



## Solid dividends for students created through philanthropy and scholarship

Thousands of low-income, underserved students, backed by a caring community and generous scholarships, flourished in college and beyond.

*By Seattle Times editorial board  
The Seattle Times*

**A** dynamic combination of hardworking, motivated students, the insights of a creative nonprofit and the financial support of a generous benefactor has transformed the lives of thousands of Washington students.

The power of the word “opportunity” radiates from the findings of a survey of the roughly 5,000 Washington Achievers guided through college with the help of the College Success Foundation and scholarships from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The idea behind the Achievers program was to support low-income, underserved students who might not be thinking about or pointed toward college.

The College Success Foundation’s template for college planning started early — as early as middle school. Students who expressed an interest would receive sustained support through high school.

Students were pointed toward the classes they needed for college admission. Students and families were guided through the swamp of college aid applications.

The Gates Foundation covered the gaps not paid for by other financial grants and family sources.

In college, students found emotional support from older students who served as mentors to help them adjust to campus life and cope with family anxieties from the new experience of a family member in college — a son or daughter not at home contributing to family maintenance and income.

The Achievers program also sent foster-care children to college and nurtured their adjustments and eventual success.

The legacy of the Achievers program is extraordinary, as the Gates funding sunsets and other sources emerge.

Here was a collaboration of students with the will, intent and academic capacity to attend college but not the means, a gifted nonprofit with a strategy to help them succeed and a generous philanthropic foundation to help cover expenses.



A survey of these Achievers found virtual full employment after college. These program alums were living and volunteering in Washington communities. All had stayed close to home. And they are committed to seeing their own children going to college.

This is a celebration of the tenacity of spirit of the students, the creative insights of the College Success Foundation and the well-focused generosity of the Gates Foundation.

Opportunities create options, and they empower and enrich lives.

*Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Ryan Blethen, Brier Dudley, Mark Higgins, Jonathan Martin, Thanh Tan, William K. Blethen (emeritus) and Robert C. Blethen (emeritus).*

*Check out the following page for more insights from the Seattle Times*



## College scholarships a big boost to break cycle of poverty in students, study finds

A majority of the low-income, B-average students who received college scholarships from the Gates Foundation are doing very well after graduation, a new study shows.

By Katherine Long  
Seattle Times higher education reporter

**A** new survey of low-income, B-average students who received scholarships to college shows that a few years after graduation, many had good jobs, volunteered in their communities, and expected their own children to go to college, too.

The survey suggests that college scholarships, combined with the right support in high school, can break the cycle of poverty. And it can work for low-income students with promising — but not stellar — academic records, said Jeffrey Knudsen, a researcher with the College Success Foundation (CSF).

The nonprofit, which administers many different types of scholarships in Washington state, studied recent graduates who received Washington Achievers scholarships, funded by a \$100 million grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation over 10 years. Students who received some other types of scholarships were studied as well.

Not all the students who received the scholarship finished college — in fact, 40 percent never did. If that sounds low, however, Knudsen said it's important to note that only about 14 percent of low-income Washington students usually complete college.

The scholarships were awarded to about 500 students from Washington high schools for each of the 10 years. The Achievers scholarships paid for the college costs that state and federal grants, other private scholarships and the family's own contributions didn't cover.

The scholarships were given to kids who often weren't seen as "college material," Knudsen said — not straight-A students, but rather B-average kids. They had potential, but little family money or other resources to fall back on.

While state and federal grants would have paid for a chunk of their tuition bills, these students likely would have had to take out large loans to cover costs such as housing and food, he said.

With the Achievers and other College Success Foundation

scholarships, he said, "regardless of whatever other aid they got, finances were not going to prevent them from going to college."

As part of the scholarship, students received planning help in their junior year of high school. They learned how to pick a school that offered a good fit, and how to prepare for the SAT and other standardized tests.

The study shows that nearly 90 percent of the scholarship awardees who graduated from college are currently employed, and about three-quarters of them are working in their field of study. Some are unemployed because they're enrolled in college. Only 1 percent are unemployed and seeking work.

About 30 percent have earned, or are in the process of earning, advanced degrees. Twenty-one percent have earned a master's.

More than 70 percent earn \$40,000 or more per year, and about a third earn \$60,000 or more. In the survey, the graduates reported strong job satisfaction, and 86 percent said it's very likely their own children will go to college. Nearly half are already saving for their children's college educations.

Four-fifths of the students have stayed in Washington state, and nearly half stayed in the community from which they graduated from high school. That shows that Washington state is benefiting from the scholarships, because the graduates serve as role models for family members and neighbors, said Mary Theisen, director of marketing for the CSF.

Two out of three graduates also volunteered in the past year, and one in five has served in a leadership role outside their primary place of employment.

Knudsen said the foundation has long had anecdotal evidence that the Achievers students were contributing to their communities after college. The survey makes it clear the effect is widespread.

The scholarship aid also kept students from accumulating large amounts of debt. More than 60 percent of the students graduated with less than \$20,000 in student debt, and almost one-fifth graduated with no debt at all. Because their debt figures were low, many were able to borrow money to go to graduate school, Knudsen said.

The Gates grant is nearly over; the money runs out next year. But the grant has largely been replaced with state and private funding, including the state-supported College Bound scholarship. In all, 85 different funding streams have replaced the Gates Foundation's seed money, Knudsen said.

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