

Ten-Year Roadmap Policy Options

Challenge Area

Student Readiness: Early Learning

Planning Activity

Describe how the needs of the Pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade population have implications for K-20 learning, and advise the Council on how higher education could contribute to enhancing early learning.

Council Lead Members

Scott Brittain

Ray Lawton

Council Staff

Randy Spaulding (Lead), Director for Academic Affairs and Policy

Noreen Light, Associate Director for Academic Affairs and Policy

Mark Bergeson, Associate Director for Academic Affairs and Policy

May 2013

Summary

The Washington Student Achievement Council has identified **student readiness for postsecondary opportunity and success** as one of five critical challenge areas to be addressed in the Ten-Year Roadmap. One component of student readiness is early learning.

An early learning workgroup, comprising representatives from key agencies, institutions, and organizations supporting the Washington's early learning system, is working to help Council members address this challenge area. The following report outlines this workgroup's policy recommendations.

These policy options are founded on key early learning targets:

- Increase access to high-quality programs.
- Improve the workforce.
- Develop and implement comprehensive assessment systems.
- Ensure program effectiveness and accountability.

The workgroup recommends that the Council endorse and support implementation of the Early Learning Plan developed by Department of Early Learning, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Thrive by Five Washington. In support of that plan, the workgroup recommends a number of specific policies and actions:

- Providing more parenting learning opportunities.
- Implementation of a comprehensive professional development and compensation system for early learning providers.
- Alignment of Pre-K and K-3 instructional and programmatic practices.
- Expansion of the P-20 Longitudinal Data System.
- Utilization of data to support program development.
- Increased funding for early learning.

This report reflects a diversity of input, empowering the Council to consider and prioritize policy options for inclusion in the Ten-Year Roadmap. In addition, the Roadmap will also address the outcomes, metrics, and fiscal impacts of those recommendations.

Context of the Ten-Year Roadmap

Increasing educational attainment is vital to the well-being of Washington residents and to the health of our state's economy. To this end, the Washington Student Achievement Council is working to propose goals and strategies for increasing educational attainment through a Ten-Year Roadmap and a two-year Strategic Action Plan.

The Council's Strategic Action Plan, adopted in November 2012, identifies five critical challenges to be addressed in the Roadmap. The five challenge areas are:

1. **Student Readiness** (with four planning activities: Early Learning; Outreach and Support; Alignment; Remedial Postsecondary Education)
2. **Affordability**
3. **Institutional Capacity and Student Success** (with two planning activities: Meeting Increased Demand; Assessment of Student Skills and Knowledge)
4. **Capturing the Potential of Technology**
5. **Stable and Accountable Funding**

To inform the Council's work of creating the first Roadmap, workgroups comprising lead Washington Student Achievement Council Members, Council staff, and external workgroup members were formed to research, discuss, and develop issue briefings and policy recommendations for each of these five critical challenge areas.

The Challenge Areas are complex and interrelated. While the Roadmap will recommend actions for each of the Challenge Areas, these recommendations will be integrated into a cohesive plan.

Introduction

“In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children...studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, form more stable families of their own. We know this works. So let’s do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind.”

— President Barack Obama
State of the Union, February 12, 2013

Defining the Issue: Early Learning

This is the second report to the Council on the topic of Early Learning. The first report¹ provided an overview of the issue. This second report provides recommendations from the Early Learning Workgroup for policy options and actions. Both reports serve as resources to the Council members as they develop the Ten-Year Roadmap to raise educational attainment in Washington.

As part of the Ten-Year Roadmap, the Council will address the need to improve the health, social-emotional well-being, and cognitive outcomes of all children from birth through 3rd grade. These early learning targets are crucial to student success, successful academic transitions, and college and career readiness.

Background

Gaps in student readiness stem from students’ earliest learning experiences and persist throughout school and life. This fact—along with dramatic social changes such as increasing numbers of families with work-related child care needs—has raised the importance of early learning.

High-quality early learning experiences, particularly those that include school-age support through at least 3rd grade, can make long-term differences in the lives of students. Formal and informal early learning are clearly associated with both improved academic outcomes and reduced negative social outcomes. In other words, children served through effective early learning programs are more likely to succeed and achieve. In turn, these children are more likely to experience improved career opportunities and wages, resulting in positive returns on investment. In fact, a recent study by the Washington Institute for Public Policy found that every dollar invested in early learning yielded a combined personal and social return of twelve dollars.²

In recognizing the value of early learning, the Washington State Early Learning Plan examines the state’s early learning needs and provides recommendations for action.

