

**“A HEAD START FOR LATINO CHILDREN IN WASHINGTON STATE”**

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## **“A Head Start for Latino Children in Washington State”**

### **Introduction**

For the past three months I have been researching early childhood education for the Latino community in Washington State. Specifically, I have been investigating how more eligible Latino children could become enrolled in Head Start and how Head Start could provide the most effective preschool experience for Latino children. I have been focusing on how parent outreach programs could contribute to enrollment and preschool education, and the cultural and language barriers to getting Latino children enrolled and having successful experiences in these programs.

These questions are extremely significant in Washington State today. As of 2004, there were an estimated 67,951 Hispanic citizens ages 0-4 in Washington State<sup>1</sup>, and an additional 61,328 Hispanic citizens ages 5-9.<sup>2</sup> These two age groups are by far the largest Hispanic demographic in the state (compare to only 50,293 ages 10-14), and represent the vast majority of Hispanic growth in the state. According to the Washington State Office of Financial Management estimates of 2004, “13% of children in Washington are Hispanic, but Hispanic representation in the population grows as you go down in age. For example, 17% of 0- to 4-year-olds is Hispanic. In counties such as Adams, Franklin, Yakima and Grant, more than half of the births are of Hispanic origin.”<sup>3</sup> Because of this growing demographic of 0-4 year-old Hispanic citizens, it is important now more than ever before to ensure that these children have access to high-quality early childhood education programs. Early childhood education has consistently proven to be an essential building block to a child’s future educational attainment; unfortunately, Hispanic children, especially those of low socioeconomic status, are among the least likely to be enrolled in such programs. The future of the state is becoming increasingly tied to the future of these children, and it is crucial that they receive the best education possible, not only as a moral imperative to provide children the opportunity to make the most of their lives, but to ensure that Washington will have an educated work force and prosperous economy.

Head Start, founded as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty in 1965, is the nation’s primary early childhood education provider for disadvantaged and low-income children. Head Start is designed specifically to provide such high-quality early childhood education programs for disadvantaged children, and is the primary source of funding and enrollment for such programs in Washington state. Therefore, it is especially important that Head Start enroll as many eligible Hispanic children as possible and provide a comprehensive and successful experience for these children. An important part of Head Start’s mandate, beyond cognitive/academic development, is to ensure children are healthy, for which they provide health and nutrition services, and that parents are effective advocates for their children throughout their educational career, for which Head Start provides parent education and outreach.

I researched scholarly literature and studies on the benefits of early childhood education for the child, and how it contributed to cognitive, social, and emotional development, which were all essential for future educational attainment. I also investigated aspects of preschool programs which were likely to help Latino children succeed and how parent involvement and

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<sup>1</sup> Estimates now show that the number has reached over 70,000. “Investigating in Children: An Early Learning Strategy for Washington State,” November 2005. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2004. Available online at: <http://www.ofm.wa.gov/pop/race/default.asp>

<sup>3</sup> Washington State Office of Financial Management, 2004.

communication were essential to this success. Lastly, I examined data about the current Head Start and Migrant Head Start programs with regards to enrollment and funding.

Combined with my case study of the Migrant Head Start program in College Place, Washington, including interviews with staff and parents at this program, this scholarly research allowed me to conclude that some of the most important factors to create preschool programs that allow Latino children to succeed and have long-lasting positive effects on their lives are parent involvement and communication, accepting and respecting the home culture and language of the children, and providing health services and other comprehensive services. Recommendations include providing adequate cultural and linguistic training for staff members, ensuring that parent outreach and education programs are accessible to all parents, and acknowledging the variety of needs within the Washington State Latino population and catering to each community to the greatest extent possible, among other things.

### **Scholarly Research Discussion**

Research consistently shows the irreplaceable value of early childhood education, both for a child's development and as an investment for society. However, scholars also acknowledge Hispanic under representation in preschool programs, and explain how this "preparation gap" leads to lower educational achievement later in life. Cultural and linguistic acceptance and respect, as well as parent education and involvement, are believed to be key factors in helping Latino children succeed in preschool programs. Scholars also emphasize the importance of educational achievement today because of higher academic standards and a knowledge-driven economy.

#### *Early Childhood Education: An Effective Investment*

Numerous studies have been performed about the advantages of early childhood education for disadvantaged children, both for the individual and for the public good. The consensus among scholars is that early childhood education for at-risk children does lead to greater academic achievement and is a good public investment with a high return rate. Three of the most comprehensive, long term and most highly regarded of these studies are the Carolina Abecedarian Project, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, and the Chicago Parent-Child Centers study.

The Carolina Abecedarian Project, conducted by a team of researchers at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, randomly assigned 57 infants from low-income families to receive early intervention at a high quality child care center from ages 0-5; fifty-four infants from similarly low-income families were assigned to a control group and did not receive any intervention. The infants in both groups scored comparably on infant mental and motor tests on an initial assessment before the intervention program began. However, by the age of only 18 months the infants in the intervention group were already scoring higher than the control group on mental tests. The children in the intervention group went on to score significantly higher on both reading and math tests from elementary school through middle adolescence, showing that the early childhood intervention did have a measurable and significant impact on their readiness and success upon entering school. Furthermore, the Carolina Abecedarian Project conducted a follow-up study when the participants in the study were 21 years old. This follow-up study found that the children who received early childhood intervention had significantly higher scores on

mental tests through age 21, and that these differences were considered educationally meaningful; tests scores of the intervention group were higher in reading and in math than those of the control group. The children in the intervention group were twice as likely to be in school at age 21 compared to control group (40% to 20%, respectively), and were more than twice as likely to have graduated from or be attending a four-year university or college at the age of 21 (35% to 14%, respectively). The employment rates of the control group were also lower than the intervention group.<sup>4</sup> While the services provided by the Carolina Abecedarian Project were greater than the average childhood education program (full-time educational intervention in a high-quality program from infancy to five years old), this study still proves the significant and life-altering impact of early childhood education and intervention, especially among disadvantaged children. In addition, by age 21, this project found a return of \$4.01 for every dollar invested in early childhood programs, including returns to the individual child, government and society as a whole.

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project<sup>5</sup> conducted a study of 123 African-American children who lived in Ypsilanti, Michigan. There was a program group of 58 3-4 year old children who received 2.5 hour classes on weekday mornings October-May, and weekly 1.5 hour home visits to each mother and child. There was also a control group of 65 children of comparable age, income, family background and IQ, who did not receive any schooling/intervention. This study found that the program group scored better on intellectual and language tests given from after the first year of preschool to age 7 than the control group, but not afterwards, indicating that the gains in intellectual achievement from preschool had faded out. Similar results have also been found in some Head Start studies; however, despite this result, the Perry Preschool Project found dramatic and long term effects of the program on participants. These effects include less grade repetition, higher high school graduation rate, higher employment rate at age 27 and 40, higher median annual earnings at 27 and 40, reduced dependence on social welfare throughout lifetime, and a lesser rate of arrest for a variety of crimes throughout lifetime<sup>6</sup>. By age 40, this study found an average return rate of \$17.07 per dollar invested- \$12.90 per dollar invested went to the general public, and \$4.17 went to the individual participants<sup>7</sup>. According to Lawrence Schweinhart of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, “The program was an extremely good economic investment, comparing favorably with alternative uses of public resources and even with private-sector investments.”<sup>8</sup>

#### **A Comparison of Perry Students vs. Control Group at age 40**

	Perry Students	Control Group
Graduate from regular high school	65%	45%
Grade repetition	21%	41%

<sup>4</sup> Information about the Carolina Abecedarian Project taken from the official Executive Summary of the project, available online at <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/summary.cfm>

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence J. Schweinhart, “Benefits, Costs, and Explanation of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program” High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2003. Available online at: [http://www.highscope.org/Research/PerryProject/Perry-SRCD\\_2003.pdf](http://www.highscope.org/Research/PerryProject/Perry-SRCD_2003.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence J. Schweinhart “The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40” High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. Available online at: <http://www.highscope.org/Research/PerryProject/PerryAge40SumWeb.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence J. Schweinhart “The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40” High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence J. Schweinhart, “Benefits, Costs, and Explanation of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program” High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2003.

