

Every year, more than 70,000 children start kindergarten in Washington. When children have high-quality early learning services and programs, they are better prepared to succeed in school and in life. In Washington, public and private partners use the Early Learning Plan (www.del.wa.gov/plan) as our guide for helping ensure children have high-quality early learning experiences so that they start school healthy and ready to succeed.

Early learning matters because:

National longitudinal research over the past 40 years demonstrates that high-quality early learning programs yield long-term positive benefits for children and families:

- Increased school readiness
- Increased reading and math skills
- Increased high school graduation and college enrollment
- Increased family wages
- Increased community engagement
- Lower rates of incarceration
- Lower rates of dependence upon public assistance
- Greatest impact for low-income children

Investing in early learning yields substantial return on investment for society:

- Economists and social scientists have found that for every dollar invested in high-quality early learning, at least 3 dollars are returned in reduced costs for remedial education, public safety, health care, and other social spending.
- Early learning is the one publicly funded program that will pay for itself—in six years for programs aimed at at-risk children, and in nine years for universal programs. (Lynch, 2007)
- “Quality early childhood education can close the income gap, reduce health disparities, and save taxpayers in lower health and social costs. It saves lives and saves money. Early childhood education is a moral imperative with an economic payoff.” (University of Chicago Economics Professor James Heckman, 2011)

There is clear, convincing science that early childhood is a critical time for development:

- 85 percent of the “sculpting” of the human brain’s neurological architecture happens between birth and age 5.
- Continuous “toxic stress” in a young child’s life—physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence and family economic hardship—actually impacts the baby’s developing brain and the way neural connections are formed. The more adverse experiences in childhood, the greater the

likelihood of developmental delays and lifelong health problems. (Harvard University Center on the Developing Child, *The Impact of Early Adversity on Children's Development*)

High-quality early learning programs help prevent the opportunity and achievement gaps:

- Children who are enrolled in high-quality programs make significant measurable gains in physical, social/emotional, cognitive and language development—those skills they need to start kindergarten ready to succeed.
- In the first three years of life, children in professional families hear about 11 million words per year; children in working class families hear about 6 million words per year; and children in low-income families hear about 3 million words per year. High-quality early learning experiences can help mitigate these gaps. (Hart, B. & Risley, T.R. (1995) *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*)
- Young children who form secure attachments to the adults in their lives are better prepared to have healthy relationships throughout life. Research shows that the relationships between an early learning provider and a child as young as 18 months is predictive of the relationships that child will have with elementary school teachers. (Hamre, B.K. & Pianta, R.C. (2001) *Early teacher-child relationships and the trajectory of children's school outcomes through eighth grade*)

Early learning matters because it impacts real children, families and professionals.

Early Achievers

"Our participation (in Early Achievers) had allowed my staff to see themselves as more professional and made them take their jobs more seriously."

—*Olympia child care center director*

"Our daughter has been attending (an Early Achievers center) for seven months. When we went looking for a daycare, as first timers it was quickly obvious that this center was different from the others. The environment is large and bright with plenty of toys and books to help our daughter learn and grow.

Since then, we have learned that the staff and teachers are also very high quality and caring people. Thank you!

—*Parent of a child in a Spokane child care center participating in Early Achievers*

ECEAP

In Douglas County, a boy in ECEAP struggled with serious behavior concerns, including harming others. His father was in prison and there was a new father figure in his life.

ECEAP staff set up mental health services for him and met with the family to plan strategies to work with him at home. They also adjusted specific classroom areas to meet his needs. The ECEAP team communicated daily with his family to share and learn.

During the year in ECEAP, the boy benefited from attention from his teachers, the support of the mental health consultant, and lessons in Talk About Touching. By the end of the year, he was able to socialize with other children and use his words, instead of violence, to express feelings. The whole family left ECEAP better prepared with anger management skills.