
Early Learning & Human Services Committee

HB 1723

Brief Description: Concerning early learning opportunities.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Walsh, Farrell, Maxwell, Roberts, Freeman, Goodman, Sawyer, Sullivan, Jinkins, Seaquist, Lytton, Haigh, Hunter, Morrell, Sells, Ryu, Morris, McCoy, Reykdal, Tarleton, Tharinger, Pollet, Fey, Moscoso, Bergquist, Ormsby and Santos.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a technical working group and a legislative task force to examine options for creating an accessible, integrated, high-quality, and community-based early learning program for children and their families.
- Expands early learning programs and services for children and families.
- Prioritizes high-quality early learning programs and services for children and families.

Hearing Date: 2/15/13

Staff: Lindsay Lanham (786-7120).

Background:

In Washington State, there are several early learning, child care, and parent education programs. Each program has unique objectives, eligibility requirements, processes for enrollment, hours of operation, and funding streams.

Home visiting programs provide support and education to expectant parents and new families. Home visiting programs are voluntary and offer an array of in-person services to families based on the particular objectives of the program and needs of the family. There are several home visiting programs utilized in Washington State. Nurse-Family Partnership, and Parents as Teachers are two examples of home visiting programs.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The Working Connections Child Care Program (WCCC) provides subsidies to child care providers serving families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line. The WCCC is often associated with Washington State's WorkFirst program and is intended to support parents who are working, attending training, or enrolling in educational programs outside the home. Not all families receiving the WCCC benefits, however, participate in approved Workfirst activities. For example, a parent under 22 years of age may be eligible for the WCCC benefits for high school development. Children of families receiving the 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 Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is an early learning program for children ages three-to-five years of age and who have not entered kindergarten. The ECEAP provides preschool education, family support, and health and nutritional services to families at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty line.

In 2007 the Legislature supported the development of Early Achievers, which is Washington State's quality rating and improvement system. Early Achievers establishes a common set of expectations and standards that define, measure, and improve the quality of early learning settings. Participation in Early Achievers is voluntary.

Summary of Bill:

A technical working group is established to examine federal and state early education funding streams and early education eligibility processes. The technical working group is charged with developing technical options for system designs that blend and braid federal and state funding streams. A legislative task force is created to use the information gathered by the technical working group and develop recommendations for how to create an accessible, integrated, high-quality, and community-based early learning program for children and their families.

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) is required to annually review rates for the WCCC and the ECEAP and make recommendations to the legislature based on market rates and the annual rate of inflation. For all new funds appropriated for the specific purpose of home visiting and parent and caregiver support, DEL must also reserve at least 80 percent of the new funds for home visiting and up to 20 percent for parent or caregiver support. Funds accruing to the General Fund from Initiative 502 (the legalization of recreational marijuana) will be utilized to phase in an integrated high quality continuum of early learning program, called Early Start, for children birth-to-five years of age.

The DEL must increase base rate for all the WCCC providers by 5 percent, provide tiered subsidy rate enhancements to child care providers who meet quality rating and improvement levels of two or higher, and require exempt providers to participate in continuing education opportunities.

The ECEAP eligibility is increased to include families who are at 130 percent of the federal poverty line. The DEL is to increase the base slot rate for the ECEAP to align with the Washington State Head start slot rate. By fiscal year 2014, providers receiving the ECEAP subsidies must enroll in Early Achievers. Additionally, new funding for the ECEAP expansion

must be distributed through a competitive bidding process where the DEL must prioritize the following programs for new funding:

- programs offering an integrated full-day early learning program for children ages birth-five, and
- programs that have created partnerships with elementary schools and offer transitional planning and support to children as they advance to kindergarten.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 8, 2013.

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