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**Steppingstone Scholars and Philadelphia Futures Awarded \$250,000
from the William Penn Foundation to Increase High School Graduation Rates
and Create Pathways to College for Minority and Low-Income Students**

December 9, 2020 (PHILADELPHIA, PA) – [Steppingstone Scholars](#) (Steppingstone) and [Philadelphia Futures](#) (Futures) today announced that their organizations have been awarded a shared \$250,000 grant from the [William Penn Foundation](#) which will support joint efforts to increase the number of Philadelphia minority and low-income students who graduate from high school and enroll in college. By providing critical supports beginning in middle school, this two-year grant will allow Steppingstone and Futures to activate around three key interventions for Philadelphia students:

- **Enhancing the capacity and quality of middle and high school counseling departments**
 - Steppingstone and Futures will provide training to middle and high school counselors to better connect students to college and career opportunities. Trainings will include Steppingstone’s Coursera course, “How to Apply to College,” Futures’ “Step Up to College Guide,” ESSA requirements, FAFSA completion, and other programming offered by both organizations.
- **Improving the transition to high school**
 - A summer bridge program will be created for rising 9th graders, which will enhance their academic readiness and increase their ability to successfully navigate high school.
- **Expanding enrollment in “dual enrollment” courses**
 - The organizations will offer college credit-bearing courses for high school students during summer break and the spring semester prior to fall college enrollment. Steppingstone and Futures will also advocate to the School District of Philadelphia (District) to increase the number of high schools that offer dual enrollment options to students.

“At a moment of profound crisis for young people in this city, we are proud to have the William Penn Foundation invest and endorse this shared vision with Philadelphia Futures,” said Sean E. Vereen, President and CEO of

Steppingstone. “Steppingstone and Futures have long histories of engaging the students and families in Philadelphia who face systemic barriers to academic success and college. We believe working together we will create stronger pathways for low-income students and students of color to graduate high school and enroll in college. This shared work is critically important in developing a new generation of workers and leaders who will make the City of Philadelphia more equitable and prosperous.”

Sara L. Woods, Executive Director, Philadelphia Futures, echoed Vereen’s comments saying, “The grant from the William Penn Foundation will enable Philadelphia Futures and Steppingstone Scholars to expand our work together supporting first-generation-to-college students with the tools, resources, and opportunities necessary for admission to and success in college. Our shared vision, which is furthered with this generous investment, is a city where every student has what they need to succeed in college and thrive in life. We are grateful to the Foundation for investing in this partnership.”

Steppingstone and Futures have a significant, embedded presence in middle schools and high schools across the Philadelphia region and a strong working relationship with the District. This grant also supports the organizational work of formalizing a strategic partnership between the two organizations with shared programming as well as data collection and analysis. Through greater collaboration, both organizations recognize the potential to support students long-term while also providing shared expertise around high school trajectory and postsecondary success to the District.

For more information regarding Steppingstone Scholars, please visit: www.stepsstonescholars.org.

For more information regarding Philadelphia Futures, please visit: www.philadelphiafutures.org.

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About Philadelphia Futures

Philadelphia Futures is a nonprofit organization that supports Philadelphia’s low-income, first-generation-to-college students with the tools, resources, and opportunities necessary for admission to and success in college. Philadelphia Futures envisions a city where every student has what they need to succeed in college and thrive in life. Through its direct service programs, Sponsor-A-Scholar (SAS) and College Connection, the organization annually serves more than 500 high school and college students offering academic enrichment services, personalized college guidance, career-readiness programming, placement and retention services, and financial resources. Through its other programs and services, including its Step Up to College resources, Outreach Futures, and The Charles E. Ellis Trust for Girls, Philadelphia Futures provides college guidance and financial resources to students throughout the city. Philadelphia Futures can be found online at: www.philadelphiafutures.org, www.facebook.com/philadelphiafutures, www.twitter.com/phillyfutures and www.instagram.com/phillyfutures.

About Steppingstone Scholars

Steppingstone Scholars is an educational social mobility organization. For low income students in the City of Philadelphia there are no clear pathways made specifically for them to go to college and enter the workforce. Since 1999, Steppingstone has been working to address this systemic problem by creating not just one pathway, but many. Serving students ages 10 – 24, Steppingstone offers three (3) solutions-oriented approaches: *Academy*, which provides transformative, rigorous learning opportunities to high-achieving educationally underserved students to access and succeed at highly resourced schools; *Pathways*, which leverages custom resources inside public K-12 schools (neighborhood, charter, and citywide) to create pathways to college and the workforce for

educationally underserved students and; *Ventures*, which creates broad enrichment programs that innovate the ways in which schools, nonprofits, and communities can more equitably serve engaged citizens ready to enter college and a changing workforce. This systemic multi-faceted approach helps students identify, create, and confidently walk their pathways through institutions of higher education and work, well-prepared to begin breaking the cycles of disinvestment and socioeconomic inequality that has existed in Philadelphia for generations.