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"The most important investment we can make is in our children. We know that the benefits from early learning programs extend throughout a child's life. I am proud that my budget invests in comprehensive early learning services that will ensure that all children receive the support necessary to enter kindergarten prepared and well positioned for success in school and life."

Gov. Jay Inslee

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

Gov. Inslee proposes major investments to strengthen state early learning system

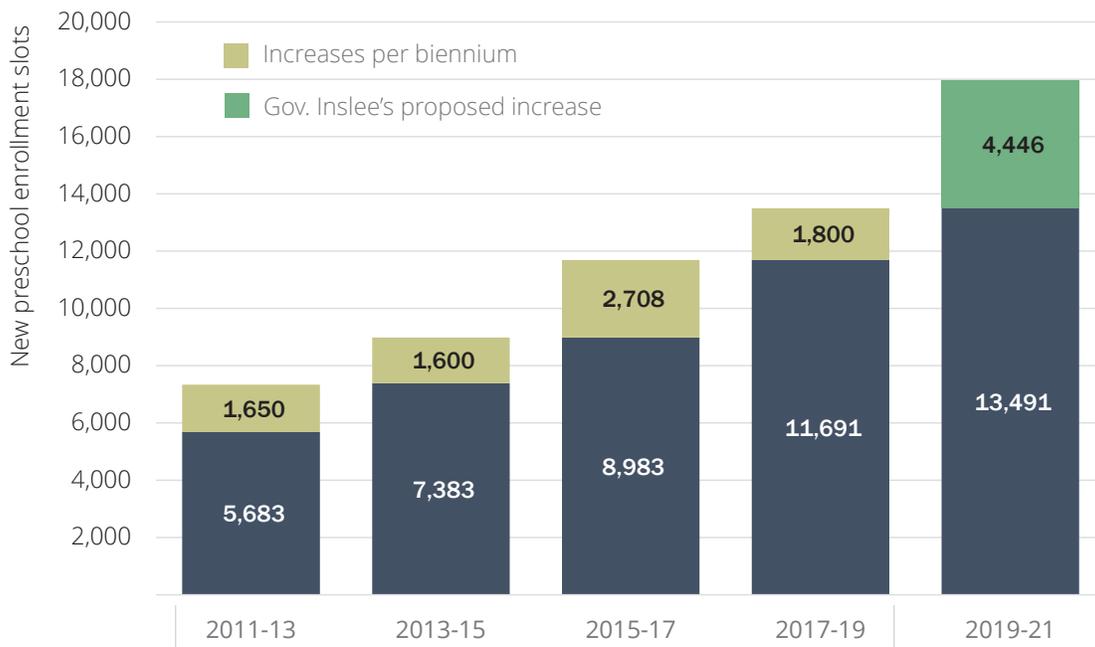
Brain science tells us that strong bonds and learning-focused experiences early in life are essential for a child's healthy development. Unfortunately, across our state, many young children face challenges that have long-term implications for their well-being. In fact, fewer than half our children are kindergarten-ready by age 5. Gov. Inslee's 2019–21 operating and capital budgets invest in comprehensive early learning services that will ensure children (regardless of race, family income and/or disability) receive the support necessary to enter kindergarten prepared and well-positioned for success in school and life.

Background

During the first five years of life, the brain develops faster than at any other stage. In these critical years, children need to be exposed to high-quality learning experiences and have positive relationships to maximize brain development and reduce the need for interventions later in life.¹



Governor's budget continues preschool expansion



Since 2013, we have increased enrollment in state preschool programs by more than 7,800 children. The governor is proposing to increase enrollment by another 4,446 in the next biennium.

Indeed, studies show that high-quality early learning programs return an estimated \$4–9 for every \$1 invested.²

Washington now provides a number of high-quality early learning programs that prevent child abuse and neglect and prepare children for kindergarten. Two highly successful programs serve a limited number of children:

Home visiting matches volunteering families with trained professionals who provide information and support for child health and development. This leads to stronger parent-child bonds, healthier mothers and babies, lower rates of child abuse

and neglect, and promotes earlier language development. State-funded programs now serve about 2,500 families.

