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## **ECEAP Facts**

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is a comprehensive “whole child”, family-focused preschool program designed to help low-income and at-risk children and families succeed in school and life. The program was established in 1985, and was modeled after the successful federal Head Start program.

ECEAP provides an intensive combination of education, health and nutrition screening and assistance, parent involvement and family support. Three- and four-year-olds attend high-quality pre-school classes, are screened and immunized for possible health problems that could hinder learning.

ECEAP is available to families who earn less than 110% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$24,255/year for a family of four). Children in foster care, and children with disabilities are also eligible.

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## **Washington’s Economy is hitting ECEAP families hard**

ECEAP programs have seen significant deterioration in the financial and health situation of their families and children since last year. Many more families are relying on unemployment, food stamps and are in need of emergency housing assistance. More children are arriving at school without basic medical or dental care, and we’re seeing an increase in the percentage of children who aren’t fully immunized.

- At enrollment, 33% of families were on food stamps last year and 45% this year.
- Last year 84.1% of families received their income in wages, and 74.5% this year.
- Last year, 33% of enrolled children were not up-to-date on medical exams. This year, it is 47%.
- Last year, 58% of children needed a dental exam. This year, 64% need these.
- The number of children who are fully immunized declined from 94% to 91%.

In addition, budget cuts made to local social, health and mental health services has it made it even more difficult for children and families to get help. This “double whammy” means that ECEAP programs often find themselves as the only safety net in their communities for the most vulnerable children and families.

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## **Increased demand for ECEAP**

ECEAP programs are reporting the highest demand for services in the history of the program. Right now, there are 3,294 3- and 4-year-old low income children waiting for a chance to get into ECEAP, but they cannot enroll due to the state economic crisis. These new numbers are more than 50 percent higher than at the same point last year – a troubling all-time high in demand for these services.

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## **ECEAP is an investment in future savings and success**

In a 12-year longitudinal study of ECEAP (1988-2000), 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.

Families also greatly benefited from ECEAP’s family orientation and focus on parent involvement and training. In year 1 of the study only 5% of ECEAP families were above the Federal Poverty Level; in year 9 over 50% had reached that level, a ten-fold increase. Their mean family income rose by more than 51%, and their reliance on public assistance was greatly reduced.

Other studies have shown that at-risk children without quality preschool were 70% more likely to commit violent crimes, have lower graduation rates and higher drug use.