

Executive Summary: ECEAP Expansion Plan Serving All Eligible Children by 2018-19

**Washington State Department of Early Learning
Office of Financial Management**

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Washington State Department of Early Learning

Executive Summary

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is a comprehensive preschool program for low-income children at higher risk for academic failure. The objectives of ECEAP, managed by the Department of Early Learning (DEL), are to:

- ▶ Achieve kindergarten readiness, including academic, social and health goals.
- ▶ Strengthen families' resilience.
- ▶ Foster family engagement in their child's learning experiences.

During the 2013 session, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 5904, which directed DEL and the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to submit a plan for expanding the current ECEAP program to serve all eligible children by the 2018-2019 school year, when it becomes an entitlement.

This report was limited to the directive of the legislation. Ideas that require future exploration and action such as raising eligibility levels, increasing classroom hours, integrating into family child care settings and evaluating ECEAP vendor rates are noted in future actions of the full report. DEL appreciates the ad hoc work group of ECEAP parents, contractors and other stakeholders including Head Start who provided input on the expansion strategy.

Action Since the 2013 Session

In the 2013-15 biennial budget, the Legislature appropriated an additional \$22 million to enhance and expand ECEAP. In state fiscal year 2014 (school year 2013-14), DEL added 350 ECEAP slots to underserved areas that also received state funds for full day kindergarten, ensured a four-year program review cycle and allowed monitoring of expansion sites. In state fiscal year 2015 (school year 2014-15), contractors will receive an average vendor rate increase of 10 percent. ECEAP will:

- ▶ Use Teaching Strategies GOLD[®] for child assessment.
- ▶ Increase professional development for lead teachers and family support specialists from 15 to 20 hours per year.
- ▶ Enter staff qualifications data in the Managed Education Registry and Information Tool (MERIT), our state's early learning professional development registry.
- ▶ Participate in Early Achievers, Washington's quality rating and improvement system.
- ▶ Phase in the use of Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and Environment Rating Scale (ERS) assessments for comprehensive program reviews, monitoring and continuous quality improvement.

DEL has continued to strengthen and integrate quality assurance processes to ensure early learning services focus on common child development and learning aims, respond to individual child and family needs, ensure a level of quality that delivers results and comply with program requirements. DEL will also use data from ECEAP Early Achievers ratings to inform comprehensive program reviews.

National Research

Research shows that a high-quality preschool experience can have a tremendous impact on a child's learning and development and can contribute to reductions in grade level retention and special education. Three key factors contribute to the extent that preschool benefits low-income children: program quality; the comprehensiveness of education, health and family services; and the dosage (the amount of time children and families participate). High-quality programs provide a combination of the following characteristics:

- ▶ Highly skilled teachers.
- ▶ Small class sizes and high adult-to-child ratios.

- ▶ Age-appropriate curricula and stimulating materials in a safe physical setting.
- ▶ A language-rich environment.
- ▶ Warm, responsive interactions between staff and children.
- ▶ High and consistent levels of child participation.

The duration and intensity of preschool also contribute to children’s learning and development. Two years of preschool are more effective than one year, in achieving educational outcomes. New Jersey’s rigorously evaluated preschool program closed more than 50 percent of children’s achievement gap after one year, versus 18 percent for the “no Pre-K group.” Two years of participation roughly doubled the gain at second grade on most measures.

Comprehensive preschool services can improve children’s physical and mental health as well as their learning and development. Children living in poverty are more likely to experience highly stressful home environments and be exposed to violence, both of which are associated with negative health and developmental outcomes. Research also shows that family engagement in a child’s education is a key predictor of academic achievement. National research as well as a brief research project commissioned by DEL on best practices of six states implementing statewide programs (See Appendix C: State Best Practices Brief) confirm that:

- ▶ ECEAP is research-based. ECEAP Performance Standards draw on strong national research and longitudinal studies such as the Abecedarian, Chicago and Perry Preschool programs.
- ▶ High-quality preschool is cost effective. In 2013, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy presented data to the Senate Ways & Means Committee showing that every dollar invested in early childhood education for low-income 3- and 4-year-olds nets a return on investment of \$3.
- ▶ Expansion must balance aspiration and reality. The six states in the best practices review noted the importance of being realistic about the current supply of facilities, contractors and a qualified workforce when setting expansion goals and program standards. They particularly counseled strengthening of collaborative relationships with higher education to improve the pipeline of qualified teachers and other staff members.

