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**ENGROSSED SECOND SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1491**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2015 Regular Session**

**By** House Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Kagi, Walsh, Hunter, Johnson, Ormsby, MacEwen, Senn, Magendanz, Farrell, Hayes, Ortiz-Self, Hudgins, Appleton, Fitzgibbon, S. Hunt, Ryu, Jinkins, Bergquist, Goodman, Tharinger, and Riccelli)

AN ACT Relating to improving quality in the early care and education system; amending RCW 43.215.100, 43.215.135, 43.215.1352, 43.215.425, 43.215.415, 43.215.455, 43.215.020, and 43.215.090; reenacting and amending RCW 43.215.010; adding new sections to chapter 43.215 RCW; creating new sections; repealing 2013 2nd sp.s. c 16 s 2 (uncodified); and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  INTENT. (1) The legislature finds that quality early care and education builds the foundation for a child's success in school and in life. The legislature acknowledges that a quality framework is necessary for the early care and education system in Washington. The legislature recognizes that empirical evidence supports the conclusion that high quality programs consistently yield more positive outcomes for children, with the strongest positive impacts on the most vulnerable children. The legislature acknowledges that critical developmental windows exist in early childhood, and low quality child care has damaging effects for children. The legislature further understands that the proper dosage, duration of programming, and stability of care are critical to enhancing program quality and improving child outcomes. The legislature acknowledges that the early care and education system should strive to address the needs of Washington's culturally and linguistically diverse populations. The legislature understands that parental choice and provider diversity are guiding principles for early learning programs.

(2) The legislature intends to prioritize the integration of child care and preschool in an effort to promote full day programming. The legislature further intends to reward quality and create incentives for providers to participate in a quality rating and improvement system that will also provide valuable information to parents regarding the quality of care available in their communities.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.215.100 and 2013 c 323 s 6 are each amended to read as follows:

EARLY ACHIEVERS, QUALITY RATING, AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM.

(1) ((~~Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose,~~)) The department, in collaboration with tribal governments and community and statewide partners, shall implement a ((~~voluntary~~)) quality rating and improvement system, called the early achievers program((~~, that~~)). The early achievers program provides a foundation of quality for the early care and education system. The early achievers program is applicable to licensed or certified child care centers and homes and early ((~~education~~)) learning programs such as working connections child care and early childhood education and assistance programs.

(2) The ((~~purpose~~)) objectives of the early achievers program ((~~is~~)) are to:

(a) ((~~To~~)) Improve short-term and long-term educational outcomes for children as measured by assessments including, but not limited to, the Washington kindergarten inventory of developing skills in RCW 28A.655.080;

(b) Give parents clear and easily accessible information about the quality of child care and early education programs((~~,~~));

(c) Support improvement in early learning and child care programs throughout the state((~~,~~));

(d) Increase the readiness of children for school((~~, and~~));

(e) Close the ((~~disparity~~)) disparities in access to quality care;

(f) Provide professional development and coaching opportunities to early child care and education providers; and ((~~(b) to~~))

(g) Establish a common set of expectations and standards that define, measure, and improve the quality of early learning and child care settings.

(3)(a) Licensed or certified child care centers and homes serving nonschool age children and receiving state subsidy payments must participate in the early achievers program by the required deadlines established in RCW 43.215.135.

(b) Approved early childhood education and assistance program providers receiving state-funded support must participate in the early achievers program by the required deadlines established in RCW 43.215.415.

(c) Participation in the early achievers program is voluntary for licensed or certified child care centers and homes not receiving state subsidy payments.

(d) School age child care providers are exempt from participating in the early achievers program. By July 1, 2017, the department shall design a plan to incorporate school age child care providers into the early achievers program. To test implementation of the early achievers system for school age child care providers the department shall implement a pilot program.

(4) ((~~By fiscal year 2015, Washington state preschool programs receiving state funds must enroll in the early achievers program and maintain a minimum score level.~~

~~(5) Before final implementation of the early achievers program, the department shall report on program progress, as defined within the race to the top federal grant award, and expenditures to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the legislature.~~)) There are five levels in the early achievers program. Participants are expected to actively engage and continually advance within the program.

(5) The department has the authority to determine the rating cycle for the early achievers program.

(a) Early achievers program participants may request to be rated at any time after the completion of all level 2 activities.

(b) The department shall provide an early achievers program participant an update on the participant's progress toward completing level 2 activities after the participant has been enrolled in the early achievers program for fifteen months.

(c) The first rating is free for early achievers program participants.

(d) Each subsequent rating within the established rating cycle is free for early achievers program participants.

(6)(a) Early achievers program participants may request to be rerated outside the established rating cycle.

(b) The department may charge a fee for optional rerating requests made by program participants that are outside the established rating cycle.

(c) Fees charged are based on, but may not exceed, the cost to the department for activities associated with the early achievers program.

(7)(a) The department must create a single source of information for parents and caregivers to access details on a provider's early achievers program rating level, licensing history, and other indicators of quality and safety that will help parents and caregivers make informed choices.

(b) The department shall publish to the department's web site, or offer a link on its web site to, the following information:

(i) By August 1, 2015, early achievers program rating levels 1 through 5 for all child care programs that receive state subsidy, early childhood education and assistance programs, and federal head start programs in Washington; and

(ii) New early achievers program ratings within thirty days after a program becomes licensed or certified, or receives a rating.

