



Joint Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) and Provider Supports Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

December 3, 2024 – 8:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting

Welcome, Virtual Meeting Protocols and Introductions

Provider Supports Executive Committee member Julie Schroath welcomed attendees and walked through virtual meeting protocols. Introductions were completed via chat.

DCYF Leadership Panel

DCYF’s Director of Public Affairs Allison Krutsinger, Assistant Secretary of Early Learning Nicole Rose and Assistant Secretary of Licensing Ruben Reeves answered member questions.

Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are your plans to support providers as the field continues to rebuild from the pandemic?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Our decision packages are the foundation to support providers. We look at how to increase subsidy rates and how to implement and move towards a private pay market for our providers accepting subsidy. That is enrollment-based pay and prospective payment. Regarding access and living wage, that is where we need to continue to increase the number of families that are accessing subsidy. We do have a decision package that goes up to 75% of the State Median income. But we know, to support all providers, we need to continue to increase the number of families that are eligible for subsidy so that all families are paying a sustainable monthly rate. Given our current budget reality, hanging on to as many of the items that have been put in place with the Fair Start for Kids Act (FSKA) are important to continuing to support providers. Continuing to have community conversations with providers about staff qualifications, billing, and licensing is another way that we can continue to support providers in the field. • <i>It was a bipartisan effort to form DCYF. There has also been quite a bit of negative press in the last 3-4 years. Do you feel the department has met the initial directives? Why or why not? If not, what is the plan to course correct?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I think depending on who you ask at DCYF, we all may have a slightly different opinion about the broad scope of our agency and staff doing the work. I think by and large this agency was created to think about a continuum for children and families that that meets their needs. I think DCYF, despite some negative press has had tremendous success in some of our charges around prevention and reducing the number of children in out of home placements. We are seeing less children entering the foster care system now than we have seen in decades, and I think that's a tremendous success. We are seeing more support for families on the front end building out prevention networks of increased combined in-home services, and home visiting expansion. There is more access to childcare and preschool early learning opportunities across the State, both in licensed capacity and preschool opportunities as well as more families engaging in the subsidy system. Is there more work to do? Absolutely. We can always get better and do more for families and children and youth across the State. One area that we'll talk more about this next year is around the adolescent space prevention of unaccompanied young people or homeless at risk, who aren't necessarily victims of abuse and neglect. How do we
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create a continuum of space for those young people. I think there's always going to be more work to do in expanding drug treatment programs. That's not DCYF's mission; that's those of the healthcare authority. But as we battle, the Fentanyl crisis in our nation and our State, we're going to have a lot of work to do as a state to respond to that, to ensure that young children have the care they need. Overall, I think we have had tremendous success, and I think we will continue to have work to do.

- *How will you ensure that Early Learning is on the new governor's radar? What are the important issues you will share with he and his team when you meet with him after being sworn into office?*
 - I hope that we will be able to meet with the governor elect as well as his policy staff and parts of the Transition team. We have an authorizing environment under the current governor that will be transitioning on January 15th. Our approach will continue to be within the bounds of our decision packages and our message has been to maintain the existing commitments set out by the legislature. The legislature has been very clear the last couple of years, with the passage of FSKA, around the importance and the value of early care and education. Our message will be to maintain those commitments both with the governor and the legislature, who ultimately will consider and pass a budget.
- *The topic of insurance has risen at several public meetings. With compliance issues being connected; a small infraction looks larger to the outside world. Is DCYF having internal conversations on how the agency can support the field offset how Childcare Check is being used to deny insurance to providers?*
 - We have had internal meetings about how we can advocate for both our child care providers and providers who serve foster children around this topic. As many of you know, we have a new Insurance Commissioner who will be in office in January. We are hoping to schedule time with her and talk about this amid concerns that we will be losing providers because of the continuous increases of insurance and on the foster care side they're also concerned about not having insurance liability at all. We have had conversations with Matt Judge with Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) about the external facing Child Care Check. We've considered adding a disclaimer to show that providers listed as open on Child Care Check are not undergoing any licensing actions, and they are in good standing. We're trying to think of some creative ways that we can advocate for the childcare community around this. We've encouraged childcare providers to reach out to the Office of the Insurance Commissioner to voice this. We are also waiting for our new secretary for DCYF and we'll definitely put this in front of them as a topic that is definitely impacting our provider community.
- *With Ross Hunter not seeking reappointment as Secretary, when is his last day and what character and leadership traits would you like for the new DCYF executive to possess?*
 - Ross Hunter's last day will be January 15th. When I think about the leader of DCYF, I would argue, it is probably one of the hardest jobs in State government, second to those who work on the front lines doing DCYF's work every day. It is a complex secretary role that covers a wide variety of professions and sectors. DCYF is an organization of over 6,000 employees across 70 plus offices in every corner of this state and having someone who has led large enterprises is beneficial. I think some orientation to the content and the context of our work is also important, but I recognize it's highly unlikely that there is someone out there that has had direct experience or practitioner work across the continuum. Having an orientation to understand how children and families grow, how they develop, how they live and exist in community, and how communities exist in an



