



State Legislation and Early Childhood Systems Building, 2010-2015

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Introduction

States are successfully working with their legislatures and governors to pass legislation that supports comprehensive early childhood (EC) systems, with a focus on better integration of programs, policies, and services to benefit young children and their families. This report profiles six diverse States that have successfully passed legislation aimed at advancing their EC system.

EC system-building is the ongoing process of developing the structures, behaviors, and connections that make all the components of an EC system operate as a whole to promote shared results for children and families (please see Appendix A for a graphical representation of the EC system and systems-building strategies).¹ Through legislative action, States are addressing various areas to drive change. Common legislative focus areas across the six States include governance, leadership and advisory committees, child care subsidy modifications, accountability systems, quality incentives and requirements, and prekindergarten expansion.

The State legislation profiled in this report illustrates a new era in EC policymaking. The provisions are designed to build a stronger and more coordinated system to serve young children and their families.

Methodology

This report profiles six States that have successfully passed legislation aimed at improving their EC systems. Key informants who track legislation at the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the National Governor's Association, and the Alliance for Early Success assisted us in identifying six geographically and politically diverse States for inclusion in this report: Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Nebraska, Oregon, and Washington. A search was conducted using the NCSL's Early Education and Child Care Bill Tracking Database² for legislation enacted in these States between 2010 and 2015. Legislation was considered for inclusion if it involved multiple sectors or multiple systems-building strategies (e.g., coordination, quality, accountability, efficiency, etc.)

Overview

The States profiled below have taken different approaches to working with the legislature on systems building. Colorado, Indiana, Nebraska, and Oregon are examples of States that have used legislation over time to develop a stronger EC system. Connecticut and Washington were able to build upon previous legislative work to pass omnibus legislation—passed in a single legislative session and as one bill—to support their vision of comprehensive systems reform.

Approach to Systems Building: Legislation over Time

Colorado

In the past five years, Colorado has made legislative progress in support of its EC systems vision, which focuses on access, quality, and equity. In 2010, Colorado's Early Childhood Leadership Commission was established to promote the coordination of policies and procedures that affect the health and well-being of Colorado children. In 2013, a governance bill promoted coordination and alignment by moving this Commission and many state-administered EC programs under the Office of Early Childhood in the Department of Human Services. Over time, Colorado has been able to establish new policies and initiatives, such as tiered reimbursements that incentivize quality, additional prekindergarten slots, and subsidy eligibility modifications, to promote access for children and families.

Indiana

Legislation in Indiana has focused on data-informed decisions to increase access, affordability, and quality in EC programs and services. In 2013, Indiana established the Early Learning Advisory Committee to assess the current state of the early learning system and make recommendations to strengthen the system. Indiana also established the Early Education Evaluation Program in 2013 and the Prekindergarten and Early Learning Study in 2014 to improve data and accountability, and to promote informed decision-making regarding EC programs and initiatives. Legislation in Indiana has created a series of policies and programs aimed at funding high quality care for low-income children and families, all of which require participating programs to engage in evaluation and quality



improvement efforts. Indiana also established new health, safety, and quality policies for child care programs that receive Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) funds.

Nebraska

Recent legislation in Nebraska has focused on building a high quality, accessible, and effective system of supports for children and families. In 2013, the Step Up To Quality Child Care Act created a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) and the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Records System in order to improve data, increase accountability, support quality improvements, and provide a tool for parents to evaluate program quality. Nebraska has also focused legislative efforts on child-related public assistance programs to make services more accessible and continuous for families. In 2015, Nebraska established the Intergenerational Poverty Task Force to create a strategic plan and develop recommendations regarding effective policies and programs for children and families in poverty.

Oregon

Oregon has concentrated its legislative efforts on building a coordinated, connected, and outcomes-focused early learning system. In 2011, Oregon established the Early Learning Council and in 2013, a governance bill formed the Early Learning Division within the Department of Education to provide a unified mission and increase coordination at the state level. In 2013, the Early Learning Hubs Demonstration Project was established to increase coordination of cross-sector EC services at the regional and local level. In 2015, Oregon enacted legislative changes in subsidy eligibility, quality incentives, and supports for license-exempt providers to increase access to affordable, high quality child care. In 2015, Oregon also established a new mixed-delivery preschool program to expand high quality preschool options for Oregon's families, leveraging its quality rating and improvement system and the role of the Early Learning Hubs.

Approach to Systems Building: Omnibus Legislation

Connecticut

In 2011, Connecticut's legislature established an EC planning team and required the team to design a plan for a comprehensive EC system in the State. This work culminated in "A Plan for an Early Childhood System for Connecticut: The Office of Early Childhood," which proposed a new governance model in the State and outlined plans for a new Office of Early Childhood (OEC). In 2013, the Governor signed an Executive Order, recognizing the OEC as the office responsible for coordinating and improving the delivery of EC services, and in 2014 the Office was established via Public Act 14-39. Public Act 14-39 strengthens Connecticut's early learning system through a variety of mechanisms. First, the establishment of a consolidated early learning office supports coordination of cross-sector policies and programs serving young children. In addition to improving coordination, the law directs the OEC to establish new systems that will enhance the way the larger EC system operates. Provisions related to accountability and data systems will allow the OEC to assess their system and make data-informed decisions. The law also requires the OEC to develop systems to improve quality and support providers, such as a QRIS, state-wide professional development system, and performance-based evaluation system for licensed child care.

Washington

The Washington legislature established the Department of Early Learning (DEL) as a cabinet-level early learning department in 2006 and established the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) in 2007 to advise the Department. Together, DEL and ELAC created a 10-year Early Learning Plan for a comprehensive high quality early learning system. From 2011 to 2015, Washington advanced its EC systems-building work through a Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant. In 2015, Washington passed the Early Start Act to expand access, improve quality, and establish accountability across child care and prekindergarten programs. By using the Washington QRIS as a framework for quality and aligning standards, the Early Start Act creates a more coordinated system guided by a unified framework. It establishes clear QRIS rating targets and program supports for all state-funded early care and education providers, which aims to improve quality across multiple settings. It includes provisions related to access, with a particular focus on diverse and underserved communities, in order to expand the reach of the system and work toward Washington's vision of a high quality system for all children. Finally, the Early Start Act implements accountability requirements and focuses on data use to drive ongoing system improvements.



Common Themes across States

While the States profiled below have taken different approaches to EC systems-building legislation, common themes emerge across their legislation.

Governance

States have used legislation to change governance structures to allow for increased coordination and alignment across state-level EC programs. For example, Oregon established the Early Learning Division within its Department of Education, Connecticut established a new OEC, and Colorado moved many of its EC programs under its OEC in the Department of Human Services.

Leadership and Advisory Committees

Many States used legislation to establish committees to examine the current state of their early learning systems, make recommendations for improvement, or advise government agencies. Colorado created an Early Childhood Leadership Commission, Indiana established an Early Learning Advisory Committee, and Oregon formed its Early Learning Council. Nebraska established an Intergenerational Poverty Task force to specifically examine the issue of intergenerational poverty and its impact on children.

Child Care Subsidy Changes

Colorado, Nebraska, Oregon, and Washington passed legislation to modify child care subsidy eligibility requirements. Changes such as increasing eligibility periods or expanding eligibility to include individuals enrolled in coursework are aimed at decreasing barriers to child care assistance and promoting service continuity for children.

