

WASHINGTON STATE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY TABLE

Primer: Youth Development and COVID

This primer serves as a COVID recovery-related state of affairs for the youth development community and the children and youth that participate - or could participate if one was available - in programming. Included are several examples of programs across the state as well as recommendations to support the field so that our young people can thrive during and post-pandemic.

The international COVID-19 pandemic created struggles and challenges for nearly every industry, service, and person across the globe. It also led to new innovations and ways of completing work and supporting people with education, health care, basic needs and more. For the youth development field - including expanded learning, school-age child care, mentoring, and school-based wrap-around supports - new obstacles and innovations hit the sector alongside existing pre-pandemic challenges that have yet to be resolved.

Youth development programs have been available in-person and virtually since the start of the pandemic. Some examples of services provided include, and not limited to:

- Academic support through one-on-one meetings, mentoring, study groups, tutoring, and delivering homework packets from the school
- Assistance with technology including devices, wifi, and digital navigation support
- Locating and reengaging students in learning that were not attending virtual K12 classrooms
- Project-based learning virtually, in-person, and dropping off learning kits to homes
- Providing in-person school-age child care
- Providing meals, mental/behavioral health referrals, and other basic needs products/referrals
- Social-emotional programming, critical as many students were isolated from peers

Youth development programs and their staff, much like the amazing children and youth of Washington state, are resilient and dedicated. However, the strain and pressure of decreasing COVID-related support, challenges with hosting traditional fundraisers, increased costs related to health and safety training and products, increased student and family needs, and sporadic assistance from most of the K12 system continues to mount. The next page offers several examples of successes and challenges programs have faced. It is critical that public and private funders and institutions support youth development providers and the children and youth they serve as we move towards recovery.

Program Examples

Asia-Pacific Cultural Center (Service Area: Tacoma, South and Central Pierce County)

Asia Pacific Cultural Center (APCC) is a nonprofit organization that represents 47 countries and cultures, offering programs and services honoring their distinct artistry, business protocols, history, and social practices. During the pandemic, APCC launched a virtual and in-person system of support for students and families to ensure education, basic needs, and mental health needs were met as much as possible.

APCC created a virtual learning program which provided social-emotional support to students along with other programming related to culturally-related events and groups, COVID-related education, basic life skills, substance use and abuse, environmental awareness, and homework assistance. In addition, the program worked to get families online including securing devices, setting up hotspots, providing technical assistance and basic technology education. Staff also did safety and well-being home visits that included homework materials, PPE, and meals.

To continue serving students and families, APCC needs funding and school partnerships to continue to provide virtual and in-person programming and resources. For example, several staff are working in all five school districts limiting the number of kids that can be served. Funding to help secure set staff per district will help build consistency of service and trust between students and families with the program and the school.

Foundation for Youth Resiliency and Engagement (Service Area: Okanogan County)

Foundation for Youth Resiliency and Engagement (FYRE) is a multi-service organization serving youth ages 12-24 across large and rural Okanogan County. FYRE was created to meet the underserved youth across the county that struggle with minimal support services, isolation, lack of broadband and cell service in some areas, and opportunities to engage with social-emotional or academic supports outside of their schools. Programming ranges from life skills to cultural activities, to managing stress, providing 1-on-1 case management, and supplying basic needs products and clothing to some students.

Since the pandemic began, transportation has been a major obstacle as the county is over 5,300 square miles. Some students travel 1 hour - each way - to participate in programming. In addition, partnerships with some districts in the county have been challenging and many students, primarily LGBTQ+, Latinx and Native American, do not feel they are represented by many adults in the education system.

FYRE summer equine play and therapy



Due to the increasing demand for services, FYRE is working hard to ramp up services and programming. To sustain this work, increased funding for operations, staffing and transportation is critical. COVID-related rapid grants have been immensely helpful in supporting these youth and more are needed. In addition, partnerships with districts and cultural responsiveness in a range of services are needed to support kids and ensure they are on a path to school and life success.

Communities In Schools of Benton-Franklin *(Service Area: Tri-Cities and surrounding areas)*

Communities In Schools of Benton-Franklin (CIS-BF) implements the CIS model of integrated students supports tailored to meet local needs at 34 schools in the region. CIS staff (site coordinators) work full time in schools, providing supports to students and their families such as (and not limited to) academic assistance, securing basic needs essentials, engaging students in virtual and in-person learning environments, social-emotional supports and connections to physical, behavioral, and mental health providers. During the pandemic and beyond, CIS-BF is working with many school and community partners to ensure students are engaged with the resources and tools they have to address academic and non-academic needs.



