

Understanding the Opportunities, Benefits, and Realities of Public and Private Partnerships:

The Washington State Early Childhood Comprehensive System's Experience

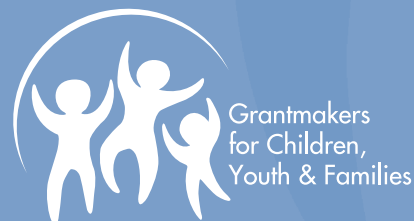
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Featured in:



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understanding the opportunities, benefits, and realities of public and private partnerships

The Washington State Early Childhood Comprehensive System's Experience

kIDS MATTER: IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN WASHINGTON STATE: AIM HIGH, FRAME HIGH

Kids Matter is a collaborative and comprehensive strategic framework for building the early childhood system in Washington State in order to improve outcomes for children. Services, policies, and systems that serve young children are inadequate to meet the needs of children and families. This plan offers a framework that supports the efforts of local and state stakeholders to coordinate, collaborate, and integrate efforts that will lead to children being healthy and ready for school. It identifies specific, achievable outcomes within four goal areas:

- 1 Access to health insurance and medical homes
- 2 Support for mental health and social-emotional development
- 3 Provision of early care and education/child care
- 4 Parenting information and support for parenting

Each of the four goal areas includes an integral family support approach. Our private partners, especially, encouraged us to create an over-arching plan "at the 50,000 foot level." This systems-based approach exemplifies the value of collectively working together to use a framework that is much more than what we each bring, or can achieve, separately.

The Build Initiative

www.buildinitiative.org

The Build Initiative is a multi-state partnership that helps states construct a coordinated system of programs, policies and services that responds to the needs of young children and their families. It does this by supporting those who set policies, provide services, and advocate for children from birth through age five so that our youngest children are safe, healthy, eager to learn, and ready to succeed in school. Build serves as a catalyst for change and a national resource on early learning.

The Build Initiative was created by the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative (ECFC), a consortium of national and local foundations that have substantial grantmaking programs in early childhood care and education. The ECFC provides networking, information sharing and strategic grantmaking opportunities to its members. Through its work, the ECFC has recognized that current programs, policies and services for young children and their families often operate in isolation, at cross purposes, or without enough resources to meet critical needs. In response, the ECFC created Build to invest private funds to stimulate public investments in early learning.



Describing the development of the Kids Matter early childhood systems-building framework is a daunting challenge. It would be impossible to succinctly describe the years of work, involving hundreds of people, perspectives, and contributions. Enormous energy, talent, and effort united to develop strong leadership and a clear direction for a more comprehensive, high-quality early childhood system. Concrete lessons that have emerged from the partners and their contributions are important to note and share with others who seek creative and strategic grantmaking practices to improve outcomes for children and their families across the country.

CONCEPTUALIZING A STATEWIDE SYSTEM FOR EARLY LEARNING

Young children in Washington State are fortunate to have a large number of early childhood providers, organizations, advocates, and other stakeholders who have worked tirelessly for decades to care for young children and bring their needs to the attention of the public. In 2002 building on this base, leaders from multiple sectors, systems, and levels began working together to conceptualize a statewide system for thinking, planning, and acting strategically concerning early-learning issues.

Federal and private funds provided a catalyst for the strategic thinking, planning, and acting that became

the foundation of Kids Matter. In the public arena, the Washington State Department of Health's (DOH) maternal and child health program¹⁶ used support from a State Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Grant (ECCS).¹⁷ DOH recognized the significant challenges inherent in engaging other agencies and organizations in an early childhood systems-planning effort. To orient other public and private entities to DOH's role and capacity, the DOH maternal and child health program engaged a pediatrician to conduct informational interviews with key public and private stakeholders to explain the ECCS grant and obtain input on how a statewide planning process might work in Washington

¹⁶ All state public health agencies receive Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

¹⁷ The DHHS/HRSA Maternal and Child Health Bureau also provided two-year federal planning grants to most state public health agencies' maternal and child health. In Washington State, the ECCS grant promoted a statewide multi-agency plan for early childhood, including the following five components: 1) Access to Health Insurance and Medical Homes, 2) Mental Health and Social-Emotional Development, 3) Early Care and Education/Child Care, 4) Parent Education, and 5) Family Support.