(c) The early achievers program rating levels shall be published in a manner that is easily accessible to parents and caregivers and takes into account the linguistic needs of parents and caregivers.

(d) The department must publish early achievers program rating levels for child care programs that do not receive state subsidy but have voluntarily joined the early achievers program.

(e) Early achievers program participants who have published rating levels on the department's web site or on a link on the department's web site may include a brief description of their program, contingent upon the review and approval by the department, as determined by established marketing standards.

(8)(a) The department shall create a professional development pathway for early achievers program participants to obtain a high school diploma or equivalency or higher education credential in early childhood education, early childhood studies, child development, or an academic field related to early care and education.

(b) The professional development pathway must include opportunities for scholarships and grants to assist early achievers program participants with the costs associated with obtaining an educational degree.

(c) The department shall address cultural and linguistic diversity when developing the professional development pathway.

(9) The early achievers quality improvement awards shall be reserved for participants offering programs to an enrollment population consisting of at least five percent of children receiving a state subsidy.

(10) In collaboration with tribal governments, community and statewide partners, and the early achievers review subcommittee created in RCW 43.215.090, the department shall develop a protocol for granting early achievers program participants an extension in meeting rating level requirement timelines outlined for the working connections child care program and the early childhood education and assistance program.

(a) The department may grant extensions only under exceptional circumstances, such as when early achievers program participants experience an unexpected life circumstance.

(b) Extensions shall not exceed six months, and early achievers program participants are only eligible for one extension in meeting rating level requirement timelines.

(c) Extensions may only be granted to early achievers program participants who have demonstrated engagement in the early achievers program.

(d) A report outlining the early achievers program extension protocol shall be delivered to the appropriate committees of legislature by December 31, 2015.

(11)(a) The department shall accept national accreditation that meets the requirements of this subsection (11) as a qualification for the early achievers program ratings.

(b) Each national accreditation agency will be allowed to submit its most current standards of accreditation to establish potential credit earned in the early achievers program. The department shall grant credit to accreditation bodies that can demonstrate that their standards meet or exceed the current early achievers program standards.

(c) Licensed child care centers and child care home providers must meet national accreditation standards approved by the department for the early achievers program in order to be granted credit for the early achievers program standards. Eligibility for the early achievers program is not subject to bargaining, mediation, or interest arbitration under RCW 41.56.028, consistent with the legislative reservation of rights under RCW 41.56.028(4)(d).

(12) A child care or early learning program that is operated by a federally recognized tribe and receives state funds shall participate in the early achievers program. The tribe may choose to participate through an interlocal agreement between the tribe and the department. The interlocal agreement must reflect the government-to-government relationship between the state and the tribe, including recognition of tribal sovereignty. The interlocal agreement must provide that:

(a) Tribal child care facilities and early learning programs may volunteer, but are not required, to be licensed by the department;

(b) Tribal child care facilities and early learning programs are not required to have their early achievers program rating level published to the department's web site or through a link on the department's web site; and

(c) Tribal child care facilities and early learning programs must provide notification to parents or guardians who apply for or have been admitted into their program that early achievers program rating level information is available and provide the parents or guardians with the program's early achievers program rating level upon request.

(13) The department shall consult with the early achievers review subcommittee on all substantial policy changes to the early achievers program.

(14) Nothing in this section changes the department's responsibility to collectively bargain over mandatory subjects or limits the legislature's authority to make programmatic modifications to licensed child care and early learning programs under RCW 41.56.028(4)(d).

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.215 RCW to read as follows:

REDUCTION OF BARRIERS—LOW-INCOME PROVIDERS AND PROGRAMS—EARLY ACHIEVERS.

(1)(a) The department shall, in collaboration with tribal governments and community and statewide partners, implement a protocol to maximize and encourage participation in the early achievers program for culturally diverse and low-income center and family home child care providers. Amounts appropriated for the encouragement of culturally diverse and low-income center and family home child care provider participation shall be appropriated separately from the other funds appropriated for the department, are the only funds that may be used for the protocol, and may not be used for any other purposes. Funds appropriated for the protocol shall be considered an ongoing program for purposes of future departmental budget requests.

(b) During the first thirty months of implementation of the early achievers program the department shall prioritize the resources authorized in this section to assist providers rating at a level 2 in the early achievers program to help them reach a level 3 rating wherever access to subsidized care is at risk.

(2) The protocol should address barriers to early achievers program participation and include at a minimum the following:

(a) The creation of a substitute pool;

(b) The development of needs-based grants for providers at level 2 in the early achievers program to assist with purchasing curriculum development, instructional materials, supplies, and equipment to improve program quality. Priority for the needs-based grants shall be given to culturally diverse and low-income providers;

(c) The development of materials and assessments in a timely manner, and to the extent feasible, in the provider and family home languages; and

(d) The development of flexibility in technical assistance and coaching structures to provide differentiated types and amounts of support to providers based on individual need and cultural context.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.215.135 and 2013 c 323 s 9 are each amended to read as follows:

WORKING CONNECTIONS CHILD CARE.

(1) The department shall establish and implement policies in the working connections child care program to promote stability and quality of care for children from low-income households. These policies shall focus on supporting school readiness for young learners. Policies for the expenditure of funds constituting the working connections child care program must be consistent with the outcome measures defined in RCW 74.08A.410 and the standards established in this section intended to promote ((~~continuity of care for children~~)) stability, quality, and continuity of early care and education programming.

