Early Achievers
Participant Operating Guidelines

Adapted from National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning

September 2017
# Early Achievers

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1. Introduction

Overview: What is Early Achievers?

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) has developed Early Achievers, Washington’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS), to help early care and education facilities offer high-quality care that supports each child’s learning and development. Early Achievers is a system designed to:

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

Early Achievers is a key strategy of the Washington State Early Learning Plan, Washington’s roadmap to improving early learning so that all children can start school ready to succeed. In addition, Early Achievers is the centerpiece of the Early Start Act (ESA), which passed the Washington State Legislature as HB 1491 in July 2015. 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 is designed to align, support, and build upon other key early learning initiatives in Washington, such as the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), Washington’s Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS) and the Professional Development Achievement framework. Creating seamless programs for children and families in Washington is essential to helping all children grow, develop, and successfully transition from early childhood into early elementary school.

DEL knows there are many settings that provide care for young children and that children often move between these settings. 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!

Updated September 2017
Our Goal: 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.
- Creating a plan with goals, timelines and responsibilities.
- Testing and implementing solutions.
- Evaluating the results and revising the plan.

Early Achievers is committed to CQI at multiple levels:

- **Facility level:** Early Achievers empowers facility staff and leadership to identify and achieve quality improvement goals with the support of strengths-based coaching. Early Achievers helps facilities create the best early learning system in the country through methods such as observation, reflection, self-assessment and participation in communities of practice.
- **Partner level:** Partners working to implement Early Achievers participate in ongoing professional development and gather lessons learned from participants to recommend and develop enhancements in service delivery.
- **State-system level:** The Department of Early Learning consults with implementing partners and reviews feedback and data in order to adjust and improve policy on an ongoing basis.

Agency Roles

There are many organizations critical to the success of Early Achievers, including the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, Thrive Washington and Regional Early Learning Coalitions. The following agencies are key partners in direct implementation of Early Achievers, and have distinct roles as described in Figure 1:

- The Department of Early Learning (DEL)
- Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA)
- University of Washington (UW)
Figure 1: Implementation Partners

Early Achievers Review Subcommittee

The Early Achievers Review Subcommittee advises DEL on strategies to improve the quality of early learning programs participating in Early Achievers. Subcommittee responsibilities include reviewing and providing feedback on all major Early Achievers policy changes and contributing to the development of the Early Start Act Annual Report to the Washington State Legislature. Members represent all levels of the early learning system and include diverse languages and cultures, different levels of Early Achievers participation and statewide geographic representation. The subcommittee has made a commitment to racial equity and considers the cultural and linguistic needs of families and providers in its analysis and recommendations. All Early Achievers Review Subcommittee meetings are open to the public. More information can be found at del.wa.gov/partnerships/elac/earlyachievers.
Purpose of the Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

This document is designed to:

- Help facilities understand key components of Early Achievers to ensure successful participation.
- Provide a detailed overview of Early Achievers policies and expectations.
- Serve as a reference tool throughout participation.

While it is the facility’s responsibility to read, understand and follow the guidelines in this document, Child Care Aware of Washington, the Early Achievers regional lead agency, is available to answer questions or concerns and help successfully implement these guidelines. The term facility will be used throughout this document to indicate child care centers and family home child care providers participating in Early Achievers.

Updates to Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

Participant Operating Guidelines will be updated annually in July. The current version of the Operating Guidelines is always available on the DEL website at https://del.wa.gov/node/602. The Operating Guidelines posted on the DEL website replace all former versions of the Operating Guidelines. Participants are responsible for reading and following the current Operating Guidelines.

In the event that an Early Achievers policy change is made in-between annual updates, the information will be sent to Early Achievers participants via an email from DEL and posted on our website labeled as a policy update.

Non-discrimination Statement

DEL 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 participants. All staff are trained in cultural sensitivity and strive to match services and resources for culturally diverse Early Achievers participants.
Mandated Reporting

All staff providing Early Achievers services, including data collectors, community liaisons, coaches and technical assistance specialists, 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. Early Achievers Quality Standards

Overview

Early Achievers provides a common set of expectations to define and measure the quality of early learning settings. The Early Achievers Quality Standards promote and support comprehensive facility quality and help ensure that quality practices have a direct impact on the progress of individual children. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) and the University of Washington (UW) developed the standards based on findings from QRIS field tests and the 2016 Early Achievers Validation Study.

All licensed and certified early learning settings are included in the Early Achievers framework. Licensing or certification is the foundation of quality for Early Achievers and is considered Level 1. Programs that choose to register for Early Achievers earn rating Levels 2 through 5 based on participation and evaluation. The following section describes the structure of the rating system, what the rating levels mean and how facilities earn ratings.

Figure 2: Overview of Early Achievers Levels 1-5

- **Level 1: Licensing or Certification**
  - This includes child care centers and family home child care, as well as military, tribal, Head Start and ECEAP programs. Facilities must register in MERIT to participate in Early Achievers.

- **Level 2: Professional Growth and Facility Management**
  - Level 2 is designed to help facilities understand Early Achievers Quality Standards and program requirements. Facility leaders complete a series of trainings to prepare the facility for successful participation and evaluation.

- **Levels 3 - 5: Evaluation and Rating**
  - Facilities that choose to pursue rating will earn points during an on-site evaluation. Final ratings are determined by the number of points earned in the Quality Standard areas.
Rating Structure

Quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) across the nation use the following approaches to create ratings:

- **Building Block Approach**: Facilities must meet every component of each standard in each level before moving to the next level.
- **Point System Approach**: Facilities earn points in Quality Standard areas and ratings are based on total cumulative points.
- **Hybrid Approach**: A combination of building block and points system approaches; requires that all facilities meet the same basic foundational quality, while allowing for facilities to achieve additional points based on program strengths, philosophy, approach, etc.

Early Achievers is a **hybrid model**, meaning that all participating facilities share the same basic foundational requirements at Levels 1 and 2, and earn points to achieve Levels 3-5.

*Figure 3: Overview of Early Achievers Points by Level*

The Early Achievers Quality Standards framework provides a common set of standards for all programs, while recognizing that quality looks different in different settings. The Quality Standards are designed to be flexible to encourage a comprehensive approach to facility-wide quality improvement, regardless of curriculum or philosophy.
Early Achievers Quality Standards

The Early Achievers Quality Standards focus on achieving positive outcomes for every child a facility serves. There are five Quality Standard areas:

- Learning Environment and Interactions
- Child Outcomes
- Curriculum and Staff Supports
- Professional Development and Training
- Family Engagement and Partnership

Each Quality Standard area is made up of several components, which describe ways in which a facility may demonstrate quality. For example, “Developmental Screening is conducted within 90 days of enrollment and results are shared with parents” is one component of the Child Outcomes Quality Standard area.

The Early Achievers Quality Standards provide a common set of standards for all participants, while recognizing that quality looks different in different settings based on philosophy and the needs of the families and children served. For this reason, all components of the on-site records review are optional. This allows participants to demonstrate quality practices in a variety of ways.

See Figure 4 for general examples of the types of facility practices that the Quality Standards measure in each area. Please refer to the Early Achievers Quality Standards booklet for specific components.

ERS and CLASS

Description of Assessment Tools

The Early Achievers Quality Standards incorporate two standardized assessments: the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). The ERS and CLASS both measure facility quality by evaluating the types of supports available to children. Because each tool focuses on different elements within the environment, Early Achievers uses both to provide a comprehensive assessment of facility quality.

Environment Rating Scales

- Measures the quality of the environment in a child care center classroom/family home child care, including how the available materials, activities, routines, schedules and interactions support learning. Scoring is assigned on a 7-point scale.
### Quality Standard Areas

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<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td><strong>Learning Environment and Interactions</strong></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Participants receive points based on average facility score in the following tools:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- CLASS: Instructional Support</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- CLASS: Emotional Support/ Classroom Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Environment Rating Scale (ERS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>• Screen children to spot developmental concerns.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide ongoing assessment to learn about each child’s strengths and needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Share information about children’s growth and progress with families to promote school readiness.</td>
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<td><strong>Curriculum and Staff Supports</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>• Implement a curriculum that aligns with the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide planning time and supports for staff for professional growth and learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family Engagement and Partnership</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>• Partner with families to determine perception of child strengths and needs.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Complete the modified Strengthening Families Self-Assessment and develop a Plan of Action, based on the research-based Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Development and Training</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>• Facility and teaching staff have verified state Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificates or credentials, Associates, Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees in ECE or DEL Approved degree documented in MERIT.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
• Consists of sets of scales for different settings and ages of children. The following scales are used in Early Achievers:
  o Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS-R)—child care center classrooms serving children birth to 2 ½ years.
  o Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R)—child care center classrooms serving children ages 2 ½ to 5 years.
  o Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (FCCERS-R)—family home child care for children birth to 5 years.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System
• Measures the quality of interactions between teachers and children. The CLASS is scored on a continuum from one through seven, with 1-2 considered low, 3-5 considered middle, and 6-7 considered high. CLASS looks at the following areas, or domains:
  o Emotional Support/Emotional & Behavioral Support: warm and respectful relationships, positive communication, responsive caregivers and awareness of children’s needs.
  o Classroom Organization: proactive behavior management, organized routines that maximize learning time and children’s involvement, and children who are active and engaged in activities and learning.
  o Instructional Support/Engaged Support for Learning: discussion and activities that encourage development of children’s reasoning and logic skills, frequent conversations with open-ended questions and advanced language, use of children’s past knowledge and understanding to build upon and increase learning, and active and engaged children.

• Consists of sets of assessments for different ages of children:
  o Infant CLASS – ages 0 to 18 months
  o Toddler CLASS – ages 15 to 36 months
  o Pre-K CLASS – ages 3 to 5 years
  o Combined CLASS (Family Home Child Care) – ages birth to 5 years

In the Early Achievers Quality Standards, the Emotional Support and Classroom Organization domains in Pre-K CLASS are combined for scoring purposes.
Minimum Thresholds

All facilities must achieve designated minimum CLASS and ERS scores. These scores, or minimum thresholds, represent the foundational level of quality that all facilities must have in order to reach Levels 3-5. Facilities that do not meet the minimum thresholds will receive a rating of Level 2, regardless of total facility points earned. Each assessed child care center/family home child care must score a 3.0 or higher on the ERS, at least a 2.0 on Instructional Support/Engaged Support for Learning in CLASS and a 3.5 on Emotional Support and Classroom Organization/Emotional and Behavioral Support in CLASS. The facility ERS and CLASS scores are averages based on the scores of all assessed classrooms.

Records Review

With the exception of completing the ERS and CLASS in Learning Environment and Interactions, all other Quality Standard areas are optional. Standards in Child Outcomes, Curriculum and Staff Supports and Family Engagement and Partnerships are evaluated through a records review during the on-site evaluation. Professional Development and Training points are based on education verification outcomes in staff professional records in MERIT. These points are automatically calculated. If participants want to include components in addition to the ERS and CLASS and Professional Development, they must indicate that at the time they request their rating. They do this by opting-in to records review and developing a file of supporting materials for the selected standards.

How the Quality Standards are “Weighted”

The Early Achievers Quality Standards were 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. For this reason, the Environment Rating Scale (ERS) and CLASS tools represent 60 out of 100 total possible points. These scores make up a significant portion of overall facility rating because engaging environments and positive teacher-child interactions lead to positive outcomes for children. This emphasis on ERS and CLASS allow providers to achieve a Level 3 by reaching the minimum thresholds in ERS and CLASS. This allows participants preparing for their initial rating to focus their efforts on the
quality of care and interactions in the learning environment. Providers who want to work toward a higher point level may opt-in to additional Quality Standards.
3. Eligibility

This chapter outlines the eligibility requirements for participation in Early Achievers.

Facility Type

Licensed or Certified Providers
Licensed or certified child care centers or family home child care providers that serve children between the ages of birth and five are eligible to enroll in Early Achievers.

- Facilities that receive payment from the following subsidies are required to participate in Early Achievers:
  o Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)
  o Seasonal Child Care
  o Homeless Child Care

- Facilities that serve only school-age children are not eligible to participate at this time.

Certified for Payment Only Providers
The Early Start Act of 2015 requires all facilities that accept state child care subsidies to participate in Early Achievers. This includes military, school-based and tribal facilities that are Certified for Payment Only with the Department of Early Learning. Military, school-based, or tribal facilities that are license-exempt must be Certified for Payment Only to enroll in Early Achievers.

- To download forms to request Certification for Payment Only, visit: https://del.wa.gov/providers-educators/publications-forms-and-research/licensing-forms-and-documents-providers.
- For more information about the Tribal Certification process, visit: www.del.wa.gov/government/tribal/certification.aspx

Head Start/ECEAP Providers
Early Achievers participation requirements for Head Start/ECEAP programs are determined by the percentage of enrollment slots that receive Head Start/ECEAP funding. The Early Start Act requires Early Achievers participation for all facilities that provide ECEAP services. Additionally,
Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 170-290-2440 requires Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Pilot sites to participate in Early Achievers.

- Facilities in which Head Start or ECEAP slots fill at least 75% of total facility slots must follow the Head Start/ECEAP Early Achievers Pathway found in Part 2 of the Operating Guidelines.
- Licensed or certified facilities in which Head Start or ECEAP slots fill less than 75% of total facility slots will follow the traditional Early Achievers Pathway.

**Child Enrollment Requirements**

DEL understands that enrollment can fluctuate, especially in family home child care. Therefore, low enrollment will not impact a facility’s eligibility to register for Early Achievers and begin to work on Level 2 activities.

After the completion of Level 2 activities:

- Facilities are expected to report enrollment on a yearly basis.
- Facilities that drop below a minimum enrollment of three children are required to notify their coach within seven business days. Coaches will work directly with facilities to develop a plan to increase enrollment.
- If a facility has no children enrolled for 60 calendar days, the Department of Early Learning reserves the right to initiate the dismissal process described in Participation Requirements and Expectations: Criteria for Dismissal.
- Facilities must ensure that there are at least three children ages birth to five enrolled before requesting an on-site evaluation.

**Licensing Status**

Facilities must be in good standing with licensing in order to participate in Early Achievers. Good standing is defined as having a non-expiring license that is not suspended, revoked or on probationary status. For more information on licensing, please visit [www.del.wa.gov/laws/licensing/Default.aspx](http://www.del.wa.gov/laws/licensing/Default.aspx).

**Initial License**

Facilities that hold an initial license may register to participate in Early Achievers and can complete Level 2 activities. However, the facility cannot submit the Early Achievers Request for On-site Evaluation until the facility receives a non-expiring license.
No Referral Status

- Facilities that are on “no referral status” may register to participate in Early Achievers if they are otherwise in good standing.
- Facilities placed on “no referral” status during participation may continue to participate in Early Achievers activities.
- Facilities that are on “no referral status” may not request or participate in the Early Achievers On-site Evaluation.