The Council’s March 2013 early learning issue brief³ includes information from this plan and other sources, including a review of the availability of quality early learning programming, the potential of technology to address gaps, and the implications for student achievement. The brief also discusses the roles of parents, providers, and the state in improving education, health programs, and social services to ultimately improve student achievement.

Development of Policy Options

The early learning workgroup and other key early learning partners assisted in the development of early learning policy options.

The policy options discussed below were informed by a workgroup including representatives from key agencies, institutions, and organizations that support the early learning system in Washington. The recommendations were also influenced by presentations from experts in the field who spoke at the March 26, 2013, Council meeting. Presenters included: Bette Hyde, Director, Department of Early Learning; Gail Joseph, Assistant Professor, Educational Psychology and Early Childhood and Family Studies, University of Washington; and Sally Holloway, Early Childhood Education Project Director, Whatcom Community College. At the same meeting the Council also considered a report summarizing feedback gathered during its recent statewide listening tour. Among the concerns raised on the listening tour were the critical needs to implement all-day kindergarten and to improve early learning experiences so that young children come to school ready to learn.

Policy Options for Recommended Actions

The policy options in this brief are founded on the belief that the state should promote initiatives that increase access to high-quality programs, improve the early learning workforce, develop and implement comprehensive early learning assessment systems, and ensure program effectiveness and accountability.^{4,5} Although there was broad agreement on many of the proposals, the contributors to this report did not uniformly support each policy option. The report reflects a diversity of input, empowering the Council to consider and prioritize policy options for inclusion in the Ten-Year Roadmap.

Since the aforementioned Early Learning Plan addresses these considerations, **the first recommendation is for the Council to endorse the Early Learning Plan and ensure that subsequent recommendations support the implementation of the plan.** The specific recommendations for Council action (in italics below) are described in the context of strategies identified in the Early Learning Plan:

Provide more parenting learning opportunities: Provide parenting learning opportunities and peer supports in diverse and family-friendly venues (Early Learning Plan Strategy #15).

- *Provide additional support for parent/family education programs offered by the community and technical college system. The colleges provide support for a variety of highly successful parent education programs, many of which are targeted to specific populations.*

Align Pre-kindergarten and K-3 instructional and programmatic practices: Ensure that children's Pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade experiences are aligned and coordinated (Early Learning Plan Strategy #27).

- *Support full implementation of WaKIDS assessment system and collaboration to improve practices of early learning professionals and kindergarten teachers and support smooth transitions for children.*

Implement comprehensive professional development and compensation system: Build a comprehensive, integrated statewide system of professional development with fair compensation (Early Learning Plan Strategy #23).

- *Provide incentives and pathways for K-3 teachers to complete an early learning endorsement as part of their ongoing professional development.*
- *Improve articulation among early learning programs so that students can more easily transfer from certificate to degree programs and from associate degrees to bachelor's degrees.*
- *Invest in professional development activities that would enable early learning and K-3 teachers to improve their understanding of child development.*
- *Inform designers of early learning preparation programs of the value of considering K-8 early learning endorsement requirements to ensure that early learning teachers who go on to K-8 teaching careers have a clear pathway for endorsement.*
- *Advocate for improved compensation for Pre-K teachers and caregivers to ensure they earn a living wage.*

Expand P-20 Longitudinal Data System: Develop an integrated P-20 data system that includes early learning services and programs outside the K-12 system (Early Learning Plan Strategy #36).

- *Include Pre-K students beyond Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Head Start students in the longitudinal data system.*

Analyze data to support program development:

- *Improve analysis of the needs for educator training, including the demand in Pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade, as part of the State and Regional Needs Assessment Process and Skilled and Educated Workforce Report.*

Improve funding for Early Learning:

- *Enhanced funding for education including funding for all-day kindergarten (Early Learning Plan Strategy #29) and K-3 class size reduction (Early Learning Plan Strategy #27) would help to ensure we provide opportunities for all children to succeed in school. It is also clear that additional investment in early learning, such as additional funding for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (Early Learning Plan Strategy #12), will be needed to close achievement gaps in Washington and improve student outcomes.*

Next Steps

Following the Council's consideration and discussion of the above policy options at its May 2013 meeting, Council staff will prepare a framework for Roadmap recommendations for this planning area. The framework for Roadmap recommendations will include a delineation of specific strategic actions, each of which will be described by the following factors:

1. Expected Outcome of the Action
2. Action Time Period
3. Outcome Time Period
4. Metrics for Measuring Outcomes
5. Legislative Action Needed
6. Fiscal Impact

Staff will develop the framework in close consultation with the Council members and the workgroup. The Council will use this framework at its October retreat to help shape the Ten-Year Roadmap.

