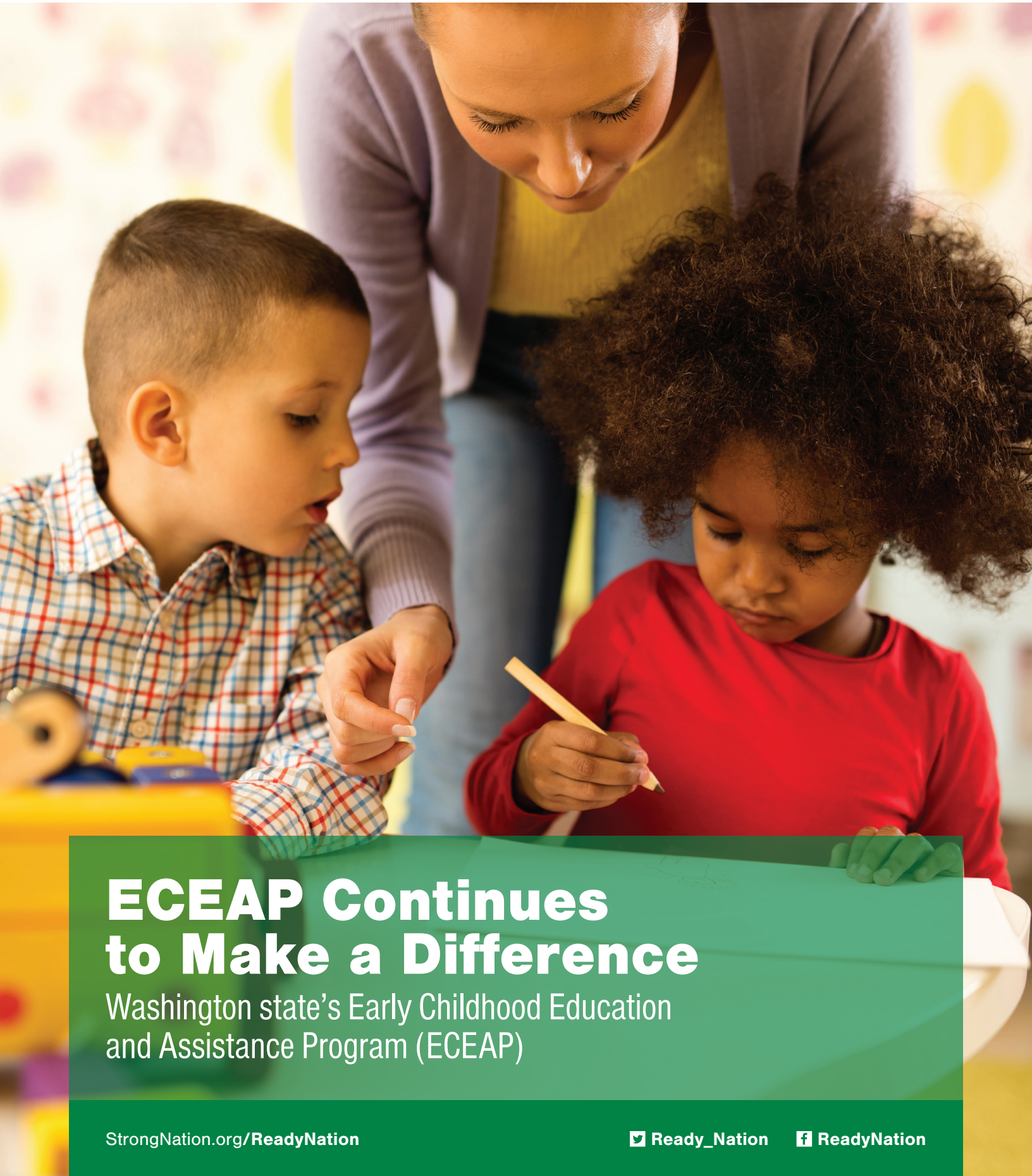
READY NATION
COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA
WASHINGTON

REPORT



ECEAP Continues to Make a Difference

Washington state's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)

StrongNation.org/ReadyNation

Ready_Nation ReadyNation

Acknowledgements

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be citizen-ready.

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Business executives building a skilled workforce by promoting solutions that prepare children to succeed in education, work, and life.

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22,300
eligible children in Washington are not being served by publicly-funded state pre-K (ECEAP) or Head Start.

Washington state business leaders recognize the need for a highly-skilled workforce to fill the 740,000 total jobs that will be available from 2016 to 2021. Business leaders also recognize that the foundation to a strong workforce is built early, with high-quality pre-K that helps students develop the needed pre-academic skills like recognizing letters and numbers, but also the character skills like problem-solving, perseverance, and the ability to work in groups.

