

Partnership Name: WABS South Snohomish County Partnership

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Fiscal Agent: Washington Alliance for Better Schools (WABS)

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 partners coming together for this work have shared values, vision, and strategy for addressing educational attainment in South Snohomish County. Subsets of the partners have been working together in various ways on the topic of postsecondary attainment over the past decade. There is significant existing infrastructure between partners to build from by formalizing and building capacity for this work through the Regional Challenge Grant in order to sustain deeper impacts. The current partners are Washington Alliance for Better Schools (WABS), Latino Educational Training Institute (LETI), Edmonds College (EC), Edmonds School District, Everett Public Schools, and Mukilteo School District.

Washington Alliance for Better Schools (WABS) is a nonprofit that leads a partnership of school districts, industry, and community dedicated to ensuring students furthest from opportunity can pursue a future that embraces their strengths, passions, and dreams. As a collaborative of school districts, WABS brings strong school district relationships to the partnership, as the superintendent of each partner district serves on WABS' board of directors, and senior district staff members meet on a monthly basis to collaborate on the programs and services provided for students, families, and educators. WABS also brings 20+ years of leadership in the family engagement space to the partnership through the Natural Leaders program which is active in 59 schools and impacted nearly 16,000 individuals last year across the 3 K-12 partner districts.

Latino Educational Training Institute (LETI) is a nonprofit whose mission is to facilitate the personal and financial success of Spanish-speaking and bilingual persons and inspire Latino youth to pursue their dreams and become leaders in their communities. LETI provides wraparound support for families and adults, communication and outreach to the Latino community, GED in Spanish, and experience in economic development programs. LETI typically makes 30,000 encounters per year.

Edmonds College (EC) serves approx. 14,000 students per year, of which about 46% are students of color. The majority of students feed in from the three partner school districts. EC works closely with LETI and has partnered with WABS on numerous initiatives and projects including guided Career Launch tech pathways. Additionally, EC and Edmonds School District are involved in a Limitless Partnership through the Gates Foundation, focused on postsecondary attainment. The best practices learned through Limitless will be shared and amplified through this cross-organizational Regional Challenge partnership.

Values: The members of the partnership are committed to centering equity in all our work and to the core values that were identified through WABS' comprehensive, community-engaged strategic planning process in 2023, in which the partners were involved.

Engage: We authentically engage with students, families, community, and partners

Create: We co-create innovative programs and strategies to advance equity for students

Amplify: We activate and amplify the capacity that exists in people, communities, and systems

Vision: The shared vision for our partnership is that the expertise, knowledge, and voice of families will be elevated as the catalyst through which we can make meaningful, sustainable change in postsecondary enrollment and outcomes for students furthest from educational justice. We recognize the inherent wisdom and expertise within communities and acknowledge that the existing systems neglect the imperative role of families in postsecondary behaviors. The partnership is committed to taking a collective impact approach to drive innovative solutions to educational attainment.

Strategy: The interventions proposed are innovative; they build on existing work, taking it to a new level for capacity building and implementation as we elevate families as integral to this cross-organizational work. Among the influences in the postsecondary ecosystem, families are an often-forgotten but incredibly powerful group that can make transformational changes in educational attainment. We will also integrate investments in K-12 educators as critical members of the educational ecosystem who can impact educational attainment through their interactions with students and families. We are primed and ready to further develop and catalyze this work across South Snohomish County as we continue to develop the partnership and move into strengthening our work through this investment.

2. How is or will the partnership be structured?

While significant relationships exist between many of the partners, there are aspects of the partnership that we look forward to strengthening through this proposal. WABS will serve as the backbone organization and fiscal agent of the partnership, convening the partners on a monthly basis and driving the momentum of the work. This role will build on a track record of success in engaging in a collective impact approach to designing programs and initiatives that support students and families. Partners will collaborate to take on different aspects of the work and will support and learn from each other.