(2) ((~~Beginning in fiscal year 2013,~~)) As recommended by Public Law 113-186, authorizations for the working connections child care subsidy shall be effective for twelve months ((~~unless a change in circumstances necessitates reauthorization sooner than twelve months. The twelve-month certification applies only if the enrollments in the child care subsidy or working connections child care program are capped.~~

~~(3) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, beginning September 1, 2013, working connections child care providers shall receive a five percent increase in the subsidy rate for enrolling in level 2 in the early achievers programs. Providers must complete level 2 and advance to level 3 within thirty months in order to maintain this increase~~)) beginning January 1, 2016.

(3) Existing child care providers serving nonschool age children and receiving state subsidy payments must complete the following requirements to be eligible for a state subsidy under this section:

(a) Enroll in the early achievers program by August 1, 2016;

(b) Complete level 2 activities in the early achievers program by August 1, 2017; and

(c) Rate at a level 3 or higher in the early achievers program by December 31, 2019. If a child care provider rates below a level 3 by December 31, 2019, the provider must complete remedial activities with the department, and rate at a level 3 or higher no later than June 30, 2020.

(4) Effective July 1, 2016, a new child care provider serving nonschool age children and receiving state subsidy payments must complete the following activities to be eligible to receive a state subsidy under this section:

(a) Enroll in the early achievers program within thirty days;

(b) Complete level 2 activities in the early achievers program within twelve months of enrollment; and

(c) Rate at a level 3 or higher in the early achievers program within thirty months of enrollment. If a child care provider rates below a level 3 within thirty months from enrollment into the early achievers program, the provider must complete remedial activities with the department, and rate at a level 3 or higher within six months.

(5) If a child care provider does not rate at a level 3 or higher following the remedial period, the provider is no longer eligible to receive state subsidy under this section.

(6) If a child care provider serving nonschool age children and receiving state subsidy payments has successfully completed all level 2 activities and is waiting to be rated by the deadline provided in this section, the provider may continue to receive a state subsidy pending the successful completion of the level 3 rating activity.

(7) The department shall implement tiered reimbursement for early achievers program participants in the working connections child care program rating at level 3, 4, or 5.

(8) The department shall account for a child care copayment collected by the provider from the family for each contracted slot and establish the copayment fee by rule.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.215.1352 and 2012 c 251 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

WORKING CONNECTIONS CHILD CARE.

When an applicant or recipient applies for or receives working connections child care benefits, ((~~he or she~~)) the applicant or recipient is required to((~~:~~

~~(1)~~)) notify the department of social and health services, within five days, of any change in providers((~~; and~~

~~(2) Notify the department of social and health services, within ten days, about any significant change related to the number of child care hours the applicant or recipient needs, cost sharing, or eligibility~~)).

**Sec.**  RCW 43.215.425 and 1994 c 166 s 6 are each amended to read as follows:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(1) The department shall adopt rules under chapter 34.05 RCW for the administration of the early childhood education and assistance program. Approved early childhood education and assistance programs shall conduct needs assessments of their service area((~~,~~)) and identify any targeted groups of children, to include but not be limited to children of seasonal and migrant farmworkers and native American populations living either on or off reservation((~~, and~~)). Approved early childhood education and assistance programs shall provide to the department a service delivery plan, to the extent practicable, that addresses these targeted populations.

(2) The department, in developing rules for the early childhood education and assistance program, shall consult with the early learning advisory ((~~committee~~)) council, and shall consider such factors as coordination with existing head start and other early childhood programs, the preparation necessary for instructors, qualifications of instructors, adequate space and equipment, and special transportation needs. The rules shall specifically require the early childhood programs to provide for parental involvement in participation with their child's program, in local program policy decisions, in development and revision of service delivery systems, and in parent education and training.

(3)(a) The department shall adopt rules pertaining to the early childhood education and assistance program that outline allowable periods of child absences, required contact with parents or caregivers to discuss child absences and encourage regular attendance, and a de-enrollment procedure when allowable child absences are exceeded.

(b) Rules pertaining to child absences and de-enrollment procedures shall be adopted no later than July 31, 2016.

(4) The department shall adopt rules requiring early childhood education and assistance program employees who have access to children to submit to a fingerprint background check. Fingerprint background check procedures for the early childhood education and assistance program shall be the same as the background check procedures in RCW 43.215.215.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.215.415 and 1994 c 166 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(1) Approved early childhood education and assistance programs shall receive state-funded support through the department. Public or private ((~~nonsectarian~~)) organizations, including, but not limited to school districts, educational service districts, community and technical colleges, local governments, or nonprofit organizations, are eligible to participate as providers of the state early childhood education and assistance program. ((~~Funds appropriated for the state program shall be used to continue to operate existing programs or to establish new or expanded early childhood programs, and shall not be used to supplant federally supported head start programs.~~))

(2) Funds obtained by providers through voluntary grants or contributions from individuals, agencies, corporations, or organizations may be used to expand or enhance preschool programs so long as program standards established by the department are maintained((~~, but shall not be used to supplant federally supported head start programs or state-supported early childhood programs~~)).

(3) Persons applying to conduct the early childhood education and assistance program shall identify targeted groups and the number of children to be served, program components, the qualifications of instructional and special staff, the source and amount of grants or contributions from sources other than state funds, facilities and equipment support, and transportation and personal care arrangements.

