

# Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families

## Brief Overview of Projects Serving Vulnerable Children

### July 2019

#### Early ECEAP

Washington State is working to increase the availability of high-quality services for infants and toddlers, including child care for low-income working families. A key strategy funded in the Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5) Washington received is developing a design for Early ECEAP (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program).

ECEAP is a comprehensive preschool program for children ages three to five, modeled after Head Start. ECEAP is funded by the state and, similar to Head Start, includes part-day, school-day and working-day models to meet different family and community needs. Currently, ECEAP serves 14,000 low-income children in Washington. Early ECEAP is a new program that will set precedent for serving at-risk infants and toddlers with comprehensive early learning and family support services modeled after the successful Early Head Start center-based program funded at the federal level by the Office of Head Start.

The Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) created an Early ECEAP Design Team of external and internal partners to create a framework and funding plan for future implementation. In 2019, the Legislature passed a bill to plan phased implementation. The bill requires that pilot sites include licensed center and family home providers enrolled in Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), Early Achievers. DCYF must prioritize Early Head Start, Head Start or ECEAP programs, and include a mix of urban, suburban and rural locations. The Design Team recommends children experiencing homelessness, involved in child welfare or with parents under age 21 be categorically eligible.

Starting in September 2019, DCYF will use the Early ECEAP plan to launch Early ECEAP readiness training at 10 pilot sites. Lessons learned from the pilot sites will be used to inform an Early ECEAP launch in subsequent years.

#### Child Welfare Child Care

DCYF is the mandated public child welfare agency in Washington that serves abused and neglected children and their families. DCYF's child welfare child care program funds temporary child care for families with an open child welfare case to address safety concerns or prevent out-of-home placement. Local law enforcement, the courts and other community partners and stakeholders also have roles in the protection, placement and service planning for the needs of the child. Cases are complex, with a range of federal timelines and rules that must be followed to ensure child safety and meet the best interests of the child. Child welfare child care shares the same guidelines and rates for providers as the state's CCDF funded Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program. However, family eligibility criteria and the special needs determination process for child welfare child care differ from WCCC.

#### Child Welfare – Early Learning Project

DCYF launched in July 2018, bringing together child welfare services with early learning services. As outlined in the legislation creating the new department, one of the goals is to assure our most at-risk children receive high-quality early learning opportunities. DCYF believes focusing on referral pathways for children involved in child protection will support their future academic success, and reduce the likelihood of future child welfare involvement.



Connecting vulnerable children involved in child welfare services with high-quality early learning programs is a strategy funded in the PDG B-5. DCYF created three early learning liaison positions to support the project mission. Our theory is that every eligible family will benefit from connecting to the community early learning and family support programs. However, the first year of the project found that system demands make it challenging for Child Protective Service case workers to become familiar with the landscape of early learning and family support programs available to the families they work with, and to prioritize referral. The early learning liaisons will develop relationships with the high-quality early learning programs in their communities, including Early Head Start, Head Start, ECEAP, early intervention services and evidence-based home visiting programs. They will develop a successful referral process to meet the needs of children, families and programs.

### **Improving the Lives of Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in Washington**

The Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP, the Office of the Governor, Building Changes (a public/private partnership in Washington), DCYF and providers across the state are partnering together to create targeted solutions for young children experiencing homelessness. These will help them develop critical foundational skills to be successful in school and mitigate the trauma of homelessness in early childhood. This partnership will hold stakeholder meetings, learn from people with lived expertise, analyze and synthesize data and present a summary of the findings to policymakers and providers to encourage early learning and housing providers to prioritize the needs of young children and families experiencing homelessness in their programs and advocacy.

The partnership, working with existing Head Start grantees, will develop pilot sites to take Early Head Start and Head Start services to where homeless families live, including shelters, transitional housing and substance abuse treatment facilities. The partnership will work closely with the Region X Office of Head Start to explore the use of innovative, locally designed options to meet homeless families where they are. DCYF will share information from the pilot sites to inform replication of best practices of the models and use data to track our progress.

**This project is supported by a grant from *Education Leads Home*, a national campaign focused on improving education and life outcomes for children and youth experiencing homelessness.**

### **Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) Homeless Grace Period**

WCCC is Washington's primary child care subsidy program funded by CCDF. Within WCCC, DCYF prioritizes services to families experiencing homelessness by making them eligible for a Homeless Grace Period. Families experiencing homelessness according to the McKinney-Vento definition have access to subsidized licensed child care with no copayment to help resolve issues related to homelessness such as housing, obtaining or verifying employment or resolving outstanding copayment issues. Following the four-month period, the family's eligibility is reviewed, and if they have verified their employment or other approved activity, eligibility is extended so that the family receives a full 12 months' eligibility. The copay for these families is typically \$15 for the remaining eight months.

DCYF further supports families experiencing homelessness to access WCCC through the grace period by contracting with Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA-WA). CCA-WA "navigators" offer families technical assistance in filling out the WCCC application, accessing the grace period and navigating the system. Navigators also conduct follow-up calls and check-ins to address lingering issues or needs.

### **QRIS Birth to Three Quality Initiatives**

DCYF offers targeted quality supports to early learning providers that participate in Early Achievers and provide services to families with infants and toddlers. These supports include training, on-site coaching and material supports for early learning providers.

Family child care and center early learning providers can receive training and coaching specific to increasing adult-child interactions through Filming Interactions to Nurture Development (FIND). FIND is a video coaching program that aims to strengthen positive interactions between caregivers and children. FIND uses select clips of adults engaging with children to reinforce developmentally supportive interactions, or what's known as "serve and return."

Another support includes training and materials supports for early learning providers to successfully implement a program-wide developmental screening program. Universal developmental screening of children helps parents, caregivers, teachers and pediatricians know whether a child is achieving important developmental stages through the use of a specific, researched tool that is administered by the parent, teacher or physician. The results of a screening can provide more information about whether or not a child needs further testing. Providers can request targeted training and coaching and free training on how to engage parents in the process of developmental screening and referral for specialized services in their community. DCYF also supports them with the screening tools and how to distribute, score and share results with families.

### **ECLIPSE (Early Childhood Intervention and Prevention Services)**

DCYF's ECLIPSE program offers developmentally appropriate therapeutic programming for families and children who have endured biological, familial and environmental risk factors consistent with exposure to complex trauma in early childhood.

ECLIPSE aims to address the wide-range needs of children and families impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) by offering comprehensive and coordinated care through monthly home visits with families and daily therapeutic care with an emphasis on social-emotional learning for children ages birth through five in developmentally age-appropriate infant, toddler and preschool environments. ECLIPSE services are provided through a combination of center-based therapeutic treatment with children and home visits with families. ECLIPSE's goal is to support families and each child's healthy development with a unique focus on supporting and increasing children's emotional, pro-social, self-help and self-regulation skills needed to be successful in social settings, kindergarten/school and in life. ECLIPSE services include developmental and behavioral screening, comprehensive assessment and individual treatment planning, center-based day treatment, monthly home visits and transition planning.

### **If You Would Like Further Information on Any of These Projects, Please Contact:**

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For projects related to Early ECEAP, Head Start and the Child Welfare-Early Learning Project