Foundational to the partnership are the deep, long-standing relationships with families that inform and catalyze the work of the partnership. These relationships come from various sources including the deeply held relationships with Latino families through LETI, WABS' Natural Leaders program of parents from BIPOC, immigrant, refugee, and low-income communities, and a Student & Family Advisory Council. The partnership relies on the existing expertise and structure of Natural Leaders parent communities across 59 schools in the 3 districts. These localized groups come together to identify challenges for their students and families and use culturally relevant communication and outreach methods.

Our partnership structure is aligned with our values of co-creating, engaging, and amplifying existing capacity within our entities. The partnership utilizes a consensus-based decision-making model in which all partners must agree on decisions, emphasizing collaboration and collective investment in the work. This structure can be time-consuming, but we feel that it promotes ownership of the work as well as inclusivity, which are foundational to long-term partnership work. Complex, systems-level work like what we are engaging in requires full commitment from all partners to truly be impactful and sustainable.

The partners anticipate recruiting additional members along the way as we continue to develop as a partnership and connect intentionally with community-based resources, which may be formal organizations or informal groups. For example, we are in conversations with Connect Casino Road, a collaborative that supports families living in the Casino Road neighborhood of South Everett. We are still in the beginning stages of how to align our regional work with this group, but they are in support of the effort and have already offered to host evening sessions and meetings at their community center facility.

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?

The foundation of this partnership is the understanding that we need to center the voices of families and students to affect significant, sustainable changes in postsecondary attainment. To operationalize this, families are at the heart of codesigning and leading the strategies within their own communities, where they have established, trusting relationships. Deep community ties exist within partners such as LETI and through the Natural Leaders groups, which serve as their own defacto community organization at their school, listening to the needs of their community members, creating action plans, and sharing strategies within and between communities using culturally relevant communication and feedback methods.

Mechanisms for learning from all partners, school districts, communities, and higher education include:

- Monthly partnership meetings for open dialogue and sharing of successes, challenges, best practices, and evidence-based solutions gained from within and outside the work of the partnership.
- Routinely sharing and analyzing data to identify trends, successes, and areas for improvement.
- Ongoing engagement with the Student & Family Advisory Council, who helped us develop the proposed intervention strategies and will provide feedback on ongoing successes and challenges.
- The implementation of the Parent Leadership Academy (*see #7*), is fundamental to implementing our strategies and allows us to continually engage directly with communities to adapt to their feedback.
- Engagement with participants in LETI's Latino Leadership Institute (LLI), which trains young Latinos from Edmonds College to become leaders through community involvement and leadership training. LLI participants are near-peers to the high school students we are hoping to influence and can provide critical insight and guidance as we co-design and implement our strategies.

To incorporate the above learnings into our ongoing work, we will develop shared goals and objectives, identify emerging challenges and needs, and adapt program design and implementation based on feedback and data analysis. All partners are committed to a culture of continuous improvement and reflection.

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?

The South Snohomish County region encompassed by our partnership is diverse, vibrant, and full of opportunity. The community of over 55,000 students includes Black, Indigenous, Latino, immigrant, refugee, and low-income students and families. Systemic oppression has disproportionately impacted these communities and requires targeted intervention for change, which is why our partnership unapologetically focuses on impacting students furthest from educational justice.

There is a rich tapestry of knowledge, wisdom, and assets in families in our region. Over 100 different languages are spoken by families in Mukilteo School District, for example, demonstrating the breadth of perspectives and backgrounds represented in the community. One of the strongest assets brought by families and learners in our region is deep, committed community relationships. There are strong ties within and between language communities, and in particular within recently immigrant and refugee populations. These families are dedicated to trying to improve life for their children and are committed to helping each other. For example, 406 families engaged in the Natural Leaders program across 59 schools in the three school districts last year. These family leaders held events and activities that impacted over 15,982 individuals last year. They identify the needs of their communities and develop an action plan to address these needs. They identify the best ways to bring people together and communicate, whether through texts, face-to-face meetings, or events featuring food, dance, and/or childcare. These existing, trusted leaders are incredible community assets, serving as bridges between BIPOC, immigrant, and refugee families and institutions, guided by the principle of ‘Nothing about us, without us.’

