

WASHINGTON STATE RACE TO THE TOP— EARLY LEARNING CHALLENGE



2015

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transforms
lives.

Evaluation Report

Written by Diane Schilder

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Our Youngest Children

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Glossary

3SI:	Third Sector Intelligence
CLASS:	Classroom Assessment Scoring System™
DEL:	Washington Department of Early Learning
DOH:	Washington Department of Health
EA:	Early Achievers
ECE:	Early Care and Education
ECEAP:	Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program
ESD:	Educational Service Districts
MERIT:	Managed Education and Registry Information Tool
OSPI:	Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
PD:	Professional Development
Pre-K:	Prekindergarten
QRIS:	Quality Rating and Improvement System
RTT-ELC:	Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge
WaKIDS:	Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills

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Introduction

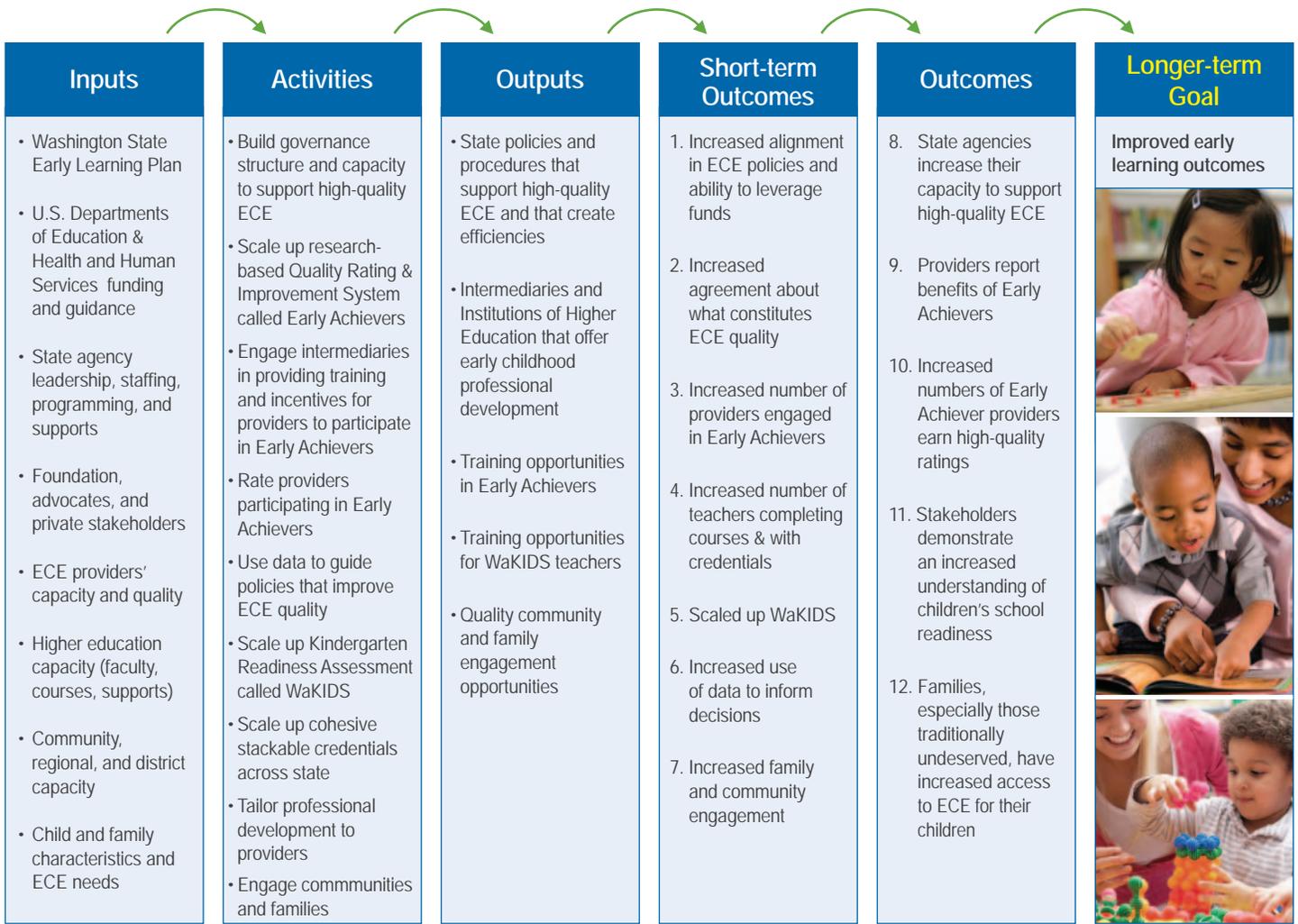
In late 2011, Washington State received a highly competitive Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) award, and in 2015 the state will enter into its fourth and final full year of implementing RTT-ELC activities. The RTT-ELC awards are designed to support each recipient state's implementation of a comprehensive approach to improve the overall quality of child care, prekindergarten, and Head Start services, with a particular focus on improving early learning opportunities for children with high needs and supporting their families and early childhood educators as they guide these children's development prior to kindergarten entry.

The RTT-ELC awards are designed to support each recipient state's implementation of a comprehensive approach to improve the overall quality of child care, prekindergarten, and Head Start services...

The federal RTT-ELC competition awarded points to each application based on the degree to which each state described how it would develop and scale up: a) a successful ECE state system; b) high-quality accountable programs; c) systems that promote early learning and development outcomes for children; d) supports for a great early childhood workforce; and e) systems to measure progress and outcomes. Applicants were eligible to earn additional points for including all early learning and development programs in the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and for addressing the status of children's learning and development at kindergarten entry.

The RTT-ELC program is jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. In their applications to the RTT-ELC, states created proposals to improve early learning by coordinating existing programs; improving, evaluating, and rating the quality of early care and education services; and increasing access to high-quality programs, particularly for children with high needs. In the first year, the federal government received 37 applications, and Washington was one of only nine states to receive an award. The award was for \$60 million. In the Washington State RTT-ELC application, state early care and education (ECE) stakeholders articulated a theory of change that presented the logical links between inputs, activities, outputs, and short- and longer-term outcomes. Figure 1 (next page) illustrates Washington State's RTT-ELC theory of change. It shows the links between inputs, or resources that support the RTT-ELC in Washington, including an Early Learning Plan, federal grant funding, and state capacity and expertise. These inputs are used to support a set of cohesive, research-informed activities. In turn, the activities are designed to lead to specific outputs (types, levels, and targets of services) such as the number of policy changes created to support more cohesive early childhood services and the number of technical and community colleges offering similar professional development to early childhood educators.¹ Washington State articulated seven short-term outcomes and five longer-term RTT-ELC outcomes that represent progress toward the goal of enhancing early learning outcomes for young children.

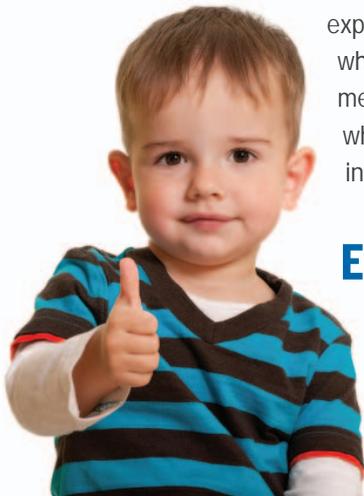
Figure I. Washington State Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge Logic Model



The theory of change includes a number of assumptions based on existing research. Specifically, research suggests that the cohesive set of activities proposed in the RTT-ELC application are needed to support all ECE providers in best nurturing young children's early development and meeting the needs of their families.² (See Appendix B for detailed research that supports these assumptions.)

Evaluation Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The BUILD Initiative contracted with Education Development Center, Inc., in September 2014 to conduct an external evaluation of the nature and early perceived outcomes of Washington State's RTT-ELC. A team of evaluators experienced in qualitative and quantitative evaluations of early childhood initiatives performed data collection, analysis, and reporting activities. The experienced team members had evaluated large-scale early care and education systems reform initiatives, which gave them an understanding of the policy and contextual issues as well as the evaluation methodologies and approaches appropriate for conducting the evaluation. The team included two members who are fluent Spanish speakers who translated the provider survey and conducted the key informant interviews with Spanish-speaking providers.



Evaluation Objectives and Questions

The objectives of the evaluation were to provide Washington State stakeholders with information about the nature and early perceived outcomes of the RTT-ELC: (a) to inform the continued implementation of the initiative and (b) to inform future directions for the state regarding early care and education policy and programming.

The logic model framed the refinement of evaluation questions that were developed to address this objective. The evaluation questions that guided the data collection and analysis, are as follows:

1. To date, have the RTT-ELC activities been completed according to plan? What activities are perceived as most beneficial by ECE stakeholders?
2. Has the RTT-ELC accomplished or made progress toward desired short-term outcomes?
3. Has the RTT-ELC accomplished or made progress toward desired longer-term outcomes?

Scope and Methodology

Between September 2014 and December 2014, EDC engaged in a mixed-methods evaluation that used the logic model as the frame for instrument design, data collection, analysis and reporting. The evaluators recognized that experimental designs are best to assess the impact of interventions, but if the conditions do not support an experimental design because of the diffuse nature of the intervention, a mixed methods approach provides an alternative methodology to exploring perceived early outcomes.

The evaluation team developed interview and focus-group protocols, surveys, and protocols for evaluating the existing datasets. The interview and focus group protocols included both open-ended items and Likert-scale questions designed to obtain information about the nature of the RTT-ELC activities and stakeholders' attribution of impact of the RTT-ELC on short and longer-term outcomes and included questions about the degree to which activities addressed cultural and linguistic issues, especially for Spanish- and Somali-speaking providers. The stakeholder survey included 14 Likert-scale questions and two open-ended questions. The provider interview protocols were designed to obtain data on the perceived impact of the RTT-ELC. The provider survey included 10 closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions to obtain perspectives on the perceived impact of Early Achievers. The provider interview and survey protocols were translated into Spanish.

The sample of state stakeholders chosen to participate in focus groups and interviews was selected based on a review of the RTT-ELC proposal. All key leaders with a role in the conceptualization and implementation of RTT-ELC activities were invited to contribute to the study. The sample of providers who completed surveys consists of a convenience sample. The evaluation team developed a web-based survey that was sent to regional Resource & Referral agencies throughout the state by Child Care Aware. The invitation to complete the survey was sent in both English and Spanish. Details about the evaluation activities and sample are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Data Collection Activities

Evaluation Activity	Description	Number
State Stakeholder Interviews/Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTT-ELC strategy group members • RTT-ELC state Implementation group members • State agency program directors and leaders from the Department of Early Learning, Department of Public Instruction, and Department of Health • Community stakeholders from Child Care Aware, Head Start, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Programs, agency directors, and Educational Service Districts • Higher education leaders and faculty supporting Early Achievers and providing professional development • Foundation and advocacy representatives from the Gates Foundation, Thrive by Five, the BUILD Initiative, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids • 3SI consultants responsible for Early Achievers and WaKIDS data cleaning and analysis 	41
Surveys	State stakeholders+	30
	Providers (19 Spanish-language respondents)	192
Secondary Analysis of Existing Data	Early Achievers, Workforce development, and WaKIDS data compiled, cleaned, and analyzed by 3SI	
Document Review	RTT-ELC proposal, work plan, annual reports, budget documents, and financial reports. Documents regarding Early Achievers and WaKIDS data from the state websites. Evaluation reports from University of Washington, Child Trends, Mathematica Policy Research, and the State Legislative Study Committee.	

