



## A Larger Vision for ECEAP

This year as advocates we are faced with the question of what is ECEAP's role in the overall goal of ensuring that 90% of children arrive at kindergarten ready.

We can see from WaKIDS results and our waiting lists that just doing the minimum – reaching entitlement – will not be sufficient to meet the state's school readiness goals. The question is what is needed to reach those thousands of kids who need services. In many cases, a preschool approach without wraparound services will be enough to ensure that kids arrive ready, but for many this will not be sufficient.

ECEAP will be a foundational piece of Washington reaching its 90% school ready goal, but we will need to make significant changes to ensure that we are **identifying the children that need these kind of services** and **providing the resources that programs require** to meet the needs of a challenging population.

We have three objectives in our 2019 ECEAP advocacy: support for salaries/benefits, new slots to reach entitlement, and expanded eligibility. We've started looking at the costs for each part of this, but that is still in process.

### Support for the Workforce

**Rationale:** The single most important element of quality is the teacher and her skill and interaction with the children in her classroom. Currently the average salary for an ECEAP lead teacher with a BA is \$33K, and as the economy improves and the K-12 system implements K-3 class size reduction we are losing an increasing number of staff. According to our state's [2015 Early Learning Compensation](#) report, our teachers earn considerably less (17%) than the national average.

**History:** In 2017, DEL looked at the cost of providing ECEAP and determined that a 16.7% slot rate increase was needed. The Governor did not include that, and the legislature ultimately approved a 6% increase. DEL is proposing a 4% increase for 2019.

**Proposal:** We would like to propose a minimum 10% increase. We would also be open to earmarking this in some way toward salaries and benefits, in order to underscore the importance of this element of quality as we expand our system.

### Expand Eligibility to Children Who Need ECEAP Services

**Rationale:** Each year more than 22,000 children (67%) in poverty (under 185% of FPL) arrive at school not ready according to WaKIDS. ECEAP is a proven way to improve that number – children who go through ECEAP are 11.4% more likely to be ready for kindergarten. This is even more true for children from families with identified risk factors and characteristics that place them farther from opportunity. For example, a Latinx child is 21% more likely to be ready if they have gone to ECEAP, dual language 33%, American Indian 38%. Not every child under 185% of FPL needs the full menu of ECEAP services, but many definitely do.

**History:** The ECEAP eligibility level was set in 1985 at 110% of FPL to be slightly higher than Head Start, to catch children who were not served due to lack of capacity in Head Start, and to reach many of those children who would not qualify for that program. This eligibility level is a major anomaly nationally for a state pre-k program – only 4 states have an eligibility level this low. Ten states specifically tie their pre-k eligibility to Free and Reduced Lunch guidelines (185% of FPL) and 28 states are at 200% of FPL or above. In Head Start, the reauthorization recognized the need for more flexibility with income, given regional differences and the priority to serve children with risk factors beyond income. The current HS rule allows programs, after they saturate their service of under 100% of FPL, to serve 30% of their children between 100 and 130% of FPL, plus 10% ‘over income’.

The other issue of context is the minimum wage increase. The increase will significantly reduce the number of children eligible for ECEAP without significantly improving their access to high quality pre-k. It also will further limit access from single working parents – a single mom with 2 kids working full time even at the current non-Seattle minimum wage (\$11.50) is more than a thousand dollars over income for ECEAP eligibility.

Last year WSA and the Early Learning Action Alliance (ELAA) advocated for an increase in eligibility for ECEAP to 185% of FPL, which would align with Free and Reduced Lunch and the data we see from K-12. There was a mixed reception – some very supportive, others concerned about wanting to continue to focus on the most in need of services first.

The legislature passed our alternate bill, to provide programs more flexibility by allowing up to 25% ‘over income’ in their programs. This was written so as to have a ‘0’ fiscal note – the additional eligible children are not included in the 2022 ‘entitlement’.

**Proposal:** We are exploring a couple of approaches for expanding eligibility, and these estimates are all VERY ROUGH:

1. **Income-based eligibility expansion**

	<i>New children/year</i>	<i>Estimated Cost (based on schoolday w/ 10%)</i>
Increase to 130% FPL, to align with Free Lunch and Head Start	3900	\$44 million/year
Increase to 185% FPL to align with Free & Reduced Lunch, but make ‘entitled’ only those who meet a certain risk threshold (estimated half the take-up population)	7,250	\$83 million/year
Increase to 200% FPL, to align with Working Connections (also assuming half the take-up population)	8,750	\$100 million/year

Our conversations with legislators and most advocates have led us to believe that there is not an appetite for serving ALL children under 185 or 200 in ECEAP, as not all of those families are perceived to ‘need’ the full gamut of ECEAP wraparound services, though many do.

