

Bringing Universal Access to Quality Preschool Education in Rural Communities

Pathways to Sustainable and Successful Community Investments in Early Childhood Education

7/10/21

Prepared by the Early Childhood Education Initiative
Orcas Island, Washington

Supported by the Child Care Partnership Grant
Washington State Department of Commerce

I. The Early Childhood Education Initiative on Orcas Island

The Early Childhood Education Initiative (ECEI) is a six-year project funded by private and public donors that has achieved universal access to high quality early childhood education in our community every year since 2017. Over its seven-year history, ECEI has provided over 30,000 hours of quality preschool education in our three state-licensed preschools. ECEI funding has supported over one hundred students whose families cannot afford the education their children need to be Kindergarten ready. In 2019, 96% of our preschool children were well-prepared for Kindergarten, up from less than 60% seven years ago.

II. Introduction and Background

In this report, we document and extract lessons from ECEI's early years from 2014 – 2016. During this time period, the initiative went from an informal gathering of 3 – 4 preschool program directors to a regularly meeting group of educators, advocates, advisors and investors that raised and allocated approximately \$70K – 80K annually to fund preschool access and quality.

In the report, we describe the five critical features of this initial two-year collaborative process. In laying out these critical features we hope to provide a “roadmap” for other communities interested in pursuing the goal of ensuring universal access to quality pre-school education in the absence of adequately funded and effective public initiatives to achieve this goal.

It took our community two years to get the pieces we describe below into place. We hope other communities could do so in less time by not having to repeat some of our missteps; but we also expect some communities will take longer because they face additional challenges.

Critical Features of Establishing the Early Childhood Education Initiative

- I. Assess and focus clearly on urgent and agreed upon needs
 - a. funding for students unable to pay to attend pre-school at levels sufficient to ensure kindergarten readiness
 - b. rates of reimbursement to schools at levels commensurate with actual costs of providing quality education
 - c. freeing up program directors' and educators' time from some of their fund-raising duties in order to stay focused on educational quality
 - d. flexible and predictable allocation of resources to improve student outcomes with proven strategies to improve teaching quality
- II. Articulate shared goals and use them to identify and prioritize action strategies
 - a. *access* for all students to pre-school programs regardless of financial situation and at levels sufficient to ensure their educational and developmental readiness to attend Kindergarten.
 - b. *quality* education including instructional strategies and developmental supports for children sufficient to address their diverse needs and have all children attending these programs at least one year prepared to be successful in Kindergarten
 - c. *sustainability* of funding to ensure continuous achievement of these first two goals irrespective of public policies and dollars available
- III. Strengthen trust among partners:
 - a. Maintaining and respecting the integrity of each programs' educational approach,
 - b. Recognizing and sharing different starting points toward the access and quality goals (populations being served, staff background, facilities, financial stability)
 - c. Acknowledging and documenting variation between programs in their need for resources to achieve same goals of access and quality
 - d. Mutual accountability and transparency and safe space for disclosure
 - e. Available funds flexibly allocated to meet educator requests aligned with access and quality goals (versus prescriptive and siloed funding allocations)
- IV. Build credibility of effort with broader community and investors
 - a. articulating and foregrounding the evidence base
 - i. for importance of early childhood education to future child and adult development
 - ii. for levels of access needed to produce positive and reduce negative outcomes
 - iii. for quality strategies that have been shown to improve student outcomes

- b. demonstrating the need in the community for increased access and funding to support access
 - i. how many students do not attend pre-school due to financial exigencies?
 - ii. how many students need how much more access than family and other resources can currently support
 - c. providing families choice and insisting on family contributions
 - i. Families choose program based on match with children's and their needs (not expense)
 - ii. All families asked to contribute to tuition and/or in kind supports
 - d. holding preschool programs accountable by validated and accepted metrics with regular reporting
 - e. making the process for resource disbursement transparent
- V. Preschool programs and the initiative partners state and meet clear commitments going forward
- a. Common methodology and calculation of "costs" (See Practice Guide #1, January 2021)
 - b. Acceptance of different amounts of investments going to each program in order to meet collective goals
 - c. Common definitions of quality and common metrics to assess it
 - i. Definition of positive student educational and developmental outcomes
 - ii. Definition of high-quality instruction and developmental supports
 - d. Regular data collection and reporting on these metrics
 - e. Assessment of family financial needs and student educational needs in prioritizing resource requests
 - f. Regular meetings to report progress and collectively determine allocation of resources

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Practice Guide #3

7/10/21

Determining Student and Family Needs

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II. Introduction and Overview

In this guide, we detail how the preschool program directors create their requests for quarterly access funding from ECEI. Program directors are asked to submit requests for a specific number of hours for individual students (identities concealed) taking into consideration the family's ability to contribute to total cost of their child's participation. As described in Practice Guide #1, ECEI uses the actual hourly costs of each program as the basis for funding access requests made to the Steering Committee. Submission, documentation and consideration of program requests for access costs will be covered in the final practice guide. This guide specifies how the requests are created.

This guide is organized in two sections: a) how the directors estimate the number of hours needed by each child to meet their educational and developmental educational needs; and b) how family financial situations are assessed to determine the gap in funding available to pay for the hours of participation needed by the child.

