

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Project Education Impact

2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many students experiencing foster care, homelessness, or juvenile justice face significant challenges that hinder their educational success. Recognizing these disparities, the Washington State Legislature formed the Project Education Impact (PEI) Workgroup in 2018, composed of state legislators, youth-serving agencies, and nonprofits. The Workgroup's mission is to make recommendations that will serve to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities and promote parity in educational outcomes between these vulnerable student groups and their peers.

Washington State has made notable progress in closing some equity gaps. For example, between 2018 and 2023, the graduation rate gap for students in foster care narrowed significantly, from 35 percentage points to 30.7 percentage points. Despite this progress, further action is needed to address ongoing challenges, particularly for foster youth, homeless students, and those involved in juvenile justice.

The PEI Workgroup has endorsed two key state agency decision packages to further support these students:

Recommendation 1: The Washington State Achievement and Success (WSAC) decision package proposes critical interventions to remove barriers to postsecondary enrollment and completion for former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth. The proposal includes automatically qualifying Passport to Careers (PTC)-eligible students for the maximum Washington College Grant (WA Grant), making the PTC program caseload forecasted, and requiring the full funding of awards for all PTC-eligible students. This approach combines financial support and wraparound services, providing essential resources to help these students successfully enroll in and complete postsecondary education.

Recommendation 2: The PEI Workgroup recommends fully funding the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR) Decision Package. This proposal requests \$2,062,000 and 2.0 full-time equivalents (FTE) in the 2025–27 biennial budget to expand education and employment opportunities for young adults leaving the juvenile justice system. By providing these opportunities, the proposal aims to reduce the barriers that individuals with criminal records face, ultimately supporting their successful reintegration and contributing to safer communities.

These recommendations align with the state's ongoing commitment to addressing educational equity and ensuring that all students, regardless of their life circumstances, have the support they need to succeed.

INTRODUCTION

It is well established that students experiencing foster care, homelessness or juvenile justice face significant barriers to education compared to their peers who do not share the same life experiences. The Project Education Impact (PEI) Workgroup, under its current iteration, was formed to develop recommendations to promote the achievement of parity and the elimination of racial and ethnic disparities for education outcomes between students experiencing foster care, homelessness, or juvenile justice with the general student population.

The workgroup is required to provide annual reports with a final report due to the Governor, appropriate members of the Legislature, and the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) by July 1, 2028.

Legislative History

A 2018 budget proviso (Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6032) directed the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) in collaboration with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the Office of Homeless Youth, and the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), to convene a workgroup with aligned nonprofit organizations to create a plan for children and youth experiencing foster care and homelessness to facilitate educational equity with their general student population peers and to close the disparities between racial and ethnic groups by 2027.

The Legislature renewed its commitment to the Project Education Impact (PEI) Workgroup in 2020 with SHB 2711, reinforcing the legislative mandate and appointing four legislators (two from each caucus) and two representatives from the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) to PEI. SHB 2711 further required the workgroup to submit a progress report to the Governor and appropriate legislative committees. Additionally, SHB 2711 directs the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) to prepare an annual data analysis to measure progress on educational parity for the identified student groups.

Most recently, the legislature passed <u>HB 1679</u> in 2023, which adds youth experiencing juvenile justice as a student group of focus, representation from ERDC, and requires meaningful

¹ Legal Center for Foster Care and Education (2022, January). *Exploring education outcomes: What research tells us.* Washington, D.C. Retrieved from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63dcf65b8d0c56709027332e/t/6454f86f0f4c483811518c22/168329022 4435/Education+Outcomes+final.pdf

² SchoolHouse Connection. (2024, March). *The education of children and youth experiencing homelessness: Current Trends, Challenges, and Needs.* Washington, D.C. Retrieved from https://schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/FY25-EHCY-Fact-Sheet.pdf

³ Development Services Group, Inc. (2019). *Education for youth under formal supervision of the juvenile justice system*. Literature Review. Washington, D.C., Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved from https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/education_for_youth_under_formal_supervision_of_the_juvenile_justice_system.pdf

consultation with youth and young adults who have lived experience with foster care, homelessness, and juvenile justice. The workgroup operation is extended to December 31, 2028, with a final report due to the Legislature by July 1, 2028. Additionally, the legislature provided \$150,000 for the 2023–25 biennium or \$75,000 per fiscal year for administration of the workgroup.

