

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1391

As Reported by House Committee On:
Human Services & Early Learning

Title: An act relating to implementing improvements to the early achievers program as reviewed and recommended by the joint select committee on the early achievers program.

Brief Description: Implementing improvements to the early achievers program as reviewed and recommended by the joint select committee on the early achievers program.

Sponsors: Representatives Senn, Dent, Eslick, Reeves, Pollet and Ortiz-Self.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Human Services & Early Learning: 1/23/19, 1/30/19 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Adjusts rating levels and associated deadlines for participants in the Early Achievers (EA) program.
- Directs the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to adopt policies related to providing incentives and removing barriers for child care and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program providers participating in the EA program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & EARLY LEARNING

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Senn, Chair; Callan, Vice Chair; Frame, Vice Chair; Dent, Ranking Minority Member; Eslick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; McCaslin, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Corry, Goodman, Griffey, Kilduff, Klippert, Lovick and Ortiz-Self.

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

Background:

Working Connections Child Care.

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.

Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) is a federally and state-funded program that offers subsidies to childcare providers serving families with an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). The state pays part of the cost of childcare when a parent is employed, self-employed, or meets the requirements for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or WorkFirst programs. The family is responsible for making a copayment to the childcare provider.

Facilities that have infants and toddlers receiving subsidy payments may be eligible for technical assistance through infant-toddler consultation.

Subsidy Rates.

Federal Child Care and Development Fund rules require states to conduct a statistically valid and reliable child care market rate survey every three years. The federal Administration of Children and Families advises states to set child care rates at the seventy-fifth percentile of the private market rate in order to ensure equal access for families with subsidized child care. Licensed family homes and child care centers are paid a full or half-day rate based on the age of the child, region, and setting.

An enhanced special needs rate is provided for children who need a higher level of care in the child care setting. The child must have a verified physical, mental, emotional, or behavioral condition that requires a higher level of care.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the state's voluntary preschool program. Three and 4-year-olds from families with incomes at or below 110 percent of the FPL are eligible for the ECEAP. Children with special needs or certain risk factors are also eligible to enroll, regardless of income.

In 2014 the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) conducted a retrospective evaluation of the ECEAP. The WSIPP found that the ECEAP has a positive impact on third, fourth, and fifth grade test scores.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) has developed a pathway for licensed or certified child care centers and homes to administer the ECEAP. The pathway includes accommodations for these providers to rate at a Level 4 or 5 in the Early Achievers (EA) program in order to qualify as ECEAP providers.

Early Achievers.

The EA program is Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System for child care and early learning.

The DCYF administers the EA program. The quality of care is assigned a rating on a scale of 1-5, with Level 1 being the minimum requirements for licensing, and Level 5 being the highest possible level of quality. Participation in the EA program is mandatory for all providers serving non-school-age children and accepting state subsidy payments.

Rating Levels and Deadlines.

The EA rating system has a total of 100 possible points that participants can earn. To rate at

a Level 3, participants must earn 30-69 points. To rate at a Level 4, participants must earn 70-90 points. To rate at a Level 5, participants must earn 91-100 points.

Providers accepting subsidy must rate at specific levels by certain deadlines, as shown in the table below:

Provider Type		Rating Level Deadlines
Child care provider	Currently accepting subsidy	Level 3 or higher by December 31, 2019.
	Newly enrolled in EA	Level 3 or higher within 30 months of enrollment.
ECEAP provider	Currently providing ECEAP services	Must have rated at a Level 4 or higher by March 1, 2016.
	Newly enrolled in EA	Level 4 or higher within 12 months of enrollment.
	Child care provider newly enrolled as ECEAP provider	Level 4 or higher within 18 months of the start of the ECEAP contract.

If a child care provider accepting subsidy does not meet the rating deadline, the provider must complete remedial activities and rate at a Level 3 or higher within six months of beginning remedial activities.

Ratings are valid for three years, at which time a provider's rating must be renewed. A provider may request a re-rating outside of the regular rating and renewal cycle. The DCYF may charge a fee for a re-rating.

Provider Reimbursement and Incentives.

