

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2867

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

Title: An act relating to early learning.

Brief Description: Promoting early learning.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Sells, White, Hunt, Chase, Kessler, Morrell, Van De Wege, Kenney and Hasegawa; by request of Governor Gregoire.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Children's Services: 1/19/10, 2/2/10 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Makes legislative findings relating to the connection between early childhood development and children's social and academic functioning and success in school and beyond, and the current shortage of high-quality programs for children age birth to 3 and their parents and caregivers.
- Declares legislative intent to establish and fund a continuum of birth-to-three programs and services for children and their parents and caregivers.
- Adds to the primary duties of the Department of Early Learning (DEL) the responsibility to develop a comprehensive birth-to-three plan to provide education and support through a continuum of options.
- Directs the DEL to develop a birth-to-three plan, including recommended appropriation levels, and report to the Legislature by December 1, 2010.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Angel, Goodman and Seaquist.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

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.

Background:

Department of Early Learning.

Created by the Legislature in 2006, the Department of Early Learning (DEL) is charged with implementing state early learning policy and coordinating, consolidating, and integrating child care and early learning programs. One of the purposes underlying the creation of the DEL is to promote linkages and alignment between early learning programs and elementary schools. The DEL has approached a number of its initiatives over the past three years with the ultimate goal of improving school readiness for Washington's children.

Thrive by Five Washington.

Thrive by Five Washington (Thrive) is a nongovernmental private-public partnership created in 2006 to mobilize public and private partners to advance development and learning of children from birth to age 5.

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. The ELAC was directed to work in conjunction with the DEL to develop a statewide early learning plan.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Legislature finds that research demonstrates the connection between early childhood development and later academic and social functioning, and that there is a shortage of high-quality services and programs for children age birth to 3 and their parents and caregivers. The Legislature intends to establish birth-to-three services and programs available through a continuum of options, and to fund those programs and services proportionately as funding is expanded for early learning programs serving 3- and 4-year-old children.

The DEL is directed to collaborate with Thrive and the ELAC to develop a comprehensive birth-to-three plan for offering education and support through a continuum of options. Birth-to-three programs may include 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.

The DEL will report to the Legislature by December 1, 2010, with the birth-to-three plan and recommended appropriation levels.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill removes all provisions of the underlying bill, and adds the following provisions:

1. makes legislative findings relating to the connection between early childhood development and children's social and academic functioning and success in school

- and beyond, and the current shortage of high-quality programs for children age birth to 3 and their parents and caregivers;
2. declares legislative intent to establish a continuum of birth-to-three programs and services for children and their parents and caregivers;
 3. adds to the primary duties of the DEL the responsibility to develop a comprehensive birth-to-three plan to provide education and support through a continuum of options;
 4. declares legislative intent to fund birth-to-three programs proportionately with funding for prekindergarten programs serving 3- and 4-year-olds; and
 5. directs the DEL, in collaboration with Thrive, and the ELAC, to develop a birth-to-three plan, including recommended appropriation levels, and report to the Legislature by December 1, 2010.
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Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 2, 2010.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This was a Governor's request bill to provide voluntary preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds outside of the program of basic education. The bill also would require certification of all preschools in Washington and close this gap in our current framework. The most appealing part of this bill is the focus on birth-to-three programs as this period of development is perhaps even more critical than the development occurring during ages 3 and 4. The brain development and foundation for learning happening during this stage is critical to much of what comes later. This bill shines a light on the earliest part of the continuum of early learning, the birth-to-three period.

The Governor recognizes the very important work done by many individuals and groups on these early learning proposals and the early learning plan. The Governor believes we should develop some standards for certifying preschools and private kindergartens that are currently exempt from licensing. The Governor does not believe the early learning program for 3- and 4-year olds should be part of basic education. Rather, the Governor proposes that preschool would be available to all under a sliding scale approach that would promote socioeconomically diverse classrooms. When children from all backgrounds and abilities are together, there is a rich environment for learning. If we get early learning right, we will not be facing the issue of large numbers of dropouts.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Leslie Goldstein, Office of the Governor; and Jada Rupley, Educational Service District 112.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.