There is, however, a lot of interest in ensuring that those children over 110 who DO need ECEAP are able to get it, and that they are included in the entitlement. How we identify who those children are and how we count them is an open question. The other question is how we reach those children who do not get ECEAP with what they need, and that conversation is ongoing as well.

There is also an interest in aligning with Working Connections Child Care subsidy, to facilitate a layered approach to ECEAP funding that incorporates those funds and expands the number of extended day ECEAP slots.

2. Provide **categorical eligibility** to children in targeted populations

	<i><b>New children/year</b></i>	<i><b>Estimated Cost (based on schoolday w/10%)</b></i>
Homeless children	700	\$8 million/year
CPS Involved/Kinship Care (Currently given a huge amount of priority points so they mostly get in, but if they're in more informal arrangements they do not)	Unknown	Unknown
Tribal Children above 110%	850	\$9.7 million/year
3 year olds transitioning from EHS, ESIT, or other similar programs	Unknown	Unknown

Many of these children (homeless, CPS/Kinship) get in already, but programs use their over-income slots for them. Tribal children are often left behind – some tribes are unwilling to do ECEAP since they hear from other tribes that they often have to fill their classrooms with non-tribal children despite the fact that their own children are the least likely of any group to arrive at kindergarten ‘ready’ by state standards.

This approach will expand the program to meet children and families who need the service in the current economy, and making certain populations categorically eligible will open up programs’ over income slots to be able to serve more single moms and kids from families with other identified risk factors.

3. Include the 25% over-income as part of the entitlement

	<i><b>New children/year</b></i>	<i><b>Estimated Cost (based on schoolday w/10%)</b></i>
Fund the 25% over-income	3600	\$41.5 million/year

Our agreement with the legislature last year was that we would provide more flexibility to programs to serve more over-income children when necessary, but that those children would not be included in the entitlement. This essentially means that for every child we serve over 110%, we serve one fewer below. If we were to include the 25% over-income allotment in the entitlement, we would get the funding to serve those children.

**Expand ECEAP to Meet 2022 Entitlement**

**History:** The original ECEAP entitlement was scheduled for 2018-19. It has been delayed twice.

**Proposal:** Our slot proposal will depend on what we end up asking for in terms of expanding the entitlement. We are interested in getting feedback about program capacity to expand, and whether we

can be more aggressive in our advocacy (i.e. moving up the entitlement deadline by one year, changing the income eligibility and keeping the current 2022 entitlement date, etc.)

DCYF will likely propose 1300 slots per year, mostly full-day. You can see the attached spreadsheet for very rough estimates of the costs of various model options and slot rate increases.

### **Other Big ECEAP Issues**

**Facilities.** The new Early Learning Facilities Fund is up and running, and the hope is that there will be a large number of applications for this initial round of funding (total \$11 million for non-school district applicants). We hope to align with DCYF on a capital budget ask on this. In the original bill fiscal note, the 4 year outlook indicated that there would be an additional \$28 million requested, but I'm not sure what this is based on.

**Early Achievers.** We are likely to request the legislature to extend the amount of time allowed before a first EA review for new ECEAP sites from one year to two years, to enable programs to focus on setting up new sites and systems before they have to deal with raters coming in. We also may request a statutory limit of one rating every 3 years for ECEAP programs in good standing, so they won't end up with multiple reviews when their classrooms are moved from room to room. Licensing would still be required.

**Governor School Readiness Potential Proposal.** We will talk about this in more detail, since this is up in the air at the moment. The big questions are: How do we ensure that all (or 90%) children have what they need to arrive at school ready for success? How do ECEAP and Head Start fit into that?

### **Other ECEAP Issues.**

- The ECEAP Think Tank discusses many potential changes to ECEAP implementation that may rise to the top in the near future.
  - Entitlement – what does it mean when we get close to 'entitlement'?
  - Regional oversight
  - Differential Rates – should ECEAP rates be one-size-fits-all? Should it be negotiated based on model, cost of providing services, etc? Should there be different rates for enrolling families who are more challenging (i.e. higher rates for serving CPS, homeless, ELL, etc)? Should there be incentivized rates for BA lead teachers?
- Licensing & variances
- Removing barriers to building qualified workforce – more scholarships, more cohort models, access to Working Connections for ECE students getting AA degrees, etc.
- ECEAP Admin Rate – DCYF needs more money to hire more staff to support ECEAP, and we will be supporting their request for an additional \$1.4 million to support their work.

### **For more information:**

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