WORKGROUP CHARGE

The Project Education Impact (PEI) Workgroup is charged with reviewing the educational outcomes of students experiencing foster care, homelessness and juvenile justice by examining data disaggregated by race and ethnicity on:

- Kindergarten readiness.
- Early reading and math.
- Ninth grade on track to graduate.
- High school completion.
- Postsecondary education enrollment and completion.
- Other student outcomes post high school.
- School attendance, school mobility, special education, other student support programs, and school discipline.

The workgroup is further tasked with evaluating the outcomes, needs, and service array for the identified student groups with attention to the specific needs of students of color and students with special education needs.

To accomplish its legislative charge, the workgroup is required to engage stakeholders⁴ in providing feedback on the development of recommendations.

Required annual reports must identify progress the state has made toward achieving educational parity for identified student groups and provide recommendations that can be implemented using existing resources, rules, and regulations and these that would require policy, administrative, and resource allocation changes prior to implementation. Reports may include findings and recommendations regarding the feasibility of developing a case study to examine or implement recommendations of the workgroup. To date, the PEI Workgroup has authored the following legislative reports:

- 2019 legislative report
- 2021 legislative report

⁴ including: students experiencing foster care, homelessness, and the juvenile justice system, parents, foster parents, relative caregivers, caseworkers, school districts, educators, early learning providers, postsecondary institutions, and federally recognized tribes.

- 2022 legislative report
- 2023 legislative report

2023–2024 AREAS OF FOCUS

In its 2023 legislative report the Project Education Impact (PEI) Workgroup outlined a new structure and spent much of the 2023–24 work session defining and adjusting to that change. The workgroup also added new members, including a representative from Education Data Research Center (ERDC). (See Appendix A for a full list of membership by agency.) As required by statute, ERDC provided student outcomes data disaggregated by race/ethnicity. Student data was provided by ERDC to better understand how students fit into one or more of the student groups of focus for the PEI Workgroup.

PEI Workgroup Restructuring

In the fall of 2023, the PEI Workgroup restructured to include three steering committees and one implementation committee.

Steering committees were designed to drive the workgroup's efforts and were intended to be comprised of people with lived experience; parents, guardians, and caregivers; direct service providers; and nonprofit and state agency staff. Each steering committee was designed to address services for students experiencing foster care, homelessness, and juvenile justice based on education stages:

- Early Learning Steering Committee
- K–12 Steering Committee
- Post-Secondary Steering Committee

In addition to the steering committees, the group proposed an Implementation Committee comprised of state agency leaders and legislators. The primary function of this committee was to receive the recommendations and implement them to the extent possible. Per the 2023 legislative report, "when the recommendations are not possible to implement in their current state, the Implementation Committee will collaborate with the steering committees to make the recommendations workable."

The Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) provided data support to the workgroup. In addition to responding to numerous data requests from workgroup members, they also presented a data walk with the PEI Workgroup, gathering feedback as well as sparking conversation around how this data could influence future PEI work. Some of the data shared in those sessions is included in this report.

Student Data

The PEI Workgroup expressed interest in understanding how students experiencing foster care, homelessness, and juvenile justice moved from one identified group to another. For example, did a student experiencing foster care also experience homelessness? The interest in this data was to

recognize that students do not move in discrete groups and there is likely some crossover between groups.

Data for students experiencing foster care or homelessness showed increases in the 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rates compared to students not experiencing foster care or homelessness. This data shows progress toward parity for on-time graduation is promising; yet conclusions should be limited. The way in which students are identified through data as experiencing juvenile justice will continue to be developed. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) will continue to refine data alignment to ensure that students involved in juvenile justice are included in future reports.

Student Group Crossover

Figure 1, below, shows the crossover between the three student groups addressed by the workgroup. A student is included in one of the three student groups if they are identified for at least one day as being a part of that student group. Using the Foster Care column as an example, the bottom segment includes students exclusively in foster care and no other student group. The next two-colored segments represent students who overlap with each of the other two groups, while the top segment shows the overlap among all three groups. In each column, each student is represented only once.