Employed at age 40	76%	62%
Median annual earnings at age 40	\$20,800	\$15,300
Received social services at some time in their lives	71%	86%
5 or more arrests	36%	55%

Lawrence J. Schweinhart “The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40” High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

*As outlined in the paragraph above, a follow-up study of Perry students at age 40 showed that they were more likely to have graduated from a regular high school and be employed at age 40 and have higher earnings, and less likely to have received social services, repeated grades, or been arrested more than 5 times, than the members of the control group.*

The Chicago Parent-Child Centers study, which examined the benefits to children already enrolled in these centers, also found that early childhood education programs reduced crime and dependency on social welfare programs later in life. The children enrolled in early childhood education programs also were less likely to be enrolled in remedial education programs later in life and have an increased earnings capacity when they entered the job market. This study found an average cost-benefit ratio to society of 7.14 by age 21.<sup>9</sup>

### *Head Start Impact Study*

The three studies examined in the previous section followed participants until age 21, and in the case of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study, until age 40. Unfortunately, no studies of this length have been conducted on Head Start. The current national Head Start Impact Study (2001-2006) plans to monitor children through first grade, but no long-term follow-up is currently planned. This study, which is the most current and most comprehensive of studies on Head Start, released its First Year Findings report in June 2005. They found a small to moderate positive effect for both 3 and 4 year olds in pre-reading, pre-writing, vocabulary, and parent reports of children’s literacy skills. If a child entered the program as a 3 year old there were slight positive effects on behavior, but not if the child entered as a 4 year old. Parents of three year olds reported positive impacts on the health status of the child as well as access to health care, whereas four year olds experienced only a positive effect on access to health care. The positive impacts of Head Start were found to be greater than average for Hispanic 3 year olds in several domains. However, for 4-year-old Hispanic children, Head Start had a significant impact only in the area of health<sup>10</sup>. This shows that the younger children are enrolled in early childhood education programs the greater the positive impact will be, especially for Hispanic children.

### *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in the Head Start Classroom*

There is a consensus among scholars about the importance of early childhood education programs respecting a child’s home culture and language and bringing these diverse cultures and languages into the programs so all families feel welcome and are able to participate to the fullest extent possible. The National Association for the Education of Young Children reflects this view

<sup>9</sup> Maureen Ittig, et al. “Is Pre-K a Good Investment?” Early Childhood Digest #1, Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership, University of Wisconsin-Extension, August 25, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, “Head Start Impact Study: First Year Findings,” June 2005. Available online at: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/impact\\_study/reports/first\\_yr\\_execsum/firstyr\\_sum\\_title.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/impact_study/reports/first_yr_execsum/firstyr_sum_title.html)

when they say, “The nation’s children all deserve an early childhood education that is responsive to their families, communities, and racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.”<sup>11</sup> Scholars agree that this type of early childhood education would involve accepting and respecting a child’s home language and culture<sup>12</sup>, and instilling in the child a sense of pride and self-esteem based on their family and cultural and linguistic background.<sup>13</sup> Family is universally recognized to play a key role in the success of their preschool student, and scholars emphasize that “educational programs and families must *respect* and *reinforce* each other as they work together to achieve the greatest benefit for all children.”<sup>14</sup> To achieve this goal of providing a preschool education that is responsive to a child’s home culture and ethnicity, Head Start has “...over 20 standards in the Program Performance Standards that specifically refer to the home language, the learning of English, or the cultural background of families and children.”<sup>15</sup> These standards more specifically require the following:<sup>16</sup>

- Offer an accepting environment that “supports and respects” a child’s culture, language and ethnicity
- Serve food that is culturally and ethnically preferred
- Communicate with families in their primary or preferred language (with an interpreter if necessary), to the extent possible
- As much as possible, hire staff that speak the children’s native language
- Encourage family participation in developing the child’s literacy both in their home language and English

These Head Start Program Performance Standards help programs know what they are supposed to be doing to provide the most comprehensive and successful preschool experiences for Latino and other culturally and linguistically diverse children, but they do not always tell them how to accomplish this, or how to best customize this to fit different racial, cultural or ethnic groups. Therefore, I have decided to investigate more the practices that Head Start uses, or could use, to best provide this experience for Latino children in Washington State.

In April 2000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released a study entitled, “Celebrating Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Head Start,” which documented the increase in diversity within the program and Head Start’s response to this growth. Among the study’s findings were:<sup>17</sup>

- Head Start programs reported that they were modifying their recruitment strategies to reach this more diverse population

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<sup>11</sup> “Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Recommendations for Effective Early Childhood Education,” National Association for the Education of Young Children 1.

<sup>12</sup> “Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Recommendations for Effective Early Childhood Education,” National Association for the Education of Young Children 2.

<sup>13</sup> Creative Curriculum

<sup>14</sup> “Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Recommendations for Effective Early Childhood Education,” National Association for the Education of Young Children 1.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Head Start Bulletin: English Language Learners” 4.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Head Start Bulletin: English Language Learners” 4.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. “Celebrating Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Head Start,” 2000. Available online at: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/celeb\\_culture/reports/diversity/diversity\\_title.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/celeb_culture/reports/diversity/diversity_title.html)

- Multi-cultural activities and educational materials were readily available in Head Start classrooms; however, many teachers didn't use them often and some reported not knowing what to do with them
- Parents were contributing culturally to help make Head Start classrooms more diverse
- Many programs were offered that tried to reach out to culturally and linguistically diverse parents, including ESL at some locations, which was rated by staff at these programs as one of the most important programs offered to parents

This study found that Head Start programs were modifying their recruitment strategies to reach more diverse populations by advertising in local or mass media in the languages of the communities they were serving, holding open houses for the community, going door-to-door to talk to families about the Head Start programs and contacting agencies, churches, or other groups serving minorities to advertise.

This study also conducted interviews and focus groups at 30 Head Start sites that served linguistically and culturally diverse students, which presented interesting and significant insights. Although parents were contributing culturally to making the classroom more diverse, barriers such as transportation, childcare and staff not speaking their same language prevented them from participating more in classroom, after-school activities and meetings. Many programs used fliers and posters, translated into different languages, to communicate with parents. Some programs also recorded important announcements on a tape and sent home a small tape player to communicate with parents verbally. Many social services are provided for families of Head Start students, such as counseling or support groups and translation services, as well as information about local social services, and even transportation and accompaniment to these appointments in some cases. Head Start staff also connect families with local health services, and in some cases provide transportation and/or accompaniment to these appointments as well. However, it is oftentimes difficult for Head Start staff to coordinate with local low-cost health care providers, especially providers who speak languages other than English. There is too little health care information available in languages other than English at Head Start sites, and many health coordinators commented on the scarcity of such materials. Health coordinators also commented on the challenge of encouraging parents to have their children immunized and attending well-child visits, saying that many parents didn't believe in the importance of such preventative health care. For home visits, many Head Start employees were very interested to learn more about the culture of diverse families and took this unique opportunity to gain a greater understanding of cultures other than their own and enhance their relationship with the student and their family. However, some employees on home visits did not individualize their visits depending on the family and were less culturally aware. This study suggests that continuing cultural training for Head Start employees is an important key to success for Head Start programs.<sup>18</sup> Since the time this study was published, cultural and linguistic diversity in Head Start nationwide have continued to increase, making these issues even more pertinent today. (See "Data Presentation" section for a larger picture of Hispanic enrollment in Head Start currently.)

Overall, there are 3 factors that appeared most significant for providing a successful Head Start experience for Latino children with long-term positive effects: parent involvement and

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18 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation. "Celebrating Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Head Start," 2000.

communication, affirming the home language and culture of children and their families, and providing comprehensive health and nutrition services.

### *Increasing Importance of Early Childhood Education for Hispanic Children Today*

Recent research and scholarly literature also emphasize the importance of enrollment and success in early childhood education programs now because of growing expectations of educational standards and the job market that awaits students. As noted by Melissa Roderick, “Recent changes in the American educational system and economy have altered what we expect children to do to be successful in school and what level of education is required to enable access to economic progress. This in turn has dramatically changed what schools and families must do to ensure students’ success.”<sup>19</sup> Students are now entering school earlier and leaving later, and economic success later in life depends on a higher degree of formal education than ever before. Early childhood education, as discussed above, is the foundation this success is built on. Therefore, it is particularly concerning that today Latino children are among the least likely children in the nation to be enrolled in early childhood education programs.<sup>20</sup> This underrepresentation in early childhood education is compounded by the fact that Hispanic children are less likely to come from families that have the same educational resources available to them at a young age or be taught early literacy and numeric skills at home in preparation for school than their counterparts of other races and ethnicities.<sup>21</sup> Many scholars also attribute under enrollment in early childhood education programs to different cultural perspectives on raising and educating children<sup>22</sup>, which makes some Latino parents more likely to prefer home-based child care rather than enrollment in center-based programs such as Head Start. All of these factors together result in a “preparation gap,”<sup>23</sup> for Latino children nationwide before children even start kindergarten, which is a significant factor in the lower educational achievement of disadvantaged children nationwide.<sup>24</sup> Because of rising educational standards it is more important than ever before that this preparation gap be eliminated. To investigate this gap in Washington State, and how it could most effectively be eliminated, I chose to examine both enrollment of Hispanic children in Head Start in Washington, and the factors that lead to a successful experience for these children.

### **Discussion of Research Methods**

For this project I collected quantitative data through the U.S. Census Bureau, the Office of Head Start, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. These are all federal government organizations so they had very comprehensive and accurate data about the number of children of all race and ethnicities enrolled in Head Start, federal funding for Head Start, and other significant statistics as cited in previous sections. This gave me a broad picture of Hispanics in Head Start nationwide which helped give me place my findings for Washington

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<sup>19</sup> Melissa Roderick, “Hispanics and Education,” in *Hispanics in the United States*, ed. Pastora San Juan Cafferty and David W. Engstrom (New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 2006), 125.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Education, “The Condition of Education 2006,” Appendix 1. Available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006071>.

