



Program Report

Laying the Foundation King County Promise Early Implementation

DCHS Children, Youth, and Young Adults Division and
Performance Measurement and Evaluation Unit

Photo: Promise Summer Celebration at Highline College



Introduction

King County's young people are motivated to advance their education and build meaningful futures.¹ Yet, **a young person's postsecondary readiness and successful enrollment are all too often determined by structural factors rather than their academic merits or will to succeed.**

As youth and families know, nearly all jobs that yield a living wage in King County require a 2- or 4-year postsecondary degree or credential.² When following cohorts of our region's young people 9 years after 9th grade, only 30% earn a postsecondary credential by their mid-20s. For students of color, college enrollment rates are down, and completion rates are even lower.³

Secondary school resources predict the 2- and 4-year college persistence rates among South King County Black students, an effect stronger than individual academic factors.⁴ Additionally, Washington youth who successfully navigate the high school transition—those who enroll in college and those who work—are much less likely to become later disengaged from the workforce.⁵

Barriers in the way for our youth are: access to high-quality, individualized college counseling, financial aid navigation, **misalignment between high school graduation and college enrollment course requirements**, and placement tests that systematically under-enroll Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth in pre-college courses. For instance, among Black and Pacific Islander students, one in five were placed in pre-college English when they had a cumulative high school GPA, and the course-taking required for *college*-level courses.⁶ These factors heavily impact our (would-be) first-generation college students, BIPOC students, and Opportunity Youth*. **This means the capacity for positive impact of one caring, informed, and supportive student advisor is also large.**

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Opportunity Youth*

are young people, 16- to 26-years old who are neither in school nor working.

About the Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account

The Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA) was established through an amendment to the 2015 State Transportation Revenue Package, directing Sound Transit 3-related funds to improve educational outcomes in early learning, K-12, and postsecondary education. Administered by King County's Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS), PSTAA investments focus on advancing educational success for prioritized populations across kindergarten readiness, high school completion, and postsecondary enrollment and completion.

As outlined in the Implementation Plan for Investment of PSTAA Proceeds (PSTAA Implementation Plan), DCHS oversees the implementation of the Promise program. To promote more equitable outcomes, PSTAA funds are allocated to programs and facilities serving vulnerable and underserved students, including children and youth of color; those from families at or below 200% of the federal poverty level; students experiencing homelessness; those in foster care, child welfare, or at risk of juvenile justice involvement; students with disabilities; LGBTQ youth; and other vulnerable populations. <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dchs/human-social-services/community-funded-initiatives/pstaa>



Introduction

Background

King County Promise (Promise) is a cross-agency initiative designed to support young people furthest from educational justice so they may graduate and successfully transition to the college or career path of their choosing.

Promise provides students with one-on-one advising, service referrals, postsecondary navigation and transition support, and an Equity Grant to support them through key milestones (e.g., financial aid completion, high school graduation/equivalency, college admission, college graduation) in their postsecondary pathway. Promise also works toward an equity-focused and connected education system by engaging King County school districts, community-based organizations, and Community and Technical Colleges in intentional partnership.

In 2017, the Puget Sound College and Career Network (PSCCN), a program of the Puget Sound Educational Service District, led a collaborative effort to adapt the national College Promise model to the local King County context, also building upon learnings from South Seattle College's 13th Year Scholarship model. In 2019, King County joined PSCCN to refine Promise and recommend funding strategies to be included in the PSTAA Implementation Plan, which was adopted by King County Council in September 2020. The PSTAA Implementation Plan designated Promise as the primary strategy for PSTAA's College, Career, and Technical Education funding category.



Being a member of King County Promise means having a community that has my back. It's about being part of a network that is dedicated to seeing students like me succeed, both in college and beyond.

