

# Washington State Early Learning Efforts



## A Common Vision

*All children are healthy and ready for success in school and in life*

**Helping young children thrive.** Children's futures are significantly affected by those who care for them—at home, in child care and preschool, and in the community. Yet too often families and caregivers don't have the information and resources they need to support children's health and development.

**Early Learning efforts in Washington State have momentum...and when Docs get involved it will make a real difference!**

Below you will find a brief introduction to many of these efforts, and websites where you can obtain the latest information. Docs For Tots encourages you to learn what's happening, share information with your patients, and get involved. And remember, Docs For Tots Washington State is here to help you!

## Engaging Doctors in Washington State

### Docs For Tots Washington State (DFT WA)

DFT WA is part of a nationwide network of doctors advocating for young children. We provide information, tools and connections to make it easy for doctors to get involved in collaborative child advocacy activities. The DFT WA Early Learning Advocacy Project works specifically to inform and engage doctors in Early Learning efforts in Washington State (such as through this document). DFT WA is actively growing our network of doctors. Please join us! We welcome requests from child advocacy groups and others who desire doctor involvement. Contact Dr. Jill Sells, Director, at [JSells@DocsForTots.org](mailto:JSells@DocsForTots.org). and see our website at [www.DocsForTots.org](http://www.DocsForTots.org).

## Policies and Frameworks

### Early Learning Council—Washington Learns

In June 2005, Governor Gregoire launched Washington Learns, an 18-month comprehensive study of Washington's education system. The Early Learning Council (ELC) of experts and community leaders from across the state provides recommendations to improve the state's early learning opportunities. In November 2005, the ELC made recommendations which led to the creation of the new Department of Early Learning. Final reports for each committee and Washington Learns are due in November 2006. Meetings of Washington Learns and the ELC are open to the public. [www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov/](http://www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov/)

### Kids Matter: Improving Outcomes for Children in Washington State

*Kids Matter* is a framework for creating a comprehensive, integrated early childhood system. Developed by public and private partners across the state over a two year period, *Kids Matter* defines high-priority outcomes in four goal areas:

1. Health insurance and medical homes
2. Social, emotional, and mental health
3. Early care and education/child care
4. Parenting information and support

*Kids Matter* brings a comprehensive approach to the "whole child" and family. It is intended to be supportive of all efforts striving to benefit young children at the state, community, and family levels. The *Kids Matter* framework and other tools can be found at [www.earlylearning.org/kids-matter](http://www.earlylearning.org/kids-matter).

## Public and Private Investments

### Department of Early Learning

In July 2006 a new cabinet level agency, the Department of Early Learning (DEL), was created. The DEL brings together three programs from different agencies: the Division of Child Care and Early Learning, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), and the Early Reading First program. The Head Start—State Collaboration Office within DEL assures a visible presence for Head Start (a federally funded program) and supports development of multi-agency and public-private partnerships. By providing a focal point for policy development and coordination with the public and private sectors, the DEL will help eliminate fragmentation among programs and promote better early learning outcomes for children. The DEL will also provide a strong, effective link with K-12 education to help ensure smooth transitions from early learning to school. [www.del.wa.gov](http://www.del.wa.gov)

### Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Early Learning Initiative

Through a 10-year investment in early learning in Washington state, the Foundation is working with public and private partners, including Thrive by Five Washington. Together, they are investing in two demonstration communities, promising models in other communities, and statewide efforts to build and support the necessary infrastructure so all children have access to quality early learning opportunities and the greatest chance at success in school and life. [www.gatesfoundation.com/PacificNorthwest/EarlyLearning/default.htm](http://www.gatesfoundation.com/PacificNorthwest/EarlyLearning/default.htm)

## Public and Private Investments (continued)

### Foundation for Early Learning

The Foundation's vision is that all young children birth through age five in Washington are nurtured by their families, caregivers, and community in a healthy environment that ensures social, emotional, and academic success. Since 2000, the Foundation has awarded \$4 Million in Getting School Ready! grants across Washington, supporting parents as their children's first teachers and improving access to high-quality early learning. By offering technical support and attracting funders to successful projects, \$9 Million more has been leveraged for early learning programs. [www.earlylearning.org](http://www.earlylearning.org)

### Thrive By Five Washington

In 2006, public and private funding partners joined to create Thrive by Five Washington, a new non-profit organization. Thrive by Five Washington, its partners, and its grantees will promote community-based, market-driven solutions that will expand access to early learning opportunities for all our state's children. Thrive by Five Washington will provide support and information to parents and caregivers while working to ensure that all children from birth to age five have access to excellent, affordable early learning, whether at home with a parent or caregiver, in child care, or in a preschool. Governor Gregoire and Bill Gates, Sr. co-chair the board. [www.thrivebyfivewa.org](http://www.thrivebyfivewa.org)

In July 2006, **The Early Care and Education Coalition (EC2)** became a project of Thrive by Five Washington. EC2 coordinates the Born Learning Washington Campaign. (See Public Awareness section) [www.earlyeducationcoalition.org](http://www.earlyeducationcoalition.org)

## Resources and Tools

### Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks

The Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks were developed as a tool to help parents and caregivers better understand and support children's development across 5 domains, including:

- Physical Well-Being, Health, Motor Development
- Social and Emotional Development
- Approaches Toward Learning
- Cognition and General Knowledge
- Language, Literacy, and Communication

The Benchmarks are undergoing further development, and are available at: [www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/pubdocs/EarlyLearningBenchmarks.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/pubdocs/EarlyLearningBenchmarks.pdf)

## Child Care Quality Improvement Efforts

In order to improve child care quality, and increase the information available to parents, Washington State (through the DEL and the ELC) and private partners are preparing to pilot a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) for licensed child care. This will be linked with tiered reimbursement (higher payment for higher quality), recognizing child care programs and family child care providers that exceed state requirements for licensing. The goal is to develop a system which supports providers so that they can improve the quality of child care available to children and families. This will in turn make it easier for families to know about and access high quality care. See [www.del.org](http://www.del.org) and [www.thrivebyfivewa.org](http://www.thrivebyfivewa.org)

## Public Awareness

### Born Learning—Washington

Born Learning Washington is a public engagement campaign to boost early learning opportunities. There are 10 locally led campaigns, plus statewide activities drawing on the strengths of more than 40 partner organizations. This effort is connected to a three-year, national public awareness and engagement campaign. Born Learning aims to increase public awareness, provide targeted education to help parents and caregivers turn everyday moments into learning opportunities, and mobilize communities and champions to make early learning a top priority in our state. Born Learning—Washington is coordinated by the Early Care and Education Coalition. <http://www.earlyeducationcoalition.org/bornlearningwashington.php>

## Advocacy

### The Children's Alliance

The Children's Alliance is a statewide child advocacy organization that champions public policies and practices to deliver the essentials that children need to thrive— confidence, stability, health and safety. The Alliance mobilizes child advocates across the state to deliver strong, clear messages about what children need. Statements and recommendations from the Alliance are backed by 128 organizations and nearly 7,000 individual members, who participate in the coalitions the Children's Alliance convenes, offer on-the-ground insights, support positive legislation and programs, and send thousands of letters every year to elected officials in Washington State. [www.childrensalliance.org](http://www.childrensalliance.org)

***Docs For Tots is a collaborative advocacy organization working with the Children's Alliance, physicians groups, and other partners to improve outcomes for young children and families.***

(September 2006)