



Washington State Department of
Early Learning



The Early Start Act 2016 Annual Report

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Letter from the Director

December 15, 2016

It has now been more than a year since I came to the Department of Early Learning as its new director, and I am gratified by the successes we've had in that time. We met the deadline to enroll all existing subsidy providers into Early Achievers head-on. Nearly all providers required to sign up did so - serving more than 37,000 children under 5, or 98 percent of those served in subsidy in FY 2016. This is an inspirational embrace by the provider community of our quest for quality.

In this past year, we also:

- ❑ rolled out 12-month eligibility, providing increased stability and peace of mind for children and families;
- ❑ released a report on culturally responsive professional development to serve as a statewide resource by providing expectations for professional development creation, delivery, and evaluation; and
- ❑ embarked on a robust community input process to align our family home and center child care regulations.

We've also taken on the Early Start Act's charge to make the early learning system more diverse and racially equitable. I've dedicated staff and resources to the implementation of a racial equity initiative across the agency, and we've worked with partners to innovate new ways of supporting our diverse providers and children.

At DEL, we are the stewards of the public trust and the investment made through the Early Start Act. With that in mind, last year we set out an aspirational goal for the agency and the system to get 90 percent of kids ready for kindergarten by the year 2020, with race and family income no longer predictors of success. In the intervening months we have made great progress towards that goal, and have developed clear and coherent next steps to move us further down that path. The two most significant levers in supporting child outcomes that the ESA funded, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Early Achievers, have begun to yield results.

ECEAP is in 36 of 39 counties in Washington, serving more than 11,300 children each year. In the 2014-15 school year, more than 59 percent of ECEAP four year olds were assessed as ready for kindergarten in the spring – by fall of their kindergarten year that number dropped to 37 percent. While that's still better than their other low-income peers (we estimate 28 percent are ready) we still need to solve this drop-off problem.

There are two solutions that we believe will nearly eliminate that 18-point drop-off:

- 🌱 Provide summer ECEAP programming, and
- 🌱 Address problems with the way dual-language learners are being assessed in kindergarten.

Beyond that, we know that we are serving families for whom a 3.5 hour per day program doesn't fit with their schedule. Many kids who are eligible are not participating, so to reach not only the spirit of preschool entitlement, but the intent as well, we need to provide programming that fits the needs of families by providing full-day and extended-day program options.

With our Early Achievers system, we are in an earlier stage of our data and assessment development. We are still relying on national research that indicates quality rating and improvement systems can dramatically increase the quality of early learning programs.

A validation study of Early Achievers conducted on DEL's behalf by the University of Washington this year yielded moderately useful results. We did see some of the gains we expected, but the children in the study were not reflective of our early learning system's population. We will continue to monitor and adjust as more data becomes available.

Now that we have a much higher rate of participation in Early Achievers, and full participation across the state in the WaKIDS assessment for kindergarteners, we will be able to begin making the type of longitudinal assessments needed. We've asked providers to commit to a lot of improvements through Early Achievers – it's our job at DEL to ensure that all of our requirements are proven to yield results in kindergarten readiness. With better data collection and analysis, we'll also be able to provide feedback to providers on how their work supports school readiness and ties into larger system improvements.

A large task created by the ESA was to “align” our standards and WACs for family child care homes, child care centers, ECEAP and Early Achievers. We've put a lot of energy into the project - this translates into re-writing our entire licensing WAC to have consistent language where it makes sense. In some cases this WAC has not been updated in decades and is difficult to read. This project should help us address many of the concerns I hear from the small business owners who provide childcare for families on subsidy including the WAC is difficult to read and follow, enforcement is uneven between different licensors, and it's costly to comply with some of our requirements.

We changed the schedule for this project this fall when I realized our current process would not fix problem #1 on this list, endangering our ability to meet #2 or #3 as well. We've hired a single lawyer to have a consistent voice and simplify the language in the rules to be readable and enforceable. We will then proceed to “weight” the WACs, assigning standardized responses from the agency instead of having it completely up to the discretion of the licensor. We're here to help people provide quality care; inconsistent enforcement makes that harder. Simpler, easier to understand rules that are consistent between programs will make everyone's life easier, will result in better outcomes for kids and will improve certainty for providers.

I now have a more nuanced understanding of the strategies needed to leverage the Early Start Act to get kids to kindergarten readiness, and we're beginning to more clearly see the effect sizes of different investments. One reality that has become overwhelmingly clear to me is that while the Early Start Act's funded services are critical, they are not sufficient. Many of the children DEL serves have complicated needs and face severe challenges. We need more efficient and tighter sequencing of our birth-to-three services and coordination with other agencies that provide for the welfare of children. Only then will we be able to help every child reach their full potential.

In the next year, I look forward to growing our programs and the sophistication of our analysis of them. We are one year closer to achieving our 90% goal and implementing the intent of the Early Start Act, and I remain proud to helm this effort.

Ross Hunter,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ross Hunter". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "R" and "H".

Director, Department of Early Learning

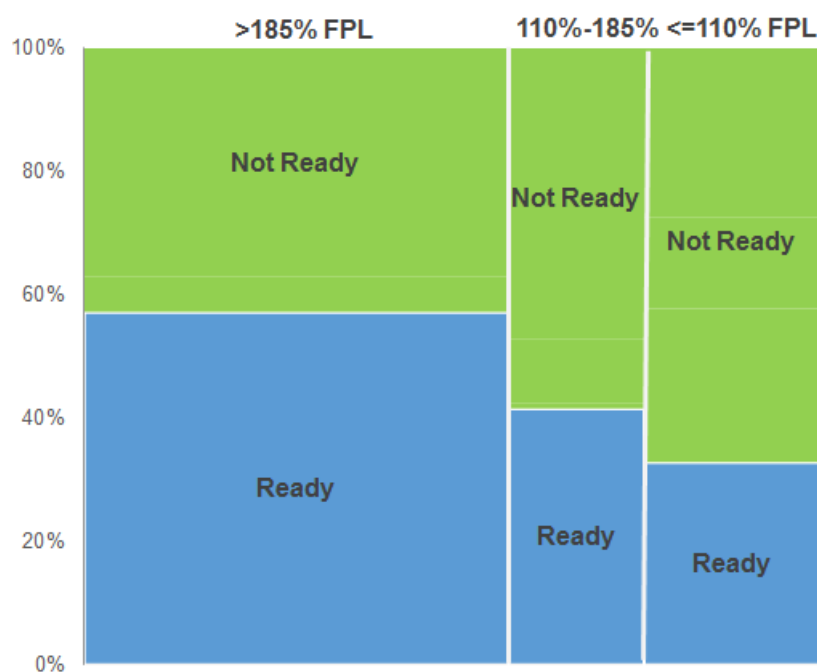
Executive Summary

The 2015 Early Start Act set a mandate for Washington to increase access to high-quality early learning opportunities in the state as a key element to improving outcomes for young children and strengthening kindergarten readiness statewide. Research clearly demonstrates that the quality of early learning environments is critical to supporting child growth and development, and that children need access to high-quality programming and stability of participation in these programs. The Early Start Act responded to this need by providing supports to help early learning providers reach a level of quality that promotes strong child outcomes, focusing on improving quality for children most at-risk for not being ready for kindergarten. The Early Start Act mandates levels of quality for licensed child care providers – child care centers and family child care homes—that accept children on child care subsidy or Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) funding.

The Early Start Act highlights several key goals:

- 🌱 Continue to build a child-focused system that supports high-quality services that will improve child outcomes and prioritize early learning services for children who need them most;
- 🌱 Build upon and strengthen the existing system by making sure it is accessible to all children, families and providers in Washington;
- 🌱 Use data to drive ongoing policy and programmatic decisions;
- 🌱 Ensure services are seamless for families, particularly child care and preschool, and are working together to promote quality and efficiency; and
- 🌱 Support the early learning workforce in their efforts to provide quality services to children and families through educational support and ongoing training.

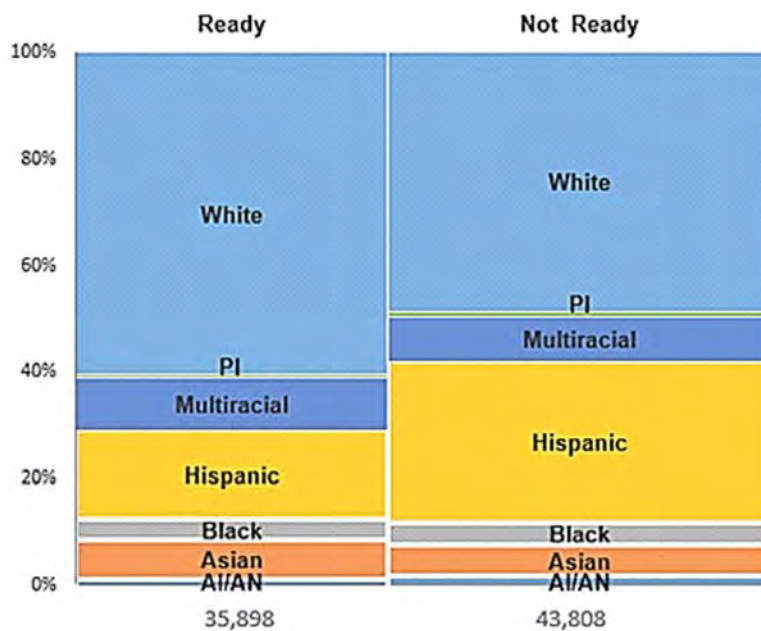
Washington’s Kindergarten Readiness



In fall 2015, only 44.2 percent of Washington’s children demonstrated readiness for kindergarten on all six domains of development. The data highlight that children from low-income households and children of color are less likely to arrive at kindergarten ready for success.

Entering kindergarteners in households >185% FPL demonstrate the highest rate of readiness at 57 percent, whereas we estimate that 42 percent of those from households with incomes 110%-185% FPL and 33 percent of those from

households with incomes $\leq 110\%$ FPL arrive at kindergarten ready for success. DEL estimates that without current ECEAP and Head Start preschool programs, only 28 percent of children in households $\leq 110\%$ FPL would arrive at kindergarten ready for success.



All racial groups are reported as non-Hispanic

Similarly, children of color entering Washington’s public kindergartens are under-represented among children who arrive ready for success, and over-represented among children who are not yet ready for success. Only 39 percent of children who arrive ready for kindergarten on all of the six WaKIDS domains are children of color, while 51 percent of those not yet ready are children of color.

It is imperative that Washington’s early learning system is designed and implemented to best support all children and families to succeed.

How the Early Start Act Will Improve Outcomes

The Early Start Act is focused on improving the quality and scale of early learning programs in Washington in order to improve school readiness rates for children. In order to achieve these goals, the Early Start Act outlined key, achievable targets that will increase access to high-quality early learning opportunities to the children most likely to benefit:

- 👋 All licensed child care providers serving non-school age children on subsidy will rate an Early Achievers level 3-5 by 2020;
- 👋 ECEAP will be available to all eligible children by the 2020-21 school year;
- 👋 ECEAP providers will offer part-day, full-school-day, and extended-day models according to demand for services and availability of supply;
- 👋 DEL will develop a single set of standards across licensing and ECEAP using Early Achievers as the framework for quality;
- 👋 DEL will create assurances that early learning programs are available, supported and appropriate for diverse communities across the state, and address barriers to participation;
- 👋 All existing ECEAP providers will rate an Early Achievers level 4-5 by March 2016 or begin remedial activities by September 2016 to rate a level 4¹; and
- 👋 DEL will implement a 12-month authorization for Working Connections Child Care subsidy to promote stability and high-quality for low-income children.

¹ This was accomplished in FY 2016.

Progress to Date

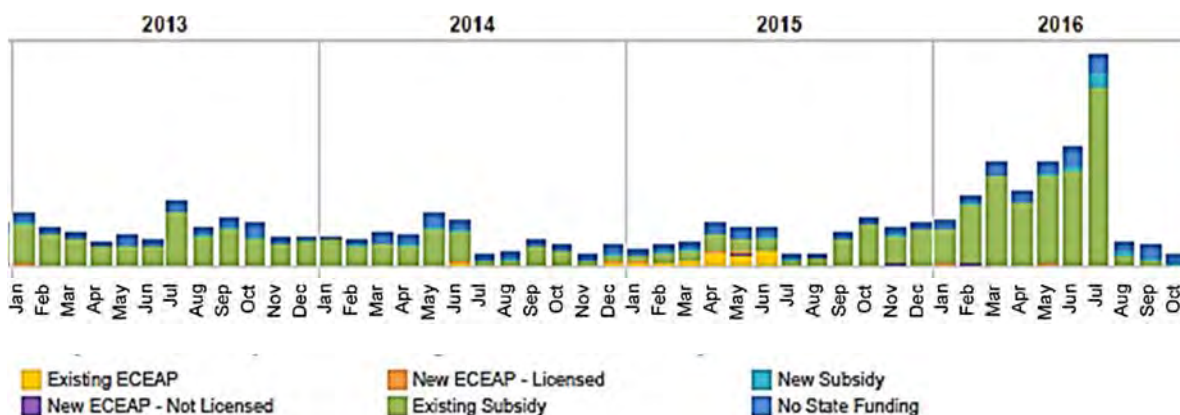
As of December 2016 there are 3,991 child care centers, family child care homes, and ECEAP/Head Start providers participating in Early Achievers. This includes 3,113 subsidy providers, 403 ECEAP/Head Start sites, and 475 private providers not taking subsidy in the past year.

By the August 1, 2016 Early Achievers enrollment deadline 92.5 percent of all required providers had enrolled – those non-school age providers taking subsidy or with ECEAP funding in the past year who had a required enrollment date no later than August 1. This includes 100 percent of all required ECEAP providers, 92.9 percent of all required childcare centers, and 90.2 percent of all required family child care homes. These providers cared for 98.0 percent of the over 38,000 children under age 5 who received subsidy care in FY 2016.

Additionally, subsidy providers representing racial/ethnic/language diversity generally enrolled in Early Achievers by the August 1 deadline at rates higher than other providers, preserving important access for subsidy care in communities of color and non-English speaking communities. For example, among required family child care homes, 98.9 percent of Spanish-speaking, 99.2 percent of Somali-speaking, 93.3 percent of American Indian/Alaska Native, and 96.7 percent of Asian providers were enrolled in Early Achievers by August 1.

The figure below illustrates the trend of increasing provider enrollment leading up to the August 1 enrollment deadline. While a small number of required subsidy providers continued to enroll in August and September, most enrollments since the August 1 deadline have been new subsidy and private providers.

Early Achievers Monthly Enrollment Trend, 2013-2016



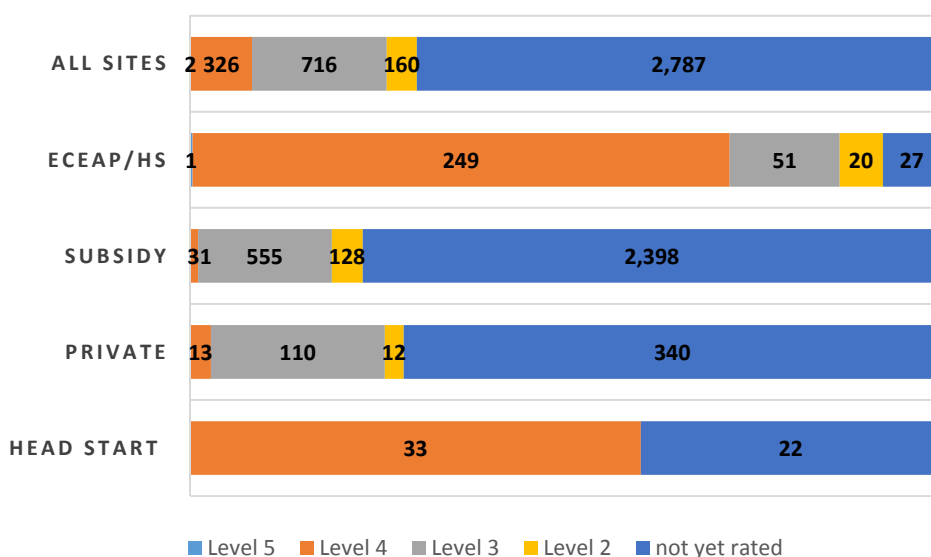
Data Source: EA Dashboard October 15, 2016

The success observed with the August 1 enrollment deadline means that in the short term Early Achievers implementation has not created new gaps in services. However, DEL acknowledges there are concerns in some communities about lack of adequate access for subsidy-eligible children that existed before the August 1 deadline. Planned ECEAP expansions, efforts to convert unlicensed care to licensed care, and encouraging private providers to accept subsidy may help address part of this need. However,

passage of the recent minimum wage initiative has raised concerns about the business viability of subsidy-dependent providers if subsidy reimbursements do not meet the increasing cost of wages. Longer term, there is the need to better understand the larger issues of supply and demand for subsidy care across the state, and to more effectively match policy solutions with the specific needs.

As of December 2016 2,787 of the 3,991 providers enrolled in Early Achievers, or 70.2 percent, are not yet rated. To date 80.8 percent of ECEAP and subsidy providers that have been rated are “at quality” (level 4 or higher among ECEAP and level 3 or higher among child care centers and family child care homes), and 19.2 percent of these providers are not yet rated at quality and will require additional supports.

Early Achievers Ratings, by Provider Type



Data Source: EA Monitoring Report and QRIS Participation Report Dec 2016

As of August 15, 2016, there were an estimated 96,887 children 0-5 being served by early learning providers participating in Early Achievers. The majority of these children (65 percent) were being served in licensed child care centers, while 16 percent were in family child care homes, and 19 percent were in ECEAP or Head Start sites. Note for licensed centers and family child care homes these numbers represent the total number of children 0-5 that providers report are in their care, regardless of payment source.

Estimated Total 0-5 Year Olds at Early Achievers Sites	
Total Children Served	96,887
ECEAP	18,715
Family Child Care Homes	15,494
Child Care Centers	62,678

Data Source: MERIT, ELMS, Famlink, SSPS

Standards Alignment

In the 2015 Early Start Act, the legislature directed DEL to implement a single set of licensing standards for child care and ECEAP by November 1, 2016.

Aligned standards demonstrate the progression of quality that is at the heart of Washington's commitment to all of its children and families. They eliminate duplication, increase consistency, and reduce provider burden in Licensing, Early Achievers and ECEAP. Quality begins with licensing, and all early learning sites will meet licensing standards as the foundation of quality. Standards alignment provides a clear and measurable progression from licensing to Early Achievers and ECEAP with minimal duplication and with similar language. This process will ensure that providers can see the progression of the standards from licensing through ECEAP and understand the expectations and next steps for participation in quality improvement.

Weighting standards is part of a new approach to enforcement that focuses on risk to children, ensuring that enforcement of these rules is both timely and consistent. It will also provide more information and clarity about the risk of each standard and the consequences for violations. Community engagement has been a priority of the standards alignment process. In the past year DEL has accomplished an initial community input process, developed an initial draft of aligned family home and center standards, solicited community feedback on the initial draft aligned standards, filed an initial rulemaking proposal for the aligned and weighted standards process, begun redrafting of the aligned standards, developed Early Achievers and ECEAP standards progression, and planned for the standards weighting process.

ECEAP

The Early Start Act confirms the legislature's intent to make ECEAP an entitlement by the 2020-2021 school year [Section 12(2)]. Since 2011, the legislature has increased ECEAP slots for children by 46 percent (3,667 slots). Based on the estimates of the Caseload Forecast Council, ECEAP will need 7,400 more slots by fall of 2020 to serve all eligible children who are likely to participate.

The Early Start Act requires all existing ECEAP providers to be rated at a level 4 or higher by March 1, 2016 [Section 9(4)(b)]. In order to support ECEAP contractors in meeting the March 1, 2016 deadline, DEL created an ECEAP rating cohort with the University of Washington's Childcare Quality & Early Learning Center (CQEL). All sites in the ECEAP cohort had data collection completed by February 29, 2016. As of December 2016, 349 ECEAP sites (on all pathways) were rated in Early Achievers and of those sites, 300 sites (86 percent) rated a level 4 or 5. There were 51 sites that rated a level 3. These sites were either on the licensed pathway or a part of the Hybrid Project. Sites that rated a level 3 and met the minimum thresholds in ERS and CLASS in their ECEAP classrooms are considered *certified* and operating at an Early Achievers level of quality. Sites that are rated a level 2, or a level 3 *without* a certified ECEAP classroom, are receiving additional coaching support and will have the opportunity to re-rate within six months of their finalized rating.

The pipeline of ECEAP participation in Early Achievers below highlights the different stages of Early Achievers participation, the number of providers at each stage, and the length of time, on average, that ECEAP providers have moved through the Early Achievers rating process.

Rating Pipeline for Providers on ECEAP Timeline



Data Source: MERIT, ELMS, Famlink, SSPS as of August 15, 2016

Key Accomplishments:

- ☑ Nearly all required subsidy providers successfully enrolled in Early Achievers by the August 1, 2016 Early Start Act deadline.
- ☑ Subsidy providers representing racial/ethnic/language diversity generally enrolled in Early Achievers by the August 1, 2016 deadline at rates higher than other providers, preserving important access for subsidy care in communities of color and non-English speaking communities.
- ☑ Nearly 80 percent of rated ECEAP and subsidy providers are rated “at quality”.
- ☑ DEL and its partners have built substantial capacity at all levels to provide training, relationship-based professional development, and rating data collection throughout the state.
- ☑ DEL and its partners have made substantial improvement in using data to drive decision-making and improvements.
- ☑ DEL and its partners have made substantial progress in the standards alignment process.
- ☑ The Early Achievers Review Subcommittee (EARS) has made nine specific recommendations to DEL for improving access for children from diverse backgrounds to high quality programs.

Key Challenges:

- ☐ Building systems capacity to address barriers that remain for reaching level 3 among subsidy providers by the June 30, 2020 Early Start Act deadline.
- ☐ The high volume of newly-enrolled providers in Early Achievers that will need to be supported through initial rating.
- ☐ The high volume of providers that need to attain level 3 or higher within Early Start Act timeline.
- ☐ Ensuring that Early Achievers protocols work well for all providers, particularly those from diverse communities.

- ❑ DEL and partners must continue to ensure that supportive services are scalable and cost effective.
- ❑ Early Achievers level 1, licensing, is not yet aligned to support overall quality improvement efforts. This alignment work is underway, but not yet complete.
- ❑ More and different supports are needed for some providers. It is necessary to assess customized pathways so that adequate resources are available to individual participants.
- ❑ Provider motivation to participate in Early Achievers is unequal and is a significant factor in their overall success in undertaking quality improvements and attaining high rating levels.
- ❑ Champions for Early Achievers are needed to create a broad messaging strategy that can increase understanding of Early Achievers.
- ❑ Partners need to better understand longer-term issues of supply and demand for subsidy care across the state, and develop more effective solutions to meet the needs.

Early Achievers is moving a whole industry toward positive change in the belief that lasting, meaningful growth occurs when the system is individualized, inclusive, and built on a shared vision. DEL is committed to improving Early Achievers and will continue to review and adapt the system, within legislative requirements and available resources, as more information becomes available about what works to improve quality and improve child outcomes.

Early Start Act Reporting Requirements

On June 30, 2015, the Washington State legislature passed E2SHB 1491, the Early Start Act, which was signed into law by Governor Jay Inslee on July 6th, 2015. The legislature defines the intent of this bill to be as follows:

“(1) The legislature finds that quality early care and education builds the foundation for a child's success in school and in life. The legislature acknowledges that a quality framework is necessary for the early care and education system in Washington. The legislature recognizes that empirical evidence supports the conclusion that high quality programs consistently yield more positive outcomes for children, with the strongest positive impacts on the most vulnerable children. The legislature acknowledges that critical developmental windows exist in early childhood, and low quality child care has damaging effects for children. The legislature further understands that the proper dosage, duration of programming, and stability of care are critical to enhancing program quality and improving child outcomes. The legislature acknowledges that the early care and education system should strive to address the needs of Washington's culturally and linguistically diverse populations. The legislature understands that parental choice and provider diversity are guiding principles for early learning programs.

(2) The legislature intends to prioritize the integration of child care and preschool in an effort to promote full day programming. The legislature further intends to 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.”

A requirement of the Early Start Act is the development of an Annual Progress Report. Beginning December 15, 2015, and each December 15th thereafter, the Department of Early Learning, in collaboration with Child Care Aware of Washington and the Early Achievers Review Subcommittee of the Early Learning Advisory Council, shall submit, in compliance with RCW 43.01.036, a progress report to the Governor and the legislature regarding providers' progress in Early Achievers, Washington's quality rating and improvement system, progress in expanding the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), as well as other topics that are important in the implementation of the Early Start Act.

Acknowledgements

This report was produced by DEL’s Early Start Act Annual Report Advisory Team. The Early Achiever Review Subcommittee provided valuable recommendations, feedback and ongoing review of this report. Child Care Aware of Washington provided much of the data for this report, as did Third Sector Intelligence (3SI), and the University of Washington’s Center for Child Care Quality and Early Learning. All of the early learning providers who have participated in Early Achievers, including child care centers, family child care homes, early care and education settings, and ECEAP/Head Start providers have made this work possible.

These providers continue to demonstrate their commitment to high quality, provide feedback essential to improve programs, and offer invaluable support to children and families every day.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The 2015 Early Start Act set a mandate for Washington to increase access to high-quality early learning opportunities in the state as a key element to improving outcomes for young children and strengthening kindergarten readiness across the state. Research clearly demonstrates that the quality of early learning environments is critical to supporting child growth and development, and that children need access to high quality programming and stability of participation in these programs. The Early Start Act responded to this need by providing supports to help early learning providers reach a level of quality that promotes strong child outcomes, focusing on improving quality for children most at-risk for not being ready for kindergarten. The Early Start Act mandates levels of quality for licensed child care providers – child care centers and family child care homes - that accept children on child care subsidy or Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) funding. The Early Start Act highlights several key goals:

- 🌱 Continue to build a child-focused system that supports high-quality services that will improve child outcomes and prioritize early learning services for children who need them most;
- 🌱 Build upon and strengthen the existing system by making sure it is accessible to all children, families and providers in Washington;
- 🌱 Use data to drive ongoing policy and programmatic decisions;
- 🌱 Ensure services are seamless for families, particularly child care and preschool, and are working together to promote high-quality, efficiently-managed services; and
- 🌱 Support the early learning workforce in their efforts to provide quality services to children and families through educational support and ongoing training.

Enactment of the Early Start Act (ESA) was possible because of a decade-long focus on early learning in Washington. The ESA itself covers many areas of the early learning system, but does not address the impact that birth-to-three services and other family supports have on a child's success. Accordingly, in the first year of the ESA's implementation, the Department of Early Learning has put forth an ambitious goal of getting 90% of children ready for kindergarten, with race/ethnicity and family income no longer predictors of readiness. This goal is a unifying direction for the entire early learning system, leveraging the other services and outcomes that DEL supports to accomplish the ESA's targets and strategies.

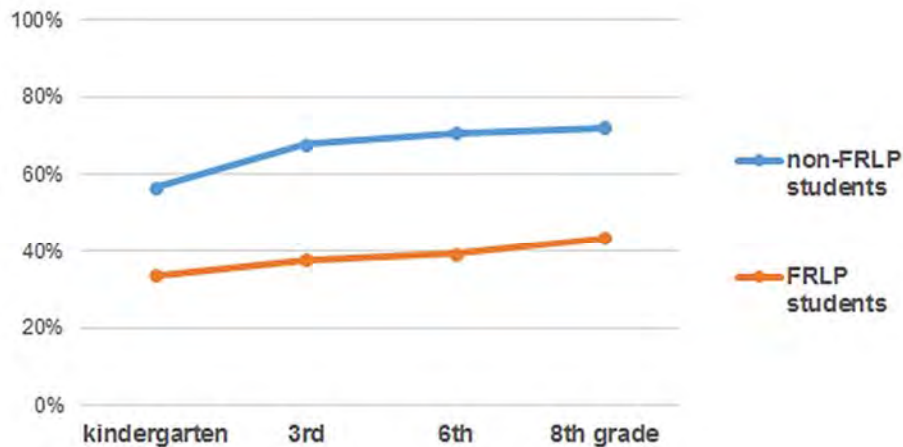
Why Kindergarten Readiness is Important

School readiness, or ensuring that children enter kindergarten with the cognitive and non-cognitive skills and supports necessary for school success, is a key goal of the Early Start Act. Supporting school-readiness begins at birth and includes ensuring that the right mix of services are available to support the healthy growth and development of all children, with a focus on the children most at-risk. Research demonstrates that the skills children develop prior to entering the school system impact their future educational experiences; children with higher levels of school readiness at age five are generally more successful in grade school, are less likely to drop out of high school, and earn more as adults.² Children entering school without the prerequisite skills are unlikely to catch up with their peers over time. In fact the reverse is true, and children entering kindergarten with lower skill levels of school readiness generally “do not progress at the same rate as their more advantaged peers, so achievement gaps tend

² J.B. Issacs (2012) “Starting School at a Disadvantage: The School Readiness of Poor Children,” Brookings Institute.

to widen over time.”³ This type of persistent gap is illustrated in Figure 1 showing the opportunity gap among Washington students by household income from kindergarten entry through eighth grade.

Figure 1. Washington Opportunity Gap by Household Income Group, 2015



*Data source: OSPI WaKIDS and English Language Arts SBA data from 2015-2016 school year Report Card website
FRLP=Free and Reduced Lunch Program*

How Washington Assesses Kindergarten Readiness

Since 2011, Washington has used WaKIDS (Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills) to support the transition process from early learning to kindergarten. A joint effort between DEL, OSPI and Thrive Washington, WaKIDS has three components:

1. **The Family Connection** is an opportunity for families to build a relationship with the kindergarten teacher and share valuable information about their child. Teachers can do this through a home visit or a one on one meeting with children and families in their classroom. The legislature allows school districts to use up to three days at the beginning of the school for the family connection component of WaKIDS.
2. **Using a Whole Child Assessment** made up of a subset of objectives from Teaching Strategies GOLD®, the WaKIDS observational assessment gathers information on a child’s skills, abilities and areas for growth at kindergarten entry. When compiled, it provides data on all the Essential Domains of School Readiness of entering kindergartners allowing teachers to use what they learn about students' entering strengths to individualize student learning. OSPI compiles this school readiness data and reports it on the OSPI Report Card and Washington’s P-20 Longitudinal Data System at the Office of Financial Management.
3. **The Early Learning Collaboration** is an opportunity for early learning professionals and kindergarten teachers to come together and engage in shared professional development, develop common goals and expectations about school readiness, and analyze regional data including WaKIDS, GOLD® and Early Achievers to inform practice and improve future school readiness.

