



Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

January 2020

Adopted from the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning

[Spanish](#) and [Somali](#) versions of the Operating Guidelines can be found on the [DCYF website](#).



Washington State Department of
CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES



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1. Introduction

Overview: What is Early Achievers?

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

- Ensure that children have high-quality early learning experiences that help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school and life.
- Support early learning professionals to provide high-quality care by 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 program quality.

Early Achievers is administered by the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and is a key strategy of DCYF’s goal of ensuring that all children start school ready to succeed.

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

Early Achievers aligns with, supports and builds upon other key early learning initiatives in Washington. 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. DCYF knows there are many different early learning and care settings and 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.

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.
- Intentional commitment to quality improvement practices, such as:
 - Creating a plan with goals, timelines and action steps.
 - Testing and implementing solutions.
 - Evaluating the results and revising the plan.

Early Achievers is committed to CQI across the system:

- Programs: Early Achievers empowers early learning program staff and leadership to identify and achieve quality improvement goals with the support of strengths-based coaching. Early Achievers supports early learning programs through methods such as observation, reflection, self-assessment and participation in communities of practice.
- Partners: Partners implementing Early Achievers participate in ongoing professional development and gather lessons learned from participants and recommend and develop enhancements in service delivery.

- State-System: DCYF relies on feedback from implementing partners, stakeholders and other data to adjust and improve policy on an ongoing basis.