III. How Many Hours of Access Do Children Need?

In 2014, ECEI's original advisory group conducted an extensive literature review to estimate the minimal level of pre-school participation that had been shown to impact subsequent child social and educational outcomes. At that time, 12 hours per week emerged as the threshold. ECEI then proposed to close the gap for families who wanted them to attend preschool but could not afford to pay for 12 hours participation. (See below for how families' capacity to contribute is determined.).

The program directors then contacted families of children attending less than 12 hours and families who were known to have preschool aged children but who were not attending preschool, to let them know about the opportunity for ECEI support. Next, children who were attending 12 hours or more (including those newly supported by ECEI) but who program directors determined needed additional hours to be sufficient to prepare them for Kindergarten, were also identified and the number of additional hours needed determined by the program directors. The initial literature review that identified the 12-hour threshold for typical students, revealed marked benefits of great than 12 hours for children who were developmentally delayed upon entering preschool. This research was used to support the creation of a second threshold for ECEI funding of individual student's access: hours needed to enrich students' experience sufficiently to ensure their Kindergarten readiness.

Since 2014, both the research and ECEI's thinking about "how many hours is enough" has evolved. The proven success of ECEI's investments in additional access for students – particularly those with either educational or socio-emotional challenges upon entry into preschool that comprise over half of our population has expanded the criteria and the number of hours being requested for ECEI support. The principles behind the initial criteria – what do students need to be successful and at what levels of participation does maximum impact occur – are still guiding the needs assessments as can be seen in these excerpts from directors' comments during interviews conducted for this report.

"Our program model is most beneficial for preschoolers with full time enrollment, which is currently 4 days a week, approx. 6-8 hours a day. We do not recommend part time attendance. We find that for children to be fully engaged with their environment and their peers, it is best to have a cohesive group with shared experiences. Also, much of our curriculum activity builds on previous day's work. Consistent attendance strengthens the depth of friendships and teacher/student relationships, which is the root of all learning.

Often, federal programs offer minimal supports which are not intended to be sufficient to ensure student success. Children with the highest level of need (those with IEP, ELL or from families with stressors that impact student success) consistently need more hours of high-quality care to have these Federal supports add their intended value. ECEI has made it possible

for our community to reach above the federal mandates, above the minimum, and surround those most in need with experiences that will increase the likelihood of public-school success.”

“Our program requires that beginning age 3 all children come at least 16 hours a week. During their second year, many students (4-year-olds) increase the number of hours they attend, and we especially recommend full day for those who developmentally would benefit from more support. We use observation of the child’s progress with Montessori materials and the TSGold to assess what kind of support they need. “

“We consider a combination of risk factors, assessment data, and educator observations to determine hours of participation. At enrollment, information about the child and family are gathered to determine if there are any risk factors that could impact the child’s kindergarten readiness. Families request the schedules or hours that work best for their family or child. Once enrolled, we use ASQ’s and TSG assessment data, educator observations, and parent teacher conferences to identify children that could benefit from additional hours.”

IV. What Can Families Contribute?

When ECEI was created, individual private funders were recruited to invest in expanding preschool access for all children to levels sufficient to ensure Kindergarten readiness. The focus would be removing financial barriers to all children gaining these levels of access. When asked by these investors how it would be determined how much support any given student would be provided, the information above regarding the two thresholds used to define sufficient participation were explained to them. ECEI committed to assessing parents’ potential contributions to supporting these levels of participation – both financial and in-kind contributions (services, volunteer work). It should be noted that other sources of funding student participation beside family paid tuition were also included in determining the ultimate request to ECEI for access funding: including Federal, state and county sources along with “scholarship” funds drawn from private contributions directly to the preschool programs. It was this latter source of funding that ECEI sought to decrease and eventually supplant, thus relieving program directors and staff of fundraising duties that interfered with their primary role as child educators.

The directors’ comments below speak to their process for determining the contributions that families can make to supporting their child’s access to quality preschool education.

“We assess potential family contributions primarily through open discussion with the families. We have developed trusting relationships with our families and use that connection to

determine the level of support each child and family needs. The model we propose is one in which families determine how many days a week they can afford (1-3) and ECEI can cover the remaining days.”

“We determine family needs for support by asking parents who cannot afford tuition for the time their child is enrolled, to apply for a scholarship and let us know what they can afford to pay. Determining how many hours they can afford to pay for, we request the balance for the optimal number of hours we recommend for the child from ECEI.”

“All families note family income on annual CACFP participation forms. Employment information is also collected on enrollment forms. If it appears that families may qualify for financial support, we encourage families to apply for WCCC or ECEAP. If they do not qualify for one of these programs, we make a request to ECEI.”

V. Lessons Learned and Summary

ECEI’s program directors use their relationships with their children and families to thoughtfully and respectfully acquire information about the children’s developmental and educational needs and their families’ financial situations. Using this information then to formulate financial requests from ECEI allows program directors to credibly articulate the “case for investment” at the individual child and family level, giving the ECEI Steering Committee an opportunity to understand fully why the funds are needed and how they will be used. This, in turn, allows the Steering Committee to communicate to investors in ECEI – individuals, foundations, state entities – fully transparent accounting of these investments along with clear metrics including how many children were supported for how many hours and where exactly these numbers come from.

Finally, this common process of program directors gathering information and then using principles agreed to by the full Steering Committee to convert these numbers into financial requests for each child and family brings focus (on children’s and families’ needs), fairness (all programs use the same process) and empowerment (educators determine the financial support requested based on their professional and personal judgment) to the process. These attributes have helped sustain ECEI over its seven years and amidst changes in personnel, individual programs facing various challenges and now COVID-related stresses.