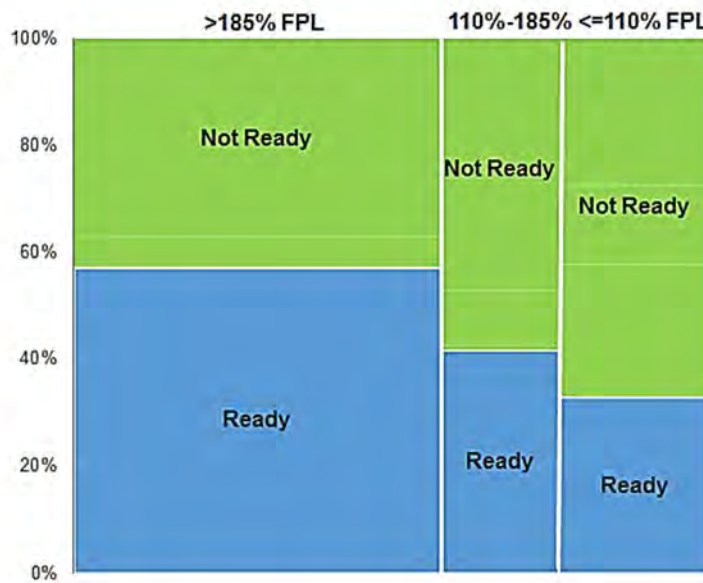
³ RAND (2005) Children at Risk: Consequences for School Readiness and Beyond.

In the 2015-16 school year, 58,279 entering kindergarteners in Washington participated in the WaKIDS whole-child assessment, approximately 73 percent of the state’s entering kindergarteners. WaKIDS implementation is aligned with the roll out of full day kindergarten, and WaKIDS is expected to reach all children in Washington by the 2017-18 school year. The WaKIDS assessment includes six domains (Cognitive Development, Language, Literacy, Math, Physical Development, and Social-Emotional Development), and teachers assess children on the extent to which they demonstrate characteristics of entering kindergarteners on each of the six domains. DEL counts entering kindergarteners as “ready for kindergarten” if they demonstrate readiness on all six of the six domains assessed.

As with other educational outcomes, kindergarten readiness is not equally distributed throughout the population of Washington’s entering kindergarteners – children from lower-income households are less likely to demonstrate readiness than are children from higher-income households. To help guide agency-wide work toward the 90% kindergarten readiness goal, DEL has used available data about WaKIDS assessments in the 2015-2016 school year to estimate kindergarten readiness by household income groupings for the entire class of entering kindergarteners. These groupings are chosen based on DEL’s programming – ECEAP primarily serves children in households <=110% Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and subsidized childcare primarily serves children in households <=185% FPL.

Approximately 79,700 children entered public kindergartens throughout the state in 2015, and OSPI reports that 44.2 percent of children assessed on WaKIDS in 2015 demonstrated readiness on six of the six domains. As illustrated in Figure 2, entering kindergarteners in households >185% FPL demonstrate the highest rate of readiness at 57 percent, whereas DEL estimates that 42 percent of those from households with incomes 110%-

Figure 2. Kindergarten Readiness by Household Income Group, 2015



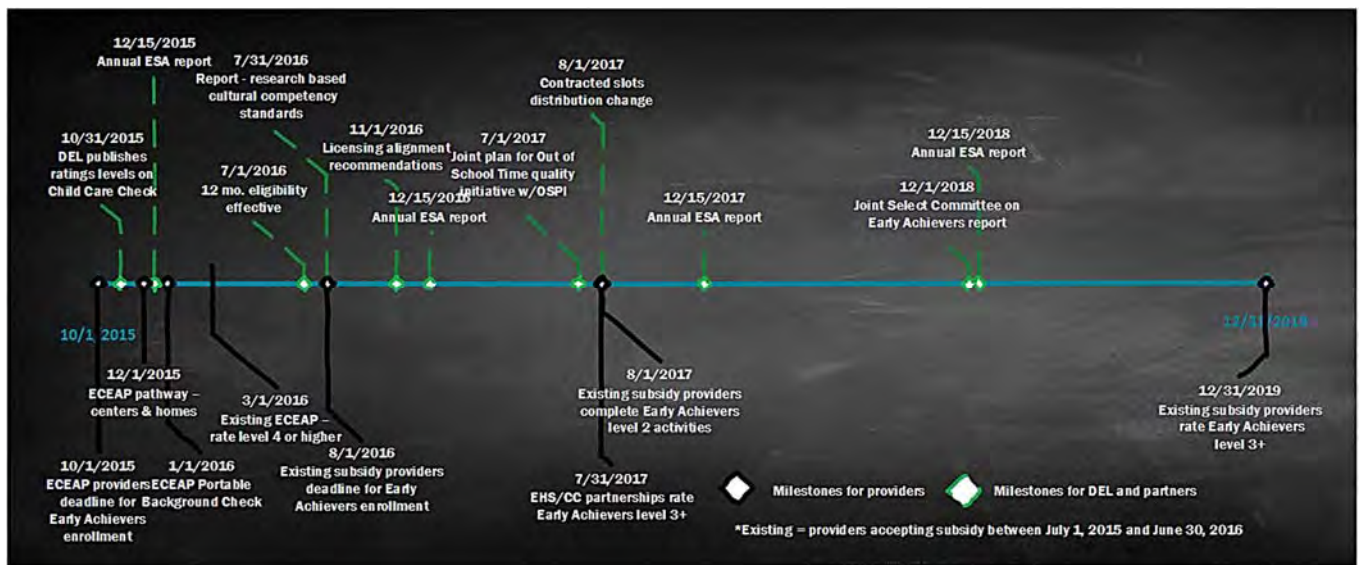
185% FPL and 33 percent of those from households with incomes <=110% FPL arrive at kindergarten ready for success. DEL estimates that without current ECEAP and Head Start preschool programs, only 28 percent of children in households <=110% FPL would arrive at kindergarten ready for success.

How the Early Start Act Will Improve Outcomes

The Early Start Act is focused on improving the quality and scale of early learning programs in Washington in order to improve school readiness rates for children. In order to achieve these goals, the Early Start Act outlined key, achievable targets that will increase access to high quality early learning opportunities to the children most likely to benefit:

- All licensed child care providers serving non-school age children on subsidy will rate an Early Achievers level 3-5 by 2020;
- ECEAP will be available to all eligible children by the 2020-21 school year;
- ECEAP providers will offer part-day, full-school-day, and extended-day models according to demand for services and availability of supply;
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- DEL will create assurances that early learning programs are available, supported and appropriate for diverse communities across the state, and address barriers to participation;
- All existing ECEAP providers will rate an Early Achievers level 4-5 by March 2016 or begin remedial activities by September 2016 to rate a level 4⁴; and
- DEL will implement a 12-month authorization for Working Connections Child Care subsidy to promote stability and high-quality for low-income children.⁴

Figure 3. ESA Timeline as of June 28, 2015



Dates from Second Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1491

⁴ This was accomplished in FY 2016.

Overview of this Report

This report measures the progress of the implementation of the Early Start Act against baseline data on early learning programs in Washington supported by DEL. This report also highlights several areas that need to be enhanced, including future data collection, to strengthen the impact of the Early Start Act and ensure that early learning programs are effective in achieving the goals of the Early Start Act. Finally, there are new or enhanced components to this year's report, reflecting a greater emphasis on racial equity, the unifying 90% kindergarten readiness goal, and the improved capacity for data analysis at DEL with the advent of DEL's new Research and Analysis team.

This report is not a comprehensive review of all of the early learning programs and child services in Washington. Complementary programs such as birth-three programs and programs for children with special needs are not examined in this report but they are also essential to supporting Washington's school readiness goals.

CHAPTER 2: Overview, Data Snapshot and Current Implementation Status

What is Early Achievers?

Early Achievers, Washington’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), was designed to help early learning providers offer high quality care that supports each child’s learning and development. Early Achievers is designed to:

- Provide resources including coaching, training, and incentives to early learning providers to support their efforts to enhance quality;
- Help parents and caregivers find high-quality child care and early learning programs that fit their needs by providing information about facility quality; and
- Ensure that children have high-quality early learning experiences that help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school and life.



Early Achievers is designed to support early learning providers on a path to continuous quality improvement. Attaining a high level of quality is a long-term commitment. Rather than crossing a finish line, it is embracing a philosophy of continuing to learn and grow over time. Providers at all levels in Early Achievers are assisted in this effort by:

- Learning about strengths and areas to grow using multiple sources of information;
- Creating a plan with goals, timelines and responsibilities;
- Testing and implementing solutions; and
- Evaluating the results and revising the plan.

Early Achievers launched on July 1, 2012 with a staggered roll-out to regions across the state. Some regions began implementing Early Achievers on July 1, 2012, while other regions did not begin implementation until July 1, 2013. The Early Start Act requires participation in Early Achievers by providers that accept children on subsidy who are not yet in school. For the purposes of this report, a subsidy provider is defined as an active child care center, family child care home, or Head Start/ECEAP site within Washington that has received a Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) or Seasonal Child

Care (SCC) subsidy payment for at least one child (excluding school age) within the last 12-month period. Homeless Child Care subsidy is a temporary assistance program that will be included in the subsidy provider definition in future reports when the necessary supporting data systems are in place.

School-age-only child care providers are currently excluded from the definition until Early Achievers introduces a pathway for participation designed for this facility type. The legislature approved a pilot to explore how the state can best support providers serving children before and after school with training and resources needed to encourage high-quality programming. The Expanded Learning Opportunity Quality Initiative (formerly known as the Out-of-School Time Quality Initiative) builds on the success and lessons learned from Early Achievers. Fifty programs from four counties (King, Pierce, Spokane, and Walla Walla) have been chosen to participate in a quality assessment and improvement process. Participants include licensed family homes and child care centers (who serve school-age children and families) already participating in Early Achievers; 21st Century Community Learning Centers; and other programs serving youth between the ages of 5-18 years.

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) are working in partnership with School's Out Washington, Child Care Aware of Washington and the University of Washington to provide training, coaching and assessment using the best national research on promoting youth outcomes. During this period, staff, families and youth will also be interviewed for perspective on their respective expanded learning opportunity programs. The pilot is well under way – in fall 2016 all 50 pilot sites signed participation agreements and began working with coaches. Pre-assessments that will serve as baseline measures were completed in October 2016, and coaching and training will occur through April 2017, at which time post-assessments will occur. All of this information will inform DEL, OSPI and the legislature as they consider the state's role in promoting high-quality school-age programs. Results from the pilot are due to the legislature in July 2017.

August 1, 2016 Enrollment Deadline

Washington's 2015 Early Start Act established the expectations that all licensed early learning providers serving children on state subsidy (excluding school-age only providers) would enroll in Early Achievers by August 1, 2016 and subsequently engage in activities to improve child care quality.

As of August 1, 2016 there were 3,669 child care centers, family child care homes, and ECEAP/Head Start providers participating in Early Achievers. This includes 982 child care centers taking subsidy in the past year, 2,134 family child care homes taking subsidy in the past year, 128 ECEAP/Head Start providers, and 425 private providers not taking subsidy in the past year. This represents an increase of 33 percent over the 2,756 providers enrolled in Early Achievers reported in the 2015 ESA Annual Report. These providers cared for 98.0 percent of the over 38,000 children under age 5 who received state-funded care in FY 2016.

Child care providers in Washington represent the rich racial/ethnic and language diversity of the communities they serve. In the 2015 Early Start Act the Washington legislature articulated its commitment to maintaining culturally and linguistically diverse providers and instructed DEL to maximize and encourage participation in Early Achievers among diverse providers. Table 1 below details the share of required child care and family child care home providers (those that have taken subsidy in the past year for children not yet school age) who had enrolled in Early Achievers by the August 1, 2016

registration deadline. In many categories, providers of color and those reporting a primary language other than English enrolled by the August 1 deadline at rates higher than average.

**Table 1. August 1, 2016 Deadline
Enrollment of Required Subsidy Providers Taking Subsidy in Past Year**

	Child Care Centers		Family Child Care Homes	
	Number EA Enrolled	Percent EA Enrolled	Number EA Enrolled	Percent EA Enrolled
Total	982	92.9%	2,134	90.2%
Race/Ethnicity of Primary Contact				
American Indian/ Alaska Native	10	90.9%	14	93.3%
Asian	22	95.7%	59	96.7%
Black/African-American	53	100.0%	418	98.6%
Hispanic/Latino	75	96.2%	697	99.0%
Multiracial/Other	15	93.8%	78	98.7%
Pacific Islander	13	92.9%	14	100.0%
White	619	99.0%	672	96.6%
Blank	175	7%	182	48.7%
Language of Primary Contact				
Amharic	---	---	10	100.0%
Arabic	---	---	10	100.0%
Cantonese	---	---	1	100.0%
English	830	98.6%	1,124	97.1%
French			3	100.0%
German	2	100.0%	---	---
Japanese	1	100.0%	---	---
Korean	3	100.0%	2	66.7%
Mandarin	1	100.0%	1	100.0%
Oromo	---	---	16	84.2%
Other	4	100.0%	30	96.8%
Punjabi	---	---	6	100.0%
Russian	1	100.0%	13	100.0%
Somali	1	100.0%	262	98.9%
Spanish	24	92.3%	618	99.2%
Tagalog	1	100.0%	5	100.0%
Ukrainian	---	---	2	100.0%
Vietnamese	---	---	11	100.0%
Blank	112	64.7%	20	9.4%

*All racial groups are reported as non-Hispanic
Data Source: MERIT Early Achievers Monitoring Report*

In the months leading up to the August 1, 2016 enrollment deadline specified in the Early Start Act for subsidy and ECEAP providers, DEL and its partners engaged in focused monitoring and outreach to identify and enroll providers taking subsidy. Regular meetings with partners involved reviewing up-to-date provider enrollment and childcare authorization data, and included examining local geographic (county and zip code) and provider race/ethnicity and language data to determine potential challenges with specific local subpopulations of subsidy providers. On August 1 only 300 subsidy providers who had taken subsidy in the past year serving children less than age 5 had not yet enrolled in Early Achievers, representing a 91.1 percent enrollment rates among required subsidy providers by the deadline.

The success observed with the August 1 enrollment deadline means that in the short term Early Achievers implementation has not created new gaps in services. However, DEL acknowledges there are concerns in some communities about lack of adequate access for subsidy-eligible children that existed before the August 1 deadline. Planned ECEAP expansions, efforts to convert unlicensed care to licensed care, and encouraging private providers to accept subsidy may help address part of this need. However, passage of the recent minimum wage initiative has raised concerns about the business viability of subsidy-dependent providers if subsidy reimbursements do not meet the increasing cost of wages. Longer term, there is the need to better understand the larger issues of supply and demand for subsidy care across the state, and to more effectively match policy solutions with the specific needs.

Rating Information

The Early Achievers Quality Standards provide Washington with a statewide framework for quality in care for children birth to school age. The Quality Standards focus on external evaluations of learning environment (using the Environmental Rating Scale – ERS tool) and adult-to-child interactions (using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System – CLASS tool). In addition, participants earn points for meeting criteria in a variety of standard areas including Child Outcomes, Curriculum and Staff Supports, Professional Development and Family Engagement. These standard areas were modeled after and are aligned with ECEAP and Head Start performance standards.

Providers who have completed all of the level 2 requirements and have worked with their regional Child Care Aware of Washington Technical Assistance Specialist to gauge readiness can request a rating. Data collection is done by a data collection team at the Childcare Quality & Early Learning Center (CQEL) in the University of Washington’s College of Education.



Levels 3 to 5 are based on points. Your facility rating is determined by the number of points you earn during your independent evaluation. Each assessed facility/family home child care must score at least a 2 on Instructional Support in the CLASS, a 3.5 on Emotional Support and Classroom Organization/Emotional and Behavioral Support in the CLASS and a 3.0 on the ERS to achieve a Level 3 to 5 rating. Facilities that do not meet these minimum thresholds will receive a Level 2 rating.

POINTS AWARDED FOR THESE AREAS:

- ← Child Outcomes
- ← Facility Curriculum & Learning Environment & Interactions
- ← Professional Development & Training
- ← Family Engagement & Partnership

Your overall points will determine your final rating. Degrees and credentials must be verified in MERIT in order to earn professional development points. The points are:

Child Outcomes	+10 points
Facility Curriculum and Learning Environment and Interactions (70 points total)	
Classroom/FCC Home Environment (CLASS/ERS)	+55 points
Curriculum, Learning and Assessment	+15 points
Professional Development and Training	+10 points
Family Engagement and Partnership	+10 points
Grand Total	100 points

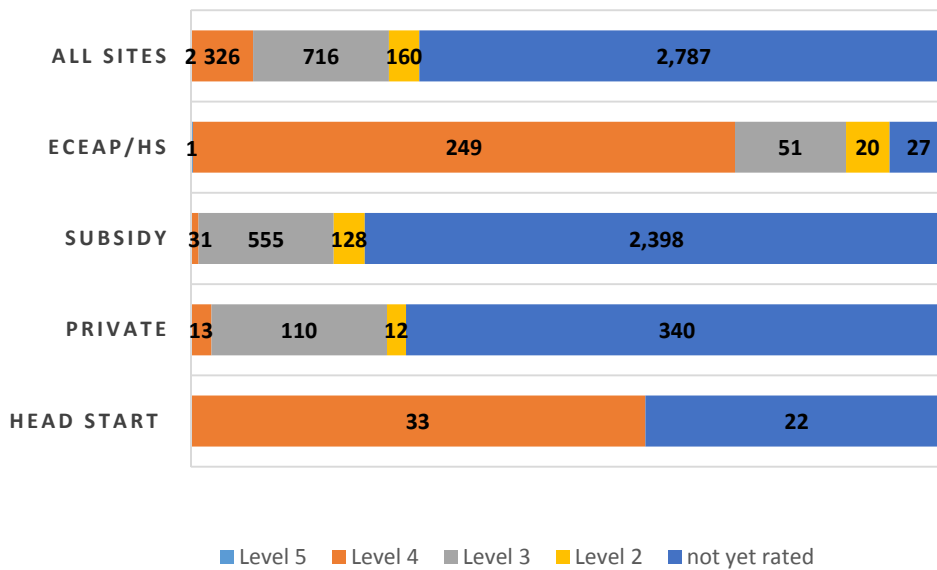


The goal of Early Achievers is to support providers to attain a high level of quality, defined as attaining a rating of a level 3 or higher.

Ratings by Provider Type

As illustrated in Figure 4 below, as of December 2016 2,787 of the 3,991 providers enrolled in Early Achievers, or 70.2 percent, are not yet rated. To date 80.8 percent of ECEAP and subsidy providers that have been rated are “at quality” (level 4 or higher among ECEAP and level 3 or higher among child care centers and family child care homes), and 19.2 percent of these providers are not yet rated at quality and will require additional supports.

Figure 4. Early Achievers Ratings, by Provider Type



Data Source: EA Monitoring Report and QRIS Participation Report Dec 2016

Children Reached

As of August 15, 2016, there were an estimated 96,887 children 0-5 being served by early learning providers participating in Early Achievers. The majority of these children (65 percent) were being served in licensed child care centers, while 16 percent were in family child care homes, and 19 percent were in ECEAP or Head Start sites. Note for licensed centers and family child care

Table 2. Estimated Total 0-5 Year Olds at Early Achievers Sites	
Total Children Served	96,887
ECEAP	18,715
Family Child Care Homes	15,494
Child Care Centers	62,678

Data Source: MERIT, ELMS, Famlink, SSPS

homes these numbers represent the total number of children 0-5 that providers report are in their care, regardless of payment source.

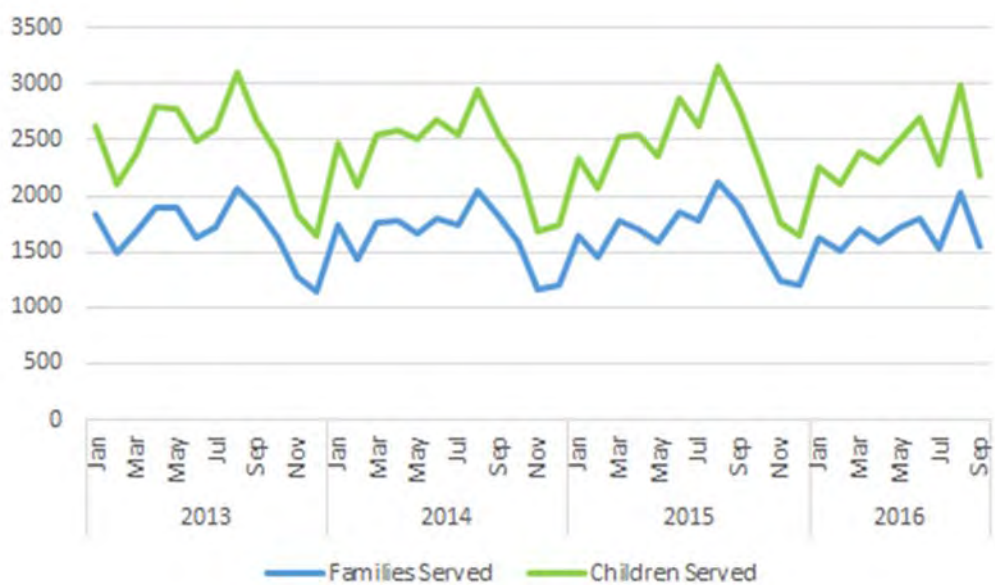
In FY 2016, 38,454 children under age 5 received subsidized childcare. 62.9 percent of these children received care in child care centers during the fiscal year, 28.9 percent received care in family child care homes, and 35.5 percent participated in subsidized family, friends, and neighbor care. Some children participated in more than one type of care, so these percentages total more than 100 percent.

Of the 35,324 children under age 5 who received subsidized care with either a licensed child care center or family home during FY 2016, 98 percent were in the care of providers who enrolled in Early Achievers by the August 1, 2016 deadline.

Family Center and Referral Data

In 2016, the Child Care Aware of Washington Family Center (managed by Child Care Resources, a Child Care Aware of Washington agency) received more than 19,000 calls for information and referrals for child care. The Family Center provides consumer education materials to help families in their search for high-quality child care that matches their needs. This includes information about child development, Early Achievers and questions that families can ask when visiting different programs.

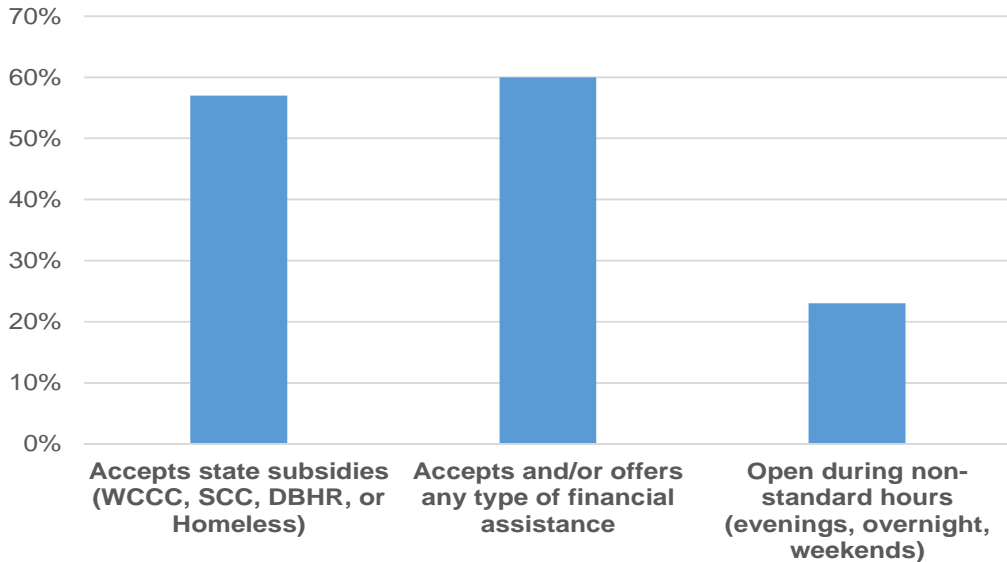
Figure 5. Families and Children Served by CCA Referrals, 2013-2016



Data Source: NACCRRAware, prepared by CCA of Washington

In FY 2016, more than half of the calls received were looking for child care that accepts children in state subsidy and/or offers financial assistance. In addition, 23 percent of the calls were seeking child care that is available during non-standard times, such as evenings and weekends.

Figure 6. Percentage of Calls Seeking Specific Providers, FY 2016



Data Source: NACCRRAware, prepared by CCA of Washington

The Family Center has dedicated English and Spanish language phone lines. In addition, the Family Center uses interpretation services that enable the resources to be accessed in nearly any language. In FY 2016, the Family Center was accessed by families speaking 21 languages other than English and Spanish – the most-accessed other languages being Somali, Tigrinian, Arabic, Mandarin, and Portuguese. Overall 7.2 percent of the over 19,000 calls were from non-English speakers. The Family Center also has a website available in English.

Key Accomplishments:

- Nearly all required subsidy providers successfully enrolled in Early Achievers by the August 1, 2016 Early Start Act deadline.
- Subsidy providers representing racial/ethnic/language diversity generally enrolled in Early Achievers by the August 1, 2016 deadline at rates higher than other providers, preserving important access for subsidy care in communities of color and non-English speaking communities.
- Nearly 80 percent of rated providers are rated “at quality.”
- DEL and its partners have built substantial capacity at all levels to provide training, relationship-based professional development, and rating data collection throughout the state.
- The historic joint communication collaborative effort by DEL, DSHS, Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA), and SEIU Local 925 encouraging providers to enroll in Early Achievers.
- The creation of an ongoing joint communications group that includes members from DEL, DSHS, DOH, SEIU Local 925, CCA of WA, Thrive Washington, WSA and other key stakeholders. This group meets monthly and works together to create aligned messages and communication strategies in order to most effectively support families and providers through the changes in the early learning system.

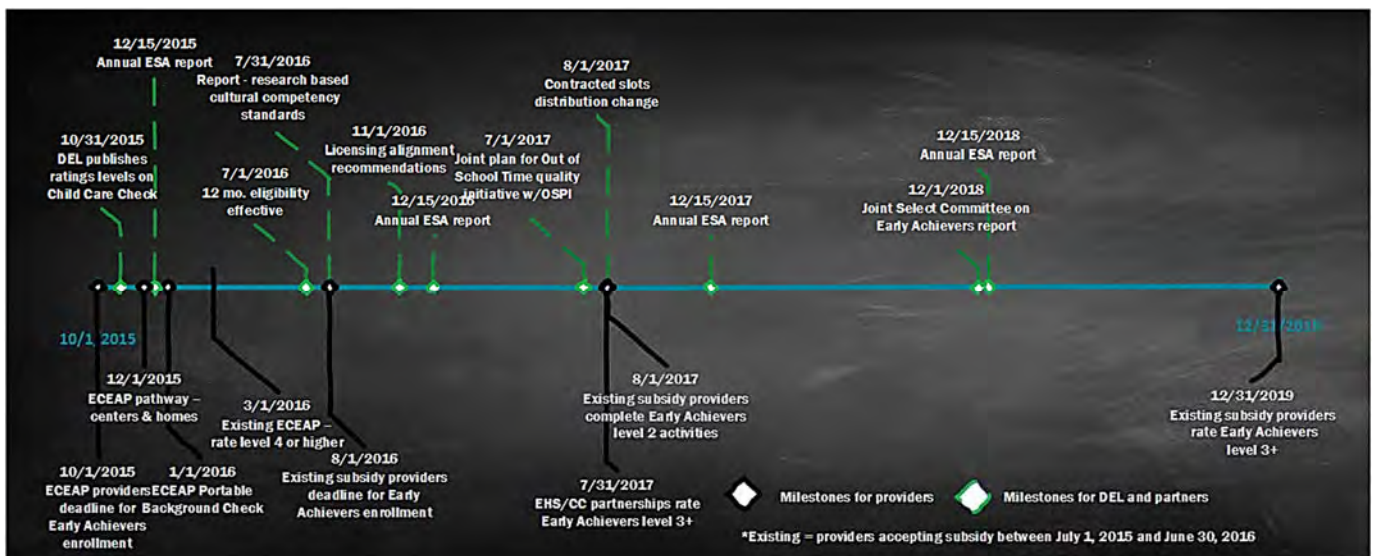
Key Challenges:

- ❑ The removal of unintended barriers for communities of color or rural communities in reaching level 3 requirements.
- ❑ Building systems capacity to address barriers that remain for reaching level 3 among subsidy providers by the June 30, 2020 Early Start Act deadline.
- ❑ Partners need to better understand longer-term issues of supply and demand for subsidy care across the state, and develop more effective solutions to meet the needs.

CHAPTER 3: Progress toward Meeting the Early Start Act Requirements

The Early Start Act created new requirements to participate in Early Achievers for early learning providers that accept state funding for Working Connections Child Care subsidy, Seasonal Child Care (referred to collectively in this report as “subsidy providers”), or ECEAP to participate in Early Achievers and to meet certain levels of quality within prescribed timeframes. The requirements for participation and quality attainment for these providers are outlined below:

Figure 7. ESA Timeline as of June 28, 2015



The Early Start Act requires that all child care centers, family child care homes, and ECEAP sites serving subsidy-eligible children not yet in school enroll in Early Achievers by August 1, 2016. As of August 1, 2016 there were 3,964 child care centers, family child care homes, and Head Start/ECEAP providers participating in Early Achievers. This includes 982 child care centers taking subsidy, 2,134 family child care homes taking subsidy, 74 ECEAP/Head Start providers, and 774 licensed private providers not taking subsidy.

In the months and weeks leading up to the August 1 deadline, DEL and its partners worked to identify providers with open subsidy child care authorizations who had not yet enrolled in Early Achievers, communicated with those providers to address barriers to enrollment, and worked with families on subsidy to find alternatives. Of the licensed subsidy providers serving any subsidy-eligible children in the past year who were required to enroll by August 1 in order to continue to participate in the childcare subsidy program, 92.9 percent of child care centers and 90.2 percent of family child care homes enrolled by the deadline.

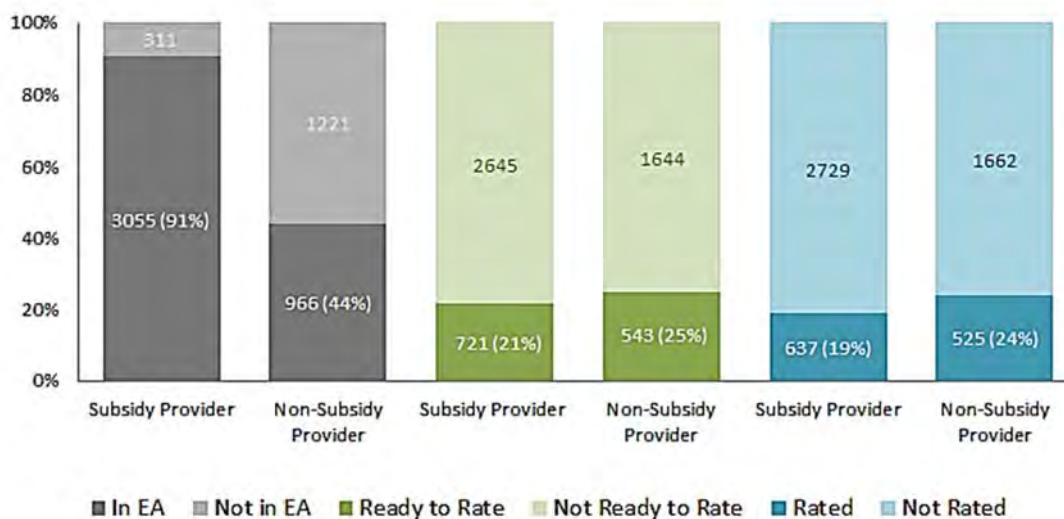
Following enrollment in Early Achievers, licensed subsidy providers have 12 months to complete the level 2 requirements and 30 months after the completion of level 2 activities to participate in quality improvement prior to being rated. Licensed child care providers that accept children on subsidy must

rate at a level 3 or higher within 30 months. Providers that do not rate a level 3 within in this time frame are given the opportunity to 1) complete remedial activities and request a free re-rate if they have already rated at a level 2, or 2) request an extension for “exceptional circumstances” to postpone rating by up to six months. Both of these options are discussed below.