ecosystem of a world, understanding how state systems really can and should impact children, youth and their families for the better. The role of state government can play in advancing economic prosperity, prevention, support, family stability. I think those skills are important for the next iteration of DCYF.

- *How can ELAC and other community groups be part of the process to weigh in on the type of person who should fill that role?*
 - Unfortunately, I don't know all the process details of how those decisions are being evaluated and made. I do know there's a 53-person transition team. That [list](#) has been published by the incoming governor's press team. I would encourage you to review that list and see if there's folks you have relationship with and want to engage. If folks are interested in engaging beyond that, we're unfortunately not privy yet to sort of how those decisions are being made or what that process looks like right now.
- *There is an education cliff on the horizon. What is the department's plan to offset it and which legislators is DCYF collaborating with to make this occur?*
 - I think it's good to set some overarching goals making sure providers have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the needs of the children and families that they're serving. We've wanted to consider education, experience, and training. I think sometimes in doing that, the variety of pathways can sometimes make things a bit more complex than they need to be. And so how do we get back to a place where we have a streamlined process and really understand the core and the basic things that childcare providers need to know. We recently received some funds through the Preschool Development Grant which will help us think about how we can clarify some of those pathways. One of the things that we have certainly heard about is childcare basics and how might we segment the content of childcare basics in a different way? We are looking at the hiring requirements and the experience-based pathway and instead of having folks opt in to that, is there a way that we can just administratively say, all those providers that were in good standing that meet that experience-based pathway requirement, meet their qualifications. Another thing that we have looked at is extending that experience-based pathway to 2028 to capture some of those providers that came in during the height of the pandemic.
 - We will be changing the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) requirement around staff qualifications, but we need to meet with the child care providers and come up with a streamlined process that makes sense.
- *How is DCYF collaborating with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) on the regulations that early learning must abide by in comparison with the less regulated Transition to Kindergarten (TK) programs where decisions seem to be based on district versus universality? For example, this seems to apply to education and health/safety requirements (i.e. ratios, playground safety and student supervision).*
 - I think there's a question here around regulation in general and TK must follow all the K-12 WACs or rules. Samantha Bowen, OSPI Director of Early Learning, has shared that as they are working on their TK Guide and looking at WACs that are relevant to TK they will be posting those on their website. OSPI also recently posted their rules that were based on the 1550 legislation. OSPI is responsible for the regulation of TK programs. We have seen places, such as Spokane Public Schools, that are bringing together their state funded Pre-K and their TK programs into the same classroom. TK, state funded Pre-K and early learning are under different agencies and different authorizing environments. We are trying to work together where we can to talk about the intersection of those rules.
 - [OSPI Transition to Kindergarten](#)



