



SKILL LINK INITIATIVE

INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive evaluation of the SkillUp Washington Skill Link Initiative is underway and will be released in 2017. This study will examine the long-term effect of Skill Link participation on student education and incomes.

Skill Link is also sharing our lessons “along the way” in a series of briefing papers. The **Community Momentum Points** paper attached to this document describes one of the promising strategies that Skill Link is piloting.

WHAT IS SKILL LINK?

SkillUp Washington piloted an ambitious three year initiative in 2011 to prepare young adults (18-29) to enter I-BEST or other career pathway programs. This target population includes low-income young adults; many have dropped out of high school or GED programs and experience multiple barriers to college participation.

Six Skill Link partnerships across Washington State, comprised of community college, workforce development council and community-based partners worked together to connect young adults to community, college education and employment resources.

The launch of Skill Link occurred during a time when concern over the future of many vulnerable young adults looms large. Two Washington State partners, the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges (WSBCTC), and the Washington State Training and Education Coordinating Board (WSTECB), have been deeply

SKILL LINK SITES INCLUDE

Green River

- Green River Community College
- Seattle Education Access
- Seattle-King County WDC

Highline

- Highline Community College
- Multi-Service Center
- Seattle-King County WDC

Renton

- Renton Technical College
- Neighborhood House
- Seattle Education Access
- Seattle-King County WDC
- Renton Youth Source

Walla Walla

- Walla Walla Community College
- Blue Mountain Action Council
- Rural Resources

Clover Park

- Clover Park Technical College
- REACH Center
- Workforce Central

Lower Columbia

- Lower Columbia College
- Lower Columbia Community Action Program
- Goodwill's Longview Work Opportunity Center
- Southwest Washington WDC

engaged in Skill Link planning, implementation and evaluation efforts. These entities regard Skill Link as a foundational piece of a continuous pathway to college and career.

WHAT ARE SKILL LINK STRATEGIES?

Skill Link has taken a concerted “real world” approach that builds on the assets of young adults. Since its inception, the Skill Link model has maintained a strong focus on:

- Assessment-driven access to college preparation and Page access to resources.
- Strength-based approaches, which build on student motivation, resiliency and leadership skills.
- Course planning and tuition assistance.
- Contextualized math and reading instruction.
- Connecting peers to each other and to school and community resources.
- Navigator staff from community-based organizations working in partnership with community college instructors.

In addition to the above strategies, Skill Link’s model has evolved and begun to place a greater emphasis on:

- “Open” student cohorts, rather than “closed” cohorts at most sites.
- Recruiting current ABE/GED students interested in transitioning to college.
- Promoting student learning and affinity groups.
- Use of a life domain tool that helps students, navigators, and instructors mitigate barriers to education and employment such as childcare, housing, and transportation.
- Integration of career-pathway focused workforce development resources into every phase of the Skill Link model.

WHAT ARE INITIAL RESULTS OF SKILL LINK?

(Effective September 30, 2013)

- 296 students enrolled in Skill Link
 - 180 students demonstrating significant CASAS score gains (61%); 85% of those who post-tested demonstrated significant gains
 - 45 earning GEDs (self reported and preliminary)
 - 115 getting internships or jobs (self reported and preliminary)
 - 48 enrolled in college credit-bearing classes (preliminary)
- Promoting opportunities to build math skills to prospective students, as this area has been identified as a primary impediment to college by many students.
 - The strategic use of incentives, timed to reward the modest, short-term and incremental successes of students.
 - Post college enrollment transition supports.
 - Influencing the way other college partners, such as tutoring and advising centers, engage and serve the target population.
 - Promoting a regional focus in South King County, with an emphasis on employer engagement, cross-college referrals, and campus visits.

USING COMMUNITY MOMENTUM POINTS TO PROMOTE COLLEGE ACCESS AND SUCCESS

Traditional measures for college success often are usually defined as enrollment, completion and transfer data. In Washington State since 2007, under the Washington State Achievement Initiative measures also include progress and compensation for colleges if students' progress in the following six areas: performance on assessment of basic skills; advancement across levels of developmental education; accumulation of 15 credits; accumulation of 30 college credits; completion of math requirements; and completion of a degree, certificate or apprenticeship.

