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College & Career Connections Changing the Learning Environment in Washington, D.C.



Students participate in a college readiness workshop as part of the College & Career Connections Learning Community in Washington, D.C.

The Washington, D.C., Learning Community, [College & Career Connections](#), is successfully creating a learning culture that motivates youth to graduate from high school and pursue postsecondary education.

Since being established three years ago, CCC has partnered with six schools and four youth-serving organizations. The program has engaged more than 600 students in grades six through nine in motivational, experiential college and career exploration programs.

USA Funds® provides financial and programming support to CCC as part of the Learning Communities initiative. USA Funds helped spearhead the work of the Learning Communities Coalition, which is focusing services on selected communities across the nation to improve access to higher education for low-income students.

The Learning Community serves an area east of the Anacostia River where only 40 percent of students graduate from high school and only 5 percent of these graduates complete college within five years of their high school graduation.

“Studies show that the most significant dropout rates are after the ninth grade,” says Deann Ayer, executive director of CCC. “We are working with middle school students in their formative years, so they understand from an early age how important high school and postsecondary education is to their future success.”

CCC programming features workshops and college and career field trips for middle school and early high school students. Activities take place during the school day as part of the schools’ curricula. Workshops introduce students to college and career experiences, and help them to explore their abilities and interests and build life skills needed for success. CCC workshops incorporate the [ScholarShop curriculum](#), a Scholarship America program designed to motivate and prepare students to achieve their potential as postsecondary students and productive members of society.

“Our schools and community partners are very excited about our programs, and we are working with each school to ensure it is receiving the full benefits of the programming we offer,” says Ayer. “The students we are reaching are also excited and are seeing that a postsecondary education is within their reach.”

Over the past two years, CCC has:

- Facilitated college field trips for 750 middle and early high school students to local universities.
- Engaged 38 professionals and 435 students in “Power Lunch” career discussions and taken nearly 200 students on career field trips.
- Engaged more than 1,000 students in workshops, including "College 101," "Career Exploration," "100% Smart" and those focusing on other self-exploration and life skills topics.
- Awarded 19 scholarships of \$1,500 each, for a total of \$28,500 to graduating seniors.

“College & Career Connections is making a difference for students in the Washington, D.C., area,” says Kyle Malone, USA Funds access and outreach senior program officer. “The program is using workshops, experiential programs and college visits to give students the tools to succeed, and USA Funds is proud to support this initiative.”