New ECEAP providers must enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days from the start of ECEAP services and must rate at a level 4 or higher within 12 months. Licensed child care centers or family child care homes that receive an ECEAP contract have 18 months to rate at a level 4 or higher.

Figure 8 below illustrates progress on three key Early Achievers milestones – enrollment in Early Achievers, ready to rate, and rating – by subsidy and non-subsidy providers. Subsidy providers enrolled at roughly twice the rate of their non-subsidy counterparts, likely due to the required timelines imposed on subsidy providers.

Figure 8. Comparison of Early Achievers Milestone by Subsidy and Non-Subsidy Providers



Data Source: MERIT, Famlink, as of August 15, 2016

Early Learning providers that accept child care subsidy payments or ECEAP contracts must participate in Early Achievers according to the timeline described above. The pipeline of provider participation in Early Achievers illustrated in Figure 9 below highlights the different stages of Early Achievers participation, the number of providers at each stage, and the length of time, on average, that subsidy providers in the past have moved through the Early Achievers ratings process. Given the very high volume of subsidy providers that enrolled in Early Achievers just before the August 1 deadline that are not yet rated, we may well see median times to completion in the later stages increase as this bulk of subsidy providers moves through the system.

Figure 9. Rating Pipeline for Child Care Providers on Subsidy Timeline



Data Source: MERIT, ELMS, Famlink, SSPS as of August 15, 2016

Different types of support are needed at each stage of the Early Achievers rating and quality improvement pipeline to support provider progression to each subsequent milestone. DEL is working with its partners, CCA of WA and UW CQEL, to prepare for the substantial downstream work anticipated by the large number of subsidy providers enrolled just before the August 1 deadline.

While licensed child care providers, both centers and family child care homes, have up to 30 months from Early Achievers enrollment to attain their “at quality” rating, there are substantially more providers that will need to continue to move through the Early Achievers process to meet this requirement. DEL is working with its partners at CCA of WA and UW CQEL to implement strategies to help ensure the process of scheduling data collection for either an initial rating or re-rating does not compromise provider eligibility.

In addition to the initial free rating, all Early Achievers participants are now eligible for one free re-rate if they do not achieve the required quality rating level on their initial rating, including licensed child care sites that need to attain a level 4 rating to provide ECEAP. This free re-rate option is current available to help Early Achievers participants meet their Early Start Act rating timeline requirement, and is available once per three-year rating cycle. The re-rate will only cover the area(s) in which the facility did not achieve the minimum threshold for the required quality level rating. For example, the re-rate may only include the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) or Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) assessments. No additional facility information will be considered.

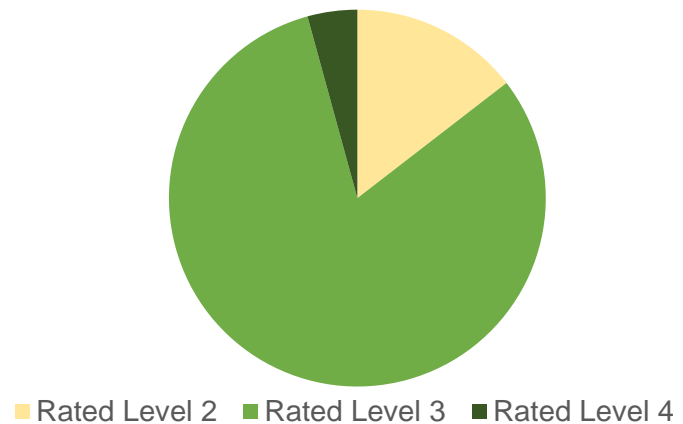
If a provider does not achieve the required quality rating level on the second rating, they have the option of paying for additional re-rates. The fee charged is dependent on the size of the facility. Based on current data, DEL expects that this option will be used infrequently as only 17 (<3 percent) of rated facilities have ever not achieved the required quality rating level after the re-rate process.

Re-Rating Success Rate

As of October 2016, 117 licensed child care providers that previously achieved a level 2 have attempted re-rating. Of these, 85.5 percent have attained a level 3 or higher on the re-rate.

The licensed providers spent an average of just under one year between their initial rating and the re-rating. These licensed providers showed significant improvements in their scores during the re-rate, with the greatest improvements occurring in the CLASS ratings.

Figure 10. Level 2 Re-Ratings, Licensed Pathway



Data Source: MERT Rated Facilities report and PRISM, as of October 2016

Extension Protocol

The Early Start Act requires all licensed early learning providers that accept children on subsidy and ECEAP providers to participate in Early Achievers and attain the required quality rating levels. It also requires the development of an Extension Protocol that allows Early Achievers participants a one-time (no longer than 6-month) extension to the rating requirement for “exceptional circumstances” [Sec 2(10)]. DEL developed this extension protocol in collaboration with the Early Learning Advisory Council and the Indian Policy Early Learning (IPEL) committee, and it went into effect in December 2015. The protocol defines the requirements for consideration of an extension, and defines exceptional circumstances such as leadership changes, high staff turnover, natural disasters, facility move, and others. Four ECEAP providers have since applied for and received extensions for renewal ratings based primarily on leadership turnover. A copy of the full Extension Protocol is included in Appendix B.

Twelve-month Authorization

As mandated in the 2015 Early Start Act [Section 6(2)], twelve-month eligibility became effective July 1, 2016 to support quality for children by providing more consistent child care arrangements. This means that a family that qualifies for child care subsidy will maintain eligibility for 12 months regardless of any increases or decreases of income, so long as income does not exceed absolute federal limits. Further, these families will maintain eligibility regardless of a loss of approved activities (work, training, and education). De-linking the parent’s activity from the child’s child care eligibility is intended to produce a more stable arrangement for the child in a quality environment. This is intended to support positive child outcomes, stability in monthly income for the provider, and provide support to the parents as they work and/or go to school.

Parents will no longer need to worry about the impact of a small pay increase at work, or temporary loss of work, leading to the loss of their child care subsidy for a 12-month period as parents will no longer be required to report changes in their circumstances that would affect care needs and eligibility. These changes are aligned with the federal reauthorization of the Child Care Development Block Grant Act which requires states to ensure that, after 12 months of eligibility, families reapplying for benefits

whose incomes now exceed state program limits (but remain within federal limits) continue to receive benefits for a 12-month phase-out period during which they transition to paying for care on their own.

Key Accomplishments:

- ☐ The strong participation in a voluntary Early Achievers system demonstrates that providers are willing to enroll and engage in quality improvement work. Although subsidy providers are required to participate in order to retain subsidy, there is evidence of strong enrollment among non-subsidy providers as well.
- ☐ DEL has worked with partners and stakeholders to update ratings protocols and policies to reflect ongoing learning and continuous quality improvement.
- ☐ The strong success in re-rating highlights the strength of the quality improvement supports as well as the provider base.

Key Challenges:

- ☐ High volume of newly-enrolled providers in Early Achievers that will need to be supported through initial rating.
- ☐ High volume of providers that need to attain level 3 or higher within Early Start Act timeline.
- ☐ Ensuring that Early Achievers protocols work well for all providers, particularly those from diverse communities.
- ☐ Providers facing competing demands of family or school. As well as times when high staff turnover occurs making continued focus on quality improvements challenging within early learning facilities.

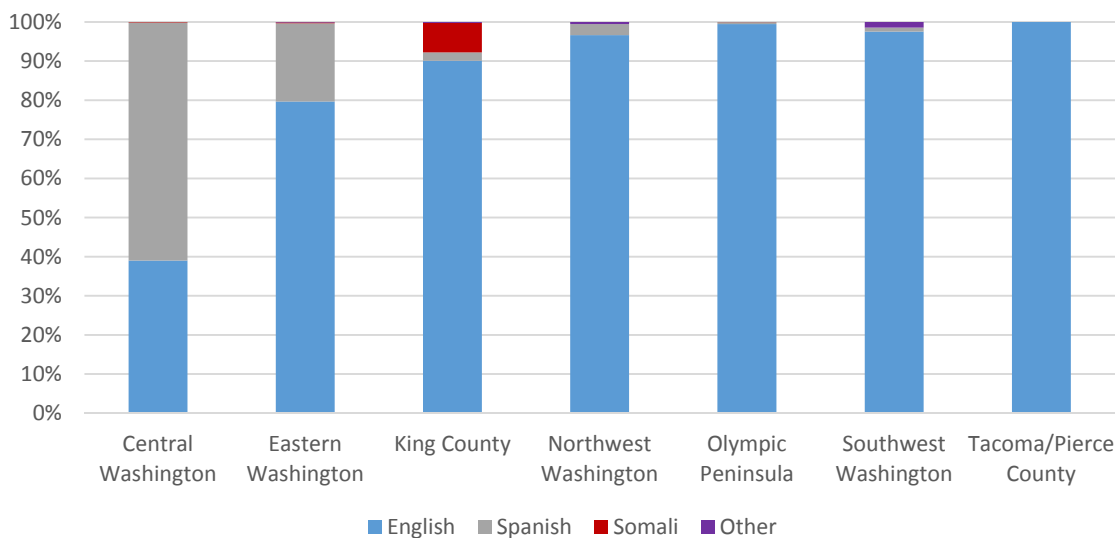
CHAPTER 4: Available Supports and their Effectiveness at Improving Quality

Early Achievers participants have supports and resources available to assist them throughout their journey through the Early Achievers quality improvement system. These aides include pre-enrollment supports, level 2 supports, and quality improvement tools and incentives. This chapter provides a detailed description of each type of support, along with data on utilization of each support type during the most recent fiscal year.

Pre-Enrollment Supports

Child Care Aware of Washington uses many outreach strategies to reach child care providers including: newsletters, a website, one-on-one orientations, telephone recruiting, training sessions, conference participation, creating and distributing marketing materials in multiple languages, and scheduled group orientations in multiple languages. In addition, they have developed partnerships with other community organizations that have relationships with child care providers to encourage participation in Early Achievers including DEL child care licensors, colleges, family child care provider associations and center directors groups, the Early Learning Regional Coalitions, ECEAP/Head Start providers, School Districts, Public Libraries, Educational Service Districts, Nurse Consultants/Health Departments, Infant/Toddler Consultants and Networks, Resource Centers, local and national conference planning committees, media organizations, and other local programs.

Figure 11. Individual & Small Group Outreach Hours by Language & Region, 2016



Data Source: ETO, NACCRRAware, through September 2016

Child Care Aware of Washington offers pre-enrollment supports, such as helping providers complete necessary tasks in MERIT⁵, signing up for orientations, and addressing barriers to enrollment. This assistance can clarify enrollment in Early Achievers while beginning a trusting relationship by paving the way for success on the Early Achievers journey.

Understanding that the existing strategies may not reach all diverse communities, Child Care Aware of Washington has also developed a number of targeted approaches to reach communities that may need additional outreach and support including:

- Hiring bilingual Early Achievers staff when and where possible;
- Developing cohorts of non-English speaking providers;
- Hiring staff in rural areas who are able to focus their time in a specific area or county;
- Contracting for special language services;
- Offering orientations and trainings in rural areas, to both Early Achievers and non-Early Achievers facilities;
- Collaborating with partner organizations and licensors on how to work together to reach these communities;
- Attending the Dual Language Immersion trainings; and
- Partnering with community-based organizations currently working with target populations.

Level 2 Supports

Early Achievers level 2 activities are designed for *Professional Growth and Facility Management* and require facility leaders (family home child care primary provider/child care center director) to complete a series of Early Achievers preparation activities and training. New participants have 12 months from enrollment to complete the level 2 requirements. Early Achievers participants receive support to help them complete the level 2 requirements and prepare for rating, including 1) the Early Achievers Professional Training Series, 2) support in Facility Self-Assessment, 3) Relationship-Based Professional Development, and 4) Rating Readiness Consultation.

1. **Early Achievers Professional Training Series:** All Early Achievers participants must complete the Early Achievers Professional Training Series, designed to support providers as they prepare themselves for quality improvement work. The trainings are intended for child care center directors and family home child care primary providers and are offered free of charge.⁶ The training series is designed as three online and three in-person classes; however, in order to make accommodations for language, technology and learning style, each of the sessions is also accessible in person. In-person trainings are offered in a variety of languages. Providers who speak a language other than those offered by their local Child Care Aware office have the option to have the support of a professional interpreter service during the training. “The Professional Training Series” includes the following six courses:

⁵ The Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT) is Washington Professional Development registry, a statewide tool to document and recognize the professional achievements of early care and education, and school-age professionals. This online tool helps professionals find training opportunities, access information on career pathways and track their individual career progress. MERIT also identifies approved trainers who provide education to professionals.

⁶ The online trainings are offered free of charge to anyone that signs up. The Core Competencies for Early Learning Professionals has been taken over 12,000 times, the introduction to the ERS/CLASS has been taken over 11,000 times and the Early Learning Guidelines training has been taken more than 13,000 times.

(a) Introduction to the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) *(Online, approximately two hours)*

This course provides an overview of the two standardized assessments used in Early Achievers as part of the comprehensive measure of program quality reflected in the rating. The focus of the ERS is on safety, organization and the age-appropriateness of daily schedule and materials within the environment. The CLASS focuses on teacher-child interactions as a means to promote children's social and cognitive development. Together these two assessments provide a comprehensive measure of the learning environment.⁷

(b) Washington State Early Learning Guidelines *(Online, approximately two hours)*

This course is an introductory overview of the *Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines (ELGs)*, which can help orient adults to child development. The module examines the history and purpose of the ELGs and who can use them and for what purpose. Additionally, the module provides an overview of the structure of the 2012 ELGs document and presents examples of how to use them to support child development.

(c) Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals *(Online, approximately two hours)*

This course is an introductory overview of the *Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals*. The goal of this course is for professional providers who care for children ages 0-8 in Washington to become familiar with the Core Competencies, and identify content areas of professional development.

(d) Introduction to Cultural Competence *(In person, two hours)*

The understanding and respect of children's cultural heritage is a foundation of their social/emotional well-being as well as their intellectual development. Through this training, early childhood professionals will reflect on their daily care giving and teaching practices of young children, heighten their level of awareness of cultural influences, and increase their ability to interact competently with children and families.

(e) QRIS School Readiness *(In person, four hours)*

School readiness means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support children's learning, and schools are ready for children. Early learning providers have a wonderful opportunity to support this process and ensure success for children. This training introduces and models instructional techniques measured in the CLASS: emotional support, well organized learning environments, and instructional techniques. Participants can apply these skills to increase the quality of interactions in their facility and prepare themselves for an Early Achievers on-site evaluation.

(f) QRIS Strengthening Families Training for Early Learning Professionals *(In person, six hours)*

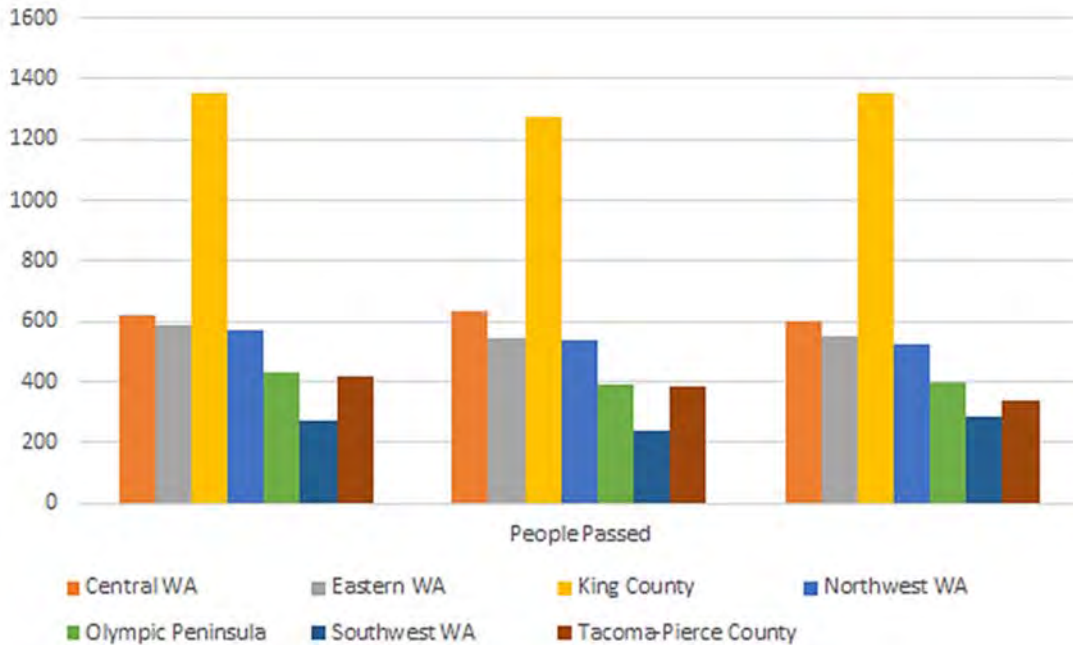
Strengthening Families Protective Factors are a new framework for preventing child maltreatment and promoting optimal child development. The protective factors shift the focus of child abuse and neglect prevention efforts from family risks and deficits to family strengths and resiliency. By recognizing and building on existing strengths within communities and

⁷ Training accommodation has been made available regionally for groups of providers to attend online training together with language interpretation. It's been typically used for providers that have limited English/Spanish literacy.

families, all providers can support all families in providing a healthy, safe, and loving environment for children.

Figure 12 below illustrates the high numbers of individuals completing the in-person level 2 trainings – in the year ending September 2016, 4,207 individuals completed Introduction to Cultural Competence, 3,999 completed School Readiness, and 4,037 completed Strengthening Families.

Figure 12. Individuals Completing In-Person Level 2 Trainings, by Region 2016



Data Source: ETO

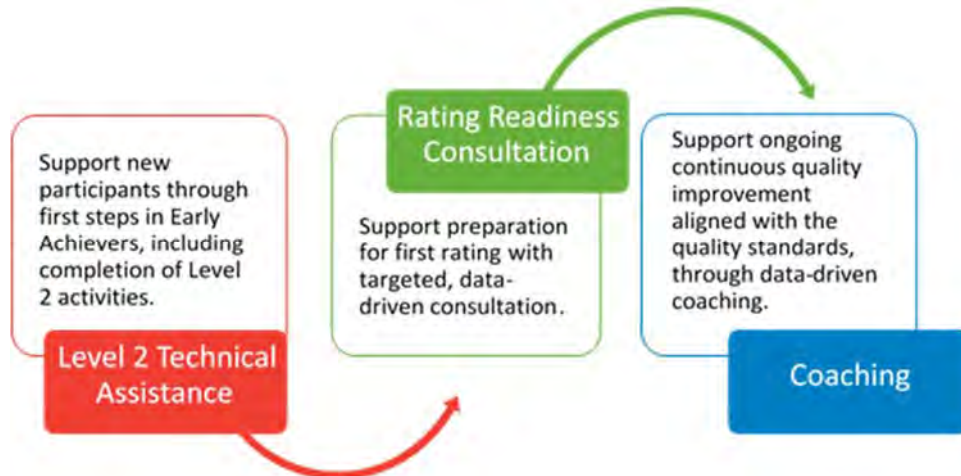
Note: Online training attendance not reported by region due to being open to anyone in the state, including non-EA providers

- 2. Facility self-assessment:** The provider’s primary QRIS contact will access and complete the facility self-assessment with their Child Care Aware of Washington Technical Assistance Specialist. The purpose of a facility self-assessment is to:
 - Promote reflection about current practice;
 - Build familiarity with the Early Achievers standards and assessments; and
 - Support internal preparation for quality improvement activities.

Each participating facility is strongly encouraged to complete their self-assessment as accurately and thoroughly as possible and use the information gathered to prepare for evaluation. Self-assessment contains two parts:

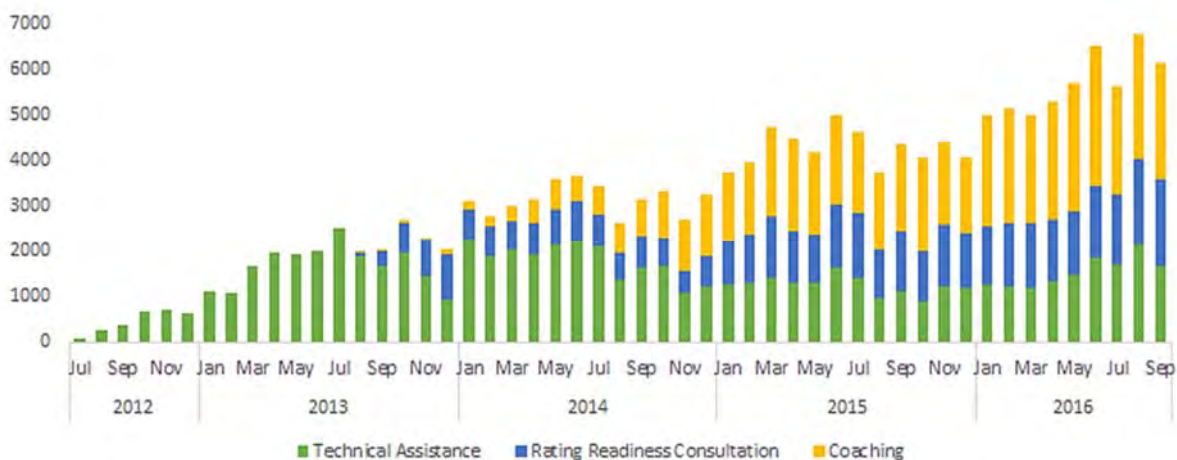
- **Environment Rating Scales (ERS):** Child care center classroom/family home child care assessment that looks at the materials and practices in the environment that supports children.
- **Washington’s Quality Standards:** Facility-level assessments are based on child outcomes; curriculum and staff supports; and family engagement and partnership components of the Early Achievers Standards.

- 3. Relationship-Based Professional Development:** Relationship Based Professional Development focuses on building trusted relationships to foster change and facilitate improvement. Early Achievers uses relationship based professional development across all of its direct service work with providers including (a) technical assistance, (b) rating readiness consultation, and (c) coaching.



While these three elements are often tracked separately and refer to distinct points in a provider’s participation in the Early Achievers system, they are part of an integrated approach to working with providers over time to support continuous quality improvements. In any given month, the majority of Early Achievers participants will receive some type of relationship-based professional development. Figure 13 below illustrates the provision of relationship-based professional development hours by type from 2012 through September 2016.

Figure 13. Relationship-Based Professional Development Hours by Type, 2012-2016



Data Source: ETO, PRISM

(a) Level 2 Technical Assistance: Upon registration for Early Achievers, facilities will be assigned a Technical Assistance Specialist (TA Specialist) by their local Child Care Aware of Washington agency to support them as they move through level 2 requirements. The TA Specialist will work with the child care center director/family child care home provider to develop a work plan and timeline for successfully moving through level 2 activities. The work plan will identify specific required activities of level 2 as well as additional resources available to help the facility meet the Early Achievers standards.

Technical assistance is delivered in multiple ways including individual sessions and group sessions, and remotely via phone and email. Participants work individually with TA Specialists on their unique work plans during one-on-one TA sessions in level 2. In order to build community connections and peer support, the regional Child Care Aware of Washington agency offers small group TA sessions including topics that address continuous quality improvement and the Early Achievers Quality Standards. The goals of TA are:

- Participants will **understand** Early Achievers program requirements, quality standards, and the process to successfully complete level 2 activities;
- Participants will **apply** new knowledge gained from self-assessments, the level 2 Professional Training Series, and personal reflections by **developing** action plans that prepare them to receive a facility rating; and
- Participants will begin to **value and embody** the concept of continuous quality improvement, laying the groundwork for deeper goal-setting through coaching in levels 3-5.

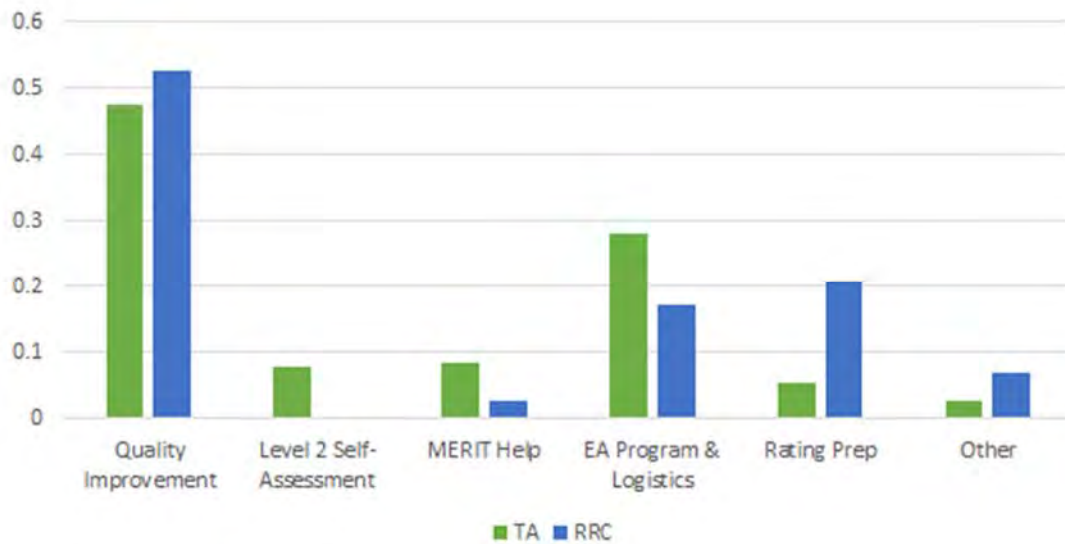
(b) Rating Readiness Consultation: Facilities that successfully complete all level 2 activities and intend to pursue an on-site evaluation have the opportunity to access *Rating Readiness Consultation*. Rating Readiness Consultation is customized on-site support to help facilities prepare for a quality rating of level 3 or above. It is distinct from Technical Assistance in terms of

the type of support provided. In particular, there is a focus on key elements of the quality standards that have the most impact on ratings, including preparing for the CLASS and ERS assessments. Rating readiness consultation may be provided to classroom teachers, as needed to prepare them for successful interactions and learning environments as defined by CLASS and ERS.

(c) **Coaching Services:** Coaching is a long-term continuous service available to all rated facilities. Coaches are employed by Child Care Aware of Washington. After an Early Achievers facility receives their first rating, they will be assigned a coach by their local CCA agency. The role of the coach is to help facilities:

- Understand and use Early Achievers ratings and assessment data;
- Identify goals and make plans to achieve goals;
- Access resources to support achievement of goals; and
- Implement strategies that sustain and continue to build on quality gains over time.

Figure 14. Technical Assistance & Rating Readiness Coaching Hours by Topic Area



Data Source: Data Source: ETO, PRISM

The Early Achievers rating is a measure of *facility* quality, rather than specific classroom quality, so coaches and center directors/family child care home owners will work together to best allocate coaching resources across the facility to different teaching staff. The total amount of coaching that a facility receives is flexible and varies based on the areas of need identified in the facility Quality Improvement Plan, and the facility’s rating level. Coaching services will change as facility rating increases, with rated level 2 and 3 facilities receiving more coaching than rated level 5 facilities. Coaches *partner* with participants through the quality improvement process; the facility is ultimately *responsible* for implementing and maintaining positive changes.

Quality Improvement Tools and Incentives

Once they enroll in Early Achievers, providers have a number of tools and incentives available to support their progression through Early Achievers in addition to pre-enrollment supports and level 2 supports described above. These include child care quality baseline assessments, quality improvement plans, and scholarships and other financial incentives.


1. **Child Care Quality Baseline (CCQB):** CCQB is a pre-rating formative assessment that Child Care Aware offers to providers prior to rating to provide baseline quality data to providers before moving through the rating process. Providers that have completed all of the level 2 requirements are eligible to request a CCQB in either the ERS, CLASS or both to give them feedback prior to rating about how they may score on the actual assessment. This pre-rating assessment tool provides a data driven road map that increases the likelihood that providers will achieve a successful rating. Child Care Aware of Washington has conducted over 2,600 CCQBs in individual classrooms between 2014 through September 2016.
2. **Quality Improvement Plans (QIP):** Rated participants set goals with their coaches based on their facility rating results including:
 - ERS and CLASS assessment scores;
 - Components of the Quality Standards;
 - Overall facility rating; and
 - Components of the Early Achievers Coach Framework.

Child Care Aware of Washington coaches work with providers to apply evaluation data to develop a QIP that addresses facility strengths and areas of growth identified by evaluation results. The QIP acts as a “roadmap” for the ongoing continuous quality improvement process, and will guide the work of the facility and the Coach.

3. **Professional Development and Scholarships:** Scholarships are available to students employed in Early Achievers facilities to pursue Child Development Associate (CDA) programs, state stackable certificates, Associates Degrees (AA) and Bachelor’s Degrees (BA) in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Early Achievers Opportunity Grants and Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals are two student financial aid resources prioritized for students employed by Early Achievers facilities.
 - **Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals (WA Scholarships)** are administered by Child Care Aware of Washington and supports educators working towards their CDA, state stackable certificate, and AA/AAS or BA degree in Early Childhood Education. WA Scholarships also offers CDA Assessment fee scholarships once students have completed CDA coursework.


Since July 1, 2012, the WA Scholarships program has awarded over 2,800 scholarships to over 1,900 individual ECE professionals. The majority of scholarships have funded students pursuing degrees and certificates at community and technical colleges. Although small relative to the size of the overall program, BA scholarships are a growing segment of the program. WA Scholarship recipients have completed or are pursuing over 31,000 credits of coursework from Washington colleges and universities, and earned more than 600 degrees, certificates, and credentials.⁸

⁸ The Athena Group (2016) Washington Scholarships 2015-2016 Evaluation.

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Early Achievers Opportunity Grants are administered by the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, and help employees at Early Achievers facilities pursue Early Childhood Education credits towards state stackable ECE certificates and Associate degrees in ECE. The *Early Achievers Grant* program helps fund a Point-of-Contact to assist students from initial contact with the college through enrollment and completion of Early Childhood Education certificates and degrees. The colleges' Points-of-Contact monitor student progress and assist students when they encounter barriers affecting their participation and persistence in their programs.