- *What is the planned percentage increase to Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) for the biennium budget?*
 - If we think about the percentage increase to WCCC overall, we would be taking into consideration the rate increases for childcare subsidy, the increase in income eligibility, and the CCDF decision packages around enrollment and prospective based pay. When you look at all three of those things, it's about a 44% increase to the WCCC budget and almost a billion dollars. The average rate increase that a provider would receive is about 27%. If we were to go to the 85th percentile of the 2024 market rate survey when we look at increasing income eligibility, we would see an increase in our caseload of about 25%. The CCDF requirement is a 4.7% increase in the budget to implement the new requirements. We would also be looking at adding one month of eligibility for approximately 15,000 or 45% of the families.
- *Instead of budgeting for only WCCC increases, please share why funds cannot go directly to providers, like MERIT reimbursement to individual educators or Early Achievers grants directly to providers?*
 - As we put forward our decision packages, we focused on what was in FSKA and what was considered a maintenance level request. If providers were interested in how additional funds would go out, like stabilization grants, we would need to be directed to do that because our focus has been on what is in law. Even as we put all of those requests out there, it gets us somewhat closer to the cost of care, but it is still not enough. The asks that we do have are for providers accepting subsidy. There are some things that can go to all providers, such as complex needs funds and equity grants. We have an even more challenging environment in front of us given our current budget situation.
- *What is DCYF planning to do to financially assist ALL providers across the state during the next biennium, not just those who receive subsidized children?*
 - In the early learning space, funds are given to the Department with line items around what those funds are supposed to go to. Much of that funding is tied to our childcare subsidy, our family eligibility for subsidy, our providers accepting subsidy. Our way to financially assist all providers is somewhat limited. Providers can access complex needs funds and equity grants. I recognize that we get way more requests than we have funding for in those spaces. We see increased subsidy rates and family eligibility as our way to be able to reach as many providers as possible with funding. But right now, we don't have a mechanism or funding to expand beyond that. I think we have over 6,000 licensed child care providers right now and over 4,000 of those providers are serving families who were receiving subsidies. Subsidy is that mechanism that the Department has to financially support providers right now. The access and living wage and the cost of quality care work are both very important.
- *How will the department support the field in obtaining health and retirement benefits for educators, like what was offered in a prior session for medical?*
 - I think this directly connects with the cost of quality care work. At this time, DCYF nor the Health Benefits Exchange (HBE) put forward asks to continue that. Most providers who accessed that zero-cost premium through the childcare premium assistance were eligible for other existing healthcare insurance reductions and subsidies that existed when Cascadia Care came online. HBE was successful in transitioning most providers who are accessing that zero-cost healthcare premium to another subsidized healthcare plan and the continuation of that has not previously been funded by the legislature. I think the pathway here to increase rates and resources going to providers is the cost of quality work and pivoting from this market-based methodology to the cost of quality.



