AN ACT Relating to expanding eligibility to the early childhood education and assistance program; amending RCW 43.216.505, 43.216.556, 43.216.512, 43.216.514, 43.216.080, 43.216.540, and 43.216.550; adding a new section to chapter 43.216 RCW; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. The legislature finds that the family income eligibility limit of one hundred ten percent of the federal poverty level for the early childhood education and assistance program hinders the state's ability to recruit and enroll qualified families, particularly in rural areas of the state and in tribal communities. This income barrier results in unused preschool slots and growing waiting lists of children who are from low-income families but who are over the established income limits. Therefore, the legislature intends to keep the qualifying income for early childhood education and assistance program entitlement at one hundred ten percent of the federal poverty level and allow for the flexibility to serve additional children with family incomes up to two hundred percent of the federal poverty level.
Sec. 2. RCW 43.216.505 and 2017 3rd sp.s. c 6 s 210 are each amended to read as follows:

Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the definitions in this section apply throughout RCW 43.216.500 through 43.216.559, 43.216.900, and 43.216.901.

(1) "Advisory committee" means the advisory committee under RCW 43.216.520.

(2) "Approved programs" means those state-supported education and special assistance programs which are recognized by the department as meeting the minimum program rules adopted by the department to qualify under RCW 43.216.500 through 43.216.550, 43.216.900, and 43.216.901 and are designated as eligible for funding by the department under RCW 43.216.530 and 43.216.540.

(3) "Comprehensive" means an assistance program that focuses on the needs of the child and includes education, health, and family support services.

(4) "Eligible child" means a three to five-year old child who is not age-eligible for kindergarten, is not a participant in a federal or state program providing comprehensive services, and who:

(a) Has a family income at or below one hundred ten percent of the federal poverty level, as published annually by the federal department of health and human services, and includes a child whose family is eligible for public assistance, and who is not a participant in a federal or state program providing comprehensive services;

(b) Is eligible for special education due to disability under RCW 28A.155.020; or

(c) Meets criteria under rules adopted by the department if the number of such children equals not more than ten percent of the total enrollment in the early childhood program. Preference for enrollment in this group shall be given to children from families with the lowest income, children in foster care, or to eligible children from families with multiple needs.

(5) "Family support services" means providing opportunities for parents to:

(a) Actively participate in their child's early childhood program;

(b) Increase their knowledge of child development and parenting skills;

(c) Further their education and training;
(d) Increase their ability to use needed services in the community;
  
  (e) Increase their self-reliance.

**Sec. 3.** RCW 43.216.556 and 2017 3rd sp.s. c 22 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Funding for the program of early learning established under this chapter must be appropriated to the department. (Allocations must be made)) The department shall distribute funding to approved early childhood education and assistance program contractors on the basis of eligible children enrolled (with eligible providers).

(2) The program shall be implemented in phases, so that full implementation is achieved in the 2022-23 school year.

(3) (For the initial phase of the early learning program in school years 2011-12 and 2012-13, the legislature shall appropriate funding to the department for implementation of the program in an amount not less than the 2009-2011 enacted budget for the early childhood education and assistance program. The appropriation shall be sufficient to fund an equivalent number of slots as funded in the 2009-2011 enacted budget.

(4) Beginning in the 2013-14 school year, additional funding for the program must be phased in beginning in school districts providing all-day kindergarten programs under RCW 28A.150.315.

(5)) Funding shall continue to be phased in each year until full statewide implementation of the early learning program is achieved in the 2022-23 school year, at which time any eligible child (shall be) is entitled to be enrolled in the program.

(6) School districts and approved community-based early learning providers may contract with the department to provide services under the program. The department shall collaborate with school districts, community-based providers, and educational service districts to promote an adequate supply of approved providers.

**Sec. 4.** RCW 43.216.512 and 2018 c 155 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The department shall adopt rules that allow the inclusion of children in the early childhood education and assistance program whose family income is above one hundred ten percent but less than or equal to two hundred percent of the federal poverty level (if the number of such children equals not)). Within this group, no more than
twenty-five percent of total statewide enrollment may consist of children with family incomes above one hundred thirty percent of the federal poverty level.

(2) Children included in the early childhood education and assistance program under this section must be ((homeless or impacted by specific developmental or environmental)) enrolled, as space is available, by the department according to a system of risk factors ((that are linked by research to school performance. "Homeless" means without a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence as set forth in the federal McKinney-Vento homeless assistance act, P.L. 100–77, July 22, 1987, 101 Stat. 482, and runaway and homeless youth act, P.L. 93–415, Title III, September 7, 1974, 88 Stat. 1129)) and priority points adopted in rule. The priority system must consider risk factors that have disproportionate effects on kindergarten readiness, including:

(a) Homelessness;
(b) Child welfare system involvement;
(c) Developmental delay or disability that does not meet the eligibility criteria for special education described in RCW 28A.155.020;
(d) Domestic violence;
(e) English as a second language;
(f) Expulsion from an early learning setting;
(g) A parent who is or has been incarcerated;
(h) A parent with a substance use disorder or mental health treatment need; and
(i) Being an "Indian child" as defined in rule by the department after consultation and agreement with tribes.

