

LET US SUCCEED:

Student College & Career Aspirations

Spring 2019

STUDENT VOICE FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

We are all responsible for the success of our students.

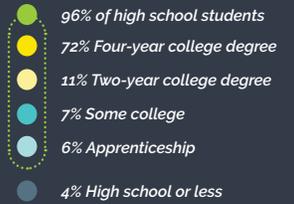
The Puget Sound region's rapidly changing economy requires education beyond high school—whether it's a college degree or a career credential—to get living wage jobs. College and career supports should be more than check boxes or buzzwords. We must work together to tear down systemic barriers that keep our students from achieving their dreams.

South King County and South Seattle students envision a future where they go to college and pursue meaningful careers, but currently, less than a third earn a college degree or career credential by their mid-twenties. Is it because our students don't have the motivation? No. Ninety-six percent want to continue their education after high school. Is it because their families don't care? No. Ninety-two percent of students are from families who expect them to continue their education. This is true regardless of their parents' level of education.

These survey and listening session findings show the aspirations of South King County and South Seattle students and how college and career supports—like structured curriculum, exploration opportunities, and one-on-one advising—are critical to their success. This is a call to action by those most impacted by education inequity: students, particularly youth of color and first-generation college students. *Let Us Succeed* is driven by the voices of South King County and South Seattle high schoolers. They are telling us—educators, education advocates, and policymakers—how to support them. They are saying: Hear us. Challenge us. Invest in us. Believe in us.

STUDENTS' COLLEGE ASPIRATIONS

We asked students what's the highest level of education they want.



96%

of high school students want to go to college to pursue a fulfilling career.

Source: 2018-19 College and Career Leadership Institute's (CCLI) College and Career Climate Survey by Illuminate Evaluation Services (n=5,781).

As one 9th grader who participated in our survey advised:

Listen to what we have to say and try and figure it out from there."





Continue to have faith in us, and support us in our dreams and ambitions for the future.”

Black/African American 11th grader



ABOUT THE REPORT: AMPLIFYING YOUTH VOICE

The data in this report come from two sources: the College and Career Climate Survey, which reflects the responses of more than 7,000 9th through 12th graders, plus in-depth listening sessions with 43 11th and 12th graders. The participating students are majority students of color, which is representative of K-12 student demographics in South King County and South Seattle. Understand our methodology by reading this companion research guide: rdmap.org/researchguide-letussucceed.

The purpose of this research was to learn about students' future goals and experiences with school supports. All respondents go to high schools taking part in the Road Map Project's **College and Career Leadership Institute**. Learn more: rdmap.org/ccli.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “COLLEGE”?

The Road Map Project promotes all pathways that prepare students for careers in the thriving local economy. This includes technical training and apprenticeships, as well as two-year and four-year degree programs, which we refer to as T-2-4.

T :: Technical training and apprenticeships

2 :: Two-year degree program

4 :: Four-year degree program

WHO ARE OUR FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS?

We asked students if one or more of their parents have completed a two- or four-year college degree in the United States. We refer to the students who respond “no” as first-generation students.

58%
of students of color surveyed would be first-generation college students.

32%
of white students surveyed would be first-generation college students.

Source: 2018-19 College and Career Leadership Institute's (CCLI) College and Career Climate Survey by Illuminate Evaluation Services. (All students of color: n=3,752; All white students: n=1,223).

WHY DO STUDENTS WANT TO GO TO COLLEGE?

Students are clear about why they want to continue their education after high school. Three themes emerged from student listening sessions:

Source: College and Career Leadership Institute Student Listening Sessions (n=43).

1
College is often a career requirement.

Be it a computer scientist, nurse, electrician, or lawyer, our students understand their chosen career, like 70 percent of jobs in Washington state, will require education beyond high school.

"I want to be a teacher or school counselor. Therefore, I would need to have a higher education."

Black/African-American female 12th-grader from the Renton School District who wants to attend a four-year college

2
College can lead to meaningful work.

Our students want fulfilled and happy lives. This includes having purpose in their careers.

"... I want to spend the moments I have on something important, something I can use for my future that will benefit me."

Asian (Vietnamese-Laotian) female 12th-grader from the Kent School District who wants to become an apprentice

3
College can provide economic mobility and a good quality of life.

For many students, a college degree is a way to break the poverty cycle for them, as well as their parents and siblings.

"I feel that college is my key to success and that a better education will provide me with a better future."

