
**Early Learning & Human Services
Committee**

E2SSB 5452

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

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Litzow, Billig, Fain, Dammeier, Hargrove, Hill, Rivers, Brown, Mullet, Frockt, Jayapal, Angel, Cleveland, Kohl-Welles, Keiser, McAuliffe and Habib).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Second Substitute Bill

- Requires the Department of Early Learning (DEL) to provide a foundation of quality through the Early Achievers program for early learning and licensed child care programs.
- Expands the Early Achievers program and authorizes the DEL to require all licensed or certified child care facilities and early learning programs serving non-school age children and receiving state funds to participate in the Early Achievers program, except programs whom the DEL determines have national accreditation standards that meet or exceed the current Early Achievers program standards.
- Requires the DEL to focus the early care and education system on supporting school readiness for young learners and improving educational outcomes in response to Early Achievers program data collection and analysis.
- Creates the Early Achievers Review Subcommittee (Subcommittee) and requires the DEL, in collaboration with the Subcommittee, to provide an annual progress report to the Governor and the Legislature regarding providers' progress in the Early Achievers program.

Hearing Date: 3/20/15

Staff: Ashley Paintner (786-7120).

Background:

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.

Early Achievers Program.

In 2007, the Legislature enacted Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5828, which created the quality rating and improvement system for the early care and education system in Washington, called Early Achievers. The Early Achievers program establishes a common set of expectations and standards that define, measure, and improve the quality of early learning and child care settings. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) completed statewide implementation of the Early Achievers program in July 2013.

There are five levels in the Early Achievers program. 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 3-5, participants are evaluated and earn points in the following areas: (a) child outcomes; (b) facility curriculum and learning environment and interaction; (c) professional development and training; and (d) family engagement and partnership. At levels 3, 4, and 5, Early Achievers program participants are evaluated and assigned a rating. The Early Achievers program provides participants with coaching, training opportunities, professional development scholarships and grants, technical assistance, and consultation.

Working Connections Child Care.

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 younger than 13 years of age or younger 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 the WCCC program oversight for child care licensing. The Department of Social and Health Services helps families apply for WCCC, determines eligibility and parent or caregiver copayments, authorizes child care, and issues payment to providers.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

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, children who are 3 years old are also eligible for the program. In addition to preschool programming, the ECEAP provides family support and health services. The stated goal of the ECEAP is to help ensure children enter kindergarten ready to succeed. Approved ECEAPs receive state-funded support through the DEL. Public or private nonsectarian organizations, including but not limited to school districts, community and technical colleges, local governments, and nonprofit organizations, are eligible to participate as an ECEAP provider.

During the legislative session in 2013, the Legislature passed Senate Bill 5904 (SB 5904), which outlines an expansion of the ECEAP through the 2013-15 biennium. The ECEAP expansion is subject to amounts appropriated and requires the DEL to develop an ECEAP expansion plan by September 30, 2013. In addition, SB 5904 required the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to complete a meta-analysis and retrospective outcome evaluation of the ECEAP. The meta-analysis was provided to the Legislature in January 2014, and the outcome evaluation was

provided to the Legislature in December 2014. The outcome evaluation found that the ECEAP has a positive impact on third, fourth, and fifth grade test scores.

Early Learning Advisory Council.

In 2007, the Legislature created the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) to advise the DEL on statewide early learning needs and progress. In 2010, the ELAC delivered a statewide early learning plan. Following the completion of the statewide early learning plan, the role of the ELAC was revised to advise the DEL on issues that would build a comprehensive system of quality early learning programs and services for Washington's children and families by assessing needs and the availability of services, aligning resources, developing plans for data collection, developing plans for professional development of early childhood educators, and establishing key performance measures.

Summary of Bill:

Early Achievers Program.

The Early Achievers program provides a foundation of quality for the early care and education system in Washington. The DEL is authorized to require all licensed or certified child care centers and homes, and early learning programs serving non-school age children and receiving state funds, to participate in the Early Achievers program. However, the DEL must accept nationally accredited programs with standards that meet or exceed the Early Achievers program standards as a qualification for Early Achievers program ratings. The stated objectives for the Early Achievers program include:

- improving short- and long-term educational outcomes for children;
- providing parents with clear and accessible information on the quality of early learning programs;
- increasing school readiness;
- closing the disparities in access to quality care;
- providing professional development and coaching; and
- establishing a common set of expectations and standards that define, measure, and improve the quality of early learning.

