

FINAL BILL REPORT

E2SHB 1648

C 281 L 25
Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Modifying child care provider qualifications.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Dent, Eslick, Burnett, Penner, Jacobsen and Graham).

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

Background:

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) regulates child care entities. The DCYF has adopted core competencies for child care providers that describe the standards of knowledge and skills required to provide quality care and education to children and their families. The DCYF licensing requirements related to staff qualifications generally require child care providers to earn educational credentials to demonstrate their knowledge of core competencies. However, providers in certain roles may alternatively fulfill staff qualification requirements through the legislatively directed community-based training pathway or the experience-based competency pathway established by the DCYF.

Additionally, providers with at least 12 months of cumulative employment must complete 10 hours of annual in-service training. There are several options for in-service training, including completion of college coursework related to core competencies.

Provider Education Requirements.

Child care providers must meet certain education requirements or the equivalent by August 1, 2026, or within five years of the provider's date of hire if hired after August 1, 2019. Providers serving the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) must meet education requirements at the time of hire. Education requirements include earning an initial, short, or state Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificate for most positions, which requires completion of college credits in core competency areas. To earn an initial ECE

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certificate requires 12 college credits; the short ECE certificate requires 20 credits (the initial certificate plus eight additional credits); and the state ECE certificate requires 47 credits (the short certificate plus 27 additional credits).

Community-Based Training Pathway.

Legislation enacted in 2021 required the DCYF to create a noncredit-bearing, community-based training pathway for licensed child care providers to meet professional education requirements as an alternative to ECE credentials. The community-based training pathway must align with early learning core competencies, include culturally relevant practices, and be made available: (1) at low cost to providers, not to exceed \$250 per person; (2) in multiple languages; and (3) in an accessible manner for providers in rural and urban settings. The DCYF implemented the community-based training pathway in 2022 as the Provider Access to a Community Equivalent program (PACE). The PACE alternative requires the following instruction: (1) 30 hours in child care basics; (2) 20 hours in enhancing the quality of early learning; (3) 40 hours of additional in-service training; and (4) 30 hours of on-the-job learning. Part 1 and Part 2 of the PACE alternative are currently available and offer an equivalent to the ECE initial certificate. Additional components that will offer an equivalent to the ECE short certificate are still under development.

Experience-Based Competency Pathway.

The DCYF has established a third pathway for providers to meet staff qualification requirements based on work experience. Child care providers in specified roles who have a cumulative seven years of experience and meet other criteria are able to meet licensing requirements without ECE certification. To fulfill requirements through this option, a provider must have all of the following:

- seven years of cumulative experience working in a licensed facility by August 1, 2026;
- maintained compliance with all health and safety trainings and child care basics trainings; and
- active employment in a qualifying job role. For family home providers, qualifying roles are licensee, lead teacher, or assistant teacher; for child care centers, qualifying roles are center lead teacher or assistant teacher.

There are certain provider roles requiring an ECE state certificate that may not fulfill staff qualification requirements through experience-based competency or the community-based training pathway, including center directors, assistant directors, and program supervisors. The alternative pathways are also not an option for providers serving the ECEAP program.

Summary:

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) must allow licensed child care providers until at least August 1, 2030, to fulfill staff qualification requirements by earning Early Childhood Education (ECE) credentials or completing the community-based training pathway. The DCYF may provide timelines beyond August 1, 2030, for providers to meet

staff qualification requirements through ECE credentials or the community based training pathway based on their date of licensure, hire, or promotion, which can be for no longer than five years.

The DCYF must allow licensed child care providers until August 1, 2030, to demonstrate experience-based competency as an alternative means of complying with staff qualification requirements. To demonstrate experience-based competency, the provider must document: (1) active employment in a position that requires an early childhood initial, short, or state certificate; (2) employment in a licensed or certified child care center or licensed family home provider without a break in service since August 1, 2021, or a cumulative five years of employment; and (3) completion of and maintained compliance with all health and safety and child care or school-age care basics training required by DCYF.

The DCYF may establish more restrictive requirements for providers serving the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program and may also exclude experience-based competency from the calculation of Early Achievers professional development points.

The DCYF must convene a stakeholder group to assist in identifying strategies to improve early learning and school-age staff qualification requirements and verification processes including, but not limited to, identifying measures to streamline and clarify relevant administrative rules and policies, defining criteria and methods by which to honor equivalent out-of-state education and training, and identifying options to offer the community-based training pathway in an online format.

The stakeholder group must include family home and child care center providers, including at least one provider from a child care center that is part of a national chain or has 10 or more sites. It must also include representation from the following organizations:

- the statewide child care resource and referral network;
- a community-based training organization that provides training to licensed family day care providers;
- a statewide organization that represents the interests of family day care providers;
- a statewide organization that represents the interests of licensed child day care centers;
- the statewide out-of-school time intermediary organization;
- an organization that represents the interests of refugee and immigrant communities;
- a bilingual child care provider whose first language is not English;
- an organization that advocates for early learning;
- an organization representing private and independent schools; and
- the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

The DCYF must report to the Legislature by December 1, 2026, on strategies identified by the stakeholder group and the DCYF's plans and timelines under which to carry out those strategies. The DCYF must convene the stakeholder group and produce the associated report within existing resources.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	97	0	
Senate	48	0	(Senate amended)
House	96	0	(House concurred)

Effective: July 27, 2025