



Washington State Department of Early Learning

Early Start Act Q&A



Our Children Deserve More than the Minimum

What is the Early Start Act?

The Early Start Act was approved by the legislature and recently signed into law by Governor Inslee. This historic legislation invests into expanding high quality early learning for Washington's children and families, particularly in our most diverse and vulnerable communities. For child care providers, the Early Start Act focuses on supporting high quality early learning services through Early Achievers and ensures that the child care providers, especially those who serve low income families, receive all needed help and resources to sustain high quality programming.

I have not joined Early Achievers yet. What does the Early Start Act require me to do?

If you do not serve young children on subsidy, Early Start Act is encouraging you to engage in Early Achievers, but you are not required to do so. If you serve children age 5 or below on subsidy, you are required to join Early Achievers by August 1, 2016. Doing so will enable you to immediately engage in the quality improvement activities and receive the state support, such as:

- higher reimbursement rates for every young child on subsidy you serve,
- professional development,
- technical assistance,
- scholarships,
- need-based grants,
- and more.

Once you have joined, you are required to complete Early Achievers level 2 activities by August 1, 2017, and reach a level 3 rating by 2020.

Beginning July 1, 2016, The Early Start Act also requires the Department of Early Learning in collaboration with the Department of Social and Health Services to provide 12 months of assistance to all families that are eligible for Working Connections Child Care (state subsidy).

I have already joined Early Achievers. What does the Early Start Act require me to do?

The Early Start Act (approved and funded in the maintenance level of the budget) ensures that your supports will be there for you now and in the future. Also, you will now receive additional services to support you in meeting the timelines articulated above.

I am interested in opening a new child care program. What does the Early Start Act require me to do?

If you do not plan on serving children age 5 or below on subsidy, then you just have to follow the current process to get licensed.

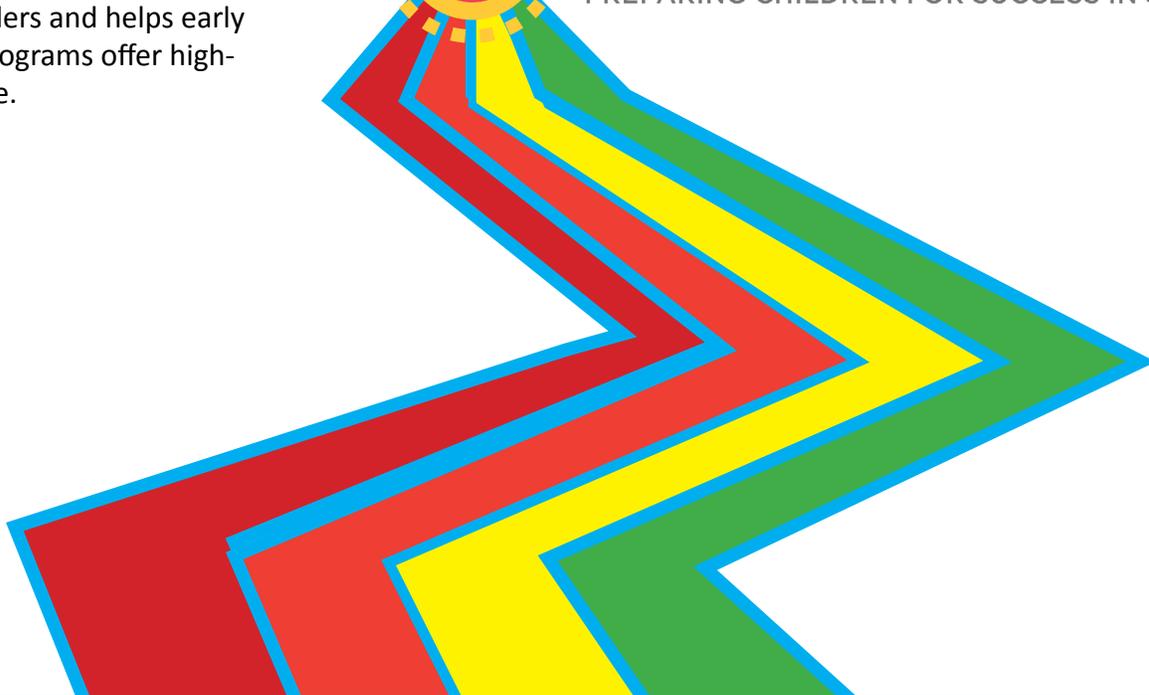
If you do want to serve young children on subsidy, you are now required to enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days of receiving your initial subsidy payment from the state. Once you have enrolled, you are required to complete level 2 activities within 12 months, and achieve a level 3 rating within 30 months of enrollment in Early Achievers. You will be eligible to receive all Early Achievers supports and awards.

Early Achievers, Washington's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), is voluntary for licensed child care providers and helps early learning programs offer high-quality care.



WASHINGTON EARLY ACHIEVERS

PREPARING CHILDREN FOR SUCCESS IN SCHOOL



ECEAP



The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP, pronounced "e-cap") helps children and families get ready for kindergarten. ECEAP is funded by Washington state and is free to enrolled families. It serves three- and four-year-olds from low income families, or with developmental or environmental risk factors that could interfere with school success.

New Providers Existing Providers



The Department of Early Learning (DEL) licenses more than 6,000 child care centers and family home child care providers in Washington. Licensed child care providers follow minimum licensing requirements set by the state to ensure children in licensed care are in safe, healthy, and nurturing places.

Volunteers



Child care providers who are not required to participate in Early Achievers may volunteer and focus on enhancing a quality of their services.



"First, Early Start Act maintains Early Achievers, our state's quality rating and improvement system, and makes it the quality standard for all our state's early learning programs . . . I have heard concerns from providers and parents about the mandatory requirements of the bill, which have the potential to reduce the number of licensed child care providers in the state. I share those worries — and we will do what we can to make sure it doesn't happen. That is why I am directing my staff to work to preserve our wonderful child care and early learning facilities and to take the steps necessary to ensure that we are growing the licensed care in our state, not shrinking it."

Governor J. Inslee
Early Start Act Signing - July, 6 2015