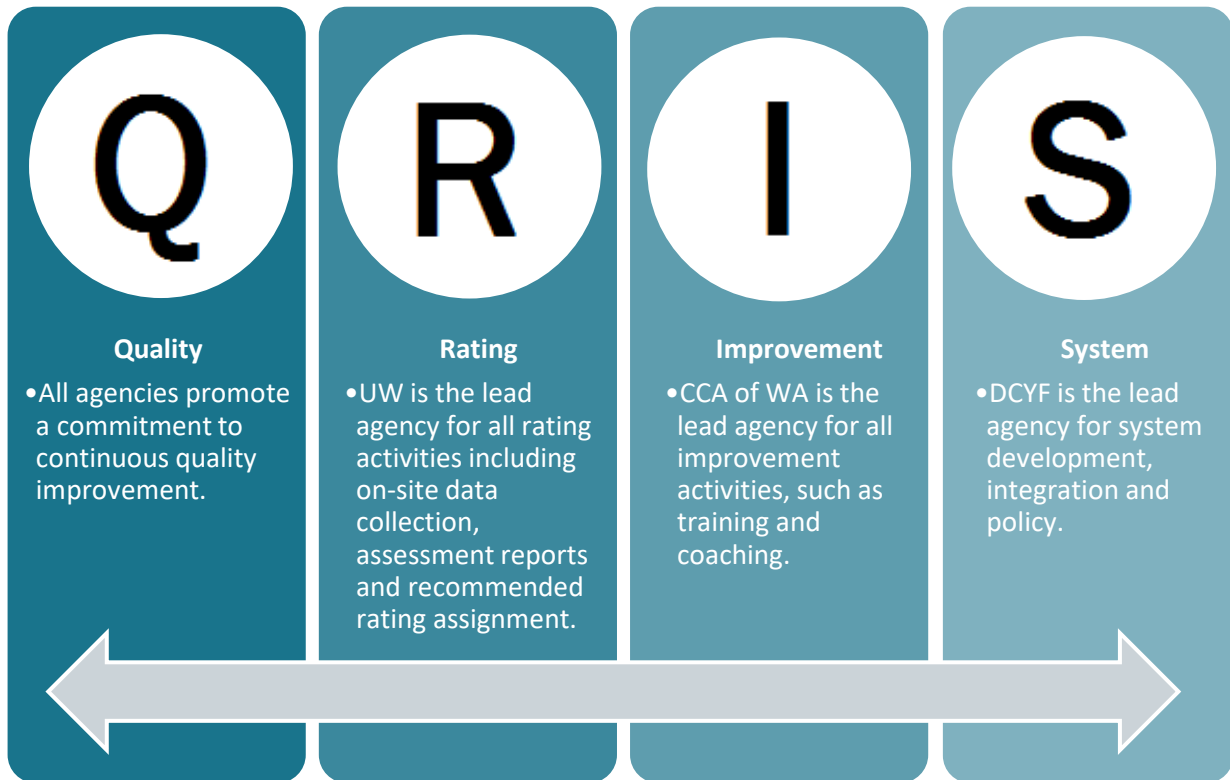
Agency Roles

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



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

Figure 1: Implementation Partners



Early Achievers Review Subcommittee

The Early Achievers Review Subcommittee advises DCYF on strategies to improve the Early Achievers system as well as the quality level of participants. Subcommittee responsibilities include reviewing and providing feedback on major Early Achievers policy changes and contributing to the development of the Early Start Act Annual Report to the Washington State Legislature. Members represent different sectors of the early learning system. They represent diverse communities from across the state.

The subcommittee is committed to advancing 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 [on the DCYF website](#).

Purpose of the Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

This document is designed to:

- Help early learning programs 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.

It is the early learning program's responsibility to read, understand and follow the guidelines in this document. CCA of WA, the Early Achievers regional lead agency, is available to answer questions or concerns and help successfully implement these guidelines. Sites offering Head Start and/or Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) services may also consult their grantee/contractor with questions.

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

Updates to Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

Participant Operating Guidelines are updated regularly. The [current version of the Operating Guidelines \(PDF\)](#) is available on the DCYF website. The Operating Guidelines posted on the DCYF website replace all former versions. Participants are responsible for reading and following the current Operating Guidelines.

In the event that an Early Achievers policy change is made between updates, information will be sent to Early Achievers participants via email and posted on the DCYF website as a policy update.

Non-Discrimination Statement

DCYF and its Early Achievers partners do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, gender expression, age, national origin, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or military status in any Early Achievers activities or operations. The Early Achievers implementing partners and their staff represent the diversity in Washington State and are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all participants. Staff members are trained in cultural sensitivity and strive to provide culturally responsive services and resources for Early Achievers participants and the children and families they serve.

Mandated Reporting

All staff providing Early Achievers services, including data collectors, community liaisons and coaches, are **mandatory reporters** under Washington State law and, as such, must report any instances of suspected child abuse and neglect directly to Child Protective Services.

