

# Early Learning Improves Kindergarten Readiness for All Kids in Washington State and Dramatically Reduces Disparities for Kids of Color

April 2017

We all have a stake in making sure that from the day they're born, kids can have the enriching experiences they need to get off to a great start in life. Research has found quality early learning can give children the tools they need to thrive academically and emotionally throughout their young lives and beyond.

In Washington state, the Department of Early Learning's goal is to ensure that, by 2020, 90 percent of children enter kindergarten prepared to learn, with race and family income no longer a predictor of kindergarten readiness.<sup>1</sup> A key to delivering on that promise is to make sure all eligible children have access to Washington's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) – our state's preschool program that serves families with incomes below 110 percent of the federal poverty line (\$26,730 for a family of four in 2017). Yet there are currently 23,000 Washington children who are

## What Does “Kindergarten Readiness” Mean?

Kindergarten teachers and ECEAP educators assess students on six developmental domains: **social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and mathematics.** These observational assessments allow educators to individualize instruction to best serve the kids in their classrooms.

Assessment data is aggregated by the state Department of Early Learning and the state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Policymakers, education advocates, and parent leaders can use this data to measure our public institutions' performance in meeting children's educational needs.

## KIDS COUNT IN WASHINGTON

KIDS COUNT in Washington is a partnership between the Children's Alliance and the Washington State Budget & Policy Center. We gather and analyze the best emerging data on how kids are doing in our state, then turn that information into action on issues like poverty, hunger, health care, and education.

eligible for this program who aren't enrolled, due to limited funding allocated by the state Legislature.

KIDS COUNT in Washington encourages legislators to allocate more resources to ECEAP. Doing so would give more of Washington's young children access to the tools they need to thrive, while also bridging disparities in kindergarten readiness for children of color.

KIDS COUNT in Washington examined how expanding ECEAP to serve the 23,000 unserved eligible children could impact readiness for kindergarten.<sup>2</sup> Our analysis concluded:

- **Kindergarten readiness in Washington overall could increase by 20 percent** (to 56 percent from 47 percent);
- **7,900 more children could be ready for kindergarten** on all six indicators for readiness (see sidebar on the left for more details) by the end of their year in ECEAP; and
- **The share of Latino, American Indian, and Black children ready for kindergarten could have the largest increases.**

While children would benefit across all race and ethnic groups, an ECEAP expansion could especially help many children of color who haven't had equal access to opportunities that promote kindergarten readiness. Indeed, this expansion could help offset

systemic inequities that make it harder for the families of many kids of color and kids who live in poverty to be able to afford high-quality early learning. Kindergarten readiness for Latino children would grow 60 percent. For American Indians, the additional children ready for kindergarten would increase by 31 percent. For Black children, the share would grow by 24 percent.

### ECEAP Gives Kids a Solid Foundation for the Future

ECEAP uses a whole-child approach – integrating high-quality classrooms with individualized learning plans, supporting the health of the child, and deeply engaging the family – to ensure children and families are supported. The reliable, high-quality early learning experiences kids receive through their enrollment in ECEAP help support their healthy

development – intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

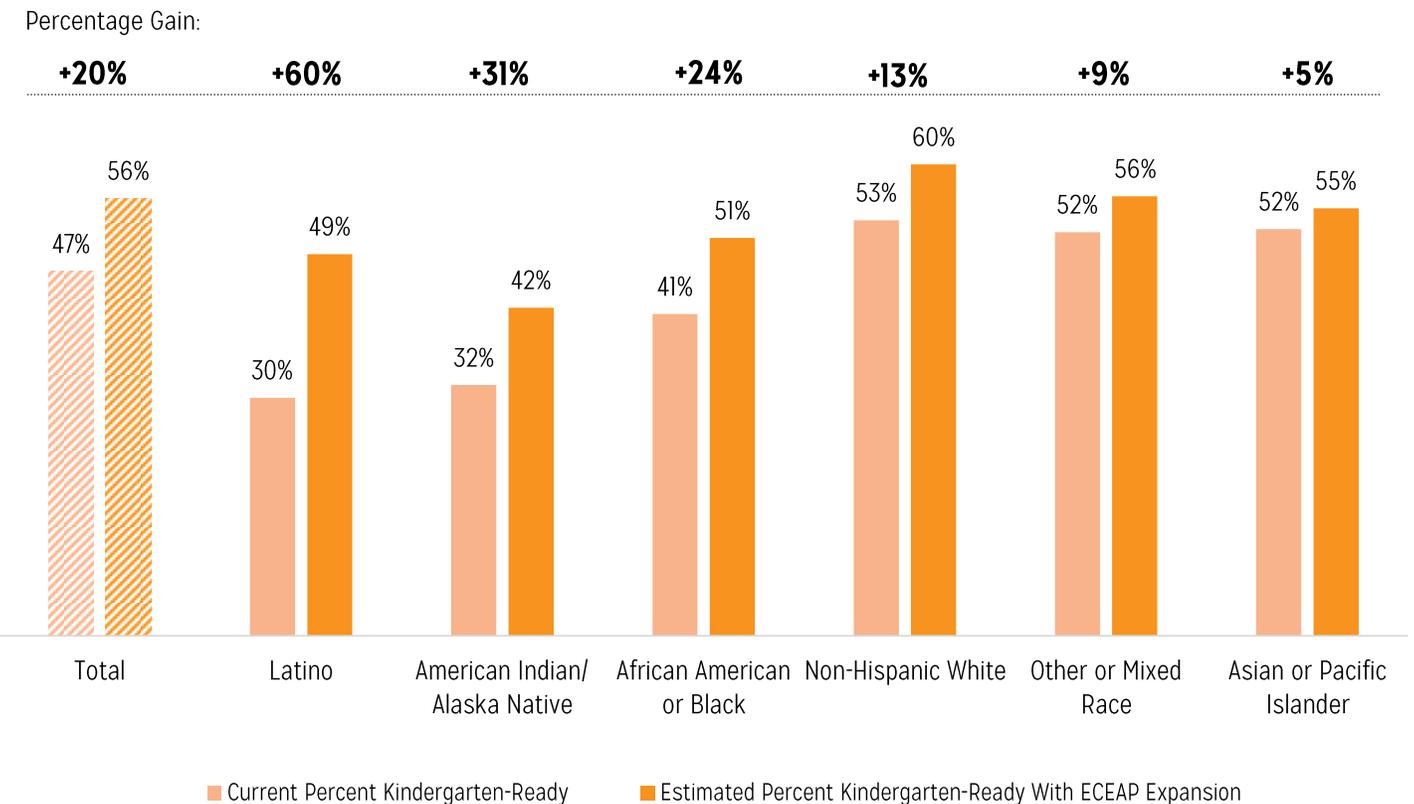
In addition to improving kids’ kindergarten readiness, ECEAP has a long-term positive impact on third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade test scores.<sup>3</sup> Students in those grades who participated in ECEAP do better in school than classmates who did not have the same opportunity.

ECEAP also plays a critical role in supporting the economic security of families. In Washington state, child care costs can eat up more than a quarter of a family’s monthly income – one of the many reasons why 71 percent of 3 and 4 year olds from low-income backgrounds do not get the benefits of preschool in our state.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, state reports have demonstrated that children served by ECEAP are better prepared to start

### Expanding ECEAP Would Create the Greatest Gains for Latino, American Indian, and Black Kids

Current and estimated percent of kindergarten-ready children with ECEAP expansion by race and ethnicity, Washington state, 2016



Source: Budget & Policy Center estimates using data from the Washington State Department of Early Learning’s “2017 Estimated Eligible and Unserved by County Saturation Study” and “2016 Spring GOLD Readiness for Kindergarten Entry (for Pre-K Children) by Race and Ethnicity;” the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s “2016-17 Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) Kindergarten Readiness by County;” and the IPUMS “2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year file.”

kindergarten than other children in families with low incomes entering public schools that offer full-day kindergarten. In fact, children who have participated in ECEAP are better prepared to start kindergarten in all six domains of readiness than the general population of all Washington kids who start kindergarten in the fall.<sup>5</sup>

### Lawmakers Can Invest in a More Equitable Future for Washington by Expanding Access to ECEAP

Despite such dramatically positive results for children with the greatest socioeconomic challenges, ECEAP currently only serves about 48 percent of the eligible population of 3 to 4 year olds.<sup>6</sup> Given the strong success of the ECEAP program in preparing children to start kindergarten across all racial groups, an expansion to serve the remaining 23,000 unserved children, 62 percent of whom are children of color, could have a significant impact on addressing the

disparities in access to opportunities that promote kindergarten readiness.

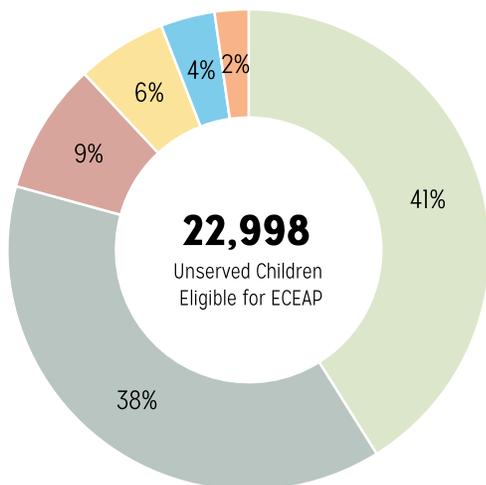
Our research estimates if the unserved eligible children were to reach similar levels of development as children currently served by ECEAP by the end of the school year, an additional 7,900 children in Washington state would be ready for kindergarten on all six domains. We estimate about 3,590 (46 percent) of these children would be Latino, followed by 3,180 (40 percent) non-Hispanic White, and 390 (5 percent) Black.