Launched in 2012, the *Early Achievers Opportunity Grant* program has been in operation for three full years (not counting the start-up school year 2012-2013). Participating colleges have increased from 18 in Year 2 to 23 in Year 4. The number of grant recipients has increased by over 76 percent from 555 in 2013-2014 to 979 in 2015-2016.⁹

- Other Financial Incentives:** Early Achievers provides additional financial incentives for participation and for attaining higher quality levels including need-based grants, new enrollment incentives, quality improvement awards, and tiered reimbursement.

- 
Needs-based Grants. Family home child cares and child care centers working on Early Achievers level 2 activities are eligible to receive a needs-based grant for the purpose of improving program quality (up to \$500 and \$1,000 respectively). A majority of eligible participants worked with their Technical Assistance Specialist or Coach to prepare and submit a needs-based grant proposed spending plan and submission form. Needs-based grants are administered by DEL, and in FY 2016 DEL awarded these grants to over 700 family home child care participants and 200 child care centers. Funds were prioritized for providers serving low-income families and/or offering culturally diverse services. This fiscal year needs-based grant funding was used primarily for:

- Purchasing items such as books, math and science materials, and gross motor equipment;
 - Substitute time; and
 - Other items identified by the Technical Assistance Specialist or coach.

Table 3 below details the regional distribution of needs-based grants awarded in FY 2016.

Early Achievers Region	Grant Dollars Awarded		Number of Providers	
	Family Homes	Child Care Centers	Family Homes	Child Care Centers
Central WA	\$117,500	\$22,000	235	22
Eastern WA	\$57,467	\$36,000	115	36
King Co	\$92,500	\$30,000	185	30
Northwest WA	\$32,000	\$31,000	64	31

⁹ SBCTC (2016) DEL Annual Report, Early Achievers Opportunity Grant Program 2015-2016

Olympic Peninsula	\$23,000	\$28,000	46	28
Southwest WA	\$17,500	\$16,000	35	16
Tacoma/Pierce Co	\$19,900	\$37,000	40	37
TOTAL	\$359,867	\$200,000	720	200

△ New Enrollment Incentive. In FY 2016 DEL provided an opportunity for newly-enrolled Early Achievers providers to apply for a one-time enrollment incentive to purchase resources to support participation in Early Achievers. A New Enrollment Incentive of \$500 was available for participants who enrolled in Early Achievers between July 1, 2015 and July 1, 2016 and submitted an application detailing how the incentive would be spent. New Enrollment Incentives were provided to 502 family child care homes and 108 child care centers during this period. Funds were prioritized for providers serving low-income families and/or offering culturally diverse services. This fiscal year new enrollment incentive funding was used primarily for:

- Purchasing items such as books, math and science materials, and gross motor equipment;
- Culturally responsive supports, curriculum; and
- Other items supporting level 2 activities.

Table 4 below details the regional distribution of new enrollment incentives awarded in FY 2016.

Early Achievers Region	Dollars Awarded		Number of Providers	
	Family Homes	Child Care Centers	Family Homes	Child Care Centers
Central WA	\$46,500	\$7,500	93	15
Eastern WA	\$42,000	\$8,000	84	16
King Co	\$78,500	\$10,000	157	20
Northwest WA	\$35,500	\$13,500	71	27
Olympic Peninsula	\$22,500	\$6,500	45	13
Southwest WA	\$9,000	\$3,500	18	7
Tacoma/Pierce Co	\$17,000	\$5,000	34	10
TOTAL	\$251,000	\$54,000	502	108

△ Quality Improvement Awards. As specified in the Early Start Act [Section 2(9)], Quality Improvement Awards are reserved for participants offering programs to an enrollment population consisting of at least five percent of children receiving a state subsidy. In response to community feedback regarding this change, DEL expanded the list of qualifying subsidies to include those offered by municipalities, state colleges or universities, local


school districts and federally recognized tribal organizations. These updates were written into WAC¹⁰ and took effect October 13, 2016.

QI Awards are annual cash awards provided to participating child care centers that achieve rating levels 3 through 5 and participating family home child care that achieve rating levels 2 through 5. Quality Improvement (QI) Awards recognize achievement and support facilities to implement quality improvement goals. All QI Award funds must be used towards achievement of quality improvement goals outlined on coach-approved, facility QIP and must align with the Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards. To be eligible to receive QI Awards, facilities must:

- Achieve an Early Achievers rating of level 2¹¹, 3, 4 or 5;
- Create a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) with assigned coach; and
- Maintain active participation throughout the 3-year rating cycle by participating in ongoing coaching and maintaining the goals set in the facility’s QIP.

Table 5 below details the eligibility limits for Quality Improvement Awards for family child care homes and child care centers at different levels of quality.

Level Attainment	Family Homes	Child Care Centers
Level 2	\$750	N/A
Level 3	\$2,000	\$5,000
Level 4	\$2,250	\$7,500
Level 5	\$2,750	\$9,000

 **Tiered Reimbursement** is a tool to support the cost of quality above the basic base rate paid for children on subsidy. Providers enrolled in Early Achievers receive an additional 2 percent increase in the subsidy base rate. These providers are expected to advance to a rated level of 3 or higher within 30 months of enrolling in Early Achievers. Facilities who receive a level 3 through 5 rating are eligible to earn an additional increase to the subsidy base rate, as detailed in Table 6 below.

¹⁰ WAC 170-290-0210

¹¹ QI Awards are provided to Level 2 rated family child care home providers.

Family Child Care Homes	Level 3	10 percent above the base rate ¹²
	Level 4	15 percent above the base rate
	Level 5	20 percent above the base rate
Child Care Centers	Level 3	4 percent above the base rate
	Level 4	10 percent above the base rate
	Level 5	15 percent above the base rate

Key Accomplishments:

- 🕒 A relationship-based professional development approach engages providers in the long-term investment in quality, and has empowered thousands of early learning professionals to undertake quality improvement efforts.
- 🕒 A streamlined Early Achievers enrollment process, including eliminating orientation as a requirement prior to enrollment.
- 🕒 Training in the ERS, CLASS and other quality standards-related topics has increased and improved.
- 🕒 Using data to drive services such as the CCQBs and the use of data in coaching to develop quality improvement plans promotes rating success.
- 🕒 Customized, community-based services ensure providers are reached with culturally, linguistically, geographically, and educationally appropriate services.

Key Challenges:

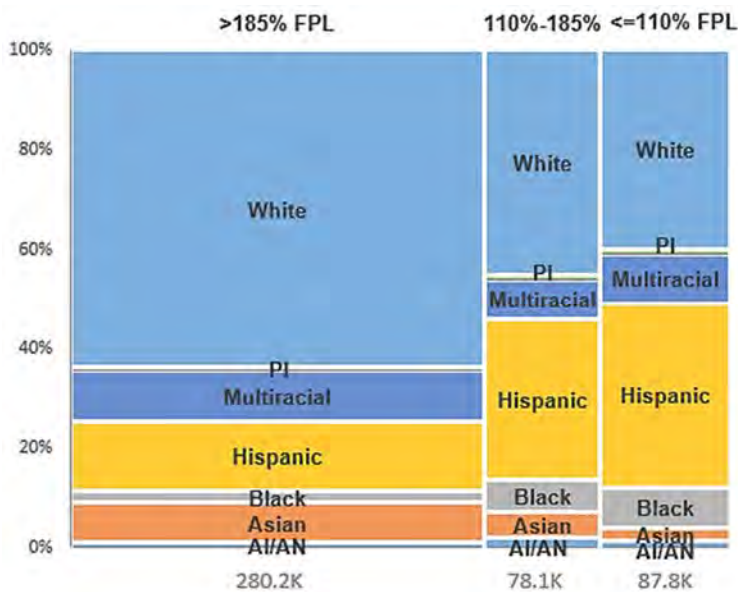
- 🕒 DEL and partners must continue to ensure that supportive services are scalable and cost effective.
- 🕒 Early Achievers level 1, licensing, is not yet aligned to support overall quality improvement efforts. This alignment work is underway, but not yet complete.
- 🕒 More and differentiated supports are needed for some providers. It is necessary to assess customized pathways so that adequate resources are available to individual participants.
- 🕒 Provider motivation to participate in Early Achievers is unequal and is a significant factor in their overall success in undertaking quality improvements and attaining high rating levels.
- 🕒 Champions for Early Achievers are needed to create a broad messaging strategy that can increase understanding of Early Achievers.
- 🕒 DEL must continue to assess Early Achiever’s language and culturally appropriate training and services to ensure that diverse communities are well served.

¹² This makes the subsidy payment for family child care homes equivalent to the 75th percentile of market rate costs, which is industry best practice for subsidy rates. 75th percentile of market rate costs means that within a local community and dependent on age and category of care rate variations, subsidy care recipients would be able to purchase 75 out of 100 available child care slots. This applies only to family child care homes.

CHAPTER 5: Supporting and Promoting Diversity— Children, Families, and Providers from Diverse Backgrounds¹³

Washington is becoming increasingly diverse—44 percent of the estimated 446,000 children younger than five years of age are from racial and ethnic backgrounds that are either American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black, Hispanic/Latino, multiracial, or Pacific Islander. Children of color are the fastest growing subgroup of all children under 5, and currently make up 60 percent of children under 5 years of age living in the lowest-income households.

Figure 15. Race/Ethnicity of WA Young Children <5 by Household Income, 2015

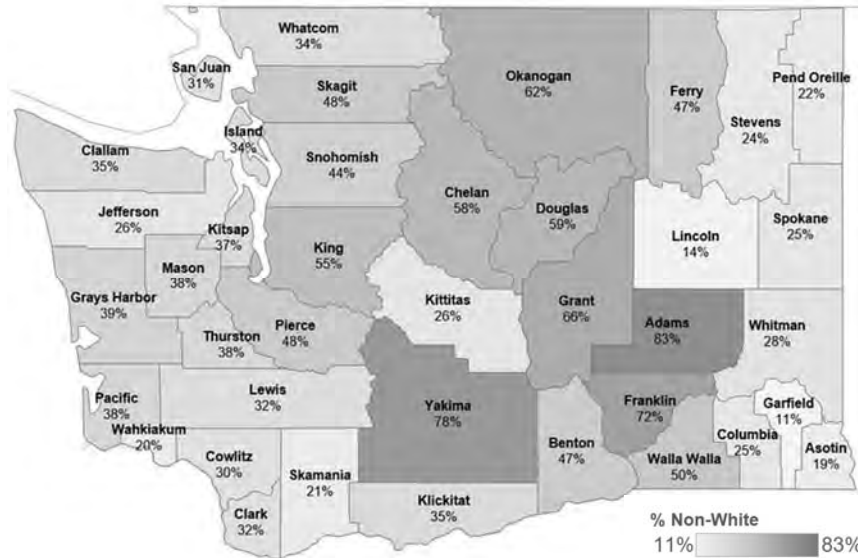


*Data Source: American Community Survey PUMS 2015 1-year data
All racial groups are reported as non-Hispanic*

The portion of the young child population made up of children of color varies throughout the state. In Adams County for example, children of color make up 83 percent of all children under age 5, while in Garfield County they make up only 11 percent.

¹³ In this report “diverse backgrounds” refers to children, families, providers, and communities who may be distinguished [from the mainstream culture] by race, ethnicity, and/or language. As such, this term may refer to children, families, providers, and communities who are from racial and/or ethnic minority groups, and/or whose primary language is not English.

Figure 16. Children of Color as Share of Young Child Population (0-4) by County, 2015



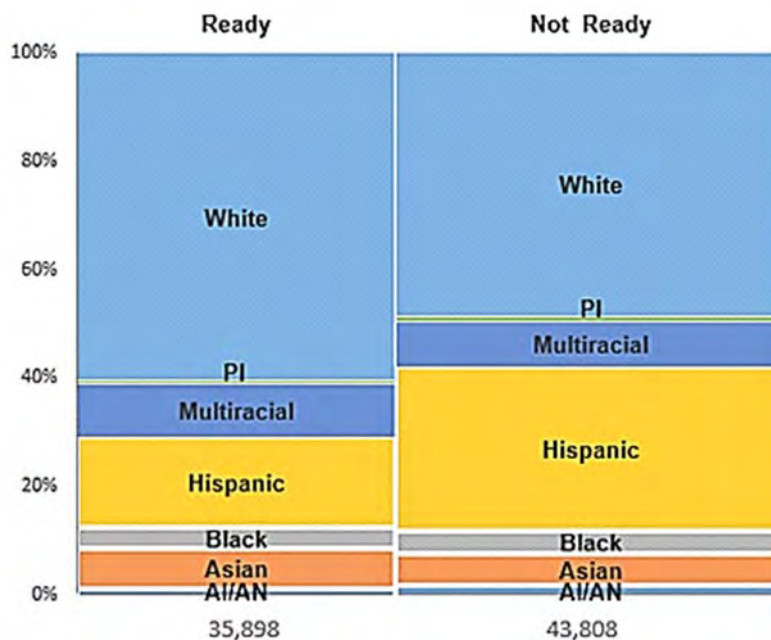
Data Source: OFM Small Area Demographic Estimates (SADF)

Children of color made up 46 percent of the class of entering kindergarteners in Washington’s public schools in 2015, and are expected to make up a greater share in future years.

Children of color entering Washington’s public kindergartens are under-represented among children who arrive ready for success, and over-represented among children who are not yet ready for success. Only 39 percent of children who arrive ready for kindergarten on six of the six WaKIDS domains are children of color, while 51 percent of those not yet ready are children of color.

It is imperative that Washington’s early learning system is designed and implemented to best support all children and families to succeed.

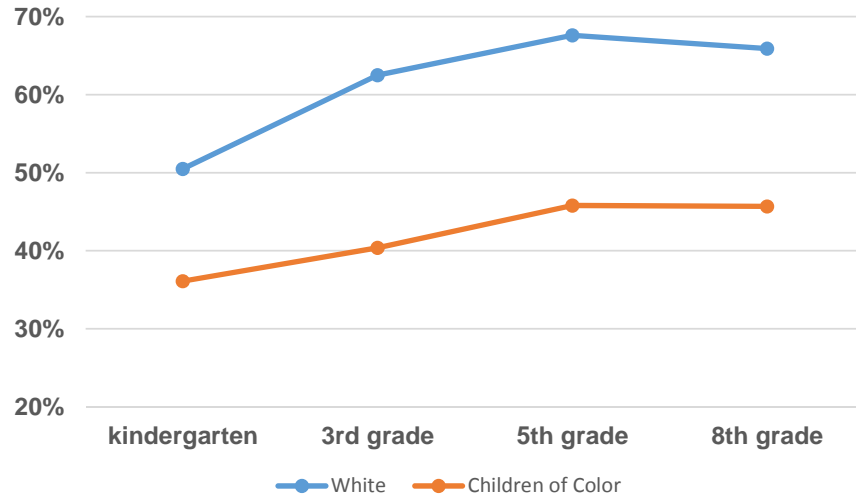
Figure 17. WaKIDS Readiness by Race/Ethnicity, 2015



Data Source: WaKIDS 6/6 readiness rates and kindergarten enrollment
All racial groups are reported as non-Hispanic.

As with children from low-income households, children of color on the whole demonstrate opportunity gaps that persist throughout the public school system. Figure 18 illustrates the opportunity gap between children of color and white children that persist from kindergarten through eighth grade. Note that Asian children are excluded from this analysis because in the aggregate Asian children do not exhibit the same gap.

Figure 18. Washington Opportunity Gap by Race/Ethnicity, 2015-2016



Data source: WaKIDS 6/6 readiness and ELA assessment data

The Early Start Act aspires to create a Washington early

learning system that addresses the needs of the most vulnerable of Washington’s children and families, and seeks to address the specific needs of children and families from racial/ethnic and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The specific requirements related to ensuring the system is culturally and linguistically responsive include:

- ✔ Address cultural and linguistic diversity when developing the professional development pathway for early learning professionals [Section 2(8)(c)];
- ✔ Explore the use of alternative quality assessment tools that meet the culturally specific needs of the federally recognized tribes in the state of Washington [Section 2(12)];
- ✔ Implement a protocol to maximize and encourage participation in Early Achievers for culturally diverse and low-income center and family home child care providers [Section 5(1)(a)];
- ✔ Provide recommendations on research-based cultural competency standards for early learning professional training [Section 13(3)(b)]¹⁴;
- ✔ Reduce barriers to participation for low-income providers and providers from diverse cultural backgrounds, including a review of Early Achievers rating tools, quality standard areas, and components, and how they are applied [Section 16(9)(a)(iii)]; and
- ✔ Provide oversight and accountability by establishing an Early Achievers Review Subcommittee to review the availability and effectiveness of efforts to support providers and children from diverse cultural backgrounds [Section 16(9)(a)(iv)].

¹⁴ Report completed July 2016.

Diversity of Children Served and Early Learning Educators

The diversity of the state is largely reflected in the population of children who participate in publicly-funded early learning programs. 86,900 total children were served in Washington’s subsidized childcare program in FY 2016, and 38,454 of these were children less than 5 years of age. An additional 11,691 children were served in the state’s ECEAP preschool program. Table 7 below details the race/ethnicity and non-English home language status of children served in WCCC and ECEAP. For comparison, columns are included detailing the race/ethnicity/language of the corresponding underlying income-similar populations across the state – children in households with incomes under 200 percent Federal Poverty Level (FPL) for subsidy, and under 110 percent FPL for ECEAP.

The diversity of children participating in Washington’s childcare subsidy program is closely related to that of the state’s TANF program. This is consistent with recent findings from a 50-state study of subsidies funded by the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF).¹⁵

Table 7. Children Served in Subsidized Child Care & ECEAP by Race/Ethnicity and Language, FY 2016

	Subsidy <5	WA <5 <=200% FPL, 2014	ECEAP 3-4	WA 3-4 <=110% FPL, 2014
N=	38,454	---	11,691	---
American Indian/ Alaska Native	2.3%	2.1%	2.1%	2.3%
Asian	1.9%	3.2%	2.9%	2.8%
Black/African American	16.9%	6.1%	8.9%	6.4%
Hispanic/Latino	31.2%	35.0%	37.5%	42.6%
Multiracial/other	5.6%	8.6%	8.1%	8.1%
Pacific Islander	0.8%	0.9%	1.5%	1.2%
White	41.4%	44.2%	38.2%	36.1%
Non-English Home Language	9.1%	43.0%	32.5%	49.7%

Data Source for Subsidy: DEL tabulation of DSHS Barcode data, 86 percent of families reporting race/ethnicity, 99 percent reporting language

Data Source for ECEAP: DEL ELMS

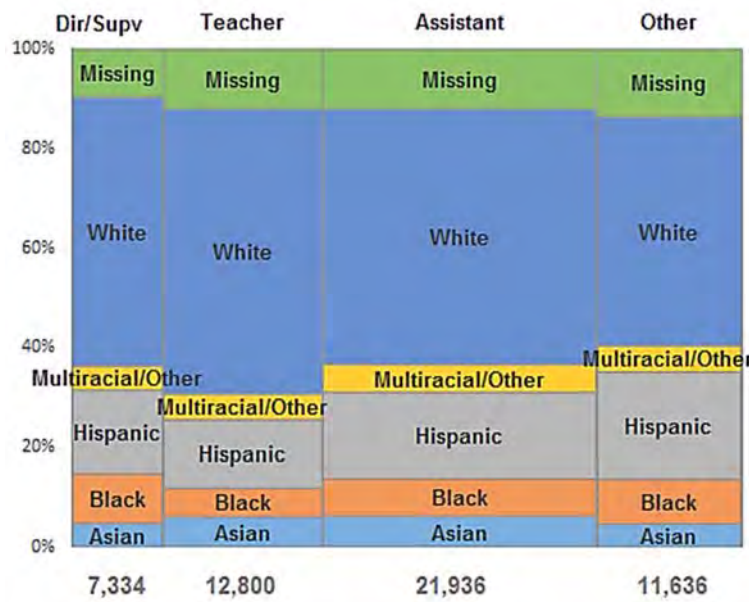
Data Source for WA comparisons: Census Bureau, ACS 2014 5-year PUMS

All racial groups are reported as non-Hispanic

Washington’s early learning workforce represents many different racial, ethnic and language groups. Diversity is higher in some job titles/roles the active early learning workforce than others, as seen in Figure 19 below. For example, while overall 35.9 percent of the active early learning workforce working in licensed facilities across the state are people of color, only 30.6 percent of teachers (or primary staff working with children) are people of color.

¹⁵ GAO (2016) Child Care: Access to Subsidies and Strategies to Manage Demand Vary across States. GAO-17-60.

Figure 19. Race/Ethnicity of Active Early Learning Workforce, 2016



The racial/ethnic makeup of the early learning workforce also varies by region, with higher portions of the workforce made up of people of color in the Central Washington (61.7 percent) King County (43.3 percent) and Tacoma/Pierce County (31.0 percent) regions.

Data Source: MERIT, ELMS, Famlink
All racial groups reported as non-Hispanic

Table 8. Active Early Learning Workforce Racial/Ethnic Diversity 2016, by Region

	Central	Eastern	King	North west	Olympic	South west	Tacoma Pierce	Unkn. Reg.
N=	5,466	7,312	19,091	7,337	4,577	3,759	4,813	1,351
American Indian/ Alaska Native	<1%	1.8%	<1%	1.9%	2.9%	1.6%	1.6%	3.0%
Asian	<1%	1.6%	10.7%	5.5%	3.3%	1.7%	3.4%	3.9%
Black/African American	<1%	2.0%	15.5%	3.0%	3.1%	1.4%	10.8%	4.2%
Hispanic/Latino	58.8%	22.4%	10.8%	12.4%	7.8%	7.8%	9.9%	22.1%
Multiracial/Other	<1%	1.6%	4.6%	2.4%	2.6%	1.5%	3.3%	2.3%
Pacific Islander	<1%	<1%	1.0%	<1%	1.7%	1.1%	2.0%	<1%
White	28.2%	58.4%	43.5%	61.3%	67.6%	74.0%	57.2%	54.3%
Unknown	10.2%	11.6%	13.3%	12.7%	11.0%	10.9%	11.8%	9.5%

Data Source: MERIT, ELMS, Famlink
All racial groups reported as non-Hispanic

Washington’s Language Diversity

Census data indicate that 44 percent of young children in WA under 5 years of age live in households where English is not the primary language. When the data are disaggregated by household income we see that language diversity becomes even more common in lower-income households. As detailed in Table 9 below, in the lowest income group <=110 percent FPL, over half of young children live in households where English is not the primary language.

Language Group	All	<200% FPL	<110% FPL
English Only	66.1%	57.1%	47.9%
Spanish	18.5%	29.9%	39.6%
Other Indo-European Language	5.8%	4.4%	3.9%
Asian/Pacific Islander Language	7.2%	4.5%	3.7%
Other	2.5%	4.0%	4.9%

Data Source: American Community Survey PUMS 2010-2014

Table 10 below summarizes the reported household language of children under 5 years of age participating in subsidy in FY 2016.

Almost 91 percent of children under 5 years of age participating in child care subsidy are from households where English is the primary language, and 7.4 percent are from households where Spanish is the primary language. Less than 1 percent are from households where Somali, Arabic, Russian, Vietnamese, Amharic, and other languages are spoken.

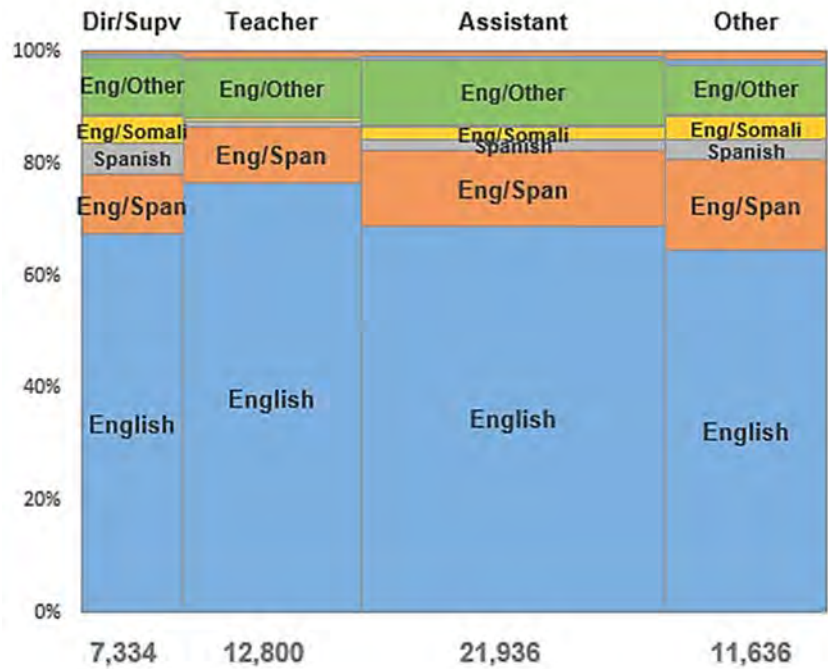
English	90.9%
Spanish	7.4%
Somali	0.6%
Arabic	0.3%
Russian	0.2%
Vietnamese	0.1%
Amharic	0.1%
Other	0.5%

Data Source: DEL tabulation of DSHS Barcode data, 99 percent of families reporting language

Washington’s early learning educators speak many languages reflective of the communities they serve. The languages most frequently reported by those in the active early learning workforce are English and Spanish. As with racial/ethnic diversity, language capacity other than English is least common among teachers (or primary staff working with children).

Also as with racial/ethnic diversity, regional variation is evident in language diversity. Only 40.6 percent of the active early learning workforce in the Central Washington region and 61.8 percent in the King County region speak only English.

Figure 20. Language Diversity of Active Early Learning Workforce, 2016



Data Source: MERIT, ELMS, Famlink

Table 11. Active Early Learning Workforce Language 2016, by Region

	Central	Eastern	King	North west	Olympic	South west	Tacoma Pierce	Unkn. Reg.
N=	5,466	7,312	19,091	7,337	4,577	3,759	4,813	1,351
English only	40.6%	74.9%	61.8%	76.6%	88.2%	85.4%	84.1%	68.8%
English/Other	1.5%	3.7%	18.4%	10.5%	5.6%	6.7%	7.3%	8.4%
English/Somali	---	<1%	7.1%	<1%	---	6.2%	---	<1%
English/Spanish	42.0%	15.9%	9.0%	9.7%	4.8%	<1%	6.8%	19.5%
Other	<1%	<1%	1.4%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Somali only	---	---	<1%	---	---	---	---	1.2%
Spanish only	14.6%	4.4%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1.3%	<1%	1.4%
Unknown	1.2%	<1%	<1%	1.5%	1.2%	---	1.1%	---

Data Source: MERIT, ELMS, Famlink

Supports for a Diverse Early Learning Workforce

As noted in Chapter 2 (see Table 1 on page 8), subsidy providers of color and non-English-speaking providers serving subsidy-eligible children in the past year generally enrolled in Early Achievers at rates at least as high as White and English-only providers. The groups where this was least likely to be true were those for which race/ethnicity and language are unknown. The data suggest that these providers were least likely to have recently served subsidy-eligible children and thus least likely to have recently updated their MERIT professional development account, so we know less about their racial/ethnic and language makeup.

In the months leading up to the August 1, 2016 enrollment deadline specified in the Early Start Act for subsidy providers, DEL and its partners engaged in focused monitoring and outreach to identify and enroll providers taking subsidy. Where data indicated potential challenges, DEL worked with its partners to engage in language-specific outreach to encourage and assist providers to enroll in Early Achievers, such as with Somali-speaking providers in King County and Spanish-speaking providers in Central Washington.

Ensuring that Early Achievers is culturally and linguistically competent and serves diverse communities well has been both a priority and an area for growth and development for DEL and its partners since the inception of the Early Achievers system. Child Care Aware of Washington, the main provider of relationship-based professional development for Early Achievers, have increased understanding about the diverse communities they serve and have adapted their practices to be more relevant.

Examples include:

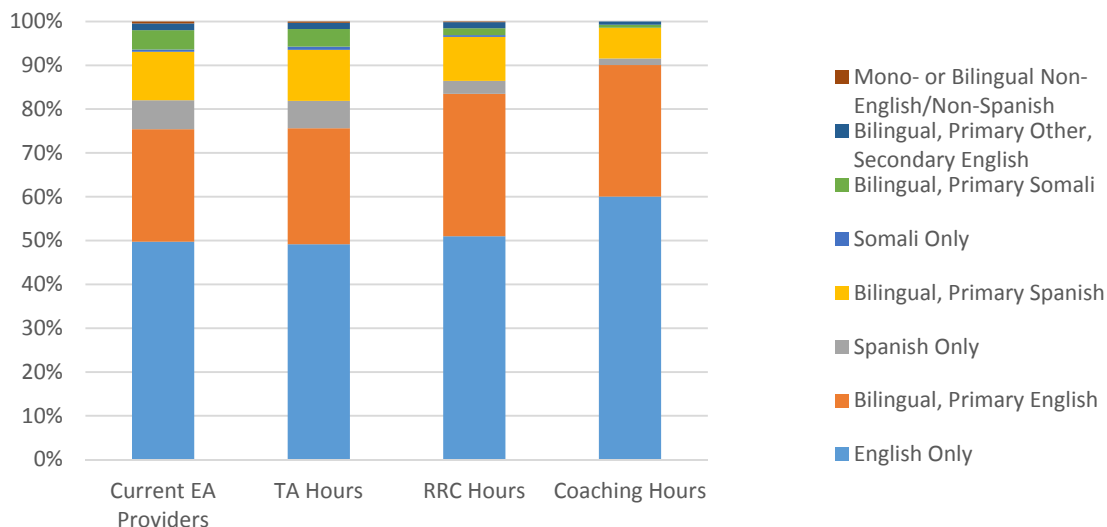
- 🌱 Offering bilingual staff in each region for relationship-based professional development services;
- 🌱 Providing orientation and trainings in multiple languages;
- 🌱 Giving hands-on support for non-English speakers to register in MERIT;
- 🌱 The creation of cohorts of non-English speaking providers to build supportive networks through the Early Achievers quality improvement process;
- 🌱 Nurturing ongoing engagement with tribes to build trust and co-develop strategies to meet provider needs;
- 🌱 Offering dual-language immersion trainings;
- 🌱 Partnering with organizations that currently work with target populations;
- 🌱 Making translation and interpretation services accessible;
- 🌱 The creation of an Early Achievers Level 2 User Guide and updated guide for filing supporting materials available in English, Spanish and Somali; and
- 🌱 Adapting and enhancing visual guides to each of the different ERS (Environmental Rating Scale) assessments available in English, Spanish, and Somali. The guides include information about the assessment, checklists, and pictures of example materials for each part of the Activities scales. The guides are also a useful tool for providers who speak other languages or have limited literacy because they use pictures to illustrate what is needed for a high quality early learning environment.

