



Washington Preschool Program: Increasing Access and Outcomes for Children

Executive Summary

Final Recommendations of the
Early Learning Technical Workgroup
November 2011

Improving Preschool Access and Quality in Washington

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Executive Summary

The following recommendations and analysis constitute the Final Report of the Early Learning Technical Workgroup as required by SB 6759. Considerable research and extensive deliberation lead the Workgroup to recommend a voluntary high-quality preschool program for all 3- and 4-year-old children in Washington. The Workgroup views these preschool recommendations, referred to as Washington Preschool in this report, as a key element of education reform. A high-quality preschool program with higher intensity than the state-funded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and rigorous accountability is recommended, with the aim of significantly increasing the number of children in all population groups that are prepared for kindergarten, so that K-12 funds can be used more effectively to the advantage of all students.

Our state's 10-year Early Learning Plan includes a strategy to support school readiness for all children by implementing voluntary, universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds (strategy #13). Washington Preschool would build on a history of strong support for preschool from the Governor, the Legislature, and the Quality Education Council.

The Need for a Solution

Education is the fuel of fiercely competitive 21st century economies. By 2018, 67 percent of jobs in Washington will require a college degree or credential, yet our state's high school graduation rates hover in the bottom third nationally. Only 31 percent of 2004 Washington high school graduates had graduated from either a two- or four-year college by September 2010.¹ The picture is far bleaker for students of color, with only 16.2 percent of African Americans, 15.5 percent of Hispanics, and 10.7 percent of Native American students graduating from college. **Clearly something must be done.**

Considerations: Balancing Educational Gains and Cost

In developing these recommendations, the Workgroup was guided by the twin aims of *substantially improving educational attainment for children* and *exercising prudence in light of the economic climate*. The following considerations informed the Technical Workgroup's recommendations:

Two years of preschool are far more effective than one year, in achieving educational outcomes. New Jersey's rigorously evaluated preschool program closed more than 50 percent of children's achievement gap after one year, versus 18 percent for the "no Pre-K group." Two years of participation roughly doubled the gain at second grade on most measures.² Washington needs this boost in educational outcomes.

Preschool can reduce grade-level retention and special education costs-- to schools and to children. Grade level retention was cut in half by second grade for participating 3- and 4- year-olds in New Jersey.³ In Pennsylvania, only 2.45 percent of Pre-K Count children needed school district special education, versus 18 percent for non-participants; 3-year olds who participated for two years showed the greatest gains.⁴ Kindergarten readiness assessments of Washington's Longview School District show that nearly twice as many children (48 percent) who have no preschool require alternative curricula and intensive supports for reading skills as children who participate in community preschool (25 percent). Washington can reduce spending on expensive interventions.

¹ The BERC Group College Tracking Data Services. "Washington State High School Graduates 2004 to present, graduating from college as of September 2010" <http://www.collegetracking.com/reporting/Reports.aspx>

² Frede, E, Kwanghee, J, Barnett, W.S., Figueras, A. "The APPLES Blossom: Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (PPLES) Preliminary Results through 2nd grade" (June 2009) http://nieer.org/pdf/apples_second_grade_results.pdf

³ Frede, E, Kwanghee, J, Barnett, W.S., Figueras, A. "The APPLES Blossom: Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (PPLES) Preliminary Results through 2nd grade" (June 2009) http://nieer.org/pdf/apples_second_grade_results.pdf

⁴ Bagnato, S.J., Salaway, J., Suen, H. "Pre-K Counts in Pennsylvania for Youngsters' Early School Success: Authentic Outcomes for an Innovative Prevention and Promotion Initiative" (2009) http://www.uclid.org/uclid/pdfs/ecp_specs_report.pdf

Children of all income levels and abilities benefit from preschool. In Oklahoma's state-funded preschool, children from lower-middle class families (130 percent to -185 percent of federal poverty level or FPL) showed a 74 percent increase in letter-word identification and a 37 percent increase in spelling.⁵ However, preschool remains out of reach for many of these working families. At the same time, recent studies reveal that, despite better performance on average, children from middle-income families account for the largest numbers of children failing and dropping out of school nationally. These are problems that high-quality preschool education can help prevent.⁶ The children of Washington's working families deserve this opportunity.

