

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5357

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Establishing a pilot project to license outdoor early learning and child care programs.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Ranker, Fain, Billig, Sheldon, Hunt, Palumbo, Zeiger, Hobbs, Rolfes, Pearson, Rivers, Carlyle, Saldaña, Walsh, Liias, Conway, Kuderer and Hasegawa).

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

Background: Early Achievers. This quality rating and improvement system rates the quality of child care and early education programs on a scale of one to five. As providers move up the rating scale, child care and early learning providers receive state-funded coaching, professional development, and monetary awards to help them continue to improve the quality of their programs. In 2015, the Early Start Act required licensed child care and early learning providers serving nonschool-age children and receiving state subsidies to be enrolled in Early Achievers and meet certain rating deadlines.

Licensing of Child Care and Early Learning Providers. Under state law, it is unlawful for any agency to care for children unless the agency is licensed by Department of Early Learning (DEL). 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 certain entities irrespective of whether there is compensation to the agency. The term agency does not include 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.

The Early Start Act, enacted in 2015, requires DEL to implement a single set of licensing standards for child care and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) by November 1, 2016. The new licensing standards must:

- provide minimum health and safety standards for child care and preschool programs;
 - rely on the standards established in Early Achievers to address quality issues;
 - take into account the separate needs of family care providers and child care centers;
- and

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- promote the continued safety of child care settings.

DEL published proposed aligned standards and is currently seeking community input. This project will be completed November 2017.

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC). This federally and state-funded program offers subsidies to childcare providers serving families with an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, \$48,600 for a family of four. The state pays part of the cost of childcare when a parent is employed, self-employed, or meets the requirements for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or WorkFirst programs. WCCC requires that child care providers are licensed, certified, or DEL-contracted unless the care is provided in the child's home or by the child's relative.

Summary: The following provisions are subject to appropriations.

DEL must establish a four-year pilot project to license outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care programs beginning on August 31, 2017. Outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care program means an agency-offered program operated primarily outdoors in which children are enrolled on a regular basis for three or more hours per day.

DEL must select up to ten pilot locations during the first year of the pilot project. Beginning August 31, 2018, additional outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care programs may apply to participate in the pilot project. When selecting and approving pilot project locations, DEL must aim to select a mix of rural, urban, and suburban locations, and may give priority to:

- areas where there are few or limited licensed early learning programs;
- areas of need where licensed early learning programs are at or near full capacity, and where access may be restricted by one or more enrollment wait-lists; and
- areas where an outdoor early learning program would provide more family choice.

DEL must adopt rules to implement the pilot project and may waive or adapt licensing requirements when necessary to allow for the operation of outdoor classrooms. DEL must explore options for developing a quality rating and improvement system for outdoor preschools, and DEL may utilize funds from philanthropic organizations for this purpose.

DEL may convene an advisory group of outdoor, nature-based early learning practitioners to inform and support implementation of the pilot project.

DEL must submit a brief status report each year of the pilot project describing implementation of the pilot project, including a description of participating providers, and the number of children and families being served. By November 30, 2020, DEL must submit a full report on the findings from the pilot project, including recommendations for modifying or expanding the availability of outdoor, nature-based early learning and child care programs. The final report also must include a discussion of potential options to mitigate the uncertainty for families and participating providers during the final six months of the pilot project when legislation may be pending.

A child care or early learning program operated by a federally recognized tribe may participate in the pilot project through an interlocal agreement between the tribe and DEL. The interlocal agreement must reflect the government-to-government relationship between the state and the tribe, including recognition of tribal sovereignty.

The pilot project expires August 1, 2021.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	44	5
House	74	23

Effective: July 23, 2017