

PropelNext In Action

CollegeSpring

“A higher SAT or ACT score can provide access to more-selective universities with better financial aid, stronger social support, and higher graduation rates,” according to Yoon Choi, CEO of Oakland-based CollegeSpring. “The problem is not the test, the problem is access to test prep. If some students have access to SAT or ACT test prep, all students should, and we’re working to close the gap.”

CollegeSpring provides schools and teachers with curriculum, training, and data to help students boost their scores and their Test Confidence™. “Our mission is to

ensure schools and their teachers have a high-quality SAT, ACT, and college knowledge curriculum so that students are prepared to succeed on the exam and enter college,” explained Choi.

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CollegeSpring works with schools who serve students from populations that are historically underrepresented in



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an initiative of the
Edna McConnell Clark Foundation



higher education, including students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, English language learners, and those who would be the first in their families to attend college. Founded in 2008, CollegeSpring has grown to serve over 30,000 students in the Bay Area, Southern California, and New York.

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PropelNext is helping CollegeSpring ask the right guiding questions to redefine its target population to better identify partners and deepen impact. According to Choi, “CollegeSpring has always focused on the student as the beneficiary, but we realized throughout this process that we actually serve teachers who serve students, even though students are the end beneficiary.”

For CollegeSpring, deepening impact means being more intentional about how they partner with schools and how they work with teachers who deliver the curriculum. According to Choi, scaling in a thoughtful way is both about reaching more students and schools and about ensuring consistent results for students through a rigorous program model.

Although their work with PropelNext is focused on the Bay Area, Choi said that the program is positively impacting the entire organization. “So much of their support and the guidance they provide really impacts the entire organization because I’m able to use our learnings to make larger decisions or changes...The Bay Area is a nice petri dish to help us understand how the program plays out on the ground, but the impact is very far-reaching.”

CollegeSpring aims to one day become the premier SAT and ACT prep provider to students who have historically been underrepresented in higher education. Choi explained, “Standardized tests are often viewed as unfair, but they can be a springboard for our students, leading to enrollment in better colleges, unlocking financial aid, and avoiding remedial courses.

“We’re focusing our energy on the solutions that can help us achieve our end-game of embedding universal test preparation into the school day for all students,” Choi said. “To achieve this vision, Choi believes a “game-changing program” like PropelNext will help CollegeSpring get there.

PropelNext is a program of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation that helps promising nonprofits convert their passion for serving disadvantaged youth into data-driven insights and practices that increase their impact on young people’s lives. This is a look into CollegeSpring, a PropelNext grantee in their Northern California 2021 cohort, and the organization’s experience thus far in the program. The David & Lucile Packard Foundation is the co-investor for CollegeSpring.