



Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

Summer 2022

Adopted from the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning

Spanish and Somali versions of the Operating Guidelines can be found on the DCYF website.



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1. Introduction

Overview: What is Early Achievers?

Early Achievers is Washington State’s quality recognition and improvement system (QRIS). It was developed to help early learning programs offer high-quality care that supports each child’s learning and development. Early Achievers is a framework designed to:



- Ensure that children have high-quality early learning experiences that help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school and life.
- Support early learning professionals to provide high-quality care by offering resources such as professional development opportunities, coaching, and financial supports.
- Help families and caregivers find high-quality child care and early learning programs that fit their needs by providing information about program quality.

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) administers Early Achievers as a key strategy of DCYF’s goal of ensuring that all children start school ready to learn.

While participation in Early Achievers is voluntary, many Washington State supports and incentives for child care and early learning programs require active participation in Early Achievers.

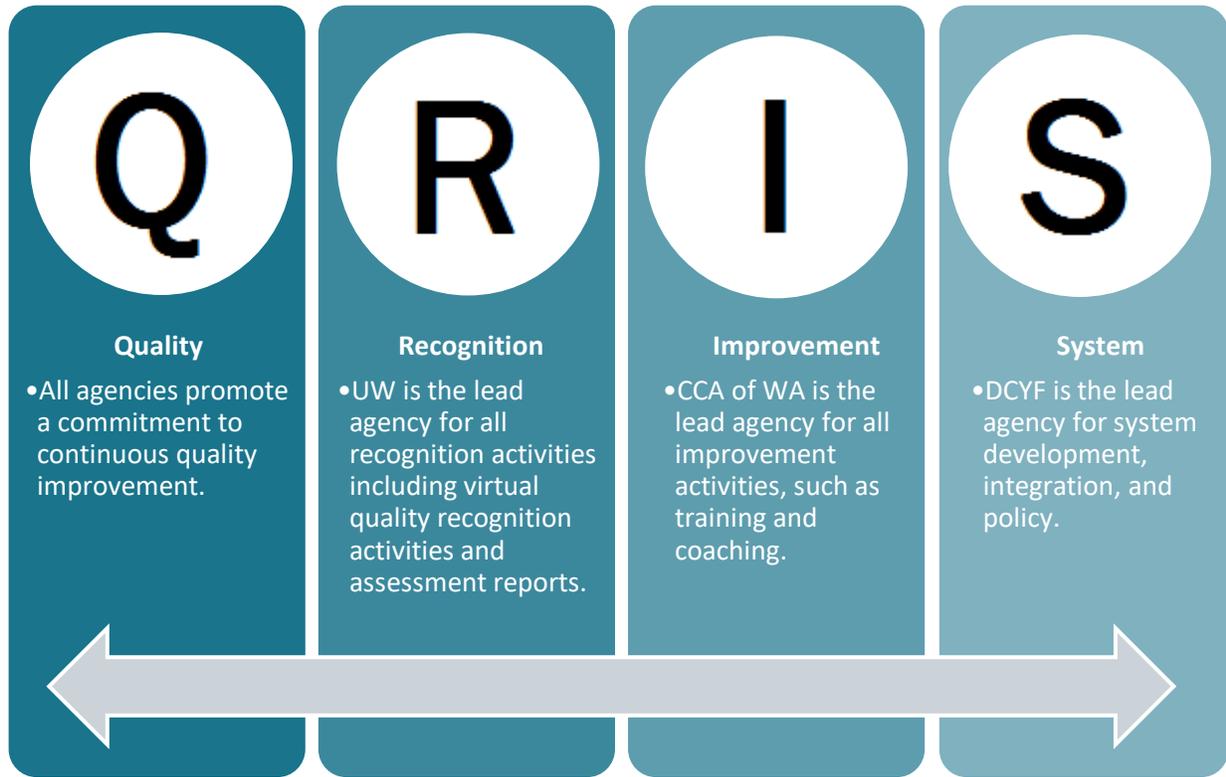
Early Achievers aligns with, supports, and builds upon other key early learning initiatives in Washington. Our goal is to create seamless programs for children and families to help all children grow, develop, and successfully transition from early childhood into early elementary school. Early Achievers participants are part of a system of quality that helps ensure that children receive high-quality care regardless of where they live – because every child should have the chance for a strong start.

Agency Roles

There are many organizations critical to the success of Early Achievers, such as the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, School’s Out Washington, The Imagine Institute, and Washington Communities for Children. The following agencies are key partners in direct implementation of Early Achievers and have distinct roles as described in Figure 1:

- Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)
- Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA)
- University of Washington Cultivate Learning (UW)

Figure 1: Implementation Partners



Purpose of the Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

This document will:

- Help early learning programs understand key components of Early Achievers and support successful participation.
- Provide a detailed overview of Early Achievers policies and expectations.
- Serve as a reference tool throughout participation.

It is your responsibility as a participant to read, understand, and follow the guidelines in this document. CCA of WA, the Early Achievers regional lead agency, is available to answer questions or concerns and help you successfully implement these guidelines. If you offer Head Start and/or Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) services, you may also consult your grantee or contractor with questions.

The term *early learning program* is used throughout this document to indicate child care centers and family home child care providers, as well as facilities that provide Head Start and/or ECEAP services.

Updates to Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

DCYF updates the Participant Operating Guidelines regularly. The current version of the Operating Guidelines (PDF) is available on the DCYF website. The Operating Guidelines posted on the DCYF website replaces all former versions.

Early Achievers is engaged in [Liberatory Design](#) as part of our revisions process. Based on feedback and data from Early Adopters, as well as stakeholder input, DCYF will continue to update policies in the coming year. Any policy updates or changes will be emailed to Early Achievers participants and posted on the website.

Non-Discrimination Statement

DCYF and its Early Achievers partners do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status in any Early Achievers activities or operations. The Early Achievers implementing partners and their staff represent the diversity in Washington State and are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all participants. Staff members participate in training on cultural sensitivity and strive to provide culturally responsive services and resources for Early Achievers participants and the families you serve and we expect the same level of ethical conduct and respect from all Early Achievers participants. You can find additional information on the [Equity in Early Achievers](#) webpage.

Mandated Reporting

All staff providing Early Achievers services, including Quality Recognition Specialists, Community Liaisons and Coaches, are [mandatory reporters](#) under Washington State law and, as such, must [report](#) any instances of suspected child abuse and neglect directly to Child Protective Services.

2. Continuous Quality Improvement

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is at the heart of Early Achievers. CQI refers to the ongoing process of:

- Learning about strengths and opportunities for growth using multiple sources of information.
- Intentional commitment to quality improvement practices, such as:
 - Creating a plan with goals, timelines, and action steps.
 - Testing and implementing solutions.
 - Evaluating the results and revising the plan.

Early Achievers is committed to CQI across the system:

- Programs: Early Achievers empowers early learning program staff and leadership to identify and achieve quality improvement goals with the support of coaching partnerships. Early Achievers supports early learning programs through methods such as shared goals and action planning, reflection, self-assessment, and participation in communities of practice.
- Partners: Partners implementing Early Achievers participate in ongoing professional development. They gather lessons learned from participants and recommend and develop enhancements in service delivery.
- State-System: DCYF relies on feedback from implementing partners, stakeholders, and other data to adjust and improve policies, practices, and supporting resources on an ongoing basis.

Re-Imagining Early Achievers

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the early learning system and programs in Washington State. Early Achievers recognizes the challenges facing programs and has embraced the opportunity to reimagine the system with a focus on the needs of providers and efforts to advance racial

equity. Washington has come a long way in its quality journey. Current data shows that 93% of programs with a finalized quality level have reached a Quality Level 3 or above, a 35% positive change over the last five years. Building on that success, we have identified three goals to help Early Achievers meet the needs of providers, support recovery from the pandemic, and move us into the future:

- Increasing transparency.
- Creating virtual methods to demonstrate quality.
- Allowing a flexible menu of options to reach higher quality levels.

As part of this work, DCYF is developing a CQI cycle for the Early Achievers system so we can continue to enhance the system over time in a regular and predictable schedule.

CQI Cycle

Everyone has room to grow, including the Early Achievers system. DCYF is committed to developing a CQI cycle for the Early Achievers system. This CQI cycle includes a process of reflection, goal setting, and action that allow us to evaluate our system components, policies, practices, and supporting resources. We are doing this in partnership with Cultivate Learning and CCA of WA, as well as providers and other stakeholders across the state. We welcomed and encouraged provider feedback throughout our revision process, and we strive to actively involve early learning providers in our CQI cycle moving forward.

The [Early Achievers Continuous Quality Improvement webpage](#) has more information about our system CQI work and ways that you can participate in the process.

3. Early Achievers Quality Recognition Framework

Overview

DCYF designed the Early Achievers Quality Recognition Framework for a variety of provider types including licensed and certified early learning settings, as well as sites that provide ECEAP, Early ECEAP, Head Start, and/or Early Head Start services in Washington. The framework includes five primary levels. Licensing or certification is equal to Quality Level 1 and sets the foundation of quality for Early Achievers. Participating early learning programs can earn Quality Levels 2 through 5 by meeting the Early Achievers Quality Standards. The following section describes the structure of the Quality Recognition and Improvement System, including an overview of the Quality Standards and Quality Levels.

Early Achievers Quality Standards

The Early Achievers Quality Standards provide a common set of best practices to recognize, support, and improve the quality of early learning settings and improve child outcomes. They are the basis for facility quality levels. The five quality standard areas are aligned with Child Care Licensing and include:

- Learning Environment
- Child Outcomes
- Interactions and Curriculum
- Family Engagement and Partnerships
- Professional Development and Training

See Figure 2 for general examples of the types of program practices that the Quality Standards measure in each area. Please refer to the [Early Achievers Quality Standards booklet \(PDF\)](#) for specific standards.

