

SENATE BILL REPORT

2SHB 1723

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, March 27, 2013
Ways & Means, April 9, 2013

Title: An act relating to expanding and streamlining early learning services and programs.

Brief Description: Concerning early learning opportunities.

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Kagi, Walsh, Farrell, Maxwell, Roberts, Freeman, Goodman, Sawyer, Sullivan, Jinkins, Seaquist, Lytton, Haigh, Hunter, Morrell, Sells, Ryu, Morris, McCoy, Reykdal, Tarleton, Tharinger, Pollet, Fey, Moscoso, Bergquist, Ormsby and Santos).

Brief History: Passed House: 3/06/13, 59-38.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 3/15/13, 3/27/13 [DPA-WM].
Ways & Means: 4/08/13, 4/09/13 [DPA, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Litzow, Chair; Dammeier, Vice Chair; McAuliffe, Ranking Member; Rolfes, Assistant Ranking Member; Billig, Brown, Cleveland, Fain, Hill, Mullet and Rivers.

Staff: Eric Wolf (786-7405)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Hill, Chair; Baumgartner, Vice Chair; Honeyford, Capital Budget Chair; Hargrove, Ranking Member; Nelson, Assistant Ranking Member; Bailey, Becker, Braun, Conway, Dammeier, Fraser, Hasegawa, Hatfield, Hewitt, Keiser, Kohl-Welles, Murray, Parlette, Ranker, Rivers, Schoesler and Tom.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Padden.

Staff: Jenny Greenlee (786-7711)

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.

Background: In Washington, there are several early learning, child care, and parent education programs. Each program has unique objectives, eligibility requirements, processes for enrollment, hours of operation, and funding streams.

Home visiting programs provide support and education to expectant parents and new families. Home visiting programs are voluntary and offer an array of in-person services to families based on the particular objectives of the program and needs of the family. There are several home visiting programs utilized in Washington. Nurse-Family Partnership and Parents as Teachers are two examples of home visiting programs.

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. 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 home. Not all families receiving WCCC benefits, however, participate in approved WorkFirst activities. For example, a parent under 22 years of age may be eligible for WCCC benefits for high school development. Children of families receiving WCCC benefits must 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.

The Washington State Preschool Program, or the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is an early learning program for children ages three to five years and who have not entered kindergarten. ECEAP provides preschool education, family support, and health and nutritional services to families at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty line.

In 2007, the Legislature supported the development of Early Achievers, which is Washington's quality rating and improvement system. Early Achievers establishes a common set of expectations and standards that define, measure, and improve the quality of early learning settings. Participation in Early Achievers is voluntary.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Amendments): Early Education Funding Technical Workgroup. A technical workgroup is established to examine federal and state early education funding streams and early education eligibility processes. The technical workgroup is charged with developing technical options for system designs that blend and braid federal and state funding streams for early learning programs.

Department of Early Learning (DEL) Responsibilities. DEL must apply data already collected comparing state-funded child care and preschool program compensation rates to market rates. DEL must report recommendations to the Legislature regarding compensation models that would attract and retain high-quality early learning professionals.

Home Visiting Services Account Funds. For all new funds appropriated for the specific purpose of home visiting and parent and caregiver support, DEL must also reserve at least 80 percent of the new funds and deposit those funds into the Home Visiting Services Account for home visiting, and up to 20 percent for parent or caregiver support. Home visiting services must include programs that serve families involved in the child welfare system.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments): The technical workgroup will be convened and staffed by the Legislature. A waiver is added for schools administering the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKids) to use up to three school days to meet with parents and families to fulfill parent involvement requirements. Removes language requiring DEL to annually compare child care subsidy rates and staff compensation to market rates. Reviews are replaced with a mandate to use existing data to compare compensation levels for state-funded programs to market rates and to make recommendations to the Legislature regarding compensation models. Adds reporting requirements for DEL related to the Race to the Top grant. Specifies that a mixed-delivery system must include alternative models for delivery including licensed centers and licensed family child care providers. Language regarding increasing subsidy rates and tiered subsidy rate enhancements for child care providers is stricken. Language regarding directing revenues from Initiative 502 to early learning is also removed.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments): A legislative taskforce on early learning is removed. A technical working group convened by DEL is directed to submit a report on early learning funding to the Legislature by December 31, 2013.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Second Substitute House Bill (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Early learning has been a focus of the Legislature for several years. The first three years of childhood development are critical for cognitive development. Many families with very young children utilize the state's various early education providers, and the state must fund these robustly to serve them. Early education of children makes them much more likely to successfully complete high school, avoid crime, and embark on a productive career. High-quality early learning programs are a proven method of preventing future crime. Using the revenue generated from recently legalized recreational marijuana purchases to fund early learning is a perfect diversion of money away from crime and into crime prevention. Dozens of studies show that early learning provides the greatest return on investment of all education reforms.

CON: There is virtually no empirical evidence to support the proposition that early learning leads to K-12 success. If DEL continues to expand, it will eliminate the ability of families to take care of their children at home. The opportunity gap is a result of deficiencies in the K-12 system, not the early education system. The Legislature has mistakenly decided that fixing early learning will fix the K-12 system.

OTHER: Indian tribes in Washington require additional flexibility, and will work with DEL in the future to address the needs of those communities. A member of a federally recognized tribe should be added to the legislative taskforce on early learning.

Persons Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education): PRO: Laura Wells, Kennewick Police Chief; Ken Hohenberg, King County Sheriff; John Urquhart, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; Jen Estroff, Children's Alliance, Early Learning Action Alliance; Ryan Pricco, Child Care Aware of WA; Frank Ordway, League of Education Voters; Elizabeth Grillet, citizen; Steve Leahy, America's Edge; Patrick Beehler, David Evans and Associates; Amy Blondin, DEL; Lynne Tucker, Schools Out WA.

CON: Gib Kocherans, Tim Benn, citizens.

OTHER: Lonnie Brown-Johns, American Indian Health Commission for WA State.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony as Amended by Early Learning & K-12 Education (Ways & Means): PRO: We learned so much about the importance of early learning in the last three years. This bill pulls all the elements of early learning together including preschool and child care. The majority of brain development happens from birth to age five. We are missing opportunities for low-income children to get access to high-quality early learning. This bill looks at how WCCC and preschool can be integrated and create efficiencies. The bill also supports high-risk parents with home visiting, which we know to be effective. This is a very good crime-prevention initiative. This bill helps families by expanding ECEAP, increasing the availability of child care, and creating higher quality child care. This bill builds on the existing early learning infrastructure. It benefits parents and children and the economy by helping provide child care to workers. The foundation the early learning system is built on is crumbling and this bill will help build it back up.

Persons Testifying (Ways & Means): PRO: Representative Kagi, prime sponsor; Laura Wells, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; Chief Robert Berg, Centralia Police Dept.; David Foster, YMCA; Donna Christensen, WA State Catholic Conference; Frank Ordway, League of Education Voters; Lori Pfingst, Center on Budget and Policy; Lani Todd, Service Employees International Union 925.