

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 and culturally and linguistically relevant early learning options. The policies and budgets passed by the legislature jumpstarted 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](#)), roadmaps for growing early learning in the future.

It would have been hard to imagine that just weeks after the legislature invested heavily in early learning, COVID-19 would be pushing an already strained system to the brink of collapse. With significant budget deficits on the horizon, Governor Inslee responded with vetoes to the legislature's budget. The consequences of those vetoes are significant for communities across Washington State. Thankfully, Governor Inslee chose to preserve many investments in early learning that are essential to our immediate and long-term recovery from the devastating impacts of COVID-19.

Our work is far from done as we need an urgent infusion of federal and state resources to ensure access to child care for our essential workforce, particularly low-wage earners who find it difficult to access and afford child care in the best of times, and for families in crisis. **There's a long road ahead to make sure we have a healthy and functional child care system in the future. Child care is the backbone of so many of our communities, we can't let COVID-19 break it.**

PRIORITIES SIGNED INTO LAW

Each of ELAA's priorities will help communities respond to COVID-19. However, these changes were already sorely needed before we fell into crisis and they will not be enough on their own to provide for the needs of children and families, especially those farthest from opportunity.

Addressing the Child Care Crisis

Increased rates for providers accepting Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)

Supplemental budget investment = \$31.904 million

Rates paid to family child care providers and child care centers accepting WCCC will be increased to reach the 65th percentile beginning at Early Achievers Level 2. 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.

[HB 2456](#) : Ensuring continuity of care for families experiencing homelessness

Supplemental budget investment = \$1.909 million

Sponsored by Representative Lisa Callan (D, 5th LD), HB 2456 will extend the child care assistance grace period for families experiencing homelessness from 4 to 12 months beginning July 1. 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. Continuous access to care will help families have 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.

✓ **Access to professional development for providers, including through [HB 2556](#)**

Total supplemental budget investment = \$4.023 million

HB 2556, sponsored by Representative Tom Dent (R, 13th LD), 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). 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.

Supporting Preschoolers with Special Needs

✓ **Special needs enhancement for Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP):**

Total supplemental budget investment = \$2.22 million

Funding is provided for a rate enhancement for ECEAP providers serving children with special needs. ECEAP is a comprehensive program meeting the needs of Washington families who are farthest from opportunity. 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.

Making Space for Growth

✓ **Investing in the Early Learning Facilities Fund**

Total supplemental budget investment = \$7.296 million

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).

PRIORITIES VETOED

Unfortunately, Governor Inslee did veto important investments made by the legislature as a cost saving measure. The loss of these investments will make it harder for already strapped families and programs to make ends meet in these challenging times.

- ✗ \$6 million to smooth the **Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) co-payment cliff** by capping co-pays at 12% of family income and creating a second tier of eligibility for families between 220% and 250% of FPL.
- ✗ \$6.903 million for a **5% across-the-board rate increase for Early Childhood Education and Assistance (ECEAP) programs**.
- ✗ \$246,000 for development and administration of the **Early Learning Dual Language Grant Program**.