

IMPLEMENTING 15 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K: Washington

The Washington State Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) was created in 1985 to prepare 3- and 4-year-olds from low-income families for success in school and in life. ECEAP focuses on the well-being of the whole child by providing comprehensive nutrition, health, education and family support services to Washington’s most at-risk young children. Funding for ECEAP is awarded through a competitive process. ECEAP is operated by a variety of agencies including school districts, educational service districts, colleges/universities, nonprofit organizations, and local governments. The program is offered in 35 of the state’s 39 counties. Head Start serves 3- and 4-year-olds in three of the counties not served by ECEAP, and the other county is sparsely populated.

Three- and 4-year-olds from families with incomes at or below 110% of the federal poverty level are eligible to attend ECEAP. Children with IEPs are also eligible to enroll in ECEAP, regardless of income. Up to 10% of enrollment can be children who do not meet the income requirement but experience other risks that could jeopardize learning, development, or school success. Enrollment is prioritized based on a combination of income and other risk factors.

Essential Elements

Fifteen Essential Elements clustered in three categories—Enabling Environment, Support for Educators and Young Learners, and High-Quality Instruction—have been identified among exemplary pre-K programs (Minervino, 2014). Note that practice in the field may vary so as to be either better or worse than might be expected based on specific policy or guidance. Consistency or quality of practice across large-scale programs is more difficult to assess than policy.

Enabling Environment		Rigorous, Articulated Early Learning Policies								Strong Program Practices				
Political Will	Strong Leaders	BA + comp	Class size	Two Adults	Hours/ Dosage	EL Standards	Effective Curriculum	Special Ed	DLL support	HQ Teaching	PD	Child Assessments	Data Driven	Integrated System
●	●	–	●	●	–	●	●	–	—	ND	●	●	●	●

Key: ● Fully Met ○ Partially Met – Not Met ND Not determined

Political will. Legislation passed in the Washington State Legislature in 2010 (House Bill 2731) outlined the legislative intent to establish state Pre-K as a statutory entitlement for all eligible children by 2018-2019. This deadline has since been extended to 2022-2023. The Early Start Act showed continued clear bipartisan legislative support for early learning in Washington. Governor Jay Inslee (D) proposed the largest early learning funding increase in state history, including a substantial increase in ECEAP, though the final 2015-2017 budget contained only a minor expansion of the program. Early learning has also enjoyed legislative and cabinet-level support, particularly from Ruth Kagi and Bette Hyde; both have since retired, but their leadership can still be felt in the institutions that they led.



In 2016-2017, Washington State invested \$96 million in ECEAP. State funding comes from both the state general fund and the “opportunity pathways account,” which consists of lottery funds. In 2015-2016, the state increased overall funding and enrollment as well as spending per child. In the 2017 legislative session, the State Legislature invested an additional \$7,710,000 to create spaces for 800 more children for 2017-2018; funded 1,000 more slots for children beginning in 2018-2019. In addition, the Legislature invested \$12,670,000 to increase the vendor rate for ECEAP providers for 2017-2019. Washington’s largest city, Seattle, created the Seattle Preschool Program, supported by the Seattle City Council, Mayor, and voters who passed a property tax funding stream in 2014.

Across Washington, the Early Learning Action Alliance (ELAA) is a coordinated and organized statewide coalition focused on advocating for state policies and investments in early learning. Founded in 2008 and led by Children’s Alliance, ELAA has been instrumental in defending early learning programs during the recession, and in the recent advancements, as Washington’s economy has recovered. The coalition comprises over 50 organizations, sets an annual legislative agenda, and establishes legislative, communication, and mobilization strategies for early learning to be widely organized and used across the state.

Washington’s early learning ecosystem has benefited significantly from investments by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has funded an early learning program and advocacy portfolio in Washington for the past 10 years. Other foundation leaders in Washington include the Boeing Company and the Bezos Family Foundation.

Compelling vision and strong leadership. ECEAP had been overseen by the Department of Early Learning (DEL) and early learning initiatives have fared relatively well. In 2018, DEL joined the much larger Department of Children, Youth, and Families. While there are some opportunities for early learning to be more coordinated and aligned with other units, like child welfare, there are also concerns that early learning’s profile in the state may not be as prominent. Ross Hunter, the previous head of DEL, is now the secretary of the new department, so that may be helpful in maintaining a focus on ECE. In 2016-2017, 19 FTEs were assigned to work on ECEAP at the state level.

Washington also benefits from the University of Washington’s multiple approaches to building early learning leaders and disseminating high quality programs and practices, including the College of Education at UW which has been home to one of the Head Start Centers—the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning (NCQTL) and the National P-3 Center. The UW is also the home to the Institute for Learning and Brain Science (I-LABS), a leader in early childhood brain research.

Education and compensation. ECEAP requires lead teachers to have an AA or higher with the equivalent of 30 credits in early childhood education or have a valid state teaching certificate with an endorsement in ECE or EC Special Education. ECEAP teachers do not earn compensation at the same level as K-3 teachers. ECEAP lead teacher salaries vary based on degree, geographic location, and organization.

Adult-child ratio and two adults in the classroom. ECEAP has a maximum class size of 20 for 4-year-olds and requires a staff-child ratio of 1:10.

Learning time. Washington has four operating schedule options: (1) old part-day model at 2.5 hours per day minimum and 320 hours per year, (2) new part-day model (beginning with slots awarded in 2015) at 3 hours per day minimum and 360 hours per year, (3) full school-day model at 5.5 to 6.5 hours per day and 1,000 hours per year, and (4) extended day at 10 or more hours per day and 2,370 hours per year. In 2016-2017, most children (83.4%) attended a part-day program.