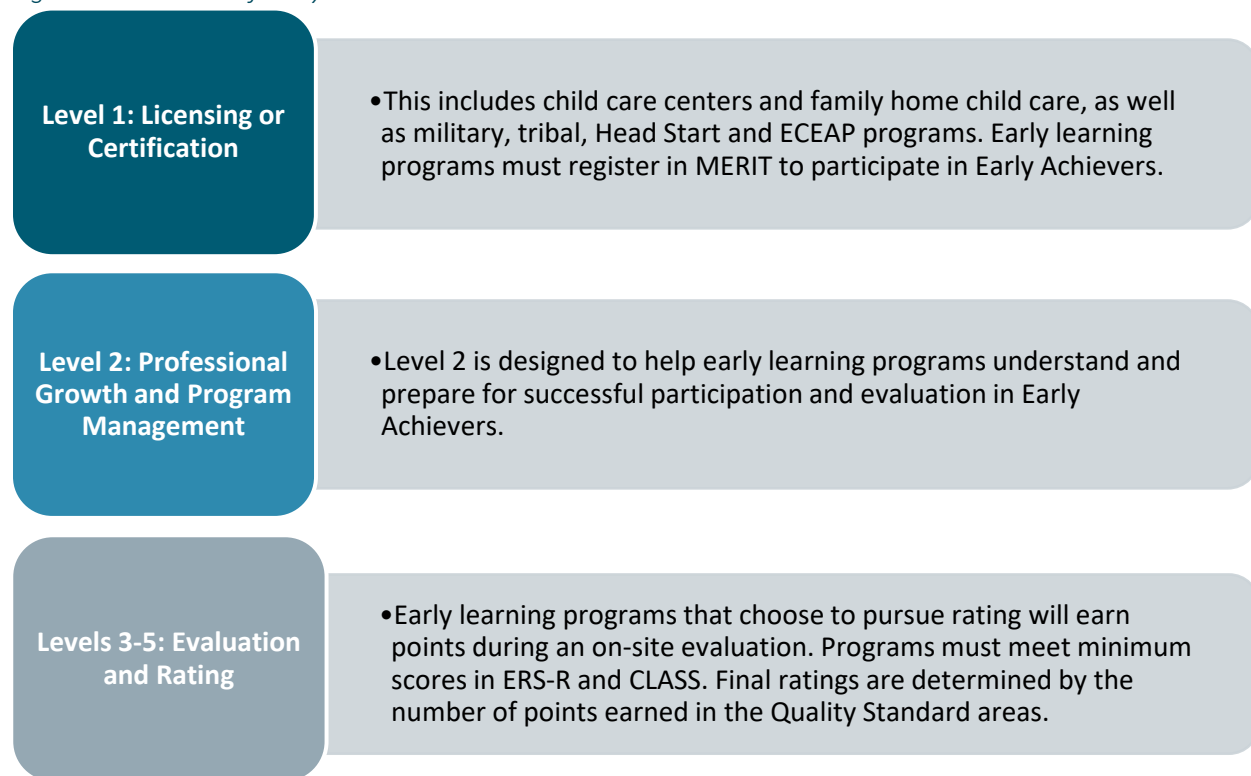
2. Early Achievers Quality Standards

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 program quality and ensure that quality practices have a direct impact on the progress of individual children. The current standards are research-based and reflect findings from the [2016 Early Achievers Validation Study \(PDF\)](#).

The Early Achievers framework is designed for licensed and certified early learning settings in Washington. There are five primary levels. 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 early learning programs earn ratings.

Figure 2: Overview of Early Achievers Levels 1-5



Rating Structure

In Early Achievers, all participating early learning programs share the same basic foundational requirements at Levels 1 and 2 and earn points to achieve Levels 3-5. All early learning programs must achieve designated minimum Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition (ERS-R) scores in order to reach Levels 3-5, regardless of total points earned.

Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

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 program-wide quality improvement while respecting provider approach and philosophy. 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.

Early Achievers Quality Standards

The Early Achievers Quality Standards focus on achieving positive outcomes for every child an early learning program 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 has a number of components, which describe ways an early learning program may demonstrate quality. For example, “evidence of family engagement, data sharing and transition support for individual children” is one standard within the Child Outcomes Quality Standard area.

Note: The updated Early Achievers Quality Standards will be released in early 2020, meaning the five Quality Standard categories will be different.

See Figure 4 for general examples of the types of program practices that the Quality Standards measure in each area. Please refer to the [Early Achievers Quality Standards booklet \(PDF\)](#) for specific standards.

Figure 4: Quality Standard Areas – Examples

Quality Standard Areas	
<p>Learning Environment: 60 points</p>	<p>Participants receive points based on average program score in the following tools:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CLASS: Instructional Support 2. CLASS: Emotional Support/Classroom Organization 3. Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition (ERS-R)
<p>Child Outcomes: 9 points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen children to spot developmental milestones and possible concerns. • Provide ongoing assessment to learn about each child’s strengths and needs and individualize instruction. • Share information about children’s growth and progress with families to promote school readiness.
<p>Curriculum and Staff Supports: 11 points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a curriculum that aligns with the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines. • Provide staff supports for improvement in curriculum and teacher-child interactions.
<p>Family Engagement and Partnership: 10 points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with families to determine perception of child strengths and needs. • Develop a Plan of Action, based on the research-based Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework.
<p>Professional Development and Training: 10 points</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early learning program and teaching staff have verified state Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificates or credentials, associates, bachelor’s or master’s degrees in ECE or DCYF-approved degree documented in MERIT.

ERS and CLASS

Description of Assessment Tools

The Early Achievers Quality Standards incorporate two standardized assessments: The Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition (ERS-R) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). ERS-R and CLASS both measure program 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 early learning program quality. Beginning July 2020, DCYF will retire the ERS-R and CLASS tools and implement the Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition tools (ERS-3). ERS-3 tools incorporate a focus on teacher-child interactions and child engagement in the learning environment.

Minimum Thresholds

All early learning programs must achieve designated minimum CLASS and ERS-R scores. These scores, or minimum thresholds, represent the foundational level of quality that all programs must have in order to reach Levels 3-5. Early learning programs that do not meet the minimum thresholds will receive a rating of Level 2, regardless of total points earned. Each assessed child care center/family home child care must score a 3.0 or higher on the ERS-R, 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 final ERS-R and CLASS scores are averages based on the scores of all assessed classrooms.

