

May 2021

# Our Work in Washington State

## What's Changed and What Remains the Same



COVID-19 upended everyone's plans, including ours. In light of the pandemic, our Washington state team has had to reassess our plans and shift investments to support community priorities in the context of living in a transformed world. Central to that effort has been the need to understand the ways COVID-19 has disrupted our communities, such as:

- **Unprecedented challenges for our schools.** With no time to plan, schools had to adjust to teaching and learning online, address health and safety concerns, and provide access to food and other critical resources for students and families.
- **Barriers to access basic needs, experienced unequally.** The pandemic has been especially devastating for communities of color, frontline workers and families experiencing poverty and

homelessness, exacerbating existing inequities and presenting new challenges for these communities to navigate.

- **Stretched capacity.** For grantee partners that support our communities, many have experienced an increased demand for their services while also grappling with declines in revenue. Working safely during a pandemic also posed unexpected costs including PPE, technology, extra cleaning and construction costs to redesign space.

In recognizing these challenges and identifying where our foundation is best positioned to provide support and deliver impact, the following is an overview of how our work has changed over the past year in Washington state, and how we are responding to these unprecedented times moving forward.



## Early Response

Immediately following the onset of COVID-19, we worked with our partners and other funders to be responsive to the immediate needs of the community, with timely investments to support:

- General operating needs for organizations on the front lines of providing basic services, including homelessness service providers and community foundations in King, Pierce, Snohomish, Yakima and Spokane Counties
- The Seattle Foundation's COVID-19 Response Fund, a collaborative fund to provide basic needs—food, shelter, and child care—to our region's most vulnerable families
- Local COVID-19 diagnostic testing, contact tracing and vaccine distribution planning, infrastructure, communications and outreach support for Public Health, Seattle & King County and the Washington State Department of Health
- Bringing pandemic mitigation, response research and evidence directly to decision-makers to help ensure that they are operating with the latest, most effective set of guidance.

## Adapting to Meet Evolving Needs

Education has long been a priority for our work in Washington state, and we believe that if districts can seize this opportunity to improve teaching and learning across online and hybrid settings in today's context, then they will be able to equitably accelerate and recover learning both in the near-term and into the future. Our approach to supporting their work includes co-designing efforts with local districts to adapt and evolve teaching and learning in ways that apply research insights and drive toward more equitable outcomes for all. Examples of this work include:

- We focused our work on helping school leaders and other partners address challenges that are exacerbating equity and opportunity gaps as well as disrupted student learning. Resources were also shifted toward supporting social-emotional well-being for students of color and students experiencing poverty.

- We engaged our Local Improvement Networks to better understand their needs. This resulted in us adapting that work to focus on expanding access to vetted, curated tools and resources.
- We connected districts and schools with models and best practices for remote and hybrid learning, such as:
  - Seattle’s “Principal Playbook for Remote Learning,” shared with the 35 districts in the Puget Sound Educational Service District
  - Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession’s [Teacher Tech Project](#), which provided how-to’s and help desks for the five most common online learning platforms
  - Council of Chief State School Officers and Chiefs for Change’s support of Highline Public Schools to develop the “Day In the Life Of” scenario planning tool and district [reopening plans](#), which were replicated in districts across the state and nationally
- We also actively participated in statewide efforts to support districts and schools, including:
  - The Tech Alliance’s [Remote Learning Task Force](#), bringing actionable recommendations to Gov. Inslee and the legislature
  - Challenge Seattle’s [report on mitigating learning loss](#), which was integrated into Gov. Inslee’s budget and policy requests to the legislature
  - [Protocols](#) for school districts to reduce COVID-19 risks in hybrid and in-person learning with up-to-date disease transmission modeling from the [Institute for Disease Modeling](#), which included building COVID diagnostic testing into school reopening plans in partnership with the Department of Health

## Recovering Disrupted Learning

Recent [research from the Northwest Education Association](#) finds that students are performing at lower levels in math as compared to 2019. This is in part, due to inequitable access to the internet and devices, as well as rising absenteeism in virtual and hybrid classrooms. In addition, delivering virtual and hybrid instruction isn’t easy for educators. Not only do teachers need to learn how to use new tools and platforms, they need effective and engaging strategies to successfully teach remotely, and create strong relationships with students and families. In response, we are investing \$14.5M over the 2021-2022 school years to support districts across the state to recover disrupted learning and accelerate solutions.

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### We’ve provided funding to ten districts:





Rather than recreate the wheel in every district across Washington state, we asked “who else has faced this problem, and how did they solve it?” These ten districts will have access to a national knowledge base, through a variety of **technical assistance providers** who tailor and customize their support to what works best for each district. In turn, we’ve helped amplify our own homegrown innovation to reach other districts on a national level.

## Get Involved

As part of our current investments, the foundation is coordinating several “**Communities of Practice.**” The purpose of these communities is to bring educators together to share knowledge and experiences, accelerate their own learning, and collaborate on best practices. Educators, schools and districts who participate in these Communities of Practice are sharing factors leading to their success, available assets, and insights on other critical COVID recovery topics.

- Nine districts focused on mitigating learning loss are participating in a CoP with each other and their respective technical assistance providers.
- The schools and districts identified in the “**Outlier**” study by the Center for Educational Excellence are in a CoP to share the factors leading to their success and the assets available to support continued success across remote and hybrid settings
- Two educator-driven CoPs, with COVID recovery topics chosen by superintendents (Washington Association of School Administrators or WASA) and principals ([Association of Washington School Principals](#) or AWSP), are open to their entire networks.

All districts and schools, including charter public schools, are welcome to participate in the [WASA](#) and [AWSP](#) communities of practice; we encourage you to reach out to them to learn more.

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## Technical Assistance Providers:

**Achievement Network**  
*Everett*

**TNTP**  
*Spokane, Highline*

**Education NW**  
*Edmonds, Evergreen*

**UnboundEd**  
*Federal Way*

**New Leaders**  
*Kent*

**NWEA**  
*Tacoma*

**Leading Educators**  
*Yakima*

**Attuned**  
*Seattle*

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## What Remains the Same

Despite the challenges of the past year, we remain steadfast in our commitment to equity and our insistence that every student in Washington state have a chance to reach their full potential. We’re leveraging the skills and knowledge of our national teams, and also listening to local needs, concerns and solutions for each district. We continue to support innovations in teaching and learning as well as options like charter public schools, and we are still dedicated to improving outcomes for kids, especially those who are facing the barriers of racial and economic inequities.

For more on our Washington state work, please visit <https://local.gatesfoundation.org/>

More on our national K-12 education work here: <https://usprogram.gatesfoundation.org/what-we-do/k-12-education>