



Washington State Early Learning Guidelines Redesign Summary of Public Review Comments, Rounds 1 and 2

1. Overview of Redesign and Public Comment Process

What are Washington State's Early Learning Guidelines?

Many states have guidelines as a resource to support school readiness for all children. In our state, these guidelines are known as the *Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines*. Washington's guidelines were created in 2005 (then called the *Early Learning and Development Benchmarks*), with the agreement that they be reviewed and updated every five years.

How is the redesign happening?

The Department of Early Learning (DEL), the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and Thrive by Five Washington (Thrive), are leading the process and convened a workgroup to update the Guidelines. The 51-member group includes representatives from Head Start, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Programs, parents, Tribes, early learning providers, disabilities experts, K-12 professionals and our state ethnic commissions.

How are public outreach and review being carried out?

The redesign process includes three rounds of public outreach, the goal of which is to gain perspectives and experiences from diverse stakeholders across the state to inform the draft redesigned Early Learning Guidelines.

- **The first round** of outreach, conducted from June 1 - 29, 2011, solicited advice on a draft Statement of Purpose and Guiding Principles. The draft was sent to approximately 250 stakeholders. Workgroup members also distributed the material to key contacts in their agencies and networks. Seventy-five sets of comments were received, which informed the workgroup's revisions of the Statement of Purpose and Guiding Principles.
- **The second**, and most extensive, round of outreach took place September 12 - October 27, 2011. The purpose was to solicit input on the draft Guidelines themselves. Several principles guided the outreach:
 - Having an intentional strategy with coordinated activities
 - Striving to reach key stakeholders, with attention to underrepresented voices.
 - Cultural relevance and accessibility.

The outreach included four "tiers":

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1. The project Workgroup, whose members represent key constituents (such as parents, providers,...), served as a first-line source of advice.
2. The Community Outreach Group, a larger circle of stakeholders, was invited to give direct input and help solicit input from others.
3. Communities whose voices have been traditionally underrepresented were invited to provide input.
4. Broad outreach through general dissemination.

Activities included one-on-one contact and group conversations organized by members of the Workgroup and Community Outreach Group; press releases to 68 community-based, mostly ethnic, media outlets; and information on the DEL, Thrive and OSPI websites. To support as broad a reach as possible, the Workgroup and Outreach Group identified additional underrepresented stakeholders that expanded the contact list to 365. As with the first round of outreach, group members distributed materials across their networks. Outreach toolkits supported written and oral comment. Comments could also be given via online survey. DEL provided language support on request, resulting in translated materials in Chinese, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese. Key characteristics of respondents were tracked in real time, which allowed in-process adjustments. During this period, and parallel to outreach efforts, the Committee also commissioned a full cultural competency review of the draft, which was conducted by cultural competency expert Betty Emarita. Additionally, OSPI facilitated outreach with the state's K-12 Curriculum Advisory and Review Committee that includes school district superintendents, curriculum directors, and principals; ESD representatives; and higher education partners. This group gave suggestions about content, potential uses and benefits, and implementation with K-3 educators and early learning partners.

- **The third** and final round of outreach will be done from January 2 -13, 2012. This round is for review of the final draft Guidelines. With this input, the Guidelines will be finalized by January 31, 2012.

2. Who We Heard From

Round 1 Outreach

Of the 75 sets of comments received, 61 came from individuals and 14 from participants in three group meetings. Among those who provided background information, roles and organizational affiliations included the following:

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Roles and Affiliations of Respondents	
Caregivers/educators	33
Family or kin	14
Non-profits	13
Tribal government representative	11
Students in early childhood education	6
Public or government agencies	6
School districts	6
Statewide	12
Western Washington	21
Eastern Washington	9

Round 2 Outreach

In round 2, we received input from 382 people, including 180 via individual comments and 202 in 13 group meetings.¹ An additional 12 sets of comments were submitted on behalf of organizations.