Accountability Systems

Most of the States profiled enacted legislative provisions related to accountability, improved data, and data-based decision making. For example, Connecticut's legislation mandates an EC accountability plan and the development of an EC data system and kindergarten entry assessments. Nebraska established an Early Childhood Professional Record System to enhance data about the EC workforce. Indiana created an Early Education Evaluation Program to gather data concerning the school readiness of low income children who have received high quality early education services.

Quality Incentives

Many of the States profiled passed legislation to incentivize quality early care and education programs. Colorado, Nebraska, and Oregon established tiered reimbursement incentives for programs engaging in quality improvement. Nebraska created a grant fund for high quality programs and established property tax exemptions for programs rating at a high level in their quality rating and improvement system.

Quality Requirements

Nebraska, Oregon, and Washington established requirements regarding quality rating and improvement system participation for certain early care and education programs. Nebraska requires child care programs or EC education programs receiving over two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in child care assistance to participate in the QRIS. Oregon establishes quality rating requirements for programs to receive funding to participate in their new mixed-delivery prekindergarten program. Washington sets quality requirements for child care and prekindergarten programs receiving State funding.

Expanding Prekindergarten Access

States passed legislation to increase access to state-funded prekindergarten programs. Colorado's legislature expanded access by adding 3,200 additional prekindergarten slots in the 2013-2014 school year, and 5,000 additional slots beginning in the 2014-2015 school year. Oregon created a new mixed-delivery prekindergarten model to expand preschool options. Washington is gradually phasing in funding for full statewide implementation of its prekindergarten program.



Colorado

Summary of Legislation

Colorado's EC systems vision focuses on access, quality, and equity.³ Recent legislation in the State has focused on coordination, governance, quality incentives and supports, and subsidy eligibility in order to advance this agenda. In 2010, Colorado established the Early Childhood Leadership Commission to promote the coordination of policies and procedures that affect the health and well-being of Colorado children. In 2013, the Early Childhood Leadership Commission and other EC services were consolidated in the Department of Human Services in order to increase coordination across programs. In 2012, Colorado launched a Child Care Assistance Pilot to determine if changes to child care subsidy eligibility requirements could increase service continuity for children and families. In 2014, Senate Bill 003 established a Child Care Assistance Cliff Effect Pilot Program Fund and grant program to incentivize and support counties to participate in the program. House Bill 1317 built upon this progress by requiring the establishment of a tiered reimbursement system for programs participating in the child care assistance program by July 2016 and modifying family eligibility requirements for child care assistance to promote stability and continuity of services. In 2013 and 2014, Colorado also made legislative progress regarding its prekindergarten program by adding 3,200 additional slots in the 2013-2014 school year and 5,000 additional slots beginning in the 2014-2015 school year.

Colorado's EC Systems Building Legislation, 2010-2015:

Date	Legislation
June 6, 2010	Senate Bill 195 established the Early Childhood Leadership Commission to advance a comprehensive service delivery system for children from birth to age eight.
April 13, 2012	Senate Bill 22 created a pilot program for child care assistance to study whether changes in eligibility requirements for child care subsidy can mitigate the "cliff effect" and enhance service continuity for children and families.
May 17, 2013	Senate Bill 260 expanded Colorado's state-funded prekindergarten program by adding additional slots.
June 05, 2013	House Bill 1007 recreated an Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission to study issues and recommend legislation concerning early childhood (EC) and school readiness.
June 07, 2013	House Bill 1117 transferred the Early Childhood Leadership Commission and other programs serving children and families to the State Department of Human Services in order to create a more coordinated structure within the State government.
May 21, 2014	House Bill 1298 expanded Colorado's state-funded prekindergarten program and mandated a report on QRIS implementation in school district and charter school EC programs.
May 22, 2014	House Bill 1317 established a tiered reimbursement system for child care programs receiving subsidy and modified family eligibility requirements for child care subsidy in order to promote increased access to high quality EC programs.
May 22, 2014	Senate Bill 003 established a Child Care Assistance Cliff Effect Pilot Program Fund and grant program for the child care assistance pilot program (established by Colorado Senate Bill 22 in 2012) to encourage county participation.



Overview of Key Legislation

Senate Bill 195: Establishes Early Childhood Leadership Commission

Summary. In 2010, [Colorado Senate Bill 195](#) established the Early Childhood Leadership Commission to advance a comprehensive service delivery system for children from birth to age eight, using data to improve decision making and alignment, and coordination among federally funded and state-funded programs for young children and their families.

Key provisions

- ◆ The Early Childhood Leadership Commission is created in the Office of the Governor.
- ◆ The Commission's duties include:
 - Provide advice and recommendations to the general assembly concerning methods to promote the sharing and use of common data for planning and accountability by State programs and agencies that support young children.
 - Identify opportunities for, and barriers to, the alignment of standards, rules, policies, and procedures across programs and agencies that support young children.
 - Recommend changes to enhance the alignment and provision of services and supports for young children.
 - Develop recommendations regarding a quality, cohesive professional development and career advancement system.
 - Review the overall governance system for EC services and supports within the State and develop recommendations concerning the feasibility of creating a state-level oversight and coordination structure.

Senate Bill 22: Pilots Child Care Subsidy Eligibility Changes

Summary. In 2012, [Senate Bill 22](#) created a pilot program for child care assistance to study whether changes in eligibility requirements for child care assistance can mitigate the “cliff effect” and enhance service continuity for children and families.

Key provisions

- ◆ The Colorado Department of Human Services is authorized to develop and oversee a county-level pilot program in which the Colorado child care assistance program—which is the State's child care subsidy program to offset tuition costs for low income families—is modified to mitigate the cliff effect. The cliff effect occurs when working parents receiving child care assistance receive a minor income increase that makes them ineligible for assistance, but is not enough to cover the cost of child care.
- ◆ A county that is participating in the pilot program is required to continue to provide child care assistance for a period of up to two years for any person who has been receiving child care assistance from the county and whose income exceeds the county-adopted income eligibility limit for the county's child care assistance program.
- ◆ Participating counties must require a parent who is receiving extended child care assistance to pay a series of incremental increases in the portion of the parental share of the child care costs on a scheduled basis based upon a formula established by the county. The county is required to stop assistance if a family's income exceeds the maximum level for eligibility for services set by federal law for a family of the same size.
- ◆ The State department is directed to compile the data submitted by the counties and submit a report on the pilot program with the State department's findings and recommendations.



Senate Bill 260: Expands State Prekindergarten Program

Summary. In 2013, [Senate Bill 260](#) expanded Colorado's State prekindergarten program by adding [Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement](#) (ECARE) slots. The legislation gives school districts the flexibility to use the slots for half-day or full-day prekindergarten enrollment or full-day kindergarten enrollment.

Key provisions

- ◆ For the 2013-14 budget year and each budget year thereafter, an additional 3,200 slots are added to the Colorado preschool program via ECARE slots, for a total of 23,360 children who may annually participate in the Colorado preschool program.
- ◆ School districts can enroll a child in the program using one position so that the child may attend a half-day preschool program, using two positions so that the child may attend a full-day preschool program, or using one preschool program position to enroll a child in full-day kindergarten program.