ECEAP’s Comprehensive Preschool Design

Since 1985, ECEAP has focused on the well-being of the whole child by providing education, nutrition, health and family support services. ECEAP reaches the children most in need of these foundations for learning. The program design includes the following key elements:

- ▶ Eligibility for children whose family income is at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level or who are otherwise at-risk. Washington currently serves 37 percent of income-eligible children in ECEAP and Head Start.
- ▶ A minimum of 320 preschool classroom hours per year, over at least 30 weeks and at least 2.5 hours per session. A maximum class size of 20 students with the minimum adult-to-child ratio of 1:9.
- ▶ ECEAP contractors integrate ECEAP “slots” in a variety of settings in a mixed-delivery system.
- ▶ Children receive comprehensive services including: developmental, vision and hearing screening; immunization verification; health and mental health services coordination; and nutrition support.
- ▶ Families are engaged in the children’s classrooms, program governance, program quality monitoring, parenting education and family and community events.

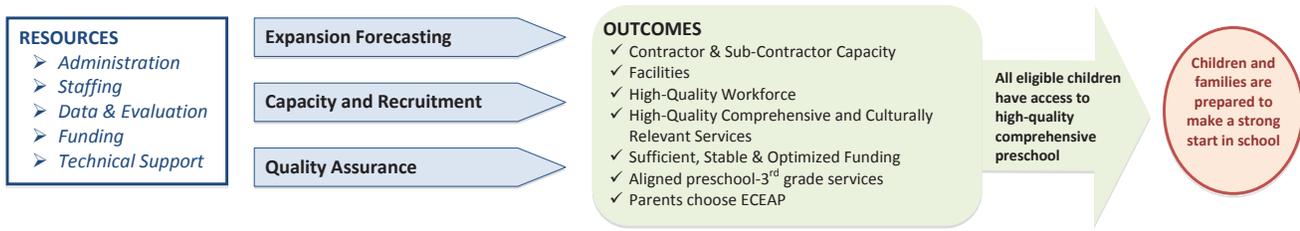
ECEAP's Fit in the Integrated System of Early Learning Opportunities

Some learning and development services (such as public school) are intended for all children, while others (such as subsidized child care) are available to some children because they are at-risk. Still other services (Early Support for Infants and Toddlers—ESIT—and ECEAP) are available to the few children with multiple risk factors. Early Achievers, preschool-through-third grade (P-3) alignment and other quality assurance structures support data-driven continuous quality improvement of these early learning services. The goal for Washington State's integrated system of early learning opportunities is to meet children's diverse needs as they develop and learn. A continuum of high-quality, easily accessible early learning opportunities respond to the individual needs of children and families based on age, developmental needs and desired learning settings. This allows for family choice and range of options in the types of early learning services they access including part-day, full-day and integrated options. ECEAP serves the few, most vulnerable, children.

Pillars of Success

The Theory of Action drives expansion outcomes. The three interconnected strategies support achievement of positive results for children and families.

ECEAP Expansion Theory of Action



Expansion Projections

Making ECEAP an entitlement provides exciting and challenging opportunities. The scale and scope of the expansion will require considerable preparation to ensure adequate pipelines of interested and qualified contractors, subcontractors, professionals and facilities to realize the envisioned expansion.