- What's different this time? The Cost of Care work and Living Wage work could be important, but how will it differ from the work of the Compensation Technical Workgroup? That work did not result in action.
 - This is going to take legislative investment to move the cost of quality care work forward. We've really tried as an agency to make the connections between the 2024 market rate survey and why that cost of quality care is important. We also have the foundation of at least having the market rate survey in law, which is also important.
- Health Benefits Exchange (HBE) still has no cost navigators that are helping providers identify a health care plan and sign up for coverage through Washington Health Plan Finder. For folks who worked on the cost of quality care work, that did include amounts to cover retirement and health care. That was part of what the provider group recommended and the access and living wage work asked us to contemplate that as well. Licensed family home providers bargain healthcare through 925 but that also does not cover all providers.
- *How can DCYF best equip and train licensors to work with providers as a supportive team instead of a relationship that is more punitive/violation-based? Providers should not be afraid of their licensor.*
 - I agree, providers should not be afraid of the licensors. This is not the culture we want in DCYF. We are continuing to work, review and train our child care licensing staff on presumed compliance and a strength-based approach to childcare licensing. That is an ongoing effort. I've met with my training team to deliver this training as well as offer continued resources and communications to my licensing leadership. We'll be inviting providers to be a part of this staff training as well as panel participants and supporting this important approach to our licensors. We've had a turnover in licensors, especially during the pandemic, but what I've learned this last year in our in-person child care forum meetings is that we overregulate. That's something that, as the Assistant Secretary of this Division, I'm addressing with the child care leadership team and we need to change that approach. In the first quarter of 2025, we'll be having our survey through WA Compass. After an inspection, providers will have the opportunity to fill out a survey about how their experience went. We'll be using that survey as a quality assurance piece to our licensing team. There are times where we do have to take licensing action on the WAC but we need to do it in a way that is respectful, professional and ensure that we are providing technical assistance.
- *What is the best way for a parent voice to be heard?*
 - We have our [Parent Advisory Group \(PAG\)](#). In state funded Pre-K we also do a parent survey. Another place where we engage families and get some feedback is through the Early Achievers process. We've also reached out to families who have utilized our family resource center and the family contact center for child care subsidy. This is from the early learning division perspective. There are other divisions in the agency that are engaging families in a variety of ways as well. But we would be open to feedback and any ideas that you all have about some other ways that we could do this in a way that meets families where they're at.
- How can we get in contact with the department (foster care, childcare providers, or people facing investigations) to provide feedback?
 - The Constituent Relations team is available to receive feedback, hear complaints, look into cases, and also pass along any praise. They are not connected to any one program or division and are trained to be responsive.
 - You can contact Constituent Relations via phone (360) 902-8060 or 1-800 723-4831 or Email: constrelations@dcyf.wa.gov.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I also encourage providers to reach out to their licensor’s supervisor and provide feedback whether it's positive or concerns. The child care licensing survey will be implemented in the first quarter 2025. As far as CPS investigations, we also have a survey that we send out at the end of the investigation with the findings letter that providers can also provide feedback on. ○ Early Achievers has a "Suggest Improvements to Early Achievers" button on their webpage.
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Review of Meeting Materials

Provider Supports Executive Committee member Dave Mayer led the group in the review of meeting materials.

- [Feedback Loop](#)
- [State Agency/Partner Updates](#)
- [Regional Coalition Updates](#)
- [Early Learning Updates](#)

ELAC Executive Committee Recruitment Update

DCYF Community Engagement Manager Marlene White provided an update on the ELAC Executive Committee vacancies.

Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the term of service? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The ELAC Charter also spells out the roles and responsibilities for the Executive Committee. • Do these roles have any authority or influence? What is the time commitment? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ We work with the Community Engagement team to plan the agendas for meetings and go through the different topics. We have always pushed for materials to be sent out early so that people have time to review it. We also ask that presenters come with a question for the group as opposed to just sharing reports, so that there is that time to collaborate with DCYF staff. Program leadership usually attend planning meetings at some point to be able to talk about any topics that are emerging that they may need feedback. ○ Typically, there are three planning meetings that take place in between ELAC sessions. Sometimes there are some additional meetings that we are called to attend if things come up related to ELAC meetings. • What are the most important aspects of this position? What kind of background would be best for this leadership position? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The biggest thing is being willing to work collaboratively with the DCYF Community Engagement team, as well as DCYF leadership and other staff members. Being able to be present is also important. There are a lot of different things that happen behind the scenes during meetings so being able to facilitate is important. ○ Being able to be flexible is important as well as in some cases being persistent. There are a fair number of times where we need to act pretty quickly in order to help inform the next ELAC meeting. Every one of us has a passion for early learning, and to me I think that is the requirement for this role and I think that best situates you to serve in in this capacity. It's just your passion, enthusiasm, and your drive for early learning. ○ Also, being willing to ask the tough questions and be willing to push back on different things that are proposed. You'll have people who are okay with everything that DCYF does and those who have an issue with everything that DCYF does. You have to be able to balance that and bring both sides forward so that DCYF can make informed decisions around the work that it's doing. • Is there a goal to have statewide representation?
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In the past we have had a balance on the Executive Committee in terms of Eastern and Western Washington representation. That is something that we definitely look for. ● How can someone become an ELAC member? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ With the passage of FSKA that impacted ELAC’s membership requirements quite a bit. Every seat is assigned to a specific role and most of the seats are assigned by an appointing authority. In reviewing all the required seats on ELAC, if you feel like you meet any of those requirements and the seat is vacant, you can connect with the appointing authority for that seat. You can always contact the Community Engagement team directly, and we can give you information on whatever specific seat you may be interested in dcyf.communityengagement@dcyf.wa.gov <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To give you an idea of the seat, here is the current ELAC membership roster. ● I would engage in early conversation with the new DCYF leadership team and have a conversation of how can they strengthen ties and encourage participation in ELAC and engagement efforts and why it matters as a starting place. Maybe we can invite the new DCYF leadership team to an upcoming meeting to engage in conversation with them.
Next Steps/Follow Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If you are interested in the Executive Committee role or want to learn more, please email us at: dcyf.communityengagement@dcyf.wa.gov

