

Welcome to the first edition of the Department of Early Learning's (DEL) Building Blocks! Each month, Building Blocks will offer a quick snapshot of some of the exciting things happening at DEL and around the state to build a comprehensive early learning system.

As the first state in the nation with a Cabinet-level agency devoted to early learning, we in Washington have an incredible opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our youngest residents. Thank you for your interest in helping *all* Washington children reach their full potential! What would you like to hear about in this update? E-mail [communications@del.wa.gov](mailto:communications@del.wa.gov) and let us know.



Jone Bosworth, Director  
Department of Early Learning

### **DEL Parent Needs Assessment preliminary results: Parents know quality**

Washington parents have spoken. In February and March 2008, DEL asked parents of young children around the state what they wanted and needed in helping their children grow up healthy, safe and with a love of learning. The Parent Needs Assessment will help guide DEL's policy and budget decisions.

DEL will release the final report later this month. Some highlights from the preliminary results:

**Parents know what quality child care is.** In the survey, 97% statewide say cleanliness and safety is the most important reason for choosing child care. Other top reasons include how the provider talks and plays with the child, the provider's experience and training, and the learning activities/books/toys available. In short, the preliminary assessment results suggest what's important to parents in choosing child care are all the qualities that DEL's minimum licensing requirements aim to ensure: safe, healthy environments and highly trained staff who will help children enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

**Parents want information about early learning—no one form of communication reaches all families.** Parents say they most want information about family-friendly community activities, how to support early reading skills, how to help a child start kindergarten ready to learn and succeed, and ways to help children manage their emotions and get along with others. Parents most trust pediatricians, child care providers or teachers, and family members and friends.

**Parents access a variety of child care and early learning arrangements.** Half of Washington children ages birth through 5 are in child care, while the other half are in the care of a parent or guardian. Of children in child care, about 60% are in center-based child care or a preschool program; 30% are in informal care with family, friends or a nanny; and 10% are in family home child care.



## Quality Rating and Improvement System pilot field-testing to begin soon

After a year-long community-based, “from the ground up” process in designing our statewide Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), the pilot “field-testing” phase will begin this summer. DEL has used the rich information gathered by local pilot sites, as well as national research and previous work in Washington State, to develop one statewide model for pilot field-testing.

On May 23, DEL convened an all-day QRIS meeting to make key decisions around final elements for the statewide QRIS implementation model. Because this has been a community-based process from the beginning, this decision-making meeting included a representative from each of the pilot communities and members of DEL’s Early Learning Advisory Council with links to pilot communities.



What the communities agreed to on this day was:

- We all want it to work.
- It’s a dynamic process that may change along the way.
- We have to jump right in!

Another community meeting takes place this week. View the proposed QRIS model, which is still a work in progress, as well as frequently asked questions, at <http://www.del.wa.gov/partnerships/qrisk/what.aspx>. We’ll add QRIS information to the Web site in the coming weeks.

## DEL issues its agency strategic plan

DEL’s 2009-2013 strategic plan focuses on making smart investments so all children are healthy and ready to succeed in school and life. We organized our plan around four main questions:

- What do we know right now?
- What are we going to do about it (along with parents and strategic partners)?
- What do we need to do it?
- What could stop us?

The plan is built on input from our statewide Parent Needs Assessment and conversations with the DEL Parent Advisory Group; our public poll that set a baseline for what voters believe about early learning and want to see happen for our state’s children; studies of national trends and best practices in key administrative aspects of early learning such as child care subsidies and licensing; evaluations of our agency’s current capacity; conversations with our new Early Learning Advisory Council; local communities we funded to conduct their own data gathering on what they have and what they need to raise the quality of care and education for children; and the DEL staff who serve on “Accountability Core Teams” that put forth recommendations for goals, objectives, strategies, and performance measures.

DEL’s four strategic goals are:

- Build a comprehensive early learning system
- Strengthen dialogue with parents and caregivers
- Build public awareness and will to act
- Build organizational excellence



Read DEL’s strategic plan online at [www.del.wa.gov](http://www.del.wa.gov).

## **DEL convenes summit to discuss effects of methamphetamine on early learning**

DEL staff hear frequently from child care providers, Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) teachers, and other early learning professionals that they are struggling to work with children and families affected by meth use. Some children come to child care or preschool with behavior issues, and teachers tell us they don't have the tools to work with these children. We also are hearing about teachers conducting home visits and encountering safety issues in homes where meth is used or manufactured.



On June 23, DEL sponsored a summit in Seattle to give early learning professionals tools and information for working with families affected by meth use. More than 150 participants joined experts for a day of learning.

View coverage of the event on [www.tvw.org](http://www.tvw.org), and listen to coverage of the summit on KPLU radio: [www.kplu.org/news.html](http://www.kplu.org/news.html).

## **'Ready or Not' Community Conversation**

DEL and our public-private partner Thrive by Five Washington co-hosted a community conversation on June 18 with the authors of *Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education*. It was a fascinating conversation among Washington early learning community members about the early learning landscape in our state and nationally.

## **DEL and Talaris Institute partner to distribute parenting kits**

Because we know parents are a child's first and most important teacher, DEL is excited to have entered a public/private partnership with the Talaris Institute to help support parents in fostering healthy social and emotional development in children. A private Seattle-based not-for-profit organization, the Talaris Institute is dedicated to translating current research on how children think, learn and feel in their earliest years into high-quality and highly accessible educational materials for parents and caregivers.

DEL and Talaris are partnering to distribute and evaluate research-based kits with information and activities for parents with infants, toddlers and preschoolers. DEL will purchase 2,000 kits, and will help distribute them to families enrolled in DEL's ECEAP, and through other community organizations including the Parent Trust for Washington Children and Child Care Resources of King County.

Talaris will fund the evaluation of the kits' effectiveness for parents, in collaboration with the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center at Washington State University.



## **What have you done to help a child today?**

It's a question we at DEL ask ourselves every day, and we encourage everyone in Washington to do the same. Our goal at DEL is to help create the most child-friendly state in the nation, a place where all children can grow up healthy, safe and with a love of learning.

Whether it's driving the speed limit through a school zone, or volunteering at your local school, there are endless ways to help children every day. Go to [www.del.wa.gov/promo/help.aspx](http://www.del.wa.gov/promo/help.aspx) for ideas on helping children in your life, and share your own ideas for creating a child-friendly Washington.

Questions or comments about DEL's Building Blocks newsletter? E-mail [communications@del.wa.gov](mailto:communications@del.wa.gov).