+ Of the 30 state stakeholders who provided quantitative data, 17 stakeholders completed an online, web-based survey and 13 answered the Likert-scale questions during interviews or focus groups.



The lead evaluator met with data analysts from 3SI to verify the accuracy, validity, and reliability of the data analyses that had been performed. Codebooks, data tables, cleaning and re-coding procedures, and processes for verifying the accuracy of the data were reviewed.

The evaluation team analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data with the aim of describing the nature of the RTT-ELC activities and perceived impact of the RTT-ELC on desired short- and longer-term outcomes. The quantitative analyses included descriptive statistical analyses to determine frequencies and averages, and independent samples t-tests to determine whether differences between providers participating in Early Achievers and nonparticipating providers are statistically significant. The qualitative methods were guided by Miles and Huberman's framework of creating an initial coding schema, refining the codes after preliminary analysis, and exploring emerging themes and trends.³ Qualitative data were coded based on a schema that examined the relationship between actors (such as agency directors and providers), activities, outputs, and short and longer-term perceived outcomes.

Findings

The findings are organized into three sections. The section begins with a brief description of activities. Next, findings related to short-term outcomes are presented. The concluding section presents findings related to longer-term outcomes. Contextual information is presented throughout.

PROPOSED ACTIVITIES SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED

Between 2012 and 2014, Washington stakeholders successfully implemented the key activities articulated in the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge proposal. A team of Washington ECE stakeholders had developed the RTT-ELC proposal in response to a funding opportunity presented by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. The proposal presented an ambitious plan of activities to be carried out from 2012 through 2015.

The proposal drew heavily on the state's comprehensive strategic 10-year roadmap for building an early childhood system with the aim of improving child outcomes.⁴ The BUILD Initiative, the Gates Foundation, Thrive by Five, and state stakeholders supported the development of this 10-year plan; and, state stakeholders in collaboration with private partners led the effort. The 10-year plan drew on a body of research and possible future federal funding opportunities that conceivably would require streamlined governance structures, a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), and a statewide assessment of children's school readiness. As such, the Early Learning Challenge proposal acknowledged that federal funds and technical assistance would be used to support scaling up numerous activities that had been conceptualized and piloted in previous years rather than to support the creation of new activities.

Washington was successful in the first phase of the very competitive grant application, and the state received \$60 million in federal funds, technical assistance, and support from the federal government. Since the receipt of the federal funds, Washington has successfully implemented its proposed activities.⁵ Specifically, Washington has successfully accomplished the following:

- Established operating structures with ECE stakeholders, through public-philanthropic partnerships and inter-agency teams, to scale up the implementation of planned RTT-ELC activities
- Recruited intermediaries and institutions of higher education to support the scale up of the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), called Early Achievers
- Supported full implementation of a more cohesive professional development system by offering awards and incentives to those who work with and care for young children and increasing capacity in higher education institutions.
- Created policies and systems to support the expansion of the state's kindergarten readiness assessment, called Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS)

An analysis of annual reports submitted to the U.S. Department of Education provides evidence of successful implementation of

proposed activities. Similar to all of the other states that received RTT-ELC grants, Washington reported some implementation challenges. For example, the number of providers participating in Early Achievers and the number of schools implementing WaKIDS was initially lower than projected. To address these challenges, Washington stakeholders examined data, made policy changes, and changed funding to successfully encourage participation. These issues are described in more detail in sections of the report that follow.

SUCCESS ON SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Using the logic model found in Figure 1 on page 2, this section presents findings related to the seven short-term outcomes. The short-term outcomes represent the outcomes articulated in the RTT-ELC proposal that the state aimed to achieve in the first three years of the funding cycle. The state successfully achieved each of these short-term outcomes.

OUTCOME 1. Increased Alignment in Policies and Ability to Leverage Funds

Upon receipt of the RTT-ELC funding, Washington successfully leveraged existing governance structures that have led to successful implementation of the RTT-ELC activities, and as a result stakeholders report greater alignment in policies and an enhanced ability to leverage funds. The state created two important structures that support the strategic direction and implementation of the RTT-ELC. A strategic planning team, comprised of leaders who had key roles in the RTT-ELC proposal, meets regularly. It includes stakeholders from the Department of Early Learning (DEL), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Third Sector Intelligence (3SI), and private consultants. A separate RTT-ELC implementation team meets regularly to guide and oversee RTT-ELC implementation. The implementation team is comprised of staff from DEL who maintain performance-focused contractual relationships with partners, including the state Resource & Referral association (Child Care Aware), the University of Washington,

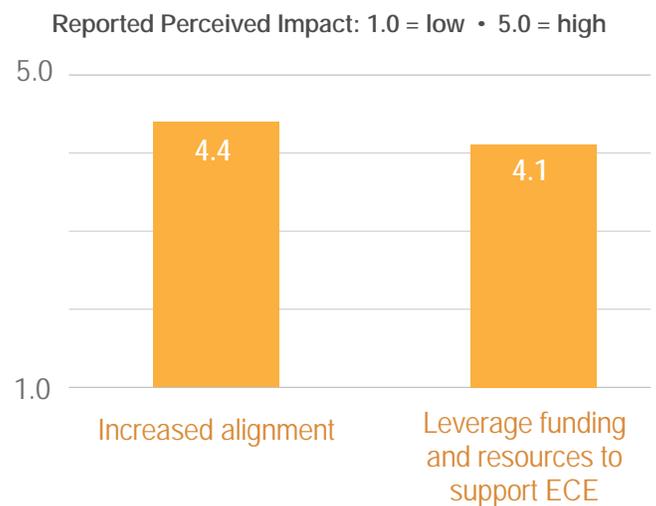
representatives from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), Thrive by Five, the Washington State Library, the Washington Association of Head Start and



Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), and Educational Service Districts (ESDs).

When asked about the impact of the RTT-ELC on increases in the alignment of policies affecting ECE providers and in the leveraging of funding and resources to support ECE, stakeholders reported that the RTT-ELC had an impact. Specifically, on a five-point scale from low-to-high, stakeholders reported that RTT-ELC had an impact on increased alignment of policies and on leveraging funding and resources. (See Figure 2 below.)

Figure 2. Increased Alignment and Leveraged Funding



Study participants reported that the RTT-ELC has helped to improve ECE policies and services in the following ways: by increasing collaboration between and among state agencies and by increasing alignment of policies and programs.

Personnel from the Department of Early Learning, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Department of Health (DOH) reported increased collaboration between and among state agencies. Documents provide further evidence to support the stakeholder perceptions. For example, the RTT-ELC annual report to the U.S. Department of Education stated that DEL and OSPI in collaboration with the Education Research Data center has been engaged in efforts to link children who are participating in state-funded early learning programs with K–12 schools. The initial focus of this collaborative work was on identifying kindergartners who had formerly participated in ECEAP.⁶ DEL and DOH reported that, while the role of public health in the RTT-ELC was small, activity to streamline screening and assessments have resulted in increased state agency collaboration and more seamless services for young children.

The state has also taken steps to create a more coherent monitoring system by pilot testing a joint child care licensing/ECEAP monitoring system. Moreover, the state pilot tested a process of engaging ECEAP and Head Start in Early Achievers in the first year of the RTT-ELC grant.⁷ On June 26, 2014, the Department of Early Learning (DEL) adopted new rules to revise Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) eligibility, prioritization, and enrollment rules and align them with clarified ECEAP Performance Standards. The updated eligibility rules also clarify that three- and four-year-olds who receive child protective services or family assessment response services are eligible and prioritized for ECEAP services. The rules also created greater consistency in staff qualifications.⁸

The RTT-ELC project has provided an opportunity for ECE stakeholders throughout the system to leverage funds. For example, students reported that it was substantially easier to obtain financial aid the 2013-2014 than during the first year of the RTT-ELC funding.⁹ Moreover, analysis of RTT-ELC annual reports demonstrate that private foundation funding has exceeded the original target, as the RTT-ELC has been used to leverage additional funding and supports to create a higher-quality, more cohesive early care and education system.

The RTT-ELC project has provided an opportunity for ECE stakeholders throughout the system to leverage funds.

Stakeholders commented about the increased alignment and the state's enhanced ability to leverage funds:

“We have taken all of the programs that existed in friendly silos and we are creating a single system. Head Start was in one division, pre-K was another, and licensing another. I have been pushing for this to be one system. We have one common metric for quality, and it is Early Achievers. It [RTT-ELC] has given us the ability to have intense meetings about aligning policies and monitoring systems.” —*State agency personnel*

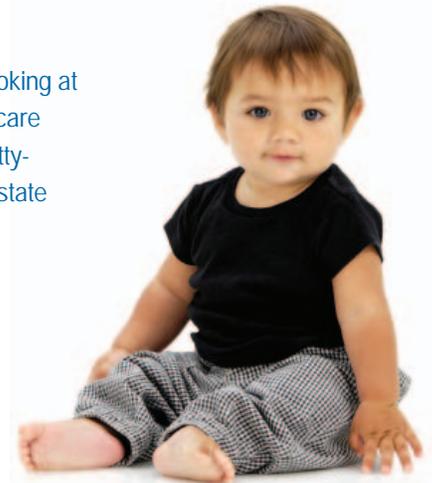
“Piloting expedited licensing is now in place. We have begun with about 20 sites in the state, and it is moving forward. We decided that we would take our Early Achievers money, braid it with Working Connections child care money, and offer parents who need full-school-day and full-school-year care a high-quality program.” —*State agency staff*

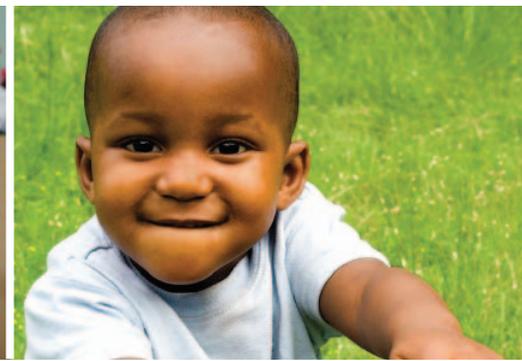
“In this process [of RTT-ELC implementation] we are all engaging the folks who can help us support providers who are braiding funding, including the fiscal folks. This way all they [the providers] have to do is think about teaching the kids.” —*State agency staff*

“As far as monitoring the programs themselves, you have one lens. Before you would have a lot of conflicting information throughout the state. You would have people telling providers to do things differently [depending on whether they were looking at child care, Head Start, or pre-K]. Now we are talking about high-quality early childhood regardless of the setting.” —*State agency staff*

Some stakeholders reported that the first few years of the RTT-ELC focused on the implementation of the proposed activities; and while some activities to align services were implemented, there will be additional opportunities to implement more cohesive systems in the next few years. One state agency staff member noted:

“Right now [we] are poised to create more coordinated, aligned services. As we are looking at ECEAP expansion and Early Achievers and looking into Family, Friend and Neighbor care regulations, the vision has expanded because they have been able to get out of the nitty-gritty of getting systems off the ground. The focus now is looking at quality across the state wherever children are.” —*State agency staff*



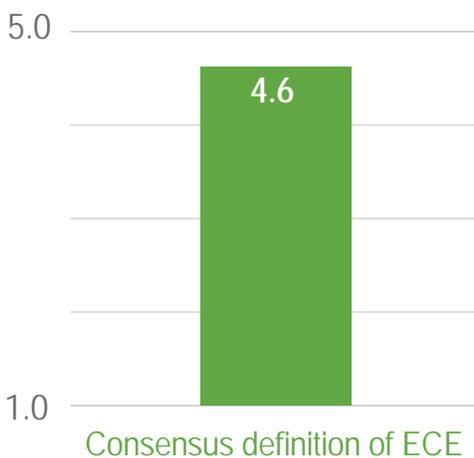


OUTCOME 2. Common Definition of High-Quality ECE

Since receiving the RTT-ELC funds, Washington State has achieved a common, shared understanding of high-quality ECE that applies across child care, Head Start, and prekindergarten. When asked to rate the impact of the development of a consensus definition of ECE, state stakeholders reported that RTT-ELC has had a large impact. On a five-point scale from low to high, stakeholders reported that the RTT-ELC had an impact on a consensus definition of ECE quality. (See Figure 3 below.)