Figure 2: Quality Standard Areas – Examples

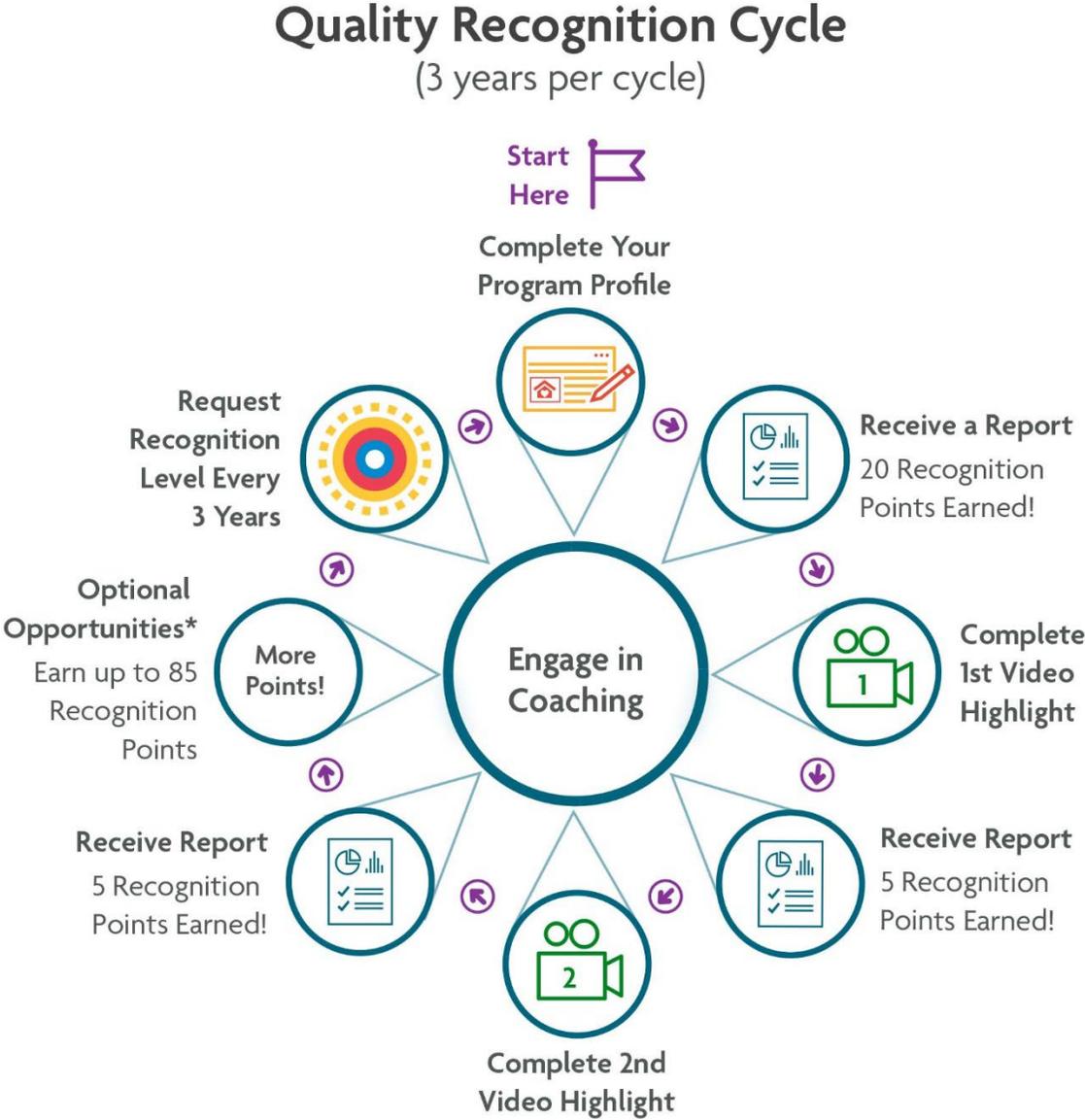
Quality Standard Areas

Learning Environment: 55 points	<p>Participants earn recognition points as they complete the components below. Recognition Components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Profile – 20 points • Video Highlights – 5 points per video cycle (up to 30 points) • School-Age Video – 5 points
Child Outcomes: 20 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen children to spot developmental milestones and possible concerns. • Provide ongoing assessment to learn about each child’s strengths and needs and individualize instruction. • Share information about children’s growth and progress with families to promote school readiness.
Interactions and Curriculum: 10 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a curriculum that aligns with the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines. • Provide staff supports for improvement in curriculum and teacher-child interactions.
Family Engagement and Partnership: 10 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with families to determine perception of child strengths and needs. • Develop a Plan of Action, based on the research-based Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework.
Professional Development and Training: 10 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early learning program and teaching staff have verified state Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificates or credentials, associates, bachelor's or master's degrees in ECE or DCYF-approved degree documented in MERIT.
Accreditation: 10 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit an Accreditation Recognition Request. • Submit as evidence a current certification or other documentation that states the facility is fully accredited by an agency that meets the Early Achievers accreditation requirements. • Accreditation must be valid on the date that the accreditation request is submitted.

Quality Recognition Cycles

To better support your ongoing growth, you are now able to meet the Quality Standards and earn recognition points over time, through the quality recognition cycle. The quality recognition cycle begins when you submit a Request for Quality Recognition in MERIT. A guide to submitting your Request for Quality Recognition is available on our website in [English](#), [Spanish](#), and [Somali](#). Each step of the cycle builds on the last, as you participate in a continuous process of improvement with the help and support of your coach. The cycle is provider-driven, so you define the areas where you want to improve. Your recognition points are not shared publicly and quality levels are not finalized until you choose to complete the cycle by finalizing your Quality Level in MERIT.

Figure 3: Quality Recognition Cycle



*Opportunities include additional video highlights, school-age video highlights, accreditation, and MERIT professional development

Quality Level Structure

In Early Achievers, all participating early learning programs share the same basic foundational requirements at Quality Level 1 and earn points to achieve Quality Levels 2-5. All programs must complete a Program Profile and submit two Video Highlights per classroom to earn a Quality Level 3 or higher.

Figure 4: Overview of Early Achievers Points by Level



4. Getting Started

Overview

To participate in Early Achievers, all early learning providers must first enroll. Early Achievers participants have access to a range of supports and resources. The early stages of participation focus on getting familiar with the Early Achievers system through coaching and training, as well as learning more about provider philosophy, strengths, and goals through the Program Profile.

Eligibility

Licensed, certified or Certified for Payment Only early learning programs, Head Start, and ECEAP sites are eligible to participate in Early Achievers. All licensed or certified early learning programs must be in good standing with licensing to participate in Early Achievers. “Good standing” means having a non-expiring license that is not suspended, revoked, or on probationary status. More information about participation requirements and expectations can be found in [Chapter 9](#).

Participation Requirements

[RCW 43.216.085](#) requires early learning programs that accept state funding to enroll in Early Achievers and meet participation timelines. These requirements apply to early learning programs that:

- Accept subsidy payments through:
 - Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)
 - Seasonal Child Care
- Provide ECEAP/Early ECEAP services

Additional information about timeline requirements can be found in [Chapter 7](#).

Early Achievers Registration

The early learning provider/primary contact can access the registration application on the Facility/Site tab in MERIT. You can find information about [how to register for Early Achievers](#) on the DCYF website, also available in [Spanish](#) and [Somali](#). The Early Achievers Registration includes:

- Basic facility information and demographics.
- Identification of the Early Achievers contact person for your program.
- A link to the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines. Applicants must mark that they have read and agree to these guidelines before submitting the registration.
- An electronic signature by the applicant.

Once you submit the Early Achievers Registration, the Early Achievers contact will receive a confirmation email from DCYF stating the program has enrolled in Early Achievers.

Early Achievers Contacts

The center director/family home child care primary provider will be designated as the Early Achievers contact. The Early Achievers contact is responsible for the oversight and completion of all Early Achievers activities. In early learning programs where there are multiple administrative staff members, you may appoint a secondary Early Achievers contact to support the process.

Coaching

All Early Achievers participants have access to coaching through their regional CCA of WA agency or Head Start grantee/ECEAP contractor. Coaching is a foundational support within Early Achievers, and is an essential part of quality recognition and growth.

Connecting and Working with Your Coach

Once you complete the Early Achievers enrollment application, you will be connected with your Early Achievers coach. Early Achievers coaches help participants successfully engage and navigate the Early Achievers Quality Recognition and Improvement System. Coaches support your goals and action plans through relationship-based and culturally-responsive coaching.

Your local Child Care Aware office will reach out and connect you to available coaching services, or you can use the [Find My Coach tool](#). If your site offers ECEAP/Early ECEAP or Head Start services to 75% or more of the slots in your program, please reach out to your Contractor to learn more about your coaching support.

Each site is unique. You have unique strengths and goals for your site's quality journey. Coaches work with the early learning program leaders to determine the best way to use coaching resources to help your site reach its goals. Each staff person that participates in the quality recognition process will have access to relationship-based professional development. The total amount of coaching that an early learning program receives will vary based on the program's needs. Coaches and other support staff maintain individual privacy, and information regarding specific children will remain confidential.

Technical Supports and Resources

MERIT

MERIT is the system of record for staff employment, education, and qualifications. The Early Achievers contact must ensure that all early learning program staff have entered professional records in [MERIT](#). Staff must associate themselves with the early learning program by logging into their own MERIT professional records and entering their current employment information. Site supervisory staff are required to verify employment records in MERIT using their facility/site tab in MERIT.

All Early Achievers applications and participation history are in MERIT, DCYF's Professional Development Registry. In MERIT, participants can:

- Find current participation status, important information, and contacts.
- Update the Early Achievers Primary/Secondary Contact.
- Begin your quality recognition cycle by submitting the Request for Quality Recognition.
- Finalize your Quality Level.
- And more!

Coach and Educator Community Interface (CeCi)

[CeCi](#) is Washington State's virtual quality recognition and coaching tool (formerly known as Coaching Companion). CeCi is integrated with MERIT so that programs have easy access to the features of both systems. CeCi is a wonderful way to enhance and supplement coaching practices. CeCi facilitates virtual coaching through the Practice-Based Coaching cycle. It contains many resources to support quality early childhood education practices. Coaches can share existing resources or upload resources of their choice to share with providers. Coaches can connect with each other and groups of providers by creating and using Communities of Practice. Resources such as webinars and tips for using CeCi are located in the [resource library](#).

CeCi supports quality improvement through virtual coaching and is a complement to the quality recognition process by incorporating the Provider Profile, Video Highlights, Accreditation, and Records Review components of Early Achievers.