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

We defined our region in South Snohomish County based on the use of shared resources, common demographic profiles, and similar challenges and opportunities. Although the region is divided by school district boundaries, the reality is that there is a high level of mobility for families between these three districts due to overlapping geographies. Families often move between districts to find more affordable housing or to be more proximate to their language community, particularly for more recent immigrant and refugee populations. This creates closely-knit communities that communicate frequently and share resources as they work to navigate the US school system and broader society, which is an incredible community asset in our region. This more communal approach often runs counter to the dominant culture in the US but is a powerful way to support student success.

Edmonds, Mukilteo, and Everett school districts serve over 55,000 students, of which a majority are students of color, between 18-25% are English language learners, and nearly half are low-income. Our region encompasses the Casino Road area of South Everett/North Lynnwood which is an area of focus for community and legislative investment due to high poverty, crime, and gang activity in the area. Given these challenges, there are also incredible opportunities to support students and families in these areas.

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

Families and students have directly informed our partnership about the systemic barriers in the region that impact educational attainment. The main barriers encountered include:

- **Systemic exclusion of families from career connected learning opportunities** so they are often unaware of these opportunities or feel the opportunities do not reflect their input, needs, and assets.
- **Lack of information about postsecondary opportunities AND confusion over the crowded postsecondary landscape.** There is both a lack of information about the breadth of pathways that

exist as well as confusion and overwhelm due to the lack of clarity and accessibility of existing opportunities. Families are often unaware of programs such as short-term credentials and certificates.

- **Families are addressing immediate needs** such as poverty, crime, and gang violence, which makes it challenging to try to navigate a complex, convoluted postsecondary landscape.
- **While information is communicated to students, families are often a significant influence in decision-making, particularly in some immigrant, refugee, and BIPOC communities.** Without involving families, current interventions are not culturally relevant or impactful.
- **Immigrant, refugee, and low-income communities often lack access to social networks closely tied to high-opportunity careers due to economic disparities.** Without direct connections to these resources, there is often a lack of understanding of the value proposition of postsecondary education.
- **Language barriers persist.** With over 100 languages spoken in the region, there is a misalignment between how schools and colleges share information and how families want to receive it.
- **Lack of trust between families and institutions,** particularly for new immigrant and refugee families, emphasizes the need for trusted community relationships at the center of our strategies.

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

Our partnership is focused on building our capacity to center the voice and expertise of families and students furthest from educational justice in designing and building out a continuum of advising strategies and interventions across K-12, college, family, and industry silos to increase equity for college enrollment and credential attainment. Our partnership has been co-designing, piloting, and assessing strategies. Grant funding will help us deepen our partnership and implement these strategies, serving approximately 290 students, 25-30 parent/community leaders, and 12 educators during the grant period.

Capacity building system strategies leading to college enrollment & completion:

- a. Strengthen collaboration with community based organizations.** Historically, our partnership has had particularly strong engagement with immigrant, refugee, and BIPOC families through the Natural Leaders program. We are working to broaden engagement through additional partnerships with CBOs such as Latino Educational Training Institute (LETI), a core partner on this grant. We are also engaging with Connect Casino Road, but our conversations are still in the initial stages. We see strengthened collaboration with CBOs as a critical step in the development of community-based postsecondary transition and completion strategies using multi-generational, family-based approaches. The grant provides funding and structure to further develop these relationships.
- b. Student and Family Leadership**
 - **Student & Family Advisory Council:** The partners collaborated to co-develop a framework for a Student & Family Advisory Council to integrate student and family voice and leadership into all aspects of our partnership and across family, school, college, and employer interactions. Grant funding will support a pilot of the council. Participants will receive stipends.
 - **Parent Leadership Academy:** In collaboration with K-12 districts, WABS will lead intentional, compensated professional learning for family leaders through the Natural Leaders program. Parents and community members completing the Academy will collaborate with grant partners to design and pilot family-led, culturally responsive, in-language Info Sessions and Workshops (FAFSA, Dual Credit, College Applications, etc.). We anticipate serving a cohort of 25-30 parent leaders. In-language sessions help address communication barriers that our families and community partners have identified and also strengthen a multi-generational approach to increase family participation and therefore learning for all partners. Participants will receive stipends.
- c. Family-based Navigation:** Edmonds College currently has staff positions that help students navigate their education and career options. These positions cross K-12 and college boundaries, providing system support, coaching, and guidance to students on opportunities and steps to enroll in college and achieve early milestones and momentum toward college credentials. The partnership will work with students, families, and stakeholders to create job descriptions, frameworks, and strategies to integrate