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.
- Consists of sets of scales for different settings and ages of children. The following scales are used in Early Achievers:
 - Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS-R) — child care center classrooms serving children birth to 2½ years.
 - Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) — child care center classrooms serving children ages 2½ to 5 years.
 - 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:
 - Emotional Support/Emotional and Behavioral Support: warm and respectful relationships, positive communication, responsive caregivers and awareness of children’s needs.
 - 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.

- Instructional Support/Engaged Support for Learning: discussion and activities that encourage the 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:
 - Infant CLASS – ages 0 to 18 months.
 - Toddler CLASS – ages 15 to 36 months.
 - Pre-K CLASS – ages 3 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.

Records Review

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 Quality Standards in addition to the ERS-R and CLASS and Professional Development, they must indicate that at the time they request their rating. They do this by selecting full data collection with records review and opting in to the desired Quality Standards.

How the Quality Standards Are Weighted

The Early Achievers Quality Standards are 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. Because we know that engaging environments and positive teacher-child interactions lead to positive outcomes for children, the ERS-R and CLASS tools represent 60 out of 100 total possible points. This emphasis on ERS-R and CLASS allows providers to achieve Level 3 by achieving the minimum thresholds in ERS-R and CLASS. Streamlined data collection consists of ERS-R and CLASS assessments and allows Early Achievers 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 higher point levels may opt in to additional Quality Standards.

3. Eligibility

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

Early Learning Program Type

Licensed or Certified Providers

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

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

Certified for Payment Only Providers

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

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

Sites that Offer ECEAP Services

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

Child Enrollment Requirements

DCYF understands that enrollment can fluctuate, especially in family home child care. Therefore, low enrollment will not affect an early learning program's eligibility to register for Early Achievers and begin to work on Level 2 activities.

After the completion of Level 2 activities:

- At least three children between birth and 5 years old must be enrolled in a child care center and one child between birth and 5 years old in a family child care home before requesting an on-site evaluation.
- Child care centers that drop below a minimum enrollment of three children and family child care homes that drop below a minimum enrollment of one child must notify their coach within seven business days. Coaches will work directly with early learning programs to develop a plan to increase enrollment.
- If an early learning program has no children enrolled for 60 calendar days, DCYF reserves the right to initiate the dismissal process described in Participation Requirements and Expectations: Criteria for Dismissal.

Licensing Status

All licensed or certified early learning programs 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. The DCYF website has more information on [licensing and definitions of terms](#).

Initial License

Early learning programs that hold an initial license may register to participate in Early Achievers and can complete Level 2 requirements. However, the early learning program cannot submit the Early Achievers Request for On-site Evaluation until it receives a non-expiring license.

No Referral Status

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

Revocation

- Early learning programs with a license that is revoked may not register to participate in Early Achievers.
- If an early learning program’s license is revoked while enrolled in Early Achievers, the early learning program will be withdrawn, regardless of rating level. All activities related to Early Achievers will be discontinued.

Summary Suspension

- Early learning programs with a license that is on summary suspension may not register to participate in Early Achievers.
- If an early learning program’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. Additionally, an early learning program may not request or participate in on-site evaluation while on summary suspension.
 - If the summary suspension leads to a full restoration of the license, the early learning program may continue Early Achievers participation.
 - If summary suspension leads to revocation of the early learning program’s license, the program 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 early learning program’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

- If an early learning program is issued a probationary license while enrolled in Early Achievers, the early learning program may continue to participate in Early Achievers during the probationary period. The early learning program 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 early learning program is issued a probationary license prior to rating, the early learning program may continue working on Level 2 requirements. However, the early learning program cannot submit the Early Achievers Request for On-site Evaluation or move forward with the rating process until the early learning program has regained a non-expiring license.

Future Participation

In the event that an early learning program is withdrawn from Early Achievers due to failure to meet the above licensing requirements, the early learning program may reapply for participation. In order to be eligible to reapply for participation in Early Achievers, the early learning program must be licensed in good standing and follow the procedures outlined in Participant Requirements and Expectations: Reapplication to Early Achievers.

