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**Early Learning & Human Services  
Committee**

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**2SSB 5595**

**Brief Description:** Concerning child care reform.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Billig, Litzow, Darneille, Fain, Hargrove, McAuliffe, Harper, Nelson, Hobbs, Mullet, Frockt, Cleveland, Rolfes, Kohl-Welles, Shin, Kline and Conway).

**Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill**

- Defines the goals and each of the five levels of the Early Achievers Program.
- Outlines a Child Care Consumer and Provider Bill of Rights.
- Creates a legislative task force to examine certain components of the Working Connections Child Care program.
- Incorporates recommendations from the Aclara Report into statute.

**Hearing Date:** 3/26/13

**Staff:** Lindsay Lanham (786-7120).

**Background:**

The Working Connections Child Care Program (WCCC) provides subsidies to child care providers serving families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line. Parents are also expected to make a copayment based upon income and household size. While the Department of Early Learning (DEL) has the authority to establish and implement policies in the WCCC, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) has the responsibility for verifying a families' eligibility to receive the WCCC subsidies.

The WCCC is often associated with Washington's WorkFirst program and is intended to support parents who are working, attending training, or enrolling in educational programs outside the

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home. Not all families receiving the WCCC benefits participate in Workfirst activities. For example, a parent under 22 years of age may be eligible for the WCCC benefits, if the parent is enrolled in a high school development program. Children of families receiving the WCCC benefits are required to be less than 13 years of age, or less than 19 years of age and have a verified special need or be under court supervision.

In 2007 Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5828 established the Early Achievers program, which is Washington State's quality rating and improvement system. The program was developed by the DEL and the University of Washington. Early Achievers establishes a common set of expectations and standards that define, measure, and improve the quality of early learning settings. All the WCCC providers have the option of participating in the Early Achievers program.

The DEL and the DSHS contracted with the Aclara Group to evaluate the WCCC eligibility system. The Aclara Group provided its report to the DEL and the DSHS on October 31, 2012. Utilizing the lens of lean management, an evaluation was conducted to identify the gaps in the system and provide a list of recommendations that if adopted may improve efficiency of eligibility processes, enhance cost effectiveness, and improve parental access to the WCCC.

#### **Summary of Bill:**

The Early Achievers program is defined in statute to accomplish the following goals: provide parents with clear and easily accessible information about the quality of child care and early education programs; improve early learning programs throughout Washington; increase school readiness for children; close the disparity between segments of the population with regard to access to quality child care; and establish a uniform set of expectations and standards that define, measure, and improve the quality of early learning environments. It is established that the Early Achievers program has five levels of quality standards and each level is defined. All licensed child care providers are eligible to participate, but participation is voluntary.

A child care consumer and provider bill of rights is detailed and includes requirements such as timeframes for returning phone calls, electronic submission of forms, and professionalism training for employees. The DEL must also convene a parent and provider oversight board. A legislative task force is also created to examine the tiered reimbursement model, child care enrollment procedures, and eligibility requirement rules.

Finally, the DEL and the DSHS must incorporate some of the recommendations from the Aclara into practice by December 2013. Specifically, the DEL and the DSHS must eliminate the current custody and visitation policy, create broad authorization categories, eliminate the activity schedule and reduce the number of minor changes that families are required to report, and clarify and simplify the requirement to count child support as income.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.