



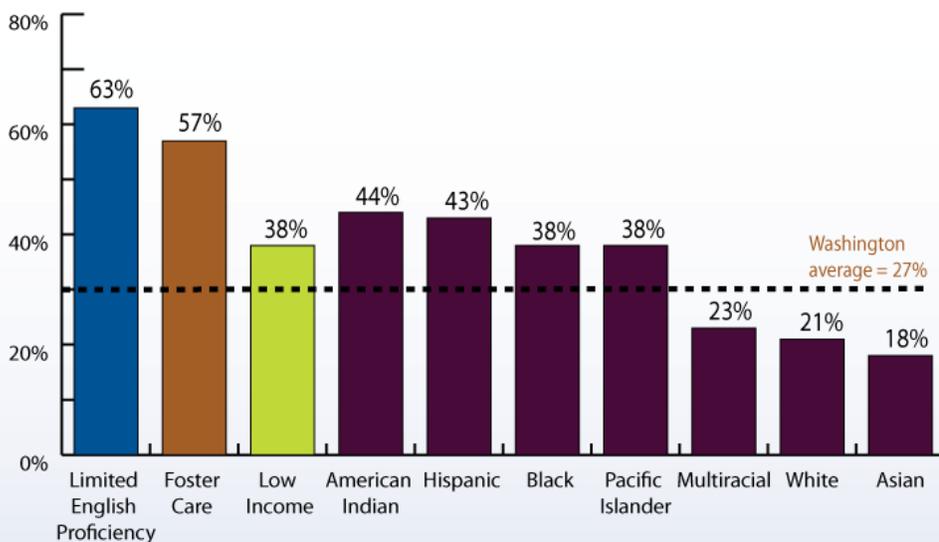
## Raise the Bar and Close the Opportunity Gap in the Early Years

### The Opportunity Gap is Evident at 9 Months and Grows with Time

More than half of children entering kindergarten classrooms across Washington have not had the opportunities they need to be ready for school. We know that for low-income children and children of color, this is more likely to be true. By elementary school, this disproportionate outcome is already evident in one of the first statewide measures of academic outcomes: third grade reading scores.

Percent of Students Not Meeting 3rd Grade Reading Standards by Key Demographics  
Washington 2010-2011

Students of color and those with special needs least likely to meet 3rd grade reading standards



BPC analysis of OSPI Report Card data

***But the opportunity and achievement gap begins long before children step into their first K-12 classroom.*** In fact, disparities in cognitive, social, behavioral, and health outcomes associated with family income, race and ethnicity, home language, and mother's educational attainment are apparent at 9 months and increase by the time a child is two years old. An 18-month achievement gap exists between impoverished children and their peers by age four.<sup>1</sup> This gap only grows through high school.

**Disparities in cognitive, social, behavioral and health outcomes are apparent at 9 months and increase by the time a child is two years old.**

## Investing in the Early Years are Critical for Preventing the Opportunity Gap

### Brain Development

85% of brain development occurs by age three. Positive or negative experiences can help shape the very architecture and wiring of a child's brain, for better or worse. We know that children who are exposed to fewer colors, less touch, little interaction with adults, fewer sights and sounds, and less language, actually have smaller brains.<sup>ii</sup>

### Language Development

Children who have rich language experiences before age three, with parents or caregivers who engage them in conversation and a range of words, have dramatically higher vocabularies than children who do not. How much parents and caregivers talk with children is also critical for language acquisition.<sup>iii</sup>

- **11 million:** average number of words a child with professional parents hears in a year
- **3 million:** average number of words a child with parents who receive TANF benefits hears in a year<sup>iv</sup>

### Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: What is at Stake for Washington?

Washington is home to more than 348,000 children from birth to age 3. Currently, 1 in 3 of these children are children of color. Between the years 2010 and 2030, the Office of Financial Management (OFM) projects a 53% increase in the multiracial population of children ages birth to 4.

We also know that children of color are already disproportionately affected by poverty, and that the number of children in poverty overall has increased in recent years. For Washington State, this means that despite what we know, low-income children and children of color in the most critical developmental period in their lives are facing a widening opportunity gap.

### What can be done now to close the gap?

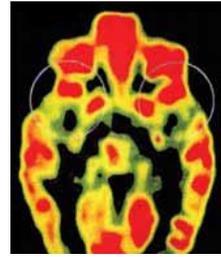
Connecting research to policy means that we need to act early to address disparities in our education system. Targeted support for children from birth to three as PreK is expanded in Washington is a smart path forward.

*Children who receive high-quality services for five years beginning at birth fare better than those who spend only two years before kindergarten in a high-quality preschool program. To wait until children are three or four years old ignores the potential of promoting child development in the earliest years, and providing parent education and coaching at one of the most critical periods of parenthood.*

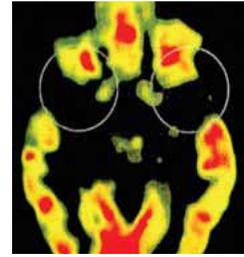
***Expanding preschool and birth-to-three programs concurrently, especially for children at risk, is essential.***

*- Learning Begins At Birth, Ounce of Prevention Fund*

### Comparison of the Developing Brain Temporal Lobes



Healthy Development



Development Affected  
by Environmental Stress

<sup>i</sup> Child Trends. *Disparities in Early Learning and Development: Lessons from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort*. June 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> The Ounce. *Learning Begins at Birth*. <http://www.ounceofprevention.org/news/pdfs/LearningBeginsAtBirth.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iv</sup> Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing