



UNDER EMBARGO until Tuesday, September 25 at 12:01 a.m. ET

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### **Washington Missing Opportunities to Give Young Adult Parents and their Kids a Boost**

New Casey Foundation report illuminates needs and barriers facing Washington state's young parents and their children

SEATTLE — With limited access to opportunities to advance their education and find family-sustaining jobs, Washington's 50,000 young adult parents face hurdles to support their children and fulfill their own potential, according to *Opening Doors for Young Parents*, the latest KIDS COUNT® policy report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Parents ages 18 to 24 face unique economic, workforce and educational challenges. They and their young children are both still experiencing critical windows of cognitive development. Unlike their childless peers, they are also tasked with the responsibility of getting a good education and making a family-wage living to support their children at the very outset of their working lives. Yet with the right forms of help, young parents can act on their growth opportunities for themselves and their families.

Washington is among 15 states and the District of Columbia with the lowest percentages of youth ages 18 to 24 who are also young parents – at 8 percent. The national average is 10 percent.

Nearly 43 percent of Washington's young parents are people of color. Like all young adults of color, discrimination and inequities in family wealth, income, housing and other domains make their path to economic security and educational achievement is steeper and more difficult.

"Children need to be able to count on the adults in their lives to equip themselves with the tools for a solid future," said Paola Maranan, executive director of the Children's Alliance. "Policymakers can do more to support our parents who are just getting started."

The report illuminates the most common obstacles young adult parents face, including incomplete education, lack of employment and career growth, lack of access to quality child care, inadequate and unstable housing and financial insecurity. These barriers don't threaten not only these young adults, but also their young children, setting off a chain of diminished opportunities for two generations.

The Casey Foundation stresses the importance of a two-generation approach to address these challenges and equip young parents for success.

“If we don’t support young people when they become parents, we are cheating two generations out of having a positive future,” said Casey Foundation President and CEO Patrick McCarthy. “We can help young adult parents develop the skills they need to raise their children, contribute to their communities, and drive our national economy forward.”

KIDS COUNT in Washington notes a number of strategies can help the state’s young parents access educational and employment opportunities. In an increasingly competitive workforce, education can make a significant difference in earning power. For example, single mothers with associate degrees can earn \$150,000 more over their lifetimes than high school graduates, and single mothers with bachelor’s degrees earn nearly \$296,000 more. Affordable child care and other early learning opportunities for their children can reap benefits for both generations later on. So can in-person assistance to new parents via voluntary home visiting, and quality maternal and postpartum health care.

Such strategies are at work in Washington. In South King County and South Seattle, dozens of families take part in mentoring, resource assistance and age-appropriate play via El Centro de La Raza’s Parent Child Home Program. There, home visitors lead Spanish-speaking parents in developmentally appropriate learning activities with their kids — and watch as young parents build stronger families.

The parents she meets “have a lot of love for their children,” says Maria Miranda, coordinating supervisor of the Parent Child Home Program. “They come from a collectivistic culture; they’ll open their households to people who are struggling, and they rely on those collectivist behaviors to survive.”

Good home visitors, she says, have a culturally based familiarity with these practices — a basis of relatability which helps service providers and parents build positive, mutually beneficial relationships.

Home visitors “have a lot to learn from them,” Miranda says of the parents her program serves. “We get to know the family, and we get to know the child.”

The Parent Child Home Program is supported by county, federal and private dollars. Washington state policymakers can do more for home visiting and other measures to allow younger parents to build strong, economically stable families. For example, they can:

- Support young parents’ access to high-quality early learning by expanding the reach and flexibility of the state’s Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). A 2017 [analysis](#) by KIDS COUNT of Washington found that expanding ECEAP would disproportionately help many children of color who haven’t had equitable access to opportunities shown to promote kindergarten readiness.
- Invest in affordable access to quality child care for infants, toddlers, and other young children.
- Remove barriers to high school graduation for young parents by expanding the Graduation, Reality and Dual-role Skills (GRADS) program and ensure young parents in high school have access to Working Connections Child Care, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and transportation.
- Expand the state need grant, which provides tuition assistance to all students in higher education with household incomes below 70 percent of the state median income, so all income-eligible students have an affordable path to a degree or certificate.
- Invest in local communities and school districts that are designing programs and policy solutions that remove barriers for students of color to thrive in school, including investing in school board

trainings on race and racial equity and ensuring parents of color are included in the hiring of leadership staff and principals.

- Help young parents save for their children's future by creating child savings accounts, which are long-term savings accounts established for young children that build until they reach adulthood. Offer incentives that can help parents accumulate savings along the way. Make sure child savings programs do more to close the racial wealth gap experienced by many households of color.

"Policymakers ought to take steps like these to help families get strong and stay strong," said Misha Werschkul, executive director of the Washington State Budget & Policy Center. "A two-generation approach can build positive futures for the long run."

### **Release Information**

*Opening Doors for Young Parents* will be available September 25 at 12:01 a.m. EDT at <https://www.aecf.org/opening-doors-for-young-parents>. Reporters may request an embargoed copy beginning September 18.

### **About KIDS COUNT in Washington**

KIDS COUNT in Washington is a partnership of the Children's Alliance and the Washington State Budget & Policy Center, pursuing measurable improvements in child outcomes through equitable public policy measures. The two organizations offer policymakers and the public the knowledge they need to remove the barriers kids face to brighter, freer, more equal futures. For more information, visit [www.kidscountwa.org](http://www.kidscountwa.org).

### **About the Annie E. Casey Foundation**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). KIDS COUNT® is a registered trademark of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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