Multiracial (Nisqually-Nigerian-White) male 12th grader from Highline Public Schools who wants to attend a four-year college





Pull us up, not push us down.”

Asian 9th grader

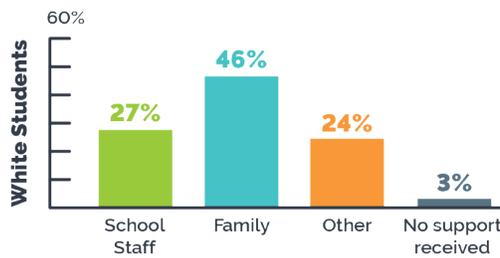
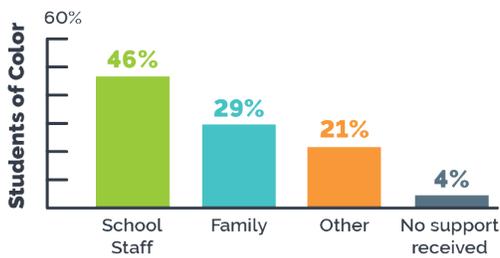


WHEN SCHOOL STAFF SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

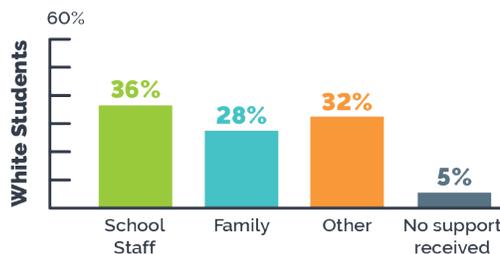
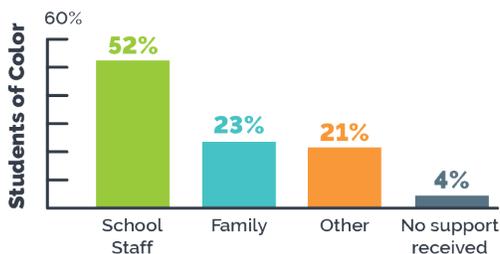
LEARNING ABOUT COLLEGE

We asked students who has been most helpful when it comes to understanding the college-going process. White students lean more on their families for help, while students of color rely mostly on school staff, such as teachers, counselors, and college and career specialists.

ALL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS



Regardless of race, first-generation students also rely more on school staff.

Source: 2018-19 College and Career Leadership Institute's (CCLI) College and Career Climate Survey by Illuminate Evaluation Services. (All students of color: n= 3,770; All white students n=1,230; First-generation students of color: n=2,178; First-generation white students: n=387). Note: totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Sofia Torres is graduating from Seattle Public Schools' Cleveland High School this spring. She wants to be an architect because art and math are her best subjects. Sofia was admitted to Whitworth University, Western Washington University, Washington State University, South Seattle College, and Seattle Pacific University. She has chosen SPU and will be the first in her family to go to college.

THE MOST CHALLENGING STEP

During my sophomore year, I suffered with really bad stress because I was going through court because I'm undocumented. My GPA dropped to 2.1. I really let myself slip. But three of my teachers pushed me to do better. They said, "We know this isn't you. You're capable of something bigger and better." Because of their support, I was able to see that they were right. My junior year, I got it together. My GPA went up to 3.8.

Applying to colleges was the most challenging step. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done. I struggled to understand what I had to do. At home, nobody understood what was going on, even my mom, who is a really supportive person.