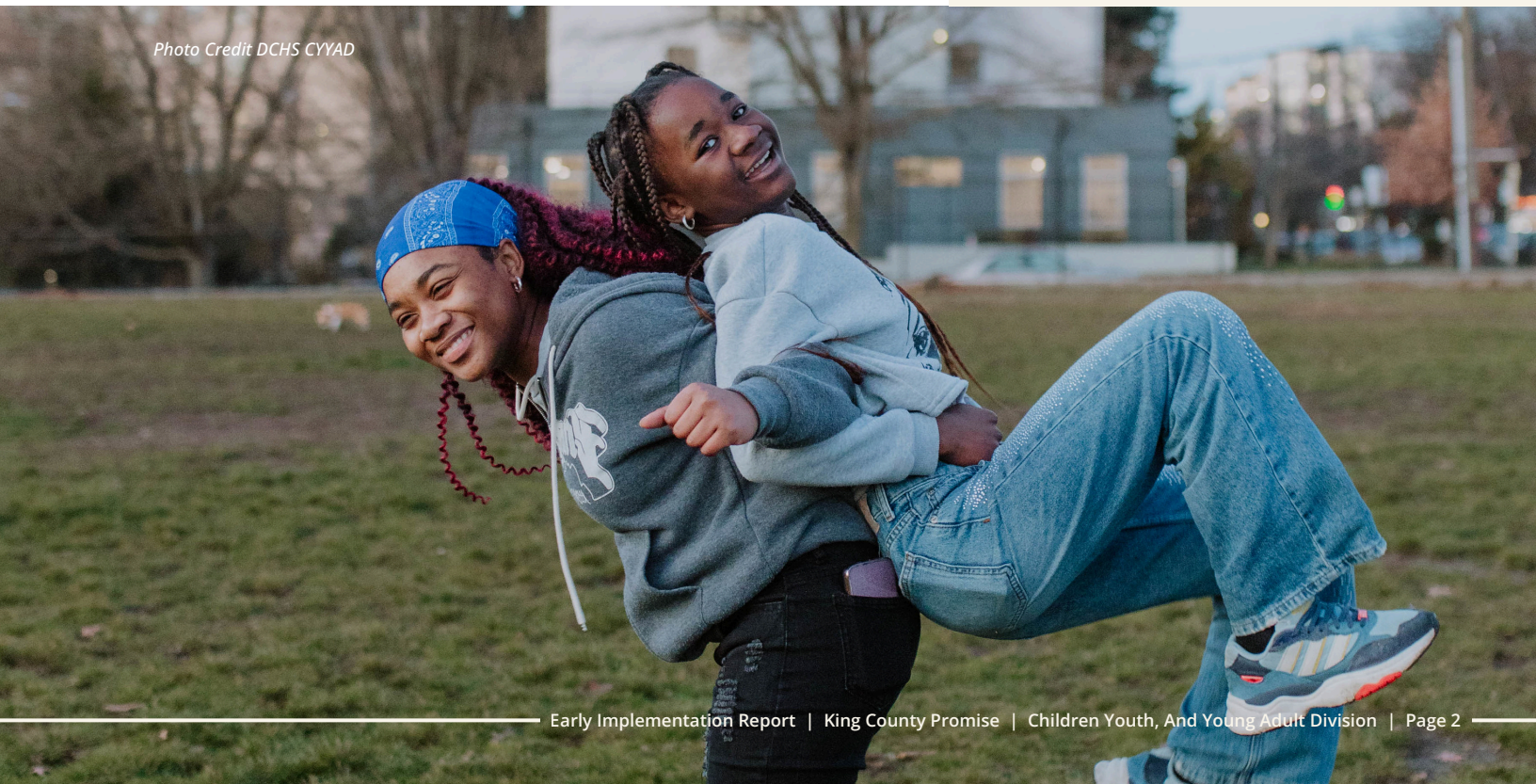
Promise Student



I'd like to [share] my appreciation for your kindness the other day... I was nervous, and being late almost made me hesitate to go. But seeing your patience, really helped ease my nerves. Your work doesn't go unnoticed, and for that, I can't thank you enough."

Promise Student to their Promise Navigator

Photo Credit DCHS CYYAD





Promise Program Model

Impact

Design Elements

Strategy Outcomes

Student Support

- **Postsecondary Advising and Navigation.** Promise Navigators (trained social workers and education advisors) help students graduate high school and transition to college successfully. They provide comprehensive supports that guide students through pre-college, transition, and college milestones.
- **Cross-system Improvement and Alignment.** Promise seeks to not only provide essential services (e.g., mental health, basic needs, etc.) to students who need it most, but also to challenge and change the systems providing those services. The goal is to holistically serve students by addressing barriers.

Increase postsecondary attainment of Promise students to 70 percent by age 26, with no gap in attainment rates between young people in the PSTAA prioritized populations and their peers.

Systems Change

- **Promise Partnerships.** Promise addresses educational silos by cultivating partnerships between community-based organizations, K-12 school districts, and Community and Technical Colleges to create a coordinated, student-centered approach. Students experience seamless supports by providers and are engaged consistently as active participants in their postsecondary pathway.
- **Sustainability and Continuous Improvement.** While PSTAA provides funding for the initial phases of Promise, the initiative is designed for long-term sustainability, continuing beyond the life of the fund. Promise also includes plans for ongoing evaluation and improvement to ensure its continued success.

Create a cohesive, equity-focused educational system through collaboration between K-12 districts, postsecondary institutions, and community-based organizations.



Introduction

Performance Measurement

The King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) leads the ongoing measurement of investments as outlined in the [PSTAA Implementation Plan](#). In collaboration with Promise partners, DCHS began identifying and collecting data on key performance measures in 2022–2023 to assess Promise’s impact on student outcomes and system-level change in education. The evaluation focuses on three core questions:

1. How many young people and families were served, and how well?
2. What educational improvements were experienced by prioritized populations?
3. What changes occurred in services, systems, and environments?

To answer these, DCHS gathers quantitative and qualitative data, including enrollment figures, demographics, and narrative insights from Promise partners. This data sheds light on program implementation, student experiences, cross-agency coordination, and early outcomes.

Data collection began in January 2023, with outcome measures finalized during the 2022–23 school year. Quantitative tracking of implementation and student-level outcomes launched in July 2023. Partners report only on measures relevant to their scope; for example, Highline Public Schools does not report on postsecondary persistence, as they do not serve college-level students (see Appendix V Measures Map (page 18) for a breakdown of performance measure contributions by partner).

Student Experience

Promise focuses on supporting prioritized high school students and Opportunity Youth as they complete their high school credentials, transition to and through local community and technical colleges (more in Appendix I).



Entry points

Students are recruited by Promise partners and may enter the program through a partner high school, community or technical college, or a community-based organization.



Network of supports

Promise Navigators provide students personalized support in college readiness, financial aid, admissions, and academic skills, while building a support ecosystem across all partner organizations.



Equity Grant

Eligible college-level students can receive a \$1,000 annual Equity Grant and Promise services for up to three years or until they complete a postsecondary degree—whichever comes first. The grant supports ongoing engagement in both the program and school.

Promise Evaluation Measures

Evaluation Questions

What improvements were made in how many and how well young people and families were served?

What improvements in educational outcomes were experienced by young people from the prioritized populations served by Promise?

What improvements were made in relevant services, systems, and environments?

Performance Measures

Program Scale	Program Quality	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes	System-Level Outcomes
<i>Number of young people served</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Race/Ethnicity • Gender • ZIP Code • Language • Education Status • Grant Recipients 	Engagement Postsecondary Application Financial Aid Application College-Level English & Math	Academically On-Track Direct Enrollment in Postsecondary Persistence in Postsecondary	<i>Improved Academic Outcomes</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school graduation and GED completion rates • Postsecondary completion rates 	<i>Changes to the Local Educational System</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship among Community and Technical Colleges, high schools, and community-based organizations • Alignment and integration of postsecondary supports across the region

Data Sources

Quarterly and annual quantitative reports and biannual narrative reports from partners

Biannual quantitative and narrative reports and continuous improvement sessions with partners



Implementation of Phase One

In April 2021, PSCCN was awarded a contract to serve as the System Supporting Organization (SSO) for Promise. The SSO worked closely with DCHS to co-develop and shape the implementation of this initiative. The SSO also provided support services to school districts, community-based organizations, and Community and Technical Colleges, working together to provide direct services to students. The support services provided by the SSO included professional development and technical assistance; continuous improvement activities and convenings; and leadership on fundraising and sustainability planning efforts.

Promise provides resources to Promise Partnerships, which may be comprised of King County school districts, community-based organizations, and Community and Technical Colleges. In July 2022, two Promise Partnerships were awarded a two-year contract (school years 2021-2022 and 2022-23) to launch Promise (learn more about each partnership, see Appendix II and III).

- Highline Promise partnership:** [Becoming a Man program \(Youth Guidance\)](#), [Highline College](#), [Highline Public Schools](#), and [Northwest Education Access](#)
- Promise to Community partnership:** [Centro Rendú \(St. Vincent de Paul\)](#), [Congoese Integration Network](#), [Northwest Education Access](#), and [Renton Technical College](#)

In this initial phase, Promise partners worked to build partnerships, collaborated with the SSO to further define the services for their prioritized student populations, and began providing outreach and support services to students. Funding in this phase also prioritized hiring Promise Navigators* and the resources needed to implement Promise's core components.