State. This early connection was a key first step in engaging partners in a genuine way, by asking for their input and involvement in developing the plan for how the ECCS grant could support a statewide cross-agency and sector planning process.

At the same time, a private foundation in Washington State, the Foundation for Early Learning, joined efforts with Washington's Head Start-State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) and with other public and private supporters, to develop an application to become a Build Learning Partner State through the Build Initiative, a private, grantmaking initiative of the Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative. The Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative selected Washington to become a Build Learning Partner State in mid-2003. This support provided additional opportunities for systems-building technical assistance, connecting Washington State with a national business and philanthropic effort. In addition, HSSCO was actively engaged in early childhood systems-building work facilitated by a federal Head Start Bureau grant.

Despite multiple initiatives focusing on early childhood systems, public and private entities across the state were determined to focus on the creation of one early childhood systems-planning effort. To achieve this, ECCS, Build Initiative, and HSSCO purposefully merged their efforts into one initiative. While visible public/private partnerships at all levels emerged throughout this systems-planning work and have been central to its success, the original partners—the Foundation for Early Learning, the HSSCO and the Washington State Department of Health—continued to play key leadership roles throughout the process.

PLANNING FOR A COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SYSTEM

The collaboration contracted with Organizational Research Services (ORS), an independent research and evaluation firm, to facilitate a two-year planning process among collaborating public and private partners. From the beginning, the collaboration intentionally created an outcomes-focused, stakeholder-driven, and research-based framework. Early in the process, the initiative engaged both public and private stakeholders, building upon existing strengths and opportunities in the state.

ORS conducted a broad environmental survey and comprehensive needs assessment, based on the five components of the ECCS grant¹⁸ to provide support for the whole child. Throughout the planning period, the collaboration sustained this approach. It became clear that a traditional strategic plan with predetermined next action steps could not include all current or future individuals, organizations, and efforts in this field throughout Washington State. In order to achieve the integrated, comprehensive "system

of systems" that young children need, the collaboration sought to create a "big tent"—an over-arching program that all who care for young children could own and use. It was also crucial to make the system understandable and attractive to non-traditional stakeholders, such as the business and philanthropic communities, who are key partners in the effort to promote early childhood efforts.

KIDS MATTER IN ACTION

Three years after the planning process began, Washington's in-depth, cross-sector, cross-agency, conceptual thinking about a statewide early childhood system resulted in a framework called Kids Matter. Kids Matter is a tool, not a directive, or an end in and of itself. It offers a common vision, opportunity for integration, and common language for partners in early childhood efforts to define high-priority common outcomes.

Kids Matter partners participate in strategic and exciting ways at the regional and county levels in Washington State. Kids Matter has also fostered an environment of collaboration in Washington State that has opened the doors for other

The Foundation for Early Learning, Seattle, WA, played a leading partnership role in Kids Matter, opening doors and making available opportunities that would not have been possible in Washington State. The Foundation's recognition of the importance of systems building, and its provision of direct support for partnership development within this intensive collaboration is a key element of our success to date. **The Foundation for Early Learning** also hosts the Kids Matter website and assists in disseminating written materials—a significant aspect of sharing the framework so it can be used by others.

Read all the details of the planning process in the full report at the Foundation for Early Learning's website, Kids Matter: Improving Outcomes for Children in Washington State, www.earlylearning.org/kidsmatter.

¹⁸ These included 1) access to Health Insurance and Medical Homes, 2) Mental Health and Social-Emotional Development, 3) Early Care and Education/Child Care, 4) Parent Education, and 5) Family Support.



public/private partnerships. The Born Learning-Washington campaign (www.bornlearning.org), a public-awareness collaboration among many public and private, statewide and local partners, has framed its efforts with Kids Matter outcomes in mind.

Other initiatives and organizations connect with the Kids Matter framework. For example:

>> State legislation in 2005 created an Early Learning Council (ELC) to give input on the state's early learning system. Governor Christine Gregoire

private partnership called Thrive by Five will work closely with the new department.