<sup>21</sup> Roderick 134 and 139

<sup>22</sup> Roderick 139.

<sup>23</sup> “Inequality at the Starting Gate: Social Background Differences in Achievement as Children Begin School”, Lee and Burkam, 2002.

<sup>24</sup> Roderick 131

State in a broader context. I also collected data from Washington State government organizations, such as the Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Care and Early Learning and the Washington State Office of Financial Management. Again, these state government organizations provided comprehensive data about early childhood education statewide, including Hispanic enrollment in such programs.

For my case study, I chose to focus on the Migrant Head Start program in College Place, Washington. Since the local Head Start programs had been examined in last years' "State of the State of Latinos" report (see Danielle Alvarado's "Making it Count: The Impact of Head Start on Latino Children," 2005), the Migrant Head Start program was an intriguing new angle on early childhood education within the Latino community in Washington state. The Migrant Head Start program also focuses on a different segment of the Latino community than the Head Start programs; it is created specifically for the migrant workers who come to Washington for seasonal, primarily agricultural, work. The Migrant Head Start program has different requirements for entry, as well as different hours and yearly schedule, than Head Start. It serves an almost completely Latino population. For these reasons, it seemed necessary to examine this program.

To have a comprehensive and effective case study, I chose to interview parents, teachers, social workers and staff members at the Migrant Head Start program in College Place, WA. Since Head Start is not only focused on educational, or cognitive development, but also on the emotional well-being and health of the child, and helping the parents become advocates for their children as they start school, I wanted to gain a greater firsthand understanding of how all these programs worked. First, I wanted to gain perspectives from parents who had been with the Migrant Head Start program for a long time, and families who had recently entered the program as well. My community partner, Yolanda Esquivel, recommended first that I interview Ana Robles, who has had four children in the Walla Walla Migrant Head Start program, from 1989 to present. I interviewed her Friday, October 13, 2006, at the Farm Labor Camp in College Place, WA at 4:30 PM. Cresencia Duran, Health Assistant, at the Head Start program, helped translate for me, and then I had a chance to talk with her directly after Ms. Robles's interview. Both of these interviews were not recorded; instead, I took notes during the interviews. On October 20, 2006, at 8:30 AM, I interviewed Dora Cruz, a Migrant Head Start social worker at the Farm Labor Camp. That same morning I also had the opportunity to interview teacher. Both of these interviews were conducted in English, recorded and later transcribed by me. I then interviewed and parent Irma Olmos, who had 2 kids, ages 4 and 2, currently enrolled at the Migrant Head Start program. Martha Ivovra, the Migrant Head Start receptionist, helped translate. This parent interview was not recorded, I took notes. I also conducted a phone interview with my community partner Yolanda Esquivel, the director of the Migrant Head Start program at College Place, on November 11, 2006 at 4:00 PM.

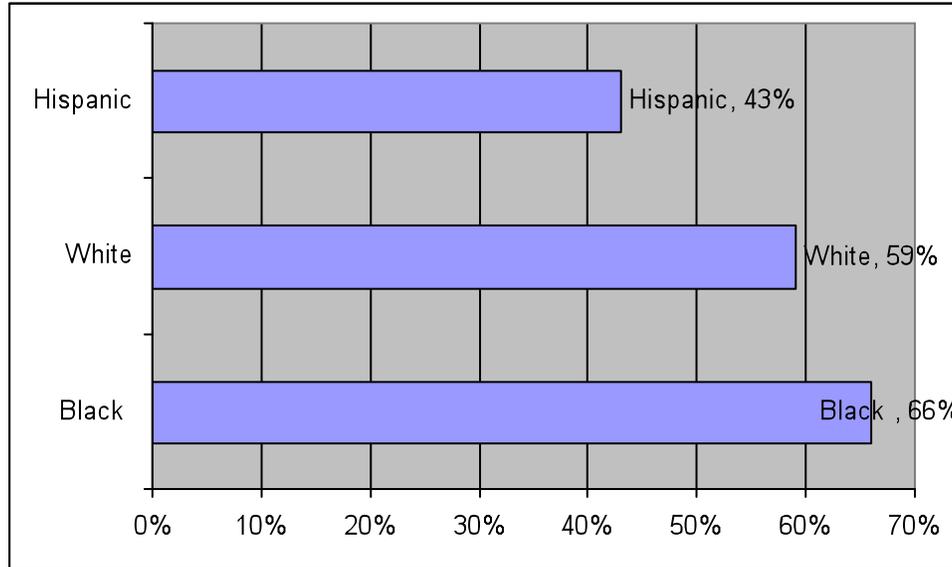
## **Data Representation**

### *A National Picture*

Hispanic children nationwide, especially those of low socioeconomic status, are among the least likely to be enrolled in early childhood education programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education, "The Condition of Education 2006," only 43% of Hispanic children 3-5 were

enrolled in early childhood care and education programs, compared to 66% of Black children and 59% of White children.<sup>25</sup>

**Percentage of Pre-kindergarten Children ages 3-5 Enrolled in Early Childhood Care and Education Programs, United States, 2005.**



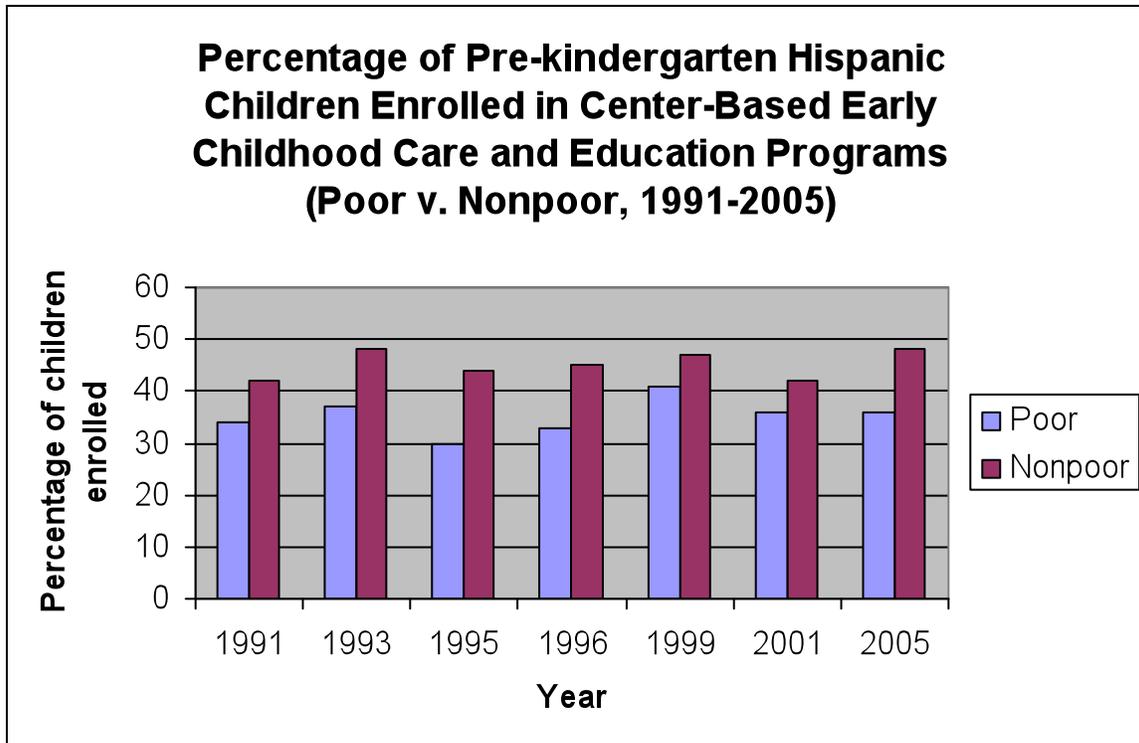
Source: U.S Department of Education, “The Condition of Education 2006,” Appendix 1.

This trend is undoubtedly persistent because of external factors contributing to lack of enrollment in early childhood education programs, such as poverty; in 2005, the national poverty rate was 12.6% for Americans overall, and 21.8% for Hispanics.<sup>26</sup> However, this trend of under enrollment in early childhood education programs proves to be a historical trend for both poor and nonpoor Hispanic children.

The fact that Hispanic children are so underrepresented in early childhood education programs is especially significant because they are also less likely to come from homes where parents teach them literacy, math and other skills necessary to succeed in school, as discussed above.