This figure serves as a first step toward understanding the complexities within these student groups and serves as a path forward for PEI. Each of these groups has a different set of experiences, is identified differently, has different obstacles in front of them, and has access to different resources. This important acknowledgement allows for the treatment of this data with the care that is required to learn about the realities of what these students experience, so they can be better served.

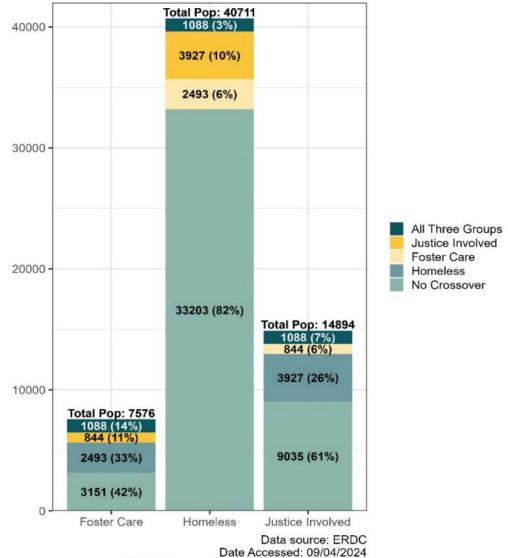


Figure 1: Student Population Crossover, Year 2012–17

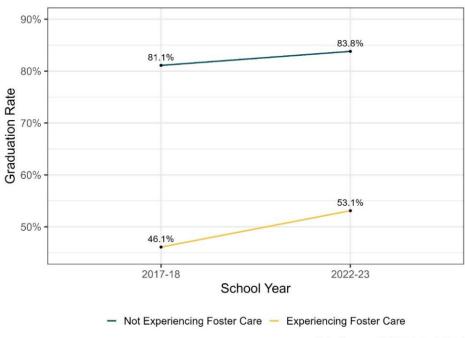
Totaled across 8th grade cohorts 2012-2017

Graduation Rates

Since the inception of the PEI Workgroup, equity gaps for students in foster care and students experiencing homelessness have narrowed. For example, in 2018 when considering graduation rates, 46.1% of students in foster care graduated with their 4-year adjusted cohort compared to 81.1% of students not in foster care—a gap of 35 percentage points (as shown in Figure 2). By 2022–23 (the most recent year for which data is available), the equity gap for the 4-year adjusted cohort had closed to 30.7 percentage points (53.1% for foster care students compared to 83.8% for students not in foster care).

OSPI currently does not report on graduation rates for students experiencing juvenile justice. This gap stems from OSPI graduation calculations and is an identified equity issue that will be a focus going forward. The key question is how we can calculate graduation rates that accurately reflect the experiences of these students. The cohorts tracked by ERDC differ from those in the OSPI report card, making the data non-comparable. OSPI and ERDC are collaborating on a plan for data collection and analysis moving forward. This will be a focus for PEI so the workgroup can ensure the experiences of these students are accurately represented.

Figure 2: Experiencing Foster Care⁵ Graduation Rates Over Time



Data Source: OSPI Report Card
Date Accessed: 10/7/2024
Graduation Rate is the 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate from the OSPI Report Card

⁵ Ever Experienced Foster Care: Youth who were in DCFS placement and care authority as identified through DCYF records, age 3-21 since 1/1/2012. Youth in Tribal Child Welfare or Federal Foster Care are not included in this data.

90%
80%
80%
80%
60%
555.5%
50%

Not Experiencing Homelessness
Data Source: OSPI Report Card

Figure 3: Experiencing Homelessness⁶ Graduation Rates Over Time

Data Source: OSPI Report Card
Date Accessed: 10/7/2024
Graduation Rate is the 4-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate from the OSPI Report Card

2023–24 WORKGROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the three steering committees (Early Childhood, K-12, and Post-Secondary), the Early Childhood and Post-Secondary steering committees convened and postsecondary developed recommendations.

Early Childhood Steering Committee

This Steering Committee formally met twice during the 2023–24 school year. The meeting resulted in productive conversation about the importance and complexity of early childhood learning. Ultimately, the Steering Committee members were hesitant to continue convening without a better understanding how restructuring the PEI Workgroup would impact its focus and efforts. They stated a desire to be included in the K-12 Steering Committee rather than convening as a separate group.