Figure 3. High Impact of RTT-ELC Reported on Consensus Definition of ECE Quality

Reported Perceived Impact: 1.0 = low • 5.0 = high



As in other states, young children in Washington can participate in early care and education opportunities ranging from Early Head Start and Head Start, to family child care or center-based care, to state-funded pre-K, called ECEAP. Prior to the receipt of the RTT-ELC funding, Washington had begun discussions about how to best support coherence with a consistent quality framework among these programs, since each served young children before the age of school entry. Yet the quality standards and regulations across Head Start, child care, and pre-K differed, which created a patchwork of quality options for parents seeking ECE.

Although Washington State had conceptualized and pilot tested a QRIS, the state used the RTT-ELC funds to bring to scale its QRIS, currently called Early Achievers.¹⁰ Early Achievers includes all programs (licensed child care centers, family child care homes, and ECEAP/Head Start). The RTT-ELC has thus helped to scale and sustain a statewide system that supports “a common continuum of quality.”¹¹ A pilot report states, “Early Achievers allows parents and staff to have a common understanding about high-quality services as children as well as staff move between settings.”¹²

The consensus definition of high-quality ECE articulates thresholds of quality that correspond to the QRIS ratings that are based on research showing correlations between aspects of quality and child outcomes. It is noteworthy that the standards articulated in Early Achievers are higher than many of the QRIS standards employed in first-generation systems. Many of the earliest states that adopted QRIS as an accountability and quality improvement strategy, focused only on structural indicators of quality such as child-staff ratios rather than interactions between ECE caregivers and children, which research has shown are linked to improved child outcomes.¹³

State ECE stakeholders attribute the common definition of quality to the RTT-ELC. The Early Achievers quality framework addresses the following dimensions:

- High-quality teacher/adult-child interactions and rich learning environments
- Ongoing child assessment and screening to learn about and support the needs and strengths of each child in collaboration with families
- Curriculum that is aligned with the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines to help ensure that all children across age groups and settings have developmentally appropriate learning experiences
- Ongoing professional development and training for staff that is aligned with the Washington State Core Competencies
- Family engagement to support children’s success
- Use of practices that strengthen and engage families in early learning and that support parents/caregivers as primary educators/first teachers



- Individualized learning opportunities and instruction based on the unique needs and strengths of each child
- Use of data (child and program) to inform teaching and program practices with children
- Alignment with national and state standards and systems, including the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS), and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), and Head Start performance standards.¹⁴

State ECE stakeholders reported that the RTT-ELC funding and the requirements that the state implement the activities in the RTT-ELC proposal gave the state the resources and incentives to achieve the consensus definition. One state agency staff member reported that prior to RTT-ELC each program focused on its own definition of quality. Through regular meetings of the strategy team, the implementation team, and those responsible for scaling up Early Achievers, all state ECE stakeholders have now achieved a single, consensus definition of quality.

Stakeholders reported that the common definition has been helpful in creating a more cohesive ECE system and that the RTT-ELC funds had a large impact on arriving at a shared definition of quality. ECE stakeholders made the following comments:

“It [RTT-ELC] is bringing quality to scale.” —*State agency staff*

“Washington has been able to build an integrated system that provides high-quality care for children and supports providers in their pursuit and maintenance of offering high-quality care and information to parents so they will demand high-quality care.” —*State agency staff*

“[RTT-ELC has been] critical to building the supportive systems (such as, Early Achievers and WaKIDS) that enable the entire early learning system to become focused on quality. While there is still much work to do to get all programs at a high level of quality, we now have the structure to move to quality, which didn’t exist before RTT-ELC funding. RTT-ELC was essential to building the platforms that are needed to shift all of the work towards quality implementation.” —*Private partner*

“Through Early Achievers we have reached more providers with deeper quality improvement support than ever before in our 25-year history of providing these services as a CCR&R system.” —*Community stakeholder*

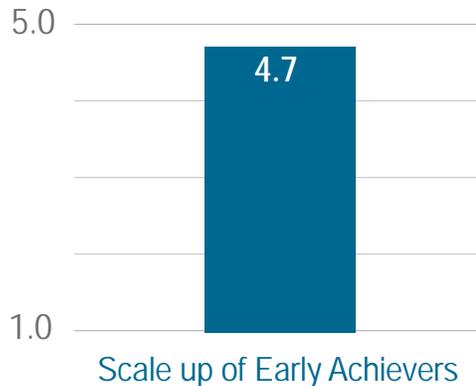
“For the first time child care providers in the State of Washington have a clear path to follow as they attempt to improve the quality of care and education in their programs. Early Achievers has given us a common language that can be used by all stakeholders. This common language is beginning to break down the ever-present silos of our early learning system. We now have childcare licensors, technical assistance specialists, Head Start, ECEAP, teachers, family child care providers, and many other representatives regularly learning together at EA institutes as well as in other venues. These stakeholders are engaging in important discourse around where we stand and the direction we need to go from here. . . . RTT-ELC has brought us the data and determination that we need as a state to take the next steps towards ending the opportunity gap here in our state and beyond.” —*Professional development provider*

OUTCOME 3. Scale Up of Early Achievers

As noted above, prior to receiving RTT-ELC funding, Washington State had pilot tested a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS); but in the words of one stakeholder, “In the absence of federal funding it [a scale up of QRIS] would not have been achieved.” This director of a regional Resource & Referral stated, “I didn’t think it would happen in my lifetime, but the RTT-ELC gave us the opportunity to implement the dream we started working toward decades ago.” Many study participants echoed this sentiment. Figure 4 below shows that on a five-point scale of impact, on average, stakeholders reported that the RTT-ELC has had a very large impact on the state’s ability to scale up Early Achievers.

Figure 4. High Impact of RTT-ELC on Scale up of Early Achievers

Reported Perceived Impact: 1.0 = low • 5.0 = high



State stakeholders expressed their conviction that the RTT-ELC has had a positive impact on scaling up Early Achievers:

“Scale up of Early Achievers wouldn’t have happened without RTT-ELC.” —State agency staff

“We would never have gotten this far in terms of the numbers.” —Private partners

A number of stakeholders reported that the state had developed a QRIS prior to receiving the RTT-ELC but that the funding has made it possible to bring Early Achievers to scale.

“We have been talking about this for over a decade and would not have scaled up the system if it weren’t for the Challenge.” —Community partner

“I was with the R&R the first time we developed a really robust QRIS that went nowhere. There was no legislation that told us we had to do it. There was no federal grant that told us we had to do it. That was about 10 years ago. [From] my historical perspective, having the resources and the obligation of the grant clearly made this happen. It [the QRIS pilot report] would have been more shelf art if we hadn’t had the RTT-ELC grant.” —Community partner

State stakeholders reported during the first two years of the RTT-ELC that they devoted efforts to informing ECE providers about Early Achievers. In the grant application, Washington proposed offering orientation sessions to ECE providers to communicate the consensus perspective on quality. Stakeholders learned that, in addition to these orientation sessions, additional resources needed to be devoted to engage providers in understanding key components of Early Achievers and to become ready to be part of the system.

The activities to engage providers have yielded benefits. Compared with other states that are implementing QRIS, Washington State’s QRIS participation rate is higher than the median state’s participation rate. Currently 58 percent of child care centers (868 centers) in Washington (1,343) are participating, compared with 34 percent of centers in the median state implementing a QRIS. Moreover, 35 percent of family child care providers in Washington are participating in Early Achievers, compared with 17 percent of family child care providers in the median state implementing a QRIS.¹⁵ In addition, 214 Head Start/ECEAP sites participated in ECEAP. Combined, Early Achievers child care, Head Start, and ECEAP sites provide early care and education to a total of 67,522 children.

OUTCOME 4. Scale Up of Cohesive Professional Development System

Stakeholders report that the RTT-ELC has led to successful scale up of a cohesive professional development system. Prior to receiving funds, the Washington community and technical college system had conceptualized common “stackable” ECE certificates that offered credential pathways for ECE providers. Beginning in 2012, statewide “stackable” common Initial ECE Certificates were adopted by community and technical colleges. At the end of the first year of the RTT-ELC funding, 11 community and technical colleges (41 percent) offered these certificates; and, as of June 2014, 22 of the 27 community and technical colleges (81 percent) had received scholarship funding to support EA employees to earn ECE stackable certificates and associate degrees. Moreover, even some of the community and technical colleges that are not receiving the scholarship funding are offering the stackable certificates.

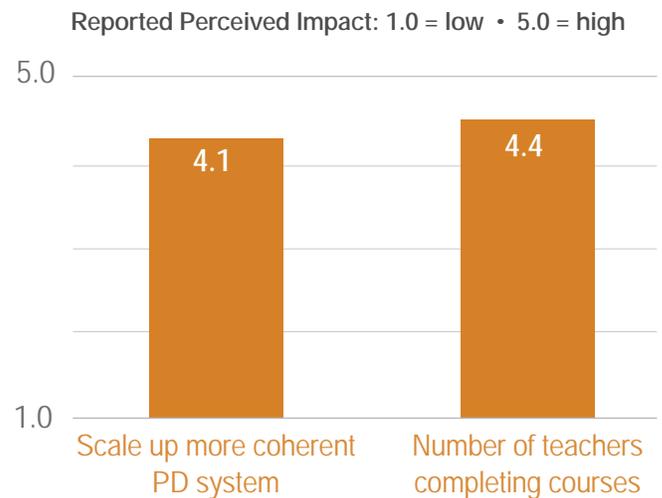
Stakeholders report that the RTT-ELC funding has had large impact on scaling up a more cohesive ECE professional development system, since in the absence of scholarship funding for ECE teachers, fewer ECE educators would have the means to participate in the coursework. The RTT-ELC funds support 700 educators who are currently participating in the scholarship programs.

An analysis of data trends over the past three years reveals a 63 percent increase in the number of ECE educators who have completed certificates and credentials. According to the RTT-ELC proposal, 192 ECE educators had completed certificates and credentials in the year prior to the application submission. In contrast, even though overall community and technical school enrollment has declined in Washington as the economy has improved, a total of 303 students received ECE certificates or degrees in early childhood in the 2013–2014 academic year.^{16, 17, 18}

Stakeholders report that the RTT-ELC has had an impact both on the scale up of a more coherent system of professional development and on increasing the number of teachers who have completed courses and who have credentials. On a five-point scale, with five being high-impact and one being low-impact, stakeholders reported that RTT-ELC has had an impact on scaling up a more coherent professional development system and an impact on increasing the number of teachers with courses and credentials (see Figure 5). The slightly lower impact of RTT-ELC on scaling up the professional development system was reported by some who stated that the system was already built prior to the receipt of the RTT-ELC and by others who voiced a desire for specific additional changes in the system. Those wanting additional changes reported that, while the state had made strides in aligning the curriculum across institutions of

higher education, additional work is needed to educate the faculty on Early Achievers, the assessment tools used to assess quality, and the links among the professional development providers outside the institutions of higher education.