During Phase 1 implementation (school years 2022–23 and 2023–24), Promise investments were designed to generate insights that inform ongoing decision-making across the lifespan of PSTAA funding and shape future Promise investments in King County.

Promise Navigators*

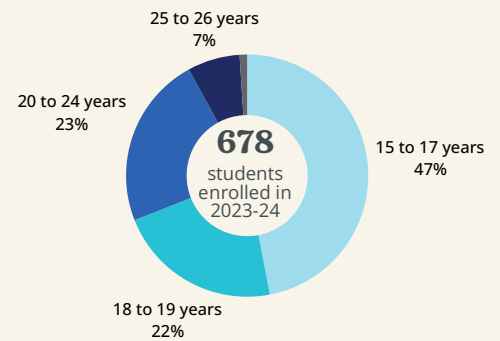
provide postsecondary advising, transition support, and navigation services to students. Titles vary by partner (e.g., Advisor, Education Advocate, etc.) but roles are consistently held by case managers with training and degrees in social work, education, or related fields. Role structures may differ based on the needs of the young people served.

About the Data Set

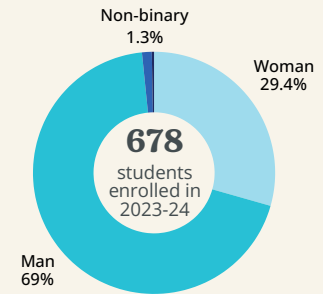
This report reflects data collected from January 2023 to June 2024, capturing just one full school year. As Promise is designed for multi-year support, it is too early to assess long-term impact or trends. The findings presented here offer initial insights, with more comprehensive outcomes to be shared in future reports.

Demographics 2023–24

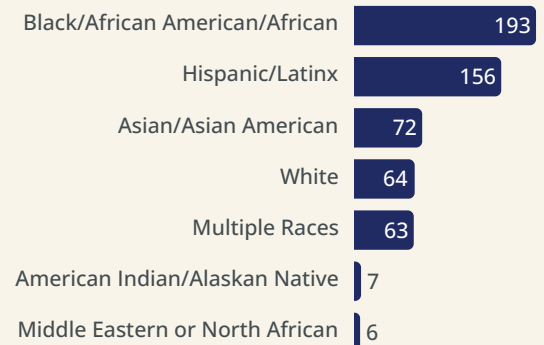
Student age



Gender identities



Race and ethnicity



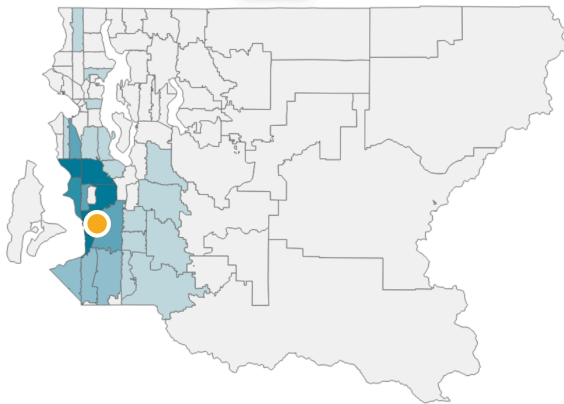
Note. Of those reached through outreach in 2023–24, 678 students formally enrolled; 80 students reported “prefer not to answer” for the race/ethnicity. **Data Source.** DCHS King County Promise quarterly reports.



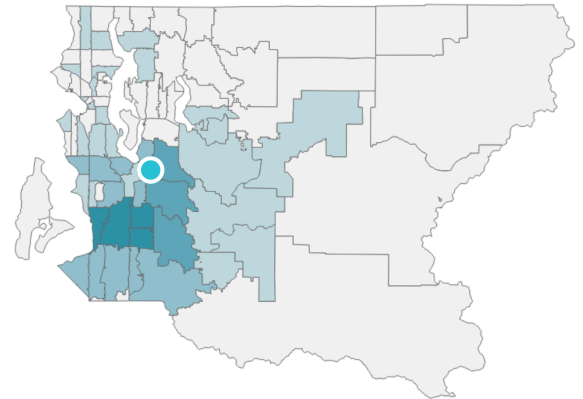
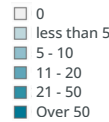
Regional Reach

Enrollment patterns reflect the structure of each program. The Highline Promise partnership, which includes a K-12 district partner, primarily serves students residing within the Highline School District. In contrast, Promise to Community primarily engages Opportunity Youth who are not affiliated with a K-12 district, resulting in recruitment from a broader geographic area.

● Highline Promise partnership



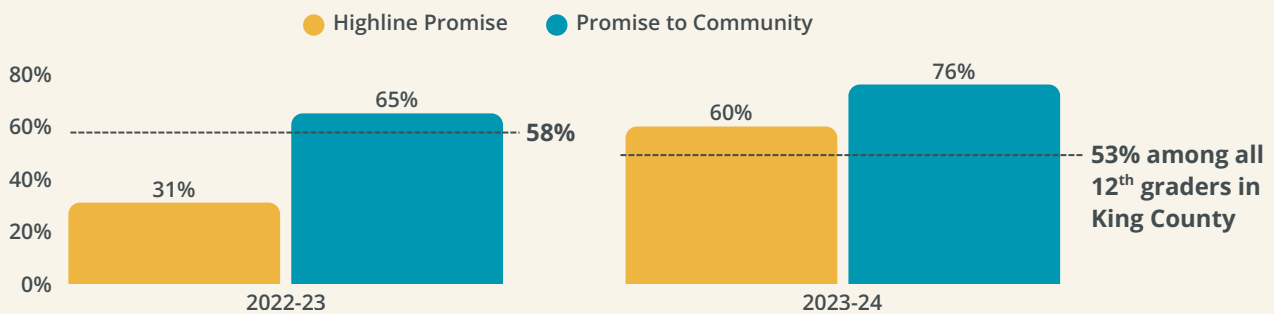
● Promise to Community



Financial Aid Completion Rates Increased in 2023-24 Despite Nationwide Challenges

The U.S. Department of Education’s delayed rollout of the redesigned Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in December 2023 caused widespread disruptions, limiting timely support for low-income students. In King County, these delays led to lower FAFSA completion rates among 12th graders.⁷ Still, Promise partners provided individualized support to students and families, achieving higher completion rates than both the prior (partial) school year and the county average. For more details, see Youth Service Lesson 5 (page 11).

