

FINAL BILL REPORT

2SHB 2964

C 265 L 06

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Creating the department of early learning.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Kagi, Talcott, Walsh, Quall, Haler, Shabro, Fromhold, Kessler, Hunt, Appleton, Lantz, Darneille, Kenney, Chase, Hasegawa, Sells, Roberts, Hunter, Moeller, McCoy, Santos, Green and Simpson; by request of Governor Gregoire).

House Committee on Children & Family Services

House Committee on Appropriations

Senate Committee on Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education

Senate Committee on Ways & Means

Background:

Early learning and child care programs in Washington are administered or regulated by three state agencies. The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCEL) licenses child care homes and centers, develops policy and procedures for the Working Connections Child Care Program, and administers the Head Start Program. The Department of Community Trade and Economic Development (CTED) administers Washington's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) oversees child care and early learning programs, including special education for three- and four-year olds, programs promoting family literacy, and nutrition assistance for child care.

The Washington Early Learning Council (Council) was established in the 2005 legislative session for the purpose of providing vision, leadership, and direction to the improvement, realignment, and expansion of early learning programs and services for children from birth to five years of age. The goal of the Council is to build upon existing efforts and recommend new initiatives in order to better meet the early learning needs of children and their families. The Council also serves as the advisory committee for early learning under Washington Learns, Governor Gregoire's initiative to comprehensively examine all sectors of the state's education system. In December 2005, Washington Learns issued its first set of recommendations, including a recommendation for the creation of a cabinet-level department of early learning.

Summary:

The Department of Early Learning (Department) is established as an executive branch agency whose director is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Governor subject to confirmation by the Senate. The Department's primary duties are to implement early learning policy, to coordinate, consolidate, and integrate child care and early learning programs to

promote an efficient use of funds. The Director of the Department will actively participate in a non-governmental public-private partnership focused on supporting government's investments in early learning and promoting school readiness and success.

Early Learning Defined

"Early learning" is defined to include: programs and services for child care; state, federal, private, and nonprofit preschools; child care subsidies; child care resource and referral; parent education and support; and training and professional development for early learning professionals. The Department's early learning programs must be designed to respect and preserve the ability of parents and legal guardians to direct the education and development of their children.

Transfer of Programs and Functions

The following programs and functions within the DSHS, OSPI, and CTED are transferred to the Department:

- child care licensing and quality;
- child care tiered reimbursement system;
- child care career and wage ladder;
- Child Care Partnership employer liaison;
- Child Care Resource and Referral Network;
- Early Childhood Education Assistance Program;
- Head Start collaboration;
- Early Learning Reading Initiative; and
- Working Connections Child Care.

The income eligibility determination and provider payment functions for Working Connections child care will remain with the Economic Services Administration within the DSHS. Beginning in the 2007-2009 biennium, spending authority for Working Connections Child Care moneys will be transferred from the DSHS to the Department. Appropriations and staff associated with the programs listed, except appropriations for the DSHS, will be transferred to the Department. Appropriations for the programs transferred from the DSHS to the Department will be transferred through interagency agreement.

Reports, Studies, and Evaluation

By November 15, 2006, in collaboration with the Early Learning Council, the Department will make recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor regarding:

- (1) coordination and collaboration with K-12 and other education programs at state and local levels;
- (2) practices to encourage local and community public-private partnerships;
- (3) the Department's relationship with the statewide public-private partnership;
- (4) the Department's internal governance; and
- (5) transition of any additional programs and responsibilities.

Every two years the Department must report to the Governor and the Legislature regarding the effectiveness of its programs in improving early childhood education. The first report must include program objectives and identified performance measures for evaluating progress, and a

plan for commissioning a longitudinal study comparing the kindergarten readiness of children participating in the Department's programs with the readiness of other children.

By July 10, 2010, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee must evaluate the implementation and operation of the Department to assess the extent to which:

- (1) services and programs that previously were administered separately have been effectively integrated;
- (2) reporting and monitoring activities have been consolidated and made more efficient;
- (3) consolidation has resulted in administrative efficiencies within the Department;
- (4) child care and early learning services are improved;
- (5) subsidized child care is available;
- (6) subsidized child care is affordable;
- (7) the Department has been an effective partner in the public-private partnership;
- (8) procedures have been put in place to respect parents and legal guardians and to provide them the opportunity to participate in the development of policies and program decisions affecting their children; and
- (9) the degree and methods by which the Department conducts parent outreach and education.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	79	19	
Senate	47	2	(Senate amended)
House	81	15	(House concurred)

Effective: July 1, 2006