Roles and Affiliations of Individual Respondents	
Caregivers/educators	114
Family or kin	33
Other providers	32
K-12 school system	30
Public or government agencies	11
Students in early childhood education	4
General interest	4
Foundations	2
Statewide	26
Western Washington	56
Eastern Washington	45
Rural areas	51
Urban areas	41

With group meetings, it was not possible to tabulate exact counts because individuals' background information was not documented for all meetings. However, it was possible to infer ranges. Based on this method, group meetings included up to 30 family or kin, between 67 and 156 caregivers/educators, between 12 and 46 representatives of K-12 school systems, and between 37 and 100 other service providers.

¹ This is unduplicated, except for 1 group meeting with 22 participants, of whom 19 also completed individual comment forms. This was counted as both a group meeting and individuals because group and individual comments were distinct from each other.

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Among individual respondents, 171 said they work directly with children and 169 said their work indirectly supports parents and/or children in a significant way

Age of Children Respondents Work with or Indirectly Support		
Age Range	Work Directly with Children	Work Indirectly Supports Children
0 to 3 years old	50	86
3 to 5 years old	100	131
Kindergarten	35	66
1 st through 3 rd grades	44	59
Older than 3 rd grade	29	42

Respondents were invited to indicate their own racial or ethnic identity and whether they represent specific racial or ethnic population(s). The tables below summarize the results among respondents who provided this information. Overall, the one significant gap was in respondents from African-American communities, so project sponsors are redoubling efforts to reach stakeholders in these communities in the third round of outreach.

Individuals who Indicated their OWN Racial or Ethnic Identity	
Individual Comments and Group Meetings	
Caucasian	86
Asian Pacific Islander	36
Hispanic	24
American Indian Alaskan Native	12
African American	2
Somali, Oromo, Ivory Coast, Lao, African American	30
Multi-racial	7

Individuals and Organizations who Indicated they REPRESENT or work with a specific racial or ethnic population(s)	
Individual Comments	
American Indian Alaskan Native	25
Hispanic	10
Communities of color generally	1
Group Meetings (# of individuals)	
Asian Pacific Islander	28
Primarily African refugee & immigrant populations	30
Multi-racial populations	6
American Indian Alaskan Native	2
Organizational Responses	
African-American families	n/a

Besides geographic, organizational and racial and ethnic background, respondents were asked if they represented any other constituencies. Responses covered a wide range of stakeholder groups, including:

Among INDIVIDUAL Responses & Group Meetings

- Low-income families (104)
- Individuals with disabilities (40)
- Yesler Terrace residents and parents (30)
- Young children with special needs (20)
- Libraries (16)
- Refugee and immigrant families (33)
- Middle class families (2)
- Migrant families (5)
- Military families (1)

Among ORGANIZATIONAL Responses

- Infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities
- Early Head Start
- ECEAP Programs
- Kinship caregivers in King County
- Pediatricians across Washington state
- Refugee and immigrant families
- Rural, small school districts

3. Comment Review and Response

How Comments Were Compiled and Reviewed

We appreciated receiving many and all comments, which covered diverse issues, communities, and constituencies across the state. Each comment was carefully considered and informed our work to edit and improve the document. Comment review involved several steps: 1) compiling all comments into a spreadsheet; 2) reviewing specific suggestions on formatting, flow, clarification, etc., and making those edits where consistent with goals and principles; and 3) synthesizing substantive comments for further discussion and decision making. In synthesizing comments, same or similar comments were grouped to reveal recurrent themes or issues. In round 1, step 3 was first done by the Purpose and Principles Subgroup of the Workgroup and then discussed by the full Workgroup. In round 2, that step was first carried out by the Document Subgroup, followed by full Workgroup discussion.