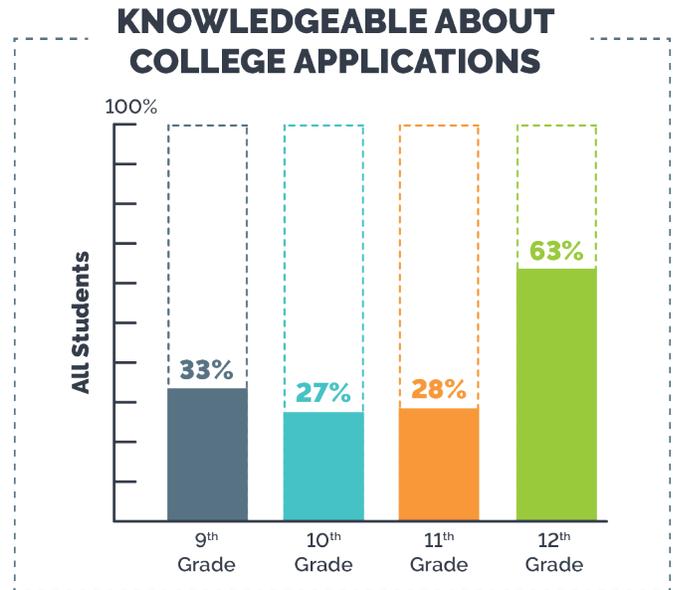
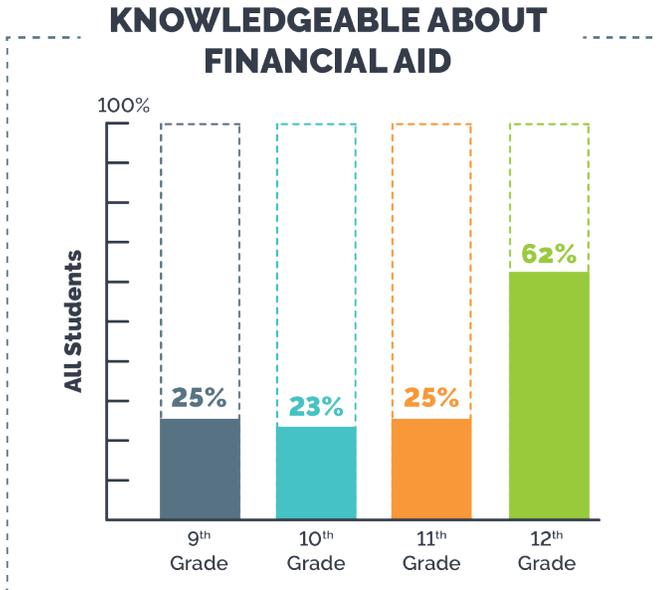
Luckily, my teachers, counselor, and school social worker helped me with my applications. They knew me and my situation, so they could help with specifics. My counselor helped me apply to WASFA [Washington Application for State Financial Aid]. I went to the counseling office because I wasn't sure what to do about financial aid or what the difference between FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid] and WASFA were. It took me a whole week just to fill out WASFA because it was confusing, but I did it, thanks to the help I got.

One of my friends who goes to another school was told by an adult, "If you keep messing up, you won't go to college!" But she was going through stuff at home, and they never even asked. They were really negative about her going to college. She ended up proving them wrong. But it would've been easier with their support, which is why I feel really lucky to be at Cleveland.

Honestly, I can't think of a time that a teacher here has ever discouraged me. Adults at school should always check up on their students. Not everyone has the knowledge already when it comes to college stuff. Check their understanding of what they're learning. That's a big part of being a teacher, in my opinion.

COLLEGE READINESS KNOWLEDGE

Students of all grades shared if they feel knowledgeable about financial aid and college applications. While 12th graders know more, the reality is that most students should be aware of this information before their senior year.



Sources: 2018-19 College and Career Leadership Institute's (CCLI) College and Career Climate Survey by Illuminate Evaluation Services. 2018-19 Evergreen High School Student Aspirations and Expectations Survey by Highline Public Schools. (Financial Aid - 9th graders: n=1,941; 10th graders: n=1,760; 11th graders: n=1,165; 12th graders: n=786. College Applications - 9th graders: n=1,647; 10th graders: n=1,543; 11th graders: n=1,042; 12th graders: n=694). Note: items were 1 - no knowledge; 2 - slightly knowledgeable; 3 - knowledgeable; 4 - extremely knowledgeable. Percent reflect students being knowledgeable or extremely knowledgeable.

By 11th grade, **only 64% of students had a conversation about college options** with a school staff member.

Sources: 2018-19 College and Career Leadership Institute's (CCLI) College and Career Climate Survey by Illuminate Evaluation Services (n=1,048).

Students really, really, really, want college and career info and they want it to start early and be talked about often. We need to include [college and career readiness] info in all of our classes and not limit it to a few conversations a year in a couple of spaces.

South Seattle Educator

WHAT HAS BEEN HELPFUL?

At most high schools, college and career readiness curriculum is incorporated into advisory or homeroom. We asked students what their schools could do during these class times to help them feel confident and prepared for what's after high school.

- Give structure and formalize hands-on work
- Share specific details on college requirements and opportunities
- Give time for individual work
- Invite guests like alumni or local professionals to share experiences
- Instill confidence, encouragement, and excitement



Source: College and Career Leadership Institute Student Listening Sessions (n=43).