An expansion would increase the share of children ready for kindergarten in the state overall by 20 percent, to 56 from 47 percent. It would benefit families and kids in rural communities and in metropolitan areas across the state. The counties with the largest percentage increases would be in central and eastern Washington: Yakima, Adams, Franklin, and Chelan.

### Six in Every Ten Unserved Children Eligible for ECEAP Are Children of Color

Race and ethnicity of unserved children eligible for ECEAP, Washington state, 2016

- Latino
- Non-Hispanic White
- Other or Mixed Race
- African American or Black
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- American Indian/Alaska Native



Source: Budget & Policy Center estimates using data from the Washington State Department of Early Learning's "2017 Estimated Eligible and Unserved by County Saturation Study" and the IPUMS "2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year file."

### Nearly Half of the Additional Children that Would Be Ready for Kindergarten Are Latino

Estimated additional children ready for kindergarten with ECEAP expansion by race and ethnicity, Washington state, 2016

	Total	Percent
Latino	3,589	46%
Non-Hispanic White	3,180	40%
African American or Black	391	5%
Other or Mixed Race	348	4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	194	2%
Asian or Pacific Islander	184	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,886</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Budget & Policy Center estimates using data from the Washington State Department of Early Learning's "2017 Estimated Eligible and Unserved by County Saturation Study" and "2016 Spring GOLD Readiness for Kindergarten Entry (for Pre-K Children) by Race and Ethnicity;" the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's "2016-17 Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) Kindergarten Readiness by County;" and the IPUMS "2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year file."

## Kindergarten Readiness Would Increase Across the State

Percentage increase in kindergarten-readiness with ECEAP expansion by county, Washington state, 2016



Source: Budget & Policy Center estimates using data from the Washington State Department of Early Learning's "2017 Estimated Eligible and Unserved by County Saturation Study" and "2016 Spring GOLD Readiness for Kindergarten Entry (for Pre-K Children) by Race and Ethnicity;" the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's "2016-17 Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) Kindergarten Readiness by County;" and the IPUMS "2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year file."

*The counties with the largest percentage increases would be in central and eastern Washington: Yakima, Adams, Franklin, and Chelan.*

### The Time Is Now to Expand ECEAP to Serve Every Eligible Child

Expanding ECEAP to serve all eligible unserved children would have significant benefits, and help

narrow the differences in kindergarten readiness by race and ethnicity statewide. While expanding ECEAP is not the single policy fix for closing the kindergarten readiness gap, its proven track record and geographic reach across the state could move us closer to reaching the statewide goal of 90 percent of children entering kindergarten prepared to learn by 2020. While an expansion requires resources to pay for things such as building and expanding classroom facilities, this is an investment that would pay off in dividends for future generations of Washingtonians.

Serving the 23,000 children who are predominantly children of color and among our lowest-income Washingtonians would yield tremendous and long-lasting benefits for our state. We must invest in an education and support system to prepare all Washingtonians for lifelong success. ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Washington State Department of Early Learning, "Getting to 90 Percent: DEL's Vision for School Readiness in Washington," <http://bit.ly/2n2987J>.

<sup>2</sup> Drawing on data from the Department of Early Learning's estimated number of unserved eligible ECEAP children and the GOLD Readiness for Kindergarten Entry scores of ECEAP children, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) data, and the IPUMS 5-year American Community Survey, we generated estimates on the impacts to kindergarten readiness across the state by race and ethnicity under an ECEAP caseload expansion. Our analysis is based on the assumption that without an ECEAP expansion, unserved ECEAP eligible children are likely to have kindergarten readiness scores similar to all low-income children in the WaKIDS dataset. To model the potential kindergarten readiness of unserved eligible children, we apply the kindergarten readiness rates of ECEAP students at the end of their pre-K year (by race and ethnicity) to the demographics of the ECEAP-eligible children to estimate how many more children would meet six measures of readiness. For more information on our methodology, please contact [jennifert@budgetandpolicy.org](mailto:jennifert@budgetandpolicy.org) for a copy of our Data and Methods document.

<sup>3</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy, "Outcome Evaluation of Washington State's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program," 2014, [http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1576/Wsipp\\_Outcome-Evaluation-of-Washington-States-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Assistance-Program\\_Report.pdf](http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1576/Wsipp_Outcome-Evaluation-of-Washington-States-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Assistance-Program_Report.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Washington State Budget & Policy Center, "Bringing High-Quality Early Learning to Kids and Families in Washington State," 2015, <http://budgetandpolicy.org/schmudget/bringing-high-quality-early-learning-to-kids-and-families-in-washington-state>.

<sup>5</sup> Washington State Department of Early Learning, "ECEAP Outcomes, 2015-16."

<sup>6</sup> Washington State Department of Early Learning, "DEL ECEAP and Head Start Saturation Study, March 2017," [https://del.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/ECEAP/ECEAP\\_and\\_Head\\_Start\\_Saturation\\_Study\\_-\\_March\\_2017.pdf](https://del.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/ECEAP/ECEAP_and_Head_Start_Saturation_Study_-_March_2017.pdf).

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