In addition, through experience, training, and actively reflecting on practice, Child Care Aware of Washington and other DEL partners have deepened their understanding of working with racially/ethnically and linguistically diverse providers such that they have developed and implemented a number of specialized approaches. Hiring staff who represent the community and who are able to help

bridge the cultural context is important. As important, however, is taking time to work with providers, building trust, and establishing supportive relationships that emphasize co-learning and “doing with” instead of “doing for.”

As illustrated in Figure 21 below, CCA of WA’s provision of relationship-based professional development services are largely reflective of the language diversity of the Early Achievers provider base.

Figure 21. Relationship-Based Professional Development by Provider Language



Data Source: ETO, PRISM, and MERIT

Data collectors at the University of Washington’s Childcare Quality & Early Learning Center (CQEL) visit child care centers and family child care homes that are ready for rating and perform the assessments that result in the Early Achievers ratings. In addition, CQEL community liaisons provide support to providers participating in Early Achievers by conducting in-person interviews and ensuring that the ratings team has up-to-date information around the individual needs of the facility such as enrollment information and language support. The CQEL community liaison serves as the facility’s point of contact and advocate as the facility moves through the rating process. Once the community liaison completes their process, CQEL data collectors visit the early learning facility to conduct the evidence based assessments that result in the actual Early Achievers rating.

CQEL’s regionally-based community liaison and data collection teams are made up of early learning professionals who are a part of the communities they serve. Qualifications for the data collectors include a bachelor’s degree, experience working in early learning environments, and experience and ability working with people from various racial, cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The UW CQEL has worked to build diversity in its data collector and community liaison teams – currently these are 36 individuals in 12 teams throughout the state. Three percent of CQEL data collection and community liaison staff are American Indian/Alaska Native, 13 percent are Asian, 13 percent are Black/African American, 19 percent are Hispanic, and 52 percent are White.

Additionally, CQEL's community liaison and data collection teams have the capacity to collect data in any language. Early learning programs are matched with data collectors and community liaisons based on language—52 percent of the CQEL team speak only English, 20 percent are bilingual Spanish/English, 10 percent are bilingual Somali/English, and 18 percent are bilingual in other languages (including Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Oromo, Russian, Uzbek, and Vietnamese). Because some languages are not yet represented on the data collection and community liaison teams, CQEL staff make use of language interpreters. Interpreters and data collectors work together using a headset and microphone system for simultaneous interpretation. In FY 2016 the CQEL data collection team conducted about one quarter of the Early Achiever's quality assessments in a language other than English, including Mandarin, Hindi, Telugu, Colville, Okanagan, Russian, Kalispell, Salish, Vietnamese, Oromo, Amharic, Tigrinya, and Ukrainian, Somali, and Spanish.

Partnerships with Tribal Communities

Supporting children and families from tribal communities in the Early Achievers system, and establishing productive relationships with tribes to support high quality early learning in tribal communities within the context of government-to-government relationships is a priority of DEL. In fiscal year 2016, 2,059 children whose parents identified them as American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) participated in ECEAP and the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) programs, about 2.1 percent of the total.

DEL has identified 64 tribal child care program sites across the state with licensed capacity to serve up to 2,908 children. These sites include private child care centers and family child care homes operating as private businesses under tribal licensing authority (certified for WCCC payment), as well as tribally-sponsored child care centers and Head Start programs. Also included are ECEAP programs in nine tribal communities – two in which tribes serve as direct contractors (Lummi and Suquamish) and seven in which tribes serve as subcontractors (Kalispell, Puyallup, Salish, Spokane, Swinomish, Tulalip, and Upper Skagit). In terms of Early Achievers participation, 35 of the 64 tribal child care program sites are enrolled in Early Achievers –5 are rated at a level 4; 3 are rated at a level 3; and 27 are not yet rated. The Early Start Act makes provision for inter-local agreements between tribes and DEL for participation in Early Achievers. To date, DEL has worked with the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe to create an inter-local agreement. The Tribal Liaison and Early Achievers staff are working together to encourage other tribes to begin this work.

FY 2016 has been a time of learning and capacity building within DEL in terms of laying the groundwork for future success in partnering with tribal communities around Early Achievers. During FY 2016 DEL has established and filled a new Tribal Liaison position with an experienced Native early learning professional. The DEL Tribal Liaison has begun reaching out to individual tribal communities as well as working with the Indian Policy Early Learning Committee.

DEL is admittedly at the beginning stages of building its capacity to support children, families, and early learning providers in tribal communities to participate in Early Achievers. Future success in this area will be measured by the extent to which providers are adequately prepared to enter and be successful in the Early Achievers quality improvement system. Future indicators DEL will monitor as evidence of this success will be progression of tribal providers through the Early Achievers system, including progress made in renewal ratings which occur every three years.

DEL's Tribal Liaison and Early Achievers staff provide individualized consultation to support tribal providers, based on the needs of providers and relevant tribal government context. DEL is working to

build a toolkit for its staff and partners working with tribes, including sample participation agreements, options for modifying quality standards, assessment tools, and coaching methods.

Other DEL Early Achievers-related activities in tribal communities include:

- 🌿 **Early Start Act Training:** DEL has offered webinars, phone consultation and/or on-site training for Tribes to assist with the onboarding process for enrollment in Early Achievers. In addition, DEL is partnering with Tribes through roundtable discussions on the Standards Alignment process and involving tribal stakeholders in the review of newly developed licensing regulations to ensure equitable, high quality, safe and healthy early learning environments.
- 🌿 **STARS Training:** 20-hour and 10-hour STARS trainings are offered annually to tribal child care providers. DEL reimburses \$250 per year for eligible professionals, for state-approved training costs.
- 🌿 **Tribal Certification Process:** A certification process for child care licensing is available for Tribes, allowing tribal providers to access the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) subsidies while respecting the alternative licensing procedures of sovereign tribal governments.
- 🌿 **UW CQEL Tribal Liaison:** CQEL has established a Community and Tribal Liaison Lead who is responsible for direct support to tribal programs once they enter the Early Achievers rating queue.
- 🌿 **Peer Learning:** DEL and its Early Achievers partners, CCA of WA and CQEL, have participated in peer learning facilitated by the National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance to learn from successes that others states (Arizona and Nevada) as well as British Columbia have had in working with tribal communities in their states/provinces.
- 🌿 **Conferences:** DEL sponsors Tribal Early Care and Education Conferences for early learning professionals who work with tribal children and families. The conference is held every two years and the 2016 conference had over 300 participants.
- 🌿 **Curriculum Supports:** DEL's Head Start State Collaboration Office (HSSCO) provided funding, in partnership with Thrive Washington, to develop and implement the *Since Time Immemorial* curriculum for preschool.
- 🌿 **Early Head Start:** DEL's HSSCO supported the Early Head Start Child Care Partnership grantees, including the tribal grantee, the Nisqually Tribe.

Additionally, a primary mechanism for developing partnerships with providers in tribal communities is through the Indian Policy Early Learning (IPEL) Committee. This committee was established in 2013 to ensure quality, comprehensive delivery of early learning services to AI/AN children in Washington, as well as to guide DEL's implementation of policies that impact tribes. The IPEL Committee does not circumvent the sovereign authority of individual tribal governments, but rather advises DEL, promotes shared learning, and guides DEL's implementation of the Centennial Accord and DEL's policies that impact tribes. Each of the 29 Federally-recognized Tribes of Washington are entitled to appoint one delegate and alternates to participate as members. Since DEL hired a Tribal Liaison, the IPEL Committee has almost tripled its membership from six to 19 members.

The IPEL Committee meets quarterly and in FY 2016 provided guidance to DEL on engaging with tribes and reducing barriers in Early Achievers through:

- 🌿 The development of an Engagement Protocol;
- 🌿 Seeking tribal input on the Cultural Competency standards for early learning professional training; and
- 🌿 Assisting in hiring the new DEL Tribal Liaison.

Key Accomplishments:

There has been significant progress in providing support to diverse providers who enter and successfully navigate the Early Achievers system:

- 🕒 In July 2016, DEL completed the required “Culturally Responsive Guidelines for Professional Development.”
- 🕒 CCA of WA coaches with bilingual/bicultural capacity supported non-English speaking and culturally diverse providers with Early Achievers enrollment, subsidy eligibility, and professional development.
- 🕒 DEL and partners hired local contractors with cultural and linguistic connections for specific communities to support the Early Achievers enrollment process.
- 🕒 CCA of WA has conducted training on Opening Doors (Abriendo Puertas) curriculum with two CCA of WA staff and UW CQEL staff in each region. UW CQEL is working to develop a culturally-grounded version (not simply a translation) in Somali as an option for Somali-speaking providers. This training has been added to the list of approved trainings for parent education for Early Achievers.
- 🕒 DEL partnered with organizations such as Voices of Tomorrow, OneAmerica, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the Center for Linguistic and Cultural Democracy to engage in dialogues about supporting diverse providers and families and developing new strategies to further the goal of supporting diverse providers into and through the Early Achievers system.
- 🕒 DEL collaborated with community colleges to offer dual-language classes for providers working on meeting their educational requirements.
- 🕒 DEL and Thrive partnered with the Early Learning Regional Coalitions to ensure diverse voices at the table during the Standards Alignment community input process.
- 🕒 DEL established a pilot Community Conversations project to provide a neutral space for providers and licensors to gather, learn from each other about each entity’s role in the early learning system, gain greater cultural understanding from each other, and improve licensing relationships.
- 🕒 DEL successfully hired a Tribal Liaison and has begun to build robust capacity to meet the needs of tribal providers in Early Achievers.
- 🕒 The UW CQEL team now includes a Community and Tribal Liaison Lead who manages the team of community liaisons who support providers through the Early Achievers data collection process. This role is responsible for providing direct support to tribal programs that enter the rating queue.
- 🕒 DEL is launching a new racial equity initiative to provide a more critical focus on its work to support diverse children, families, and providers.

Key Challenges:

- 🕒 Available administrative data on diverse provider, child, and family participation must be more intentionally connected to DEL and its partners program planning and evaluation efforts at all levels – providers, teachers, and children.
- 🕒 DEL and its partners must examine the use of translated materials to ensure that the right materials are available to diverse communities in a timely manner.
- 🕒 DEL and its partners must continue their focus on hiring and developing bilingual, bicultural staff (e.g. teachers, technical assistance specialists, coaches, trainers, data collectors, etc.) to ensure that Early Achievers reflects the diverse communities in Washington.

- ❑ The challenge of developing a diverse workforce includes ensuring meeting the qualifications and characteristics required by the system, but must also include developing staff who are viewed as qualified by the diverse communities they serve.
- ❑ DEL and its partners must ensure ongoing availability of professional development with a focus on cultural competency, racial equity, language acquisition, and best practices in educating dual language learner students.
- ❑ DEL and its partners must develop strategies for engaging and supporting non-traditional providers in Early Achievers, including diverse providers operating in isolated areas and providers offering non-standard hours of care.
- ❑ DEL and its partners must work to increase parent awareness about Early Achievers across diverse communities in the state.
- ❑ While DEL and its partners have created many services to support the unique populations around the state, there remain unique challenges in providing differentiated supportive services for both rural and urban providers.

Recommendations:

The Early Start Act required the development of recommendations for improving access for children from diverse background to programs that are rated at a level 3 or higher [Section 18(h)].

The Early Achievers Review Subcommittee have made the following recommendations. In order to promote access to high-quality services to children and families from diverse backgrounds, DEL should:

- 🌱 Evaluate the extent to which children of color have equitable access to high quality early learning environments; and further, how Early Achievers is working for children and families from diverse backgrounds;
- 🌱 Develop a data-driven plan that will better assure equity of access to high quality early learning environments for diverse children and families;
- 🌱 Develop workforce data analysis on the needed availability of providers over time to support diverse children and families on subsidy;
- 🌱 Develop a data-driven professional development plan to ensure a pipeline for a diverse early learning workforce at all levels - including identifying the resources needed to attract, recruit, and retain diverse staff;
- 🌱 Ensure appropriate resources are available for translating materials;
- 🌱 Develop communications channels and feedback loops for use with diverse providers in multiple languages;
- 🌱 Work with the Washington State Human Rights Commission to develop recruiting practices that support hiring diverse populations;
- 🌱 Promote stronger collaboration with Tribal Governments and greater success in Early Achievers among tribal providers; and
- 🌱 Coordinate and build the capacity of Washington’s early learning system to reduce the negative impacts of implicit bias¹⁶ on children’s educational experiences and outcomes.

¹⁶ “Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control.” Kirwan Institute (2015) Implicit Bias Review.

CHAPTER 6: How Early Achievers has Changed and Developed

Throughout its development, Early Achievers staff and partners have built a culture of learning, assessing, and using data to inform decisions. Over the past year, changes to Early Achievers have focused on implementing the Early Start Act in a way that is research-based and relationship-centered. Early Achievers is moving a whole industry toward positive change with the belief that lasting, meaningful growth occurs when the system is individualized, inclusive and built on a shared vision. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) is committed to improving Early Achievers and will continue to review and adapt the system, within legislative requirements and available resources, as more information becomes available about what works to improve quality and improve child outcomes.

How Have Early Achievers Standards Developed?

As directed by the 2009-2011 legislature, DEL, in partnership with Thrive by Five Washington (now Thrive Washington) and the University of Washington's Childcare Quality & Early Learning Center (CQEL), conducted a pilot of a QRIS (quality rating and improvement system). Known as "Seeds to Success," the QRIS pilot completed in June 2011 and focused on field testing, evaluating, validating and refining an initial QRIS set of standards. The Seeds to Success pilot provided Washington with valuable data that served as the basis of Early Achievers. Early Achievers launched in July of 2012, adding new processes and requirements at all levels. For a full history of the development of Early Achievers, please refer to the 2015 Annual Report.

The knowledge garnered from the pilot formed the basis of revisions to the program standards and modifications to the implementation plans. The end result was the Early Achievers model that was taken to scale with several distinguishing features:

- **Quality teaching practices:** Early Achievers uses a research-based coaching model for improving quality of care and interactions with children. Evaluations of the Washington model demonstrated a significant increase in the quality of learning environments and teacher-child interactions. While the framework rewards early childhood educators for attaining higher levels of education, the model invests highly in promoting day-to-day, concrete changes and actions that lead to high-quality learning experiences, nurturing relationships and rich learning environments for young children.
- **Alignment:** Early Achievers promotes the use of common strategies, assessments, and curricula that are based on the statewide Early Learning and Development Guidelines, the Kindergarten entry assessment (WaKIDS), and promotes use of evidenced-based family engagement strategies that align with those used in other programs serving high-need children and families (e.g. Head Start, ECEAP and home visiting).
- **Maximizing Participation and Inclusion:** Early Achievers was designed to seamlessly support programs that serve high-need children and families. Standards and tiered quality levels align with Head Start/ECEAP performance standards and types. The initial expansion plans focused on increasing participation of all programs, with targeted strategies for increasing participation and quality of programs that serve high-need children and families.
- **Child outcomes-focused:** Early Achievers promotes quality practices that are demonstrated through research to have direct impact on children's progress. Early Achievers evaluations are testing the effects of higher tiers of quality on child outcomes.

- **Strong supports and incentives:** The quality standards include incentives and support for providers to achieve higher Early Achievers ratings and to maintain quality levels.

The current Early Achievers model assesses quality through the use of three primary assessment tools: the Environmental Rating Scales, the Classroom Assessment Scoring System and Quality Standards.

Environmental Rating Scales (ERS): The ERS is an observational tool designed to assess the learning environment in multiple early learning settings. The tool reviews quality practices related to health and safety, the types of materials and activities children can access and how providers facilitate children’s learning. The ERS is the most valid and reliable tool available nationally to measure the quality of environments in an objective way. Using the ERS, coupled with coaching, has led to significant improvements in the quality of early learning facilities. The minimum threshold on the ERS to attain a rating level of quality in Early Achievers has been set at 3.0, as research has shown that overall ERS scores are predictive of some child outcomes.

The ERS scales are designed to assess *process quality* in early childhood classrooms. Process quality refers to the various interactions that go on in a classroom between staff and children, staff, parents, and other adults, among the children themselves, as well as the interactions children have with their environment including space, schedule, materials and activities that support these interactions. Process quality is assessed primarily through observation and has been found to be more predictive of child outcomes than structural indicators such as staff to child ratio, group size, cost of care, and type of care.¹⁷

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS): CLASS measures the quality of interactions between providers and children. Facilities must score a minimum of 2.0 on Instructional Support/Engaged Support for Learning and 3.5 on Emotional Support and Classroom Organization/Emotional and Behavioral Support. These domains measure:

- *CLASS Instructional Support/Engaged Support for Learning:* Discussion and activities that encourage development of children’s reasoning and logic skills, frequent conversations with open-ended questions and advanced language, use of children’s past knowledge and understanding to build upon and increase learning, and active and engaged children.
- *CLASS Emotional Support & Classroom Organization/Emotional and Behavioral Support:* Warm and respectful relationships, responsive providers, awareness of children’s needs, proactive behavior management, and organized routines that maximize learning time and children’s involvement.

Quality Standards: Early Achievers Quality Standards provide a roadmap for planning and implementing quality early learning services, which includes goals for children and families, the experiences and materials provided by the facility to help children achieve those goals, and how providers and families work together to support children. The quality standards are comprised of four areas of quality: child outcomes, curriculum and staff supports, professional development and training, and family engagement and partnership.

The Early Achievers Standards Validation Study: Published in May 2016, the Early Achievers Standards Validation Study addressed whether the quality standards and assessments of Early Achievers are associated with measurable gains in children’s outcomes across developmental domains. UWCQEL

¹⁷ Source: <http://www.ersi.info/scales.html>

conducted this study from June 2014 through December 2015 in partnership with the Department of Early Learning.

The validation study used records review, surveys with early learning professionals and parents and families, observational assessments of center care classrooms and family child care homes, and individual direct child assessments to explore whether children who attend higher-rated Early Achievers sites show greater gains than children who attend lower-rated Early Achievers sites. The study also sought to determine how Early Achievers' quality standards and instruments are associated with children's learning.

The final analyses found that children made greater developmental gains in sites with higher-level ratings than in sites with lower ratings in the learning domains of receptive language, expressive language, and fine motor skills. A relationship of practical significance was found between site ratings for professional development and children's acquisition of letter word knowledge. The study also found some associations between domains of CLASS and child outcomes including receptive language, letter word knowledge, fine motor skills and early writing. In addition, there were positive associations between the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) - when alternative administration was used—and gains in receptive language, early science, expressive language, cognitive, and social-emotional skills. The full study is available on the DEL website.¹⁸

The results and recommendations from Washington's QRIS Validation Study are being used by DEL staff and partners to inform plans for future changes to standards. Specifically the results are informing plans for professional development for early learning professionals, implementation of alternative scoring for the Environmental Rating Scales to capture developmentally-enhancing interactions within the context of safe and engaging environments, improvements in efficiency of Early Achievers data collection, and professional development on positive behavioral supports for young children. Also in the spirit of continuous improvement, DEL and UW CQEL are planning additional analyses of these and future data to further validate and inform improvements in Early Achievers, especially for vulnerable children.

Early Achievers Practice Changes in 2016

The three primary implementing partners - DEL, Child Care Aware of Washington, and UW CQEL - work together to assess the progress of Early Achievers implementation and to develop recommendations for future changes. Policy changes are typically made each year on July 1 and reflect the learning from the prior year of implementation as well as the stage of development of the system. The major practice changes made in 2016 include those in the areas of increased support for quality improvements and enhancement to level 2 supports, improved accommodations for non-English speaking providers, and implementation efficiencies.

1. Increased Support for Quality Improvements and Enhancement to Level 2 Supports

Needs-based Grants: Beginning in fiscal year 2016, the ESA of 2015 provided additional funds for Needs Based Grants to support low-income and culturally-diverse providers working to achieve level 3. Needs-based grants have been issued with specific ERS resource lists and coaching support to help programs purchase materials, such as books, science materials, and gross motor equipment;

¹⁸ <https://del-public-files.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/EA%20Report%205.31.16.pdf>

substitute time; and other items identified by the technical assistance specialist or coach. See details on regional disbursement of needs-based grants for FY 2016 in Chapter 4 (page 27).

Quality Improvement Awards: On July 1, 2016, Early Achievers implemented the Early Start Act requirement that Quality Improvement Awards be reserved for participants that provide child care for an enrollment population of which at least 5 percent of total licensed capacity are non-school-age children currently receiving a state subsidy. In response to community feedback regarding this change, DEL expanded the list of qualifying subsidies to include those offered by municipalities, state colleges or universities, local school districts and federally recognized tribal organizations. These updates were written into WAC¹⁹ and took effect October 13, 2016.

Scholarships: Scholarships have been expanded to serve more Early Achievers educators. Early learning professionals that are employed at an Early Achievers facility are eligible to apply for one of Washington's scholarship programs. See Chapter 4 (pages 26-27) for more information on scholarships.

Remedial Activities: The Early Start Act requires Early Achievers participants who have not met their mandated rating level within the allotted time, to engage in up to six months of remedial activities in order to re-rate at the level required for their early care and education model. Remedial activities can help participants improve quality in time for a re-rating to maintain their ECEAP, Working Connections Child Care subsidies or Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership funding. DEL worked with implementation partners to design a suite of supports to target specific areas of the Early Achievers Quality Standards in order to help facilities make quick gains and re-rate within the set timeline so they can maintain their state funding.

Hybrid Project: The Department of Early Learning created the **Hybrid Project** to allow sites that do not meet the criteria for either the Head Start/ECEAP Reciprocity Pathway²⁰ or the licensed pathway to move through Early Achievers. Hybrid sites are license-exempt *and* have less than 75 percent Head Start or ECEAP slots. The Hybrid Project included 31 sites from nine ECEAP contractors. The majority of these sites are located within school districts. For data collection, Hybrid Project participants created a file of supporting materials aligned with the licensed pathway and received 10 reciprocity points for professional development.

Children with Behavioral and other Special Needs: Based on feedback from the field, Early Achievers coaches have begun receiving training through internships at the Haring Center at UW to help them support providers who work with children needing behavioral and other special supports. The focus of the internships is inclusive care where children with and without special needs learn side by side, ensuring all children have equitable opportunities to engage in the early learning environment. Internships include ongoing consultation and mentoring for coaches, with the goal of promoting continuity of care, inclusion of children with special needs, and providing relevant support to providers. In the past year, the Haring Center provided 30 internship cohorts, and each

¹⁹ WAC 170-290-0210

²⁰ Facilities in which Head Start or ECEAP slots fill at least 75% of total facility slots qualify for the streamlined Head Start/ECEAP Reciprocity Pathway. These facilities receive 45 reciprocity points toward the Early Achievers Quality Standards for meeting Head Start/ECEAP Performance Standards.

cohort accommodated four to five coaches for a total of 120-150 coaches served. The goal is to double the participation this coming year.

Early Achievers Provider Hotline: As participation in Early Achievers has increased, DEL has taken steps to provide additional supports in an effort to be more responsive to provider needs. In April 2016, DEL launched the Early Achievers Provider Hotline. The hotline number was initially sent to all providers accepting subsidy to answer questions about Early Achievers and facilitate enrollment but has since been expanded to offer assistance to all Early Achievers participants. Since its inception, the Early Achievers hotline has fielded more than 500 calls from early learning professionals.

Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Support Services: To assist providers with interpreting ERS scoring indicators and better prepare facilities for rating, DEL has focused on building capacity in ERS reliability among Child Care Aware (CCA) of Washington staff. Technical Assistance Specialists and Coaches in each region have achieved high levels of inter-rater reliability²¹ and participated in ERS “Train the Trainer” sessions, adding capacity to train others to reliability in each of the 3 ERS measures used in Early Achievers – the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS), and the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS)

This investment has built local capacity and bolstered the confidence of coaches and TA Specialists to assist providers. The number of CCA staff who are reliable on these ERS tools has nearly doubled in the past year. While regional needs on the ERS differ, each region now has the capacity to provide ERS expertise – each of the six CCA regions have an average of 8-10 and a minimum of three staff who are reliable in each of the three ERS tools (ECERS, ITERS, FCCERS), for a statewide CCA total of 61 staff reliable on the ECERS, 56 reliable on the ITERS, and 63 reliable on the FCCERS. This investment in widespread ERS reliability increases CCA’s capacity to maintain reliability as a system and provide continuous ERS support to providers across the state.

Free Re-Rates: After the Early Start Act passed, DEL updated the re-rate policy to ensure that all providers who have a mandated rating timeline have access to one free re-rate per rating cycle. All providers have access to a paid re-rate that is a portion of the cost of a facility rating and based on size of the facility.

2. Improved Accommodations for Non-English Speaking Providers

Ensuring that Early Achievers works for all early learning educators has been a focused area of improvement. Initial feedback highlighted that Early Achievers participation was difficult for some providers. Improvements to Early Achievers have been made, ensuring that all providers, particularly providers who speak languages other than English, have the supports they need to enhance the quality of their services. Improvements to the supports for these providers in Early Achievers include:

Staff Composition: Child Care Aware Technical Assistance Specialists and coaches reflect community diversity in staff composition and culturally responsive practices. Over a quarter of the 155 CCA staff

²¹ Inter-rater reliability, in Early Achievers, is the degree of agreement among data collectors. It gives a score of how much consensus data collectors have when they code a particular measure.

that provide coaching and technical assistance through Early Achievers speak other languages in addition to English including Spanish, Somali, Russian, Tagalog, Hindi, Arabic, and American Sign Language.

In addition, through experience, training, and actively reflecting on practice, Child Care Aware of Washington and other DEL partners have deepened their understanding of working with racially/ethnically and linguistically diverse providers such that they have developed and implemented a number of specialized approaches. Hiring staff who represent the community and who are able to help bridge the cultural context is important. As important however is taking time to work with providers, building trust, and establishing supportive relationships that emphasize co-learning and “doing with” instead of “doing for”.

Regional Customization: Child Care Aware has increased flexibility to allow for tailored services for unique regional populations, such as specific communities or language groups. Regions with high language diversity have the highest percentage of bilingual staff, including Central (over 75% of staff bilingual in Spanish), Eastern (33% staff bilingual in Spanish, including nearly all the staff serving the Tri-Cities area) and King & Pierce (multiple staff bilingual in Spanish and Somali, with additional staff covering more than half a dozen languages).

Bilingual Rating Data Collection: UW CQEL’s community liaison and data collection teams have the capacity to collect data in any language. Early learning programs are matched with data collectors and community liaisons based on language - 52 percent of the CQEL team speak only English, 20 percent are bilingual Spanish/English, 10 percent are bilingual Somali/English, and 18 percent are bilingual in other languages (including Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Oromo, Russian, Uzbek, and Vietnamese). Because some languages are not yet represented on the data collection and community liaison teams, CQEL staff make use of language interpreters.

Training Enhancements: Child Care Aware Professional Development Academy and level 2 trainings have been held in Spanish and Somali, as well as additional interpretation support for other languages where needed. Child Care Aware of Washington staff also make accommodations to the online trainings by providing them in-person. If a provider speaks a language that is not currently reflected by the CCA of WA staff and CCA of WA a professional interpreter is used to support them.

Early Achievers Institutes: Training institutes were created to provide additional support on the Early Achievers Standards to participants, with sessions ranging from improving instructional support to incorporating developmental screenings. Sessions and handouts are available in English, Spanish and Somali and interpretation services are available for all keynote presentations. Additionally, upon registration, participants can request language services in any language they choose and an interpreter will be provided to them at the institute. Bi-lingual staff provide direct outreach to Spanish and Somali language providers, assisting them with the registration process and providing support at the institutes.

Over the last four years, the institutes have expanded their scope to include greater language diversity in sessions and a stronger focus on supporting children with special needs. Highlights include the development of a full training series in Spanish and Somali, with multiple sessions addressing high quality interactions (CLASS focus) and environments (ERS focus). Additionally, through a partnership with the UW Haring Center, sessions like “Leadership for Inclusion,” “Individualized Teaching and Learning,” as well as panel discussions and key notes presentations,

have raised awareness about the why and how of creating inclusive early education settings for children needing behavioral and other special supports.

Targeted Outreach: DEL is working with community organizations and contracting with respected community members to perform outreach.

- *Pre-enrollment Support:* Prior to the August 1, 2016 enrollment deadline, DEL contracted with local community members to support specific groups of providers who were eligible but had not yet joined Early Achievers. The contractors worked with individual regions to provide personalized, culturally responsive outreach focused on education and assistance for individual providers. For example, in Yakima, where enrollment among Spanish speaking providers was found to be significantly lower prior to the August 1 deadline, the outreach specialist personally contacted over 35 providers to offer information and support, resulting in successful enrollment of a majority of these providers.
- *Voices of Tomorrow:* Voices of Tomorrow is a non-profit organization providing culturally responsive services focused on early childhood education within East African communities in King County. Early Achievers has partnered with Voices of Tomorrow to engage and support providers in these communities. Outreach efforts include Early Achievers participation in the Annual East African Family Child Care Conference and the development of trainings in Somali by Voices of Tomorrow and UW staff. These efforts have resulted in 100 percent Early Achievers participation among Somali providers in King County.

3. Implementation Efficiencies

MERIT Improvements: Over the last year, enhancements have been made to the MERIT and WELS data systems to improve the functionality and ease of use for providers, DEL and other partners:

- ✔ Built free and paid re-rating choices, so providers can choose to re-rate in between initial and renewal ratings, in order to meet their required rating levels.
- ✔ Removed the automatic withdrawal from Early Achievers for providers who do not sign their Participation Agreements by the required dates.
- ✔ Removed the requirement for providers to complete an Orientation Training prior to being able to access the Early Achievers registration application.
- ✔ Built the Early Achievers Participation Monitoring Report so DEL could track the progress of providers required to participate in Early Achievers (non-school-age providers receiving state subsidy and those serving ECEAP).
- ✔ Built the Barcode upload process to send data from the Monitoring report to the DSHS Barcode system so that DSHS case workers know which providers are in compliance with Early Achievers milestones.
- ✔ Built the percent subsidy calculation process to determine which providers are eligible for Quality Improvement Awards. This process runs automatically.
- ✔ Also built a manual QI award process to pay providers who receive other types of subsidy and are not eligible under the automated process.

Orientation timing: As the August 1, 2016 enrollment deadline approached, DEL identified the Early Achievers Orientation as a barrier to provider registration. DEL streamlined the enrollment process by allowing providers to access the Early Achievers registration application prior to attending the orientation. Providers now have the option to complete the orientation requirement after they

enroll. This change helped to eliminate a bottle neck and allowed DEL and Child Care Aware of Washington staff to enroll a record number of subsidy providers in advance of the August 1, 2016 deadline. In addition to providing more scheduling options, this shift in policy also allowed Licensors to have a greater role in recruiting and enrolling providers in Early Achievers.

