
Human Services & Early Learning Committee

2SSB 5437

Brief Description: Expanding eligibility to the early childhood education and assistance program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Wilson, C., Palumbo, Wellman, Hunt, Saldaña, Nguyen, Randall, Das, Billig, Mullet, Darneille, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Kuderer and Takko; by request of Office of the Governor).

Brief Summary of Second Substitute Bill

- Allows the enrollment of a child in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) who has a family income above 110 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) but less than or equal to 200 percent of the FPL.
- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families to plan for the implementation of a birth to three ECEAP pilot project.

Hearing Date: 3/15/19

Staff: Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

Background:

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the state's voluntary preschool program for 3 and 4 year olds. The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) administers the ECEAP.

Eligibility.

Children are eligible for the state-supported ECEAP who are eligible for special education due to a disability or are from a family with an income at or below 110 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). Up to 10 percent of the total enrollment in the state-supported program may consist of children who are eligible based on other criteria adopted in rule. Priority for enrollment must

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be given to children from families with the lowest incomes, children in foster care, or eligible families with multiple needs.

Entitlement.

State funding for the ECEAP is phased in yearly, and eligible children may be admitted to the extent the state provides funds for the program. Full statewide implementation is required by the 2022-23 school year, when any eligible child will be entitled to enroll in the state-supported ECEAP.

Additional Enrollments.

As space is available, the DCYF may allow up to 25 percent of the total statewide ECEAP enrollment to consist of children who have family incomes above 110 percent of the FPL. These children must be either homeless, or impacted by specific developmental or environmental risk factors that are linked by research to school performance. Within this group, priority must be given to children experiencing homelessness, child welfare system involvement, or a developmental delay or disability that does not meet the eligibility criteria for special education. Children included in the ECEAP under these eligibility criteria are not considered part of the state-funded entitlement.

HeadStart and Early Head Start.

HeadStart (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) programs are federally funded early learning programs. The HS program serves 3 and 4 year olds, and the EHS program serves pregnant women and infants and toddlers under the age of 3. The EHS program provides comprehensive support, including child development and family support services, designed to nurture healthy attachments between a child and his or her caregiver.

Early Achievers.

Early Achievers (EA) is Washington's quality rating and improvement system for child care and early learning. Participation in the EA program is mandatory for all providers serving non-school-age children and accepting state subsidy payments.

Preschool Development Grant.

In December 2018, the DCYF received a federal Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) award of \$5.3 million for planning and training activities related to integrating Washington's early learning system. Activities related to training providers for an early ECEAP pilot are allowed under the grant. The grant period ends December 30, 2019, at which time the state will have the opportunity to apply for a grant renewal.

Summary of Bill:

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program Enrollment.

As space is available, the DCYF may allow a child to be enrolled in the ECEAP who has a family income above 110 percent of the FPL but less than or equal to 200 percent of the FPL. Within this group:

- priority must be given first to children with incomes up to 130 percent of the FPL; and
- no more than 25 percent of total statewide enrollments may consist of children with family incomes above 130 percent of the FPL.

Children included in the ECEAP under these provisions must be enrolled, as space is available, according to a system of risk factors and priority points adopted by the DCYF in rule. The priority system must consider risk factors that have disproportionate effects on kindergarten readiness, including:

- homelessness;
- child welfare system involvement;
- a developmental delay or disability that does not meet the criteria for special education;
- domestic violence;
- English as a second language;
- expulsion from an early learning setting;
- a parent who is or has been incarcerated;
- a parent with a substance use disorder or mental health treatment need; and
- being an "Indian child" as defined in rule by the DCYF.

When developing the definition of the term "Indian child," the DCYF must consult with, and obtain the advice and consent of, the governing bodies of the state's federally recognized tribal nations. The DCYF must adopt the definition in rule by July 1, 2020.

The DCYF must continue to prioritize entitled children for enrollment.

Birth to Three Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program Pilot Project.

Within resources available under the federal PDG B-5 award, the DCYF must develop a plan for phased implementation of a birth to three ECEAP pilot project (pilot). Children eligible for the pilot must be under 3 years old and have a family income at or below 130 percent of the FPL. The DCYF must consider EHS rules and regulations when developing the pilot requirements and report to the Governor and the Legislature on any deviation from the EHS model.

Planning for the pilot must begin by January 1, 2020, and phased service delivery may begin after the DCYF has secured adequate funds to implement the pilot in at least 10 locations. Funds may include a combination of federal, state, or private sources. The DCYF may adopt rules to implement the pilot.

Upon securing adequate funds, the DCYF must begin delivering the pilot through child care centers and family home providers who meet minimum licensing standards and are enrolled in the EA program. The DCYF must attempt to select a combination of rural, urban, and suburban locations and must prioritize locations already operating an EHS, HS, or ECEAP program. The DCYF must determine minimum EA ratings scores for participating programs.

Beginning November 1, 2020, the DCYF must report annually to the Governor and the Legislature during pilot project activity. The report must include a status update that describes planning work completed, funds secured, and any implementation activities conducted. The report must also include a description of the participating programs and the number of children and families served.

Other.

Clarifying changes are made to the description of how ECEAP funds are distributed to contractors. The definition of "eligible child" for the ECEAP is modified, and eligibility for public assistance is removed as a qualifying criterion.

Obsolete statutory references are corrected.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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