Financial aid completion rates by academic year and partnership



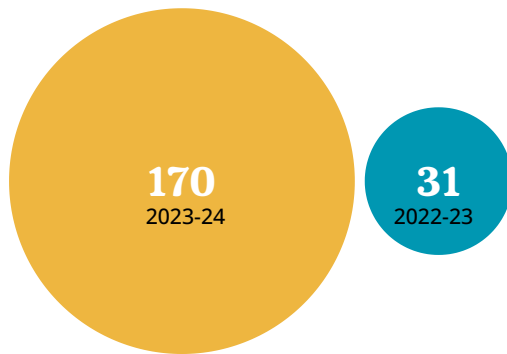
Data Sources. DCYS King County Promise annual reports (FAFSA and WAFSA); Washington Student Achievement Council Financial Aid Completion Dashboard: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/wsac/viz/WashingtonStateFAFSACompletionDashboard/DashboardIndex>



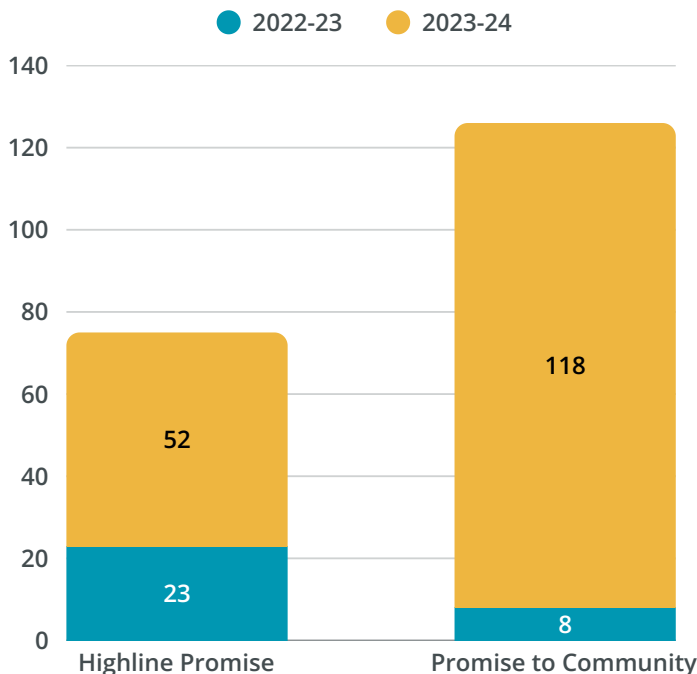
Improved Access to the Equity Grant

In the first half of Phase 1, students had to meet a very specific list of eligibility requirements to receive an Equity Grant. Partners realized that the rigidity of these criteria (e.g., one-on-one vs. small group advising) was preventing many students (especially those with demanding schedules) from accessing the funds. As a result, practice changes were introduced to reduce these barriers, which increased grant participation in the following school year (see Youth Service Lesson 3 on page 9).

Number of students qualifying for and receiving an Equity Grant



Equity Grants by partnership

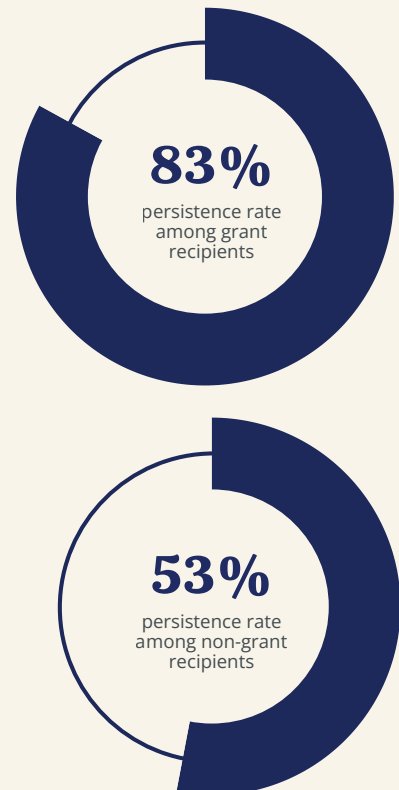


Data Sources. DCHS King County Promise annual reports

Students who received an Equity Grant were more likely to persist to year 2 of college

Among first-year college students, 83% of those who received an Equity Grant persisted to their second year, compared to 53% of those who did not. While this is a promising early indicator, the difference in persistence rates cannot be attributed solely to the grant itself. Eligibility requirements—such as maintaining regular contact with a Navigator—may also contribute to higher persistence. Moreover, students who meet these requirements may face fewer pre-existing barriers, making them more likely to persist regardless of grant receipt.

College persistence rates for awardees and non-award peers



Data Sources. DCHS King County Promise annual report



Narrative Data Analyses

Qualitative analysis of phase one narrative data revealed key findings in how these cross-sector partnerships worked and leveraged each other's capacity to improve service to students.

Promise partners developed strong cross-agency relationships that improved collaboration

Promise partners built strong relationships through regular partnership touchpoints and in-person engagements. This provided a solid foundation for collective planning and navigating collaboration challenges. A staff member from Congolese Integration Network (CIN) praised the Promise to Community partnership's **responsiveness and problem-solving** ability: "This partnership does an amazing job of connecting each other to solutions." Promise partners found that in-person interactions, such as attending the Umoja Conference and Promise retreats organized by the SSO, were crucial for fostering connections and collaboration.

Intentional hiring practices strengthened program effectiveness

Research shows that having staff with similar backgrounds enhances cultural relevance, fosters a stronger sense of belonging, and boosts student motivation.⁸ Promise leaders intentionally hire **staff who share similar backgrounds with their students**. This approach ensures that Promise Navigators can offer guidance from a place of understanding. Students connect better with Promise Navigators who already have a base understanding of some of the assets they bring and the challenges they face.



This partnership does an amazing job of connecting each other to solutions."

CIN Staff Member



The retreat proved to be a pivotal event in establishing better connections among staff, bringing everyone onto the same page and facilitating a more cohesive approach."

Highline College Staff Member



[One student] highlighted that learning from someone who looks like him and shares his background was incredibly impactful and gave him hope for the future."

Highline Promise Navigator

Resources, collaboration, and shared capacity across organizations improved student care coordination

PSTAA's Promise investment has greatly enhanced organizations' ability to support students by increasing staff and expanding services. In Phase 1, PSTAA provided funding for 11.6 FTE student-facing positions. Cross-sector collaboration has enabled the sharing of resources and expertise. For instance, community-based organizations new to postsecondary advising hired and trained their Promise Navigators to begin advising students. Conversely, Promise-funded K-12 and Community and Technical College have gained valuable insight into some of the barriers that contribute to students leaving the education system. An instance where Promise students were transferred to an alternative learning program without their Promise Navigators' knowledge led to the development of new protocols. Promise Navigators and school administrators work in coordination to support Promise students transferring out of their high school. As a result, if a student transfers to an alternative learning program, Navigators can continue to provide ongoing academic and relational support throughout the transition without losing contact. The cross-sector collaboration embedded in the program model has allowed Promise partners to begin the work of breaking down siloes to share the knowledge and resources needed to support students holistically and make progress toward system change.