Revocation

- Facilities with a license that is revoked may not register to participate in Early Achievers.
- If a facility’s license becomes revoked while enrolled in Early Achievers, the facility will be withdrawn, regardless of facility rating. All activities related to Early Achievers will be discontinued.

Summary Suspension

- Facilities with a license that is on summary suspension may not register to participate in Early Achievers.
- If a facility’s license is put on summary suspension while enrolled in Early Achievers, all activities and services related to Early Achievers will be put on hold pending the outcome of the investigation. In addition, a facility may not request or participate in on-site evaluation while on summary suspension.
  - If the summary suspension leads to a full restoration of the facility’s license, the facility may continue Early Achievers participation.
  - If summary suspension leads to revocation of the facility’s license, the facility will be immediately withdrawn from Early Achievers and all activities related to Early Achievers will be discontinued.
  - If summary suspension leads to a probationary license, the facility’s license must be reinstated with a non-expiring license within six months of the date the license was initially placed on probationary status. If the probationary license is not reinstated as a non-expiring license within six months, participation in Early Achievers will be discontinued.

Probationary License

- Facilities that hold a probationary license may register to participate in Early Achievers and complete Level 2 activities. However, facilities that have been issued a probationary license cannot submit the Early
Achievers Request for On-site Evaluation until the facility has regained a non-expiring license. If the probationary license is not reinstated as a non-expiring license within six months of registration, participation in Early Achievers will be discontinued.

- If a facility is issued a probationary license while enrolled in Early Achievers, the facility may continue to participate in Early Achievers during the probationary period. The facility must be actively working with their licensor toward the reinstatement of a non-expiring license. All coaching and technical assistance will focus on licensing compliance. If the probationary license is not reinstated as a non-expiring license within six months of being placed on probationary status, participation in Early Achievers will be discontinued.
  - If an enrolled facility is issued a probationary license prior to rating, the facility may continue working on Level 2 activities. However, the facility cannot submit the Early Achievers Request for On-site Evaluation or move forward with the rating process until the facility has regained a non-expiring license.

Future Participation

In the event that a facility is withdrawn from Early Achievers due to failure to meet the above licensing requirements, the facility may reapply for participation. In order to be eligible to reapply for participation in Early Achievers, the facility must be licensed in good standing and follow the procedures outlined in Participant Requirements and Expectations: Reapplication to Early Achievers.
4. Early Start Act of 2015 Timeline Requirements

Overview

In July 2015, the Early Start Act established participation timelines for providers that accept state funds. This section will cover timeline requirements for Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Pilot sites as outlined in Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 170-290-2440. These requirements are met at the facility level, regardless of pathway. The timeline requirements apply to providers that:

- Accept subsidy payments through:
  - Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)
  - Seasonal Child Care
  - Homeless Child Care
- Provide ECEAP services
- Participate in the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Pilot

Timeline Requirements

Existing Subsidy Providers

Licensed and certified facilities that received a subsidy payment between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016 and do not provide ECEAP services must meet the following requirements:

- Complete Level 2 activities by August 1, 2017.
- Participate in the Early Achievers on-site evaluation process and receive a rating of a Level 3 or higher by December 31, 2019.
- Maintain an up-to-date facility rating of Level 3 or higher by renewing their rating every three years.

If an existing subsidy provider does not rate at a Level 3 or higher by December 31, 2019, the provider must complete remedial activities and rate at a Level 3 by June 30, 2020. More information can be found in Post-Rating Supports: Remedial Activities. Any existing subsidy providers that do not rate at least a Level 3 by June 30, 2020 will no longer be eligible to receive state child care subsidy.
Facilities that Are Newly Licensed or Certified to Receive State Subsidy Payments

Facilities that did not receive a subsidy payment between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016 and received a subsidy payment on or after July 1, 2016 are considered new subsidy providers. Any provider that begins accepting subsidy payments after 12 or more months without accepting payments are also considered new subsidy providers. All new subsidy providers must meet the following requirements:

- Enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days of receiving the initial subsidy payment.
- Complete Level 2 activities within 12 months of Early Achievers registration.
- Receive a rating of Level 3 or higher within 30 months of Early Achievers registration.
- If the facility fails to rate at a Level 3 or higher within 30 months of enrollment, the provider must participate in remedial activities.
- If the facility fails to rate at a Level 3 or higher within six months of beginning Remedial Activities the facility will no longer be eligible to receive state child care subsidy payments.
- Maintain an up-to-date facility rating of Level 3 or higher by renewing their rating every three years.

**Figure 5: Timeline for Providers that Receive State Subsidy Payments**

- Enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days of receiving initial subsidy payment.
- Complete Level 2 activities within 12 months of Early Achievers enrollment.
- Receive a rating of Level 3 or higher within 30 months of enrollment.
- If unsuccessful in reaching Level 3, facility must participate in remedial activities.
- Rate at Level 3 or higher within six months of beginning remedial activities.
ECEAP Provider Timelines

Facilities that provide ECEAP services must meet the following timelines:

- ECEAP programs must register for Early Achievers within 30 days of the start of ECEAP services.
  - License-exempt ECEAP sites must receive a rating of a Level 4 or higher within 12 months of the date of Early Achievers registration. More information about timeline requirements for license-exempt ECEAP providers can be found in the Head Start/ECEAP Pathway.
  - Licensed or certified ECEAP sites must complete the rating process and receive a rating of a Level 4 or higher within 18 months of the start of providing ECEAP services, regardless of pathway. The timeline requirements for Licensed/Certified ECEAP providers are outlined in the following illustration.

**Figure 6: Licensed/Certified Administering ECEAP Timeline**

1. Enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days of starting to provide ECEAP services.
2. Rate at Level 4 or higher within 18 months of starting to provide ECEAP services.
3. Facilities that rate below Level 4 must participate in remedial activities.
4. Rate at Level 4 or higher within 6 months of beginning remedial activities.
5. If rated below Level 4 after remedial activities, facility contract will not be renewed at the end of the school-year.
Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Pilot Timeline

Early Head Start-Child Care Partners must:

- Enroll within 30 days of signing the Partnership Agreement.
- Rate Level 3 or higher within 18 months of their Early Achievers enrollment date.
- Facilities that rate below Level 3 are required to participate in remedial activities, as outlined in Remedial Activities.
- Maintain an up-to-date facility rating of Level 3 or higher by renewing their rating every three years.

Timeline Extension Protocol

Providers that receive subsidy payments and/or provide ECEAP services are required to meet the timelines outlined above. However, Early Achievers policy does allow providers who have completed Level 2 activities to apply for a one-time six-month extension for “exceptional circumstances.” Participants may request an extension up to 12 months before their rating deadline or during remedial activities, if necessary. All extensions will be granted for six months; however participants can choose to move forward with rating before their extension expires. NOTE: providers who have already received their initial rating may request an extension to their renewal rating.

Criteria for Extension Eligibility

Early Achievers participants that wish to request an extension to the rating deadline must meet the following criteria:

- Be in full compliance with all licensing/ECEAP requirements, if applicable.
- Have met all prior Early Achievers requirements, including enrollment and completion of Level 2 activities.
- Must meet minimum participation requirements in rating preparation activities, such as training and coaching.
- Have experienced exceptional circumstances that can be verified.
Definition of “Exceptional Circumstances”

DEL may only grant extension requests if a participant can demonstrate an “exceptional circumstance” that warrants additional time prior to rating.

Extensions will be granted for the following exceptional circumstances:

- Leadership changes onsite, such as director, assistant director or program supervisor, within the past six months.
- Organizational leadership change, such as changes in Tribal Council membership, or other agency leads, within the past six months.
- High staff turnover in a Child Care Center, Head Start or ECEAP program—more than 30% of lead staff have changed within the past six months (this is limited to staff who work with children in the birth to five years age range).
- Staff turnover in Family Home Child Care—family child care assistant or lead staff have changed within the past three months.
- Community-defined events/subsistence lifestyles/seasonal issues—such as a canoe journey.
- The facility is engaged in a grievance process with DEL, CCA of WA or other entity providing Early Achievers supports.
- Reallocation of Head Start or ECEAP slots that may impact data collection procedures.
- Extended illness of either the Director, Family Home Child Care provider, or a Lead Teacher.
- Less than three children between birth and five years old are enrolled.
- Natural disaster or accidental damage to the facility that requires professional repair.
- Death or other tragedy that has a significant impact on the program staff or families.
- Other exceptional circumstances will be 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 protocol panel to determine if the circumstances warrant an extension.
  - The panel will include staff from DEL, CCA of WA and a member of the Early Achievers Review Subcommittee.

Process for Requesting an Extension

Providers must request an extension in writing by completing the Early Achievers Extension Application form before their rating timeline expires. The application is available on the DEL website and must include the following information:

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

All extension requests will be reviewed by DEL. Those that meet the defined criteria will be approved. Any requests for an extension that do not meet the defined categories for eligibility will be submitted to an Extension/Exception protocol panel for review. This panel will have a DEL staff member, CCA of WA staff member and Early Achievers Review Subcommittee member. They will review the evidence and determine if the program qualifies for an extension.

Requests for extension can be emailed to the QRIS inbox at gris@del.wa.gov, or mailed to:

    QRIS Extension Request  
    c/o DEL – Early Achievers  
    PO Box 40970  
    Olympia, WA 98504-0970

Once requests are reviewed, programs will be notified by an email from the QRIS inbox or by U.S. mail stating if their request for extension was granted or denied, along with information about any next steps.
5. Enrolling in Early Achievers

Early Achievers Registration

The center director/FCC primary provider must complete the Early Achievers Registration form. Information about how to register for Early Achievers can be found on the DEL website at https://del.wa.gov/node/566. The Early Achievers Registration includes:

- Basic facility information and demographics.
- A link to the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines. Applicants must check off that they have read and agreed to the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines before submitting the registration.
- An electronic signature by the applicant.

When the Early Achievers Registration is submitted, the facility’s Early Achievers Contact will receive a confirmation email from DEL. The facility is now enrolled in Early Achievers.

Early Achievers Contacts

The child care center director/family home child care primary provider will be designated the Early Achievers Contact. The Early Achievers Contact is responsible for the oversight and completion of all Level 2 activities. In facilities where there are multiple administrative staff members, a secondary Early Achievers Contact may be appointed to support participation and complete the Professional Training Series described below. Either the primary or secondary Early Achievers Contact must be designated the on-site contact for Early Achievers coaches and data collectors.

Early Achievers Participation Agreement

The Early Achievers Contact must sign an initial Early Achievers Participation Agreement in order to participate in Early Achievers. The Participation Agreement is an agreement between participating facilities and Child Care Aware of Washington and outlines the requirements and responsibilities of Early Achievers participation. Participants should maintain a saved electronic copy or
hard copy for their records. Facilities that do not have a signed initial Participation Agreement documented within 14 days of Early Achievers Registration may not be able to move forward with Early Achievers participation. The Participation Agreement will be renewed at least every three years at the time of initial rating, re-rating or rating renewal.
6. Level 2 Activities

Overview

Early Achievers Level 2 is designated for Professional Growth and Facility Management and requires facility leadership (center director/primary provider) to complete a series of Early Achievers preparation activities and training. CCA of WA will provide pre-rating coaching to help facilities complete Level 2 activities. Upon DEL approval of completion of Level 2 activities, the facility will achieve Level 2 status and be eligible to request an evaluation for facility rating when they are ready.

Required Level 2 Activities

After successful registration, the Early Achievers Contact may begin to complete Level 2 activities. These activities include staff professional records in MERIT and completion of the Professional Training Series.

Staff Professional Records in MERIT

The Early Achievers Contact must ensure that all facility staff have entered professional records in MERIT. Staff must associate themselves with a facility by logging into their own MERIT professional records and entering their current employment at a facility. If a facility wants to earn points toward their rating for staff education, it is important that facilities prioritize this task early in Level 2 participation in order to ensure ample time to gather, submit, review and process transcripts. All staff must verify their education qualifications by completing the following steps:

Fill out an education application in MERIT

- Log into your MERIT account.
- Select Education Application under the My Education Tab, and then complete the application.
- You will receive a copy of your submitted application and instructions for submitting supporting documents via email.

Copy transcripts – MERIT now accepts photocopies of official transcripts.
• Have all college or university transcripts mailed to you at your home. Copy the front and back sides of the transcripts.

Copy certificates and high school diploma

Label all documents with STARS ID

• Write your STARS ID on the top of the copied official transcript(s) and certificates or diplomas.

Send copies by mail or email

• Place the copies of your transcripts and certificates into one envelope and mail it to:
  Centralia College CFS, Attention MERIT
  600 Centralia College Blvd.
  Centralia, WA 98531-4035

• For faster service, transcripts may also be scanned and emailed to centraliamerit@centralia.edu.

MERIT is the source of evidence during data collection for staff education qualifications for facility Professional Development and Training Quality Standard points. Education applications must be verified before the Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation is submitted to be considered for the professional development portion of your rating. NOTE: If you have staff whose highest education is a CDA, be sure that their most current, unexpired CDA is reflected in their MERIT professional record.

Facility employees may qualify for a professional development achievement award by filling out an education application and submitting supporting documentation. For more information, visit del.wa.gov/requirements/professional/awards.aspx.

The Professional Training Series

The Professional Training Series consists of six core trainings offered free of charge to the Early Achievers Contacts. Three of these trainings are online, three are in-person and all provide STARS hours.

The training series must be completed by one of the Early Achievers Contacts. All six trainings must be completed by the same person. The online trainings are available to all facility staff for free.
Online trainings are available at cca.deltraining.com. Please note that these trainings require participants to create an account that is separate from their MERIT log-in. The online trainings include:

- Introduction to the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Overview
- Introduction to the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines
- Introduction to the Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals
- **Optional** Online Training: Early Achievers Health Training

In-person trainings can be scheduled through your regional CCA of WA office. More information about finding trainings in your area can be found on the [CCA of WA website](#). The three in-person trainings are:

- Introduction to Cultural Competence
- Strengthening Families Training for Early Learning Professionals
- School Readiness

**Reaching Early Achievers Level 2 Status**

Once all Level 2 activities have been completed and the application submitted, then facilities will receive an email from DEL announcing the achievement of Level 2 status and outlining next steps for those who wish to prepare for an on-site evaluation in the future.

**Program Change before Completion of Level 2 Activities**

**Early Achievers Contact**

If the Early Achievers Contact leaves the facility prior to completing Level 2 activities, the facility must designate a new contact by completing a new facility registration. The new Early Achievers Contact is required to complete all six trainings in the Professional Training Series unless the facility has a second designated Early Achievers Contact that has completed the training series.

If the second Early Achievers contact was the designated training participant and leaves the facility prior to Level 2 completion, all six trainings will need to be taken by the primary Early Achievers Contact or
by a newly designated secondary contact. If the secondary contact was not the designated training participant no action is needed.

Facility Information

The facility Early Achievers Registration and Application will remain active regardless of staff change. Facility information including demographics, program information and staff professional records will remain in the system and do not need to be entered again.

