

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1663

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Children's Services

Title: An act relating to early child development and learning.

Brief Description: Regarding early child development and learning.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Haler, Walsh, P. Sullivan, Appleton, Green, Seaquist, Fromhold, Hurst, Santos, Roberts, Dickerson, Ormsby, Sells, Conway, Flannigan, Chase, Morrell, Haigh, Sommers, Simpson and Darneille.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Children's Services: 2/6/07, 2/22/07 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes an Early Learning Advisory Council.
- Directs the Department of Early Learning (DEL) to implement a five-star voluntary rating system for child care centers and early education programs.
- Outlines the private-public responsibilities between the DEL and Thrive By Five Washington.
- Directs the Children's Trust Fund of Washington to fund home visitation programs.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Hinkle and Pettigrew.

Staff: Chris Alejano (786-7115).

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.

The 2005 Legislature created a comprehensive education study to include examination of early learning, K-12 education, and higher education. The study effort, chaired by Governor Gregoire, became known as Washington Learns. Washington Learns issued an interim report in November 2005, and final recommendations in November 2006, for consideration by the Legislature.

The Washington Learns recommendations identify a number of strategies intended to create a "world-class, learner-focused, seamless education system for Washington." The strategies are organized around five major initiatives:

- (1) Early Learning: A Smart Investment;
- (2) Math and Science: A Competitive Edge;
- (3) Personalized Learning: Helping Every Student Succeed;
- (4) College and Workforce Training: Increasing Opportunities; and
- (5) Quality and Accountability: Keeping the Promise.

The final report also recommends additional work on accountability and education finance, along with development of a 10-year implementation strategy.

The Governor recommends implementation of many of the recommendations of Washington Learns through her proposed budget for the 2007-09 biennium and proposed omnibus legislation.

Home visitation programs deliver services in the home to parents and children and aim to alleviate the effects various family risk factors have on child development. Home visitation programs share a focus on the importance of children's early years, the pivotal role parents play in shaping children's lives, and the belief that one of the best ways to reach families with young children is by bringing the services to them, rather than expecting those families to seek assistance in the community. Offering the services in the home eliminates barriers such as transportation and time and provides a more personalized experience by allowing families to interact in a comfortable and natural environment. Current research provides significant evidence of the effectiveness of home visitation programs as an early intervention strategy.

The Legislature created the Washington Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (WCPCAN) in 1982. The WCPCAN is a 14-member, Governor-appointed Council legislated to promote prevention of child abuse and neglect, and to encourage and support effective community prevention efforts.

In 1993, the Legislature enacted HB 1991 authorizing the five agencies comprising the Family Policy Council (the Department of Health, the Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Employment Security Department) to develop a program plan for the Home Health Visitor Program for the purpose of preventing child abuse and neglect. Due to funding constraints and other limitations, however, no coordinated program of home visitation services was implemented.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Early Learning Advisory Council. A 25-member Early Learning Advisory Council (Council) is established to advise the Department of Early Learning (DEL) on statewide early learning community needs and progress. The Council is also directed to work with the DEL to develop a statewide early learning plan. Council representation criteria and term limits are outlined.

Five-Star Voluntary Rating and Improvement System. The DEL, in collaboration with community statewide partners, is directed to implement a five-star voluntary rating implement system for licensed or certified child care centers and early education programs to: (1) provide information to parents; (2) increase the quality of early learning programs and the readiness of children for school; and (3) close the disparity in access to quality care.

Information. Upon developing an early learning information system, the DEL will make available to parents timely inspection and licensing action information through the Internet and other means.

Private-Public Partnerships. The private-public partnership responsibilities between the DEL and Thrive By Five Washington are outlined. The partnership's duties include: (1) enhancing parent education and support; (2) working with and complementing existing early learning programs; (3) accepting and spending funds for quality initiatives; (4) encouraging local partnership efforts; (5) assisting the statewide movement to high quality early learning; and (6) supporting parents as a child's first and best teacher.

Nongovernmental private-public partnership is defined as a partnership which has registered as a nonprofit corporation in 2006 with a primary focus on early learning.

Rules Review. The DEL shall review and revise child care provider rules to: (1) encourage mutual respect among parents, providers, and state staff who enforce rules; (2) clearly focus on children's safety; and (3) improve early learning outcomes for children.

Renaming the Washington Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (WCPCAN). The WCPCAN is renamed the Children's Trust Fund of Washington.

Home Visitation Services. The Children's Trust Fund of Washington is authorized to fund voluntary home visitation programs for improving parenting skills and outcomes for children that are research based. The Children's Trust Fund of Washington, the Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Health, the Department of Early Learning, and the Family Policy Council shall develop a plan to coordinate or consolidate home visitation services for children and families and report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2007 with recommendations for implementation of the plan.

