

Best Starts for Kids Blueprint Report

Attachment A to Proposed Ordinance XXXXXX

January 28, 2021

An explanatory report accompanying transmittal of the proposed ballot measure ordinance to renew and expand *Best Starts for Kids*. This report is a blueprint to continue and build upon the existing *Best Starts for Kids* levy. This report's purpose is to explain and provide context for the Executive's proposed ballot measure ordinance during Council and Regional Policy Committee consideration and deliberations—the report should be detached from the ballot measure ordinance before final action.

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Best Starts for Kids Blueprint Report: Introduction and Orientation

The start given to children now will define the region’s health, prosperity and equity for a generation. Every child is born full of potential. *Best Starts for Kids* is King County’s community-driven initiative and research-informed framework for all children to realize their potential to be healthy, happy, safe and thriving, through a voter-approved property tax levy lid lift. To date, *Best Starts for Kids* has served more than half of a million King County children, youth, young adults, and families in partnership with more than five hundred community-based organizations.

Best Starts for Kids (*Best Starts*) is a type of property tax called a levy lid lift (levy) that Washington law limits to six years.¹ Voters approved the first *Best Starts* levy in 2015 with a first-year levy rate of \$0.14 per \$1,000 of a property’s assessed value. The levy began in 2016, and *Best Starts* will expire on December 31, 2021 unless voters renew the levy.

What is the Blueprint Report and how is it organized?

This explanatory Blueprint Report accompanies transmittal of a proposed ballot measure ordinance to the King County Council. If the Council adopts the legislation, King County voters will have a choice to renew and expand the *Best Starts* levy for six more years on the August 2021 ballot. This report uses current *Best Starts* levy performance data and outcomes, findings from *Best Starts* annual reports, community input, the recommendations of the *Best Starts for Kids Assessment Report* as accepted by the County Council and its Regional Policy Committee, and the recommendations of recent State, King County and community analyses on child care. The report’s four sections provide an overview of *Best Starts*, review *Best Starts*’ impacts and outcomes, describe how current conditions inform the renewal proposal, and provide a blueprint for renewal and expansion of *Best Starts*.

Executive Summary

The Proposal to Renew and Expand *Best Starts for Kids*

If approved by voters, the renewed *Best Starts* levy will maintain and build upon *Best Starts*’ current strategies and programs and expand the levy for new investments in child care for infants, toddlers, and school-age children. Levy strategies and programs would carry over from the current levy, with contracts funded by the levy would be re-procured in accordance with a new *Best Starts* Implementation Plan.

The proposal maintains programs and strategies that currently set King County’s children, youth and young adults on healthier paths. The proposal also meets new or newly visible needs laid bare by a once-in-a-generation COVID-19 pandemic and an overdue racial justice reckoning. Specifically, in addition to supporting existing *Best Starts* programs, the proposal invests in:

- A new child care subsidy program for more than 3,000 low-income children,
- A new workforce demonstration project for low-wage child care workers,

¹ [RCW 84.55.050](#).

- Expansion of out of school time programs for school-age children,
- Up to four new school-based health centers, and
- Expansion of transitions to adulthood programs for youth and young adults.

The proposed ballot measure ordinance sets a first-year levy rate of \$0.19 per \$1,000 of a property's assessed value, or about \$114 per year for a median-priced King County home,² and limits annual levy growth to three percent. Highlights include:

- In the levy's first year, the first 22.5 percent of levy revenue would be dedicated to four purposes: continuing the [Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative](#), a new affordable child care program, a new child care workforce demonstration project, and continuing technical assistance and capacity building programs that support community-based organizations. The proposal would require the six-year sum investment in these programs to total \$235 million. Specific allocations for these programs in all years of the levy would be set later in 2021 through a Council-adopted new *Best Starts* Implementation Plan.
- Within the remaining 77.5 percent of first-year levy revenue, the proposal would refine the current *Best Starts* investment pattern. It would maintain the current levy's requirement that 50 percent of investments support programs for children aged pre-natal through five. Thirty-seven percent of investments would be directed to services for children, youth and young adults aged five through 24.³ The proposal then allocates eight percent to continue Communities of Opportunity (COO) and five percent for evaluation.⁴ Current revenue projections indicate that applying these percentages to the proposed new levy rate would maintain or increase funding in each strategy area as compared to the last year of the current *Best Starts* levy (2021).
- To support local jurisdictions, the proposal continues *Best Starts*' practice of making proceeds available to local fire or parks districts if this levy suppresses their levies.⁵

Planning for Next Steps

If the proposed ballot measure is approved by the King County Council for placement on the August 2021 ballot, detailed budget and implementation planning for the next *Best Starts for Kids* levy will follow. Implementation planning will follow the requirements of the ballot measure ordinance and will occur in close consultation with community partners, the youth and families whom *Best Starts* serves, the COO Governance Group, and the Children and Youth Advisory Board (CYAB). The proposed ballot measure ordinance also requires recommendations to update and affirm the resident advisory and oversight roles of the CYAB and the COO Governance

² King County Assessor, Assessed Value and Taxes by City, Typical Residence in 2019 and 2020. [\[LINK\]](#).

³ The current levy sets five-through-24 investments at 35 percent.

⁴ Communities of Opportunity [\[LINK\]](#).

⁵ In accordance with Ordinance 18088, Section 5, the initial *Best Starts* levy was designed to provide revenue to park and fire districts for eligible services if those districts' levy revenues were suppressed as a result of prorationing under RCW 84.052.010 that resulted from the *Best Starts* levy lid lift. This proposal for the renewed and expanded *Best Starts* levy would continue this policy.

Group. The proposed measure requires implementation planning to occur before the August 2021 election to promote continuity of services should voters renew and expand *Best Starts* ahead of the existing levy's expiration in December 2021.

Who Wrote This Report?

The Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) and Public Health—Seattle and King County (PHSKC) inter-departmental team that administers *Best Starts* prepared this report. The departments blend their respective specialties to promote comprehensive well-being at the community and individual levels. DCHS and PHSKC consulted extensively with clients, community, providers, the CYAB, and the COO Governance Group to prepare this report and the proposal it accompanies.

Best Starts for Kids

I | An Overview of *Best Starts* for Kids

Best Starts for Kids (*Best Starts*) is a King County voter-approved levy and an initiative to improve the health and well-being of all King County residents. This is achieved through investing in promotion, prevention and early intervention for children, youth, young adults, families and communities. *Best Starts* focuses upstream to affect long-term change, promoting well-being and equity rather than reacting to the myriad crises born of their absence.

Best Starts is rooted in the fundamental belief that this is a region of considerable opportunity and that all residents benefit when every child, youth and young adult is supported to fulfill their potential. Lives of health, prosperity and purpose must be within reach for every King County resident. *Best Starts* envisions a future in which ZIP code and family income do not constrain young people from pursuing lives of promise and possibility.

Best Starts programs incorporate the abundance of research identifying key windows of human development – prenatal through early childhood, and again in adolescence – in which the right supports can catalyze strong and healthy starts in children’s early years and sustained gains and successful transitions for youth and young adults. *Best Starts* is also committed to delivering on these opportunities by setting goals and measuring performance.

This first section of the Blueprint Report gives an overview of *Best Starts*, reviews the initiative’s place within King County’s guiding values and policy statements, and describes *Best Starts*’ framework for measuring how much programs do, how well they do it, and how people who receive *Best Starts* supports are better off.

I. A | *Best Starts* Levy Basics, Initiative Structure and Theoretical Framework

Best Starts is a community-driven initiative and a science and research-informed framework to help all children realize their potential to be happy, healthy, safe, and thriving. Because promoting well-being is best for people, communities, and budgets, *Best Starts* takes a disciplined approach to supporting children and families early rather than reacting to crises.

Voters approved the current *Best Starts* levy in 2015.⁶ In addition to the original *Best Starts* ballot measure ordinance, a Council-adopted Implementation Plan⁷ defines key aspects of the initiative. The ballot measure ordinance and implementation plan together define *Best Starts*’ goals, policy framework and investment areas. Since 2016, *Best Starts* has served King County’s

⁶ Ordinance 18088 outlined the goals and uses of the original Best Starts for Kids Levy and provided for its submission to voters. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁷ The King County Council approved the original Best Starts for Kids Implementation Plan [\[LINK\]](#) via Ordinance 18373 in 2016 [\[LINK\]](#).

children, youth, young adults and their families by pursuing three goals, called *Best Starts'* Results:

***Best Starts for Kids'* Results**

1. Babies are born healthy and given the foundation for a happy, healthy life.
2. Young people have equitable opportunities to be safe, healthy and thriving.
3. Communities offer safe and welcoming environments for their kids.