TWO JOURNEYS TO COLLEGE

All our high school students want the same thing: a bright future. Yet some face more challenges getting there. For our students of color, students from low-income households, and/or the first in their families to go to college, the path to higher education has more hurdles.

Meet Mackenzie and FouinaNeiAso. Both are Honor Roll students at the same high school. Both aspire to go to college. Mackenzie is white. Her parents both graduated from college: one is a director at a local education nonprofit, the other is an accountant. FouinaNeiAso, who goes by Fouina, is Pacific Islander with Samoan heritage. Her parents attended high school: one is a restaurant server, the other is a fisherman.

**MY FAMILY
EXPECTS ME
TO GO TO
COLLEGE.**

90%

of white students
agreed or strongly agreed
with this statement.

92%

of students of color
agreed or strongly agreed
with this statement.

Source: 2018-19 College and Career Leadership Institute's (CCLI) College and Career Climate Survey by Illuminate Evaluation Services, 2018-19 Evergreen High School Student Aspirations and Expectations Survey by Highline Public Schools. (Students of color: n=3,702; white students: n=1,215). Note: items were 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - agree, 4 - strongly agree.

Aspiring to go to college and understanding how to get there

Parents expect Mackenzie to go to college

Mackenzie grew up hearing stories about her parents' college years. She has a college fund. Mackenzie tours colleges with her parents in 11th grade; they also connect her to alumni from her top school choices.

Parents expect Fouina to go to college

Fouina grew up with a strong sense of community. Her parents want her to go to college, but because they didn't go, they consider her school the authority on how to get to college. Fouina gets some information from her counselor, but not enough.

Completing requirements to apply to a four-year college in state, such as the College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADRs)

Mackenzie boosts SAT score by taking it several times

Mackenzie's mom emails and texts Mackenzie's teachers to make sure her daughter takes the classes she needs for college. Mackenzie's parents place her in an SAT prep course. Her parents pay for her to take it multiple times. She also takes the ACT.

Fouina takes rigorous courses, but later hits a roadblock

Fouina enrolls in the rigorous International Baccalaureate program. Fouina excels, but doesn't learn until her senior year she needs two years of a world language to fulfill CADRs. Fouina makes up the credits, but it takes time from other college prep. She takes the in-school SAT once.

Exploring college and career interests through activities

Mackenzie joins a wide range of extracurricular activities

Mackenzie is on the cross-country running team, like her father was. She is also part of the swing dance group and drama club, and volunteers at her mother's nonprofit.

Fouina has to make a decision on what she can join

Fouina is the editor of her school newspaper, which meets during school. She was interested in joining the debate team and the Pacific Islander Club, but because she has to walk her younger siblings home after school each day, she couldn't. Fouina also has a part-time job.

Applying to colleges

Mackenzie's parents take the lead

Mackenzie's parents help by filling out college applications, editing personal statements, keeping a calendar of deadlines, and paying application fees. Her parents encouraged her to apply for a dozen colleges. The fees totaled to about \$1,000.

Fouina navigates on her own

Fouina figures out the application process on her own. Mindful of her family's budget, she limits her college applications to three. She learns too late in her senior year that she was eligible for application fee waivers.

Filing for financial aid and applying for scholarships

Mackenzie's parents handle finances

Mackenzie's parents fill out her financial aid form and take out a modest loan in their name to cover her room and boarding fees. She doesn't need to apply for scholarships.

Fouina is overwhelmed

Fouina researches the terms on financial aid applications and her parents' tax returns in order to fill out the paperwork. More questions arise when she receives her financial aid letter. She struggles with this process while finding time to apply for scholarships.

Making a decision

Mackenzie gets into college!

Mackenzie gets into most schools she applies for, including her top choice. Based on their experiences, her parents give her the advice to enroll full time, not work her first semester, and simply enjoy life as a college student.

Fouina gets into college!

Fouina is unsure how to make a decision. She got into her top choice, but because she must support her family, she considers enrolling part time so she can work. She feels pressure to make everyone proud.

SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES WILL CONTINUE

The challenges Fouina faces have nothing to do with her as an individual and everything to do with the system she must navigate. High school is a crucial crossroad for young people. Educators and systems leaders must guide our students, trust the direction they choose, and help clear the obstacles in their paths.

For students of color and those first in their families to go to college, K-12 barriers carry over to college. That's why an enhanced college navigation support system for historically underserved students and cross-system improvement efforts are so important. Keep reading the next few pages to learn how schools and policymakers can make strong supports a reality.

