

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



## LETTER FROM THE CEO



**LYNNE K. VARNER**

As we reflect on the past year, I am humbled and energized by our collective impact. From policy wins in Olympia to transformational programming by network partners, we are fulfilling our mission to bolster STEM education from cradle to career across Washington state.

I've had a remarkable journey since becoming CEO in August 2023, starting with a recruitment process that stood out for its inclusivity and transparency. Facilitated by a dedicated executive team, this process underscored our commitment to diverse perspectives and co-created solutions. It was a testament to the Washington STEM ethos that I've come to cherish—one rooted in collaboration and in pursuit of equitable excellence.

It has been a thrill to work with expert staff who leverage data to inform policy conversations and convene statewide partners to collaborate on solutions. Whether we're building early learning dashboards or helping schools access National Student Clearinghouse data—we focus on partnerships and capacity building. I'm particularly proud of the strides we've made supporting a new online High School and Beyond Plan. Once online in late 2026, it promises to level the playing field for students across the state.

Our partnerships have been instrumental in driving our collective impact, none more so than our collaboration with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Washington STEM is lending its data expertise to a groundbreaking statewide initiative called the Limitless Learning Network aimed at bolstering data capacity in schools.

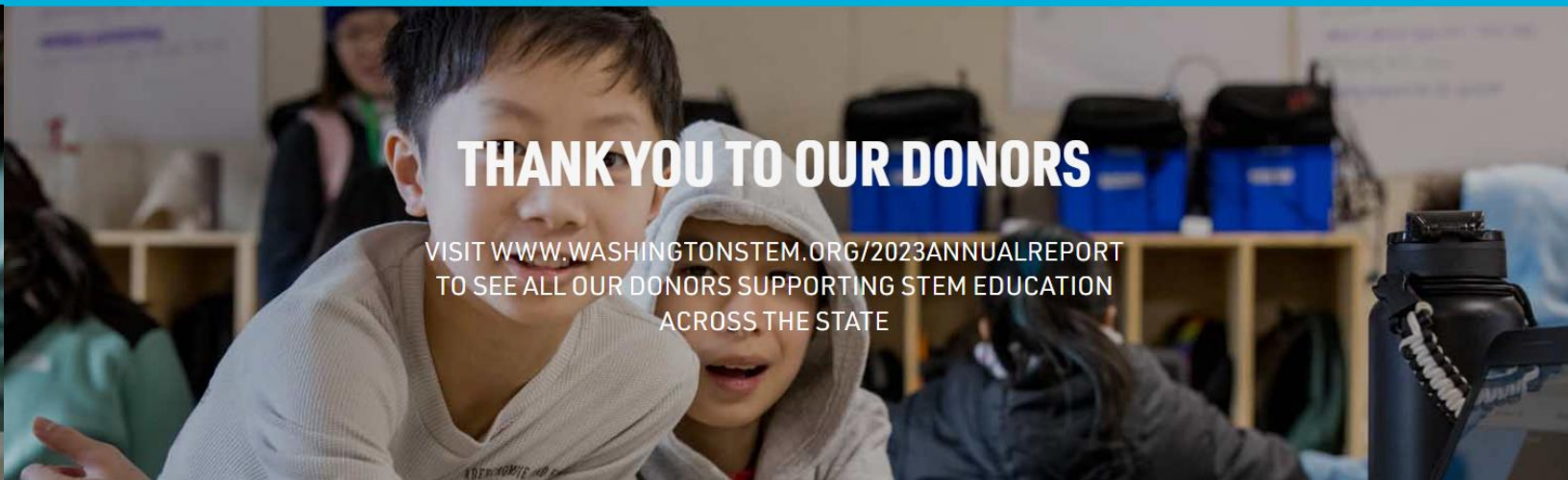
Throughout 2024, we'll continue to address systemic barriers to STEM education such as lack of access to quality child care. Meaningful investments in early childhood education and care are smart moral and economic imperatives with the potential to unlock untold opportunities for future generations. Between policy successes and transformational partnerships, we're feeling optimistic about our progress.