Staff Change after Completion of Level 2 Activities

If the Early Achievers Contact leaves the facility after the facility has achieved Level 2 status, the facility will not be required to redo Level 2 activities. However, it is the responsibility of the facility to ensure that new leadership staff is informed of facility participation status and is equipped to participate in Early Achievers

Facilities that Remain at Level 2

Scenarios

When Level 2 activities are complete, facilities may remain a Level 2 in the following scenarios:

- Facility chooses to remain a Level 2 (no evaluation).
- Facility participates in on-site evaluation and is awarded a Level 2 rating because facility does not meet minimum thresholds for Levels 3 through 5.
- Facility is not accepting state subsidy payments.

Responsibilities of Facilities that Remain Level 2

In the future, facilities that remain at Level 2 may be required to participate in additional quality improvement activities, as well as providing updates and reporting on such activities. For facilities that choose to remain at Level 2 and not participate in the on-site evaluation for rating may have limited access to Early Achievers coaching supports and other resources.
7. Preparing for an Initial On-Site Evaluation

What to Expect

Coaching supports

Facilities that complete all Level 2 activities and intend to pursue an on-site evaluation have access to coaching through CCA of WA. This customized support will focus on best practices, determining facility goals and preparing for data collection, including CLASS and ERS.

Coaches will require participation from facility leadership and classroom teachers. The ERS and CLASS items involve teaching practices, routines and the set-up and maintenance of learning environments. It is important for the facility leadership to understand how these tools measure quality and how to support their staff as they work to implement best practices.

Child Care Quality Baseline Assessment

Facilities may request a Child Care Quality Baseline (CCQB) assessment after completing Level 2. The CCQB is a low-stakes assessment conducted by reliable CCA of WA staff to determine a facility's strengths and opportunities. This information is used to customize coaching supports to help the facility meet ERS and CLASS minimum thresholds for Level 3.

Selecting an Evaluation

Facilities that are ready for the on-site evaluation can choose the components they want to include in their rating. Facilities can select just ERS and CLASS; or they can select the ERS and CLASS, plus Records Review. If they select the on-site evaluation with records review, they can include any combination of standards from Child Outcomes, Curriculum and Staff Supports or Family Engagement and Partnerships. Facilities that select the streamlined evaluation will only receive the ERS and CLASS during their on-site evaluation. Full data collection will include a review of all Quality Standard components selected by the participant. Professional Development point calculation is part of both the full and streamlined data collection.
Streamlined Data Collection

Participants that do not opt to participate in records review will receive the ERS and CLASS assessments during their on-site evaluation. These facilities may earn up to 70 total points. The final facility score will be calculated based on points received in:

- Learning Environment and Interactions: points are based on the average facility scores for CLASS and ERS (60 points).
- Professional Development: points are determined by staff professional development as documented in MERIT (10 points).

Data Collection with Records Review

Data collection with records review includes an on-site records review, in addition to the ERS and CLASS assessments. Participants may opt-in to some or all of the records review components included in the Interactive Rating Readiness Tool and must provide accompanying documentation and signed parent consent forms prior to requesting an evaluation. Facilities requesting data collection with records review may earn up to 100 points.

Completing the Interactive Rating Readiness Tool

To prepare for full data collection, facilities will complete an Interactive Rating Readiness Tool (IRRT). The IRRT is a checklist that helps facilities and the data collection team plan for a successful, efficient on-site evaluation visit. It is available on the CCA of WA website at wa.childcareaware.org/providers/early-achievers/tools-for-providers-in-rating-readiness-consultation. The IRRT collects facility information for use by data collectors including:

- Classroom schedules and other relevant facility details.
- For facilities participating in the full data collection, the IRRT will also document:
  - Confirmation that the facility has collected consent forms from all families (described in Parent Consent below).
  - Identifying the Quality Standard components the facility plans to demonstrate during the on-site evaluation visits.
  - Location of documentation and files for data collector review.

Facilities may indicate on the tool that they choose to “opt out” of certain components of the records review. Facilities might choose this option when a component does not align with their program philosophy, or if their facility does
not have plans to implement the component at this time. Opting out of a component means the data collector will not look for evidence of that component during the on-site evaluation. All components will be used to determine total facility points, regardless of whether a facility opts out, so scores may be negatively impacted by opting out.

Once the IRRT has been completed, the Early Achievers Contact submits it to their CCA of WA regional coordinator for review. The regional coordinator will determine the facility’s readiness for evaluation based on whether the completed IRRT indicates that the facility has:

- Completed all required facility information.
- Included all required documentation, including signed consent forms and supporting materials, for those selecting full data collection.

If the regional coordinator determines that the facility has not yet met the necessary criteria, the facility will continue to work on the IRRT. Once the regional coordinator determines that all criteria have been met, the submitted IRRT is considered the official Interactive Rating Readiness Tool of record, and cannot be modified without additional review by DEL or its designee. The official IRRT should be kept on-file.

Please note: Regional coordinators and other CCA of WA staff cannot guarantee a facility rating. The Interactive Rating Readiness Tool does not account for ERS and CLASS assessment scores, which determine the majority of facility points.

Parent/Guardian Consent

Facilities are responsible for notifying families of their Early Achievers participation in on-site evaluation. During the evaluation, data collectors will observe center classrooms and family home providers while children are present for CLASS and ERS assessments.

Facilities receiving the full data collection must provide signed consent forms for all children in family home child care and children birth to five in child care centers. Although no individual child will be assessed, child files will be reviewed by data collectors to measure whether a facility meets certain Quality Standard components, such as completion of child assessment and developmental screenings. Families are required to sign the consent form, regardless of whether or not they choose to grant permission for their child’s
files to be reviewed as part of the facility rating process. Consent is between the facility and the family.

A consent form template is available for participants. The template:

- Describes the purpose of Early Achievers on-site evaluation for facility rating and quality improvement.
- Describes how facility information will be gathered including review of children’s files.
- Allows families to indicate if they are willing to participate in an interview as part of the data collection process (optional).

The Consent Form Templates, as well as a Frequently Asked Questions handout for parents are available on the DEL website.

Facilities must:

- Distribute and collect signed consent forms from parents or guardians for each child in care (family home child care) or each child in a classroom serving children birth to five (child care centers). Every child must have a signed consent form in place. The consent form must be signed no more than one year prior to the on-site evaluation.
- Identify which families indicated on the consent form that they do not want their child’s file reviewed. Data collectors will only review files of children with parental consent.
- Show evidence of signed consents during the community liaison site visit (consent forms will stay on-site at the facility and should be sorted by classroom).
- Notify their community liaison of families that did not sign consent.

In the case that a facility uses videotaping for CLASS observations due to language accommodations or other special circumstances, the facility is required to include language about videotaping in their parent consents, and to notify the community liaison of children that may not be videotaped.

Accreditation

Certain national accreditations have been incorporated into Early Achievers. Eligible participants will receive an additional five points toward their final rating, as well as an Accreditation Area of Specialization on their rating certificate. Accreditation points are not retroactive. To qualify, accredited providers must:
• Be fully accredited at the time of rating by an agency that has met Early Achievers accreditation requirements. At this time, these agencies include:
  o National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
  o National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
  o American Montessori Society (AMS)
• Document current accreditation on the IRRT, including the location of their current certificate of accreditation for verification by the data collector.
• Participate in full data collection and meet the minimum score requirements in ERS and CLASS.
8. Pre-Rating Supports and Incentives

Overview

Early Achievers includes a range of supports and incentives to assist participants with quality improvement efforts throughout their participation. Supports for participants at Levels 1 and 2 focus on director-level training and pre-rating coaching to increase successful Early Achievers participation and support preparation of learning environments and classrooms.

Please note that facilities must maintain active engagement in order to receive services. Active engagement means responding to communications, participating fully in on-site visits or cohort groups and demonstrating program growth based on professional development and coaching.

Coaching Services

Coaching is a service provided by regional CCA of WA agencies and is designed to meet the needs of diverse child care providers to help them understand Early Achievers policies and navigate the process successfully.

Upon registration for Early Achievers, facilities will be assigned a coach by their regional CCA of WA agency. Coaches will work with the Early Achievers Contact to develop work plans and timelines for completing Level 2 activities. To learn more about coaching services for providers working toward Level 2, please read the Early Achievers Technical Assistance Framework, located in the Early Achievers Participant Toolkit on the DEL website https://www.del.wa.gov/sites/default/files/imported/publications/elac-qris/docs/EA_TA_Framework.pdf.

Facilities that successfully complete all Level 2 activities and intend to pursue an on-site evaluation will receive customized on-site support to help them develop an action plan. Action plans identify facility goals as well as additional resources and training available to help the facility prepare for their first on-site evaluation and rating. More information can be found above in Preparing for an Initial On-Site Evaluation.

The goals of pre-rating coaching services are:
• Participants will understand Early Achievers program requirements, Quality Standards and the process to successfully complete Level 2 activities.

• Participants will apply new knowledge gained from the Level 2 Professional Training Series and personal reflections by developing action plans that prepare them to receive a facility rating.

• Participants will begin to value and embody the concept of continuous quality improvement, laying the groundwork for deeper goal-setting through coaching in Levels 3-5.

Coaching services are delivered in multiple ways, including on-site visits, email, phone calls and group sessions. Participants work individually with their coach on their unique work plans. Additionally, in order to build community connections and peer support, the regional CCA of WA agency may offer small group sessions on topics that support continuous quality improvement and the Early Achievers Quality Standards.

Level 2 User Guide

Participants also receive an Early Achievers Level 2 User Guide to help them navigate each step in Level 2 participation. The User Guide is designed to provide instructions, helpful tips and tools to assist in the completion of Level 2 activities. The User Guide can be found on the CCA of WA website at wa.childcareaware.org/providers/early-achievers/tools-for-providers-in-early-achievers-level-2.

Substitute Pool

DEL and The Imagine Institute, a non-profit organization that provides training to family child care providers and family, friends and neighbors, have partnered to create a substitute pool for providers working toward an initial rating of Level 3 or higher. The substitute pool provides services to child care centers and family home child care providers.

In order to access the substitute pool, providers must be:

• Enrolled and actively participating in Early Achievers.
• Working towards a Level 3 or higher.
• In good licensing status (this means having a non-expiring license that is not suspended, revoked, or on probation).
• Serving or have served at least one child receiving subsidy within the last 12 months.

Qualifying participants may request substitutes for time spent participating in approved Early Achievers rating readiness activities such as:

• Attending trainings that are required or are included in their rating readiness action plan.
• Developing their file of supporting materials
• Time spent with coaches to prepare for rating

All substitutes meet the current minimum education standard for a licensed facility lead teacher, have completed DEL training and have a cleared Portable Background Check. For more information about the substitute pool, please visit our website at del.wa.gov/substitutepool.

Training
The Early Achievers Professional Training Series described in Moving toward Level 2: Completion of Required Level 2 Activities is available to the Early Achievers Contact(s) of participating facilities. These trainings are offered free of charge and include STARS hours. They will provide background and context for key elements of the Quality Standards, and are designed to prepare facilities for successful participation in Early Achievers. The online trainings are free and recommended for all staff members.

Needs-Based Grants
Needs-Based Grants are intended to help qualifying facilities overcome barriers that may prevent them from achieving a Level 3 quality rating. Early Achievers participants may work with their coach to prepare and submit a Needs-Based Grant application package. The grant application can also be found in the pre-rating toolkit on the DEL website.

Grant Eligibility and Prioritization
In order to be eligible a facility must meet the following criteria:
• Participate in Early Achievers as an active Level 2 or rated Level 2 facility.
• Serve non-school-age children receiving Working Connections Child Care subsidies.

And at least one of the following:
• Enrolled in the Tier 1 food program, or
• Located within a school district that serves 20% low income children based on OSPI data (data is found on the OSPI website here).

Needs-Based Grants will be prioritized for facilities that:
• Have at least 80% of facility slots filled by children who are accessing state subsidies.
• Demonstrate a culturally diverse program.

Distribution of Grant Funds

Needs-Based Grant awards will be distributed between 30 and 60 days from the date that a facility’s completed grant application is approved by DEL.

• Facilities must register as a vendor of Washington State by submitting the Statewide Payee Registration form and W-9 to the Department of Early Learning prior to receiving a Needs-Based Grant. Facilities that fail to provide this information to DEL will not be eligible to receive a grant award.

Allowable Uses of Grant Funds

• Classroom materials
• Substitute time
• Professional development
• Curriculum development and instructional materials
• Other supplies or equipment to improve program quality

Restrictions

Award funds may not be used 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**: Funds may not be used for any religious purpose or activity, including worship or instruction.
- **Gift Cards**: Grant funds should not be used to purchase monetary equivalents such as gift cards, traveler’s checks, or money orders.

Facilities that receive a Needs-Based Grant are required to keep their receipts for seven years. For more information, an overview of Needs-Based Grants can be found in the pre-rating toolkit on our website at: [del.wa.gov/EarlyAchievers-PreRatingToolkit](del.wa.gov/EarlyAchievers-PreRatingToolkit).

**Professional Development Scholarships**

Scholarships are available for students working in Early Achievers facilities to pursue state stackable certificates, Associates Degrees and Bachelor’s Degrees in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Early Achievers Grants and Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals are two student financial aid resources that are prioritized for students who are employed by Early Achievers facilities. Each scholarship has different eligibility criteria and financial benefits. To learn more about these scholarships, visit [Professional Development/Financial Support](https://del.wa.gov/EarlyAchievers-PreRatingToolkit) on the DEL website.

**Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals (WA Scholarships)**

Washington Scholarships is administered by Child Care Aware of Washington and supports educators working toward their CDA (Child Development Associate) and BA degrees in Early Childhood Education. Participants interested in Washington Scholarships should contact Child Care Aware of Washington at [wa.childcareaware.org/providers/scholarships](wa.childcareaware.org/providers/scholarships).

**State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Early Achievers Grants**

Early Achievers Grants are administered by the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, and help employees at Early Achievers facilities pursue Early Childhood Education credits toward state stackable ECE certificates and Associate degrees in ECE. Participants interested in Early Achievers Grants should contact their college’s financial aid department for more information on how to apply.
**Subsidy Reimbursement**

Enrolled providers who serve children receiving Working Connections Child Care (WCCC), Seasonal Child Care or Children’s Administration subsidies will receive a 2% increase to the subsidy base rate. Providers who accept subsidy payments must advance to a rated level of 3 or higher within 30 months of enrolling in Early Achievers in order to maintain this subsidy incentive. If a provider withdraws and then re-enrolls in Early Achievers, the 30-month timeline continues based on the first enrollment date.