(4) Existing early childhood education and assistance program providers must complete the following requirements to be eligible to receive state-funded support under the early childhood education and assistance program:

(a) Enroll in the early achievers program by August 1, 2015;

(b) Rate at a level 4 or 5 in the early achievers program by January 1, 2016. If an early childhood education and assistance program provider rates below a level 4 by January 1, 2016, the provider must complete remedial activities with the department, and rate at a level 4 or 5 within six months.

(5) Effective August 1, 2015, a new early childhood education and assistance program provider must complete the requirements in this subsection (5) to be eligible to receive state-funded support under the early childhood education and assistance program:

(a) Enroll in the early achievers program within thirty days;

(b) Rate at a level 4 or 5 in the early achievers program within twelve months of enrollment. If an early childhood education and assistance program provider rates below a level 4 within twelve months of enrollment, the provider must complete remedial activities with the department, and rate at a level 4 or 5 within six months.

(6)(a) If an early childhood education and assistance program provider has successfully completed all of the required early achievers program activities and is waiting to be rated by the deadline provided in this section, the provider may continue to participate in the early achievers program as an approved early childhood education and assistance program provider and receive state subsidy pending the successful completion of a level 4 or 5 rating.

(b) To avoid disruption, the department may allow for early childhood education and assistance program providers who have rated below a level 4 after completion of the six-month remedial period to continue to provide services until the current school year is finished.

(7) The department shall collect data to determine the demand for full-day programming for early childhood education and assistance program providers. The department shall analyze this demand by geographic region and report the findings to the appropriate committees of the legislature by January 1, 2016.

(8) By December 1, 2015, the department shall develop a pathway for family home providers to administer an early childhood education and assistance program.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.215.455 and 2010 c 231 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

(1) Beginning September 1, 2011, an early learning program to provide voluntary preschool opportunities for children three and four years of age shall be implemented according to the funding and implementation plan in RCW ((~~43.215.142~~)) 43.215.456. The program must ((~~be~~)) offer a comprehensive program ((~~providing~~)) of early childhood education and family support, ((~~options for~~)) including parental involvement((~~,~~)) and health information, screening, and referral services, ((~~as~~)) based on family need ((~~is determined~~)). Participation in the program is voluntary. On a space available basis, the program may allow enrollment of children who are not otherwise eligible by assessing a fee.

(2) The ((~~first phase of the~~)) program shall be implemented by utilizing the program standards and eligibility criteria in the early childhood education and assistance program in RCW 43.215.400 through 43.215.450.

(3)(a) Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, the program implementation in this section shall prioritize early childhood education and assistance programs located in low-income neighborhoods within high-need geographical areas.

(b) Following the priority in (a) of this subsection, preference shall be given to programs meeting at least one of the following characteristics:

(i) Programs offering extended day early care and education programming;

(ii) Programs offering services to children diagnosed with a special need; or

(iii) Programs offering services to children involved in the child welfare system.

(4) The director shall adopt rules for the following program components, as appropriate and necessary during the phased implementation of the program, consistent with early achievers program standards established in RCW 43.215.100:

(a) Minimum program standards((~~, including lead teacher, assistant teacher, and staff qualifications~~));

(b) Approval of program providers; and

(c) Accountability and adherence to performance standards.

((~~(4)~~)) (5) The department has administrative responsibility for:

(a) Approving and contracting with providers according to rules developed by the director under this section;

(b) In partnership with school districts, monitoring program quality and assuring the program is responsive to the needs of eligible children;

(c) Assuring that program providers work cooperatively with school districts to coordinate the transition from preschool to kindergarten so that children and their families are well-prepared and supported; and

(d) Providing technical assistance to contracted providers.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.215 RCW to read as follows:

PROGRAM DATA COLLECTION AND EVALUATION.

(1) The education data center established in RCW 43.41.400 must collect longitudinal, student-level data on all children attending a working connections child care program or an early childhood education and assistance program. Data collected should capture at a minimum the following characteristics:

(a) Daily program attendance;

(b) Identification of classroom and teacher;

(c) Early achievers program quality level rating;

(d) Program hours;

(e) Program duration;

(f) Developmental results from the Washington kindergarten inventory of developing skills in RCW 28A.655.080; and

(g) To the extent data is available, the distinct ethnic categories within racial subgroups of children and providers that align with categories recognized by the education data center.

(2) The department shall provide child care and early learning providers student-level data collected pursuant to this section that are specific to the child care provider's or the early learning provider's program.

(3) Every four years, the department in collaboration with the early achievers review subcommittee shall review the data collected on the achievement of the early achievers program standards and provide a report to the appropriate committees of the legislature. The report shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

(a) Recommendations for improving the early achievers program standards;

(b) A review of the services available to providers and children from diverse cultural backgrounds;

(c) Recommendations for improving access to providers rated at a level 3 or higher in the early achievers program by children from diverse cultural backgrounds; and

(d) To the extent data is available, an analysis of the distribution of early achievers program rated facilities in relation to child and provider demographics, including but not limited to race and ethnicity, home language, and geographical location.

(4)(a) The department shall review available research and best practices literature on cultural competency in early learning settings. The department shall review the K-12 components for cultural competency developed by the professional educator standards board and identify components appropriate for early learning professional development.

(b) By July 31, 2016, the department shall provide recommendations to the appropriate committees of the legislature and the early learning advisory council on research-based cultural competency standards for early learning professional training.

(5)(a) The Washington state institute for public policy shall conduct a longitudinal analysis examining relationships between the early achievers program quality ratings levels and outcomes for children participating in subsidized early care and education programs.

