

Partnership Name: (In progress)

Application Point of Contact: David Mendez

Fiscal Agent: True Measure Collaborative

1. Why are the partner organizations that are or will be included in this work the ones that came together to address educational attainment through place-based work in your region?

The proposed partnership will build on an existing relationship between three entities: the True Measure Collaborative (TMC), Northeast Washington Educational Service District 101(NEWESD101) and the Washington Statewide Family Engagement Center (WASFEC). We have had ongoing conversations around how to better support families who are navigating the special education system and increase shared knowledge around inclusive practices amongst educators and families. Funding from WSAC would allow us to develop a comprehensive, regionally responsive plan that leverages our partnership’s unique skill sets and experiences working within our education system and centering community voice. This partnership would lay the groundwork for a longer-term program that provides robust and regionally appropriate services, programming, and resources to ensure that more students, including students with disabilities, can access post-secondary pathways. This work seeks to add to the growing statewide work dedicated to influencing systems towards more inclusive and intentional supports for students with disabilities.

Completing a college degree is the [most reliable path to upward mobility](#). Although Washington’s public schools are supporting more students to earn a high school diploma and creating opportunities to engage in advanced coursework, students with disabilities continue to have one of the lowest graduation rates amongst student groups in the state with only 65.3% [graduating after 4 years](#). Based on recent Post School Survey data, 11.5% of students with disabilities in the NEWESD101 region are enrolled full or part-time in a community college or college/university for at least one complete term compared to 66% of Washington student's statewide.

The True Measure Collaborative, a statewide non-profit organization which partners with Washington public schools to offer centralized expertise and tailored supports to promote inclusive education in anti-racist environments, also serves five LEAs in the NEWESD101 region, and has developed a collaborative partnership with the NEWESD101 team. Regular communication between the TMC and NEWESD101 teams about LEA-specific needs has ensured coordinated and aligned services for these five LEAs’ inclusive education programming. NEWESD101 provides essential and cooperative services to schools and other learning communities. Among the many LEA-facing services and supports housed at NEWESD 101 is a Special Education Cooperative that provides direct Special Education services, consultation and program coordination, and staff and family support. NEWESD101 hosts and facilitates centralized professional development opportunities.

WASFEC is a statewide initiative committed to establishing full and equitable family, school, and community partnerships so that every learner feels belonging, knows they matter, and has access to a high-quality education. In collaboration with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Community Center for Education Results, Roots of Inclusion, and Washington Family Engagement, WASFEC is building and providing a centralized resource hub of trainings, information, and resources to help families and educators foster research-based school-family-community partnerships. The TMC and WASFEC have worked closely to build a relationship around resources for families who are navigating the special education system. We have begun to develop and collect resources to add to the WASFEC resource HUB around supporting families to navigate the IEP process, including resources from Dr. Erik Carter’s work on the ten dimensions of belonging.

This three-organization partnership will build on the complimentary work and aligned goals of all three organizations to help create strong, accessible pathways to college and career for all students, particularly those with disabilities. This grant will allow us to engage with one another and the community to inform, guide, and develop resources to better serve students.

2. How is or will the partnership be structured?

Our goals for collaboration are to create awareness across all organizations, minimize duplication, maximize individual and collective efforts, identify gaps/needs and fill them, and create a unified regional action plan with short- and long-term outcomes. To achieve these goals under TMC leadership, the core partners will regularly collaborate and convene to achieve key milestones of the project as laid out in section 7.

The TMC will serve as the essential coordinator for this grant. TMC will direct and manage the work and carry out all core activities. The NWESD101 will serve as an issue area expert around inclusionary practices and be our regional lead to support in coordinating efforts for bringing critical voices together and providing additional community context. The NWESD101 will also serve as our in-person meeting hub. The WASFAC will serve as an issue area expert, bringing their deep experience and strong collaboration partnership to inform, guide, and support our shared goals, particularly their skillsets in engaging community voice, as well as potentially hosting and more broadly sharing any co-developed resources over the long-term.

All core partners will commit significant staffing and other organizational resources to this project. We will develop a memorandum of understanding, along with letters of support from additional organizations working directly on this project to formalize our partnership and lay out expectations and key responsibilities.