Figure 5. Impact on Professional Development



Stakeholders reported that the RTT-ELC had a large impact on the professional development system, and some recommended improvements for the future:

“I’d say a big body of work has been cohesively implemented through the CCR&R and other PD systems and with the higher education grants. I think there is a lot of work yet to be done to have an aligned system that goes beyond what [has been done]. Within the higher education system, there is a lot of alignment that is needed to ensure faculty know about the rating scales and can speak the same language used in Early Achievers when they are teaching.”
—Professional development provider

“It is one of the most difficult things to describe for people who are not in the “day-to-day.” People from child care, Head Start, and ECEAP now have the same framework. Those who don’t understand that Head Start has federal regulations might wonder why we have different coaches and workshops offered by Head Start and others who work with child care and ECEAP. But now there are coaches and professional development providers who are using the same framework even if they have different regulations. We have much greater cohesion in and across the systems. Now we have a continuum of supports depending on provider needs.” —Community provider



“This funding has had a transformational effect on the quality of care in private licensed child care settings. I have been involved with improving child care in Washington with many pilot programs over the last 15 years. This is the only program that has given a framework to child care providers so they really understand the map to improving quality in their settings. It also uses our best talent in the field for TA and coaching. Finally there is a ladder for professional development for individuals in the field.” —ECE provider

“I hear stories about employers signing on with Early Achievers because it makes a difference with their personnel. Child care directors see that educators are applying what they are learning to their classrooms. The Race to the Top [ELC] has given us an opportunity to be more accountable to the people we engage in the classrooms so they apply it directly in their work.” —Higher education faculty member

“This is one of the areas where infusion of resources has made a difference in the ability to do more (in terms of offering coursework and credentials) and has helped to ensure that we are flexible and adapting to needs as they arise.”
—Professional development provider

“The grant forced us to change the way we deliver our services and target with a “child outcomes” frame. While I believe we were delivering good professional development and support services before, it took us to a different level.”
—ECE community stakeholder

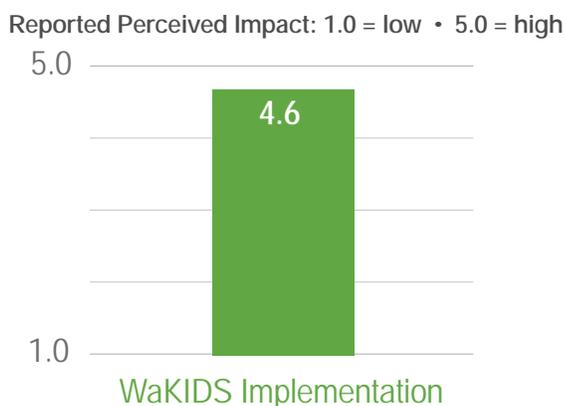
“The reason I gave a lower rating to the number of providers taking courses and with credentials is that this takes time. People need to recognize that for providers in the system, it can take a while to finish courses and credentials.”
—Higher education faculty member

Early care and education providers reported that they experienced benefits from the enhanced professional development opportunities, as well. This information is presented in the long-term outcomes section of the report, starting on page 15.

OUTCOME 5. Scale Up of WaKIDS

The vast majority of stakeholders who participated in this evaluation reported that, had the state not received RTT-ELC funding, Washington would not currently be successfully scaling up the implementation of WaKIDS, Washington State’s kindergarten entry assessment. Figure 6 below shows that stakeholders reported that the RTT-ELC had a large impact on scaling up WaKIDS.

Figure 6. Large Impact on Scaling Up WaKIDS Reported



The vast majority of stakeholders who participated in this evaluation reported that, had the state not received RTT-ELC funding, Washington would not currently be successfully scaling up the implementation of WaKIDS.

WaKIDS is designed to collect and provide information about children’s cognitive, linguistic, physical, and social/emotional development that can help kindergarten teachers and parents best support children’s early learning and development. As such, WaKIDS is not simply an assessment but a system that is designed to collect data on all important aspects of children’s development, engage families, and create a continuum of services for young children, from early childhood education through kindergarten.¹⁹

WaKIDS was pilot tested during the 2010–2011 school year^{20,21} with approximately 3,000 incoming kindergarteners.²² With the receipt of the RTT-ELC funds, the state moved forward with rolling implementation. Consistent with the RTT-ELC priorities, WaKIDS implementation began in the communities that demonstrated the highest need. In 2013, “The Legislature increased the number of children eligible for state-funded, full-day kindergarten from 22 to 44 percent. This led to an increase in the number of participating districts, schools and children.”²³

“The resources provided for the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS), the state’s kindergarten transition process, helped the state scale up this initiative more quickly. The data emerging from the assessment component of WaKIDS has helped identify the need for a state focus on early numeracy. As a result, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction has begun developing resources and professional development in this area.” —*State agency personnel*

“Although WaKIDS was a very small portion of the Early Learning Challenge grant, the assistance with teacher training resources helped ensure that all schools interested in participating—not just those receiving state funding for full-day kindergarten—could pursue that option. As a result, although Washington currently funds 44 percent of all kindergartners for full-day kindergarten (and by extension, WaKIDS), closer to 53 percent of all kindergartners benefited from WaKIDS in 2014.” —*State agency personnel*

OUTCOME 6. Data-Informed Decision Making

Washington State stakeholders reported that the RTT-ELC has been instrumental in building new systems of data collection, analysis, and reporting that have resulted in substantial improvements in data-informed decision making. Stakeholders noted that the state has a culture of supporting data as part of a continuous improvement process, and the RTT-ELC provided the state with the opportunity to build the capacity to use data to inform the state’s ECE reform efforts. Prior to receiving the RTT-ELC, the state had piloted a number of systems; but the RTT-ELC funds have been used to scale up Early Achievers and WaKIDS, which provide ECE stakeholders with important information to inform ECE policy.

Figure 7. Impact on Use of Data to Inform Decisions Reported

Reported Perceived Impact: 1.0 = low • 5.0 = high



Many state ECE stakeholders reported that RTT-ELC has had an impact on their ability to access and use data to inform decisions, and some community and regional stakeholders reported an impact as well. A divergent perspective was voiced by some community ECE stakeholders, and by state advocates who have a desire for greater access to real-time data:

“I would say there has been a very big impact because we didn’t even have the data [before the RTT-ELC funding.] Even within the field it has created a data-driven culture. Now the data is there.” —*State agency staff*





“We had grand plans [to collect, analyze, and report data], but without an external push as big as RTT, one that requires so much accountability, we wouldn’t have been as successful. No way.” —*State implementation team member*

“We are able to refine our data systems to be able to pull out and refine our systems to be truly effective. When I think about how limited the data were prior to the grant and now, I think the impact is huge. We have a data director and system. Organizationally, RTT-ELC has had a huge impact on making us a more data-driven decision-making group. There are still a lot of data questions we have that we were hoping we could answer, but it is going pretty slowly.”
—*Community ECE stakeholder*

“The bridges are the pieces that are missing. There is data now, and we didn’t have it a few years ago. We are gathering far more data than we ever have, but haven’t been able to link it or making it available in a public way.” —*Advocate*

“When it comes to child outcomes data we really need to be able to link ECE to later child outcomes. It is tricky because we don’t have a unique child identifier. This is work that still needs to be completed.” —*Advocate*

Some stakeholders reported that they had access to Early Achievers and WaKIDS data, whereas others reported that their access was more limited. Stakeholders reported that the state was taking action to increase access to data in the final year of the RTT-ELC funding.

In addition to providing access to data, state stakeholders have also used RTT-ELC funds as well as private foundation funds to support evaluations of Early Achievers, WaKIDS, and the state professional development system. In turn, state and community ECE stakeholders reported using evaluation recommendations to inform future directions. For example, the evaluation of the WaKIDS pilot recommended increased training on family participation, increased training for teachers, increased time for teachers to spend engaging with parents, and stronger systems for information sharing between and among ECE providers and kindergarten teachers. The state has implemented many changes in WaKIDS to directly address these recommendations and is continuing to pursue additional quality improvements.²⁴

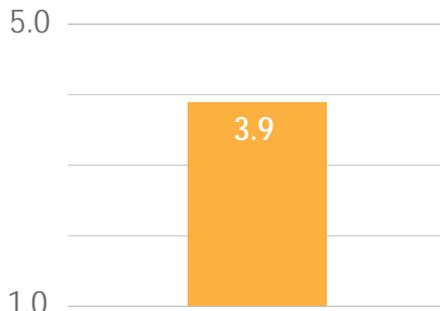
OUTCOME 7. Family and Community Engagement

The planned RTT-ELC Early Achievers and WaKIDS activities included robust family and community engagement components. Part of the Early Achievers Professional Training Series requires participants to complete a daylong, in-person training on how to best support the families in their programs. The Early Achievers Strengthening Families training offers suggestions for how to be a good role model for families, how to make families feel welcome, and where to find resources for families that need additional support.²⁵ As noted in the WaKIDS section, an integral part of the kindergarten readiness assessment, is a family engagement component.

When asked about the impact of the RTT-ELC activities on family and community engagement, many stakeholders reported a high impact; but others voiced concern that the impact to date has not been as strong as they hope it will be in the future. Figure 8 illustrates the average rating of the impact that RTT-ELC has had to date on family and community engagement.

Figure 8. Impact on Family and Community Engagement

Reported Perceived Impact: 1.0 = low • 5.0 = high



Family & community engagement

Those who gave a lower rating reported that they are hoping to use data to inform family and community members but cannot yet do so; they reported that Early Achievers ratings and WaKIDS data are not currently readily available “in all communities to engage families and community members. Others reported that the processes required of providers engaged in Early Achievers and the WaKIDS family engagement processes have resulted in greater engagement between ECE providers, kindergarten teachers, community members, and families.

