

What is ECEAP?

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is Washington's pre-kindergarten program serving at-risk three and four year olds and their families. ECEAP provides children in 36 counties with preschool education, health services, intensive family support, and parent involvement and training. ECEAP addresses the needs of the whole child to ensure that gains are sustained.

For 2014-2015 ECEAP will be serving 10,091 children in three different models – part-day, full school-day, and extended full day/full year for working parents. The Department of Early Learning estimates that only about 42% of eligible children are being served by either Head Start or ECEAP - there are over 28,000 children eligible but unserved. Every year thousands are left on waiting lists.



Who are our families?

92 percent of the children enrolled in ECEAP were living at or below 110% of the federal poverty line (\$21,483 for a family of 3), including two thirds with a family income less than 80% of FPL. Ten percent of ECEAP children had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for addressing a disability, 10 percent of the children were homeless, 35 percent speak English as a second language, and 42 percent had parents without either a high school diploma or GED. ECEAP serves Washington's children who are at the highest risk for school failure, and puts them on a path to success in school and life.

ECEAP Gets Results for Our Most At-Risk Children

The 2013-14 ECEAP Outcomes Report found that the program was very successful and that children made incredible progress during the school year in the key areas in which ECEAP programs are evaluated: health outcomes, social-emotional development, and learning outcomes.

In just two examples, in the fall of 2013 only 44% of ECEAP children were at or above their expected age level in literacy development. By spring of 2014, 94% demonstrated these skills, an increase of 50%. In the fall of 2013 only 22.6% of ECEAP children were at or above their expected age level in their ability to use numbers and count. By spring of 2013, 81.3% of ECEAP children demonstrated these key school-readiness skills, an increase of 58.7%.

Making sure kids and families are school-ready is ECEAP's primary objective, and the data shows that programs are achieving that goal. **These end of year results show the impressive short-term results of ECEAP's efforts, and the WSIPP study shows that they last.**

WSIPP Report Shows ECEAP works

In 2014, the state legislature asked the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to conduct a retrospective outcome analysis of the ECEAP program, looking back to 2003-4. The study compared 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade test scores from children who had attended ECEAP to those of similar children who had not.

The results were impressive and sustained.

Lasting Impacts of ECEAP

- The study concluded that ***'children who attended ECEAP had significantly higher math and reading scores in 3rd, 4th and 5th grades compared to children who did not attend the program'***. And the 'effect sizes' are as good or better than some of the top full-day state programs in the country, like Abbott Pre-k in New Jersey.
- **Return on Investment** – just based on these impressive test scores, WSIPP found a return of \$13,030 for each ECEAP participant, and that doesn't include two of the major economic benefits of early learning – high school graduation and crime prevention. Previous WSIPP cost-benefit analysis for ECEAP estimated a \$4.20 return for every dollar invested.

ECEAP might be even better than study shows

Because the study looked primarily at 3rd-5th grade test scores, the researchers were limited to looking at ECEAP before 2008. Today ECEAP looks even better than in 2008 – 33% more classroom hours, restrictions on caseload for family support workers, greater emphasis on research-based curriculum and assessment, and participation in Early Achievers.

The study used participation in 'Basic Food' as a comparison group for the non-ECEAP kids, which meant that the overall income level and percentage of native English speakers was higher than the general ECEAP population, and that an estimated 20-25% of those kids may have attended Head Start. Given that ECEAP closely mirrors Head Start and that most children are in programs who provide both, outcomes are likely to be higher for ECEAP if those kids were separated out of the comparison group.

A Successful Model

When ECEAP was established, the legislature recognized the challenges faced by this high-risk population, and created a program that addresses the needs of the whole child – a high quality classroom with individualized learning plans, attention to the health of the child, and fully engaging the family to ensure that the child is supported and gains are sustained. ECEAP is one of the few state pre-k programs who adopted this model, and this study proves that it works.

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Outcome Evaluation of Washington State's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program

Revised December 17, 2014 to add details to Exhibit A3 and remove Exhibit A4

The 2013 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to "conduct a comprehensive retrospective outcome evaluation and return on investment analysis" of Washington State's Early Childhood Education and Assistance program (ECEAP).¹ This report presents our results.

Nationwide, there has been considerable interest in early childhood education and whether these investments can help prepare students for success in the K-12 system and beyond.

WSIPP has previously found that early childhood education appears to be a sound investment. Beginning in the early 2000s, the Washington legislature directed WSIPP to analyze the results of credible studies from other states. Based on our most recent review, we concluded that early childhood education can be expected to improve student outcomes and generate about \$4.75 of benefits for every dollar of cost.²

This previous bottom-line WSIPP estimate, however, is based entirely on non-Washington studies. Washington State's ECEAP program has never been evaluated rigorously. The purpose of this legislatively directed study, therefore, is to determine whether Washington's early childhood education program is achieving results comparable to those found in other states.

¹ Senate Bill 5456, Chapter 16, Laws of 2013.
² Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2010). Benefit-cost results. Retrieved from <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/Research>

Summary

WSIPP conducted a retrospective evaluation of Washington State's early childhood education program, ECEAP, at the direction of the 2013 Legislature.

To analyze the impact of ECEAP, we identified a group of children who received food assistance benefits when they were three- or four-years old and subsequently attended Washington State public schools. Some of these children attended ECEAP and others did not.

We developed a statistical model to determine whether attending ECEAP had any impact on student academic outcomes.

We found that ECEAP has a positive impact on third, fourth, and fifth grade test scores. ECEAP's impact on test scores is almost twice as large as the average effect we found when we reviewed research on early childhood programs in other states.

At this time, we are unable to conduct a complete benefit-cost analysis because we cannot measure whether ECEAP affects longer-term outcomes such as high school graduation and crime.

WSIPP would be able to conduct an evaluation of these long-term outcomes after 2020 when the children in the analysis are expected to graduate from high school.

Suggested citation: Berlin, H., Kay, N., Lee, S., & Hemmelt, D. (2014). Outcome evaluation of Washington State's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program. December 17, 14-01-2014. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.