

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) licenses nearly 6,000 child care centers and family home child care providers in Washington. Child care licensing is the foundation of quality, and a key part of the state's quality framework, Early Achievers. Licensed child care providers follow licensing requirements set by the state to help ensure children in care are in safe, healthy and nurturing places.

DEL licensors work to help licensed child care providers offer the best programs possible. DEL licensors:

- Offer orientations
- Ensure provider application packets are complete
- Process background checks
- Inspect and monitor facilities
- Take corrective action as necessary.

Working with licensed providers, licensors identify strengths in the child care setting and offer information and resources when something needs to be changed. Once the licensed provider demonstrates full compliance, a full non-expiring license is granted; the provider maintains annual compliance by keeping current with licensing fees, declaration of compliance, and background check verifications.

The benefits of licensed child care

The latest brain research has given us a much clearer picture of how children learn and grow in their early years. During the early years of life, the brain is forming connections that help determine a lifetime of skills and potential. High quality child care helps ensure healthy physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development.

The benefits of licensed child care include:

- Health and safety checks on the facilities. DEL staff visit child care centers at least once a year and visit family home child care providers at least once every 18 months. This is changing to once every 12 months in 2015.
- Child development training
- First aid and CPR training
- Criminal background checks on the provider and staff (and certain household members of family home child care providers)

Licensed child care by the numbers:

- 3,899 family homes
- 1,488 centers
- 432 school-age programs
- Total child enrollment capacity statewide: 161,973

To ensure they meet state health and safety standards, licensed child care providers follow specific rules about:

- The skills and training providers must have
- Who may be a child care provider
- How providers interact with children
- Child care staff-to-child ratios
- What children learn
- Safe food handling and preparation
- Safe storage of medicine, cleaning supplies and other toxins
- Safe indoor and outdoor play areas