While none of these activities occurred *because* of Kids Matter, they address many of the needs and desired outcomes, such as policy, governance, finance, systems planning, and program implementation, that were identified through the Kids Matter planning process. The framework provided by Kids Matter provides support to, and a critical foundation for early childhood systems development in Washington State, across sectors and agencies.

KEY LESSONS FROM THE KIDS MATTER EXPERIENCE

Public/Private Partnerships Are Essential

In Washington State we continue to build on the successes of individuals and organizations that come together day in and day out because they care about children. These advocates

worlds, amazing things can happen. Collectively, public and private partners working together offers a powerful and unique opportunity to create the world we all hope for—a world in which communities and families are supported, so that all children are healthy and ready for success in school and in life.

Leadership is Organic

Leadership can come from anywhere and from many different places. It might be visible at the beginning of an initiative, or it might emerge throughout the development process. The ECCS grant, HSSCO, Build Initiative, the business community, local and national foundations, pediatricians, the governor, the legislature, and the Department of Health—all have counterparts nationwide. Opportunities for cultivating emerging leadership exist in every community and state.

Engaging Public Partners—Challenges and Opportunities

The many institutional barriers to collaboration and integration make working within and across state agencies a significant challenge. Government agencies operate under different rules than those of private industry or the nonprofit world, adding to the complexity inherent in public partnerships. Government procedures are slow and, therefore, public partners have difficulty reacting quickly to emerging opportunities and policy considerations, answering requests for data, or contracting for services. In spite of these challenges, grantmakers find considerable value in partnerships with the public sector, which plays a key role in providing critical infrastructure, funding, and services in many areas which effect young children. Having partners

“Kids Matter provides a framework that each organization can work within, thus multiplying the value and impact of the work. It eases the task of ensuring that complementary efforts are synergistic rather than unintentionally conflicting.”

Chris Rogers, Social Venture Partners

became an active advocate, making early learning part of a statewide review of Washington's educational system.

>> The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced its Early Learning Strategy.

>> Washington State created a new cabinet level Department of Early Learning in July 2006. A new public/

for children dedicate themselves to developing and sustaining the relationships that allow us to work together, in both good and bad times. We do our best work when we leave our egos and turf battles at the door and focus on outcomes for children. When we leverage relationships with people inside the public and private

inside and outside of state government is vital in advocating for needed change or new approaches. Without substantial public partnerships, no individual grantmaker or collaboration of private grantmakers can produce the systemic changes necessary to create a state or a country that meets the needs of young children.

Private Contributions Extend Far Beyond Funding

While the financial resources of philanthropy and business are critical to effecting change in early childhood systems, many other characteristics of the private sector make it a valuable partner. In Washington State private partners added a critical voice and perspective to early childhood issues and brought a credibility factor to the planning process. Business investors helped highlight the connection between early childhood investments and real economic and social returns, playing a critical role in the Kids Matter planning process in Washington State. Private partners can influence and leverage other private entities in ways the public sector could never do. They often can attract other private investors who might not otherwise have considered partnership with government.

Grantmakers Play a Critical Role in Public Systems Change

Private grantmakers played, and continue to play, a critical role in the development of Kids Matter. Grantmakers brought a flexibility and speed to the planning process that public agencies could not. Throughout the Kids Matter experience, private grantmakers made strategic investments that helped attract public resources. Grantmakers facilitated collaboration, integration, and a comprehensive approach through their own funding



“We used the Kids Matter framework to guide our local process to choose outcomes and strategies for our regional early childhood systems building efforts. Because this (five county effort) is also part of the Kids Matter planning process, we could both contribute to and benefit from the momentum around early childhood efforts in the state.”

Margy Miller, Early Childhood Education Manager, Northwest Early Learning

“Kids Matter represents a convergence of thinking from a variety of perspectives around outcomes for children in Washington State, and is a helpful framework to inform the hard work and planning ahead.”

Greg Shaw, Director for Education, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

strategies, as well as by leveraging investments of time and money by other investors. Cognizant of their interest in outcomes-based programming, grantmakers in the state of Washington are encouraging public partners to develop data collection and evaluation processes to assure effective investments over time. These efforts will require private capital. Private grantmakers also provide a critical link to political decision makers, creating public interest in and support for early childhood systems.

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