

## 2020 Legislative Session Review

A great start for children promises healthy child development, resilient families and communities, and a more robust and stable economy for all. In the 2020 legislative session, the Early Learning Action Alliance advocated for a comprehensive policy and budget agenda focused on addressing affordability and access to high quality, culturally and linguistically relevant, early learning options. Legislators heard our messages loud and clear!

In fact, [legislators took urgent action](#) to address system failures that threaten the infrastructure of our early learning system and stand in the way of future expansion. Together, these actions also jumpstart foundational elements of Representative Tana Senn’s Fair Start for Kids Act ([HB 2661](#)) and Senator Claire Wilson’s Early Care and Education Act ([SB 6253](#)), two ELAA priorities serving as roadmaps for the future.

**While our work is far from done, these are the important investments and policies that the Early Learning Action Alliance saw through the finish line this session:**

### Addressing the Child Care Crisis

- **Increasing rates for providers accepting Working Connections Child Care (WCCC):** Rates paid to family child care providers and child care centers accepting WCCC will be increased to reach the 65<sup>th</sup> percentile beginning at Early Achievers Level 2. **Supplemental budget investment = \$31.904 million.**

The relationship between caregivers and children is cornerstone for development and learning, and yet it is increasingly challenging for early learning providers to make ends meet. Increased rates will help preserve our high-quality and diverse community-based workforce and make it easier for families to find care options.

- **Smoothing WCCC co-pay cliff to ensure continuity of care for families:** WCCC co-payments will be made less burdensome for families who earn modest wage increases by being capped at 12% of family income. A second tier of eligibility is also established so that families earning between 220% and 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$65,500/year for a family of four) can access child care assistance. **Supplemental budget investment = \$6 million.**

For too long, parents scraping by at or near minimum wage have had to turn down promotions for fear of losing child care—because policymakers designed a payment cliff that hardworking people can’t climb up. That hurts families and economic productivity—which hurts us all.

- **Ensuring continuous child care for families experiencing homelessness through [HB 2456](#):** This ELAA priority legislation, sponsored by Representative Lisa Callan (D, 5<sup>th</sup> LD), will extend the child care assistance grace period for families experiencing homelessness from 4 to 12 months beginning July 1. **Supplemental budget investment = \$1.909 million.**

With only four months of child care assistance, families experiencing homelessness have found it hard to access quality early learning environments critical to childhood development. With 12-months of approved assistance, families will have more better access to nurturing and reliable

child care, while they have the time needed to resolve issues related to homelessness such as housing and employment.

- **Funding professional development opportunities for child care providers, including through [HB 2556](#):** Funding is provided for ELAA priority legislation sponsored by Representative Tom Dent (R, 13<sup>th</sup> LD) which creates a community-based pathway for child care providers to meet new education requirements (\$500,000). Funding is also provided for scholarships for students pursuing credits related to child care licensing requirements or Early Achievers milestones (\$1.854 million), including one-time funding for scholarships for the current waitlist of 450 students (\$1.669 million). **Total supplemental budget investment = \$4.023 million.**

A range of professional development opportunities, including experiential learning, community-based training, and credit bearing coursework, is essential for growing a highly qualified workforce. Importantly, community-based pathways promote linguistically accessible and culturally relevant instruction and help preserve and expand a diverse workforce that reflects the children and families it serves.

### Keeping the Doors to PreK Open, Especially for Families Most in Need

- **Increasing rates for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP):** Funding is provided for a 5% across-the-board rate increase for ECEAP programs, effective beginning July 1 (\$6.903 million). Funding is also provided for a rate enhancement for ECEAP providers serving children with special needs (\$2.22 million). **Total supplemental budget investment = \$9.123 million**

ECEAP is a comprehensive program meeting the needs of Washington families who are farthest from opportunity. And yet, programs ECEAP programs are severely underfunded. While we await results from the ECEAP rate study, this modest but important rate increase will help alleviate financial pressure on local programs that is forcing some to turn down slots and others to close their doors. What's more, programs will be better equipped to serve children with special needs, including those with individual education plans and/or or behavioral and social emotional challenges that require extra care.

### Ensuring a Linguistically and Culturally Relevant Early Learning System

- **Investing in the Early Learning Dual Language Grant Program:** Funding is provided for the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) to develop and administer the early learning dual language grant program, with two separate competitive grant processes: one for child care providers and one for ECEAP contractors. Funding is for staffing costs, professional service contracts for training and data evaluation, and \$50,000 each per year in grant funding. **Supplemental budget investment = \$246,000**

Supporting home language development – particularly for immigrants, refugees, and communities of color – is essential for promoting equitable opportunities and outcomes for children and families. That's why it's essential that dual language programming is offered in early

learning settings as part of a language acquisition pipeline from early learning through higher education.

### **Making Space for Growth**

- **Investing in the Early Learning Facilities Fund:** The supplemental capital budget makes critical investments in the Early Learning Facilities Fund (\$4.234 million) in addition to investments in named early learning projects (\$2.962 million). The Fund aims to enable high-quality early learning providers to expand, remodel, purchase, or construct early learning facilities and classrooms necessary to support state-funded early learning opportunities for low-income children. Importantly, the budget also includes an investment in technical assistance to ensure successful projects (\$100,000). **Total supplemental budget investment = \$7.296.**

Lack of financing for facilities and capital improvements restricts the ability of child care and pre-school programs to expand. To meet the demand, it's essential that we have more space available for programs to grow. The Early Learning Facilities Fund aims to enable high-quality early learning providers to expand, remodel, purchase, or construct early learning facilities and classrooms necessary to support state-funded early learning opportunities for low-income children.

**The relationship between caregivers and children is cornerstone for development and learning. We need to invest in wages and benefits for our early learning workforce so we have the capacity to serve additional families through expanded eligibility. We look forward to ongoing work with champions to ensure the intent of the Fair Start for Kids Act and the Early Care and Education Act, including robust compensation for providers, is brought to life in the years to come.**