3. How have or will the partner organizations learn from each other and the communities served, and how does or will the partnership incorporate this learning into ongoing work?

All three key partners bring a discrete skillset and expertise into this partnership, as laid out in section 1, and based on conversations over the past several months, have identified one another as critical thought partners and resource providers to help address ongoing challenges of post-secondary enrollment in rural communities in the region. We will inform our technical assistance and create a vision for systems change by guiding our work with cycles of data- and evidence-driven planning that moves the initiative toward intended outcomes while simultaneously strengthening organizational conditions or capacities.

The partnership has laid out a preliminary project plan (see section 7) with key milestones that help ensure strong, aligned coordination and regular touchpoints for information sharing and data-driven decision-making. We are grounding the plan in a phase of data assessment and landscape mapping that will help us gather known data and information from the partnership and identify key areas of data needed to be successful. By the end of the plan, we hope to have a pilot program or resource set that we can offer for input to the community, allowing us to refine and improve.

4. Who are the focal population(s) in your partnership's work, and what assets do learners and families in these populations bring to their educational journeys?

We will be working directly with the NEWESD101 Special Education Cooperative which is made up of small rural districts in the region: about 24 districts, with a total of 3,154 enrolled students served, with 18% being diagnosed with a disability. The goals of the Cooperative are to respond to current trends in the field and aim to assure compliance with federal and state requirements. Due to capacity, districts and regional educational support entities focus on compliance and have little time to offer other support for educators and families. The Special Education Cooperative is based on district need, and supports include consultation, program coordination, file/program review, professional development, and resource sharing. Most districts have only one special education teacher for the entire district, so the Cooperative allows time to collaborate and network in addition to receiving professional development and technical assistance. This space is led by the NEWESD 101 Special Education Center Director and Coordinator, Dr. Connie Kliewer. Meetings occur six times per year and are primarily attended by special education teachers, building administrators, and Superintendents.

While some resources around families' needs are known, it is essential that families are partners in helping us understand unmet needs and informing system changes. Building equitable and inclusive schools does not fall to the people who work in schools alone - it takes a community of people who know and care about young people and what they need to thrive in school and in life. Families are essential partners in this work. They bring a wealth of information and assets that can support the success of their children and result in school communities where we value and affirm the experiences, abilities, cultural identities, values, and languages that each student and family brings to our schools. Understanding issues that present barriers to post-secondary pathways and belonging for students is essential for making our schools more equitable and inclusive for students of all races, cultures, abilities, and linguistic backgrounds. We believe with this partnership we could add additional value around community voice, and training and resources to support inclusionary efforts and family engagement in the region.

5. What is the geographic region where the focal population(s) that would be served by this investment live?

We will be working directly with the NEWESD101 Special Education Cooperative which is made up of small rural districts in the region. This cooperative currently serves about 24 districts, with a total of 3,154 enrolled students. [The NEWESD101](#) is responsible for the seven northeastern counties of the state, Adams, Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens and Whitman counties serving 59 districts and over 100,000 students, 17% of whom are students with disabilities.

6. What are some of the systemic barriers that learners and families in your focal population(s) encounter?

Students with disabilities are systemically underserved across Washington state due to several key factors including lack of professional development and support for teachers, lack of Special Education staff, lack of funding and resources, and lack of capacity for inclusive, comprehensive family engagement and support. These realities result in significant barriers to high-school graduation and post-secondary success and these are exacerbated for students with disabilities: according to the most recent annual [Post-School Survey](#) (2021-22) only 17.4% of students with disabilities had enrolled in full- or part-time two or four-year college, in comparison to an average of 66% post-secondary enrollment among all Washington students in 2021 (according to the [Washington Roundtable's Path to 70 Update, 2023](#)).

The aim of this project is to build a holistic program in partnership with the NEWESD101 and the regional community to help address key challenges around geography, professional development and community engagement resources, and funding.

With a service area of over 14,000 square miles, NEWESD101 is the state's largest ESD in the number of local education agencies (LEA) served, counties served, and geographic region served. The vast majority of districts supported by NEWESD101 are in rural locations, some of which are situated as much as 3.5 hours' drive time from the ESD. As a result, access to critical resources such as staffing, professional development, and onsite technical assistance is highly variable across the region, with rural and remote LEAs often unable to leverage regional supports.

