

HOUSE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 2377

As Passed House:
February 18, 2014

Title: An act relating to improving quality in the early care and education system.

Brief Description: Improving quality in the early care and education system.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Hunter, Kagi, Walsh, Sullivan, Farrell, Carlyle, Senn, Moeller, Tharinger, Ryu, Reykdal, Morrell, Roberts, Goodman, Tarleton, Freeman, Pollet and Habib).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Human Services: 1/23/14, 2/3/14 [DPS];
Appropriations: 2/10/14 [DP2S(w/o sub ELHS)].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/18/14, 64-33.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Second Substitute Bill

- Adds definitions for "school-age child" and "non-school age child" in statute.
- Adds a definition for "low-income child care provider" and "low-income neighborhood" in statute.
- Requires the Department of Early Learning (DEL) to electronically publish the Early Achievers program ratings for certain early care and education programs and take into account the linguistic needs of parents and caregivers when publishing these ratings.
- Requires the DEL to create a single source of information for parents and caregivers to access information on early care and education opportunities in the state.
- Directs the DEL to create a culturally and linguistically reflective professional development pathway for child care and early learning providers.
- Provides that the DEL is required to implement a tiered reimbursement for the Early Achievers participants rated at a level 3, 4, or 5.
- Directs the DEL to design a plan to incorporate school-age child care providers into the Early Achievers Program.

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.

- Specifies that the Early Achievers program quality improvement awards are reserved for participants offering programs that are comprised of at least five percent of children receiving subsidy.
- Outlines Early Achievers participation and rating goal requirements for certain child care and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) providers.
- Directs the DEL to develop a protocol to for granting extensions in meeting rating level requirements for child care and early learning programs.
- Directs the DEL to develop a protocol for the creation of a substitute pool and needs-based grants for certain providers.
- Requires the DEL to collect specific data pertaining to the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) and ECEAP and provide data to the Education Data Center, Washington State Institute of Public Policy (WSIPP), and child care and early learning providers.
- Instructs WSIPP to complete analyses examining quality levels and child outcomes and a cost-benefit analysis.
- Specifies that a child is eligible for the WCCC program for a 12-month enrollment period.
- Removes a parent's or a caregiver's obligation to report changes in regards to the WCCC to the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).
- Specifies that the WCCC cap is established in the operating budget.
- Requires the DEL to develop an absence and de-enrollment policy for WCCC and ECEAP.
- Specifies that certain relative caregivers are not required to obtain child care licensure in order to receive child care subsidy.
- Directs the DEL to contract at least 20 percent of the WCCC slots by a certain date and prioritize certain programs.
- Directs the DEL to reserve a certain number of contracted slots for the WCCC program for certain programs.
- Aligns fingerprint processes for the WCCC program and ECEAP.
- Requires the DEL to develop a pathway for family home providers to administer ECEAP.
- Directs the DEL to prioritize certain programs and mandate certain requirements when implementing the preschool program.
- Outlines licensing requirements for certain Family, Friend, and Neighbor child care providers.
- Requires the DEL to complete annual reports on the preschool program and the WCCC program that examines various components of the services.
- Requires the DEL to implement an electronic time and attendance records system by July 1, 2015.

- Instructs the DEL to implement a single set of licensing requirements by July 1, 2017.
- Specifies that local government may contribute funds to the DEL.
- Creates the Early Start Account.
- Adds a null and void clause.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & HUMAN SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Freeman, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Goodman, MacEwen, Ortiz-Self, Roberts and Senn.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Scott, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Fagan, Sawyer, Young and Zeiger.

Staff: Lindsay Lanham (786-7120).

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Majority Report: The second substitute bill be substituted therefor and the second substitute bill do pass and do not pass the substitute bill by Committee on Early Learning & Human Services. Signed by 17 members: Representatives Hunter, Chair; Ormsby, Vice Chair; Carlyle, Cody, Dunshee, Green, Haigh, Hudgins, S. Hunt, Jinkins, Kagi, Lytton, Morrell, Seaquist, Springer, Sullivan and Tharinger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Ross, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Wilcox, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buys, Christian, Fagan, Haler, Harris, G. Hunt, Parker, Pettigrew, Schmick and Taylor.

Staff: Catrina Lucero (786-7192).

Background:

In 2007, the quality rating and improvement system for the early care and education system in Washington, called Early Achievers, 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. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) completed state-wide implementation of the Early Achievers program in July 2013. There are five levels in the Early Achievers program. All licensed or certified child care programs enter the program at level 1. Participants advance to level 2 when they officially enroll in the Early Achievers program. At level 2, participants are required to complete several activities such as a self-assessment and trainings. For levels 3 through 5 participants are evaluated and earn points in the following areas: child outcomes; facility curriculum and learning environment and interaction; professional development and training; and family engagement

and partnership. At levels 3, 4, and 5 Early Achievers participants are evaluated and assigned a rating. The Early Achievers program provides participants coaching, training opportunities, professional development scholarships and grants, technical assistance, and consultation.

The Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program 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 WCCC subsidy payments. 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 DEL sets child care subsidy policy and provides oversight for child care licensing. The Department of Social Health Services (DSHS) helps families apply for WCCC, determines eligibility and parent or caregiver copayments, authorizes child care, and issues payment to providers.

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 4 years old by August 31, children who are 3 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 program is to help children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The DEL was required to develop an ECEAP expansion plan by September 30, 2013. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy was directed to complete a meta-analysis and retrospective outcome evaluation and return on investment analysis of the ECEAP. The meta-analysis was provided to the Legislature in January 2014. The retrospective study is to be completed by December 15, 2014.

Summary of Engrossed Second Substitute Bill:

Definitions.

"Non-school age child" is defined as a child birth through 6 years of age who has yet to enter kindergarten. Additionally, "school-age child" is defined as a child not less than 5 years of age through 12 years of age who is attending kindergarten or school. "Low-income child care provider" is defined as person who administers a child care program that consists of at least 80 percent of children receiving a WCCC subsidy. "Low-income neighborhood" is defined as a district or community where more than 20 percent of households are below the federal poverty level.

Early Achievers Program

Language is added that states that the Early Achievers program establishes the framework for strengthening the quality of the early care and education system. Two additional objectives are added to the Early Achievers program and include the following: to improve short-term and long-term outcomes for children as measured by specific assessments; and to provide professional development opportunities to early care and education providers. It is established that there are five levels in the Early Achievers program and that participants are expected to actively engage in the program and advance from level 1 to level 5.

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) is given the authority to establish the rating cycle in the Early Achievers program. The fee structure for ratings and optional re-rating requests are outlined. The DEL is required to only charge a fee for optional re-rating requests made by program participants that are outside the established rating cycle. The fee charged by the DEL may not exceed the cost associated with the cost to the DEL for the class of activities associated with the Early Achievers program. It is specified that participants may request ratings at any time after completing all of the level 2 activities. Additionally, the DEL is required to provide Early Achievers participants an update on the participant's progress toward completing level 2 activities after the participant has been enrolled in the Early Achievers program for 15 months.

Effective July 1, 2015, the DEL is required to publish Early Achievers program ratings for child care programs that receive state subsidy, ECEAP, and Head Start programs. The DEL is directed to publish ratings on the DEL web site or offer a link on its web site. Ratings are to be published within 30 days from the time a program becomes licensed or certified, or receives a rating. Child care providers who do not receive state subsidy have the option to publish their Early Achievers rating. The ratings also are to be published in a manner that are easily accessible to parents and caregivers take into account the linguistic needs of parents and caregivers. Participants with a published rating may provide the DEL a description of their program to accompany the rating. The DEL is further directed to create a single source of information for parent and caregivers on a child care providers' early achievers program rating level, licensing history, and other indicators of quality and safety.

The DEL is further directed to create a professional development pathway for Early Achievers participants to obtain a high school diploma or equivalency or higher education credential in early childhood education or other academic field related to early care and education. The professional developmental pathway is required to include opportunities for scholarships and grants to assist participants with the costs associated with obtaining an educational degree. The professional development pathway must be culturally and linguistically reflective of participants' needs and demographics.

The DEL is also directed to implement a tiered reimbursement for Early Achievers participants rated at level 3, 4, or 5. The DEL is further directed to design a plan to implement to incorporate school-age child care providers into the Early Achievers program. The Early Achievers quality improvement awards are required to be reserved for participants offering programs that are comprised of at least five percent of children receiving subsidy.

The DEL is directed to work with tribal governments, and community and statewide partners to develop a protocol for granting Early Achievers participants an extension in meeting rating level requirement timelines outlined for the WCCC and the ECEAP. Extensions may be granted when an Early Achievers program participant experiences an unexpected life circumstance, such as an illness. A report outlining the Early Achievers program extension protocol is to be delivered to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 31, 2014.