<sup>25</sup> U.S Department of Education, “The Condition of Education 2006,” Appendix 1. Available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006071>.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Historical Poverty Tables, “Table 2: Poverty Status of People by Family Relationship, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959-2005). Available online at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov2.html>



“Poor” is defined as families below federal poverty threshold, “Nonpoor” includes families at or above federal poverty threshold

U.S Department of Education, “The Condition of Education 2006,” Appendix 1

The above graph shows that Hispanic enrollment in early childhood education programs, by percentage, has not increased significantly since 1991, and not increased at all since 1993, for either poor or nonpoor Hispanic children. This enrollment has not increased even with the presence of programs such as Head Start which are specifically designed to serve disadvantaged children and eliminate the “preparation gap.” Some reports even say Hispanic children are underrepresented in Head Start nationwide as well.<sup>27</sup>

However, there is greater reason now than ever before to find new ways to increase Hispanic enrollment in early childhood education programs. Nationwide, the number of Hispanic students is increasing; Hispanics are currently the second-largest segment of the U.S. schools population, after Whites.<sup>28</sup> This demographic will continue to grow, and it is in the best interest of these children, and for society as a whole, to ensure that they have the greatest chance to succeed in school. Since early childhood education has proven to have great benefits on later educational achievement, and be a good investment for society, increasing Hispanic enrollment in early childhood education programs seems a solid educational priority for the nation. Head Start, as the nation’s primary provider of preschool programs for disadvantaged children, would also seem the logical place to start with such a goal. In a report on the Fiscal Year 2005 program statistics, the Office of Head Start reported that 32.9% of Head Start students nationwide were Hispanic,<sup>29</sup> for a total of 298,401 students. Since Head Start currently serves such a large

<sup>27</sup> National Council of La Raza, “State of Hispanic America 2004” 22.

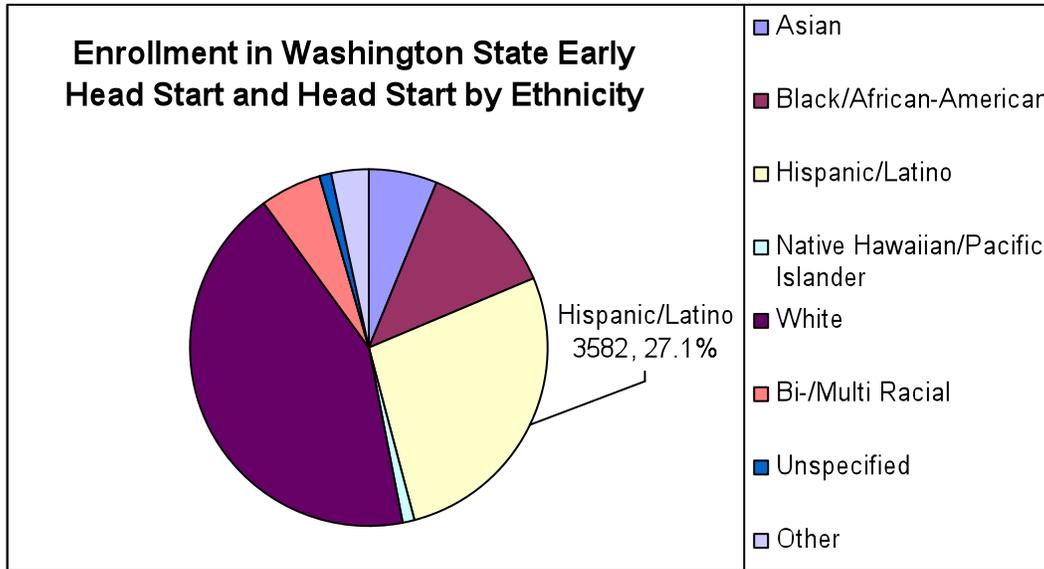
<sup>28</sup> National Council of La Raza, “State of Hispanic America 2004” 19

<sup>29</sup> Office Of Head Start, “Head Start Program Fact Sheet: Fiscal Year 2006.” Available online at <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/research/2006.htm>

percentage of Hispanic students information about how to provide these children with an effective and comprehensive preschool experience would also play a key role in ensuring the future success of American students.

*Washington State*

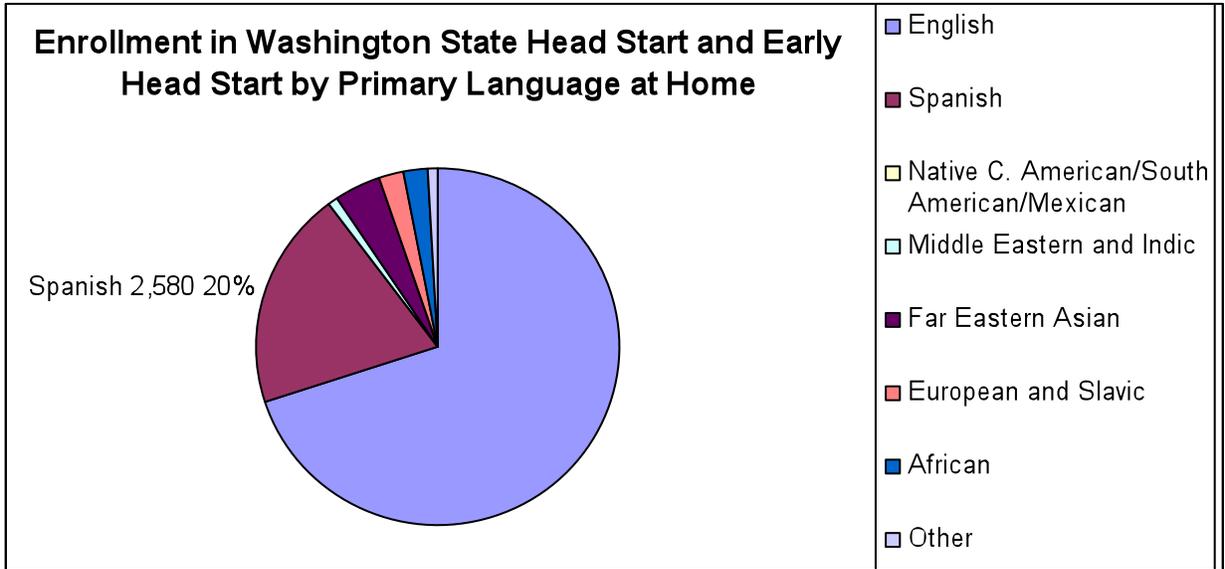
In fiscal year 2005, Washington State had a federal Head Start grant of \$100,094,355 and enrolled 11,102 children<sup>30</sup>. Enrollment in Head Start and Early Head Start in Washington State by ethnicity and language spoken at home can be seen on the charts below:



\*Does not include Migrant and American Indian/Alaskan Native Programs

Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Care and Early Learning, "Head Start, Early Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Programs in Washington State," 2003.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Head Start. "Head Start Program Fact Sheet: Fiscal Year 2006." Available online at <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/research/2006.htm>



\*Does not include Migrant and American Indian/Alaskan Native Programs

Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Child Care and Early Learning, "Head Start, Early Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Programs in Washington State," 2003.

In Washington State over 27% of Head Start and Early Head Start children are Hispanic, second only to Whites. Also, 20% of children enrolled in these programs speak Spanish as their primary language at home, second only to English. As discussed at the beginning of this paper, Hispanic children ages 0-4 are the fastest growing Hispanic demographic in Washington State, so these percentages are likely to grow over time. Since Hispanic children make up such a large percentage of Head Start students served in Washington, providing a comprehensive and effective preschool program for these children should not only be a priority nationwide, but in Washington specifically as well.

Recent research from the University of Washington Human Services Policy Center also shows that Hispanic children ages 0-5 in Washington State are more at risk than children in the same age range of other ethnicities. The University of Washington Human Service Policy Center evaluated Washington children ages 0-5 on various risk factors to access how at-risk they were. The risk factors they used that might indicate a disadvantaged child were<sup>31</sup>:

- Poverty
- Single or no parent
- No parent employed full time/full year
- All parents with disability
- Mother does not have high school degree
- No parent fluent in English

If a child has only one of these factors present in their life, they are most likely resilient enough to overcome it and succeed. However, if a child has two or more of these factors, especially at a young age, it significantly impedes their chances for success in school, for example, and can lead

<sup>31</sup> "Investing in Children: An Early Learning Strategy For Washington State," Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, November 2005.

to negative outcomes such as poverty, crime or incarceration later in life.<sup>32</sup> Below is a chart that shows the number of children ages 0-5 in Washington state, by race or ethnicity, that have two or more of these factors present in their lives:

**Children in WA State ages 0-5 with 2+ Risk Factors, by race/ethnicity**

	Total in group	Children with 2+ risk factors	Percentage of children with 2+ risk factors
All races/ethnicities	476,648	109,725	23%
White	323,993	52,954	16%
Hispanic	70,205	31,593	45%
Native American	7,303	3,592	49%
African-American	17,181	7,288	42%
Asian	25,325	5,102	20%
Other/multicultural	32,641	9,196	28%

University of Washington Human Services Policy Center

“Investing in Children: An Early Learning Strategy For Washington State,” Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, November 2005.

In 2005, 45% percent of Hispanic children ages 0-4 had more than 2 of these risk factors present in their lives, approximately double the state average and almost triple the average for Whites. Since Hispanic children in Washington State have been proved to be significantly more at-risk than other races or ethnicities it is especially important that they are enrolled in early childhood education programs to help counteract the negative forces in their lives, and that the programs they are enrolled in are effective at enacting positive change in their lives.

