

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2731

As Reported by House Committee On:
Early Learning & Children's Services

Title: An act relating to implementing a program of early learning for educationally at-risk children.

Brief Description: Creating an early learning program for educationally at-risk children.

Sponsors: Representatives Goodman, Haler, Maxwell, Priest, Kagi, Sullivan, Seaquist, Quall, O'Brien, Jacks, Haigh, Pedersen, Darneille, Kenney, Rolfes, Hunter, Williams, Orwall, Lias, Carlyle, Roberts, Simpson, Walsh, Nelson, Kelley, Dickerson, Appleton, Eddy, Sells and Morrell.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Early Learning & Children's Services: 1/19/10, 1/22/10 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the development and implementation of a basic education program of early learning to be governed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Department of Early Learning (DEL).
- Directs the DEL to develop, coordinate, and implement community-based services and programs for children ages birth to 3 years and their parents and caregivers.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Kagi, Chair; Roberts, Vice Chair; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Goodman and Seaquist.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Haler, Ranking Minority Member; Angel.

Staff: Sydney Forrester (786-7120).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

Department of Early Learning.

Created by the Legislature in 2006, the Department of Early Learning (DEL) is charged with implementing state early learning policy and coordinating, consolidating, and integrating child care and early learning programs. One of the purposes underlying the creation of the DEL is to promote linkages and alignment between early learning programs and elementary schools. The DEL has approached a number of its initiatives over the past three years with the ultimate goal of improving school readiness for Washington's children. The Director of the DEL serves on the Quality Education Council.

Quality Education Council.

The Quality Education Council (QEC) was created by the Legislature in 2009 to serve as the education reform implementation and oversight body. The Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) serves as chair of the QEC. In its January 2010 report to the Governor and the Legislature, the QEC included 13 recommendations, including a recommendation for the inclusion of an early learning program for at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds within the definition of basic education.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is the current state-funded voluntary preschool program serving children ages 3 and 4 from low-income households. The program is similar to the federal Head Start program of preschool in terms of the populations served and the types of services delivered to children and their families, but the programs have different standards and levels of service required. In 2008 the Legislature directed the DEL to develop a proposal for implementing a statewide Washington Head Start program that would maintain quality standards and align the ECEAP program with Head Start performance standards, eligibility criteria, and methods and processes for ensuring continuous improvement in program quality. The DEL published its progress on this task in its December 2008 report to the Governor and the Legislature, but because funding for completion of the task was withdrawn for budget reasons, further work was suspended.

Program of Basic Education.

The 1977 Basic Education Act defines the program of basic education as:

- the goal of the school system, which includes providing students the opportunity to develop essential knowledge and skills in various subjects;
- the instructional program to be made available by school districts; and
- the determination and distribution of state funding to support the instructional program.

Previous Legislation.

In 2009 the Legislature enacted Engrossed Substitute House Bill 2261 (ESHB 2261), which, among other reforms, declared the intent to develop a program of early learning within basic education; directed the SPI and the DEL to convene a working group to develop the basic education program of early learning; and required status reports and a final report be delivered to the QEC. This section of ESHB 2261 was vetoed by the Governor. The Governor's veto message included her commitment to "providing quality early learning programs for all" Washington's children, and requested the SPI and the Director of the DEL

"to work together to bring a proposal forward that ensures all Washington children have the benefit of early childhood education." By letter, the Governor also requested Thrive by Five Washington be included in development of the proposal and that a final report be delivered by December 1, 2009.

The Early Learning Advisory Council incorporated the proposal requested by the Governor in her veto message into the draft Early Learning Plan (ELP) presented to the Legislature on December 2, 2009. Among the near-term implementation recommendations in the current draft ELP is a recommendation to increase investments in, and phase in the implementation of, enhanced early learning opportunities for children ages birth to 3. The opportunities should be available to all who wish to access them, and they should work to close the preparation and achievement gap children are experiencing.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

Beginning September 1, 2011, a voluntary basic education program of early learning for children who are educationally at-risk (Program) is established within the overall program of basic education. The program is to be phased in beginning in the 2011-2012 school year in school districts with the highest numbers of children eligible for free and reduced price lunch, following the same model as used for implementation of all-day kindergarten programs. The program must provide comprehensive services to eligible 3- and 4-year-olds and their families, and is to be phased-in beginning in the 2011-2012 school year.

