

# Local nonprofit seeks to double the amount of first-generation college graduates across Central Texas

Breakthrough Central Texas | September 2019

You may be surprised to learn that Austin, Texas, one of the most vibrant cities in the world, has the lowest college graduation rate in the state for children from under-resourced communities – only 8% go on to earn a college degree.

This is a tremendous loss of opportunity and talent for a region where 9 out of 10 new jobs require a college education. The good news is there is a solution to this problem. For 18 years, Breakthrough Central Texas has been guided by the belief that a child's outcomes should not be determined by his or her zip code.

Starting in middle school, Breakthrough makes a radical 12-year commitment, providing the right intervention at the right time, to help children become the first in their family to earn a college degree. From sixth grade through college graduation, Breakthrough offers out-of-school learning experiences, leadership skills, and comprehensive advising to each of our students. Our commitment ensures long-term success, and our model is proven.

The life-changing power of a college degree is undeniable. Still the most proven path out of poverty, college graduates tend to be healthier, less reliant on public assistance, more civically engaged and, as parents, actively involved in their own children's education.

Every parent wants the best for their children, and so do we. We believe in our families and their potential. We offer an extra helping hand that is always there when you need us. We believe in the Breakthrough model because it works.

That is why we feel called to challenge ourselves and our community to do more. We have set a North Star goal to double the number of students from Central Texas' under-resourced communities who become the first in their family to graduate from college. Earlier this month, we publicly announced the Breakthrough Challenge, a \$10 million campaign to do just that. Over the next 5 years, Breakthrough will:

- Enroll 1,400 more students, building its pipeline of students to more than 3,000.
- Launch an endowment, The Promise Fund, to ensure that Breakthrough can always fulfill the 12 year promise it make to each of its students.
- Pilot a new whole-school model, investing in the capacity of schools serving our most vulnerable students, so that thousands more can benefit from the life-changing power of a college degree.

When you accept the Breakthrough Challenge, you are helping to create a ripple effect not only in the lives of students and their families but our entire region, making us a stronger Central Texas for generations to come.



# West Austin Leaders Come Together to Accept the Breakthrough Challenge



*Pictured above (top left to bottom right): Breakthrough Board Chair and Breakthrough Challenge Steering Committee member Hannah Temple, Breakthrough Challenge Steering Committee member Ted Whatley, Breakthrough Challenge Co-Chair Christie Bybee, Breakthrough Challenge Honorary Co-Chair Gary Farmer, Breakthrough Challenge Co-Chair and Leadership Investor Walt Penn, Breakthrough Founder and Challenge Co-Chair Jessica Slade, and Breakthrough Challenge Honorary Co-Chair Senator Kirk Watson*



*Pictured above (left to right): Breakthrough Central Texas Leadership Investors Jack and Carolyn Long, Walt and Cheryl Penn (Cheryl not pictured), and Neil Webber. Thanks to these leadership donors and other early investors, \$7 million has already been pledged toward the \$10 million goal.*

## Why have you accepted the Breakthrough Challenge?

"I grew up here in Austin and had no hurdles to achieving a college degree – in fact, it was expected. As Austin has grown, so has the economic divide. I don't want to wake up in 20 years and say, 'I should have done something.' These kids are incredibly special and full of potential. They deserve a helping hand to become the best they can be."

- **Walt Penn, Breakthrough Challenge Co-Chair, Leadership Investor**

"I've been asked why should others accept this Breakthrough Challenge. And my response is really, why not? This is a community that has unlimited potential. Central Texas is a knowledgeable place with an educated workforce that's capable of attracting and retaining the best in the world. So why wouldn't we be a place that says we're going to turn that internally? To help educate and create the best and the brightest with the people that we already have here. The Breakthrough Challenge is our opportunity to make that kind of a difference."

- **Texas Senator Kirk Watson, Breakthrough Challenge Honorary Co-Chair**

"Education is the great equalizer in our society, but educational achievement in Central Texas is far from equal. We can lift the barriers and lift the status quo if we work as a collective - everyone has something they can contribute to the Breakthrough Challenge, and the ultimate impact will be a wealthier, more engaged and dynamic Central Texas for us all."

- **Carolyn Long, Breakthrough Challenge Leadership Investor**

"Breakthrough instills a college-going mindset in the students, their families, and the schools that we serve. Central Texas desperately needs a college-educated workforce — most of the new jobs in our region require it. With a track record of dramatically boosting the college success rates of students from low-income communities, Breakthrough helps create a more equitable region where those opportunities are open to everyone."

- **Hannah Temple, Breakthrough Board Chair, Breakthrough Challenge Steering Committee member**

"While in leadership of the Texas Association of School Boards, I visited school districts with limited resources throughout the state. It was eye-opening. I met amazing students who probably wouldn't have the chance to go to college. Then I learned about Breakthrough and it was an AHA moment. Breakthrough was exactly what the kids I had met needed to help break the cycle, change their lives and have a brighter future."

