

## OPEN DOORS PROGRAM PROFILE

# Skagit Valley College

*This profile was produced as part of the Community Partnerships for Reengagement Initiative to promote shared learning about promising youth reengagement practices and program models in the Open Doors system. In spring 2023, we collected data from six Open Doors sites (two in each pathway: GED-plus, high school diploma, and college) to develop profiles of programs with evidence of promising student outcomes. Information about this project and the methods used to develop this profile are provided at the end of this report.*

Skagit Valley College (SVC) Open Doors is a college pathway program based in Mount Vernon and serving students from rural communities and towns across northwest Washington. The SVC Open Doors program started in 2015 to serve students who were too young to participate in the college's adult high school diploma program. The SVC Basic Education for Adults (BEAdA) program now operates as an "intergenerational high school" with Open Doors students working towards their high school diploma alongside adult learners (over 21). The program braids Open Doors funding with High School Plus and institutional funding from the college. During the 2022–23 school year, a school improvement grant with Mount Vernon Schools supported efforts to improve graduation rates for students who identify as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) enrolled in the SVC Open Doors program.

### Skagit Valley College Open Doors

- College pathway
- Established in 2015
- College partnership with six districts
- Hybrid courses two days each week
- In-person and virtual case management
- **46** students enrolled in 2020–21
- Average age at enrollment: **18**
- Average credits at enrollment: **11**

## Partnership Structure and Roles

The program serves students from six school districts: Anacortes, Burlington-Edison, Concrete, LaConner, Mount Vernon, and Sedro-Wooley. From 2018–2020, the program also partnered with Job Corps to offer career training in healthcare and computer science. Currently, the districts and SVC are the primary organizational partners.

District staff members such as principals or guidance counselors refer students to the program for instruction, often after the students have tried other alternative learning options. SVC provides districts

with monthly updates on student attendance and shares grades quarterly. In the past, SVC program leadership met with district partners several times during the school year, but communication is now more limited. Students re-enroll in a district school or program for graduation.

# Student Population

In 2020–21, SVC Open Doors served 46 students with a peak of 131 students in 2017–18. The program engages a diverse population (table 2). Across six academic years (2015–16 to 2020–21), on average the program enrolls a higher percentage of students who identify as BIPOC and students classified as English language learners compared with the statewide student population. It also engages a higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, migrant education, and homeless education services. On average, SVC students enroll in the program with more cumulative credits earned than Open Doors students do statewide.

**Tables 1–5. Average Student Characteristics (2015/16–2020/21), Skagit Valley Open Doors**

**TABLE 1**

| Gender     | Percentage |
|------------|------------|
| Male       | 50%        |
| Female     | 50%        |
| Non-binary | 0%         |

**TABLE 2**

| Race                                       | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| White                                      | 38%        |
| Latino/a/x                                 | 52%        |
| Two or more races                          | 2%         |
| Black or African American                  | 2%         |
| American Indian or Alaska Native           | 5%         |
| Asian                                      | <1%        |
| Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander | <1%        |
| Race not provided                          | 0%         |

**TABLE 3**

| High school experiences and programs | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Free or reduced-price lunch          | 87%        |
| Learning assistance program          | 38%        |
| Experienced homelessness             | 19%        |
| Special education                    | 11%        |
| 504 plan                             | 9%         |
| English language learner             | 15%        |
| Migrant education program            | 17%        |

**TABLE 4**

| Previous high school progress                                       |       |
|---|-------|
| Cumulative high school grade point average at Open Doors enrollment | 1.37  |
| Cumulative high school credits earned at Open Doors enrollment      | 11.07 |

**TABLE 5**

|                                     | Age |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Average age (first year in program) | 18  |

Note: All data originally came from Comprehensive Education Data and Research System data files and are students’ high school records.

Source: Authors’ analysis of data from the Washington State Education Research and Data Center.

SVC program staff members observe that most students have, as one put it, “big lives” outside of school such as work and/or caring for family members. Districts view the SVC program as a fit for **older students who are behind in credits and need a flexible schedule and hybrid classes** due to these responsibilities. Districts also consider access to reliable transportation to get to campus—a potential challenge in this rural region—in referring students.



College is a place where you want to be here. You don't have to be here. And everybody wants to be here so bad. I feel so good here.

SVC student<sup>1</sup>

Program leaders portray Open Doors as a unique opportunity for students to benefit from a college environment that may be a better fit for their learning and lifestyle than the K-12 system. Both students and district staff members say that a college campus appeals to older students and note that the program is a best fit for **young people who are “highly motivated” to complete a high school degree quickly in an adult learning setting.**



I find that those highly motivated kids are the ones that are most successful [in SVC Open Doors] ... Somebody that's seeking out opportunities, not just that we are like, “You should do this.” Somebody that really wants to get through high school quicker.

