

The State of Washington's Mixed Delivery Early Care and Education System

January 15, 2026



Background

Landmark legislation and investments are working: Investments in high-quality early care and education are taking root in communities across Washington, expanding access to the early learning opportunities. Through Working Connections Child Care (WCCC), the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), and Transition to Kindergarten (TTK), families in greatest need are increasingly benefiting from low-cost or free care options.

Washington's families can't afford further cuts and delays to early care and education: In response to budget shortfalls, the 2025 Legislature made significant cuts, delays, and changes to WCCC, ECEAP, and TTK expansion milestones. Access to care keeps families in the workforce and fuels our state's economy – even more essential in challenging economic times.

Snapshot of WCCC, ECEAP, and TTK Programs

	WCCC	ECEAP	TTK
Eligibility	WCCC serves children ages 0-12 years old in working families earning at or below 60% of the State Median Income (SMI) at application or 65% of SMI when reapplying.	ECEAP serves children ages 3 and 4 years from families with incomes at or below 36% of the state median income (SMI) along with tribal children, those with special education needs, and/or experiencing homelessness.	TTK serves children in participating school districts who are at least 4 years old by August 31 and have been identified through a screening process to need additional preparation to be successful in kindergarten.
Caseload	36,531 families are receiving WCCC subsidies as of June 2025. ⁱ The November 2025 caseload forecast projected 38,975 families will be served in 2026 and 42,239 families will be served in 2027. ⁱⁱ	14,391 children are served through ECEAP as of September 2025. ⁱⁱⁱ View slots by program .	6,525 children are served through TTK as of October 2025. Per SB 5769 , funding for TTK programs was capped at 7,266 annual average full-time equivalent students statewide for the 2025-27 school years. Each district now has its own funding limit, and no new programs may open until 2027-28. ^{iv}
Spread			

Changes to Implementation Timelines

7/1/25	2025-26 SY	7/1/26	10/1/26	12/1/26	12/1/26	7/1/29	8/1/30	2030-31 SY	7/1/31
Rates for Family Child Care providers increased to the 85th percentile of the Market Rate Survey (MRS).	TTK funding limited to the level in the omnibus appropriations act.	Reimbursement rates for Center-Based providers increased to the 85th percentile of the MRS (previously scheduled for 7/1/25).	New WCCC co-payment structure takes effect, including increased costs for some families.	DCYF report due with strategies to improve staff qualification requirements and verification processes (including measures to streamline/clarify, recognition of out-of-state training, and making community-based training pathways available online).	OSPI report due with plan for phasing in TTK, including priorities for expansion (not to exceed 5% growth).	Eligibility for WCCC expanded from 60% to 75% of State Median Income (previously scheduled for 7/1/25).	Eligible providers are allowed until 8/1/30 to demonstrate experience-based competency as an alternative to staff qualification requirements.	ECEAP entitlement (previously scheduled for 2026-27 school year).	Subject to availability of funds, eligibility for WCCC expanded from 75% to 85% SMI (previously scheduled for 7/1/27).

2025 Budget Investments

The 2025 Legislature adopted a 2025-2027 budget with new investments in early learning, including (but not limited to)^v:

- Nearly \$100 million in Capital funding for the Early Learning Facilities (ELF) Fund, including \$51 million for competitive grants, \$9 million for minor renovation grants and \$3 million for the new Emergency Fund created by [HB 1314](#)
- \$383.7 million to fund the Collective Bargaining Agreement for Family Child Care providers which includes funding to increase the reimbursement rate for Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) to the 85th percentile of the 2024 Market Rate Survey beginning 7/1/25
- \$127 million to increase center-based reimbursement rates to the 85th percentile of 2024 MRS beginning 7/1/26
- \$13.9 million to support a 5% rate increase for full-day ECEAP slots and a nearly \$4 million for 250 full-day ECEAP slots



2025 Policies that Delayed and Cut Investments

[ESSB 5752](#) (Modifying child care and early childhood development programs)^{vi}:

- Delayed expanded eligibility for WCCC to 75% of SMI to 7/1/29 (previously scheduled for 7/1/25) and subsequent expansion to 85% of SMI, subject to appropriations, to 2031 (previously scheduled for 7/1/27)
- Created a new WCCC co-payment structure with increased costs for most families beginning October 1, 2026 (see Section 6 of [ESSB 5752](#))
- Removed expanded WCCC eligibility for child care employees and apprenticeship participants for new applications and reapplications
- Set a household's 12-month WCCC authorization to begin at the time of eligibility determination, rather than when child care is expected to begin
- Delayed ECEAP entitlement to the 2030-31 school year (previously scheduled for the 2026-27 school year)
- Made funding for Early ECEAP subject to appropriations

[ESSB 5769](#) (Addressing transition to kindergarten programs):

- Limited Transition to Kindergarten Program funding, beginning in the 2025-26 school year, to the funded level in the omnibus appropriations act
- Required OSPI to create a plan for phasing in TTK by 12/1/26, including priorities for expansion (not to exceed 5% growth)

ⁱ October 2025 presentation by DCYF to EL & HS Committee:

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/committeeschedules/Home/Document/289749#toolbar=0&navpanes=0>

ⁱⁱ Estimated caseloads per November 2025 caseload forecast at https://cfc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Handouts/DCYF_WCCC.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ October 2025 presentation by DCYF to EL & HS Committee:

<https://app.leg.wa.gov/committeeschedules/Home/Document/289749#toolbar=0&navpanes=0>

^{iv} Transition to Kindergarten information and data available through OSPI:

<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/early-learning-washington-state/transition-kindergarten>

^v Cost savings drawn from 5/20/25 Start Early WA Budget Analysis: <https://www.startearly.org/app/uploads/2025/05/Analysis-of-Final-2025-27-Biennium-Operating-and-Capital-Budgets-for-Early-Learning-5.21.25-415pm.pdf>

^{vi} Cost savings drawn from 5/20/25 Start Early WA Budget Analysis: <https://www.startearly.org/app/uploads/2025/05/Analysis-of-Final-2025-27-Biennium-Operating-and-Capital-Budgets-for-Early-Learning-5.21.25-415pm.pdf>