



## MEDIA RELEASE

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**CONTACT:** Ay Saechao: 206-592-3303, [asaechao@highline.edu](mailto:asaechao@highline.edu)

Raechel Dawson: [rdawson@highline.edu](mailto:rdawson@highline.edu)

### **Highline College to Develop Talent Search Program at Local Schools to Help Students Persist to College**

**500 Students at Pacific, Mount Rainier are Focus of Grant**

DES MOINES, Wash. — Whether it's an overnight trip to universities and colleges across the state, having the means to take a SAT/ACT prep course or getting the chance to meet with professionals in the STEM field, low-income, first-generation students often miss out on critical opportunities that will help them graduate high school and enroll in college.

But with the help of a \$1.38 million TRiO Talent Search grant, Highline College aims to change that.

The U.S. Department of Education recently awarded Highline College the 5-year grant, which will fund a director and two advisor positions, and the development of the Talent Search program. The program team will be charged with providing wraparound advising, tutoring and college prep services to approximately 500 first-generation, low-income students at Pacific Middle School and Mount Rainier High School in the Des Moines-based Highline Public Schools district.

“We know that the relationship and mentorship first-generation college students have with an educator can make all the difference navigating K-12 and college,” Ay Saechao, Highline College’s Dean of Student Support and Funding Services, said. “If the student has a school staff member who knows their goals, their challenges and strengths, that can propel students to overcome obstacles to reach their destination. Our first-generation college students, who often don’t have members of their family to walk them through the complex education system, can benefit greatly from the professional mentorship of Talent Search staff and from its services and resources.”

The students this program will serve live in the most racially and ethnically diverse community in Washington state, where residents speak close to 100 different languages. However, of the 10,164 families living in Des Moines, [11.8%](#) — close to 1,200 — are living in poverty, according to the 2015-19 American Community Survey. It's also reported that 64.5%, or nearly 1,600 students, are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch at Mount Rainier and Pacific. Yet [14%](#) of adults in the area do not have a high school diploma and only [25%](#) of adults have a bachelor's degree.

Saechao, who will serve as the Interim Talent Search Director, said the program will complement the work being done at Highline Public Schools, while increasing the schools' capacity to serve a larger population.

"We know they are doing their best, and we're here to join them to reach the goal of college preparedness together," Saechao said. "For Highline College, this is a new endeavor as we will now have our site-based staff working directly with teachers, counselors, parents and community partners on a daily basis to build and operate a college access pipeline. That level of partnership will result in further opportunities for our students and community."

Some wraparound services include academic skill, career and college-readiness assessments; academic success planning; academic skills and development and tutoring; academic advising and counseling; admissions and financial aid application assistance and college exploration and campus visits.

"The ultimate goal is for students to reach their higher ed goal, whatever that is," Saechao said, noting that while the Talent Search staff will be employed at Highline College through the grant, the staff will work extensively with students on setting them up for success at whatever college they choose.

In addition to college preparation, students will be exposed to high-profile company visits, career counseling and exploration with a specific focus on the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) field. Talent Search staff will promote jobs within those industries by providing STEM-related career exploration workshops, industry visits to companies like Microsoft and Boeing, and expose students to internship opportunities, such as those at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center or the University of Washington GenOM ALVA Project.

Throughout the TRiO Talent Search grant process, Highline College received backing both at a regional and national level with letters of support from Highline Public Schools, the College Success Foundation, the Highline College Foundation, Sen. Patty Murray's office, Sen. Maria Cantwell's office and Rep. Adam Smith's office.

Learn more about Highline's [Talent Search program](#).

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**Attachment:** Photo of a student at Highline College.

**Links within this release:**

- <https://www.census.gov/search-results.html?q=2018+poverty+des+moines+washington&page=1&stateGeo=none&searchtype=web&cssp=SERP& charset =UTF-8>
- <https://www.census.gov/search-results.html?q=2018+des+moines+washington+high+school+diploma&page=1&stateGeo=none&searchtype=web&cssp=SERP& charset =UTF-8>
- <https://www.census.gov/search-results.html?q=2018+des+moines+washington+educational+attainment&page=1&stateGeo=none&searchtype=web&cssp=SERP& charset =UTF-8>
- <https://trio.highline.edu/talentsearch/>

*Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves more than 16,500 students. With over 70 percent students of color, Highline is the most diverse higher education institution in the state. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education, basic skills and applied bachelor's degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.*