



Early STEM Community of Practice

Building belonging through early STEM

In six regions across Washington, teams made up of Educational Service District early learning staff, math and science coordinators, and community-based organizations partnered with priority communities. Together, they co-designed early STEM programming, resources, and professional development opportunities to foster STEM belonging for children and adults alike.

Each region developed a localized work plan utilizing Washington STEM's research- and partner-informed self-assessment tool, which outlines best practices for designing and sustaining high-quality early STEM learning experiences. In 2025, informed by ongoing learning from partners and communities, the tool was updated to recognize belonging as a core foundation of early STEM quality.

Through the Early STEM Community of Practice, which continues into 2026, partners are building a shared understanding and practical approaches to assessing and documenting qualitative evidence of belonging within their programs—strengthening the field's ability to create inclusive, engaging early STEM experiences statewide.

What we're seeing

- More communities now have the tools, data, and partnerships needed to deliver high-quality early STEM learning—grounded in local context and focused on equity.
- Early STEM partners are engaging in shared learning about how to cultivate and assess aspects of belonging in their programs. (Washington STEM provided support through a community of practice focused on improving qualitative feedback practices.)
- Increased quality of local early STEM professional development trainings, family events, and publicly available resources as a result of co-design and engagement with priority populations.
- Families and educators reported greater confidence with math content and learned new ways of integrating math games and activities into familiar daily practices.
- Many partners piloted new kinds of early STEM programming, which increased access to high-quality learning experiences for children, families, and educators.



EARLY STEM COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE



Partners have expressed deep gratitude and excitement for this work, particularly the freedom to center belonging, identity, and experience when designing early STEM programming.

Many of the bright spots they've shared center on the relationships they've built and nurtured with co-designers, colleagues, and educators.

By taking an asset-based approach to program design, the diversity of strengths and identities among these communities and within regional teams has made a critical impact on the quality of local early STEM experiences for children, families, and educators.

Shatterra Overton, Program Manager for Early Care & Education & P-12 STEM Education

Across six regions in Washington, early STEM programs have been designed with and for these priority communities:

- Native families and educators
- Child care providers from a variety of settings, including family home, ECEAP, and Head Start
- Multilingual families and educators, including Spanish and American Sign Language, and BIPOC families