Important ECEAP expansion assumptions

1. ECEAP prioritizes serving the most vulnerable children and families.
2. ECEAP serves 3- and 4-year-old children because research shows that vulnerable children benefit from receiving two years of high-quality preschool.
3. DEL partners with ECEAP contractors and communities to reflect and respond to the unique character and needs of the populations they serve.
4. DEL estimates that 80 percent of families with 4-year-old children and 57 percent of families with 3-year-old children eligible for ECEAP and Head Start will choose to participate. These estimates are based on the experiences of other state-funded preschools.
5. All ECEAP contractors will participate in Early Achievers by 2014-2015, per House Bill 1723.
6. All strategies are contingent upon funding appropriated by the Legislature.

Guiding Principles for ECEAP Expansion

The following principles ensure an effective and high-quality expansion process:

1. Place slots first in communities with state-funded full day kindergarten that are underserved by ECEAP and Head Start. This is required by statute 43.215.142 and ensures we reach low-income children and families.
2. Focus on closing the opportunity gap that results in the academic achievement gap by:
 - Strengthening cultural competency and addressing the changing demographics of children served as ECEAP expands.
 - Ensuring ECEAP contractors meet minimum quality standards while expanding and enhancing services for children and families.
 - Reaching all communities with eligible children, including those in rural and remote areas and those furthest from opportunity.
3. Continue to deliver comprehensive education, health and family services necessary to improve child outcomes.
4. Broaden the existing mixed-delivery settings and organizations that provide ECEAP.
5. Strengthen the integration of the birth to 3rd grade early learning system as envisioned in our State’s 10-Year Early Learning Plan. Continue alignment such as ECEAP’s use of Teaching Strategies GOLD®, the same whole-child assessment used in the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS).
6. Address quality assurance and the use of data for continuous quality improvement. Identify funding for the infrastructure necessary to maintain high quality and culturally competent services.
7. Build on current contractor expertise to support rapid and high-quality expansion including mentoring new ECEAP contractors. Promote cooperation, collaboration and affiliation at contractor-, regional- and state-levels. Intentionally engage communities and potential participating families as part of expansion.
8. Value and encourage local in-kind and cash support, including facilities.

Caseload Forecast. DEL will continue to annually forecast caseloads using the methodology approved by OFM, which counts current ECEAP, Head Start, Migrant/Seasonal Head Start and American Indian/Alaskan Native Head Start slots. These processes indicate:

- ▶ 10,941 additional slots will be needed to serve eligible 3- and 4-year-olds by 2018-19 (in addition to the 350 ECEAP expansion slots the Legislature appropriated in FY14).
- ▶ Existing contractors can provide 6,641 of these slots in FY15-19 (including new subcontracts and expanded service areas).
- ▶ DEL will recruit new contractors to provide the remaining 4,300 slots to reach 10,941 slots.

Slots requested	SFY14	SFY15	SFY16	SFY17	SFY18	SFY19
Additional slots	350	1,350	2,398	2,398	2,398	2,397
Total slots	8,741	10,091	12,489	14,887	17,285	19,682
Cost of total ECEAP slots**	\$60,229,000	\$76,474,000	\$94,652,000	\$112,826,000	\$131,000,000	\$149,166,000
Additional appropriation needed	\$0	\$0	\$18,178,000	\$36,352,000	\$54,526,000	\$72,692,000
**Includes costs associated with rate increase in FY15. Base ECEAP appropriation for SFY16-19 is assumed to carry forward at SFY15 funding levels.						

Recruitment Plan

DEL currently provides 8,741 ECEAP slots through 39 contractors at 269 sites around the state. This Recruitment Plan is intended to help DEL build on existing infrastructure, workforce and capacities. DEL has defined “pathways” through which new contractors, subcontractors and staff members will come on board by 2018-2019.

