



## Build's Learning Community and WASHINGTON

*The Build Initiative is a multi-state partnership that helps states construct a coordinated early care and learning system that responds to the needs of young children from birth to five and their families, so that 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. As a participant in Build's Learning Community, Washington joins the Build states, national experts and others, to exchange information and share ideas and best practices.*

### Background

Participation in Build's Learning Community has energized efforts to integrate Washington's many early learning activities and initiatives. The missions of numerous early care and education groups are being examined and aligned with unified priorities, including work related to the state's federal Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant. Over the past year, these efforts have emerged as the Kids Matter Framework, which is designed to guide coordinated action ([www.earlylearning.org/kidsmatter.html](http://www.earlylearning.org/kidsmatter.html)).

Early care and education momentum in Washington continues to build. Governor Christine Gregoire has continued and expanded the leadership and support for early learning began by the previous Governor. High-profile philanthropists such as Bruce McCaw and Bill and Melinda Gates have financially supported organizations such as the Foundation for Early Learning and Talaris Research Institute and have recently begun to connect their programmatic grants with advocacy strategies to promote early learning governance and public policy. The recent creation of a Washington Learns committee, connecting early learning, K-12 and higher education, has created a platform for business, philanthropic, and public sector leaders to lend their support.

### Early Learning Partnerships

Advocacy organizations like the Early Care and Education Coalition, the Children's Alliance and the League of Education Voters have joined forces to use modern web-based communications tools to raise awareness and mobilize early learning constituents. Increasing numbers of advocacy organizations have come together to align policy priorities and messages to magnify their effects.

Local collaborative efforts focus on development of child care quality rating and improvement models as well as general strategic and service planning. Local *Born Learning* campaigns are coordinating their efforts through the Early Care and Education Coalition. In Clark County, service providers, philanthropists, public sector agencies and businesses have joined forces to develop the Clark County Early Learning Fund in cooperation with the Foundation for Early Learning to focus resources on building the local early learning system.

## System-Building Planning and Progress

Strides have been made toward creating an early learning governance structure. The Early Learning Council was established and charged with coordinating current programs and creating a child care quality rating and improvement system.

The Head Start State Collaboration Office, Build Initiative, Department of Health's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems, and Foundation for Early Learning have combined their respective Advisory Councils into one to aid integration and reduce redundancy. The creation and adoption of the Kids Matter Framework has successfully begun to focus efforts of diverse early learning players in a way that provides flexibility, yet direction.

The publication of the initial Washington Early Learning and Development Benchmarks has created excitement among those who hope to connect the work of parents and early learning caregivers with expectations for children's success in the school system and beyond.

Efforts to encourage cross-sector relationships among key players have been rewarding. Many of Washington's current and anticipated early learning successes have their roots in Washington efforts to use Build events and projects to create and strengthen key relationships.

## Challenges for the Future

The success and comprehensiveness of the Washington Early Learning and Development Benchmarks has also created some anxiety among segments of the population who hope to test their use within their community. This has resulted in some uncomfortable, but necessary, conversations about the role of race and culture in various levels of the system.

The sudden infusion of a large number of new players in Washington's early learning conversations has provided new excitement, energy and opportunity while also making consistent forward momentum more complex.

Identification of a sustainable early learning funding methodology, the state's unstable funding structure, and deficits in TANF and child care continue to be challenges to progress.

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To learn more about early care and learning in Washington, please visit [www.earlylearning.org](http://www.earlylearning.org), or contact:

Garrison Kurtz

Tele: 206-525-4801, Ext. 28

[garrison@earlylearning.org](mailto:garrison@earlylearning.org)

Sangree Froelicher

Tele: 360-413-3330

[froelsm@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:froelsm@dshs.wa.gov)

Lorrie Grevstad

Tele: 360-236-3560

[lorrie.grevstad@doh.wa.gov](mailto:lorrie.grevstad@doh.wa.gov)

To learn more about the Build Initiative, please visit [www.buildinitiative.org](http://www.buildinitiative.org), or contact:

Barbara Gebhard, Project Director

Tele: 304-776-2940

[bgebhard@buildinitiative.org](mailto:bgebhard@buildinitiative.org)