(b) The institute shall submit the first report to the appropriate committees of the legislature and the early learning advisory council by December 31, 2018. The institute shall submit subsequent reports annually to the appropriate committees of the legislature and the early learning advisory council by December 31st, with the final report due December 31, 2021. The final report shall include a cost-benefit analysis.

(6)(a) The department shall complete an annual early learning program implementation report on the early childhood education and assistance program and the working connections child care program.

(b) The early learning program implementation report must be posted annually on the department's web site and delivered to the appropriate committees of the legislature. The first report is due by December 31, 2015, and the final report is due by December 31, 2019.

(c) The early learning program implementation report must address the following:

(i) Progress on early childhood education and assistance program implementation as required pursuant to RCW 43.215.415, 43.215.425, and 43.215.455;

(ii) An examination of the regional distribution of new preschool programming by zip code;

(iii) An analysis of the impact of preschool expansion on low-income neighborhoods and communities;

(iv) Recommendations to address any identified barriers to access to quality preschool for children living in low-income neighborhoods;

(v) An analysis of any impact from quality strengthening efforts on the availability and quality of infant and toddler care;

(vi) An analysis of any impact of extended day early care and education opportunities directives;

(vii) An examination of any identified barriers for providers to offer extended day early care and education opportunities; and

(viii) To the extent data is available, an analysis of the cultural diversity of early childhood education and assistance program providers and participants.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.215 RCW to read as follows:

CONTRACTED CHILD CARE SLOTS AND VOUCHERS.

(1) The department shall employ a combination of vouchers and contracted slots for the subsidized child care programs in RCW 43.215.135 and 43.215.415. Child care vouchers preserve parental choice. Child care contracted slots promote access to continuous quality care for children, provide parents and caregivers stable child care that supports employment, and allow providers to have predictable funding.

(2) Only child care providers who participate in the early achievers program and rate at a level 3, 4, or 5 are eligible to be awarded a contracted slot.

(3)(a) The department is required to use data to calculate a set number of targeted contracted slots. In calculating the number, the department must take into account a balance of family home and center child care programs and the overall geographic distribution of child care programs in the state and the distribution of slots between ages zero and five.

(b) The targeted contracted slots are reserved for programs meeting both of the following conditions:

(i) Programs in low-income neighborhoods; and

(ii) Programs that consist of at least fifty percent of children receiving subsidy pursuant to RCW 43.215.135.

(c) Until August 1, 2017, the department shall award at least fifty percent of the contracted slots for children birth to age three.

(4) The department shall award the remaining contracted slots via a competitive process and prioritize child care programs with at least one of the following characteristics:

(a) Programs located in a high-need geographic area;

(b) Programs partnering with elementary schools to offer transitional planning and support to children as they advance to kindergarten;

(c) Programs serving children involved in the child welfare system; or

(d) Programs serving children diagnosed with a special need.

(5)(a) The department shall adopt rules pertaining to the working connections child care program for both contracted slots and child care vouchers that outline the following:

(i) Allowable periods of child absences;

(ii) Required contact with parents or caregivers to discuss child absences and encourage regular program attendance; and

(iii) A de-enrollment procedure when allowable child absences are exceeded.

(b) Rules pertaining to child absences and de-enrollment procedures shall be adopted no later than July 31, 2016.

(6) The department shall pay a provider for each contracted slot, unless a contracted slot is not used for thirty days.

(7)(a) By December 31, 2015, the department shall provide a report to the appropriate committees of the legislature on the number of contracted slots that use both early childhood education assistance program funding and working connections child care program funding.

(b) The report must be provided annually, with the last report due December 31, 2018.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.215.020 and 2013 c 323 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

DEPARTMENT OF EARLY LEARNING DUTIES.

(1) The department of early learning is created as an executive branch agency. The department is vested with all powers and duties transferred to it under this chapter and such other powers and duties as may be authorized by law.

(2) The primary duties of the department are to implement state early learning policy and to coordinate, consolidate, and integrate child care and early learning programs in order to administer programs and funding as efficiently as possible. The department's duties include, but are not limited to, the following:

(a) To support both public and private sectors toward a comprehensive and collaborative system of early learning that serves parents, children, and providers and to encourage best practices in child care and early learning programs;

(b) To make early learning resources available to parents and caregivers;

(c) To carry out activities, including providing clear and easily accessible information about quality and improving the quality of early learning opportunities for young children, in cooperation with the nongovernmental private‑public partnership;

(d) To administer child care and early learning programs;

(e) To apply data already collected comparing the following factors and make biennial recommendations to the legislature regarding working connections subsidy and state-funded preschool rates and compensation models that would attract and retain high quality early learning professionals:

(i) State-funded early learning subsidy rates and market rates of licensed early learning homes and centers;

(ii) State-funded early learning subsidy rates and market rates of licensed child care homes and centers that serve children ages birth to three;

(iii) Compensation of early learning educators in licensed centers and homes and early learning teachers at state higher education institutions;

((~~(iii)~~)) (iv) State-funded preschool program compensation rates and Washington state head start program compensation rates; and

((~~(iv)~~)) (v) State-funded preschool program compensation to compensation in similar comprehensive programs in other states;

(f) To serve as the state lead agency for Part C of the federal individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA);

(g) To standardize internal financial audits, oversight visits, performance benchmarks, and licensing criteria, so that programs can function in an integrated fashion;