Washington CeCi is accessible at <https://wa-coachingcompanion.org/>. When creating an account for the first time, please use your work email address, if you have one, to create an account. There are also several short quick start videos that provide guidance in using CeCi: <https://wa-coachingcompanion.org/help>

5. Quality Recognition Cycle

Overview

DCYF designed the Early Achievers system to support a continuous Quality Recognition Cycle, so that each step of the cycle builds on the last. Through Early Achievers, a provider participates in an ongoing process of improvement with the help and support of their coach. Participants lead the process with the focus being on areas for growth that you, as the provider, have identified. The Quality Recognition Cycle has three components: Program Profile, Video Highlights, and Records Review. The Program Profile lays the foundation of Quality Recognition. The Video Highlights then expand on the Program Profile, and serve to highlight the teaching practices within a program. Providers who want to go further than a Quality Level 3 (including ECEAP/Early ECEAP providers) can submit additional Quality Recognition Components such as Records Review or additional Video Highlights.



The quality recognition cycle begins when you submit your Request for Quality Recognition in MERIT. The first step is completing a Program Profile, followed by two video highlights – this is the minimum requirement to reach a Quality Level 3. These steps must be completed before your site may submit additional evidence or earn Professional Development points. The cycle ends when you have earned the desired number of recognition points and finalize your Quality Level in MERIT.

You will then be able to submit a new Request for Quality Recognition and begin the cycle again. Quality Levels expire every three years. You must provide current evidence during each quality recognition cycle.

Quality Recognition Components

Program Profile

Completing the Program Profile is the first step in the Quality Recognition Cycle. The Program Profile is an opportunity for providers and families to share information about their program and to celebrate what they are proud of and what makes them unique. The research-based Program Profile provides valuable feedback and data, promotes family engagement, and supports the CQI coaching cycle. The Program Profile consists of reflective questions for the owner/director, staff, and families to complete. Individuals complete the questions independently through an online survey or through an interview with a Quality Recognition Specialist. Early learning programs request their Program Profile by submitting the Early Achievers Request for Quality Recognition in MERIT. Your Community Liaison will contact you when it's your turn to begin your Program Profile. You can access additional information on the [Program Profile Fact Sheet](#) on the DCYF website, along with the Program Profile questions for:

- Director ([English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Somali](#))
- Family Home Child Care Provider ([English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Somali](#))
- Teacher ([English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Somali](#))
- Families ([English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Somali](#))

Upon completion, the Program Profile Report will give coaches and program administrators the opportunity to plan for the quality improvement process. You will work collaboratively with your coach to identify and create goals around your specific program needs. At this point, coaching will focus on:

- Building or updating your site's Quality Improvement Plan based on feedback.
- Guiding you and your staff toward specific professional development resources.
- Teaming up with you to practice the Video Highlights demonstration of teaching practices.

Video Highlights

We measure the quality of your learning environment and interactions through Video Highlights. Video Highlights are 10-15 minute videos of quality teacher-child interactions from each classroom or learning environment. After your program has completed the Program Profile, you may begin submitting Video Highlights. Teachers identify an Early Learning Guideline or Core Competency to demonstrate in their video and write a short reflection. Quality Recognition Specialists review videos using a research-based rubric and provide positive feedback on strengths and opportunities for growth. Through practice-based coaching and culturally affirming approaches, your coach will collaborate with you to review feedback together to celebrate successes and create quality improvement goals. Videos must be submitted for each early learning (ages 0-5) classroom or session.

If your program needs additional support or you do not initially meet the video submission requirements, you will have the opportunity to work with your Community Liaison and Coach to resubmit the video.

If you would like to move beyond a Quality Level 3 (including ECEAP/Early ECEAP providers), then you may choose to submit additional Video Highlights. Your program can submit up to four additional Video Highlights, showing additional standard areas. By submitting additional Video Highlights, you can earn up to 20 additional points.

Coaching at the Video Highlights level continues to follow your quality improvement plan and allows for support of individual teaching practices.

- You and your coach can view the videos that you have submitted together.
- Your coach can guide you and your staff toward specific trainings and other professional development based on feedback.
- Your coach can work with a group of providers to support reflection and shared growth in a trusted community.

Video Highlight Exceptions: Early learning providers that have a cultural, religious or philosophical belief which prohibits the recording and submission of video highlights may request an in-person or virtual observation conducted by Cultivate Learning. Requests for an exception should be sent to the Early Achievers inbox at QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov and must include a copy of program policies that preclude the recording of video highlights.

Records Review

Programs demonstrate other practices through Records Review. Providers can submit evidence in the Quality Standard areas of Child Outcomes, Interactions and Curriculum, and Family Engagement and Partnership by completing the Records Review Tool and uploading files in CeCi. Supporting documents

should include written proof of policies and practices, such as policies in a staff handbook. Providers can choose which Quality Standards they would like to submit evidence for – they can choose some or all.

Completing the Records Review Tool

The Records Review Tool (RRT) is a checklist that helps early learning programs and the quality recognition team prepare for a successful review of records that demonstrates additional Quality Standard areas. The RRT includes:

- Selection of the Quality Standards the early learning program plans to demonstrate during virtual quality recognition.
- Examples of documentation and files for Quality Recognition Specialist review.

As you complete the RRT, you will “opt in” to standards and practices that you plan to demonstrate in your evidence. If there are standards for practices that you do not have in place, then you indicate on the tool that you choose to “opt out” of these standards. You might choose this option when a standard does not align with your program philosophy or if your program does not have plans to implement the standard at this time. Opting out of a standard means the Quality Recognition Specialist will not look for evidence of that standard during virtual quality recognition. Opting out of standards will reduce the number of points earned toward your overall quality level.

Professional Development

You can also earn points for staff education. To earn points for staff education, staff must ensure that their education information in MERIT is both current and verified. It is important that early learning programs prioritize this task early in order to ensure plenty of time to gather, submit, review, and process transcripts. For more information on education verification, please visit the MERIT website: www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-profdev/merit

DCYF calculates Professional Development and Training points based on education that has been verified in MERIT. Directors and teaching staff must have verified state Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificates or credentials, associates, bachelor's, or master's degrees in ECE or DCYF-approved degree documented in MERIT. You can preview your Professional Development points on the Quality Recognition Framework in the Early Achievers subtab. You must complete the Program Profile and two Video Highlights before your program is eligible to earn points for professional development. The Professional Development points are not finalized until you have completed the minimum requirements and finalize your quality level. More information about Professional Development standards and calculations can be found on the DCYF [Early Achievers Supports & Resources webpage](#).

Accreditation

DCYF has incorporated certain national accreditations into Early Achievers. Eligible participants will receive an additional ten points toward their final Quality Level as well as an Accreditation Area of Specialization on their Quality Level certificate. Accreditation points are not retroactive. To qualify, accredited providers must:

- Be fully accredited by an agency that has met the Early Achievers accreditation requirements. At this time, these agencies include:
 - National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
 - National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
 - American Montessori Society (AMS)

- National Accreditation Commission (NAC)
- AdvancED
- Present a current certificate or other documentation during quality recognition that states the facility is fully accredited by an agency that meets the Early Achievers accreditation requirements. This can be completed in CeCi.

Component Review

Quality Recognition staff will work closely with you and your coach and their internal quality assurance team to ensure accuracy in the review of all evidence. If you believe that you have been awarded an incorrect number of points for any quality recognition component, please email QRIS@dcfy.wa.gov with information regarding the component in question, the number of points you believe you should have been awarded, and any additional information within 30 days of receiving points for that component.

Quality Recognition Support Staff

Coaching Supports

This customized support focuses on developing and supporting program goals, preparing for quality recognition activities, and continuous quality improvement.

Coaching requires participation from early learning program leadership and classroom teachers. The Early Learning Development Guidelines help guide best practices around teaching practices, routines and the setup and maintenance of learning environments. It is important for you to understand how these resources outline best practices and how to support your staff as they work to improve quality.

Community Liaisons and Quality Recognition Specialists

Cultivate Learning's Quality Recognition team is composed of Community Liaisons (CLs) and Quality Recognition Specialists (QRSs). Community Liaisons work closely with participating sites and coaches to ensure you receive personalized support during the quality recognition process. Cultivate Learning's QRSs are highly skilled early learning professionals who conduct observations and create data reports for you and your coach to use as you work on quality improvement activities. Cultivate Learning is committed to advancing equity. All CLs and QRSs complete culturally responsive training, and engage in regular reflection and review to ensure accountability in their efforts to advance equity.

Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

Participants set goals with their coaches based on their early learning program evaluation results including:

- Feedback from the Program Profile and Video Highlights.
- Components of Records Review, Early Learning Development Guidelines, or Core Competencies.
- Overall early learning program Quality Level.

These goals will make up the early learning program QIP. Coaches will help participants interpret evaluation data to develop a QIP that identifies program strengths and addresses areas of growth. The QIP acts as a roadmap for the ongoing continuous quality improvement process and guides the work of the early learning program and the coach.

6. Quality Level

Finalize My Quality Level

DCYF determines your early learning program's quality level based on points that you have earned throughout the three-year Quality Recognition Cycle. You earn points throughout the cycle by submitting quality recognition components for review and feedback. When Cultivate Learning reviews each component, you will receive feedback and earn points. This means you earn points over time and will always know how many points you have throughout the process. You can find this information in your Quality Framework sub-tab in MERIT. Once you reach the points needed for the quality level you want to achieve, then you can finalize your quality level in MERIT and receive your assigned quality level.

Eligibility Requirements for Finalizing a Quality Level

To be eligible to Finalize a Quality Level, your early learning program must:

- Complete the Program Profile.
- Have a non-expiring license in good standing.
- Achieve a Quality Level 3 or higher:
 - Complete at least 2 Video Highlights (2 videos per learning environment)

Quality Level Assignment

Quality Level Determinations

DCYF determines your Early Achievers Quality Level based on the number of points received for quality recognition components such as the Program Profile and Video Highlights completed during the Quality Recognition Cycle. QRSs compile and analyze your early learning program data, provide feedback and determine points for each component. DCYF displays the number of points earned and calculates your points and projected Early Achievers Quality Level in MERIT. Once you have completed all the Quality Recognition Components for your early learning program that you want to submit for the cycle and are satisfied with the number of points earned, you can finalize your quality level in MERIT.

Quality Level Finalization

Once your quality level has been finalized, you will need to submit a new Request for Quality Recognition in MERIT to begin working on your next Quality Recognition Cycle. DCYF will email Early Achievers Quality Level Certificates to your early learning program the month after you finalize your Quality Level. Certificates highlight your early learning program's Early Achievers Quality Level, as well as information about early learning program strengths, or Areas of Specialization. For providers that accept subsidy, quality levels also determine the Quality Improvement Award and tiered reimbursement amounts for eligible early learning programs.

