COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund

Education and Youth Working Group

The Education and Youth Working Group is focused on the needs of young people throughout this crisis, as school closures have forced students across the region to stay home and transition to distance learning. School closures have created an unprecedented situation for parents, teachers, students. All schools in the DMV area are closed through late April, while schools in the New York area, Virginia, and Seattle have closed through the end of the school year – and it is possible that our region could follow.

School closures will exacerbate already deep divides in educational equity. Many families count on schools to feed and provide other services for children (food, technology access, healthcare, safe space). We are in uncharted waters as schools and families transition to distance learning and prepare to provide online instruction and alternative options for childcare and enrichment moving forward.

Even the most well-intentioned efforts will mean that especially low-income students will suffer. Low-income families with parents working hourly wage jobs or jobs without paid sick leave do not have the option to work from home or take days off. Without options for childcare or in-school participation, low-income children are more likely to be left alone or in environments that are less than ideal for learning. While online learning is being made available, the digital divide will be a challenge that could prevent many low-income students from participating. We also know that students tend to learn less online compared with in-person instructions and that disadvantaged children tend to learn the least. We are quickly moving into a “summer-like” situation where opportunity gaps will only worsen.

Our conversations with our nonprofit partners providing services to young people have identified several of the most critical needs for support. The Education and Youth Working Group will strategically invest in emergency childcare supports, enrichment access, and other opportunities to reach and support children and families through this unique crisis. Our initial funding priorities include:

- Ensuring emergency personnel childcare is available.
- Addressing a potential increase in child abuse, through virtual supports.
- Meeting the unique needs of children with special needs (disabilities, students with IEPs, ESL, foster care children, and families interacting with Child Protective Services).
- Providing services to opportunity youth (ages 16-21) who are not connected to school or work, or who are at risk of dropping out of school.
- Supporting programs focused on high school completion and college access.
- Expanding mental health supports for children and families and helping families address social emotional development during uncertain times.
- Increasing access to resources and networks for parents transitioning to homeschool.
- Addressing the digital divide to ensure all children have access to computer/devices and internet for distance learning.
- Supporting virtual programming for home visiting, mentoring, tutoring, and other forms of enrichment and youth development supports.
- Enhancing the supply of childcare and out of school time programs once the immediate crisis is over.

As the situation unfolds, we expect the working group’s priorities to evolve and shift to meet emerging needs. In addition, we are coordinating with federal, county, and local government responses to COVID-19 to complement and align our efforts. We are also working with our advocacy partners to ensure that what we are learning about the needs of children and families is included in the response. We are also coordinating with the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers group focused on Children, Youth and Families.