Author Information

Randy Spaulding
Director of Academic Affairs and Policy
Washington Student Achievement Council
randys@wsac.wa.gov
360-753-7823

Acknowledgements

The Council would like to thank the following people for their contributions to the Early Learning work group:

Council Lead Members

Scott Brittain
Ray Lawton

External Workgroup Members

Nina Auerbach - *Thrive by Five Washington*
Melissa Beard - *Education Research and Data Center*
Vi Boyer - *Independent Colleges of Washington*
Bob Butts - *Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction*
Linda Drake - *Washington State Board of Education*
Kathy Goebel - *Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges*
Curt Guaglianone - *Heritage University*
Bob Hamilton - *Washington State Department of Early Learning*
Bette Hyde - *Washington State Department of Early Learning*
Christine McCabe - *College Spark Washington*
Justin Montermini - *Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board*
Jane Sherman - *Council of Presidents*
Phil Venditti - *Faculty Association of Community and Technical Colleges*
Jane Wall - *Council of Presidents*
Jennifer Wallace - *Professional Educator Standards Board*
Gena Wikstrom - *Northwest Career Colleges Federation*
Bryan Wilson - *Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board*

Council Staff

Randy Spaulding
Noreen Light
Mark Bergeson

Appendix – Policy Options

Strategy	Council Actions
<p><u>Provide more parenting learning opportunities</u> Provide parenting learning opportunities and peer supports in diverse and family-friendly venues (Early Learning Plan Strategy #15).</p>	<p><i>Provide additional support for parent/family education programs offered by the Community and Technical College System. The colleges provide support for a variety of highly successful parent education resources, many of which are targeted to specific populations.</i></p>
<p><u>Align Pre-kindergarten and K-3 instructional and programmatic practices</u> Ensure that children’s Pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade experiences are aligned and coordinated (Early Learning Plan Strategy #27).</p>	<p><i>Support full implementation of WaKIDS assessment system and collaboration to improve practices of early learning professionals and kindergarten teachers and support smooth transitions for children.</i></p>
<p><u>Implement comprehensive professional development and compensation system</u> Build a comprehensive, integrated statewide system of professional development with fair compensation (Early Learning Plan Strategy #23).</p>	<p><i>Provide incentives and pathways for K-3 teachers to complete an early learning endorsement as part of their ongoing professional development.</i></p>
	<p><i>Improve articulation among early learning programs so that students can more easily transfer from certificate to degree programs and from associate degrees to bachelor’s degrees.</i></p>
	<p><i>Invest in professional development activities that would enable early learning and K-3 teachers to improve their understanding of child development.</i></p>
	<p><i>Encourage designers of early learning preparation programs to consider K-8 early learning endorsement requirements to ensure that early learning teachers who go on to K-8 teaching careers have a clear pathway for endorsement.</i></p>
	<p><i>Advocate for improved compensation for Pre-K teachers and caregivers to ensure they earn a living wage.</i></p>
<p><u>Expand P-20 Longitudinal Data System</u> Develop an integrated P-20 data system that includes early learning services and programs outside the K-12 system (Early Learning Plan Strategy #36).</p>	<p><i>Include Pre-K students beyond Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Head Start students in the longitudinal data system.</i></p>
<p><u>Analyze data to support program development</u></p>	<p><i>Improve analysis of the needs for educator training, including the demand in Pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade, as part of the State and Regional Needs Assessment Process and Skilled and Educated Workforce Report.</i></p>
<p><u>Improve funding for Early Learning</u></p>	<p><i>Enhanced funding for education including funding for all-day kindergarten (Early Learning Plan Strategy #29) and K-3 class size reduction (Early Learning Plan Strategy #27) would help to ensure we provide opportunities for all children to succeed in school. It is also clear that additional investment in early learning, such as additional funding for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (Early Learning Plan Strategy # 12), will be needed to close achievement gaps in Washington and improve student outcomes.</i></p>

Endnotes

¹ Washington Student Achievement Council (March 2013) 10-Year Roadmap Issue Briefing – Student Readiness: Early Learning. <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/EarlyLearning-IssueBriefing.pdf>.

² Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2012). Return on Investment: Evidence-Based Options to Improve State Outcomes.

³ Washington Student Achievement Council (2013). 10-Year Roadmap Issue Briefing Student Readiness: Early Learning.

⁴ Adapted from US Department of Education Early Learning Initiative. <http://www.ed.gov/early-learning>.

⁵ These strategies must also be inclusive of children with disabilities and those who are English learners.