In a discussion of early childhood education in Washington State it is important to examine how Washington compares to other states in spending and enrollment to place the state in a national context and examine how the data from other states could guide Washington’s strategy on early childhood education. In the mid-1990s the Progressive Policy Institute developed the New Economy Index (NEI), which rates states on their potential to compete in the new global economy, measured by 21 different indicators based on jobs and the economy. Washington ranked second overall in the NEI in 2002, the last time it was published. To put early learning in Washington in a national context the state can be compared to the rest of the Global Challenge States, which are the top-ranked states in the NEI. The top 8 states, in ranked order, are Massachusetts, Washington, California, Colorado, Maryland, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Virginia. Minnesota and North Carolina were chosen for the comparisons below because they have economic characteristics similar to Washington’s but are further down in the NEI rankings. The first comparison among these states shows overall spending on preschool programs.

**Pre-K Spending (millions) (2005)**

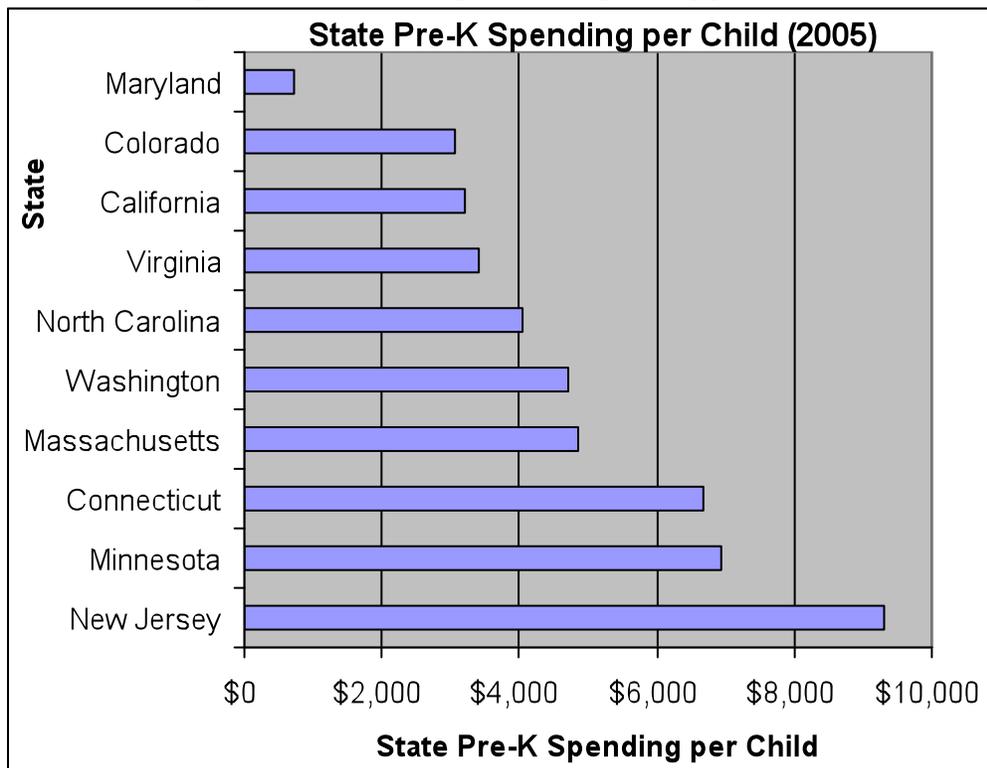
New Jersey	\$432.30
California	\$264.40

<sup>32</sup> “Investing in Children: An Early Learning Strategy For Washington State,” Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, November 2005.

Massachusetts	\$68.60
North Carolina	\$49.40
Connecticut	\$48.60
Virginia	\$35.30
<b>Washington</b>	<b>\$30.00</b>
Colorado	\$27.10
Minnesota	\$17.10
Maryland	\$16.90

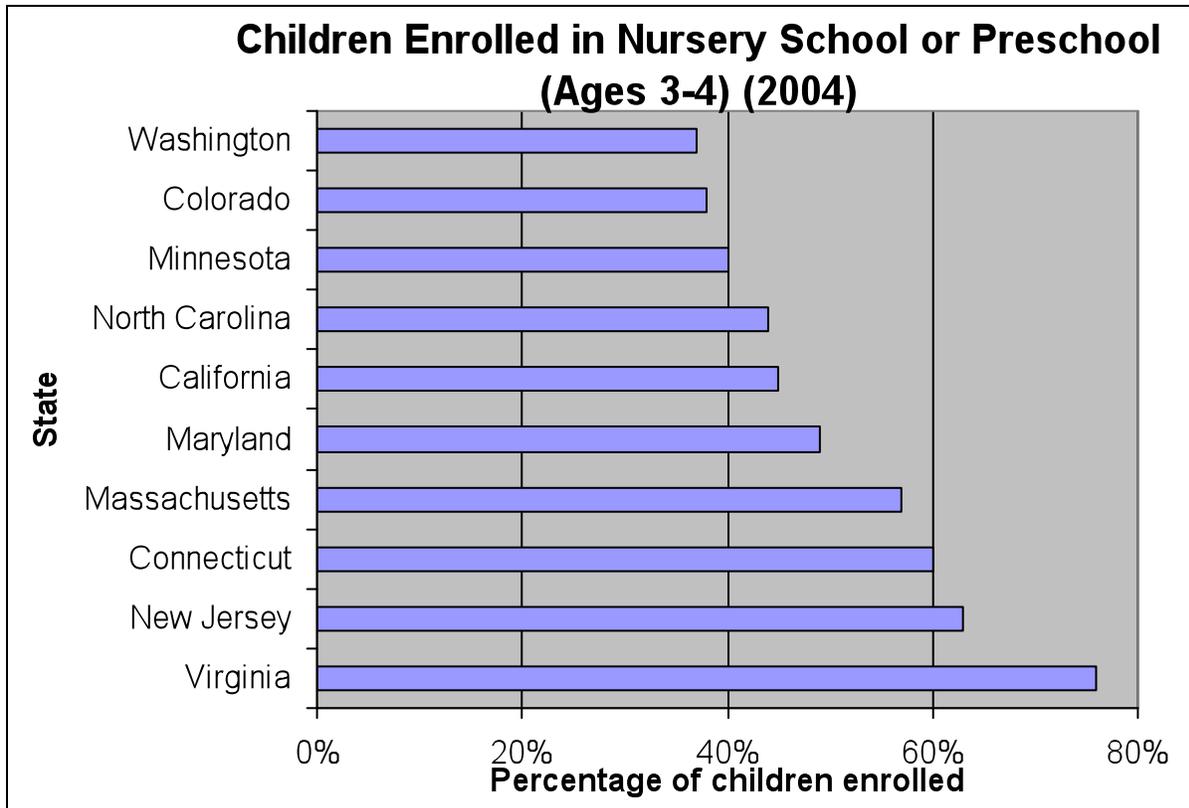
Washington Learns, "Global Challenges States." Available online at <http://www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov/report/GlobalChallengeStates.pdf>.

While not at the bottom of the list, Washington clearly has not invested in early childhood education as much as some of the other Global Challenge States. There is precedent among the top states in the nation for investing more in early childhood education, an example which Washington might look to in the future. However, since early childhood education needs vary by state depending on population demographics, perhaps an even better comparison between these Global Challenge States is the state preschool spending per child, shown below.



Washington Learns, "Global Challenges States." Available online at <http://www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov/report/GlobalChallengeStates.pdf>.

With state spending of \$4,710 per child, Washington is in the middle of the pack when compared to the Global Challenge States. However, with 3 of the Global Challenge States and Minnesota still investing more per child than Washington, there is again precedent to dedicate more funds to pre-K programs. When the percentage of children actually enrolled in early childhood education programs in each of the states is examined, however, it is clear that Washington is lagging behind.



Washington Learns, “Global Challenges States.” Available online at <http://www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov/report/GlobalChallengeStates.pdf>.

With only 37% of children ages 3-4 enrolled in nursery school and preschool, Washington ranks last out of the 10 states. Since early childhood education has proven to greatly help a child’s future educational attainment and career earnings, as well as to be a solid investment for society, Washington needs to increase the percentage of children enrolled in preschool programs if it wants to compete with the Global Challenge States in the future. Clearly the early childhood programs that children are enrolled in need to be quality programs as well, but funds allotted to early childhood education could subsequently be dedicated towards improving new programs as well as creating new ones. For further evidence that Washington needs more preschool programs, especially for disadvantaged children, statistics show that at present “Washington’s early learning programs (including Head Start and the state’s Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program) serve only half of eligible low-income children, leaving more than 14,000 children unserved each year.”<sup>33</sup> It is especially important that these children are enrolled in effective preschool programs to avoid the preparation gap and ensure their continued success throughout school and after.

