

Washington

Background

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)

ECEAP is an early childhood program for three- and four-year-olds, with priority for children who are four years old by August 31.¹ ECEAP accepts children from families with incomes below 110 percent of the federal poverty level, though up to 10 percent of children can come from families above the income threshold if they exhibit environmental or developmental risk factors. Children who are homeless, in foster care, or in families receiving specific child protective services and with the lowest FPL are prioritized for enrollment.²

The Washington State Department of Early Learning administers ECEAP through a competitive grant program. Public and private nonsectarian organizations are eligible to offer ECEAP.³ Charter schools can only offer ECEAP through an affiliated pre-K program.⁴

Charter schools in Washington

Washington allows new and conversion charter schools. The Washington Charter School Commission and certain local school boards serve as authorizers in Washington State.⁵ The state's charter school law, passed in 2012, allows the creation of up to forty charter schools in five years.⁶ The state's first charter school opened in fall 2014; nine more schools are approved to open by 2016.

Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

Providers interested in offering ECEAP apply for funding through a competitive application process. Applications are reviewed and scored by a committee of external stakeholders and Department of Early Learning staff. Each application is assigned points based on specific application criteria, and the successful applicants are awarded a number of slots. The new ECEAP contractor then submits an implementation plan and attends required trainings before starting ECEAP services. To continue receiving funding, contractors must comply with all program requirements, submit funding renewal applications every two years, and complete an annual self-assessment.⁷



TOTAL SCORE

10/50

Washington's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **not hospitable**

- − There are state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- + Compared to K–12 funding levels, pre-K program funding is sufficient to attract charters.
- − The size of the state pre-K program limits charter access to funding.
- + The funding, application, and approval processes do not create barriers to charter access.
- − Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is prohibited in legislation or practice.



Barriers

Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

 **Yes.** Washington’s charter school legislation defines a charter school as “a public, common school offering any program or course of study that a non-charter public school may offer, including one or more of grades kindergarten through twelve,” which the state interprets to mean that charter schools cannot offer pre-K directly. Further, the state’s common school funding law only allows charter schools to receive state funding for students over age five, which prevents charter schools from receiving state school funding formula funds for preschoolers.

The ECEAP legislation, which pre-dates Washington’s charter school law, does not explicitly list charter schools as an eligible provider. The Department of Early Learning has determined that charter schools can apply for ECEAP funding if the school demonstrates that it can meet ECEAP requirements, including contract provisions, child care licensing requirements, and performance standards.⁸ If a charter school met these criteria, it could offer pre-K as an affiliated program. No charter schools in Washington currently offer pre-K.

Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **No.** The funding level is not a barrier to charters offering pre-K in Washington. Charter schools that offer an affiliated ECEAP program, even if only for part-day services, receive more than charter schools in the state receive to serve K-12 students.

LOCAL INITIATIVES: SEATTLE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

In November 2014, Seattle voters passed a ballot initiative to raise property taxes to fund a preschool demonstration project for 2,000 three- and four-year-olds by 2018–19. The program will be free for all children from households earning less than 300 percent of the federal poverty level. Tuition for other families will be on a sliding scale. Initially, the program is funding pre-K spaces only in existing preschool programs, including existing public schools and community-based providers—so new providers, including charter schools, are not currently able to access funds.

Source: City of Seattle, “Seattle Preschool Program Action Plan: A Blueprint for Narrowing the Opportunity and Achievement Gap,” http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OFE/AboutTheLevy/EarlyLearning/SPP_118114a.pdf.

Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **Yes.** The size of the program is a barrier to charters accessing state pre-K funds. The program only serves 8 percent of all four-year-olds in the state.

Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

 **No.** If charter schools were permitted to offer pre-K, the application, approval, and funding processes would not be barriers to charter access.

Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

 **Yes.** Charter schools that offer pre-K through an affiliated program are not permitted to grant enrollment preference to their pre-K students.

Recommendations

Because Washington State’s charter school law is relatively new, no charter schools have yet pursued ECEAP funding. As the charter sector in Washington State grows, it is likely that some charter operators will seek to include pre-K in their educational offerings, and will encounter the barriers noted above in doing so. To address these barriers, Washington should:

- Amend the state charter law to include pre-K as a grade that charter schools may offer and clarify that charter schools may serve children under age five. If the state decides that charter schools should not receive funding for pre-K through the school funding formula, the legislation should reflect that—but it should not be a barrier to charter schools offering pre-K through other funding streams.
- Revise the ECEAP legislation to explicitly include charter schools as an eligible provider.
- Release guidance that explicitly allows charter schools to automatically enroll pre-K students into their kindergarten program if those students do not pay tuition.



	Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)	Charter schools in Washington
Year created	Launched in 1985 ⁹	Charter law enacted in 2012 ¹⁰
Children in state	178,069 three- and four-year-olds in Washington ¹¹	1,312,077 school-age children in Washington ¹²
Children served	10,091 children served 3 percent of three-year-olds 8 percent of four-year-olds ¹³	Ninety-eight students served ¹⁴ <1 percent of school-age population One charter school ¹⁵
Charters offering pre-K	No charter schools in Washington offer pre-K.	One charter school in Washington offers an elementary program.
Funding	Providers receive \$7,331 (part-day), \$9,868 (full-day), and \$15,111 (extended-day) per pupil to offer ECEAP. ¹⁶	Charter schools receive \$6,850 per pupil to serve K–12 students. ¹⁷

Endnotes

1 Programs are required to offer a minimum of 320 program hours per year.

2 Washington State Department of Early Learning, “Who is Eligible?” <http://www.del.wa.gov/care/find-hs-eceap/eligible.aspx>.

3 Washington State Legislature, “Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, Chapter 170-100 WAC,” <http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=170-100&full=true>.

4 An affiliated pre-K program is one that a charter school operates through a separate, but affiliated, entity or organization.

5 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Washington,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/WA/>.

6 Washington Secretary of State, “Initiative Measure No. 1240,” http://sos.wa.gov/_assets/elections/initiatives/FinalText_274.pdf.

7 Interview with Washington Office of Early Learning, December 5, 2014.

8 Ibid.

9 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

10 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Washington.”

11 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” www.census.gov/acs.

12 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.

13 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

14 First Place Scholars Charter School, “Fast Facts,” <http://fpscholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/FPSCS-Fast-Facts.pdf>.

15 Washington State Charter Schools Association, “Explore Charters,” <http://wacharters.org/explore-charters/>.

16 Interview with Washington Office of Early Learning, December 5, 2014.

17 Interview with Washington Charter Association, December 15, 2014.