



2024 COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT



ABOUT US

We are BrightSpark!

Founded in 1990, BrightSpark Early Learning Services serves children, families, child care providers, and community partners across King and Pierce Counties. We believe that every child deserves access to a high quality early learning experience. We offer a wide range of services, resources, and supports to help every caregiver and educator create the best outcomes for the children in their care.

Our mission is to nurture and sustain child-centered, antiracist early learning communities. Our collective values are that we are stronger together; we honor community strengths; and we seek continuous learning and improvement.

Our Commitment to Antiracism

BrightSpark is dedicated to recognizing, disrupting, and addressing racial inequities both within our organization and in the work we do externally. Below are just some of the ways we ensure antiracism remains central to our work:



Employees are expected to have a deep understanding of antiracism, and we regularly host in-depth trainings and learning opportunities for every staff member.



Our programs are designed to honor the cultures, values, and languages of the communities we served.



We follow the Community-Centric Fundraising model for external engagement, meaning the needs of our community are always our top priority, and all gifts are appreciated equally.



WELCOME MESSAGE

Hello Friends & Supporters of BrightSpark,

What a joy to be able to reflect on the past year, and what a year it was! At BrightSpark, our focus is on 0-12 year old children, and we know that their early start will predict their future pathways, and we hope these pathways are filled with equity, opportunity, and a lot of joy. Considering the last year, we can confidently say that BrightSpark engaged in a variety of successful efforts to ensure all our learners had access to high quality early learning! Over the last year, we have homed in and focused on work in two key areas: Access and High Quality.

This work is the starting point for thousands of children and families in King and Pierce Counties. We could not be prouder of our agency!

An example of the critical work we do to ensure all families—especially those farthest from educational and economic opportunities—have access to early learning is raising funds to provide subsidy support that helps families pay for the high cost of child care. We do not do this alone! We have key partners in King and Pierce Counties' Human Services Departments; the cities of Auburn, Bellevue, Kent, Redmond, and Renton; and multiple private foundations and donors.

Ensuring access for all children only works when we know that the early learning experiences of children are high-quality. BrightSpark strives to achieve this through our expansive coaching and training of over 2,000 child care providers, and our partnership with child care providers to deliver both Early Head Start services as well as offer Seattle Preschool Program slots.

We also provide Infant Early Childhood Mental Health consultation and support to providers and families. This work creates strong relationships between families and providers so they can collaborate to meet the needs of the children in their care. The impact of providing these services is decreasing challenging behaviors at home and in care, decreasing expulsion of children from care, reducing teacher stress, and helping decrease staff turnover; all contributing to the quality of care each child receives.

This last fiscal year also marks the end of our 18-month Strategic Plan. We had aspirational, mission-aligned priorities, and it is gratifying to see how much progress we made!

We focused on developing infrastructure and the results were many, including our rebrand and moving the organization to a new financial system. Ultimately, we built the infrastructure to support the agency we have become, and we will continue to grow moving from an organization with an operating budget of \$14 million to \$38 million within the last five years.

In the last legislative session, the greatest legislative win was an additional investment in the state budget to expand the Infant Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultation work. This investment was spurred immensely by advocacy from our agency, community members, and our statewide partners. **This win will result in 6 new IECMH Consultants to serve children across the state!**

We also remain committed to building our investment in Pierce County through increased services and supports. It was 9 years ago that our agency became a King and Pierce County agency, and in that time, we have made great strides in increasing services, partnerships, and supports in Pierce County; and we want to do even more! In the last year, we received considerable investment from Pierce County Human Services for our subsidy work enabling us to increase access for hundreds of families. We want to continue to develop this work, ensuring access and high-quality early learning for every child in Pierce County.

As we look to this next year, words like “reflect, refine, and refocus” are top of mind as we develop our next 18-month plan. We have had an immense year and we want to live into the changes that have taken place, and we want to continue our agency-wide quality improvement cycle.

A **HUGE** thank you to all our partners and supporters for being alongside us through the last year! And we invite you to join us in this next year which is sure to be filled with impactful and gratifying work we are honored to be able to do.

