



Building momentum for postsecondary success

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### **STRONG START TO FINISH TO RECEIVE \$5.35 MILLION IN NEW FUNDING**

***Now impacting nearly 3.7 million students, initial funders pledge additional support as momentum builds in landmark year three***

**(DENVER, Colo.) – October 21, 2019 -** [Strong Start to Finish](#) (SSTF), a national initiative aimed at significantly increasing the number and proportion of low-income students, students of color and returning adults who succeed in college math and English, will receive an additional \$5.35 million in funding. The initiative of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) received initial funds – along with this next boost – from Ascendium Education Group, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Kresge Foundation. The first pooled investment helped launch SSTF in August 2017, and this round of support reflects the national initiative’s success to date. Funds are earmarked to spur equity-centered research, practice, and policy invention and innovation, address emerging challenges at currently supported systems, and to provide targeted technical and strategic assistance to systems preparing to implement developmental education reforms at scale.

“States across the country are examining developmental education reform, and through a collaborative model, Strong Start to Finish has quickly emerged as the leader to inform the field,” said Jeremy Anderson, ECS president. “We look forward to sharing our knowledge of what we learn is working with our system-level partners, so that even more states can shift policies and practices to increase the number of students who complete college.”

SSTF is a network of committed postsecondary leaders and philanthropists, working together to change institutional practice and policy across the nation to bring equity to education. The collaborative initiative believes the single most impactful way to help students finish college and achieve a degree is to help them get a strong start by completing college-level math and English in their first year of study. Through remedial education reform, SSTF seeks to improve college completion rates, lessen debt burden and make an overall impact on the economic viability of communities.

“We are incredibly grateful and humbled by the continued support of our funding partners,” said Christopher Mullin, SSTF director. “We’ve focused the initiative on addressing historic and persistent attainment gaps, placing equity at the center of our work and targeting programmatic and analytic resources at supporting students of color, low-income students, and returning adults.”

“Within just two short years Strong Start has managed to bring on two additional systems – beyond the initial four - including one of the largest in the country, California Community Colleges,” said William Moses, managing director of the Kresge Foundation’s Education Program. “We are proud to be a partner of this initiative and look forward to seeing the impacts of this next phase of funding.”

SSTF began working with four initial systems in early 2018 -- City University of New York (CUNY), Ohio Department of Higher Education, State University of New York (SUNY) and University System of Georgia (USG). Since then it has added Arkansas Community Colleges (ACC) and the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, and most recently, California Community Colleges, which is spearheaded by the

California Community College Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) and the Foundation for California Community Colleges. In total, SSTF's work impacts an estimated 3.7 million students across 250 institutions.

"It's gratifying to see what SSTF has achieved in such a short amount of time," said Amy Kerwin, vice president of education philanthropy for Ascendium Education Group. "That's why we are proud to be part of this next round of funding. We believe strongly in the need to remove systemic obstacles so that every student who starts can finish. The momentum we are seeing thus far demonstrates that SSTF's approach is working, and we are excited to reach even more students with this new investment."

For its part, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supports the continuing work of Strong Start to Finish as part of its efforts to help students get on a path to a degree or certificate, stay on that path, and ensure learning along the way.

SSTF selects system-level partners based on a number of factors, including demonstrated work underway on reforms that will increase the number of low-income students, students of color and adult students completing gateway math and English courses in their first year of college and those that exhibit evidence of scale through the participation of a system and its institutions. Once selected, SSTF's partner systems maintain flexibility to execute programs they believe will work best for their students. Each is required to share its learnings with the full network. The collaborative approach is designed to amplify changes at scale.

Strong Start to Finish is a network of like-minded individuals and organizations from the policy, research and practice spaces who've come together for one reason – to help all students, not just the select few, find success in postsecondary education. SSTF is an initiative supported by Education Commission of the States, a nonpartisan organization that conducts research, delivers reports, provides expert counsel on the full spectrum of education policy issues, and convenes education leaders across the 50 states to learn from each other. For more information on Strong Start to Finish, please visit [www.strongstart.org](http://www.strongstart.org) or call (303) 299-3683.

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