The DEL and the SPI are directed to develop recommendations for the Legislature and report back by November 15, 2010, regarding:

- program standards for a developmentally appropriate curriculum;
- service standards for delivery of family support services; and
- strategies to provide technical assistance to current ECEAP and Head Start providers interested in being approved to deliver the basic education early learning program.

Program eligibility will be based on risk factors correlated with increased probability of poor educational outcomes, including:

- the child's household income is at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level;
- the child has limited English proficiency;
- the child's family is receiving child welfare services; and
- other factors identified by the SPI and the DEL.

For children who may be educationally at-risk for reasons other than research-based risk factors, school districts, in collaboration with approved providers, will conduct an individual evaluation to determine eligibility. The DEL and the SPI will develop recommendations for the Legislature regarding an evaluation process that is aligned with early learning benchmarks and the kindergarten assessment process.

On a space-available basis, and so long as eligible children are not displaced, the Program may allow enrollment of children who are not educationally at-risk, but a fee or co-payment will be assessed.

The DEL is directed to develop, implement, and coordinate early learning services and programs to be available in community settings for children birth to age 3 and their parents and caregivers. Birth-to-three early learning programs are not part of the program of basic education.

Funding for the basic education program of early learning for educationally at-risk children must be appropriated to the SPI on a per-eligible-child basis. The DEL will contract with school districts and community-based, DEL-approved early learning providers to deliver services. The Legislature intends to appropriate a proportional amount to the DEL for implementation of birth-to-three early learning programs.

The SPI, the DEL, and the Office of Financial Management must report to the Legislature by November 15, 2010, with recommendations for:

- a budgeting and funding allocation method;
- the indicators, benchmarks, and evaluation process to be used for eligibility screening; and
- a schedule for implementing the eligibility evaluation process statewide.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill makes the following changes:

1. Adds to the intent section:
 - findings relating to neuroscience and brain development;
 - intent to fund early learning programs for children birth to age 3 and their caregivers; and
 - a statement that birth-to-3 early learning programs are not part of the overall program of basic education.
2. Defines *community-based early learning providers* to include for-profit and non-profit licensed providers of child care and preschool programs.
3. Removes the detailed program standards for the basic education program of early learning for children who are educationally at-risk and instead, directs the DEL and the SPI to report back to the Legislature with recommendations for:
 - program standards for the curriculum (adds numeracy to the curricular areas of the program);
 - service standards for the family support services; and
 - strategies to provide technical assistance to ECEAP and Head Start providers to become approved to deliver the Program.
4. Allows enrollment of children not otherwise eligible for the program on a space-available basis with payment of fees on a sliding scale to be developed by the DEL and the SPI.
5. From the start of the Program and continuing, eligibility is based on the child being educationally at-risk due to risk factors correlated with poor school outcomes, or on the basis of an individual evaluation indicating a child is educationally at-risk for other reasons.
 - Removes the shift in the 2016-17 school year to an individual evaluation-only eligibility process.

- Adds additional risk factors: child has limited English proficiency; and child's family is receiving child welfare services.
 - Revises the low-income eligibility standard to 130 percent of the federal poverty level (from 110 percent in the original bill).
 - Directs the SPI and the DEL to report back to the Legislature with recommendations for any additional risk factors shown by research to correlate with poor educational outcomes.
6. Adds a requirement for school districts and early learning providers to work cooperatively with the other to assure children and their families are prepared and supported in the transition from preschool to kindergarten.
 7. Modifies the DEL's duty to monitor programs by specifying it be done in collaboration with school districts.
 8. Adds to the primary duties of the DEL the responsibility to develop, coordinate, and implement early learning programs and services to be available in community settings for children birth to age 3 and their caregivers.
 - Declares legislative intent to invest in a network of high-quality birth-to-3 programs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Preliminary fiscal note available. New fiscal note requested on January 22, 2010.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed, except section 10, relating to amending the definition of basic education, which takes effect September 1, 2011.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The Ready for School Act is based on the longitudinal research demonstrating that the benefits of quality early learning are undeniable, both for the child and society. The value of incorporating early learning into our basic education program is to bind future legislatures to support this investment in providing the extra help many children need in order to be prepared for kindergarten and beyond. It assures our commitment will continue. This proposal focuses on those children most at-risk for educational failure. Quality early learning programs are the key to children's educational success.