- **Christie Bybee, Breakthrough Challenge Co-Chair**



*Pictured above: Breakthrough Central Texas college graduates in front of the Breakthrough Challenge Dream Banner on Sept. 12, 2019 at the kickoff event.*

"Susan and I support Breakthrough because it's where we can do the most good, where our community will receive the biggest return. Breakthrough Central Texas is a proven program. This is not some theoretical journey. It's a program with a track record of proven results. If you look at the statistics they're very compelling. If you hear the stories of the students, it's completely overwhelming. You know in a moment it is the right thing to support. We will see the return on this investment for many years to come."

- **Gary Farmer, Breakthrough Challenge Honorary Co-Chair**

"I believe talent is distributed equally but opportunity is not, and in Central Texas that gap is far too big -- we lag the rest of the state in college completion for students from under-resourced communities. I love Austin; I want our community to thrive. We have a chance to change Austin for good, in a way that will make a difference for future generations. The need is urgent, and we have a solution that works. Let's do this!"

- **Jessica Slade, Breakthrough Founder and Breakthrough Challenge Co-Chair**

"My own successes trace back to my strong education that was simply a given in the environment I grew up in. I believe the motivated students Breakthrough serves deserve those same opportunities. Breakthrough Central Texas focuses on root causes, is tightly focused on its mission, has a long track record of strong results backed up with hard data and research. This is a program that works, and we have an obligation to make it available to as many students as we can!"

- **Neil Webber, Breakthrough Founding Funder and Breakthrough Challenge Leadership Investor**

"Breakthrough offers the possibility for holistic, broad, sustained intervention in the lives of young people that almost guarantees high school and college graduation and thereby a longer, more successful life. Breakthrough has exceeded my expectations. The organization has grown from 41 students to 1,900+ young people whom we commit to for 12 years, until college graduation. It is poised to grow dramatically and will have a significant impact on the region's at-risk young people who have higher education aspirations. Breakthrough's capital investment is in human beings, not bricks and mortar. Every cent of the Breakthrough Challenge will go to the support of Breakthrough students as they navigate their voyage from middle school to college graduation."

- **Ted Whatley, Breakthrough Founding Board Member and Breakthrough Challenge Steering Committee member**

Learn more at [TheBreakthroughChallenge.org](http://TheBreakthroughChallenge.org) and use the hashtag [#BreakthroughChallenge!](https://twitter.com/BreakthroughChallenge)

### We face a problem.

Austin is the number one city in the U.S. for job seekers. Nine out of 10 new jobs require a college degree. Yet, only 8% of middle schoolers from our under-resourced communities go on to graduate from college.

### You can help. Accept the #BreakthroughChallenge

to double the number of first-generation college graduates, helping change everything for children who need it the most.

### What our students are accomplishing:

**98%**

of Breakthrough students graduate high school on time and more than 90 percent enroll directly into college.

**2.5x**

Breakthrough students graduate college at more than 2.5 times the rate of all students in the region.

**7x**

Breakthrough students graduate college at seven times the rate of their peers.

**6 years**

For first-generation college graduates, median income surpasses that of their parents within six years.



"I come from a family of three, with a younger brother and hard-working mom. Growing up in our low-income South Austin neighborhood, it felt like my life path had been pre-determined by the ethnicity, geography and income level I was born into. With the help of Breakthrough and my own developing ambition, I went on to enroll in St. Mary's University, with a major in political science. Now I've landed my dream job at Google. The sky's the limit for me now!"

- **Barbara Falcon-Mendoza, Breakthrough Central Texas Graduate**



"As a 12-year-old student I had a dream of being a lawyer and the first in my family to go to college, but was told by others that maybe I should aim lower. So when Breakthrough came into my life, it was a family and an organization that really supported me and my dreams. Breakthrough said, 'You can do anything you set your mind to, and we'll help you along the way.'"

- **Yasmine Smith, Breakthrough Central Texas Graduate**



"The Breakthrough Challenge is about changing educational inequity in Austin. I'm excited that more students will find a home in the Breakthrough community. That more will be able to envision themselves going to college. That more will be able to defy expectations and realize their dreams."

- **Joe Anthony Cruz, Breakthrough Central Texas Graduate**



## Will you accept the Breakthrough Challenge?

Donate \$10 now, for free by sharing on social media!

Use the **#BREAKTHROUGHCHALLENGE** hashtag publicly in a social post and our matching donor National Instruments will give \$10 towards our \$10 million campaign.

Visit [TheBreakthroughChallenge.org](http://TheBreakthroughChallenge.org)

### September 12th marks Breakthrough Day!

Breakthrough Central Texas is proud to announce Austin Mayor Steve Adler has signed a Mayoral Proclamation dedicating September 12 as Breakthrough Day. At our kickoff event, Senator Kirk Watson introduced the proclamation on the Mayor's behalf (pictured below).