

Media Advisory – Dec. 16, 2009

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Reardon says state should protect ECEAP funding

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon highlighted the importance of giving Wednesday as well as the importance of the state's Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP) during a visit to Hawthorne Elementary School's ECEAP classroom, one of 21 operated by Snohomish County.

Reardon read stories to the class of three and four year olds while also talking to the children about the need to share with others, especially during the holiday season. Reardon read "The Gingerbread Boy" by Paul Galdone before being asked to read "The Doorbell Rang" by Pat Hutchins -- a classroom favorite. Reardon also brought gingerbread cookies to share with the children.

"The earlier we prepare children and families for school, the more successful they will be, benefiting themselves and their community," Reardon said. "These are our future workers, leaders and decision-makers. We must be sure they're prepared."

ECEAP is a free, comprehensive, family focused school-readiness program preparing three- and four-year-old children for school, while teaching parents the tools they need to raise healthier children.

The program also connects families to additional services, improving their quality of life. Many ECEAP classrooms in the Snohomish County program are multicultural and multilingual. At least four different languages were represented during the morning ECEAP class at Hawthorne on Wednesday.

But with deep state cuts on the horizon, the ECEAP program is under threat of losing funding and thus potentially having to eliminate three-year-old children from the program. More than 1,100 children and their families participated in ECEAP in Snohomish County during 2009. Funding primarily is passed through to the county from state and federal sources.

"I talked with the children Wednesday about the importance of giving to others," Reardon said. "We need to make sure that the state continues to give enough funding to this incredibly successful program, and we should encourage state officials to increase that funding."

Most programs throughout the state have extensive waiting lists and could use additional funding to admit more children.