

EARLY LEARNING

HIGH-QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN

Since 2005, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has worked with public, private, and community partners in Washington State to ensure high-quality early learning opportunities that help children enter school ready to succeed.

Thanks to our partners, more Washington children than ever before have access to pre-K. Over the past decade, our grantmaking responded to the changing landscape and our learnings about the most effective role for philanthropy. In all of our work, we believe in following the evidence. By 2012, we began more closely researching the early learning workforce and what makes high-quality pre-K effective in producing societal benefits and lasting academic gains.

We learned that high-quality preschool programs consistently focus on improving the interactions between teachers and children. They also share a set of common features that support educators and center directors, foster high-quality instruction, and benefit from state and local policies that create a positive, enabling environment.

We know that all children need support from stable families, healthy communities, and great teaching at every step along their educational path, and research shows that high-quality preschool can give the children who are furthest from opportunity a strong start.

For these purposes, the term “preschool” refers to all programs for 3- and 4-year olds, which “pre-K” refers to programs that are publicly funded.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K

High-quality pre-K includes specific, replicable features in support for educators and young learners, instruction and playful learning, and an environment that sets the foundation for success.

Support for Educators & Young Learners

- **Education and compensation.** Lead teachers earn a B.A. degree plus an early learning credential and compensation at the same level as K-3 teachers.
- **Adult-child ratios.** Programs have a maximum class size of 22 children and adult-to-child ratios ranging from 2:15 to 2:22.
- **Learning time.** Additional time in high-quality pre-K benefits children with the greatest needs. High-quality pre-K programs run 6 to 6.5 hours a day, 180 to 205 days a year.
- **Two adults in the classroom.** High-quality pre-K programs have two adults in the classroom at all times: one lead teacher and one paraprofessional or aide.
- **Support for Dual Language Learners.** Bilingual teachers and specialists can help students build skills in their native language while learning English.
- **Support for students with special needs.** For children with special needs, early intervention helps most. Early intervention can also reduce future special education needs and grade retention in elementary school.



Children playing at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Home Center

High-Quality Instruction & Playful Learning

- **Teacher-child interactions focused on learning.** Teachers use structured activities and play to create rich learning environments in which children talk about what they are doing and follow their natural curiosity.
- **Age-appropriate learning standards.** Goals for academic and social-emotional learning align with the expectations of kindergarten and beyond
- **Proven curriculum.** Programs adhere closely to a research-based curriculum that is aligned with cognitive and social-emotional goals and with teachers' professional development.
- **Formative assessments.** At the pre-K level, assessments are classroom-based and designed to help teachers and administrators improve outcomes for children.
- **Data-driven decision making.** As part of a cycle of continuous improvement, pre-K programs use data to inform action and improve outcomes for children.
- **Professional development.** Ongoing coaching focused on improving teacher-child interactions can help teachers improve instruction and student outcomes.
- **Integrated system.** Learning goals, curriculum, professional development, formative assessments, and data are tied together and are mutually reinforcing.

Foundation for Success

- **Public commitment.** Support from elected officials, courts and the policy environment can help sustain public commitment to high-quality pre-K.
- **Strong leadership.** Educators create a culture of high expectations, cultivate public commitment, and communicate the importance of quality to parents

AREAS OF FOCUS

The early learning field is broad, and there are many established organizations making significant progress for children from birth to 5. Our efforts are meant to be complementary, and we believe that we can have the greatest impact for the most children by focusing our work on increasing access to high-quality pre-K and improving support for early childhood educators and leaders.

Across all of our areas of focus, we seek to meet the needs of dual language learners (DLL) because they are a growing demographic. We use data to inform decision-making and technology to enhance efficacy. As we move forward, we will conduct regular evaluations and adjustments to ensure we are meeting our goals. Our areas of focus are:

- **Increasing Access to High-Quality Pre-K.** Our goal is to increase access to high-quality pre-K for more young children by expanding, stabilizing, and evaluating the effectiveness of state and local pre-K programs and Head Start. This includes building awareness, support, adoption, and implementation of the research-backed essential elements of quality—and expanding the number of children served by these high-quality programs.
- **Supporting Early Childhood Educators.** Our goal is to support the practice of preschool teaching in order to improve student outcomes. We believe that teachers in preschool settings deserve special training and professional development and should be compensated at a rate on par with K-12 teachers. We recognize that a diverse workforce is essential to meet the needs of the 1 in 4 children who speak a language other than English at home.
- **Washington State.** Our goal is to ensure that early learning in Washington informs and is complementary to our national strategy, while maintaining and strengthening our long-term relationships and commitments in our home state.

LOOKING AHEAD

We know that all children need support from stable families, healthy communities, and great teaching at every step along their educational path. Research shows that high-quality preschool can give the children who are furthest from opportunity a strong start.

In 2014, the foundation approved an expanded, national Early Learning strategy. Over the next few years, we will collaborate with partners and educators to ensure that more young children, especially those furthest from opportunity, have access to high-quality, effective, and affordable preschool education.

Guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people's health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people—especially those with the fewest resources—have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Sue Desmond-Hellmann and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

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