Early Achievers Participant Feedback

Feedback from Early Achiever participants comes from both formal and informal sources:

- *Training Feedback:* Every training (in-person and online) includes a post-training participant survey.
- *Exit Survey:* Participants that withdraw from Early Achievers are asked to complete an exit survey if they discontinue Early Achievers participation.
- *Rating Feedback:* Participants are given the opportunity to submit feedback immediately after onsite data collection takes place.
- *Ongoing Feedback:* Child Care Aware of Washington coaches and Technical Assistance Specialists receive ongoing feedback from providers and share that feedback internally.
- *Licensors:* Beginning in September 2016, DEL Early Achievers staff serve as communication liaisons for each licensing region, allowing licensors to share provider questions and concerns directly with the Early Achievers team.
- *QRIS Inbox and Early Achievers Provider Hotline:* The QRIS inbox and provider hotline give participants the opportunity to directly communicate with DEL Early Achievers staff.
- *Early Learning Regional Coalitions:* DEL partners with Thrive Washington to attain feedback through the Early Learning Regional Coalitions.
- *Early Achievers Review Subcommittee:* While some members of the Early Achievers Review Subcommittee are Early Achievers participants, all members are encouraged to bring feedback from participants in their home communities to the group.
- *Annual Survey and Focus Groups:* Child Care Aware of WA conducts a statewide annual survey of all Early Achievers participants; focus groups are led by independent evaluators in a few different cities each year. DEL also conducts an online annual survey of Early Achievers participants, available in English and Spanish, and is assessing the most effective way to reach providers with other language needs.

As part of DEL's focus on prioritizing responsive, system-wide improvements, DEL has developed an Early Achievers Provider Feedback Protocol and Tracking System. Together, these procedures give DEL the ability to track and monitor trends in Early Achievers feedback while ensuring timely responses to participant input.

During the course of the 2016 changes, provider feedback indicated that some Early Achievers providers feel that subsidy rates are too low, that for some providers the annual quality improvement awards are not enough of an incentive to continue to serve subsidy-eligible children nor to incentivize private providers to serve subsidy-eligible children. These concerns appear especially pronounced among providers who are at or near the 5 percent requirement for quality improvement awards, where the loss of one subsidy child can make the difference between receiving the award or not.

In the 2016 report of Early Achievers Annual Survey and Focus Groups, Early Achievers providers expressed concerns with the lack of sustainability of quality improvements in light of what they perceive as low subsidy rates, and the continued lack of awareness about Early Achievers among parents. From the report's Executive Summary (included as Appendix D to this report):

- “They are challenged with high rates of turnover due to inadequate pay for their staff. Some providers report that the combination of the cost of the program, having to provide at least five percent of their slots to children on subsidy, and the low reimbursement rates of subsidy-eligible children will make the program financially unsustainable for them. As a result, many are questioning the benefits and value of staying in the program and some have said they will no longer take children on subsidy because the subsidy rate is too low to offset the costs of the program. In their view the mandate to participate is not viable. This is especially true for smaller family home child care” (pages 3-4).
- “...both providers and staff are finding that parents are not aware of Early Achievers. Very few are reporting parents who are asking about it, instead most have no knowledge of Early Achievers nor appreciation for the provider’s achievement in the program. This has reduced one of the incentives for providers to join and remain in Early Achievers, and also makes it difficult for providers to advocate for the program. Some providers feel there is no incentive to continue because they already have a quality program that parents value. In their view the time commitment and costs of Early Achievers are not worth it...CCA of WA and its partners have conducted some public affairs and marketing work, however, staff and providers report that more is needed” (page 4).

Key Accomplishments:

- System responsiveness to providers and partners, making modifications as needed.
- Using data to make informed decisions and program improvements.
- Streamlining the enrollment process by removing the Early Achievers Orientation as a prerequisite to registration and allowing providers to complete the orientation after enrollment.
- Developing the Remedial Activities Policy and a menu of tools and supporting resources.
- Creating multiple opportunities for targeted, individualized and culturally responsive outreach and communication.

Key Challenges:

- Providers are entering Early Achievers at varying levels of quality, and successful participation requires tailored, differentiated services based on their unique needs.
- Changes, even when positive, can be confusing to the field and difficult to implement.
- Maintaining a healthy balance between understanding the current baseline of quality and pushing for quality improvements.
- There is need for better alignment between pre-rating training and preparing providers strategically for their initial data collection and rating.
- Longer-term, there is need to better understand the actual cost of implementing high quality early learning so as to most efficiently and effectively align incentives.

Next Steps:

- DEL is working to streamline standards through an alignment process by eliminating duplication or conflicts with Licensing standards.
- DEL and its partners are working to simplify the participation process without compromising the commitment to quality by eliminating barriers.

- 🌱 DEL and its partners will better align pre-rating trainings and initial data collection and rating.
- 🌱 DEL will move to a three-year participation agreement that is incorporated into the Early Achievers application and request for re-rate process so that providers do not have to provide duplicative information.
- 🌱 DEL will work with the newly-convened Early Achievers Parent Outreach (internal) workgroup, EARS, and the Parent Advisory Group to develop and deploy a simplified message to increase awareness of and demand for Early Achievers, including development of promotional materials, an updated webpage for families, and an increased online presence through social media and partner websites.
- 🌱 DEL is undertaking a “cost of quality” study to better understand the actual cost of implementing high quality early learning, using methodology and support from the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO).

CHAPTER 7: Standards Alignment Process

In the 2015 Early Start Act, the legislature directed DEL to implement a single set of licensing standards for child care and ECEAP by November 1, 2016.

“The new licensing standards must:

- (a) Provide minimum health and safety standards for child care and preschool programs;
- (b) Rely on the standards established in the early achievers program to address quality issues in participating early childhood programs;
- (c) Take into account the separate needs of family care providers and child care centers; and
- (d) Promote continued safety of child care settings.” [Section 3(1)]

Aligned standards demonstrate the progression of quality that is at the heart of Washington’s commitment to all of its children and families. They eliminate duplication, increase consistency, and reduce provider burden in Licensing, Early Achievers and ECEAP. Aligned standards, quality progressions, and provider continuous quality improvement are key strategies in ensuring 90% of all children arrive ready for kindergarten by 2020, with race/ethnicity and income eliminated as predictors of success.

Quality begins with licensing, and all early learning sites will meet licensing standards as the foundation of quality. Standards alignment provides a clear and measurable progression from licensing to Early Achievers and ECEAP with minimal duplication and with similar language. This process will ensure that providers can see the progression of the standards from licensing through ECEAP and understand the expectations and next steps for participation in quality improvement.

Building on past work (including a 2012 revision of the family home standards) along with an ongoing community engagement process to revise the current center standards, DEL has worked with an internal Steering Committee and external Standards Alignment Advisory Committee to receive feedback on the standards alignment process. The Advisory Committee is made up of a variety of stakeholders including:

- ▣ family child care home providers,
- ▣ child care center providers,
- ▣ Head Start/Early Head Start and ECEAP providers,
- ▣ Montessori providers,
- ▣ school district providers,
- ▣ Local SEIU 925 representatives,
- ▣ Child Care Aware of Washington
- ▣ Childcare Quality & Early Learning Center (CQEL)
- ▣ Child advocacy organizations (e.g. One America, Children’s Alliance, Washington State Assoc. of Head Start and ECEAP)
- ▣ Educational Service Districts
- ▣ Regional Early Learning Coalitions
- ▣ Health and mental health provider organizations
- ▣ Department of Health
- ▣ Department of Social and Health Services

DEL has relied on these groups since September 2015 to advise on creating one, clear set of standards that demonstrate a clear progression of quality from licensing, to Early Achievers and through to ECEAP.

Standards Alignment and Licensing

Washington is aligning standards across licensed centers, family homes and ECEAP, Washington's state-funded preschool using Early Achievers as the quality framework. Licensing serves as the foundation of quality that ALL licensed early learning settings (including ECEAP) must meet, while Early Achievers serves as the overarching framework for quality improvement. The standards alignment process aims to create a clear progression of quality standards for ensuring the health and safety of children and promoting child development across licensing and ECEAP. Licensing provides the foundation; Early Achievers builds on licensing to focus on strong child outcomes and ongoing quality improvement; ECEAP, Washington's state-funded preschool, builds on these standards as well focusing on comprehensive services. In order to accomplish the goals of this mandate, DEL first aligned regulations between family child care homes and child care centers, eliminating unnecessary differences and consolidating two separate rules sections into one. The next step is to continue the standards progression through Early Achievers and ECEAP. Aligned standards will eliminate duplication, increase consistency, and reduce provider burden in licensing, Early Achievers and ECEAP.

DEL has been working for over a year with the support of the Standards Alignment Advisory Committee, Thrive Washington, the ten Early Learning Regional Coalitions, and the statewide early learning community to review and align non-school age licensing standards for family-home and center providers - Washington Administrative Code (WAC). The goal throughout this project has been to address many of the concerns of the small business owners and organizations who provide childcare for families on subsidy.

As an agency, DEL is adding another step to this project that will "weight" the different licensing regulations. Weighted regulations will allow DEL to be clear with providers and stakeholders about the relative risk for children associated with each regulation and the consequent severity of response from the Department. Adding this element to the project has changed the schedule originally laid out in the Early Start Act: while proposed aligned standards were made available for public review in November 2016, the project will not be complete until November 2017.

Weighting Standards to Clarify Relative Risk and Enforcement

All licensing rules provide a foundation of protection for children and each rule is designed to provide for the health, safety, and development of children in licensed care. However, some regulations are designed to prevent a greater level of risk and harm to children than others. Weighting the rules focuses on identifying those that place children at greatest risk if violations or citations occur. In other words, a violation of some standards pose a greater risk to children than others and the process of "weighting" the rules will identify those regulations that are most critical to ensuring the safety and protection of children.²²

²² Fiene, R. and K. Kroh (2016) Human Services Licensing Measurement, Regulatory Compliance, and Program Monitoring Systems. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.1067.0968.

Weighting standards is part of a new approach to enforcement that focuses on risk to children, ensuring that enforcement of these rules is both timely and consistent. It will also provide more information and clarity about the risk of each standard and the consequences for violations.

DEL is working with national experts, Thrive Washington, and the Early Learning Regional Coalitions to engage a diverse group of external and internal stakeholders from across the state with experience and expertise in licensing. DEL's process is rooted in the experience and expertise of Washington providers and builds on national best practice to inform DEL's weighting approach. Several states have already created a weighted standards process including Georgia, Texas, and Illinois. DEL is relying on this best practice model for reducing harm to children. At the same time, the process will tap into the vast store of knowledge of Washington providers to identify which rules should be weighted and to create the actual weights.

Goals for the standards weighting process:

- 👉 Focus the state's licensing resources;
- 👉 Support increased provider and consumer understanding;
- 👉 Reduce variance in decision-making; and
- 👉 Facilitate taking the right licensing action at the right time.



Progressing to Early Achievers and ECEAP

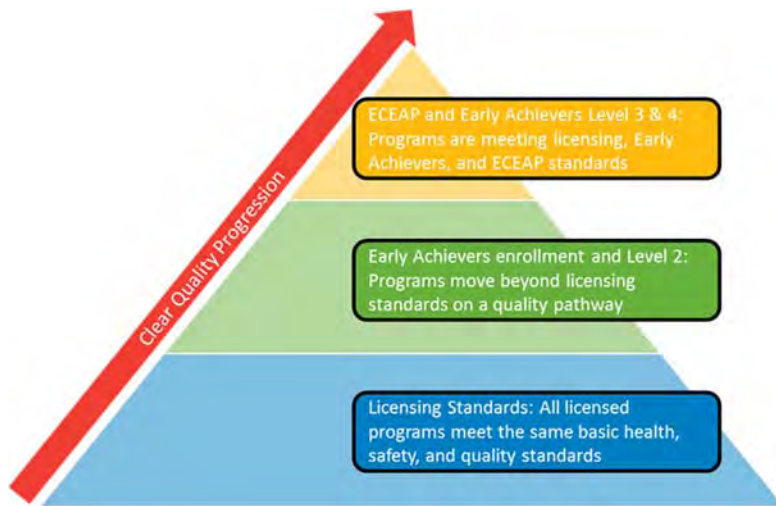
Alignment involves all three programs – Licensing, Early Achievers, and ECEAP. Simultaneous to the process of aligning family homes and center regulations, DEL is developing a progression of standards through Early Achievers and ECEAP. Children receive services in many different early learning settings. During their early years many children will participate in some combination of early care and education opportunities that are licensed, participating in Early Achievers, and/or offering ECEAP services. To maximize the experiences of these children, it's essential that these early learning programs provide clear and consistent services and use the same quality framework.

An analysis of the existing rules and Early Achievers quality requirements and ECEAP performance standards demonstrated existing areas of alignment between licensing, Early Achievers and ECEAP. However, there are areas where the standards and requirements are at odds. A clear progression of standards and coordinated monitoring of licensing, Early Achievers and ECEAP will allow an efficient, streamlined approach to tracking implementation of standards and will reduce the burden on providers.

Early Achievers and ECEAP Standards progression goals:

- 🌟 Quality begins at licensing. All sites will meet licensing standards as the foundation of quality;

- Standards are clear and measurable;
- Standards provide a progression from licensing to Early Achievers and ECEAP without duplication and with similar language; and
- Providers can see the progression of the standards from licensing through ECEAP and understand the expectations and next steps for participation in quality improvement.



How Creating a Progression of Standards Works:

The alignment process is creating a progression of quality within the Early Achievers quality framework. The new aligned standards use licensing as a foundation.

Racial Equity and Standards Alignment

DEL is committed to advancing racial equity in all of its work and has made it an agency-wide goal. The Standards Alignment process is operating with a principle of consistent application of racial equity and cultural humility principles. This work is happening internally at DEL, as well as in partnership with the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC), Thrive Washington, The Children’s Alliance, the Early Learning Regional Coalitions, and other external partners to make sure that the process supports Washington’s diverse population of children, families, and providers.

A feedback process took place in April-May 2016 to review the licensing standard drafts by applying a community engagement, racial equity, and cultural humility lens. The Standards Alignment Community Feedback Report summarizes the feedback received in this effort; the Executive Summary is included as Appendix C to this report.

Community Engagement

Community engagement has been a priority of the standards alignment process. DEL in collaboration with Thrive Washington, the Early Learning Regional Coalitions and Child Care Aware organized a process to gather input and feedback from the community. In November and December 2015 the Coalitions, in collaboration with Thrive, CCA and DEL, hosted and facilitated 22 community input meetings in different regions and communities of our state. More than 1000 early learning educators representing different services, programs, and organizations provided DEL with their valuable input. The community input process included two data collection strategies: 1) regional focus groups and 2) a broad-reaching survey via an online community input portal.

The materials were made available in English, Spanish, Somali, Oromo, Amharic, and Russian languages. While no clear consensus emerged among the proposed options for modifying the standards, the following key messages and themes were articulated:

- Focus on the state-wide, regional and local support systems and resources;
- Eliminate inconsistencies in licensing, EA and ECEAP requirements and monitoring processes;
- Develop a shared language for the standards progression;
- Consider cultural, programmatic, linguistic, settings, space, and geography components in creating standard progressions;
- Be aware of the business relationships that providers have with families;
- Understand current education/qualification status of the diverse populations of early learning educators, current capacity of the higher education system, and the level of available resources and supports; and
- Ensure resources for improving provider's business practices.

DEL will continue working with its partners, the Standards Alignment Advisory Committee, and the community of providers to solicit feedback on this process.

Alignment Activities – past and future

- 🗓 Spring 2015: formation of DEL Alignment Steering Committee
- 🗓 Summer 2015: established the alignment project approach and principles, and alignment analysis of Licensing, ECEAP and Early Achievers
- 🗓 Summer 2015: formation of the Standards Alignment Advisory Committee
- 🗓 Sept. 2015 – Dec. 2015: initial community input process
- 🗓 Dec. 2015 – April 2016: development of an initial draft of aligned family home and center standards
- 🗓 April – May 2016: community feedback process on draft aligned standards
- 🗓 July 2016: rule-making proposal filed for the aligned and weighted standards process
- 🗓 May – Nov. 2016: processing community feedback and re-drafting of aligned standards
- 🗓 Aug. 2016 – May 2017: development of Early Achievers and ECEAP standards progression (not subject to formal rule-making procedures as these are not in statute)
- 🗓 Nov. 2016 – April 2017: standards weighting process, including community focus groups and a survey of content experts
- 🗓 May 2017 – June 2017: negotiated rule-making process with SEIU 925, the union representing licensed family home child care providers
- 🗓 July 2017: filing proposed rules with the State
- 🗓 Aug. – Sept. 2017: formal public comment period on the aligned and weighted standards.
- 🗓 Nov. 2017: final rule filing

CHAPTER 8: Promoting Quality Expansion of ECEAP

Washington launched its comprehensive Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) in 1985 to prepare 3- and 4-year-old children from low-income families for success in school and in life. ECEAP focuses on the well-being of the whole child by providing comprehensive nutrition, health, education, and family support services to young children from Washington’s lowest-income households. ECEAP reaches the children most in need of these foundations for learning, with a focus on children in families with household income at or below 110 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The program is aligned with nationally-researched programs that have shown strong returns on investment.

In the short-term, ECEAP is effective at:

- 👉 Increasing children’s social-emotional, physical and pre-academic skills.
- 👉 Helping families move toward self-sufficiency and build their capacity to support their children’s success.
- 👉 Ensuring that each child receives medical and dental care to start school healthy.

In a longer-term study of ECEAP, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that ECEAP has a positive impact on third, fourth, and fifth grade test scores. The study further found that ECEAP’s impact on elementary school test scores is almost twice as large as the average effect of early childhood programs in other states.²³

During the 2016-17 school year, ECEAP is serving 11,691 children at more than 350 sites. DEL administers ECEAP through 54 contracts with school districts, educational service districts, community colleges, local governments, tribal organizations, child care centers and homes, and non-profits. Table 12 below details ECEAP sites by location type.

Facility Type	# Sites	% Sites
Public Schools	196	56.0%
Child Care Centers	50	14.3%
Head Start Facilities	48	13.7%
Non-Profit Facilities	34	9.7%
Faith-based Facilities	16	4.6%
Other	14	4.0%
TOTAL	350	100%

The Early Start Act confirms the legislature’s intent to make ECEAP an entitlement by the 2020-2021 school year [Section 12(2)]. Since 2011, the legislature has increased ECEAP slots for children by 46

²³ Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2014) Outcome Evaluation of Washington State’s Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

percent (3,667 slots). Based on the estimates of the Caseload Forecast Council, ECEAP will need 7,400 more slots by fall of 2020 to serve all eligible children who are likely to participate.

Through most of ECEAP’s 30 years, the program model was a part-day only model. Preschool class sessions were a minimum of 2.5 hours per day and 240 hours per year. In 2008, the ECEAP program model was increased to a minimum of 320 hours per year. In the 2015-16 ECEAP expansion, new part-day slots required a minimum of three hours a day and 360 hours per year, and the new full-school-day and extended-day models were added on a limited scale. Full-school-day slots average six hours per day and 1,000 hours per year. Extended-day is year round, and a minimum of 10 hours per day. Table 13 below details the distribution of program model slots during the 2015-2016 school year.

Table 13. ECEAP Slots by Program Model, 2015-2016

Program Model	# Slots	% Slots
Part Day	9,759	83.5%
Full School Day	1,516	13.0%
Extended Day	416	3.6%
TOTAL	11,691	100%

DEL is not yet able to analyze the impact of ECEAP full-school-day and extended-day models on child development and learning outcomes, due to small numbers of these slots and the fact that most have gone to novice ECEAP sites. However, we can see that these models are enrolling children who on average have different characteristics than those enrolled in traditional part-day ECEAP slots.²⁴ For example:

- 🌱 60 percent of children in ECEAP extended-day slots are in single parent homes, compared to 45 percent in full-school-day and 40 percent in part-day.
- 🌱 26 percent of children in part-day ECEAP slots speak Spanish as their home language, compared to 20 percent in full-school-day and 12 percent in extended-day. Extended-day slots have the highest percentage of children with English as their first language.
- 🌱 73 percent of families in part-day ECEAP slots were employed for wages versus 67 percent for extended-day and 64 percent for full-school-day.
- 🌱 Parents whose children are enrolled in part-day ECEAP slots have the lowest education levels with just 60 with a high school diploma, GED, or higher. Parents whose children are enrolled in full-school-day slots follow closely with 66 percent, while 84 percent of parents in extended-day have a high school diploma, GED or higher.
- 🌱 Full-school-day and extended-day ECEAP program models enroll higher percentages of Black/African-American children and multiracial children. Full-school-day models enroll the highest percentage of Native American children.
- 🌱 Part-day ECEAP enrolls the highest percentage of children on Individual Education Plans (IEPs), closely followed by full-school-day.
- 🌱 Extended-day models enroll a higher percentage of children with incarcerated parents - 9.9 percent of extended-day enrollments compared to 5.4 percent for full-school-day slots and 4.9 percent for part-day slots.

²⁴ Data Source: ELMS 2015-16 Child Demographics Report

Overview of Participating ECEAP Families

ECEAP serves families with demonstrated need, including families at or below 110 percent Federal Poverty Level (\$26,675 for a family of four), children who qualify for special education, families involved with Child Protective Services (CPS) or Family Assessment Response (FAR), or children with developmental or environmental risk factors related to school success.

Table 14. ECEAP Child/Family Characteristics, 2016-2017

Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian/Alaska Native	2.1%
Asian	2.9%
Black/African American	8.9%
Hispanic/Latino	37.5%
Multiracial/other	8.1%
Pacific Islander	1.5%
White	38.2%
Unknown	0.7%
Home Language	
English	67.5%
Other	6.1%
Spanish	24.8%
Somali	1.6%
Family Income	
<=50% FPL	40%
50.1%-80% FPL	23%
80.1%-110% FPL	27%
>110% FPL	10%

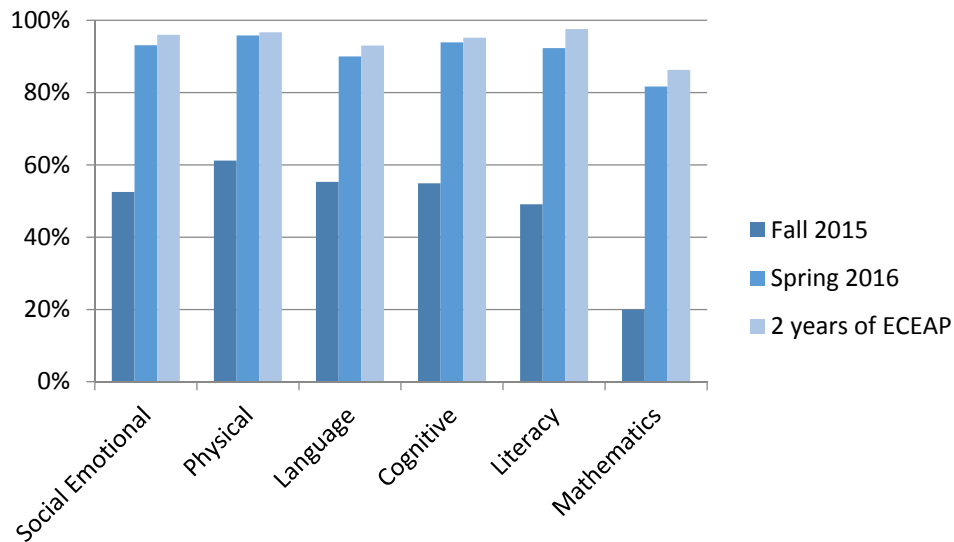
All racial groups reported as non-Hispanic

ECEAP Improves Child Outcomes

All ECEAP contractors assess the progress of participating children three times a year using Teaching Strategies GOLD® Online (TS GOLD®), a valid and reliable whole-child observational assessment. DEL can access all ECEAP GOLD® child data entered under the DEL agency license, allowing it to report statewide ECEAP child assessment results and assure alignment with WaKIDS. Kindergarten teachers with a child previously enrolled in ECEAP can access an ECEAP WaKIDS report in Teaching Strategies GOLD® and view the child's spring checkpoint. Beginning in 2016-17, DEL is supplying ECEAP teachers that use the Creative Curriculum® with a license to GOLDplus® along with extensive training opportunities. This added feature in TS GOLD® supports teachers in linking curriculum planning to assessment results.

As detailed in Figure 22 below, across all six learning domains assessed in TS GOLD®, children who participate in ECEAP show significant growth during the course of the program. Children demonstrating the highest likelihood to be at or above age level are children that have had two years of participation in ECEAP.

Figure 22. Percentage of Children at or Above Age Level by Domain, 2015-2016 School Year



Data Source: Teaching Strategies GOLD

Alignment with WaKIDS

ECEAP’s TS GOLD® assessment is aligned with OSPI’s WaKIDS assessment. Both are whole-child observational assessments using the same six developmental domains. The main difference is that WaKIDS is made up of a subset of the larger TS GOLD® assessment objectives. ECEAP Contractors are required to maintain communication with local kindergarten staff, which aligns with the early learning collaboration component of WaKIDS. In 2015, DEL began reporting GOLD® results for ECEAP children using the kindergarten readiness scale in GOLD, better aligning with OSPI WaKIDS report. In 2016-17, Teaching Strategies will revise this scale, nationally, based on their most current research. This is expected to support closer alignment of ECEAP and WaKIDS assessment results.

In early 2016 Washington’s Education and Research Data Center (ERDC) was for the first time able to link ECEAP TS GOLD® assessment scores with WaKIDS assessment scores for ECEAP participants. This allowed DEL to undertake a first-ever analysis of ECEAP outcomes in terms of kindergarten readiness for children entering kindergarten in fall 2015. The main findings of that analysis include

- 1) A very high share of ECEAP-enrolled children assess as ready for kindergarten on all six TS GOLD® domains in Spring of their ECEAP year (59.4 percent);
- 2) A greater share of children who have participated in ECEAP arrive at kindergarten ready for success on six of six WaKIDS domains (36.9 percent) than do all entering kindergartners from low income households (30.6 percent);

- 3) ECEAP children who are English-language learners, those who are Hispanic, and those who participate in Special Education are significantly more likely to experience “drop-off” in readiness between spring of their ECEAP year and fall of their kindergarten year.

Alignment between ECEAP and Licensing

The Early Start Act supports the strong alignment between ECEAP and child care for a single set of licensing standards [Sec 3(1)]. About 35 percent of current ECEAP sites are licensed and that number will grow as more full-school-day and extended-day ECEAP slots are made available. Ensuring that all early learning programs have strong health and safety practices is a priority for DEL.

At the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, DEL child care licensors and ECEAP pre-k specialists conducted expedited licensing visits to ECEAP expansion sites located in unlicensed facilities. These included community college, Head Start, and nonprofit early learning centers. The teams of one licensor and one ECEAP pre-k specialist partnered in these monitoring visits, providing opportunities for cross-training in monitoring practices and protocols. The visits focused on health and safety inspections (using both child care licensing WAC and ECEAP requirements) and meetings with directors to discuss findings of the visit, ECEAP enrollment and eligibility requirements, Early Achievers, data coaching, and technical assistance needs. This opportunity for partnership resulted in stronger alignment between these two programs and was appreciated by the ECEAP Directors and child care providers. Comments from ECEAP directors included how positive the monitoring experience was and how much they appreciated seeing the alignment between these two services in action. Currently, expedited licensing is only available for ECEAP providers.

In the 2016-17 school year, child care licensors and ECEAP pre-k specialists continue to work together to serve licensed ECEAP sites. Additionally, the two are collaborating (along with DEL Early Achievers staff) to rewrite WAC, Early Achievers standards, and ECEAP performance standards as a main focus of DEL’s standards alignment project. This cross-functional work is presenting a range of learning opportunities for child care licensors, ECEAP pre-k specialists, and Early Achievers staff to better understand where existing work aligns and is setting the stage for developing coordinated monitoring, training and quality improvement systems in the future.

Alignment between ECEAP and Early Achievers

To assess the alignment between Early Achievers and ECEAP, DEL conducted a voluntary pilot project in 2012 with ECEAP and Head Start providers to determine the best ways to incorporate these preschool models into Early Achievers. Many states allow state-funded prekindergarten programs an automatic entry into the higher tiers of their quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). DEL took the opportunity to have ECEAP contractors and Head Start grantees volunteer to participate in a QRIS pilot to gather data to inform final decisions on how these programs should be integrated into Early Achievers. The data DEL gathered includes the alignment between Early Achievers quality standards and existing ECEAP and Head Start performance standards, and the strengths and challenges that exist in these programs.

The results of the pilot highlighted the high degree of alignment between Early Achievers quality standards and the Head Start and ECEAP performance standards, and showed that Early Achievers participation can be integrated into other Head Start and ECEAP quality assurance activities and goals.

Pilot participants reported that Early Achievers activities provided them with new and valuable information about site- and classroom-specific quality.

Progress of ECEAP Sites in Meeting Early Start Act Requirements

The Early Start Act requires all existing ECEAP providers to be rated at a level 4 or higher by March 1, 2016 [Section 9(4)(b)].²⁵ In order to support ECEAP contractors in meeting the March 1, 2016 deadline, DEL created an ECEAP rating cohort with UW CQEL. All sites in the ECEAP cohort had data collection completed by February 29, 2016. The cohort included sites receiving an initial rating or a re-rating in order to meet the ESA rating requirements. Following rating, DEL reviewed detailed information with providers on the areas where they failed to meet the quality standard along with barriers needing to be addressed to make the needed quality improvements.

As of December 2016, 321 ECEAP sites (on all pathways) were rated in Early Achievers and of those sites, 250 sites (78 percent) rated a level 4 or 5. There were 51 sites that rated a level 3. These sites were either on the licensed pathway or a part of the Hybrid Project. Sites that rated a level 3 and met the minimum thresholds in ERS and CLASS in their ECEAP classrooms are considered *certified* and operating at an Early Achievers level of quality. Sites that are rated a level 2, or a level 3 *without* a certified ECEAP classroom, are receiving additional coaching support and will have the opportunity to re-rate within six months of their finalized rating.

Coaches at these sites were offered coaching consultation through the UW CQEL, as well as additional training and support in the ERS tool, including reliability training. DEL’s ECEAP staff will provide on-going webinars to build on their coaching skills and create a professional learning community of support and resources.

Figure 23. Rating Pipeline for Providers on ECEAP Timeline



Data Source: MERIT, ELMS, Famlink, SSPS as of August 15, 2016

²⁵ New ECEAP providers must enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days of receiving an ECEAP contract and must rate at a Level 4 or higher within 12 months. Licensed child care centers or Family Child Care Homes that receive an ECEAP contract will have 18 months to rate at a Level 4 or higher.

The pipeline of ECEAP participation in Early Achievers illustrated in Figure 23 above highlights the different stages of Early Achievers participation, the number of providers at each stage, and the length of time, on average, that ECEAP providers have moved through the Early Achievers rating process.

ECEAP: The Road to Serving all Eligible Children

In its first 30 years, ECEAP has gradually expanded from serving 1,000 children per year to 11,691 children in the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years, while maintaining the same basic program design. In the remaining four years before ECEAP becomes an entitlement, the program must expand much more rapidly. Based on the November 2016 Caseload Forecast, DEL estimates we must add 7,400 children to serve all who are eligible whose families will choose to enroll. To expand at this rate, ECEAP will need to add an average of 1,850 slots per year while maintaining high quality and continuing to enhance child outcomes.