Reduction of Barriers: Low-Income Providers and Programs.

In collaboration with tribal governments and other community partners the DEL is directed to implement protocol to maximize and encourage participation in the Early Achievers program

for low-income providers and providers who offer programs in low-income neighborhoods. The protocol is to address barriers to program participation and at a minimum include a substitute pool and the establishment of needs-based grants for providers in level 2 in the Early Achievers program to assist with purchasing curriculum development, instructional materials, supplies, and equipment to improve program quality.

Early Achievers Data Collection and Evaluation.

The DEL is required to collect longitudinal, student-level data on children attending a WCCC or ECEAP program. Data collection includes at a minimum the following: daily attendance; identification of classroom and teacher; Early Achievers rating level; program hours; program duration; distinct ethnic categories within racial subgroups that align with categories established by the Education Data Center; and developmental results from the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, or WaKIDS.

The DEL is further directed to give child care and early learning providers, student-level data that are specific to the individual provider's program. Additionally, data collected are required to be provided to the Education Data Center and the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP). The WSIPP is directed to conduct a series of evaluations examining relationships between the Early Achievers program quality rating levels and outcomes for children. The WSIPP's final report is to include a cost-benefit analysis. The first WSIPP report is due to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 31, 2017 and the final report is due to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 31, 2020.

Working Connections Child Care.

It is specified that a child is eligible for WCCC for a 12-month enrollment period and may not be deemed ineligible due to any change in circumstances, including but not limited to the following: a change in family composition or household; a change in a parent's or a caregiver's employment status; a change in a parent's or a caregiver's employment status due to health; or a change in a parent's or a caregiver's income. Language pertaining to a 5 percent increase in subsidy for providers enrolling in the Early Achievers program levels 1 and 2 and advancing to level 3 within 30 months is removed from statute. Provisions requiring a parent or caregiver receiving WCCC to notify the DSHS, within 10 days, about significant changes related to the number of child care hours a parent or caregivers needs, cost sharing, or eligibility are removed. The WCCC program is identified as a capped program and the cap is established in the operating budget.

The DEL is to adopt rules pertaining to both contracted slots and vouchers for the WCCC that outline the following: allowable periods of child absences; required contact with caregivers to discuss child absences and encourage program attendance; and de-enrollment procedures when allowable child absence are exceeded. The implementation of rules pertaining to child absences and de-enrollment procedures are required to align with the implementation of the DEL's electronic time and attendance record system and be adopted no later than July 31, 2015.

Child care providers serving non-school aged children and receiving state subsidy are required to enroll in the Early Achievers program and complete level 2 activities by July 1, 2017. Child care providers serving non-school aged children and receiving state subsidy payments must be rated at a level 3 in the Early Achievers program by July 1, 2019. If a

provider serving non-school age children and receiving state subsidy payments has completed all of level 2 activities and is approved and waiting for a rating by July 1, 2019, the provider may continue to receive state subsidy pending the successful completion of the level 3 rating activity. Effective July 1, 2015, a new child care provider serving non-school aged children and receiving state subsidy payments must enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days; complete Early Achievers level two activities within 12 months from receiving a state subsidy payment; and rate at an Early Achievers level three within 30 months from receiving a state subsidy payment.

Family, friend, and neighbor child care providers who receive state subsidy payments are exempt from child care licensure are not required to join the Early Achiever program while qualifying as an unlicensed provider. Family, friend, and neighbor child care providers are required to obtain a child care license no later than 36 months after the effective date or 36 paid months after receiving the first subsidy payment, whichever occurs later, or after simultaneously or consecutively caring for more than six unrelated children unless certain conditions are met. It is established that certain relative child care providers, such as a grandmother or grandfather who care for grandchildren, do not have to obtain licensure in order to receive state subsidy. Family, friend, and neighbor child care providers who do not obtain child care licensure as aforementioned are not able to receive state subsidy.

The DEL is directed to employ a combination of vouchers and contracted slots for the WCCC program. The DEL is required to contract at least 20 percent of the WCCC slots by January 1, 2016. The DEL is further required to use data to calculate a set number of targets contracted slots for child care programs in low-income neighborhoods or child care programs that consist of at least fifty percent of children receiving state subsidy. The DEL is to award the remaining contracted slots via competitive process and prioritize child care programs with specific characteristics. The DEL is to pay a provider for each contracted slot, unless a contracted slot is not used for 30 days; charge a child care copayment for each contracted slot; and establish a copayment fee by rule. Only a child care provider who participates in the Early Achievers program and is rated at a level 3, 4, or 5 is eligible to be awarded a contracted slot. Only providers offering full workday early care and education opportunities are eligible to be awarded a contracted slot.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (Preschool).