**Program Description on Child Care Check**

Child Care Check is an online tool that provides helpful information to parents and families about licensed or certified child care and early learning programs. DEL supports Early Achievers participants’ commitment to quality by offering a customized program description on Child Care Check. Participating facilities may create and submit a brief description in the Program Description for inclusion on their Child Care Check profile.
9. Data Collection

Overview

On-site evaluation is conducted by data collectors from the University of Washington (UW) and is required to achieve Levels 3, 4 and 5. Once a facility has determined, in conjunction with Regional CCA of WA staff, that it is ready for an on-site evaluation, the Early Achievers Contact must submit the Early Achievers Request for On-site Evaluation. After review, the UW data collection team, which includes data collectors and community liaisons, will work with providers to gather the data necessary to assign a facility rating.

Eligibility Requirements for Evaluation Request

In order to be eligible to request an on-site evaluation, facilities must:

- Have been awarded Level 2 status.
- Have a non-expiring license in good standing.
- Have a minimum of three children birth to five enrolled and present at the time of on-site evaluation.
  - If a facility does not have at least three children ages birth to five enrolled and present during the on-site visit, the evaluation visit may be cancelled and the facility will remain a Level 2 until they can be rated.
  - If a facility evaluation is cancelled due to low enrollment, the facility will be required to wait a minimum of one application cohort period (three months) before they are considered eligible to receive another evaluation visit. Facilities must demonstrate that they have three children enrolled and present prior to a second data collection visit.
  - If a second data collection is scheduled and there are not a minimum of three children present when the data collection team arrives, the facility must work with their regional coordinator and DEL to determine the best time to submit another request for on-site evaluation.
- Facilities receiving the full data collection must have
  - A signed, completed Interactive Rating Readiness Tool.
  - A signed Early Achievers parent consent form on file for all children who are enrolled to attend a minimum of one day per week.
The families of children who attend on a drop-in basis must be notified of facility participation in Early Achievers and alerted to the possibility that a data collector will be conducting observations in the child’s classroom. Children on drop-in schedules will not have their files reviewed during the records review process. Providers should identify the files of these children to their community liaison so that data collectors do not inadvertently review them.

Process to Submit Request for Evaluation

Request for On-site Evaluation

Once all evaluation eligibility requirements have been met, a facility can request an evaluation for rating. The application includes:

- Update of facility demographic information
- Normal facility operating hours and days of the week
- Update of classroom and staff information

Facilities will receive unannounced on-site evaluation visits during a 2-month window, as outlined in the Cohort Calendar below. Facilities will work with their community liaison to document “block-out” dates of when the facility is not available for evaluation visits.

Facilities should be completely ready to receive on-site evaluation visits when they submit the Request for On-Site Evaluation, including the verification of all staff education in MERIT.

Rating Cohort Calendar

Facilities should consider the cohort calendar when submitting the Request for On-Site Evaluation. The cohort calendar allows facilities to request an on-site evaluation based on the schedule that works best for them and know exactly when their rating report will be released.

Applicant cohorts were designed to efficiently process a high volume of Early Achievers ratings requests across the state. Each cohort has specific dates by which the request for on-site evaluation must be approved in order to be included in that cohort. However, it is possible that the cohort approval period may be shortened or extended depending on the
number of requests received. Please contact your regional coordinator for more information.

As agreed upon by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU Local 925) and the Department of Early Learning (DEL), licensed family home child care providers will be notified of placement in either the first or second half of the Early Achievers rating cohort. This goes into effect June 2, 2017, and applies to family home child care providers who request an on-site evaluation on or after this date.

Figure 7: Rating Cohort Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Cohort 1</th>
<th>Cohort 2</th>
<th>Cohort 3</th>
<th>Cohort 4</th>
<th>Cohort 5</th>
<th>Cohort 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Request Submitted to UW by</td>
<td>Oct. 1</td>
<td>Dec. 1</td>
<td>Feb. 1</td>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>June 1</td>
<td>Aug. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating Release Date</td>
<td>Feb. 15</td>
<td>April 15</td>
<td>June 15</td>
<td>Aug. 15</td>
<td>Oct. 15</td>
<td>Dec. 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Block-Out Dates

In general, programs are asked to list no more than four block-out dates per cohort. These block-out dates are in addition to days that the program is closed. Programs that report more than four block-out dates are more likely to have their data collection visit delayed, which could result in the program not receiving a rating in their desired cohort.

Review of Evaluation Request

After a facility submits their Request for On-Site Evaluation, the facility’s regional coordinator will review the request to determine if the facility has met each of the evaluation eligibility requirements. If the regional coordinator verifies that all requirements have been met, the request will be forwarded to DEL. The QRIS team at DEL verifies licensing status and the rating type. Once this information is processed DEL forwards it to the
UW evaluation team and the evaluation process will begin. If it is determined that the facility has not met all of the evaluation eligibility requirements, the regional coordinator will provide the reason the facility was deemed not ready for evaluation. The facility is responsible for addressing the reason(s) before submitting another request for evaluation.

**On-site Evaluation**

**Community Liaison Visit**

To ensure that the on-site evaluation is conducted as efficiently and unobtrusively as possible, a community liaison will contact the facility prior to the on-site data collection visit. The community liaison is a member of the UW evaluation team whose purpose is to support the facility and enable a successful data collection visit by:

- Explaining the on-site visit and answering any questions or concerns.
- Reviewing the completed Interactive Rating Readiness Tool with the facility.
- Confirming that all facility documentation and files are ready and in place for data collection. The community liaison does not review the content of the documentation, but rather confirms and documents the availability and location of the materials so the data collectors are able to easily find and review materials during data collection.
- Reviewing consent forms for each classroom to ensure that all children have a signed document indicating whether their files may be reviewed.
- Collecting information about parents interested in participating in a phone or email interview about their child's program.
- Gathering information about the facility, including layout and classroom schedules.
- Conducting the Early Achievers Contact interview.
- Conducting parent interviews.

The community liaison reviews the IRRT with the Early Achievers Contact, sign it and take a picture of the front page to serve as a record of their visit to the facility. Upon successful completion of the visit, the community liaison will indicate that the facility is ready for the on-site evaluation visits.
Data Collection

Data collectors from the University of Washington visit the facility to conduct an on-site evaluation. The visits are unannounced and occur within the facility-selected cohort as described above. Facility information is collected by the data collectors through a variety of methods including:

- Direct observation of the learning environment
- Interviews with teachers receiving the ERS assessment
- Review of records and documentation

On average, data collection visits take place over three days for centers and one to two days for family child care programs, depending on the type of evaluation and facility size. In child care centers, classroom selection is based on the number of classrooms per age group (infant, toddler and preschool). Between 80 and 100% of center classrooms will be observed, although they will not all necessarily receive full data collection. The facility will not be notified in advance which classrooms will be observed. In some circumstances, more than one data collector will be present in the classroom at the same time.

If the facility is participating in the full data collection, the data collection team will refer to the IRRT to determine which records review components the facility is attempting to meet. The IRRT also serves as a reference for data collection, helping to locate and access materials in a way that works best for the facility. Both the data collector and the Early Achievers Contact, or their designee, will sign and date the document. The completed IRRT will provide a history of the facility’s evaluation process.

Post-visit Surveys

Community Liaisons will send a post-visit survey link via email after the final on-site evaluation visit. This survey should be completed by the Early Achievers Contact within three business days. The facility rating cannot be released until this survey is complete.

The purpose of these surveys is to document any concerns or feedback about the visits. The UW evaluation team will consider concerns documented in the survey and contact the Early Achievers Contact directly to address concerns if applicable. To avoid a delay in assigning a rating, the Early Achievers Contact survey must be completed and submitted online within three business days of receipt.
In addition, data collectors will provide a post-visit survey link to teachers following both the CLASS and ERS observation visits. Teachers wishing to participate in this survey should complete it online within three business days of the observation. A paper copy of either survey can be requested from the facility’s community liaison.
10. Facility Rating

Rating Assignment

Rating Determination

Early Achievers ratings are based on facility data collected during the on-site evaluation. The UW evaluation team is responsible for compiling and analyzing facility data to determine total facility points and make a rating recommendation. The Department of Early Learning will assign the final Early Achievers rating level based on UW recommendations.

Rating Notification

Facilities will receive access to their Early Achievers Rating Report on the rating release date identified in the cohort calendar. The Rating Report lists overall facility rating, ERS and CLASS assessment score averages and points earned in each Quality Standard area.

Areas of Specialization

DEL will mail Early Achievers Rating Certificates to facilities 30 days after their rating release date. Certificates will highlight the facility’s Early Achievers Level as well as information about facility strengths, or Areas of Specialization. Areas of Specialization offer recognition of high quality and provide more substantive information to families. Areas of Specialization are also highlighted in the provider referral process. They are based on total points earned in each Quality Standard area:

- **Child Outcomes**: facilities that receive 6 out of 9 points.
- **Interactions and Environment (ERS/CLASS)**: facilities that receive 45 out of 60 points.
- **Curriculum and Staff Supports**: facilities that receive 9 out of 11 points.
- **Professionalism**: facilities that receive 7 out of 10 points.
- **Family Engagement and Partnerships**: facilities that receive 8 out of 10 points.
- **Accreditation**: facilities that have a current, verified accreditation from a recognized accreditation agency.

Rating results will help facilities identify and prioritize areas for quality improvement as they develop Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) with their
coaches. Rating Levels also determine the Quality Improvement Award and tiered reimbursement amounts for eligible facilities.

Publication of Early Achievers Rating

A key goal of Early Achievers is to provide information to families about child care and early learning quality in order to help them make informed choices. Thirty days after the rating is released to the provider, the Early Achievers rating levels are available on DEL’s Child Care Check online search tool to acknowledge the commitment of participating facilities and provide this information to families. Child Care Aware of Washington’s website and call center also provide rating levels when applicable.

Rating Cycle

Early Achievers ratings are valid for three years from the rating release date. During this period, the Early Achievers Contact must submit an annual facility update to confirm that the facility is still an active participant. Facilities may begin the renewal process twelve months prior to the expiration of their current rating. More information can be found below in Renewal Rating.

Ratings Appeals

Overview

The following section describes what Early Achievers rating information can be appealed, what steps a participant must take and what DEL will do to address the appeal.

Please note: Rating appeal is different from requesting a re-rating. Rating Appeal should only be used as described below in Purpose of Rating Appeal Process.

Eligibility

The Early Achievers Ratings appeals process applies to Early Achievers participants that have participated in on-site evaluation and received a facility rating.

Facilities may pursue one rating appeal per Early Achievers rating cycle.
Purpose of Rating Appeal Process

Facilities may pursue a rating appeal after the receipt of their Early Achievers Rating Report for the following reasons:

- Facility suspects errors in calculation of points or other technical errors.
- Facility claims that their practice at the time of on-site evaluation should have earned at least one level higher based on the Early Achievers Quality Standards.

Facilities may not pursue a rating appeal in order to:

- Provide new evidence or documentation of facility practice.
- Express concerns about evaluators, such as inappropriate or unprofessional behavior or perceived conflict of interest between data collectors and facility. These issues should be submitted in the post-visit survey, described above in On-site Evaluation so that DEL can address any issues before a rating is finalized.

Criteria for Appeal

Facilities that wish to pursue a rating appeal must demonstrate through the use of the DEL-provided Early Achievers Rating Appeal Form that a successful appeal would result in a rating increase of at least one rating level, e.g., an increase from Level 3 to Level 4. This form is located on the DEL website at del.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/QRIS/Appeal_Form_and_FAQ.pdf.

Facilities may not appeal ratings based on the following:

- Additional information gathered by facility after on-site evaluation visits.
- Components that facility marked “opt out” on the completed Interactive Rating Readiness Tool provided to their regional lead agency.
- Self-Assessment or CCQB scores were higher than official assessment scores.
- ERS and CLASS scores from past assessments were higher than Early Achievers evaluation scores.
- Date/time of on-site visits if visits occurred during timeframe provided by facility on their Request for On-Site Evaluation, including: facility hours/days of operation; two-month evaluation window requested by facility; facility-chosen block-out dates (four). Visits are rescheduled only in the case of facility emergency/natural disaster.
- Selection of classrooms for observations.
- Variability of time spent in classrooms.
• Typical staff not present during visit.
• Classroom or family home child care had new children, sick children, or an otherwise “non-typical” day, including disruptions to regular schedule.
• Occurrence of evaluation processes as outlined in the Participation Agreement and Operating Guidelines.
• Information was not ready for review by data collectors at time of on-site evaluation visits.
• Professional Development and Training Quality Standard Area (Staff Qualifications). Concerns about staff education verification must be appealed using existing MERIT processes before on-site evaluation for rating.

Initiating a Rating Appeal

The Early Achievers Rating Appeal Form and supporting documentation must be received by DEL no later than 5:00 pm (PST) of the 30th calendar day following the rating release. The rating release date is the date that Early Achievers Rating Reports are released to facilities.

Please note: In order to protect the integrity of the rating appeal process and ensure that all facility information is fully considered, all communication with the Department of Early Learning regarding a specific rating appeal must be handled through the formal rating appeal process outlined below.

• Early Achievers Contact communicates concerns with regional coordinator, who will review the Early Achievers Quality Standards with the facility to address misunderstandings or questions about general ratings calculations. This initial step is intended to help facilities clarify how ratings are calculated in general based on the Quality Standards, which may prevent the need for rating appeal.

• If the facility still has concerns, the Early Achievers Contact will complete the Early Achievers Rating Appeal form and attach detailed written information including:
  o Description of why the facility practice at the time of evaluation should have earned at least one level higher based on Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards components (e.g., from Level 3 to Level 4).
  o Documentation and evidence of facility practice specific to each Quality Standard component under dispute.
  o Date(s) of communication with regional coordinator.
o A copy of completed post-visit survey and, if applicable, date(s) of communication with UW and outcome of survey feedback. Participants may request a copy of their completed survey from their Community Liaison.

- The Early Achievers Contact will submit completed Rating Appeal Form and supporting documentation to the DEL QRIS Inbox (qr@del.wa.gov) or by certified mail, at the participant’s expense, to the following address:

  Department of Early Learning  
  Attention: QRIS Support Services  
  PO Box 40970, Olympia, WA 98504-0970

DEL assumes no responsibility for delays caused by mail delivery service. Materials received after 5:00 pm on the 30th calendar day after the facility’s rating release will not be considered.

DEL’s Rating Appeal Resolution Process

- The QRIS Administrator will review the facility Early Achievers Rating Appeal Form and may request additional documentation from the facility or partners, including the UW evaluation team and the facility’s regional coordinator.
- The QRIS Administrator will make an initial decision within 10 business days of receiving all necessary documents and information to make a decision. Written notification of the decision will be sent to the facility.
- If the facility disagrees with the decision, the Early Achievers Contact must respond in writing either by email or certified mail within 10 business days from the date of the DEL decision. Correspondence received by DEL after 5:00 pm (PST) on the 10th business day after the appeal decision will not be considered. DEL assumes no responsibility for delays caused by mail delivery service.
- The QRIS Administrator will summarize the facility appeal and the initial DEL decision and submit it to the DEL Assistant Director of Quality Practice and Professional Growth for review within 10 business days.
- DEL will notify the facility of the final decision in writing.
- If Rating Appeal is granted:
  o If it is determined that an error was made in calculation, the scores will be adjusted and the facility will be issued an updated Rating Report. The facility’s participation status and/or rating will
be updated on DEL’s Child Care Check and publicly referenced by Child Care Aware of Washington, when applicable.