(3) Children included in the early childhood education and assistance program under this section are not to be considered eligible children as defined in RCW 43.216.505 and are not considered to be part of the state-funded entitlement required in RCW 43.216.556.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 5. (1) The department of children, youth, and families must consult, and obtain the advice and consent of, the governing bodies of the state's federally recognized tribal nations in developing an agreed upon definition of the term "Indian child" for the purposes of RCW 43.216.512 and, by July 1, 2020, must adopt the definition in rule.
This section expires December 1, 2020.

Sec. 6. RCW 43.216.514 and 2018 c 155 s 3 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) The department shall prioritize children for enrollment in the early childhood education and assistance program who are eligible pursuant to RCW 43.216.505.

(2) As space is available, children may be included in the early childhood education and assistance program pursuant to RCW 43.216.512. Priority within this group must be given first to children ((who are experiencing homelessness, child welfare system involvement, or a developmental delay or disability that does not meet the eligibility criteria for special education adopted under RCW 28A.155.020)) with incomes up to one hundred thirty percent of the federal poverty level.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 7. A new section is added to chapter 43.216 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Within resources available under the federal preschool development grant birth to five grant award received in December 2018, the department shall develop a plan for phased implementation of a birth to three early childhood education and assistance program pilot project for eligible children under thirty-six months old. Planning for the pilot project must start by January 1, 2020, and phased service delivery may begin after the department has secured adequate funds to implement the pilot project in at least ten locations. Funds to implement the pilot project may include a combination of federal, state, or private sources.

(2) The department may adopt rules to implement the pilot project and may waive or adapt pilot project requirements when necessary to allow for the operation of the birth to three early childhood education and assistance program. The department shall consider early head start rules and regulations when developing the provider and family eligibility requirements and program requirements. Any deviations from early head start standards, rules, or regulations must be identified and explained by the department in its annual report under subsection (6) of this section.

(3)(a) Upon securing adequate funds to begin implementation, the pilot project programs must be delivered through child care centers
and family home providers who meet minimum licensing standards and
determine minimum early achievers ratings
scores for programs participating in the pilot project.
(4) The department shall select up to ten pilot project locations
for the first year of service delivery under the pilot project. Each
pilot project location may have up to three classrooms per location.
When selecting and approving pilot project locations, the department
shall attempt to select a combination of rural, urban, and suburban
locations. The department shall prioritize locations with programs
currently operating early head start, head start, or the early
childhood education and assistance program.
(5) To be eligible for the birth to three early childhood
education and assistance program, a child's family income must be at
or below one hundred thirty percent of the federal poverty level and
the child must be under thirty-six months old.
(6) Beginning November 1, 2020, and each November 1st thereafter
during pilot project activity, the department shall submit an annual
report to the governor and legislature that includes a status update
that describes the planning work completed, the status of funds
secured, and any implementation activities of the pilot project.
Implementation activity reports must include a description of the
participating programs and number of children and families served.

Sec. 8. RCW 43.216.080 and 2017 c 178 s 2 are each amended to
read as follows:
(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, school districts, institutions of higher education
as defined in RCW 28B.10.016, and nonprofit organizations.
(2) Local governments, school districts, institutions of higher
education as defined in RCW 28B.10.016, and nonprofit organizations
are encouraged to collaborate with the department when establishing
and strengthening early learning programs for residents.
(3) Local governments, school districts, institutions of higher education as defined in RCW 28B.10.016, and nonprofit organizations 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;
(b) Reductions in copayments charged to parents or caregivers;
(c) To expand access and eligibility in the early childhood education and assistance program.

(4) Funds contributed to the department by local governments, school districts, institutions of higher education as defined in RCW 28B.10.016, and nonprofit organizations must be deposited in the early start account established in RCW 43.216.165.

(5) Children enrolled in the early childhood education and assistance program with funds contributed in accordance with subsection (3)(c) of this section are not considered to be eligible children as defined in RCW 43.216.505 and are not considered to be part of the state-funded entitlement required in RCW 43.216.556.

Sec. 9. RCW 43.216.540 and 1994 c 166 s 10 are each amended to read as follows:
For the purposes of RCW 43.216.500 through 43.216.550 and 43.216.900 through 43.216.901, the department may award state support under RCW 43.216.500 through 43.216.530 to increase the numbers of eligible children assisted by the federal or state-supported early childhood programs in this state. Priority shall be given to those geographical areas which include a high percentage of families qualifying under the "eligible child" criteria. The overall program funding level shall be based on an average grant per child consistent with state appropriations made for program costs: PROVIDED, That programs addressing special needs of selected groups or communities shall be recognized in the department's rules.

Sec. 10. RCW 43.216.550 and 1994 c 166 s 11 are each amended to read as follows:
The department may solicit gifts, grants, conveyances, bequests and devises for the use or benefit of the early childhood state education and assistance program established by RCW 43.216.510.
43.216.500 through ((28A.215.200)) 43.216.550 and ((28A.215.900 through 28A.215.908)) 43.216.900 and 43.216.901. The department shall actively solicit support from business and industry and from the federal government for the state early childhood education and assistance program and shall assist local programs in developing partnerships with the community for eligible children.

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