The DEL is required to adopt rules pertaining to the ECEAP that outline the following: allowable periods of child absences; required contact with caregivers to discuss child absences and encourage program attendance; and de-enrollment procedures when allowable child absence are exceeded. Implementation of rules pertaining to child absences and de-enrollment procedures are required to align with the implementation of the electronic time and attendance record system and be adopted no later than July 31, 2015. Language that specifies the funds used to continue or expand preschool programming may not supplant federally supported head start programs is removed from statute.

The DEL is also required to adopt rules requiring ECEAP employees and volunteers to submit to finger print checks that align with the finger print processes required for the WCCC program, if the volunteers or employees have access to children. Existing ECEAP providers are required to enroll in the Early Achievers program and be rated a level 3 by July 1, 2015. ECEAP providers must be rated a level 4 by July 1, 2019. By January 1, 2015, new ECEAP

slots are only available to Early Achievers participants rated at a level 3, 4, or 5. Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program providers are required to institute a WCCC program and maintain an optional full workday program by July 1, 2017. By July 1, 2016, the DEL is required to develop a pathway for family home providers to administer ECEAP.

For school year 2014-2015, implementation of preschool programming must prioritize the following programs: programs located in a high-need geographic area, programs offering full workday early care and education programming; programs offering services to children diagnosed with a special need and children involved in the child welfare system; or programs participating in the Early Achievers program and rated at a level 3, 4, or 5. For school year 2014-2015, 80 percent of the preschool slots are reserved for providers offering full workday early care and education programming. For school year 2015-2016, only providers meeting both of the following requirements are eligible for the implementation of preschool programming: programs participating in the Early Achievers program and rated at a level 3, 4, or 5; and programs offering full workday early care and education programming.

DEL Reporting Requirement.

The DEL is directed to complete an annual report on preschool implementation and the WCCC program. The first report is due by December 31, 2014, and the final report is due by December 31, 2018. The report is to be posted on the DEL's web site and delivered to the appropriate committees of the Legislature. The report is to include the following: progress on preschool program implementation; examination of the regional distribution of new preschool programming by zip code; an analysis of the impact of preschool programming on low-income neighborhoods; recommendations to address any identified barriers to access to quality preschool for children living in low-income neighborhoods; the impact of quality strengthening efforts on the availability of infant and toddler care; an analysis of any impact of full workday early care and education opportunities directives; and an examination of any identifies barriers for providers to offer full workday early care and education opportunities.

Licensing Standards.

By July 1, 2015, the DEL is required to implement a single set of licensing standards for child care and ECEAP. The single set of licensing requirements must use Early Achievers as a framework, eliminate additional regulations, take into account the separate needs of family care providers and child care centers, and promote the continued safety of child care settings.

Local Government.

Local government is encouraged to collaborate with the DEL when establishing early learning programs for residents. Local government may contribute funds to the DEL for initial investments to establish capacity and quality in local early care and education programming and reductions in copayments charged to caregivers. Funds contributed to the DEL by local government are deposited in the Early Start Account.

Early Start Account.

The Early Start Account is established in the state treasury. Moneys in the account may only be used after appropriation. Expenditures from the account can only be used to improve the quality of the early care and education program. The DEL oversees the account.

Electronic Time and Attendance Records System.

The DEL is directed to implement an electronic time and attendance records system by July 1, 2015. The savings generated from the electronic time and attendance records system can only be used to improve quality in the early care and education system.

Null and Void Clause.

If specific funding is not provided by June 30, 2014 this act is null and void.

A section of uncodified session law from the second special session of 2013, pertaining to early learning, is repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 19, 2014.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Early Learning & Human Services):

(In support) All the research leads us to believe that high quality programs matter tremendously for school readiness and other child outcomes. The research also indicates that low-quality programming is actually bad for children. A series of carrots and sticks are provided that build on the quality foundation of the Early Achievers program and better integrates the state subsidized early care and education programs, the WCCC program and the ECEAP. By linking eligibility to children and ensuring 12-month eligibility for the WCCC program, stability is increased for children. Financial stability is also increased for providers offering quality programming via tiered reimbursement and contracted slots.