House Bill 1007: Recreates Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission

Summary. In 2013, [House Bill 1007](#) recreated an Early Childhood and School Readiness Legislative Commission.

Key provisions

- ◆ The legislative commission is required to meet on a regular basis throughout the year to study issues and recommend legislation concerning EC and school readiness, including health care, mental health, parental involvement, family support, child care, and early learning.
- ◆ The Commission is required to consult with the Early Childhood Leadership Commission with regard to policies concerning EC and school readiness.

House Bill 1117: Transfers Early Childhood Programs from Various Agencies to the Department of Human Services

Summary. In 2013, [House Bill 1117](#) transferred the Early Childhood Leadership Commission and other programs serving children and families to the State Department of Human Services in order to create a more coordinated structure within the State government across the sectors of early learning, child health, child mental health, and family support and parent education.

Key provisions

- ◆ The Early Childhood Leadership Commission established in 2010 is moved from the Office of the Governor to the State Department of Human Services. The focus of the Early Childhood Leadership Commission is expanded to include services for pregnant women in addition to young children and their families.
- ◆ Various programs serving pregnant women, children, and families are transferred to the Department of Human Services:
 - The Nurse Home Visitor Program
 - The Tony Grampsas Youth Services Program (provides state funding for community-based programs that target youth and their families for intervention services in an effort to reduce incidents of youth crime and violence)
 - Student Dropout Prevention and Intervention Program
 - Colorado Student Before-and-After-School Project
 - The Family Resource Center
 - The Colorado Children's Trust Fund Board (funds evidence-based parent education programs. Example programs include the Nurturing Parenting Program, Smart Parenting, Incredible Years, and Better Start for Babies).



House Bill 1298: Expands State Prekindergarten Program

Summary. In 2014, [House Bill 1298](#) expanded Colorado's state-funded prekindergarten program by adding [Early Childhood At-Risk Enhancement](#) (ECARE) slots. It also mandated a report on QRIS implementation in school district and charter school EC programs.

Key provisions

- ◆ For the 2014-2015 budget year, and each budget year thereafter, an additional 5,000 slots are added to the Colorado preschool program, for a total of 28,360 children who may annually participate.
- ◆ School districts can enroll a child in the program using one position so that the child may attend a half-day preschool program, using two positions so that the child may attend a full-day preschool program, or using one preschool program position to enroll a child in full-day kindergarten program.
- ◆ The Department of Education, working with the Department of Human Services, is required to write a report concerning the status of implementing the QRIS for school district and charter school EC education programs.

House Bill 1317: Creates Tiered Provider Reimbursement Rates and Changes Subsidy Eligibility Requirements for Families

Summary. In 2014, [House Bill 1317](#) required the establishment of a tiered reimbursement system for child care programs receiving subsidy and modified family eligibility requirements for child care assistance in order to promote increased access to high quality EC programs. It appropriated \$9.9 million total funds to the Department of Human Services, including \$8.5 million general funds.

Key provisions

- ◆ Tiered Reimbursement
 - On or before July 1, 2016, the state-established provider reimbursement rates for each county must include a system of tiered reimbursement pay structure that reflects an increased rate of reimbursement for high quality EC programs that enroll children participating in the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP).
 - The tiered reimbursement pay structure includes tiered reimbursement for holidays and absences, based on the providers' QRIS rating.
 - Counties may opt out of adhering to the state-established provider rates and negotiate their own rates with providers, in consultation with local EC councils, child care resource and referral agencies, and providers. County-established rates must also include a system of tiered reimbursement.
 - The Department of Human Services is required to conduct a study to examine private payment tuition rates, how they compare to CCCAP rates set by the State and the counties, and whether the rates achieve the federal requirement of equal access.
- ◆ Child Care Assistance Eligibility
 - Counties are required to provide child care assistance to families whose income is not more than 165 percent of the federal poverty level.
 - If a family's income exceeds the level set by the county, the county must continue to provide child care assistance for at least 90 days. Counties are strongly encouraged to continue to provide child care assistance for a period of six months and to provide a gradual transition off of child care assistance.
 - If a county sets the income level at which the county chooses to initially provide CCCAP at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level, then that county must set the income level at which the county may deny the family higher than the income level at which the county chooses to initially provide child care assistance for that county and at a level not to exceed eighty-five percent of the state median income for a family of the same size.
 - Families' CCCAP eligibility redetermination must occur once every twelve months. Families are only required to report changes in income if the family's income exceeds 85 percent of the state median income.



- A parent participating in CCCAP must not be determined ineligible to receive assistance as a result of taking maternity leave or if the parent is not employed for 60 days within a twelve month period and actively looking for a job.
- A parent who is enrolled in a postsecondary education program or a workforce training program is eligible for CCCAP for at least any two years of the postsecondary education or workforce training program.
- The hours authorized for the provision of child care through CCCAP must include authorized hours for the child that promote continuous, consistent, and regular care and must not be linked directly to a parent's employment, education, or workforce training schedule.

Senate Bill 003 Creates the Child Care Assistance Cliff Effect Pilot Program Fund and Grant Program

Summary. In 2014, [Senate Bill 003](#) established a Child Care Assistance Cliff Effect Pilot Program Fund and grant program for the child care assistance pilot program (established by Colorado Senate Bill 22 in 2012) to encourage county participation. It also added provisions that allow counties more flexibility in designing their pilot programs.

Key provisions

- ◆ A Colorado Child Care Assistance Cliff Effect Pilot Program Fund is established.
- ◆ The Colorado Department of Human Services is required to develop and administer a grant program and application process for county departments to apply for grants from the Child Care Assistance Cliff Effect Pilot Program Fund.
- ◆ A county department that is selected to participate in the pilot program may apply for a grant through this fund. Grant moneys may be used, at the county's discretion, to cover the administrative costs of participating in the pilot program and the costs of providing continued benefits to families participating in the pilot program.
- ◆ Counties are given flexibility to design the pilot program in a manner that best addresses the county's specific community needs:
 - In developing the pilot program for the county, a county may limit participation in the pilot program to a reasonable percentage of the county's caseload for the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program.
 - A county may also limit participation in the pilot program to families who enter the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program with children who are 36 months of age or younger.



Connecticut Public Act No. 14-39 (HB5562)

Background

In 2005, Connecticut established the Early Childhood Education Cabinet. The Cabinet brought together legislators, representatives from the various State agencies and commissions which serve young children, and representatives from Head Start and prekindergarten. In 2011, the legislature established a planning team to design a comprehensive early care and education system. The planning team developed, "[A Plan for an Early Childhood System for Connecticut: The Office of Early Childhood.](#)" In 2013, the Governor signed an Executive Order, recognizing the Office of Early Childhood as the office responsible for coordinating and improving the delivery of early childhood services, and in 2014 the Office was established via Public Act 14-39⁴.

Summary of Legislation

[Connecticut Public Act No. 14-39](#), created on May 28, 2014, has two major systems components. First, it establishes Connecticut's Office of Early Childhood (OEC). It transfers duties, roles and responsibilities of early care and education from the Department of Education, Department of Social Services, and Department of Health to the Office of Early Childhood in order to create a coordinated system of early care and education and child development. A wide range of programs is included such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant and the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program. Second, the Office of Early Childhood is required to develop systems of quality improvement, monitoring, professional development, and accountability.

