

EARLY LEARNING: OUR FEDERAL FOCUS 2021



Introduction

PSESD is the largest provider in the Northwest of Head Start programs and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), the state's preschool program. We also operate Educare Seattle, one of 23 Educare programs across the nation. We provide child development and family support services to over 5,000 families and their children from birth to five years old.

Head Start programs serve families living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level with children who are three or four years old. Early Head Start programs serve children from birth to age three and their families, and pregnant women and their families who are also living at or below 100% of the federal poverty level.

Demand far exceeds opportunity. Reliable short and long-term research demonstrates that Head Start works for children and families. Children who have been through the program are better prepared for kindergarten, do significantly better in school and benefit from improved family stability. Some studies have even found that for every dollar taxpayers invest in the Head Start program, they receive a return of \$9. These savings occur because children who have been through the program are less likely to repeat a grade in school, more likely to graduate from high school and college, and are less likely to commit a crime.

PSESD federal funding consists of three Head Start and Early Head Start grants that serve infants, toddlers and preschoolers in a variety of program models. These include part-day preschool, school day/school year preschool, and full day/full year early learning in licensed childcare settings family child care homes. We serve infants and toddlers through home visiting year-round, in licensed childcare facilities and in family child care homes full day and full year.

Early Learning Opportunities in PSESD region

- **More than 5,000 Served in HS, EHS & ECEAP funded models**
- **Total Population Under 5 in Poverty in PSESD Region is over 20,000**
- **The number of eligible children and families far exceeds enrollment opportunities.**



IN ORDER TO EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES WE NEED MORE INVESTMENTS IN EARLY HEAD START AND HEAD START. THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT IS HIGH!

Teacher Recruitment, Loss and Professional Development

The average Head Start teacher with a bachelor's degree in Washington makes \$33,080 per year, compared to the annual salary of \$54,950 for kindergarten teachers. We are losing high-quality teachers due to low wages and poor benefits. Poor compensation undermines efforts to recruit a highly-qualified workforce. Early childhood education has the lowest lifetime earning potential of all college majors, reducing the field's appeal for new graduates, particularly those with significant student debt. Waiving student loans for those who commit to serve as educators for our earliest learners during their most rapid time of brain development is just one strategy to support the early childhood workforce.

Low wages and poor benefits also affect retention. Among childcare centers who experienced turnover prior to COVID the average turnover rate was 25%. Some teachers leave the field altogether, while others remain in education but seek higher-paying positions with better benefits and supports.

Federal policymakers and local grantees should continue working to increase the qualifications and skills of Head Start and other early childhood teachers. We must also consider the broader context in which Head Start teachers work, including compensation levels, quality of early childhood educator preparation programs, and the impact of trends in the early childhood landscape and K-12 teacher workforce that affect the employment market for Head Start teachers.

Early learning remains a profession in which predominantly white educators teach mainly children and families who are people of color, so it's imperative to consider the importance of training, recruiting and retaining teachers of color. Increasing the percentage of teachers of color narrows the opportunity and achievement gap. Children struggle to be what they cannot see; they need to see themselves in their teachers. By recruiting, training and retaining teachers of color, students of color can form relationships with professionals who may share their cultural background and lay a foundation for success.

THE SUCCESS OF CHILDREN IS PARAMOUNT. WE MUST INVEST IN TEACHERS, CREATE PATHWAYS FOR EDUCATORS OF COLOR, AND INCREASE WAGES WITH TARGETED INVESTMENTS.

Supporting Early Learning and Care: Early Head Start, Head Start and Childcare are Essential and Must Be Prioritized

America needs early learning and care relief to keep the industry moving forward during the nation's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The disastrous economic crisis has hit the early learning and care system especially hard, causing widespread layoffs and closures as a result of catastrophic drops in enrollment. And while the nation's economic recovery from this crisis will be a slow, phased process, early learning and care providers will be expected to be open to care for children as parents return to work, all while operating on financial losses for months

to come due to new social distancing requirements and continued low enrollment.

WE MUST INVEST IN THE EARLY LEARNING AND CARE SYSTEM WITH TANGIBLE AND SUSTAINED FUNDING IN ORDER TO SUPPORT THE FIELD, ECONOMIC RECOVERY, AND CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Heal, Protect, and Invest

Two major factors promote healing in early childhood education programs. The first is strong, trusting and responsive relationships between parents and early childhood providers; parents and their children; and children and early childhood providers. The second is safe, consistent, predictable and nurturing environments. Head Start programs play a vital role in supporting these factors for the children and families they serve.

We need to not only protect the investments made in Head Start, but we must invest more. Early Head Start and Head Start are uniquely positioned to provide healing and learning opportunities for children and families that result in improved outcomes in school and life.

WE MUST INVEST IN THE MENTAL WELLNESS OF YOUNG CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS AS WELL AS IN SCHOOL READINESS.

Increase Eligibility Threshold

In the PSESD region, elementary school students and families who are eligible for free or reduced lunch exceed 40% of total enrollment. We believe aligning Early Head Start and Head Start eligibility with that of free and reduced lunch would better serve the children and families in King and Pierce Counties. Increasing the income threshold from 100% of the federal poverty level to align with the free and reduced lunch level at 185% would be an initial positive action towards equitable access to early learning, kindergarten readiness and support for families.

WE NEED TO INCREASE THE INCOME THRESHOLD TO CREATE A MORE EQUITABLE EARLY LEARNING AND CARE SYSTEM WITH INVESTMENTS THAT CREATES OPPORTUNITY.

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