PSESD is the largest provider in the Northwest of Head Start – Early Head Start programs and the Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), the state’s preschool program. We also operate Educare Seattle, one of 25 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 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 the federal poverty level. For example, a family of four makes $30,000 or less.

Early learning remains a profession in which mainly people of color, so it is imperative to consider the importance of training, recruiting, and retaining teachers of color. Improved family stability. Studies have even found that for each 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.

In Washington State, there is a $40,000+ gap between Head Start teachers with a bachelor’s degree compared to the annual salary of kindergarten teachers. We are losing high-quality teachers due to low wages and poor benefits. In early childhood, the workforce is 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 is higher than 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 are instructing children and families who are mainly people of color, so it is imperative to consider the importance of training, recruiting, and retaining teachers of color. Increasing the income threshold from $40,000 to $50,000 ensures that Black and Hispanic children, and children from other racial or ethnic groups were less likely to receive services for developmental delays than White children. In addition, children found eligible for early intervention services in neighborhoods that were low-income communities of color were least likely to receive those services.

Research clearly indicates that early intervention and early childhood special education for children ages birth through five years produces positive outcomes on many levels. Immediate benefits for the child include cognitive, language, motor, and social emotional development, and improvements were found for the child’s family members as well.

When comparing 2005–2006 ECSE funding to that in 2019–2020, the percentage of 3 and 4-year-olds in ECSE increased from 4.9% to 6.1%. Federal 619 funding remained at $7.5 billion for inflation. Given the stagnant levels of federal funding for early childhood special education, it becomes clear that both an increase in funding and coordination of funding streams are important to ensuring systems that provide equitable special education services to all the students in our region.

To ensure that all students receive FAPE in their LRE, it is important to consider how separate funding streams with distinct, and sometimes incompatible, regulations or requirements present obstacles to access.