

WASHINGTON STEM 2021

POLICY PRIORITY: EARLY LEARNING

Washington STEM is a catalyst for opportunity, possibility, and prosperity in STEM. We work in partnership with eleven regional networks to provide equitable access to STEM education and pathways to careers in the in-demand fields of science, technology, engineering, and math for all Washington students, especially those furthest from opportunity

OUR EARLY LEARNING GOALS

- Accessible, affordable, and high-quality early learning opportunities;
- Working conditions for early care and education providers that honor their expertise, increase retention, and expand the workforce;
- Aligned systems across early learning, K-12, health, and mental health to connect and coordinate supports for families.

Fair Start for Kids Act: We support [House Bill 1213, the Fair Start for Kids Act](#), and its companion [Senate Bill 5237](#). Access to high-quality early learning for students under age 6 is critical to closing equity gaps in early math learning, Kindergarten readiness, and subsequent education outcomes.

Washington STEM supports the Fair Start for Kids Act for four main reasons:

1. It will close gaps in access to high quality early learning. And high-quality early learning for students under age 6 is critical to closing equity gaps in early math learning, Kindergarten readiness, and subsequent education outcomes;
2. It will solve the critical childcare shortage in our state and enable low and middle income families to access subsidized care;
3. It will provide economic relief through equitable compensation for thousands of early care professionals, as well as enable tens of thousands of families to return to the workforce;
4. It will ensure accountability by tasking the Early learning Advisory Council with the measurement and tracking of outcomes and highlighting possible system improvements.

Washington state's child care and early education systems were already in [crisis](#) before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Fair Start for Kids Act offers a solution to the critical childcare shortage in our state and enables low-and middle-income families to access subsidized care and will provide economic relief through equitable compensation for thousands of early care professionals. These critical investments will help Washington's economy recover forward by enabling tens of thousands of families to return to the workforce.

Investing in early education is one of the smartest moves we can make. [For every dollar spent ensuring children have access to high quality education, there is up to a \\$7 dollar return in remedial education cost savings and increase earnings later in life.](#)

EQUITY: Access to child care and early learning is disproportionate along lines of income, race, and geography, which means that the populations we know are furthest from opportunity are unable to access one of the most important building blocks for both lifelong learning as well as economic security.

Black, Indigenous, and Latinx families make up to 35% less than White families in our state, have fewer dollars to go to child care, and consequently have access to fewer high quality child care options for their children. Early care providers, 41% of whom are people of color and nearly half of whom speak a language in addition to English, are one of the most diverse workforces in our state, are deemed essential workers,

and yet are one of the lowest compensated: approximately 40% of care providers make so little they themselves qualify for state assistance; and the vast majority do not have health insurance.

ECONOMIC IMPACT: In Washington State, families and businesses forgo up to \$2 billion dollars a year due to child care shortages and related child care issues. The Fair Start for Kids Act addresses these issues, and will create greater equity, advance our economic recovery, and support our long term economic growth in three ways: expand access to high quality education and care for low and middle income families, supporting children's academic and future career success; retain the diverse and essential early learning workforce through increased reimbursements and access to health care; and make sure families have the care they need to get back to work as our economy recovers. Governor Inslee has highlighted the need in the 2021 budget priorities [here](#).

DATA AND STATE OF THE CHILDREN: Essential to this work will be measuring progress, ensuring efficient use of funds, and transparency of data for local leaders and providers. This is so we can ensure that gaps are closing quickly and that the system is better serving families of color, families in low-wage households, and families from across all geographies.

Washington STEM has already spent more than a year in working with state agencies and dozens of community-based organizations to pull together measurement indicators and large datasets and we have already created a feedback loop for co-creating [regionalized reports](#) and interactive data dashboards. We are able to nimbly and efficiently turn large datasets into consumable, accessible, and relevant platforms. We want to ensure that the whole system can monitor progress, make mid-course corrections, and close systems gaps and quickly and equitably as possible.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- [Washington State Early Learning & Care: Where Historic Underinvestment Meets National Health Crisis](#) (Washington STEM)
- [Southwest WA- State of the Children: Early Learning and Care](#) (Washington STEM)
- [Spokane and Inland Northwest WA – State of the Children: Early Learning and Care](#) (Washington STEM)
- [Fair Start for Kids Act Summary](#) (Washington State House Democrats)
- [Fair Start for Kids Act Summary](#) (Start Early Washington)

ABOUT US

At Washington STEM, our work revolves around three main areas:

- **Strategically Convene and Partner** with 11 Regional STEM Networks, alongside business, education, and community leaders to identify and scale effective local solutions.
- **Provide direct support** through open-source access to data and measurement tools and targeted financial investments.
- **Advocate for change** through educating decision makers, storytelling, and collaboration in order to create the foundation for lasting, equitable change in our state.

If you have any questions about our work, please contact Washington STEM Policy Director Dr. Bish Paul at bish@washingtonstem.org.

1,000,000 students across the state are supported through STEM Network activities and programs.