Washington ranks low in access to preschool. Washington ranks 31st of all states in preschool participation for 4-year-olds and 16th in access for 3-year-olds. Oklahoma, ranked first in four-year-old participation, serves 85.8 percent. In comparison, 20.3 percent of 4-year-olds in Washington attend ECEAP, Head Start or special education preschool (on par with Mississippi at 20.2 percent). Vermont (ranked first in three-year-old participation) provides preschool to 29.4 percent of 3-year-old children compared to Washington's 9.5 percent. Washington must do better.

The Vision for the Washington Preschool Program

The Early Learning Technical Workgroup's recommendations are grounded in the vision that: *All children in Washington, whose families so choose, will have access to high-quality preschool learning experiences that prepare them to be ready for kindergarten and ready to perform at or above grade level by third grade.* For this reason, the Workgroup recommends that Washington set a goal of "making high-quality, voluntary preschool with a sliding fee scale available to all 3- and 4-year-old children whose families choose it."

Additionally, the Workgroup recommends that the preschool program build toward a unified system of early learning and an educational continuum that effectively connects preschool to kindergarten through third grade. Toward this end, the Workgroup underscores the importance of services and supports for infants and toddlers and their families and also recommends integrating Washington Preschool with the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System.

Findings from Rigorous Evaluation of Preschool Programs

The Workgroup analyzed results from nine rigorously evaluated preschool programs in 10 states and reviewed cost-benefit data from two studies that have followed children into adulthood. Because the Chicago Child-Parent Centers approach is more similar to the Washington Preschool recommendations, the Technical Workgroup believes that Washington Preschool will achieve results similar to those of the Chicago program in the following table.

Outcomes and Benefit-Cost Analyses of High-Quality Preschool Education

	Chicago Child-Parent Centers	High/Scope Perry Preschool
Year began	1983	1962
Sample size	1,539	123
Age	Ages 3-4	Ages 3-4
Program schedule	Half-day, school year	Half-day, school year
Family Support	Home visits, parent resource program, community mobilization	Weekly home visits
Program Outcomes in comparison to control groups⁷		
Special Education	14% vs. 25% at age 18	15% vs. 34% at age 15
Grade Retention by Age 15	23% vs. 38%	NA (school policy against retention)
High School Completion	66% vs. 54% at age 22	71% vs. 54% at age 27
Cost to Benefits (2006 Dollars, Discounted at 3%)⁸		
Cost	\$ 8,224	\$ 17,599
K-12 Cost Savings	\$ 5,989	\$ 9,787
Crime Cost Savings	\$41,100	\$198,981
Earnings	\$34,123	\$ 74,878
Total Benefits	\$83,511	\$284,086
Cost-to-Benefit Ratio	1 to 10	1 to 16

⁵Gormley, W. Jr. et al., "The Effects of Universal Pre-K on Cognitive Development," *Developmental Psychology* 41, no. 6 (2005); Wat, A. "The Pre-K Pinch: Early Education and the Middle Class," (2008). Pre-K Now, Washington, DC: http://www.preknow.org/documents/pre-kpinch_Nov2008_report.pdf.

⁶ Barnett, W.S. "Maximizing Returns from Prekindergarten Education. In "Education and Economic Development: A Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland Research Conference. Cleveland, OH: Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland" (2004)

⁷ Galinsky, E. "The Economic Benefits of High-Quality Early Childhood Programs; What Makes the Difference" (February 2006) Families and Work Institute & The Committee for Economic Development

⁸ Barnett, W. J., Yarosz, D, J. "Who Goes to Preschool and Why Does It Matter?" Table 1. November 2007 National Institute for Early Education Research

Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations combine gradual ramp-up of a high-quality program with rigorous evaluation and continuous quality improvement to ensure good results.

A. Improve Access: Open to All 3- and 4-Year-Olds in a Zone Approach

The focus on educational attainment, benefit to children of all income levels, Washington's low ranking in access to preschool, and gains from two years of preschool lead the Workgroup to make the following recommendations regarding access to Washington Preschool:

	Current ECEAP	Washington Preschool Recommendation	Difference
Eligible Children	4-year-olds and some 3-year-olds in families up to 110% of FPL or facing developmental risk	Voluntary for all 3 & 4 year-olds with graduated co-pays for families over 250% FPL	Voluntary for <i>all</i> 3 & 4 year-olds Graduated co-pays
Transportation	Allowed expense, not required.	Limited transportation funds. Allowed expense, not required.	Limited transportation funding