The **Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program**, or ECEAP, is the state's preschool program for 3- and 4-year-olds with a family income below 110 percent of the federal poverty level. Since 2013, we have increased enrollment by 7,808 children, and the program now serves about 13,500 children. A 2014 state study found that ECEAP had a positive impact on test scores for third, fourth and fifth grade students. In fact, these improvements were twice as large as the average effect of early childhood

education programs in other states.³ Unfortunately, ECEAP serves only a little more than two-thirds of eligible children, which places Washington as 34th in the nation in terms of preschool access.⁴

Even with these and other early learning programs in place, there is significant unmet need. A lack of access to these services disproportionately affects our most vulnerable families. With the cost of high-quality preschool programs exceeding the average cost of tuition at public four-year universities, many families in poverty can't afford to work because child care is cost prohibitive.

Not only is access to affordable early learning programs problematic, several components are missing in a comprehensive early learning system. First, we do not have a universal home-visiting program or universal screening assessment to identify risk factors or early learning needs for families and children. And when needs are identified, there is no statewide referral system linking families to services. Lastly, there is significant unmet need for preschool services for low-income families.

The dearth of high-quality early learning opportunities may be why just 47 percent of our children are ready for kindergarten. The school-readiness rates are even lower for children of color (39 percent), children from low-income households (32 percent), children with limited English proficiency (31 percent) and children who are homeless (27 percent).⁵ Given the low school-readiness rates, the state must invest in high-quality, evidence-based programs to close these gaps, raise overall kindergarten-readiness and ensure that parents and caregivers have the tools to help children thrive.



Gov. Inslee's birth-to-5 early learning system

Investing in a comprehensive early learning initiative is a key focus in Inslee's 2019–21 budgets. Along with other early learning investments, the governor's capital and operating budgets include a combined \$173 million to:

- Provide **universal home visiting and universal newborn assessments** to all families in Washington. In these programs, specialized nurses conduct in-home assessments on all families who request the service with newborns between 3 and 12 weeks of age. The nurse will provide up to six home visits and determine if additional resources and supports are needed.
- Create a **statewide early learning referral system** linking families to services in their community. The system will give home visiting nurses, parents, caregivers, medical professionals and early learning educators ready access to a centralized resource for all early learning services in their area.
- Make progress toward **ECEAP entitlement** by adding 2,385 slots (an 18 percent increase), raising provider payment rates and funding quality improvements such as coaching, technical assistance and scholarships for teachers. The majority of new slots will be full-day, and a 6 percent rate increase for ECEAP contractors is included.

- Set up a new **affordable preschool program** with targeted wraparound family support services for about 1,910 children. Families with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level will now have access to high-quality, state-funded preschool. Aligning the income limit with the state’s subsidized child care program requirements maximizes the opportunity to serve children while their parents work full time, extended hours or nontraditional work hours.
- Build **142 classrooms for ECEAP** and preschool. Capital grants will be made available through the competitive Early Learning Facilities program for eligible contractors to construct new ECEAP and preschool classrooms.
- Set up a three-year **Early ECEAP** pilot project modeled after the federal Early Head Start program that will be provided for 154 children ages birth to 3 in families with income below 110 percent of the federal poverty level. The model blends home visiting services and age-appropriate curriculum in a classroom setting.
- Construct a state-of-the-art **capitol campus child care center** with the capacity to enroll 148 children. Priority will be given to state employees and low-income families. The child care center will serve as a business model for employer-supported child care and a training site for state preschool licensing staff.

This new and enriched early learning continuum ensures that families receive foundational supports to successfully prepare children for kindergarten and close the opportunity gap for vulnerable and low-income children. These investments also prevent the need for expensive interventions later in life by improving social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, educational, economic and health outcomes in adulthood.

1 Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, “In Brief – The Science of Early Childhood Development.”
 2 “: National Forum on Early Childhood Policy and Programs, “In Brief – Early childhood Program Effectiveness.”
 3 Bania, N., Kay, N., Aos, S., & Pennucci, A. (2014). Outcome evaluation of Washington State’s Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (Document No. 14-12-2201).
 4 National Institute for Early Education Research, The State of Preschool 2017, annual report.
 5 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, “Washington State Report Card – WAKIDS 2017-18.”