

Notes from WSA Conference Call 2/13/08

Washington Head Start

The conference call is to get feedback about latest changes and to give you a sense of what will happen next.

HB 3168 passed unanimously out of the Appropriations committee, and should be heard on the floor on the House today. We're working to get a hearing in the Senate Early Learning and K-12 committee. That will be an opportunity to make any changes needed.

The other piece is the funding. HB 3168 is a policy bill that sets up a planning process for DEL to align the ECEAP standards with the Head Start standards, to look at some of the flexibility issues raised, etc. It is a planning bill. Separate from that is an effort to get 7.5 million in the supplemental for programs that are ready to go to test the proposal. The economic forecast is not good, so it makes it less likely to get big increases in ECEAP. We don't know how the budget will come out, but we will see fairly soon. Speaker Chopp and others are working to make sure that there is something there. The money could also be used to pilot an Early state head start program. There's some interest in that, it's just a question of whether there is enough money.

HB 3168 has changed since you saw it last.

- There was a concern from tribal programs in particular to make sure they were involved in the process and that standards be culturally appropriate. The bill has been changed to do that.
- There is also language for migrant families.
- The language is stronger regarding involvement of state ECEAP-only program. In the earlier version it said ECEAP-only programs must have representation, but the language is now stronger.
- As the planning goes along, the Federal Regional office will be part of the process.
- In response to the meeting with ECEAP-only providers, we added a reference to the importance of small rural programs and the flexibility that would be needed there.
- Leaves the state open to review the standards, including incorporating new innovations. We don't want to tie everything to Head Start – we want to adopt the standards that create the best outcomes, and incorporate any improvements that come out of the Thrive by Five sites.
- Includes a list of areas of flexibility that need to be addressed.

Wendy Shuell – question about what transportation flexibility means.

Joel – many ECEAP programs use school district transportation, and it could be very costly and add little benefit to families.

Dorlan Hergesheimer – Transportation standards are federal standards, not Head Start standards per se. They apply to school districts and public transit.

Wendy Shuell – She’s confused by that – school district standards are not as onerous as for Head Start. They follow the OSPI standards. Nancy Leidke agrees with this.

Joel thinks it’s a Head start-centric program. Some programs have waivers from their HS Regional office. In terms of the state ECEAP program, we would like to allow some flexibility in this area.

Nancy Leidke – re: Delivery methods. When we have locally designed programs, like one serving more than one population (developmentally disabled, eceap, etc)

Joel – We proposed that as an amendment, and the staff felt that was included in the language already. We sent them a package of proposed amendments based on the meeting with ECEAP-only providers.

Sandra Szambelan – will areas that can’t make some of these standards without a waiver not be eligible for the increased vendor rate? Will we be left out of the funding process if we can’t meet the performance standards by virtue of where they are located or other issues?

Joel – We’ll need to give that more thought. We don’t want to automatically put in the dually-funded programs and make everyone else wait, since it wouldn’t be fair. I’ll talk more with the staff about how that might work.

Rick Garza – Will there be money right away for some ECEAP programs to move to Head Start standards?

Joel – We don’t know what will end up in the budget. We might just get the planning bill passed. If we get some funding, we need to explore further how that initial money would be distributed.

Wendee – will we be able to take part in the planning process?

Joel – There was a fiscal note attached to the bill to fund the DEL for the planning process, and that will include getting people together to figure out how this would work. We’ll probably be lucky to get a couple million dollars out of this session to start the planning. It will be a lot of work.

Laurie - Is the language strong enough that DEL will be required to listen to us, directors? We’ve seen the department make decisions without consulting providers.

Joel - The language right now is tilted more toward ECEAP-only providers, and he's been a little hesitant to put our association in the legislation as a part of this. I would assume we would have a role, with our members. I wanted to make sure that those with the most concerns about it had a seat at the table. If you send suggested language, we might be able to get it in. There is some concern from the ECEAP-only providers that worry that the process would be weighted too much toward HS. There's still time for amendments.

When would we be obligated to start?

Joel - you'd be obligated once the plan was complete, and the resources were found.

Wendy Roedell - Head Start funding has lagged and many programs are having trouble making ends meet. Have you thought about whether this is a risk to tie ECEAP to the Head Start standards?

Joel - Part of the bill and the planning would address the parity issues in funding, and state-funded programs would have flexibility. We're still going to have to go to DC and Olympia every year about funding, but it's a fight worth winning.

Cathy Garland - this helps us build one framework and work together to reach out and serve more children over time. Next week talking to our Senators will be important.

Joel encouraged everyone to make appointments with their Senators to talk about the bill and the funding too.