District partner

While the college campus location is a draw for many students, district partners and SVC staff members agree that students need a lot of support to “mentally prepare for” the transition to the opportunities and responsibilities of the new environment. The **First Quarter Experience Class** is an opportunity for SVC staff members to get to know students and increase their comfort on campus. In this class, students receive initial transition support such as opportunities to practice skills they need to be successful in college (e.g., emailing instructors, developing a study schedule).

# Program Design and Implementation

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## STAFFING STRUCTURE

The **director** oversees program operations and maintains relationships with Washington’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the districts. The **navigator** conducts outreach, reviews transcripts, enrolls students, advises students on course selection, monitors progress, and connects students with campus resources as needed. Students primarily take high school diploma classes with **tenure-track faculty** in the BEdA program who develop their own curriculum. Students can also take dual-credit college classes taught using the I-BEST model by both a content instructor and a basic skills instructor who can provide sufficient small group and individual support.

The staffing structure of the program has shifted with larger changes in the college in recent years. While students take most of their classes with BEdA faculty and Open Doors is based in that program, the navigator is instead based in the student services department. The navigator, faculty, and program leadership communicate informally as needed to coordinate their support for students. The program used an early alert system with Open Doors students in the past.

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## PROGRAM MODEL



### *Pre-program*

**District or self-referral.** District counselors and principals refer students to the program and the navigator follows up with the student to complete a paper application and secure transcripts. Sometimes the navigator meets students and families in their communities to help complete registration paperwork. Students can also self-refer through the website or after hearing about the program from peers.



### *Enrollment and onboarding*

**Enrollment and placement.** Students meet with the navigator on campus to enroll and select courses aligned with their long-term goals. The navigator encourages students to take placement tests as they may earn credits that way.

**First Quarter Experience Class.** Students learn about mindsets, practice study skills, and engage in career and college exploration. The class also examines the history of the U.S. education system and students earn a social studies elective. Class meeting times vary depending on the format—fully in-person classes meet twice a week, hybrid classes meet once a week, and online classes are asynchronous and do not meet formally.





## *Program experience*

**Instruction.** The high school courses take a contextualized instruction approach. Content instructors and basic skills instructors collaboratively teach courses and provide individual student support. Since the pandemic, the program started offering hybrid classes, with some students fully online. Classes are offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays. About 30 percent of students also take college-level courses outside of BEdA with continued support from Open Doors until they are aged 21.


**Case management.** The navigator emails students as a group weekly and meets with them individually each quarter to work on their education plans. If students identify a need for wrap-around support, the navigator connects them with campus or community resources. Students can request meetings with the navigator anytime via Calendly.

**Additional opportunities and support.** During the first week of the quarter, students can drop in to student support sessions for advising or help with navigating technology. Open Doors students have access to campus facilities, resources, and clubs.



## *Next steps support*

**Postsecondary planning.** In developing their education plans, the navigators and students discuss long-term goals and select relevant classes, making sure to choose a pathway that leaves options beyond high school open. Staff members also talk with students about financial aid if they choose to stay at SVC after aging out of Open Doors.