Key Provisions

Governance

The Office of Early Childhood is established. A Commissioner of Early Childhood runs the office and is appointed by the Governor.

Coordination

The OEC is responsible for coordinating and delivering services to young children and their families to ensure optimal health, safety, and learning for each young child. This includes:

- ◆ Integrating EC care and education and special education;
- ◆ Promoting universal access to EC care and education;
- ◆ Administering the Child Care Development Block Grant;
- ◆ Administering the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program.

Reporting and Accountability

The OEC is charged with developing and implementing an EC accountability plan. To support this plan, OEC is directed to build accountability systems such as:

- ◆ Developing and implementing an EC information system;
- ◆ Beginning a state-wide longitudinal evaluation of Connecticut's School Readiness Program (Connecticut's prekindergarten program);
- ◆ Creating and implementing a state-wide developmentally appropriate kindergarten assessment tool;
- ◆ Developing early learning and development standards.

Improving Quality

Public Act 14-39 includes multiple provisions related to improving the quality of early care and education programs. It directs the OEC to develop systems of quality improvement and supports, such as:



- ◆ Providing technical assistance to providers of early care and education to obtain licensing and improve program quality;
- ◆ Establishing a quality rating and improvement system that covers home-based, center-based, and school-based early child care and learning;
- ◆ Ensuring a coordinated and comprehensive state-wide system of professional development for EC providers and staff;
- ◆ Developing and implementing a performance-based evaluation system to evaluate licensed child day care centers;
- ◆ Continually monitoring and evaluating all early care and education and child development programs and services.

Implementation Progress

The Early Childhood law was passed in 2014, and it required a phase-in for many of its key provisions. The Connecticut OEC provides an annual [administrative digest report](#) to highlight accomplishments towards these provisions. The reports from 2014 and 2015 are summarized below.⁵

Improving Quality

- ◆ The OEC is launching an integrated quality improvement system to support early care and education programs and professionals in 2016. Beginning in FY16, this system will allocate funds to support early care and education providers so they may provide safe, supportive environments for children and families while incorporating best practices in teaching and learning.⁶
- ◆ The OEC published and distributed copies of Connecticut's Early Learning and Development Standards (CT ELDS). The CT ELDS were developed through the work of the Connecticut Early Childhood Education Cabinet and its Early Learning Standards Workgroup.

Reporting and Accountability

- ◆ The OEC completed development, testing, and launch of the first portion of the Early Childhood Information System, a program-level data system for OEC-funded early care and education programs.
- ◆ The OEC worked with the State Department of Education to create a single system for the purpose of creating and assigning children enrolled in preschool with unique child identifiers.

Licensing

- ◆ In 2014, the OEC, in conjunction with the Department of Public Health, worked with the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA), to identify strengths and weaknesses within the State's child care licensing program. As a result of the needs assessment, NARA made recommendations to help improve the current child care licensing program.
- ◆ In 2015, in response to NARA's recommendations, the OEC developed a Policy and Procedure Manual outlining key functions of the child care licensing program including topics such as initial licensing, routing licensing inspections, and complaint processing. The new manual was created to support consistency in the application of licensing regulations during inspections.
- ◆ In 2015, the Division of Licensing hired and trained 16 additional child care licensing staff to implement the provisions of Public Act 14-39, which mandated annual inspections of all licensed child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes.

Communications

- ◆ The OEC developed a logo, mission, vision, and guiding principles to give the agency a common brand. The brand provides the agency with an official presence and identity, and gives staff a sense of unity and belonging. The OEC also developed an agency website and social media pages.



Indiana

Summary of Legislation

Recent legislation in Indiana has focused on data-informed decisions to increase access, affordability, and high quality in EC programs and services. In 2013, Indiana established the Early Learning Advisory Committee to assess the current state of the early learning system and make recommendations to “ensure that children ages birth to age eight years and their families have access to affordable high quality early childhood education programs that keep children healthy, safe, and learning.”⁷ To build upon the Committee’s needs assessments, Indiana established the Early Education Evaluation Program in 2013 and the Prekindergarten and Early Learning Study in 2014 to further accountability and data-informed decisions regarding their EC system. Indiana has also created a series of programs to that provide funding for high quality care for low-income families, such as the Early Education Match Grant Program, property tax exemptions, and the Early Education Grant Pilot Program. In 2014, Indiana passed legislation regarding the health, safety, and quality of child care programs receiving CCDF funds.

Indiana’s EC Systems Building Legislation, 2010-2015:

Date	Legislation
May 13, 2013	House Enrolled Act 1004 established the Early Education Evaluation Program to gather data concerning the school readiness of low income children who have received high quality EC services. The Early Learning Advisory Committee was established to assess the capacity of Indiana’s EC system to provide access to high quality EC services and to develop recommendations.
May 13, 2013	House Enrolled Act No. 1001 created an Early Education Match Grant Program to support high quality programs serving four and five year olds below the federal poverty level. The grant program mandates the use of the kindergarten entry assessment and establishes student testing numbers to track child progress over time.
March 26, 2014	Senate Bill 158 provides property tax exemptions for high quality EC programs serving four to six year olds that agree to participate in the Early Education Evaluation program.
March 26, 2014	House Enrolled Act 1036 outlines new health, safety, and quality regulations for child care programs receiving Child Care and Development Fund funds.
March 27, 2014	House Enrolled Act 1004 created the Early Education Grant Pilot Program for high quality EC programs serving 4 to 5 year olds below 127 percent of the federal poverty level. Participating programs must administer the kindergarten readiness assessment and participate in the Prekindergarten and Early Learning Study established by this Act.

Overview of Key Legislation

House Enrolled Act 1004: Creates Early Education Evaluation Program

Summary. In 2013, [House Enrolled Act 1004](#) established the Early Education Evaluation program to gather data concerning the school readiness of children in low income families who have received high quality early education services. The Early Learning Advisory Committee was established to assess the capacity of Indiana’s EC system and develop recommendations to provide access to high quality EC services.

Key provisions

- ◆ The Early Education Evaluation Program is established to conduct a study of school readiness of children in low income families receiving early education services from providers that:
 - Meet the standards of quality recognized by level 3 or 4 Paths to Quality (Indiana’s QRIS) program ratings;



- Include parent involvement, based on guidelines established by the Division.
- ◆ The Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning (OECOSL) is directed to submit an annual report of the results of the Early Education Evaluation Program.
- ◆ The OECOSL is required to provide the Department of Education with information to assign children enrolled in participating programs with a student testing number. Upon receipt of the information, the Department of Education will assign the child a student testing number to track the child's educational growth and development.
- ◆ The [Early Learning Advisory Committee](#) is established to
 - Conduct periodic statewide needs assessment concerning the quality and availability of early education programs from children from birth to the age of school entry, including the availability of high quality prekindergarten education for children in low income families;
 - Identify opportunities for, and barriers to, collaboration and coordination among federally and state-funded EC programs and services;
 - Assess the capacity and effectiveness of two and four year public and private higher education institutions in Indiana for the support of development of early educators;
 - Develop and make recommendations to the Governor and the Legislative Council concerning the results of the Committee's work.

