

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6532

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As of January 30, 2012

**Title:** An act relating to improving quality in early learning programs.

**Brief Description:** Implementing a voluntary quality rating and improvement system for child care centers and early learning programs.

**Sponsors:** Senators Frockt, Litzow and Harper.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/30/12.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

**Staff:** Lidia Mori (786-7755)

**Background:** In 2007 the Legislature required the Department of Early Learning (DEL) to implement a voluntary quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) for licensed or certified child care centers, homes, and early education programs in collaboration with community and statewide partners, subject to the availability of funds.

The stated purpose of QRIS is to:

- provide parents with information about the quality of child care and early education programs;
- support improvements in early learning programs throughout the state;
- increase the readiness of children for school; and
- close the disparity in access to quality care.

Prior to the final implementation of QRIS, DEL must report to the appropriate policy and fiscal committees of the Legislature.

For two years, child care providers in five communities around the state have participated in the development of Washington's QRIS. An evaluation of the model showed the quality of care increases quickly when there is one-on-one coaching and funding support. The federal Office of Child Care recognizes QRIS as an important strategy not only to increase child care quality but to align early learning programs including licensed child care, Head Start and state pre-kindergarten programs.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Summary of Bill:** The Legislature finds that a two-year field test of a voluntary QRIS has prepared Washington to begin statewide implementation of such a system to the extent funds are available. The Legislature finds that all parents need better information when choosing quality child care and that license child care providers need support, training, and incentives to improve the quality of child care they offer.

DEL must implement QRIS for licensed and certified child care centers, homes, and other early learning programs as determined by DEL, subject to the availability of funds. QRIS must focus on participation of all programs with targeted strategies for increasing participation and quality of programs serving low-income children. The objectives of QRIS are to:

- increase the readiness of children for school;
- give families clear and easily accessible information about the quality of early learning and school-age programs;
- support improvement in child care throughout the state above the minimum safety and health standards required for child care licensure;
- promote access to quality early learning programs for all children; and
- promote and support professional development and training for early learning and school-age care professionals.

When QRIS is fully implemented, DEL assigns ratings to participating early learning programs founded on research-based voluntary quality rating and improvement program standards which include:

- child outcomes;
- facility curriculum and learning environment;
- professional development and training; and
- family engagement and partnership.

DEL must partner, to the extent funds are available, with community-based organizations, higher education, and other key stakeholders to provide:

- supports and incentives to voluntary QRIS participants including highly trained coaches with expertise in early childhood development, professional development, training and facility improvement grants;
- professional development, training, and higher education opportunities, including scholarships, linked to a career pathway in early childhood education for participating program staff and directors;
- supports that expand family engagement and understanding of quality early childhood education while respectful of the diversity of families and children with special needs;
- incentives for early learning professionals for the attainment of training and education; and
- increased child care assistance reimbursement rates and payments that reflect the cost of quality programs for participants.

The effectiveness of QRIS must be evaluated every three years by DEL and the evaluation report must be publicly available. By December 2015 DEL must make recommendations to the Legislature about adding additional incentives to support compensation increases based on facility rating. In addition, DEL must, in consultation with constituents, develop a plan for full inclusion of licensed and certified school-age programs serving children ages 5-12

years in the voluntary QRIS. Program ratings must be reported on a publicly accessible website and DEL must partner with the child care resource and referral agency or other entities to increase parent awareness about QRIS and its potential to improve child care quality; help parents make child care decisions that meet family needs; and support the school readiness of their children.

Implementation of QRIS does not change the responsibility of DEL to collectively bargain over mandatory subjects.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 27, 2012.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.