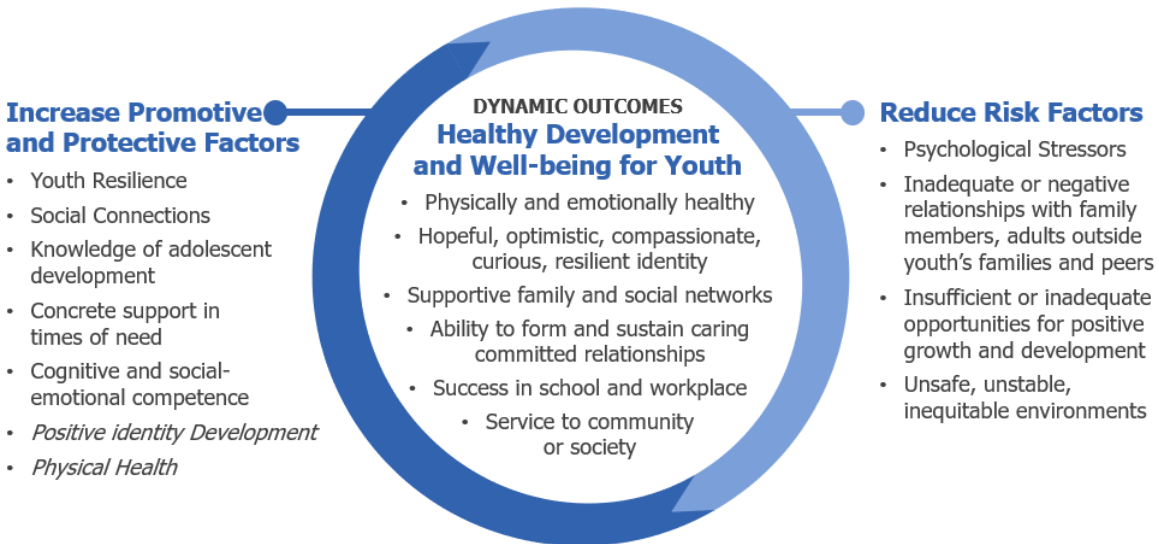
Each result draws upon cutting-edge scientific research and continuous community input while clearly acknowledging the fact that race, ethnicity and place within King County have for too long strongly correlated with which kids and families benefit—and get the benefit of the doubt—from systems and policies and which kids and families do not. Figures 1 and 2 below, adapted from the Center for the Study of Social Policy – Youth Thrive,⁸ illustrate *Best Starts'* emphasis on increasing promotive and protective factors within families and communities while reducing risk factors. The frameworks emphasize *Best Starts'* strengths-based approach.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework (Prenatal-5)



⁸ Browne, C., Notkin, S., Schneider-Muñoz, A., & Zimmerman, F. (2015). [Youth Thrive: A Framework to Help Adolescents Overcome Trauma and Thrive](#). *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work*, 25, 33-52.

Figure 2: Theoretical Framework (5-24)



To achieve *Best Starts'* results, the initiative focuses on five investment areas, each grounded in the Theoretical Frameworks above. The five investment areas are Invest Early, Sustain the Gain, Communities of Opportunity, Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative, and Evaluation. Each is described below, including examples of programs currently funded in each investment area. The entire list of programs funded by *Best Starts* is available online; anyone can access *Best Starts* information through the [Best Starts database](#) to view a list of contracted partners and programs in *Best Starts'* major investment areas.

- **Invest Early** | Programs for Pregnant Parents and Children prenatal to 5
 At fifty percent of the existing levy's revenue, Invest Early is *Best Starts'* largest investment area. Research shows the earlier investments are made, the greater the return for children and families.⁹ Two examples of Invest Early programs are *Parent/Caregiver Information and Support* and *Home-Based Services*:
 - **Parent/Caregiver Information and Support (PCIS)** builds on community trust and networks to provide expecting parents and parents of children from birth to age five with information, resources, and peer support to enhance maternal-child health, positive parenting, and child social-emotional development. Community partners that include *Center for Human Services*, *Divine Alternatives for Dads Services (D.A.D.S.)*, *Families of Color Seattle (FOCS)*, *HopeCentral*, *Korean Community Service Center*, *Refugee Women's Alliance (REWA)*, *United Indians of All Tribes*, *Voices of Tomorrow*, and *West African Community Council* provide the program. The *Best Starts* blog [highlighted the PCIS program](#) in 2019.
 - **Home-Based Services (HBS)** provide relationship-based support to expecting parents and parents of children from birth to age five in the places they live. Through HBS,

⁹ Heckman, J. (2021). [The Heckman Equation: The Economics of Human Potential \[LINK\]](#).

well-trained home visitors provide information, resources, and social connection to parents to support healthy births, positive parenting, child development and growth, safe home environments and school readiness. In this program area, *Best Starts* has built a continuum of services including national, evidence-based and evidence-informed home-visiting models and home-based programs implemented by specific cultural communities in King County. Community partners include *Friends of Youth, Kinderling, Open Arms, United Indians of All Tribes, Vashon Youth and Family Services, Renton Area Youth & Family Services, Navos, Denise Louie Education Center, and Iraqi Community Center*. The *Best Starts* Blog provided [in-depth coverage of HBS](#) in 2018.

- **Sustain the Gain** | Programs for Children, Youth and Young Adults age five to 24
Sustain the Gain programs receive 35 percent of the existing levy's revenue. Research shows that promotion and prevention efforts, made during key developmental stages or transition points in a young person's life, can sustain earlier gains.¹⁰ The Sustain the Gain strategy area supports programs that empower youth; support social-emotional development, positive identity, health, academics and employability; and provide safe and healthy spaces for youth to connect with peers and supportive adults in and out of school. Trauma-informed and Restorative Practices and School-Based Health Centers are two examples of *Best Starts*' Sustain the Gain programs:
 - **Trauma-informed and Restorative Practices (TIRP)** supports schools and school partners to create safe, welcoming environments where students facing adversity or trauma have trusted adults in whom they can confide. TIRP works to transform schools' institutional culture so that students do not experience additional trauma within the school community and instead receive the support they need to build resilience and positive identity. TIRP has 30 partners, including the *Bellevue School Foundation, Delridge Neighborhoods Development Association, El Centro de la Raza, Federal Way Public Schools, Seattle Public Schools sites, and the Snoqualmie Valley School District*. The *Best Starts* Blog provided [in-depth coverage of TIRP](#) programs in 2018.
 - **School-Based Health Centers (SBHC)** provide comprehensive medical, mental health, and dental services in school settings to children and adolescents who would otherwise go without care. SBHCs are a proven strategy for increasing students' educational and health outcomes, including in school performance, grade promotion, and high school completion. They also decrease health risks like unintended teenage pregnancy, poor diet, inadequate physical activity, physical and emotional abuse, and substance use. From 2017 to 2019, *Best Starts* opened three new centers in Bellevue, Renton, and Vashon Island schools, provided enhancement funds to 15 other SBHC locations to fill gaps in services for students, and pursued partnerships with health care providers to offer more

¹⁰ Browne, C., Notkin, S., Schneider-Muñoz, A., & Zimmerman, F. (2015). Youth Thrive: A Framework to Help Adolescents Overcome Trauma and Thrive. *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work*, 25, 33-52. [\[LINK\]](#)

services in SBHC locations. The *Best Starts* Blog [celebrated school partnerships](#) in 2018.

- **Communities of Opportunity (COO)** COO programs receive 10 percent of the existing levy’s revenue. Because children do best in thriving communities, *Best Starts* supports community-level programs and policies developed by community members themselves. This work is accomplished through COO, in partnership with the Seattle Foundation. Within COO, communities work to change policies and conditions in communities where people experience the lowest outcomes in health and well-being. COO funds place-based and systems & policy work focused on housing, health, economic opportunity, and community connections. The Food Innovation Network is an example of a COO program:
 - **The Food Innovation Network (FIN)** is a food business incubator that supports low-income immigrant and refugee communities and increases access to healthy and culturally relevant foods in South King County. In 2020, [FIN](#) launched the [Spice Bridge food hall](#), and incubator participants prepared [over 8,000 free meals](#) for seniors and families experiencing food insecurity due to COVID-19. FIN works in partnership with the *SeaTac-Tukwila Community Coalition (Global to Local, Congolese Integration Network, Partner in Employment, Somali Health Board, and Somali Youth & Family Club)*.
- **The Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative (YFHPI)** In collaboration with diverse community partners, YFHPI identifies needs for families with children and young adults in crisis and intervenes quickly to assist with maintaining their housing. Funding case managers who demographically reflect communities disproportionately impacted by homelessness allows clients to identify with their case manager and more effectively navigate cultural and language barriers. YFHPI operates as a network of more than 20 partners, including *Arc of King County, United Indians of All Tribes, Atlantic Street Center, Kent Youth & Family Services, Youth Care, Open Doors for Multicultural Families and Riverton Park United Methodist Church*. The *Best Starts* Blog [covered YFHPI](#) in 2020.
- **Evaluation** At five percent of the levy, evaluation and data help tell the story and monitor the impact and progress of *Best Starts*. Examples of *Best Starts* evaluation efforts include:
 - **Best Starts Health Survey and Data Dives** *Best Starts* has a unique, nationally award-winning¹¹ approach to assess the well-being of children, youth, young adults, families and communities. All data are made available through the *Best Starts* website, and communities are asked for feedback to ensure accurate interpretation. This project won the 2017 Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologist’s Robert Wood Johnson Foundation National Award for

¹¹ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2017). *National Award for Outstanding Epidemiology Practice in Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities*. [\[LINK\]](#) See also *Best Starts for Kids* Blog (2017). [\[LINK\]](#)

Outstanding Epidemiology Practice in Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities. The *Best Starts* Blog [covered Community Data Dives](#) in 2018.

- **Best Starts School Partnerships** strive to create school environments that are safe, supportive, respectful and engaging for students, staff and families. *Best Starts* partners with schools and community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide opportunities for students who face systemic barriers in pursuing their educational, career, and life goals. *Best Starts* engaged the Puget Sound Educational Service District’s (PSESD) Strategy, Evaluation and Learning team to better understand how CBOs and schools are working together. *Best Starts* Blog [examined this evaluative effort](#) in 2020.
- **Best Starts Dashboard** Transparency is a key *Best Starts* evaluation principle. Making the data available [online](#) is one way to increase transparency of the needs of children, youth, families and communities in King County, and share information about activities of *Best Starts* partners.

In addition to investing in programs, *Best Starts* embraces the responsibility to support a vibrant, sustainable system of community organizations. Historically, public and private funders have underinvested in small CBOs, especially racially- and culturally-based organizations. CBOs that serve and are led by their own communities are most likely to know their communities best and be able to design programs that have positive impacts with children, youth, young adults and families within their communities. Without adequate funds, small CBOs are unable to invest in the vital infrastructure and organizational functions that allow their organizations to be stable and healthy and provide ongoing quality services. Understanding that a strong community infrastructure is foundational to our long-lasting outcomes, *Best Starts* created a technical assistance and capacity building (TA/CB) program, partnering with community-based consultants to provide a diversity of supports that assist organizations in establishing and maintaining strong organizational infrastructures.