Bringing Universal Access to Quality Pre-school Education in Rural Communities

Practice Guide #4

7/10/21

Collaborative Decision-making Strategies

Prepared by the Early Childhood Education Initiative
Orcas Island, Washington

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Washington State Department of Commerce

I. The Early Childhood Education Initiative on Orcas Island

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II. Introduction and Overview

In this guide, we document the process ECEI uses to decide which investments to make in children's access to preschool education and which quality investments to make in improving the supports children receive in the three participating state-licensed preschool programs. The reason we are dedicating a separate practice guide to this topic is that we believe this decision-making process has arguably been the most critical element in sustaining the initiative and its success for the past seven years.

In this guide we cover two levels of decision-making by the ECEI Steering Committee: a) how much money the participating programs receive each quarter to meet the upcoming quarter's access and quality needs; and b) what revisions or additions are needed, if any, in what activities are most relevant to the access and quality goals that are guiding the committee's decision-making process? We describe how these two levels of decisions are made, step by step, and why they are made that way. We also provide examples of how the decision-making process has helped us overcome challenges we have encountered and that we believe other

communities will encounter in their efforts to provide universal access to quality preschool education to their children and families.

III. Critical elements of ECEI decision-making

a. All decisions refer to the shared goals of getting every preschool-aged child the access and quality they need to complete preschool Kindergarten-ready

In our first report -- *Pathways to Sustainable and Successful Community Investments in Early Childhood Education* – we describe how ECEI’s initial advisory group decided to focus the initiative on providing universal access to quality preschool education as the focus for the initiative. Our second practice guide describes how metrics were selected to measure these goals. These goals and their associated metrics have been used over the course of the initiative to track the return on the community’s financial investments and our educators’ efforts using these resources.

Perhaps most important, we use these goals as “first principles” to guide our decision making at every turn. Both individually and as a group we have asked ourselves repeatedly, “will this investment increase children’s access to supports that will help them leave preschool Kindergarten ready?”; “will this investment increase the quality of instructional and developmental supports all children in this program experience?”. When multiple potential investments have potential to move these needles, but we couldn’t afford to do both, we asked “which investment will make a bigger difference?”, or “how can we invest a lesser amount in both options to maximize impact on these goals?”.

With these goals accepted as our north star, we have been able to discuss thoughtfully and expeditiously requests to fund other legitimate, pressing priorities. We’ve debated and decided not to invest in meeting individual program budget shortfalls with our funds, expand our age range to support infant care and older children’s after-school care and to provide family supports other than access for children to participate in quality programs. By staying focused on these goals, we were able to hit our access and quality thresholds for the initiative. These successes gave the initiative the legitimacy and credibility it needed to sustain and strengthen its positive impacts on children and families.

b. All decisions are made by consensus of a small, empowered ECEI Steering Committee.

Many disadvantages accrue to small, geographically isolated rural communities when it comes to attracting public resources in areas such as childcare. However, one major benefit of small size and relative isolation in small communities such as ours is the social capital found here. Individuals know a higher percentage of people in the community than in larger communities

and we are known by a higher percentage as well. The high levels of social capital helped us considerably when we gathered decision-makers involved in early childhood education in our community in a single room at the outset of the initiative. We were able to focus in engage them in collective action. We still have a small number of individuals (8-10) who have met on a quarterly basis for seven years. These individuals and now the group have the support of their original constituencies (educators, board members, parents, funders, public officials); they also have the authority to make decisions about preschool education in our community and the credibility to communicate our progress and challenges to the broader community.

Partnership members have distinct responsibilities in this collective effort. The three preschool program directors meet with individual students and families to assess their financial and educational needs, oversee and participate in data collection on student progress and instructional quality, and submit quarterly requests for resources to support access for children whose families face financial constraints. The board members from the preschool programs ensure that partnership efforts align with and advance policies of their respective programs and the initiative's shared goals. Community experts represent the fields of pediatrics and education and bring their content expertise to the discussions of best practices and research. The lead facilitator also brings strategic planning, collective decision-making and organizational development experience to the partnership. The County Coordinator of Early Childhood Education Assistance Program is also a member of the partnership and provides invaluable information and coordination with state and county initiatives. Our fiscal sponsor's board representative acts as a liaison with OICF to ensure timely and coordinated financial exchanges between the partnership, its donors and the fiscal sponsor. Advocates involved in ECEI include preschool parents and community leaders committed to early childhood education on Orcas Island.

All these participants meet quarterly to review information about early childhood education access and quality in these programs and to discuss and decide on requests for investments to strengthen access and improve quality across all three preschool programs.

In each of its quarterly meetings, the group follows an agreed-upon process to make quarterly allocations that will be discussed below. It also addresses emerging issues and opportunities – most recently COVID-related issues – as well as state and county policy issues raised by the ECEAP coordinator and other issues raised by the program directors and board members that affect their programs' achievement of access and quality goals.

- c. **Decisions rely primarily on educators' assessments** of individual children's education and developmental needs and their families' financial capacity to cover costs of access as well as their assessments of how their staff can be supported to meet specific quality goals.

As discussed in detail in Practice Guide #3, each of the program directors has the responsibility to assess on a quarterly basis the educational needs of the individual children in their preschool program as well as the quality activities they see as essential to strengthen the quality of

supports received by children in their program. Here are the steps that take this information forward to a final decision on resource allocation.

