

FAIR START FOR KIDS ACT

After a difficult year for the children, families, and providers who make up our early learning ecosystem, the 2021 Legislative Session brought historic and substantial investments that will help build and sustain equity and opportunity for Washington's children. Child care and early learning were hit especially hard by the COVID-19 pandemic; families and providers were forced to navigate health and wellness crises, extreme financial strain, and closures in an already-fragile and undersupported industry. However, this year's legislation will do significant work to expand access and investments in early learning, utilizing an array of federal stimulus money, state funding, and potentially a new, dedicated revenue stream.



Preschool students at South Shore PreK-8

The Fair Start for Kids Act was arguably one of the most important and impactful pieces of legislation passed this session. Sponsored by Senator Claire Wilson and championed by Representative Tana Senn, [Senate Bill 5237](#) significantly increases access to essential, early learning programs like Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) by expanding family income eligibility and increasing the rates at which providers are subsidized for offering these programs.

The Fair Start for Kids Act will also bring more equity to the child care space by supplying rate enhancements to providers offering dual language programs, grants for other culturally and linguistically specific programs, grants to help address child care deserts, and strengthening services for children prenatal - age 3. The bill will also better support providers serving children with disabilities by strengthening the use of Complex Needs Funds, and it will better meet child and family needs by resourcing trauma-informed care and expanding early childhood mental health consultation services.

The bill's long-term supports will promote greater accountability and sustain industry funding far beyond this biennium. Changes made to the Early Learning Advisory Council will allow for more parents, providers, and other representatives to oversee state decision-making, and both the Fair Start for Kids Account and the Education Legacy Trust Account will be essential new funding streams for the early learning space. In addition to carrying out the landmark investments of this bill, these accounts will help fund future goals around covering the full cost of high-quality child care and better supporting the workforce through higher compensation and more affordable health coverage.

As the Fair Start for Kids Act requires large funding investments by the state, the passage of Senator June Robinson's capital gains tax bill this session, [Senate Bill 5096](#), is also a monumental and exciting step towards a more sustainably-funded early learning ecosystem. This bill would implement a 7% excise tax on certain long-term capital gains exceeding \$250,000, with exceptions for certain small businesses, residential properties, retirement accounts, and more. Up to \$500 million of the revenue raised each year would be deposited in the Education Legacy Trust Account to fund education and early learning needs. While the tax may face additional challenges in its path ahead, its eventual implementation would be a significant value-add for all children across Washington.