(h) To support the implementation of the nongovernmental private-public partnership and cooperate with that partnership in pursuing its goals including providing data and support necessary for the successful work of the partnership;

(i) To work cooperatively and in coordination with the early learning council;

(j) To collaborate with the K-12 school system at the state and local levels to ensure appropriate connections and smooth transitions between early learning and K-12 programs;

(k) To develop and adopt rules for administration of the program of early learning established in RCW ((~~43.215.141~~)) 43.215.455;

(l) To develop a comprehensive birth-to-three plan to provide education and support through a continuum of options including, but not limited to, services such as: Home visiting; quality incentives for infant and toddler child care subsidies; quality improvements for family home and center-based child care programs serving infants and toddlers; professional development; early literacy programs; and informal supports for family, friend, and neighbor caregivers; and

(m) Upon the development of an early learning information system, to make available to parents timely inspection and licensing action information and provider comments through the internet and other means.

(3) When additional funds are appropriated for the specific purpose of home visiting and parent and caregiver support, the department must reserve at least eighty percent for home visiting services to be deposited into the home visiting services account and up to twenty percent of the new funds for other parent or caregiver support.

(4) Home visiting services must include programs that serve families involved in the child welfare system.

(5) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose, the legislature shall fund the expansion in the Washington state preschool program pursuant to RCW ((~~43.215.142~~)) 43.215.456 in fiscal year 2014.

(6) The department's programs shall be designed in a way that respects and preserves the ability of parents and legal guardians to direct the education, development, and upbringing of their children, and that recognizes and honors cultural and linguistic diversity. The department shall include parents and legal guardians in the development of policies and program decisions affecting their children.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.215 RCW to read as follows:

SINGLE SET OF LICENSING STANDARDS.

No later than July 1, 2016, the department shall implement a single set of licensing standards for child care and the early childhood education and assistance program. The new licensing standards must:

(1) Provide minimum health and safety standards for child care and preschool programs;

(2) Rely on the standards established in the early achievers program to address quality issues in participating early childhood programs;

(3) Take into account the separate needs of family care providers and child care centers; and

(4) Promote the continued safety of child care settings.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.215 RCW to read as follows:

INTEGRATION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT EFFORTS.

(1) The foundation of quality in the early care and education system in Washington is the quality rating and improvement system entitled the early achievers program. In an effort to build on the existing quality framework, enhance access to quality care for children, and strengthen the entire early care and education systems in the state, it is important to integrate the efforts of state and local governments.

(2) Local governments are encouraged to collaborate with the department when establishing early learning programs for residents.

(3) Local governments may contribute funds to the department for the following purposes:

(a) Initial investments to build capacity and quality in local early care and education programming; and

(b) Reductions in copayments charged to parents or caregivers.

(4) Funds contributed to the department by local governments must be deposited in the early start account established in section 15 of this act.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.215.090 and 2012 c 229 s 589 are each amended to read as follows:

EARLY LEARNING ADVISORY COUNCIL.

(1) The early learning advisory council is established to advise the department on statewide early learning 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 and professional development of early childhood educators, and establishing key performance measures.

(2) The council shall work in conjunction with the department to develop a statewide early learning plan that guides the department in promoting alignment of private and public sector actions, objectives, and resources, and ensuring school readiness.

(3) The council shall include diverse, statewide representation from public, nonprofit, and for-profit entities. Its membership shall reflect regional, racial, and cultural diversity to adequately represent the needs of all children and families in the state.

(4) Councilmembers shall serve two-year terms. However, to stagger the terms of the council, the initial appointments for twelve of the members shall be for one year. Once the initial one-year to two-year terms expire, all subsequent terms shall be for two years, with the terms expiring on June 30th of the applicable year. The terms shall be staggered in such a way that, where possible, the terms of members representing a specific group do not expire simultaneously.

(5) The council shall consist of not more than twenty-three members, as follows:

(a) The governor shall appoint at least one representative from each of the following: The department, the office of financial management, the department of social and health services, the department of health, the student achievement council, and the state board for community and technical colleges;

(b) One representative from the office of the superintendent of public instruction, to be appointed by the superintendent of public instruction;

(c) The governor shall appoint seven leaders in early childhood education, with at least one representative with experience or expertise in one or more of the areas such as the following: The K-12 system, family day care providers, and child care centers with four of the seven governor's appointees made as follows:

(i) The head start state collaboration office director or the director's designee;

(ii) A representative of a head start, early head start, migrant/seasonal head start, or tribal head start program;

(iii) A representative of a local education agency; and

(iv) A representative of the state agency responsible for programs under section 619 or part C of the federal individuals with disabilities education act;

(d) Two members of the house of representatives, one from each caucus, and two members of the senate, one from each caucus, to be appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate, respectively;

(e) Two parents, one of whom serves on the department's parent advisory group, to be appointed by the governor;

(f) One representative of the private-public partnership created in RCW 43.215.070, to be appointed by the partnership board;

(g) One representative designated by sovereign tribal governments; and

(h) One representative from the Washington federation of independent schools.

(6) The council shall be cochaired by one representative of a state agency and one nongovernmental member, to be elected by the council for two-year terms.

(7) The council shall appoint two members and stakeholders with expertise in early learning to sit on the technical working group created in section 2, chapter 234, Laws of 2010.

