

## Questions and answers about the proposed Washington Preschool Program

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) has received several questions from child care providers and others about a bill that is currently being considered in the Legislature. This is House Bill 2448 (also called the High-Quality Early Learning Act of 2012). The bill moves forward the recommendations of a legislatively required work group about how to phase in a high-quality, voluntary preschool program to help children get ready for success in school and life.

Following are some answers to some of the questions we at DEL have heard most frequently:

### **What does House Bill 2448 do?**

HB 2448 would establish a new voluntary preschool program for 3- and 4-year-olds in Washington. The bill calls this the “Washington Preschool Program.” The new program includes 450 hours of preschool a year, as well as health and family support services. The bill also would focus on planning voluntary programs for birth-to-3-year-olds at the same time.

The Washington Preschool Program would build on the standards of our current state-funded preschool program (the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, or ECEAP).

The Washington Preschool Program would be what is called a “mixed-delivery system.” This means that many different groups could deliver these preschool services. That could include licensed family home providers and child care centers; school districts; educational service districts; current Early Learning and Education Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Head Start providers; and faith-based organizations.

You can read the most current version of House Bill 2448, along with analysis prepared by House of Representatives committee staff, [online by clicking here](#).

### **What does this mean for licensed child care providers? Would they have to participate?**

This preschool program would be voluntary for families. Not all families will choose to enroll their child, for any number of reasons. There is no requirement for families to be a part of the Washington Preschool Program.

Licensed child care providers could choose to apply to be a Washington Preschool Program provider, and would be encouraged to do so. Participation is not required. Providers who were selected by competitive process to be part of Washington Preschool Program would be funded per-slot to deliver high-quality preschool programming that meets the requirements of this bill, for a minimum of 450 hours per year. Child care providers may choose to have Washington Preschool hours when all requirements of this bill are in place, and child care hours when they meet child care licensing requirements.

Licensed child care providers who did not wish to apply to be a Washington Preschool Program provider would be able to continue offering licensed child care, following the child care licensing WAC. The requirements of the Washington Preschool Program do not apply to all child care or to preschools that are not part of the Washington Preschool Program.

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Licensed child care providers could choose to deliver both Washington Preschool Program services (which would be part-day) and subsidized child care to result in a high-quality full-day program.

### **What does this mean for private preschool providers? Would they have to participate?**

Currently, private preschool providers offering educational curriculum and operating for fewer than four hours per day are exempt from child care licensing requirements. These preschools would not have to participate in the Washington Preschool Program.

### **What would the educational requirements for lead teachers be under the Washington Preschool Program?**

Research is clear that a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field supports high-quality early learning programs. Part of HB 2448 is a requirement that DEL and others make recommendations to the Legislature about a timeline to phase in a bachelor's degree requirement for lead teachers. The bill also will likely include a requirement for DEL and others to review current capacity at higher education institutions, affordability in attaining a degree, barriers for child care providers, and any "equivalencies" that would allow child care providers to demonstrate quality without having a bachelor's degree.

### **How would the Washington Preschool Program impact the Working Connections Child Care and Seasonal Child Care subsidy programs?**

The Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) and Seasonal Child Care (SCC) subsidy programs would continue operating the way they currently do. Funding for WCCC and SCC would not be diverted to fund the Washington Preschool Program.

### **I have heard that the Washington Preschool Program could not include religious instruction. Is that true?**

It is true that any publically funded education program may not include religious instruction during the time of day funded for the preschool program. Faith-based organizations would be encouraged to apply for Washington Preschool Program with the understanding that they would not offer religious instruction during the portion of the day funded with public dollars.

### **Why would any entity consider being part of Washington Preschool Program?**

Those who participate in Washington Preschool Program would be paid per-slot to offer high-quality preschool services. In addition, participants would have access to professional development and materials to support them in their work.

### **Would this program be for families with low incomes only?**

The Washington Preschool Program as proposed in House Bill 2448 would offer access to this program to all families upon full implementation in school year 2024-25. Families with incomes above 250 percent of the federal poverty level would pay a co-pay set by DEL.

### **How were these recommendations for this program created?**

This has been a gradual and thoughtful process:

[www.del.wa.gov/government/legislature/voluntary.aspx](http://www.del.wa.gov/government/legislature/voluntary.aspx)

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- A bill passed in 2010 ([House Bill 2731](#)) created a voluntary preschool program for educationally at-risk children, to be phased in as an entitlement program by the 2018-2019 school year. An entitlement means a guarantee of access to specific benefits either by law or by constitution.
- Another bill passed in 2010 ([Senate Bill 6759](#)) set up a work group to look at whether this preschool program should be part of basic education or an entitlement, and get more specific about what the preschool program should look like. You can find the recommendations from the SB 6759 work group [online by clicking here](#). At that same place, you can find more information about the work group membership and process.
- The SB 6759 work group delivered its recommendations to two groups in November 2011: The Quality Education Council (QEC) and the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC).
- ELAC considered the recommendations during its Dec. 12, 2011, regular meeting. They supported the work group recommendations, with two additions:
  - Adding a birth-to-3 technical workgroup to use [the state Birth to 3 Plan](#) as the basis for working to enhance services for infants and toddlers.
  - Phasing in the SB 6759 work group recommendations about lead teacher education requirements, rather than requiring a bachelor's degree at the creation of the program.
- The QEC at its Dec. 19, 2011, regular meeting, voted to recommend the work group recommendations.
- The bill was introduced for consideration during the 2012 legislative session and is now being considered by the Legislature.