

News release



Dec. 30, 2013

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Everett Public Schools welcomes Opportunity Council as latest strategic partner *With nearly a half-century of success helping low income families, Council joins district work*

The [Opportunity Council](#) launched in Whatcom County in 1965 as a volunteer group and model project for President Lynden B. Johnson's [1964 Economic Opportunity Act](#) to help low income people. Today, it also has an office in Everett Public Schools Community Resource Center as a strategic partner to continue that work and focus on early learning programs that lead to students' success in high school and beyond.

The private, non-profit human services organization serves Whatcom, Island, San Juan, Skagit and Snohomish counties, offering a broad scope of services including meeting immediate and crisis-oriented needs, longer-term programs promoting self-sufficiency, and early childhood education and child development support services.

"Four out of every 10 students in Everett Public Schools qualify for free or reduced lunch programs. Each year, nearly 800 students from kindergarten through 12th-grade qualify as homeless under the federal McKinney-Vento Act. Those facts alone make the Opportunity Council's work extremely important for our families," explains the district Director of Categorical Programs, Dr. Cynthia Jones. "Working with other community-based organizations, the Opportunity Council will be a partner helping families get services a school district is not able to provide."



Opportunity Council Division Manager Wilianne Ollila-Perry (left) and Early Achievers Regional Coordinator Elaine Larson (right) stand with Everett Public Schools Director of Categorical Programs Dr. Cynthia Jones at the doorway to the Council's office in the district's Community Resource Center at 3900 Broadway in Everett.

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The Council will also be integral to the district's role within the *P-3 Cross District Leadership Coalition*. Begun three years ago as a partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the University of Washington, the *Coalition* includes Everett Public Schools, Edmonds, Seattle, Federal Way and Highline school districts. The *Coalition's* work focuses attention and resources to building strong early learning connections among pre-school and kindergarten programs as a way to ensure each child is ready to learn in kindergarten and thus be more likely to succeed through high school and beyond.

Pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade alignment, (P-3) is gaining momentum, nationally and in Washington state. Until now, work to help students succeed in high school and beyond has focused most intensely on middle and high school students. Less attention has been paid to the important years from birth through pre-kindergarten as foundational for all future learning.

"This is changing," says Jones, "as evidenced by the launch and planned roll-out of WaKIDS and all-day kindergarten for all Washington state students – and by the formation of such multi-district coalitions as the one Everett is working with. Now our partnership with Opportunity Council and the location of their first Snohomish County office in the CRC will facilitate improved preschool opportunities for our families and closer connections between preschool and kindergarten."

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