

Making Early Education a Funding Priority

Joint Task Force on
Basic Education Finance
June 10, 2008



WSA Washington State Association
of Head Start & ECEAP



WSA Position Statement

1. **Early learning has both a constitutional and a legislative foundation for inclusion in an updated definition of Basic Education.**
2. **Extensive research confirms that high quality early learning experiences benefit children, and offer a significant return on investment of state dollars.**
3. **We agree on where this work should begin:**
 - Immediate targeted early interventions for children deemed at risk of school failure;
 - A commitment over time to ensure that all children are “school ready.”
4. **Quality early education should continue to be provided through a mixed delivery system which draws on the strengths of families as well as services provided in a variety of settings.**



Washington State Constitution

Article IX, Section 1 of the Washington State Constitution asserts, “It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.”



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Washington State Constitution

Washington State’s paramount constitutional duty to educate all children must be determined and satisfied within a changing context. As the Washington State Supreme Court in School Funding I (Doran I) stated, children have a right to an education “beyond mere reading, writing and arithmetic. It also embraces broad educational opportunities needed in the contemporary setting to equip our children for their role as citizens and as potential competitors in today’s market as well as in the market place of ideas.” (School Funding I at 517).



Other States

While Washington State has pending litigation the Supreme Courts in New Jersey and North Carolina are the only state high courts to direct the state to fund pre-K. Both rulings were made in the context of a school funding case in which plaintiffs put on evidence showing that low-income and disadvantaged preschoolers enter school with large learning gaps that prevent them from availing themselves of a constitutionally-guaranteed public education. A similar ruling was made by a trial court in South Carolina and that case is now on appeal to the state Supreme Court.



Legislative Mandate

Washington Learns

Under the legislative mandate of the Joint Task Force on Basic Education Finance, any definition of basic education must be aligned with the extensive and lauded work of the Washington Learns committee and reflect the demands of the contemporary setting and an evolving education system. In laying out new expectations of the state's education system, the final report of the committee, *Washington Learns: World-class, learner-focused, seamless education*, explicitly recognized the fundamental role played by early learning in building a strong system of education in a competitive global economy.



Legislative Mandate

The first three goals of Washington Learns' *Ten-Year Goals for a World-Class Education System* focus on early education:

- “Parents will be their child’s first and best teachers, and will have the support they need to help their children “learn to learn” in their first years of life.
- Families will have access to high-quality, affordable child care and early education programs staffed by providers who are adequately trained and compensated.
- All children will enter kindergarten healthy and emotionally, socially, and cognitively ready to succeed in school and in life.”



Legislative Mandate

Washington Learns

The report also clearly states that “we will invest in early learning so that children start off as lifelong learners” as the first of the five initiatives necessary for the creation of a world-class system of education.



Washington Learns

Research into the brain development of young children tells us that children are born learning. As their child's first and best teachers, parents have the first and best opportunity to start their children on the path to lifelong learning.

Through early experiences, the basic architecture of the brain is built, and the quality of that architecture determines whether a child's learning and behavior will be sturdy or fragile. As the brain matures, the ability to process complex information builds on this early hard-wiring of the brain.



Washington Learns

The years from birth to age eight are the “learning to learn” years, when children build the foundations to become capable readers, writers, mathematicians, artists, musicians, creative thinkers, speakers of more than one language and caring citizens. With guidance from parents, families and other caregivers, children develop bonds with others and learn to express compassion, work well in groups and live with rules.



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Washington Learns

These are the years when each child's innate capacity for creativity must be developed. These are the years when parents and early education teachers can make the most difference in a child's life and future. With a strong foundation, children will be prepared to communicate about subjects more deeply, and to connect and apply their learning to new topics and personal interests in later years



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Washington Learns

A survey of Washington kindergarten teachers in 2004 found that more than half of children entering kindergarten were not ready for school.¹⁸ The child who is not ready in kindergarten starts behind other children, and children who start behind tend to stay behind throughout their time in school.



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13 States and the DC Fund Early Learning Through School Funding Formula

Colorado, D.C., Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Vermont, West Virginia and Wisconsin.



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Thrive by Five

In Washington State, less than half of all children begin kindergarten with the skills necessary to succeed in school, and just 25 percent of the lowest-income students are considered ready. In recent years we have learned that school readiness, as well as long-term life success, is dependent on the child's learning environment during the first few years of his or her life. Children need positive early learning opportunities during this time because they are growing faster – in every way – than they will at any other time in their life.



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New Brain Research Shifts Thinking On Early Learning in 2000

Neurons to Neighborhoods 2000 Jack Shonkoff and Deborah Phillips

- From birth to age 5, children rapidly develop foundational capabilities on which subsequent development builds.
- Remarkable linguistic and cognitive gains and exhibit dramatic progress in their emotional, social, regulatory, and moral capacities.
- All of these critical dimensions of early development are intertwined, and each requires focused attention.



