

FINAL BILL REPORT

2E2SHB 1491

C 7 L 15 E3
Synopsis as Enacted

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

Sponsors: House Committee on 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).

House Committee on Early Learning & Human Services
House Committee on Appropriations
Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education
Senate Committee on Ways & Means

Background:

Early Achievers Program.

In 2007 the quality rating and improvement system for the early care and education system in Washington was created, 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: child outcomes; facility curriculum and learning environment and interaction; professional development and training; and 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

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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 less than 13 years of age or less than 19 years of age and have a verified special need or be under court supervision. The 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. In 2010, the funding program was implemented that allows for phased in implementation of the ECEAP, with full statewide implementation to be achieved in the 2018-19 school year.

In 2013 an outline for the expansion of the ECEAP through the 2013-15 biennium was enacted. The ECEAP expansion is subject to amounts appropriated, and required the DEL to develop an ECEAP expansion plan by September 30, 2013. In addition, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) was required 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 Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) was created 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:

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 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 on its 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. Additionally, 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.

The DEL must 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. The professional development pathway must include opportunities for scholarships and grants to assist the Early Achievers program participants with the costs associated with obtaining an educational degree. The DEL must also, in collaboration with tribal governments and community and statewide partners, implement protocols to maximize and encourage participation in the Early Achievers program for culturally diverse and low-income providers.

DEL Licensing Standards.

By November 1, 2016, the DEL must implement a single set of health and safety licensing standards for child care and preschool programs. The DEL must streamline and eliminate duplication between the Early Achievers program standards and the newly developed health and safety standards. Private schools that operate early learning programs and do not receive state subsidy payments must be subject only to the health and safety licensing standards. Additionally, the DEL must exempt before- and after-school programs that serve only school-age children and operate in the same facilities used by public or private schools from facility-based licensing standards.

Early Achievers Program: Data Collection & Evaluation.

The Education Data Center (EDC) must collect longitudinal, student-level data on all children attending an ECEAP provider. Upon completion of an electronic attendance system, the EDC must also collect longitudinal, student-level data on all children attending a WCCC program. The DEL, in collaboration with the statewide child care resource and referral

organization, and the Early Achievers Review Subcommittee (Subcommittee) must develop an annual progress report regarding providers' progress in the Early Achievers program. Additionally, the WSIPP must conduct an analysis that examines relationships between the Early Achievers program quality rating levels and outcomes for participating children. 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.

A legislative Early Achievers Joint Select Committee (Committee) is created to review the demand and availability of child care providers, early learning programs, and family, friend, and neighbor caregivers by geographic region. By December 1, 2018, the Committee must provide recommendations on the sufficiency of funding for the Early Achievers program, the need for targeted funding for specific geographic regions or major ethnic populations, and whether to modify the deadlines for the Early Achievers program mandate.

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. Effective January 1, 2016, unless an earlier date is provided in the budget, authorizations for the WCCC program must be effective for a 12-month enrollment period, and the child may not be deemed ineligible due to a change in circumstance. An existing WCCC provider serving non-school age children must enroll in the Early Achievers program by August 1, 2016, complete level 2 activities by August 1, 2017, and rate at a level 3 or higher by December 31, 2019. 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. Additionally, the DEL must 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 October 1, 2015, and rate at a level 4 or higher by March 1, 2016. Effective October 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 must prioritize ECEAP providers located in low-income neighborhoods within high-need geographical areas. Additionally, the full statewide implementation of the ECEAP must be achieved by the 2020-21 school year.

Early Learning Advisory Council.

The ELAC must convene the 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 DEL must consult with the Subcommittee on all substantial policy changes to 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.

Votes on Final Passage:

House 67 31
Senate 33 11 (Senate amended)

First Special Session

House 64 31

Third Special Session

House 65 32
Senate 38 7

Effective: October 9, 2015
July 1, 2016