Best,



Phoebe Sade
Executive Officer



Rebecca Benavides
'23-24 Board Chair

Our 2024 Legislative Priorities

Last year, BrightSpark issued its own standalone legislative agenda. Our team made an intentional choice to truly focus on priorities that will benefit our communities. During this session, we prioritized support for policy and budget proposals to:



Increase mental health consultation investments



Make child care available to more families



Increase ECEAP entitlement capacity

Our Engagement

Results that come from advocating for change with the legislature can be attributed to many factors and actions. The BrightSpark team was proud to take action with state lawmakers and their staff in a variety of ways, including:



5 public testimonials made by Logan Endres, Policy & Advocacy Director, and Mica Slater, Comprehensive Services Dept. Manager



23 "sign in" actions during public hearings



6 recurring meetings that legislators held with Advocacy Director



7 written communications to explain detailed thoughts about various policy proposals

Highlights & Successes

Throughout the legislative session, the BrightSpark team worked on a number of policy proposals in support of our priorities as well as others that relate and support our overall goals.

Our work contributed to collective advocacy that led to the legislature:



Bolstering infant and early childhood mental health consultation



Making critical improvements to early learning subsidy programs



Expanding programs and benefits for child care providers



Increasing opportunity for statewide engagement



Funding various early learning facility projects

Direct wins tied to our legislative priorities include:



The Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultation program received an additional \$1.75 million to increase staffing and address the growing waitlist.



ECEAP rates grew by 5% for full day and 9% for extended care.



The Infant Rate Enhancement increased from \$90 to \$180 per child, per month effective July 1, 2024.



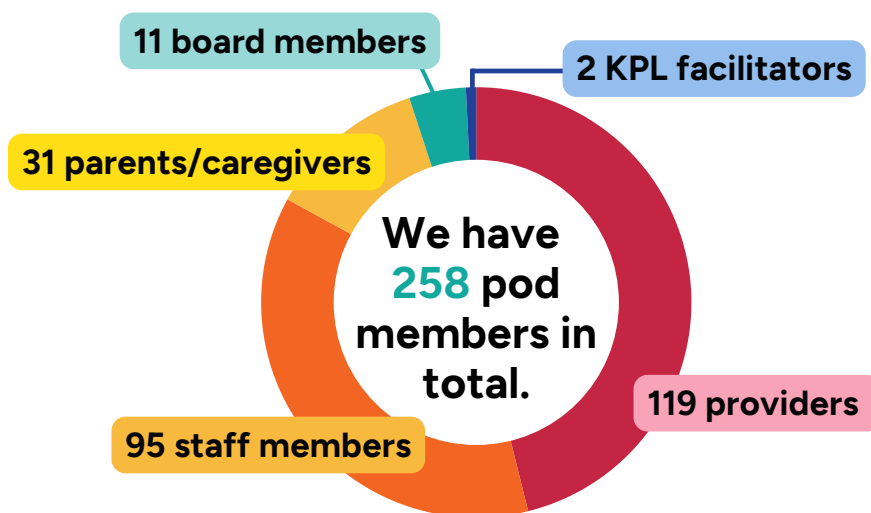
The Non-Standard Hour Bonus increased from \$135 to \$150 per child, per month effective July 1, 2024.

ADVOCACY

Advocacy Pods

2023 marked the third year of our Advocacy Pods. Advocacy Pods are built on the belief that the stronger the local relationships are amongst advocates and their elected officials, the more powerful our advocacy will be on a larger geographic scale. Advocacy Pods bring together community members from across the early learning spectrum living in the same legislative district. This includes child care providers, parents; Family, Friend, & Neighbor caregivers; BrightSpark staff and board members; and community partners.

Each Pod meets with their elected officials to share the realities of what it's like to navigate finding, paying for, and offering care in their neighborhoods. Some meetings are straight to the point while in the others we share stories of deep experiences and babies sometimes pop up on the screen! Ultimately, they are a space for our community to share stories, hard truths, insights, and concerns.



Advocacy Pod Fun Facts:



In the 2023-24 fiscal year, we met virtually and in-person with 40 elected state legislators and sent community members to Washington DC to meet with federal representatives.



The BrightSpark Advocacy Pods include 23 pods representing each of the legislative districts in King and Pierce Counties.



We aim to meet during nap time in the early afternoon so that child care providers can easily join as well as parents and other caregivers. Kids set the schedule!



Thank You, Donors!



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