B. Provide High-Quality and Adequate Intensity: Program Quality and Standards

The Workgroup recommends the following quality standards that will result in the best outcomes for children per dollar invested. Reducing any of these interdependent elements is likely to reduce effectiveness of the program:

	Current ECEAP	Washington Preschool Recommendation	Difference
Classroom Hours	320 hours per year, minimum.	450 preschool classroom hours per year, minimum	40% more hours
Teacher Qualifications	Lead teachers: AA or higher degree w/ 30 credits in early childhood education	Lead Teacher- BA Degree in Early Childhood Education or related field, or BA & demonstrated competence	BA Degree- ECE /Related field; or BA degree & demonstrated competence
Class Size and Teacher/Child Ratio	Maximum class size: 20 Teacher: Child Ratio- 1:9 or better	Maximum class size: 18 Teacher: Child Ratio: 1:9 or better, plus, additional staff for high-risk children (below 130% FPL, homeless, in foster care; with an IEP; or ELL)	Smaller class size Added resources for high risk children (Response To Intervention – RTI – approach)
Professional Development	Teachers- 15 hours per year. Lead teachers/ family support specialists - 15 hours per year.	100 approved hours of continuing education study and/or equivalent academic credit (10 quarter hours) for lead teachers every five years.	More hours and more intentional professional development required for lead teachers
Child Health & Family Support Services	For all children, health screening, assistance with access, family support and follow-up.	Initial screening with tiered child health, family support and engagement based on child and family needs	After initial screening, services based on individual child and family needs

C. Increase Accountability: Performance Goals and Evaluation

Based on its research, the Technical Workgroup makes the following recommendations concerning evaluation, performance goals and expected results:

1. Conduct preschool classroom quality assessment and child outcomes evaluation to inform implementation and provide accountability.
2. Establish performance goals for expected preschool and elementary child outcome results:
 - Children attain age-level skills on preschool assessments linked to the Washington Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS).
 - Kindergarten readiness demonstrated by WaKIDS at kindergarten entry
 - Students at, or above, grade-level by end of third grade (elementary school assessments)
 - Reduced grade level retention and special education by end of third grade (P-20 Database)

D. Institute a Mixed Delivery System of High-Quality Providers: Eligible Providers

The workgroup recommends a mixed delivery system with a wide variety of eligibility providers to support the rich diversity of our state. Research shows that school district and community providers are both effective. This approach allows the most parent choice.

1. Allow a wide array of public and private entities to serve under contract as preschool providers, providing that the preschool program is free from religious instruction, activities or symbolism.
2. Providers should be approved by DEL through an application process and establishment of a contract for services. They must be in good standing with contract requirements, including performance standards, and applicable state laws and regulations.

	ECEAP	Washington Preschool Recommendation	Difference
Eligible Providers	Public or private nonsectarian organizations	Public and private entities, including nonprofits, for-profit organizations and sectarian organizations providing that the program is free from religious instruction, activities or symbolism	Open to more types of providers

E. Clarify Governance Responsibilities

The Workgroup recommends that DEL manage Washington Preschool and:

1. Work with OSPI to promote preschool through third grade (P-3) educational alignment.
2. Establish a subcommittee of the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) with appropriate expertise to guide development of the new program.

F. Recommend Role of the ECEAP Program

In the interest of creating a unified early learning system and maximizing effectiveness and efficiencies of current programs, the Workgroup recommends creating a single Washington Preschool program.

1. Merge ECEAP into the new program upon full implementation. ECEAP slots should be converted to Washington Preschool in graduated steps so that the most vulnerable children can benefit from the higher intensity preschool program.
2. Maintain two side-by-side programs during early implementation.

G. Create Washington Preschool as an Entitlement Program: Analysis of Basic Education and Entitlements

The Workgroup researched legal and programmatic issues related to implementation of the preschool program as a program of basic education or as an entitlement (statutory or constitutional.) Basic education clearly provides the most protection of funding. However, the Workgroup believes that, at this time, the associated governance requirements and political challenges would put the focus on legal requirements and politics rather than on the impact of preschool. For this reason, the Workgroup recommends that Washington Preschool become a statutory entitlement consistent with House Bill 2731, passed in 2010.