This state has been talking about basic education and early learning since at least 1982. Two generations of children have already gone through the system. It is time we invest now in order to reap the savings in the future. It is time to close the chapter on our pondering and turn the page to a time of action.

Children who are adequately prepared for kindergarten have the opportunity to do well in school, but not all children have this opportunity. Investments in high-quality early learning can reduce the number of children needing special education services later. The current

mixed delivery models around Washington can serve as a model for integrating children from various backgrounds who have similar needs.

Early learning should be closely linked with the SPI because this influences the public perception of the importance of early learning and emphasizes the weight that should be assigned to this phase of development. It also will help reinforce the connections between school success and school readiness.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids believes we cannot continue to keep locking people up because it is too expensive. We must work on preventive strategies and prevent high school dropouts by promoting school success from the beginning. High school dropouts are three times more likely to get arrested and eight times more likely to be incarcerated. With appropriate early learning investments we can increase the high school graduation rate by 44 percent. If we fail to invest now, we will pay the costs later.

Forward-thinking businesses are investing in early learning and so should the government. It is a smart way to spend limited funds and generates an excellent return on investment. Spending money on early learning programs is better than spending it on the juvenile justice system or the corrections system.

Eighty-five percent of core human brain development occurs in the first five years of life, but, only 4 percent of the public investment in children happens during this period of their development. We also should keep the birth-to-three populations in mind, as this is part of the critical developmental period.

The Early Learning Action Alliance believes early learning is a bipartisan issue. This bill is a powerful vision for our future. There is strong support for including a preschool component in the definition of basic education from parents, early learning providers, advocates, philanthropy, researchers, law enforcement, and the business community. All four of the legislative work groups have come to this same conclusion.

The cost to restore children to a level of functioning that will support successful educational outcomes, is 40 to 50 percent more than if we invest during this critical time. The analysis from the Washington State Institute of Public Policy reflects that the cost-benefit analysis of pre-kindergarten programs provides an estimated \$2.53 return on every dollar invested. We can see the benefits of our investments in as little as 10 years. We know that the preparation gap is what creates the achievement gap. Providing quality preschool instruction allows children at-risk to catch-up and be ready for kindergarten.

Quality preschool can break the cycle of poverty and homelessness. A strong predictor of on-time high school graduation is being on grade level in math and reading. A strong predictor of being on grade level in third grade is being ready to learn when entering kindergarten. Equality of opportunity means all children have an equal shot at high school graduation and the opportunities that lie beyond. Education is the foundational cornerstone of our society.

The Service Employees International Union has been a strong proponent of including early learning in the definition of basic education. This bill will help support a seamless education

system; will support parental choice by utilizing the current community-based infrastructure; and will allow for evaluation of funding of the entire system. This bill will help us move forward while increasing the quality of early learning.

The Child Care Resource and Referral Network strongly support making this connection between early learning and basic education. This bill makes a strong statement about the importance of early learning. We also would like to continue a focus on birth-to-three programs because of the critical brain development that occurs during the first few years of life.

The Washington State Parent Teacher Association strongly supports phasing in the early learning preschool program with the all-day kindergarten programs. By including early learning in basic education, we strengthen our current investments in basic education.

(In support with concerns) Early learning is one of the priorities of the SPI and he is concerned about the potential cuts to current early learning and all-day kindergarten programs. There is some concern that, as written, school districts would see the requirement to conduct screening evaluations as an unfunded mandate. There also is the possibility that very small school districts would be challenged to provide a program on their own if community-based providers cannot be found. The SPI supports including early learning in the definition of basic education and believes we also need to fully fund the other components of basic education.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Goodman, prime sponsor; Jim Kainber, Kay Slonim, and Alison Merryweather, Stand for Children; Gregory Malcolm, Encompass; Susan Anderson-Newham, Pierce County Library; Sheriff Casey Salisbury, Mason County Sheriff's Office and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids; Undersheriff Jim Barrett, Mason County Sheriff's Office; Faith Trimble; John Gould, Children's Alliance; Hannah Lidman, Economic Opportunity Institute; Joel Ryan, Washington Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program Association; Bea Kelleigh, City of Seattle; Janet Levinger; Michael Power, Tacoma Housing Authority; Pat Montgomery, Auburn Parent Teacher Association; Dana Walker; Kirsten Holabird, Service Employees International Union Local 925; Ryan Pricco, Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network; and Kim Howard, Washington State Parent Teacher Association.

(In support with concerns) Robert Butts, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.