

Early Learning Technical Work Group (created by legislature's SSB 6759) October 14, 2011 Update

Background Introduction: A legislative task force authorized by SSB 6759 in 2010 (the "early learning technical workgroup") after its next meeting on October 21st, will release its report to the state's Quality Education Council (QEC) on October 26th. As mandated by the Legislature, the report will examine funding options and provide recommendations for establishing a new high-quality preschool program, capable of ramping up to be available for all Washington 3- and 4-year-olds. The QEC is required to report to the Legislature on this matter by January 1.

The Early Learning Advisory Council will receive a full report on these recommendations at its December 12 meeting. The Workgroup's recommendations can serve as the basis for legislation to build on our state's successful and well-regarded ECEAP program and to significantly expand access, both for economically disadvantaged as well as for all of Washington's families..

Program and Quality: A high-quality early education experience provided to children regardless of income; BA degree in early childhood education required for the lead teacher; class size limited to 18 children; 40% more hours of preschool classroom time per year than required by our current ECEAP program; family support and parent education for all families.

Differentiated Service by Need: At-risk children have access to enhanced and intensive intervention services, including increased health screening and assistance with access, and more family support services (e.g. linkages to emergency housing and food assistance). As the need decreases by income or other risk factors, so will the intensity of the comprehensive services.

Age Eligibility: Access for all 3 and 4 year-olds

Mixed-Income Classrooms: All children regardless of income will be in the same classes together, a model shown to improve the outcomes of all children who participate.

Mixed-Delivery System: Public schools, for-profit and nonprofit agencies and faith-based organizations are all eligible as long as they can meet the program's high standards and non-sectarian rules.

Voluntary: Family/child participation is completely voluntary, expanding parent choice by making high-quality preschool accessible and affordable for all families.

Cost to Participants: Free-of-charge for low-income families and a sliding scale fee system for parents with higher incomes to cover a portion of the program costs.

Phase-in Strategy: The preschool program would begin in targeted pilot communities, defined by elementary school boundaries. These pilot sites would be in low-income communities currently designated for expansion of full day kindergarten and which have a large number of ECEAP-eligible but unserved children. Although at-risk children would receive first enrollment priority, any family living in the school boundary would be eligible for the program.