family-based engagement, supports, and strategies into these existing positions.

- d. Integrate and scale current and in-development partnership frameworks for expanding on-site work based learning** as a part of a holistic, equity-centered strategy for college and career advising that spans family, community, secondary, and postsecondary boundaries. WABS has been working with K-12 partners to conduct worksite tours and postsecondary visits for students furthest from educational justice. We believe school day career awareness and exploration activities that provide an opportunity for students to see and engage directly are a critical element that is often missing in college and career advising efforts. School districts have shared projections on their capacity and need to scale on-site work based learning. Through this grant, we will collaborate with partners to build scaffolded systems for partners to increase the scale of these visits, pilot and assess a job shadows program our partnership recently co-designed, and develop holistic supports to better integrate these experiences for students and link them to college and career pathways, navigation, family-led workshops (FAFSA, WASFA, College Application, etc.).
- e. Develop educator capacity and leadership for equity-centered career connected learning.** The purpose of the program is to help educators better connect learning to STEM and other careers by providing time, resources, curricular flexibility, and support for educators to authentically integrate career connected learning (CCL) into interactions with students and course curricula while ensuring inclusive, equity-centered design and implementation so that all students better understand the relevance of classroom learning to the world of work as they pursue a future that embraces their strengths, passions, and dreams. The partners co-designed an educator professional learning program that includes industry mentorship and on-site visits to companies and postsecondary institutions. During the grant period, we will pilot the semester-long program with a cohort of 12 educators and their 290 students across the partner districts. Educators will receive stipends for participation.
- f. Build intentional connections to college and career pathways based on family feedback and insights.** Our region's Skill Center provides a wide array of programs with dual credit, college certificates, and career pathways. Families and community partners have underscored the importance of ensuring students and families are aware that these opportunities exist and having access to information and support to increase access. Additionally, Edmonds College has a broad array of short certificates aligned with industry careers, longer certificates, and two & four-year degrees. Intentional collaboration on dual credit, FAFSA/ WASFA, college applications, and other resources, such as navigators, advisors, and affinity groups, is a critical aspect of our envisioned work.
- g. Data & Accountability:** Build data systems and agreements to track a cohort of students and the effectiveness of our proposed interventions.

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

Our theory of change is rooted in developing an ecosystem of partners and shared strategies to create a more holistic, equity-centered, and family-based advising system. This ideology is based on the idea that in order to impact students, we need to influence all of the primary players in their world, which includes not just students themselves, but also their families and teachers.

Our partnership brings together students and families, community based organizations, K-12 and postsecondary administrators, K-12 and college educators, navigators, and counselors around a shared set of strategies and supports for our focus population. We know that a stronger regional, family, and community-based approach is needed to address system disparities in postsecondary transition and attainment so that our systems can be more responsive to the circumstances of all students. We also believe that teachers who are supported and equipped with resources and professional learning can have a powerful influence in supporting postsecondary aspirations and pursuits. Our aim is for our community-based approach and co-developed strategies to become embedded into current education systems and become adopted as standard practices so that they will continue to be used beyond the life of the grant, serving students and families more effectively and equitably long term.