

State's preschool program offers high-quality experience

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Kudos for recognizing the need to invest in Head Start, a program that helps children be ready for kindergarten, while supporting parents and promoting children's health and social and emotional development. Without improved federal funding, Head Start can't do its job well. Washington's state preschool program (ECEAP) strives to be like Head Start, providing high-quality preschool experiences for more children in Washington, but has even less funding per child than Head Start. This means less class time and fewer critical supports for the child and family; making it difficult for families to achieve their goals.

We must ensure high-quality programs through adequate funding, and then increase the number of children served by Head Start/ECEAP. The federal government absolutely needs to support and grow Head Start. Washington state demonstrated great vision when it created ECEAP. We now have an opportunity to strengthen preschool in Washington state via legislation that further supports ECEAP and renames it "Washington Head Start."

The economic and educational, return on investment in comprehensive preschool programs is well documented. The alternative -- to wait and let the K-12 system try to help kids "catch up"-- is a strategy that fails to deliver.

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