

The most important educational environment is the one that surrounds children in their earliest years. Not surprisingly, young children who experience homelessness also suffer negative impacts to their learning and development.



*“The road to college attainment, higher wages, and social mobility in the United States starts at birth,” notes James Heckman, a Nobel-winning economist at the University of Chicago. “The greatest barrier to college education is not high tuitions or the risk of student debt; it’s in the skills children have when they first enter kindergarten.”*

In 2016–17, 256 homeless children enrolled in Bellevue School District’s K–12 classrooms. Families who experience homelessness need access to safe, nurturing, early learning programs for their children. Not only does this benefit the child, it gives the parents the ability to seek employment and housing during school hours.

Bellevue School District loss of Head Start funding in 2016 has severely impacted Bellevue’s ability to serve low-income and homeless preschool-age children in our community. The District’s Early Learning Program secured additional state-funded, half-day preschool slots to help replace the Head Start loss. While homeless children have the highest priority for these state-funded preschool slots, typically they miss out because (1) half-day slots do not adequately meet their needs, and (2) state-funded slots are typically not available after the end of September. Unfortunately, children experience the trauma of homelessness at any time of the year.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

This project provides extended full-day preschool for 10–15 homeless 3- and 4-year-olds in Bellevue. In addition to high-quality early learning, they receive services such as nutrition, medical and dental screening, and family support services through the District’s Early Learning Program. Extensive research informs us that high-quality early learning positively impacts low-income children in the long-term. In addition to helping them get ready for school, high-quality early learning is linked to higher high school graduation rates, higher career earnings, and better health (e.g., Heckman, 2016).

*Budget:* \$75,000

*Timeline:* September 2017—July 2018

## MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

The CLASS assessment tool, Teaching Strategies GOLD (which forms the foundation for the entering Kindergarten student assessment, WaKIDS) and the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale will be used to assess children’s progress. This data will be utilized to evaluate program effectiveness, to inform instruction and for continuous program quality efforts.



# EARLY LEARNING ACCESS FOR HOMELESS PRESCHOOLERS 2017-18