ECEAP has a strong base of research demonstrating its effectiveness in contributing to school readiness, and expansion to entitlement levels is essential if DEL is to reach its goal of having 90 percent of all children ready for success when they enter kindergarten.

Based on review of data and discussion with current ECEAP directors and other partners ECEAP expansion will require the program to ensure there are no barriers to participation, and specifically to:

- **Target expansion geographically:** Use both data and outreach to community leaders to assess need and demand for ECEAP services and most appropriate models. As some communities approach saturation²⁶, DEL must target expansion to communities where the need and demand for increased preschool services is documented. This includes targeted outreach to underserved cultural and linguistic groups.
- **Target expansion by model:** Contractors report greater demand in filling full-school day (6-hour) and extended-day (10-hour) ECEAP slots in comparison to traditional part-day (3-hour) slots. They note that these models better meet the needs of both the children and the parents. This observation is supported by service delivery data indicating that ECEAP is underserving eligible single-parent households. During the 2015-2016 school year 42 percent of ECEAP students were from single-parent households, compared with the 60 percent of 3 and 4 year old children in households $\leq 110\%$ FPL statewide who are in single-parent households. In a recent survey by the Washington State Association of ECEAP and Head Start (WSA), directors of existing programs reported wanting to expand by more than 1,000 full or extended-day slots, as well as an interest in converting some of their existing part-day slots into longer day models, as long as appropriate funding was available.

DEL is working to gather additional data to assess demand for full-school-day and extended-day services by gathering census data on labor force participation among parents with children under age five by community, surveying other organizations serving low-income families and surveying low-income parents. DEL also plans to survey existing ECEAP contractors in early 2017 to assess existing capacity and demand for full school day and extended day.

²⁶ Saturation means the point at which 100% of the 3 and 4 year old children estimated to be eligible for ECEAP and whose parents would voluntarily participate are enrolled.

- **Support for Mixed Delivery Models:** DEL needs to strengthen the capacity of new and existing ECEAP contracts to offer ECEAP services and focus on reaching children with the best services for their families. This includes providing support to child care centers and/or groups of family child care providers to be able to offer ECEAP slots. In 2015-16, DEL explored ways to help child care providers prepare to offer integrated child care and ECEAP services. DEL contracted with Child Care Aware of Washington to conduct a two-year pilot to learn what child care providers need to be successful in providing joint ECEAP and child care services. CCA also developed and tested the training and coaching approaches needed for sites considering applying for ECEAP slots, support that would be needed above and beyond the existing support provided through Early Achievers.
- **Address space constraints for ECEAP programs:** As ECEAP continues to grow, an adequate number of high quality early learning facilities are needed to ensure a successful expansion to meet entitlement. It is widely accepted that public schools need more space in order to provide full-day kindergarten and smaller class sizes, so less space in school buildings will be available for preschool programs. The current ECEAP funding model does not provide funding to acquire and retro-fit new space, and full-school day and extended-day models with longer days increase the importance of high-quality space and materials. In 2016, utilizing a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, DEL worked with two consulting teams, BERK Consulting to conduct a facilities needs assessment and Washington State Association of Head Start & ECEAP (WSA) to conduct outreach and coordination, to explore facilities/space needed to serve all eligible children whose families choose to participate in ECEAP by fall 2020.

Released in September 2016, the BERK Facilities Needs Assessment report²⁷ provided an estimate of the additional classrooms needed for the statewide expansion of ECEAP and included recommendations on technical assistance and financing needs including rough cost estimates for construction and renovation of facilities to meet expected demand. The analysis included an assessment of current ECEAP providers' interest in expanding ECEAP and an assessment on the demand for Part-day, Full-school-day and Extended-day ECEAP services.

Information from the report contributed to the DEL's capital project request for \$37,063,228 in general obligation bonds to address 25 percent of the statewide supply shortage of early learning facilities. In a partnership between DEL, the Department of Commerce, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Washington State Housing Finance Commission, local government, private funding institutions like community development financial institutions, and private donors, the \$37,063,228 investment would complement a small amount of existing resources in the Child Care Facility Fund (CCFF) program, tax-exempt bonds, local match, private investment, and in-kind donations, to help address this supply shortage by making strategic investments in new preschool and other early learning facilities across the state.

DEL will continue to explore transitioning existing space into different uses as well as ensuring ECEAP reaches children where they may already be receiving services such as a licensed child care center or home.

²⁷ https://del-public-files.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/Facility%20Needs%20Assessment%20for%20ECEAP%20Expansion%20September%202016_0.pdf

- **Target highest-needs children and families:** ECEAP is designed to serve the most at-risk children, including families experiencing homelessness and children with behavioral challenges. In full-school day and extended-day settings, meeting the needs of these children can be especially challenging as many families are difficult to reach and enroll. Difficulty enrolling existing slots suggests new strategies for reaching families are needed, and DEL is exploring new recruitment strategies to reach families most in need of services, including:
 - 🌱 Sharing best and promising practices for outreach among current contractors;
 - 🌱 Targeting enrollment to children on child care subsidies;
 - 🌱 Piloting efforts to strengthen referral pathways with key organizations serving low-income families such as DSHS, WIC and health clinics; and
 - 🌱 Piloting efforts to strengthen referral pathways with key organizations serving culturally specific populations.
- **Focus on scalability and differentiation:** The ECEAP model needs to be flexible to the unique needs of the children and families that participate. This includes differentiating the services provided to families based on the needs of an expanded population. DEL is currently engaged in a family support pilot where contractors will further individualize and differentiate approaches to family support. This will lead to more focused services, potentially allowing more dollars for high-quality education services.

Key Accomplishments:

- 🕒 DEL placed 1,600 more part-day ECEAP slots in communities, and supported new contractors to learn to provide ECEAP services.
- 🕒 77.7 percent of ECEAP sites have attained an Early Achievers rating of level 4 or level 5.
- 🕒 DEL obtained a rating of 9 out of 10 quality points for ECEAP, as determined by the National Institute for Early Education Research. The tenth point would require BA degrees for lead teachers.
- 🕒 The Learning Policy Institute featured ECEAP in their study, “The Road to High-Quality Early Learning: Lessons from the States”. Washington is one of the four states exemplifying “an array of promising practices that are designed to meet a state’s needs and to satisfy its priorities.”
- 🕒 DEL conducted a successful family support pilot project with the goals of strengthening ECEAP family outcomes and targeting intensive services to the families who need them the most. Fourteen volunteer ECEAP contractors tested two research-based approaches. DEL is moving forward in an expanded pilot in 2016-17 with the EMPATH Mobility Mentoring® model, which demonstrated significant gains for families in all 21 areas of self-sufficiency measured in the pilot.
- 🕒 DEL’s continued success in supporting ECEAP children’s health outcomes, ensuring that children had medical and dental coverage; regular providers; up-to-date well-child exams, dental screenings, and immunizations; vision and hearing screening, and received treatment as needed.
- 🕒 DEL focused on implementing research-based curricula with fidelity, by supplying curriculum materials and in-depth training directly to ECEAP teachers.
- 🕒 For more information, see the *2015-16 ECEAP Outcomes Report*.

Key Challenges:

- ❑ Ensuring the internal capacity at DEL to monitor and support a growing portfolio of contractors.
- ❑ Availability of appropriate facilities to accommodate growth in communities where program expansion is most needed.
- ❑ Building a workforce of qualified staff, including recruitment and retention of qualified staff in an increasingly competitive market.
- ❑ Equitable distribution of new ECEAP slots.
- ❑ Ensuring that diverse communities are served with culturally appropriate language, staff diversity, instruction, and cultural competency.

CHAPTER 9: Continuous Quality Improvement

Continuous quality improvement is a foundational element of Early Achievers participation. The responsibility for continuous quality improvement lies with DEL and its implementing partners – Child Care Aware of Washington, UW CQEL, and Early Achievers providers. While much of the material in this chapter has been introduced in previous chapters, this chapter focuses on DEL’s view of continuous quality improvement in Early Achievers.

Providers enrolled in Early Achievers agree to engage in an ongoing process of learning, developing improvement plans, implementing and testing those plans, evaluating the results, and then making modifications. This cycle provides a path for providers to build on current strengths and capacities to grow and offer the highest quality early learning programs to children. It also provides a path to the Department of Early Learning for how the agency accomplishes its own work.

DEL wishes to be intentional about building a learning system with multiple feedback loops at multiple levels that is continuously improving. In such a system collaboration, coordination, and communication with external partners are essential.

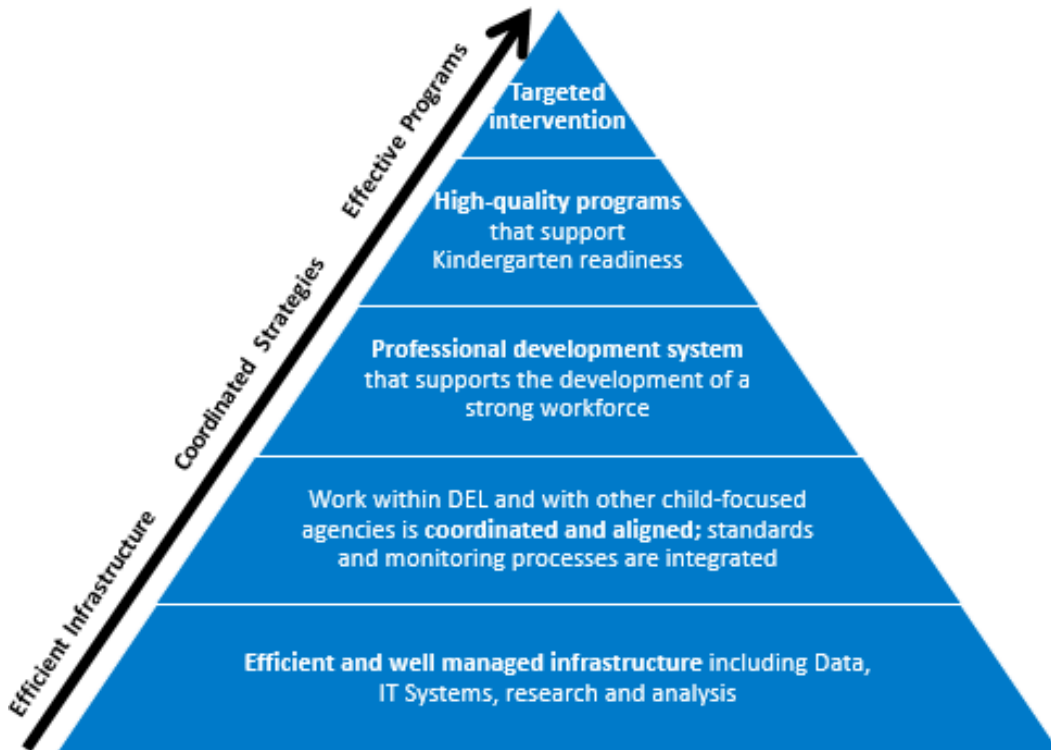
Washington is charting new territory in the creation of an early learning system tied to improving school readiness. To achieve this goal, DEL and its partners will:

- 🌱 Use research and lessons learned about what works for children to develop strategies;
- 🌱 Implement programs and services focused on providing high quality opportunities to children and families who need them most;
- 🌱 Evaluate, assess and test the results of our work;
- 🌱 Modify the plans when necessary to maximize outcomes; and
- 🌱 Partner with others whenever possible to attain broad collective impact.

WaKIDS data provide an opportunity to target prevention and intervention to children who need them most. DEL is currently assessing how we do our work in several areas, with a clear focus on implementing early learning programs that will improve outcomes for children. Specifically, we are focused on ensuring that our work impacts school readiness rates. We are holding ourselves accountable to two primary goals: **improving the kindergarten readiness rate to 90 percent, and eliminating race/ethnicity and family income as predictors of kindergarten readiness.**

As illustrated below, to achieve these goals DEL is focusing on three primary system components: 1) ensuring programs are effective, 2) coordinating our strategies and approaches, and 3) building an efficient infrastructure to support, measure, and scale our work. Recognizing that kindergarten readiness begins at birth, DEL will use these components to build a system to support the work and promote strong outcomes for children.





System Components to Support DEL Goals



Effective Frameworks

All programs and services will be research-based and rely on outcome measurement to drive improvement.

1. **Early Achievers:** The passage of the Early Start Act provides an opportunity to assess the progress of Early Achievers to date and ensure that it is designed to attain the strongest possible outcomes. DEL has developed an updated Early Achievers model that:

-  Establishes a process to create practices that are further focused on impact and will garner the strongest improvements in quality and, over time, child outcomes;
-  Ensures a process that is research-based, uses existing implementation and evaluation data, and is child-focused: DEL commissioned the 2016 Early Achievers Standards Validation Study and will continue to look for opportunities to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the Early Achievers system;
-  Looks for efficiencies in the existing system and ways to streamline; and
-  Ensures stakeholder and community engagement: In 2016, Early Achievers has improved outreach and community engagement through sharing updates earlier and through

Early Achievers: Key Goals

- **Improve average quality to a level that will support all children to be ready for kindergarten**
- **High quality is available in all geographic regions**
- **Diversity of workforce reflects participating children and families**

multiple channels, creation of a family outreach strategy, and development of a provider feedback protocol and tracking system.

2. **Early Achievers Review Subcommittee:** The subcommittee of the statewide Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC), provides feedback and guidance on strategies to improve the quality of instruction and environment for early learning, as well as providing input and recommendations on the implementation and refinement of Early Achievers. In January 2016 the subcommittee established a work plan focused on the continuous quality improvement of Early Achievers. The minutes for all subcommittee meetings are available on the DEL website. Three bodies of work the subcommittee focused on this past year are national accreditation, data collection and Early Achievers barriers.

- 🌱 *National accreditation:* A workgroup was assembled to review the Early Achievers standards and the national accreditation standards from the following agencies: National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association of Family Child Care and the American Montessori Society. The Early Achievers Review Subcommittee proposed awarding sites accredited by these organizations 5 points in the Early Achievers facility rating process. These facilities will provide evidence of their national accreditation status in order to receive these points. This proposal was shared with the Early Learning Advisory Council and they had a series of follow up questions prior to DEL implementing the proposal. DEL is currently in the process of responding.
- 🌱 *Data collection:* The subcommittee reviewed the quality standards and discussed strategies to streamline data collection. This included identifying quality standards for which providers could upload evidence for review, as well as modifying the sampling procedures for the records review portion of the onsite evaluation. The subcommittee reviewed a proposal for curricula that states that DEL will approve a number of curricula and providers using the selected curricula will receive credit for alignment with the Washington State Early Learning Guidelines. If providers are using other curricula, they can choose to complete a shortened version of the Curricular Alignment Tool. The shortened Curricular Alignment Tool and shortened WaKIDS Alignment Tool had significant edits based on subcommittee feedback.
- 🌱 *Early Achievers barriers:* In January 2016 the Early Achievers Review Subcommittee began discussing participation barriers in detail. The committee worked with community organizations to identify a number of barriers at each phase of Early Achievers, including registration, rating, data systems, supports and resources. This information was shared with their home communities to learn what actions were already in process to address the identified barriers. This feedback helped the subcommittee set priorities for the remainder of the year. Prior to the August 2016 enrollment deadline for providers accepting subsidy, their efforts primarily focused on barriers to enrollment into Early Achievers. They have since begun addressing level 2 barriers, in anticipation of the next milestone that subsidy providers must achieve. The committee is reviewing data and soliciting information from implementation partners to help understand the scope of the supports and identify the gaps in services. This work will be ongoing.

By the end of 2016 the EARS will have met nine times, with plans for a similar schedule of meetings in 2017. The subcommittee has prioritized the following areas for review in 2017:

- 🌱 Review data related to technical assistance and coaching and make recommendations to improve their impact.

- 👉 Propose strategies in response to data on the effectiveness of Early Achievers program standards in relation to providers and children from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- 👉 Continue to monitor the impact of the subsidy mandate on the availability of care and propose strategies as needed.
- 👉 Review member participation to ensure diverse perspectives are represented and suggest improvements to eliminate barriers to participate in the subcommittee.
- 👉 Provide feedback on standards alignment related to the progressions for Early Achievers and ECEAP.

3. **ECEAP Entitlement:** Washington has the opportunity to use preschool expansion to strengthen the existing ECEAP model and ensure it both garners the strongest outcomes for children and is cost-effective. DEL will continue to enhance the following elements which began in the 2014-15 expansion year:

- 👉 *Research-Based Curriculum:* Statewide implementation of research-based curriculum with a focus on quality training and fidelity of practice.
- 👉 *New Pathways to Bachelor's Degrees:* Expand opportunities for teachers to attain quality BA degrees in early childhood. Implement a new statewide preschool salary scale and supports that promote K-12 level salaries for preschool teachers who attain a BA in early childhood education and complete training in research-based curriculum.
- 👉 *Aligned Coaching Practice:* Ensure a clear and efficient system of coaching throughout the early learning system that includes ECEAP contractors and child care providers participating in Early Achievers.
- 👉 *Differentiated Family Support Services:* Allow for flexibility in services that support the unique needs of families participating in ECEAP.
- 👉 *Specialized Supports and Training:* Enhance supports for children and create new professional development opportunities focused on reaching and providing quality services to dual-language learners and children who need additional supports.

ECEAP: Key Goals

- All programs are high quality and participating children are kindergarten ready by completion of the program.
- Expand ECEAP to meet entitlement date of 2020-2021

4. **Targeted Interventions:** Improving school readiness rates relies on clear strategies for reaching children that are at risk of not being ready for kindergarten. DEL is focusing on screening and identifying these children who are in DEL programs in order to provide them with appropriate services as early as possible. This also includes supporting universal developmental screenings so that children most in need can be identified and offered services early.

Targeted Interventions: Key Goals

- Children with delays or disabilities are identified early and provided with appropriate services.
- Interventions targeted at high-need children are effective in improving school readiness rates.

Coordinated Strategies

With limited resources, it is imperative that services designed to support high-need children and families work together across agencies and departments. DEL is prioritizing the development of a coordinated approach to our work that maximizes services to children and families while looking for efficiencies within DEL and with our state agency partners.

1. **Cross-Agency Collaboration:** Multiple state agencies manage programs designed to benefit children and families. The Department of Early Learning recognizes that the health and safety of young children has a tremendous impact on their learning, and is working with other state agencies to develop strategies that support the many interconnected needs of children and families more efficiently and effectively. DEL has convened a cross-agency communications group that meets each month and includes representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Social and Health Services, Child Care Aware of Washington, SEIU 925, Thrive Washington, the Washington State Head Start and ECEAP Association, among others. This group helped to develop aligned communication strategies that led to the successful enrollment of the vast majority of subsidy providers in Early Achievers by the August 1, 2016 deadline. In addition to creating messaging, agencies co-branded communications to providers demonstrating the unified front of DEL and their partners. One of the major accomplishments of this group was a letter sent to family child care providers that was co-created and co-signed by DEL, CCA of WA and SEIU 925.

Cross-Agency Collaboration: Key Goals

- All of Washington’s child-focused agencies align services for high-need children and families.
- Cross-sector mechanisms, resources, and structures reflect, support, and sustain shared vision, collaborative relationships, and mutual accountabilities between all of Washington’s child-focused services.

2. **Aligning Systems:** DEL is working to establish a common set of expectations and standards that define, measure, and improve the quality of early learning and child care and education settings. This includes the development and implementation of a single set of standards for child care and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program within the Early Achievers framework.




Aligning Systems: Key Goals

- Align health and safety standards to ensure sustainable wellbeing of children.
- Address quality issues by establishing and implementing consistent and coordinated monitoring processes and protocols.
- Promote the ongoing improvement of health and safety practices for all early learning settings.

To develop these new standards, DEL has implemented a collaborative, state-wide approach that includes a statewide community- based Alignment Advisory Committee, an internal DEL Steering Committee, and a statewide community input process that includes reaching out to diverse communities, such as tribes, racial and ethnic communities, cultural and linguistic communities, and child care providers (both centers and family home child care). The Steering Committee and the Advisory Committee have dedicated many hours to the alignment work. They have participated in meetings no less than once per month and have reviewed a great deal of content in between meetings in order to help shape the draft version of the aligned Washington Administrative Code for child care centers and family child care homes. We hope the same individuals will have the stamina to continue the work as we move on to the next phase of standards progression writing which includes the Early Achievers and ECEAP standards.

Efficient Infrastructure



DEL is committed to using data to inform decisions and assess the effectiveness of our work. DEL has focused on improving our infrastructure in order to access the data we need and do a real-time, in-house analysis of that data by:

-  Creating an in-house Research and Analysis team to allow for quicker, cost effective, and more flexible analysis of data.
-  Working toward improving the licensing system to support modern architecture and implement less intrusive research-based and data-informed practices focused on children’s health and safety.
-  Field testing ways to create and implement an attendance tracking software to improve ease of data collection for DEL and early learning providers, ensure federal auditing compliance, and track data to analyze progress toward improving child outcomes.







Efficient Infrastructure: Key Goals

- **Data systems support staff and provider base to achieve quality improvement goals.**
- **Sufficient internal DEL capacity and capability.**





Key Accomplishments:

-  The Early Achievers Review Subcommittee (EARS) is functional and has a work plan for the coming year.
-  Feedback loops are in place at multiple levels that feed practice improvements.

Key Challenges:

-  Ensuring Early Achievers and ECEAP are scalable, outcome-based and cost effective.
-  Targeting programs to reach children with the appropriate services.
-  Developing a workforce with the skills necessary to meet kindergarten readiness goals.
-  Expanding the ability to match children with appropriate programs to ensure universal kindergarten readiness.
-  Constraints of pre-determined allocations sometimes result in inability to invest strategically when we know it would pay off, or not being able to pursue innovative strategies.
-  Continuing to align administrative data system data collection and reporting to most effectively support Early Achievers processes and outcomes.

Next Steps:

-  DEL and its partners will leverage the Professional Development Leadership Workgroup to develop additional curriculum and training delivery options in order to enhance the workforce.
-  DEL will coordinate the curriculum approval process for Early Achievers and ECEAP.
-  DEL and its partners will identify strategies to reframe the participation process in order to simplify the steps for providers without compromising the commitment to quality.
-  DEL and its partners will create shared professional development opportunities for Early Achievers staff, DEL licensors and ECEAP contractors to provide all field staff with the same foundation of knowledge. Coordinated trainings will also provide an opportunity for staff members to build relationships and enhance communication between sectors.

Glossary

Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA): a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that every child in Washington has access to high-quality child care and early learning programs. CCA of Washington is comprised of six regional agencies in six regions across the state.

Child Care Center: "Child care center" means the same as a "child day care center" or a facility providing regularly scheduled care for a group of children one month of age through twelve years of age for periods less than twenty-four hours.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP): Washington's state-funded comprehensive Preschool program.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (or ECEAP) provider: an organization that provides site level, direct, and high quality early childhood education and assistance program services under the direction of an early childhood education and assistance program contractor.

Early Childhood Educator: any professional working in Early Learning and Development Programs, including but not limited to center-based and family home child care providers, infant and toddler specialists, early intervention specialists and early childhood special educators, home visitors, related service providers, administrators, Head Start teachers, Early Head Start teachers, preschool and other teachers, teacher assistants, family service staff, and health coordinators.

ELMS (Early Learning Management System): the data system that tracks information about ECEAP services and the children and families served.

Efforts to Outcomes (ETO): a data system managed by CCA of WA used to track CCA staff caseloads, key milestones of providers' progress through Early Achievers, and many different supports CCA staff deliver to child care providers before they are rated: orientations, outreach, pre-enrollment assistance, technical assistance, rating readiness consultation, and several types of assessments.

Family Child Care Home: means a facility licensed by the department where child care is provided for twelve or fewer children in the family living quarters where the licensee resides as provided in RCW [43.215.010](#) (1)(c).

FamLink: the data system managed by the Department of Social and Health Services and maintained, in part, by DEL child care licensing staff to track child care licensing information.

Kindergarten Readiness: a child's ability to demonstrate the foundational skills and behaviors in all 6 Domains of Learning that comprise the WaKIDS Assessment (Cognitive Development, Language, Literacy, Math, Physical Development, and Social Emotional Development).

MERIT (Managed Education and Registry Information Tool): Washington Professional Development registry, a statewide tool to document and recognize the professional achievements of early care and education and school-age professionals. This online tool helps professionals find training opportunities, access information on career pathways, and track their individual career progress. MERIT also identifies approved trainers who provide education to professionals. MERIT is also a cornerstone system for Early Achievers, used by child care providers, DEL staff, and CCA staff for Early Achievers registration, the level 2 application process, on-site evaluation requests and approvals, etc.

Service provider: an entity that operates a community facility, either an ECEAP provider, a family child care provider, or a child care center.

Social Service Payment System (SSPS): the data system managed by the Department of Social and Health Services that tracks payments for social services such as child care subsidy.

Teaching Strategies GOLD (TS GOLD): is a whole child assessment system for children from birth through kindergarten. Washington State adapted the TS GOLD instrument to create the WaKIDS Assessment. Extensive field tests have shown it to be both valid and reliable. Available online and in print, the system can be used with any developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum.

University of Washington Childcare Quality and Early Learning Center (CQEL): a research center at the University of Washington dedicated to enhancing the quality of early learning environments for all children and eliminating the achievement gap that exists among children.

Web-Based Early Learning System (WELS): The QRIS database that calculates ratings and tracks rating information, quality improvement plans, and coaching data.

APPENDIX A: COUNTY AND ZIP CODE TABLES - SUBSIDY PROVIDERS ENROLLED BY AUGUST 1, 2016 DEADLINE

	Required Prov Enrolled by 8/1	Total Req Providers	% required providers enrolled by 8/1/2016	% FY2016 subsidy children served by enrolled providers
Adams	31	33	93.9%	98.6%
Asotin	4	5	80.0%	99.5%
Benton	85	89	95.5%	99.6%
Chelan	101	105	96.2%	99.2%
Clallam	31	32	96.9%	99.0%
Clark	109	138	79.0%	95.9%
Columbia	0	2	0.0%	0.0%
Cowlitz	30	33	90.9%	97.1%
Douglas	55	58	94.8%	98.8%
Ferry	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
Franklin	121	124	97.6%	99.4%
Garfield	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
Grant	118	122	96.7%	97.7%
Grays Harbor	38	43	88.4%	97.9%
Island	18	22	81.8%	95.2%
Jefferson	5	5	100.0%	100.0%
King	925	1,007	91.9%	98.0%
98001	14	20	70.0%	92.5%
98002	18	20	90.0%	98.5%
98003	28	30	93.3%	98.3%
98004	3	8	37.5%	80.9%
98005	2	3	66.7%	90.9%
98006	8	11	72.7%	82.4%
98007	14	16	87.5%	97.2%
98008	6	6	100.0%	100.0%
98010	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98011	6	6	100.0%	100.0%
98019	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98022	4	5	80.0%	96.9%
98023	30	32	93.8%	99.0%
98024	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98027	6	8	75.0%	97.5%
98028	4	5	80.0%	54.5%
98029	3	4	75.0%	100.0%
98030	44	46	95.7%	98.5%
98031	49	50	98.0%	99.7%
98032	19	19	100.0%	100.0%
98033	10	11	90.9%	96.8%
98034	20	25	80.0%	97.8%
98035	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98036	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98038	3	3	100.0%	100.0%
98039	0	1	0.0%	0.0%
98040	1	1	100.0%	100.0%

APPENDIX A: COUNTY AND ZIP CODE TABLES - SUBSIDY PROVIDERS ENROLLED BY AUGUST 1, 2016 DEADLINE

98042	16	20	80.0%	94.3%
98045	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98047	8	9	88.9%	97.0%
98052	11	14	78.6%	95.6%
98055	15	15	100.0%	100.0%
98056	5	6	83.3%	100.0%
98057	6	6	100.0%	100.0%
98058	17	20	85.0%	91.6%
98059	6	8	75.0%	94.6%
98063	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98065	4	4	100.0%	100.0%
98070	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98071	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98072	5	5	100.0%	100.0%
98074	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98075	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98092	16	18	88.9%	98.6%
98093	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98101	3	4	75.0%	82.8%
98103	10	10	100.0%	100.0%
98104	17	17	100.0%	100.0%
98105	4	4	100.0%	100.0%
98106	22	24	91.7%	97.6%
98107	3	3	100.0%	100.0%
98108	64	67	95.5%	99.3%
98112	4	4	100.0%	100.0%
98114	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98115	8	10	80.0%	98.4%
98116	1	3	33.3%	0.0%
98117	5	7	71.4%	78.6%
98118	62	63	98.4%	99.3%
98119	1	2	50.0%	50.0%
98122	20	20	100.0%	100.0%
98125	28	29	96.6%	99.2%
98126	34	34	100.0%	100.0%
98133	23	25	92.0%	99.1%
98134	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98136	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98144	14	15	93.3%	84.1%
98146	14	16	87.5%	97.5%
98148	7	8	87.5%	99.7%
98155	21	22	95.5%	98.9%
98166	8	8	100.0%	100.0%
98168	46	47	97.9%	98.2%
98177	4	4	100.0%	100.0%
98178	16	16	100.0%	100.0%
98188	31	31	100.0%	100.0%

APPENDIX A: COUNTY AND ZIP CODE TABLES - SUBSIDY PROVIDERS ENROLLED BY AUGUST 1, 2016 DEADLINE

98198	19	21	90.5%	99.3%
98199	3	3	100.0%	100.0%
98390	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98405	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
99352	0	1	0.0%	0.0%
980000000	9	11	81.8%	93.0%
Kitsap	64	77	83.1%	97.2%
Kittitas	13	16	81.3%	96.1%
Klickitat	3	3	100.0%	100.0%
Lewis	27	32	84.4%	93.0%
Lincoln	2	3	66.7%	90.0%
Mason	24	25	96.0%	99.7%
Okanogan	27	32	84.4%	90.9%
Pacific	7	7	100.0%	100.0%
Pend Oreille	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
Pierce	285	319	89.3%	98.7%
98023	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98092	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98093	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98321	7	7	100.0%	100.0%
98327	4	4	100.0%	100.0%
98328	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98329	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98332	5	5	100.0%	100.0%
98335	4	7	57.1%	92.9%
98338	11	12	91.7%	95.7%
98354	3	3	100.0%	100.0%
98360	2	4	50.0%	72.2%
98371	5	6	83.3%	92.0%
98372	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98373	10	11	90.9%	100.0%
98374	11	12	91.7%	100.0%
98375	8	8	100.0%	100.0%
98387	25	28	89.3%	96.0%
98388	3	3	100.0%	100.0%
98390	8	11	72.7%	95.7%
98391	7	8	87.5%	99.1%
98394	0	1	0.0%	0.0%
98402	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98404	16	18	88.9%	96.8%
98405	10	10	100.0%	100.0%
98406	4	4	100.0%	100.0%
98407	8	11	72.7%	96.9%
98408	21	22	95.5%	98.7%
98409	12	12	100.0%	100.0%
98415	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98418	7	7	100.0%	100.0%