(8) Each member of the board shall be compensated in accordance with RCW 43.03.240 and reimbursed for travel expenses incurred in carrying out the duties of the board in accordance with RCW 43.03.050 and 43.03.060.

(9)(a) The council shall convene an early achievers review 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. At a minimum the review shall address the following:

(i) Adequacy of data collection procedures;

(ii) Coaching and technical assistance standards;

(iii) Progress in reducing barriers to participation for low-income providers and providers from diverse cultural backgrounds;

(iv) Strategies in response to data on the effectiveness of early achievers program standards in relation to providers and children from diverse cultural backgrounds;

(v) Status of the life circumstance exemption protocols; and

(vi) Analysis of early achievers program data trends.

(b) The subcommittee must include consideration of cultural linguistic responsiveness when analyzing the areas for review required by (a) of this subsection.

(c) Beginning January 1, 2016, the subcommittee shall provide an annual report of the review findings and recommendations to the department and the appropriate committees of the legislature.

(d) The subcommittee shall include representatives from child care centers, family child care, the early childhood education and assistance program, contractors for early achievers program technical assistance and coaching, the organization responsible for conducting early achiever program ratings, and parents of children participating in early learning programs. The subcommittee shall include representatives from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

(10) The department shall provide staff support to the council.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.215 RCW to read as follows:

EARLY START ACCOUNT.

The early start account is created in the state treasury. Revenues in the account shall consist of appropriations by the legislature and all other sources deposited into the account. Moneys in the account may only be used after appropriation. Expenditures from the account may be used only to improve the quality of early care and education programming. The department oversees the account.

**Sec.**  RCW 43.215.010 and 2013 c 323 s 3 and 2013 c 130 s 1 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

DEFINITIONS.

The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Agency" means any person, firm, partnership, association, corporation, or facility that provides child care and early learning services outside a child's own home and includes the following irrespective of whether there is compensation to the agency:

(a) "Child day care center" means an agency that regularly provides early childhood education and early learning services for a group of children for periods of less than twenty-four hours;

(b) "Early learning" includes but is not limited to programs and services for child care; state, federal, private, and nonprofit preschool; child care subsidies; child care resource and referral; parental education and support; and training and professional development for early learning professionals;

(c) "Family day care provider" means a child care provider who regularly provides early childhood education and early learning services for not more than twelve children in the provider's home in the family living quarters;

(d) "Nongovernmental private-public partnership" means an entity registered as a nonprofit corporation in Washington state with a primary focus on early learning, school readiness, and parental support, and an ability to raise a minimum of five million dollars in contributions;

(e) "Service provider" means the entity that operates a community facility.

(2) "Agency" does not include the following:

(a) Persons related to the child in the following ways:

(i) Any blood relative, including those of half-blood, and including first cousins, nephews or nieces, and persons of preceding generations as denoted by prefixes of grand, great, or great-great;

(ii) Stepfather, stepmother, stepbrother, and stepsister;

(iii) A person who legally adopts a child or the child's parent as well as the natural and other legally adopted children of such persons, and other relatives of the adoptive parents in accordance with state law; or

(iv) Spouses of any persons named in (a)(i), (ii), or (iii) of this subsection, even after the marriage is terminated;

(b) Persons who are legal guardians of the child;

(c) Persons who care for a neighbor's or friend's child or children, with or without compensation, where the person providing care for periods of less than twenty-four hours does not conduct such activity on an ongoing, regularly scheduled basis for the purpose of engaging in business, which includes, but is not limited to, advertising such care;

(d) Parents on a mutually cooperative basis exchange care of one another's children;

(e) Nursery schools that are engaged primarily in early childhood education with preschool children and in which no child is enrolled on a regular basis for more than four hours per day;

(f) Schools, including boarding schools, that are engaged primarily in education, operate on a definite school year schedule, follow a stated academic curriculum, accept only school((~~-~~))age children, and do not accept custody of children;

(g) Seasonal camps of three months' or less duration engaged primarily in recreational or educational activities;

(h) Facilities providing child care for periods of less than twenty-four hours when a parent or legal guardian of the child remains on the premises of the facility for the purpose of participating in:

(i) Activities other than employment; or

(ii) Employment of up to two hours per day when the facility is operated by a nonprofit entity that also operates a licensed child care program at the same facility in another location or at another facility;

(i) Any entity that provides recreational or educational programming for school((~~-~~))age((~~d~~)) children only and the entity meets all of the following requirements:

(i) The entity utilizes a drop-in model for programming, where children are able to attend during any or all program hours without a formal reservation;

(ii) The entity does not assume responsibility in lieu of the parent, unless for coordinated transportation;

(iii) The entity is a local affiliate of a national nonprofit; and

(iv) The entity is in compliance with all safety and quality standards set by the associated national agency;

(j) A program operated by any unit of local, state, or federal government or an agency, located within the boundaries of a federally recognized Indian reservation, licensed by the Indian tribe;

(k) A program located on a federal military reservation, except where the military authorities request that such agency be subject to the licensing requirements of this chapter;

(l) A program that offers early learning and support services, such as parent education, and does not provide child care services on a regular basis.

(3) "Applicant" means a person who requests or seeks employment in an agency.

(4) "Conviction information" means criminal history record information relating to an incident which has led to a conviction or other disposition adverse to the applicant.

(5) "Department" means the department of early learning.

(6) "Director" means the director of the department.

(7) "Early achievers" means a program that improves the quality of early learning programs and supports and rewards providers for their participation.