Preschool Development Grant (PDG) – Support the B-5 Workforce & Open Source Curriculum

DCYF’s Federal Initiatives and Collaboration Senior Administrator Matt Judge, PDG Birth-5 Integration Specialist Delta Rotter, Workforce Supports Manager Gretchen Stahr Breunig, QRIS Administrator Kelli Heikkila, and Teaching and Learning Administrator Michelle Roberts provided an update and gathered feedback on PDG supports for B-5 Workforce and Open Source Curriculum.

- [Early Learning Coordination Plan](#)

Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are these funds coming from the Department of Education? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No, these funds come from Health and Human Services (HHS). ● Why is DCYF creating a brand new curriculum when so many well established curriculums already exist? It seems that funding could be better spent. Also, providers are required to use a curriculum, so everyone already has one. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The goal of creating an open source curriculum is to have a freely available curriculum that provides engaging and culturally relevant activities for children across all areas of child development. This curriculum will not be a requirement but rather a free tool that providers may choose to use. ● This cohort suite was designed by providers and piloted in our planning grant. ● Is the cohort model optional? Will there be both in-person and virtual opportunities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes, the cohort model is optional for those who wish to access. Training may occur at a physical location, live in a virtual platform (zoom) and some may be in the LMS (Child Care Basics). ● What is the time commitment to participate in the design, analysis and test implementation pieces? How many providers are you planning to involve? Hoping the ask will be broad. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The goal is to have multiple touchpoints - some may have a light commitment with a survey and others may participate in a more intensive design process. For the health and well-being supports we will have a design team of a minimum of 20 providers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do you plan to recruit providers?
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- Historically we've worked with contracted partners who work closely with providers and they were able to do a lot of the outreach on our behalf because they have more of that connection in the community.
- Who will be creating the curriculum? Who will DCYF be partnering with to create it?
 - We are contracting with our partners that cultivate learning through the University of Washington to facilitate and help create this curriculum. We will be engaging in educator design circles throughout the process so it will be co-designed with educators in mind.
 - What is the compensation for educators to participate in the design circles?
 - We try to stay with a typical amount of \$200, which try to equate to no more than 8 hours of time commitment.
- A free curriculum is a shortcut to classroom management, not a teacher development plan. Funds are needed for true professional development. Plans need to emphasize a career instead of a package.
- Can you kind of give us the guidelines of what the grant specifies the funds to be used for?
 - The Federal grantor is expecting us to move forward with the open source curriculum project. Within that we do have a lot of flexibility to make moves in how we implement and how we engage and develop it working with communities. Redirecting the funds, for example to purchase curriculum that already exists wouldn't be on the table, and I don't think we would have been awarded the funds because of the limited impact to the system.
- Curriculum is very risky, especially when you start getting into all the different theory and philosophy. What are you thinking in regard to programs and how are you going to align that with cultural practices and family engagement?
 - I think the educator design circles are going to be integral in providing feedback on what would work best for their programs and making sure that we are incorporating those diverse viewpoints and incorporating the flexibility to be used for different programs.
- [DCYF List of Aligned Curricula](#)
- I don't think there's a need for more curriculum. There's a need to support the work that we're currently doing regarding curriculum delivery. So has the train left the station on the Cultivate Learning people, or can we back it up and engage with providers first?