I.B | Building Upon Foundational Policies and Plans

Best Starts builds upon years of policy direction, community partnership, and evidence about what works to build a welcoming community where every person can thrive. A renewed and expanded *Best Starts* levy will build upon and align with strong policy foundations:

King County Strategic Plan

In 2010, the County enacted [Ordinance 16897](#), establishing the [King County Strategic Plan](#). In 2015, [Motion 14317](#) revised the County’s vision, mission, guiding principles and goals. Among the guiding principles is a commitment to “address the root causes of inequities,” and goals include “improv[ing] the health and well-being of all people in our community,” “implementing alternatives to divert people from the criminal justice system,” “increasing access to family wage job opportunities,” and ensuring that government is “accountable to the public.”

Health and Human Services Transformation Plan

Under direction of [Motion 13768](#), King County agencies created the Health and Human Services Transformation Plan, which the Council accepted in [Motion 13943](#). The Plan seeks to improve health and well-being and create conditions that allow residents of King County to achieve their full potential through a focus on prevention. The plan states King County's commitment to addressing root causes and investing upstream.

Youth Action Plan

[Ordinance 17738](#) called for the creation of the [King County Youth Action Plan](#). In 2015, the Council adopted the Youth Action Plan in [Motion 14378](#). The Youth Action Plan is a direct forebear of the *Best Starts* initiative and sets the policy frame for *Best Starts*. Among the shared policies binding the Youth Action Plan to *Best Starts* is an unflinching focus on equity. The Youth Action Plan directs that the well-being of children, youth, young adults and families should not be predicted by their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, geography, income or immigration status.

Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan

In accordance with the [2016 Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan](#), King County actively seeks to eliminate racially disparate health and human services outcomes in King County. *Best Starts* has been at the forefront of the County's equity work, and the proposal to renew and expand the levy would continue to focus on advancing equity.

2016 *Best Starts* Implementation Plan and Evaluation and Performance Measurement Plan

The first *Best Starts for Kids* [Implementation Plan](#)¹² and [Evaluation and Performance Measurement Plan](#)¹³ are substantial policy and research documents. Combined with annual reports for each year of the levy, they comprise a rigorous local examination of how policy, implementation, and performance measurement intersect to make change in King County.

I.C | Outcomes Orientation: The Central Role of Performance Measurement & Evaluation

Best Starts is dedicated to measuring how its programs perform, documenting outcomes and measuring changes in community-level indicators. *Best Starts* focuses on three results, and utilizes data to improve service delivery, ensure accountability, and support strategic learning and decision making. *Best Starts* collects both quantitative and qualitative data and values them equally, recognizing that impact can be measured in both numbers and stories. *Best Starts* routinely reports on the initiative's outcomes, programs, and expenditures, including the

¹² King County Council approved the original [Best Starts for Kids Implementation Plan](#) by Ordinance 18373 in 2016.

¹³ King County Council accepted the [Best Starts for Kids Evaluation and Performance Measurement Plan](#) by Motion 14979 in 2017.

production of detailed [Annual Reports that are available online](#).¹⁴ In addition to annual reports, *Best Starts* [data dashboards for each strategy area](#)¹⁵ are available online.

Best Starts' evaluation framework¹⁶ uses the **Results Based Accountability** (RBA) framework,¹⁷ to track whether people are experiencing better outcomes over time due to *Best Starts*-funded programs. RBA asks three questions: **How much did you do? How well did you do it? Is anyone better off?**

In addition, the *Best Starts* evaluation framework measures population level, long-term changes through headline and secondary indicators. *Best Starts'* performance accountability is conducted through performance metrics that correlate to the well-being of children, youth, young adults, families and communities directly served by *Best Starts*-funded programs.

How much did you do?
How well did you do it?
Is anyone better off?



Measuring results is an essential part of effective health and human services planning, and a new *Best Starts* levy must continue to maximize its effectiveness through performance measurement and evaluation.

¹⁴ Visit [the Best Starts for Kids website \[LINK\]](#) to see annual reports.

¹⁵ Best Starts for Kids Data and Indicator dashboards are available for each strategy area.

¹⁶ See the Best Starts for Kids Evaluation and Performance Measurement Plan [\[LINK\]](#), accepted by Motion 14979 in 2017.

¹⁷ Description of Results Based Accountability by Clear Impact. [\[LINK\]](#)

Best Starts for Kids

II | Looking Back: Selected Outcomes from *Best Starts*' First Five Years

Since its inception, *Best Starts* has funded almost six hundred programs and served more than half a million children, youth, young adults, and families throughout King County with community-driven programming. This section of the Blueprint Report describes key outcomes and highlights of *Best Starts*-funded programs and activities within each of the five investment areas.

II.A | Invest Early Highlights

Invest Early programs served approximately **377,000** children, youth, and families in *Best Starts*' first five years. Many programs intentionally expanded services to reach communities that have historically lacked access to health and early learning services. Program highlights include:

- ✓ *Best Starts* invests in Public Health – Seattle and King County's Parent Child Health programs that support new families. In these levy-funded programs, **an average of 97 percent of new parents started breastfeeding**, helping their babies off to a healthy start. This exceeds the goal of Healthy People 2020, a federal initiative that sets data-driven national objectives to improve health and well-being. Healthy People 2020 aimed for 82 percent of new birthing parents in the United States breastfeeding their infants.¹⁸
- ✓ In the Parent Child+ program, serving children ages two through four, a school readiness assessment showed a 57 percent improvement for families served by the program. *Best Starts* built a continuum of home-based services that includes evidence-based, evidence-informed and community-designed programs. Across all programs, home visitors provided over **162,000** visits to new families.
- ✓ 16,700 families with young children accessed healthy food and supplies such as diapers, car seats and clothes in 2018. **By 2019, over 30,500 children were served, an 83 percent increase between the two years.**
- ✓ In 2019, 13 community-based organizations served 5,643 children and their families through the Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program. ESIT supports families whose children have developmental delays, focusing on children up to age three. **Blended with federal and state funds, *Best Starts* investment in ESIT has increased the number of children served by 44 percent since 2016.**
- ✓ Invest Early strategies provided trainings on developmental screenings, equity and social-emotional learning to **17,000** health care providers, child care providers, community health workers, and other caregivers and providers supporting healthy outcomes for over **70,000** children, many in communities of color.

¹⁸ Office of Disease and Prevention and Health Promotion. "Healthy People 2020-2030." [Healthy People 2030](#).

"[Our] staff is participating in Reflective Supervision-structured support groups from trained facilitators over the past several months. Through this effort, staff have gained skills and tools to provide the best possible services to our families who face significant challenges and hardships... Reflective Supervision supports... direct-service staff to assess their thoughts, feelings, and values within a service encounter to better support the children and families we serve. This includes understanding implicit bias and how that influences service encounters and access to services." Quote from an Early Support for Infants and Toddlers Provider



II.B | Sustain the Gain Highlights

Best Starts served approximately **40,000** youth in the Sustain the Gain strategy area. These programs empowered youth; promoted social-emotional development, positive identity, health, academics and employability; and provided safe and healthy spaces for youth to connect with peers and supportive adults in and out of school.

- ✓ Over **7,700** youth participated in the Youth Development strategy area programs that built leadership skills, positive identity, and healthy relationships.
- ✓ Out of School Time strategy area programs served an average of **937** students *every day*, supporting academic and social emotional learning. **In 2019, 82 percent of youth in *Best Starts'* Out of School Time programs experienced social-emotional and academic improvements.**
- ✓ A competitive process in February 2017 resulted in funding for three new SBHCs: International Community Health Services in Bellevue, HealthPoint in Renton, and NeighborCare Health on Vashon Island. **In 2018, students made 5,732 visits to the three centers. The following year, the centers saw more than a 15 percent increase, with 6,749 visits.**
- ✓ TIRP strategy area programs enable schools and school partners to create safe, welcoming environments where students facing adversity or trauma connect with trusted adults. At the end of their first school year in 2019, almost **80 percent** of the

youth in these programs reported an improved school climate and culture, and that same number felt safer and more connected and valued. School attendance improved for **94 percent** of these students.

- ✓ Transitions to Adulthood employment programs increased enrollment by 71 percent with more than 500 youth participating in 2019 alone. Of the youth and young adults who completed these programs, almost **80 percent stayed in school, graduated, or enrolled in post-secondary education.**



II.C | Communities of Opportunities Highlights

From 2018 through June 2020, *Best Starts'* COO invested in community-led initiatives to change policies and conditions in communities through collaboration with over **150** organizations to create more than **241** new community partnerships and build the skills and capacity of approximately **2,500** people serving in leadership positions. Examples of COO community work include:

- ✓ Increased capacity for data-driven community solutions in the Snoqualmie Valley, where a coalition of human services providers created A Supportive Community for All (SCFA) to foster connections and strengthen the delivery of services. In 2019, SCFA completed a comprehensive, community needs assessment - a high quality, regional data resource with contributions from more than **530** residents and **20** service providers on the specific needs and assets of their community. SCFA, as well as other COO partners, noted their improved ability to be more responsive to COVID community needs as a result of relationships strengthened through their COO work.
- ✓ Advanced community-led policy and systems solutions to protect low-income families and BIPOC communities from evictions and displacement including Burien's adoption of a Just Cause Eviction Policy and staffing for a rental housing inspection program.

- ✓ Supported new, local food systems that provide jobs and increase access to culturally relevant, healthy food.
 - A new community run food stand in Rainier Beach served well over 500 residents, selling 2,500 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables.
 - In SeaTac/Tukwila, the FIN (Food Innovation Network) expanded access to local produce, launched 12 businesses and opened a new food hall that accommodates 20 food businesses.
 - Youth leaders of Food Empowerment Education & Sustainability Team (FEEST) conducted a pilot program at Evergreen High School, provided 900 students daily access to nutritious snacks and developed a set of policy recommendations for the school district to improve nutrition for students. Many of the policy recommendations were adopted by Highline School District.

