



Regional Partnerships Case Study

Leveraging Learning and Collaboration in Spokane

Abbey Roth, Associate Director of Strategy & Partnerships | April 2026

Washington's Regional Approach

In Washington State, 62 percent of adults have a postsecondary credential. To increase postsecondary attainment, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) invests in regional, cross-sector partnerships seeking to improve educational attainment in lasting ways and meet the needs of learners historically underserved by higher education.

The Regional Challenge Grant (RCG) brings together public K-12 school districts, community-based organizations, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Beyond just programs and services, these place-based partnerships seek to build regional cultures that value education for all residents. Each partnership works with the learners in their communities to identify place-based strategies to improve attainment, such as:

- Financial aid application assistance (FAFSA & WASFA)
- Guidance for the transition to college
- Early and ongoing family engagement
- Basic needs and transportation resources

Today, 12 partnerships are working to increase postsecondary attainment across Washington. The following case study explores the strategies and results of one partnership: **Mpower in Spokane County**.



Figure 1: Dancers from Nuestras Raíces Posadas event (Photo by Nuestras Raíces)

Partnership Snapshot:

LaunchNW and Mpower Mentoring

In 2022, the Innovia Foundation created **LaunchNW** to bring partners together around a shared vision of collective community success with a focus on children and youth. Modeled after the success of Say Yes to Education in New York, LaunchNW began as a supported Promise Scholarship initiative, working with community organizations, schools, and universities to build a supportive, collaborative pathway for students in their region. By March of the following year, LaunchNW had received one of the first RCG investments to further develop this community infrastructure and support high school students with the transition to postsecondary education.

Regional Partnerships Case Study

LaunchNW built a multi-sided mentoring and career-readiness partnership known as **Mpower**. Today, the partnership offers four styles of mentoring: peer, near-peer, adult, and family. This deeply collaborative approach places site coordinators from community organizations within large schools full-time. It also provides smaller, rural schools with a stipend to increase existing staff capacity to coordinate connections between mentors and students, complementing existing school resources and working with teachers and counselors. Partner organizations strengthen this approach by providing individualized career coaching and career exploration opportunities. These experiences enable students to build self-awareness about how their skills and interests translate into good jobs in their community. Outside of the RCG scope, LaunchNW offers other, aligned resources to students who participate in Mpower, like a Promise Scholarship and financial aid completion events.

With the RCG investment, Mpower partners with eight schools across seven school districts, including Central Valley, East Valley, Liberty, Medical Lake, Nine Mile Falls, Riverside, and Spokane Public Schools, in coordination with Northeast Washington Educational Service District (NEWESD 101). Through other, braided funding, Mpower operates within an additional five schools. The partnership includes community-based organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters, Communities in Schools of Northeast Washington, Nuestras Raices, and Slingshot. Participating Universities include Eastern Washington University (the Aspire Program), Gonzaga University, and Whitworth University. To learn more, please see our [2025 RCG Legislative Report](#).

"Through our partnership with Mpower, we surround students with mentors, resources, and opportunities so they can dream big, plan ahead, and soar after graduation. We're showing what's possible when a community comes together to help every student thrive—it truly takes a village."

- Debra Raub, Executive Director, Communities In Schools of Northeast Washington

Regional Context



Spokane County is home to many higher education institutions, including the Spokane Colleges, Gonzaga University, Whitworth University, Eastern Washington University, and Washington State University Spokane. And while 12 out of 13 school districts in Spokane County regularly outpace the Washington State's average graduation rate, only 46 percent of adults in the county have a postsecondary degree. This disparity is further amplified for BIPOC, English Learners, foster youth, and low-income students. As the second-largest city in Washington, Spokane is anchored by several mission-similar CBOs and strong healthcare and manufacturing industries, and there is an opportunity to coordinate around a shared vision that links student success to economic development.

Results and Impact

- *Mpower serves an average of over 1,600 students each year*
- *FAFSA completion rates have jumped by more than 20 percentage points in multiple districts served by Mpower*

Nearly 2,300 Spokane County students participated in mentoring or career coaching during Mpower’s first two school years. This approach is already showing signs of shifting the culture around college-going, with more students demonstrating their intent to enroll by completing the FAFSA. **For instance, at Riverside School District, the FAFSA completion rate jumped to 62 percent in 2025, a 23-percentage point increase from 2023, marking two years of progress under the RCG investment.**

Riverside is not the only district changing. Just over 20 miles southwest, at Lakeside High School in Nine Mile Falls School District, coordination and collaboration are making a big difference. **As of January, 66 percent of the Class of 2026 have already completed a FAFSA application. This represents a 25-percentage point increase from the same point in time for the class of 2023, before the partnership began.** Meanwhile, across the county, only 33 percent of the class of 2026 completed a FAFSA application by January.

To learn more, visit WSAC’s [FAFSA Completion Dashboard](#).

