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For more information about
Washington's Professional
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[www.del.wa.gov/ requirements/
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Research shows that increased training and education for early learning professionals relates to higher-quality interactions with and care for children.

In Washington, we can improve the quality of early learning programs by increasing the skills and education levels of those who work with children. Our state's professional development system helps those who care for and teach young children:

- Understand what they need to know and be able to do when caring for children.
- Manage their training and education records.
- Find training and education opportunities to help them move forward in their careers.
- Find resources and financial support for individual professional development.

The majority of Washington's professional development activities are paid for with federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) dollars.

Why does professional development matter?

A number of major studies have shown that high-quality early care and education programs have a profound and lasting impact on young children. Children who are nurtured and taught by sensitive, well-trained and well-compensated caregivers are more prepared for school and life. These results are especially significant for children from low-income families. Recent research findings also indicate that professional development for the early care and education workforce is linked to program quality, child outcomes and positive adult-child interactions and work force stability.

Elements of professional development include:

- Continuing education
- Community-based training
- Higher education including certificate and degree programs
- On-site consultation and technical assistance
- Coaching and mentoring
- Career guidance tools such as information on career pathways
- Work force initiatives such as scholarships and wage enhancements to support professionals

Washington has implemented a number of professional development system components to raise the quality of professional development in our state over the past year:

- Development of a statewide registry (MERIT) to collect and track work force data for professional development planning.

- Development of a state Career Lattice that details a clear pathway of professional progression from novice providers to experienced professionals based on education and training qualifications.
- Implementation of a new quality assurance process for trainers to promote quality training opportunities around the state, and ensure that all trainings are grounded in the state's Core Competencies for professionals and Early Learning Guidelines.
- Planning and development for statewide certificates and credentials in early childhood education (ECE) offered at all community colleges across the state that offer ECE degree programs through the Opportunity Grant model.
- Development of a coaching framework through the state Quality Rating & Improvement System (QRIS), which offers child care programs the opportunity to improve the quality of care they provide through a system of supports and incentives including professional development.

What is MERIT?

The Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT) is our state's registry to document and recognize the professional achievements of early care & education and school-age professionals. This online tool helps professionals find training opportunities, access information on career pathways, and track their individual career progress. Some of the features in MERIT include:

- A quality assurance process and requirements for trainers to ensure that the workforce is receiving high-quality training that is linked to the state Core Competencies and Early Learning Guidelines.
- Individual professional records for providers based on verified training and education accomplishments.
- Licensing view screens for DEL child care licensing staff to help ensure that state requirements for individuals and facilities are met.
- Data collection on the early care and education and school-age work force in order to identify trends and inform decision-making related to policy and investments.