Age-appropriate learning standards. Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines were last revised in 2012, are comprehensive, and aligned with the state's K-3 standards and the ECEAP Performance Standards. The state provides professional development opportunities, online training modules, and coaching to support use of the ELDS.

System that ensures effective curriculum. ECEAP programs must use a DEL-approved, comprehensive, research-based curriculum, which includes Creative Curriculum or HighScope. DEL purchases full sets of either curriculum for each classroom. If an ECEAP contractor wishes to use an alternative research-based curriculum they must complete DEL's Alternative Curriculum Approval Form. In order to ensure the curricula are implemented with fidelity, staff who support teachers that are implementing Creative Curriculum (92% of ECEAP sites) must attend a *Coaching to Fidelity* training provided by the QRIS staff. For the ECEAP sites using HighScope, fidelity is built into training and teacher/trainer feedback. The ECEAP contractor must also ensure that the ECEAP lead teachers participate in the DEL sponsored, in-person curriculum training. Beginning in 2016-2017, a process was put in place for ECEAP contractors to submit additional curricula for approval, based on the Head Start National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning's Preschool Curriculum Consumer Report.

Support for students with special needs. Children with developmental delays or disabilities are eligible for ECEAP and are not counted in the over-income limits; they receive priority points during the enrollment process. In 2016-2017, 10% of ECEAP children were identified as having special needs. If a child is identified as having special needs, ECEAP providers must work with the Local Education Agency (LEA) to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that identifies and plans for needed services.

Support for dual (English) language learners (DLL). In 2016-2017, 34% of ECEAP students were classified as being DLLs; a much greater percentage of DLLs than estimated for the state (23%) population as a whole. To support DLLs, the following program options are permitted: monolingual non-English classes, transitional bilingual programs, DLL immersion classes, and summer language programs. Of the 817 classes that operated during the 2016-2017 program year, instruction was provided in: English in 641 classrooms; Spanish in 4 classrooms; other languages in 3 classrooms; English and Spanish in 160 classrooms; English and another language in 8 classrooms; and English, Spanish, and another language in 1 classroom. In 2016-2017, 11% of preschool lead teachers and 34% of assistant teachers were fluent in a language other than English. ECEAP providers are required to complete a home language survey on all children, and, as appropriate, assess the child's language acquisition as part of the Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment. Screening tools must be responsive and sensitive to the cultural and linguistic needs of each child and family, and administered only with parent consent.

High-quality teaching. CLASS or ECERS scores were not able to be reviewed.

Professional development. ECEAP requires 15 professional development hours per year for lead teachers and family support staff. ECEAP contractors must have a training plan for staff. The state

requires individualized annual professional development plans for any lead or assistant teacher who does not yet fully meet the required qualifications for their position.

Since 2012, Washington has been implementing practice-based coaching as the framework for providing early childhood teachers with support as they implement quality improvement plans as part of Early Achievers (QRIS). Early Achievers coaches are employed by regional organizations and trained and supported by the University of Washington's Childcare Quality and Early Learning Center for Research and Professional Development (CQEL). CQEL is the state's QRIS evaluation partner and also leads work to ensure that Washington's professional development system is based on practices that promote quality and school readiness outcomes. The average caseload for each coach is 2.9 sites and 5.2 classrooms/lead teachers per coach. Coaches may also be assigned to Head Start and/or child care classes in addition to their ECEAP classes.

Child Assessments. ECEAP children are assessed three times/year in part- and full-day classes, and four/times per year in extended day classes, using Teaching Strategies GOLD. Though ECEAP has had an assessment process throughout its history, and voluntary use of Teaching Strategies GOLD was widespread for many years, it did not become mandatory until fall 2013. Teaching Strategies GOLD is also used as part of the WaKIDS process as children enter kindergarten. ECEAP performance standards also require that contractors complete developmental screenings on children within 90 days of enrollment (Head Start requirement is within 45 days of enrollment). Teachers receive PD and coaching support to use child assessment as a formative process to make adjustments to the curriculum, to individualize instruction and support for each child at the local level, to track child and program outcomes overtime, and to guide teacher training, professional development, or technical assistance.

Data-driven decision-making. As of 2015-2016, all ECEAP sites were required to participate in the state's QRIS, Early Achievers, and receive a rating of level four or five by March 2016. Structured observations of classroom quality are conducted every three years using the ECERS and CLASS as part of the QRIS. ECEAP contracts with the University of Washington to conduct the ERS & CLASS observations, using observers who are certified reliable. Every ECEAP classroom has a coach who has access to the QRIS data, including ERS and CLASS score details. They use these in discussions and planning with teachers. The ECEAP Contract requires contractors to use the CLASS and ERS assessments to improve curriculum, learning environments and adult-child interactions.

Review of program records occurs through data entered in ELMS, ECEAP's database, or MERIT, ECEAP's professional registry, and reviewed on a weekly/monthly/quarterly/or annual schedule depending on the factor reviewed. Additional records are reviewed by the state onsite during the periodic site visits. Other monitoring includes a list of deliverables prepared by each contractor and sent to the state including program self-assessment, service area agreements, operating budget, and staff compensation review.

The legislature commissioned a study of ECEAP's outcomes in 2013. The retrospective evaluation conducted by Washington State Institute for Public Policy, released in December 2014, found that "ECEAP has a positive impact on third, fourth, and fifth grade test scores. ECEAP's impact on test scores is twice as large as the average effect we found when we reviewed research on early childhood programs in other states."



Integrated System. ECEAP has a fully integrated system. Professional development, which includes coaching, integrates the child assessments and curriculum that is aligned with the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines. The state has access to structured classroom observations that are also used at the program level to improve the quality of the ECEAP classrooms.