APPENDIX A: COUNTY AND ZIP CODE TABLES - SUBSIDY PROVIDERS ENROLLED BY AUGUST 1, 2016 DEADLINE

98422	4	5	80.0%	97.1%
98424	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98443	3	4	75.0%	100.0%
98444	14	16	87.5%	99.0%
98445	8	12	66.7%	95.1%
98446	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98464	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98465	6	6	100.0%	100.0%
98466	10	11	90.9%	98.7%
98467	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98498	11	12	91.7%	97.7%
98499	14	15	93.3%	99.3%
98580	3	3	100.0%	100.0%
98000000	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
San Juan	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
Skagit	77	80	96.3%	99.3%
Skamania	4	4	100.0%	100.0%
Snohomish	229	267	85.8%	97.4%
98012	5	6	83.3%	100.0%
98020	2	3	66.7%	91.7%
98021	5	5	100.0%	100.0%
98026	12	12	100.0%	100.0%
98036	27	30	90.0%	99.6%
98037	15	19	78.9%	81.0%
98043	5	5	100.0%	100.0%
98082	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
98087	5	7	71.4%	97.2%
98201	6	6	100.0%	100.0%
98203	17	18	94.4%	99.6%
98204	11	11	100.0%	100.0%
98206	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98208	19	20	95.0%	99.8%
98213	0	1	0.0%	0.0%
98223	15	18	83.3%	95.1%
98251	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
98252	3	4	75.0%	97.4%
98258	14	17	82.4%	93.0%
98270	25	31	80.6%	94.9%
98271	14	18	77.8%	97.9%
98272	6	7	85.7%	99.1%
98275	7	9	77.8%	86.0%
98290	4	8	50.0%	73.3%
98292	3	3	100.0%	100.0%
98294	5	5	100.0%	100.0%
Spokane	145	166	87.3%	98.7%
99001	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
99003	1	1	100.0%	100.0%

APPENDIX A: COUNTY AND ZIP CODE TABLES - SUBSIDY PROVIDERS ENROLLED BY AUGUST 1, 2016 DEADLINE

99004	2	3	66.7%	78.9%
99005	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
99006	3	4	75.0%	97.5%
99019	2	2	100.0%	100.0%
99022	3	5	60.0%	93.1%
99026	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
99027	3	3	100.0%	100.0%
99037	8	9	88.9%	99.3%
99110	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
99201	10	12	83.3%	96.8%
99202	6	6	100.0%	100.0%
99203	4	5	80.0%	98.8%
99204	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
99205	17	18	94.4%	100.0%
99206	16	19	84.2%	96.3%
99207	14	14	100.0%	100.0%
99208	12	13	92.3%	99.2%
99209	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
99212	6	8	75.0%	98.4%
99216	11	11	100.0%	100.0%
99217	5	8	62.5%	94.2%
99218	2	3	66.7%	100.0%
99223	7	7	100.0%	100.0%
99224	4	5	80.0%	96.4%
99228	1	1	100.0%	100.0%
990000000	2	3	66.7%	93.3%
Stevens	8	9	88.9%	81.7%
Thurston	117	123	95.1%	99.6%
Walla Walla	31	33	93.9%	98.2%
Whatcom	55	64	85.9%	93.0%
Whitman	12	12	100.0%	100.0%
Yakima	265	276	96.0%	99.2%
Grand Total	3,072	3,372	91.1%	98.0%

Extension Protocol for Early Achievers

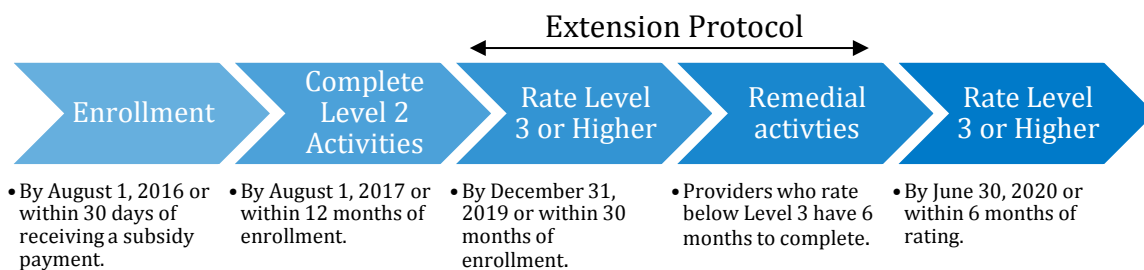
Overview

The Early Start Act of 2015 established Early Achievers participation timelines for all early learning providers that accept state funds. Under these timelines, providers that are unable to rate the required level by the rating deadline will no longer be eligible to accept state child care subsidy or ECEAP funding. The Early Achievers Extension Protocol allows participants who have completed Level 2 activities to request a one-time six month extension to the Early Start Act rating requirements for “exceptional circumstances”.

Timeline Requirements

Timeline requirements vary based on the pathway and source of state funding for each facility. Participants may request an extension up to 12 months before their rating deadline or during remedial activities, if necessary.

Timeline for Licensed and Certified for Payment Only Facilities



Criteria for Extension Eligibility

Early learning providers that wish to request an extension to the rating deadline must meet the following criteria:

- Compliance with all licensing requirements and ECEAP requirements, if applicable.
- Have met all prior Early Achievers timeline requirements.
- Must meet minimum participation requirements in rating preparation activities, such as training and technical assistance.
- Have experienced exceptional circumstances that can be verified.

Definition of “Exceptional Circumstances”

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) will only grant extension requests if an early learning provider can demonstrate an “exceptional circumstance” that warrants additional time prior to rating. These exceptional circumstances include:

- Leadership changes onsite—such as director, assistant director or program supervisor.
- Organizational leadership changes—such as changes in Tribal Council membership, or other agency leads.
- High staff turnover in a Child Care Center, Head Start or ECEAP program—more than 30% of lead staff, as defined in MERIT, have changed within the past 6 months (this is limited to staff who work with children in the birth to 5 years age range).
- Natural disaster or accidental damage to the facility that requires professional repair.

- Staff turnover in Family Home Child Care-- family child care assistant or lead staff have changed within the past 3 months.
- Community defined events/subsistence lifestyles/seasonal issues—such as ceremony, canoe journey.
- The facility is engaged in a grievance process with DEL, Child Care Aware of Washington or other entity providing Early Achievers supports.
- Reallocation of Head Start or ECEAP slots that may impact data collection procedures.
- Extended illness of the Director, Family Home Child Care provider, or a Lead Teacher.
- Less than three children between birth and 5 years old are enrolled (more than three children between birth and 5 years old are required to complete data collection).
- Death or other tragedy that has a significant impact on the program staff or families
- Other exceptional circumstances, reviewed case by case.
 - In these situations, the facility must provide documentation that demonstrates a need for an extension. This documentation will be reviewed by an Exception/Extension protocol panel to determine if the circumstances warrant an extension.
 - The panel will include staff from DEL and Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA) and a member of the Early Achievers Review Subcommittee.

Process for Requesting an Extension

Participants may request an extension up to 12 months before their rating deadline or during remedial activities, if necessary. All extensions will be granted for six months; however participants can choose to move forward with rating before their extension expires. Providers must request an extension in writing with the following information:

- Reason for requesting extension
- Summary of Early Achievers participation and quality improvement activities
- Supporting documentation to verify the request (e.g. Doctors' letters, termination letters, etc.)

All extension requests will be reviewed by DEL. Those that meet the defined criteria will be approved. Any requests for an extension that do not meet the defined categories for eligibility will be submitted to an Extension/Exception protocol panel for review. This panel will have a DEL staff member, CCA of WA staff member and Early Achievers Review Subcommittee member. They will review the evidence and determine if the program qualifies for an extension.

Requests for extension can be emailed to the QRIS inbox at qris@del.wa.gov, or mailed US Post to QRIS Extension Request, c/o DEL--Early Achievers, PO Box 40970, Olympia, WA 98504-0970.

Once requests are reviewed, programs will be notified by an email from the QRIS inbox or mailed by US Postal mail stating if their request for extension was granted or denied as well as information about any next steps.

Extension Protocol for ECEAP Providers and Contractors

ECEAP and Early Head Start – Child Care Partnership Providers with timeline requirements are also eligible for extensions and will follow the same protocol as licensed child care facilities.



Standards Alignment Community Feedback Report

A Community Engagement Effort by the Early Learning
Regional Coalitions to Advance Racial Equity and Cultural
Humility of the Proposed Licensing Standards Drafts

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the community members - parents, providers and other early learning supporters – who volunteered their time and expertise to help make the proposed child care standards clear, comprehensive and equitable. They took time away from their work and families to help ensure high-quality care for all the children in Washington state.

And it was the state’s 10 Early Learning Regional Coalitions sought to bring together diverse community voices in a collaborative space to share feedback. The coalitions planned, facilitated and recorded all of the meetings. This was a large-scale effort, and their professionalism and dedication to this work – as well as their commitment to amplifying community members’ voices – is what makes our state a leader in early learning.

On behalf of Thrive Washington and the Department of Early Learning, thank you!

EARLY LEARNING REGIONAL COALITIONS

Central (Investing in Children) Yakima and Kittitas counties

King County (SOAR) North Central
Chelan, Douglas, Grant and Okanogan counties

Northeast (Inland Northwest Early Learning Alliance)
Adams, Ferry, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens and Whitman counties

Northwest Island
Skagit, Snohomish, San Juan and Whatcom counties

Olympic-Kitsap Peninsulas
Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap and north Mason counties

Pierce County (Project Child Success) Southeast Asotin
Benton, Columbia, Franklin, Garfield and Walla Walla counties

Southwest
Cowlitz, Clark, Klickitat, south Pacific, Skamania and Wahkiakum counties

Executive Summary

PURPOSE AND GOALS OF COMMUNITY FEEDBACK PROCESS

In a series of 23 meetings in April and May 2016, dozens of stakeholders shared their feedback on a set of proposed licensing standards drafts. The participants included 467 stakeholders representing all types of early learning providers and a wide variety of racial, ethnic, cultural, refugee and immigrant, income, and linguistic communities. The communities represented in the meetings included, but are not limited to: Native American, African-American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Yakama Nation, East African, Filipino, Spanish-speaking, Somali-speaking, Oromo-speaking and Russian-speaking. Using equity tools and led by experienced facilitators, participants reviewed these proposed licensing standards drafts:

- Child Outcomes: Developmental Screening
- Environments: Routines, Meals and Snacks – Milk and Food
- Family Engagement and Partnership: Family Support
- Family Engagement and Partnership: Strengthening Families Self-Assessment
- Interaction and Curriculum: Expulsion
- Interaction and Curriculum: Restraint
- Professional Development and Training: Staff Qualifications – Minimum Education and Age
- Program Administration and Oversight: Postings
- Program Administration and Oversight: Recordkeeping, Reporting and Posting – Attendance Records
- Program Administration and Oversight: Recordkeeping, Reporting and Posting – Emergency Preparedness Plan
- Program Administration and Oversight: Staff Policies, Observation and Evaluation
- Program Administration and Oversight: Staff Supports – Provisions for Personal and Professional Needs
- Program Administration and Oversight: Recordkeeping, Reporting and Posting – Child Records

CULTURAL HUMILITY AND RACIAL EQUITY LENS

Each coalition designed its community meetings and received support – materials and technical assistance – from Thrive Washington and department of early Learning. Those materials included resources to facilitate conversations on racial equity and cultural humility. The Coalitions used the Early Learning Advisory Council racial equity guiding questions to facilitate discussion:

- Is this policy, decision or practice good for kids, families and early learning educators of color?
- Do some kids, families and early learning educators benefit more or less than others?
- Do kids, families and early learning educators of color have access, and if not, why?
- What data and information is missing?
- Are there any unintended consequences?

PROCESS

Participants from every part of the state – representing family child care, child care centers, community-based organizations, public health, Educational Service Districts and more – suggested changes to the subset of 13 proposed drafts of the Washington Administrative Codes (WAC). The Department of Early Learning intended for the focus of the meetings to be the WAC; participants provided feedback on the proposed WAC drafts, as well as the standards for Early Achievers and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). This report focuses on feedback on the proposed WAC drafts but includes Early Achievers and ECEAP feedback where it was provided by participants.

Each meeting used different facilitation styles and a combination of note-taking strategies. Thrive collected and analyzed all the feedback from those meetings, as well as an online portal, for this report. (For more on the methodology of data collection and analysis, see Appendix A.)

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK THEMES

In many meetings, participants commented that the drafts demonstrated good intentions but require changes be more equitable in word and in implementation.

On the whole, they agreed that raising the quality of child care throughout Washington requires more family and community engagement, more educated providers and more equitable policies, and they said that it also requires more training, resources and support for all providers – especially providers of color.

From child-restraint practices to the Strengthening Family self-assessment to record-keeping, the participants were consistent in calling for training or funding that will help providers pull off what they perceived as more rigorous standards. They said repeatedly that providers of color, who are often family child care providers, currently do not have the resources to comply with the standards as proposed, and they are also less likely to have access to funds or training to reach compliance.

This theme came through most intensely in the comments about professional qualifications. Participants asked in almost every meeting how providers, especially family home providers, would find the time and money to achieve higher educational levels. Participants said an unintended consequence of the proposed educational requirements could be that providers of color close up shop or choose to provide services without a license.

Participants also voiced support for family choice. In areas such as developmental screening and food, they called for respectful collaboration with families that honor families' cultures. Of particular concern was how to communicate well with families across language barriers and despite caregivers' frantic

schedules. Participants called for more resources in translation and interpretation that support families' awareness and involvement.

Major systemic issues emerged from the conversations; these are challenges that stretch far beyond the boundaries of standards alignment, but they highlight the interconnectedness of this work. There are opportunities to partner with counterparts in K-12, health, social services, higher education – or even across teams at the Department of Early Learning – to break down barriers and collaborate in support of providers and families.

KEY THEMES OF PARTICIPANTS' FEEDBACK

- The drafts demonstrate good intentions and the potential for high-quality access for all, but providers will require support (funding, technical assistance and materials) to comply
- In particular, providers of color and family child care providers have less access to the supports that will allow them to comply with the standards as proposed
- Translation and interpretation supports – for providers and for families – are essential
- In the implementation of the standards, there must be leeway for providers to honor families' cultures and languages – and accommodate the barriers faced by low-income, over-worked and disenfranchised families
- There are systemic challenges with community supports in health, K-12, higher education and social services that could hamper families' success despite the best efforts of child care providers or the best intentions of these standards

NEXT STEPS

Thrive Washington is committed to maintaining a feedback loop with the coalitions, who in turn communicate with meeting participants and other interested stakeholders. All are invested in ensuring that the aligned standards are supporting health and safety in early learning settings and high quality of early learning environments and advance our school readiness work to eliminate the opportunity gap.

The coalition representatives, the meeting participants and the field as a whole are eager to see how the proposed standards emerge in the next phase.

EARLY ACHIEVERS 2015-16 EVALUATION

Child Care Aware of Washington

July 19, 2016



The Athena Group, LLC
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Olympia, WA 98501
(360)754-1954
www.athenaplace.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This evaluation assesses the program development efforts, activities and results of Child Care Aware of Washington's administration of the Early Achievers program in 2015-16. The program is completing its fourth year and is entering a new phase of development. With the passage of the Early Start Act in 2015, the program now receives more state funding, but still also receives federal grant funding. The legislation requires additional investments in program development and provider supports, and requires child care providers that serve children age 5 or below on the Working Connection Child Care to join Early Achievers by August 1, 2016.

These changes are driving program advancement and expansion. Sixty percent of the state's child care providers are now enrolled in Early Achievers and many more are expected to join before the August deadline. Additional investments in Child Care Aware were made to build capacity to meet program growth, including a 50 percent increase in the number of direct service staff to provide Technical Assistance, Rating Readiness Consultation, and Coaching for child care providers. CCA of WA and its partners in the regions and the University of Washington have also strengthened professional development programming for their staff, including working to ensure more staff are reliable in ERS and CLASS, and providing structured orientation and onboarding training for new staff.

Highlights of the year

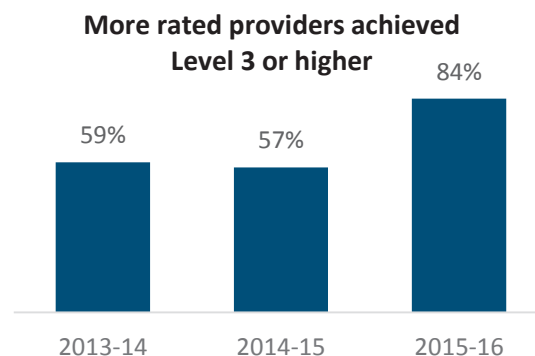
In summary, this year's evaluation found that Early Achievers enrollment is up with over 3,000 child care providers enrolled in Early Achievers. Additionally, ratings are improving, with most providers receiving Level 3 or higher. The number of staff and amount of staff training has increased in recent years, and staff are generally more positive about Early Achievers and their ability to prepare providers for rating. However, despite the positive gains, providers are slightly less satisfied overall, in part because of legislative changes.

Enrollment is up

As of the start of June 2016, over 3,000 child care providers have enrolled in Early Achievers, with about 1,000 of those child care providers enrolling in the last year. Altogether, these 3,000 providers serve just over 66,000 children. At this time, 60 percent of licensed child care providers have enrolled in Early Achievers.

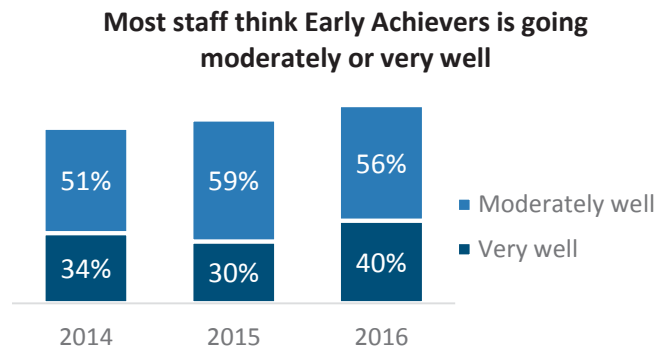
Ratings are improving

This year, 84 percent of rated providers received a Level 3 or higher, with most (82 percent) receiving a Level 3 and only 2 percent receiving a Level 4. This is an improvement from last year when only 57 percent of rated providers received a Level 3 or higher.



Regional staff are more positive

One common theme of the regional staff survey is that staff are more positive about Early Achievers than they were in the past. In response to a question of how well Early Achievers is going, 40 percent responded it is going very well and another 56 percent responded it is going moderately well. Both of which are increases from previous years.

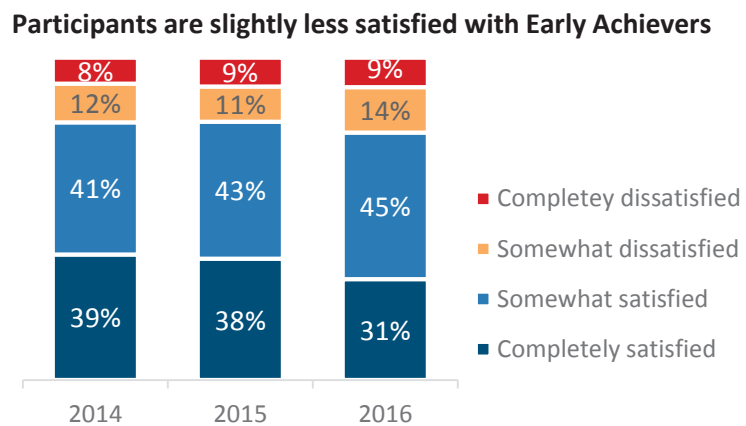


Staff were also more positive about many program components, including: recruiting participants, training, Technical Assistance, Rating Readiness Consultation, delivering and interpreting rating results, and Coaching.

This improvement is all in the context of a growing number of participating providers and regional staff. The number of regional staff has increased by 50 percent in the last year from 83 to 127. To prepare new staff for their jobs, CCA of WA now offers a new employee orientation for regional staff from around the state and the regions have developed more systematic staff onboarding processes that include staff mentoring and job shadowing.

Providers are less positive

While staff are more positive than in the past, Early Achievers participants are slightly less positive. This year a total of 76 percent of respondents reported being completely (31 percent) or somewhat (45 percent) satisfied with Early Achievers. This is a slight decrease from previous years. One reason for the decline may be legislative changes that made the program mandatory for some child care providers.



The percent of participants who reporting being satisfied with Technical Assistance, Training, and Coaching is comparable. However, fewer participants are satisfied with Rating Readiness Consultation (72 percent) than were last year (76 percent). We heard from some providers about TA Specialists and RR Consultants who have been unavailable to answer their questions or return their calls. However, other providers have been grateful for the assistance they have received in improving quality and preparing for rating.

Emerging Issues

A number of issues are arising as Early Achievers enters this new more mature phase of program development. These issues are important to instilling and sustaining effective administration practices.

Region Staff

For region staff, the increase in providers has posed both ongoing and new challenges. Staff continue to be challenged to accommodate not only the increase in number of providers, but the increasing diversity of their caseload. Many more providers, about 25 percent of those enrolled, are now in the Coaching phase. Balancing caseload mix and numbers, and keeping up with provider demand, poses ongoing challenges. Regions are using different approaches to assigning duties and caseloads. Some assign providers to the same staff person throughout the TA, RRC, and Coaching phases, others change the assigned staff member for each program phase, or use a hybrid of the two approaches. Feedback from staff and providers indicate some pros and cons to each approach. However, region staff shared that changing assigned staff between the phases causes confusion and breaks in service continuity for providers, as well as gaps in knowledge among staff of the work that's conducted during the other phases.

Region staff who are providing coaching are experiencing a variety of challenges as coaching expands and they find themselves working with providers who have a wide range of intentions and circumstances. For example, many providers have experienced high levels of turnover in staff as well as leadership after they were rated. Sustaining quality is often undermined by turnover. Some coaching staff feel that they need more tools or supports to help such providers remain "ready for rating," in addition to their regular coaching work. Also, questions are arising about what their services should look like when they are working with providers who have attained their rating, but are interested only in maintaining their level of quality rather than working towards a higher rating.

Providers

Provider feedback about the new mandates that require those who serve children in Working Connections to join and remain in Early Achievers is generally adverse. Some providers simply resist the idea of the program being mandated. However, others have more complex reasons that range from program cost to the value of ratings. These perceptions will affect Child Care Aware of Washington and its regional partners as they continue their work to recruit new providers and retain existing ones in the program.

The providers who joined Early Achievers initially and voluntarily report that they did so because they wanted to enhance the quality of the care they provided, and were pleased that Early Achievers would help support and fund this effort through Technical Assistance, ongoing coaching, and the Quality Improvement Awards. However, while they are strongly supportive of the program's goal to increase the quality of care provided to lower income children, they feel different about the program now that it is mandated, and they are no longer eligible for Quality Improvement Awards unless they serve children on state subsidy.

Closely related to this, is the financial cost of participating in Early Achievers. Providers report that while they remain supportive of the program goals, the program costs make it difficult for them to remain a viable business. Many shared that meeting standards costs more than they thought it

would, and more than the estimates that were given them when they joined. They are challenged with high rates of turnover due to inadequate pay for their staff. Some providers report that the combination of the cost of the program, having to provide at least five percent of their slots to children on subsidy, and the low reimbursement rates for subsidy children will make the program financially unsustainable for them. As a result, many are questioning the benefits and value of staying in the program and some have said they will no longer take children on subsidy because the subsidy rate is too low to offset the costs of the program. In their view the mandate to participate is not viable. This is especially true for smaller family home child care.

Lastly, providers in our focus groups report that the ability to demonstrate the quality of their child care services was one of the main reasons they joined Early Achievers. However, both providers and staff are finding that parents are not aware of Early Achievers. Very few are reporting parents who are asking about it, instead most have no knowledge of Early Achievers nor appreciation for the provider's achievements in the program. This has reduced one of the incentives for providers to join and remain in Early Achievers, and also makes it more difficult for providers to advocate for the program. Some providers feel there is no incentive to continue because they already have a quality program that parents value. In their view the time commitment and costs of Early Achievers are not worth it.

CCA of WA and its partners have conducted some public affairs and marketing work, however, staff and providers report that more is needed.

Recommendations

Below are some recommendations based on the evaluation's conclusions that CCA of WA and its partners should consider for improving Early Achievers services.

Services for providers:

1. Continue to work with program partners to strengthen program marketing, public education, and information for families.
2. Continue to explore ways to help providers understand how the ERS, CLASS and Quality Standards can be applied in a variety of settings, especially family child care as well as Montessori settings.
3. Continue to work with staff and providers to identify how provider rating results information can be further improved to strengthen provider understanding.
4. Develop additional supports to help providers prepare Files of Supporting Materials for initial rating, and maintain them during coaching.
5. Explore options for connecting child care directors with training in business management and leadership.

Services for region staff:

6. Provide additional guidance for coaches to help providers with different circumstances or goals, such as those who want to maintain their level or work to re-rate at a higher level.
7. Provide additional tools for coaches to help providers with sustaining quality practices throughout the coaching time period, especially with the File of Supporting Materials and tools to maintain practices through provider staff and director turnover.
8. Continue to monitor caseload management, staff assignment practices, and workload levels, to ensure that service quality is maintained.

Child Care Attendance Policy

Section 13(5)(a) of the Early Start Act requires DEL to provide recommendations to the legislature on child attendance policies pertaining to the working connections child care program and the early childhood education and assistance program. The recommendations should include the following:

- (i) Allowable periods of child absences;
- (ii) Required contact with parents or caregivers to discuss child absences and encourage regular program attendance; and
- (iii) A de-enrollment procedure when allowable child absences are exceeded.

The intent of this requirement is to resolve two separate concerns:

- That families and providers are motivated to encourage stable attendance of children in child care and/or preschool.
- That the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program strike the appropriate balance between adequately compensating providers for their costs when a child calls in absent and not paying for too many “vacant” slots that could be better utilized by another child and family.

Stable attendance is important for the continuity of care for children – children thrive when they can establish stable relationships with caring adults. Additionally, regular attendance in child care and preschool may be predictors of reduced absenteeism in the school-age years.

Recommendations:

1. Continue requiring ECEAP providers to follow an attendance policy.
Status: This is in place now and addresses requirements i, ii, and iii above.
Current ECEAP Performance Standard B-112 Attendance states:
 - Contractors must maintain records of children’s attendance in ECEAP classes.
 - If a contractor’s average daily attendance falls below 85% for any month, contractors must analyze the causes and patterns of absenteeism and develop a plan to improve attendance.
 - Contractors must retain attendance records at least three years after their completion.
 - If any child has three or more consecutive absences and staff are not aware of the reasons, staff must contact the family to offer support and help address obstacles to attendance.
 - If these absences continue after intensified family support, the slot must be considered vacant and offered to a family on the waiting list.
2. Develop and implement an attendance policy as part of the Early Achiever requirements for participating providers.
Status: This is being developed as part of the standards alignment and progression work that DEL is currently undertaking. The child care-based policy will be adapted from the existing ECEAP policy and will also address the three requirements listed above.

Adequately compensating providers for the care they provide to children enrolled in WCCC requires the state allow providers to charge for days they planned the child to be in attendance when he/she does not show up due to illness, vacation, or some other reason. In the private sector, for example, families often pay a flat rate for the child care they plan to use, whether they actually attend or not. The state has not moved to such an “enrollment-based” funding model, but does recognize a need to compensate providers for their fixed costs, to a point.

The current absent day payment policy allows providers to bill up to a full month of eligible days for any child who was in attendance at least one day in that month. Under the 12-month authorization rule established in the Early Start Act, this would imply that a provider could be paid for a full year of child care for a child who attended only 12 days in the year – leaving that child care “seat” mostly vacant and unavailable to another child or family in need.

Recommendations:

3. Negotiate with the union representing licensed family home child care providers to establish an absent day billing policy that will leave fewer seats vacant and encourage attendance.
Status: DEL and SEIU 925 have come to a tentative agreement for the 2017-19 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) that provides a bank of 60 billable absent days per 12-month authorization, addressing requirement i above. This proposal will support providers who have to pay for costs when children do not attend, but does not allow for children to be chronically absent for multiple months. Implementation of the tentative agreement will also require that providers affirmatively claim absent days in their billing, and once system enhancement and rules are implemented to allow for this, DEL will have ready access to data on absent days providers bill. This CBA is currently under consideration for approval by the Legislature.
4. Implement a similar policy for licensed child care centers.
Implementation timelines both for Family Homes and Centers depend on system enhancements to the invoice (in all its forms) to allow providers to affirmatively claim absent days. These enhancements are expected to be online by July 1, 2017.

The recommendations above are centered largely on child care provider behavior. Although parents should be responsible for getting their children to care on a consistent basis, the state does not yet have a system for monitoring an attendance policy for children on subsidy. When an electronic time and attendance system is implemented in WCCC, DEL will have the ability to track attendance and absences billed by providers, and compare these to total hours the child is authorized to attend. This will allow the agency to fine-tune the attendance requirements in ECEAP and Early Achievers and consider an additional recommendation as to whether attendance history should be included as a factor in determining ongoing parent eligibility to participate in WCCC.

Caseload Forecast

The OFM Caseload Forecast Council tracks and forecasts paid households for the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program in consultation with a Technical Work Group comprised of representatives of OFM, Legislative Fiscal Committee Staff, DSHS and DEL. OFM's most recent caseload counts contains the following responsive data, among other data points:

For the month of November, 2016, WCCC caseload consisted of 30,364 paid households, including 3,094 also receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and 1,038 Child Only TANF households.

The most recent Council forecast was released in November 2016 and predicted caseload exceeding 33,000 paid households in March 2017.

A paid household is an eligible household with a provider authorized to receive payment who receives payment for services. The Caseload Forecast Council also tracks households that are not paid but may become paid in the future. They include eligible households with a provider authorized to receive payment who has not yet submitted an invoice (authorized without warrant) and households that are eligible for WCCC but do not have a provider authorized to receive payment (eligible but not authorized).

- **Authorized without warrant:** As of November 2016 (the most recent month for which almost all warrants would likely have been submitted) 2,817 households were eligible and had an authorized provider who had not submitted an invoice for that month. This is not inconsistent with previous observations.
- **Eligible but not authorized:** As of November 2016, 3,793 WCCC households were eligible but had no authorized provider. Implementation of 12-month eligibility for WCCC in July 2017, along with change in DSHS practice in Spring 2015²⁸, likely contribute to the observed increase in this number in 2017, up from 3,157 in September 2016. DSHS is currently analyzing data from a survey of families in this category completed in January 2017 to determine if the lack of authorization reflects lack of access to licensed childcare. While this analysis will be helpful in understanding family needs, the 2017 changes in policy and practice will not allow DEL and DSHS to determine whether the number of households in this category is actually increasing until a full year of data are available under the new policies/practices.

²⁸ Now counting families as eligible even if no authorization received, whereas previously families would not have been counted among eligible if no authorization was received within 30 days.