Areas of Specialization

Areas of Specialization recognize high quality in focused areas. This information can help families learn more about your program as they search for an early learning program for their family. DCYF awards Areas of Specialization based on total points earned in each Quality Standard area.

Figure 5: Areas of Specialization

Learning Environment	•Awarded to providers that earn 40 out of 55 points
Child Outcomes	•Awarded to providers that earn 14 out of 20 points
Interactions and Curriculum	•Awarded to providers that earn 7 out of 10 points
Family Engagement and Partnerships	•Awarded to providers that earn 7 out of 10 points
Professional Development and Training	•Awarded to providers that earn 7 out of 10 points
Accreditation	•Awarded to facilities that have a current, verified accreditation from a recognized accreditation agency

Publication of Early Achievers Quality Level

A key goal of Early Achievers is to provide information to families about child care and early learning quality to help them make informed choices. The Early Achievers Quality Levels are available 30 days after the Quality Level is released to the provider on DCYF’s [Child Care Check](#) online search tool to acknowledge the commitment of participating early learning programs and provide this information to families. The CCA of WA website and CCA of WA Family Call Center also provide Quality Levels.

Quality Recognition Cycle

Early Achievers Quality Levels are valid for three years from the most recent finalization date. During this period, your early learning program must maintain active participation through engagement in ongoing quality improvement activities and submission of quality recognition components over the course of the three-year cycle. As soon as your early learning program has completed a new Request for Quality Recognition in your MERIT facility/site tab, you can begin working on the quality recognition components for the next cycle, starting with your next Program Profile. More information can be found below in the Renewing my Quality Level section.

Renewing my Quality Level

To maintain a current quality level, you must complete a new quality recognition cycle and finalize a new quality level every three years. Since there are multiple components to the quality recognition framework, you will need to complete these activities over time during the three-year cycle. You must finalize your quality level before your three-year quality recognition anniversary. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting pause in quality recognition, a submitted Request for Quality Recognition (formerly the Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation) currently maintains your program’s subsidy and/or ECEAP eligibility.

Renewal Process

- DCYF will email the Early Achievers Contact at your early learning program 12 and six months before your early learning program’s third quality level anniversary as a reminder to submit an Early Achievers Request for Quality Recognition or to finalize your quality level in MERIT.
- The Early Achievers contact can finalize their quality level at any time as long as they have met the [eligibility requirements](#).

Re-Submitting for an Updated Quality Level

Rated Early Achievers participants that did not meet their mandated or desired quality level have up to 12 months after their most recent quality level release date to request and resubmit an updated quality level.

Re-Submission Eligibility

To re-submit for quality recognition and finalize an updated quality level for free, participants must meet one of the following requirements:

- Did not reach their required Quality Level.
- Provide ECEAP/Early ECEAP or Head Start services.
- Accept subsidy payments from:
 - Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)
 - Seasonal Child Care

Resubmitting for quality recognition can help you reach the quality level mandate for your program type ([RCW 43.216.085](#)). If your early learning program finalizes an updated quality level but still does not reach the mandated quality level, you may request one paid re-submission for quality recognition.

Providers that do not accept state funding may request a paid re-submission for quality recognition.

Resubmission Process

Figure 6: Resubmitting for an Updated Quality Level



What Does it Mean to Re-submit for Quality Recognition?

Re-submitting for Quality Recognition differs from starting a new Quality Recognition Cycle. Re-submission allows you to continue working on your previous Quality Recognition Cycle rather than beginning a new Quality Recognition Cycle. If you are eligible for re-submission, you will regain access to

the Quality Recognition Framework in MERIT that you completed most recently. Your early learning program may then earn points toward your required Quality Level by re-submitting Quality Recognition Components and meeting Quality Standards. The table below highlights some of the key differences in the processes:

Original Quality Level	Updated Quality Level
Must begin with the Program Profile	Reuses the existing Program Profile
May have submitted one or more Video Highlights	May submit additional Video Highlights, up to six total
May submit additional components for points	May submit additional Records Review components, or submit additional evidence (such as an updated policy) for points that were not received
Three years to complete	12 months to complete

Remedial Activities

If you serve children receiving subsidy or provide ECEAP/Early ECEAP services and do not meet your required quality level, then you must engage in remedial activities. These activities can help you improve quality in time to re-submit for an updated quality level and maintain your state subsidy or ECEAP/Early ECEAP funding.

Remedial Activities Participant Requirements

You have 12 months from the date your quality level is finalized to complete the remedial activities and reach your mandated quality level. Please work with your coach and/or other support staff to submit additional evidence to meet your required quality level.

Suggested Next Steps

We recommend the following actions to help you as you work toward an updated quality level:

- Review your quality level data and share applicable information with staff within 60 days of receiving it.
- Work with your coach to identify areas where you would like to resubmit additional Quality Recognition Components.
- Create or update an existing QIP to outline how you plan to earn the additional points needed to achieve your desired quality level.
- Make sure your QIP outlines roles and responsibilities for staff members, as well as a timeline for when you will submit additional evidence.

Coach and Participant Accountability

You and your coach must document your active participation in remedial activities. You can do this by:

- Updating your QIP to include all notes related to your early learning program’s progress during remedial activities.
- Check in with your coach regularly. Review the progress that you and your staff have made on your goals. Make sure you have the resources you need for successful quality improvement.
- Key early learning program staff should participate in video coaching at least once per month.

Early Learning Programs That Do Not Wish to Finalize a Quality Level

If you do not accept subsidy and you do not provide ECEAP services, then you are not required to finalize a quality level. If you are not actively engaged in quality improvement activities and/or working toward a quality level, you and your early learning program staff may have limited access to Early Achievers coaching supports and other resources.

Withdrawing a Finalized Quality Level

If you finalize your quality level in error, you may request to withdraw the finalized level within 30 days of finalization. Doing so will allow you to continue working on your Quality Recognition Framework and submit additional evidence. For more information, please email QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov.

7. Timeline Requirements

Overview

[RCW 43.216.085](#) requires early learning programs that accept state funding to meet participation timelines. These requirements apply to early learning programs that:

- Accept subsidy payments through:
 - Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)
 - Seasonal Child Care
- Provide ECEAP/Early ECEAP services

Additional information about timeline requirements can be found on our [website's Supports & Resources page \(English | Spanish | Somali\)](#). Details about your program's timeline and milestones can be viewed on the Early Achievers subtab of your Facility/Site tab in MERIT.

Timeline Requirements

Impact of COVID-19 on Timeline Requirements

We understand that COVID-19 has had an impact on providers' participation and ability to meet Early Achievers timelines. For specific information on the impact of COVID-19 on timelines, please visit our [website](#) or email QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov.

Providers Newly Accepting Subsidy

Providers newly accepting subsidy* must meet the following requirements:

- Enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days of receiving the initial subsidy payment.
- Complete the Request for Quality Recognition within 12 months of enrollment in Early Achievers or first subsidy payment, whichever is later.
- Receive a Quality Level 3 or higher within 30 months of Early Achievers enrollment or first subsidy payment, whichever is later. An early learning program that does not achieve a Quality Level 3 within this timeline is no longer eligible to receive state child care subsidy until the required Quality Level is met.
- Maintain an up-to-date early learning program Quality Level 3 or higher by renewing their Quality Level every three years.

**Any provider that begins accepting subsidy payments after 12 or more months without accepting subsidy is considered a new subsidy provider*

Subsidy providers that receive a Quality Level 2 must work with their coach to complete remedial activities and receive a Quality Level 3 or higher within 12 months of beginning remedial activities. Any existing subsidy providers that have not received a Quality Level 3 or higher within 12 months of beginning remedial activities will no longer be eligible to receive state child care subsidy until the required quality level is met.

Timeline for Sites Providing ECEAP/Early ECEAP Services

All providers serving ECEAP/Early ECEAP must:

- Register for Early Achievers within 30 days of the start of ECEAP/Early ECEAP services.
- Receive a Quality Level 4 or higher within 24 months of the start of providing ECEAP/Early ECEAP services.
- Maintain a current Quality Level 4 or higher by renewing their Quality Level every three years.

Provider serving ECEAP that receive a Quality Level 2 or 3 must work with their coach to complete remedial activities and receive a Quality Level 4 or higher within 12 months of beginning remedial activities. ECEAP providers that have not received a Quality Level 4 or higher within 12 months of beginning remedial activities will be at risk of losing their contract to provide ECEAP services.

Figure 7: Timeline for Early Learning Programs That Receive State Funding



Timeline Extension Protocol

The Early Achievers Extension allows participants who receive subsidy payments and/or provide Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) services to request a one-time, six-month extension to their timeline requirements. The extension does not provide relief of the 30-month timeline expectation for tiered reimbursement outlined in [RCW 43.216.710](#). Providers may request an extension up to 12 months before their milestone or during remedial activities.

Criteria for Extension Eligibility

Early learning providers who want to request an extension of the quality level milestone must:

- Submit the Early Achievers Extension Application ([English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Somali](#)) before the Quality Level/remedial milestone date.
- Be in full compliance with all licensing and ECEAP/Early ECEAP requirements, if applicable.
- Meet all prior Early Achievers requirements, including enrollment and completion of the Early Achievers Request for Quality Recognition.
- Meet active participation requirements. The full definition of active participation is found in the Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines ([English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Somali](#)).
- Experience verifiable exceptional circumstances (see definition below).

Providers who do not wish to use their one-time extension can request a deferment, which moves you to the bottom of the quality recognition queue, due to exceptional circumstances once per quality recognition cycle. Please contact your Cultivate Learning Community Liaison for more information.