4. Timeline Requirements

Overview

[RCW 43.216.085](#) established participation timelines for providers that accept state funds. All timeline requirements are met at the program level and apply to providers that:

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

Timeline Requirements

Existing Subsidy Providers

Licensed and certified early learning programs that received a subsidy payment between July 1, 2015, and June 30, 2016, and do not provide ECEAP services are considered existing subsidy providers and must meet the following requirements:

- Submit the Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation or rate Level 3 or higher by December 31, 2019.
- Maintain an up-to-date early learning program rating of Level 3 or higher by renewing their rating every three years.

Existing subsidy providers that do not rate at a Level 3 or higher must complete remedial activities and rate at a Level 3 or request their rating by December 31, 2020. More information can be found in [Post-Rating Supports: Remedial Activities \(PDF\)](#). Any existing subsidy providers that do not re-rate or request an on-site evaluation within this remedial activities timeline are no longer eligible to receive state child care subsidy until the required rating level is met.

New Subsidy Providers

Early learning programs 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 is also considered a new subsidy provider. 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.
- Submit the Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation or rate Level 3 or higher within 30 months of Early Achievers registration. An early learning program that does not rate or request an on-site evaluation within this timeline is no longer eligible to receive state child care subsidy until the required rating level is met.
- Maintain an up-to-date early learning program rating of Level 3 or higher by renewing their rating every three years.

Subsidy providers that do not rate at a Level 3 or higher must complete remedial activities and rate at or request to be rated at a Level 3 or higher within 12 months of beginning remedial activities. More information can be found in [Post-Rating Supports: Remedial Activities](#). Any existing subsidy providers that have not submitted the Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation or rated a Level 3 or higher

within 12 months of beginning remedial activities will no longer be eligible to receive state child care subsidy until the required rating level is met.

Please note: If the request for on-site evaluation is withdrawn after the rating or remedial milestones, the early learning program will no longer be eligible to accept state child care subsidy until the rating level requirement has been met.

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.

Request or receive a rating of Level 3 or higher within 30 months of enrollment.

If unsuccessful in reaching Level 3, early learning program must participate in remedial activities.

Request or receive a rating of Level 3 or higher within 12 months of beginning remedial activities.

Timeline for Sites Providing ECEAP Services

All providers serving ECEAP must:

- Register for Early Achievers within 30 days of the start of ECEAP services.
- Must complete the rating process or receive a rating of a Level 4 or higher within 24 months of the start of providing ECEAP services.

The timeline requirements for ECEAP providers are outlined below.

Figure 6: Timeline for Early Learning Programs that Offer ECEAP Services

Enroll in Early Achievers within 30 days of starting to provide ECEAP services.

Rate at Level 4 or higher within 24 months of starting to provide ECEAP services.

Early learning programs that rate below Level 4 must participate in remedial activities.

Rate at Level 4 or higher within 12 months of beginning remedial activities.

If rated below Level 4 after remedial activities, early learning program contract will not be renewed at the end of the school-year.

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 allows providers who have completed Level 2 activities to apply for a one-time, six-month extension for “exceptional circumstances.” Participants may request an extension once per rating cycle up to 12 months before their rating deadline or during remedial activities. All extensions will be granted for six months; however, participants can choose to move forward with rating before their extension expires.

Providers who do not wish to use their one-time extension can request a change in cohort due to exceptional circumstances once per rating cycle.

Criteria for Extension Eligibility

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

- Submit the [Early Achievers Extension Application \(Word\)](#) prior to the rating/remedial timeline.
- 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.
- Meet minimum participation requirements in rating preparation activities, such as training and coaching.
- Have experienced verifiable exceptional circumstances. A full list of exceptional circumstances is available in the [Extension Protocol \(PDF\)](#) on the DCYF website.

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 [DCYF 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 DCYF QRIS staff. Those that meet the defined criteria will be approved. The exception/extension protocol panel will review requests that do not meet the defined categories for eligibility and determine if the program qualifies for an extension. This panel consists of a DCYF QRIS staff member, CCA of WA staff member and Early Achievers Review Subcommittee member.

Requests for an extension can be emailed to QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov or mailed to:

QRIS Extension Request
c/o DCYF – Early Achievers
P.O. Box 40970
Olympia, WA 98504-0970

Programs will be notified by email from the QRIS inbox stating if their request for an extension was granted or denied, along with information about any next steps.

