



WSA

WASHINGTON STATE ASSOCIATION OF HEAD START & ECEAP

Parent Ambassadors

Who we are:

The Washington State Association of Head Start & ECEAP (WSA) Parent Ambassadors is a grassroots organizing program for low income parents involved with Head Start and ECEAP in Washington. The program is based on an empowerment model of peer-to-peer training and education. Parent Ambassadors assist our association's efforts to advocate for increased investments in Head Start and ECEAP and related children's programs and are part of a sustainable cadre of parent advocates who can continue to fight for positive social change.

Twenty Parent Ambassadors from across Washington State are accepted each year, receive training on legislative advocacy and grassroots organizing, and are responsible for training parents in their local programs and participating in organizing WSA advocacy campaigns.

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★ "I have gained so much confidence from this program. I have found my voice and exercise it when something needs addressed in many different circumstances. I also have a clear vision of where I want my future to go because of the hope I have had restored through this program." Cherise Billington, 2014 Parent Ambassador, Vancouver, WA ★

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Accomplishments:

Since 2008 Parent Ambassadors have achieved considerable success in their advocacy for state and federal legislation and child-friendly budgets. Parent Ambassadors helped to pass legislation mandating that the state serve all eligible children in ECEAP by 2018. They also played a key role in pushing through a Child Welfare bill. They have been active at the federal level advocating for Head Start, child care, and other early learning programs. In this past legislative session Parent Ambassadors contributed to the following early learning victories:



- Parent Ambassadors advocated for the Child Welfare bill, which led to making those children in the child welfare system gain priority for entering ECEAP.
- Drayton Jackson, 2014 Parent Ambassador has started his own non-profit organization called "Parents in Politics". Through is organization he will be working with local school districts and parent groups on the power of parents voting.
- Grace Ssebugwawo, 2014 Parent Ambassador from Federal Way also started her own non-profit organization called Culture Legacy Outreach International. Culture Legacy Outreach International will bridge the gaps within the education system by integrating culture experience interventions to address education disparities. It will reinforce education instruction through relevant practice and modeling.

Testimonials:

The WSA Parent Ambassadors are highly regarded advocates in Washington State – last year the Parent Ambassadors Program received the Children’s Alliance “Voices for Children” award. Here are some other testimonials from the early learning community about Parent Ambassadors:

“I can think of few things more important than engaging parents in the important work of early learning. Parent Ambassadors speak with credibility and knowledge as their child’s first teachers. They have been truly wonderful in educating the public, policy makers, and key stakeholders in advancing this important initiative.” **Bette Hyde, Director of the Department of Early Learning**

“The Parent Ambassador program is a wonderful way for parents to gain skills, confidence, and knowledge to engage in policy advocacy. In the past two years, there has been a marked increase in the number of parents who advocate in Olympia, encourage others to advocate, and effectively share their stories with policymakers. Their voice is essential to ensuring that policies work for families they are designed to impact.” **Leslie Dozono, Early Learning Policy Director, Children's Alliance**

“When parents enroll their children in ECEAP or Head Start they learn to be advocates for their own children. When they participate in the Parent Ambassador program, they learn to be advocates for *all* children. The Parent Ambassadors have done an excellent job of putting a real face on the issues impacting families in our state.” **Laura Wells, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids**

“We have been so happy with the Parent Ambassador program. It has been life changing for our parents that have been selected to be a Parent Ambassador in Washington State. I have seen our parents grow in their leadership abilities, their confidence in speaking to others whether it is parents, legislators or City Council. Through this program our parents have decided on lifelong dreams for themselves, and have worked to follow those life dreams. I am in "awe" as a Director to see what this program does for parents, which consequently means not only do the parents benefit, but their children and the community. It is an investment worth continuing in Washington State.” **Sandy Junker, Director, Lower Columbia College Head Start/ECEAP**