Definition of Exceptional Circumstances

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) will only grant extensions if an early learning provider can demonstrate an “exceptional circumstance” that allows additional time prior to finalizing a quality level. These exceptional circumstances include:

- Leadership changes onsite — director, assistant director or program supervisor.
- Organizational leadership changes — Tribal Council membership or other agency leads.
- High staff turnover in a Child Care Center, Head Start or ECEAP program — more than 30% of lead staff, as defined in MERIT, have changed within the past three months (this is limited to staff who work with children in the birth to 5-year-old age range).
- Staff turnover in Family Home Child Care — family child care assistant or lead staff have changed within the past three months.
- Natural disaster or accidental damage to the facility that requires professional repair.
- Community defined events, subsistence lifestyles, seasonal issues — such as ceremony, canoe journey.
- The facility is engaged in a grievance process with DCYF, Child Care Aware of Washington or other entity providing Early Achievers supports.
- Reallocation of Head Start or ECEAP slots that may impact quality recognition procedures.
- Extended illness of the director, family home child care provider or a lead teacher.
- Less than three children between birth and 5 years old per early learning environment are enrolled in a child care center.
- Less than one child between birth and 5 years old per early learning environment are enrolled in a family child care.
- Death or other tragedy that has a significant impact on the program staff or families.
- Other exceptional circumstances, reviewed case by case.

- In these situations, the facility must provide documentation that demonstrates a need for an extension. This documentation will be reviewed by an Exception/Extension panel to determine if the circumstances warrant an extension. The panel will include staff from DCYF and Child Care Aware of Washington and a member of the Provider Supports Subcommittee.

Process for Requesting an Extension

Providers must be in compliance with all timeline requirements at the time they submit the Early Achievers Extension Application form. The application must include the following information:

- Reason for requesting an extension.
- Summary of Early Achievers participation and quality improvement activities.
- Documentation to verify the request (e.g., doctors' letters, termination letters, etc.)

DCYF Early Achievers staff will review all extension requests and approve if it meets the predetermined criteria listed on the application. If the provider's exceptional circumstance is not on the predetermined list, a DCYF panel will review your request. The panel includes a DCYF QRIS staff member, CCA of WA staff member, and a member of the Provider Supports Subcommittee and/or the Early Achievers Values and Processes Workgroup. The panel will review the request and supporting evidence to determine if the provider qualifies for an extension. An email from the QRIS inbox will state if DCYF granted or denied the request for an extension and will include information on next steps.

8. Participant Supports and Incentives

Overview

Early Achievers includes a range of supports and incentives to assist participants with quality improvement efforts throughout your participation. We have designed these supports and incentives to help you implement goals, increase your early learning program quality, and ultimately improve child outcomes.

Coaching Services

Coaching is a long-term continuous service provided at no cost within Early Achievers to help you understand Early Achievers policies and navigate the process successfully. CCA of WA regional agencies provide most coaching services. If 75% or more of your program's slots are dedicated for Head Start or ECEAP/Early ECEAP services, then you may receive coaching services through your grantee/contractor.

You can access coaching if you are actively participating in Early Achievers. Active participation means that your early learning program responds to communications, participates fully, and demonstrates program growth based on consultation and coaching. The goals of coaching are to:

- Promote relationship-based professional development.
- Engage in conversations with you that promote equity and positively change practices.
- Provide you with resources and recommend professional development.
- Support you as you navigate the Quality Recognition system.
- Help you and your early learning program staff understand the Early Achievers Quality Standards.
- Help you understand and use Early Achievers Quality Level and assessment data.
- Support your program goals and the creation of your QIPs.

You will access coaching services in multiple ways, including on-site visits, email, phone calls, group sessions, and virtual coaching through CeCi. You may work individually with your coach or within small group sessions on topics that support continuous quality improvement and best practices.

Birth to 3 Quality Initiative

Washington State and DCYF are committed to increasing the supply and quality of care for children ages birth to 3. Early Achievers provides specialized relationship-based support to teachers working with children ages birth to 3. A network of infant-toddler specialist coaches deliver virtual or on-site coaching to home-based and center-based early care and education programs.

Eligibility

If your early learning program provides services to children ages birth to 3 who are receiving state subsidy benefits, then you are eligible to request focused classroom coaching by an infant-toddler coaching team.

Specialized Coaching and Support

Birth to 3 coaches work cooperatively with Early Achievers coaches to support teachers who are working with children under 3 years old. Some of the services they offer include:

- Developmental Screening supports and materials to promote universal developmental screening across ages birth to 5. Participants are eligible for free STARS training and a developmental screening kit.
- Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation to promote social and emotional growth and behaviors that are challenging.
- Strengths-based video coaching to support warm, responsive serve and return interactions between adults and children. Participants are eligible for free STARS training.
- Relationship-based professional development and communities of practice to promote the Program for Infant Toddler Care.

Professional Development Scholarships & Grants

Scholarships and grants are available for students working in Early Achievers early learning programs to pursue state stackable certificates, associate's degrees, and bachelor's degrees in ECE. Early Achievers Grants and Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals are two student financial aid resources that DCYF has prioritized for students employed by Early Achievers early learning programs. Each scholarship has different eligibility criteria and financial benefits. You can learn more about these [scholarships](#) on the DCYF website under Professional Development.

Child Care Aware of Washington Scholarships

CCA of WA Scholarships support educators working toward BA degrees in ECE. You can find more information about these scholarships on [CCA of WA's website](#).

State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Early Achievers Grants

The State Board of Community and Technical Colleges administers Early Achievers Grants. This grant program helps employees at Early Achievers early learning programs pursue ECE credits toward state stackable ECE certificates and associate degrees in ECE. If you are interested in Early Achievers grants, contact the point of contact at each participating college for more information on how to apply. You can

find the Point of Contact and other valuable information on the Early Learning [Career Planning Portal](#) under the “[Find a Degree](#)” tab, as well as on the [State Board for Community and Technical College website](#).

Substitute Pool

Family home child care providers and child care center providers can access release time using Washington’s Early Care and Education Substitute Pool. Early Achievers participants have access to the substitute pool to support their growth in Early Achievers. Access depends on funding availability.

All substitutes meet the current standards for a licensed program lead teacher, have completed DCYF training, and have a cleared Portable Background Check. You can visit the DCYF website’s Professional Development page for more information about [the substitute pool](#).

Needs-Based Grants

If you need funds to purchase materials or training, you may qualify for a Needs-Based Grants. Needs-Based Grants are available to support early learning programs participating in Early Achievers to assist with purchasing curriculum development, instructional materials, supplies, focused infant-toddler improvements, equipment, and/or environment improvements to improve program quality. A program is eligible for one Needs-Based Grant each fiscal year (July 1-June 30). If you meet the eligibility criteria, you may work with your coach to prepare and submit a Needs-Based Grant application online in [WA Compass \(English\)](#). You can find [Spanish](#) and [Somali](#) translated paper applications and additional information about Needs-Based Grants on the [Supports & Resources](#) page of the DCYF website.

Grant Eligibility and Prioritization

To be eligible, Early Achievers participants must meet the following criteria:

- Be registered for Early Achievers and have submitted the Program Profile, or
- Be registered for Early Achievers and have a finalized Quality Level 2, 3, 3+, 4 or 5

AND meet at least one of the following:

- Enrolled in the Tier 1 food program, or
- Live within a school district that serves at least 20% low income children based on OSPI data (for more information on how to determine if your school district meets this criterion, please visit the Frequently Asked Questions section below)

Prioritization

DCYF may prioritize applications. When DCYF prioritizes applications, they consider:

- Participants who provide services to non-school age children accessing WCCC, by the estimated percentage of children accessing services in a center or family home child care.
- Participants who demonstrate a culturally diverse program.

Distribution of Grant Funds

DCYF distributes Needs-Based Grant awards between 30 and 60 days from the date that DCYF approves your early learning program’s completed grant application.

- Your early learning program must have a Statewide Vendor Number to receive the Needs-Based Grant Funds. Your early learning program must register as a vendor of Washington State by submitting the [Statewide Payee Registration form and W-9](#) to obtain a Statewide Vendor Number. If your early learning program fails to provide this information to DCYF, you will not be eligible to receive a grant award.

Allowable Uses of Grant Funds

You may use grant funds to assist with purchasing curriculum and instructional materials, supplies, equipment, focused infant-toddler improvements, environmental improvements, minor renovations to your child care facility, supports and materials or services for care of children with special needs, or other items as identified by your coach.

Restrictions

You may not use award funds to purchase items considered to be:

- Capital Improvements: This includes the purchase or improvement of land and the purchase, construction, or permanent improvement of buildings. An exception is made for upgrades that are necessary to meet health and safety requirements, including plumbing upgrades, electrical repairs, replacing worn flooring, replacing groundcover or hazardous outdoor equipment, roof repair, or installing a fire suppression or door alarm system.
- Religious Activities: You may not use grant funds for any religious purpose or activity, including worship or instruction.
- Gift Cards: You may not use grant funds to purchase monetary equivalents such as gift cards, traveler's checks, or money orders.

If your early learning program receives a Needs-Based Grant, you are required to keep your receipts for seven years, and DCYF may ask you to provide these receipts. You can find an overview of Needs-Based Grants on the DCYF website on the [Supports & Resources](#) page ([English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Somali](#)).

Tiered Subsidy Reimbursement

As a participant, if your early learning program serves children receiving WCCC or Seasonal Child Care subsidies, you will receive a 2% increase to the subsidy base rate. Participants who accept subsidy payments must submit a Request for Quality Recognition or advance to a Quality Level of 3 or higher within 30 months of enrolling in Early Achievers or submitting your first subsidy invoice, whichever comes later, to maintain subsidy eligibility and tiered reimbursement. If your early learning program withdraws and then re-enrolls in Early Achievers, the 30-month timeline continues based on your first enrollment date.

If your early learning program receives a Quality Level 3 through 5 and your serve children receiving WCCC or Seasonal Child Care subsidies, you are eligible to earn a higher tiered reimbursement incentive added to the base rate as follows, effective July 1, 2021:

Family home child care:*

- Quality Level 3: 12% above the base rate
- Quality Level 3+: 15% above the base rate
- Quality Level 4: 17% above the base rate
- Quality Level 5: 20% above the base rate

**Family home child care tiered reimbursement rates are negotiated by SEIU 925.*

Child care center:

- Quality Level 3: 8% above the base rate
- Quality Level 3+: 8% above the base rate
- Quality Level 4: 15% above the base rate
- Quality Level 5: 20% above the base rate

The tiered reimbursement rates are a percentage increase over the base rate at any given time. Any time the base rate increases, DCYF applies the reimbursement incentive is to the higher base rate.

DCYF pays tiered reimbursements for the full month and based on your early learning program's Quality Level on the first day of the month of service. You will receive your tiered reimbursement payments the month after the base subsidy rate payment for the same period.