Overall, data confirms the under enrollment of Hispanic children in early childhood education programs nationwide. Washington State specifically has a lower percentage of children ages 3-4 enrolled in preschool programs than the Global Challenge States and other comparable states. Latino children ages 0-4 are the fastest growing Latino demographic in

<sup>33</sup> League of Education Voters, based on state data and data from the Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP. Available online at: <http://www.educationvoters.org/>

Washington State, as documented in the introduction; as of 2002, over one fourth of children enrolled in Head Start in Washington were Hispanic, and one-fifth spoke Spanish as their home language. Therefore, I will be examining my case study in the context of this overall Latino under representation in early childhood education programs, as well as the growing urgency of providing quality preschool programs to Latino children in Washington State as an increasingly demographic.

## **Case Study**

For my case study, I chose to examine the Migrant Head Start program in College Place, Washington. Migrant Head Start has not been subject to nearly as much research and scholarly attention as Head Start, and represents a largely untapped resource on Latino early childhood education programs. Although Migrant Head Start and Head Start are both federally run programs with similar structures, such as curriculum, they are funded separately and have significant differences, such as daily hours (longer at Migrant Head Start to accommodate parent work schedules) and school year (approximately April-October for Migrant Head Start and September-June for Head Start). Also, the Migrant Head Start program in College Place serves an almost exclusively Latino student body (99%), which provides a unique opportunity to examine the specific methods the program uses to recruit families and provide the best experiences for these children. Since it is an entirely Latino program, however, it represents an anomaly among Head Start programs and does not have to address the issue of diversity within the classroom (i.e. incorporating many cultures and languages into the program to serve a variety of children.) I found that the Migrant Head Start program in College Place is highly regarded by parents and the local Latino community for its work with the enrolled children as well as the services it provides for families. Also, many links can be drawn from the work of this program to other Migrant Head Start and Head Start programs across the state.

At the end of each year the Migrant Head Start staff gives parents an anonymous survey, written in Spanish to make sure it is accessible to all parents, evaluating important aspects of the program. Such evaluation is important to make sure parents have a chance to formally and anonymously evaluate the program and give ideas for how the program could serve them better. The survey asked 14 questions covering all aspects of the program, some of which are detailed in the following sections. For each question, the parents could mark “Satisfactorio,” (Satisfactory), “Regular” or “Insatisfactorio” (Unsatisfactory). At the bottom of the survey, they were asked how the program could correct the problems if they weren’t happy with any items mentioned above, and also asked how the program could serve them better. Overall, the parents reported great satisfaction with all aspects of the program. Out of 62 total surveys returned, 51 parents marked “Satisfactorio” for every aspect of the program (all 14 questions.) Many parents commented below that “todo esta bien” (“everything is good”) or some variation on that phrase, saying that the program was satisfactory as it was currently being run. Only three parents offered comments on how the program could serve them better, which all related to either the food served or closer supervision of the children during their free play time.

At the Migrant Head Start program in College Place the staff uses the Creative Curriculum. As part of my case study, I examined the curriculum to see if it corroborated with the scholarly literature about how to best provide an early childhood education for linguistically and culturally diverse students, specifically Latinos in the case of this program, and if it furthered the Head Start goals for these students as well.

In my case study, I have focused on 4 specific aspects of the Migrant Head Start program in College Place, Washington: enrollment/recruitment, parent involvement and communication, cultural and linguistic diversity within the classroom, and health programs.

### *Enrollment/Recruitment*

For recruitment, the Migrant Head Start program advertises in the local media, including newspaper and radio, and posts fliers at shops frequented by migrant workers who might qualify for their services. The program has a good reputation in the local migrant and Latino community so when new families arrive to work in College Place and Walla Walla they hear about the program from family and friends and come enroll their children. This social networking seems to be an important tool for getting children enrolled in Head Start programs statewide, especially in minority communities, because parents are more likely to trust a recommendation that comes from their family or friends, and not just advertisements from the program itself. So, if programs gain a good reputation in their local community that is likely to be a good recruitment tool on its own. Programs can also encourage families currently enrolled in the program to tell any family and friends that they think might be eligible about the program, and promote this social networking as an ever more effective tool for enrollment.

This Migrant Head Start program is full every year, and has a waiting list for families waiting to enroll, indicating that more resources need to be dedicated to this program if all eligible children are going to have access to early childhood education, which is the goal of Head Start/Migrant Head Start. This site is actually planning to expand next year and will be able enroll more children.

### *Parent Communication and Involvement*

The Migrant Head Start program in College Place provides parent outreach and education to help parents become effective advocates for their children. The program provides educational and promotional materials in Spanish and English specifically designed to inform parents about the Head Start curriculum that they use and their children's experiences in the classroom. For example, they have, "a parent's guide to preschool," ("una guía para los padres a la educación preescolar") which helps to inform parents about what their children are learning in preschool, how children learn during the preschool years, and what they can do to help their children learn at home. This parent's guide also explains the importance of the social and emotional skills children gain by attending a preschool program and reviews the goals of the Creative Curriculum used by this Migrant Head Start site. It is available to parents in both Spanish and English. This is extremely important, especially for parents who are less familiar with the preschool system to start out with and then have this lack of knowledge compounded by a scarcity of materials about the program in Spanish. Knowing what's going on in the classroom and what the children are supposed to be learning and doing in preschool can help parents a lot in becoming effective advocates for their children. In addition, signs and messages for parents at the Migrant Head Start site are posted in both Spanish and English to facilitate communication and parent awareness and involvement with activities at the preschool.

The Migrant Head Start program also holds parent's meetings once a month, in Spanish so that they are accessible to all parents. At these meetings staff inform parents about recent and

upcoming events at the preschool, and parents and staff discuss any concerns or problems that have come up recently. Having this forum for ongoing communication, both between staff and parents as well among parents, is also extremely helpful to ensure the success of both the family and the child.

The Creative Curriculum that the Migrant Head Start program uses, echoing scholarly consensus, also emphasizes the importance of parent involvement and communication as instrumental in helping children succeed. They offer the following tips for facilitating parent communication and involvement<sup>34</sup>:

#### Beginning Parent Communication:

- Hold an open house for parents
- Get to know all parents
- Convey importance of parent involvement
- Ask parents for suggestions and try them
- Promote a sense of pride in their child

#### Ongoing Parent Communication:

- Send weekly messages home
- Develop and distribute a parent handbook
- Use journals
- Set up a parent's bulletin board

The Migrant Head Start program seemed to follow this curriculum and embody many of its goals. The staff at the program knows the parents well and conveys to them their importance in their child's success at the program. Parents volunteered in the classroom, which allowed them to voice any concerns or ideas they had about the program, and possibly implement these ideas. The program did distribute a parent handbook, discussed above, in both Spanish and English, and sent messages home with children in the family's home language.

These efforts to involve parents in their child's education and maintain close communication were well received and appreciated by the parents at the Migrant Head Start program. This can be seen in the responses to the following questions on the parent survey at the end of the school year:

- ¿Qué le parece el plan de estudios "creativo" que usamos? Se lo explicaron a usted?
  - What is your opinion of the Creative Curriculum that we use? Was it explained to you?
- ¿Cómo evaluaría usted la calidad de nuestras reuniones de Padres?
  - How would you evaluate the quality of our parent's meetings?
- ¿Cómo evaluaría usted la calidad y cantidad de visitas a su hogar?
  - How would you evaluate the quality and quantity of your home visits?

Every parent surveyed except one rated the curriculum as satisfactory and indicated that it had been explained to them. (The 1 parent who did not rate this satisfactory rated it "Regular" and did not give any indications on their survey about how this could be improved.) This

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<sup>34</sup> Diane Trister Dodge and Laura J. Colker. *The Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood: Third Edition*. Teaching Strategies, Inc., Washington D.C., 1992., 64.

awareness of the curriculum is extremely important in helping parents become advocates for their children because it indicates that they know what is happening in the classroom and are aware of the goals of their child's preschool program. This, in turn, helps facilitate ongoing parent communication and parent involvement in the classroom because a parent who is aware of the general classroom activities and goals is more likely to stay informed and be more involved in their child's education in whatever ways they can (volunteering in the classroom, working with them at home, etc.) The fact that parents approved of the curriculum also indicates that they felt it was working for their children in the classroom. Therefore, according to my case study, the Creative Curriculum appears to be a successful curriculum to use for Latino preschool children in Washington.

Home visits and parent meetings were also rated satisfactory almost unanimously. There were only a couple "Regular" rankings for each. The one comment that was offered on the parent meetings was that both parents had to work on the days that the meetings were scheduled, so they were not able to attend. This reiterates the importance of ongoing communication with parents to keep them updated on an individual basis when they are not able to attend meetings such as these.

### *Respecting and Accepting Cultural and Linguistic Diversity within the Head Start Classroom*

One of the "Socio-Emotional Development" goals of the Creative Curriculum is for the child to experience a sense of self-esteem. Two criteria under this goal are to "identify oneself as a member of a specific family and cultural group," and to "feel proud of one's heritage and background."<sup>35</sup> This is widely accepted as an important part of childhood development, and the program clearly carried this out by incorporating the children's home culture and language into the curriculum on a daily basis (activities, food, etc.), celebrating their culture with them on special holidays and hiring staff who could relate to the children linguistically and culturally. Most of the staff at this program were Hispanic and spoke fluent Spanish, so cultural and language training were less of an issue than at other Head Start programs with a more diverse student body. Both of the social workers at the Migrant Head Start program spoke the home language of most of the children (Spanish), and home visits were conducted in this language.