 - The reason we put this into the grant is because 63% of programs in Washington State are not using a curriculum or not using one that meets that meets evidence-based standards. I do think that there is a need for a free open sourced optional curriculum.
 - How was that data gathered?
 - It was collected through Early Achievers.
- If a provider qualifies for WCCC and working with Early Achievers, are they not required to have an evidence-based high quality curriculum?
 - With Early Achievers you get a higher score if you use one of the evidence-based curriculums, but it's not a requirement. The cost can be a hinderance as well.
 - The [Early Achievers Data Dashboard](#) will give you a breakdown of the providers participating.
- Does anyone have examples of curriculum that they use in their programs successfully?
 - [Creating Curriculum in Early Childhood: Enhanced Learning through Backward Design](#) by Julie Bullard is a resource.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cultivating the Genius of Black Children: Strategies to Close the Achievement Gap in the Early Years by Debra Ren-Etta is another resource. ○ We have our very own expert locally in Dr. Debra Sullivan. ● Hearing strong emphasis on social-emotional learning. we agree and have been thinking about how Pyramid Model can be incorporated ● I am passionate about the delivery. Is this an opportunity your work will cover? I.e. coaching, data collection and personalization? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Absolutely, that is something we want to hear about and incorporate during the process of development. ● Even though you will be developing an open source curriculum for providers that there are always costs in implementing and maintaining curriculum be it supplies materials, training etc. Will there be a way to support the providers in this aspect? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A big focus during the development of this curriculum is making sure that the resources needed to implement the curriculum will be carefully created to ensure that the costs are realistic for all program types. ● Using the 63% data shared earlier, it seems logical to reach out directly to those providers who reported not using or listing a specific curriculum. Gathering data from them could provide valuable insight into their reasoning—whether it's cost, training barriers, time, or philosophical misalignment. Without this input, there's a risk of doing a lot of work that won't be utilized, even if the curriculum is free or available. It's crucial to ensure that any effort aligns with the values and philosophies of providers to truly meet their needs. ● Is the grant funding enough to develop, implement and provide on-going support? I anticipate that there is not going to be future federal funding. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This is a three year grant with only the first year locked in. We will have to apply again for years 2 and 3. We are optimistic that our funding will continue with a renewal grant.
Next Steps/Follow Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Please reach out to Matt (matt.judge@dcyf.wa.gov) and Delta Rotter (delta.rotter@dcyf.wa.gov) with any follow-up questions.

Closing Remarks/Adjourn

Next Steps/Follow Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Our next ELAC FSKA Report Development meeting is scheduled for January 7, 2025, the next Provider Supports meeting is scheduled for January 22, 2025, and the next ELAC public meeting is scheduled for February 4, 2025.
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ELAC Members in Attendance:

Ami Magisos, April Messenger, Astrid Newell, Brittany Hartikainen, Bryana Kowalski, Carlina Brown-Banks, Cheryl Smith, Claudette Lindquist, Danielle Rasmussen, Debbie Ham, Deeann Puffert, Enrica Hampton, Hanna Bruning, Heidi Scott, Jen Sandvig, Kathy Carman, Lois Martin, Lola Moses, Michelle Perez, Olivia Burley, Representative Mari Leavitt, Ruba Ayub, Ryan Guzman, Samantha Bowen, Shereese Rhodes, Tafra Jones, Valerie Arnold, Valisa Smith, Victoria Hilt, Waylon Ballew

ELAC Members Absent:

Alexandra Martin-Truesdell, Andrea Carrillo, Colleen Condon, Debbie Carlsen, Isis Lara Fernandez, Julie Rolling, Luz Gomez, Mary Rulewicz, Million Shiferaw, Nancy Spurgeon, Representative Travis Couture, Senator Claire Wilson