

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5279

As of February 4, 2025

Title: An act relating to qualifications for child care providers.

Brief Description: Concerning qualifications for child care providers.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, C., Frame, Hasegawa, Krishnadasan, Nobles, Saldaña, Shewmake and Trudeau.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 2/04/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to allow licensed child care providers until at least August 1, 2028, to demonstrate experience-based competency as an alternative to an early childhood education (ECE) certificate.
- Expands the experience-based competency to positions that require an ECE state certificate, including child care center directors, assistant directors, and program supervisors.
- Directs DCYF to establish a process to proactively recognize the fulfillment of staff qualification requirements who has all of the criteria required for experience-based competency.
- Requires DCYF to convene a temporary stakeholder group to assist in identifying strategies to improve early learning and school-age staff qualification requirements and verification processes and report to the Legislature by December 1, 2026.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Ailey Kato (786-7434)

Background: Child Care Licensing. The secretary of the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) has the authority to adopt rules governing child care and early learning programs. In 2016, DCYF implemented a single set of licensing standards for child care and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), the state-funded voluntary preschool program for eligible children. These licensing standards had to:

- provide minimum licensing requirements for child care and preschool programs;
- rely on the standards established in Early Achievers, the state's quality rating and improvement system, to address quality issues;
- take into account the separate needs of family home providers, outdoor nature-based providers, and child care centers; and
- promote the continued safety of child care settings.

Staff Qualifications. In 2019, new staffing qualifications went into effect. DCYF rule sets out the general staff qualifications for various positions including family home licensee, child care center director and assistant directors, supervisors, lead teachers, and assistant teachers. These positions require various early childhood education (ECE) certificates or equivalents according to certain timelines.

In 2020, DCYF was directed to allow licensed child care providers until at least August 1, 2026, to comply with child care licensing rules that require an ECE initial certificate or short certificate, or complete community-based trainings.

Community-Based Training Pathway. In 2021, DCYF implemented a noncredit-bearing, community-based training pathway for licensed child care providers to meet professional education requirements known as Provider Access to Community Equivalent (PACE). The community-based training must include certain components including aligning with core competences for early learning professionals, available in multiple languages, include culturally relevant practices, and available at a low cost in rural and urban settings.

Experience-Based Competency. DCYF rule allows providers multiple options known as equivalents for meeting educational requirements. According to DCYF, equivalents include alternative credentials, PACE, and an experience-based competency demonstration. To be eligible for an experience-based competency, a person must have:

- active employment in an eligible job role;
- seven years of cumulative experience working in a licensed facility by August 1, 2026; and
- completed and maintained compliance through all seven years with certain health and safety trainings and child care basics training.

Currently, child care center directors, assistant directors, and program supervisors, who must have an ECE state certificate or equivalent, are not eligible for an experience-based competency.

Summary of Bill: Experience-Based Competency. DCYF must allow licensed child care providers until at least August 1, 2028, to demonstrate experience-based competency as an alternative means to comply with child care licensing rules that require a provider to hold an early childhood education initial, short, or state certificate. The provider must have the following documented in DCYF's electronic workforce registry:

- active employment in a position that requires a certificate;
- employment in a licensed or certified child care center or family home provider without a break in service since August 1, 2021, or a cumulative seven years of employment; and
- completion of and maintained compliance with all health and safety and child care or school-age care basics training required by DCYF.

DCYF must establish a process to proactively recognize fulfillment of staff qualification requirements for any provider who has, as of the effective date of this section, demonstrated all of the criteria required for experience-based competency. This process may not require providers meeting these criteria to submit an application, and DCYF must provide notice to providers who staff qualification requirements have been fulfilled through this process.

DCYF may establish more restrictive requirements for providers serving ECEAP. DCYF may also exclude experience-base competency from the calculation of Early Achievers professional development points.

Stakeholder Group. DCYF must convene a temporary stakeholder group to assist in identifying strategies to improve early learning and school-age staff qualification requirements and verification processes. The group must include certain members and must report to the Legislature by December 1, 2026, on identified strategies and DCYF's plans and timelines to carry out those strategies.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Childcare is in a crisis and providers are needed, so people can go back to work. This bill addresses one of the gaps for the workforce and honors providers' experience. Providers need more time and flexibility to meet the upcoming deadline for educational requirements. The work group would help identify efficiencies in child-care rules without compromising the safety of children.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Claire Wilson, Prime Sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.