In helping children achieve the fourth basic need in Maslow's hierarchy, a sense of self-esteem, the Creative Curriculum says, "Teachers must value and respect cultural differences in order to promote self-esteem in children. By learning even a few words of a child's primary language or including songs or recipes from each child's family in the day's activities, teachers can convey the message that differences are valuable and interesting. By including dress-up clothes and cooking utensils from different cultures in your house corner [of the classroom] children learn that differences are valued," (20). This emphasis on respecting cultural and linguistic diversity was a major focus of a lot of the literary work in this area, and is widely acknowledged to be essential for students achievement in preschool programs, as previously mentioned. Migrant Head Start incorporated this in different ways, such as trying to have more ethnic food from the students' cultural backgrounds for the snacks and lunch provided each day. Some parents at this Migrant Head Start site had actually been requesting more ethnic foods be served during the time I was working with the site, and the program was working on

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<sup>35</sup> Diane Trister Dodge and Laura J. Colker. *The Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood: Third Edition*. Teaching Strategies, Inc., Washington D.C., 1992., 11.

incorporating this. Also, the menu was discussed at the monthly parent meeting I attended, where parents could find out what was being served and offer comments or opinions to the program.

In its plan for the classroom environment the Creative Curriculum emphasizes creating a sense of belonging where children can feel accepted and comfortable. To create such an atmosphere, the Curriculum suggests that, “pictures on the wall, in books, and in learning materials include people of different ethnic backgrounds and economic means and people with disabilities.”<sup>36</sup> The Migrant Head Start program had their site set up with diverse wall hangings and learning materials to create a welcoming atmosphere for all children, which is also widely acknowledged in academic literature to be important for a child’s success in early childhood education.

### *Health Programs*

This Migrant Head Start program provides the health and nutrition services that are an integral part of the Head Start program, as well as numerous parent outreach programs in these areas. Many of the health and nutrition service provided by this program were similar to those mentioned in the “Celebrating Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Head Start,” study discussed earlier. There was a nurse, provided by the Washington State Migrant Council, available for children enrolled in the program, and children are provided with health exams at the Migrant Head Start program. The program also connects families with local health services, such as the SOS clinic in Walla Walla. The families’ satisfaction with these services was shown on the responses to the following questions on the parent survey:

- ¿Cómo evaluaría usted la calidad de educación de Salud que se les da a usted y su hijo/a?
  - How would you evaluate the quality of the health education that is given to you and your child?
- ¿Cómo evaluaría usted la calidad de los exámenes de Salud que se les da a su hijo/a? Se les explicaron a usted?
  - How would you evaluate the quality of the health exams that are given your child? Were they explained to you?

Every parent surveyed except one also rated the quality of health education and health exams as satisfactory. (Again, one parent rated them both “Regular” and offered no indications on how either of these aspects of the program could be improved.) This indicates that the steps the program is currently taking for health education, including having health campaigns conducted in both English and Spanish and providing health information (fliers, etc.) in English and Spanish are utilized and well-received by parents, as are the health exams provided by the program. Since ensuring children enrolled in Head Start are healthy and receiving preventative medical care is a major goal of Head Start, strategies that this program is using in the area of health could be used as a model for other programs serving Latino students.

### **Interview Discussion**

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<sup>36</sup> Diane Trister Dodge and Laura J. Colker. *The Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood: Third Edition*. Teaching Strategies, Inc., Washington D.C., 1992., 17.

I used my interviews to further my case study about the Migrant Head Start program in College Place, Washington. Therefore, I interviewed various people at this program: 3 mothers of children enrolled in Head Start, a health assistant, a social worker, a teacher, and the Director of the program. I also attended one of the monthly parent meetings at the Migrant Head Start site.

### *Parent Involvement/Communication*

Ana Robles was the first mother I interviewed. (Please see Appendix C for the transcript of this interview.) She has had 4 children enrolled in this Migrant Head Start program, ranging from 1989 to present. Since she has been involved in this Migrant Head Start program for so long I wanted to get her perspective on how these programs prepare children for kindergarten and the services that Migrant Head Start provides for families, as well as if there have been any significant changes within the program while she has been a parent in it. She said there have been changes in the program during this time, specifically citing the fact that it is “más escuelita” currently, (“more a little school”), contrasting it to simply a childcare/daycare program. This reflects the shift of preschools in recent years from more of a daycare format to focusing more on cognitive/academic development and preparation for kindergarten, part of a nation-wide trend of higher educational expectations, as discussed earlier. Ms. Robles said that it was important for Latino children to attend early education programs such as Head Start because they learn a lot (“aprenden mucho”) and are preparing for kindergarten (“están preparando para kinder”). This reflects her belief that the Migrant Head Start program is having a significant positive impact on her children’s ability to succeed in kindergarten and providing them with the skills that they need. When asked what services this Migrant Head Start program provides to families, Ms. Robles’s first response was that the program cared for and educated the children during the day; without their children being enrolled in a program such as this, the parents would not be able to work. This answer echoes an observation by Yolanda Esquivel, the Director of the Migrant Head Start program in College Place, when she said that 60% of parents at the program are primarily concerned with the safety and well-being of their children, and the care that allows the parents to go to work all day without having to worry about their children, while the other 40% are more focused on educational-oriented goals, such as preparation for kindergarten. However, she added that they are seeing an increase of parents concerned with educational preparation, also reflecting the trend of higher educational standards. It is clear that parents in this program feel a great pressure to find quality care for their children so that they can provide for their families by working.

Regarding Migrant Head Start services to families, Ms. Robles commented on the comprehensive services that were offered. She said that the Migrant Head Start site makes home visits to parents and creates a Family Plan Agreement (FPA) with them to help them accomplish both their individual and family goals. Migrant Head Start social workers also help parents with providing food and clothing for their family, immigration/legal works status paperwork, and connects them to services in the community, such as health clinics and ESL classes. These resources provided by Migrant Head Start represent the importance of Head Start programs to families outside of just the educational or health arenas. While these services are not directly related to the cognitive, social or emotional development of the child they are still essential in setting up a child to succeed throughout their educational career. In keeping with the Head Start goals, they are training parents to be advocates for their children. In the interview it was clear

how essential these services were in providing a quality preschool experience for the migrant children at this site in College Place. In a larger state-wide context this interview can illustrate the importance of recognizing the specific and special needs of the community a Head Start program is serving and catering to those needs to the greatest extent possible. Within the Latino population in Washington there are a myriad of different needs depending on geographic location, socio-economic status, and other specific family circumstances. Therefore, it is essential to recognize and accommodate these differences to ensure the success of the children enrolled in the program. A good example of this flexibility came up later in the interview with Ms. Gomez, where she mentioned that it would be extremely helpful for the Head Start program to remain open into November. Currently, the program ends the third week in October, although a significant number of parents have jobs that would allow them to continue working into November. Left without the Migrant Head Start program to care for their children, parents are forced to find alternate short-term child care or quit their jobs early to stay home with their children. This is clearly a very specific circumstance relating to the migrant workers job schedule, but to the families at this Migrant Head Start it made a significant difference, as was confirmed by discussions with several parents and staff members.

Yolanda Esquivel, the Migrant Head Start director for the College Place site, said that parent involvement has increased throughout her time at the program. She said the program used to have parents come in and think that their child's education was only the responsibility of the program, and there was no real involvement or interaction with the parents. She noted that it has been a struggle to change this because the culture in Mexico is that teachers are looked upon "almost like saints, very respected"; parents tell their children to listen to the teacher, and respect and obey the teacher, but do not really interact with the teacher and the school. This culture inhibits these parents from participating in their child's education to the fullest extent possible and becoming effective advocates for their child throughout their academic careers because, in many cases, it is not a part of the culture they grew up in and still relate closely to. This is especially true among the migrant workers, many of whom live in the United States only part of the year and still maintain strong ties to family and home in Mexico or other places in Latin America. However, through parent outreach and education efforts parents have become much more involved in the Migrant Head Start program in College Place. In addition to the parent communication and outreach programs outlined in the Case Study section above, Mrs. Esquivel mentioned that the program also has people from the community come and talk to the parents about the opportunities available to their children if they succeed in their education, including colleges. As evidence of increased parent involvement, Mrs. Esquivel mentioned that parent-teacher conferences numbers have gone up; currently approximately 75% of families will go to parent-teacher conferences, where the program aims to set goals with the parents for their children. This shows first-hand evidence of how parent outreach programs can be effective in involving parents in their child's education and helping them become advocates for their children.