Lessons on Strong Youth Service from Early Implementation

Promise was designed as a long-term, phased strategy to allow for iteration, local adaptation, and scaling over time. **The goal is to embed the most impactful components into a sustainable initiative that outlasts PSTAA's initial investment.** Early implementation phases have generated (and will continue to generate) insights that inform PSTAA investments and guide future iterations of Promise in King County.

1 Partners developed strong cross-agency relationships that improved collaboration

Implementation partners learned that the program design must remain flexible to respond to external disruptions as well as evolving student needs. While Promise was carefully developed with community input, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed gaps in the initiative's original design and required significant adjustments, such as revising Equity Grant eligibility, creating policies for pre-college expenses, and adjusting program offerings to fit students' varied circumstances. One such example involved Highline Promise partners' Summer Bridge program, which was replaced with quarterly events or a Welcome Day to better accommodate students with full-time jobs or daytime commitments, enabling Promise Navigators to engage a broader student group.

Partners also learned that planning time is essential for effective collaboration. Some organizations began programming before planning together, which hindered partners' ability to work cohesively at the onset. Additionally, workloads exceeded available funding, particularly as resources were diverted to planning/redesign. **Partners realized the importance of resource alignment with workload and worked with the SSO to streamline coordination structures** (e.g., fewer meetings) to alleviate this pressure. However, reduced partnership meetings did not fully resolve engagement challenges, as capacity limitations were not addressed.

2 Engaging Opportunity Youth requires a comprehensive, resource-intensive approach

Engaging Opportunity Youth is time-intensive, relationship-based work. Navigators need to address barriers that led youth to leave traditional education paths first. Often, this involves multiple meetings with youth and families to build trust and to understand their goals. Additionally, engagement of this population requires support that addresses basic needs. Navigators connect Opportunity Youth to vital resources (e.g., housing, employment, childcare, ESL classes, legal aid, driver's licenses, translation services). Promise to Community partners found that this process can take months before postsecondary enrollment decisions.

Financial barriers, especially the high cost of living, were frequently cited as major obstacles. **Pre-college financial support helps bridge gaps that traditional financial aid does not cover.** For example, Promise to Community provides a pre-college stipend (\$150-\$500 annually per student) to help young people overcome financial barriers related to the transition to college. Flexibility in scheduling and engagement methods is critical to meeting Opportunity Youth where they are. Navigators' engagement strategies must include home visits, workplace meetings, or informal settings. **Additionally, approaches must be adaptive to accommodate non-linear education journeys.** This tailored approach to Opportunity Youth is relatively unique among College Promise models and offers valuable insights for supporting a historically underserved population.⁹

College 101

College 101 is a course offered by most Community and Technical Colleges that helps first-year students prepare for college and navigate their experience. The course typically introduces students to campus resources, technology platforms, and effective study techniques, among other topics.



3 Reducing barriers to funds and services is critical

Complicated eligibility criteria can hinder enrollment and participation. During the first year of Promise implementation, confusion about Equity Grant eligibility and requirements (e.g., full-time enrollment, College 101 completion, minimum Navigator interactions) limited student access to Equity Stipends. This annual \$1,000 funding, intended for non-tuition expenses, saw low disbursement.

Promise partners recognized that rigid program requirements, including mandatory participation in structured activities, could **unintentionally exclude students with demanding schedules.** In response, they introduced more flexible engagement options, such as one-on-one *and* group Navigator meetings, and extended timelines for completing program milestones. Collaboratively, Promise to Community and Highline Promise also expanded the Equity Grant disbursement window from two to three years, better aligning with students' enrollment patterns and supporting long-term academic momentum.¹⁰

4 Support services must acknowledge and respect young people's identities and journeys

Promise Navigators emphasized the importance of creating culturally responsive spaces where students can safely explore identity and share personal experiences in order to build community and trust. One Highline Promise workshop with Black and Brown young men challenged dominant narratives around young men of color and vulnerability to promote inclusiveness and healing (see quotes and Appendix V, page 19, for additional reflections).

Providing role models is key to students feeling seen and valued, and strong, career-connected matches can inspire and motivate. One Promise to Community example involved a probation-referred young person who became engaged through connection and a culture of respect:



So often, I am pushed to believe that males of color don't share feelings or aren't vulnerable. That day, something very special happened. With the right activities, conversations and space, students challenged the norms around vulnerability and their identities. Most of all, they built community, trust and support in each other."

Highline Promise Staff Member



[During the workshop] we asked students to select from a range of photos relating to race, culture, religion, etc. I asked a student to share why they chose the image of [a rapper]. The student shared this was the first artist that helped him cope through the anger and frustration of losing an immediate family member a year prior...The room fell silent...There was so much respect for his story and vulnerability. Other students began to console him [and] share themselves. It was truly magical and comforting."

Highline Promise Staff Member



A 16-year-old was referred to me by her probation officer. Her guarded body language and an initial defensiveness made it clear that she was only there for her appointment ... Drawing on my experience and information about her aspirations, I took her to the Department of Culinary Arts [and described Promise].

I watched as she connected with [a Chef] who shared her passion, spoke with respect, [and] extended an invitation to job shadow. Overwhelmed with emotion, she shared how rarely she felt treated like an adult and respected by authority figures."

Promise to Community Navigator



5

The 2023–24 FAFSA rollout highlighted the need for individualized, family-centered support

The December 2023 rollout of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), delayed from the usual October 1 start, caused nationwide confusion, disproportionately affecting low-income students. The updates, intended to simplify the process and expand Federal Pell Grant eligibility, led to unexpected delays and errors, adding stress for students reliant on aid.⁷ This situation highlighted that **proactive support for frontline providers is crucial to ensure that Promise can adapt to unexpected system-level challenges and achieve its goals.**

Strong partnerships between colleges and community-based organizations are vital in navigating systemic challenges, such as the new FAFSA rollout. Community-based organizations in the Promise to Community partnership collaborated with Renton Technical College (RTC) to mitigate impacts—e.g., RTC placed financial aid holds on student accounts to prevent automated drop notifications, easing student anxiety.

