

Washington State Partnership for Pre-K Improvement Overview: December 2016 through April 2018

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), overseen by the Department of Early Learning (DEL), is Washington’s pre-kindergarten program. It is designed to prepare low-income 3- and 4-year-old children for success in school and life. ECEAP’s comprehensive “whole-child” approach includes preschool education; family support; parent involvement; and health and nutrition services. Currently DEL is responsible for ensuring that ECEAP services are available to all eligible children statewide by the school year 2022-23.

DEL ECEAP was invited to participate in a multi-year initiative called the Partnership for Pre-K Improvement (PPI) with other identified states. This project is overseen by the [Ounce of Prevention Fund](#) and funded through the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#). Through this partnership initiative, DEL ECEAP is examining the state run pre-k program to better understand how to strengthen policies, systems, and practice in order to achieve better results for early learners and advance Washington’s vision for high quality pre-k. Throughout the partnership, state participants from Washington, Oregon and Tennessee are receiving targeted resources, including peer learning opportunities, technical assistance, and consultation, from the Ounce of Prevention Fund, University of Washington, and Alliance



for Early Success in addition to access to other national experts. With these resources, the partnership initiative supports each state to identify state priorities and assess strengths and barriers to quality. The partnership also aims to build capacity to advance identified areas of need and achieve the program and systems changes that will ensure

continuous quality improvement of pre-k. Additionally the partnership works to help states to coordinate and collaborate with advocacy partner(s) and research practice partners to advance pre-k quality improvement and effectiveness. DEL began its participation in this work in December of 2016.

To help DEL staff better understand the state’s current pre-k system, staff completed [The PPI: State Self-Assessment Tool](#). The Ounce of Prevention based this tool on essential elements of preschool quality and recent school improvement research.

The self-assessment consisted of 6 areas of focus which included:

- Structural Program Features
- Workforce Development
- Teaching and Learning

- Continuous Quality Improvement
- Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement
- Evidence of System Quality and Effectiveness

Within the assessment, each of these six focus areas included prompting questions that analyzed 4 areas including teaching and learning, implemented policies, policy support and guidance, and implementation in the field. Each section also contained indicators and narrative descriptions and analysis. The indicators section is designed to gather information about current policy and the extent to which policy support and guidance is in place and implemented. The narrative section allows for descriptions and analysis that would include threats and opportunities to improve policies, implementation and considerations for scaling. For Washington State, DEL staff assessed implementation for both licensed and exempt sites as this reflected the make-up of ECEAP site across the state of Washington.

DEL began the work to complete the self-assessment tool in March of 2017. To do this, DEL created a “Core Team” that consisted of DEL ECEAP, Early Achievers, Professional Development and Children’s Alliance, ESD 105, ESD 112, and the Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP staff. The Core team began the process of answering and then reviewing the self-assessment prompts. As part of this process, the team identified sections that required additional information to complete the self-assessment. This led to the creation and distribution of [ECEAP Director](#) and [Teacher surveys](#) in May of 2017. DEL contracted with a consulting firm for the development and analysis of these surveys. They completed final analysis in July of 2017. Data collected in the surveys provided information in the following areas:

- Continuous quality improvement processes
- Instructional leadership
- Professional learning practices offered by ECEAP contractors
- Types of and locations teachers received training
- Professional learning opportunities
- Supports for children with challenging behaviors

Results from the Directors’ survey indicated that ECEAP contractors regularly set goals and made plans to improve teaching and learning. A majority of respondents shared that this occurs anywhere from monthly to quarterly. Contractor survey respondents identified 8 different types of positions that serve as instructional leaders in ECEAP programs. Most programs have more than one instructional leader. Almost all respondents said that they provided Job Embedded Professional Learning (JEPL) for direct service staff. While most provide JEPL for teachers, some also provide it for family support staff. Fewer provided it for center directors, program managers, coaches, health staff, instructional leaders and other administrative staff. There are relatively few differences among different types of organizations and program size (number of slots) in contractor responses. This represented a strong baseline for the next steps in ECEAP quality improvement.

Teacher Survey Data Indicated:

- ECEAP teachers most often attended training at their ECEAP contractor or agency (66%) or at an Educational Service District (59%) in the past twelve months.
- 45% of teachers in small rural communities participated in online training compared to 10-28% in larger communities.
- More teachers (58%) thought that training in strategies to support children with special needs (including challenging behaviors) would benefit their practice more than any other content areas of learning. Followed by:
 - Strategies to promote higher order thinking and problem solving (47%);
 - Effective teacher-child interactions and instruction (37%).
- Over 70% of respondents identified their participation in observation and feedback learning (48%) as the most useful. 60% said they had participated in professional learning communities and 54% had participated in in-person peer learning.

Analysis of the surveys and the completed self-assessment resulted in the identification of multiple areas of strengths. Each of the identified strengths is the result of the availability of quality data from DEL's data collection practices and management systems. Data management systems include:

- The Early Learning Management System (ELMS),
- Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT),
- Web-based Early Learning System (WELS),
- Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) and,
- Early Achievers data entry or participation requirements.

The work that ECEAP direct service staff spent entering required data into systems and preparing for data collection resulted in a depth of data that easily identified key strengths in ECEAP. The 9 highlighted strengths are outlined in the table to the right.

In addition, DEL ECEAP staff also identified 5 opportunities for growth upon completion of the self-assessment. These areas of focus represent the next areas that DEL ECEAP staff will begin focused improvement efforts. They include:

- Instruction Leadership and Professional Learning System
- Cultural Competency, Anti-Bias and Dual Language Learners
- Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Settings
- Data Specification, Monitoring and Analysis
- Education, Scholarships and Compensation Parity

With the completion of the *PPI: State Self-Assessment Tool*, DEL ECEAP began the work of implementing 5 workgroups in April of 2018. Each workgroup is led by an ECEAP team member and will address each of the identified opportunities for growth through a racial equity lens. In partnership with workgroup participants, DEL staff will identify the scope of work necessary to address areas of growth. They will identify strategies that can be developed in the 2018-19 school-year and beyond. They will identify needed resources, authorizing entities and content experts for participation, and partner with the state's research-practice partner at [Cultivate Learning Washington](#). Through the research-practice partnership, DEL will be able to help identify areas of data collection, continuous quality improvement (CQI) and research priorities that support state strategic plans for improvement. Additionally, co-construction of research plans to meet those priorities will be developed. The expansion of research-practice partnerships in Washington also allows researchers to collaborate across the states participating in the PPI. DEL ECEAP work group leaders will participate in bi-monthly technical assistance meetings with the Ounce of Prevention team members and the DEL project leaders. The project leaders will meet with Ounce of Prevention staff weekly.



ECEAP Areas of Strength

- Professional Development and Provider Qualifications
- Curriculum and Assessment Requirements
- Information in DEL Data Systems
- Quality Assessment
- Contractor Continuous Quality Improvement
- Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement
- Family Access and Outreach
- Teaching Quality
- Child Outcomes

Overall, the work related to this partnership is integrated into the ECEAP expansion efforts mentioned at the beginning of this overview. ECEAP's Theory of Change focuses on thoughtful expansion of ECEAP services that requires participation and decision making from voices in the field. This work is outlining how DEL can approach expansion in ways that will ensure that all ECEAP services are strengthened towards a goal of increasing outcomes for children and families. The identified areas of growth are incorporated into the foundational structure of ECEAP expansion work happening in Washington.