



 early
 head
 start



**2024
EARLY
HEAD
START
REPORT**





www.brightspark.org

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

- 3 About BrightSpark
- 4 Welcome Message

EARLY HEAD START

- 7 Program Overview
- 8 2024 By The Numbers
- 9 Audit Results
- 10 Past & Projected Budget
- 11 Program Leadership
- 12 Expulsion Prevention





INTRODUCTION

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

A young child with short dark hair is sitting on a wooden play structure. The child is wearing a dark grey or black quilted jacket and blue jeans. They are holding a bright yellow handle with their right hand. The play structure is made of light-colored wood. In the background, there is a blue building and a person in a white shirt. A large red shape is in the bottom left corner, and a teal shape is in the top right corner.

EARLY HEAD START



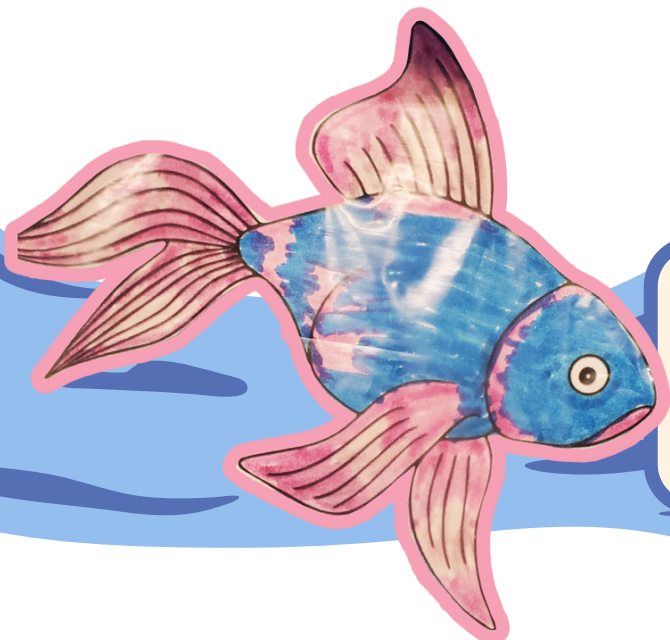
Early Head Start

The Early Head Start (EHS) Program provides family-centered early learning services for low-income families with children ages 0 to 4 as well as support for the entire family. EHS partners with family child care centers to implement best practices that promote the development of the children while also enabling families to move toward self-sufficiency.

The EHS program prioritizes affordability and flexibility by offering subsidized - and often free - care for qualifying families. Many partner providers start earlier than 6:00 am and may even offer 24 hour care which allows families to both benefit from EHS services while also continuing to work non-standard hours. Families work with EHS Specialists in addition to their providers to help them determine their long-term goals and direct them to community resources to help with their overall physical, mental, and financial well-being.

EHS offers families support in the following areas:

- ◆ Physical and mental health
- ◆ Special needs and early intervention
- Long-term/sustainable housing
- ✶ Substance abuse intervention
- ▲ Domestic violence prevention and intervention
- ☾ Job training, higher education, and work placement
- ◆ Financial stability education



Last year, our EHS Team:

Worked with **12** Family Child Care Centers and served **99** children and **3** pregnant people.

Federal Program Audit Results

From June 10 to June 14, 2024, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted a Focus Area Two monitoring review of BrightSpark's Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership program. The review determined that our program meets all applicable Head Start Performance Standards, laws, regulations, and policy requirements.

In addition to compliance in all performance areas, the ACF identified two "Strong Practices" within our Family Partnerships work:

- Providing economic mobility support to help families establish pathways out of poverty
- Tracking data on family goals, strengths, and needs, and regularly adjusting our activities to ensure they remain responsive to families' interests and needs.

A Strong Practice is defined as an activity or strategy that shows promise for long-term, sustainable impact. It has an objective basis for claiming effectiveness, potential for replication, and can be shared with other organizations.

We would like to thank our EHS families, FCC partners, Policy Council, Governing Body, and staff for their engagement in the review process and continued partnership in building kid-centric, antiracist early learning communities!



“It’s so relieving to have a safe space for my infant, and know that I can go to work and not stress about diapers and wipes.”