II.D | Youth & Family Homelessness Prevention Highlights

The *Best Starts for Kids*-funded Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative (YFHPI) assisted young people and families with children at imminent risk of homelessness to remain housed. Its innovative approach included providing flexible funds and intensive case management, including assistance with securing long-term stable housing.

- ✓ Of the more than **9,200** youth and families served by the program, **90 percent did not enter the homeless system while enrolled in the program and 92 percent of those completing the program remained housed one year after leaving.**

II.E | Performance Measurement and Evaluation Highlights

Consistent with its overall approach to community involvement, *Best Starts* actively engaged communities in *Best Starts* data and evaluation work. Communities contributed to the effort to understand the state of well-being of the County's children, youth, young adults and families, to interpret and provide context for the data, and to define success for programs.

- ✓ *Best Starts* evaluators held nine community meetings, called data dives, with families and service providers. Members of specific communities provided thoughts, context and analysis regarding the data collected from their community. Participant communities included: Black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Chinese American, Latinx, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Trans/Queer/Two Spirit, Samoan, Somali American and Vietnamese American.
- ✓ To address the significant lack of data on young children in King County, *Best Starts* created the *Best Starts* for Kids Health Survey, implemented biennially beginning in

2017.¹⁹ The survey focuses on questions about the health, well-being, strengths, and needs of young children and their caregivers. This unique data set quantifies current needs and disparities as well as progress, and helps to guide *Best Starts* investments. The survey is available in six languages (Chinese, English, Russian, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese). Nearly **6,000 families** have participated.



II.F | Technical Assistance and Capacity Building: Highlights

In 2018, *Best Starts* created a technical assistance and capacity building (TA/CB) program, partnering with community-based consultants to provide support for a diversity of organizational functions that assist organizations to be stable and healthy and provide ongoing quality services. These functions included financial management, human resources, data system development, fundraising, board governance, and leadership.

Best Starts' technical assistance services supported CBOs in responding to levy requests for proposals (RFPs). Capacity building efforts centered on providing intensive coaching and training in organizational functions.

- ✓ Through 2019, *Best Starts* provided more than **2,540 hours** of technical assistance to **250 organizations**.
- ✓ **40 percent** of the organizations that received technical assistance had never applied for King County funding before – **62 percent** of the organizations that received technical assistance were awarded for at least one application.

¹⁹ [Best Starts for Kids Health Survey](#).

- ✓ The capacity building portion of the program started in late 2019. *Best Starts* supported **more than 70 CBOs** with intensive capacity building services in the first year.

Best Starts for Kids

III | How the Current Environment Informs Renewal and Expansion

In addition to looking back at what *Best Starts* has accomplished in its first five years, planning for potential renewal and expansion of *Best Starts* requires examining current conditions. The King County Council in 2020 directed the completion and transmittal of a *Best Starts for Kids Assessment Report*, which was subsequently accepted by motion. The assessment report identified five recommendations for a potentially renewed and expanded levy. *Best Starts* staff also engaged with community to learn about what is working and what could change. Responding to consistent feedback and accounting for the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, *Best Starts* staff also closely examined the child care crisis described below. This section of the blueprint report summarizes the recommendations of the *Best Starts for Kids Assessment Report*, discusses key feedback from community engagement, and summarizes themes from recent examinations of problems and solutions in the child care system.

III.A | Overview of the 2020 *Best Starts* Assessment Report Recommendations

In July 2020, King County Council passed [Motion 15651](#), requesting the Executive transmit a [Best Starts for Kids Assessment Report](#). In December 2020, the Council accepted the report by [Motion 15769](#). The *Best Starts for Kids Assessment Report* made five recommendations to inform a proposal for renewal of the *Best Starts* levy:

Keep Leading on Equity

The inequities identified by the County Strategic Plan, Health and Human Services Transformation Plan, Youth Action Plan, ESJ Strategic Plan and other analyses are largely attributable to generations of public policies and practices that allocate benefit and burden in ways that have favored some while disfavoring and oppressing others. Inequities that result from policy and practices can be undone by new policies and practices. *Best Starts* is at the forefront of designing and implementing policies and practices to reduce the role that a person's race or identity plays in whether they benefit from society and feel like they belong. Centering the voices of Black, African American, Indigenous, and other People of Color in investments and program decisions is the way for King County to build the new pro-equity public policies and practices that will undo inequity and promote comprehensive well-being for the entire community.

Maintain Long-Term Goals and Strategies while Refining Programs and Measures

Among *Best Starts'* most important and innovative work is its recognition that the health of the entire community is rooted in promoting protective factors for children from the very beginning of their lives. Therefore, maintaining this current emphasis on upstream transformation by preserving the current goals and strategies in the *Best Starts for Kids* Implementation Plan is recommended. Even while re-affirming the commitment to the goals and strategies embraced in the original *Best Starts* levy, needs evolve and there is

always room for program improvement. *Best Starts* will continue to use data and performance measures as powerful tools for directing change and refining programs.

Build Stronger Systems

The forces that diminish and threaten children’s and the community’s ability to be healthy, happy, safe and thriving operate systemically. Racism, patriarchy, income inequality, xenophobia, and poverty are mutually reinforcing and interdependent. All profoundly impact health, well-being and futures. *Best Starts* recognizes that no single program or provider – no matter how well designed, implemented and measured – can by itself dismantle a harmful system, particularly one as entrenched as racism. Undoing system problems will require systemic solutions. To overcome the entanglements of systemic racism, patriarchy, income inequality, and poverty, *Best Starts* must keep knitting individual programs into networks, reinforcing individual clients’ sense of belonging in their broader communities, and strengthening its systems of promotive and protective interventions.

Expand the Role of Youth in the Children and Youth Advisory Board

In looking at its commitment to equity and social justice and to giving voice to those most impacted by decisions, the Assessment Report recommended stronger representation and roles for youth and young adults going forward, consistent with input from the current Children and Youth Advisory Board (CYAB).

Strengthen Care for Children and Youth, including Increased Child Care Investments

2020 revealed the importance of child care and out-of-school care as critical social infrastructures for all of society. As detailed later in this report, a child care affordability and availability crisis existed before COVID-19, and the pandemic dramatically worsened the problem. Investing in affordable, culturally appropriate child care is essential for giving children and families the best start possible.

III.B | What the Community Had to Say

Communities informed planning for the proposal to renew and expand *Best Starts*. In July 2020, *Best Starts* sought community input via a survey on what the public felt had gone well and what modifications they wished to see if the levy were renewed. *Best Starts* received over 180 responses to the survey. Building off this feedback, *Best Starts* then partnered with ten regionally based community organizations/ coalitions and five community stakeholder groups from August through November 2020 to host fifteen listening sessions. Over 600

600

constituents reached

10

regionally based community organizations or coalitions

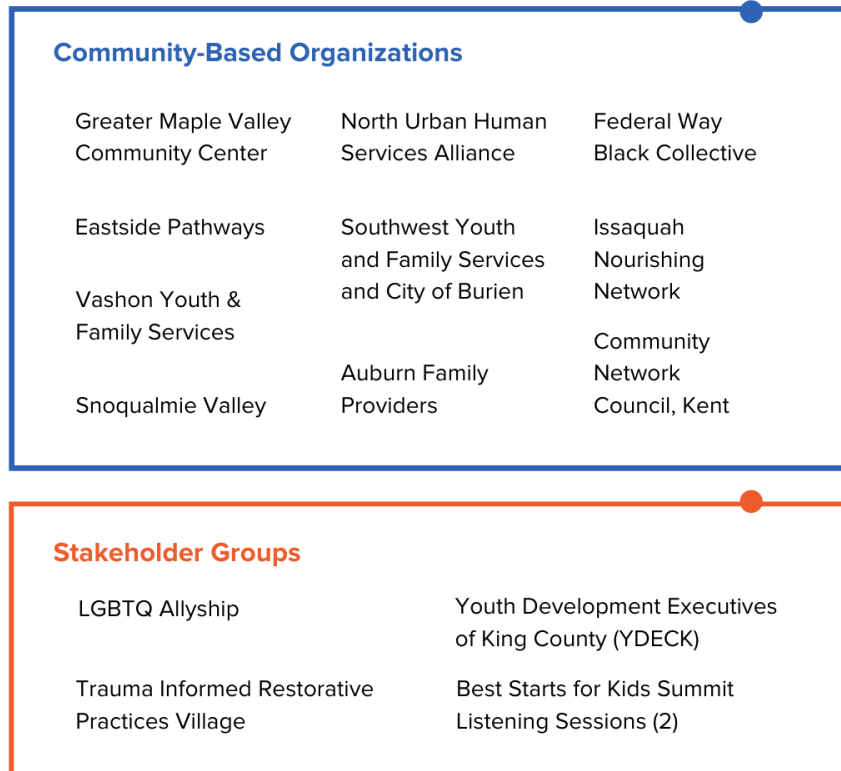
5

community stakeholder groups

constituents attended the listening sessions and provided feedback.

The boxes in Figure 3 below highlight the host organizations and communities with which *Best Starts* staff worked to receive feedback and community direction about a potentially renewed levy. Listening sessions that under normal circumstances would have taken place in communities were modified to happen online because of limitations on in-person gatherings for most of 2020.

Figure 3: 2020 Community Feedback Participants



The community survey findings and input gathered from the listening sessions provided rich feedback to integrate into future planning. The community’s feedback consistently expressed the desire to continue and deepen current *Best Starts* programs and to amplify *Best Starts*’ commitment to racial equity. Community partnership and feedback shaped planning for a potential new levy and will remain a critical component of *Best Starts* if renewed and expanded. Snapshots of themes from community engagement sessions follow:

Key Themes from *Best Starts'* 2020 Community Partnership and Engagement:

What *Best Starts* priorities are most important to continue?