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO

We asked students a series of questions about how schools can support them and their families with the college-going process. The answer is simple: more. Here are some of the most common themes that emerged.

Support students' academic and career goals.

"I will ask them to honestly listen to what the student has to say about what they want to do in the future and no matter what their grades look like or how outlandish it is, have the teacher try and do their best to get that student to where they want to be or where the student feels satisfied at least. And don't have the teacher shoot down a student based on how they learn, act, talk, and more."

-Black/African American 11th grader

Formalize college and career planning, integrate it into the school day, and scaffold content across grade levels.

"Give students more time and opportunities to participate in college planning activities at school. The activities right now and during advisory feel super limited and feel like they don't matter because they're so brief. They feel like side-activities."

-Asian 10th grader

Provide college and career exploration opportunities.

"We should get field trips especially to campuses/colleges to get experience of what college is like. It's not fair to other students who honestly would want to go to the programs, but they can't because unfortunately their parents can't take them."

-Black/African American 10th grader

Increase access for families by providing practical resources in multiple languages, demystifying the college application process, and communicating consistently.

"Send more information to my parents."

-Latinx (Mexican-Salvadoran) 12th grader

Believe—and believe in—students. Create a learning environment that builds confidence, encouragement, and excitement for students. Listen to their concerns and desires.

"A strong connection would look like a staff member giving feedback on students' ambitions outside of school in order to help form their path after high school."

-Multiracial (Nisqually-Chinese-Filipino-White) 12th grader



WHAT POLICYMAKERS CAN DO

Schools need to help students, but they are not getting enough support to create opportunities for rigorous college and career planning during the school day. District, regional, and state policymakers need to step up and address structural gaps and funding needs. Here are some recommendations for policymakers based on student surveys, listening sessions, and our work with educators.

INCREASE STAFFING FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER PLANNING

Require school districts to spend school counselor funding allocations on school counselors and meet the recommended counselor-student ratio of 1 to 250.

District & State: Washington state's school funding formula provides one school counselor for every 236 high school students regardless of school need, but districts are not required to use the funding to hire counselors. Actual state high school counselor ratios are closer to 1 to 450. Districts should be required to use this funding for counselors and meet the American School Counselor Association recommended ratio of 1 to 250.

Fund staffing to support the High School and Beyond Plan and online platform management.

District & State: The state requires schools to work with students on individualized High School and Beyond Plans on top of existing responsibilities, but doesn't provide extra funding. Schools need staff to oversee the implementation of the High School and Beyond Plan, including supporting curriculum delivery and online platform management.

Move to equity-based funding for college and career planning.

District, Regional, & State: Too often, funding is distributed equally even though some schools need more supports than others. Our state should move to a weighted funding formula and policymakers at all levels should identify supplemental funding sources to ensure that schools with large populations of low-income students receive additional funding for college and career planning.

BUILD SYSTEMS THAT SUPPORT COLLEGE AND CAREER PLANNING DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

Hire college and career staff with expertise to provide engaging, relevant, and equitable programming.

District & Regional: Ensure job descriptions are clear and align to current college and career preparation needs. Hire staff with personal experiences similar to our students' lived experiences reflective of our students, including people of color, local alumni, and first-generation college graduates. Provide appropriate access to school leadership, sufficient budget, and ongoing professional development to enable these positions to be effective and remain focused on college and career priorities.

Offer sustainable funding and time for online college and career planning platforms, platform management, and training.

District & State: Beginning in the 2020-21 school year, Washington State House Bill 1599 requires each school district to ensure that an electronic High School and Beyond Plan platform is available to all students who are required to have a plan. Online college and career platforms can be powerful tools to support and house students' plans. However, like other curricula and classroom technology, they only succeed with sustained investment and when staff receive ongoing training. Time also must be built into the school day to make best use of these tools.