Early care and education providers participating in Early Achievers reported specific impacts on their family engagement activities:

“The main impact for our center has been the improvement of relationships we have had with our parents. We now have a renewed focus on working with families for the benefit of their children. We see the family as an extension of that child and have specific events and support for the entire family. Another great impact of Early Achievers has been the knowledge of resources available for families. Before this, my staff and I were very limited on knowing where to send people if they needed help for developmental delays or assistance. With the specific trainings and meetings Early Achievers has in regards to resources, we now have a list that we are able to share with our families.” —ECE EA provider

“The main thing for my program is giving me a better understanding of how families work, and the dynamic that when families leave here, what families have in their lives and how I can help them do little things to help their children. I’m more aware of what their busyness of life might be because EA has pushed us to talk to them and involve them more. I’m more aware.” —ECE EA provider

“I have been able to openly communicate with a particular parent about her child’s behaviors and have offered her resources that may help to evaluate the child rather than just speaking to her about his behaviors without being able to offer her support. I invited her to a class on understanding behaviors, which unfortunately she did not attend because of a medical emergency. The opportunity was there for her because of the Early Achievers program providing the class and welcoming parents to participate. Perhaps in the future the class will be offered and she will be able to attend. I believe that quality of early care and education includes parents as well as children, and Early Achievers demonstrates this as well.” —ECE EA provider

“Families are more aware of why high-quality early learning environments are important.” —ECE EA provider

“I believed we have always had good relation with our families; the difference is that they see and compliment on how their children are learning, and they better understand the value of play and developmental stages. We have taken advantage of the many resources that Early Achievers offers, and we can share them with families. They seem to appreciate it.” —ECE EA provider

“We were able to share information with parents about why we do what we do and the benefits to them and their children. We started a parent support group.” —ECE EA provider

“Our teachers are much more aware of creating more lines of communication between home and school.” —ECE EA provider



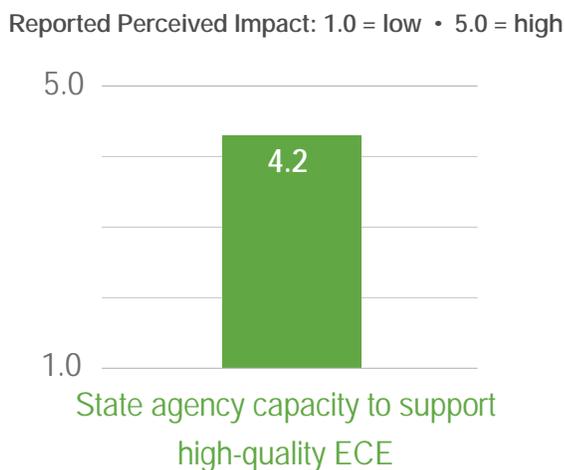
Progress on Longer-term Outcomes

Washington’s RTT-ELC proposal articulated longer-term outcomes that the state aimed to make substantial progress toward during the RTT-ELC funding period. In the first three years of funding, the state has made progress toward each of the five longer-term outcomes; and the state is poised to fully achieve these outcomes in the upcoming years.

OUTCOME 8. State Capacity to Support ECE

RTT-ELC has resulted in increased state capacity to support high-quality early care and education. Stakeholders reported that, now that the state knows what quality changes are needed, ECE stakeholders throughout the state can use data to tailor supports to build quality within programs that will lead to positive child outcomes.

Figure 9. Increased Capacity to Support High-quality ECE



During interviews and focus groups, agency staff and other stakeholders elaborated on the benefits:

“Washington has been able to build an integrated system that provides high-quality care for children [and that] supports providers in their pursuit and maintenance of offering high-quality care and information for parents so they will demand high-quality care.” —*State agency staff*

“[RTT-ELC has been] critical to building the supportive systems (like Early Achievers and WaKIDS) that enable the entire Early Learning system to become focused on quality. While there is still much work to do to get all programs at a high level of quality, we now have the structure to move to quality, which didn’t exist before RTT-ELC funding. RTT-ELC was essential to building the platforms that are needed to shift all of the work towards quality implementation.” —*Private foundation staff*

“[RTT-ELC has] enabled WA to try some things . . . so that we could move to a more streamlined and cost-effective system over time. State funding would never have allowed this. [We have] created a data-driven culture that did not exist. People now HAVE data, and they are more used to USING data to make decisions. RTT-ELC changes the conversation from “increasing access” to “increasing access to high-quality programs.” This was an important shift for Washington.”
—*Private partner*

“RTT-ELC [made it possible for] Washington State to create the infrastructure to support higher quality child care throughout our entire state. It may be too early to see the full impact it has had on the number of rated programs, WaKIDS, and the quality of care experienced by families. Now our challenge is to keep the momentum going!”
—*Community ECE stakeholder*

Reviews of documents and analyses of interview and focus group data reveal that Washington State has increased capacity to support high-quality ECE, but state funding is needed to sustain this capacity and secure quality enhancements at the provider level. The Department of Early Learning is seeking state funding to sustain improvements in the ECE system beyond fiscal year 2015, when the federal grant will conclude. The Department of Early Learning has requested funding to sustain Early Achievers at its current level to significantly increase the number of early learning programs that rate above Level 2 and to ultimately increase the percentages of children who are ready for kindergarten as measured by the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS).

The state has received significant contributions from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Thrive by Five, and other philanthropies that have committed to continue supporting work in Washington State, with a specific emphasis on preschool quality.

The state has received significant contributions from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Thrive by Five, and other philanthropies that have committed to continue supporting work in Washington State, with a specific emphasis on preschool quality. Nonetheless, private funding is not viable for long-term sustainability of Early Achievers.

State stakeholders and documents produced by state agencies conclude that in the absence of a state investment of approximately \$70 million for the next two years, the state will no longer be able to fund the work of EA at the current participation rate. All participating providers in quality improvement efforts will lose momentum. State money is essential for maintaining the quality of ECE that Washington State has achieved, enhancing that quality for providers who are currently rating low in the QRIS, and expanding the participation of ECE providers in Early Achievers.

Analysis of the proposed request reveals that a majority of the funds would be devoted to quality enhancements in the form of coaching, training, scholarships, incentives, and tiered reimbursements. The proposal would allocate approximately six percent of funds to ratings, with the majority of fund allocated to providers engaged in the system. As Table 2 below shows, the state funds would be used to replace federal funds as Early Achievers reaches more ECE providers *and* offers quality enhancements to increase the quality of care.

Table 2. Early Achievers Projected Financial Data and Participation for FY 2015-2017

EA Financials	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
State/GRF	\$831,489	29,404,287	41,136,565
CCDF (Federal \$)	\$9,552,539	8,354,249	8,354,249
RTT-ELC (Federal \$)	\$25,942,257	10,058,129	-
TOTAL	\$36,326,285	\$47,816,665	\$49,490,814

EA Participation/Provider	FY2015 Number, %	FY2016 Number, %	FY2017 Number, %
Center	1,105 / 73%	1,334 / 88%	1,359 / 90%
Family	2,279 / 56%	2,448 / 60%	2,705 / 66%
TOTAL Number	3,384	3,782	4,064
ECEAP	327 / 100%	430 / 100%	533 / 100%
Head Start	415 / 100%	415 / 100%	415 / 100%
TOTAL Number	742	845	948

Note all numbers represent *forecasted numbers*. Numbers for FY 16 - 17 are consistent with the Early Achievers Decision Package submitted to Washington State's Office of Financial Management in mid September. State appropriation for the next biennium (FY 16-17) has not yet been confirmed. FY15 numbers are consistent with and taken from the Early Achievers model used to forecast the Race to the Top Grant through the end of the Grant (December 2015) to fiscal year 2020. Subsidy assumptions for centers and homes are consistent with the Office of Financial Management's case load forecast at the time DEL's decisions package was submitted in September, 2014 and represent the year's average. It is assumed that all ECEAP and Head Start centers will be participating in EA by the close of FY 15.

Source: 3SI performed analysis of state agency data.

State ECE stakeholders who participated in focus groups underscored the importance of funding all aspects of the system:

“Child outcomes ultimately come down to child/teacher interaction, and the only way we can get the results we want is to move the interactions. We need to support tailored coaching, supports, and coursework to move that needle.” —ECE stakeholder

“There needs to be funding in place to continue the education awards, scholarships, rating, and coaching. If we want to improve quality for the most vulnerable children, we need to support providers who care for them.” —ECE stakeholder

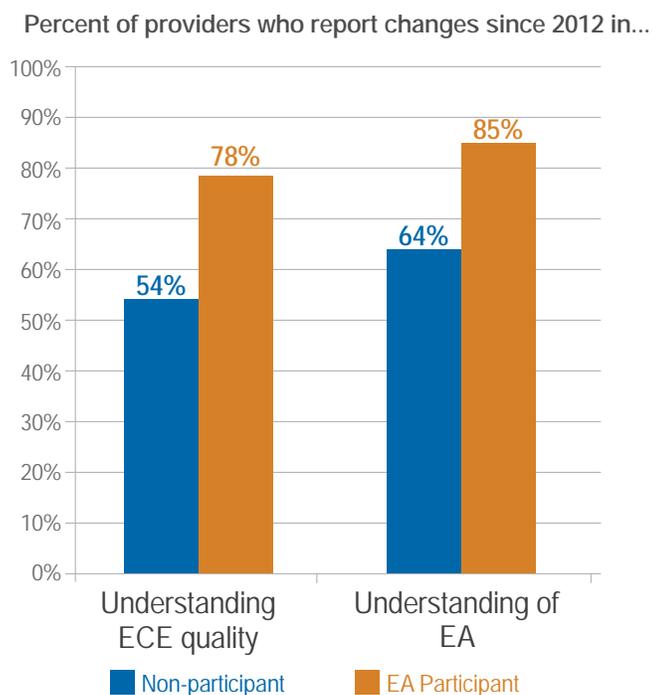
“What we have learned is that this is a very high-touch process, and it requires money. Without the money to lead providers through that process, we will not be able to move them along and increase quality.” —ECE stakeholder

OUTCOME 9. Benefits for Early Achievers for Providers

Providers participating in Early Achievers reported strong and statistically significant benefits as compared with providers who are not participating in Early Achievers. In December 2014, survey data were collected from 192 RTT-ELC providers, 20 of whom completed Spanish versions of the survey. Of the 192 providers, 24 were not participating in Early Achievers, and the remaining 168 were participating in the QRIS. The evaluation team performed independent samples t-test analyses of data from providers participating in Early Achievers and the 24 nonparticipating providers.

Providers participating in Early Achievers were significantly more likely than non-participants to report an increased understanding of Early Achievers and ECE quality as well as a greater access to technical assistance, coaching, and coursework. (See Figures 10 and 11 below.)

Figure 10. Impact on Understanding Quality and Early Achievers



Analysis of survey data reveals that more than half of all providers report that they have an increased understanding of Early Achievers and an increased understanding of what ECE quality looks like. About one third of providers not participating in Early Achievers reported they were interested and had taken steps to improve quality.

“I very much believe in the quality of staff that Early Achievers is trying to achieve and push my staff to achieve higher standards than in the past. I believe the program is a work in progress and know that all improvements will only benefit children.”
—ECE EA provider

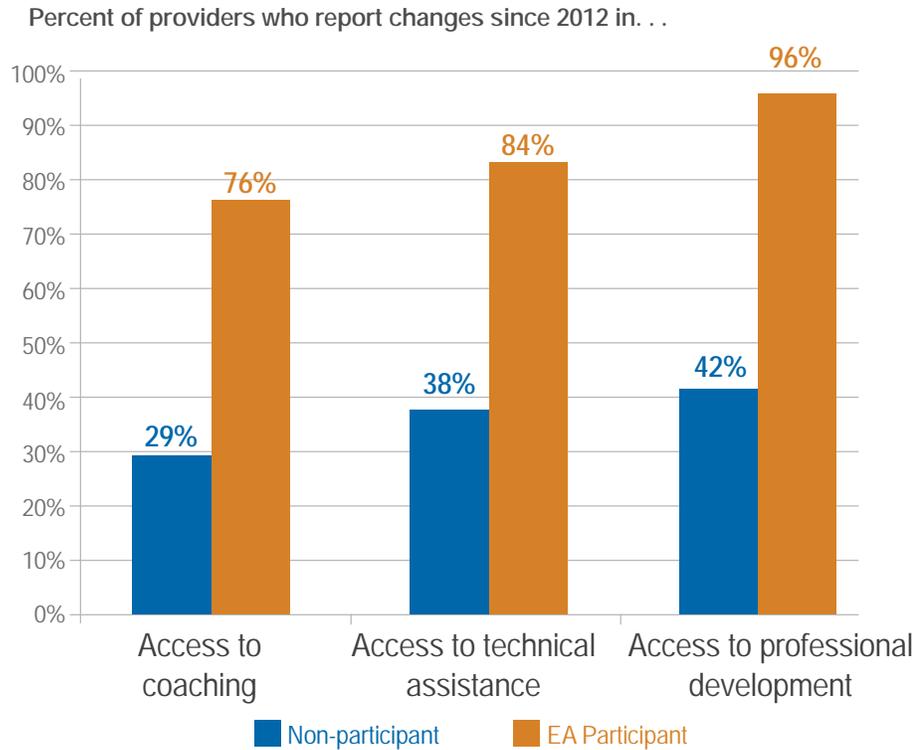
“I have been more aware of how I talk to the children and how I listen to them. Also [I have learned] how to be more engaged in what they are doing.” —ECE EA provider