House Enrolled Act 1001: Creates Early Education Match Grant Program

Summary. In 2013, [House Enrolled Act No. 1001](#) created an Early Education Match Grant Program to support high quality programs serving four and five year olds below the federal poverty level. The grant program mandates the use of the kindergarten entry assessment and establishes student testing numbers to track child progress over time.

Key provisions

- ◆ The Early Education Matching Grant Program is established to provide matching grants to providers serving four to five year old children below the federal poverty level.
- ◆ To be eligible to apply, providers must provide services for at least 180 days per year, administer the kindergarten readiness assessment, meet the standard criteria of a three or four star rating in the quality rating and improvement system, and include parental involvement as a component of their services.
- ◆ The Department of Education is responsible for assigning student testing numbers to children being served by providers in the Early Education Matching Grant Program. The Department of Education will use the student testing number to track the child's educational growth and development.

Senate Bill 158: Establishes Property Tax Exemptions for High Quality Early Childhood Programs

Summary. In 2014, [Senate Bill 158](#) created property tax exemptions for high quality EC programs that serve four to six year olds and agree to participate in the Early Education Evaluation program.

Key provisions

- ◆ Tangible property owned, occupied, or used by a for-profit provider of EC education services to children between four and six years old is exempt from property taxation if all the following requirements are satisfied:
 - The primary purpose of the provider is educational;
 - The provider is the property owner and the provider also predominantly occupies and uses the tangible property for providing EC education services to children between four and six years old;
 - The provider participates in the Early Education Evaluation Program and meets the standards of quality recognized by level three or four quality improvement system ratings or a comparable rating from a nationally recognized accrediting body.



House Enrolled Act 1036: Health, Safety, and Quality Requirements for Programs Receiving CCDF Funds

Summary. In 2014, [House Enrolled Act 1036](#) outlines new health, safety, and quality regulations for child care programs receiving Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) funds.

Key provisions

- ◆ Physical Facilities Safety
 - Beginning July 1, 2015, a provider is required to have and maintain compliance with a written policy describing practices related to safe conditions in the facility and on the grounds and safety of motor vehicles used to transport children.
- ◆ Developmentally Appropriate Activities
 - Beginning July 1, 2015, a provider is required to make available daily activities appropriate to the age, developmental needs, interests, and number of children in the care of the provider, including the following: active play, quiet play, and daily outdoor play as conditions allow.
- ◆ Food Requirements
 - Beginning July 1, 2015, a provider is required to make available to each child appropriately timed, nutritious meals and snacks in a quantity sufficient to meet the needs of the child and drinking water at all times.
- ◆ Group Sizes and Ratios
 - Group size and child-to-caregiver ratio requirements are established for providers serving fewer than 16 children that will go into effect on July 1, 2015.
- ◆ Continuing Education
 - Beginning July 1, 2015, unless the provider is a parent, stepparent, guardian, custodian, or other relative to each child in the care of the provider, the individual annually must receive at least 12 hours of continuing education approved by the division and related to the age appropriate educational development, care, and safety of children.
- ◆ Child Abuse, Neglect, and Injury
 - OECOSL is required to prepare written materials specifying the duty to report known or suspected child abuse or neglect and that knowing failure to make a report is a Class B misdemeanor.
 - A provider is required to immediately notify the parent or legal guardian of a child in the care of the provider concerning injuries or death of the children that occur during the hours that the child is in the care of the provider. The provider is required to notify the Division of the incident.

House Enrolled Act 1004: Creates Early Education Grant Pilot Program

Summary. In 2014, [House Enrolled Act 1004](#) created the Early Education Grant Pilot Program for high quality EC programs serving four to five year olds below 127 percent of the federal poverty level. Participating programs must administer the kindergarten readiness assessment and participate in the Prekindergarten and Early Learning Study established by this Act.

Key provisions

- ◆ The Early Education Grant Pilot Program is established to provide grants for qualified early education services in a manner consistent with how funds are distributed under the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) grant program.
 - Services are to be provided to children between four and five years of age in households whose income does not exceed 127 percent of the federal poverty level.
 - Eligible programs must meet at least a three or four star rating in the Indiana QRIS or be accredited by the State Board of Education or a national/regional accrediting agency, administer a kindergarten



readiness assessment, include family engagement in their services, and participate in the longitudinal study outlined below.

- ◆ A longitudinal study of children who participate in the pilot program will be conducted to determine the achievement of those students in kindergarten and later grades. The study must include a comparison of test and assessment results in grade three for children who participated in the pilot and compare them to a control group.
- ◆ The Prekindergarten and Early Learning Study Commission is established to:
 - Study the feasibility of using the federal CCDF, Head Start, or other federal grants to fund prekindergarten and early learning in the State.
 - Study options for funding prekindergarten or early learning programs.
 - Review whether other States have developed rigorous accountability standards for prekindergarten or early care and education.
 - Study parent involvement strategies.
 - Study the economic benefits of prekindergarten and early learning programs.
 - Study the appropriate state agency or entity to oversee and develop early learning accountability standards.
 - Determine the appropriate income standard to use when determining whether a parent is eligible to receive assistance from the State for prekindergarten or early learning programs.
 - Examine opportunities to partner with an investment group or entity to establish an investment fund or vehicle to finance early education in Indiana.



Nebraska

Summary of Legislation

Legislation in Nebraska has focused on building an accessible and effective system of supports for children and families, with a particular focus on economically disadvantaged families. In 2013, the Step Up to Quality Child Care Act created a quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) to increase accountability for public funds invested in EC programs, provide a path to higher quality for EC programs, and create a tool for parents to evaluate program quality. It also established the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System to support QRIS implementation and provide better data about the EC workforce. In 2014 and 2015, Nebraska passed legislation related to eligibility for child-related public assistance programs in order to make them more accessible and continuous for families. The establishment of the Intergenerational Poverty Task Force in 2015 provides the opportunity for a next step in Nebraska's commitment to creating an effective system of policies and programs for all families and children.

Nebraska's EC Systems Building Legislation, 2010-2015:

Date	Legislation
June 4, 2013	Legislative Bill 507, also known as the Step Up to Quality Child Care Act, established Nebraska's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) and the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System . LB 507 also changed subsidy eligibility requirements for child care assistance to increase access to affordable child care.
April 2, 2014	Legislative Bill 359 amended eligibility requirements for certain public assistance programs in order to increase access and financial supports for eligible families with children.
May 27, 2015	Legislative Bill 81 revised child care subsidy eligibility rules to create transitional assistance options and service continuity for families whose incomes exceed eligibility requirements at redetermination.
May 27, 2015	Legislative Bill 607 established the Intergenerational Poverty Task Force to examine the current state of intergenerational poverty in Nebraska, with a specific focus on children who are at risk of continuing the cycle of poverty. The committee is charged with creating a strategic plan and developing recommendations regarding effective policies and programs.

Overview of Key Legislation

Legislative Bill 507: Creates Quality Rating and Improvement System and Early Childhood Professional Record System and Changes Subsidy Eligibility Requirements

Summary. In 2013, [Legislative Bill 507](#), also known as the Step Up to Quality Child Care Act, established Nebraska's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) and the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System. LB 507 also changed eligibility requirements for child care assistance to increase access to affordable child care.

