

Washington Head Start State Collaboration Office

Brief Overview of Projects Serving Vulnerable Children

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If you would like further information on any of these projects, please contact:

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Early ECEAP

Similar to many states, Washington is working to increase the availability of high-quality services for infants and toddlers, including child care for low-income working families. A key strategy funded in the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5) that Washington received is developing a design for **Early ECEAP** (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program). Early ECEAP will provide an opportunity to serve more at-risk infants and toddlers with comprehensive early learning and family support services modeled after the successful Early Head Start center-based program funded at the federal level by the Office of Head Start.

ECEAP is a comprehensive preschool program for children ages three to five, modeled after Head Start. ECEAP is funded by the state of Washington and, resembling Head Start, includes part-day, school-day and working-day models to meet different family and community needs. Currently, ECEAP serves 14,000 low-income children in Washington.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) created an Early ECEAP Design Team that includes representation from external and internal partners, including tribes. The Early ECEAP Design Team work will result in a framework and funding plan for future implementation. In 2019, the state legislature passed [Senate Bill 5437](#) which calls for the development of a plan for phased implementation of Early ECEAP. The legislation also provides a framework for Early ECEAP policy, including that the pilot sites must be delivered through child care center and family home providers who meet minimum licensing standards and are enrolled in Early Achievers (Quality Rating and Improvement System, or QRIS). It also states the requirement to prioritize locations for the pilot sites with programs currently providing Early Head Start, Head Start or ECEAP, and to include a mix of urban, suburban and rural locations. Funds to implement the pilot program may include a combination of federal, state or private sources. The Design Team is recommending several vulnerable populations to be categorically eligible to be enrolled, such as children experiencing homelessness, children involved in child welfare and children with young parents under the age of 21.

Beginning in October 2019, DCYF will use the Early ECEAP plan to launch Early ECEAP readiness training at 10 early learning pilot sites. Recommendations learned from the pilot sites will be used to inform an Early ECEAP launch in subsequent years. During 2019, this work is housed in the Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) within the Early Learning Programs Division at DCYF.

Child Welfare – Early Learning Project

DCYF launched in July 2018, bringing together child welfare services with early learning services. In July 2019, juvenile rehabilitation services, the Office of Juvenile Justice and the Child Care Subsidy Programs were also added to the agency. As outlined in the legislation creating the new department, [House Bill 1661](#), one of the goals behind DCYF's creation is to assure that our most at-risk children are provided high-quality early learning opportunities. DCYF believes that focusing on referral pathways for children involved in child protection processes will support these vulnerable children's future academic success, and reduce the likelihood of future child welfare involvement.

The connection of vulnerable children involved in child welfare services to high-quality early learning programs is a strategy funded in the PDG B-5. Three early learning liaison positions were created as a part of this child welfare and early learning project to support that mission. Our theory is that every eligible family will benefit from being connected to community early learning and family support programs. However, the first year of the project found that system demands make it challenging for Child Protective Service case workers to become familiar with the landscape of early learning and family support programs available to the families they work with, and to prioritize making and supporting these referrals. The early learning liaisons will be located within child welfare offices in three regions in Washington. The early learning liaisons will develop relationships with the high-quality early learning programs in their communities, including Early Head Start, Head Start, ECEAP, early intervention services and evidence-based home visiting programs. They will develop a successful referral process to meet the needs of the children, families and programs. The Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab is supporting this project by providing Fellows to lead the work. The HSSCO will facilitate a learning community for the early learning liaisons, which includes providing knowledge and support regarding the early learning system, programs in their communities and to support the early learning liaisons learning from each other as they pursue their work in separate regions.

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Improving the Lives of Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in Washington

The Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP, the Office of the Governor, Building Changes, a public/private partnership in Washington, the HSSCO located within DCYF in the state of Washington and providers across the state are partnering together to expand current state efforts to improve the lives of young children experiencing homelessness and their families. We are working together to create targeted solutions for young children experiencing homelessness to help them develop critical foundational skills to be successful in school and mitigate the trauma of homelessness in early childhood. We are committed to researching and implementing replicable best practices. During this next year, this partnership will accomplish stakeholder meetings, learn from people with lived expertise, analyze and synthesize data and present a summary of the findings to policymakers and providers to encourage early learning and housing providers to prioritize the needs of young children and families experiencing homelessness in their programs and advocacy, including developing new policies as needed.

The partnership, working with existing Head Start grantees, will develop pilot sites to take Early Head Start and Head Start services to where homeless families live. This could include shelters, transitional housing and substance abuse treatment facilities. The partnership will work closely with the Region X Office of Head Start to explore the usage of locally designed options to develop innovative ways to meet homeless families where they are. Information from the pilot sites will be shared to inform replication of best practices and of the models. The partnership will also use data to track our progress. Currently in Washington, only 26.8 percent of children experiencing homelessness are kindergarten ready.

This project is supported by a grant from *Education Leads Home*, a national campaign focused on improving education and life outcomes for children and youth experiencing homelessness.