- In the case that the appeal outcome requires a re-rating, DEL will contact the UW evaluation team to initiate an on-site evaluation for re-rating. Please note: In the case of re-rating due to founded rating appeal, no new facility documentation or evidence that was not available during original on-site visits will be reviewed.

- If appeal is denied:
  - Facility will be notified in writing of decision including information about why the appeal was denied. Facility rating will remain valid for three years from the date rating was issued.

- While a facility is in process of rating appeal:
  - All Early Achievers services including coaching and distribution of QI Awards will be put on hold until final rating appeal decision.

Request for Re-Rating

Early Achievers participants that must meet Early Start Act rating requirements qualify for one free re-rate per three-year rating cycle. Participants who do not accept subsidies or provide ECEAP/Head Start services are eligible for paid re-rates.

Free Re-Rate Eligibility and Options

Qualifying Early Achievers participants may request a free re-rate up until the 24th month of the three-year rating cycle. To apply for a free re-rate, participants must meet one of the following requirements:

- Provide ECEAP/Head Start services
- Accept subsidy payments from:
  - Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)
  - Seasonal Child Care
  - Homeless Child Care

Accessing a free re-rate can help sites reach the rating mandate outlined in the Early Start Act of 2015 for their program type. Going through a re-rate and achieving a higher rating can also give sites access to larger QI Awards and higher subsidy reimbursement rates. Facilities that receive a free re-rate but do not have the desired outcome may request a paid re-rate.

Early Achievers participants that provide ECEAP services may select any combination of the following measures for their free re-rate:
- Environment Rating Scale
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System
- Full Records Review (not applicable to participants with more than 75% ECEAP slots)

Early Achievers participants that receive subsidy payments or provide Head Start services and no ECEAP services may select any combination of the following measures for their free re-rate:

- Environment Rating Scale
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System

Paid Re-rate Eligibility and Options

All Early Achievers participants are eligible for a paid re-rate. Re-rates can be requested until the 24th month of the three-year rating cycle. The cost is based on facility size. Payments (checks or purchase orders) made payable to “CQEL” should be mailed to:

CQEL
Attention: Early Achievers Re-rate
5001 25th Ave NE, Suite 201E
Seattle, WA 98105

*Figure 8: Fees for Paid Re-Rate*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Classrooms/ Learning Environments</th>
<th>Facility's Portion of Re-rate Cost for One to Two Measures</th>
<th>Facility's Portion of Re-rate Cost for Three Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>$2500</td>
<td>$3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 or more</td>
<td>$3500</td>
<td>$4000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Facilities may select any combination of the following measures for their paid re-rate:

- Environment Rating Scale
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System
- Full Records Review, including Professional Development points

Quality Improvement Awards

Participants who qualify for Quality Improvement (QI) Awards will receive the full payment amount for their current rated level. If a participant has already received their QI Award for the year, they will receive payment for the difference between their former and current rated levels. Total annual QI Award payments will not exceed the amount of the participant’s highest rated level for that year. Quality Improvement Awards may be used toward the cost of re-rating.

Additional Information

- **Licensed Pathway Participants** may address questions to the facility’s Regional Coordinator at the local Child Care Aware of Washington office or via email to the QRIS Inbox (qris@del.wa.gov).
- **HS/ECEAP Pathway Participants** may address questions to the site’s Head Start Grantee or ECEAP Contractor or via email to the QRIS Inbox (qris@del.wa.gov).
- Access the full re-rate policy online.

**Renewal Rating**

Early Achievers participants must complete a new rating every three years in order to maintain their participation status and be eligible for Early Achievers supports and incentives. Facilities receiving ECEAP, EHS-CC Partnership Pilot and or state subsidy funds must renew their rating and meet their mandated rating level to maintain eligibility for these programs. Providers that have not renewed or requested renewal by the anniversary of their rating release date will lose subsidy eligibility, jeopardize ECEAP contracts and their status on Child Care Check will change to “Pending Renewal”.

The Renewal Rating option is available twelve months before the third anniversary of the provider’s rating release date. Facilities must request their first renewal rating on or before their initial rating release anniversary. The release
date of the first renewal rating will become the facility’s new rating release date and all future renewal ratings must be released on or before the anniversary of this date. The Early Achievers Contact is responsible for ensuring that the request is submitted in time for data collection and rating to be completed prior to this date. The full renewal rating policy can be found on the [DEL website](#).

**Renewal Rating Process**

- DEL will send emails to the Early Achievers Contact twelve and six months before the facility’s third rating anniversary with a reminder to complete the Request for On-Site Evaluation application.
- The Early Achievers Contact can access the renewal rating option in the Request for On-Site Evaluation application. Providers cannot request a renewal rating more than twelve months before the third rating release anniversary.
- The CCA of WA Regional Coordinator will review the request to ensure that all requirements have been met before submitting it to DEL for processing. DEL then sends the request to the UW data collection team.
- The community liaison will then contact the Early Achievers Contact to discuss and prepare for on-site data collection. All facilities will participate in the full data collection required by their designated pathway.
- The facility will receive its renewal rating after data collection is completed and reviewed for accuracy. Participants can appeal their rating based on criteria outlined in [Rating Appeals](#).
11. Early Achievers Participation for Rated Facilities

Commitment to Quality

For Early Achievers participants, rating is just the beginning of providing high-quality care to Washington children and families. Early Achievers empowers facility staff and leadership to identify and achieve quality improvement goals through methods such as observation, reflection, self-assessment and participation in communities of practice. Rated Early Achievers participants are the foundation of a first-class statewide early learning system.

Providers that have completed an on-site evaluation receive detailed, personalized information about their facility strengths and opportunities for growth. Together with personalized coaching, this data allows participants to maintain their commitment to quality over time by:

- Learning about strengths and opportunities for growth using multiple sources of information.
- Creating a plan with goals, timelines and responsibilities.
- Testing and implementing solutions.
- Evaluating the results and revising the plan.

Figure 9: Continuous Quality Improvement
Coaching

Coaching is a foundational support within Early Achievers. In the QRIS field test, coaching was found to be a highly effective method of enhancing quality in child care settings. Participants reported that their relationships with coaches were instrumental in their professional growth and quality improvement progress. To learn more about the coaching model, check out the Early Achievers Coach Framework in the post-rating toolkit on the DEL website.

The Early Achievers rating is a measure of facility quality, rather than specific classroom quality, so coaches and participants will work together to determine the best allocation of coaching resources. The total amount of coaching that a facility receives will vary based on the facility’s rating level and the needs identified in their Quality Improvement Plan. Coaching services will change as facility rating increases, with rated Level 2 and 3 facilities receiving more coaching than rated Level 5 facilities. Coaches partner with participants through the quality improvement process; the facility is ultimately responsible for implementing and maintaining positive changes.

All efforts will be made to maintain individual privacy and information regarding specific children will remain confidential. Facility Quality Improvement Plans and any documentation of work is accessible to all coaches working with a facility and is subject to public disclosure law as described in Participation Requirements and Expectations: Information Sharing.

Quality Improvement Plan

Participants set goals with their coaches based on their facility evaluation results including:

- ERS and CLASS assessment scores
- Components of the Quality Standards
- Overall facility rating
- Components of the Early Achievers Coach Framework

These goals will make up the facility Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Coaches will help participants interpret evaluation data to develop a QIP that addresses program strengths and identifies areas of growth. The QIP acts as a “roadmap” for the ongoing continuous quality improvement process, and will guide the work of the facility and the coach.
12. Post-Rating Supports and Incentives

Overview
Rated facilities are eligible for additional incentives and supports. All incentives are designed to help facilities implement goals based on evaluation results, increase facility quality, and ultimately improve child outcomes. Facilities must remain active and engaged Early Achievers participants to receive supports and incentives, as defined in Pre-Rating Supports and Incentives.

Coaching Services
Coaching is a long-term continuous service available to all actively participating facilities. Coaches are employed by CCA of WA. The role of the coach is to help facilities:

- Help facilities understand the Early Achievers Quality Standards.
- Help facilities prepare for an initial rating.
- Understand and use Early Achievers ratings and assessment data.
- Identify goals and make plans to achieve goals.
- Access resources to support achievement of goals.
- Implement quality improvement.

Infant-Toddler Consultation
Washington State and the Department of Early Learning are committed to building a continuum of infant and toddler services and programs to promote healthy development in the first years of life. Infant-Toddler Consultation provides relationship-based technical assistance to professionals working with infants and toddlers.

Eligibility
Facilities that have infants and toddlers receiving subsidy payments may be eligible for focused classroom coaching by an infant-toddler coaching team on a voluntary basis.
Infant-Toddler Coaching Services

Infant-toddler coaches are regional contractors that work cooperatively with Early Achievers coaches to support continuous quality improvement in accordance with a facility’s QIP. Some of the services they offer include:

- Coaching topics related to infant-toddler care in areas such as social and emotional development, child care health, positive teacher-child interactions, developmental screening and classroom environments.
- Participation in FIND (Filming Interactions to Nurture Development). FIND is a strengths-based intervention offered to support early learning professionals who work with infants and toddlers. This is a voluntary program that uses short video clips of children and teachers to support and celebrate positive interactions. Parental consent is required and confidentiality of information is strictly maintained for both children and caregivers. FIND coaches will support child care providers in communicating with parents about FIND and the consent forms.

Marketing and Outreach Materials

DEL encourages Early Achievers participants to showcase their commitment to quality with families and the community. DEL has created materials, including an informational brochure, sample letter to families and a rating certificate, to assist facilities with communication. Facilities may share their Early Achievers participation by accessing the many valuable outreach tools available online at wa.childcareaware.org/providers/early-achievers/tools-for-rated-early-achievers-providers.

Participants can work with their Early Achievers regional lead agency for support with family and community outreach. Facilities wishing to use the Early Achievers logo on their website or create their own marketing materials should consult the section on the Use and Development of Early Achievers Outreach Materials.

Quality Improvement Awards

Quality Improvement (QI) Awards are awarded to qualifying rated Early Achievers participants that serve non-school-age children receiving state child care subsidies. QI Awards recognize achievement and support facilities to implement quality improvement goals.
Purpose of Award Funds

QI Awards are intended to be used to reach quality improvement goals outlined on approved QIPs and must align with the Early Achievers Quality Standards. Level 2 QI Awards for family home child care providers may be used toward activities that support re-rating.

Award Eligibility

To be eligible to receive QI Awards, facilities must:

- Achieve an Early Achievers rating of Level 3 or higher. Family Home Child Care Providers who are a rated 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.
  - For the purpose of the calculation, DEL defines “children receiving state subsidy” to mean non-school-age children receiving state funding for child care through any of the following programs:
  - Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)
  - Seasonal Child Care (SCC)
  - Children’s Administration (CA) Child Care programs
  - Homeless Child Care Program (HCCP)
  - 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 must be submitted to the QRIS inbox by the provider.
- Agree to create a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) with assigned coach.
- Maintain active and engaged participation throughout the three-year rating cycle by participating in ongoing coaching and the goals set in the facility’s QIP.
- Register as a vendor of Washington State by submitting the Statewide Payee Registration form and W-9 to the Department of Early Learning. Registration must be completed under the facility name, as funds will not be awarded to individuals. All facilities must submit their payee registration and W-9 prior to receiving a monetary award. Failure to do so forfeits that year’s QI award.
More information about QI awards can be found at del-public-files.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/QI_Awards_FAQ.pdf.

Calculation of the Percentage of Subsidized Enrollment

Providers must have an enrollment population of which at least 5% are non-school-age children receiving state subsidy. The percentage is calculated annually 60 days after the facility’s rating release date. All subsidy invoices must be received by DSHS prior to this date. Once the calculation is completed, no adjustments will be made for additional invoices from the 12-month period. The percentage is calculated as follows:

- The number of children receiving state subsidy each month for the 12 full months preceding the rating release date are added together.
- The total number of children served during the 12-month award period is then divided by the number of months the facility was open at least one day in the month. This is the monthly average number of children receiving state subsidy the facility served.
- The facility’s average monthly licensed capacity is determined by adding the licensed capacity for all months the facility was open over the 12 months preceding the rating release date and dividing by the number of months the facility was open.
- DEL calculates the final percentage of children receiving state subsidy for a facility by dividing the monthly average number of children receiving state subsidy the facility served by the facility’s average monthly licensed capacity.

Quality Improvement Award Amounts

QI Awards are distributed annually according to provider type as follows:

**Figure 10: Child Care Center Quality Improvement Award Amounts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Award Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>$5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>$7500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>$9000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distribution of Award Funds

QI Awards will be distributed approximately 90 days after the facility’s rating release date. Facilities that re-rate to a higher level during the rating cycle and have already received a QI Award for the year will receive payment for the difference between their former and current levels after the re-rating release date. Total annual QI Award payments will not exceed the amount of the participant’s highest rated level for that year. The facility will receive the full award amount for the re-rated Level each remaining year of the rating cycle, as long as they remain eligible to receive the award. Award payments expire one calendar year after they are awarded.

Allowable Uses

QI Award funds may only be used in the following categories, based on the Early Achievers Quality Standards:

- **Child Outcomes**: Funds may be used for materials, tools and resources to support ongoing child assessment and developmental screening.
- **Facility Curriculum, Learning Environment and Interactions**: Funds may be used to strengthen and enhance a facility’s capacity to provide high-quality, individualized experiences and environments for children in the following areas:
  - **Program/classroom materials**: Examples of acceptable items include but are not limited to: developmentally appropriate materials, educational toys and equipment to support learning and basic routines.
  - **Curriculum**: Examples of acceptable items include but are not limited to: curriculum guides, reference books and other resources that supplement the curriculum.
  - **Observational Assessment resources**: Examples of acceptable items include tools that help facilities document children’s
growth and development and increase staff ability to individualize programming for children. Facilities may also use funds to purchase tools and supporting materials for Early Achievers assessments, including Environment Rating Scales (ERS) books and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) guides.