Prevalent Themes and Issues from Round 1

In round 1, many positive comments were received about both the draft Purpose Statement and the Guiding Principles. Respondents “rated” both an average 3.3 on a scale of 1 to 4. The most recurrent comments centered on several issues: 1) making sure the language is user-friendly, simplified and accessible, especially for parents; 2) making sure certain terms were not overly subjective, undefined or vague; 3) considering overall health and safety of children as a goal; 4) adding emphasis on children with special needs and different abilities; and 5) being mindful of the importance of a strong dissemination and implementation plan to distribute the Guidelines. Additionally, seven respondents submitted comments at the line-edit level.

Prevalent Themes and Issues from Round 2

The overwhelming majority of comments were positive. Commenters liked:

- The clear, understandable language.
- Specific suggestions for what parents/caregivers can do to help children develop.
- Age-specific information.
- Descriptions of behaviors rather than outcomes.
- The inclusion of information through 3rd grade.
- The whole-child approach.
- The recognition of family and culture.
- The opportunity to use the Guidelines as a tool to connect child care providers, families and teachers.

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Respondents gave ratings as follows, on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being not useful and 4 being very useful:

▪ Useful resource generally:	3.4	(average of 211 responses)
▪ Useful resource for birth to 5 years:	3.5	(average of 186 responses)
▪ Useful resource to bridge with K-3:	3.3	(average of 170 responses)
▪ Useful resource across diverse cultures:	3.1	(average of 154 responses)

Quite a few commenters suggested additional topics to cover, wording changes, and ways to clarify the text.

Several provided line edits of the document. We accepted many of these suggestions, with thanks.

Among those who voiced concerns, six themes and issues emerged:

1. Organization of the Guidelines
2. Age Groupings
3. Relation to Various Standards
4. Usability for Multiple Audiences
5. Differences in Development
6. Length of the Document

Below we describe each of the key issues and the workgroup's response to each.

1. Organization of the Guidelines

Description of Issue:

A number of early learning professionals said the Guidelines should be organized as a continuum of learning (like the previous Benchmarks), instead of by age. For example, one respondent said, "We could not easily see how learning in one age group directly connects to learning in the next age group . . . This makes it more challenging for a provider/teacher to scaffold children's experiences to follow and support the child's individual rate of learning."

Response:

In the Introduction "How the Guidelines Can Be a Resource for You," we explain why we used age as the organizing factor, how the content is organized by areas of development, and that the same topics appear under areas of development for each age. A reader can look back or ahead to see how a skill develops for prior and coming ages. We also created an index of areas of development to help users find the same skill across all ages.

2. Age Groupings

Description of Issue:

Several commenters were concerned that the youngest ages need to be broken down into smaller segments to provide correct recommendations for feeding and physical development. Other commenters were confused by the overlap in the early ages or were concerned that age groups do not match licensing requirements, Child Profile or recommendations of the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

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Response:

In the introduction we explained the rationale for the age groups used. We also referred readers to the Differences in Development sections at the end of each age group for milestones by smaller age groups for infants. In the Resources List, we have added references to “Picturing Development” from Head Start and a variety of sources for child development milestones by age and nutrition information.

3. Relation to Various Standards

Description of Issue:

More than a dozen comments asked how the Guidelines relate to other standards required or in use for various ages, including Head Start, Early Childhood and Assistance Program (ECEAP), Teaching Strategies GOLD, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS), Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), licensing standards, K-12 Grade Level Expectations (GLEs), Common Core Standards, and the “Love.Talk.Play.” campaign. An example of a comment was, “How is this connected to WaKIDS assessment? WaKIDS is using Teaching Strategies GOLD, which is based on a developmental continuum, these Guidelines are not. Need crosswalks linking Guidelines to other efforts like WaKIDS, MERIT, etc.” Another commenter noted that ECEAP standards say that “programs must incorporate information from state early learning standards in instructional plans and processes. The layout, format and informal language of the Guidelines will make this work much more time intensive and challenging.” Another commenter suggested changing the title of the document to “Guide” to indicate that it is providing information but not requirements.