Recruitment of New Contractors and Subcontractors. Prospective contractors must demonstrate minimum capacity and quality (See Contractor Characteristics). DEL and partners will provide orientations regarding ECEAP roles, responsibilities, contract requirements and standards, Early Learning Management System (ELMS) data entry and monitoring practices. DEL will engage new contractors who can provide a minimum of 240 slots. Head Start slots count toward this total. This contract size ensures ECEAP contractors have sufficient infrastructure to manage high-quality comprehensive services. 2013-14 ECEAP contractors are exempt from the minimum requirement of 240 slots. When applying for expansion, 2013-14 contractors that meet ECEAP requirements may be exempt from the minimum. DEL may negotiate nation-to-nation agreements with sovereign nations that meet the needs of individual Indian Nations and the interests of the state. DEL will encourage potential new ECEAP contractors that cannot provide that level of slots to participate as subcontractors through affiliation with a larger organization. Also, there is no minimum slot amount at a particular site, to allow access to services in smaller communities and through varied types of organizations. DEL will reach out to potential new ECEAP contractors and subcontractors of different types as a key component of expansion. (See ECEAP Contractor and Subcontractor Pathways.)

Workforce Development and Staff Recruitment. A larger pool of qualified teachers, family support staff and health staff will be needed to expand ECEAP. Washington also needs to maintain highly capable staff that reflect children’s language and culture and have considerable experience. DEL will collaborate with higher education to strengthen course work and expand opportunities for experienced professionals to gain a degree. DEL will also work with state and regional partners to expand existing professional development and learning opportunities as described in the Washington Career Lattice. (See Figure 7: Workforce Development and Recruitment Pathways.)

Facility Development & Financing. Lack of appropriate facilities may be a barrier to reaching our expansion goals. In some locations, the expansion of state-funded full-day kindergarten may reduce the space currently used for ECEAP in existing school buildings. Some contractors and subcontractors in other settings may have existing facilities requiring little or no modification to meet standards. DEL will need a variety of ways to support local communities to develop and finance facilities. (See Figure 8: Facility Development and Financing Pathways.)

Oversight and Evaluation Design

Research shows that only high-quality programs achieve the results needed to close the opportunity and achievement gap. In addition, the changing demographics of our state require cultural and linguistic competence as hallmarks of high-quality programs. Achieving child outcomes requires focus on program quality and a data-driven continuous quality improvement process. To accomplish this, DEL must have:

- ▶ Adequate staff to analyze data, to refine program design and requirements based on data, to increase the intensity and frequency of contractor monitoring and to provide on-site coaching and technical assistance to contractors.
- ▶ Regional staff to oversee regional and local functions, consistent with the Lessons Learned best practices research. (See Figure 10: Distribution of Oversight and Quality Assurance.)