Tiered reimbursement: Participants can earn an increase to their subsidy base rate based on EA rating levels. This is referred to as tiered reimbursement. The following percentages are applied to the authorized base subsidy rates based on the rating level and licensed setting:

Increases to subsidy base rates by Early Achievers rating level and provider type		
	Child Care Center	Licensed Family Home
Level 2	2%	2%
Level 3	4%	10%
Level 4	10%	15%
Level 5	15%	20%

Professional development, coaching, and technical assistance: An objective of the EA program is to provide professional development and coaching opportunities to child care and early learning providers. Participants have access to training opportunities and education

scholarships and grants to use towards bachelor degrees, associate degrees, and Early Childhood Education certificates.

Each participant is assigned a coach who provides technical assistance and helps the participant prepare for the EA rating process.

Quality Improvement Awards and needs-based grants:

- Quality Improvement Awards (QIA) may be awarded annually to providers. To be eligible, at least 5 percent of the children served by the provider must be receiving subsidy. The QIA must be used toward achievement of quality improvement goals outlined in a quality improvement plan. The QIA range from \$5,000 to \$9,000 for centers, and \$1,000 to \$2,750 for family home providers.
- Needs-based grants are available to assist providers at Level 2 with purchasing curriculum development, instructional materials, supplies, and equipment to improve program quality. Priority for the needs-based grants must be given to culturally diverse and low-income providers. A child care center may receive up to \$1,000, and a family home child care provider may receive up to \$750.

Joint Select Committee on the Early Achievers Program.

The Legislature established the Joint Select Committee on the EA program (Committee) to review the demand and availability of various types of child care and early learning programs and make recommendations related to the EA program. In January 2019 the Committee issued a final report and adopted recommendations.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Rating Levels and Deadlines.

The DCYF must create an intermediate rating level that is between a Level 3 and a Level 4 and serves to assist participants in transitioning to Level 4.

A re-rating must reset the rating cycle timeline for participants. The DCYF must prioritize re-ratings for providers rated at a Level 2 and for providers rated at a Level 3 who are seeking to become ECEAP providers.

Rating deadlines for child care providers are adjusted as follows:

- A child care provider currently accepting subsidy must rate or request to be rated at a Level 3 by December 31, 2019, rather than be rated at a Level 3 by this date.
- A provider who does not meet this deadline must complete remedial activities and rate at or request to be rated at a Level 3 within 12 months, rather than six months.
- A new child care provider accepting subsidy must rate or request to be rated at a Level 3 within 30 months of enrollment, rather than be rated at a Level 3 by this date.

If a provider does not meet these deadlines, they are no longer eligible to receive state subsidy.

Rating requirements for ECEAP providers are adjusted as follows:

- A new ECEAP provider must rate at Level 4 or 5 within 24 months of enrollment rather than 12 months.
- A child care provider who is administering the ECEAP must rate at a Level 4 or 5 within 24 months of the start date of the ECEAP contract, rather than 18 months.
- When an ECEAP in good standing changes classroom locations and moves to a comparable or improved space within the same facility, a re-rating is not required outside of the regular rating cycle.
- When an ECEAP in good standing moves to a new facility, the provider must notify the DCYF of the move within six months in order to retain their existing rating. The EA program must conduct an observational visit to ensure the new classroom space is of comparable or improved environmental quality. If a provider fails to notify the DCYF within six months of the move, the EA rating must be changed to "Participating, Not Yet Rated," and the provider will cease to receive tiered reimbursement incentives until a new rating is completed.

Provider Reimbursement and Incentives.

The DCYF must consider using the intermediate level between Level 3 and 4, incentives, and front-end funding to develop multiple pathways for child care providers interested in providing the ECEAP.

Needs-based grants may be used for environmental improvements of early learning facilities and focused-infant toddler improvements. Needs-based grants are not limited to providers rated at a Level 2.

The DCYF must adopt the following administrative policies in the EA program:

- Consider child care provider schedules and needs and allow flexibility when scheduling data collection and rating visits.
- Eliminate rating scale barriers and weight EA points to incentivize infant and toddler care.
- Remove barriers to timely approvals for one-on-one behavioral support assistants when requested by a provider.
- Require trauma informed care training for raters and coaches.
- Provide continuous and robust post-rating feedback to providers.

