



News Release

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Rainier Scholars and Tacoma Public Schools Announce New Partnership

*Community-based **Rainier Scholars Tacoma** will help increase college access for underrepresented students and build on a commitment to serve more African American students in the region.*

Rainier Scholars and Tacoma Public Schools (TPS) are excited to announce a new partnership supporting Tacoma students of color on a path to college graduation and a lifetime of choices.

Rainier Scholars currently serves students in the Seattle, Renton and Highline School Districts, supporting multi-generational African American, African immigrant, Hispanic/LatinX, first-generation Asian, Pacific Islander and Native American students. While Rainier Scholars aims to serve those most likely to face barriers to a college education, the Tacoma partnership is a critical step towards their commitment to serving more multigenerational African American students and families.

Jennifer Ward will serve as Chief Operating Officer of Rainier Scholars Tacoma. She is a longtime advocate of equity in education with nearly 20 years' experience building programs that increase access for students of color.

“As a black woman who grew up in a low-income, single-parent household, I know first-hand the unique struggles of pursuing college,” she says. “Centering multigenerational African American students in our Tacoma program design is in response to the disproportionate achievement outcomes we see for Black students. We’re excited to work alongside local community leaders and organizations to be a part of the solution.”

In Tacoma, academic data shows a longstanding gap between the academic performance of students of color and white and Asian students.

“We are so excited about what this partnership with Rainier Scholars means for TPS students and our community,” said Amanda Scott-Thomas, TPS Director of Community Partnership. “Expanded learning opportunities have been essential to TPS’ work of building a system of support for our students and families that promote a college-going culture and increase awareness of, and access to, college and career success.”

Working in collaboration with TPS and other partners, Rainier Scholars Tacoma will develop a program model that will be responsive to the needs of Tacoma students. The first cohort of TPS fifth graders will be selected during the 2021-22 school year and begin the program in summer 2022. Each year, Rainier Scholars Tacoma plans to add one cohort of 45-60 students. Students will be selected through a holistic application process that includes teacher recommendations, test scores and interviews.

During their first 14 months in the program, students selected for the program will complete 1,000 hours of addition academic enrichment focused on:

- Exposing scholars to challenging content that they will see in a college preparatory pathway.
- Practicing the essential academic skills of time management, organization, self-advocacy, accountability, risk taking, and collaborative learning
- Developing a foundation of cultural identity and resiliency

The goal of that work is to get ready for success in a college preparatory pathway for middle school. In middle and high school, students receive ongoing academic support, college planning support, leadership development, career guidance and paid internship opportunities.

Over the next year, Rainier Scholars will begin to introduce itself to TPS students and families across the city and build relationships with other community partners. This summer, Rainier Scholars is planning several community engagements around Tacoma, including book giveaways and other literacy building activities.

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Tacoma Public Schools (TPS) is one of the largest districts in Washington State, serving approximately 30,000 children in preschool through grade 12. The district has 35 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, 10 high schools and 4 early learning centers. 19 schools are

designated as innovative. TPS has nearly 5,000 employees and is one of the largest employers in Tacoma.

Now in its 21st year, **Rainier Scholars** cultivates the academic potential and leadership skills of underrepresented students of color through a comprehensive 12-year program that provides academic enrichment, leadership training, career development and personalized support to students and their families, with the goal of increasing college graduation rates and empowering new generations of leaders. Learn more at www.rainierscholars.org