

Delaware

Background

Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP)

The Early Childhood Assistance Program (ECAP) offers half-day pre-K to four-year-olds who meet the income or other eligibility requirements for Head Start (see Appendix C).¹ Ten percent of enrollment slots are offered to children with disabilities.²

The Delaware Department of Education (DDE) administers ECAP as a competitive grant program.³ For-profit child care centers, Head Start agencies, public schools and private and faith-based centers are eligible to offer the program. Charter schools can only offer ECAP through an affiliated pre-K program.⁴

Charter schools in Delaware

Delaware permits start-up and conversion charter schools. Local school boards and the state board of education serve as charter authorizers in Delaware, but all charter schools must be approved by both the state secretary of education and the state board of education. Those seeking to convert a public school to a charter school must also go through the district's local school board.⁵

Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

ECAP providers receive funding through the Delaware Department of Education. In general, the DDE issues an RFP only when there is an increase in ECAP funding to support the creation of new ECAP slots or when providers relinquish or lose their slots. Programs must complete an application that demonstrates they can meet the program's requirements, which are the same as the federal Head Start program standards.⁶ Once programs receive funds, they continue to do so unless they relinquish their slots or fail to meet performance standards.

There have been few ECAP competitions in recent years. In 2013, a provider relinquished its ECAP slots, opening funding for seventeen slots to new and existing providers.⁷



TOTAL SCORE

6/50


Delaware's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **not hospitable**

- There are state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- + Compared to K–12 funding levels, pre-K program funding is sufficient to attract charters.
- The size of the pre-K program limits charter access to funding.
- The funding, application, or approval process creates a barrier to charter access.
- Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is prohibited in legislation or practice.




Barriers


Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

 **Yes.** Delaware’s charter school legislation defines a charter school as “a public school including 2 or more of grade kindergarten through 12 managed by a board of directors.”⁸ The state interprets this language to mean that a charter school cannot offer pre-K as part of its grade span in its charter agreement, even though the ECAP legislation says that public schools are eligible grantees. Charter schools interested in offering pre-K may only do so through an affiliated program.


Is the per-pupil funding of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **No.** Pre-K program funding is sufficient to attract charters. Providers that offer half-day ECAP services receive almost 69 percent of the per-pupil funding amount that charters receive to serve full-day K–12 students.


Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **Yes.** The small size of the pre-K program limits charter access. Delaware funds very few ECAP slots; the program currently serves just about 7 percent of four-year-olds in the state.

Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

 **Yes.** The approval process is a barrier to charter access to state pre-K funding. The state has limited ECAP funding to existing providers for the past several years. The limited ECAP slots available are currently tied up by existing providers, effectively shutting out new providers, including charter schools.

Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

 **Yes.** Children that attend a pre-K program affiliated with a charter school are not granted enrollment priority in the state’s charter school legislation; they must enter the school’s enrollment lottery as any other student.

Recommendations

To address these barriers to charter access, the state should:

- Revise the Delaware charter law to allow charter schools to serve preschoolers.
- Release guidance clarifying that, as public schools, charter schools themselves, not just affiliated organizations, can apply for ECAP.
- Regularly re-compete ECAP slots. To provide reasonable stability for families and providers, the state should award ECAP grants for a set number of years, with staggered terms so that a certain percentage of grants expire every year. At the end of the grant period, new and existing providers should compete on an equitable basis, based on student need, program quality, and track record of improving student outcomes.



	Early Childhood Assistance Program	Charter schools in Delaware
Year created	Launched in 1994 ⁹	Charter law enacted in 1995 ¹⁰
Children in state	23,094 three- and four-year-olds in Delaware ¹¹	172,158 school-age children in Delaware ¹²
Children served	843 children served 0 percent of three-year-olds 7 percent of four-year-olds ¹³	10,370 students served 6 percent of school-age population Twenty-one charter schools ¹⁴
Charters offering pre-K	One charter school in Delaware offers pre-K through an affiliated organization. ¹⁵	Fifteen charter schools in Delaware offer elementary programs. ¹⁶
Funding	Providers receive \$7,100 per pupil to offer ECAP. ¹⁷	Charter schools receive \$10,327 per pupil to serve K–12 students. ¹⁸

Endnotes

1 Children from families with household incomes at or below 100 percent of federal Head Start income guidelines are automatically eligible to participate. Children from families with household incomes between 100 and 135 percent of the Head Start guidelines may make up to 35 percent of open slots, provided the slots are first offered to automatically eligible children.

2 Delaware Early Childhood Center, <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/558>.

3 Overview of Outcomes p4, <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib09/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/146/ECAP06%2007%20State%20Report.pdf>.

4 An affiliated pre-K program is one that a charter school operates through a separate, but affiliated, entity or organization.

5 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Delaware,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/DE/>.

6 Delaware essentially adopted the federal Head Start program requirements for pre-K programs rather than creating its own.

7 Delaware Department of Education, “Request for Proposals for Professional Services to Provide Early Childhood Assistance Program for 17 Four-Year-Old Children,” March 2011, http://bidcondocs.delaware.gov/DOE/DOE_1319ECAP17_RFP.pdf.

8 Delaware Code Online, 14 Del.C. § 503, “Charter Schools,” <http://delcode.delaware.gov/title14/c005/index.shtml>.

9 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

10 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Delaware.”

11 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” www.census.gov/acs.

12 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.

13 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

14 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Delaware.”

15 Eastside Charter School, www.eastsidecharterschool.org/.

16 Delaware Department of Education, <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/Page/976>.

17 Interview with Delaware Department of Education representative, January 14, 2015.

18 Larry Maloney et al., “Charter School Funding: Inequality Expands,” Delaware section (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform, School Choice Demonstration Project, April 2014), <http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/charter-funding-inequality-expands-de.pdf>.