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Early Education Is Critical to Success in School

James Heckman-Nobel Award Winning Economist

It appears that cognitive abilities are set into a trajectory of a certain level before children start school. Early brain development is so important that risk factors in first grade predict dropout nearly as well as risk factors in high school.

James Heckman put it this way: "the most effective college preparatory program is enriching the lives of infants and toddlers."



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Early Education Is Critical to School Success

Rob Grunewald - Federal Reserve Bank in Minneapolis

When a child is born, the only organ not fully developed is the brain. The abilities to comprehend, understand and reason are developed up to age 4. That is when vocabulary is absorbed. Adverse childhood experiences, including neglect, disease and even stress, all hamper the healthy growth of the brain. Children from homes with little reading, limited vocabularies and prolonged isolation will enter kindergarten behind, will have more difficulty adapting, and may never catch up. Early childhood education can change the outcome.



No Child Left Behind and Early Learning

NIEER Working Paper

Effects of Preschool on Educational Achievement

by Luis M. Laosa

March 30, 2005

<http://nieer.org/docs/?DocID=122>

Several major conclusions from the paper include the following:



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No Child Left Behind and Early Learning

Current school reform strategies aimed at closing the educational achievement gap, including particularly NCLB, generally assume that high curriculum standards, test based accountability, and high-quality teaching in K-12 can close this gap. Because the achievement gap has deep roots that begin before children enter school, these policies alone are not likely to close the gap.



No Child Left Behind and Early Learning

Many studies show that high-quality preschool education programs can significantly influence cognitive development and hence can help to narrow the achievement gap, particularly in the early grades. Accordingly, more and more states are establishing state-funded pre-K education programs for three- and four-year olds.



No Child Left Behind and Early Learning

By expanding the definition of schooling to include high-quality, comprehensive early childhood programs, educational policies are more likely to make significant progress toward closing the achievement gap than if they focus exclusively on K-12 improvement.



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Research on Early Learning

Perry Preschool

Economists and educators have found that investments in high-quality early learning, especially for at-risk children, yield significant benefits. The Perry Preschool Study found that eight dollars was saved for every dollar invested in early learning, as the costs of remedial education, special education, abuse and neglect, health care, school drop-out rates, teen pregnancy, crime and incarceration were all significantly reduced.



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Research on Early Learning

Abbott Preschools in New Jersey-2005 Research Study

Language (receptive vocabulary), early literacy and early math skills were assessed in a sample of 2072 children from across 21 Abbott districts.

Results indicate that the Abbott Preschool program has statistically significant and meaningful impacts on children's language, literacy and mathematical development.



Research on Early Learning

North Carolina Pre-K Program

A North Carolina study of 531 students in 16 different schools showed that there was a range of 2-10 year cognitive levels (literacy and social skills) when children started kindergarten, and this difference continued into the next grades and even became more exaggerated as they progressed in school.



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Research on Early Learning

Tulsa Pre-K

- 3,028 children in Tulsa public schools
- Rigorous RD design
- Gains for all SES & ethnic groups
- Literacy and Math gains
- Larger gains for minority and poor children

Source: Gormley et al. (2004). CROCUS/Georgetown University



Head Start Research

Barnett, Ludwig, and Miller

Head Start children have increased achievement test scores and favorable long-term effects on grade repetition, special education, and high school graduation rates.

Meier

The results of a study of more than 600 Head Start graduates in San Bernardino County, California, showed that society receives nearly \$9 in benefits for every \$1 dollar invested in these Head Start children. These benefits were projected and include increased earnings, employment, and family stability, and decreased welfare dependency, crime costs, grade repetition, and special education.



ECEAP Research

In a 12-year longitudinal study of ECEAP (1988-2000), researchers found that ECEAP children made significantly greater academic gains, displayed more positive behaviors, enjoyed school more, and had fewer health problems than non-ECEAP children.



All Children Should Have Access to High Quality Early Learning; But Start With Low Income Children First

WSA supports access to early learning for all children. All children can benefit from a high quality early learning experience.

Low income children, however, start further behind than their middle class peers.

Studies demonstrate that low income children make the largest gains from a high quality early learning experience.



A Mixed Delivery System Makes Sense

All high quality early education programs should have access to additional funding. This means ECEAP, Head Start, and child care programs.

A mixed delivery system recognizes that there are a multitude of settings and services needed for children.

We believe additional funding for ECEAP would be a good starting place and a great investment.



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Start By Making ECEAP Funding Comparable to Head Start

Step #1: Fund ECEAP At Head Start Levels

Current number of children being served by ECEAP=8,226

ECEAP cost per child=\$6,630

Head Start cost per child=\$8,725

Difference per slot=\$2,095

Cost to Move Current ECEAP Slots To Head Start per child levels=\$17 million a year in new funding.



Allow ECEAP to Serve All Eligible Children

Step #2: Allow ECEAP To Serve All Eligible Children

It is estimated that about 12,500 three and four year olds are eligible to receive services, but cannot participate in ECEAP because of a lack of resources.

If ECEAP were to serve all eligible children at Head Start per child funding levels then it would cost about an additional \$109 million a year in new funding.



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