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**Early Learning & Children's Services  
Committee**

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**HB 2431**

**Brief Description:** Establishing within basic education a program of early learning for at-risk children.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Haler, Chase, Goodman and Santos.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Declares legislative intent to create a program of early learning for at-risk children to be included in the program of basic education and tasks a working group to develop the program parameters.

**Hearing Date:** 1/19/10

**Staff:** Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

**Background:**

Department of Early Learning.

Created by the Legislature in 2006, the Department of Early Learning (DEL) is charged with implementing state early learning policy and coordinating, consolidating, and integrating child care and early learning programs. One of the purposes underlying the creation of the DEL is to promote linkages and alignment between early learning programs and elementary schools. The DEL has approached a number of its initiatives over the past three years with the ultimate goal of improving school readiness for Washington's children. The Director of the DEL serves on the Quality Education Council.

Quality Education Council.

The Quality Education Council (QEC) was created by the Legislature in 2009 to serve as the education reform implementation and oversight body. The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) serves as chair of the QEC. In its January 2010 report to the Governor and the Legislature,

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the QEC included 13 recommendations, including a recommendation for the inclusion of an early learning program for at-risk 3 and 4-year-olds within the definition of basic education.

#### Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the current state-funded voluntary preschool program serving children ages 3 and 4 from low-income households. The program is similar to the federal Head Start program of preschool in terms of the populations served and the types of services delivered to children and their families, but the programs have different standards and levels of service required. In 2008 the Legislature directed the DEL to develop a proposal for implementing a statewide Washington Head Start program that would maintain quality standards and align the ECEAP program with Head Start performance standards, eligibility criteria, and methods and processes for ensuring continuous improvement in program quality. The DEL published its progress on this task in its December 2008 report to the Governor and the Legislature, but because funding for completion of the task was withdrawn for budget reasons, further work was suspended.

#### Program of Basic Education.

The 1977 Basic Education Act defines the program of basic education as:

- the goal of the school system, which includes providing students the opportunity to develop essential knowledge and skills in various subjects;
- the instructional program to be made available by school districts; and
- the determination and distribution of state funding to support the instructional program.

#### Previous Legislation.

In 2009 the Legislature enacted Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2261 (ESHB 2261), which, among other reforms, declared the intent to develop a program of early learning within basic education; directed the SPI and the DEL to convene a working group to develop the basic education program of early learning; and required status reports and a final report be delivered to the QEC. This section of ESHB 2261 was vetoed by the Governor. The Governor's veto message included her commitment to "providing quality early learning programs for all" Washington's children, and requested the SPI and the Director of the DEL "to work together to bring a proposal forward that ensures all Washington children have the benefit of early childhood education." By letter, the Governor also requested Thrive by Five Washington be included in development of the proposal and that a final report be delivered by December 1, 2009.

The Early Learning Advisory Council incorporated the proposal requested by the Governor in her veto message into the draft Early Learning Plan (ELP) presented to the Legislature on December 2, 2009. Among the near-term implementation recommendations in the current draft ELP is a recommendation to increase investments in, and phase in the implementation of, enhanced early learning opportunities for children ages birth through grade three. The opportunities should be available to all who wish to access them, and they should work to close the preparation and achievement gap children are experiencing.

#### **Summary of Bill:**

The Legislature finds that disadvantaged young children need supplemental instruction in preschool to assure they have the opportunity to meaningfully participate and reach the necessary levels of achievement in the regular program of basic education. The Legislature intends to

establish a program of early learning for at-risk children and intends to include it within the overall program of basic education.

The DEL and the SPI must convene a technical working group to develop the basic education program of early learning. The working group must include representatives from the ECEAP, school districts, Thrive by Five Washington, and other stakeholders with expertise in early learning.

The working group must continue developing a proposal for a statewide Washington Head Start Program and:

- recommend eligibility criteria focusing on children ages 3 and 4 considered most at-risk;
- develop options for a mixed service delivery system;
- develop options for shared governance including the DEL and the SPI;
- recommend parameters and minimum program standards; and
- continue development of a statewide kindergarten assessment process.

The working group must submit progress reports to the QEC by September 1, 2010, and September 1, 2011, with a final report due by September 1, 2012.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.