Key provisions

- ◆ Quality Rating and Improvement System
 - The Nebraska Departments of Education and Health and Human Services (Departments) are required to collaboratively develop, implement, and provide oversight for a quality rating and improvement system, [Step Up to Quality](#).
 - The Departments are required to establish quality rating criteria for the system, to use the criteria to assign quality scale ratings to participating early care and education programs, and to provide incentives and supports to participating programs.



- By July 1, 2017, the Departments must make the quality scale rating of participating programs available on a publicly accessible website.
- Participation and Ratings
 - Applicable programs include: licensed child care programs, prekindergarten services or programs, and Head Start/Early Head Start programs.
 - Applicable child care programs or EC education programs receiving over two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in child care assistance are required to participate in the QRIS.
 - Child Care licensure is required for participation in the QRIS and is sufficient for programs to be rated at step one in the system.
 - Nebraska's State Department of Education prekindergarten program criteria, federal Head Start/Early Head Start standards, or accreditation standards from a nationally recognized accrediting body are sufficient to rate programs at a step three.
- Incentives and Supports include:
 - Tiered child care subsidy reimbursements for programs at step three or higher;
 - Incentive bonuses given to providers of child care and EC education programs upon completion of specific requirements of step two ratings or higher;
 - Professional development, training, and scholarships;
 - Support that expands family engagement.
- ◆ Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System
 - The Nebraska Department of Education is required to establish the [Nebraska Early Childhood Professional Record System](#), a database of Nebraska's EC education workforce for the purpose of verifying educational degrees, professional credentials, and relevant trainings completed by employees of participating applicable child care and EC education programs.
 - The Department of Education must provide this information to the Department of Health and Human Services for use in establishing QRIS ratings.
 - Programs participating in the QRIS that are rated above a step one must report their educational degrees, professional credentials, and relevant training to the Nebraska Early Childhood Professional record system.
- ◆ Child Care Assistance
 - Eligibility for child care assistance is modified to include families with incomes up to 125 percent of the federal poverty level for FY 2013-14 and 130 percent of the federal poverty level for FY 2014-15 and each fiscal year thereafter.

Legislative Bill 359: Changes Eligibility Requirements for Public Assistance Programs

Summary. In 2014, [Legislative Bill 359](#) amended eligibility requirements for certain public assistance programs in order to increase access and financial supports for eligible families with children.

Key provisions

- ◆ In determining eligibility for aid to dependent children, for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, and child care subsidy, the following will not be included in determining assets and income:
 - Assets in or income from an educational savings account, a qualified tuition program, scholarships for post-secondary education, or post-secondary work-study programs.
- ◆ In determining ongoing eligibility for the child care subsidy program, ten percent of a household's gross earned income will be disregarded after twelve continuous months on the program and at each subsequent redetermination.



Legislative Bill 81: Creates Transitional Assistance for Child Care Subsidy

Summary. In 2015, [Legislative Bill 81](#) revised child care subsidy eligibility rules to create transitional assistance options and service continuity for families whose incomes exceed eligibility requirements at redetermination.

Key provisions

- ◆ At redetermination of child care subsidy eligibility, if a family's income exceeds 130 percent of the federal poverty level, the family will continue to receive transitional child care assistance for up to twenty-four consecutive months or until the family income exceeds 185 percent of the federal poverty level.
- ◆ If a family's income falls to 130 percent of the federal poverty level or below, the 24 month time limit described above ceases to apply until the family becomes eligible for transitional child care assistance.
- ◆ The amount of transitional child care assistance shall be based on a cost-shared plan between the recipient family and the State and shall be based on a sliding-scale methodology.
- ◆ On or before December 1, 2016, and each year thereafter, the Division of Children and Family Services of the Department of Health and Human Services are required to report to the Governor and the Legislature on the number of families in all transitional child care assistance programs and the number of families no longer eligible for transitional child care assistance programs due to failure to meet income guidelines.

Legislative Bill 607: Establishing Intergenerational Poverty Task Force

Summary. In 2015, [Legislative Bill 607](#) established the Intergenerational Poverty Task Force to examine the current state of intergenerational poverty in Nebraska, with a specific focus on children who are at risk of continuing the cycle of poverty. The committee is charged with creating a strategic plan and developing recommendations regarding effective policies and programs.

Key provisions

- ◆ The Intergenerational Poverty Task force consists of:
 - The chairperson of the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature
 - The chairperson of the Appropriations Committee of the Legislature
 - Three at-large members appointed by the Executive Board of the Legislative Council
 - Non-voting members:
 - The chief executive officers of the Department of Health and Human Services or his or her designee, the Commissioner of Labor, and the Commissioner of Education
 - Members appointed by the executive committee of the task force through an application and selection process, representing advocacy groups, academic experts, service providers, educational institutes, EC experts, and workforce development agencies.
- ◆ The Intergenerational Poverty Task Force will, with respect to programs such as aid to dependent children, the supplemental nutrition assistance program, child care assistance, and Employment First:
 - Share, examine, and analyze data and information regarding intergenerational poverty in the State with a primary focus on data and information regarding children who are at risk of continuing the cycle of poverty unless outside intervention is made.
 - Develop effective and efficient plans, programs, and recommendations to help such children escape the cycle of poverty.
 - Encourage participation and input from academic experts, advocacy groups, nonprofit corporations, local governments, and faith-based institutions in exploring strategies and solutions to help children who are victims of intergenerational poverty.
 - Study, evaluate, and report on the status and effectiveness of policies, procedures, and programs implemented by other States and by nongovernmental entities.



- Identify policies, procedures, and programs, including any lack of interagency data sharing, lack of policy coordination, or current federal requirements, that are impeding efforts to help children in the State affected by intergenerational poverty.
- Create a long-range strategic plan containing:
 - Measurable goals and benchmarks;
 - Recommended data-supported changes to policies, procedures, and programs;
 - Protections of the privacy of individuals living in poverty by using and distributing the data it collects or examines in compliance data privacy requirements.
- Submit a preliminary report on or before December 15, 2015 and a final report on or before December 15, 2016 to the Governor and to the Executive Board of the Legislative Council.
- ◆ The Intergenerational Poverty Task Force terminates on December 31, 2016.



Oregon

Summary of Legislation

Oregon passed a series of laws over a multi-year period as part of its work create a coordinated, connected, and outcomes-focused early learning system.⁸ In 2011, Senate Bill 909 established the Early Learning Council and in 2013, House Bill 3234 formed the Early Learning Division as a separate entity located in the Department of Education. House Bill 3234 transferred duties from the Child Care Division of the Employment Department to the new Early Learning Division. These governance changes provided a unified mission and increased coordination at the state level. In 2013, the Early Learning Hubs Demonstration Project was established to increase coordination of cross-sector EC services at the regional and local level. In 2015, changes in subsidy eligibility, quality incentives, and supports for license-exempt providers were enacted to increase access to affordable, high quality child care. In 2015, Oregon also established a new mixed-delivery preschool program to expand high quality preschool options for Oregon's families, leveraging its quality rating and improvement system and the role of the Early Learning Hubs.