Yet, we're mindful of challenges ahead. Artificial intelligence is already transforming teaching and learning, but we must ensure the benefits of emerging technologies reach every corner of our state. Advances like prioritizing high-speed internet for all and leveraging AI-powered college advising tools in rural communities will improve equity.

Lastly, I am deeply inspired by the many students touched by our work. As we chart our course forward, let us remain guided by their potential and committed to a future where every child can thrive in a STEM-infused world.

## THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

VISIT [WWW.WASHINGTONSTEM.ORG/2023ANNUALREPORT](http://WWW.WASHINGTONSTEM.ORG/2023ANNUALREPORT)  
TO SEE ALL OUR DONORS SUPPORTING STEM EDUCATION  
ACROSS THE STATE





# 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

## ENGAGED EMPLOYERS WITH THE FAMILY FRIENDLY WORKPLACE REPORTS

Published 11 regional, data-rich Family Friendly Workplace reports, so businesses can take action to improve access to child care and better support working families. Access to high quality child care not only promotes children's well-being, it is also a strong foundation for the advanced STEM learning needed for future workforce readiness.



## TRACKED CHILD CARE SUBSIDY EXPANSION THROUGH DATA DASHBOARDS

Updates to [early learning data dashboards SB 5225](#) provide the latest data on child care availability across the state. Lawmakers relied on this data to pass legislation (SB 5225) expanding the Working Connections Child Care subsidies to child care providers, undocumented families, and families in the therapeutic court system.



## CO-LED EFFORT TO BUILD DATA-CAPACITY IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Joined network partners to gauge familiarity with state-level, pre-school to workforce (P20W) data sets. Over the next four years, this effort aims to build and advocate for better data access and increase capacity among educators, researchers, policymakers, and community leaders and advocates.

## CREATED THE CHILD CARE BUSINESS FEASIBILITY ESTIMATOR

Child care businesses are a key part of meeting the need for early care and education across the state. But understanding the real costs of operating a child care business can be challenging. This [new online tool](#) provides real cost estimates for aspiring child care business owners, enabling them to make sound decisions as they develop their business plans.

## IMPLEMENTED CAREER PATHWAYS FRAMEWORK ACROSS THE STATE

Working with statewide education partners, we developed a framework for robust career pathways by identifying underlying conditions and practices. These partners joined with cross-sector leaders in their region to put the [career pathways framework into practice](#) so all students have access to postsecondary opportunities.



## INCREASED ACCESS TO DUAL CREDIT PROGRAMS

In support of boosting postsecondary education enrollment, we supported legislation that eliminated fees for College in the High School ([SB 5048](#)) and expanded the Running Start summer program statewide ([HB 1316](#)). Research has shown that students who take dual credit courses are more likely to continue their education after high school.

## HIGHLIGHTED WASHINGTON'S CAREER PATHWAYS PRACTICES AT NATIONAL LEVEL

After joining LAUNCH, a national initiative to build equitable and accelerated career pathways, Washington STEM led a team of educators, policymakers, and school leaders from across the state to the national conference. There, we shared Career Connect Washington's practices in creating career pathways that help students transition from K-12 to higher education and into high-demand STEM careers.

## HONORED LEGISLATORS OF THE YEAR

We recognized Representative Chipalo Street for supporting early learning data dashboards, Representative Jacquelin Maycumber for leading the effort to build five regional apprenticeship programs (HB 1013), and Senator Lisa Wellman for sponsoring legislation for a statewide, online High School and Beyond Plan platform (SB 5243).

## 2023 Legislators of the Year



Rep. Chipalo Street 37th District    Rep. Jacquelin Maycumber 7th District    Sen. Lisa Wellman 41st District

## ADVOCATED FOR CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION PILOT PROGRAM

STEM is integral to career & technical education (CTE), a crucial pathway for Washington students who aspire for challenging, in-demand STEM careers. In 2023, we advocated for a \$700k pilot program that will increase participation in dual credit CTE programs and credential attainment in professional and technical programs across the Skagit Valley.



