



Washington State Department of Early Learning

Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge

March 2015 Update

Dear Washington early learning leaders,

The rumors are true – the Environmental Rating Scale threshold is being lowered in Early Achievers beginning July 1, 2015. Did you get this news through the grapevine, backdoor, or rumor mill? Yeah, that happens sometimes and we apologize for any confusion. Below are the details of this change, and we welcome any feedback about it.

What are the Environmental Rating Scales (ERS)?

The Environmental Rating Scales (ERS) are one set of assessment tools used in Early Achievers. The ERS assess the learning environment, health and safety of children in multiple early learning settings. The ERS is the most valid and reliable tool available to measure the quality of environments in an objective way. Through both the QRIS pilot (2007-2009) and in Early Achievers since 2012, Washington has seen that using the ERS, coupled with coaching, leads to large improvements in child care quality.

Nationally, the ERS Scales are used in 27 out of 36 state QRIS systems. It is available in more than 20 languages and used officially in more than 30 countries (and on every continent except Antarctica) including China, Japan, Brazil, Chile, Hong Kong, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Taiwan, Bahrain...

The ERS scales are designed to assess *process quality* in an early childhood or school age care group, which consists of the various interactions that go on in a classroom between staff and children, staff, parents, and other adults, among the children themselves, and the interactions children have with the many materials and activities in the environment including space, schedule and materials that support these interactions. Process quality is assessed primarily through observation and has been found to be more predictive of child outcomes than structural indicators such as staff to child ratio, group size, cost of care, and even type of care,

for example child care center or family child care home. For more information on the ERS, please see an [Overview of the ERS](#).

Why Reduce the Threshold?

Early Achievers has required a minimum rating of a 3.5 on the ERS to achieve a rating of a Quality Level of Excellence (Level 3-5). Through the initial years of implementation, the ERS threshold proved to be a significant barrier to many providers to achieving a Quality Level of Excellence. DEL has already implemented several [changes](#) to how the ERS tool is used in Early Achievers, and this is another step to make sure that Early Achievers supports as many providers as possible as they participate on the path of quality improvements.

What Will the Impact Be?

DEL will retroactively implement this change beginning July 1, 2015. Future ratings will use the new 3.0 threshold and facilities that have already been rated will have their rating reassessed and those that have received an ERS score of 3.0 or higher will receive 5 Early Achievers points. This change will increase the number of providers that are currently rated as a Quality Level of Excellence by approximately 86 providers. Many of these providers were planning to get re-rated and now that will not be necessary. In addition, Quality Improvement Awards will be issued to providers with changes to their ratings beginning in July.

What Other Changes Will Be Made?

Each July, DEL issues policy changes to Early Achievers based on data and lessons learned. In addition to the changes in the ERS threshold, DEL is looking at ways to strengthen the alignment between licensing and Early Achievers. The path of quality improvement begins at licensing, so it's important to make sure that all providers have access to tools and training from day one. DEL is exploring ways to make some of the training currently available to providers when they enroll in Early Achievers available to providers before they enroll. Stay tuned for more information about these changes as details become available.

Subscriber link

[Subscribe to DEL Race to the Top-Early Learning updates](#) and other DEL news.

Thanks for everything you do to support young children in Washington!

Washington's Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Performance Tracker			
EARLY ACHIEVERS: LEVELS 2 TO 5			
As of January 31, 2015	Registered in EA	2015 Year End Targets	2015 Year End Progress
Total # of Programs	2,478	3,982	62%
Head Start and ECEAP Sites	204	493	41%
Licensed Child Care Sites	2,274	3,489	65%
<i>Family Home Child Care</i>	1,387	2,556	54%
<i>Child Care Centers</i>	887	932	95%
Total Children Served by EA	67,460	87,144	77%
Head Start and ECEAP Sites	10,107	17,361	58%
Licensed Child Care Sites	57,353	69,782	82%
<i>Family Home Child Care</i>	9,039	16,398	55%
<i>Child Care Centers</i>	48,314	53,384	91%

Click [here](#) for more data on Early Achievers progress.