Financial aid **training enhanced partners' capacity to respond effectively to a new process, and culturally relevant and family-centered outreach** increased engagement and reduced confusion. Promise partners learned that proactive, individualized support and culturally relevant engagement with students and their families, in their native language, helped to build trust and kept students working toward their goals during a stressful time. This experience reinforced that **personalized assistance** can prevent systemic barriers from derailing students' success.

Promise to Community Partnership staff setting up for Summer Bridge





Lessons on Partnership Structure and Initiative Design

This section highlights key lessons from the initial implementation phase of Promise, with a focus on effective partnership development, staff management, and project governance.



Invest early in relationship-building and collaborative planning

Effective partnerships require time, trust, and shared understanding. At the outset of Promise, partners needed additional time to build relationships, align expectations, and understand each other's work. Delays in hiring and the need for extensive initiative onboarding also complicated implementation.

Funders should allocate sufficient time and resources for relationship-building and joint planning before implementation. Partnership work can be transformative, but funders must allocate intentional time for organizations to build relationships and trust amongst each other as well as the agencies supporting the partnership. Along with prioritizing time for relationship-building, ample resources are necessary for thorough collaborative planning before implementation.

Flexibility in early-stage timelines allows partners to adapt and engage more meaningfully. During the initial months, many organizations were in the middle of hiring, and those who had staff they could assign to the project needed a supported orientation. This underscored the need to adjust the project's pace and priorities, and, as such, Promise partners requested a delay to implementation in order to spend time building relationships with one another and learning about the work. The SSO provided additional time and opportunities for relationship-building and collective planning. This adjustment led to improved partner engagement and stronger connections. **In-person meetings also strengthened trust and collaboration.**



Proactively manage transitions for continuity

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, staffing turnover—intensified by sector-wide workforce shortages—disrupted program design, strained student relationships, and challenged partner coordination. Despite timeline adjustments, funded partners struggled to manage transitions, slowing implementation momentum and underscoring the need for consistent, high-quality onboarding across organizations.

Additionally, this experience demonstrated the importance of **backbone organization readiness to provide intensive partnership support during the early stages** of implementation and to sustain these activities over time to build project cohesion to preserve continuity during staffing transitions.



Clarify roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes

Role confusion between the SSO and DCHS hindered responsiveness to emerging needs and led to implementation delays and uncertainty among Promise partners. The SSO's responsibilities included managing partnership-wide activities, including supporting program implementation; coordinating convenings; and leading fundraising efforts. DCHS' role focused on overseeing the budget; leading performance measurement efforts; managing and monitoring all contracts; and providing technical assistance as needed. While the implementation plan grounded the initial design, more detailed process documentation was needed.

To address these challenges, DCHS and the SSO worked to **clarify project roles, responsibilities, and communication** to Promise partners and identified areas for stronger collaboration and co-ownership. Overall, these experiences shed light to the complexities of implementing a collective impact model and highlight the importance of ongoing clarification and adjustments to scopes of work help maintain alignment and accountability.

DCHS and the SSO also learned that **collective impact initiatives benefit from shared leadership** models that balance ownership with equity and transparency. Especially given the partnership model, where large institutions are partnered with small community-based organizations to carry out program activities, carefully considering and clearly communicating how decisions are made is essential to avoid creating power imbalances. Adopting a transparent approach is also critical at the project governance level, where DCHS must balance roles as a co-implementer *and* funder of Promise.



Next Steps

Financial Constraints

Promise receives funding from DCHS's PSTAA fund, which collects fees from Sound Transit 3 (ST3) construction projects initiated after 2015. The WA Department of Revenue collects and distributes these funds quarterly to King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. **King County is projected to receive approximately \$318 million by 2036.** According to the PSTAA Implementation Plan, 38% of these funds are allocated to the College, Career, and Technical Education investment strategy, which supports Promise.

In 2021, as DCHS began its implementation of PSTAA, ST3 revenue projections for PSTAA changed, significantly reducing anticipated revenues available for investment in the initial years. Because of this, DCHS **scaled back its Promise investment and began budgeting to only 75%** of the projected revenue forecast, retaining the remaining 25% of revenues (if collected) in a stability reserve **to fill the gaps of forecasted low-revenue years.**

DCHS coordinates with Sound Transit to monitor ST3 construction timelines, which directly affect PSTAA revenue projections. With most funding tied to ST3's light rail expansion and other major projects lacking clear schedules, DCHS anticipates ongoing investment adjustments. **In 2023, three separate Sound Transit forecasts showed significant variation in revenue timing, reinforcing the need for continuous monitoring and strategic fund deployment.**

Given the volatility of the PSTAA fund, DCHS and the Puget Sound Educational Service District mutually agreed to pause investment in the SSO and ended their contract one year early, on December 31, 2024. By pausing SSO investment, DCHS ensures PSTAA **resources remain available to meet the needs of Promise students** and advance the work of current partnerships.

Insights Shaping the Future

Promise implementation is still in the early stages. DCHS and its Promise implementation partners are **encouraged by initial progress**, such as increasing financial aid completion rates among Promise students. This success highlights the potential for future impact.

Promise Phase 2 of implementation began in August 2024. This phase spans three academic years: 2024-25, 2025-26, and 2026-27. All Phase 1 Promise partners have been invited and have accepted the extension of their contracts. PSTAA has committed to invest approximately \$6.8 million in Phase 2 (\$3.2 million for the Promise to Community partnership and \$3.6 million for the Highline Promise partnership), which will provide a modest budget increase to account for inflation and gaps from Phase 1.

Continuous Learning Through Phase 1 Resulted in the Following Improvements

- ✓ The College 101 requirement has been refined, so Promise students may participate in a range of college success learning activities to meet the requirement.
- ✓ The timeline for Equity Grant disbursement has been specified as up to three years or until graduation.
- ✓ Given high inter-district mobility and transfer rates, student supports, including advising and Equity Grants, extend to those who choose a non-Promise local Community and Technical College. Due to limited funding, Highline College and Renton Technical College pathway students will continue to be prioritized.



When we talk to families about what is available and possible for their youth, hope is born out of trusting that [we] are not just talking about a promise of educational opportunities for their children, but rather, an accessible and reachable reality."

Promise to Community Partner



Next Steps

We have learned important lessons that will shape the future and build a lasting foundation for Promise. **By design, Promise tests two service models—one traditional pathway from high school to college, and another for reconnecting to education.** We have learned that role clarity, strong structures for collaboration, and orientation toward a common vision (while remaining nimble to respond to unforeseen challenges) are imperative to support these pathways cohesively.

