



FAQs about [House Bill 2448](#) (High Quality Early Learning Act of 2012)

This bill will establish universal voluntary early learning for 3- and 4- year olds in Washington, with concurrent targeted focus on birth to three programs.

Question: Who will be eligible to provide services for the program for 3- and 4- year olds?

Answer: The bill states in Section 2, subsection 3 (a) that:

“Eligible providers may include, but are not limited to, nonprofit, profit, and faith-based organizations; licensed child care centers and family homes; private schools; school districts; educational service districts; community and technical colleges; local governments; tribes; and tribal organizations.”

This bill is about increasing access to high-quality early learning for as many children as possible. Early Learning Action Alliance wants that to be through a system that encourages parent choice and services that are culturally relevant. We are working on stronger language in the bill around a mixed delivery system that includes a range of providers that includes goals for proportions of community-based providers in the system and a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process for with contract selection panels that include a diverse range of providers, underrepresented communities, and other experts.

Question: With the recent Washington Supreme Court decision in the McLeary case, how can we afford to focus on early learning?

Answer: We can't afford not to. We need to revolutionize our thinking about the needs of tomorrow's kids, who have been poorly served by yesterday's systems. The best time to make a significant contribution to effective financial management of our state's constitutional obligation to K-12 is to support kids' healthy development before they enter the classroom. We know the McLeary ruling will necessitate significant investments; we need to spend money upfront so we spend less in K-12. Research shows that **high-quality PreK saves school districts about \$3,700 per child** over the course of the K-12 years. Children who attend PreK have increased K-12 achievement and decreased rates of special education placement and grade repetition. Additionally, there is \$1,000 in savings per preschooler for programs outside the school system, such as health care, drug prevention, child protection, and juvenile justice.¹ Savings are even greater when children have access to the right supports from the beginning. For Washington to raise the bar and close the opportunity and achievement gap so that our state truly provides all children with ample education, we must focus some of our education reform attention on early learning.

¹ National Institute for Early Education Research. *The Economic Consequences of Early Childhood Education on the School System*. 2006.



Question: What will happen if this bill passes?

Answer: This bill would create a new program in Washington State called “Washington Preschool Program.” The bill is designed to give universal access to pre-k programs to all 3- and 4-year olds in Washington, regardless of income, by 2025. The program would be based on a mixed-delivery system which would include a variety of providers, including FCC providers (see above).

Immediate impacts of the substitute bill in development:

- Will push out the deadline for full implementation of the current state PreK program (ECEAP) by 2018 to full implementation of the Washington Preschool Program by 2025
- Begin converting current ECEAP slots into Washington Preschool Program slots
- Require DEL to prepare a gap analysis report regarding availability, affordability and access of early learning providers to higher education.
- This report will be utilized by the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) subcommittee assigned to guide the development and implementation of the Washington Preschool Program. The group will make recommendations about the phasing-in of provider requirements and education. The subcommittee will be made up of community stakeholders, including child care providers, Tribes, and Head Start/ECEAP. The requirements and plan implementation would not take effect until the subcommittee was able to make adequate recommendations to the legislature and the legislature approved of the recommendations.
- Empower an Early Learning Advisory Council subcommittee to plan for concurrent phase-in of birth to three programs.

Question: How would this bill impact child care in Washington?

Answer: This bill builds upon state and federal efforts and our current state program, ECEAP, which is a part-day program for 3- and 4-year old children. With a universal approach and the intentional work to strengthen the bill to ensure a mixed delivery system, more families will be able to access high-quality early learning services, including in child care settings. In this bill, cost-sharing for the program for families above 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (about \$56,000 for a family of four) will mean that more families will have access to choices for their young learners in a range of high-quality settings.

Additionally, some child care providers braid funding together so that the low reimbursement rate for child care assistance (Working Connections Child Care) combines with funding for preschool (which is part-day) to result in high-quality, full-day programs. This bill will increase the number of child care providers who will be able to use this innovative strategy to offer high-quality full-day services for children.

ELAA is working on language that would assure that funds cannot be supplanted or diverted from already-existing programs such as Working Connections or Seasonal Child Care to fund this program. The expansion of universal preschool would build upon the current investment in ECEAP.



Question: How will child care providers be able to achieve the higher standards given the very low reimbursement rate for Working Connections Child Care?

Answer: Child care reimbursement rates in Washington *are* too low to expect child care centers and family homes who accept high numbers of subsidized children to reach these new higher standards immediately. At the same time, we recognize we all want children in Washington to get the high-quality early learning they need. We are working to strengthen the bill by including further work to look at the challenges and barriers for child care providers in access and affordability to training and education, and to work with higher education leaders, child care centers, family child care homes, Tribes, and other stakeholders to work towards solutions to overcome these barriers. The first two years of bill implementation will include phasing the standards, considering equivalences as appropriate, and looking for innovative ways to share professional development resources so that more child care providers can offer the high-quality services that children need. The goal of the bill is to ensure a true mixed delivery system, parent choice, and high-quality. We are also working to ensure that any new funding for the Washington Preschool program does not supplant funding for Working Connections or Seasonal Child Care.

The Early Learning Action Alliance will continue its robust advocacy efforts to strengthen child care in Washington. This session, we are working to protect Working Connections Child Care in the budget and promoting a policy bill ([HB 2569](#)) to improve Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). QRIS will provide the data to parents about the quality of care available and provide professional development supports to child care in order to improve quality.

Question: This bill expands degree requirements for early learning teachers. Why do that?

Answer: We know that the period of development from birth to five is the most rapid in a person's life; it makes sense to try to ensure that the professionals guiding that development are well-trained. Multiple studies have shown a positive correlation between higher levels of education and child outcomes in early learning.

We do recognize that there can be significant barriers to attaining a degree. We are working to ensure that the bill has provisions to work together with higher education institutions, child care providers, Tribes, and other stakeholders to develop a plan for implementation of the degree requirements that considers capacity at higher education institutions, affordability to attain a degree, and availability of needed courses at non-traditional times for child care providers currently in the field. The group will also considering equivalences as appropriate, and look for innovative ways to share professional development resources so that more child care providers can offer the high-quality services that children need.

Question: Will ECEAP providers be more likely to be awarded contracts in this new system?

Answer: No. This bill includes language for current ECEAP slots to be converted over to the new preschool program in implementation with DEL's oversight. There is a desire for phasing to happen relatively quickly so that there is not undue confusion about two different preschool programs in Washington at the same time. However, the program will not prioritize specific providers when creating new Washington Preschool Program slots.

As mentioned earlier in this document, for new expansion of the program, we are working on strengthening language in the bill around a mixed delivery system that includes a range of providers. This will include goals for proportions of community-based providers in the system and a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process for with contract selection panels that include a diverse range of providers and other experts.

Question: Will providers with a religious focus be allowed to participate?

Answer: Yes. As with any program that receives a state subsidy, religion instruction cannot be a part of curriculum. Federal law requires that government funds not be used to teach religion. However, our state currently maintains contracts with a few religious pre-schools so there is precedent for inclusion of providers from religious groups.