

Youth Development Fund:

SB 5992/HB 2484: A Policy Container for an Equitable Future Youth Ecosystem

What we do and why

Since 2019, the **Youth Development Strategy Table (YDST)**—a coalition of 100+ programs across Washington state—has been advocating for the establishment of a **state grant program and resourcing for youth development** that is transparent and advances equity across the state.

Public funding for the youth development sector in Washington is low and allocated in an uneven way. The state can play a more strategic role in coordinating equitable funding and should allocate more money to positive youth development investments as we are currently far behind peers in Oregon, California, Michigan, etc.

This has resulted in:

- Inequitable access to positive youth development, especially outside of major urban areas and for BIPOC and low-income youth, and
- A sector that lacks strong infrastructure and adequate sustainability.

Further, state investments in positive youth development programming are scattered throughout several agencies in our state budget, making it hard for legislators to see the extent to which they invest and de-invest in this work. This past session, we identified that:

- There were large cuts made to youth development investments, and
- There needs to be more visibility around where these investments are made.

What is a Washington State Youth Development Fund?

The **Youth Development Fund** is a central container for future investments in positive youth development programming that will increase fiscal transparency and visibility to the sector.

In addition, this policy will:

- Set up as a public/private fund—we are working with philanthropies to set up challenge matches to future public funding, and
- Name a fiscal agent to sub-grant funding so that we can equitably prioritize funding.

The fund will live in one agency (OSPI) so that all future investments are centrally placed. OSPI will name a fiscal agent to award sub-grants to youth development providers using an equity lens for the grant criteria.

Youth Development Fund

Statute language will prioritize grant funding to programs serving youth between ages 5 to 24:

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| <p><i>Eligible youth development grantees may include, but are not limited to programs that provide:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning acceleration• Social-emotional learning• Mentorship• Connection to non-school-based resources• Support related to post-secondary access and career pathways• Arts, sports, and STEM-based programming• Outdoor education• Youth civic engagement• Cultural programming | <p><i>Future resourcing from this fund will use an equity lens to prioritize subgrants to youth programs that need it most. Specifically, we will prioritize:</i></p> <p>Geographies where young people have the least access to youth development opportunities based on available data</p> <p>Supporting youth from groups that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• have historically not met academic standards• are at a higher risk of dropout/lower than average graduation rates• are in the foster care system or experiencing homelessness• living in poverty |
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Why this?

Creating the fund, even if it is initially small and/or mostly containing private funding, establishes a **formal state intention to invest in youth development for the first time**, and a transparent place in the state budget for youth development investments. Getting this established will position youth development to benefit from future general fund dollars when Washington is in a healthier fiscal position and other opportunities such as:

- Federal social media lawsuit dollars: Washington is part of a network of states suing large social media companies for the role their addictive algorithmic practices played in aggravating the youth mental health crisis. Youth development programs play an important prevention role here. They are healthy alternatives to young people spending time in isolation and on screens.
- Other dedicated revenue: Options could include vape taxes, etc.

Why now?

Our ask of the state currently is to create the infrastructure for a future time when resourcing is more available. This infrastructure would be responsive to the realities of the moment while building toward a future we all want. We know there is a likelihood of funding in the future, especially with a likely social media settlement, and our chances of having that funding dedicated to youth development increase substantially with the infrastructure created to house it.