-Anonymous EHS parent

Past & Projected Expenses

2023 Expenses Overview

\$546,621
Staff Salaries

\$208,101
Fringe Benefits

\$21,911
Supplies

\$35,948
Travel

\$228,457
Other

\$1,913,289
TOTAL EXPENSES

\$701,286
Contractual

2024 Approved Budget

\$645,452
Staff Salaries

\$198,268
Fringe Benefits

\$35,540
Supplies

\$15,500
Travel

\$215,005
Other

\$2,059,782
TOTAL EXPENSES

\$773,706
Contractual

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

BrightSpark's Board of Directors

CHAIR

Rebecca Benavides

VICE CHAIR

Dr. Tafona Ervin

SECRETARY

**Roshini Durand
Mootoosamy**

TREASURER

Kathryn Flores

**Soleil Boyd
Christina Chan
Jessica Cole
Richard De Sam Lazaro
Laura Kneedler
Carter Osborne
Jill Pavlus
Page Perey
Mary Red Crow
Alicia Teel
Derek Young**

EHS Governance Committee

Page Perey (Chair)

Soleil Boyd

Mary Red Crow

Gail Neal

Vinnie Duffy

Kathryn Flores

Matt Gerard

EHS Policy Council

Our EHS Policy Council is made up of both parents of children currently enrolled in an EHS program and parents of children who have previously been enrolled in EHS. These parents meet monthly to discuss the EHS budget, vote on proposed changes, and build community engagement opportunities to support other parents in the EHS program.

Last year, the EHS Policy Council was comprised of Alexis Cubillos, A'layzha Daniels, Jessica Heavner, and Zoe Meyer.

This year, the council took a trip to Washington DC for a conference and advocacy day. During the event, they met with seven members of Congress (one Senator and six Representatives) to discuss continued support in the federal budget and asking for support with following provider suggested rule changes/amendments.

Photo caption: BrightSpark Advocacy team members, Donny and Jaymie, take a selfie with Alexis Cubillos outside WA Senator Patty Murray's office in Washington, D.C.





**QUALITY IMPROVEMENT HIGHLIGHT:
EXPULSION PREVENTION**

How We're Working to Keep Children of Color in Care

All of our EHS providers participated in the EPP training series, including reflective practice and follow-up coaching to ensure that they had the resolve and tools to react to challenging behavior and mental health issues that emerge in a way that is intentional, compassionate and reflective.

In addition to participating in the EPP training cohort, EHS providers have ongoing professional development and reflective practice to continue to build their capacity to support the emotional wellbeing of the children in their care as well as care for their own mental health.

When challenging situations arise, EHS providers are able to tap into the network of supports offered here at BrightSpark, including Mental Health Consultation, direct support from their EHS Specialist, and connection to community resources.



QUALITY IMPROVEMENT HIGHLIGHT: EXPULSION PREVENTION

Why Does Expulsion Prevention Matter?

For many providers, expelling a child from an early learning program feels like a last resort. However, data collected both nationally and locally shows that when it comes to expulsions, implicit biases play a major role in these decisions, as Black children (especially boys) are disproportionately impacted. Studies show that:

80% of children expelled from child care programs are boys.



Black boys are **twice** as likely to be expelled as their white counterparts.



Black girls are **six times** as likely to be expelled as their white counterparts.



How BrightSpark is Addressing this Inequity

In response to this troubling trend, BrightSpark staff members created the Expulsion Prevention Partnership (EPP) workgroup to work on disrupting this harmful practice. EPP's objectives are to support providers in:

- ▶ Ending expulsions of children from early learning programs through education
- ▶ Centering child development basics considering the context of childrens' home culture
- ▶ Understanding the language of behavior
- ▶ Practicing self-awareness and reflection to challenge implicit biases
- ▶ Creating strong partnerships with families

Through educational opportunities such as trainings, reflective practices, and designated coaching support, BrightSpark is working to give providers both the resolve and the tools to react to challenging behavioral and mental health issues that emerge in a way that is intentional, compassionate, and reflective.



Triton Towers One
555 S. Renton Village Place, Suite 280
Renton, WA 98057

Main phone: 206-329-1011
Main email: getinvolved@childcare.org

WWW.BRIGHTSPARK.ORG