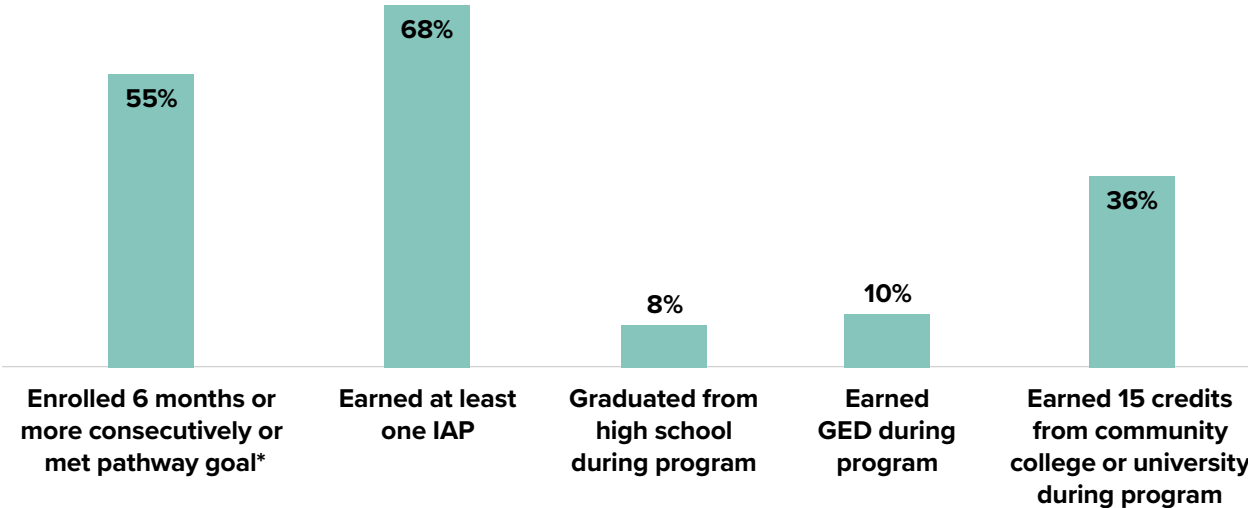
# Student Progress and Outcomes

## SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC PROGRESS

*Over half of students persist and make academic progress, with more than a third of students earning at least fifteen college credits.*

Looking across six academic years (2015–16 to 2020–21), an average of **55 percent of students enrolled in SVC Open Doors for six months or more** (figure 1). This is a higher percentage than the average for Open Doors college pathway programs statewide (54%). About **68 percent of enrolled students earned at least one indicator of academic progress** and **36 percent earned at least 15 college credits**. During the program, 18 percent earned either a high school degree (8%) or GED (10%).

*Figure 1. Program outcomes, Skagit Valley Open Doors (2015–16 to 2020–21)*



\*Higher than statewide average for the college pathway.

Source: Authors' analysis of data from the Washington State Education Research and Data Center.

### *Students find the adult learning environment engaging, respectful, and supportive.*

All the young people we spoke with said that taking **fewer classes two days a week, with evening and hybrid options**, increased their ability to focus on their coursework and manage their time in relation to other responsibilities. They appreciate being able to work, as one said, “on your own time and your own pace.” Students also suggested that classes seemed “more organized” than in their districts and liked using the Canvas software application to keep abreast of their coursework.

Students said the courses offered **interesting and relevant content**. They shared examples of how the classes helped them to reflect and make meaning of past educational experiences or to choose a postsecondary pathway. Students said they especially enjoy working on assignments during class in small groups with support from instructors and other students. They often described how hearing the perspectives of other students increased their understanding of the course content and engagement in class.



There's a bunch of older people here, but I don't mind it. I mean, I like that they're always asking questions, and you're learning from them. So, you do get that whole range here, from 16 to 40, honestly. And you're just learning from everybody.

SVC student

BEEdA faculty participate in training on liberatory education and inclusive pedagogy and how to incorporate these principles into their instruction. Instructors endeavor to foster a “safe” learning environment that recognizes the “community cultural wealth” their diverse students bring, while providing space to process and “heal” from experiences of trauma in previous educational settings.



We give students a chance to talk about some of the educational trauma that they've experienced ... and tell them you're not alone, or it's okay, this isn't going to happen here.

SVC staff member

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## **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING**

*The positive climate contributes to a sense of belonging and academic efficacy.*

All students expressed that the positive and respectful adult learning environment is a major motivation for them to persist toward their goal. Being among other adult learners who are working hard toward the same goal enhances positive **peer relationships** and increases students' sense of belonging on the college campus as well as their sense of self-efficacy as learners. They suggest that SVC students are more focused on learning than are students in district high schools; they “really want to be here” and “are not just doing it for a grade,” as one student said. Students say that their SVC classmates more actively participate in class rather than looking at their phones.



A lot of the people here are adults and a lot of them are in the same situation as me. They didn't finish their high school diploma and they really wanted it and they're passionate about it, so are coming here to do it. So, everyone's kind of on the same page here.

SVC student

Students also describe **positive relationships with staff members** as a key factor in their progress. Instructors and navigators “believe you can do it,” one said, bolstering student confidence and engagement. Staff members help students celebrate everyday successes—whether through compliments on their coursework or high-fives in the hallway. In our conversations, SVC students often expressed surprise at the level of encouragement and support they receive from staff members.



I do feel the support. I don't feel like I can't do it. If I need help, I come and get help. And everyone is so nice, and they want you to succeed. And it's crazy. I don't believe it.