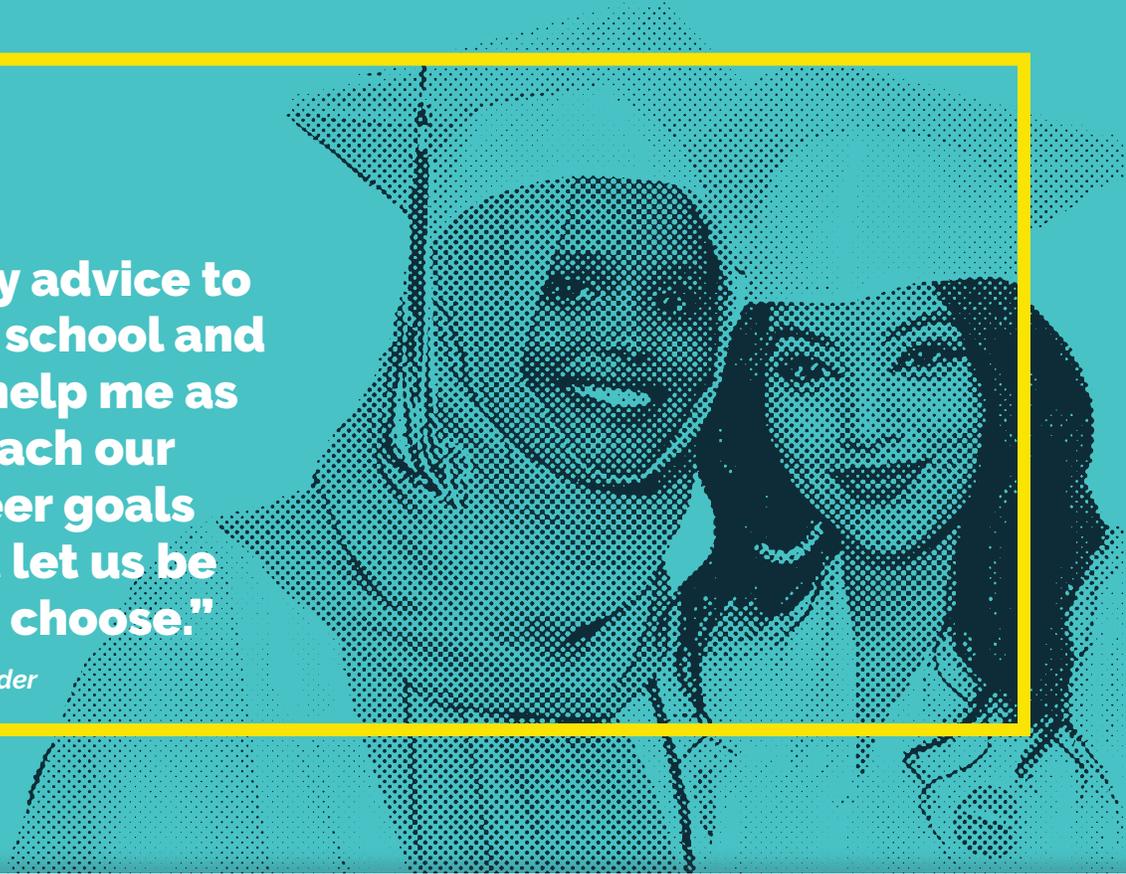
Offer college and career exploration and preparation as a class.

District: There is a lot students need to know to choose and pursue their next steps after high school. Districts can help schools develop credit-bearing college and career seminar classes or leverage AVID and career and technical education career choices, so all students can learn and explore their full range of options. These classes should include college and career exploration and planning, skill building, and financial literacy.



If I could give any advice to the adults in the school and how they could help me as well as others reach our college and career goals I would say, 'Just let us be ourselves. Let us choose.'

Black/African American 9th grader



THANK YOU

Many people helped make this report possible. Thank you to Auburn School District, Highline Public Schools, Renton School District, and Tukwila Public Schools for providing photos. Additional gratitude goes to Freda Crichton, Illuminate Evaluation Services, Sofia Torres, Teysia Parks, and the 11 College and Career Leadership Institute high school teams—Auburn High School, Federal Way High School, Thomas Jefferson High School, Evergreen High School, Kent-Meridian High School, Kentwood High School, Hazen High School, Lindbergh High School, Cleveland High School, Franklin High School, and Foster High School.

Most importantly, we'd like to thank school staff who facilitated the survey and listening sessions and the participating students whose voices are central to this report.

ABOUT THE ROAD MAP PROJECT

The Road Map Project is a collective impact initiative that began in 2010 to improve student achievement from cradle through college in seven King County, Washington school districts: Auburn, Federal Way, Highline, Kent, Renton, (South) Seattle, and Tukwila. Through multisector and community collaboration, we aim to increase equitable policies and practices in education systems to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps, and for 70 percent of our students to earn a college degree or career credential by 2030.

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