- ✓ **Technical Assistance and Capacity Building has been important for CBOs.** *Best Starts'* approach to equity and effective contracting often meant working with community partners that had not engaged previously with King County. The ability to support partners in developing their organizations and to invest in their infrastructure has helped provider organizations deliver better services and meet County contracting requirements.
- ✓ **Flexibility to adjust funding to meet unmet needs, especially during COVID-19 has been critical.** Contracts that focus on *what* changes and outcomes to achieve rather than on overly specific requirements on *how* to provide services equip contracted partners with the right amount of flexibility to serve clients. The ability to tailor services became even more important in 2020 as needs in communities changed quickly.
- ✓ **Clear focus on racial equity should continue and deepen.** Undoing a problem as engrained and pernicious as racism will require constant attention. Long-standing government practices have for centuries systematized racism. Government policies that will contribute to undoing racism must receive tireless support to succeed.
- ✓ **Multi-year funding structure is appreciated.** It is difficult for a community-based provider to hire and sustain staff and form effective client and community relationships when funding patterns create too much uncertainty. Although communities want opportunities for new organizations to apply for *Best Starts* funding, funding commitments of greater than one year are stabilizing and better support effective services.

Key Themes from *Best Starts'* 2020 Community Partnership and Engagement:

How can *Best Starts* for Kids improve?

- ✓ **Streamline data collection and reporting processes.** Reporting, especially for smaller organizations, should not be so detailed or cumbersome that it distracts from service delivery.
- ✓ **Continue to expand funding to reach all areas of King County, including rural and unincorporated.** Scarcity of human services funding means that programs are rarely well-funded enough to meet the level of need in the community. Expanding funding is important to allow service areas to grow and create service access, even in more remote and less traditionally well served parts of the County.
- ✓ **Provide continuity and flexible funding.** In addition to scarcity, community partners routinely experience funding instability and funding rigidity that complicate service delivery and effectiveness. Even though *Best Starts'* relatively longer and more flexible funding approaches were identified as a strength, community members identified the importance of doing more to promote continuity and flexibility.

- ✓ **Continue to develop intentional and effective partnerships with community, incorporate parents and young people in decision-making.** The field of human services has a long history of *doing to* communities and clients instead of *working in partnership* with communities and clients. *Best Starts* should continue and deepen efforts to support communities’ and clients’ agency in their own development, including a specific focus on engaging children, youth and young adults in decision making.

III.C | Recognizing the Child Care Crisis

Child care is essential social infrastructure. Affordable, accessible child care is necessary to improve racial and gender equity in King County and will be critical in the region’s economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic.^{20, 21}

Child care’s influence at both individual and social scales is potent. Child care prepares infants and toddlers to succeed in school and reduces education inequities.²² Child care promotes workplace gender equity as women bear caregiving responsibilities disproportionately. Child care is also necessary to other critical societal functions: during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, governments stepped in to support emergency child care so that nurses, first responders, teachers, homeless service providers and many other essential workers can in-turn show up to make their critical contributions.²³

Insufficient high-quality child care was already a crisis in Washington and King County before the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey of Washington State parents reports that 49 percent of respondents find it difficult or very difficult to receive, afford, or keep child care.²⁴ Governments and community-based organizations have recently and regularly examined the child care crisis and reached consistent conclusions about child care’s necessity and its challenges of

These recent reports examine the local child care crisis and its equity and economic impacts. Each proposes solutions.

All three reports informed the proposal to renew and expand *Best Starts*.

[Equitable and Accessible Child Care in King County: Recommendations from the Children and Families Strategy Task Force](#) (King County Children and Families Strategy Task Force, 2020)

[The Mounting Costs of Child Care: Impacts of Child Care Affordability and Access to Washington’s Employers and Economy](#) (Washington Department of Commerce, 2019)

[Supporting King County’s Women, Families & Employers: Improving Child Care Access and Affordability Throughout King County](#) (King County Women’s Advisory Board, 2018)

²⁰ Hamm, K., Baider, A., White, C., Gallagher Robbins, K., Sarri, C., Stockhausen, M., and Perez, N. (2020). “America, It’s Time to Talk about Child Care” [\[LINK\]](#).

²¹ Center for American Progress (2020). “[How Child Care Disruptions Hurt Parents of Color Most.](#)” ReadyNation (2019). “[Want to Grow the Economy? Fix the Child Care Crisis](#)” [\[LINK\]](#).

²² Johnson, R. and Kirabo, J. (2018). Reducing Inequality Through Dynamic Complementarity: Evidence from Head Start and Public School Spending. *The National Bureau of Economic Research*. [\[LINK\]](#)

²³ Equitable and Accessible Child Care in King County: Recommendations from the Children and Families Strategy Task Force, as requested by Motion 15521 [\[LINK\]](#).

²⁴ Washington State Department of Commerce (2019). *The Mounting Costs of Child Care*. [\[LINK\]](#)

access, affordability, quality and equity.

King County government has analyzed the child care crisis three times since 2018. In 2018, the King County Council commissioned a study of local child care access and affordability with a research team from the University of Washington’s Evans School of Public Policy. That same year, King County’s Women’s Advisory Board issued recommendations on child care. Under the direction of Council [Motion 15521](#), King County’s Children and Families Strategy Task Force transmitted in October 2020 a set of recommendations on child care.

Across local and national analyses of the child care crisis, clear themes emerge:

- **Child care is a potent contributor to early childhood development.** Children whose families cannot access care lose out on the benefits of high-quality early learning, which is critical since a child’s brain develops more from birth to five than during the remainder of school years.²⁵
- **Child care is in high demand, but supply is scarce.** Since 2014, Washington State has gained 3,000 child care slots,²⁶ but the State’s population of children under age 6 grew by nearly 30,000.²⁷ Locally, approximately 257,000 children under age 10 live in King County, and 62 percent of households with children under age six have all parents working outside the home.²⁸ According to the *Best Starts for Kids Health Survey* conducted in 2019, in King County, 34.2 percent of children lived in families that found it difficult to afford child care since the child was born.²⁹
- **Child care is expensive.** The cost of high-quality infant care at a licensed center has surpassed that of tuition at Washington’s public universities, and a typical single parent in Washington spends over half of their income on child care.³⁰ Child care costs can consume an even bigger portion of family budgets in the Puget Sound region, where the cost of living is significantly higher than the rest of the state.³¹

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Washington State Department of Commerce Child Care Collaborative Task Force (2019). *Recommendations Report to the Legislature under SHB 2367, Laws of 2018*. [\[LINK\]](#)

²⁷ Washington State Office of Financial Management (2019). *Estimates of April 1 Population by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, State Data Tables 2010-2018*. [\[LINK\]](#)

²⁸ U.S. Census Bureau (2018). *American Community Survey*. [\[LINK\]](#)

²⁹ King County Best Starts for Kids Health Survey (2019). [\[LINK\]](#)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ A family of four must earn less than \$49,200 to qualify for Working Connections, the state’s child care subsidy program, regardless of where they live in the state. But a family of four making \$72,000 in King and Snohomish Counties is considered low-income by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The 2019 average cost of center-based tuition for an infant was \$23,013 in Seattle and \$16,604 elsewhere in the tri-county region (18.9 and 15.9 percent, respectively, of median household income for married parents with children, or 61.8 and 45.2 percent, respectively, for single parents with children). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers seven percent of family income the threshold for affordable child care. Sources:

- **Child care inaccessibility hurts family budgets and the regional economy.** A 2019 study led by the Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis found that employee child care issues resulted in an estimated annual loss statewide of \$6.5 billion in direct and opportunity costs.³² Forty-nine percent of Washington parents found it difficult or very difficult to find, afford, or keep child care.³³ These challenges hinder job stability and prevent parents from seeking additional education or training associated with higher lifetime earnings and overall family success.³⁴
- **The essential labor of child care workers does not provide livable wages.** Nearly 15 percent of child care providers live below the poverty line, and many cannot afford care for their own children.³⁵ Only 15 percent of child care providers receive health insurance, and fewer than 10 percent are covered by a pension plan at their job.³⁶ Many child care providers continue to live in poverty,³⁷ and efforts to increase their wages conflict with cost implications for families who already struggle to afford care.³⁸

Pandemic Impacts on Child Care

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened the child care crisis, affecting children, their families, child care workers, and the region’s employers and economy. Awareness of child care’s critical social role has been growing for years, but the COVID-19 pandemic laid it bare. Essential workers and critical services required access to emergency child care supports so that first responders, medical providers, the food services industry, and others in critical roles could keep serving society while the rest of society entered shutdowns to slow the spread of the disease.

Just as child care is essential in responding to the pandemic, it will be essential in recovering from the pandemic, especially to avoid worsening social inequities that could characterize King County’s recovery absent deliberate planning. Child care is likely only to grow in importance as new patterns and norms of work and school form in the coming years. *Best Starts for Kids* is uniquely situated to galvanize a regional understanding of the child care crisis as well as the regional solutions that solving the crisis will require.

Child Care Aware of America (2019). *The US and the High Price of Child Care* [\[LINK\]](#). U.S Department of Health and Human Services (2016). *Child Care and Development Fund Program* [\[LINK\]](#). Child Care Resources [\[LINK\]](#).

³² Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis, Eastern Washington University (2019). *Washington State Childcare Study: Analyzing the costs facing businesses due to workforce turnover and missed time associated with inadequate childcare options.* [\[LINK\]](#)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Washington State Department of Commerce (2019). *The Mounting Costs of Child Care.* [\[LINK\]](#)

³⁵ Economic Policy Institute (2015). *Child care workers aren’t paid enough to make ends meet.* [\[LINK\]](#)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Child Care Aware of Washington. [\[LINK\]](#)

³⁸ Urban Institute (2001). *Models for Increasing Child Care Worker Compensation.* [\[LINK\]](#)

Best Starts for Kids

IV | Looking Forward: Maintaining Intergenerational Investments and Stepping Up to the Child Care Crisis

The first section of this report provided an overview of *Best Starts for Kids* as a levy, initiative, and theoretical framework. The report's next two sections looked back at what *Best Starts* has accomplished and analyzed current conditions as the original *Best Starts* approaches its expiration. In this section, the *Blueprint Report* describes the proposal to renew and expand *Best Starts for Kids*, to refine its resident oversight and governance, and to plan for implementation of a potentially renewed levy.

IV.A | The Proposal for a Renewed and Expanded *Best Starts for Kids* Levy

The *Best Starts for Kids* levy expires at the end of 2021. This report accompanies a proposed ballot measure ordinance to renew and expand the levy for six years. If King County enacts the proposed ballot measure ordinance, King County voters will consider a *Best Starts for Kids* levy in the August 2021 election.

The proposed ballot measure ordinance to which this blueprint is attached envisions a new *Best Starts* levy that maintains and builds upon the first *Best Starts'* intergenerational investments while adding new strategies to address the critical child care needs of our region. The proposed ballot measure ordinance envisions substantial new investments in a new child care subsidy program to make child care more affordable for more than 3,000 low-income families, with a specific focus on communities that can least afford child care because of long-standing inequities or emergent challenges like unemployment or homelessness. The proposal also establishes a new child care Workforce Demonstration Project to bolster the ability of child care workers to earn a livable wage in King County as they care for the region's children at a critical time in children's lives.

If approved, King County will implement a new *Best Starts for Kids* levy for 2022-2027 at a first-year rate of \$0.19 per \$1,000 of a property's assessed valuation ("per \$1K AV"), or about \$114 per year for a median-priced King County home.³⁹ As with the current levy, the new levy's annual levy growth will be limited to three percent. In a change from the first *Best Starts* levy made possible by a 2017 change in State law, the levy will be exemptible under the property tax exemption program for eligible low-income seniors and persons with disabilities.⁴⁰

For comparison, the [King County Office of Economic and Financial Analysis](#) (OEFA) projects the existing levy to collect \$75.5 million in 2021, the levy's final year. Under current OEFA projections, the proposed renewal and expansion will yield approximately nearly \$122 million in

³⁹ King County Assessor. [Assessed Value and Taxes by City, Typical Residence in 2019 and 2020](#).

⁴⁰ [Guide to Property Tax Exemptions for Seniors, Persons with Disabilities, and Disabled Veterans](#). King County Department of Assessments.

2022 revenue. For another comparison, if the levy were renewed at the current *Best Starts* levy's first year rate of \$0.14 per \$1K AV, the projected 2022 revenue would be about \$90 million. The original levy, which had a first-year rate of \$0.14, is projected to collect \$75.5 million in 2021 but a new levy with a \$0.14 rate would collect a projected \$90 million in 2022. The reason for the difference is the original levy's three percent annual growth limit.

As another point of reference, the existing *Best Starts* is budgeted in 2021 to expend \$91.8 million to deliver Implementation Plan-required services. Because *Best Starts* began in 2016 as a first-time levy and focused in its initial years on program design, procurement and start-up while expending less than its annual collections, the original levy's final-year expenditures exceed its final-year collections while remaining consistent with the implementation plan and King County's biennial budget. Detailed financial planning more specific than the percentages and amounts required in the proposed ballot measure ordinance would be reserved for the required Implementation Plan that the County Executive will transmit in July 2021 for King County Council and Regional Policy Committee consideration. This approach allows additional economic forecasting to refine projections of levy proceeds before staff conduct detailed planning of a proposed budget.

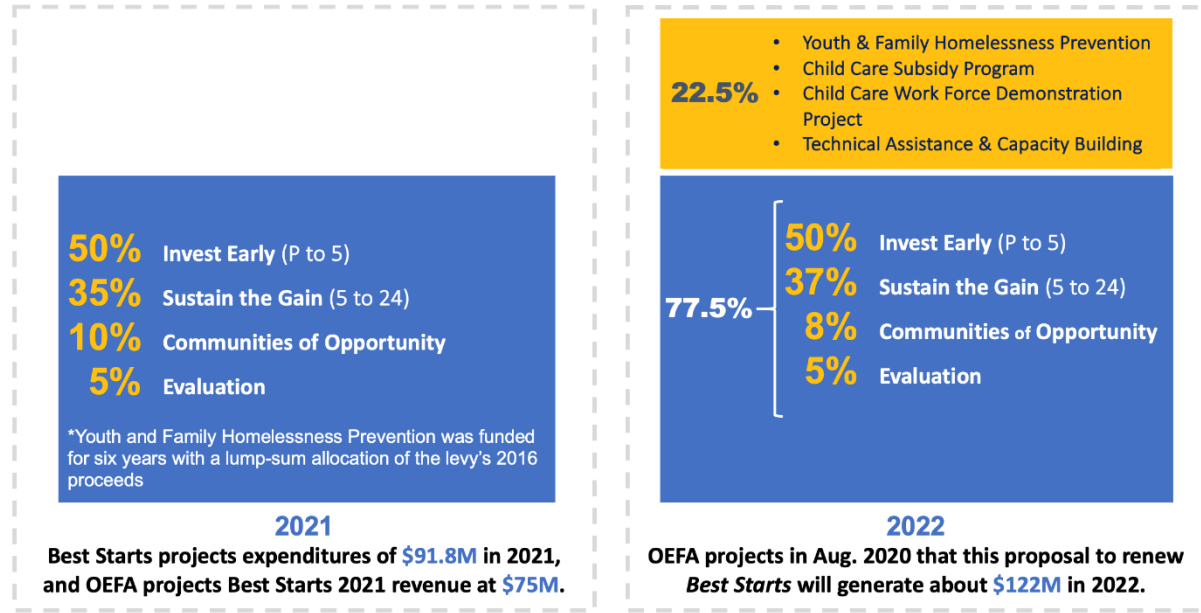
For planning purposes, modeling that informed this proposal would allow a renewed and expanded *Best Starts* to maintain 2021 annual program expenses of \$91.8 million per year and add new investments in child care, out of school time, school based health centers, and safe and healthy transitions to adulthood, as described in this report. While this proposal allows *Best Starts* to persist in its existing strategies and programs while expanding to meet new needs, all strategies and programs in a new levy will be procured or re-procured at the contract level in accordance with the Implementation Plan that will be provided to the Council for consideration in summer 2021.

Structure of Eligible Expenditures in the Proposal

Section 4 of the proposed ballot measure ordinance describes the proposed eligible expenditures of a potentially renewed levy's proceeds. The proposal's structure mirrors the format of the 2015 ballot measure by setting categories of expenditure, called investment areas in Sections 1 and 2 of this report, and then allocating percentages of levy revenue to each category. The ballot measure does not include detailed financial planning within each investment area, instead requiring the Executive to later transmit a detailed Implementation Plan that proposes specific allocations of funds and spending plans within the investment areas.

Figure 4: Investment Area Allocation Comparison

Comparing Investment Area Allocations in the Current Best Starts vs. Proposed Allocations in Renewed and Expanded Best Starts



As shown in Figure 4 above, in 2022, a potential new levy’s first year, the proposed ballot measure ordinance first sets aside 22.5 percent of first-year proceeds (about \$27 million on current OEFA projections) to fund the proposed new child care subsidy program and a child care workforce demonstration project (detailed below); continuation of the existing Youth and Family Homelessness Prevention Initiative (YFHPI); and ongoing Technical Assistance and Capacity Building (TA/CB). Current estimates are that YFHPI will cost an average of approximately \$3.7 million per year to continue and that provision of Technical Assistance and Capacity Building should average \$1 million per year, with more potentially allocated in the levy’s earlier years and less in later years.

After setting a required percentage for these four purposes in year one, the ballot measure ordinance is silent on the required percentage of levy proceeds for these purposes in subsequent years, with the ballot measure requiring that the six-year sum total allocation of levy proceeds for the four programs must equal at least \$235 million. The ballot measure leaves specific annual financial planning for the Implementation Plan that would be transmitted to the Council for consideration in summer 2021. If Council-approved annual costs for the YFHPI and TA/CB adhere to Best Starts staff modeling of \$4.7 million per year for those two programs, the ballot measure’s requirement for a total \$235 million total six-year expenditure would leave approximately \$206 million total to fund the child care subsidy program and child care workforce demonstration project for six years, at a six-year annual average of just more than \$34 million per year.