1. When full implementation is achieved, any eligible child shall be entitled to enrollment in the program.

H. Phase In Gradually, Implement Fully by Fiscal Year 2024-25

The Technical Workgroup believes that voluntary high-quality preschool and full-day kindergarten are equally important for improving educational achievement gains. This, combined with the need for prudence in this economic climate, leads the Workgroup to recommend that Washington:

1. Link implementation of Washington Preschool to state-funded full-day kindergarten;
2. Phase the preschool program in gradually so that it reaches full implementation in school year 2024-25.

Program Recommendations and Financial Projections

The research-based program quality elements used to create the above policy recommendations also informed the program recommendations (including mixed classrooms, administration, revenue and funding assumptions) and financial model. Recommendations for program implementation include:

1. Move toward a **single Washington Preschool program** that encompasses the current ECEAP and special education preschool programs. Gradually convert existing ECEAP slots to the new preschool program;
2. Establish **inclusive, mixed-income classrooms** with differentiated levels of teaching and family support resources. Simply put, children who need the most will get the teaching and support they need. In K-12 education, this is known as Response to Intervention (RTI);
3. Institute **graduated co-pays** for families with incomes above 250 percent of federal poverty level to offset state costs, allowing limited state dollars to go further.

Financial Model

Cost projections are based on the following assumptions:

Participation Estimate. At full implementation, the Workgroup estimates that families of 62 percent of 4-year-olds and 33 percent of 3-year-olds will choose to participate in the new preschool program (83,785 of approximately 176,190 preschoolers). This represents 48 percent of the state's 3- and 4-year-olds.

New and Existing Slots. Of these 83,785 noted above, 52,460 will be served in new preschool slots with the remaining preschoolers served by slots currently available in ECEAP, Head Start, American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start, Migrant/Seasonal Head Start and special education preschool.

Differentiated Slot Cost. As shown in the figure to the right, cost per slot will vary due to differing levels of subsidization based on family income and developmental risk factors. It is recommended that parent co-payments (for families over 250 percent FPL) make up the difference between full cost and state share. As illustrated in slot costs, additional increments of staff resources will be provided for children who: a) are very low-income or are homeless or in foster care b) are in an Individualized Education Program; or c) are an English Language Learner.

Per Child Cost by family Income and Risk Factors		
Per Child	State share	Family Income & Risk Factors
\$8,413	\$8,413	≤130% FPL/foster/homeless
\$7,466	\$7,466	130.1 to 185% FPL
\$7,237	\$7,237	185.1-200% FPL
\$7,099	\$7,099	200.1-250% FPL
\$7,008	\$6,558	250.1-300% FPL
\$6,033	\$5,133	300.1-400% FPL
\$5,984	\$4,184	400.1-500% FPL
\$5,640	\$2,040	>500% FPL
\$1,951	\$1,951	Additional per child with IEP
\$1,338	\$1,338	Additional per ELL child

Phase-In

To allow for a reasonable start-up scale and to support development of the P-3 continuum, the Workgroup recommends the following.

1. Begin the new program with 936 3- and 4-year-olds who live in elementary school attendance areas where there is full-day kindergarten and lower than average access to Head Start and ECEAP;
2. Sites should be selected through a competitive process.

The steps and funding required for this first phase are:

Fiscal Year	Actions	Item	Cost
2012-13	DEL: Develop program standards, evaluation plan and data systems. Complete facilities survey. Conduct competitive statewide RFP for 936 slots/10-15 preschool providers in full-day kindergarten elementary school attendance areas underserved by current publicly funded programs	1 FTE + related goods, services, travel	\$98,267
		Facilities Survey	20,000
		Total	\$118,267
2013-14	DEL: Develop evaluation plan and data systems, train providers. Preschool Providers: Hire and train site supervisory staff, prepare facilities and classrooms (~26), hire program staff and enroll children	1 FTE + related goods, services & travel	\$98,267
		Facilities	500,000
		Program Development	350,000
		Total	\$948,267
2014-15	Begin Washington Preschool for 936 children at 10-15 sites around Washington. Begin program evaluation.	PreK-Services	\$4,540,623
		Equipment/materials	195,000
		Program Evaluation	290,460
		Total	\$5,026,083

Next Steps

- Request appropriation of \$118,267 for FY 2012-13 and prepare for implementations as noted above.
- Complete necessary policy work, including specifying which degrees are early childhood-related degrees, conducting the preschool facilities survey, and analyzing transportation needs.