

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 1723

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, March 27, 2013

Title: An act relating to expanding and streamlining early learning services and programs.

Brief Description: Concerning early learning opportunities.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by 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 History: Passed House: 3/06/13, 59-38.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 3/15/13, 3/27/13 [DPA-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Litzow, Chair; Dammeier, Vice Chair; McAuliffe, Ranking Member; Rolfes, Assistant Ranking Member; Billig, Brown, Cleveland, Fain, Hill, Mullet and Rivers.

Staff: Eric Wolf (786-7405)

Background: In Washington, 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. Nurse-Family Partnership and Parents as Teachers are two examples of home visiting programs.

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. WCCC is often associated with Washington'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 WCCC benefits, however, participate in approved WorkFirst

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activities. For example, a parent under 22 years of age may be eligible for WCCC benefits for high school development. Children of families receiving WCCC benefits must 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 Washington State Preschool Program, or the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is an early learning program for children ages three to five years and who have not entered kindergarten. 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'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 (Recommended Amendments): Early Education Funding Technical Workgroup. A technical workgroup is established to examine federal and state early education funding streams and early education eligibility processes. The technical workgroup is charged with developing technical options for system designs that blend and braid federal and state funding streams for early learning programs.

Department of Early Learning (DEL) Responsibilities. DEL must annually review rates for child care compared to market rates and make recommendations to the Legislature. Additionally, DEL is mandated to conduct an annual survey of staff compensation in licensed child programs and in the Washington State Preschool Program, including Early Achievers and non-Early Achievers programs, using data generated by the managed education and registry information tool and the Early Achievers program. DEL must report survey findings to the Legislature.

Home Visiting Services Account Funds. 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 and deposit those funds into the Home Visiting Services Account for home visiting, and up to 20 percent for parent or caregiver support. Home visiting services must include programs that serve families involved in the child welfare system. The 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 ages birth to five years of age.

WCCC Funds. DEL must increase the base rate for all the WCCC child care providers by 10 percent in August 2013 and January 2014 and require exempt providers to participate in continuing education opportunities. Child care providers must receive a 5 percent increase in the subsidy rate for achieving level two of Early Achievers; however, providers must complete level two and advance to level three within 18 months in order to maintain this increase. Child care providers who participate in the Early Achievers program and maintain a minimum score may apply for contracted slots.

ECEAP Eligibility and Funding. ECEAP eligibility is increased to include families who are at 130 percent of the federal poverty line. DEL must continue to offer half-day preschool

programming for children. DEL must increase the base slot rate for ECEAP to align with the Washington Head Start slot rate. By fiscal year 2015, providers receiving ECEAP subsidies must enroll in Early Achievers. Additionally, new funding for ECEAP expansion must be distributed through a competitive bidding process. When reviewing applications, DEL must consider local community needs, demonstrated capacity, and the need to support a mixed delivery system of early learning. DEL must prioritize programs for new funding including the following: programs offering an integrated full-day early learning program for children ages birth to five years of age; and programs that created partnerships with elementary schools and offer transitional planning and support to children as they advance to kindergarten.

Section 4 relating to preschool expansion, section 8 relating to base rate increases and tiered reimbursement, and section 9 relating to subsidy rate increases, are null and void unless funded in the budget.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments): A legislative taskforce on early learning is removed. A technical working group convened by DEL is directed to submit a report on early learning funding to the Legislature by December 31, 2013.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Second Substitute House Bill: PRO: Early learning has been a focus of the Legislature for several years. The first three years of childhood development are critical for cognitive development. Many families with very young children utilize the state's various early education providers, and the state must fund these robustly to serve them. Early education of children makes them much more likely to successfully complete high school, avoid crime, and embark on a productive career. High-quality early learning programs are a proven method of preventing future crime. Using the revenue generated from recently legalized recreational marijuana purchases to fund early learning is a perfect diversion of money away from crime and into crime prevention. Dozens of studies show that early learning provides the greatest return on investment of all education reforms.

CON: There is virtually no empirical evidence to support the proposition that early learning leads to K-12 success. If DEL continues to expand, it will eliminate the ability of families to take care of their children at home. The opportunity gap is a result of deficiencies in the K-12 system, not the early education system. The Legislature has mistakenly decided that fixing early learning will fix the K-12 system.

OTHER: Indian tribes in Washington require additional flexibility, and will work with DEL in the future to address the needs of those communities. A member of a federally recognized tribe should be added to the legislative taskforce on early learning.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Laura Wells, Kennewick Police Chief; Ken Hohenberg, King County Sheriff; John Urquhart, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; Jen Estroff, Children's Alliance, Early Learning Action Alliance; Ryan Pricco, Child Care Aware of WA; Frank Ordway, League of Education Voters; Elizabeth Grillet, citizen; Steve Leahy, America's Edge; Patrick Beehler, David Evans and Associates; Amy Blondin, DEL; Lynne Tucker, Schools Out WA.

CON: Gib Kocherans, Tim Benn, citizens.

OTHER: Lonnie Brown-Johns, American Indian Health Commission for WA State.