Quality Improvement Awards

DCYF pays Quality Improvement (QI) Awards to qualifying Early Achievers participants that serve children receiving state child care subsidies and have a current Quality Level. QI Awards recognize your achievement and support early learning programs to implement your quality improvement goals.

Purpose of Award Funds

You should use your QI Awards to reach your quality improvement goals that you have outlined on your QIP. You and your coach can work together to document your QIP and ensure that it aligns with the Early Achievers Quality Standards.

Award Eligibility

To be eligible to receive QI Awards, your early learning programs must:

- Achieve an Early Achievers Quality Level 3 or higher. Family home child care providers who are a Quality Level 2 or higher may qualify for QI Awards.
- Serve an enrollment population of which at least 5% of total licensed capacity consists of non-school-age children receiving state or other qualifying child care subsidies.¹
 - For the purpose of the calculation, DCYF defines "children receiving state subsidy" to mean children receiving state funding for child care through any of the following programs:
 - WCCC
 - Seasonal Child Care
 - Child care subsidies funded by Medicaid, ECLIPSE, municipalities, colleges or universities, local school districts, the military, or federally recognized tribal organizations may also be included in the calculation and you must submit this information to QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov.

¹ Through negotiations with SEIU 925, both school-age and non-school age children using subsidies are considered when calculating the 5% subsidy requirement for family home child care providers.

Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

- Agree to create a QIP with the help of your assigned coach within six months of the Quality Level Request. If you do not have a QIP six months after you receive your quality level, you may be asked to repay your QI Award.
- Maintain active and engaged participation throughout the three-year Quality Recognition Cycle by participating in ongoing and working on the goals set in your early learning program’s QIP.
- Register as a vendor of Washington State by submitting the [Statewide Payee Registration form](#) and W-9 to DCYF. You must complete registration under the early learning program name; DCYF will not award QI Award funds to individuals. All early learning programs must submit their payee registration and W-9 before receiving a monetary award. Failure to do so forfeits that year’s QI award.
- DCYF calculates the percentage of children receiving state subsidy for your program by dividing the monthly average number of children receiving state subsidy your early learning program served by your early learning program’s average monthly licensed capacity.
- You can find more information about QI Awards and how they are calculated on the [QI Award Overview document](#).

Quality Improvement Award Amounts

DCYF distributes QI Awards annually according to provider type as follows:

Figure 8: Child Care Center Quality Improvement Award Amounts



Figure 9: Family Home Child Care Quality Improvement Award Amounts



Distribution of Award Funds

DCYF distributes QI Awards approximately 60 days after your early learning program’s quality level release date. If your early learning program finalizes an Updated Quality Level to a higher quality level during the Quality Recognition Cycle and you have already received a QI Award for the year, you will receive payment for the difference between your former and current levels after the updated quality level release date. Total annual QI Award payments will not exceed the amount of your early learning program’s highest finalized quality level for that year. Your early learning program will receive the full

award amount for the updated quality level each remaining year of the quality recognition cycle, as long as they remain eligible to receive the award.

Allowable Uses

You may only use QI Award funds in the following categories, based on the Early Achievers Quality Standards, and aligned with your current QIP goals:

- Child Outcomes: You may use funds for materials, tools, and resources to support ongoing child assessment and developmental screening.
- Early Learning Program Curriculum, Learning Environment, and Interactions: You may use funds to strengthen and enhance your early learning program's capacity to provide high-quality, individualized experiences and environments for children in the following areas:
 - Program/Classroom Materials: Examples of acceptable items include developmentally appropriate materials, educational toys, and equipment to support learning and basic routines.
 - Curriculum: Examples of acceptable items include curriculum guides, reference books, and other resources that supplement the curriculum.
 - Observational Assessment Resources: Examples of acceptable items include tools that help you and/or your staff document children's growth and development and increase staff ability to individualize programming for children. You may also use funds to purchase tools and supporting materials for assessing the quality of early learning practices.
- Family Engagement and Partnership:
 - Parenting Education/Support Program: You may use funds to support the implementation of parenting support and education.
 - Strengthening Families Plan of Action Implementation: You may use funds to strengthen and enhance the early learning program's work with families based on the results of their Strengthening Families Plan of Action. Examples of acceptable items include parent education resources and training materials; program materials to create a welcoming environment for families; and social/educational gatherings/events for families.
- Professional Development and Training:
 - Staff Development: You may use funds for staff professional development including but not limited to staff training and conferences. Note: You may use funds for registration/tuition/materials only, and you may not use funds for travel, hotel, or related attendance expenses.
 - Wage Enhancements: You may use funds to increase or supplement staff salaries. Grant funds are not intended to fund teacher, assistant director, or director salaries in full.
 - Staff Bonuses: You may use funds to provide bonuses to staff.
 - Release Time: You may use funds for staff to engage in quality improvement activities that are beyond the normal scope of work. Examples include substitute pay, out of classroom planning time for lead teachers, and participation in family partnership activities.
 - Continuing Education: You may use funds toward credit-bearing coursework for staff. You should first explore existing Early Achievers scholarship opportunities (WA

Scholarships and Early Achievers Grants) described in this section in [Professional Development Scholarships](#) before using QI funds for this purpose.

- **Technology:** You may use QI Awards toward technology that supports early learning program implementation of QI goals, including computers, software, cameras, and video cameras.
- **Paid Re-Submission:** You may use QI Awards toward the cost of a re-submission to meet your early learning program's mandated quality level requirements.

Restrictions

In addition to the requirements outlined above, award funds you may not use QI Awards to purchase items considered to be:

- **Capital Improvements:** This includes the purchase or improvement of land and the purchase, construction, or permanent improvement of buildings. An exception is made for upgrades that are necessary to meet health and safety requirements, including plumbing upgrades, electrical repairs, replacing worn flooring, replacing groundcover or hazardous outdoor equipment, roof repair, or installing a fire suppression or door alarm system.
- **Religious Activities:** you may not use QI Awards for any religious purpose or activity, including worship or instruction.
- **Gift Cards:** you may not use QI Awards to purchase monetary equivalents such as gift cards, traveler's checks, or money orders.
- You may not use QI Awards to reimburse your early learning program for purchases made before receiving the award funds.

Documentation and Reporting

DCYF is not responsible or liable for any tax reporting or financial liability that may apply to participants choosing to accept QI awards. DCYF recommends that you contact your early learning program's accountant, auditor, and/or financial advisor for guidance on fiscal reporting.

Early learning programs that receive Early Achievers QI Award funds are required to:

- Document how your early learning program used your QI Awards to support your QIP goals.
- Keep all documentation including records, receipts, and paperwork related to the spending of QI Awards on site for a minimum of seven years.
- Have a current QIP in place within six months of the Quality Level release.

Misuse of Funds

If you misuse your QI Award funds, DCYF may immediately dismiss your early learning program from Early Achievers as outlined in Participation Requirements and Expectations: Procedure for Dismissal. DCYF defines *misuse of funds* as the use of funds for any purchases not included in Allowable Use of Funds; use of funds for any purchases included in Restrictions; and use of funds for purposes not related to early learning program QIPs.

Marketing and Outreach Materials

DCYF encourages Early Achievers participants to share their commitment to quality with families and the community. DCYF has created materials, including an informational brochure, sample letter to families, and a Quality Level certificate, to assist early learning programs with communication. You may share your Early Achievers participation by accessing the many valuable outreach tools available online at

<https://www.childcarebizedge.org/successful-program-management/marketing-your-program/>.

Additionally, you may use the resources in the [Marketing Plan Toolkit](#) to support your program.

Use and Development of Early Achievers Outreach Materials

DCYF encourages you to share your participation in Early Achievers and your commitment to quality with families and the community, both online and in your printed materials. You are welcome to use your Early Achievers participation in your own marketing materials with the following guidelines.

Early Learning Program Website

As an Early Achievers participant, you may place the Early Achievers logo on your business website provided you use the logo and the phrase “We are an Early Achievers Participant” along with a link to the [Early Achievers page on DCYF’s website](#). This is the only logo use approved for an early learning program’s website.

You must notify DCYF when you use the Early Achievers logo on your early learning program’s business website. You and your regional coordinator should contact DCYF by email at QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov before the logo is live on the website. Please place “Use of Early Achievers Logo” in the email subject line.

Early Learning Program Business Brochure/Flyer

When you want to include the Early Achievers logo on your business brochures and/or flyers to market your early learning program, please follow these guidelines:

- The logo must not be on the title page of your early learning program’s promotional brochure.
- If you use the Early Achievers logo, you must also include one of the following phrases:
 - “Proudly participating in Early Achievers, Washington’s Quality Recognition and Improvement System” or
 - “Ask us how we are demonstrating our commitment to high-quality early learning by participating in Early Achievers, Washington’s Quality Recognition and Improvement System!”

Please work with your coach or local CCA of WA agency for support with family and community outreach. You may also share your Early Achievers participation by accessing the many valuable outreach tools available online at <https://childcareawarewa.org/providers/>

9. Participant Requirements and Expectations

The following section details your early learning program’s responsibilities and expectations as an Early Achievers participant. Please also refer to the Early Achievers Participation Agreement for participation expectations.

Eligibility

This section outlines the eligibility requirements for Early Achievers enrollment and participation.

Early Learning Program Type

Licensed or Certified Providers

Licensed, certified child care centers or family home child care providers that serve children between the ages of birth and 5 are eligible to [register for Early Achievers](#) ([English](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Somali](#)).

- Early learning programs that receive payment from the following subsidies are required to participate in Early Achievers:
 - WCCC
 - Seasonal Child CareC
- Early learning programs that serve only school-age children are not eligible to participate at this time.

Certified for Payment Only Providers

All early learning programs that accept state child care subsidies are required to participate in Early Achievers ([RCW 43.216.085](#)). This includes military, school-based, and tribal early learning programs that are Certified for Payment Only with DCYF. Military, school-based, or tribal early learning programs that are license-exempt must be Certified for Payment Only to enroll in Early Achievers.

- [Download form to request Certification for Payment Only.](#)
- [More information about the Tribal Certification process \(Word\).](#)

Sites that Offer ECEAP/Early ECEAP Services

All early learning programs that provide ECEAP/Early ECEAP services are required to participate in Early Achievers ([RCW 43.216.515](#)).