Lakeside High School’s peer-to-peer mentorship model is an important part of this story. At this school, the site coordinator capacity is provided in partnership with the Educational Service District (NEWESD 101), which increases two existing academic support roles. Beyond just coordinating a program, these staff members are building a new culture around mentorship. Rather than simply pairing peer mentors and mentees, they plan peer mentor/mentee meetings during lunches where all mentors and mentees meet at the same time. This provides a supportive structure for the mentorship model and creates a shared sense of community between mentors and mentees alike – all of them students who are thinking about their plans after high school and developing their leadership skills.



Figure 2: Peer mentors with their Site Coordinators (Photo by Lakeside High School)

Lessons Learned

When Mpower began in 2023, the partnership's presence looked very similar across all eight high schools. But over the last two years, school teams have both learned from one another and adapted their programmatic work in unique ways in response to their community's resources and needs. For example, two community partner organizations that provide near-peer mentorship (EWU's Aspire Program) and career exploration (Slingshot), offer the same level of support at each of their schools, but how they provide that support varies: the time of day, frequency, and cadence of their services are based on school needs. In one school, they meet with students in advisory classes, and in another, they work alongside counselors and students in individual meetings about career goals. Additionally, Aspire often adjusts its curriculum sequencing based on existing school resources, and Slingshot works with schools to build on the landscape of career exploration opportunities before adapting its model. These partners share a willingness to learn and to be creative and adaptive in the best interest of students.

With LaunchNW's support as the backbone, partners learn from the collective network's expertise on the most effective ways to support students and troubleshoot site-specific challenges. In addition to whole-partnership meetings, LaunchNW facilitates quarterly Site Coordinators meetings and thrice-yearly school site check-ins for real-time learning and adaptation.

"As our partnership grows and our relationships deepen, we are able to collaborate more intentionally and draw on one another's expertise, strengthening each partner's skill sets. This collective growth enables us to better support every student. Working as a collective is hard work and the journey has been worth it."

- Ben Small, Executive Director, LaunchNW

RCG Partners Across WA: Leading with Mentorship

Across Washington, other RCG partnerships are also leading with a mentorship model. In Seattle, the Postsecondary Success Network similarly facilitates mentorship connections for high school students alongside career exploration. With a focus on BIPOC students, culturally specific mentorship enables students to reinterpret their marginalized identities as cultural assets, while also building key college and career readiness skills. And like Spokane, Seattle's partnership builds on the infrastructure of a regional Promise Scholarship (Seattle Promise) to provide enhanced postsecondary pathway exploration.

The Bigger Picture

Led by LaunchNW, the Mpower partnership coordinates an array of mentorship and career exploration opportunities for high school students throughout Spokane County. Other aligned strategies include a Promise Scholarship opportunity open to Mpower high school graduates, FAFSA Open Doors, a coordinated FAFSA/WASFA completion campaign in partnership with the Spokane Teachers Credit Union (STCU) and Washington Trust Bank, and a youth mental health initiative, EngageIRL, coordinating and sharing enrichment opportunities for students to engage “in real life” with their peers and communities. LaunchNW is also a partner with WSAC’s [OtterBot](#) regionalization project that connects students with customized college-going and financial aid supports via text message. Additionally, in the fall of 2025, LaunchNW built out the next stage of their work – placing College Navigators within higher education institutions to support the postsecondary transition and retention of Mpower students. Funded by a Ballmer Group investment, this strategy enhances the Mpower model and extends the resources students experience throughout their educational journeys. LaunchNW thoughtfully integrates these resources by ensuring high school students know what support awaits them in college and by creating a warm hand-off between site coordinators and college navigators.

Summary

LaunchNW’s impact has grown significantly since 2023 when they began with the original RCG cohort. LaunchNW has seen success leveraging its Mpower partnership to provide nearly 2,300 Spokane County students with mentoring services and career exploration support. In these same districts and schools, FAFSA completion rates have increased, in some cases by more than 20 percentage points from before Mpower began. The partnership has navigated this work in a place-based way. They intentionally match community organizations and districts based on their rural or urban context and allow partner organizations flexibility to determine the most effective ways to provide Mpower services in each community. After three and a half years of collaboration, additional partners are joining Mpower, and new funding is expanding the scope of Mpower’s student services.

Two sections of this case study (Regional Snapshot and Results and Impact) were adapted, in part, from Mpower’s Theory of Change in [Appendix B](#) of the 2025 RCG Legislative Report, developed by Rita Chang. To learn more, read the [complete report](#) by Deane & Chang.

About the Washington Student Achievement Council

The Washington Student Achievement Council is committed to increasing educational opportunities and attainment in Washington. The Council has three main functions:

- Lead statewide strategic planning to increase educational attainment.
- Administer programs that help people access and pay for college.
- Advocate for the economic, social, and civic benefits of higher education.

The Council has ten members. Four members represent each of Washington's major education sectors: four-year public baccalaureates, four-year private colleges, public community and technical colleges, and K-12 public schools. Six are citizen members, including two current students (one graduate student and one undergraduate student).

If you would like copies of this document in an alternative format, please contact the Washington Student Achievement Council at:

Mail:

P.O. Box 43430

Olympia, WA 98504-3430

Phone:

360-753-7800

TTY/TDD users may dial 7-1-1 for relay services



WASHINGTON STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT COUNCIL
EDUCATION · OPPORTUNITY · RESULTS