5. Enrolling in Early Achievers

Early Achievers Registration

The early learning provider/primary contact must complete the Early Achievers Registration form. Information about [how to register for Early Achievers](#) can be found on the DCYF website. The Early Achievers Registration includes:

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

Once the Early Achievers Registration is submitted, the Early Achievers contact will receive a confirmation email from DCYF. The early learning program is now enrolled in Early Achievers.

Early Achievers Contacts

The 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 Early Achievers activities. In early learning programs where there are multiple administrative staff members, a secondary Early Achievers contact may be appointed to support. 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 early learning programs and CCA of WA and outlines the requirements and responsibilities of Early Achievers participation. Participants should save a copy of the agreement 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 when the site submits an Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation.

6. Level 2 Activities

Overview

Early Achievers Level 2 focuses on professional growth and program management. Pre-rating coaching is provided to support the Early Achievers contact(s) completion of Level 2 activities. Upon submission of the Level 2 application, the early learning program will achieve Level 2 status and be eligible to request an on-site evaluation for program rating.

Level 2 Activities

After successful registration, the Early Achievers contact may begin to complete Level 2 activities. These activities include updating staff professional records in MERIT and requesting an optional baseline assessment.

Staff Professional Records in MERIT

The Early Achievers contact must ensure that all early learning program staff have entered professional records in MERIT. Staff must associate themselves with the early learning program by logging into their own MERIT professional records and entering their current employment information. In order to earn points for staff education during the rating process, staff must ensure that their education information in MERIT is both current and verified. It is important that early learning programs prioritize this task early in Level 2 participation in order to ensure plenty of time to gather, submit, review and process transcripts. To verify education, all staff must complete 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.
- Photocopy of 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 system of record for staff education and qualifications for program Professional Development and Training Quality Standard points. Education applications should be verified before the Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation is submitted. Your program's staff and verified education

in MERIT will be considered for the professional development portion of your rating two weeks before the beginning of your rating cohort. Note: If you have staff whose highest education is a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential, be sure that their most current, unexpired CDA is reflected in their MERIT professional record.

Employees may qualify for an education award by filling out an education application and submitting supporting documentation. Find more information about the [education awards \(PDF\)](#) on the DCYF website.

Optional Baseline Assessment

Between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020, new participants and those working on Level 2 have two options.

Option 1: Request a Baseline

Participants that select this option will indicate they would like a baseline assessment from UW Cultivate Learning when they submit their application for Level 2. The baseline assessment is an on-site observation that offers programs valuable information and reliable data about their strengths and opportunities to help identify quality improvement goals. Participants will continue to work with their coach on their quality improvement goals prior to the optional baseline assessment.

Option 2: Skip the baseline.

Participants that select this option will continue working with their current coach to prepare for their initial on-site evaluation. Sites working to finish Level 2 activities before June 30, 2020 no longer need to attend the Level 2 trainings and can submit their application for Level 2 after July 1, 2019, with anywhere from zero to six trainings complete.

Reaching Early Achievers Level 2 Status

Once all Level 2 activities are complete and the application is submitted, early learning programs will receive an email from DCYF stating the site has reached Level 2 status. This email outlines next steps for those who wish to prepare for an on-site evaluation in the future.

Early Learning Programs That Remain at Level 2

Scenarios

When Level 2 requirements are complete, early learning programs that are not subject to rating timeline requirements may remain a Level 2 in the following scenarios:

- Early learning program chooses to remain a Level 2 (no evaluation).
- Early learning program participates in on-site evaluation and is awarded a Level 2 rating.

Responsibilities of Early Learning Programs That Remain Level 2

In the future, early learning programs that remain at Level 2 may be required to participate in additional quality improvement activities, as well as provide updates and reports on such activities. Early learning programs that choose not to participate in an on-site evaluation and rating and remain at Level 2 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

Early learning programs that complete all Level 2 activities and intend to pursue an on-site evaluation have access to coaching through their regional CCA of WA agency or grantee/contractor. This customized support will focus on developing and supporting program goals, preparing for data collection and continuous quality improvement.

