

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5904

As Passed Senate, April 19, 2013

Title: An act relating to high quality early learning.

Brief Description: Concerning high quality early learning.

Sponsors: Senators Hill, Hargrove, Litzow and Billig.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Ways & Means: 4/10/13, 4/11/13 [DP, DNP].
Passed Senate: 4/19/13, 45-2.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: Do pass.

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, Parlette, Ranker, Rivers, Schoesler and Tom.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Padden.

Staff: Michael Bezanson (786-7449)

Background: The Legislature established the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) in 1985. ECEAP is a comprehensive preschool program that provides free services and support to children ages three and four, and families whose income is under 110 percent of the federal poverty level. ECEAP includes early learning preschool, family support, and child health coordination and nutrition.

In 2010, the Legislature passed Second Substitute House Bill 2731, which established an early learning program for low-income and at-risk children ages three and four. It required the use of ECEAP as a starting point in 2011-12 school year, in terms of the number of funded slots and program standards. This legislation called for the phased implementation of an expanded program. Beginning in the 2018-19 biennium, the program must be statewide and serve any eligible child entitled to enroll.

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: During the 2013-15 biennium, ECEAP slots must be increased by 10 percent from 2011-13 levels and rates paid for these slots must also be increased by 10 percent from the 2011-13 levels. These increases are subject to amounts appropriated specifically for this purpose. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) must coordinate with the Office of Financial Management to develop an implementation plan for expanding the early learning program. This plan is due to the Legislature by September 30, 2013.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) will conduct a comprehensive retrospective outcome evaluation for ECEAP. This evaluation will assess short-term and long-term outcomes for the program. WSIPP will also review relevant research on components of successful early education program strategies. WSIPP will report to the Legislature by December 15, 2014.

RCWs 43.215.141 and 43.215.142, relating to expanding preschool, are recodified under the ECEAP sections within chapter 43.215.

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: OTHER: Thank you for recognizing the importance of early learning. DEL supports increases in quality and access to ECEAP. This bill puts a strong down payment on meeting the entitlement required by 2018. DEL already measures short-term outcomes and reports on these annually. Kids in the program make considerable gains while in ECEAP. DEL would like to work closely with WSIPP in designing the study to make sure there is an accurate control or comparison group. The need and capacity to expand are greater than the 10 percent increase in slots that is in this bill. The per-child rate increase is welcomed. Costs increased but the rate remains stagnant. There are concerns about the approaches to data and outcomes in the bill. ECEAP already provides outcome data, and longitudinal data is in the works. ECEAP already uses several evaluation tools. It would be good to figure out how to use existing tools to provide ongoing feedback, rather than investing in a one-time study.

Persons Testifying: OTHER: Amy Blondin, DEL; Jen Estroff, Children's Alliance.