The skills of children from low-income families often lag in both pre-literacy and pre-math.[1] Washington's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is a proven strategy to increase children's pre-academic and social-emotional skills. Giving children the right start is essential for preparing the next generation of workers and for strengthening our state's economy.

> "As a father of two, I see firsthand how essential it is to equip and prepare the young minds of today for tomorrow's opportunities and workforce.



Manuel Hochheimer
Assistant Vice President,
Numerica Credit Union

Too Many Children Are Falling Behind

Early childhood is a time when children acquire specific skills and knowledge, including foundational cognitive skills (literacy and numeracy), social and emotional competence critical for relationships, and engagement in school and learning.[2] The development of critical executive functioning skills that shape the way we manage our attention, our emotions and our behavior to achieve our goals also begins in early childhood.[3]

High-quality early childhood education can support the development of all of these essential skills. But in **Washington state, nearly 22,300 eligible children are not being served by publicly-funded state pre-K (ECEAP), or Head Start**.[4] In 2016-17, only 39 percent of eligible three-year-olds and 63 percent of eligible four-year-olds were enrolled in ECEAP or Head Start.[5] The good news: by the fall of 2022, the program will expand to serve all eligible children, per a statutory requirement.[6]

Children from low-income families

Many of Washington state's children, particularly those from low-income families, are falling behind during the most crucial years of their development. Many children from low-income families without access to high-quality pre-K start off behind their more advantaged peers.[7] For example, differences in cognitive abilities emerge as early as nine months of age. By age 3, poor children hear 30 million fewer words than their more-affluent peers.[9]

Not only are children from low-income families falling behind, they are being held back, with many having to repeat kindergarten as a result of starting behind their peers. Repeating a grade also increases the likelihood that a student will repeat a grade again later in their academic career. Approximately 140,000 children repeat kindergarten, nationwide, every year.[10] The extra year of kindergarten at an average per pupil cost of about $11,000, costs taxpayers $1.5 billion every year, nationally.[11] An investment in high-quality pre-K increases kindergarten readiness, thus setting a student up for success—which is preferable to costly remediations that are hard on kids, families, schools, and taxpayers.



Starting on the right path

High-quality pre-K can start children on the right path, so that they are less likely to repeat a grade. Studies of preschool

programs in several states have reported substantial reductions in the number of children repeating a grade. For example:

- Participants in Michigan's state preschool, the Great Start Readiness Program, were held back in school 51 percent less often during their K-12 years than similar non-participants.
- Children in New Jersey's preschool program were held back 40 percent less often by the fourth or fifth grades, compared to similar non-participants.
- The Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K program, cut the proportion of children held back in kindergarten in half, from eight to four percent, even with its inconsistent quality.

If providing high-quality pre-K to Washington's young children cut the number of children held back in kindergarten by even 25 percent (half of the effect obtained by the Tennessee program), that would mean 500 fewer children retained, and **the state could save nearly $3 million every year simply from not paying for these children to repeat kindergarten.**

Pre-K Can Help Prepare Children for the Jobs of Tomorrow

A recent evaluation of Washington's five-year jobs outlook found that 740,000 jobs will become available from 2016 to 2021.[15] The state's job growth rate (1.7 percent) is expected to be three times the national average (2014-2024) and far exceeds the state's historical average.[16] By 2020, 70 percent of Washington's jobs will require some type of training or postsecondary credential, but only 31 percent of Washington's high school graduates earn a postsecondary credential by age 26.[17]

Raising the Percentage of High School Graduates Who Earned a Credential

According to a report from the Washington Roundtable, raising the percentage of high-school graduates who earn a postsecondary credential by age 26 from 31 percent to 70 percent would result in: [18]

+ 31,000 credentialed graduates
ready to enter the workforce

$3.5 billion savings per year
in state social programs

+ $960,000 personal earnings
of those graduates over their lifetimes

- 36% unemployment
among those graduates

Short- and long-term benefits

High-quality pre-K is essential to improving reading and math readiness to ensure Washington's children are ready for further education and tomorrow's jobs. Research has shown that high-quality pre-K generates other short- and long-term benefits for our economy and our young people. For example:

- During the 2015-16 school year, the percentage of **pre-K children at or above age level in literacy development increased from 49 percent in the fall to 92 percent** in the spring. The increase was even higher for the percentage of children at or above age level in math



skills, which increased from 20 percent in the fall to 82 percent in the spring.[19]

