

Early Care for All
A Draft Vision from WSA
July 2007

Need for Proposal

WSA is interested in developing an “Early Care for All” bill that would outline our association’s vision for early education in the state. The need for such a proposal originated at our Head Start Directors Retreat. Directors based their discussion on several assumptions:

1. There is a need to see that all children in our state receive the highest quality early childhood experience.
2. Key WA policymakers and organizations are already laying the ground work for a major system building effort.
3. Head Start and ECEAP programs need to be well positioned to be apart of the pre-k discussion and to help drive the discussion at the state level.
4. The national pre-k movement is launching efforts around the country. Putting together a strong proposal positions our community to capitalize on the flowing tides sweeping the country and ensures that we will not left out when discussions take place both here in WA and nationally.

Guiding Principles

We began our discussion at the Directors retreat by laying out several major guiding principles for the development of a strong proposal:

- A high quality early care system must provide comprehensive services to children and families who need it.
- A high quality early care system must have continuous, stable, and sufficient funding.
- A high quality early care system prioritizes services for low-income children and families first.
- A high quality early care system must create opportunities for meaningful parent involvement and information sharing.
- A high quality early education system creates opportunities for the development of well trained, educated, and well paid staff.

- A high quality early care system must have a high level of cultural competence and awareness and provide services that respect the cultures of all families.
- A high quality early care system delivers seamless services to pregnant women to pre-school aged children and their families.
- A high quality early education system demonstrates real and measurable outcomes for children and their families.
- A high quality early education system contains a strong and rigorous monitoring system to ensure compliance with regulations.

Summary of Comments on Each Principle

After developing our specific guiding principles we took some time to think about what each of these principles mean and what would go into it. Here is just a brief summary of the discussion on the guiding principles:

Comprehensive Services

For most folks comprehensive services included all of the core comprehensive services currently provided by Head Start and ECEAP. Special focus was placed on the following: physical, mental, and oral health services. There was also a discussion on parent and family support including crisis management and self-sufficiency services. Support services should be added for programs to work with children with disabilities.

Some folks suggested that all families could determine for themselves which “menu” of comprehensive services were needed. In that environment low-income families could continue to benefit from comprehensive services, but families better off financially could opt out.

Finally, many attendees believed that building off of Head Start and ECEAP made the most sense as a starting point. There was some discussion on establishing a one-stop shop for families to obtain services.

Funding

There were two main points made at the Directors retreat: 1) we need to start by fully funding Head Start and ECEAP so we can serve all eligible children with high quality programming; and 2) funding for early education should focus on preserving family stability, be continuous, and not be tied to work status.

Eligibility

All children should be served regardless of their family’s income, however, priority should be given to at risk and low income children first. There was also some discussion of a sliding fee scale, whether there be an income cut-off, and how programs would serve special populations.

Parent Involvement

Opportunities should be created to allow parents to be involved with their children by volunteering in the program, through governance, and by information sharing.

Professional Development

We need an early care system that helps all early care programs attract, retain, and train staff. Most of the comments were focused on providing student loan forgiveness and higher compensation for staff.

Cultural Competence

A good early care system will train staff on cultural awareness, hire staff that reflect the families they serve, have appropriate curriculums and assessments, and establish opportunities for programs to honor and continuously learn about the cultures they are serving.

Seamless Services

Services should be available pre-natal to age 3 as well as for pre-school age children. There was a discussion on the development of Early ECEAP. Folks wanted to make sure the services were comprehensive and met the Early Head Start requirements.

Outcomes

There was strong support for the development of an appropriate assessment that respects cultures and is holistic in scope, but the group wanted to make sure the assessment would not be the driving force for determining funding decisions.

Monitoring

An early care system must have a comprehensive monitoring system that evaluates the success or failure of a program. It should not be simply outcomes focused, and if possible it should not be duplicative. There was support for a monitoring system that could be used for both Head Start and ECEAP.

Opportunity for Feedback

WSA wants to ensure that our entire Head Start and ECEAP community is behind this proposal and that you have a chance to provide your comments and feedback. To assist with this effort please answer the following 3 questions:

- 1. Do you support WSA developing its own “Early Care for All” proposal and why?**

2. Does the above list of guiding principles cover everything?

**3. What additional comments would you like to make on this proposal?
Is there anything we have not thought of or might be missing?**

Please respond by Wednesday July 25th by COB.

Next Steps

So far we have received feedback from Head Start Directors and ECEAP folks. After receiving feedback from all of you on this document our Board of Directors will meet on August 16th. At the meeting we will talk through a draft proposal and get a sense of where everyone is at. If we decide to go forward with this concept we will present our proposal at the WSA Fall Meeting in October for final comments. After that stage we will craft a final proposal for distribution, outline a legislative and grassroots strategy, and enlist your help in moving this project forward.

Contact

Please send all of your comments and feedback to Joel Ryan at joel@wsaheadstarteceap.com. You can also call me at (253)373-9100. Please share this document with staff and parents and anyone else within our community.