Child Enrollment Requirements

DCYF understands that enrollment can fluctuate, especially in family home child care. Therefore, low enrollment will not affect an early learning program's eligibility to register for Early Achievers.

- To engage in the initial Program Profile and submission of Video Highlights, a provider must have at least one child between birth and 5 years old enrolled.
- Child care centers that drop below a minimum enrollment of three children and family child care homes that drop below a minimum enrollment of one child must notify their coach within seven business days. Coaches will work directly with early learning programs to develop a plan to increase enrollment.

Licensing Status

All licensed or certified early learning programs must be in good standing with licensing to participate in Early Achievers. "Good standing" means having a non-expiring license that is not suspended, revoked, or on probationary status. The DCYF website has more information on [licensing and definitions of terms](#). Licenses with temporary closures are still considered in "good standing."

Initial License

If your early learning program has an initial license, you may register to participate in Early Achievers and can complete the Initial Program Profile. However, you cannot finalize the Early Achievers Quality Level until you receive a non-expiring license.

No Referral Status

- If your early learning program is on "no referral status," you may still register to participate in Early Achievers if you are otherwise in good standing.
- If your early learning program is placed on "no referral" status during participation, you may continue to participate in Early Achievers activities.

- If your early learning program is on “no referral status,” you may not finalize a Quality Level.
- If your early learning program license is revoked, then you may not register to participate in Early Achievers.
- If DCYF revokes your early learning program’s license while you are enrolled in Early Achievers, then your early learning program will be withdrawn, regardless of Quality Level. All activities related to Early Achievers will stop.

Summary Suspension

- If your early learning program has a license that is on summary suspension, then you may not register to participate in Early Achievers.
- If your early learning program’s license is in summary suspension while enrolled in Early Achievers, all activities and services related to Early Achievers will pause pending the outcome of the investigation. Additionally, you may not request or participate in the quality recognition cycle while on summary suspension.
 - If the summary suspension leads to a full restoration of your license, then you may continue Early Achievers participation.
 - If summary suspension leads to revocation of your early learning program’s license, DCYF will immediately withdraw your program from Early Achievers and all activities related to Early Achievers will stop.
 - If summary suspension leads to a probationary license, your early learning program must meet the eligibility requirements outlined under the Probationary License section below.

Probationary License

- If your early learning program receives a probationary license while enrolled in Early Achievers, you may continue to participate in Early Achievers during the probationary period. You must be actively working with your licensor toward the reinstatement of a non-expiring license. All coaching will focus on licensing compliance.

Future Participation

In the event that DCYF withdraws your early learning program from Early Achievers due to failure to meet the above licensing requirements, then you may reapply for participation. To be eligible to reapply for participation in Early Achievers, your early learning program must be licensed in good standing and follow the procedures outlined in [Participant Requirements and Expectations: Reapplication to Early Achievers](#).

Definition of Active Participation

Active participation means that you and your early learning program staff are showing evidence that you are working toward a Quality Level, either by yourselves or with the support of a coach. An “active participant” meets the following expectations:

- Show evidence of quality improvement activities such as working with your coach, creating a QIP, completing components of the Quality Recognition Framework, attending Communities of Practice, or participating in Professional Development courses related to your Early Achievers participation.

- Maintain updated contact information in MERIT, and respond to any necessary communications from DCYF or CCA of WA.
- If you accept state funding, you must maintain Early Achievers timelines or communicate with DCYF and/or CCA WA regional staff if you are in danger of missing a milestone.
- Active Participation does not require you to accept coaching services. If you choose to opt out of coaching, you are still responsible for maintaining timelines and responding to communications from DCYF, CCA of WA, or Cultivate Learning.

Recordkeeping

You must keep the following records on site at your early learning program:

- All signed agreements, including the Early Achievers services agreement.
- All receipts, records and documentation of how you used your QI Awards (you must keep these for seven years).
- A copy of the Needs-Based Grant application spending plan and all receipts, records, and documentation of how you used Needs-Based Grant funds (you must keep these for seven years).
- All parent/guardian consents for children to participate in evaluation.

DCYF and CCA of WA reserve the right to request and review records pertaining to participation to verify enrollment, use of funds, or adherence to the Operating Guidelines at any time.

Notification Requirements

You are required to notify the QRIS inbox and your regional lead agency within seven business days of significant changes that affect participation, including:

- Address change.
- Early learning program closure.
- Change in licensing status: suspension, probation, or revocation.
- Low enrollment: fewer than three children enrolled.
- Voluntary withdrawal from Early Achievers.
- Change in Early Achievers contact.
- Changes in ages served, whether due to licensing capacity or provider preference if the early learning program no longer serves children birth to age 5.
- Temporary change in early learning program circumstances, such as temporary closure and the extended absence of the Early Achievers contact(s).

How Address and Ownership Changes Affect Early Achievers Participation

Change in Ownership

If your early learning program changes ownership during any stage of Early Achievers participation, you must contact QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov. DCYF staff will work with you to determine how the change of ownership affects participation or Quality Level status. The early learning program staff and the environment are key components of an Early Achievers Quality Level, so sites may be required to complete the Quality Recognition Cycle again if there are significant changes. When DCYF transfers a child care license between owners and the Provider ID number does not change, any Early Achievers participation history and timeline requirements will transfer with the license.

Change of Address

If your site provides ECEAP services and you have a current Quality Level and move to a new facility, you must contact the Early Achievers team at QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov within six months of the move.

If you are a family home child care provider and you move, you must notify your licensor, and email QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov within 30 days from the first date on the license at your new address. If you notify DCYF within that timeframe, you will maintain your participation history, including any active Quality Levels, tiered reimbursement rates, and QI Awards applied to your license, at the new address.

If you do not provide timely notice, your Early Achievers timelines restart and DCYF will consider you a new subsidy provider. You will need to re-enroll in Early Achievers to access subsidy and tiered reimbursement and must follow the new subsidy provider timeline expectations.

Information Sharing

DCYF is subject to chapter 42.56 RCW, the Public Records Act. Early Achievers participant records in the possession of DCYF or community partners may also be subject to disclosure under chapter 42.56 RCW.

Internet Usage/Security

Early Achievers participants must use MERIT, WA Compass, CeCi, and WELS. These data systems are required as part of Early Achievers participation. These web-based data systems are secure and require user login to access information. DCYF, CCA of WA, and UW Cultivate Learning can access all data entered in Early Achievers data systems to support your quality improvement work and the long-term evaluation of the Early Achievers program. To coordinate efforts and reduce duplication, coaches can view the files of other coaches working at the same early learning program. Additionally, all information entered into the data systems is subject to public disclosure requests as described above.

Conflict of Interest

Early Achievers participants may not be employed as Early Achievers coaches, regional coordinators, DCYF staff members, or a member of the UW Quality Recognition team in any way during their participation in Early Achievers.

Early Achievers Services Agreement

CCA of WA provides coaching services to Early Achievers participants serving less than 75% of Head Start/ECEAP/Early ECEAP slots. Each regional representative's purpose is to help your early learning program complete quality recognition components, prepare for your Quality Level Request, and continue quality improvement efforts after you finalize your Quality Level. The Early Achievers Services Agreement provides detailed information about the roles and responsibilities of both parties. You and your early learning program staff are required to participate in Early Achievers activities as outlined in these Operating Guidelines.

In the event that circumstances prevent your early learning program from being fully engaged, you may request to temporarily discontinue services. It is important to note that although CCA of WA may discontinue their services, any timelines required by [RCW 43.216.085](#) remain unchanged.

If you and your early learning program staff are not maintaining active participation, CCA of WA staff may elect to discontinue services. If you or your staff are unresponsive, repeatedly absent from trainings

and scheduled meeting times, or do not make good faith efforts to abide by the services agreement, CCA of WA will notify you in writing that they may discontinue their services temporarily for one quarter. Additionally, DCYF may choose to discontinue services if you or your staff are not following our Operating Guidelines or discrimination policy.

A discontinuation in coaching services does not change your early learning program's enrollment status or eligibility for other incentives such as tiered reimbursement. Your early learning program will have the opportunity to resume CCA of WA services at designated times on a quarterly basis.

Head Start Grantee/ECEAP/Early ECEAP Contractor Responsibilities

At this time, grantees/contractors for sites with more than 75% Head Start/ECEAP/Early ECEAP slots are responsible for:

- Making a plan to integrate Early Achievers into their program's quality improvement activities, including the use of Early Achievers tools.
- Training and orienting their staff in Early Achievers.
- Assisting early learning program staff in completing professional records in MERIT.
- Completing applications and managing Early Achievers participation in MERIT, CeCi, and WELS.
- Tracking, monitoring, and coordinating early learning program Early Achievers activities.
- Preparing early learning program staff for quality recognition.
- Grantees/contractors can contact DCYF for information on available Professional Development training.

Criteria for Dismissal

DCYF reserves the right to initiate early learning program dismissal from Early Achievers at any time if your early learning program fails to meet any of the expectations outlined in the Early Achievers Participation Agreement or the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines.

Criteria for dismissal include:

- Not maintaining good standing with licensing: DCYF defines *good standing* as having an active license that is not suspended, revoked, or on probation.
- Changes in ages served: early learning program no longer serves children birth to age 5 due to provider preference or DCYF licensing enforcement action.
- Changes in early learning program enrollment: no children ages birth to 5 enrolled for 60 calendar days.
- Providing false information on the Early Achievers application or any participation documents.
- Not meeting Early Achievers active participation expectations as defined in the [Active Participation](#) section of the Operating Guidelines.
- Misuse of Needs-Based Grant or QI Award funds.
- Not maintaining all records, including receipts and documentation of the use of Needs-Based Grants or QI Award funds on-site for seven years.
- Not reporting changes to Early Achievers regional lead agency that may render the early learning program ineligible for Early Achievers participation.
- Unprofessional conduct and behavior with Early Achievers representatives or DCYF staff.

- Not following the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines or other administrative and statutory guidelines issued by any local, state, or federal government agency.