“I have revamped a lot of the settings to make sure that most toys and learning materials are freely available most of the time. I have put in new shelving to make them more accessible for on-their-own decision-making choices. I purchased containers that are see-through so they can see what they are looking for. I have removed many of the plastic big toys out of the outside area and am planning on getting more natural environmental areas. I have removed many of my big posters and now have posters with Spanish and sign language besides English on them. I have a lot more open-ended projects so the kids can use their imagination.” —ECE EA provider

“First, I learned that the main and most important thing is . . . that we, the providers of child care, have a duty to prepare children for when they start attending school, both learning and emotionally. So, Early Achievers has given me a lot of information and support to do and accomplish this [high-quality care] with the children.”
—Spanish-speaking ECE EA provider

“We have been taught how to educate children so they are prepared for entering school. They feel safe in our care and [we now know] how to communicate with parents about their children’s mental and emotional needs. They are providing us with support and classes in our own language so we can support one another 100 percent.”
 —Spanish-speaking ECE EA provider

Figure II. Impact on Access to Professional Development



Early Achievers providers reported benefits from accessing coaching, technical assistance, and coursework and specific outcomes of these experiences in their work.

“Well, first of all, my staff are all enrolled in a nearby college, continuing their education; [the teachers] are more aware of how getting better education enhances the learning of the children in our care. They are all keeping up with the quality standards Early Achievers is requiring from their centers.” —ECE EA provider

“A huge benefit and bonus is that our staff are able to get scholarships to get an education in early learning. This has raised staff morale along with providing excellent staff development opportunities.” —ECE EA provider

“I have been able to send my employees who have little to no experience in early childhood education to specific classes that help them not only get a basic understanding of what quality education looks like, but also specific ideas and methods that they can take and use immediately in the classroom.” —ECE EA provider

“CLASS has probably had the greatest impact on our program. Dialogue between our teachers and their students has become richer and more frequent.” —ECE EA provider

“Before Early Achievers, the trainings and classes offered were not of any quality. Now we can find affordable, quality trainings for ourselves and our staff that we can greatly benefit from.” —ECE EA provider

“Our coach has been amazing. She has helped us train our staff, helped us brainstorm ways to increase our parent involvement at our center, and helped us think outside our box to improve in every way possible. Without coaching, this program would not be possible.” —ECE EA provider



“Early Achievers has been a valuable tool to increase the quality of our center and provide our staff with more training. This training directly affects our staff’s interactions with the children in our care. We have more quality interactions with our children.” —ECE EA provider

“Early Achievers has paid for me to finish my degree, so I am in the second year of finishing my Associate’s degree. Because of that education, understanding how children learn and being a better teacher has impacted my interaction with the children.” —ECE EA provider

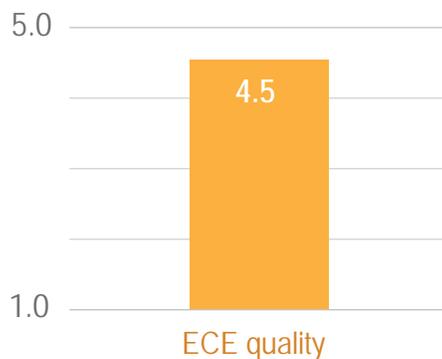
OUTCOME 10. Increased Number of High-quality Providers

A small sample of data analyzed by 3SI suggests that those providers who have been rated more than once are demonstrating higher observed quality. Moreover, stakeholders report that the RTT-ELC has had an impact on the number of providers rated as high quality. Finally, providers are reporting that Early Achievers is leading to an increase in quality.

Figure 12 below illustrates that, on a five-point scale with five being high-impact, stakeholders report that the RTT-ELC had an impact on the number of ECE’s rated as high quality.

Figure 12. Impact on ECE Quality

Reported Perceived Impact: 1.0 = low • 5.0 = high

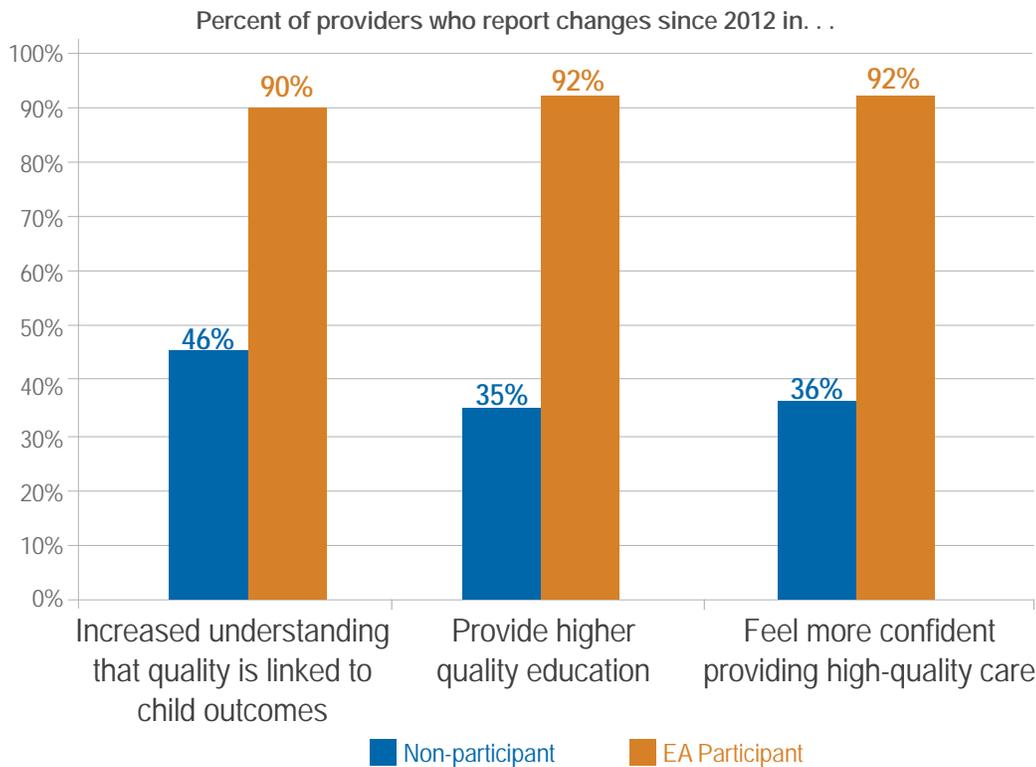


One community Resource & Referral manager reported,

“We are touching way more providers in the state. I’ve been at this for 30 years, and we have never touched as many providers in as substantive way. I thought I’d retire and never see this. There is a big upside. Just to take it to the place where I always go, we are changing the everyday lives of loads of kids. We are impacting thousands, plus providers, but each of those has upward of 100-plus kids when I think about what we are doing. It is spine tingling.”

The high percentage of providers who are participating in Early Achievers report that since 2012 they have developed an understanding of the importance of quality and how it is linked to child outcomes. These providers also report offering higher-quality ECE and feeling more confident about the quality of care they are able to deliver. These outcomes are consistent with state stakeholders' beliefs and expectations about the impact of RTT-ELC on quality of care. (See Figure 13 below.)

Figure 13. Impact on Providers' Understanding



Providers are able to articulate how Early Achievers helps to strengthen the understanding of the link between high-quality ECE and child outcomes:

“I feel strongly that Early Achievers is helping to ensure that more children are getting the boost up that they need before they start kindergarten. I hope that everyone is starting to understand that what happens in these early years is absolutely crucial to the rest of their lives. We need to be supporting these early learning programs and making sure that services are accessible to all children and families. We need to figure out how to ensure that the teachers at this level are fairly compensated for the incredible work they do. They are beginning to be seen as professionals; we now need to pay them like they are.” —ECE EA provider

“We have learned ways to extend the learning in dramatic play areas by providing books and other props to enhance the play. Early Achievers has made us aware of ways to present learning centers (science, art, dramatic, blocks, trains) to be “deeper” learning experiences with intentional outcomes!” —ECE EA provider

“Our assessment process and data-collection record now align with WaKIDS, and our staff is better able to set goals and discuss data with families.” —ECE EA provider

“I think the children have benefited because I’ve seen a lot of growth in them as far as academics and social skills and all-around curiosity and their wanting to discover and to learn more things.” —ECE EA provider

“The children in our care have benefited from the teachers’ additional trainings and support from our coach. That has led to improved outcomes in the children. Better language skills, richer curriculum, better environment.” —ECE EA provider

“I feel they are more ready for kindergarten.” —Spanish-speaking ECE EA provider (translated)



“The children in our care have benefitted.”
—ECE EA provider

Analysis of data from providers not participating in Early Achievers reveals a range of perspectives regarding their role in supporting young children’s school readiness. Some reported that they are providing quality ECE without Early Achievers.

For example, one provider reported, “I am not doing Early Achievers, but I am always doing my best to provide for the children’s learning needs in my care, depending on what their needs are.” Another stated, “We are able to give quality care without Early Achievers. We have a well-trained staff and parents who are thrilled with their children’s care and academic program.”

Other providers who are not part of EA shared a different perspective on early learning. One nonparticipant reported, “It has not changed anything for me with the kids I babysit. They get to enjoy life and have fun; and if any learning happens in the meantime, great.” Another reported, “I have not signed up for Early Achievers because I am not interested in having yet another standard from the state entering into my childcare. Right now I need the room to be whatever I want . . . and whatever the diverse needs of my clients are at the time. The community I live in struggles to put food on the table and often do not live in safe places; they do not care about having a fancy preschool program, just a warm, safe place for their little one. So I do not feel the need to add the stress of making my daycare look a certain way when it doesn’t make a difference to the clients.”

The perspectives of nonparticipants and participants in EA about EA stand in stark contrast with the participants reporting that EA has supported them to make changes that have benefitted them, the children they care for, and the children’s parents. One participating provider stated, “With the revamping of the layout and all the new learning experiences [the children] have, I see great joy; and they are learning a lot

better. My parents are very supportive and thank me all the time for this great program I have chosen to participate in.” And another stated that the changes she has made have given her the opportunity to better meet parents’ needs and to provide a more enriched, play-based experience for the children that engages them in actively choosing their experiences, all of which ultimately make her job easier.

OUTCOME 11. Improved Understanding of School Readiness through WaKIDS

RTT-ELC stakeholders have reported that they now have an understanding of children’s school readiness, early learning needs, and achievement gaps that need to be addressed. WaKIDS data are now available that show that only 41 percent of children who have been assessed enter school ready to learn. Analyses show that, across all income groups, children’s early numeracy skills are weak across the board. Moreover, children in the lowest income group perform materially lower across all assessed domains (cognition, numeracy, physical, social, language, and literacy).

