



## Parent Advisory Group

### History

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) Parent Advisory Group was originally formed in 2002-2003 as the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) Parent Advisory Group. It was formed because legislation required parent participation in the ongoing promotion and operation of the state's ECEAP program. The purpose of the Parent Advisory Group was to provide information, feedback, and recommendations about ECEAP policies and practices. It also helped to shape the services provided to ECEAP families. It had 6 members and represented ECEAP families statewide.

The ECEAP Parent Advisory Group benefited both parents and staff and left a lasting imprint and legacy. The ECEAP Parent Advisory Group was the basis for the DEL Parent Advisory Group.

### DEL Parent Advisory Group

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) was formed in July 2006, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and other early learning programs were moved to this new cabinet level agency. Legislation forming DEL required the following:

"We know that parents are their children's first and most important teachers. Our goal at DEL is that everything we do – the budget and policy decisions we make, the people we hire – are 'parent-tested.'"

Jone Bosworth  
Founding Director

▣ RCW 43.215.020

(3) The department's programs shall be designed in a way that respects and preserves the ability of parents and legal guardians to direct the education, development, and upbringing of their children. The department shall include parents and legal guardians in the development of policies and program decisions affecting their children.

▣ RCW 43.215.907 [JLARC Review]

(8) Procedures have been put in place to respect parents and legal guardians and provide them the opportunity to participate in the development of policies and program decisions affecting their children and;

(9) The degree and methods by which the agency conducts parent outreach and education.

The ECEAP Parent Advisory Group became the DEL Parent Advisory Group in January 2007. The overarching principles and practices of parent partnership at DEL include:

- ▣ Parental involvement in decision-making is the key to having policies and programs that genuinely work for families. <sup>1</sup>
- ▣ Another means of specifically obtaining parent input exists in the Parent Advisory Council. The Department is exploring expansion of this parent group to represent the interests of all parents' accessing child care and early learning programs in the state...Parents serving on this existing advisory group have been included by the Department on hiring panels...to establish the new agency. The Department wants to increase parent involvement in agency decision-making. <sup>2</sup>

- ▲ DEL uses its Parent Advisory Group as a “real-life” sounding board for decisions, ideas and questions that come up in our work. <sup>3</sup>
- ▲ Living our belief that parents are children’s first and most important teachers by ensuring our work is “parent-tested” through our Parent Advisory Group...<sup>4</sup>
- ▲ Increase parent involvement in DEL decision-making – DEL will strive to ensure all of our work is parent-tested by considering how every piece of work we do will affect parents, our primary customers. To hear from an even more diverse group of parents, DEL will expand its existing Parent Advisory Group and propose regional groups linked to our three Service Areas. <sup>5</sup>

## Parent Involvement Coordinator

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) created a Parent Involvement Coordinator position in the spring of 2008. This role assists DEL in its commitment to parent involvement in all DEL divisions, statutory requirements and major initiatives.

This is done by:

- ☑ Engaging current consumer parent voice in developing DEL strategies, programs and policies to meet the needs and interests of parents, families and communities.
- ☑ Supporting the Parent Advisory Group and overseeing its activities.
- ☑ Developing the Parent Advisory Group and its responsibilities.
- ☑ Connecting with other agencies, organizations and the public to build opportunities for parent partnership that expands beyond the Parent Advisory Group.
- ☑ Working with DEL staff to fine-tune processes for getting input needed. This includes developing methods for parent partnership on committees, through a listserv and for specific agency needs.

## Parent Involvement

The DEL Parent Advisory Group has already been involved in many programs and decisions at The Department of Early Learning (DEL). They have made a “lasting imprint and legacy” in support of the Governor’s vision for Washington State children and families.

These include:

- ✎ Participation on hiring panels.
- ✎ Participation on the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC).
- ✎ Communication in monthly conference calls and 2 face-to-face meetings a year.
- ✎ Broad based input on initiatives such as the Quality Rating Improvement System, Parent Needs Assessment, Licensed Child Care Information System (LCCIS), DEL website development, expansion of the DEL Parent Advisory Group, and Publications (Guide to Choosing Quality Child Care, Parents Guide to the Benchmarks, 2009-2013 Strategic Plan).

The Department of Early Learning gives parents an unprecedented voice in statewide policy, funding and hiring decisions. Parents understand best the needs and desires of families in accessing quality early childhood services and supports.

<sup>1</sup> Report to Governor Gregoire and the Washington State Legislature (7), Department of Early Learning, 2006

<sup>2</sup> Report to Governor Gregoire and the Washington State Legislature (14), Department of Early Learning, 2006

<sup>3</sup> Helping Children Realize Their Full Potential, 2007 Annual Report (8), Department of Early Learning, 2007

<sup>4</sup> DEL Biennial Report to the Legislature and Longitudinal Study Plan (12), Jone M. Bosworth, Department of Early Learning, 2008

<sup>5</sup> 2009-2013 Strategic Plan, Department of Early Learning, 2008