



Washington Kids Count P–20 Project Serving the Washington Policy Community with Effective Early Learning Through-Postsecondary Analysis

Project Description

The Need for an Early Learning–Through-Postsecondary Approach to Policy Analysis

There is growing consensus in Washington’s policy community, as in other states, that effective education policy must be developed by looking across the three stages of education—early childhood, K–12, and postsecondary settings. Released in November 2006, the *Washington Learns Report* included a series of recommendations aimed at “developing a world-class, learner-focused, seamless education system for our state.”¹ The report charged state educational leaders to advance a governance system that will call for greater coordination and collaboration across these educational levels, leading to the establishment of the Washington P–20 Council.

This counters the trend of most policy analysis and development occurring *within* these three separate systems that lacks consideration of the cumulative influence of learning during each stage. One reason for this is that there has not been a consistent base of data on which to build sound P–20 analysis. Currently, data is collected separately around the needs of different provider agencies and stakeholder groups representing each educational stage. Funding structures, accountability mechanisms, and professional standards are developed separately for each level. In addition, university researchers and think tanks typically focus their efforts at one stage (or at most two stages).

Overview of the WKC P–20 Project

An effective P–20 approach to educational policy requires an integrated, seamless data system to support it. The Human Services Policy Center (HSPC) Washington Kids Count (WKC) effort is uniquely positioned to develop and analyze such data through its new P–20 Project. The mission of this project is to create a data and policy framework to guide the design, collection, and dissemination of educational indicators spanning the developmental trajectory from early-learning through young adulthood.

Supported by both a three-year grant of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and ongoing funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, project goals include (1) developing a conceptual framework that has constructs for student outcomes and educational investments across the different educational levels; (2) defining key indicators to inform education policy analysis aimed at improving student learning in Washington state in early learning–through–postsecondary contexts; (3) employing indicators in policy analyses tuned to a P–20 framework, with specific attention to its seams and discontinuities; and (4) stimulating improved state and regional data collection among key policy stakeholders in Washington.

The conceptual model for the P–20 Project will place issues of race, culture, and class in the foreground of indicator defining and data gathering. Expert review of this model will inform how WKC staff will gather indicators, identify high-priority gaps in information, and employ indicators in

policy analyses. Our work will subsequently be focused on both exploring policy options that both better integrate the three institutional contexts of learning and work toward eliminating disparities among different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic groups. In order to improve state and regional data collection, WKC plans to implement a strategic communications plan focused on specific project audiences. Proposed efforts include the release of indicator data through a user-friendly, Web-based system; public speaking and conference presentations at venues for educational policymakers, researchers, and practitioners; ongoing informal dialogue with educational stakeholders across Washington; and technical assistance through responses to data requests.

Our data and policy reports will reflect such consistent themes across the P–20 spectrum as student achievement and preparation for each educational stage; equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities; and adequacy and equity of program financing. We will also begin to identify and address the seams and discontinuities between the different levels, seeking opportunities to improve institutional collaboration and effectiveness. We anticipate that these prospective themes will evolve as we work in collaboration with key stakeholders in Washington state. The P–20 Project will be guided by a group of expert consultants, including scholars and educational leaders in a range of areas, including assessment, civil rights issues, educational policy at each level, educational psychology, school finance, and workforce development.

Additional Information about HSPC and WKC

HSPC is dedicated to improving the lives of children, families, and communities, with a special emphasis on addressing the needs of those who are disadvantaged. In concert with the University of Washington’s Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, we pursue research and ideas that work to strengthen sound public policy and management. HSPC pairs applied analytic research with the promotion of policies through four core program areas:

- **Analyzing Family Support Systems.** Many of HSPC’s areas of expertise—financial analysis, data profiling, program evaluation, and communication—come together in our efforts to identify and analyze systems that support children and families.
- **Profiling Child and Family Well-Being.** WKC tracks, analyzes, and communicates information about the education, health, and well-being of children and families in Washington, producing the annual *State of Washington’s Children*.
- **Educating and Caring for Children.** HSPC researchers recently conducted studies of financing access to quality education, improving the child care workforce, and strengthening the quality of family, friend, and neighbor care of young children.
- **Building Public Understanding and Support for Better Policies.** HSPC uses public communications, strategic partnerships, and experience with the policymaking process to ensure that its research actually affects policy. The Center also conducts surveys and sponsors forums on topics concerning children and families.

For more information on HSPC and WKC, please visit our Web site at <http://www.hspc.org>.

ⁱ Washington State Office of the Governor. (2006). *Washington Learns: World Class, Learner-Focused, Seamless Education*. Olympia, WA: Author