

Dear Members of the Joint Task Force on Basic Education Finance,

We, the undersigned organizations, active in advocating and delivering early learning services to our community, thank you for your work to examine, redefine, and formulate proposals around the state's provision of basic education.

Among our organizations we represent a broad variety of perspectives on the education system. Like you, we are engaged in a long-term conversation about the future direction of a world-class, learner-focused, seamless system of education in Washington. We share a profound belief in the importance of a quality early learning environment for all children in our state.

We have listened with deep interest to your discussions on March 24<sup>th</sup> regarding the proper role of early learning in your revision of the Basic Education Act. We have explored the questions you are addressing. We agree upon the following principles (expanded upon in the attached document).

1. Early learning has both a constitutional and a legislative foundation for inclusion in an updated definition of Basic Education.
2. Extensive research confirms that high quality early learning experiences benefit children, and offer a significant return on investment of state dollars.
3. We agree on where this work should begin:
  - a. Immediate targeted early interventions for children deemed at risk of school failure;
  - b. A commitment over time to ensure that all children are "school ready."
4. Quality early education should continue to be provided through a mixed delivery system which draws on the strengths of families as well as services provided in a variety of settings.

We appreciate your consideration of the attached document and look forward to working with you on behalf of our state's children.

Respectfully,

Children's Alliance  
Children's Home Society of Washington  
Docs for Tots Washington State  
Economic Opportunity Institute  
League of Education Voters Foundation  
Northwest Early Learning Coalition  
Parent Trust for Washington Children/Parents as  
Teachers State Office  
SEIU, Local 925  
United Way of King County  
United Way of Lewis County

United Way of Snohomish County  
United Way of Spokane County  
United Ways of Washington  
Washington Appleseed Center for Law in the  
Public Interest  
Washington Association for the Education of  
Young Children  
Washington State Association of Head  
Start/ECEAP  
Washington State Child Care Resource &  
Referral Network

We, the undersigned organizations, active in advocating and delivering early learning services to our community, agree upon the following four principles:

**1. Early learning has both a constitutional and a legislative foundation for inclusion in an updated definition of Basic Education.**

Article IX, Section 1 of the Washington State Constitution asserts, “It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.”

Washington State’s paramount constitutional duty to educate all children must be determined and satisfied within a changing context. As the Washington State Supreme Court in *School Funding I* (Doran I) stated, children have a right to an education “beyond mere reading, writing and arithmetic. It also embraces broad educational opportunities needed in the contemporary setting to equip our children for their role as citizens and as potential competitors in today’s market as well as in the market place of ideas.” (*School Funding I* at 517).

Under the legislative mandate of the Joint Task Force on Basic Education Finance, any definition of basic education must be aligned with the extensive and lauded work of the Washington Learns committee and reflect the demands of the contemporary setting and an evolving education system. In laying out new expectations of the state's education system, the final report of the committee, *Washington Learns: World-class, learner-focused, seamless education*, explicitly recognized the fundamental role played by early learning in building a strong system of education in a competitive global economy.

The first three goals of Washington Learns’ *Ten-Year Goals for a World-Class Education System* focus on early education:

1. “Parents will be their child’s first and best teachers, and will have the support they need to help their children “learn to learn” in their first years of life.
2. Families will have access to high-quality, affordable child care and early education programs staffed by providers who are adequately trained and compensated.
3. All children will enter kindergarten healthy and emotionally, socially, and cognitively ready to succeed in school and in life.”

The report also clearly states that “we will invest in early learning so that children start off as lifelong learners” as the first of the five initiatives necessary for the creation of a world-class system of education.

Under these parameters, the Task Force is under both a constitutional and legislative mandate to incorporate early education and care into the scope of the basic education definition. We encourage

you to continue to look to other settings and delivery systems outside the K-12 system and linkages needed between early learning and K-12 needed to foster a seamless education system in this state.

**2. Extensive research confirms that high-quality early learning experiences benefit children, and offer a significant return on investment of state dollars.**

Over the last three decades, evidenced-based research from a variety of disciplines has definitively established the critical role early learning plays in lifetime educational and social outcomes. The skills and behaviors learned in the first five years form the basis for later academic achievement. A basic education requires that children be able to read, write, and communicate effectively, know, apply, think, and understand – all skills which are built upon foundations laid by quality early education and care.

High-quality, comprehensive early learning results in significant returns on public investment. These returns not only benefit society in the long run but also offer immediate advantages to the K-12 system in the form of decreased need for remediation, special education, and grade retention.

Further, recent research has shown that the majority of Washington children enter the K-12 system inadequately prepared for the academic and social challenges of a kindergarten classroom. Children from all backgrounds experience a lack of school readiness. Without adequate exposure to high-quality and comprehensive early learning, many of these children will continue to struggle to meet expectations year after year.

Over the course of a dozen years, some of these struggling students may eventually receive a basic education, but others may not. In the process, many will utilize extensive and costly remedial and special education support, stemming from an initial lack of school readiness.

However, our collective desire extends beyond the provision of simply a basic education to world-class, learner-focused, seamless, and high-quality education that prepares students for the marketplace of ideas and the global economy. Washington State cannot ensure a basic education for all, let alone reach a higher goal, without ensuring that children gain the intellectual and social skills required for success in school prior to entering the K-12 system.

