

Early Connections Play and Learn (ECPL)

Trained early learning specialists provide small groups of families and caregivers fun and educational activities, referrals for formal early learning, and developmental screening for young children in coordination with Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) community service offices (CSO).

What is Play and Learn?

Groups held in a community space where young children can experience early learning opportunities and peer play while their families learn about child development and local resources.

What is the model for ECPL?



ECPL is modeled after Kaleidoscope Play and Learn groups, which take place in community settings for children receiving Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) care, as well as for caregivers whose young children are not enrolled in formal early learning programs. These groups meet in community spaces such as libraries and community centers. For more information, go to www.childcare.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Kaleidoscope_Play_%26_Learn_Description.pdf.

What makes ECPL different?



To meet community need, DCYF collaborated with Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA) to pilot the ECPL groups in DSHS CSOs, predominantly serving caregivers who access services and benefits through CSO offices. ECPL can provide additional resources to support a family's basic needs and child's developmental screenings. For more information, go to <https://catholiccharitiescw.org/index.php?p=services/early-learning-and-child-care/child-care-aware>.

Which communities are served by ECPL?






Five rural locations are served in Eastern and Central Washington.

Services are designed for families accessing services and benefits through the support of CSO caseworkers.

Groups are supported by **highly-skilled, bilingual, and responsive early learning specialists** who are qualified to coordinate wrap-around services for families.

COVID-19 RESPONSE: MEETING RURAL COMMUNITY NEEDS IN VIRTUAL SPACES

In 2019, ECPL was offered exclusively in CSOs. This provided a safe, accessible, convenient, and fun in-office space for families to wait for appointments. In 2020, when CSOs were closed to clients, ECPL pivoted to a virtual space. From July 2020 to June 2021¹ virtual ECPL developed:

Design considerations	Served
Virtual programming with live components, including a YouTube channel with mailed activity kits, virtual live story times, and phone-based developmental screenings in English or Spanish.	 767 Children Served by ECPL 430+ Caregiver Attendance  253 Virtual Group Attendance
For families without internet access, ¹ a staffed text and talk line was added for real time conversations in English and Spanish. DSHS caseworkers included a flyer about ECPL and the talk/text line with EBT and WorkFirst client mailings.	 51,500 Text Messages Exchanged

1. Child Care Aware of Washington (2021). CCA Early Connections *Play and Learn PDG B5 Annual Report Quarter 4 FY20/21*. Retrieved August, 2021.

1. For Washington families earning \$20,000 or less a year, 40% did not have internet subscriptions, according to U.S. Census data from 2013-2017.

WASHINGTON'S PRESCHOOL DEVELOPMENT GRANT BIRTH THROUGH FIVE RENEWAL FY2021 EVALUATIVE BRIEFS

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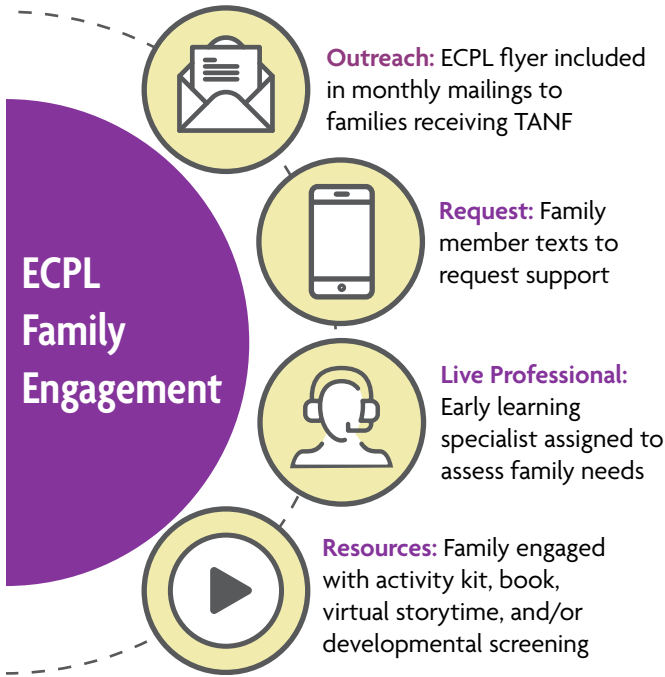
The project described was supported by the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG-R B-5), Grant Number 90TP0069, from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Child Care, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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DCYF PUBLICATION (02-2022) IAA_0004

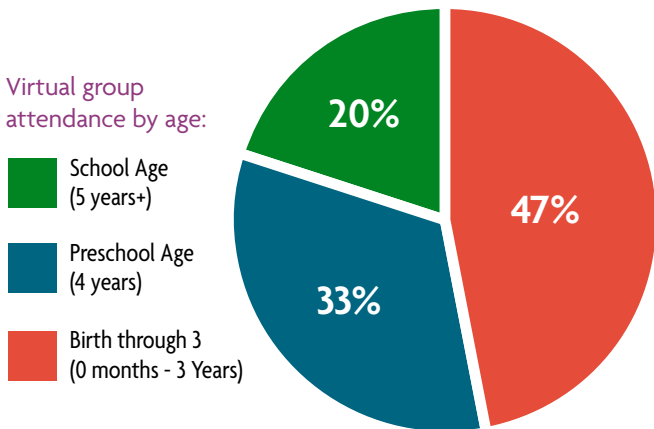


How do families access resources?



Who benefits from Early Connections Play and Learn?

Designed for children birth to 3 years, ECPL expanded to serve a wider range of children, including kindergarten-3rd grade, in response to COVID-19 related school closures.



In FY2021, parent surveys conducted by CCA of WA revealed:

- **96.5%** would refer a friend or family to ECPL
- **65%** percent of English and Spanish speaking families prefer text messaging communication
- **25%** of parents requested developmental screenings

Successes

- ✓ 700 families across five CSOs connected with ECPL through DSHS caseworkers and managers
- ✓ Staffed text/talk line, video story-time, and activities made possible by leveraging technology expertise
- ✓ Developmental screenings and referrals reach families outside of formal early learning settings; inspired by previous Project Launch investments
- ✓ Video production and data reports produced through previous Early Achievers investments
- ✓ Training materials and coursework for early learning specialists developed in anticipation of ECPL model expansion

Systemic Challenges	Next Steps
Response from the CSOs and families has been overwhelmingly positive, but services cannot be expanded due to lack of sufficient funding.	Expand to new CSO location with additional funding from partner agency.
In-person services cannot be offered until CSOs re-open.	Preparing with partner agency to plan for return to in-person ECPL services as DSHS re-opens offices.
A digital divide in rural Washington that prevents access and isolates families from engaging with online resources.	Continue to build relationships with additional CSO managers in anticipation of expansion and engagement of more families.