- **Family Engagement and Partnership:**
  - Parenting education/support program: Funds may be used to support implementation of parenting support and education.
  - Strengthening Families Plan of Action implementation: Funds may be used to strengthen and enhance the facility’s work with families based on the results of their Strengthening Families Plan of Action. Examples of acceptable items include but are not limited to: 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: Funds may be used for staff professional development including but not limited to staff training and conferences. Note: funds may be used for registration/tuition/materials only, and may not be used for travel, hotel or related attendance expenses.
  - Wage Enhancements: Funds may be used to increase or supplement staff salaries. Grant funds are not intended to fund teacher, assistant director, or director salaries in full.
  - Staff Bonuses: Funds may be used to provide bonuses to staff.
  - Release Time: QI funds may be used for staff to engage in quality improvement activities that are beyond the normal scope of work. Examples include but are not limited to: substitute pay, out of classroom planning time for lead teachers and participation in family partnership activities.
  - Continuing Education: QI funds may be used toward credit-bearing coursework for staff. Facilities 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:** QI Awards may be used toward technology that supports facility implementation of QI goals, including computers, software, cameras and video cameras.
• **Paid Re-rate**: QI Awards may be used toward the cost of a re-rate to meet Level 3 or Early Start Act of 2015 requirements.

**Restrictions**

In addition to the requirements outlined above, award funds may not be used 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**: Funds may not be used for any religious purpose or activity, including worship or instruction.

• **Gift Cards**: Grant funds should not be used to purchase monetary equivalents such as gift cards, traveler’s checks, or money orders.

QI Awards may not be used to reimburse facilities for purchases made prior to receipt of award funds.

**Documentation and Reporting**

DEL is not responsible or liable for any tax reporting or financial liability that may apply to participants choosing to accept QI awards. It is recommended that Early Achievers participants contact their facility’s accountant, auditor, and/or financial advisor for guidance on fiscal reporting.

Facilities that receive Early Achievers QI Award funds are required to:

• Work with CCA of WA twice a year to provide information about how QI Awards were applied toward QIP goals using a provided template.

• Keep all documentation including records, receipts and paperwork related to spending of QI Awards on-site for a minimum of seven years.

• DEL may conduct audits of QI Award expenditures and tracking for randomly selected facilities.

**Misuse of Funds**

Misuse of QI Award funds may result in immediate dismissal from Early Achievers as outlined in Participation Requirements and Expectations:

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**Procedure for Dismissal.** Misuse of funds is defined as 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 coach-approved facility QIPs.

**Professional Development Scholarships**

Scholarships are available to students that are employed in Early Achievers facilities to pursue state stackable certificates, Associates Degrees and Bachelor’s Degrees in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Early Achievers Grants and Washington Scholarships for Child Care Professionals are two student financial aid resources that are prioritized for students who are employed by Early Achievers facilities. Each scholarship has different eligibility criteria and financial benefits. More information is available in these guidelines under Pre-Rating Supports and Incentives: Professional Development Scholarships or on the DEL website under Professional Development/ Financial Support.

**Tiered Reimbursement**

Facilities that receive a Level 3 through 5 rating and serve children receiving WCCC, Seasonal Child Care or Children’s Administration subsidies are eligible to earn a higher incentive added to the base rate as follows:

Family home child care programs*:

- Level 3: 10% above the base rate
- Level 4: 15% above the base rate
- Level 5: 20% above the base rate

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

Center-based providers:

- Level 3: 4% above the base rate
- Level 4: 10% above the base rate
- Level 5: 15% 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, the reimbursement incentive is applied to the higher base rate.
Tiered reimbursements are paid for the full month and based on the facility rated level on the first day of the month of service. Tiered reimbursement payments will be received the month after the base subsidy rate payment for the same time period.

**Remedial Activities**

Early Achievers participants who serve children receiving subsidy or provide ECEAP or EHS-CC Partnership services and rate below their required level must engage in remedial activities. These activities can help participants improve quality in time for a re-rating to maintain their state subsidy, ECEAP or EHS/CC Partnership funding. The full remedial activities policy can be found online at: del.wa.gov/publications/eceap/docs/Remedial_Activities_Policy.pdf.

**Remedial Activities Participant Requirements**

After rating below the required level, participants have 60 days from the rating release date to meet with their coach and review the facility rating data to identify specific Quality Standards that were not met and other areas for growth. The coach and applicable staff meet to create a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

- The QIP must have an action plan for each area the standards were not met.
- The QIP must have defined roles and responsibilities for both the coach and staff throughout the duration of remedial activities.
- If applicable, the QIP will specify documents the participant must complete.
- If applicable, the QIP will specify dates of necessary training.

Sixty days after the rating release date, the remedial activities period begins. Participants that do not operate on a full-year calendar can have their timeline adjusted by following the procedure outlined in Timeline Adjustments for Part-Year Programs.

**Timeline of Remedial Activities**

Participants have 180 calendar days from the remedial activities start date to receive a new rating.
Timeline Adjustment for Part-Year Programs

Participants that do not operate on a year-round schedule can have their remedial activities timeline adjusted if there are two consecutive months within the remedial timeline that the participant is not serving children and no staff are present. To apply for a timeline adjustment, providers must submit a copy of an official calendar showing their months of operation to gris@del.wa.gov.

Coach and Participant Accountability

Active participation in remedial activities must be documented and updated regularly:
- The Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) must contain all notes related to progress during remedial activities.
- The coach and Early Achievers Contact will check in at least monthly to review progress on goals and ensure the Early Achievers Contact has the resources needed for successful rating at the end of remedial activities.
13. Participant Requirements and Expectations

The following section details facility responsibilities and expectations of participation. In addition, facilities should refer to the Early Achievers Participation Agreement for participation expectations.

Recordkeeping

The following records must be kept on-site by facilities:

- All signed agreements, including the Early Achievers Participation Agreement and the Early Achievers Services Agreement.
- All receipts, records and documentation of use of QI Awards (must be kept on-site for seven years).
- All parent/guardian consents for children to participate in evaluation.

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

Notification Requirements

Facilities are required to notify their regional lead agency within seven business days of significant changes that affect participation, including:

- Address change
- Facility closure
- Change in ownership
- 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 facility no longer serves children birth to age five
- Temporary change in facility circumstances, including temporary closure and extended absence of the Early Achievers Contact(s).
How Address and Ownership Changes Affect Early Achievers Participation

Providers who physically move to a new location or have a change of ownership during any stage of Early Achievers participation must contact QRIS@del.wa.gov. DEL staff will work with the provider to determine how the change of address or ownership impact participation or rating status. Because a provider’s Early Achievers rating is based on the environment and staff who work with children, sites may be required to go through the evaluation and rating process again.

Information Sharing

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) and the University of Washington are subject to chapter 42.56 RCW, the Public Records Act. Early Achievers Facility records in the possession of DEL or the UW may also be subject to disclosure under chapter 42.56 RCW.

Internet Usage/Security

Use of MERIT and the Early Achievers Provider Portal is required as part of Early Achievers participation. These web-based data systems are secure and require user login to access information. All data entered in Early Achievers data systems can be accessed by DEL, CCA of WA and UW/CQEL for the purpose of supporting quality improvement work and the long-term evaluation of the Early Achievers program. In order to coordinate efforts and reduce duplication, coaches can view the files of other coaches working at the same facility. Additionally, all information entered into the data systems is subject to public disclosure requests as described above.

Use and Development of Early Achievers Outreach Materials

DEL encourages Early Achievers participants to showcase their commitment to quality with families and the community, both online and in their printed materials. Facilities are welcome to use their Early Achievers participation in their own marketing materials with the following guidelines:
Facility Website

Early Achievers participants may place the Early Achievers logo on their business website provided they use the logo and the phrase, “We are an Early Achievers Participant” along with a link to the Early Achievers page on DEL’s website: www.del.wa.gov/earlyachievers. This is the only logo use approved for a facility’s website.

DEL must be notified when the Early Achievers logo is used on a facility business website. The Early Achievers participant and their regional coordinator should contact DEL through the QRIS inbox (gris@del.wa.gov) before the logo is live on the website. Please place “Use of Early Achievers Logo” in the email subject line.

Facility Business Brochure/Flyer

When a participant wishes to include the Early Achievers logo on their own business brochures and/or flyers to market their facility, the following guidelines are to be followed:

- The logo must not be on the title page of the child care facility promotional brochure.
- The logo must be accompanied only with the phrase, “Ask us how we are demonstrating our commitment to high-quality early learning by participating in Early Achievers, Washington’s Quality Rating and Improvement System!”

Participants can work with their Early Achievers regional lead agency for support with family and community outreach.

Custom-Created Marketing Materials

If Early Achievers participants would like to create marketing materials beyond the materials that DEL provides, the following guidelines are to be followed:

- All outreach, marketing and informational materials developed by participants must use and follow the branding guidelines/style guide approved by DEL. This includes newsletters, FAQs, PowerPoint presentations and any resources used to provide information about Early Achievers. The DEL branding guidelines and style guide can be obtained through CCA of WA.
- All outreach, marketing and informational materials developed by participants that also includes the Early Achievers logo must be
approved by DEL prior to distribution. Please allow two business days for review and approval by the QRIS Project Manager at DEL. Interested facilities should work with their Early Achievers regional lead agency to submit materials for approval.

**Conflict of Interest**

Early Achievers participants may not be employed as Early Achievers pre-rating or post-rating coaches, regional coordinators, DEL staff members or a member of the UW evaluation team in any way during their participation in Early Achievers.

**Criteria for Dismissal**

The Department of Early Learning reserves the right to initiate facility dismissal from Early Achievers at any time if a facility fails to meet any of the expectations outlined in the Early Achievers Participation Agreement or the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines.

Criteria for dismissal include:

- **Failure to maintain good standing with licensing**: good standing is defined as having an active license that is not suspended, revoked or on probation.
- **Changes in ages served**: facility no longer serves children birth to age five due to provider preference or DEL licensing enforcement action.
- **Changes in facility enrollment**: no children ages birth to five enrolled for 60 calendar days.
- **Provision of false information** on the Early Achievers application or any participation documents.
- **Failure to meet Early Achievers participation expectations**: failure to return calls, keep appointments or submit required paperwork, including the Quality Improvement Award Funds Use report.
- **Failure to fully participate in Early Achievers coaching services**, including participation in on-site coaching and creation of a Quality Improvement Plan based on evaluation data and Early Achievers Quality Standards.
- **Misuse of needs-based grant or QI Award funds**.
- **Failure to maintain all records**, including receipts and documentation of use of needs-based grants or QI Award funds on-site for seven years.
• Failure to report changes to Early Achievers regional lead agency that may render the facility ineligible for Early Achievers participation.
• Failure to adhere to professionalism in conduct and behavior with Early Achievers representatives or DEL staff.
• Failure to adhere to changes made to 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 a facility has not met the requirements outlined in the Early Achievers Participation Agreement or the Operating Guidelines, or if the facility has committed any acts that may result in discontinuation of Early Achievers participation, the regional lead agency must:

• Notify the facility, in writing, of the need to take corrective action.
• Give the facility 30 days to comply with the request for corrective action.
• Request any applicable documentation from the facility.
• Reserve the right to suspend all or part of Early Achievers activities during the review process.
• Notify DEL that the facility has had corrective action initiated.
• Review all information provided by facility, including steps that the facility has taken to remedy the issue, to determine if there is sufficient evidence that the facility has violated any aspect of Early Achievers participation or otherwise acted in a way that is unethical.
• Notify DEL of recommendation to dismiss facility. DEL will approve all final decisions about facility withdrawal from Early Achievers.
• Notify the facility of 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 facility licensing status, DEL is responsible for dismissal as outlined in Eligibility: Licensing Status.

Obligations of Participants upon Dismissal or Withdrawal from Early Achievers

Facilities that are dismissed or voluntarily withdrawn from Early Achievers must:
• Provide the Early Achievers regional lead agency with all outstanding reports and participation information.
• Remove all Early Achievers marketing materials, including their facility rating certificate, from facility premises, website and all promotional materials.
• If a facility has voluntarily withdrawn from Early Achievers, they are obligated to finalize their withdrawal in an email sent to DEL at gris@del.wa.gov.

In the event of dismissal due to suspected fraudulent use of funds or failure to keep records of fund use, the facility may be liable for damages as authorized by law, including repayment of Quality Improvement funds received by the facility.

Reappplication to Early Achievers

This section outlines the steps that a facility must take to reapply for Early Achievers after voluntary withdrawal or dismissal from Early Achievers. In the case of dismissal, the reapplication process is based on the reasons for discontinuation of participation.

Eligibility and Process for Reappplication – No Waiting Period

Facilities in the following scenarios may reapply to Early Achievers at any time, provided they meet the criteria outlined in Eligibility.

• Facility was withdrawn due to:
  o Address or ownership change
  o Facility Closure—non-licensing reasons
  o Low or no enrollment
  o Change in licensed capacity or ages served

In order to reapply, facilities must complete a new Early Achievers Registration. Facility information will not be saved from prior participation, but Early Achievers orientation and trainings completed by the Early Achievers Contact will be documented in MERIT and it will not be necessary for them to re-complete these activities.

Facilities that are required to follow the Early Start Act timeline requirements will resume the timeline where they left off at the time of withdrawal. For example, if a facility withdraws after six months of
participation, that facility will resume the sixth month of enrollment upon reentry into Early Achievers.

Circumstances Requiring One-Year Waiting Period

In the event that a facility is dismissed from Early Achievers for the following reasons, the facility must wait 12 months from the date of dismissal to reapply and follow the procedures for re-application outlined below:

- Failure to maintain good standing with licensing.
- Provision of false information on the Early Achievers application or any participation documents.
- Failure to meet Early Achievers participation expectations.
- Failure to fully participate in Early Achieves coaching services.
- Failure to maintain all records, receipts and documentation of use of QI funds on-site for seven years.
- Failure to adhere to professionalism in conduct and behavior with coaches, regional coordinators, trainers and DEL staff.
- Facility is unwilling to adhere to changes made to the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines or administrative and statutory guidelines issued by any state, federal or local government agency.

Process to reapply to Early Achievers after one year

Facilities interested in reapplication after 12 months are required to submit written documentation describing how the issues that resulted in dismissal have been resolved and how the facility is prepared for successful future participation. All documentation should be submitted to the QRIS inbox.

The DEL QRIS Participant Services Team will review the cause of facility dismissal, documentation submitted by facility and information from partners including regional coordinators and lead agencies to make a final decision about facility eligibility for participation. DEL may request additional information from the facility during the review process. If a facility was dismissed due to licensing suspension, revocation, or probation, DEL will consult with the Regional Administrator for recommendations before making a final decision.

DEL will notify the facility of the final decision in writing within 10 business days of receiving all documentation necessary to make a decision. DEL reserves the right to make the final decision about reapplication after dismissal or voluntary withdrawal.
Part 2
Head Start and ECEAP Pathway
Operating Guidelines

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1. Introduction

Purpose of Part 2: Early Achievers Head Start and ECEAP Pathway
Participant Operating Guidelines

The operating guidelines in this section are designed to support Head Start grantees, ECEAP contractors and their facilities on the Early Achievers Head Start/ ECEAP pathway. It is intended to serve as a supplement to the policies and procedures outlined in Part 1 of this document.

While it is the participants’ responsibility to read, understand and follow the guidelines in this document, Early Achievers staff at the Department of Early Learning (DEL) are available to provide assistance, answer questions or concerns and help with successful implementation.