- i. The directors determine, in consultation with their families and staff, the level of access needed to ensure the child's educational and developmental needs get met.
- ii. The directors also assess the families' capacity to contribute to the costs for access and look for other potential sources of funds for this purpose.
- iii. They list each child (using a code that protects their identity), show the number of hours needed per week for that child, the number of hours per week covered by available funding sources, and the funding gap requested to be covered by ECEI.
- iv. The director also lists the proposed "quality" activities in three agreed upon areas: teacher certification, data driven professional development, and instructional coaching. Information on the activities' participants and levels of participation are included (again with identity protecting codes) along with costs of the activities, other sources of funds, and the gap funds being requested from ECEI.
- v. The facilitator reviews each director's requests, gets clarification where needed before compiling the requests and integrating them into the financial review for presentation to the entire committee.
- vi. The requests are then shown as total access and quality requests across the three programs against the total funds available as well as against the previous year's request during the same period. (A review of the financials – revenues and expenditures year to date against budgeted amounts – is done as a regular agenda item before the quarter requests are presented).
- vii. The compilation of the directors' requests and the financial summary statement are sent to committee members before the meeting and are presented at the meeting as well.
- viii. Each of the directors in turn then presents their requests to the entire committee where committee members can query the requests – throughout the discussion individual identities of children and families as well as teachers are protected. At times, requests are modified on the spot when errors or needed revisions are identified. The facilitator updates the financial material as needed, assesses when the group is ready to make their decision and asks for individuals to share their assessment of the request.
- ix. Typically, approval for the request is obtained by consensus at the meeting. There have been instances where reconsiderations were requested by a director because of new information obtained since the request or issues raised at the meeting, in which case the facilitator works with the director to finalize their request and sends it out with the

others for final approval or discussion through email or a reconvening – the latter has only occurred once in the 7 years of the initiative.

Lessons Learned About Decision Making

First, **flexibility and clarity are both critical**: flexibility with respect to how resources can be allocated and clarity about the criteria used in allocating those resources. The flexibility came from not being restricted by administratively predetermined cost categories or allocation formulae. Rather, the general categories – access and quality – and the activities falling within those categories are determined by the ECEI Steering Committee itself. The clarity comes from using the self-determined categories as first principles guiding all decisions on resource allocation and the metrics associated with those goals as ways to measure the return on those investments.

Second, **have the resource decisions be driven by information coming from the bottom up** – from each educator’s knowledge and experience working with their individual children and families – and then **have that information and the resource request be considered in a timely fashion by a larger and credible group** that has full information on the resources available and responsibility to allocate the resources that maximize access and quality.

Bringing Universal Access to Quality Pre-school Education in Rural Communities

Practice Guide #1

Estimating the Cost to Provide Access to Quality Pre-school Education

Prepared by the Early Childhood Education Initiative
Orcas Island, Washington

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I. The Early Childhood Education Initiative on Orcas Island

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II. Background to this Practice Guide

This guide briefly summarizes how ECEI estimates a key financial parameter used by the ECEI Steering Committee in its effort to support universal access to quality pre-school education in our community. In this guide, we explain how we calculate and use the per hour cost of providing quality education to children at each and across all of the pre-school programs.

The initial impetus for developing this common cost estimation process was to estimate the funding needed to achieve universal access and to communicate clearly to our potential investors the basis of our requests. We sought funding to support economically disadvantaged children's access to these pre-school programs. We believed that potential investors would want to know how their investments were being used to provide access and, specifically, how the costs of access were being determined. This transparency and accountability turned out to be very important to several of our initial investors and also provided an opportunity for the pre-school directors to take a hard look at their own business practices and methods of delivery both individually and collectively. The origins and history of this initiative and the early discussions of cost estimation are described in an upcoming report that also is part of this project.

The three pre-school program directors have been members of the ECEI advisory and now steering committee for the past six years. To develop the cost estimations, the directors worked initially with one of our founding funders (a financial analyst and investment advisor) and for the past three years with our lead facilitator (a retired education systems consultant) to design, refine and use the hourly rate and quarterly cost estimation process. All of the assumptions underlying these calculations and ultimately the actual calculations themselves are reviewed by the full ECEI Steering Committee and made transparent to our constituents.

III. Hourly Rate Calculation Process

The methodology used by ECEI to calculate hourly costs seeks to accurately and simply represent full and actual costs of providing childcare and educational services to each student for each hour they attend the pre-school program. The method has been refined since the initial cost calculations six years ago. The original discussions and process for establishing cost estimates will be summarized in another report in this series.

In coming up with this method of hourly cost estimation we established common assumptions about what “access” means and what counts as “program costs”. The approach also attempts to keep the effort necessary to calculate costs as simple as possible while still reflecting accurate estimates of what each program expends to provide its services to these children and families.

Here are the most recent “instructions” provided to each of the program directors for calculating hourly costs over a three-month period. Included in these recent instructions are costs associated with COVID compliance. We asked for these costs so that we could make adjustments in the hourly costs paid by ECEI to provide access to students.

The basic hourly cost is comprised of two estimates: the number of hours the program is accessible by students (access hours available), and the total costs of providing those hours (program costs). Worksheets follow.