Oregon's EC Systems Building Legislation, 2010-2015:

Date	Legislation
June 28, 2011	Oregon Senate Bill 909 established the Oregon Education Investment Board and the Oregon Early Learning Council to create a coordinated system from EC to post-secondary education.
July 19, 2013	Oregon House Bill 3234 established the Early Learning Division in the Department of Education to consolidate early learning within state government.
August 14, 2013	Oregon House Bill 2013 established the Early Learning Hub Demonstration Projects and the Early Learning Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation Program to increase service coordination, create partnerships, align resources, and make services more accessible.
July 22, 2015	Oregon House Bill 2015 established new rules for the subsidy eligibility, quality incentives for providers and parents, and a system of supports for license-exempt family child care providers .
July 22, 2015	Oregon House Bill 3380 established a new mixed delivery model in Oregon to fund preschool in a variety of high quality settings and will expand preschool options available to children and families.

Overview of Key Legislation

Senate Bill 909: Creates Oregon Education Investment Board and Oregon Early Learning Council

Summary. In 2011, [Oregon Senate Bill 909](#) established the Oregon Education Investment Board and the Oregon Early Learning Council to create a coordinated system from EC to post-secondary education.

Key provisions

- ◆ The Oregon Education Investment Board is charged with overseeing a unified public education system that begins with EC services and continues throughout public education from kindergarten to post-secondary education.
- ◆ [The Early Learning Council](#) functions under the direction of the Oregon Education Investment Board and is established for the purpose of assisting the board in overseeing a unified system of EC services, including the funding and administration of those services. The council shall conduct an analysis of plans to merge, redesign, or improve the coordination of EC services and to align EC services with child centered outcomes.



House Bill 3234: Establishes the Early Learning Division in the Oregon Department of Education

Summary. In 2013, [Oregon House Bill 3234](#) established the Early Learning Division in the Department of Education to consolidate early learning within state government.

Key provisions

- ◆ The Early Learning Division is established as a separate entity in the Department of Education and functions under the direction of the Early Learning Council established in 2011.
- ◆ Duties are transferred from the Child Care Division of the Employment Department to the Early Learning Division of the Department of Education by establishing the Office of Child Care within the Early Learning Division. The Office of Child Care administers CCDF and provides technical assistance, linkage of local agencies, data collection, and monitoring.
- ◆ The Early Learning Division is directed to:
 - Administer Oregon's Head Start prekindergarten program (OPK) and examine, monitor, and assess the effectiveness of the program.
 - Administer grants to local commissions on children and families to fund research-based services and initiatives to improve outcomes for children, youth, or families.
 - Support parents-as-teachers programs and relief nurseries.
 - Establish Healthy Start Family Support Services programs through contracts entered into by local commissions.

House Bill 2013: Creates Oregon Early Learning Hubs and the Early Learning Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation Program

Summary. In 2013, [Oregon House Bill 2013](#) established the Early Learning Hub Demonstration Projects and the Early Learning Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation Program to increase service coordination, create partnerships, align resources, and make services more accessible.

Key provisions

- ◆ [Early Learning Hubs](#) are entities designated by regional partners to coordinate early learning services.
- ◆ The Early Learning Council is charged with determining metrics for funding Early Learning Hubs. The system implemented and overseen by the Council must ensure that:
 - Providers of early learning services are accountable for outcomes;
 - Services are provided in a cost-efficient manner;
 - The services provided, and the means by which those services are provided, are focused on the outcomes of the services.
- ◆ [The Early Learning Kindergarten Readiness Partnership and Innovation Program](#) is established. It is administered by the Early Learning Council.
- ◆ The Early Learning council provides grants to applicants that:
 - Form a partnership with at least one provider of early learning services, child care provider or elementary school;
 - Form partnerships with community-based providers of EC services to provide preschool and other early learning services;
 - Establish meaningful targets for kindergarten readiness;
 - Invest resources in students who meet criteria established by the Council;
 - Agree to report to and partner with Early Learning Hubs.



House Bill 2015: Creates New Rules for Subsidy Eligibility, Supports for License-Exempt Programs, and Quality Incentives for Parents and Providers

Summary. In 2015, [Oregon House Bill 2015](#) established new rules for the subsidy eligibility, quality incentives for providers and parents, and a system of supports for license-exempt family child care providers.

Key provisions

- ◆ Subsidy eligibility changes:
 - Subsidy recipients may be entitled to receive child care subsidy for at least one year, regardless of changes in employment. Rules adopted by the Department of Human Services may provide for termination of subsidy eligibility for reasons other than changes in employment during the one-year period.
 - Subsidy recipients who are enrolled in coursework or who are self-employed may be entitled to receive subsidy, provided all other eligibility requirements are met.
- ◆ Quality incentives:
 - Subsidy recipients who voluntarily choose child care providers that meet minimum standards established under the tiered quality rating and improvement system may qualify for lower copayments.
 - Child care providers that meet specified minimum standards established under the tiered quality rating and improvement system may receive an enhanced reimbursement under the subsidy programs.
- ◆ Supporting license-exempt family child care:
 - No later than July 1, 2016, the Early Learning Division, in consultation with the Department of Human Services, must develop and implement a system of quality supports for license-exempt family child care providers.
 - The Early Learning Division is required to conduct a study regarding methods to incentivize parents to select license-exempt family child care providers who have participated in the system of quality supports.

Oregon House Bill 3380: Creates New Mixed Delivery Prekindergarten Program

Summary. In 2015, [Oregon House Bill 3380](#) established a new mixed delivery model in Oregon to fund preschool in a variety of high quality settings and will expand preschool options available to children and families.

Key provisions

- ◆ The Early Learning Division of the Oregon Department of Education is required to administer a preschool program, now known as [Preschool Promise](#). Preschool Promise will serve children between three and five years of age in families whose incomes are at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- ◆ The Oregon Early Learning Hubs are required to apply for funding, coordinate local planning, and enter into contracts with preschool providers in order to expand preschool options.
- ◆ Eligible programs must be establishing a new preschool program or expanding an existing preschool program. They may be a Head Start, Oregon prekindergarten program, child care provider, relief nursery, private preschool, public school, public charter school, education service district, or community-based organization that provides preschool.
- ◆ Programs must meet outlined quality standards:
 - Attain one of the top two ratings in Oregon's quality rating and improvement system.
 - Utilize culturally and linguistically diverse methods, practices, curricula, assessments, professional development, and family engagement strategies.
 - Employ lead preschool teachers that have at least a bachelor's degree in EC education or who have submitted a plan to attain a bachelor's degree and are making progress on the plan.



Washington Early Start Act (WA HB1491)

Background

In 2006, Washington established the Department of Early Learning (DEL) and was the first State in the nation to have a cabinet-level early learning department. The following year, the Washington legislature established the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) to advise the Department on early learning issues and policies. Together, DEL and ELAC created a [10-year Early Learning Plan](#) to guide the development of a comprehensive and high quality early learning system in Washington. This plan was instrumental in helping Washington secure a Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Grant, which provided \$60 million to support early learning systems-building efforts from 2011 through 2015.⁹ The Early Start Act was passed in 2015 to advance Washington's systems-building efforts in support of their vision that, "all children start life with a solid foundation for success, based on strong families and a world-class early learning system for all children prenatal through third grade."¹⁰

Summary of Legislation

The [Early Start Act](#), passed July 6, 2015, establishes cross-sector requirements in child care and prekindergarten programming to improve the quality and scale of early learning programs in Washington State. It mandates levels of quality for early learning programs across the State and "creates assurances that early learning programs are available, supported and appropriate for diverse communities across the State."¹¹ By using the Washington QRIS as a framework for quality and aligning standards, The Early Start Act creates a more coordinated system guided by a unified framework. The Early Start Act establishes clear QRIS rating targets and program supports for all state-funded early care and education providers. It includes provisions related to access in order to expand the reach of the system and work toward Washington's vision of a high quality system for all children. Finally, the Early Start Act establishes accountability requirements and focuses on data-use to drive ongoing system improvements.

