

Partnership for Pre-K Improvement

Improving State-Run Pre-K

The Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) was invited to participate in a multi-year initiative called the Partnership for Pre-K Improvement (PPI) with other identified states. This project is overseen by **The Ounce of Prevention Fund** and funded through the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**.

Through this partnership initiative, ECEAP is examining the state-run pre-k program to better understand how to strengthen policies, systems and practices in order to achieve better results for early learners and advance Washington's vision for high-quality pre-k.

Throughout the partnership, participants from Washington, Oregon and Tennessee receive targeted resources, including peer learning opportunities, technical assistance and consultation. DCYF receives support from the Ounce of Prevention Fund, University of Washington, Education NW and Alliance for Early Success in addition to access to other national experts.

With these resources, the partnership initiative supports each state to identify state priorities and assess strengths and barriers to quality. The partnership also aims to build capacity to advance identified areas of need and achieve the program and systems changes that will ensure the continuous quality improvement of pre-k.

Additionally, the partnership works to help states coordinate and collaborate with advocacy partners and research practice partners to advance pre-k quality improvement and effectiveness.

DCYF began its participation in this work in December 2016.

PPI Self-Assessment Tool

To help DCYF staff better understand the state's current pre-k system, staff completed the *PPI: State Self-Assessment Tool*. The Ounce based this tool on essential elements of preschool quality and recent school improvement research.

The self-assessment consisted of six areas of focus which include:

- Structural Program Features
- Workforce Development
- Teaching and Learning
- Continuous Quality Improvement
- Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement
- Evidence of System Quality and Effectiveness

Within the assessment, each of these six focus areas included prompting questions that analyzed four areas including teaching and learning, implemented policies, policy support and guidance and implementation in the field. Each section also contained indicators and narrative descriptions and analyses. The indicators section is designed to gather information about current policy and the extent to which policy support and guidance is in place and implemented. The narrative section allows for descriptions and analysis that would include threats and opportunities to improve policies, implementation and considerations for scaling.

For Washington State, DCYF staff assessed implementation for both licensed and exempt sites as this reflected the make-up of ECEAP sites across the state.



Results from the directors’ survey indicated that ECEAP contractors regularly set goals and made plans to improve teaching and learning. A majority of respondents shared that this occurs anywhere from monthly to quarterly.

Contractor survey respondents identified eight different types of positions that serve as instructional leaders in ECEAP programs. Most programs have more than one instructional leader. Almost all respondents said that they provided Job Embedded Professional Learning (JEPL) for direct service staff. While most provide JEPL for teachers, some also provide it for family support staff. Fewer provided it for center directors, program managers, coaches, health staff, instructional leaders and other administrative staff.

There are relatively few differences among different types of organizations and program size (number of slots) in contractor responses. This represented a strong baseline for the next steps in ECEAP quality improvement.

Analysis of the surveys and the completed self-assessment resulted in the identification of multiple areas of strengths. Each of the identified strengths is the result of the availability of quality data from DCYF’s data collection practices and management systems. Data management systems include:

- The Early Learning Management System (ELMS)
- Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT)
- Web-based Early Learning System (WELS)
- Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG)
- Early Achievers data entry or participation requirements

The work that ECEAP direct service staff spent entering required data into systems and preparing for data collection resulted in a depth of data that easily identified key strengths in ECEAP. The nine highlighted strengths are outlined in the table below.

ECEAP Areas of Strength		
Professional Development and Provider Qualifications	Curriculum and Assessment Requirements	Information in DCYF Data Systems
Quality Assessment	Contractor Continuous Quality Improvement	Comprehensive Services and Family Engagement
Family Access and Outreach	Teaching Quality	Child Outcomes

Additionally, ECEAP staff also identified five opportunities for growth upon completion of the self-assessment. These areas of focus represent the areas that ECEAP staff focused their improvement efforts. They include:

- Instructional Leadership and Professional Learning System
- Cultural Competency, Anti-Bias and Dual Language Learners
- Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Settings
- Data Specification, Monitoring and Analysis
- Education, Scholarships and Compensation Parity

PPI Workgroups

With the completion of the *PPI: State Self-Assessment Tool*, ECEAP began the work of implementing five workgroups in April 2018. Each workgroup was led by an ECEAP team member and addressed each of the identified opportunities for growth through a racial equity lens. In partnership with workgroup participants, DCYF staff identified the scope of work necessary to address areas of growth.