Access Hours Available

1. Take the number of hours per day your school is open for pre-school children (2.5 to 6 years old)
2. Multiply that number times the number of children you can serve during those hours (if numbers change from morning to afternoon sessions make those adjustments).
3. Multiply that number times the number of days per week those daily hours are available (if different days have different hours available make those adjustments).
4. Multiply that number times the number of weeks these weekly hours will be available between the week *<date provided>* through *<date provided>* (if there are short weeks in that period, make those adjustments).

EXAMPLE:

1. Pre-school program is open 3 hours in the morning and 4 hours in the afternoon.
2. Morning session can serve 10 children; afternoon can serve 14.

Daily hours = $3 \times 10 + 4 \times 14 = 86$ hours per day.

3. Pre-school is open M – W with these same hours and Th for just afternoon session

Weekly hours = $4 \times 86 + 4 \times 14 = 400$ hours per week

4. There are 13 full 5-day weeks pre-school program will be open between the two dates provided, 2 weeks where it will be open 4/5 days and 2 weeks it will be open 2/5 days.

Funding period hours

= $13 \times 400 + 2 \times (4/5 \times 400) + 2 \times (2/5 \times 400) = 11,600$ **Access Hours Available** for the Fall funding period

Program Costs

1. Personnel costs

Monthly compensation estimates for director, other administrative, support staff personnel costs and pre-school instructor's monthly compensation X <# months provided>).

2. Fixed costs

Projected annual costs for insurance, utilities, cleaning services, ongoing COVID safety compliance requirements, etc. for <date to date provided>. Pro-rate annual costs where relevant.

3. COVID compliance set up costs

Include initial set up costs NOT covered by other external funding sources (e.g., PPP, ECEAP Family Support).

4. Sum of 1 – 3 above = **Program Costs** for this funding period

5. Divide Program **Costs** by **Access Hours Available** to get hourly cost.

IV. Use of Individual Program Cost Estimates to Establish ECEI Disbursement Rates

Once these calculations are completed, the ECEI Steering Committee facilitator works with the program directors to establish either a common disbursement rate for all three programs or a differentiated rate, depending upon circumstances at the time of the cost estimation. Typically, the cost estimation rates come with \$1-2 per hour of each other and a single rate is used. However, earlier on in the initiative's history, the cost estimates were more disparate and different disbursement rates were applied. These different disbursement rates were possible because the process for determining them were completely transparent and the cost differences between programs fully discussed by three directors and the full ECEI Steering Committee before approval.

V. Lessons Learned

First, establishing a transparent and straightforward method for estimating hourly costs of providing access to quality childcare and education was a critical step for building trust among educators, advocates, experts and investors.

Second, reimbursing full hourly costs provides incentives for the pre-school programs to expand access to students and families eligible for these financial supports, whereas other revenue sources – tuition and ECEAP – do not because they fall well short of covering full costs resulting in the programs “losing money” when they provide access for these students and families.

Third, reimbursing full hourly costs reduces the pressure on program directors and staff to spend time raising funds rather than improving educational quality. This lesson will be expanded upon in other reports in this series.

Bringing Universal Access to Quality Pre-school Education in Rural Communities

Practice Guide #2

7/10/21

Collecting, Analyzing and Reporting Data on Student Outcomes and Education Quality

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II. Introduction and Background

In this report, we document how ECEI initially selected and then revised its metrics for assessing the initiative's major goal: universal access to quality pre-school education across the three state-licensed pre-school programs. Perhaps even more critical was the setting of thresholds on these metrics for *how good was good enough*. We had to define high quality early childhood education. As outlined in our first report, establishing reliable and valid metrics against which the success of ECEI could be assessed was critical for three reasons:

1. It brought focus and mutual accountability across the participating programs;
2. It gave investors and other constituents benchmarks to follow the initiative's progress
3. It provided the grist for improvement efforts and a way to judge those efforts' efficacy.

The rest of the guide lays out both the metrics chosen and the thresholds we set on those metrics. We also explain how and why we came to those decisions. We then discuss how and how often these data are collected, entered, analyzed and reported. Finally, we give examples of how the data are used to guide professional development activities funded by the initiative and how results are communicated to our community constituents.

- III. Measuring and defining access
 - a. Hours currently attended versus “hours needed” to be Kindergarten ready
 - b. Closing gap between financial resources available and those required to provide “hours needed”

- IV. Measuring and defining quality
 - a. Student outcomes
 - i. TS-Gold assessment
 - ii. Quality thresholds

Over the course of four months of weekly discussions, the initial ECEI team discussed what measures should be used that will a) validly assess student progress—what gets measured is important and accurate; b) not add undue burden or redundancy to educators’ workload; and c) be useful for communicating results to multiple audiences, most importantly for educators to use in improving their practice but also for state/county compliance and investor reports.

It was decided in 2017 that the TS-Gold assessment being used by the state in its Early Achievers program was the best fit based on these criteria. However, the actual metrics used to assess educational “quality,” while extracted from the TS-Gold, reflected two additional considerations: having ECEI focus on improving quality in areas that ECEI’s directors considered most critical in terms of their students’ current needs; and, having the standard for *how good is good enough* accurately reflect actual Kindergarten readiness.

This led to four of the TS-Gold dimensions being prioritized—Cognitive, Language, Literacy, and Socio-emotional. Specific thresholds were set on each for all children and across all four. These calculations produced On-Track or Off-Track status scores for each child for each domain as well as an overall status score across all domains. These status scores were also used to assess each child’s progress toward Kindergarten readiness. Thresholds were then set for what percentage of children would be “on track” and making adequate progress toward “on track” status upon “graduation,” i.e., Kindergarten ready.

