

## **Report Ranks WA 31st in Nation for Preschool Access**

### **Local News**

Posted by:

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High quality but limited access. That's the way [a new national report](#) summarizes preschool programs in Washington state, which is ranked seventh in the nation for state spending on preschool.

However, says Dr. Steve Barnett, director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, relatively few families are able to take advantage of the programs, known as Early Childhood Education and Assistance Programs (ECEAP).

Washington is a state with a high-quality preschool program - good standards, adequate funding - but it makes it available to less than one in 10 children, and has made very little progress in expanding enrollment over the last decade. That needs to change. - Dr. Steve Barnett Even those states spending the most money on preschool have cut back in recent years, the report says, either restricting access or diminishing quality. In the past decade, it notes, spending on early learning has decreased nationally by about \$700 per child per year.

Gary Burris, senior policy associate at the Economic Opportunity Institute in Seattle, says there's a big reason for the discrepancy between high quality and low access. Washington has focused on enrolling children with special needs and from low-income families, an approach that he says costs more but is also very effective.

"They're focused on supporting the whole family, with home visits and other services, getting families referrals to the kinds of services they need. Perhaps it's domestic violence or alcohol or substance abuse. So it's a whole-family approach to supporting the child, and that really is what you need to do to help kids be ready for school."

Burris says ECEAP has been successful and the state wants to expand it. However, he says, this year the Legislature pushed that plan back to 2025 because of the budget crisis.

The report is online at [nieer.org](http://nieer.org).

- Chris Thomas