SVC student

When they are experiencing challenges in completing coursework or attending class, students say that staff members remain warm and respectful, reaching out to assist students in getting back on track toward their goals. This includes adjusting how they teach in response to student needs. Students say that at SVC, instructors consider “other factors” that get in the way of student progress, focusing on student strengths. Students commonly described the instructors as being “more understanding” than their previous high school teachers because they reach out if students are absent, later welcoming them back and helping them catch up on missed work without shaming them. As one SVC staff member noted: “Our tone here is like every day they come is a good day.”



# Key Strategies

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## PROGRAM STRATEGIES



### *Outreach and relationship-building*

- All staff members demonstrate “understanding” and a “non-judgmental approach” that makes students feel welcome and respected, including when they have challenges in meeting expectations.
- The “intergenerational high school” on a college campus model offers opportunities for mutual learning and support among older and younger students, as well as a culture of motivated peers.
- Small-group work encourages students to develop friendships with other students.



### *Case management and wraparound support*

- All staff members regularly remind students about wraparound support available to them on campus and reach out to them individually when they notice a potential need.
- Navigators meet individually with students to provide academic counseling and track progress, encouraging and reaching out to students who stop coming to class to help them reconnect.
- Instructors offer individual student support during class, via office hours, and by email.



### *Relevant and flexible learning opportunities that build on student experiences and strengths*

- Students take classes two to four days a week, with night, hybrid, and online asynchronous options.
- Smaller dual-credit college classes taught by two instructors use group work to provide individual student support for basic skills as well as content. Inclusive pedagogy and asset-focused adult learning strategies build on student strengths, promote mutual learning, and explore content of high interest to students.
- Instructors provide flexibility on class requirements in response to student needs.



### *Student voice and choice*

- Students work with the navigator to select courses aligned with their interests and schedule, with multiple options and ease in changing courses.
- Students can participate in campus-wide student government, clubs, and events.

# Partnership Strategies

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## **BENEFITS OF FREQUENT COMMUNICATION AND A PHYSICAL PRESENCE IN DISTRICTS**

District and program staff members both suggest that frequent communication about student progress towards high school graduation facilitates effective collaboration, including timely responses to requests for information. All partners appreciated when SVC staff members met annually with the district to check in about the partnership and connected informally during regional Open Doors meetings. Districts value when SVC staff members can be physically present in districts to help students register and educate school staff members about the program. They suggest that recent efforts to build strong partnerships between SVC and individual schools helps to support students through the transition to the program.

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## **USE OF OUTSIDE RESOURCES FOR CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The program received a school improvement grant to improve graduation rates for BIPOC students, develop new outreach materials for BIPOC students, and shorten pathways to math credits. The BEdA program also volunteered to participate in a program review with the state which they use to improve the quality of their basic education courses for Open Doors and other students.

## **About this Project**

The [Community Partnerships for Reengagement Initiative](#) (CPRI) is a collaboration between [Education Northwest](#) and Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to strengthen the capacity of the Open Doors system and to increase equitable education and workforce outcomes for youth. Our purpose is to use data to promote shared learning across the Open Doors system and nationally about promising youth reengagement practices and program models. This project is funded by the Ballmer Group and Kaiser Family Foundation.

Education Northwest worked closely with an advisory committee of local and national experts to identify practices and strategies that make a program effective and successful. We developed a statewide [Open Doors Theory of Action](#) in collaboration with the CPRI advisory committee, the Open Doors steering committee, and programs across the state. We also analyzed program and student data (2016–2021) to understand the short- and long-term outcomes for each program site and selected sites doing better than expected in meeting their pathway goal for students historically underserved in education. We also considered issues such as program size, location, provider type, and student characteristics in selecting sites that represent the diversity of program models and communities across the state.

In spring 2023, we collected data from six Open Doors sites (two in each pathway: GED-plus, high school diploma, and college) to develop profiles of programs with evidence of promising student outcomes.

For more information about the CPRI initiative or questions regarding the information presented in this memo, please contact Julie Petrokubi [julie.petrokubi@ednw.org](mailto:julie.petrokubi@ednw.org).

## Methods

Education Northwest developed this program profile from artifact review and interviews/focus groups with six Skagit Valley College staff members, four district staff members, and four current or former students. Data was collected both online and during an in-person site visit. We analyzed quantitative program and student data (2016–2021) from the Washington State Education Research and Data Center to produce the student demographics and outcomes figures.

### *Recommended citation*

Petrokubi, J., Hodara M., & Fujita-Conrads, E. (2023). *Open Doors Program Profile: Skagit Valley College*. Education Northwest.

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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Due to the small sample size and need to preserve anonymity, we do not distinguish between quotations of Open Doors students and alumni in this profile report.