- b. Teacher certification

In examining different aspects of “quality,” teacher qualifications emerged early as an important area to address. The levels of training and education in early childhood varied greatly among educators working in the three state-certified programs. It was decided by the ECEI team that the goal of all educators to be CDA certified or higher was desirable, and at that time approximately half of the educators met this threshold. ECEI has considered and funded requests for tuition reimbursement, travel, and preparation and has also supported increased hourly wages for certified staff and incremental increases for staff making progress toward certification. Data are collected on staff progress toward and completion of CDA certification.

- c. Instructional and developmental supports
 - i. CLASS observational protocol
 - ii. Quality thresholds

The same three criteria were used for selecting measures of the quality of instructional and developmental supports: validity/reliability, practicality, and utility. At the time, the CLASS observational protocol developed at the University of Virginia was being used by the Early Achievers program. This assessment met all three of our criteria for adoption as a metric to assess objectively the quality of instructional and developmental supports. As was the measure of student outcomes, it was critical to select thresholds for *how good was good enough* on the CLASS measure. Having taken baseline assessments, we set initial thresholds on this metric in 2017 as follows:

By the Spring 2017 assessment, we intend to have all three of the overall dimensions rated strong (4) or very strong (5) on our five-point scale and the other rated no less than promising (3 or 4) in every pre-school classroom assessed.

- V. Collecting and analyzing data
 - a. Access

Hours attended by individual children are the basic data points for assessing progress toward achieving the access goals of the initiative. These data are collected by the pre-school programs as part of their state requirements and business accounting procedures so did not add to workloads.

Access requests take the form of hours over and above those supported by other sources, i.e., tuition, state/county payments, scholarship. ECEI quarterly requests for funding are accompanied by information on the hours attended by children that were supported by ECEI funds the previous quarter. This report comes in the form of funding remaining as surplus due to underuse of access funds when children do not “use” their access hours. ECEI only pays for hours actually attended.

- b. Quality
 - i. Student outcomes
 - ii. Instructional and developmental supports

TS Gold data are collected in accordance with state requirements for ECEAP funding on all students multiple times per year depending on when students are enrolled in the programs. Results are entered by program staff, and results are used in developing lesson plans by individual educators and in groups of educators. ECEI considers and funds requests for data entry, analysis and meeting time to discuss these results.

CLASS data have been collected by external observation multiple times per year, and results are obtained by program directors and used to guide professional development and coaching with

educators both by outside coaches and by trained master educators from program staff. ECEI has funded costs of CLASS training for educators and outside coaches, master educators' time to support educators using CLASS results, and educators' meeting time to discuss CLASS results and improvement practices.

- VI. Reporting data
 - a. Access
 - b. Quality
 - i. Student outcomes
 - ii. Instructional and developmental supports

In addition to the internal uses of data on access and quality to guide requests for ECEI investments by program directors and for professional development activities for educators, ECEI's steering committee prepares summary reports of results on these measures for communicating ECEI's progress to multiple constituencies and using multiple outlets. Examples of such reports are shown below.

VII. Lessons Learned

The commitment by pre-school program leaders (directors and boards) to adopt common metrics and thresholds for success across the programs cannot be overemphasized. Early discussions of these metrics and the thresholds for success and progress deepened the shared understanding and trust among the ECEI team's members. The same commitment also helped maintain the focus of the group amidst ever-changing community conditions, financial and other challenges within individual programs, shifts in personnel, and potentially distracting funding opportunities and continues to give the initiative credibility with external audiences including funders, advocates, and other influentials.

Second, making sure that the collection and analysis of data do not cause undue burden on the educators and program directors is critical to maintaining data-driven decision making and improvement. This is not to say effort on their parts won't be required, but having ECEI steering committee members assume as much of the burden as possible and making financial investments in data collection and analysis—including paying educators to enter and analyze data—communicates the importance of this component.

Finally, results matter more when they're based on credible data. Having objective measures and clear thresholds for success undergirds stories we can tell of individual children and families, gives educators and families even more to be proud of, helps bring along skeptics, and lays the groundwork for the success of potential policy efforts that will require more than "being a good cause."

THE SOLUTION TO ACCESS

- 2020
 - 100% of Orcas' children have access to quality pre-school education irrespective of their families' financial situation
 - 100% of Orcas' children can participate at levels sufficient to get them ready educationally and developmentally for Kindergarten

THE SOLUTION TO QUALITY

- 2020
 - 90% of educators either have or are within a year of having threshold levels of certification in early childhood education
 - Common metrics of student performance and educational practice guide professional development activities of all educators
 - Lead educators receive professional development and work directly with individuals and groups of teachers to improve their practice
 - **96% of 2018-19 pre-school "graduates" demonstrate Kindergarten readiness across research-validated measures of developmental and educational skills**

Measurement of Goals Used to Assess Progress and Guide Activities (2015 –)

