



## Rainier Scholars

According to a mountain of statistics, students of color are less likely than their peers to graduate high school, attend college, and earn a bachelor's degree. They also get fewer opportunities to excel academically. What's the best way to address this complex issue? Rainier Scholars, a program for talented minority students in the Puget Sound, has one answer to that question: hard work—and lots of it.

Promising students are selected for the program in the fifth grade, and they make a very serious pledge. They will spend an entire school year taking after-school classes every Wednesday and Saturday and two summers doing intensive academic work. The level of rigor—and the expectations—couldn't be higher. But they're nothing compared to the self-confidence the scholars gain.

In a sixth grade language arts class, the 12-year-olds select a text, explain why it's meaningful to them, and recite it from memory. Then the rest of the class discusses the selection and gives feedback on the delivery. In science class, students learn the fundamentals of physics by building race cars with compact discs for wheels that use rubber bands for power. They build the cars in teams and keep troubleshooting until the car is fast and goes as far as possible. In math class, students work together on complex algebra problems. In short, this is a rigorous curriculum that emphasizes critical thinking and collaboration.

And that's just the academic program. Rainier Scholars supports students over an 11-year cycle, all the way through college graduation. The goal is to help students thrive in advanced courses of study, attend the college of their choice, and graduate ready to assume community leadership roles. Over the years, students receive academic and career counseling, leadership training, internship opportunities, tutoring, and mentoring.

Rainier Scholars is just six years old. Its first class has not yet applied to college, but the preliminary results are impressive. More than 90 percent of the scholars have been admitted to academically rigorous programs in local private or public schools. And more than 80 percent of the program's students will be the first in their families to graduate from college.