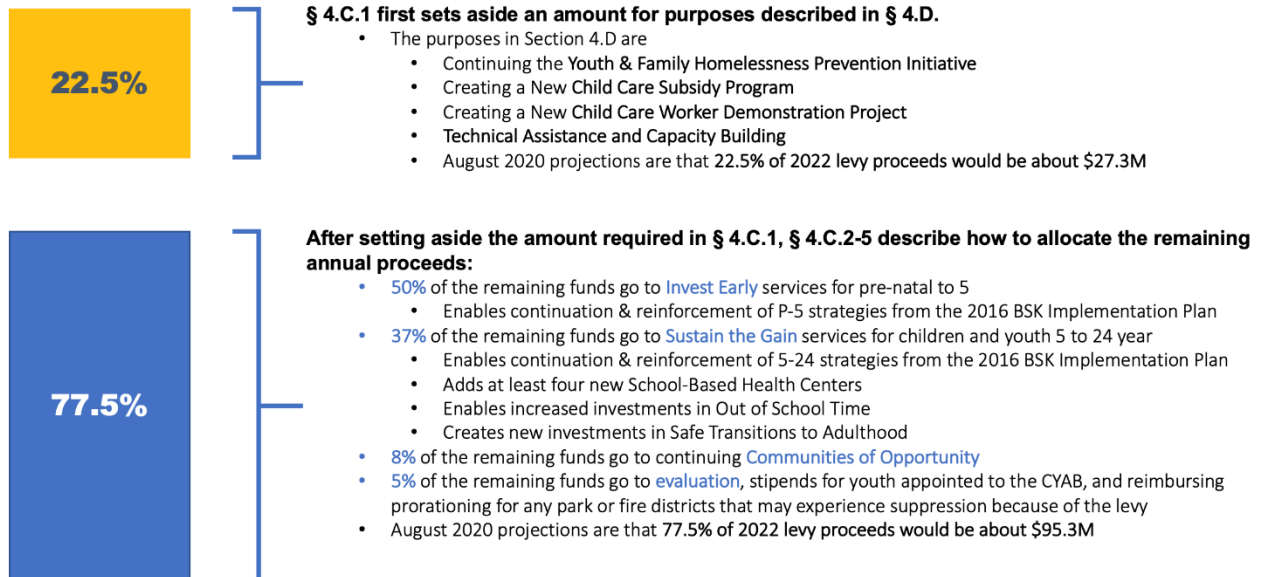
After annually setting aside proceeds for child care, homelessness prevention, and technical assistance and capacity building, the proposed ballot measure ordinance then allocates remaining levy proceeds between the Invest Early, Sustain the Gain, Communities of Opportunity, and Evaluation investment areas that the proposal maintains from the first *Best Starts*.

- Consistent with the existing levy, 50 percent of remaining revenues are invested in existing Invest Early (pre-natal to five-year-old) strategies.
- Investments in the Sustain the Gain area (five to 24-year-old strategies) are increased from 35 percent in the current *Best Starts* to 37 percent in the proposed renewal. These funds would be able to maintain current programming and increase funding for School-Based Health Centers, Transitions to Adulthood, and Out of School Time.
- Finally, eight percent of remaining funds are set aside to continue Communities of Opportunity at the existing funding level, and five percent is preserved for Evaluation, CYAB stipends, and reimbursing prorationing for any affected tax districts.

These allocations from Section 4 of the proposed ballot measure ordinance are visualized in Figure 5 below:

Figure 5: Proposed Allocations from Section 4 of Proposed Ballot Measure

In 2022, The First Year for a New *Best Starts for Kids* Levy:



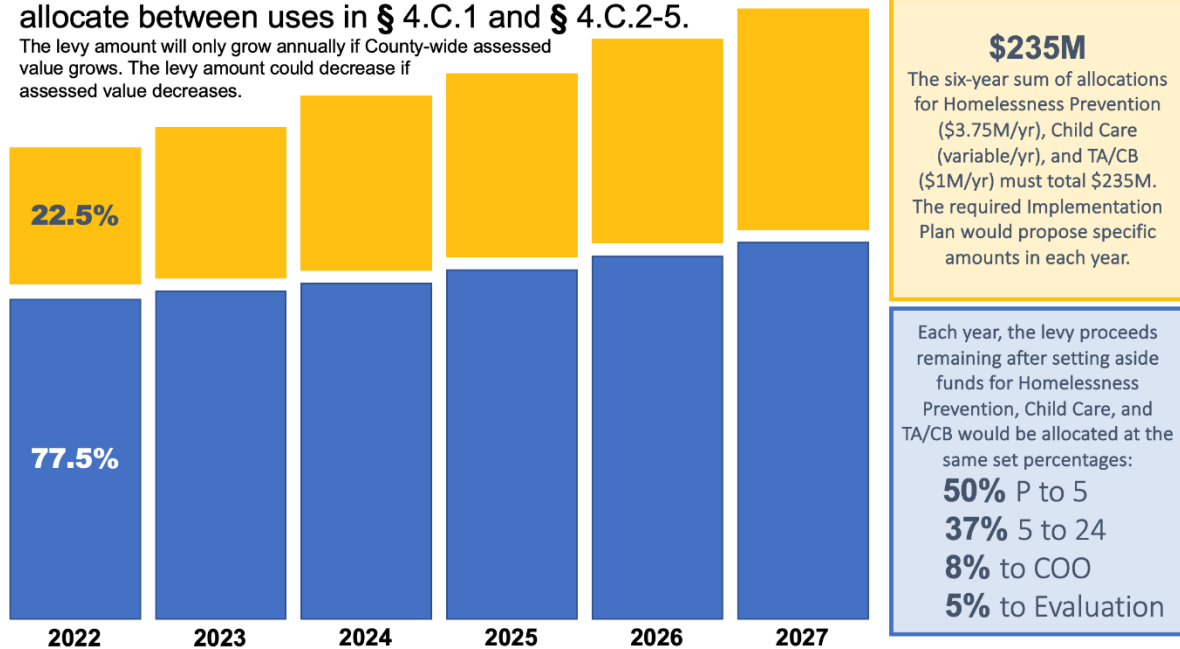
Per the proposed ballot measure ordinance, regardless of specific annual allocations, the total six-year sum of levy proceeds allocated for YFHPI, Child Care programs and TA/CB must total at

least \$235 million. The directed 2022 percentage and six-year allocation sum requirements combine to have the effect that the two child care programs would grow annually as a percentage of each year’s total levy proceeds, as shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: 2022-2027 Annual Allocations

After 2022, the Implementation Plan will annually allocate between uses in § 4.C.1 and § 4.C.2-5.

The levy amount will only grow annually if County-wide assessed value grows. The levy amount could decrease if assessed value decreases.



While this proposal would maintain the current *Best Starts*’ strategies, it also provides for important new investments in Sustain the Gain investment area programs for youth and young adults and in two new strategies to make child care more accessible and affordable while better supporting the child care work force. The following describes how this proposal envisions deepening investments for schoolchildren and making bold new investments in child care for infants and toddlers.

Deepening Investments for Youth & Young Adults

Renewal and expansion of *Best Starts* provides an opportunity to deepen investments in promotion and prevention efforts that help launch youth and young adults into adulthood. In addition to programs required by the proposed ballot measure ordinance, the renewed and expanded levy will deepen investments in out of school time programs for school-age children, providing for up to four new school-based health centers, and increasing supports for transitions to adulthood for youth to support the continuum of care for youth and young adults.

The existing *Best Starts* Out of School Time program provides out-of-school learning and enrichment opportunities, particularly in underserved geographies.⁴¹ After school programs foster social/emotional well-being and safety for kids and help them learn and grow through school support and extra-curricular activities. However, the need continues to grow and exceeds capacity for children between the ages five and 12. Across Washington State, five children are waiting to get into afterschool programs for every child participating.⁴²

The School Based Health Care Center (SBHC) strategy builds on a 30-year PHSKC program⁴³ that provides comprehensive medical, mental health, and dental services in school settings to children and adolescents who would otherwise go without care. SBHCs are proven to increase students' educational and health outcomes, including school performance, grade promotion, and high school completion. They also decrease health risks such as teenage pregnancy, poor diet, inadequate physical activity, physical and emotional abuse, and substance abuse.⁴⁴ The need for SBHCs is great, as their work is important to our youth's health and well-being. SBHCs also offer an important alternative as many communities scrutinize the role of law enforcement officers in schools. When schools choose to reduce or eliminate the presence of law enforcement in learning environments, SBHC offer a pro-health approach to supporting youth in difficult and challenging situations.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and connected recovery, children need mentoring and guidance for social/emotional well-being and support navigating education and employment opportunities on their path to adulthood. This proposal would expand funding for BSK's transitions to adulthood strategy to launch kids into a thriving adulthood. This strategy aims to cement a best start and provide young adults with a strong foundation for the rest of their lives. Transitions to adulthood invests in programs for age-appropriate social/emotional support; high school completion; and post-secondary education, training, and employment.

Investing in Essential Child Care Infrastructure

An earlier section of this report documented the crisis of child care affordability and availability crisis. While King County cannot build and maintain a healthy and equitable child care sector alone, the County can lead on this critical issue and complement existing or other potential new efforts.

Policies and programs to strengthen child care fall into three major efforts: Increasing child care access and affordability for children and families, supporting the child care work force, and improving the child care system. Racial, ethnic and gender equity are critical elements of all three efforts. The first *Best Starts* focused its child care efforts on improving the child care system. This proposal dedicates new resources from an expanded levy to make major new

⁴¹ Afterschool Alliance. "An Ideal Opportunity: The Role of Afterschool in Social and Emotional Learning." Issue Brief No. 71, May 2018. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴² Afterschool Alliance (2020). Washington After 3PM. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴³ King County Public Health School-based Health Centers. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴⁴ Ibid.

investments –totaling more than \$200M over six years—to make child care more affordable and make a career providing child care more equitable and sustainable.

A New Child Care Subsidy Program

This proposal includes a new King County Child Care Subsidy program to make child care more affordable for those who can least afford it. If approved by King County voters, this program will help more than 3,000 King County families per year afford child care costs.

This program would implement Recommendation 11 of the King County Children and Families Strategy Task Force:⁴⁵ *Reinstate a regional [child care subsidy program] to address unmet need,⁴⁶ re-envisioning equitable access by focusing supports on lower-income families in King County who are not eligible for or adequately served by other subsidy programs.* The program would prioritize families facing increased barriers to accessing child care, such as:

- Those who are in training/re-training programs or are college students (without limitations on program type);
- Those who are unemployed and seeking employment;
- Families who are undocumented;
- Families who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness; and,
- Families who are facing other barriers to care and unable to access other subsidy programs.

Because of the effects of systemic racism, county residents meeting the criteria above are disproportionately persons of color.