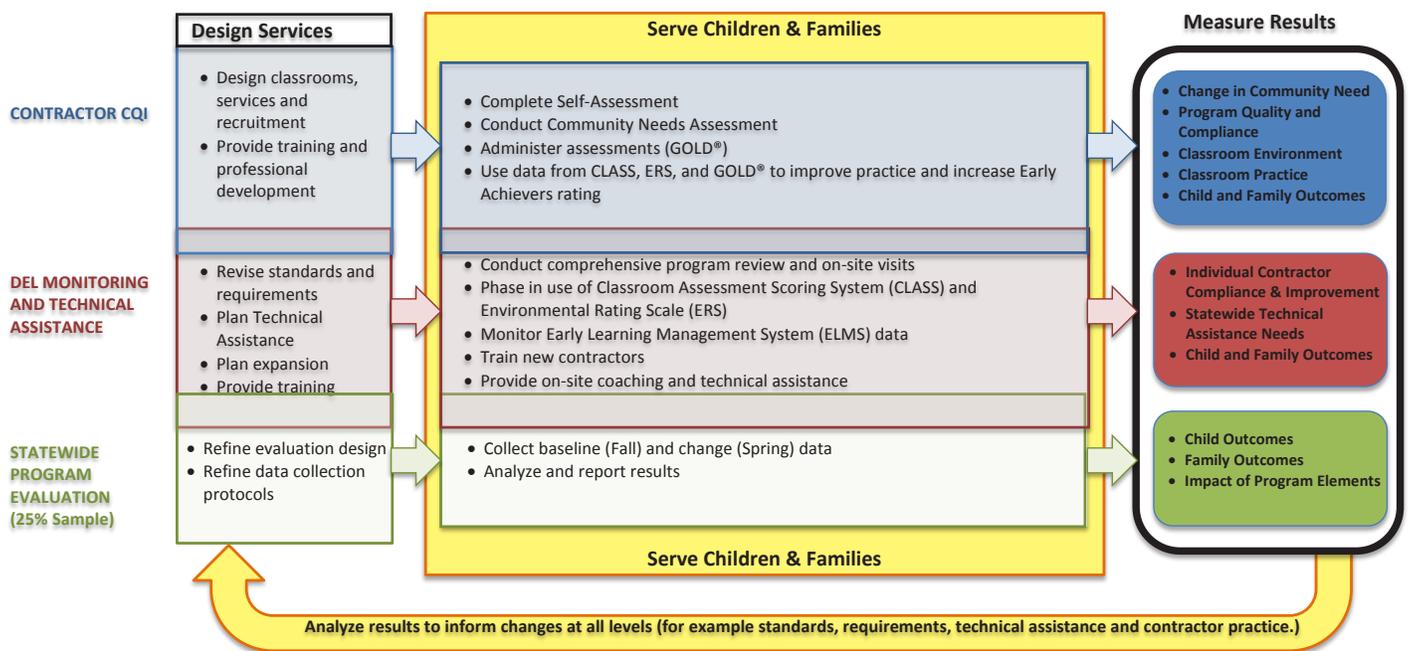
Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), Monitoring and Evaluation. ECEAP measures outcomes that contribute to this: “Each participating child progresses farther in development and learning during the time in the program than they would if not participating.” Data gathered through enhanced program monitoring and comprehensive reviews, technical assistance requests and longitudinal evaluation guides program quality at the state, regional and local levels. (See ECEAP Oversight, Quality Assurance and Evaluation.)

Program Administration. DEL provides oversight, monitoring and quality assurance. By 2018-2019, DEL will locate some staff in early learning regions, which share the same boundaries as educational services districts with King and Pierce counties divided. Regional monitoring and technical assistance capacity will allow State Office staff to focus on contract and data management, comprehensive program reviews, statewide training needs, evaluation and system development (See Distribution of Oversight and Quality Assurance Functions).

As part of ECEAP expansion, DEL will need staff for ECEAP monitoring, quality assurance, program support, data analysis and information technology. DEL will maintain a staff level of one ECEAP FTE per 620 ECEAP slots by school year 2018-19. DEL may add additional FTEs a year prior to specific slot expansion targets to support high-quality implementation of ECEAP. DEL will adjust staffing assumptions based upon rate of expansion, changes to the program model and regionalization of quality assurance efforts. ECEAP will use the expertise of all DEL staff in expansion efforts and training needs.

Evaluation. An evaluation of the statewide program will occur every two years. The evaluation will include approximately 25 percent of ECEAP children, from around the state and employ a control group of children who have not received Head Start services. (See ECEAP Oversight, Quality Assurance and Evaluation.) Data gathered through the evaluation and continuous quality improvement processes will be used to target quality improvement efforts and to refine ECEAP requirements and program design.

ECEAP Continuous Improvement, Monitoring and Evaluation



Together the independent evaluation, State monitoring and technical assistance and contractor continuous quality improvement processes provides data and insight so that:

- ECEAP providers implement the high-quality preschool services described in the *ECEAP Performance Standards*, which ensures that children and families receive the comprehensive services shown to generate results.
- Children experience cognitive, social, emotional and physical development and learning as described in the *Early Learning Guidelines* and as measured by *Teaching Strategies GOLD®*