To support progress towards the above types of outcomes, Skill Link partners have developed a model that could be used to create a "community momentum point system," which would promote the college access and success experiences of low-income 18-29 year olds who lack the basic skills to enter credit-bearing college courses. Because many members of this target population also face personal challenges, such as unstable housing and lack of access to transportation, income, or other vital resources their entrance to college is frequently delayed and momentum to stay derailed. To address these issues we developed and implemented a model which could be sustained through the creation of a community momentum point system and related strategies.

WHAT WOULD A COMMUNITY MOMENTUM POINT SYSTEM LOOK LIKE?

Eight core community momentum points comprise the community momentum system. To work optimally this system requires that:

- A **formal community based organization (CBO) Navigator/Community College Faculty partnership** is

established and includes the campus-based presence of CBO Navigator staff, and ongoing communication between college faculty and CBO Navigators.

- Navigators administer **holistic life domain assessments** in partnership with students to determine if students require assistance to address certain issues that may interfere with their success before college enrollment. The assessments are administered later at set intervals. Navigators use this information to make strategic referrals to community resources and to help students develop the self-efficacy skills to independently access and negotiate these resources in the future.
- A **shared early alert system** is in place to ensure that college faculty and Navigators identify in tandem and in a timely manner warning signs (low attendance, low grades, inability to complete projects, loss of tuition assistance, subsidies or employment, etc.) and initiate efforts to address these issues.
- **Tuition assistance and income supports** are provided well in advance and coupled with practical financial coaching and planning, and referrals to work-study or other subsidy supports to ensure that student enrollment is not interrupted and momentum and progress towards graduation is sustained.

COMMUNITY MOMENTUM POINTS

- CBO Navigator/Community College Faculty Partnership
- Holistic/Life Domain Assessments
- Shared Early Alert System
- Tuition Assistance and Income Supports
- 1:1 Coaching
- Learning Resources
- Career Engagement
- Social Networking

- **1:1 Coaching** is provided to students by Navigators and includes a focus on goal setting, life and course mapping, study skills, schedule and time management, self-advocacy, problem solving and conflict resolution.
- **Learning resources** such as reduced rate or free computers, tutoring, books and other supplies are provided.
- **Career engagement** opportunities are woven into college activities that allow Navigators to develop integrated career and education plans with students and connect them with employer and workforce partner resources, which may include tuition assistance, hiring events, mock interviews, work experience, or connections to full and part-time employment.
- **Social networking** opportunities are woven into college activities, and include engaging students in learning community, affinity group and work focused tours or activities necessary to support their access to social networks, and expand their access to college, career and community-based champions and mentors.

WHAT WOULD RESULT FROM IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY MOMENTUM POINT SYSTEM?

Results would include:

- Increases in student self-efficacy skills and navigation of community and education resources. In short, students know how and where to seek help, and how to negotiate complex bureaucracies.
- The development of an holistic early alert system to ensure that student problems are addressed more efficiently and effectively, using the resources of CBO/Community College collaborative community-based partners.
- Students increase their access to college, community and career-focused social networks and support. Their identity as a student and future worker is strengthened, as are their ties to community organizations.

- Student participation in college is more consistent due to access to academic interventions, community, income assistance, career resources, and tuition assistance. As a result, more students achieve their academic goals, and more colleges benefit financially from student progress towards Student Achievement Points.
- A sustained and growing base of community and career resources and collaborative partnerships are put in place and strategically aligned to support student college and career success.

Community college faculty do not have time to provide the above community momentum types of assistance, yet are adept and vital partners in this work. By creating a community momentum point system, both community college faculty and CBO Navigators combine their efforts and expertise to benefit students. The resources available to students are greater as they have access to CBO supports, connections and networks. Furthermore, the community college/CBO partnership increases the awareness of both partners of each other's initiatives, and builds the foundation for sustained and informed recruitment and referral systems, that would not have occurred in the absence of this partnership.

A big picture look reveals that implementing community momentum point strategies would be both cost-effective and practical. The students who most need these supports likely are overrepresented in the disturbingly high number of students who never earn any student achievement points - posing a cost burden to community colleges and the economic prosperity of the community, every time a student fails to progress. The value added proposition and case for implementing a community momentum system to support student success is compelling.

Readers who are interested in learning more about Skill Link Community Momentum point strategies and tools should contact Susan Crane, Executive Director of SkillUp Washington at (206) 388-1660.