Response:

In the Introduction, we added language to more clearly explain the Guidelines’ intent to be a tool to help bridge caregivers/teachers and parents, and birth-5 and K-3rd grades, and to complement various standards. We also added a chart that shows how Guidelines’ “areas of development” relate to the traditional early learning “domains,” the Head Start Framework and Washington State Learning Standards for K-12.

4. Usability for Multiple Audiences

Description of Issue:

Some early learning professionals said the simple language of the Guidelines and the lack of connection to required standards diminishes the professionalism of providers and continues the traditional difference between child care providers and elementary school teachers. A sample comment was, “Guidelines should help promote the idea of early learning being more professional; Benchmarks did this. We need a credible, professional document for use when talking professional to professional [with teachers].” A few respondents found the mixing of strategies for parents and for caregivers/teachers to be awkward. “If the intent is to make a guide for parents, great. If the intent is for professionals (caregivers and teachers) then a lot of this needs to be rewritten.” Several commenters were confused by the column heading “Parents/Caregivers/Teachers.” Some noted that some

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suggested activities are more clearly for the home and some for the classroom. Some felt that “teacher” for the birth – 5 years incorporates a wider range of involvement in the child’s life (feeding, naptime, etc.), while “teacher” for grades K-3 evokes a classroom setting. Others said a broader term would better include after school program staff, librarians, health care providers and others who work with children outside the classroom.

Response:

On balance, the Workgroup believes that a major focus for the Guidelines is to allow it to address multiple audiences and to use language that makes the Guidelines broadly accessible, especially for parents. We wish to maintain this approach, and believe that doing so can also be of use to the professional – in supporting professionals to strengthen the connection with parents, to provide an at-your-fingertips “refresher” about child development, and to help balance other existing resources, most of which are geared for professionals and less accessible to parents. We have added language in the Introduction to explain the Guidelines’ purpose more clearly, clarify why they are written the way they are, reinforce that they are a tool teachers/professionals can use for sharing information with parents, and suggest that caregivers and teachers at all levels can use them to share information with each other. We also changed the column heading “Parents/Caregivers/Teachers may ...” to “Ideas to try with children” to indicate the ideas are inclusive of anyone who cares for or works with children.

5. Differences in Development

Description of Issue:

Many commenters liked how the Differences in Development sections at the end of each age group list behaviors that might indicate delays in a child’s development that need follow-up. But a dozen commenters suggested additions, changes and clarifications, and asked if these developmental differences were aligned with the state’s Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) program and recommendations of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). One reviewer suggested gathering these pieces into one section so parents could easily pull it out and post it somewhere visible.

Response:

In developing the draft Guidelines, we found particularly strong alignment with the CDC recommendations, which were also the most up-to-date resource available. We specifically drew on information found in the CDC’s “Milestone Moments” booklet for parents. We kept the sections at the end of each age group, so that they come to the reader’s attention when looking at a particular age. We also included, at the end of the Guidelines, a link to the ESIT brochure, “Birth to Six Growth and Development” and to the CDC “Milestone Moments” booklet.

6. Length of the Document

Description of Issue:

Several commenters thought the document was too long, especially for parents. Quite a few said they could see copying sections for parents but probably would not give it to parents as a whole. However, some comment

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groups liked the many examples and range of activities provided. They suggested graphics or ways to break up the text to make it seem less wordy.

Response:

The final layout will make it easy to print each age group separately. As noted in the response for issue #1, we also created an index of areas of development to help users find the same skill across all ages. We conducted an additional line-by-line review of the draft Guidelines for kindergarten through 3rd grade to address concerns about length and level of complexity in these ages. To accommodate this additional step, we pushed out the redesign schedule by one month. Beyond document revisions, the Workgroup is discussing roll-out and implementation of the Guidelines. Those efforts will work to translate the Guidelines into usable, accessible formats. For example, ideas already mentioned have included a parent-friendly pamphlet, a video series in different languages, or a booklet series by age that could come out after the Guidelines are issued. These projects require additional resources and will be determined over the next few months.