An evaluation of the WaKIDS pilot, a WaKIDS workgroup study report, and stakeholder interview data reveal that most ECE stakeholders believe the WaKIDS has yielded a much better understanding of school readiness and what the state needs to do to address early learning deficits.

“WaKIDS was a very small portion of the Early Learning Challenge grant. The assistance with teacher training resources helped ensure that all schools interested in participating—not just those receiving state funding for full-day kindergarten—could pursue that option. As a result, although Washington currently funds 44 percent of all kindergartners for full-day kindergarten (and by extension, WaKIDS), closer to 53 percent of all kindergartners benefitted from WaKIDS in 2014.”
 —Focus group participant



Teachers and principals found the Family Connection component of WaKIDS to be extremely beneficial.

“The RTT-ELC funding has been an important catalyst in Washington’s growing realization of the importance of early learning in general and in high-quality early learning in particular. The resources provided for the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS), the state’s kindergarten transition process, helped the state scale up this initiative more quickly. The data emerging from the assessment component of WaKIDS has helped identify the need for a state focus on early numeracy. As a result, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction has begun developing resources and professional development in this area.” —*Focus group participant*

The WaKIDS pilot evaluation and workgroup reports both concluded that WaKIDS benefitted teachers and educators by supporting their use of data to tailor instruction and to engage families:

“With few exceptions, teachers regard the WaKIDS assessment tools and process as meeting best practices. . . . Few of the teachers in the pilot reported using comprehensive assessment processes prior to their involvement in WaKIDS. Most teachers report that the instruments piloted with WaKIDS provided information on multiple areas of children’s skills. In general, teachers found the instruments used in this pilot to be helpful with assessing the class as a whole and for planning individual instruction.”²⁶

OUTCOME 12. Increased Access to ECE for Traditionally Underserved

Currently, Early Achievers providers are serving nearly 70,000 children, and the state has successfully engaged providers serving the lowest-income children and families. Specifically, within economic risk classifications, Early Achievers participation is above target; and participation rates are highest among centers located in zip codes with high economic risk.

State ECE stakeholders, community members, and professional development providers reported that in the past two years the system has taken specific actions to become much more culturally and linguistically sensitive to ensure that Early Achievers and WaKIDS offer services that are tailored to community and cultural needs.

Interviews with professional development providers highlighted how RTT-ELC funding has provided critical support to non-English speaking providers. As one professional development provider explained, “The biggest impact is through one-to-one support. Not all training materials are translated so the one-to-one makes all the difference in providers understanding the training content.” This and other

professional development providers reported that supporting cohorts of non-English speaking providers who attend trainings together is an effective method of reaching those who are traditionally not part of the ECE system. She stated that addressing cultural and linguistic needs requires “intensive time and energy and discovery . . . [but offering trainings to cohorts] provides opportunities to learn together as peers and to support culturally relevant ideas.” The cohort model is also used with higher-education classes that are offered in the community so that people of similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds can “go through it together.”

Professional development providers also explained that state agencies supporting ECE (DEL, OSPI, and DOH) are open to hearing feedback and to making changes as needed to protocols. In turn, non-English speaking providers trust the professional development providers because, “They feel we believe them and we advocate on their behalf.” Higher education faculty as well as resource & referral staff who are providing coaching and support added that this back-and-forth is necessary, but can take time. One professional development provider stated, “We have to have enough time to get them to higher quality. These programs are often the least prepared to get higher ratings. Give it some time.”

Another professional development provider stated, “Ultimately, the quality of care is going up.” Across the board, RTT-ELC has provided the ECE system with opportunities “to reach these [underserved] communities in a way we never would have.”

Some noted that in the first year of RTT-ELC implementation, Early Achievers was not as sensitive to the cultural and linguistic needs of providers; but in the past two years great strides have been made in addressing the needs of those traditionally underrepresented in the system. Others noted that a greater proportion of WaKIDS participants are bilingual and Hispanic than the total kindergarten population, revealing that this important RTT-ELC activity is effectively addressing the needs of those who are traditionally underserved in the ECE system.



OUTCOME 13. Unanticipated Benefits

RTT-ELC has resulted in a number of positive unanticipated benefits that were not addressed in the 10-year plan or the ELC-specific plan.

ECEAP Expansion.

In 2013, the Washington Legislature appropriated an additional \$22 million to enhance and expand ECEAP. In state fiscal year 2014 (school year 2013-14), DEL added 350 ECEAP slots to underserved areas. Stakeholders report that the data from Early Achievers and WaKIDS informed the expansion efforts.²⁷

Deeper Understanding of How to Address Cultural and Linguistic Needs of Providers. Stakeholders reported that they now have a much deeper understanding of what is needed to best support the cultural and linguistic needs of non-English speaking providers. Professional development providers, child care resource & referral staff, and other ECE stakeholders reported that they have a much more nuanced and complete understanding of the needs of the Spanish- and Somali-speaking communities and have used newly acquired information to better tailor services to meet their needs.

Application of Lessons Learned to Other Sectors. Lessons learned from RTT-ELC have informed other activities that were not originally anticipated or planned for. Some stakeholders reported that lessons learned have prompted greater attention to creating more seamless services for children who are in the child welfare system and who access early care and education.

Recommendations and Discussion

Stakeholders report that the RTT-ELC has led to early outcomes, noting that the remaining year of federal funding will provide the state with opportunities to continue to learn from early experiences, use data to improve activities, and address gaps that have been identified.

Analysis of quantitative and qualitative evaluation data revealed consensus on three recommendations:

Stakeholders
reported that they now have a
much deeper understanding of what
is needed to best support the cultural
and linguistic needs of non-English
speaking providers.

- **Recommendation 1.** The state should support the investments that were initiated through the federal grant. Stakeholders provided the following comments, which include both moral commitment to continue the work and data-driven justification to the focus on highly vulnerable, low-income children:

“It is our responsibility to support children in the state.”—*State ECE stakeholder*

“We now know the overall quality of early care and education is lower than we thought, and we have an obligation to improve the quality to ensure all children have opportunities to enter school ready to learn.”—*ECE stakeholder*

“This is a “high-touch” endeavor, and we know from previous research that every dollar invested in early education pays off in the long run.” —*ECE stakeholder*

- **Recommendation 2.** Early Achievers should retain the highest-quality bar and ensure that supports are available to help providers achieve the bar.
 - Stakeholders recommended that the state should sustain support for technical assistance, coaching, and professional development. Concern was raised that in the absence of ongoing state supports for providers, the most vulnerable providers and the children they serve will fail to achieve improved outcomes.
 - The state should continue to address the linguistic and cultural needs of providers.

Stakeholders reported:

“The thing I am most concerned about is the centers and homes that serve the poorest kids and hardest to serve kids. . . . If we don’t reach providers in low-income areas at Level 2 and get them up there to Level 3, this system is not going to succeed in the areas where we most need it.” —*State policymaker*

“The biggest fear I have is that the future system will focus on the cheapest way. . . . Without the supports for providers to enhance quality, we will just be rating low-quality programs for years, and it will force a lot of providers to go underground. You can’t think about funding one side without the entire system.”
—*ECE stakeholder*

“We need lots of different pathways to provide the supports for providers reaching traditionally underserved children and families. We aren’t there yet; but we have had the chance to try different strategies and approaches, and we are figuring out what works best. The worst-case scenario is if the state funds the rating part of the system and fails to support the professional development and tailored supports to help provider offer higher quality care.” —*ECE stakeholder*

- **Recommendation 3.** The state should continue to support a framework of using data to engage in continuous improvement.
 - The state should build on its progress in systems building and streamline monitoring across licensing, ECEAP, and Head Start. The state should move forward quickly on the recommendations from the pilot study.
 - The state should continue to strengthen access to real-time data.
 - The state should avoid overly restrictive regulations and guidelines, which could impede the stakeholders’ ability to use data to inform program improvements.
 - The state should continue to evaluate ECE settings with the battery of assessments that are currently being used as these are valid and reliable measures that have been effectively used to assessment and tailor quality improvements.
 - The state should continue to take steps to support systematic transition plans so that communities and regions across the state have systems in place that help smooth transitions from preschool to kindergarten.

Stakeholders reported:

“We need to recognize that we are only 3 years into this thing. We have learned a lot and plan to continue to use data and evaluation results to create better systems. It is important to note that what we are talking about here is systems reform. It isn't easy, and we need flexibility to adapt and make the entire system better. We have been very fortunate to have private foundation partners, outside facilitators, and state support. This has been a heavy lift, and it [the scale up of Early Achievers and WaKIDS] would not have happened without the federal funds. But moving forward we need state support since we are talking about kids and families in our state.”
—ECE stakeholder

“One of the things that the federal funding gave us is the ability to pilot the system with the understanding that when you are engaged in a systems-reform effort, we were able to make changes. We could incentivize in a way that could help us move through. It allowed us to be responsive to the field.” —ECE stakeholder

“[I recommend that] DEL should prioritize the alignment work and act on the recommendations of the pilot study. We learned that a lot of alignment exists, but we now need to figure out better ways to support child care providers who are participating in ECEAP to align licensing with Early Achievers.” —ECE stakeholder

“I think it would be great if we could strengthen access to real-time data. . . . I realize we are building these systems . . . but now we have an opportunity to use data to inform decisions at the local level, and it would be great if we had systems in place to make sure the right data is in the hands of [those who are providing services]. Some regions have put together transition plans that make sharing WaKIDS assessment information with kindergarten teachers easier. In communities with a handful of ECE providers, it is easier than in very large communities. But we can learn from the regions that have strong transition plans.” —ECE stakeholder

“We've had to adapt over the past few years to put more and more emphasis on the pre-rating work to get providers ready and improve their quality for a year or two before they get rated so they will have a better chance of being successful on their first try. I think the greatest strength of what we've built is that adaptation. It's tough on staff to have constant changes to policies and approaches, but it means that we're using the information we gather to learn and improve the system.” —ECE stakeholder

“We are evaluating Early Achievers and plan to use the data from this evaluation to see which standards are most closely aligned with child outcomes. This information should help us focus our efforts in the future.”
—ECE stakeholder

“I would feel very sad if we had had hard-and-fast timelines and regulations about how many rating levels need to be achieved and how far you have to move. We have had the ability to look at the data and target activities to move quality. If it is not working for providers, we must have flexibility. If we see that for levels 3–5 they must have coaching, that might not support the providers in terms of where they are. If the language is very prescriptive, it won't work.” —ECE stakeholder

To date, stakeholders report that the RTT-ELC has achieved desired short-term outcomes and has resulted in substantial progress toward longer-term outcomes. Stakeholders strongly recommended that the state fund the activities that were initiated with federal funds to sustain improvements in quality that research suggests will ultimately improve children's school readiness. In the absence of sustained support, the state's most vulnerable children will continue to be cared for in low-quality environments rather than experiencing the high quality that will improve their success in school and beyond.