**3. The work should begin with immediate targeted early interventions for children deemed at risk of school failure; and a commitment over time to ensure that all children are “school ready.”**

If a basic and amply-funded education is the right of every child in Washington State then being ready for school, both intellectually and socially, is a critical component of this right. We also understand the limitations and constraints impeding broad implementation. Therefore, we recommend the state pursue an aggressive phase-in approach for the provision of programs and policies ensuring that children are ready to succeed in the K-12 setting.

Due to a variety of factors, including income levels and language barriers, a more immediate need exists for certain students deemed at high-risk for school failure. Therefore, the first step in the delivery of high-quality basic education should include targeted early interventions for children who we know are most at risk.

Subsequently, Washington State should seize opportunities to extend early learning to all children, based on emerging evidence. Building a culture of school readiness is an ongoing conversation that we plan to continue to hold amongst ourselves and with you and your colleagues in the Legislature.

**4. Quality early education should continue to be provided through a mixed delivery system which draws on the strengths of families as well as services provided in a variety of settings.**

We, as individual organizations and as a consortium of stakeholders, do not envision a unitary delivery system for the provision of basic education school readiness initiatives.

Early education takes place in a variety of settings and it is within these settings that basic education should be supported. We recognize that a multitude of different individuals and institutions have historically played key roles in children’s lives before they enter the public schools.

The state’s responsibility for the school readiness of young children need not mirror the K-12 system but can be delivered through a coordinated system of financial supports, incentives, and guidelines. We look forward to a system of enhancements and expansions to the existing structures that allow each person and organization to play its part.

We believe that local innovation and responsiveness can best respond to the needs and demands of individual children and families. However, a high-level of coordination among these settings is necessary to ensure that all children have equal access to high-quality early learning and an equal opportunity to be prepared for school.

**Presented By**

**Children's Alliance**

Paola Maranan  
Executive Director  
206.324.0340 x.16  
[paola@childrensalliance.org](mailto:paola@childrensalliance.org)

**Children's Home Society of Washington**

Laurie Lippold  
Public Policy Director  
206.695.3229  
[lippoldlau@aol.com](mailto:lippoldlau@aol.com)

**Docs For Tots Washington State**

Jill Sells, MD  
Director  
206.947.5847  
[jsells@docsfortots.org](mailto:jsells@docsfortots.org)

**Economic Opportunity Institute**

Hannah Lidman  
Senior Policy Associate  
206.529.6360  
[hannah@eoionline.org](mailto:hannah@eoionline.org)

**League of Education Voters Foundation**

Chris Korsmo  
Executive Director  
206.728.6448  
[chris@educationvoters.org](mailto:chris@educationvoters.org)

**Northwest Early Learning Coalition**

Joe Varano  
Snohomish County ECEAP Director  
425.388.7251  
[joe.varano@co.snohomish.wa.us](mailto:joe.varano@co.snohomish.wa.us)

**Parent Trust for Washington**

**Children/Parents as Teachers State Office**

Jack Edgerton  
Executive Director  
206-233-0156 x 226  
[jedgerton@parenttrust.org](mailto:jedgerton@parenttrust.org)

**SEIU, Local 925**

Adair Dammann  
Political Strategies Director  
206.322.3010 x.325  
[adamann@seiu925.org](mailto:adamann@seiu925.org)

**United Way of King County**

Carol Wood  
Director of Public Policy and Governmental  
Affairs  
206.461.3756  
[cwood@uwkc.org](mailto:cwood@uwkc.org)

**United Way of Lewis County**

Debbie Campbell  
Executive Director  
360.748.8100  
[director@lewiscountyuw.com](mailto:director@lewiscountyuw.com)

**United Way of Snohomish County**

Katrina Ondracek  
Senior Manager, Public Policy & Early  
Learning Initiatives  
425.374.5533  
[katrina.ondracek@uwsc.org](mailto:katrina.ondracek@uwsc.org)

**United Way of Spokane County**

Tim Henkel  
President & CEO  
509.838.6581  
[timh@unitedwayspokane.org](mailto:timh@unitedwayspokane.org)

**United Ways of Washington**

Erica Hallock  
President & CEO  
509.991.2390

[behallock@comcast.net](mailto:behallock@comcast.net)

**Washington Appleseed Center for Law in  
the Public Interest**

Sue Donaldson  
Executive Director  
206.632.7197

[sdonaldson@waappleseed.org](mailto:sdonaldson@waappleseed.org)

**Washington Association for the Education  
of Young Children**

Agda Burchard  
Executive Director  
253.854.2565 x.12

[agda@waeyc.org](mailto:agda@waeyc.org)

**Washington State Association of Head  
Start/ECEAP**

Joel Ryan  
Executive Director  
253.373.9100

[joel@wsaheadstarteceap.com](mailto:joel@wsaheadstarteceap.com)

**Washington State Child Care Resource &  
Referral Network**

Elizabeth Bonbright Thompson  
Executive Director  
253.383.1735 x.15

[ebthompson@childcarenet.org](mailto:ebthompson@childcarenet.org)