It is nearly impossible to get every sheriff in Washington and 150 police chiefs to agree on anything; however, one thing that sheriffs and police chiefs agree on is that the most effective crime prevention tool we have is to get at-risk kids off to a good start in life. And this includes high quality early learning. In one study, children who did not attend a high quality preschool program were 70 percent more likely to commit a violent crime than the kids who did attend preschool. High quality early learning programs also impact a child's success in schools. This is important because kids who do not graduate are more likely to get in trouble with the law. We do not get the crime reduction benefits of early learning unless there are high quality early learning schools. In one jail it takes \$80 a day to keep a person in that jail. One person offers that he would much rather spend \$80 a day on a child for early learning.

The DEL is very committed to help providers improve the quality of care that they provide to children in Washington. The DEL knows that they can improve the quality of programming by strengthening the adult-child interactions, offering rigorous curriculum, and increasing the dosage of programming provided to children.

All children deserve a strong start in life and high quality early learning creates a foundation for the future. Early learning programs have a unique opportunity to impact the rapid brain development that occurs during the earliest years. Many children in Washington are arriving at kindergarten not ready to learn. For many children of color and children from low-income

families, this opportunity gap continues to show up throughout the school years. It is critical, however, that programs have the resources to sustain quality and programs remain culturally relevant to ensure a diverse mix of providers.

There are few occasions like this one where you get to truly change the trajectory of thousands of children by supporting these policies. Washington has made great strides in both policy and investing in early learning. The battle and debate over the data and impact of early learning is over because it has been firmly established that early learning is the best place to invest.

One parent discussed her experience with the ECEAP. The parent's child moved to the United States in 2011 and enrolled in an ECEAP program in 2012-2013. At the time of enrollment, the child was just beginning to learn English. The love, care, and support that the ECEAP teacher provided to the child helped the child build her language, her confidence, and love for school. Her transition to kindergarten went well. Every child deserves the opportunity to attend an ECEAP.

Another parent discussed her experience with the WCCC program. This parent began working as a young teenager. She always provided for herself and her children. When this parent was going through a divorce, the parent enrolled in the WCCC program to provide a stable learning atmosphere for her children. When the parent was seven months pregnant, the parent was diagnosed with a medical condition that required bed rest. Per medical instruction, the parent was not able to return to work. The parent notified the WCCC program to report that she was placed on bed rest. This was the last day the children qualified for the WCCC program. Despite the fact that her children were thriving in child care and the parent felt that the children needed the stability and learning opportunities offered with child care, the children were not able to attend. A 12-month enrollment period would have allowed the parent's children to benefit from the stability they needed during the time of crisis.

Business people around the state have come to the conclusion that we need to take advantage of what can be done smartly to change lives of children before kindergarten. There needs to be industry standards and best practices. Early Achievers is the right direction as it offers continuous quality improvement for people in the field.

(In support with concerns) Homeless children do not qualify for the WCCC program and there are concerns homeless children may have unmet needs. One person would like to see children experiencing homelessness have an exemption in regards to the absence and de-enrollment provisions.

Requiring full-day programming may leave out some children that may not qualify for the WCCC program. Many immigrant families do not apply for the WCCC program because of fear of the government. Programs in rural areas are also concerned about the physical building capacity that it would take to implement a full-day program. It may be helpful to implement full-day programming at a slower pace.

Removing Friend, Family, and Neighbor care providers will eliminate parent choice and may cause harm to immigrant communities. We want to make certain we strengthen parent

choice, whether that it is through extended hours or culturally and linguistically diverse programs. Friend, Family, and Neighbor care providers offer dual language care and special needs care. Until licensing issues are fixed, there is not the trust in the licensing system to encourage exempt providers to pursue licensing. It may be better to direct resources to providers than directing more money at the WCCC program. Provided funds should be focused on pushing providers from level two to level three. Additional funds may also be needed to reach immigrant communities.

(Opposed) It is difficult to believe that the DEL included all the provisions. The children, parents, and citizens of the state will all be adversely affected if this legislation passes. There is no empirical evidence that supports the premise of the DEL. Early learning is the wrong remedy for a very crucial problem.

One provider stated that participation in the Early Achievers program is not helpful. It is all forms and no function. The Early Achievers coaches are being paid to make phone calls. The only benefit to providers is access to a credential. Providers are also required to remain in the program. So providers are constantly filling out forms. The quality rating and improvement system is subjective. The DEL is also able to charge a fee in the Early Achievers program. Early Achievers is not a voluntary program. It was initially called a voluntary program. Early Achievers is not the answer. One provider was rejected from the program after identifying the program as a fraud. Contracted slots will greatly reduce parental choice and culturally diverse program options. Funding will be wasted on empty slots. This massive change in child care policy will have negative consequences and force out child care providers. Early learning is going in the wrong direction.