Workforce Demonstration Project

This proposed pilot is grounded in the pro-equity belief that people who care for the kids in King County should be able to afford to live in King County. Those caring for children are professionals who prepare kids for kindergarten, support the social and emotional well-being of children, and are vital to maintaining King County’s health and economic infrastructure throughout the pandemic. Unfortunately, these workers, traditionally women and often women of color, make much less than public school teachers, often just more than minimum wage, with limited if any benefits.⁴⁷

The quality of child care in King County depends on this workforce. And like all workforce investment strategies, the region must invest in attracting and retaining quality child care workers. The child care workforce demonstration project from this proposal will test the hypothesis that supplementing salary and benefits for 1,400 child care workers across the County, focusing on child care providers that serve low-income communities and communities of

⁴⁵ Equitable and Accessible Child Care in King County: Recommendations from the Children and Families Strategy Task Force, as requested by Motion 15521. [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴⁶ King County previously established a Comprehensive Child Care Assistance Program through Motion 07204, which included a subsidy for families that reflected regional costs of living (1988).

⁴⁷ Child Care Aware of Washington. [\[LINK\]](#)

color, will improve the quality of child care and improve the ability of child care providers to live in the communities they serve. The demonstration project will be evaluated each year to determine how these wage and benefit changes affect recruitment and retention. In 2025, the demonstration project will report on outcomes and recommend any changes to improve the program for the second half of the levy period.

IV.B | Aligning with Foundational Plans, Policies and Analyses

Best Starts builds upon years of policy direction, community partnership, and evidence about what works to build a welcoming community where every person can thrive. Section 1 of this report detailed how the initial *Best Starts for Kids* levy implements direction from the King County Strategic Plan,⁴⁸ the Health & Human Services Transformation Plan,⁴⁹ the Youth Action Plan,⁵⁰ and the King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan.⁵¹ In addition, the 2016-2021 levy implemented the direction of the 2016 *Best Starts* Implementation Plan⁵² and Performance Measurement and Evaluation Plan.⁵³

Looking forward, planning and implementation of a renewed and expanded Best Starts would continue alignment with the County's other local human services initiatives:

County Human Services Investment Initiatives

VSHSL,⁵⁴ MIDD,⁵⁵ and *Best Starts* support service networks for the region's human services, physical and behavioral health, and housing needs, each with a distinct focus. Combined, they support programs, services, and regional innovations that cross the lifespan and address service gaps. The initiatives simultaneously impact King County residents' access to 14 key community factors that every person needs to thrive, laid out in greater detail in the [King County Determinants of Equity Report](#).⁵⁶ While each specializes in particular populations or service types, some areas intersect and require planned cooperation. For example, both MIDD and *Best*

⁴⁸ The King County Council approved the King County Strategic Plan [\[LINK\]](#) by Ordinance 16897 in 2010, and adopted the corresponding vision, mission, guiding principles, goals, and priorities by Motion 14317 in 2015.

⁴⁹ Motion 13768 requested the development of the Health and Human Services Transformation Plan [\[LINK\]](#). The King County Council accepted the plan by Motion 13943 in 2013.

⁵⁰ Ordinance 17738 directed the development of the Youth Action Plan. The King County Council adopted the plan by Motion 14378 in 2015 [\[LINK\]](#).

⁵¹ The King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan 2016-2022 [\[LINK\]](#) reflects Ordinance 16948, which established foundational equity and social justice policy for King County in 2010.

⁵² The King County Council approved the original Best Starts for Kids Implementation Plan [\[LINK\]](#) by Ordinance 18373 in 2016.

⁵³ The King County Council accepted the Best Starts for Kids Evaluation and Performance Measurement Plan [\[LINK\]](#) by Motion 14979 in 2017.

⁵⁴ The VSHSL Implementation Plan [\[LINK\]](#) covers the period 2019-2023 and was approved by the King County Council via Ordinance 18768 [\[LINK\]](#) in 2018, while the VSHSL Transition Plan [\[LINK\]](#), adopted by Ordinance 18638 in December 2017, governed service delivery during 2018 including continuation of many services from the prior Veterans and Human Services Levy.

⁵⁵ The MIDD 2 Implementation Plan [\[LINK\]](#), approved by the King County Council via Motion 15093 in 2018, covers the period 2017-2025.

⁵⁶ The Determinants of Equity: Identifying Indicators to Establish a Baseline of Equity in King County [\[LINK\]](#). (2015)

Starts provide programming and policy direction to support children and youth’s behavioral health. In another example, both *Best Starts* and the VSHSL offer programming to serve caregivers engaging in kinship care.

Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA)

The Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA)⁵⁷ directs transit-related revenue to educational services to improve outcomes in early learning, K-12, and post-secondary education. King County’s PSTAA’s investments focus on three main strategies: increasing child care facilities, particularly in areas experiencing child care deserts; developing and implementing King County Promise, a program focused on high school completion and post-secondary education opportunities; and supporting Love and Liberation, an innovative racial justice partnership focused on youth self-liberation and system change to help close educational achievement gaps. From its inception, King County’s PSTAA planning has closely aligned with *Best Starts*. To ensure continued alignment, promote complementary administration, and to avoid overlap, PSTAA and a new *Best Starts* levy would benefit from King County’s Department of Community and Human Services’ close administrative partnership with Public Health – Seattle and King County.

The Children and Families Strategy Task Force

The 2020 [recommendations of the Children and Families Strategy Task Force](#),⁵⁸ established in accordance with [Motion 15521](#), document extensively the existing local child care ecosystem as well as opportunities to strengthen it. A renewed and expanded levy would align child care efforts closely with these recommendations.

IV.C | Levy Governance: The Children and Youth Advisory Board and the Communities of Opportunity Governance Group

Resident oversight of special purpose funds is a strong and important tradition and community norm in King County. *Best Starts* remains at the forefront of keeping human services programming connected to the community, and advisory boards are essential parts of that work.

The proposed ballot measure to which this report is attached would require by the end of 2021 a report called the *Best Starts* Governance Update Report. The report would contain Executive recommendations to the King County Council on any technical or substantial changes that can improve the effectiveness, equity, and transparency of *Best Starts* and its programming. At this time, the Executive expects the report to address three main issues:

1. The ongoing advisory role of the CYAB,
2. A meaningful and resourced role for youth in the CYAB, and
3. Any recommended changes to the COO Governance Group.

⁵⁷ PSTAA Implementation Plan [\[LINK\]](#), approved by Motion 15673 in 2020.

⁵⁸ Equitable and Accessible Child Care in King County: Recommendations from the Children and Families Strategy Task Force [\[LINK\]](#), as requested by Motion 15521.

At a minimum, the report will detail technical changes necessary to update the King County Code provision that created the CYAB so that it can advise and oversee on a new *Best Starts* levy if it is presented to voters and they approve its renewal and expansion.

A renewed and expanded levy also holds the opportunity to increase the role of youth on the CYAB so that young people are involved in overseeing and advising on the levy, not just as recipients of its services. A key provision to make possible more meaningful youth involvement is the ability to provide stipends to youth who participate as appointed members of the CYAB, in recognition of the likelihood that other members of the CYAB will have employment or other resources that support them in their advisory role.

The *Best Starts* Governance Update Report also provides an opportunity to recommend any changes to the COO Governance Group. For both the CYAB and COO Governance Group, the proposed ballot measure ordinance requires County staff to collaborate with the boards themselves in making any recommendations for change.

IV.D | Implementation Planning

The proposed ballot measure ordinance to which this report is attached is one of four major pieces of planned legislation to transition to a renewed and expanded 2022-2027 *Best Starts* levy. These are outlined below and in Figure 7 at the end of this report.

***Best Starts for Kids* Assessment Report**

In July 2020, Council passed [Motion 15651](#), requiring the Executive to transmit a *Best Starts for Kids Assessment Report*. In December 2020, Council accepted the *Best Starts for Kids Assessment Report* through passage of [Motion 15769](#). The *Best Starts for Kids Assessment Report* made five recommendations, which are detailed earlier in this report, to inform a proposal for renewal of the *Best Starts* levy.

***Best Starts for Kids* Ballot Measure Ordinance**

The County enacted [Ordinance 18088](#) in July 2015 to present voters with the proposition to create a *Best Starts* for Kids levy, and King County voters approved the proposition in November 2015. The existing *Best Starts* levy expires at the end of 2021. Continuation of the levy requires King County to enact an ordinance that presents to King County Elections a replacement levy proposition for consideration by King County Voters. King County Elections must receive an enacted ballot measure ordinance by 4:30 PM on May 14, 2021 for the proposition to appear on the ballot for the 2021 August Primary election.⁵⁹

***Best Starts for Kids* Implementation Plan**

⁵⁹ King County Elections 2021 Jurisdiction Manual [\[LINK\]](#).

Required by Section 7 of the proposed *Best Starts* ballot measure ordinance, the next *Best Starts* Implementation Plan will describe in detail the framework, strategies, programs, allocations of proceeds, and performance measurement plan for a 2022-2027 *Best Starts* levy. Passage of the Implementation Plan before the end of November 2021 will enable the Council to appropriate 2022 levy proceeds according to the Implementation Plan and allow the Executive to execute timely contracts with community-based organizations providing *Best Starts*-funded programming. Later passage of a new Implementation Plan risks interruption of services and contracts in the transition between the existing levy and a 2022-2027 version of the levy. To provide the Council time to consider the proposed Implementation Plan, including an anticipated mandatory referral to the Regional Policy Committee, the Executive intends to transmit the proposed Implementation Plan by July 31, 2021.

Best Starts for Kids Governance Update Report

Title 2A.300.510 of the King County Code provides for the CYAB. Within that section, the Code defines the composition and duties of the CYAB, doing so by specific reference to the 2016-2021 version of the *Best Starts* levy. Section 6 of the proposed *Best Starts* ballot measure ordinance would require the Executive to transmit a proposed *Best Starts* Governance Update Report with an accompanying proposed ordinance that would update the King County Code so that the CYAB is empowered to serve as the advice and oversight body of a renewed 2022-2027 *Best Starts* levy. The Executive may also propose through the *Best Starts* Governance Update Report other changes to the composition and duties of the CYAB.

Figure 7: Proposed Timeline for Best Starts for Kids Legislation