Looking forward, DCHS is **examining resource gaps and collaboration with other regional postsecondary efforts.** To support this, DCHS has secured private funding for research and evaluation of the Promise strategy. The study assesses Promise's strengths, identifies improvement areas, explores partnership design, and sustainable funding directions by collecting new data and drawing from local and national research on Promise programs, all of which will be included in a report to be released in a 2027 report. **Findings will inform PSTAA's College, Career, and Technical Education fund strategy for Phase 3 and beyond,** including exploring potential connections to the philanthropic sector to augment the quality, scale, and potential impacts.

Acknowledgements

The DCHS teams would like to express gratitude to the young people in King County Promise, our partners, and staff who engaged in the data collection and reflective conversations shared in this report. We also thank the PSTAA subcommittee for their support and thoughtful engagement during Promise, Phase 1. We also dedicate this report to Keith Moore and to all navigators who work with our young people. Keith was a Promise Navigator at Highline College, a gifted educator who was driven, caring, and deeply committed. He inspired others through his storytelling, mentorship, and unwavering belief in young people's potential.

Highline College Summer Celebration



End Notes

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Appendix I

Promise Student Service Pathway

Promise enrolls current high school students and youth disengaged from education some near and farther from secondary degree attainment. The following model shows the 2- to 3-years of navigation support Promise students receive to and through postsecondary

Youth Outreach

Promise organizations reach out to young people in their priority group to inform them about the Promise program.

1

Intake and Program Enrollment

Prospective young person completes Promise enrollment form with guidance from the Promise partner organization.

2

Education Goal Setting

Navigator and students co-develop an individualized college-and-career plan, with goals and connection to wraparound support.

3

College and Career Readiness

Navigators and network offer college-and-career exploration and readiness via courses, workshops, and campus or worksite tours.

4

Financial Aid

Promise navigator & Network provides 1-on-1 and group support with financial aid completion.

5

Diploma and GED Completion

Navigator provides access to supports for high school or GED completion as needed (e.g., classes, tutoring, GED test prep).

6

College Admissions

Navigator provides individualized support for student to apply to at least one postsecondary option.

7

Registration and Courses

Navigator provides support with class registration and placement focused on college-level Math and English

8

Orientation/College Bridge

Navigator and network provide college orientation and navigation sessions. If new to Promise, student completes enrollment form.

9

Advising

Navigator guides students through a tailored plan with advising, support services, and college success activities.

10

Equity Grant and on-going Financing

Navigator provides support with financial aid completion and access to equity grant for students who meet the participation criteria

11

Year 2, College Persistence

Continued 1-on-1 advising, course and career planning, and service referrals through college completion.

12

College Graduation

Two-year college degree, certificate or 4-year transfer, followed by exit survey, celebrations and connected hand-offs.





Highline Promise Partnership Profile

Section	Description
Partnership Vision Statement	This Promise partnership is guided by the belief that all young people, regardless of background, should have the opportunity to access higher education in pursuit of a living-wage career. By focusing on serving Black and brown male scholars, we will utilize a targeted universalism approach with the understanding that centering the needs of those traditionally furthest from opportunity translates into services that will work across a broad continuum of student experiences as our Promise efforts evolve over the years. Each Promise partner is prepared to address the gaps or failings in our systems and be held accountable for the positive, systemic change we will make by working together.
Focus Community	This partnership focuses its efforts on supporting Black and brown young men due to notable educational disparities. Recent data show that fewer young men graduate on time, have lower 9th-grade pass rates, and are less likely to meet grade-level standards in English and Math. Additionally, only 42% of young men enrolled in college immediately after high school, versus 73% of young women, and 45% of Latinx students enrolled in college compared to 57% of the senior class overall.*
Geographic Service Area	<p>King County zipcodes of youth served in Phase 1 (See page 6 for visual map)</p> <p>98001, 98002, 98003, 98023, 98030, 98031, 98032, 98042, 98058, 98059, 98092, 98105, 98106, 98108, 98118, 98122, 98126, 98133, 98146, 98148, 98166, 98168, 98178, 98188, 98198, 98373, 98418, 98422, 98424</p> <p>Highline Public Schools: Promise staff located at each of the district’s comprehensive high schools support Promise students through pre-college milestones, in partnership with Becoming a Man, and with Highline College support.</p> <p>Youth Guidance (Becoming a Man): This community-based organization implements the social-emotional learning program Becoming a Man and provides wraparound supports to Promise students at Tyee and Highline high schools.</p>
Partners and Roles	<p>Highline College: Promise staff begin working with Promise students at Highline high schools midway through their 12th grade year. They support students through the transition from high school to Highline College and continue to support students for up to three years at the college level.</p> <p>Northwest Education Access: Promise staff from this community-based organization support Opportunity Youth, including students at Innovation Heights Academy and Career Link, interested in attending Highline College. Opportunity Youth receive support with finishing high school/GED, navigating financial aid, college admissions and then college retention once they’re enrolled.</p>
Partnership Funding	Phase 1 (2022-23 and 2023-24 school years): \$1,601,507: In addition to PSTAA funds, school district and Community and Technical College partners provide matching funds to contribute to operating costs and Promise sustainability. Highline Public Schools and Highline College provided approximately \$78,948 in match funds for Phase 1.

Note and Data Source*

OSPI student report card; ERDC High School Graduate Outcomes Dashboards; Goldhaber, D. & Liddle, S. (2023). Educational achievement and progression by gender in Washington: 6 key takeaways. American Institute for Boys and Men.



Promise to Community Partnership Profile

Section	Description
Partnership Vision Statement	Promise to Community (PtC) partnership is guided by the belief that all young people, regardless of background, should have the opportunity to access postsecondary pathways. PtC is distinct in that we are specifically focusing on building short and long-term postsecondary pathways for Opportunity Youth that are directly linked to livable wage careers. Our students navigate complex education barriers compounded by inequitable access to basic needs, all while experiencing institutional racism and surviving generational and historical trauma. A student-centered approach reflects our collective accountability to students in the spirit of equity and trauma-informed practice.
Focus Community	This partnership works to improve postsecondary navigation systems among community-based organizations providing case management to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) Opportunity Youth and students in the community . Over 18,000 youth in South King County are Opportunity Youth and BIPOC youth and boys and young men of color are overrepresented.* All organizations that make up this partnership have history and experience working with families and young people from PSTAA prioritized populations.
Geographic Service Area	<p>King County zipcodes of youth served in Phase 1 (See page 6 for visual map)</p> <p>98001, 98002, 98003, 98010, 98023, 98026, 98027, 98029, 98030, 98031, 98032, 98033, 98034, 98038, 98042, 98051, 98055, 98056, 98057, 98058, 98059, 98065, 98075, 98092, 98102, 98104, 98105, 98106, 98107, 98108, 98116, 98118, 98121, 98125, 98133, 98144, 98146, 98148, 98166, 98168, 98178, 98188, 98198, 98338, 98374, 98391, 98404, 98406, 98408</p> <p>Renton Technical College: Promise staff recruit Open Doors students into Promise and support them through pre-college milestones. The Promise Director works with Promise students transitioning from community-based organizations, ensuring they receive a network of support as they continue through college.</p>
Partners and Roles	<p>Congolese Integration Network; Centro Rendú; Northwest Education Access: Promise staff from these community-based organizations recruit Opportunity Youth and high school students into Promise, supporting them through pre-college milestones. Community-based organizations continue to support their Promise students as they transition to RTC and move through college milestones. A percentage of the Promise students served by community-based organizations may also attend a different King County Community and Technical College and continue to receive services from the community-based organizations in this partnership.</p>
Partnership Funding	<p>Phase 1 (2022-23 and 2023-24 school years): \$1,417,814: In addition to PSTAA funds, school district and Community and Technical College partners provide matching funds to contribute to operating costs and Promise sustainability. RTC provided approximately \$35,117 in match funds for Phase 1.</p>

