

Early Start Act, Overview

The Early Start Act was approved by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Inslee on June 30, 2015. This historic legislation invests into expanding high quality early learning for Washington's children and families, particularly in our most diverse and vulnerable communities. The Early Start Act dedicates resources to support 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 to sustain high quality programming. The Early Start Act focuses on equity and quality of the state-wide early learning system with the emphasis on:

Section 1. Bill Intent

Quality early care and education builds the foundation for a child's success in school and in life

- quality framework is necessary for the early care and education system in Washington
- low quality child care has damaging effects for children
- the proper dosage, duration of programming, and stability of care are critical to enhancing program quality and improving child outcomes
- high quality programs consistently yield more positive outcomes for children, with the strongest positive impacts on the most vulnerable children

Objectives:

- prioritize the integration of child care and preschool in an effort to promote full day programming reward quality and create incentives for providers to participate in a quality rating and improvement system that will also provide valuable information to parents regarding the quality of care available in their communities

Section 16. Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC)

Main Deliverable: Early Achievers Review Subcommittee

ELAC shall convene an Early Achievers Review 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. The review conducted by the Subcommittee shall be a part of the annual progress report required in section 18 of this Act.

The Subcommittee shall include representatives from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The Subcommittee shall include representatives from:

- child care centers
- family child care
- ECEAP
- contractors for Early Achievers technical assistance and coaching
- tribal governments
- the organization responsible for conducting early achiever program ratings, and
- parents of children participating in early learning programs, including WCCC ECEAP.

Section 2. Early Achievers

Main Deliverables:

1. Licensed or certified child care centers and homes serving nonschool age children and receiving state subsidy payments must participate in EA by the required deadlines
2. Approved ECEAP providers receiving state-funded support must participate in EA by the required deadlines
3. DEL and OSPI shall jointly design a plan to incorporate school age child care providers into Early Achievers – July, 2017
4. Determine the Early Achievers rating cycle
5. Create a single source of information for parents and caregivers to access details on a provider's Early Achievers rating level, licensing history, and other indicators of quality and safety that will help parents and caregivers make informed choices – November, 2015
6. Create a culturally relevant PD pathway for Early Achievers participants
7. In collaboration with tribal governments, community and statewide partners, and the Early Achievers review subcommittee develop a protocol for granting EA participants an extension in meeting rating level requirement timelines outlined for the WCCC and the ECEAP
8. Accept national accreditation that meets the requirements of the Early Achievers rating system
9. Explore the use of alternative quality assessment tools that meet the culturally specific needs of the federally recognized tribes in the state of Washington
10. Consult with the Early Achievers Review Subcommittee on all substantial policy changes to Early Achievers

Section 3. Single Set of Licensing Standards

Main Deliverable: implement a single set of licensing standards for child care and ECEAP – November, 2016.

Section 5. Early Achievers. Reduction of Barriers, Low Income Providers and Programs

Main Deliverables:

1. in collaboration with tribal governments and community and statewide partners, implement a protocol to maximize and encourage participation in Early Achievers for culturally diverse and low-income center and family home child care providers.
2. prioritize the resources to assist providers rating at a level 2 in Early Achievers to help them reach a level 3 rating - during the first thirty months of implementation of the Early Achievers
3. The protocol should address barriers to Early Achievers participation and include at a minimum the following:
 - The creation of a substitute pool
 - Development of needs-based grants for providers at level 2
 - The development of materials and assessments in a timely manner, and to the extent feasible, in the provider and family home languages

- The development of flexibility in technical assistance and coaching structures to provide differentiated types and amounts of support to providers based on individual need and cultural context

Sections 6-7. Working Child Care Connections

Main Deliverables:

1. Authorization for the twelve months WCCC subsidy
2. prioritize the resources to assist providers rating at a level 2 in Early Achievers to help them reach a level 3 rating - during the first thirty months of implementation of the Early Achievers
3. Requirements and timelines for the existing child care providers serving nonschool age children and receiving state subsidy regarding Early Achievers participation to be eligible for a state subsidy – effective July, 2016
4. Requirements and timelines for the new child care providers serving nonschool age children and receiving state subsidy regarding Early Achievers participation to be eligible for a state subsidy – effective July, 2016

Sections 8-12. ECEAP

Main Deliverables:

1. Develop a pathway for licensed or certified child care centers and homes to administer ECEAP – December, 2015.
2. Adopt rules requiring ECEAP employees who have access to children to submit to a fingerprint background check – January, 2016
3. Existing ECEAP providers must complete the Early Achievers requirements and timelines to be eligible to receive state-funded support under the ECEAP
 - Enroll in Early Achievers – October, 2015
 - Rate at a level 4 or 5 in Early Achievers – March, 2016
4. New ECEAP provider must complete the Early Achievers requirements and timelines to be eligible to receive state-funded support under ECEAP – effective October, 2015
5. Collect data to determine the demand for full-day programming for ECEAP providers – December, 2015.

Sections 13. Data Collection and Evaluation

Main Deliverables:

1. Collect longitudinal, student-level data on all children attending ECEAP
2. Upon completion of an electronic time and attendance record system, collect longitudinal, student-level data on all children attending a WCCC program.
3. Review available research and best practices literature on cultural competency in early learning settings. Review the K-12 components for cultural competency developed by the professional educator standards board and identify components appropriate for early learning professional development.

4. Provide recommendations to the appropriate committees of the legislature and ELAC on research-based cultural competency standards for early learning professional training – July, 2016.
5. Conduct a longitudinal analysis examining relationships between Early Achievers quality ratings levels and outcomes for children participating in subsidized early care and education programs – December, 2019
6. Provide recommendations on child attendance policies pertaining to child care and ECEAP, including the following:
 - Allowable periods of child absences
 - Required contact with parents or caregivers to discuss child absences and encourage regular program attendance
 - A de-enrollment procedure when allowable child absences are exceeded

Sections 14. Contracted Childcare Slots and Vouchers

Main Deliverable: employ a combination of vouchers and contracted slots for the subsidized child care programs

Sections 15. Integration with Local Governments' Efforts

Main Deliverables:

1. Local governments are encouraged to collaborate with DEL when establishing early learning programs for residents
2. Local governments may contribute funds to the department for the following purposes:
 - to build capacity and quality in local early care and education programming
 - to reduce copayments charged to parents or caregivers

Sections 18. Annual Progress Report

Main Deliverable: Submit an annual Early Achievers Progress Report developed in collaboration with CCA and the ELAC Early Achievers Review Subcommittee to the governor and the legislature – starting December, 2015.