	<i>MEASUREMENT</i>	<i>THRESHOLD</i>	<i>STATUS</i>
ECEI Goals	<i>What quantitative metric is used to assess this goal?</i>	<i>What is the target result on this metric (how good is good enough)?</i>	<i>What have and do results look like on achieving this threshold?</i>
<i>ACCESS</i>	Across the entire school year (including summer), what percentage of children who need assistance to attend pre-school for either 12 hours (minimum needed) or more than 12 hours (for those with special needs) get support they need?	100%	Threshold first achieved in early 2016 and has been sustained since.
<i>QUALITY (Teacher Certification)</i>	What percentage of teachers are at least certified with their CDA/Initial Certificate or working toward that certification and making expected progress?	100%	Threshold first achieved in 2016 and result has remained above 90%.
<i>QUALITY (Educational Practices)</i>	What rating do ECEI pre-school classrooms get on the three dimensions of quality on the research-based CLASS ratings of quality pre-school education? .	Classrooms are rated at least Strong (5/7) on all three dimensions of educational quality.	Since 2017, all classrooms have met or exceeded threshold on 2 out of 3 dimensions (Classroom Organization and Emotional Support). Some classrooms meet threshold on third dimension (Instructional Support) as of Summer 2018.

	<i>MEASUREMENT</i>	<i>THRESHOLD</i>	<i>STATUS</i>
ECEI Goals	<i>What quantitative metric is used to assess this goal?</i>	<i>What is the target result on this metric (how good is good enough)?</i>	<i>What have and do results look like on achieving this threshold?</i>
<i>QUALITY (Students' Learning and Development)</i>	What percentage of typical students in a program for at least one year "graduate" from pre-school "Kindergarten ready" according to state standards across all key dimensions on the TS Gold Assessments?	95%	Threshold first attained in June 2019.
<i>QUALITY (Special Needs Students' Learning and Development)</i>	What percentage of students with individualized education plan (special needs) in the pre-school program for at least one year make acceptable progress toward their individual goals on the TS-Gold Assessments.	100%	Threshold first hit in 2017 and sustained since that time.
<i>SUSTAINABILITY</i>	What percentage of pre-school students seeking access to high quality early childhood education on Orcas Island are guaranteed access irrespective of their financial conditions?	100%	Since 2017, the access and quality thresholds on this measure have been met. One year from now, high quality will remain, but the level of access is indeterminate, pending funding. Two years from now, neither universal access nor current levels of quality are ensured pending funding.

Table 1
Outcomes and Related Activities for ECEI Initiative (As of June 30, 2019)

	Kaleidoscope	Montessori	Children's House	Overall
Outcomes				
<i>State certification for all educators</i>	2 out of 3 teachers are state certified with CDA or higher and one is entering the process.	2 out of 3 teachers are state certified and the third is obtaining CDA certification.	1 out of 2 teachers are state certified as a result of this grant.	89% of teachers are certified or working on their certification.
<i>Common assessment of student progress taken regularly</i>	TS-Gold assessments were taken Nov, Feb, June and August.	TS-Gold assessments were taken Nov, Feb and May.	TS-Gold assessments were conducted Nov, Feb, and June	Students are assessed three times a year on the same research-based, state-approved assessments of learning and development.
<i>Student assessment date entered and used by educators</i>	Teachers entered TS-Gold assessment data within a week and used it to guide lesson planning.	Teachers entered the TS-Gold Assessment data for each of the three assessments within a week and then used those data to guide their work with their students. The data were also used by the lead educator and teachers to improve practices in specific areas.	Teachers entered TS Gold assessment data Aggregate data were used to identify trends in learning across age groups and center wide. Data were used for teacher reflection and action plans.	Teachers enter assessment data immediately and within a week use the assessment results to guide their instruction.

Table 1, continued

<p><i>Teaching quality assessed regularly and used for individual coaching</i></p>	<p>Assessments of teaching were conducted monthly by trained observers using the research-based CLASS instrument and used by master teacher to coach individual teaches.</p>	<p>Assessments of teaching practices in three areas were conducted in October and May by trained observers using the research-based CLASS instrument and used by lead teachers to guide individuals and groups of teachers to improve their practices</p>	<p>CLASS assessments of teaching practices were conducted individually in October by independent raters from the University of Washington at onsite evaluation.</p>	<p>Nationally recognized, research-based assessment of instructional quality and developmental supports employed by trained observers on a regular basis and used to guide instructional improvement by master teachers.</p>
<p><i>Professional development and lesson planning guided by student assessment and teaching quality data</i></p>	<p>Each lead teacher had approximately 2-4 hours per week individually to plan educational strategies for their students and 4-6 hours monthly to work together to share ideas and practices with each other to improve their work with their students.</p>	<p>Each teacher had approximately 3 hours each week individually to plan educational strategies for their students and 4 hours to work together to share ideas and practices with each other to improve their work with their students.</p>	<p>Each teacher had approximately 3 hours each week individually to plan individualized instruction for children and 4 hours to work together each month.</p>	<p>Every teacher provided approximately three hours per week to plan individualized instruction for students and approximately four hours per month to work with their colleagues to improve their work with their shared students.</p>
<p><i>Progress toward 95% Kindergarten ready students</i></p>	<p>Of the students leaving school to go to Kindergarten 6 out of 6 scored as K-ready on their final TS-Gold assessments in the all areas on their final TS-Gold assessments. Both students with Individual Educational Plans made significant progress toward kindergarten readiness.</p>	<p>Of the students leaving school in June 2019 to go to Kindergarten 10 out of 11 scored as K-ready on their final TS-Gold assessments in the all Dimensions (91%). One student fell short on one of the Literacy objectives.</p>	<p>Of the children leaving for kindergarten in June 2019, 6 out of 7 were K-ready. The child falling below widely held expectations for age was enrolled for only 3 months and had extended absences.</p>	<p>96% of student leaving pre-school for Kindergarten with at least one year attendance were assessed as Kindergarten ready across multiple areas of academic and socio-emotional learning.</p>

