



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE



Integrating Early Learning into the Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization: Benefits for Washington State



Congress has a significant opportunity, through reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), to incorporate 40 years of scientific research asserting the critical importance of early learning in achieving school readiness. Including early learning initiatives in ESEA will strengthen and create more opportunities for positive social and academic outcomes for Washington's children during their K-12 years.

The development of intelligence, language, emotions, and social skills are strongly interrelated and rooted in children's earliest learning experiences from birth through kindergarten entry. Children who enter K-12 school systems without high-quality early learning experiences frequently struggle in comparison with their more advantaged peers, setting the stage for later, more expensive remediation efforts and higher school dropout rates.

- **ESEA Should Integrate and Align Early Learning and K-12 Standards, Guidelines, and Assessments**

- Washington is currently revamping our Early Learning Guidelines, a resource which provides a common framework to align developmental expectations from birth to third grade. This state work could be promoted with incentives through the integration of early learning in ESEA.



- Washington's work to develop and implement WaKIDS (Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills) process is a major component in building a system that supports the smooth transition from experiences prior to school into kindergarten. The process is designed to connect teachers with early learning providers and parents, evaluate all areas of children's development and learning, individualize classroom instruction, and unify data collected across the state for decision-making. ESEA can support the alignment of learning expectations by requiring comprehensive definitions of school readiness be built upon state early learning standards and guidelines.

- **ESEA Should Promote Professional Development for Early Childhood Teachers and K-12 Teachers and Leaders**

- Recognizing that early learning, beginning from birth, lays the foundation for the successful acquisition of future knowledge and skills, ESEA can emphasize the value of coursework containing birth-to-three

content at colleges and universities as well as professional development opportunities for teachers and program administrators working with infants and toddlers.

- The final report of Washington’s early learning Professional Development Consortium, completed in December 2010, recommended creating strong career pathways for early learning professionals. As many early childhood professionals take training through state community colleges, ESEA can reinforce the importance of the successful articulation of coursework from 2-year institutions to 4-year colleges and universities. Better articulation will strengthen the educator preparation process and grow the capacity of effective teachers and program administrators in Washington.



- New research indicates that a continuous approach to education from early childhood through 3rd grade with integrated standards, aligned assessments, and consistent instructional methods, gives all children the most promising chance for school success. ESEA reauthorization must promote joint professional development for those who teach children and administer programs from early childhood through 3rd grade.

- **ESEA Should Support the Connection of Early Childhood and K-12 Longitudinal Data Systems**

- To be effective, data from cross-sector, government programs must be included in Washington’s P-20 longitudinal data system. Work is currently underway to connect Washington’s Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) to K-12 data, with plans to continue to increase our ability to track efficacy and understand the impact of early childhood programs and gaps in school readiness. ESEA can provide guidelines to encourage connections between early learning and K-12 child data systems in order to boost this work in our state.

- **ESEA Should Encourage Schools to Fund High-Quality Prekindergarten and Early Learning Programs**

- High-quality prekindergarten is a recognized and proven strategy for achieving school readiness, increasing student achievement, and shrinking opportunity gaps. ESEA can support schools to invest in early learning through prioritization and clarification of Title I funds and making prekindergarten an allowable use of funds for school turn around and extended learning time efforts.



- Washington’s state prekindergarten program, ECEAP, serves just 25% of eligible low-income children and less than 10% of all 3-and 4-year olds in the state. State funding for the program has stagnated and challenging district budgets have put early learning programs at risk. Prioritization of early learning within ESEA can help propel districts to put more federal funds to work in getting children started off on the right foot.