Quality Early Learning: What it Is and Why it Matters

What is Quality Early Learning?
Early learning programs serve children from birth through age 5 in a variety of settings, including:

- Child care centers
- Family home child care
- ECEAP and Head Start programs

Kindergarten-readiness depends on the ability of these programs to meet the needs of all children in areas such as:

- Physical development
- Approach to learning and problem solving
- Social and emotional development
- Language and literacy skills

When a child enters school behind in any of these areas, it can be difficult to catch up.

Why Does Quality Matter?
Research shows that children who receive high-quality care in the first five years have:

- Better math and reading skills
- Fewer behavior problems
- Higher scores on tests measuring cognitive and academic achievement
- Greater likelihood of graduating from high school

Many of the issues related to poor school performance are due to gaps in early care and development that existed before the child entered school, according to a 2005 study by the National Institute of Child Health and Development.

For children from low-income families, quality early learning has lasting positive effects on school success, graduation rates and less need for special education services.
What Does Quality Look Like?

Early Achievers recognizes that quality looks different in different settings based on the needs of the families and children served. Early Achievers is flexible to encourage a comprehensive approach to quality improvement, regardless of curriculum or philosophy.

High-quality programs include:

- Staff trained in early childhood education.
- A clean and safe environment.
- Small class sizes with low adult-to-child ratios.
- Communication between parents and teachers.
- A developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Early Achievers is a statewide system of high-quality early learning. Our goal is to ensure that every child in Washington has access to high-quality care that supports their learning and development.

Because every child should have the chance for a strong start.

One of the most important aspects of early learning is the quality of interactions between teachers and children. Families should look for teachers who:

- Engage with each child individually.
- Use a calm voice and simple language.
- Provide warm physical contact.
- Are responsive to child interests.
- Set clear expectations.
- Redirect children when they engage in challenging behaviors.
- Listen to children and encourage them to listen to others.
- Acknowledge children’s accomplishments.