Bringing Universal Access to Quality Pre-school Education in Rural Communities

FINAL REPORT

7/10/21

Prepared by the Early Childhood Education Initiative
Orcas Island, Washington

Child Care Partnership Grant
Washington State Department of Commerce

I. The Early Childhood Education Initiative on Orcas Island

The Early Childhood Education Initiative (ECEI) is a seven-year project funded by private and public donors that has achieved universal access to high quality early childhood education in our community every year since 2017. ECEI has provided over 30,000 hours of quality preschool education in our three state-licensed preschools. ECEI funding has supported over one hundred students whose families cannot afford the education their children need to be kindergarten ready. In 2019, 96% of our preschool children were well-prepared for kindergarten, up from less than 60% seven years ago.

II. Background and Introduction

In this final report, we summarize the completion of the project's four major activities highlighting those that we believe contributed most significantly to the project's overall outcomes. We then reflect on the project's intended outcomes with particular emphasis on next steps toward the overarching goal of expanding universal access to quality preschool education to our entire county.

III. Summary of Activities

This grant provided ECEI the opportunity to accomplish three sets of activities:

a. Coordinate and convene project partners and community stakeholders

The CCP funding allowed our initiative to continue quarterly meetings of the ECEI Steering Committee members including preschool program directors, board member representatives, community advocates including preschool parents, community foundation board members and expert advisors. Over a dozen meetings were held between sub-groups of the steering committee to pursue issues related to access to and quality of preschool education in our community. In addition, the lead facilitator along with representatives of this steering committee met with county officials and private funding sources to advocate for support of the

initiative on Orcas Island. During the latter part of the funding period, members of the steering committee along with other communities' early childhood advocates presented a proposal to our county board of health and other county leaders to examine the feasibility of expanding and adapting the initiative county-wide and seek public funding for its implementation.

b. Assessment and planning

Needs assessment and planning were ongoing processes supported by the CCP funds and documented in the set of practice guides (most specifically in Practice Guides #2 and #3 also attached to this report).

c. Documentation

Four documents, in addition to this report, were completed during the funding period and are attached. The reports describe how the Early Childhood Education Initiative was created, evolved and currently operates. We intend to draw heavily on these documents to inform and expand efforts in our county and will make them available to other outlets as well.

d. Dissemination and Cross-Community Outreach

Our major focus for dissemination and cross-community outreach thus far has been our two sister island communities – Lopez Island and San Juan Island. ECEI's lead facilitator has shared information from our work – including excerpts from our five reports – with our colleagues from these other communities. As a result of these efforts and the interest and commitment of these communities' advocates, all three communities have collaboratively presented to our county Board of Health to gain their support for expanding universal access to quality childcare and education county-wide. This board has oversight responsibilities for significant funding of early childhood education in our county.

This same cross-community group has submitted a request for continued funding to the Department of Commerce CCP program to conduct an action-oriented feasibility study for achieving ECEI's goals of universal access to quality early childhood care and education county-wide building on our two CCP-funded projects.

IV. Reflection on Outcomes

a. Increased understanding of barriers to opening a childcare business in a rural area, and the process of becoming a licensed childcare provider.

No new childcare facilities were opened during this funding period. However, one of our three programs "absorbed" and received state-licensure for another program, increasing its enrollment and the reach of ECEI's supports for child access and education quality by 20-30%. Another of our programs successfully expanded and renovated their physical facility during this period as well.

The funding provided by CCP overlapped in time with the peak of the COVID crisis. Our ability to continue our needs assessment, planning, documentation and dissemination activities during this period demonstrated the initiative's resilience. It is still not clear what longer-term aftershocks of COVID will bring. However, having CCP's support to continue the collaborative work of ECEI during this period gave us the opportunity to draw on the collective insights of our steering committee members and community partners to better prepare for the challenges still to come.

b. Action plan in place to expand childcare access

ECEI will continue its ongoing effort to provide universal access to quality preschool education on Orcas Island using the needs assessment and planning processes described in the documents produced under this grant.

We have also joined with our fellow CCP grantee, Joyce Sobel Family Resource Center, and childcare providers and advocates on Lopez Island along with a diverse network of partners to develop a county-wide action plan to expand and adapt these processes across our communities. We have proposed conducting a 6-month feasibility study that will include this action plan. We will then conduct advocacy and dissemination efforts toward implementation of its results; and, within 12 months, launch pilot projects stemming from the action plan in all three communities.

c. Deepened relationships with community partners across sectors

CCP funding has allowed ECEI to cement its relationships with key community partners – providers, families, educators -- by supporting our efforts to ensure universal access to quality preschool education even in the face of the challenges COVID has generated. Consultation with these community partners within and beyond the ECEI Steering Committee to produce the deliverables for this grant engaged all of us in reflecting on the initiative's history, challenges and accomplishments and reenergized our efforts.

d. Increased understanding of community needs by government officials, local businesses, and community partners

As part of this grant, we solicited support for expanding and adapting ECEI county-wide during presentations to our Board of Health, by soliciting letters of support from our Chamber of Commerce, county council representative, community foundation and other community advocates. These interactions provoked questions about our work and brought forth energetic responses to the work.