Districts, particularly when it comes to filling specialized roles such as Special Education teachers, LEAs do not have access to comprehensive and effective professional development resources to support their teaching staff in implementing inclusive practices. Services and supports provided by NEWESD101's Special Education Cooperative include consultation and program coordination, staff and family support, and direct services to students – but NEWESD 101 staff does not have sufficient time, capacity, or funding to meet the inclusive practices implementation needs of the entire region.

Another critical component to an inclusive educational model is family engagement. Parents and families are often not included in district conversations about what inclusion looks like at the local level, resulting in a lack of shared understanding and access to decision-making processes. One of the reasons for this gap is a lack of training and resources available to districts to support the creation and facilitation of community spaces. Lack of family engagement in decision-making processes negatively impacts student post-secondary outcomes.

Statewide, a majority of districts are reporting financial deficits when comparing special education revenues to expenses, suggesting a stark gap between available financial resources and programmatic needs for students with disabilities. OSPI has called for the Washington state legislature to fully fund Special Education in the 2023 and the 2024 legislative session, resulting in small fiscal wins (e.g. adjusting the Special Education funding cap from 15% to 17.5%), but LEAs across the state continue to be operating with a budget shortfall when it comes to serving some of their most vulnerable students. A particular challenge for small, rural LEAs is the existing barriers to accessing local, state, and federal funds for serving students with disabilities. In order to offset funding gaps caused by local levy inequities between districts of varying size throughout the state, districts may seek access to state funding through competitive grants; however, small districts face barriers including grant stipulations for population size served and limited staff capacity to manage cumbersome grant application and reporting structures.

7. What work do you propose undertaking during the granting period?

Through this partnership, we are proposing to develop a comprehensive, regional responsive plan that leverages our partnership’s unique skill sets and experiences working within our education system and centering community voice. We plan to co-develop modules for districts to utilize in their respective region for their educators and families. These modules will be co-developed with partners on the grant and the members of the community utilizing the [community conversations toolkit](#) and other strategies to engage educators and families in the region.

Below is our initial plan, objectives, and short-term outcomes for the funding year:

Q1	Planning/continued partnership development
Objectives	Plan Initial landscape assessment in the first quarter of our work together to map assets, resources, and knowledge pertaining to the key issues
Short-term Outcomes	Bring diverse set of community members and families together for collective impact and build a shared understanding of inclusion and belonging.
Q2	Landscape Analysis/Community Conversations
Objectives	Utilizing the Community Conversations Toolkit, host a conversation within the Special Education Cooperative to collectively brainstorm strategies and resources that can be used to address <u>inclusionary efforts and belonging</u> .
Short-term Outcomes	Engage various school personnel and community members including families to inform needs for resources including learning modules.
Q3	Design Phase
Objectives	Identify themes/topics of 1-2 modules that will be piloted in the region utilizing feedback from community conversations.
Short-term outcomes	Develop a community driven outline for modules.
Q4	Module Creation/Pilots

Objectives	Create modules and outreach plan for pilot schools/districts and gather feedback on the modules and accessibility of the resource.
Short-term outcomes	Build content for modules and pilot 1-2 with districts within NEWESD101.

8. How will this proposed work contribute to increasing educational attainment for the focal population(s) in your region?

As laid out throughout this proposal, we aim to build a partnership that will develop a community-driven plan for comprehensive programming to support post-secondary access for students with disabilities in NEWESD101. These students have particularly high barriers to accessing education services that help them build pathways after high school, owing to systemic factors both inside and outside of school. To help address these barriers successfully, we will bring our expertise and engage community members to build a regionally responsive plan and aligned resources that allow NEWESD101 educators and school leaders to provide comprehensive and effective services to students with disabilities.

Over the long-term, we hope this partnership will allow us to continue to build and refine tools and resources that are culturally and regionally responsive to help address geographic barriers, increase high-quality professional development, better engage families, and increase funding for special education in NEWESD101. If we are successful, we believe these will significantly decrease barriers to post-secondary access for students with disabilities in NEWESD101 and have the potential to be applicable in other regions that share NEWESD101’s unique challenges.