There are five levels in the Early Achievers program. Participants are expected to actively engage and continually advance in the program. By August 1, 2015, the DEL must publish to their website Early Achievers program rating levels for child care programs that receive a state subsidy, the ECEAP, and Head Start programs in Washington. The rating levels must be published in a manner that is easily accessible to parents and caregivers, and takes into account their linguistic needs. Tribal child care facilities and early learning programs may choose to be exempt from posting their rating on the DEL website if they provide proper notification to parents and guardians on the availability of their program rating. Subject to amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the DEL is required to create a single source of information for parents and caregivers to access details on a provider's rating level, licensing history, and other indicators of quality and safety that will help parents and caregivers make informed choices.

Subject to amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the DEL may create a professional development pathway for the Early Achievers program participants to obtain a high school diploma or higher education credential in an academic field related to early care and education.

Additionally, the DEL must employ a combination of vouchers and contracted slots for the WCCC program and the ECEAP, which must prioritize programs with specific characteristics.

Licensing Standards.

By July 1, 2016, the DEL is required to implement a single set of licensing standards for child care programs and the ECEAP. The DEL must streamline and eliminate duplication between Early Achievers standards and state child care rules in order to reduce costs associated with the early achievers rating cycle and child care licensing. Additionally, private schools with early learning programs are subject only to the minimum state controls necessary to assure the health and safety of all students in the state and to assure a sufficient early childhood education to meet usual requirements needed for transition into elementary school.

Working Connections Child Care.

The DEL must establish and implement policies in the WCCC program that promote stability, quality, and continuity of care for children from low-income households. Authorizations for the WCCC program must be effective for 12 months unless a change in circumstances necessitates reauthorization sooner. The DEL must adopt rules that provide WCCC authorizations for up to 90 days, which do not need to be consecutive, when a recipient experiences a gap in employment or approved activity during the 12-month period. In order for the recipient to continue to be authorized for child care during the 90 days, the recipient must be looking for another job or have verbal or written assurance from the recipient's employer or approved activity that the employment or approved activity will resume within the 90 days. These rules shall not apply to recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or WorkFirst benefits.

An existing WCCC provider serving non-school age children must enroll in the Early Achievers program, complete level 2 activities by August 1, 2016, and rate at a level 3 or higher by December 31, 2018. Effective July 1, 2016, a new WCCC provider serving non-school age children must enroll in the Early Achievers program within 30 days, complete level 2 activities within 12 months of enrollment, and rate at a level 3 or higher within 30 months of enrollment. If a WCCC provider fails to rate at a level 3 or higher by the required deadline, the provider must complete remedial activities with the DEL and rate at a level 3 or higher within six months. Subject to the amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the DEL may implement tiered reimbursement for the Early Achievers program participants in the WCCC program rating at a level 3 or higher.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

An existing ECEAP provider must enroll in the Early Achievers program by August 1, 2015, and rate at a level 4 or higher by January 1, 2016. Effective August 1, 2015, a new ECEAP provider must enroll in the Early Achievers program within 30 days and rate at a level 4 or higher within 12 months of enrollment. If an ECEAP provider fails to rate at a level 4 or higher by the required deadline, the provider must complete remedial activities with the DEL and rate at a level 4 or higher within six months. Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, the DEL is required to prioritize ECEAP providers located in low-income neighborhoods within high-need geographical areas. By July 31, 2016, the DEL must adopt rules pertaining to the ECEAP that outline allowable periods of child absence, require contact with parents or caregivers to discuss child absences and encourage regular attendance, and specify a de-enrollment procedure when allowable child absences are exceeded. The DEL is required to collect data on the demand for

full-day programming for the ECEAP and report the findings to the Legislature by January 1, 2016.

Early Learning Advisory Council.

The ELAC must convene an Early Achievers Review Subcommittee (Subcommittee) to provide feedback and guidance on strategies to improve the quality of instruction and environment for early learning, and provide input and recommendations on the implementation and refinement of the Early Achievers program. The Subcommittee must include representatives from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and representatives who work in a variety of early learning settings.

Program Data Collection and Evaluation.

The Education Data Center (EDC) is required to collect longitudinal, student-level data on all children attending a WCCC program or an ECEAP. The DEL and the Subcommittee shall review the data. Additionally, the WSIPP must conduct an analysis that examines relationships between the Early Achievers program quality rating levels and outcomes for children participating in the Early Achievers program. Beginning December 1, 2015, the DEL, in collaboration with the Subcommittee, must submit an annual progress report to the Governor and the Legislature regarding providers' progress in the Early Achievers program. The stated purpose of the data collection and evaluation is to improve the educational outcomes for young learners in response to Early Achievers longitudinal data.

Definitions are provided for the following: education data center, extended day program, full-day program, low-income neighborhood, non-school age child, part-day program, and school-age child.

This act is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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