

2025 Legislative Session Review: Early Learning Facilities (ELF) Fund



Overview

The Early Learning Facilities (ELF) Fund makes high-quality, affordable preschool and child care available to more Washington families by preserving and expanding physical capacity to serve children. In 2025, legislators invested just under \$100 million in early learning facilities, with approximately \$81 million for the ELF Fund and approximately \$18 million for in-district projects. At a time when operating revenues were especially scarce, legislators leveraged the ELF Fund as a program that eases the bottom line for providers and makes high-quality, affordable early learning available to more families. With bipartisan and bicameral leadership, the legislature also made important changes to the ELF Fund program through unanimous passage of [House Bill 1314](#) (signed April 7, 2025 and effective July 27, 2025).



New Early Learning Facilities Investments

Through ELF Fund programs, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and/or Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) providers can access grants for pre-development, remodel, purchase, construction, and/or minor renovations of early learning facilities and classrooms. ELF Fund resources are distributed through five programs including:

- Eligible organizations grant
- Health and safety minor renovation grant
- Public school district grant
- Emergency Fund per [HB 1314](#) (2025)
- Washington Early Learning Loan (WELL) Fund

Early Learning Facilities Fund

\$69,000,000

Eligible organizations grant	\$51,000,000 (up to 3.5% TA, up to 4% admin)
Health and safety minor renovation grant	\$9,000,000 (up to 4% admin)
Emergency Fund per HB 1314 (2025)	\$3,000,000 (up to 4% TA, 0% state agency admin)
WELL Fund	\$6,000,000 (up to 4% TA, 0% state agency admin)

Public School District Grant

\$12,119,000

Cle Elum School District Roslyn EL (13 th LD)	\$978,000
Lind-Ritzville Cooperative Schools Subsidized Care (9 th LD)	\$823,000
Medical Lake School District EL Center (3 rd LD)	\$1,102,000
Meridian School District Whatcom EL Center (42 nd LD)	\$1,100,000
Orting School District EL Center (2 nd LD)	\$4,592,000
Prosser School District ECEAP Expansion (15 th LD)	\$1,102,000
Valley School District Valley EL Center (7 th LD)	\$1,102,000
Walla Walla School District Ctr. for Children & Families (16 th LD)	\$285,000
West Valley School District Valley EL Center (3 rd LD)	\$1,035,000

In-District Projects	\$18,128,000
<i>(up to 4% or \$50,000/project for admin, whichever is less expensive)</i>	
Batey Square Early Learning (27 th LD)	\$88,000
Cora Whitley Family Center (27 th LD)	\$485,000
Hemlock Commons at Play Frontier (17 th LD)	\$1,036,000
Little Wings Child Care Center (21 st LD)	\$3,550,000
New Tomorrow's Hope Center (38 th LD)	\$3,050,000
Port Angeles YMCA Early Learning (24 th LD)	\$2,050,000
Redmond Childcare Expansion (48 th LD)	\$769,000
Ritzville Child Care Facility (9 th LD)	\$2,050,000
Willard Early Learning Center (27 th LD)	\$5,050,000

Early learning facilities projects may be funded through other parts of the capital budget that are not captured in this table.

ELF Fund Policy Changes

The legislature made the ELF Fund more accessible through [House Bill 1314](#) (Concerning the early learning facilities grant and loan program). With bipartisan sponsorship from Rep. Lisa Callan (D – 5th Legislative District) and Rep. Peter Abbarno (R – 20th Legislative District), HB 1314 was passed unanimously and signed into law on April 27, 2025 and made these important changes effective July 27, 2025:

- *Establishes an emergency grant program for projects necessitated by unforeseen circumstances.* A non-competitive emergency fund will make it possible for programs with limited resources to keep their doors open following unplanned disasters.
- *Eases the burden on financially constrained providers by eliminating matching fund requirements.* Makes access to ELF Fund resources more equitable.
- *Makes Tribal Compact Schools eligible for the Public School Districts Program.* Without access to the ELF Public School Districts Program, Tribal Compact Schools are unintentionally pitted against other tribal early learning programs in competition for eligible organizations grants.
- *Clarifies that projects supporting the conversion of ECEAP slots to full day and/or extended day are eligible for ELF Fund programs.* Makes ECEAP conversion more attainable for providers with corresponding facilities needs.



Sen. Yasmin Trudeau (D – 27th Legislative District) and Sen. Nikki Torres (R – 15th Legislative District) sponsored companion legislation, [SB 5297](#), that contributed to the success of HB 1314.

Impact of ELF Fund Investments

Since its inception in 2017, the ELF Fund has retained and/or created a total of 17,676 early learning slots and has leveraged \$274.4 million in non-state resources. Many of these resources have been prioritized for communities in greatest need, including:

- Rural counties and/or small cities and towns
- Child care deserts (where the demand for care far outweighs the supply)
- Communities with low incomes

Early Learning Facilities Group

The Early Learning Facilities Group works to make early learning options more readily available to families and more sustainable for providers through support of the Department of Commerce's Early Learning Facilities (ELF) Fund. The ELF Group provides space for information sharing and coordination between implementation leads and advocates with the goal of maximizing program, policy, and budget responsiveness.

The Early Learning Facilities Group is convened by Start Early WA – all are welcome to take part. Contact Casey Osborn (casey@centralconsultingllc.com) to learn more.