAD) and Performance Measurement and Evaluation (PME) unit at King County DCHS. It offers preliminary findings from an on-going internal program evaluation to guide program improvement and partnership strategy. This brief highlights literature, regional context, and research-informed practices in youth wraparound, education and basic needs access.

About Center for Education and Career Opportunities

The Center for Education and Career Opportunities (CECO) is a youth reengagement program of King County DCHS Children, Youth, and Young Adult Division in a partnership with Shoreline Community College. CECO offers 16 to 21-year-olds without a high school credential a supported pathway to return to school to earn their diploma and/or GED and go on to college, technical training, and/or employment. CECO offers tuition-free and fee-free services to support students to and through a postsecondary education.

 **Learn more:** shoreline.edu/high-school-programs/center-for-education-career-opportunities

Program Model

Eligible students, who are unhoused youth re-engaging in secondary education, receive up to two years of subsidized on-campus housing, individualized case management, financial and life skills courses, job-readiness training, and wraparound support.

The first cohort, enrolled starting Summer 2024, lives in quad-style dorms with private rooms and shared social spaces. CECO provides on-site group mentorship focused on social-emotional growth, conflict resolution, and community building. To remain eligible for both the pilot and CECO, students must maintain a 2.0 GPA, meet regularly with their case manager, attend 2 hours of weekly tutoring, and enroll in at least 10 credits to stay on track for earning their GED within a year.

Findings from youth surveys and interviews

Eight previously unhoused students are currently enrolled in the pilot. Students had life circumstances compatible with campus living; those with caregiving duties, pets, or partners were less likely to enroll. The first cohort of students was all students of color and self-identified as women. At the time of enrollment, they had GPAs above 2.5 and had been in CECO for 6 months or more, which gave them familiarity with staff and Shoreline campus.

Enrolled youth are making meaningful strides in education and personal growth, despite navigating complex challenges—supporting family, enduring long commutes, and experiencing housing instability. Their resilience shows across multiple areas:



Academic Progress. Over half of the participants have completed their GED or high school diploma, marking a major milestone in their educational journey.



Confidence and Future Orientation. 85% of participants report that CECO is helping prepare them for what they plan to do in life. The majority also express a strong belief in their ability to pursue goals and overcome challenges.



Life Demands and Responsibilities. Participants are managing complex life circumstances alongside their academic commitments:

- 43% work 20 hours or more per week for pay
- Over one-third provide care for a family member
- On average, young people used to spend 2.8 hours commuting to or from work or school

Program Evaluation

King County's CYAD PME team is leading a three-year mixed-methods study of the pilot's impact on well-being, housing stability, and academic progress, and to identify which supports drive outcomes.



It's made things easier to live here on campus because help is everywhere, wherever I need it. If I'm coming from class, I can come straight here and get help.

Participating young person

References

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