(8) "Early start" means an integrated high quality continuum of early learning programs for children birth-to-five years of age. Components of early start include, but are not limited to, the following:

(a) Home visiting and parent education and support programs;

(b) The early achievers program described in RCW 43.215.100;

(c) Integrated full-day and part-day high quality early learning programs; and

(d) High quality preschool for children whose family income is at or below one hundred ten percent of the federal poverty level.

(9) "Education data center" means the education data center established in RCW 43.41.400, commonly referred to as the education research and data center.

(10) "Employer" means a person or business that engages the services of one or more people, especially for wages or salary to work in an agency.

((~~(10)~~)) (11) "Enforcement action" means denial, suspension, revocation, modification, or nonrenewal of a license pursuant to RCW 43.215.300(1) or assessment of civil monetary penalties pursuant to RCW 43.215.300(3).

((~~(11)~~)) (12) "Extended day program" means an early childhood education and assistance program that offers child care for at least ten hours per day, five days per week, year round.

(13) "Full day program" means an early childhood education and assistance program that offers child care for at least six hours per day, a minimum of one thousand hours per year, and at least four days per week.

(14) "Low-income child care provider" means a person who administers a child care program that consists of at least eighty percent of children receiving working connections child care subsidy.

(15) "Low-income neighborhood" means a district or community where more than twenty percent of households are below the federal poverty level.

(16) "Negative action" means a court order, court judgment, or an adverse action taken by an agency, in any state, federal, tribal, or foreign jurisdiction, which results in a finding against the applicant reasonably related to the individual's character, suitability, and competence to care for or have unsupervised access to children in child care. This may include, but is not limited to:

(a) A decision issued by an administrative law judge;

(b) A final determination, decision, or finding made by an agency following an investigation;

(c) An adverse agency action, including termination, revocation, or denial of a license or certification, or if pending adverse agency action, the voluntary surrender of a license, certification, or contract in lieu of the adverse action;

(d) A revocation, denial, or restriction placed on any professional license; or

(e) A final decision of a disciplinary board.

((~~(12)~~)) (17) "Nonconviction information" means arrest, founded allegations of child abuse, or neglect pursuant to chapter 26.44 RCW, or other negative action adverse to the applicant.

((~~(13)~~)) (18) "Nonschool age child" means a child birth through six years of age who has yet to enter kindergarten or school.

(19) "Part day program" means an early childhood education and assistance program that offers child care for at least two and one-half hours per class session, at least three hundred twenty hours per year, for a minimum of thirty weeks per year.

(20) "Probationary license" means a license issued as a disciplinary measure to an agency that has previously been issued a full license but is out of compliance with licensing standards.

((~~(14)~~)) (21) "Requirement" means any rule, regulation, or standard of care to be maintained by an agency.

((~~(15)~~)) (22) "School age child" means a child not less than five years of age through twelve years of age and who is attending kindergarten or school.

(23) "Washington state preschool program" means an education program for children three-to-five years of age who have not yet entered kindergarten, such as the early childhood education and assistance program.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.215 RCW to read as follows:

(1)(a) A joint select committee on the early achievers program is established with members as provided in this subsection.

(i) Chair and ranking minority member of the house of representatives appropriations committee;

(ii) Chair and ranking minority member of the senate ways and means committee;

(iii) Chair and ranking minority member of the house of representatives early learning and human services committee; and

(iv) Chair and ranking minority member of the senate early learning and K-12 education committee.

(b) The committee shall choose its chair or cochairs from among its legislative membership. The chairs of the house of representatives appropriations committee and the senate ways and means committee shall convene the initial meeting of the committee.

(2) Between July 1, 2017, and December 1, 2017, the early achievers joint select committee shall review the demand and availability of licensed or certified child care family homes and centers, approved early childhood education and assistance programs, head start programs, and family, friend, and neighbor caregivers by geographic region, including rural and low-income areas. This review shall specifically look at the following:

(a) The geographic distribution of these child care programs by type of program, programs that accept state subsidy, enrollment in the early achievers program, and early achievers rating levels; and

(b) The demand and availability of these child care programs for major ethnic populations.

(3) By December 1, 2017, the early achievers joint select committee shall make recommendations to the legislature on the following:

(a) The sufficiency of funding provided for the early achievers program;

(b) The need for targeted funding for specific geographic regions or major ethnic populations; and

(c) Whether to modify the deadlines established in RCW 43.215.135 for purposes of the early achievers program mandate established in RCW 43.215.100.

(4) Staff support for the committee must be provided by the senate committee services and the house of representatives office of program research.

(5) Legislative members of the committee must be reimbursed for travel expenses in accordance with RCW 44.04.120.

(6) The expenses of the committee must be paid jointly by the senate and the house of representatives. Committee expenditures are subject to approval by the senate facilities and operations committee and the house of representatives executive rules committee, or their successor committees.

(7) The committee shall report its findings and recommendations to the appropriate committees of the legislature by December 1, 2017.

(8) This section expires December 1, 2018.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  REPEALER. 2013 2nd sp.s. c 16 s 2 (uncodified) is repealed.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 43.215 RCW to read as follows:

SHORT TITLE.

Chapter . . ., Laws of 2015 (this act) may be known and cited as the early start act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  NULL AND VOID. If specific funding for the purposes of this act, referencing this act by bill or chapter number, is not provided by June 30, 2015, in the omnibus appropriations act, this act is null and void.

**--- END ---**