Commonly Used Terms in this Guideline

- **ECEAP** – refers to the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), Washington’s pre-kindergarten program for low-income 3- and 4-year-old children and their families.
- **Head Start and ECEAP participant** – indicates Head Start grantees, ECEAP contractors and Head Start/ECEAP facilities participating in Early Achievers.
- **Contractor** – refers to an organization that provides ECEAP services under a signed contract with DEL.
- **Grantee** – refers to an organization that is awarded a Head Start grant to provide Head Start and/or Early Head Start services.
- **Provider** – refers to an organization that provides site-level, direct ECEAP or Head Start services under the direction of an ECEAP contractor or Head Start grantee.
- **Facility** – indicates the physical location where ECEAP and/or Head Start services are offered and all early learning services provided at that location.
Head Start, ECEAP and Early Achievers

Reciprocity Pilot

In 2012, DEL worked with a small number of Head Start grantees and ECEAP contractors to test policies and procedures that would encourage participation in Early Achievers. The pilot began in summer 2012 and ended in April 2013. Nine grantees and contractors participated, including more than 180 facilities and approximately 45 percent of the state’s children enrolled in Head Start and ECEAP. The primary goal of the pilot was to develop reciprocity: a streamlined process for Head Start and ECEAP participation in Early Achievers, which builds upon existing program performance standards and quality improvement practices.

Alignment

Programs that participated in the pilot reported that there is a high degree of alignment between the Early Achievers Quality Standards and Head Start/ECEAP Performance Standards. The Early Achievers Quality Standards were designed in part to align with other early learning programs focused on quality, including Head Start and ECEAP. Early Achievers is intentionally designed to integrate with, and add value to, Head Start/ECEAP’s ongoing quality assurance activities and goals. In fact, pilot participants reported that Early Achievers activities provided them with new and valuable information about facility and classroom quality.

The reciprocity pilot project confirmed that Head Start grantees/ECEAP contractors have a distinct and critical role to play in Early Achievers participation. During the pilot, grantees/contractors provided their on-site supervisors and staff with an orientation on Early Achievers and how it fits into their program, and coordinated the enrollment process and rating preparation for their facilities. These grantee/contractor activities are similar to the technical assistance and facility activities that take place at Level 2 for licensed child care programs (provided by CCA of WA).
Key Differences

While there is a high degree of alignment across the standards and goals of Early Achievers, Head Start and ECEAP, the programs and systems also have important differences. One key difference is that Early Achievers participation is tracked at a facility level, rather than the grantee/contractor level. In most licensed child care centers, activities such as administration, facility and staff supervision, professional development, curriculum and budget decisions all occur at the facility level. However, in Head Start and ECEAP, these functions typically occur at the grantee/contractor level, especially for those programs that have many facilities or subcontractors. Grantees/contractors are solely responsible for monitoring, staff training and other quality assurance and improvement activities for all of their Head Start and ECEAP facilities.

Another key difference is the role parent choice plays in enrollment. In licensed child care, parents choose a provider based on personal preferences such as facility quality, location or price. In Head Start/ECEAP, children are most often assigned to a facility based on the availability of an open slot, location of services and other factors.

Streamlined Head Start/ECEAP Pathway

A customized and streamlined participation pathway has been designed for qualifying Head Start and ECEAP facilities. The purpose of this pathway is to implement reciprocity between the programs, encourage broad participation, and mirror the pathway designed for licensed/certified programs.

Facilities in which Head Start or ECEAP slots fill at least 75% of total facility slots qualify for the streamlined Head Start/ECEAP Reciprocity Pathway outlined in this section of the Operating Guidelines.
Agency Roles

There are many organizations critical to the success of Early Achievers, including the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, Thrive Washington and Early Learning Regional Coalitions. The following agencies are key partners in direct implementation of Early Achievers, and have distinct roles:

- Department of Early Learning (DEL)
- Child Care Aware of Washington (for facilities on the licensed pathway)
- University of Washington (UW)
- Head Start Grantees and ECEAP Contractors

**Figure 1: Implementation Partners within the HS/ECEAP Pathway**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• All agencies promote a commitment to continuous quality improvement</td>
<td>• The University of Washington is the lead agency for evaluation, assessment, and rating assignment</td>
<td>• Grantees and Contractors coordinate improvement activities, such as training and coaching</td>
<td>• Department of Early Learning is the lead agency for system development, integration, and policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Washington State Department of Early Learning
**Grantee/Contractor Role**

While Early Achievers is facility-centered, the pilot project clarified the importance of grantees and contractors in Early Achievers participation. Head Start/ECEAP facilities cannot fully participate in or benefit from Early Achievers without their grantee/contractor’s involvement and support. Grantees/contractors can access Early Achievers resources, processes and tools to support and strengthen their quality improvement efforts. Early Achievers resources for grantees/contractors include:

- Access to introductory online trainings on CLASS and ERS
- Early Achievers Institutes (including content specifically designed to support Head Start/ECEAP)
- Training in practice-based coaching to support quality teaching and instruction
- Technical assistance from the DEL Early Achievers team
2. Early Achievers Quality Standards

Overview

Early Achievers provides a common set of expectations and standards to define and measure the quality of early learning settings. The Early Achievers Quality Standards were designed to align with Head Start and ECEAP Performance Standards and provide specific, research-based tools to support positive child outcomes.

All licensed and certified early learning settings, including Head Start and ECEAP, are included in the Early Achievers framework. The following section describes the structure of the customized rating system, what the rating levels mean and how facilities earn ratings.

On the Head Start/ECEAP pathway, facilities receive reciprocity for Levels 1 and 2, and begin with “Entry Level 3.” Facilities continue their quality improvement goals in coordination with the grantee/contractor to reach Levels 4 and 5.

Figure 2: Streamlined Rating for Head Start/ ECEAP Pathway

| Rating Process for Programs Prepared to Demonstrate Quality Beyond Entry Level 3 |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| **Early Achievers Quality Standards**   | **Rating Points**                                |
| Child Outcomes                          | Facilities receive 40 reciprocity points for meeting Head Start/ECEAP Performance Standards |
| Professional Development and Training   |                                                  |
| Family Engagement and Partnership       |                                                  |
| Facility Curriculum, Learning Environment and Interactions | Sites earn up to 60 points through ERS and CLASS assessments |

Early Achievers Quality Standards

Please see Operating Guidelines Part 1, Early Achievers Quality Standards.
ERS and CLASS

Please see Operating Guidelines Part 1, Early Achievers Quality Standards: ERS and CLASS.
3. Eligibility

Pathway Eligibility

Head Start/ECEAP Early Achievers Pathway
If at least 75% of total facility slots are designated for Head Start/ECEAP children, the facility is eligible to participate on the Head Start/ECEAP Pathway.

Licensed/Certified Early Achievers Pathway
If less than 75% of total facility slots are funded by Head Start or ECEAP, the facility is eligible to participate in Early Achievers using the Licensed/Certified Pathway found in Part 1.

Child Enrollment Requirements

Early Achievers Registration and Level 3 Participation
Low enrollment will not impact registration for Early Achievers and work on Level 3 requirements. However, facilities must ensure that there are at least three children ages birth to five enrolled before requesting an on-site evaluation.

Ongoing Requirements
Facilities are expected to report child enrollment on a yearly basis. If a facility has no children enrolled for 60 calendar days, DEL reserves the right to initiate the dismissal process.

Licensing Status

Facilities subject to DEL licensing must be in good standing with licensing in order to participate in Early Achievers. Good standing is defined as having an active license that is not suspended, revoked or on probationary status. For more
complete information, please refer to Operating Guidelines Part 1, Eligibility: Licensing Status.
4. Head Start/ECEAP Pathway

Grantee /Contractor Participation in Early Achievers

ECEAP
The Early Start Act, enacted in July 2015, requires all ECEAP facilities to participate in Early Achievers.

Head Start
Within Head Start programs, grantees need to determine whether facility participation is voluntary or required. This helps to ensure that facility participation is supported and integrated with other Head Start quality assurance activities, rather than conducted solely at site-level.

Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Pilot Sites
Sites are required to enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days of signing the Partnership Agreement.

Grantee/Contractor Responsibilities
Once a facility is participating, the grantee/contractor will provide assistance in completing the Entry Level 3 activities. Grantee/contractor responsibilities include:

- Attending an Early Achievers Orientation for Head Start/ECEAP.
- Making a plan to integrate Early Achievers into their program’s quality assurance activities, including the use of Early Achievers tools (ERS and CLASS).
- Training and orienting their staff in Early Achievers.
- Viewing an optional MERIT training video for grantee/contractors.
- Assisting facility staff in completing all required Early Achievers registration, application forms and professional records in MERIT.
- Tracking, monitoring and coordinating facility Early Achievers activities.
- Preparing facility staff for data collection. The rating process for these facilities is streamlined with a focus on ERS and CLASS, and trainings on each of these will be available to grantees/contractors.

Figure 3: Head Start / ECEAP Pathway for Early Achievers

**Step 1:**
Grantee/Contractor chooses to participate in Early Achievers
- Determine if facility participation is optional or required.
- Attend Early Achievers orientation session tailored for Head Start/ECEAP.

**Step 2:**
Grantee/Contractor develops plan to assist facilities with entry level activities
- Train and orient their facility staff.
- Support staff with MERIT applications.
- Integrate Early Achievers into quality assurance activities.
- Track and coordinate the facility’s activities.

**Step 3:**
Grantee/Contractor assists facilities with Rating Readiness and rating process
- Prepare facility staff for data collection.
- Attend ERS and CLASS trainings available to grantees/contractors.

**Participation Timelines for ECEAP and EHS-CC Providers**

The Early Start Act of 2015 established participation timelines for providers that accept state funds. This section will also cover timeline requirements for Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Pilot sites as outlined in Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 170-290-2440. These requirements are met at the facility level, regardless of pathway.
ECEAP Timelines

- **New ECEAP programs** must register for Early Achievers within 30 days of the start date of the ECEAP services.
- **License-exempt programs** must receive a rating of a Level 4 or higher within 12 months of the date of Early Achievers registration.
- **Licensed or certified ECEAP programs** must register for Early Achievers within 30 days of the start of ECEAP services. These facilities must also complete the rating process and receive a rating of a Level 4 or higher within 18 months of the start date of ECEAP services, regardless of pathway.

If you have questions about your participation timeline requirements please contact your assigned DEL ECEAP Specialist or the ECEAP inbox at eceap@del.wa.gov.

**Figure 4: License-Exempt ECEAP Timeline**

1. Enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days of the start of ECEAP services.
2. Rate at Level 4 or higher within 12 months of enrollment.
3. Facilities rated below Level 4 must participate in remedial activities.
4. Rate at Level 4 or higher within 6 months of beginning remedial activities.
5. If rated below Level 4 after remedial activities, facility contract will not be renewed at the end of the school-year.
Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership Timeline

- Enroll within 30 days of signing the Partnership Agreement.
- Rate Level 3 or higher within 18 months of their Early Achievers enrollment date.
- Facilities that rate below Level 3 are required to participate in remedial activities, as outlined below.
- Maintain an up-to-date facility rating of Level 3 or higher by renewing their rating every three years.

Extension Protocol for ECEAP Providers and Contractors

ECEAP providers will follow the procedure outlined in Timeline Extension Protocol.
5. Head Start/ECEAP Enrollment in Early Achievers

Early Achievers Orientation

The first step of participation in Early Achievers is for the grantee/contractor to attend an Early Achievers orientation webinar for Head Start/ECEAP. Grantee/contractors interested in the orientation can contact the DEL QRIS inbox at QRIS@del.wa.gov for a schedule of upcoming webinars. The orientation for Grantees/contractor provides helpful information about the Early Achievers registration process and tips for sharing information with facility staff.

Early Achievers Participation Agreement

After attending an orientation, the grantee/contractor must sign an initial Early Achievers Participation Agreement. This is an agreement between the grantee/contractor and the Department of Early Learning (DEL) that outlines the requirements and responsibilities of Early Achievers participation. Grantees/contractors must return signed agreements to DEL and keep a copy of the signed agreement on-site.

DEL is responsible for documenting that the grantee/contractor has signed a Participation Agreement. Grantees/contractors that do not have a signed Participation Agreement will not be able to register for Early Achievers. ECEAP Contractors will receive the Participation Agreement with their contract renewal documents and need to sign and return the agreement within 30 days.

Early Achievers Grantee/Contractor Registration

Once the Early Achievers Participation Agreement has been documented, the grantee/contractor will gain access to the Grantee/Contractor Registration Application. Once the registration application has been reviewed by DEL, the grantee/contractor can:

- View a list of their facilities and pathways.
- Give participation approval to sites on the Head Start/ECEAP pathway.
- Assign Early Achievers Contact for each facility.
- Submit Application for Level 3.

**Figure 6: Moving Through Early Achievers**
6. Facility Participation in Early Achievers

Facility Orientation and Registration

It is the grantee/contractor’s responsibility to conduct the Early Achievers orientation at the facility level to help staff understand the Early Achievers program requirements, Quality Standards, and prepare for an initial rating. Once the orientation has been completed, the grantee/contractor designates an Early Achievers Contact for each facility. The Early Achievers Contact must then submit the Facility/Site Registration to participate in Early Achievers.

Head Start/ECEAP Early Achievers Application for Level 3

After successful registration, the Early Achievers Contact may access the Early Achievers Application for Level 3. The Early Achievers Application for Level 3 is completed by the Early Achievers Contact. It contains multiple parts and can be completed over time. The Early Achievers Contact will use the Application for Level 3 to track completion of the Level 3 requirements and collect facility information:

- Staff Professional Records in MERIT
- Facility Demographics
- Professional Training Series (optional)

More information about these requirements can be found in Part 1, Moving toward Level 2: Required Level 2 Activities.

Program Change Before the Completion of Level 3

Information about program changes during facility completion of Level 3 requirements can be found in Part 1, Moving Toward Level 2: Program Change before Completion of Level 2 activities.
Reaching Early Achievers Level 3 Status

Submission and Review of Application for Level 3

When all Level 3 requirements are complete, the Early Achievers Contact will submit the Early Achievers Application for Level 3. The application cannot be submitted until all requirements are completed. Once submitted, facilities will receive an email from DEL confirming that the Early Achievers Application for Level 3 has been received and is in the process of review.

Notification of Level 3 Status

Once the application is accepted, the Early Achievers Contact will receive an email from DEL stating that the facility has been awarded Early Achievers Level 3 status. If an application is not accepted, DEL will provide the reasons and refer facilities to their grantee/contractor for guidance on steps to take to address issues.

Facilities that Remain Level 3

When Level 3 requirements are complete, facilities that do not pursue an on-site evaluation will remain a Level 3. This is only an option for Head Start programs that do not also serve ECEAP or state subsidy slots.
7. Evaluation and Rating

Overview

On-site evaluation is based on the Early Achievers Quality Standards and conducted by the University of Washington (UW). Participation in evaluation is a requirement to achieve rating Levels 4 and 5. Facilities that wish to be rated will work with their grantee/contractor to prepare for evaluation. The following section describes the process to request and participate in evaluation, how evaluation data is used to create a facility rating and how ratings are distributed and posted.