## DISTRIBUTED SURVEY TO SUPPORT A STATEWIDE ONLINE HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND PLAN

Last year we supported the launch of a statewide survey to inform the development of an online High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) platform enacted by the legislature ([SB 5243](#)). This new HSBP digital platform will provide students across the state with equitable career and education planning regardless of their zip code.



# STORIES OF CHANGE



## HIGH SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY EXPANDED TO 40+ SCHOOLS

More than 40 high schools participated in our High School to Postsecondary Collaborative to reimagine postsecondary preparation systems, so they respond to student aspirations, light up possible career pathways, and foster a sense of belonging. Washington STEM led the Collaborative's monthly work sessions and by the end of the school year, schools had started making small changes: they adjusted advisory classes, planned for more intentional financial aid support, and informed staff about dual credit options, like Running Start and College in the High School, so they can better advise students. Schools also hosted financial aid family nights, providing more one-on-one support to complete financial aid applications. Together, these concrete improvements—sourced from students and the school community—support more equitable access to, and engagement in, postsecondary pathways.



## EARLY LEARNING ADVOCATES ENHANCE DATA REPORTING

We convened 50+ caregivers, parents, and child care providers to participate in a six month co-design process in order to include more community voices in our 2023 State of the Children (SOTC) regional reports. These co-design participants helped illuminate the need for statewide data on children with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness, and children from immigrant families. Alongside the SOTC regional reports, we also released a statewide report and updated the data dashboard and the Family Friendly Workplace regional reports with the latest data.



## PARTNERING WITH THE OFFICE OF NATIVE EDUCATION

We are honored to be partnering with the Office of Native Education (ONE); the liaison between OSPI and sovereign tribes and Native families, to deepen our understanding of the issues Indigenous communities face around education equity. In 2023, we were invited to attend the Washington State Indian Education Association Conference in Toppenish and exchanged learnings gained from partnering with Indigenous educators and community groups across the state who center the knowledge and goals of tribes into early learning and career-connected learning programs. We also embarked on a collaborative research project on how Indigenous students who identify as both Native and another ethnicity are undercounted and underreported within cradle to career school systems. We join ONE in calling for the use of data collection and reporting methods, like Maximum Representation, which ensures students' multi-racial identities are fully recognized and schools receive the funding aimed at providing the culturally-sustaining education supports that help Native students thrive.



## CELEBRATING RISING STARS IN STEM

Once again, we recognized 11 high schoolers, nominated by their schools, as Rising Stars in STEM for their academic excellence and leadership in STEM. Individually, these Rising Stars participated in an international robotics competition, invented assistive devices for a disabled neighbor, expanded BIPOC student leadership in STEM courses, advocated for more Black women in public health research, completed CAD industry certifications toward an engineering career, and so much more. The 2023 Rising Stars were honored during our Annual Summit at Microsoft's Redmond campus where Washington STEM CEO, Lynne K. Varner remarked: "Our collective investment in these Rising Stars will pay dividends far into the future as more young women pursue STEM activities and careers."

*"Washington STEM helped our staff understand the importance of qualitative data—the stories and narratives students, families and teachers tell us about how they understand postsecondary pathways. This helps us build effective programs that get students where they want to go."*

**LORI HUNT,  
EDD.**

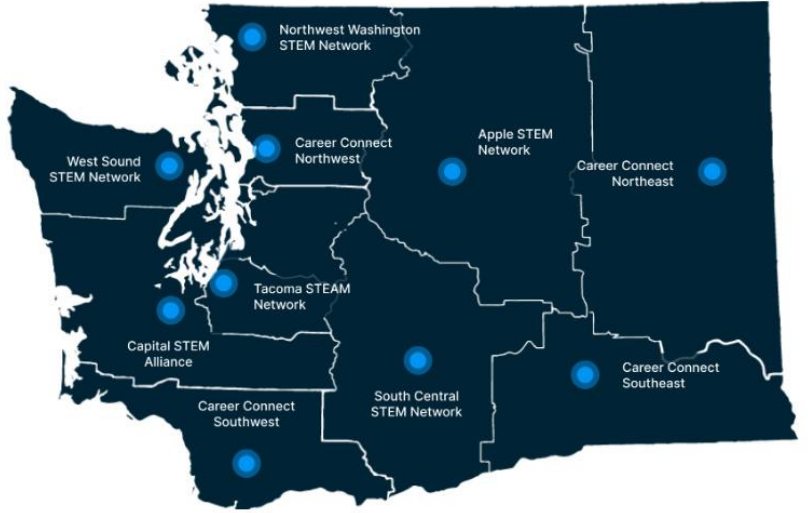
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OUR PARTNERSHIPS

