

Washington was the first state to be invited to join Frontiers of Innovation (FOI), an initiative to improve outcomes for vulnerable children using science to inform early childhood policy and practice.

FOI is a partnership between researchers, practitioners, policymakers, philanthropists and experts in systems change led by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University.

Science has shown that young children can be buffered against the harmful effects of persistent, toxic stress by:

- Establishing strong caregiver-child relationships.
- Increasing the regularity, predictability, and organization of children's daily environments.
- Strengthening the cognitive, self-regulatory, and decision-making skills of adult caregivers.

Much of the science focuses on "executive function": the ability to retain and use information, focus thinking, filter distractions and switch gears. These are essential skills for life and learning. When children develop these skills, they are better prepared for school and for making positive choices in their lives.

DEL, the Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Health, Health Care Authority and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction are using this science to inform service delivery to children and families in Washington. Our work to date includes:

1. Providing professional development through reflective practice groups to teachers, child care professionals and others to learn how to support both adult and child executive function in early learning settings. Learn more about this project: www.del.wa.gov/resources/newsroom/102313.aspx
2. A professional development module for state workers, providers and stakeholders about the science of early adversity and resilience, and how to apply it to policy and practice across systems.
3. DEL has created an online executive function training that is required for all those who train child care providers in Washington. The training is also available to all child care providers at no cost. DEL and DSHS also are training their staff on how their work connects to child outcomes.

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4. Executive function is embedded in the Washington State Early Learning & Development Guidelines.
5. Providing seed funding to five early care and education sites around the state for collaborative work with practitioners and researchers to co-create and test interventions for children and caregivers which address intergenerational trauma, caregiver child relationship and build executive function skills across generations. Data and lessons learned from site-based work will be used to inform statewide system efforts in the future.
6. In 2014 DSHS began a partnership to improve multi-generational executive functioning through engaging families receiving TANF in evidence-based home visiting programs in local communities.
7. Statewide implementation of Filming Interactions to Nurture Development (FIND) through the Early Achievers coach framework to increase strong serve and return interactions between adults and children.