By December 1, 2019, the DCYF must:

- deliver a plan to the Governor and the Legislature to pay providers an enhanced rate, award additional EA points, and create a corresponding trauma-informed care designation for providers serving behaviorally challenged children; and
- submit recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature related to paying child care providers a set monthly subsidy rate, rather than a daily rate.

Other Provisions.

By December 1, 2019, the DCYF must submit a detailed plan to implement a robust cross-accreditation process with multiple pathways that allows a provider to earn equivalent EA credit resulting from accreditation by high quality national organizations.

The DCYF must propose recommendations by December 1, 2019, for mitigating the "cliff effect" for child care subsidy consumers. The recommendations must consider how to

further develop and implement a sliding scale or tiered reimbursement and phase-out model that works for consumers and providers, whether or not changing the eligibility threshold for the WCCC would allow parents to grow professionally without losing affordable child care, and whether further graduation of the copay scale would help alleviate the cliff that occurs at subsidy cutoff.

The WSIPP must update the outcome evaluation of the ECEAP published in 2014 by examining the short and long-term impacts on program participants, including high school graduation rates. The evaluation is due by December 31, 2021.

Outdated statutory references are corrected.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill:

- provides that a re-rating must reset the rating cycle timeline for participants, rather than describing a re-rating as a renewal;
- requires the DCYF to submit a detailed plan to the Governor and the Legislature by December 1, 2019, to implement a cross-accreditation process, rather than implementing the process by that date;
- requires an ECEAP provider who moves to a new facility to notify the DCYF of the move within six months in order to retain their existing rating. The EA program must conduct an observational visit to ensure the new classroom space is of comparable or improved quality. If the ECEAP provider fails to notify the DCYF in a timely manner, the EA rating must be changed from the posted rating level to "Participating, Not Yet Rated," and the provider will cease to receive tiered reimbursement incentives until a new rating is completed;
- removes references to completing Level 2 activities prior to rating at or requesting to be rated at a Level 3;
- provides that if a provider who is required to rate or request to be rated at a Level 3 by December 1, 2019, does not meet this deadline or the associated deadline related to remedial activities, the provider is no longer eligible to receive state subsidy; and
- removes the limitation of needs-based grants to Level 2 providers and allows needs-based grants to be used for environmental improvements and focused infant-toddler improvements.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 18, 2019.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Increasing base rates of subsidy to at least 75 percent of market and establishing a stable monthly subsidy rate will help providers who are losing money accepting families on subsidy. The 3.5 rating level will break up the 40-point range in level 3, and narrowing the rating window will be helpful. Centers only have four block-out days, unlike family homes which have 10 block-out days. Allowing a reasonable timeframe when a re-rate is needed, when a provider moves to a new facility, should be considered. Pushing deadlines out will help coaches and providers. Requiring that 75 percent of providers be rated at a Level 3 before a deadline is put in place should be considered. This will make EA more practical for providers and effective for families being served. Needs-based grants are needed for setting up infant rooms. Efforts to mitigate the subsidy benefits cliff will be helpful and provide greater stability. Rates should be at the seventy-fifth percentile of market for both early learning and before-and-after school programming, and rate increases will allow programs to attract and retain qualified staff. Providers need support to serve our children and need reasonable caseloads. Trauma-informed care is a huge need in the field to support providers who need individualized training. Another joint select committee should meet in a few years to look at workforce, affordability, and accessibility as EA is rolled out. Private schools want to open their doors to low-income families, and the only way to do that is to allow them to use their existing accreditation and crosswalk that with EA requirements. The use of contracted slots in working connections child care to further incentivize providers to take subsidy kids should be considered.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Senn, prime sponsor; Julie Schroath, Washington Childcare Centers Association; Pauli Owen, Service Employees International Union 925; Sandra Best, Best Daycare; David Foster, Washington State Alliance of Young Men's Christian Association; Nicole Rose, Department of Children, Youth, and Families; Allison Krutsinger, Children's Alliance; Suzie Hanson, Washington Federation of Independent Schools; and Ryan Pricco, Child Care Aware of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.