# REGIONAL NETWORK PARTNERS

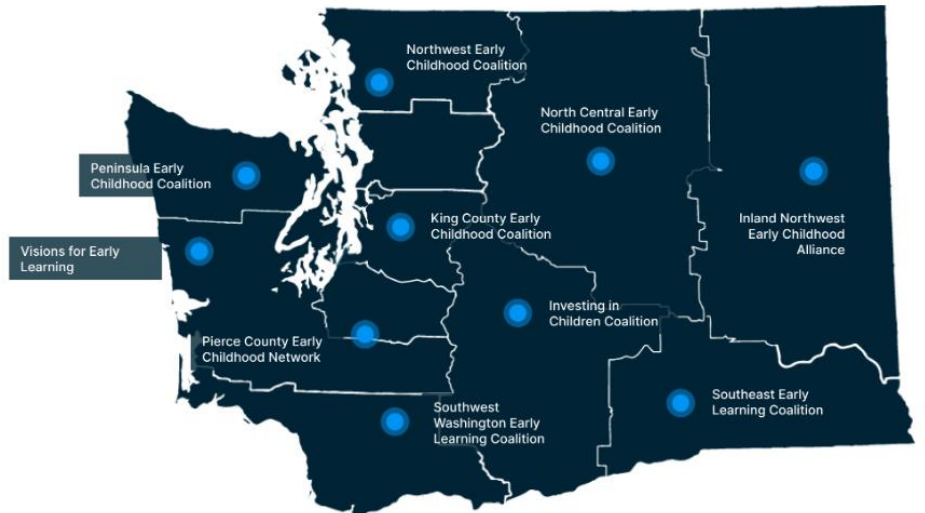
Washington STEM convenes, invests in, and works alongside a network of regional partners who harness and employ STEM education best practices as well as collectively work to create well-lit pathways to education opportunities post-high school. These ten networks are made up of educators and business and community leaders and provide access to the best STEM education, opportunities, and careers in their regions.



OUR PARTNERSHIPS

# EARLY LEARNING COALITIONS

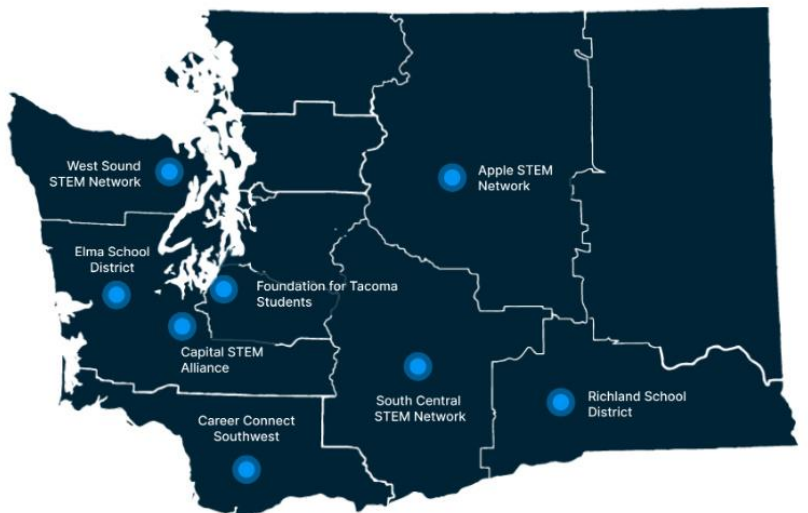
We partner with child care providers and early learning advocates across the state to equitably increase access to high-quality child care and STEM learning. In 2023, they helped update the State of the Children reports and illuminated the need for data on children with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness and children who speak a language other than English at home.



