



Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)

What it is: ECEAP is a comprehensive “whole child,” family-focused preschool program that prepares vulnerable 3- and 4-year-old children for success in school and life. ECEAP was established in 1985 by Governor requested legislation and was modeled after the successful federal Head Start program.

ECEAP focuses on the well-being of the whole child by providing an intensive combination of comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and family support services. Program goals include: increasing children’s social-emotional, physical, and pre-academic skills; strengthening families and building their capacity to support their children’s success; and ensuring that each child receive medical and dental care so they start school with optimal health.

The current ECEAP budget is \$57M per year. The program is administered by the Department of Early Learning which contracts with community-based non-profits, Educational Service Districts, school districts, local governments, and community colleges to provide services at the local level.

Who is eligible: Our children who are most vulnerable including: children from families who earn less than 110% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$24,585/year for a family of four); children who are homeless or in foster care; and children with disabilities.

ECEAP currently serves 8,391 children and their families, 367 more than in 2010-2011. However, ECEAP programs are reporting the highest demand for services in the history of the program. At its peak during the 2010-11 school year, there were 4,369 children on the waiting list.

ECEAP and the federally-funded Head Start program serve approximately half of all eligible low-income 3- and 4-year-olds in Washington State. There are 18,600 ECEAP-eligible children who are not served by ECEAP or Head Start.

Why it’s important: High-quality early learning programs like ECEAP are a proven investment in future savings, our children’s success, our economy, and our future workforce.

- **Future savings.** Investments in high-quality early learning for vulnerable children have a return on investment that is unmatched by almost any other public investment—as much as \$16 for every \$1 invested—due to increased school readiness and success, graduation rates, workforce readiness, job productivity, and lifetime income thus greater contributions to our tax base.
- **Our children’s success in school, life, and work.** Such investments reduce job training costs, special education and remedial education costs, and grade repetition. According to kindergarten teachers, 75% of our kindergarteners from low-income families are arriving to kindergarten unprepared and when these children eventually enter the workforce, their lack of basic skills such as math, literacy and other core competencies, costs the nation \$3.7 billion annually in remedial education services and lost wages.
- **Our economy and shared prosperity.** Research confirms that early learning investments will generate as much or more sales of local goods and services than investments in other economic sectors, including manufacturing, transportation, and retail and wholesale trade. These investments will also create jobs, increase workforce productivity, and help attract the skilled employees we will need in Washington as our state economy recovers.
- **Our future work force.** High-quality early learning experiences and programs, such as ECEAP, help children develop reading, writing, and math skills, as well as the ability to become good communicators, collaborators and critical-thinkers—skills that are so important to success in school and the workplace.

ECEAP is an investment in future savings, our children’s success, our economy, and our future workforce.

AMERICA’S EDGE recommends that Washington State maintain the current ECEAP funding and protect this proven program from further reductions.