Request for Evaluation

Evaluation Preparation

As part of evaluation preparation, facilities will work with their grantee/contractor staff to demonstrate rating readiness. The grantee/contractor will offer coaching and support for their facilities preparing for evaluation, including training on best practices that are measured with the CLASS and ERS assessment tools. Rating readiness work helps facilities plan for a successful, efficient on-site evaluation visit from the UW Data Collection Team.

Eligibility

In order to be eligible to request an evaluation for rating, facilities must:

- Have been awarded Level 3 status by DEL.
- Have a minimum of three children birth to five enrolled and present at the time of on-site evaluation.
- Work with their grantee/contractor to prepare for evaluation.
Process to Submit the Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation

Request for On-site Evaluation

After DEL approval of the Early Achievers Application for Level 3, the Early Achievers Contact can request an evaluation for rating using the Early Achievers Request for On-site Evaluation application. The application includes:

- Update of facility demographic information
- Updated staff and classroom information
- Normal facility operating hours and days of the week
- Choice of applicant cohort
- Option to choose block-out dates

Facilities should be completely ready to receive on-site evaluation visits when they submit the Request for On-site Evaluation.

Rating Cohort Calendar

Please refer to Part 1, On-Site Evaluation: Rating Cohort Calendar.

Review of Early Achievers Request for On-site Evaluation

After a facility submits the Request for On-site Evaluation, the grantee/contractor is responsible for establishing that the facility has met the evaluation eligibility requirements. Once eligibility is determined:

- DEL will process the evaluation request submitted by the grantee/contractor.
- The facility will be referred to the UW evaluation team and the evaluation process will begin.

If the grantee/contractor determines that the facility is not ready to move forward with the evaluation process:

- The Grantee/contractor Early Achievers Contact will provide the reasons the facility was deemed not ready.
- The facility is responsible for addressing these reasons before submitting another request for evaluation.
**On-site Evaluation**

Please refer to [Part 1, Data Collection: On-site evaluation](#).

**Rating Assignment**

**Rating Determination**

Early Achievers ratings are based on data collected in the CLASS and ERS tools. The UW evaluation team is responsible for compiling and analyzing facility data to determine total facility points and make a rating recommendation. The Department of Early Learning will assign the final Early Achievers rating level based on the UW recommendation.
Rating Notification

Grantee/contractors will receive access to each facility’s Early Achievers Rating Report on their cohort rating release date. The Ratings Report lists overall facility rating and site-level ERS and CLASS assessment score averages. Ratings results will help grantee/contractors identify and prioritize areas for quality improvement as they develop Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) with their facilities. Grantee/contractors will share ratings results with their facilities once the ratings are finalized and ready for release.

DEL will mail Early Achievers Rating Certificates to grantee/contractors 30 days after the facility’s rating release date. Certificates will highlight the site’s Early Achievers Rating Level and additional information about site strengths, or Areas of Specialization. Areas of Specialization offer recognition of high quality and provide more substantive information to families. Areas of Specialization for the Head Start/ECEAP pathway are based on total points earned in Interactions and Environment (ERS/CLASS).

Publication of Early Achievers Rating

Information about the publication of Early Achievers ratings can be found in Part 1, Facility Rating.

Rating Cycle

Information about the rating cycle can be found in Part 1, Facility Rating: Rating Cycle.

Remedial Activities

Early Achievers participants who have not met their mandated rating level within the allotted time are required by the Early Start Act of 2015 to engage in remedial activities. These activities, which may take up to six months, are designed to assist providers in identifying and incorporating changes necessary for them to improve rating quality and re-rate at the required rating level or
higher. Remedial activities can help participants improve quality in time for a re-rating to maintain their ECEAP funds, Early Head Start Child Care Partnership Pilot funding and state subsidy funding. For information about remedial activities, please refer to Post-Rating Supports: Remedial Activities in Part One.

**Re-rate Options**

Early Achievers participating ECEAP and Head Start programs qualify for one free re-rate per three year rating cycle. For more information on this, please review the Part 1, Facility Rating: Request for Re-rating.

Please note: The rating cycle will not change due to a re-rating; facilities will still go through another rating process three years after receiving the first rating, regardless of when a re-rating occurs.

**Ratings Appeals**

Please see Part 1, Facility Rating: Ratings Appeals.

**Renewal Rating**

Information about renewal rating can be found in Part 1, Facility Rating: Renewal Rating.
8. Early Achievers Supports and Incentives

Overview
Early Achievers participants are offered a range of supports and incentives to assist with quality improvement efforts. Supports in Early Achievers prior to the completion of the application for Level 3 focus on coaching with an emphasis on successful Early Achievers participation and evaluation readiness. After a facility has received an on-site evaluation Early Achievers support focuses on Continuous Quality Improvement and increasing assessment scores. Head Start and ECEAP grantees/contractors are responsible to support their facilities in areas of coaching, evaluation preparation and post-rating quality improvement efforts.

Professional Training Series
Please refer to Part 1, Pre-Rating Supports and Incentives: Training.

Professional Development Scholarships
Please see Part 1, Pre-Rating Supports and Incentives: Professional Development Scholarships for more information.
9. Participation Requirements and Expectations

The following section details responsibilities and expectations of participation specific to participants on the Head Start/ ECEAP Pathway. A list of requirements for all Early Achievers participants can be found in Part 1: Participation Requirements and Expectations. Grantees/Contractors should also refer to the Early Achievers Participation Agreement for program participation expectations.

Recordkeeping

The following records must be kept on-site by grantees/contractors for each of their facilities:

- All signed agreements including the Early Achievers Participation Agreement.
- All receipts, records and documentation of use of stipends and awards (must be kept on-site for seven years).

The following records must be kept on-site at the facility level:

- All parent/caregiver consents for children to participate in evaluation should be kept at each facility. This only applies to sites on the Licensed Pathway who participate in records review during the on-site evaluation.

DEL reserves the right to request and review records pertaining to participation in order to verify enrollment, use of funds, or adherence to the Operating Guidelines at any time.

Other Requirements and Expectations

The following topics are covered in Part 1, Participation Requirements and Expectations:

Notification Requirements

How Address Change Affects Participation

Information Sharing
Internet Usage/Security

Use and Development of Early Achievers Marketing and Outreach Materials

Conflict of Interest

Criteria for Dismissal

Procedure for Dismissal

Obligations of Participants upon Dismissal or Withdrawal from Early Achievers

Reapplication to Early Achievers
### Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certified for Payment Only</td>
<td>Child care facilities that are legally exempt from licensing (military, tribal or school-based) may apply for certification in order to receive state subsidy payments. This is referred to as Certified for Payment Only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Child Care Aware of Washington (CCA of WA)            | Child Care Aware of Washington is the lead agency for coordinating improvement activities including technical assistance, rating readiness consultation, training, and coaching for sites on the Licensed/Certified Pathway. For more information, visit wa.childcareaware.org/.
| Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)           | CLASS is an observation-based assessment tool that measures how teachers/providers interact with children to create supportive, nurturing relationships, enhance learning, and provide instruction. CLASS looks at interactions in three domains: Emotional Support; Classroom Organization; and Instructional Support. The CLASS will be conducted in child care center classrooms and family home child care by UW as part of the facility’s on-site evaluation for rating. Facility CLASS scores make up 40% of the total Early Achievers Quality Standards points. |
| Coach                                                 | Licensed/Certified Pathway: All rated facilities will be assigned a coach who will work with them to:                                                                                                     |
|                                                       |   - Navigate the Early Achievers participation process                                                                                                                                     |
|                                                       |   - Help facilities prepare for their initial rating                                                                                                                                       |
|                                                       |   - Identify goals based on evaluation data and Early Achievers Quality Standards                                                                                                          |
|                                                       |   - Make plans to achieve goals                                                                                                                                                             |
|                                                       |   - Access resources                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                       |   - Implement quality improvements                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                       |   - Help facilities implement sustainable practices                                                                                                                                       |
Coaches are highly trained early learning professionals with experience and education in early childhood education, and participate in ongoing professional development.

**Head Start/ECEAP Pathway:** Grantees/Contractors will provide a coach to provide support for continuous quality improvement in participating classrooms.

| Community Liaison | The **Community Liaison** is a member of the UW evaluation team that supports the facility and the Data Collectors to have a successful visit. The **Community Liaison** visits before the Data Collectors, and works with the Early Achievers Contact to:
<ul>
  <li>Explain the on-site visit and answer any facility questions and concerns</li>
  <li>Review the completed Interactive Rating Readiness Tool with the facility</li>
  <li>Confirm that all facility documentation and files are ready and in place for data collection</li>
  <li>Gather information for Data Collectors about the facility layout, including facility maps, classroom schedules, and other pertinent logistical information</li>
</ul> |
| Contractor | **Contractors** oversee Washington State ECEAP Programs in Early Achievers. A **Contractor** holds the Grantee/Contractor Tab for ECEAP sites and uses this function to verify employment, assign facility designees and approve applications for Early Achievers. |
| Data Collector | The **Data Collector** is a member of the UW evaluation team responsible for data collection. **Data Collectors** visit facilities to:
<ul>
  <li>Conduct observations including ERS and CLASS</li>
  <li>Review records and documentation</li>
  <li>Conduct staff interviews</li>
</ul> |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Department of Early Learning (DEL)</th>
<th>The Department of Early Learning (DEL) is a state agency dedicated to helping ensure our state offers world-class, developmentally and culturally appropriate early learning opportunities for all of Washington’s youngest leaners, so each child enters kindergarten with a solid foundation for success in school and life, ensuring Washington’s children realizes their full potential. DEL is the lead administrative agency for Early Achievers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Achievers</td>
<td>Early Achievers is Washington’s quality, rating and improvement system (QRIS), and is designed to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support child care providers to provide high-quality care by providing resources including training, coaching and incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Help parents and caregivers find high-quality child care and early learning programs that fit their needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure that children have high-quality early learning experiences that help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school and life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Achievers Contact(s)</td>
<td>The primary facility contact responsible for oversight and completion of all Early Achievers activities. Facilities may appoint a second Early Achievers contact assist in participation on behalf of the facility. Designation of a second contact is optional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Head Start – Child Care (EHS-CC) Partnerships Subsidy Pilot</td>
<td>A partnership between Early Head Start and Working Connections Child Care that will allow for the expanded availability of quality, comprehensive full-day and full-year early learning opportunities for infants and toddlers.</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early Start Act (ESA) of 2015</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Early Start Act (ESA)</strong> is a comprehensive early learning bill passed by the Legislature in July of 2015. Some of the key elements of the ESA are:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 12 month authorizations for Working Connections Child Care Subsidies (WCCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enrollment and rating milestones for providers receiving state subsidy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Enrollment and rating milestones for facilities that provide Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Moving the Department of Early Learning to a single set of licensing standards that govern child care licensing and ECEAP using the Early Achievers quality framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment Rating Scales (ERS)</strong></td>
<td>The ERS is an observation-based assessment that measures classroom/family home child care environment quality in the following categories: Space and Furnishings; Personal Care Routines; Language and Reasoning/Listening and Talking; Activities; Interactions; and Program Structure. It will be conducted in child care center classrooms and family home child care by UW as part of the facility on-site evaluation for rating. Facility ERS scores make up 20% of the total Early Achievers Quality Standards points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility or site</td>
<td>In this document, <strong>facility or site</strong> refers to the participating child care center or family home child care, Head Start/ECEAP location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grantee</td>
<td>Responsible for oversight of Head Start/Early Head Start Programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Start/ECEAP Pathway</td>
<td>The Early Achievers participation route for facilities that are serving children in a Licensed or Certified facility where 75% or more of the slots are Head Start or ECEAP slots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive Rating Readiness Tool (IRRT)</td>
<td>The <strong>Interactive Rating Readiness Tool</strong> (IRRT) is a document that helps facilities prepare for evaluation and ensure that all requirements are in place before on-site evaluation visits occur. Participants will receive the IRRT from their regional lead agency; Early Achievers regional lead agency staff will help participants complete the tool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensed/Certified Pathway</td>
<td>The Early Achievers participation route for facilities that are serving children in a Licensed or Certified facility where less than 75% of the slots are Head Start or ECEAP slots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERIT</td>
<td><strong>Washington’s Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT)</strong> 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 facility Professional Development &amp; Training. Use of MERIT is a requirement for Early Achievers Participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum thresholds</td>
<td>A facility must achieve designated minimum CLASS and ERS scores in order to achieve a rating of Level 3, regardless of total facility points earned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each assessed child care facility/family home child care must score at least a 2 on Instructional Support in the CLASS, a 3.5 on Emotional Support/Classroom Organization, and a 3.0 on the ERS. These scores, or *minimum thresholds* represent the foundational level of quality that all facilities must have in order to be rated Levels 3-5. Facilities that do not meet the minimum thresholds will receive a rating of Level 2. Sites that are on the Head Start/ECEAP Pathway must meet the minimum thresholds to be rated a Level 4, otherwise, the site will be rated a Level 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-school-age children</th>
<th>Non-school-age is defined as children ages six and under who are not enrolled in Kindergarten or grade school.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On-site evaluation</td>
<td>Facilities participate in <em>on-site evaluation</em> conducted by the University of Washington in order to earn a facility rating. On-site evaluation includes ERS and CLASS observations, review of records and documentation, and staff interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)</td>
<td>All Level 3-5 facilities will create a <em>Quality Improvement Plan</em> (QIP) in partnership with their coaches based on facility evaluation results, ERS and CLASS scores, components of the Quality Standards, and overall facility rating. The <em>QIP</em> is a plan that includes goals, action steps to achieve goals, timelines and resources needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Standards</td>
<td>The Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards (<em>Quality Standards</em>) is a comprehensive, research-based framework to support positive outcomes in early learning settings. There are four <em>Quality Standard</em> areas: Child Outcomes; Curriculum, Learning Environment and Interactions; Professional Development and Training; and Family Engagement and Partnership. Each Quality Standard area is worth a set number of points. Facility ratings are based on total points earned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sites with 75% or more of Head Start and ECEAP slots are given 40 reciprocity points during evaluation and rating. These points are given based on duplicity in Early Achievers Quality Standards and Head Start/ECEAP performance standards.

**University of Washington (UW)**

The University of Washington (UW) is the lead agency for evaluation, assessment and rating assignment. Data Collectors from UW conduct facility on-site evaluation visits. UW is also responsible for the development of the Early Achievers Coach Framework.

**Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)**

WCCC is a state child care subsidy program that helps families with low incomes pay for child care while they work. Under the Early Start Act of 2015, all licensed or certified providers receiving WCCC funds for non-school-age children must participate in Early Achievers.