

Fast facts about Washington's Early Learning Guidelines redesign

January 2012

What are early learning guidelines and why do we need them?

A strong early learning system needs a set of generally agreed-upon guidelines for child development that support families, caregivers and teachers in helping children grow and learn. Many states have guidelines as a resource for efforts to support school readiness for all children. In our state, these guidelines have been known as the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks. Going forward, these will be known as the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines.

Common early learning guidelines can help Washington consistently support school readiness at the state, regional and local levels. For example, guidelines can give parents, caregivers and teachers insight into what kinds of skills and behavior they might see as children grow and develop and ideas about how to support that growth.

Why is Washington redesigning the early learning guidelines?

The Benchmarks were created in 2005, with the agreement that they be reviewed and updated every five years. Our state has convened a workgroup to redesign the early learning guidelines based upon the 2005 agreement, the results of a broadly distributed user survey, and conversations with a variety of stakeholder groups.

Washington is demographically diverse, particularly among young children, and it is critical that our early learning guidelines reflect this diversity. The Department of Early Learning (DEL), the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and Thrive by Five Washington (Thrive) are leading this inclusive process. The goal is to produce guidelines that are:

- Culturally appropriate for Washington's increasingly diverse population.
- Have been reviewed by individuals and communities around the state.
- Provide links to the K-12 system.
- Reflect what we've learned about child development since 2005.

Who is involved in the redesign?

DEL, OSPI and Thrive convened a work group that includes representatives from Head Start, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, parents, Tribes, local early learning providers, disabilities

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experts, K-12 staff and our state’s ethnic commissions. The National Equity Project and Cedar River Group are facilitating this process to ensure it is inclusive and thorough.

Part of the workgroup’s responsibility is planning for outreach, so that individuals and communities around the state can give input throughout the redesign process. The outreach process will include intentional efforts to obtain widespread comments with an emphasis on traditionally underrepresented communities.

What is the timeline for the redesign process?

Timeframe	Activity
October 2010	Workgroup convened
September-October 2011	Public input period on draft redesigned guidelines
January 2011	Public comment period on final draft guidelines, informed by input from September-October outreach
February 2012	Final revised guidelines released, informed by input from January
Post-February 2012	Implementation

What has the workgroup done so far?

The group concluded that a substantial, inclusive redesign process is needed to develop a document that is user-friendly and culturally relevant for Washington’s diverse population. The group has formed three subgroups, each charged with one of the following tasks:

- Creating the document’s purpose and guiding principles
- Drafting redesigned Guidelines framework and content
- Designing and leading an inclusive outreach process

How is Washington paying for the redesign?

The redesign has been funded by a mix of public and private funding. So far, DEL has funding to support this work through its federal State Advisory Council grant and the Head Start State Collaboration Office. Thrive has contributed funding, including dollars from the Kellogg Foundation. OSPI also has contributed funding. Communities have offered in-kind support through meeting space.

What happens when the guidelines are released? Do I have to use them?

The guidelines will be a voluntary resource for parents and early child care professionals and educators.