



COUNCIL CONVERSATIONS

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BRIGHT FUTURES START WITH BEING A CHAMPION FOR OTHERS' SUCCESS

By Ryan Betz, Guaranteed Education Tuition Program

We've all heard the term "Kids today..." It's usually followed by a statement like, "they sure have it easy." What we must remember is that kids are often a reflection of us in the mirror of life. As adult mentors, we must hold high expectations for student success, and students must have hope and be academically and financially prepared beginning at an early age.

This philosophy was the premise for creating the [GET Bright Futures](#) program in partnership with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Washington State. The Bright Futures program is designed to help young students develop and set personal, academic, and career goals by identifying champions in their lives (family members, coaches, teachers, friends) who can invest in them and encourage them to pursue their dreams. As part of this program, champions who open a GET college savings account for their student receive a \$50 enrollment fee waiver.

I traveled to more than a dozen Boys & Girls Clubs this spring in order to share the GET Bright Futures Program. When we asked one Kindergartner to describe college, he said it was "an opportunity to become your best self!" And when I asked a second grader what a path is, she said, "It is just your journey through life. It has ups, it has downs, and it has lots of turns. It really is not about getting someplace, it is just about becoming a better person by never giving up and remembering the people you love and how they have helped you along the way." Amazing insight from two kids I now consider champions in my life!

This piece is an excerpt from a longer article. Read more on the [GET Blog](#).

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: GEAR UP SUPPORTS LOW-INCOME STUDENTS ON THE PATH TO COLLEGE

Washington State GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) provides funding and support to 27 high-poverty school districts throughout every geographical region of the state. GEAR UP offers access to financial aid resources, teaches valuable study skills, and provides mentorship opportunities.

GEAR UP focuses on students from low-income and underserved communities, many of whom may be the first person in their family to graduate from high school or go on to college. Services begin in middle school, guiding students and families through the early years of college preparation, including academic, social, emotional, and financial readiness. GEAR UP ensures that students have access to the people, resources, and information needed to graduate from high school and continue in the postsecondary program or institution of their choice.

By building the capacity of its school district partners, GEAR UP benefits students and families beyond the program's eligible population. Ongoing, high-quality professional development gives school staff—from administrators to support personnel—the knowledge and resources to fully support all students' aspirations.

Critical program partners include the [University of Washington](#), the [College Success Foundation](#), and [Washington State Employees Credit Union](#). Learn more at gearup.wa.gov.

"I have learned so much from my GEAR UP mentors. They have taught me responsibility by holding me accountable, they have taught me compassion through kindness and service to others, and they taught me that I do have the personal power to make my own path to success and show my peers that they can, too." - 12th grader at CHOICE High School, Shelton

HELPING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES GO TO COLLEGE

Students with disabilities face additional challenges that may prevent them from entering and succeeding in college and other post-high school education programs. This group includes special education graduates, who continue onto postsecondary education at less than half the rate of the total student population.

To identify and recommend strategies for improving access for students with disabilities, the 2013 Legislature passed Senate Bill 5180, which formed a statewide Disability Task Force. The task force made [recommendations for policies and funding recommendations](#) at the state level, and also for local implementation.

Teachers and administrators support students with disabilities by ensuring all appropriate elements of [secondary transition services](#) are included in each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Parents and teachers can help students with disabilities by encouraging them to get involved in internships, community experiences, or work-based learning opportunities, or by helping them develop the "soft skills" needed for college success, including study skills, time management, communication, and self-advocacy.

More information about the [Disability Task Force](#)—including meeting information, materials, and resources for students, [parents](#), and administrators—can be found on the WSAC website.

ISLS GROUP MOVES TOWARD PROJECT COMPLETION, ONGOING COMMUNICATION

The Improving Student Learning at Scale (ISLS) Collaborative is closing out work on a recent grant from the [National Governors Association](#). The project focused on coordination of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Smarter Balanced (SB) implementation efforts between various educational sectors, agencies, and organizations in Washington State.

The collaborative has been a forum for communication among postsecondary sectors, contributing to the development of agreements among community and technical colleges, four-year public baccalaureates, and private independent colleges for use of the SB assessment in college placement. Students who earn a score of 3 or 4 on the SB can now skip some placement tests at colleges and enroll directly into entry-level college coursework.

Grant resources also enabled Washington to develop an innovative [dual credit lookup tool](#), included with other outreach materials on the [ReadySetGrad](#) website. The tool allows students to search and compare how their high school Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Cambridge International exam scores will apply as college credit at various public and private independent institutions in Washington State.

The current grant will wrap up by December 2015. Washington's team is strategizing ways to align and enhance communication efforts to accomplish key objectives going forward. Learn more about the [ISLS project](#) on the WSAC website.

A SEASON OF CHANGE. A FUTURE FILLED WITH HOPE.

By Gene Sharratt, Ph.D.

Summer is upon us following the recent season of proms, senior trips, and graduation, from Kindergarten on up to university. The time of commencement, to "begin the next step," is often marked by inspirational messages. This was certainly the case at this year's Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) graduation in Vancouver, where Karley Patching was the senior speaker. Blind since birth, Karley attended WSSB for the past seven years. She will be attending Clark College to pursue a two-year associate degree, then plans to go on to a four-year institution.

Karley's message to her fellow graduates: "Be a person of hope, grace, and commitment." She was inspiring in her message and delivery. Leaving the stage, she handed me her presentation—in braille, of course—laughed and commented, "Don't worry, Mr. Sharratt. I'll get you a copy you can read." I will frame it, along with the message that our "disabilities" do not define who we are or who we can become. Thanks, Karley! Best wishes to you, and to all of Washington's graduates, as you begin your journey toward a promising future.