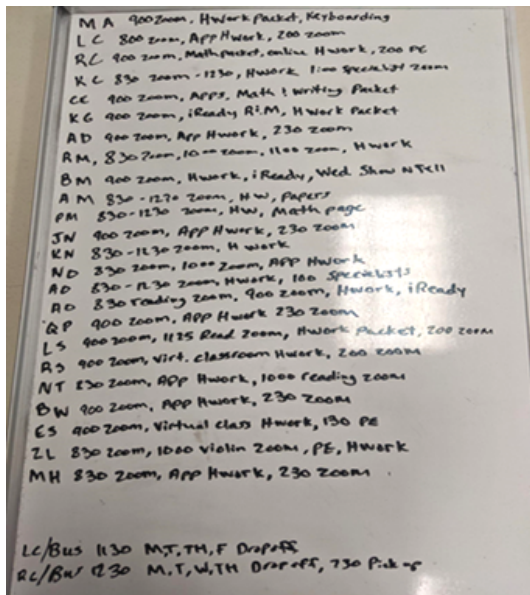
Since the pandemic began, supporting learning has been a key strategy for CIS-BF as many children and youth do not have access to the internet at home. Last school year, CIS site coordinators devised several strategies such as creating text banks for homework help and social-emotional support for students when they were feeling isolated. Coordinators also transported homework packets and other essential items directly to student homes. Basic needs have continued to be a major challenge and CIS-BF partnered with the Tri-Cities League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), which allowed the creation of mobile food markets and provided housing assistance vouchers for students and families

CIS Site Coordinator, Erika Alvarez, doing whatever it takes to support her students through COVID-19 school closures. Erika made weekly deliveries of food, hygiene items, and homework to students at Prosser High School.

ESD 112 - School-Age Child Care Centers *(Service Area: Clark County)*

ESD 112 offers different types of programming in Clark County including school-age child care (SACC). Since the beginning of the pandemic, ESD 112 tried numerous strategies to keep programs open and, as much as possible, partnered with school districts. From March 2020-June 2021, the transition to full-day care was full of challenges with many related to virtual learning. Expectations from parents and schools were not realistic as any one site may have had 20 students from 12 schools and 18 different teachers spanning seven grades. There were challenges keeping devices charged due to a lack of places to plug in devices, keeping kids on task, knowing class schedules, and dealing with behavioral issues at any given moment.

Operational support and funding needs continue as the pandemic drags on. In February 2020, ESD 112 had 29 SACC programs in 5 school districts and by September 2021 the organization had 9 programs in 2 school districts. Additionally, they had to pivot and change our SACC model 5 times to meet the varying needs of families throughout district changes. This is the result of a decrease in parent's ability to pay, state subsidy rates not at full costs of care, the ability to offer competitive wages and shortages in staff and timelines related to child care licensing. To overcome these challenges, additional COVID-related funding, rethinking of licensing regulations and monitoring, and support for competitive wages are all critical to keep programs open and kids supported



In addition to these vignettes, please see [SOWA's 2020 Annual Report](#) (pp. 7-14) for a host of other stories and examples of what programs have faced and done to support students during the pandemic.

Each line is a different student with a different teacher/Zoom link. - ESD 112

Support Kids by Supporting Youth Development

Ensuring children and youth have access to critical programming and supports across all age groups, and throughout the entire day and year, is essential to every family in our state and must be a priority for our communities. Access to high quality youth development programming is vital and will have lasting economic, educational, and public health benefits. Ensuring a strong system of support before, during, and after school will take creative and innovative funding and program partnerships between all levels of government, private philanthropy, intermediaries, and programs. The following are policy options and opportunities that are greatly needed over the next year as we continue to support children and youth through the COVID-19 pandemic, into recovery, and beyond.

COVID-Related Funding: Programs continue to struggle to hire staff, pay competitive wages, afford increased costs for PPE, food, and other overhead costs. We are also seeing signs of trouble with traditional fundraising efforts by nonprofits while several public and private COVID-related funding come to an end. Ensuring organizations led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) have equitable access to funding is critical to eliminating disparities among BIPOC youth and culturally-specific providers. As the pandemic continues, financial support will help keep programs open.

Strengthening School-Community Partnerships: Youth development programs need stronger partnerships with schools and districts. Incentivizing, amplifying, and/or requiring school-community partnerships through legislation regarding funding, building/kitchen access, transportation options, and other strategies are vital to supporting students and families.

School-Age Child Care (SACC) Licensing and Regulations: Health and safety of children and providers is paramount; however, current regulations and licensure monitoring visits are creating additional challenges for an already stressed system. Pausing non-essential regulations and site visits during the period of the crisis will allow providers to focus their efforts on serving children and securing funding to keep their doors open.

Supportive Health and Safety Guidance: Ensure COVID-related health and safety guidance continues to have input from and address concerns of youth development providers that are working through other issues outlined in this document. Additionally, aligning K12, child care and youth development COVID-related health and safety guidance is crucial.

Building State Funding and Support for Youth Development: Currently, no state agency has purview over the youth development field and there is very little public funding going into the field, with the exception of school-age child care. In 2021, the Legislature appropriated funding for a Youth Development Work Group at DCYF in collaboration with OSPI and other stakeholders. We expect these recommendations will build sustainable supports for the field to address the challenges and barriers facing our children and youth.

About the Youth Development Strategy Table (YDST): The YDST is a coalition focused on building and strengthening access to youth development (expanded learning, mentoring, and school-based wrap-around) programs across the State of Washington. SOWA provides staffing support to the Youth Development Strategy Table. Contact: David Beard dbeard@schoolsoutwashington.org.

About School's Out Washington (SOWA): SOWA is an independent 501c3 organization serving the field of expanded learning throughout Washington State. SOWA provides professional development, quality improvement, grant-making and management (*including COVID-related funding streams such as the Dept. of Commerce Non-Profit Youth Development Relief Fund and the OSPI Summer Program Fund*), and advocacy with racial equity underpinning our work.

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