OUR PARTNERSHIPS

# HIGH SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY COLLABORATIVE

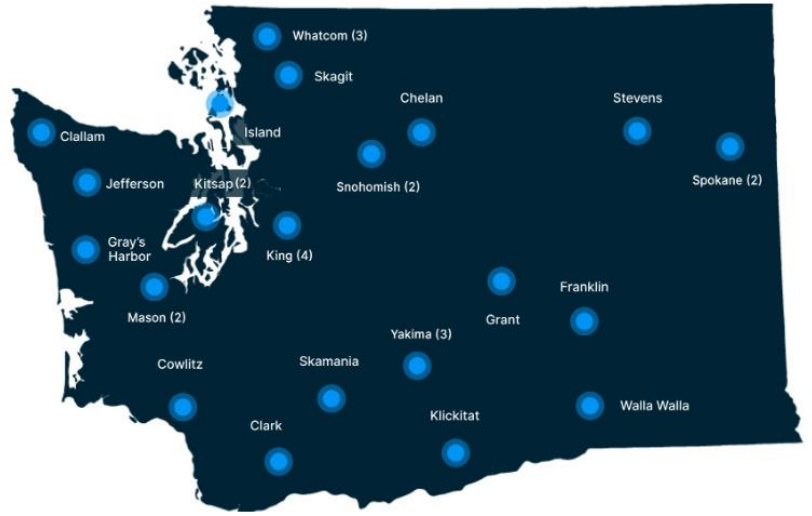
There are eight regional and district leads working with 40+ high schools across the state to reimagine postsecondary transitions. In 2023, they met monthly to examine course-taking data and coordinate listening sessions with students, their families and the wider school community to create education and career pathways that reflect student aspirations.



OUR PARTNERSHIPS

# LIMITLESS LEARNING NETWORK

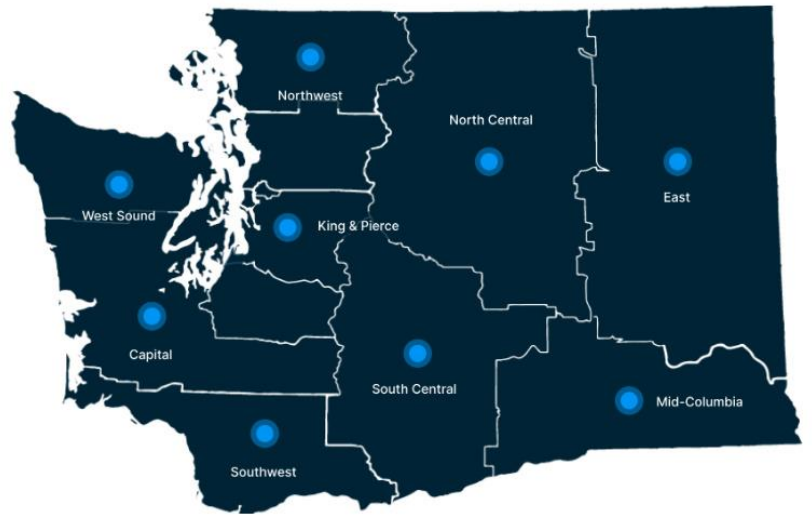
Washington STEM is providing data technical support to 26 K-12 and higher education partnerships in 21 counties as part of the Limitless Learning Network. This project is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Washington State Initiative and provides forums for exploring ideas, sharing information, and developing best practices that support students as they transition to education and career pathways. Some counties have multiple partnerships.



OUR PARTNERSHIPS

# CAREER CONNECT WASHINGTON

Washington STEM is co-leading the implementation and scaling of Career Connect Washington's work-based learning programs to launch students into postsecondary credentials, college, apprenticeships, and career training.



## 2023 FINANCIALS

