



## 2011 PROPOSED STATEMENT: **EARLY LEARNING**

The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation or policies that increase families' access to high-quality early learning programs and improve students' transition to kindergarten. This includes but is not limited to:

- Phasing in universal pre-kindergarten services for 3- and 4-year-olds, such as provided by our state's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)
- Improving access to high-quality child care by expanding Washington's quality rating and improvement system (Seeds to Success), a voluntary support and professional development service for licensed providers
- Continuing to phase in universal all-day kindergarten and use of a readiness assessment process, such as the state's new Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS), a longitudinal data system that informs schools and families of a learner's needs so that they can better support them.
- Provide resources and support for pre-kindergarten through third-grade alignment.

### **Context:**

The most rapid growth in brain development happens before age 5, yet only 4 percent of our public resources are dedicated to this age group. Instead, we play catch up. It's much more cost effective to make sure a child is prepared for kindergarten than to try to remediate after the fact.

The Department of Early Learning summarizes the case:

"Studies show that every dollar invested in high-quality early learning programs returned between \$3 and \$17<sup>1</sup> in benefits. These benefits include:

- A. Lower costs for special education; child welfare; public health; social welfare from teen pregnancy; and juvenile and adult crime
- B. Reduced need to repeat grades in school, lowering school costs
- C. Increased tax revenue from successful students' increased earnings as adults"<sup>2</sup>

To help fulfill WSPTA's vision of making every child's potential a reality and to use limited resources effectively, we must increase access to high quality early learning programs and improve transitions to kindergarten, especially for our most vulnerable children.

### **Why now?**

- Timing is everything. More than 70,000 children start kindergarten in this state every year. More than half them start without the basic skills they need to succeed in school and later in life.<sup>3</sup> This has an immediate impact on the state's bottom line for special education costs, as well as higher costs of intervention services for health and development issues not caught early. We know that children who begin school without these basic skills are at greater risk than their

peers of staying behind and eventually dropping out of school. If we want our other reform efforts to succeed, we need to circle back and make sure our youngest children are getting the support they need.

- Washington has public-private partnerships in place to support this work and a comprehensive plan. Groundwork has been laid, and now the Department of Early Learning is seeking up to \$60 million over four years in federal funds to get more disadvantaged children into quality programs. <http://www.del.wa.gov/government/racetotop/Default.aspx>

### **Why is this issue important?**

We have proven gains and a great foundation -- yet access remains limited.

- Statewide, less than 14 percent of all eligible birth to 5-year-old children and families are served by Early Head Start and Head Start programs.
- Statewide, more than 4,000 eligible children are on the wait list ECEAP (pronounced E-Cap), because programs do not have necessary funding.

#### **Proven gains:**

- Children in ECEAP show significantly greater academic gains, display more positive behaviors, enjoy school more, and have fewer health problems than children without ECEAP.
- Teachers with training in early childhood development are better equipped to facilitate young children's language, cognitive, and social-skills development.<sup>4</sup>
- Quality early preschool programs can lead to a decreased need for special education services and interventions during a child's academic career.<sup>5</sup>
- A 2010 Maryland study found that high quality preschool can save taxpayers right away. The study found that for every child that went through their preschool program the elementary school saved almost \$700 per child just in special education savings. The Bremerton School District estimates savings closer to \$3,000 per year per child who avoids special education.

#### **Seeds to Success**

- About 176,000 children are in licensed child care on any given day in Washington State. Seeds to Success, Washington's quality rating and improvement system, is designed to support licensed child-care providers in improving the quality of care they offer children and families. Results from the field test show that coaching and quality improvement grants improved observable quality and decreased turnover among lead teachers.

#### **Create a better way**

- Many school districts in Washington—and even individual schools within the same districts—use different assessment tools at kindergarten entry, and the state is unable to aggregate the information in a meaningful way. Policymakers want to know which programs help young children, how they improve the quality of education and inform instruction, and whether expenditures are effective over time. Families and educators, meanwhile, want to know how their kindergartner is doing developmentally and physically so they can best support and, if needed, provide appropriate intervention.

### **Why PTA/PTSA?**

- Early learning – and early family engagement – set the foundation for children and have deep roots in Washington State PTA. In 1915, the association created Child Study Clubs, similar to

today's preschool coops, and preceded a similar effort of national PTA by five years. In 1917, the association changed the name of the program to "pre-school," a term coined by a Tacoma PTA leader and later used by educators and the general public. The premise then and now is the same: Help parents and educators understand just how much little ones are learning and what we can do to guide and support them.

- As for kindergarten, WSPTA has had to fight to keep it funded. In the post WWII boom years the state pushed it down to districts to fund. When levy failures in the 1960s later threatened local kindergarten programs, WSPTA first organized kindergarten coops to make sure kids' needs were met, then successfully lobbied to have the state fund the programs and make access equitable. Today we are working to get state funding for all-day kindergarten. This year, the state will pay for 21 percent of the slots. The goal: 100 percent by 2018.
- Early Learning falls under our Public Education Policies and Funding Legislative Principle, which calls for promotion of early learning education programs.
- Early learning is also a federal priority for National PTA.  
[http://www.pta.org/public\\_policy\\_agenda.asp](http://www.pta.org/public_policy_agenda.asp)

**Recommended WSPTA board action:** Do pass

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### **Resources:**

- **National PTA, federal policy agenda:** [http://www.pta.org/public\\_policy\\_agenda.asp](http://www.pta.org/public_policy_agenda.asp)
- **Department of Early Learning:** <http://www.del.wa.gov/Default.aspx>
- **ECEAP:** <http://www.del.wa.gov/care/find-hs-eceap/>
- **Head Start:** <http://www.wsaheadstarteceap.com/>
- **Seeds to Success:** [http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-gris/docs/SeedstoSuccess\\_QualityStandards.pdf](http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-gris/docs/SeedstoSuccess_QualityStandards.pdf)
- **Kindergarten readiness and WaKids:**  
<http://www.del.wa.gov/development/kindergarten/Default.aspx>
- **Early Learning Action Alliance:** <http://www.childrensalliance.org/our-current-work/early-learning-now/early-learning-action-alliance>
- **Thrive by Five:** <http://www.thrivebyfivewa.org/>
- **Gates Foundation, early learning:** <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/topics/Pages/early-learning.aspx>

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Early Learning Research found savings of \$4 to \$8 for every dollar invested; A Rand study of 2005 found returns of up to \$17.

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Early Learning Plan, executive summary, September 2010, [http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-gris/docs/ELP\\_Exec.pdf](http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/elac-gris/docs/ELP_Exec.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> (Source: OSPI's Student Readiness for Kindergarten.  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/pubdocs/KindergartenPreparednessSurveyReport.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Akerman, D.J. "Getting Teachers from Here to There: Examining Issues Related to an Early Care and Education Teacher Policy." Early Childhood Research and Practice 7, no. 1 (2005).

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence J., J.M. Schweinhart, Z. Xiang, W. S. Barnett, C.R. Belfield, and M. Nores. Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40. Ypsilanti: High/Scope Press, 2005.