

State budget cuts jeopardize a healthy start for Washington children

Early learning in Washington state includes critically-important programs designed to support young children and families – from prenatal care to third grade and everything in between. Quality early learning programs are essential for growing bodies and growing minds. Leading economists estimate that when we invest in high-quality, comprehensive early learning services and programs, we see big returns – not just for kids, but for taxpayers overall. Every \$1 invested will return \$7 to society by reducing the need for remedial education, welfare, and criminal justice services.



The Impact of the Recession

Washington has been a leader on quality early learning, but the recession threatens the progress we have made in the past decade. State investments in early learning programs have eroded while needs are growing. Last year resulted in fewer opportunities for children to go to preschool, decreased investments in quality, less information for parents looking for child care, a reduction in community programs that offer parenting resources, and fewer openings for new parents to receive voluntary home visiting programs.

What We Stand To Lose in 2010

Gov. Gregoire's proposed supplemental budget slashes crucial early learning programs – just when families and children need them most. Here are just a few of the fundamental programs in jeopardy:

"My grandson's ECEAP program at Pleasant Valley elementary is an amazing example of what a quality classroom should offer. The 12 children in his class have many diverse opportunities to explore and learn through guided activities. The children in the ECEAP program are selected based on an economic or developmental need, meaning that these children could easily fall through the cracks. Once a child enters public school, they need to be functioning in the classroom at a given level, or they are at risk of being left behind"

- Cindy Mayfield, parent

- **Washington State's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)** helps ensure that low-income and at-risk children across our state can afford a quality preschool. Studies show that at-risk children without quality preschool have lower graduation rates, higher rates of drug use, and are 70% more likely to commit violent crimes. ECEAP's preschool programs have a track record of success in preparing kids for success. Every dollar

invested in early learning pays off in fewer grade repetitions and fewer run-ins with the juvenile justice system. In today's economy, there are even more at-risk children who need ECEAP. An all-cuts budget would eliminate all three-year-olds from ECEAP.

- **Working Connections Child Care** makes it possible for extremely low-income families to climb out of poverty and find jobs. It helps moderate-income families afford childcare and maintain stable employment. If the proposed cuts are enacted, as many as 1 in 2 new applicants will be denied for lack of funds and thousands of families will be dropped off the program.

"If I were to lose my childcare subsidy, I would have no choice but to quit my job with North Thurston Public Schools where I have worked for nearly nine years. There is no possible way that I would be able to pay for my youngest children to attend childcare and continue to meet my family's living expenses."

-Jeanelle Rainier, parent

- Washington's groundbreaking **Early Childhood Education Career and Wage Ladder** improves the quality of early learning and care in childcare centers across the state. By offering incentives for additional training and experience, the Wage Ladder rewards and challenges teachers and centers to provide the best care, without increasing costs to families. An independent, multi-year study by Washington State University found that Wage Ladder works, providing higher quality care than other centers. An all cuts budget would eliminate this program.

"On the first day of school I can tell which children received a quality early education and which children did not, and more times than not that gap is still in place at the end of the year."

Sara Clerget, kindergarten teacher

- Families across Washington state depend on our **Child Care Resource & Referral Network** to find quality childcare. The program provides trained phone counselors who can help match parents with licensed child care professionals and offers training

opportunities for care providers. Cuts to this critical program would result in delays accessing counselors, and reduce the flow of incoming business to licensed care providers. An all-cuts budget would eliminate state support for this program.

There is a better way forward!

We can live up to the dreams we have for our young children by taking a more balanced and humane approach to the recession by doing the following:

- **Protect our economic future** by preventing further erosion of the things that residents value so much about our state: quality schools, affordable health care, a

safety net for the most vulnerable, affordable housing, public safety, and a clean environment.

- **Adopt a balanced approach** to closing the current budget shortfall that includes closing unfair tax loopholes and identifying new revenue sources to stabilize the funding for these programs in the short and long term.

Finding the revenue to adequately fund public education is crucial to our students' futures – and our state's economic vitality.

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