 $^{^{6}}$ Ever Experienced Homelessness: Youth identified through K-12 records as experiencing homelessness (as defined by McKinney Vento Act) since the 2012 school year.

Post-Secondary Steering Committee

During the 2024 work cycle, the Post-Secondary Steering Committee worked across multiple governmental and non-governmental agencies to focus on supporting students experiencing foster care, homelessness, or juvenile justice in overcoming academic barriers and achieving their academic and career goals.

This Steering Committee is advancing these recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Fully fund the Passport to Careers Program and guarantee Washington College Grant (WA Grant) for former foster and unaccompanied homeless youth.

Funding for the Passport to Careers (PTC) was not maintained in the FY 2025 budget. The Post-Secondary Steering Committee acknowledges this funding, and education is crucial to improving outcomes for these populations. As a result, the Post-Secondary Steering Committee supports Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC)'s decision package to ensure young adults who have experienced unaccompanied homelessness and foster care have reliable funding to achieve their educational goals and postsecondary training. Passport to Careers (PTC) helps former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth prepare for and succeed in college, apprenticeship, and pre-apprenticeship programs by providing a scholarship and support services from college staff. Funding for the program is not sufficient to fund all eligible students. The shortfall is due to a growth in eligible students over the last few years and the expectation that growth will continue.

During the 2023–24 academic year (AY), more than 1,450 students received nearly \$6.3 million in PTC awards to help them make progress toward earning a postsecondary degree or credential. Following the inclusion of former unaccompanied homeless youth in PTC at the beginning of the 2019–20 AY, program headcounts have risen significantly, with a 58% increase in participation being observed since 2021–22. While budget language has consistently limited maximum PTC awards to \$5,000 per year, this capacity has never been fully funded.

Although headcounts for former foster youth and other students have remained relatively stable over time, the number of former unaccompanied homeless youth served by PTC has grown rapidly and now makes up nearly 70% of the program's headcount. Consequently, recent appropriations (\$13.998 million in the 2021–23 biennium and \$14.998 million in the 2023–25 biennium) have been insufficient to fully fund awards and support services for all PTC- eligible students, who are often deterred from pursuing college or career training without additional assistance.

The WSAC decision package would address these concerns and reduce barriers to postsecondary enrollment and completion by:

- Automatically qualifying PTC- eligible students for the maximum WA Grant award,
- Making PTC a caseload forecasted program, and
- Requiring the Legislature to fully fund awards for all PTC -eligible students.

Combining a PTC award and support services with a maximum WA Grant award provides former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth with critical wraparound assistance to help them enroll in and complete postsecondary programs. Making PTC a caseload forecasted program and requiring the Legislature to fully fund awards for all PTC eligible students would provide crucial stability to former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth who rely on the program to pursue a degree or credential.

Recommendation 2: Meeting employment and education needs within Juvenile Justice.

The PEI Post-Secondary Steering Committee recognizes the need to close the equity gap for young people in Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR). Funding is needed to increase the Department of Children Youth and Families' (DCYF) ability to meet residents' educational, postsecondary, and vocational engagement needs. PEI recommends fully funding the DCYF's JR decision package, ensuring that young adults leaving JR are better prepared for successful reintegration, ultimately contributing to safer and stronger communities in Washington.

The DCYF requests \$2,062,000 (\$2,050,000 General Fund State) and 2.0 full time equivalents (FTE) in the 2025–27 biennial budget to expand education and employment opportunities to young adults in DCYF's JR. Funding adequate education and employment opportunities addresses pervasive obstacles individuals with criminal records face. DCYF's JR decision package ensures ongoing improvement in family engagement and ongoing monitoring, reentry/future planning preparation and employment, vocational programming, IT infrastructure for vocational programming, professional consultancy and workforce development. This request is informed by young people in JR, staff, educational and community partners, in alignment with PEI's vision of engaging with young adults with lived experience to meet their definitions of success and centering the voices and perspectives of people with lived experience in policy recommendations.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

In the coming years, the focus of the PEI Workgroup will transition from reporting on equity gaps to conducting a deeper analysis aimed at identifying and scaling successful policy and program interventions for students who face significant barriers to educational success. As previously highlighted in this report, some equity gaps for students experiencing foster care or homelessness are narrowing. However, these students still do not achieve the same educational milestones as their peers, particularly in areas like high school graduation rates and postsecondary success. The workgroup expects to have more data in the coming year to better evaluate educational outcomes of students experiencing juvenile justice.