The Home Visitor Program in the Department of Health statute is repealed.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

- revises the number of early childhood education leaders on the Early Learning Advisory Council (Advisory Council) from six to seven;

- identifies that one of the seven leaders in early childhood education on the Advisory Council be someone with expertise or experience in issues affecting children with disabilities;
- identifies that one representative of child care centers, one representative of child care homes, and at least one representative from the K-12 system be appointed by the Governor to be on the Advisory Council;
- revises the language regarding the tribal representative on the Advisory Council from the executive director of the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs to a person who is a representative of a federally recognized tribe;
- inserts *and improvement* to places in the section that refer to the voluntary rating *and improvement* system;
- adds *improving the readiness of children for school* and *closing the disparity in access to quality care* as additional purposes to the voluntary rating and improvement system;
- substitutes *complaint* for *licensing action* to describe the kind of information that will be made available in the early learning information system once it is developed, limiting the kind of information that will be made available to that related to licensing actions;
- removes subsections 1 through 2 creating a new section 5 that includes only the originally amended language that appears in the original subsection 3 regarding private-public partnership responsibilities;
- adds *Non-governmental private-public partnership* to the definitions section of the Department of Early Learning statute;
- revises the name of the Washington Council for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect to the Children's Trust Fund of Washington;
- provides legislative findings regarding home visitation services;
- directs the Children's Trust Fund of Washington to fund voluntary home visitation programs for improving parenting skills and outcomes for children that are research based;
- directs the Children's Trust Fund of Washington, the Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Health, the Department of Early Learning, and the Family Policy Council to develop a plan to coordinate or consolidate home visitation services for children and families and report to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2007, with recommendations for implementation of the plan; and
- repeals the *Home Visitor Program* in the Department of Health statute.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There's a change in thinking in the state and across the country about early learning. Recent research has demonstrated that we need to pay attention to the first five years of a child's life and that they receive the support they need to thrive. Many children are arriving at kindergarten not ready to learn. It's important to establish a system that supports parents as their first and best teacher and that quality early learning is available to families and children. The bill makes the licensing process more transparent. The private-public partnership is a pivotal piece in moving the state forward and creating a focus on early learning.

The state's partnership with Thrive by Five will serve as a catalyst for deep and meaningful work in communities that will change the landscape of child care. This is a thrilling bill to say that the state is going to focus very intentionally through the Department of Early Learning and private-public partnerships to help children get ready for school. The Early Learning Advisory Council will help to provide a clear and strategic framework. The rating system is all about improving the professional levels of all child care providers in the state. The Department of Early Learning is committed to cultivating the private-public partnership with Thrive by Five.

Early learning is a smart investment and needs the support of both public and private sectors. A focus on early learning can help to close the achievement gap.

The quality rating and improvement system will provide parents information on the quality of child care providers as well as help to improve the quality of participating child care programs. It also provides accountability. Affordable and accessible child care can be maintained by implementing the quality rating system.

The quality rating and improvement system holds much promise for making a difference for all children, particularly low income and children of color. The implementation of the rating system, resources and supports, compensation, and cultural competence should carefully be considered.

The bill is necessary in meeting the needs of children and their families through an increase of quality child care and available slots.

The state's law enforcement community is in support of the bill. Investment in early learning will help to reduce and prevent crime in the future and stop the cycle of crime or violence that persists in some circumstances. Home visitation services can help to get families out of this destructive cycle.

Pediatricians across the state recognize the importance of early learning and if high quality child care is provided for low and moderate income families then it will significantly improve health and developmental outcomes for children.

The quality rating and improvement system touches all aspects of child development and gives direction for providers to achieve quality. The Early Learning Advisory Council can keep the state growing, improving, and up to date on early learning.

The complaint information provided through the parent information system should be legitimate and founded. The subsidy reimbursement rate needs to be raised.

(With concerns) A representative from the disabilities community should be included on the Early Learning Advisory Council.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Jone Bosworth, Department of Early Learning; Greg Shaw, Graciela Italiano-Thomas; Jane Gutting and Kevin Washington, Thrive by Five; Agda Burchard, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children; Paola Maranan, Children's Alliance; Evelyn Lemoine, People Programs and Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce; Laura Wells, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; Bill Mahoney, Cowlitz County Sheriff's Office; Jill Sells M.D., Docs for Tots; Elizabeth Bonbright Thompson, Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network; Angelina Alvarez, Child Care Resources; Cikeithia Pugh, Atlantic Street Center; Carol Gilmore, Child Care Workforce Alliance of Washington and American Federation of Teachers; Lily Kuu, Harmony Early Childhood Education Center; Sue Winn, Service Employees International Union; and Donna Christenson, YMCA's of Washington and Catholic Charities.

(With concerns) Donna Obermeyer, Washington State Special Education Coalition.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.