



**WSA** Washington State Association  
of Head Start & ECEAP



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## **Governor Inslee Calls for Big Increase in Preschool ECEAP Funding**

*Joins K-12 Leaders Calling for Investments in Early Learning*

Today, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee proposed creating more than 3,000 new spots for children in the state's preschool program, the [Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program \(ECEAP\)](#), taking an important step towards creating a high-quality early education system that will improve the entire public education system.

The governor's proposal comes only two days after Seattle-area superintendents, teachers and parents called on the state legislature to invest in ECEAP and other early learning systems. The plan would raise ECEAP enrollment to 11,426 students from 8,391. Currently, the program only reaches two-thirds of eligible families. Both endorsements of early learning come as legislators debate how to reform public education as part of their response to the State Supreme Court's *McCleary decision*.

Decades of research clearly show high-quality preschool and early education improve K-12 by reducing the need for costly special education and remedial interventions, while improving academic achievement. These programs also address one of the biggest challenges in public education: How to improve high school graduation rates.

"So here we are as a state, investing tons of money in 'dropout prevention', investing tons of money in incarcerating our youth, when really we know the answer comes in early childhood," Erin Jones, the Federal Way School District's Director of Achievement and Inclusion, said Tuesday at Star Lake Elementary School in Kent Wa., where education leaders called for greater funding for early education. "Let's not have another research project to decide where the money needs to go. We know where it needs to go."

Expanding access to good preschools, pre-kindergarten, and child care is perhaps the most effective way to close the achievement gap between low-income or other at-risk students and other students. In addition to expanding ECEAP, policymakers should increase the rate of support per child in the program and add new funding to support infants and toddlers, the [Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP](#) said.

"All of us as adults, both in and out of the education, are hypocrites if we say we are committed to equity, access, and closing the gap but don't fight to ensure that we are funding pre-k and full-day kindergarten for every child in the state of Washington," said Highline Superintendent Susan Enfield. "We have to impress upon our legislators, our communities, that this is the very best place that we can put our dollars."

Early learning investments save money and improve academic achievement:

- Studies have found a reduction in special education referrals of at least 40% and one recently reported a 64% reduction. A 40% reduction in special education referrals from a fully enrolled ECEAP program would save \$4.8 million per year each year.
- Each year a child is held back costs Washington State taxpayers more than \$5,000 per child. A fully enrolled ECEAP program would reduce the number of children being retained and save the state money right away as research has found that children that attend a high-quality early learning program are much less likely to be held back in school.
- Children who attend do not attend a high-quality early learning program are 25% more likely to graduate high school than those who did, and the latest research shows that high school completion rates can increase by more than 9%. Serving an additional 11,500 ECEAP children could save the state well over \$115 million

“Every year we save \$4,000 per child per year in kindergarten because we are spending less on special education services and other remediation due to our decision to pay up front for high-quality early education,” said Linda Sullivan-Dudzic, Special Programs Director for the Bremerton School District.

Gov. Inslee’s support for ECEAP is an important and welcome move closer to the goal of providing all children and their parents with the early education they deserve. Now it is up to leaders in the state Senate and House to add their voices and support to his proposals by including new investments for early education in their budget plans, decisions that will improve public education, help students and save money.

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