(Other) Quality matters particularly for the most vulnerable children. What happens and does not happen in the first five years of life, plays a significant role in how well a child does in school and in life. The experiences our youngest learners have in early care and education environments matters. Children from low income families or adverse circumstances are at-risk for school failure. These children on average start kindergarten 12-14 months behind their peers in pre-reading and language skills. Children who attend high quality early learning are less likely to repeat grades or require special education services. They are more likely to graduate from high school.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Appropriations):

(In support) The direction in the bill is compatible with the direction that the DEL is moving. It incorporates the latest research related to early learning interventions and positive outcomes for children. The bill builds on the state's system, which has historically focused on access and adds a second focus on quality. Quality matters. Poor quality is not neutral, it actually harms children. Access without quality is not sufficient. The combination of high quality in high dosages is what has the greatest impact on school readiness and other positive outcomes. There are currently two systems: Working Connections Child Care, which focuses on health and safety; and the Early Learning Child Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), which focuses on 3 and 4-year-olds. We want to combine the best of both worlds and have them work together to provide a seamless quality program.

Investing in quality early learning has positive impacts on crime rates and can lead to a reduction in criminal justice costs. Eighty cents of every dollar at the county level goes toward criminal justice costs. If we are to achieve the crime prevention benefits of early learning it must be quality.

(In support with concerns) The Early Start Act provides new ways to ensure that children get the quality care they need. Twelve-month eligibility is one of the most critical components of the bill. The estimated cost for this portion of the bill is less than the decrease in costs associated with the lower caseloads. These funds should be reinvested into quality improvement efforts. The mandate that early learning providers receiving the WCCC subsidies rate at a certain level needs to come with adequate resources to ensure quality improvement both in this budget and future budgets. School districts are concerned with the section in the bill that requires full day care for ECEAP programs. They may not be able to offer this option because they are housed in schools. This could also be an issue for rural programs given there is not enough demand for a full-day option in their areas.

(Other) We are pleased to see the focus on quality early learning in the bill, the opportunities for professional development, and the focus on addressing the opportunity gap. We also support the prime sponsor's willingness to work with parents, providers, and experts in the field to develop the best policy. However, we are concerned about how the bill may affect access to care and the stability of the workforce. As a quality development tool, any mandates that involve participation and achievement levels should only be implemented after industry stability thresholds are reached or if it is clear that the early learning environment is adequately prepared. We support the Pre-K expansion. We hope that any changes to family, friend, and neighbor care give them broad access to the program supports and make exceptions where necessary. Any quality improvement system should encourage providers to become licensed, as this is the first step toward high quality early learning. Provisions related to 12-month authorization and contracted slots will enhance stability for providers and families.

(Opposed) There are many schools and preschools that already offer quality services to children. The work done to determine high quality through accreditation is being duplicated by the Early Achievers program. Schools may choose not to support the program either by closing or no longer taking children receiving subsidized child care.

Persons Testifying (Early Learning & Human Services): (In support) Representative Hunter, prime sponsor; Casey Salisbury, Mason County Sheriff; Selena Mejia-Sandoval; Heather Moss, Department of Early Learning; Melanie Smith, Wellspring Family Services; Frank Ordway, League of Education Voters; Melissa Johnson, Washington State Association of Headstart; Grace Sebugwawo; Julianna Johnson; and Steve Leahy, America's Edge.

(In support with concerns) Casey Osborn-Hinman, Children's Alliance; Lauren Hipp, Moms Rising; and Lani Todd, Service Employees International Union 925.

(Opposed) Gib Kocherhans and Tim Benn.

(Other) Kristin Wiggins, Thrive by Five Washington.

Persons Testifying (Appropriations): (In support) Bette Hyde, Department of Early Learning; Laura Wells, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; and Sherry Burkey, Western Washington University.

(In support with concerns) Casey Osborn-Hinman, Early Learning Action Alliance; and Melissa Johnson, Washington State Association of Headstart and Early Learning Child Education and Assistance Programs.

(Opposed) Suzie Hanson, Washington Federation of Independent Schools.

(Other) Lani Todd, Service Employees International Local 925.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Early Learning & Human Services): None.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Appropriations): None.