



WSA Advocacy Goals for 2009

1. Maintain and Increase investments in the Early Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) for the benefit of children and families.

WSA opposes any effort to cut funding for ECEAP programs and is seeking additional funding to help programs keep pace with inflation. ECEAP has a strong track record of getting low income children ready for school. In a 12-year longitudinal study of ECEAP researchers found that ECEAP children made significantly greater academic gains, displayed more positive behaviors, enjoyed school more, and had fewer health problems than non-ECEAP children. While we are appreciative of the increases ECEAP received in the past few years, programs are still only able to serve 6 out of every 10 eligible children. Additionally, the costs of providing critical programming and services to low income children continues to rise. If programs are expected to maintain the same level of services, we believe that a \$2.5 million vendor rate increase is needed to help programs avoid making cuts to services.

2. Support increased funding for home visiting programs including funding for the establishment of a state home based Early Head Start program

WSA is seeking \$7 million in increased funding for home visiting programs in the 2009 legislative session. A portion of these new funds will go to support a new state home-based Early Head Start program. The Council for Children & Families is currently reviewing the research and will convene their Research Advisory Committee to make a determination as to whether the home-based Early Head Start program can be considered an approved model.

Research on home visiting demonstrates that home visiting programs post a greater return on investment than almost any other early intervention program. Rigorous research of home visiting programs conclude that children are less likely to be abused or neglected, are more likely to improve their language and cognitive abilities, and are more likely to graduate from high school. One successful model of home visiting is the Early Head Start program. Early Head Start programs have shown they can effectively help at-risk children and their parents.

The national Early Head Start study reported positive impacts for home-based programs on a number of parent outcomes, when children were 23 and 36 months old:

- At 24 months old, Early Head Start parents, compared to control group parents, provided significantly more stimulating home environments, participated in more bedtime reading, and had greater knowledge of child development. These parents also reported less parenting stress and greater involvement in education and training activities than control group parents.

- At 36 months old, Early Head Start parents were more supportive during play and continued to report less parenting stress. Compared to control group *children*, home-based Early Head Start children at 24 months old showed stronger vocabulary development.
- At 36 months old, these program children more strongly engaged their parents during play, a measure of social-emotional development.³ Impacts were larger in home-based programs that fully implemented the Performance Standards. In the *fully implemented* home-based programs, there were also positive impacts on child cognitive and language development at 36 months old (Administration for Children and Families [ACF], 2002; Jones Harden et al., 2003).

Currently, only 3 out of 100 eligible pregnant moms, and infants and toddlers, are able to receive Early Head Start services due to a lack of funding. As part of our long term agenda, WSA will advocate for a center based state Early Head Start program. We hope to continue this push following the release of the Washington Head Start study report to be completed by December 2009. In the short term, however, we are hopeful that lawmakers will support more funding for home visiting and in the process help launch a state home-based Early Head Start program.

3. Reform the child care subsidies system so that it does a better job of supporting low income children.

The current child care subsidy system does not do a good job of ensuring that low income children receive consistent, high quality care. The Department of Social and Health Services and the Department of Early Learning require parents receiving a child care subsidy to renew their applications every 6 months and sometimes more frequently. Many parents receiving child care subsidies lose their eligibility because they make slightly more than the income cut off of 200% of the poverty level, cannot find their way through a byzantine set of paperwork, and/or are disqualified because they lose their job. WSA believes that this system does a real disservice to children. We believe that reforms are needed to ensure that children truly receive continuity of learning. The Center for Law and Social Policy found that high quality and stable learning environments lead to better results for children. They found that:

- Infants with secure attachment relationships with their care providers are more likely to play, explore, and interact with adults in their child care setting.
- Very young children transition from room to room can experience high levels of distress.
- Higher numbers of changes in center or family child care providers in the earliest years has been linked to less outgoing and more aggressive behaviors among children at ages four and five.

As such we are calling upon the Governor and state lawmakers to phase in the following proposed changes:

- Allow Head Start and ECEAP parents receiving child care subsidies to automatically maintain their eligibility during the entire program year as is already done in Maryland and Oregon.
- Change the current renewal process for families receiving child care subsidies from 6 months to 1 year.
- Establish more flexibility in the number of paid absences programs can receive. We are proposing moving from the current 5 absences to 10 absences a month before a program loses funding.
- Limit to 10 percent of income the amount families would be required to contribute in co-pays.

4. Increase funding for the federal Head Start program

WSA continues to seek increased funding for Head Start programs so that they can continue to provide the highest quality programming and meet the new mandates in the new Act. WSA supported efforts to improve professional development, expand services to special populations, and strengthen the academic aspects of the program in the reauthorization legislation. However, we remain deeply concerned that while the costs of running programs are increasing, federal funding has remain stagnant. This has led programs to cut services, programming hours, staff, and in some cases the number of children they can serve.