This report recommends a shift away from a deficit model, which often focuses on the challenges these students face, toward a more constructive, solutions-oriented approach. Rather than simply documenting the struggles of these students, future reports will examine what success looks like for these groups and explore how the factors that contribute to their success can be replicated. To truly address the educational disparities faced by students in these circumstances, we must look beyond traditional reports that catalog the barriers they face. While these reports are crucial for identifying where the gaps exist, the next step is to understand what has enabled some students to overcome these barriers. For example, there are students who, despite foster care, experiencing homelessness, or involvement in juvenile justice, are successfully graduating from high school and enrolling in college. The question we must ask is: What worked for these students?

By analyzing the experiences of students who have successfully navigated these challenges, the workgroup can begin to identify patterns or interventions that have been particularly effective in supporting their academic success. This analysis can help move toward more targeted, evidence-based solutions that can be scaled across the state.

Key Areas for Analysis and Action

• Identifying Effective Policies and Interventions

One of the core aspects of this analysis will be evaluating existing policies, programs and interventions that may be contributing to the success of these students. For example, we can look at whether certain educational interventions—such as tutoring, mentorship, or trauma-informed teaching practices—have measurable effects on high school graduation rates and other academic success indicators.

• Examining Successful Schools and Postsecondary Programs

Another key strategy will be to identify schools or districts with exceptionally high graduation rates and successful, targeted Postsecondary programs for students experiencing foster care, homelessness, or juvenile justice. By examining what these schools

and programs are doing differently—whether it's a specific program, policy implementation, teaching approach, or support system—we can identify best practices that may be replicated in other situations across the state.

Scaling Successful Models

Once successful programs and interventions are identified, the next step will be determining how to scale these models statewide. What resources, support, or structures are needed to implement these programs in different contexts? How can we ensure that schools and districts have the tools they need to provide targeted support to students facing similar challenges?

Closing the Gap

Ultimately, the goal is not only to identify the gaps but to take actionable steps to close them. By asking what has worked for successful students and analyzing how we can provide those same opportunities to others, we can create an environment where all students, regardless of their background or challenges, have the support and resources they need to thrive academically.

This shift in focus will allow the workgroup to better understand the pathways to success for students experiencing foster care, homelessness, or juvenile justice, and to translate those insights into statewide policies and programs that support all students facing significant barriers. By emphasizing analysis and evidence-based practices, we can move beyond merely identifying the struggles these students face and begin to make measurable progress in closing the achievement gaps. The insights gained from this work will create a more equitable educational system that fosters success for all students, regardless of their background or circumstances.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will contract with a non-governmental agency to coordinate administrative and fiscal support for PEI with a specific focus on stakeholder engagement. The agency also anticipates moving away from contracts management and back to convening the workgroup.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Figure A1: Project Education Impact Workgroup Membership

Name	Agency	Title	Sub Group
Mindy Flett	DCYF	Tribal EL Licensing Specialist	Early Learning
Jeff Abdullah	Mockingbird Society	Director of Mockingbird Family	K-12
Daniel Lugo	Youth Care	Director of Government Affairs	Post-Secondary
Erin Feeley	Office of Homeless Youth	Program Manager	Early Learning
Jonathan Houston		Author/Consultant/Parent	Early Learning
Maggie Heard	Brightspark	Family Navigation Lead	Early Learning
Kolanye Bykoff	DCYF	Education Program Administrator (IE)	K-12
Aaron Yared	Building Changes	Senior Housing Policy Specialist	K-12
Jamie Strausz-Clark	3SI	Facilitator	
Halley Shriber	ANEW	Apprenticeship Navigator	Post-Secondary
Dr. Pela Terry	Atlantic Street Center	Executive Director	
Jaymie McLaughlin	Brightspark	Mobilization Coordinator	
Phoebe Anderson	Brightspark	CEO	
Betsy Naymon	Building Changes	Senior Research Associate	K-12
Daysha Gunther	Building Changes	Senior Research Associate	
Joey Heilman	Building Changes	Education Strategy Specialist	K-12
Mehret Tekle-	Building	Director of Practice Innovation	
Awarun	Changes		
Miranda Vargas	Building Changes	Senior Health Strategy Specialist	
Ryan Pricco	Child Care Aware	Director, Policy & Advocacy	