Procedure for Dismissal

In the event that your early learning program has not met the requirements outlined in the Early Achievers Participation Agreement or the Operating Guidelines, or if your early learning program has committed any acts that may result in discontinuation of Early Achievers participation, the regional lead agency must:

- Notify your early learning program, in writing, of the need to take corrective action.
- Give your early learning program 30 days to comply with the request for corrective action.
- Request any applicable documentation from your early learning program.
- Reserve the right to suspend all or part of Early Achievers activities during the review process.
- Notify DCYF that your early learning program has had corrective action initiated.
- Review all information provided by your early learning program, including steps that you have taken to remedy the issue, to determine if there is sufficient evidence that your early learning program has violated any aspect of Early Achievers participation or otherwise acted unethically.
- Notify DCYF of recommendation to dismiss your early learning program. DCYF makes the final decision about early learning program withdrawal from Early Achievers.
- Notify your early learning program of the final decision, in writing, within 30 days of receiving all necessary documentation to make a final decision.

Please note: In the event that Early Achievers dismissal is triggered by your early learning program's licensing status, DCYF is responsible for dismissal as outlined in the eligibility section of this chapter.

Withdrawal from Early Achievers

If you choose to withdraw your early learning program from Early Achievers, please contact DCYF at QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov to request withdrawal.

If DCYF dismisses your early learning program from Early Achievers or you voluntarily withdraw from Early Achievers you must:

- Provide the Early Achievers regional lead agency with all outstanding reports and participation information.
- Remove all Early Achievers marketing materials, including your early learning program Quality Level certificate, from your early learning program premises, website, and all promotional materials.
- Return unspent QI Award funds to DCYF.
- If you choose to withdraw your early learning program from Early Achievers, you are obligated to finalize your withdrawal in an email sent to DCYF at QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov.

In the event DCYF dismisses your early learning program due to suspected fraudulent use of funds or failure to keep records of fund use, your early learning program may be liable for damages as authorized by law, including repayment of Quality Improvement funds received by your early learning program.

Reapplication to Early Achievers

If you withdraw from Early Achievers and then reapply within 12 months of withdrawal, your early learning program will retain all current participation information, including Quality Level and timeline requirements. If your program reapplies within 12 months of withdrawal, you will not resume your timeline where you left off at the time of withdrawal. For example, if your early learning program withdraws after six months of participation and decides to reenter into Early Achievers three months later, the program would be in its ninth month of enrollment upon reentry. Your early learning program is not due any tiered reimbursement or QI Awards for the period when your early learning program was withdrawn.

DCYF reserves the right to deny reapplication to Early Achievers after a withdrawal or dismissal from Early Achievers.

Glossary of Terms

Active Participation	An early learning program that responds to communications, participates fully, and demonstrates efforts toward a Quality Level. Examples include: participation in coaching, completing portions of the Quality Recognition Cycle, completing QIPs, documenting efforts in CeCi, or attending Early Achievers related professional development trainings.
Certified for Payment Only	Child care and early learning programs that are legally exempt from licensing (military, tribal, or school-based) may apply for certification to receive state subsidy payments. These sites are Certified for Payment Only .
Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA)	CCA of WA is the lead agency for coordinating improvement activities such as relationship-based professional development and training for sites with less than 75% Head Start/ECEAP/Early ECEAP slots. For more information, visit www.childcareawarewa.org .
Coach/Coaching	<p>Coaching is a long-term continuous service provided within Early Achievers to help participants understand Early Achievers policies and navigate the process successfully. Coaching is designed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote Relationship-Based Professional Development. • Support providers in navigating the Quality Recognition system. • Engage in conversations that promote equity and positively change practices. • Help early learning programs understand the Early Achievers Quality Standards. • Provide resources and recommend Professional Development. • Help programs understand and use Early Achievers quality recognition and assessment data. • Support program goals and the creation of QIPs.
Coach Educator Collaborative Interface (CeCi, formerly known as Coaching Companion)	Online/Application (app) platform used to connect participants and facilitate quality improvements led by Early Learning Programs, Coaches, and Community Liaisons.

<p>Community Liaison</p>	<p>The Community Liaison is the first contact that Early Achievers participants have from the Cultivate Learning Quality Recognition Team. Community Liaisons support and guide participants through the Quality Recognition process and serve as their point of contact with the Quality Recognition team. The Community Liaison will reach out to participants that have been approved for each component of the Quality Recognition process and will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the Quality Recognition process and what will occur during each component. • Provide individualized support during each Quality Recognition component. • Provide technical support in CeCi. • Provide a line of communication between the program and the Quality Recognition team.
<p>Contractor</p>	<p>Contractor means the organization providing ECEAP services under a signed contract with DCYF. This role is often grouped with Head Start program leadership and referred to as “grantee/contractor.”</p>
<p>Early Achievers</p>	<p>Early Achievers is Washington’s quality, recognition, and improvement system (QRIS) and is designed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support child care providers to provide high-quality care by providing resources including training, coaching, and incentives. • Help parents and caregivers find high-quality child care and early learning programs that fit their needs. • Ensure that children have high-quality early learning experiences that help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school and life.
<p>Early Achievers Contact(s)</p>	<p>The primary early learning program contact responsible for oversight and completion of all Early Achievers activities. Early learning programs may appoint a second Early Achievers contact to assist the primary contact in participation activities.</p>
<p>Early Learning Development Guidelines</p>	<p>The Early Learning Development Guidelines are a statewide resource for child care providers and families. The guidelines provide essential information to support and enhance children’s development and learning, and include information on developmental milestones and strategies for supporting different stages of growth. The guidelines include six areas of development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About me and my family and culture. • Building relationships. • Touching, seeing, hearing, and moving around. • Growing up healthy. • Communicating. • Learning about my world.
<p>Early Learning and School Age Program</p>	<p>Refers to all programs or facilities that care for children birth to 12 years old. Types of child care providers within Early Achievers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Care Center

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Home Child Care Provider or Family Home Early Learning Provider • School-Age Program • Head Start Program (HS) • ECEAP/Early ECEAP Program <p>In this document, early learning program refers to the participating early learning facility.</p>
Early Start Act	The Early Start Act (ESA) was passed on July 6, 2015, and is intended to help all children arrive at school ready to learn. According to the ESA, beginning Aug. 1, 2016, licensed child care and early learning providers offering services to children and families that qualify for WCCC subsidies must be enrolled in Early Achievers to maintain subsidy authorization. ESA also outlines participation and Quality Level requirements for sites providing ECEAP/Early ECEAP services.
Finalize My Quality Level	Once a participant has earned a desired number of points within a Recognition Cycle period, they may request to finalize and publish their Quality Level.
Finalize My Updated Quality Level	Once a participant has re-submitted a needed recognition component, they can request to update their published Quality Level.
Grantee	The Grantee is responsible for oversight of Head Start/Early Head Start Programs. This role is often grouped with ECEAP program leadership and referred to as “grantee/contractor.”
Learning Environment/Session	<p>A space where children are routinely cared for, including but not limited to, a classroom, outdoor learning space, licensed space in family home child care, etc. Used instead of “Classroom”</p> <p><i>Example of one session in one (1) learning environment.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One room with the same group of children is a Session. <p><i>Example of two (2) sessions within one (1) learning environment.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One room with two (2) different teacher/children groups identified by a room divider. • One room where two (2) different teachers have different groups of children in the AM and another group of children in the PM.
MERIT	Washington’s Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT) is used to document and recognize the professional achievements of early care and education and school-age professionals. MERIT is the source of evidence during evaluation for staff education qualifications for early learning program Professional Development & Training. Use of MERIT is a requirement for Early Achievers Participation.
Non-School-Age Children	Non-school-age is defined as children ages 6 and under who are not enrolled in kindergarten or grade school.
Program Profile	<p>Program Profile is an opportunity for providers and families to provide data about their program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors, teachers, and families identify strengths and areas of growth for the early learning program through completion of an interview.

Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Program Profile is an opportunity for a program to celebrate what they are proud of and what makes them unique. • The Program Profile process is based on research, provides valuable feedback and data, promotes family engagement, and supports the CQI coaching cycle.
Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)	All Level 3-5 early learning programs will create a QIP in partnership with their coaches based on early learning program evaluation results, components of the Quality Standards, and overall early learning program Quality Level. The QIP is a plan that includes goals, action steps to achieve goals, timelines, and resources needed.
Quality Level	A published level achieved by an Early Learning Program which is displayed on the DCYFs Child Care Check website.
Quality Recognition Specialist	The Quality Recognition Specialist is a member of the UW Quality Recognition team responsible for quality recognition. Quality Recognition Specialists will work with early learning programs to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback and scoring on Program Profile and Video Highlights. • Review records and documentation.
Quality Standards	The Early Achievers Quality Recognition and Improvement System Standards (Quality Standards) is a comprehensive, research-based framework to support positive outcomes in early learning settings. There are five Quality Standard areas: Child Outcomes; Curriculum and Staff Supports; Learning Environment and Interactions; Professional Development and Training; and Family Engagement and Partnership.
Request for Quality Recognition	When a participant is ready to submit a component for review (e.g., Program Profile, Video Highlight, etc.), they will submit a recognition request to DCYF who then informs Cultivate Learning.
Re-Submit for Quality Recognition	A program may re-submit a recognition component if they need to or choose to achieve higher points.
Records Review & Records Review Tool	Records Review allows providers to submit evidence of Quality Standards. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers can submit evidence in the Quality Standard areas of Child Outcomes, Interactions and Curriculum, and Family Engagement and Partnership by uploading files. • Supporting documents should include written proof of policies and practices, such as policies in a staff handbook. • Providers can choose which Quality Standards they would like to submit evidence for; they can choose some or all. • Providers complete the Records Review Tool (RRT) to track and submit evidence.
University of Washington (UW)	The University of Washington (UW) is the lead agency for evaluation, assessment, and Quality Level assignment. Quality Recognition Specialists from UW conduct early learning program on-site evaluation visits. UW is also responsible for the development of the Early Achievers Coach Framework.

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<p>Video Highlights</p>	<p>Video Highlights are 10-15 minute videos of quality teacher-child interactions from each classroom or learning environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers identify the Early Learning Guideline or Core Competency to demonstrate in their video and write a short reflection. • Quality Recognition Specialists review videos using a research-based rubric and provide feedback on strengths and opportunities for growth. • Through practice-based coaching and culturally affirming approaches coaches and providers review feedback together to celebrate successes and create quality improvement goals. • Two video highlights are required for each early learning (ages 0-5) classroom or session.
<p>Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)</p>	<p>WCCC is a state child care subsidy program that helps families with low incomes pay for child care while they work. All licensed or certified providers receiving WCCC funds for non-school-age children must participate in Early Achievers.</p>