

# FINAL BILL REPORT

## ESHB 2519

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### C 160 L 14

Synopsis as Enacted

**Brief Description:** Concerning early education for children involved in the child welfare system.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Early Learning & Human Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Senn, Walsh, Kagi, Hunter, Roberts, Tharinger, Haigh, Goodman and Freeman).

**House Committee on Early Learning & Human Services**  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education**  
**Senate Committee on Ways & Means**

#### **Background:**

##### Family Assessment Response.

In 2012 the Children's Administration (CA) was directed to implement a differential response system, called the Family Assessment Response (FAR). A differential response system differs from a child protective services investigation. Investigations are often forensic in nature and involve conducting a series of interviews that have a specific objective, which is to identify child maltreatment or risk of child maltreatment. A differential response system, however, emphasizes family engagement, family assessment, and the well-being of the family unit. Additionally, parents receiving supportive services through a differential response system are not considered perpetrators of abuse or neglect and do not receive a disposition or legal finding. Under the FAR, families may receive an array of supportive services depending on the needs of the family. If required for child safety, some families may have access to child care services.

In September 2012 the federal government approved the CA's Title IV-E waiver application. Although the Title IV-E waiver does not provide access to new funding sources, the waiver does allow the CA to utilize federal dollars for services that were traditionally prohibited by certain provisions of Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. The Title IV-E waiver requires the CA to conduct and study a demonstration project. The demonstration project for Washington's Title IV-E waiver is the FAR.

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The CA implemented the FAR in three offices: Aberdeen, Lynnwood, and Spokane (two zip codes: 99201 and 99207) in January 2014. The CA will implement the FAR in five additional offices in July of 2014. Pending funding, the target for statewide implementation is July 2016.

#### Early Achievers and Early Care and Education.

In 2007 the quality rating and improvement system for the early care and education system in Washington, called the Early Achievers program, was created. The Early Achievers Program establishes a common set of expectations and standards that define, measure, and improve the quality of early learning and care settings. There are five levels in the Early Achievers Program. All licensed or certified child care programs enter the program at level one. Participants advance to level two when they officially enroll in the Early Achievers program. At level two, participants are also required to complete several activities such as a self-assessment and trainings. At levels three, four, and five, Early Achievers participants are evaluated and assigned a rating.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the Washington State Preschool Program. The ECEAP serves families at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level. Although the ECEAP prioritizes children who are four years old, by August 31, children who are three years old are also eligible for the program. In addition to preschool programming, the ECEAP also provides family support and health services. The stated goal of the ECEAP is to help ensure children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The Working Connections Child Care Program (WCCC) offers subsidies to child care providers serving families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The state pays part of the cost of child care. The parents or caregivers are responsible for making a copayment to the child care provider. Both child care centers and family home providers are able to receive working connections child care subsidy payments. Children of families receiving WCCC benefits are required to be less than 13 years of age or less than 19 years of age and have a verified special need or be under court supervision. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) sets child care subsidy policy and provides WCCC oversight for child care licensing. The Department of Social Health Services helps families apply for the WCCC, determines eligibility and parent or caregiver copayments, authorizes child care, and issues payment to providers.

#### **Summary:**

A FAR worker is required to assess for child safety and child well-being when collaborating with a family to determine the need for child care, preschool, or home visiting services. Additionally, the FAR worker must refer children to preschool programs that are enrolled in the Early Achievers Program and rate at a level three, four, or five unless there are no local preschool programs that rate at a three, four, or five in the Early Achievers Program; the local preschool program that rates at a level three, four, or five in the Early Achievers Program is not able to meet the needs of the child; or the child is attending a preschool program prior to participating in the FAR and the parent or caregiver does not want the child to change preschool programs. The FAR worker may also make child care referrals for non-school aged children to licensed child care programs that rate at a level three, four, or five in the early achievers program.

Family assessment response workers are required to provide referrals to high-quality child care and early learning programs and state and federally subsidized programs as appropriate. Prior to closing the FAR case, the FAR worker must discuss child care and early learning services with a parent or caregiver as appropriate. If the family plans to use child care or early learning services, the FAR worker must work with the family to facilitate enrollment.

The Department of Social and Health Services and the Department of Early Learning are required to develop recommendations on methods by which the agencies can better partner to ensure children involved in the child welfare system have access to early learning services and developmentally appropriate child care services. The recommendations are due to the Governor and appropriate legislative committees no later than December 31, 2014.

Children receiving child protective services or family assessment response services may be included in the definition of an eligible child for the ECEAP, if appropriations for this specific purpose are provided.

**Votes on Final Passage:**

House	90	8	
Senate	46	2	(Senate amended)
House	81	17	(House concurred)

**Effective:** June 12, 2014  
June 30, 2018 (Section 4)