Key Provisions

Improving Quality

- ◆ **Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) as framework for quality.** The Early Start Act requires early learning programs to participate in Washington's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), Early Achievers. Programs that must participate include child care centers and homes serving non-school age children that are receiving state child care subsidy payments as well as all programs participating in the State's comprehensive state prekindergarten program, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP).
- ◆ **Phases in participation.** Child care providers serving non-school age children on subsidy must achieve a rating of three through five in Early Achievers by 2020. All existing ECEAP (state prekindergarten) providers must achieve a rating of four or five in Early Achievers by March 2016, or begin remedial activities to rate at Level four by September 2016.
- ◆ **Preferred payment provisions.** Providers at Early Achievers Levels three through five will be eligible to receive contracted child care slots.

Increasing Access

- ◆ **Achieving scale.** Funding will be phased in each year until full statewide implementation of the ECEAP program is achieved in the 2020-2021 school year, at which time any eligible child shall be entitled to be enrolled in the program.
- ◆ **Continuing child eligibility.** Beginning July 1, 2016, twelve-month authorization for child care subsidy--Working Connections Child Care—is provided in order to promote stability and high quality.
- ◆ **Cultural responsiveness.** Protocols will be created to maximize and encourage participation in the Early Achievers program for culturally diverse and low-income center and family home child care providers.



Aligning Systems

- ◆ **Licensing applies to all programs.** A single set of licensing standards will apply to child care and ECEAP programs.
- ◆ **Aligning standards across licensing, Early Achievers, and ECEAP.** Department of Early Learning (DEL) is required to produce the single set of licensing standards. The new licensing standards must: provide minimum health and safety standards for child care and preschool programs, rely on the standards established in the Early Achievers program to address quality issues in participating EC programs, take into account the separate needs of family care providers and child care centers, and promote the continued safety of child care settings

Reporting and Accountability

- ◆ **Annual progress report.** An annual progress report is required for submission to the Governor and the legislature regarding providers' progress in the Early Achievers program.

Implementation Progress:

The Early Start Act was passed in July 2015. In anticipation of its passage, the DEL began to work on the key components of the bill, and prepared a progress report, [The 2015 Early Start Act Annual Report](#), to indicate its preparatory work and early implementation activities. A summary is found below.

Quality Improvement and QRIS Participation as of July 31, 2015

- ◆ 2,756 (48%) of 5,741 child care centers, family child care, and ECEAP/Head Start programs in Washington were participating in Early Achievers. This includes 2,283 (57%) of 4,009 programs receiving state funding through ECEAP or subsidy. 693 of participating programs had been rated, and of these programs, 84 percent received a rating of a level three or higher.
- ◆ More than half (53 percent) of the licensed child care providers that accept children on subsidy are participating in Early Achievers. Of these, 18 percent have achieved the required rating level of three through five. Twenty-five percent have been approved at level two or three and an additional 46% are engaging in level 2 activities.
- ◆ Ninety-five percent of ECEAP contractors are participating in Early Achievers. Twenty-four percent had received the level four rating that they are required to achieve by March 1, 2016.
- ◆ Protocols and policies have been updated to reflect ongoing learning and continuous quality improvement.
- ◆ Early Achievers has been adapted and tailored to meet the specific language and cultural differences in communities across the State.
- ◆ The DEL has created an ECEAP cohort. For programs not reaching quality standards, they will review detailed information on the areas where they failed to meet the quality standards and obstacles and challenges to making the needed quality improvements.

Provider Outreach

- ◆ Child Care Aware of Washington developed targeted approaches to reach communities that need additional outreach and support. Services were expanded in multiple languages and resources such as marketing and orientation materials were tailored for use in diverse communities. Trainings are being offered in rural areas and in multiple languages.
- ◆ As of October 2015, providers that accept child care subsidy and have not yet enrolled in Early Achievers have been contacted by their Child Care Aware region an average of three times to discuss Early Achievers participation.

Aligning Standards

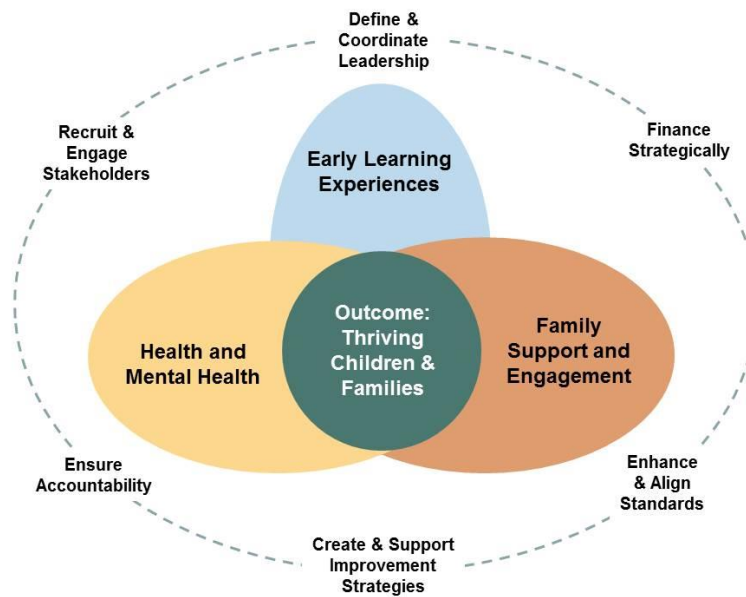
- ◆ To support the development and implementation of a single set of standards for child care and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program within the Early Achievers framework, the DEL undertook



analysis of all existing standards in licensing, Early Achievers and ECEAP, determining issues of overlap, language inconsistency, and progression across the types of standards. Revised licensing, Early Achievers, and ECEAP standards are expected to be published by the end of 2016 with implementation occurring in 2017. This approach includes a DEL Steering Committee, a Statewide Advisory Committee, and a statewide community input process involving local coalitions that attracted over 1,000 participants in 2015 to provide input on the alignment analysis and possible solutions.



Appendix A. Six Key Strategies to Improve the Functioning of a Comprehensive Early Childhood System



Source: Early Childhood Systems Working Group. (2014). Comprehensive Early Childhood System-Building: A Tool To Inform Discussions On Collaborative, Cross-Sector Planning.

- 1 Early Childhood Systems Working Group. (2014). Comprehensive Early Childhood System-Building: A Tool To Inform Discussions On Collaborative, Cross-Sector Planning. Retrieved from: http://www.buildinitiative.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/ECSWG%20Systems%20Planning%20Tool_2014.pdf
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The State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) works with State and Territory leaders and their partners to create innovative early childhood systems and programs that improve results for children and families. The SCBC is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care.

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