

A New Model for Improving the Quality of Care and Early Learning in Child Care Centers



Early learning staff seek to establish an all-inclusive, statewide Association with bargaining rights to represent their interests with the State, raise standards and improve the quality of early learning and care.



An Early Learning Professional Association bargaining unit would include:

- **Early learning staff employed at all licensed child care centers** serving state-subsidized children, including those that are non-profit and for-profit.
- **Employees of these centers who provide direct care**, including directors, teachers, assistants and others.

Association bargaining will create a platform for early learning staff to negotiate with the state over:

- **State subsidy rates** – including implementation, incentives, and all other economic issues.
- **Wage progression linked to educational attainment.** To achieve excellence, early learning staff must be both well educated and well compensated.
- **Quality and professional training and standards.**
- **Health care and other employee benefits** to attract and retain a quality workforce

This act would:

- Amend the 2006 Family Child Care Act
- Build consistent quality in child care centers
- Allow center directors and workers to bargain with the state over those areas over which the state has purview.

This act would:

- Not deal with daily working conditions
- Not involve the union in any hiring or firing decisions
- Not allow workers to strike
- Not interfere with parents' rights or choices
- Not cover child care centers operated by any government agency

This approach addresses challenges unique to early learning: Child care is a universal public good that is licensed, regulated, and often subsidized by the state, yet child care services are provided almost entirely by small business and voluntary agencies in the private sector. Our approach lets us directly address the challenge of quality improvements in this arena because it:

- Consolidates a dispersed workforce in a fragmented industry (2,200 centers; for-profit & non-profit; stand-alone/multi-site).
- Builds upon similar models used in home care, family child care, and adult family homes in Washington State.
- Allows the state to address workforce issues in diverse settings and to interact coherently with private sector service providers.
- Creates a process for early learning staff to democratically develop and unite around a common agenda.
- Precludes engagement over traditional topics of workplace-level bargaining, thus avoiding employee-employer conflict as well as conflict with federal labor law.