Note and Data Source*

US Census Bureau (2014). *American Community Survey*; Yohalem, N. & Cooley, S. (2016). *Opportunity Youth in the Road Map Project Region Summative Data Report*. Seattle, WA: Community Center for Education Results.



Measures Map and Glossary

Measures map by providers

DCHS performance measure	Partners reporting
• Number of young people enrolled in KCP	All
• Number of enrolled young people who received an equity grant	HC, NWEEdA, CIN, CR, RTC
• Percent of enrolled young people who are currently engaged in KCP	All
• Percent of enrolled young people who completed a financial aid application	HC, HPS, NWEEdA, CIN, CR, RTC
• Percent of enrolled young people who applied to a postsecondary program	HPS, NWEEdA, CIN, CR, RTC
• Percent of enrolled young people who enroll in college-level English and Math during their first year of college	HC, NWEEdA, CIN, CR, RTC
• Percent of enrolled young people who are academically on-track	All
• Percent of enrolled young people who obtain a secondary credential (i.e. GED or diploma)	HPS, NWEEdA, CIN, CR, RTC
• Percent of enrolled young people who enroll in a postsecondary program the year after obtaining a secondary credential	HC, NWEEdA, CIN, CR, RTC
• Percent of enrolled students who persist to year 2 of college	HC, NWEEdA, CIN, CR, RTC
• Percent of enrolled young people who obtain a postsecondary credential	HC, NWEEdA, CIN, CR, RTC

Note. *Becoming a Man (BAM is a program of Youth Guidance); Congolese Integration Network (CIN); Centro Rendú (CR); Highline College (HC); Highline Public Schools (HPS); Northwest Education Access (NWEEdA); Renton Technical College (RTC)*

Glossary of key terms

- **Equity Grant:** Is a programmatic component of King County Promise. It consists of a non-tuition award of up to \$1,000 per academic year for all eligible Promise students enrolled at a Community and Technical College in King County.
- **Partnership Charter:** Developed during Promise Phase 1, this document outlines why the partnerships do the work and how they work together. It includes the Partnership's collective goals, vision, and agreements that align with Promise.
- **Service plan:** Developed during Phase 1, Service Delivery Plans outline how partnerships do the work. This includes partnership advising, transition, navigation supports, aligning and/or building upon existing postsecondary readiness, completion programs within the partnership, and listing other new or existing strategies that promote Promise goals.
- **System Supporting Organization (SSO):** King County Council [Motion 15492](#) directs PSTAA's College, Career, and Technical Education investments to focus on systems-level improvements that advance educational outcomes for prioritized youth. In response, the Puget Sound College and Career Network (PSCCN) applied and was selected as the SSO to co-lead Promise implementation, support program development, promote cross-sector collaboration, and align policies across schools, colleges, and community organizations to improve postsecondary access and success.



Conditions for Academic Engagement

At the end of Phase 1, the SSO interviewed Promise Navigators from three organizations—Becoming A Man (Youth Guidance), Centro Rendú, and the Congolese Integration Network—to understand their strategies for engaging Promise students. These organizations are integral to the partnership, given their strong community ties and alignment with the cultural backgrounds of the students they serve. Interviews revealed the following themes in approaches to working with youth and fostering conditions for academic engagement among youth who face interpersonal and structural challenges daily.



Peer support

Young people thrive with supportive peer relationships. With Youth Guidance (Becoming A Man), young people participate in "circles" and discuss challenges and opportunities for support through group check-ins. Similarly, Congolese Integration Network offers a shared space with food, snacks, computers, and table games, along with transportation and weekly workshops on skills like coding and professional development. This environment helps **young people stay connected and feel a sense of belonging**. The Promise Navigator, based at Centro Rendú, emphasized that young people need to feel seen and heard, as community connection drives their engagement.



Culturally affirming learning

Young people experience greater joy and engagement when they can integrate their cultural interests with their academic learning. Recognizing cultural arts as an integral part of education, rather than just extracurricular activities, is crucial. For instance, students may play in a Mariachi band or learn Pacific Island dances as part of their studies. **Engagement also increases when students see how academics connect to their lives and communities**. For example, Highline Public Schools offers an American history class in Spanish and taught from a Latin American perspective, giving students a deeper understanding of social dynamics.



Youth agency

Promise programming emphasizes youth agency as a strategy for sustained engagement. Navigators support students in exploring their interests and developing plans aligned with personal career goals. All three organizations highlighted the importance of listening to students' passions before offering guidance. For example, at Centro Rendú, a student who had left high school chose to pursue a mechanic certificate after identifying an interest in technical and skilled trades. Navigators noted that **students gain confidence and persistence when they can envision future success and take ownership of their goals and ownership in programming activities**. Whether academic or professional, a clear sense of purpose helps students navigate challenges and maintain momentum.



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About DCHS's Children, Youth, and Young Adult Division and the Performance measurement and Evaluation Unit

King County DCHS's Children, Youth, and Young Adult Division (CYAD) leads from the strengths of the region's young people and serves as a funder and convenor across K12, postsecondary, employment, and youth development. Through investment strategies, like PSTAA and Best Starts for Kids, the division works with youth, families, educators, providers, and the community to foster an environment where young people can be happy, healthy, safe, and thriving.

The Performance Measurement and Evaluation (PME) unit helps partners use data to assess how department programs are implemented and their impact. Its mission is to generate strong measurement systems and apply insights collaboratively to inform DCHS policy and programming.