

ECEAP Advocacy Agenda 2019

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. DCYF is proposing a 16% increase for 2019.

Proposal: We would like to propose a minimum 16% 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 propose a combination of increasing the maximum income allowed to 130% of FPL (\$27K for a family of 3, or a little less than \$13/hour for a full time worker) and identifying a few very high need populations for automatic eligibility. These estimates will change:

	<i>New children/year</i>	<i>Estimated Cost (based on 70% schoolday, 30% extended day w/ 12% slot rate increase)</i>
Increase to 130% FPL, to align with Free Lunch and Head Start	3850	\$52 million/year
Homeless children	700	\$9 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	\$10.5 million/year
3 year olds transitioning from EHS, ESIT, or other similar programs	Unknown	Unknown

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.

Many of the children proposed for categorical eligibility (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.

Expand ECEAP to Meet 2022 Entitlement

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

Proposal: We propose to front-load the slots for ECEAP to underscore the commitment to reaching the 90% school ready goal and to stop leaving children behind. Our recommendation would be 1800 slots per year, for a total of 3600 for the biennium.

DCYF will likely propose 1300 slots per year, mostly full-day, for the next 4 years in order to meet the entitlement as now written.

Cost: \$77 million for the biennium, assuming 70% schoolday, 30% extended day, and a 12% slot rate increase.

Other ECEAP Legislative 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. Rumor has it that the Dept. of Commerce, based on this year's RFP and the needs assessment, may request \$88 million

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.

Workforce. Removing barriers to building qualified workforce – more scholarships, more cohort models, access to Working Connections for ECE students getting AA degrees, etc. We would like a special focus on building a workforce that reflects the population that we serve racially and ethnically.

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.

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