- Children who attended ECEAP also had significantly higher math and reading test scores in third, fourth, and fifth grades, compared to similar children who did not attend the program.[20] And another study showed that **children who were reading on grade level by third grade were four times more likely to graduate from high school**.[21]
- By fourth and fifth grades, New Jersey children who attended high-quality preschool at ages three and four were three-fourths of a year ahead in math and two-thirds of a year ahead in reading, compared to children who did not attend.[22]
- Michigan's Great Start Readiness Pre-K program reported a 35 percent increase in the number of high school graduates.[23]
- Looking at the bottom line, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy examined results from more than 20 different studies of state and local pre-K programs and found that **high-quality preschool can have, on average, a net return of nearly $34,000 for every child served**.[24] Savings result from reductions in costs due to grade repetition, special education, and crime, as well as participants' increased earnings.

Quality is Essential to Yield Results

To achieve the desired outcomes for our youngest learners, research says we must invest in quality. The elements of quality include:[25]

High-quality instruction

Students receive a quality education when they are taught by qualified teachers who

know how to tailor their instruction to students' learning styles, are adequately compensated, and receive ongoing professional development opportunities to continue improving their teaching. ECEAP meets nine of the 10 current quality benchmarks developed by the National Institute of Early Education Research (NIEER).[26] Despite increasing understanding of the importance of early education and increases in teachers' educational requirements, early childhood education professionals receive low wages, resulting in high turnover and instability for both teachers and their students.[27]

Evidence-Based Curriculum

High-quality pre-K uses evidence-based, developmentally-appropriate curricula. ECEAP focuses on evidence-based instruction that advances social-emotional, physical, language, and cognitive development, in addition to early literacy, math skills and English language acquisition (if applicable).[28] During the 2015-16 school year, the percentage of children in ECEAP who went from "below age level" to "at or above age level" was 41 percent in social-emotional development, 35 percent in physical development, 35 percent in language development, 39 percent in cognitive development, 43 percent in literacy development, and 53 percent in math skills.[29]

But it's not solely up to pre-K teachers and the curriculum. Leaders of early childhood programs need to focus on instructional leadership (adopting curricula and assessments, and working with teachers to improve teaching and student learning), not just operational leadership (managing finances, personnel, and communicating with parents).[30] Over 60 percent of elementary school principals oversee pre-K programs, but their job expectations vary from those of early learning center directors.[31] Both early learning center directors and elementary school principals should have the opportunity for professional development in instructional leadership that ensures that pre-K is high quality.[32]

"Research shows that a full-day (7-8 hours) of high-quality, developmentally appropriate, play-based pre-K benefits children the most."

Sufficient Learning Time ("Dosage")

To achieve learning outcomes, children must attend pre-K for more than a few hours a week.[33] Research shows that a full-day (7-8 hours) of high-quality, developmentally appropriate, play-based pre-K benefits children the most. A randomized trial showed that children who participated in a full-day preschool program in New Jersey improved more on vocabulary and math assessments than did children in a part-day (2.5 to 3 hours) program (11 to 12 points versus 6 to 7 points, respectively).[34] A more recent study in Chicago found that children who attended preschool full-day had higher school readiness scores (language, math, socio-emotional development, physical health) and better attendance than children who attended preschool part-day.[35]

Parent/family engagement

High-quality pre-K engages parents, children's first and most important teachers. ECEAP focuses on family engagement and the whole child, which refers to all areas of development, not just academics. Families benefit from the support they receive in preparing their children for elementary school, in addition to the individualized family support services that provide them with referrals and community resources, opportunities to volunteer in the classroom parent education and parent leadership development activities.[36]

Data and accountability

To continue to make quality improvements, pre-K programs need to be assessed on their performance at every level to ensure the needs of their students are being met and that they are well prepared for kindergarten. ECEAP evaluates its students three times during the school year to track their social-emotional, physical, language, and cognitive development, in addition to their early literacy, math skills and English language acquisition (if applicable).[37] The data collected is then used by teachers to plan the curriculum and individualized instructional supports that will best meet the needs of their students.[38]

1,275
projected additional pre-K slots are needed to meet the demand for ECEAP eligible families.

Enhancing Washington's Public Pre-K Programs

ECEAP needs ongoing investments so that more children in need have access and to ensure programs are high-quality. Demand for eligible families is projected to remain strong at: 1275 news slots each year, from 2020-2023.[39] Current law specifies that all ECEAP eligible children, who are not served by Head Start and whose parents want Pre-K, should be served by ECEAP by the fall 2022 school year.[40]

Conclusion

Business leaders across Washington recognize the need to continually improve the access to and quality of ECEAP. Investing in our youngest children will build the future workforce of Washington state.

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