Name	Agency	Title	Sub Group
Juliet Schindler	College Success Foundation	Director of Public Affairs & Strategic Partnerships	Post-Secondary & Implementation
Aubry Schlottmann	DCYF	ETV/K-12	
Haley Lowe	DCYF	Interim Director of K12 Education and After School Programs	
Mary Sprute Garlant	DCYF	Policy Advisor	
Peggy Carlson	DCYF	Education Program Administrator	K-12
Taku Mineshita	DCYF	Director, Integrated System of Care	
Terri Awoko	DCYF	Foster Care Education Program Manager	Early Learning
Wendy Thomas	DCYF	Tribal Early Learning Liaison	Early Learning
Brittni Thompson	Office of Education Ombuds	Senior Education Ombuds	
Katie Weaver- Randall	ERDC	Director	
Charles Smith	Mockingbird Society	Director of Public Policy & Advocacy	Post-Secondary
Natalie Lente	Mockingbird Society	Executive Director	Implementation
Sharn Kaur	Mockingbird Society	Youth Programs Director	
River Porter	Northwest Youth Services		
Schantell Porter	Northwest Youth Services		
Gina Thompson	Office of Homeless Youth	Program Manager	K-12
Kim Justice	Office of Homeless Youth	Executive Director	
Matt Davis	Office of Homeless Youth	Systems Change Manager	Post-Secondary
Stacey Klim	OSPI	Foster Care Program Supervisor	K-12
Veronica Maria Gallardo	OSPI	Assistant Superintendent, System and School Improvement	

Name	Agency	Title	Sub Group
Vivian Rogers Decker	OSPI	Supervisor, Homeless Student Stability Education Program	K-12
Colleen Montoya Barbano	Seattle University	Director, Fostering Scholars Program	
Liz Trautman	Stand for Children	Government Affairs Director	
Amber Alvarez	Treehouse	Regional Manager, Educational Advocacy	K-12
Andi Ervin	Treehouse	Program Director, Educational Advocacy	
Barbara Rockey	Treehouse	Senior Education Specialist	
Dawn Rains	Treehouse	CEO	
Eileen Davidson	Treehouse	Chief of Staff	
Jesse Becerra	Treehouse	Launch Success Program Manager	Post-Secondary
Cierra Draper-West	University of Washington	Champions Program	Post-Secondary
Melissa Raap	University of Washington	Director	Post-Secondary
Rep. Alicia Rule	WA State Legislature	Representative	
Rep. Michelle Caldier	WA State Legislature	Representative	
Sen. Sam Hunt	WA State Legislature	Senator	
TBD	WA State Legislature		
Ami Magisos	WSAC	Assistant Director of Policy & Planning	Post-Secondary
Becky Thompson	WSAC	Director of Student Financial Assistance	Post-Secondary
Jeff Corey	Northwest Education Access		
Dimitri Groce	Building Changes	Director of Practice Innovation	Post-Secondary
Veronica Escalante	ANEW	Apprenticeship Passport Navigator	Post-Secondary
Teresa Everett	Atlantic Street Center	Director of PR/Resource Development	

Name	Agency	Title	Sub Group
Daniel Zavala	Building Changes	Executive Director	
Jerome Hunter	Building Changes	Director of Development & Partnerships	
Adam Haizlip	DCYF		Post-Secondary
Sallyanne Hendren	DCYF	Associate Director of Education	K-12
Kia Franklin	Stand for Children	Executive Director	K-12
Diesha Rodgers	Atlantic Street Center		
Miranda Sullivan			
Dee Jackson	ANEW		Post-Secondary
Heather McCabe	ERDC	Research Scientist	Early Learning, K-12, Post-Secondary
Avery Zoglman	Catholic Charities Serving Central Washington	Youth Program Coordinator	Post-Secondary
Deborah Fabiyi	WSU		Post-Secondary
Laura Carla Lydia	WSU		Post-Secondary
Remy Styrkowicz	Northwest Youth Services	Director of Radical Intervention	

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