### *Health and Nutrition Services*

Cresencia Duran, a health assistant at the Migrant Head Start program in College Place, provided insights into the comprehensive nature of the health program at that site. The program has a nurse, provided by the Washington State Migrant Council, available to enrolled children. They also provide health exams at the site, which include vision and hearing tests as well as

records of children's heights and weights. For additional care families are provided with information about health services in the local community, such as the SOS clinic in Walla Walla. To further promote children's health within the Migrant Head Start program, the site employs a cook and nutritionist to ensure that snacks and meals served at the program are healthy and well-balanced. Breakfast, snack and lunch are provided each day during the program. If a child has a special health concern the program will cater to them, providing food for their specific needs. For example, Ms. Robles said that her daughter was underweight so the program provided Peditasure to help her gain weight. At the parents meeting every month staff and parents discuss any health or nutrition issues that have come up, as well as introduce health issues and new health campaigns. For example, at the parents meeting that I attended the health program was working with the children to brush their teeth every day, and they provided toothbrushes and toothpaste to families at the meeting. The menu for the next month is also discussed at the parents meeting so parents know what their children are eating while they are at the program and can voice their input about the menu, as discussed earlier.

### *Enrollment and Recruitment*

My interviews revealed further details about the recruitment processes of the program as well as a larger perspective on enrollment in Migrant Head Start programs statewide. Dora Cruz, a social worker at the Migrant Head Start program in College Place, said their site advertised on local radio stations and in the local media. Yolanda Esquivel, the site director, said that they also had an article and advertisements in the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin. She mentioned that fliers advertising the program are put at local stores frequented by migrants, such as Albertsons, Andy's and Super 1, as well as at local health clinics. Advertisements were published in Spanish and English to reach as many families as possible and make the program accessible to as many children as possible. Mrs. Esquivel also mentioned that when families enroll in the program they ask them if they have other family or friends who might be interested in the program as well, encouraging social networking in this way. However, the program does not contact these referrals; they let the enrolled families tell others if they chose.

In recent years, Mrs. Esquivel said, the program has not had to do a lot of active recruitment because they have filled up every year and had a waiting list to enroll in the program. Since this is the case, she said, they feel bad recruiting for a service they know they won't be able to offer to every interested and eligible family. However, not all Migrant Head Start programs in Washington State are in this same situation. Mrs. Esquivel explained that each area is different and some programs have trouble reaching full enrollment. When the Migrant Head Start program in College Place had this problem in the past they would go door-to-door and advertise the program, set up tables outside of stores frequented by migrant workers who might be eligible for their program, and contact the owners of the farms where many of the migrant workers were employed and tell them about the program and ask the owners to spread the word among their employees. These same techniques are used by other Migrant Head Start programs around the state that face enrollment shortages.

Because the program in College Place has maintained full enrollment and waiting lists in recent years, Mrs. Esquivel said, they received funding to expand and have 50 more children for next year. The College Place program also benefits from its location at the Farm Labor Camp, and Mrs. Esquivel estimated that approximately half of the children in the program live at the Farm Labor Camp. My other interviews confirmed this, as two of the parents I interviewed lived

at the Farm Labor Camp. This example emphasizes the importance of providing Head Start and Migrant Head Start sites that are located close to the community they serve, and how this factor increases enrollment numbers significantly.

### **Conclusion:**

Research has shown that early childhood education will contribute to greater educational attainment and life outcomes for disadvantaged children. In addition, investing in early childhood education for these children is a good investment for society and has significant returns due to saved costs later in the child's life. Both these facts have been proven by comprehensive and well-respected investigations, such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, the Chicago Parent-Child Centers study, and the Carolina Abecedarian Project. Therefore, the question becomes how to use this investment to create the most effective preschool programs which will have lasting positive impacts on the lives of the enrolled children.

The comprehensive approach to early childhood education used by Head Start focuses not only on academic achievement, but on health and parental involvement as well, which will allow the effects of the program to positively impact the lives of the students throughout their educational careers. Programs which accept and support the home language and culture of a child through classroom atmosphere, learning materials and supportive staff, as well as promote parental involvement in their child's education, prove to be the most successful for Latino children. The growing number of Hispanic 0-4 year olds in Washington State as well as the evidence that these Hispanic infants and toddlers are among the most disadvantaged in the state combine to form a compelling argument for a sincere effort to increase Hispanic enrollment in early childhood education programs such as Head Start by continuing with diverse recruitment methods and educating Hispanic parents about the benefits to their child and their family of programs such as Head Start.

The Washington Learns Steering Committee, chaired by Governor Chris Gregoire, released its final report, "Washington Learns: World-Class, Learner-Focused, Seamless Education," in November 2006. This report acknowledges the importance of early childhood education, including it as one of the report's "Five Initiatives for a World-Class Education System." Many of the Steering Committee's actions on early childhood education that have already been put into effect, such as creating a Department on Early Learning and the public-private Thrive by Five Washington partnership, have been significant steps to improve early childhood education in Washington state. The final report proposes to create a voluntary 5-star rating system for early childhood education and child care centers to give parents more information about the quality of their preschool options. The Steering Committee also plans to create a "kindergarten readiness assessment"<sup>37</sup> to ensure that preschool programs are effective and to enable kindergartens to tailor programs to children's individual needs. These steps could both be potentially very beneficial for early childhood education opportunities for Latino children in Washington State. Recommendations on these aspects of the Washington Learns final report are included with my final recommendations below.

### **Recommendations:**

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<sup>37</sup> Washington Learns Steering Committee, "Washington Learns: World-Class, Learner-Focused, Seamless Education," November 2006, 22. Available online at: <http://www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov/FinalReport.pdf>

- Make the “Head Start, Early Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Programs in Washington State: State Profile,” an annual report. The 2001-2002 profile was an invaluable resource on early childhood education in Washington State, and while it was intended to be an annual report, there has not been a follow-up since the original report that has been published and made readily available to the public as the original was. With the creation of the new Department of Early Learning, the importance of having a comprehensive and unified early learning strategy for Washington State has been acknowledged, and having an annual review and evaluation of this strategy is an essential part of this process.
- Commission a long-term, comprehensive study of Head Start children in Washington State, following them until at least age 21, to see the impact the program truly has on their lives. As part of this study, examine how effective the Head Start programs are in serving linguistically and culturally diverse children, including Latinos. It is only with long-term studies such as these that the true effectiveness of Head Start can be gauged and improvements for the future created.
- Provide staff with appropriate cultural and linguistic training to ensure that children’s home culture and language are accepted and respected in the classroom. These elements of a preschool program were confirmed as being essential to the success of Latino students in both in the scholarly literature and studies I researched and in my own case study of the Migrant Head Start program in College Place, Washington.
- Provide parent outreach and education programs designed to involve the parent in their child’s education to the greatest extent possible and facilitate ongoing communication with the parent. These programs should be available in the home language of the family whenever possible and culturally appropriate. Helping a parent to become an advocate for their child and their education is one of the most lasting and effective impacts a Head Start program can have and has been documented to be crucial to the success of Latino students in preschool programs.
- Acknowledge specific needs within different segments of the Latino population in Washington State and cater to the community served by each program to the greatest extent possible. Based on geographic location, socio-economic factors, and other differences in family situations, there are significant differences in the needs of the Latino preschool children in Washington State and their families. While research can provide a foundation on which to begin building a successful program for these families, flexibility, creativity and adaptability are key components of an effective program designed to serve its specific community.
- The creation of the rating system for early childhood education programs should provide information about a program’s resources for culturally and linguistic diverse students and be rewarded in the rating system for providing high quality experiences for culturally and linguistically diverse students, including Latinos. In this way Latino parents will have enough information to choose the program that can best serve their family and ensure a successful experience for their child, since they know their child’s needs best.

- The “Washington Learns: World-Class, Learner-Focused, Seamless Education,” report states that the proposed kindergarten assessment tool will “acknowledge all aspects of development, including cultural differences among children,” and that “our ability to tailor kindergarten to the developmental and cultural needs of individual children will be improved,” due to this assessment.<sup>38</sup> While these are both seemingly effective strategies for assuring the most successful early childhood education experience for Latino children, these concepts of “cultural differences” and “cultural needs” need to be defined more specifically in this context, and clear steps outlined for how these goals are going to be carried out during the creation of this assessment. If these concepts remain as vague rhetoric these ideals could be easily forgotten in the creation of the assessment, which would not aid the desired improvements.

A quality rating system including aspects of a program such as cultural and linguistic diversity would allow parents to have more information about the programs available and choose a program that is right for their family. Once children are enrolled, providing a comprehensive, culturally and linguistically appropriate program will allow them to gain the maximum advantage possible from these programs and carry those positive advantages throughout life. If parents are enabled to be effective advocates for their children at this young age the long-term benefits will remain with the family, and the child, throughout their educational career. If Washington State, both public and private sectors, challenge themselves to achieve the fifth Principle of Change outlined in the final Washington Learns report of committing the “necessary human and financial resources”<sup>39</sup> to help all the state’s students succeed, early childhood education can further its potential to enact positive change in the lives of Latino youth.

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<sup>38</sup> Washington Learns Steering Committee, “Washington Learns: World-Class, Learner-Focused, Seamless Education,” November 2006, 22. Available online at: <http://www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov/FinalReport.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Washington Learns Steering Committee, “Washington Learns: World-Class, Learner-Focused, Seamless Education,” November 2006, 8.