Appendix A. Data Tables

Table I. Stakeholder Descriptive Statistics (Valid Percent)

Statement	Answer Option (1= low impact, 5 = high impact)	Frequency	Percent
Increasing the capacity of DEL and other state agencies to support high-quality ECE (n=29)	1	0	0.0%
	2	2	6.9%
	3	3	10.3%
	4	12	41.4%
	5	12	41.4%
Using data to inform state policies and practices (n=29)	1	0	0%
	2	3	10.3%
	3	8	27.6%
	4	5	17.2%
	5	13	44.8%
Increasing alignment in ECE policies and systems	1	0	0.0%
	2	2	7.7%
	3	3	11.5%
	4	3	11.5%
	5	18	69.2%
Leveraging funding and resources to support early care and education (n=21)	1	0	0%
	2	3	10.3%
	3	8	27.6%
	4	5	17.2%
	5	13	44.8%
Increasing understanding of quality of ECE in the state	1	0	0.0%
	2	1	3.4%
	3	1	3.4%
	4	8	27.6%
	5	19	65.5%
Number of teachers completing courses and earning credentials (n=26)	1	0	0.0%
	2	0	0.0%
	3	3	11.5%
	4	9	34.6%
	5	14	53.8%
Numbers of ECEs rated as high quality (n=26)	1	0	0.0%
	2	0	0.0%
	3	2	7.7%
	4	10	38.5%
	5	14	53.8%
Parent and community engagement	1	0	0.0%
	2	3	13.6%
	3	1	4.5%
	4	14	63.6%
	5	4	18.2%
WaKIDS implementation (n=27)	1	0	0.0%
	2	0	0.0%
	3	2	7.4%
	4	6	22.2%
	5	19	70.4%



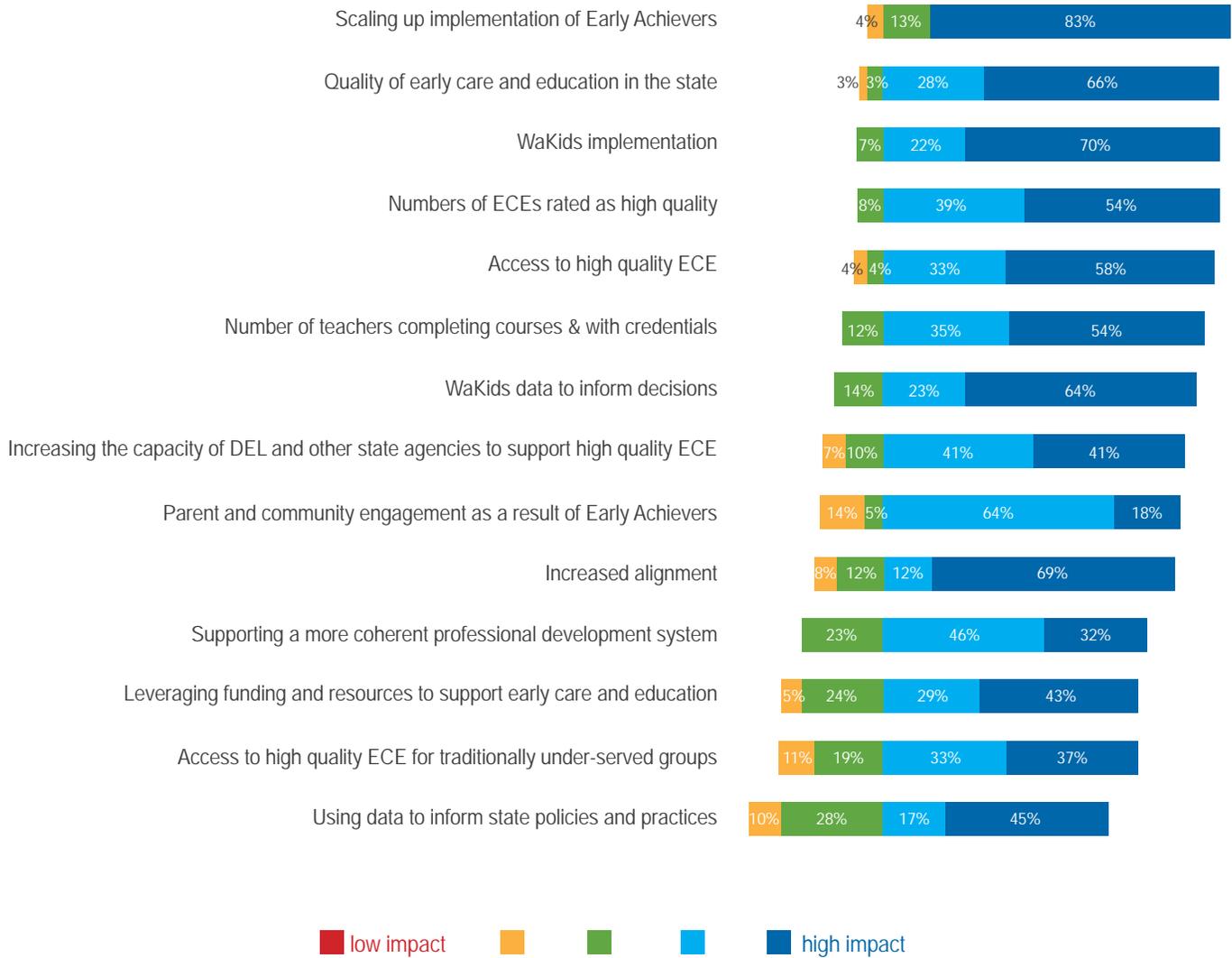
Statement	Answer Option (1= low impact, 5 = high impact)	Frequency	Percent
WaKIDS data to inform decisions (n=22)	1	0	0.0%
	2	0	0.0%
	3	3	13.6%
	4	5	22.7%
	5	14	63.6%
Access to high-quality ECE (n=24)	1	0	0.0%
	2	1	4.2%
	3	1	4.2%
	4	8	33.3%
	5	14	58.3%
Access to high-quality ECE for traditionally underserved groups (n=27)	1	0	0.0%
	2	3	11.1%
	3	5	18.5%
	4	9	33.3%
	5	10	37.0%
Scaling up implementation of Early Achievers (n=23)	1	0	0.0%
	2	1	4.3%
	3	0	0.0%
	4	3	13.0%
	5	19	82.6%
Supporting a more coherent professional development system (n=22)	1	0	0.0%
	2	0	0.0%
	3	5	22.7%
	4	10	45.5%
	5	7	31.8%

Note: The total number of individuals who answered Likert scale questions was 30 but not all respondents answered each question.

Table 2. Survey Statements by Logic Model Outcome Area (Scale: 1 low impact–5 high impact)

Logic Model Outcome	Related Survey Statements	Mean
1. Increased alignment in ECE policies and ability to leverage funds	• Leveraging funding and resources to support early care and education	4.1
	• Increasing alignment of ECE policies and systems	4.4
2. Stakeholders report agreement about definition of ECE quality	• Increasing understanding of what constitutes quality of ECE in the state	4.6
3. Increased number of providers engaged in Early Achievers	• Leveraging funding and resources to support early care and education	4.1
	• Increasing the numbers of ECEs rated as high quality	4.4
4. Increased number of teachers completing courses & with credentials	• Supporting a more coherent professional development system	4.1
	• Number of teachers completing courses and earning credentials	4.4
5. Scaled up WaKIDS	• WaKIDS implementation	4.6
6. Stakeholders report using data to inform decisions	• Using data to inform state policies and practices	4.0
7. Increased parent and community engagement	• Parent and community engagement	3.9
8. State agencies increase their capacity to support high-quality ECE	• Increasing the capacity of DEL and other state agencies to support high-quality ECE	4.2
9. Providers report benefits of Early Achievers	• No state ECE stakeholder survey items (provider survey only)	n/a
10. Increased numbers of Early Achiever providers earn high-quality ratings	• Numbers of ECEs rated as high quality	4.5
11. Stakeholders demonstrate an increased understanding of children's school readiness	• Using WaKIDS data	4.5
12. Families, especially those traditionally underserved, have increased access to EC	• Access to high-quality ECE	4.1
	• Access to high-quality ECE for traditionally underserved groups	4.0

Table 2. Most Respondents Reported Impacts Across Categories²⁸



Number/frequency said yes when asked if statement was true (compared to 2012)

Statement	Yes (True)	Non-Early Achiever participant	Early Achiever participant
I now have a better understanding of what quality early care and education looks like.	Frequency	13	101
	Valid Percent	54%	78%
I now have a better understanding of Early Achievers.	Frequency	17	107
	Valid Percent	64%	85%
I have more access to coaching that supports my work with young children.	Frequency	7	96
	Valid Percent	29%	76%
I have more access to support when I have questions concerning about the Early Achievers website, the online application, and the forms.	Frequency	9	102
	Valid Percent	38%	84%
There are more opportunities for me to take early childhood classes (such as classes at a community college, classes at a college, workshops at my place of work, or online classes).	Frequency	10	98
	Valid Percent	42%	96%
I have a better understanding that higher quality care leads to better child outcomes.	Frequency	11	99
	Valid Percent	46%	90%
I am now providing higher quality early care and education to the children I care for.	Frequency	8	96
	Valid Percent	35%	92%
I feel more confident with the quality of care I am providing to the children I care for.	Frequency	8	91
	Valid Percent	36%	92%



Appendix B. Research that Supports Assumptions Underlying Theory of Change

Compelling, rigorous research shows that high-quality ECE results in significant improvements in young children's cognitive and social-emotional development compared with those who attend lower-quality care.

Research suggests that, to sustain a comprehensive and coherent ECE system, it is important to create governance structures designed to support seamless ECE services at the point of service delivery. Effective governance structures that address barriers such as differences in quality standards and monitoring make it easier for providers to coordinate across funding streams and easier for parents to access the services that best meet the needs of their children.

Compelling, rigorous research shows that high-quality ECE results in significant improvements in young children's cognitive and social-emotional development compared with those who attend lower-quality care. Moreover, despite recent published reports to the contrary, research on Head Start, child care and pre-K show that high-quality ECE experiences lead to gains that persist at least through grade three. In recent years, studies have been conducted across states and cities in family child care, center-based care, prekindergarten and Head Start. Across all of these settings evidence is strong that children who participate in high-quality, developmentally appropriate, stimulating opportunities benefit, while low-quality care can be detrimental to young children's development.

New research provides a detailed and nuanced understanding of what constitutes high-quality ECE and suggests that multiple interrelated components are important. Strong positive interactions with adults have been shown to positively affect children's cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional development. To best support these positive experiences it is important for early childhood educators to use a curriculum aligned with the State Early Learning and Development Guidelines to ensure that all young children have developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Unlike a high school curriculum, high-quality early childhood curricula provide children with stimulation, choice, and opportunities to learn through play. To best tailor the experiences to meet young children's needs, ongoing child assessment and screening in collaboration with families is important, as are family engagement opportunities.

Policy research suggests that the majority of ECE in most states is not high quality; but by offering ongoing professional development and training, it is possible to enhance quality. In recent years, one way of enhancing quality has been to design and implement Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) that offer rigorous standards and provide ongoing supports for providers so that they can meet continuously higher quality targets.

The final important component of a comprehensive system is an enhanced link between ECE and schools. Policy research suggests that kindergarten readiness assessments that not only collect data about children's school readiness but support the transition between early care and education and kindergarten are beneficial.²⁸



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- ²⁷ Bania, N., Kay, N., Aos, S., & Pennucci, A. (2014). Outcome evaluation of Washington State's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, (Document No. 14-12- 2201). Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Retrieved from http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1576/Wsipp_Outcome-Evaluation-of-Washington-States-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Assistance-Program_Report.pdf. Authors found that ECEAP's impact on test scores is almost twice as large as the average effect reported in research on early childhood programs in other states.
- ²⁸ No stakeholders selected 1=low impact for any of the statements.
- ²⁹ Best practices and position statements from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the research literature recommend collecting information from teachers who worked with children prior to their entry to kindergarten (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005).





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