Coaching requires participation from early learning program leadership and classroom teachers. ERS-R and CLASS assess teaching practices, routines and the setup and maintenance of learning environments. It is important for program leaders to understand how these resources measure best practices and how to support their staff as they work to improve quality.

Selecting an Evaluation

Early learning programs that are ready for the on-site evaluation can choose the components they want to include in their rating. DCYF offers two options for data collection: a streamlined method for sites who are focused on interactions and the learning environment, and full data collection for sites that are also engaged in additional best practices identified in the Early Achievers Quality Standards.

Streamlined Data Collection

Participants that select streamlined data collection will receive the ERS-R and CLASS assessments during their on-site evaluation. Early learning programs receiving streamlined data collection may earn up to 70 total points. The final program score will be calculated based on points received in:

- Learning Environment and Interactions: points are determined by the average early learning program scores in CLASS and ERS-R (50 points).
- Professional Development: points are determined by staff professional development documented in MERIT (10 points).

Full Data Collection

Full data collection process includes an on-site records review, in addition to the ERS-R and CLASS assessments. Participants receiving the full data collection may opt in to any combination of Quality Standards from Child Outcomes, Curriculum and Staff Support or Family Engagement and Partnerships. Programs requesting full data collection must provide accompanying documentation for all selected standards and signed parent consent forms. Early learning programs receiving full data collection may earn up to 100 points.

Eligibility Requirements for Evaluation Request

In order to be eligible to request an on-site evaluation, early learning programs must:

- Have achieved Level 2 status.
- Have a non-expiring license in good standing.

Completing the Interactive Rating Readiness Tool

Early learning programs preparing for full data collection will complete an Interactive Rating Readiness Tool (IRRT). The IRRT is a checklist that helps early learning programs and the data collection team

prepare for a successful and efficient on-site evaluation. [Copies of the IRRT \(PDF\)](#) are available on the DCYF website. The IRRT includes:

- Confirmation that the early learning program has collected consent forms from all families (described in Parent Consent below).
- Selection of the Quality Standards the early learning program plans to demonstrate during the on-site evaluation visits.
- Location of documentation and files for data collector review.

Early learning programs may indicate on the tool that they choose to “opt out” of certain Quality Standards. Early learning programs might choose this option when a standard does not align with their program philosophy or if their program does not have plans to implement the standard at this time. Opting out of a standard means the data collector will not look for evidence of that standard during the on-site evaluation. All standards are used to determine total early learning program points, regardless of whether the early learning program opts out, so opting out will reduce the number of possible points.

Once the IRRT is complete, the Early Achievers contact submits it to their CCA of WA regional coordinator for review. The regional coordinator will determine 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.

Once the regional coordinator determines that the IRRT is complete, they will sign it. The signed, submitted IRRT is considered the official IRRT of record and cannot be modified without additional review by the regional coordinator. The official IRRT should be kept on site for data collection.

Please note: Regional coordinators and other CCA of WA staff cannot guarantee a facility rating. IRRT does not account for ERS-R and CLASS assessment scores which determine a majority of facility points.

Parent/Guardian Consent

Early learning programs 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-R assessments.

Early learning programs receiving full data collection with records review must provide signed consent forms for all children in family home child care and children birth to five in center-based settings. Although no individual child will be assessed, data collectors will review child files to measure whether the early learning program meets certain Quality Standards, 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 early learning program rating process. Consent is between the early learning program and the family.

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

- Describes the purpose of Early Achievers On-site Evaluation for early learning program rating and quality improvement.

- Describes how early learning program 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 \(PDF\)](#) and a [Frequently Asked Questions \(PDF\)](#) handout for parents are available on the DCYF website.

Early learning programs receiving full data collection 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) who are enrolled to attend a minimum of one day per week. 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.
- The families of children who attend on a drop-in basis must be notified of program 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.
- Show evidence of signed consents during the community liaison site visit – consent forms will stay on site at the early learning program and should be sorted by classroom.
- Notify their community liaison of families that did not sign consent.

Accreditation

Certain national accreditations are 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:
 - National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
 - National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
 - American Montessori Society (AMS)
 - National Accreditation Commission (NAC)
 - AdvancED
- Present a certificate or other documentation during data collection that states the facility was fully accredited by an agency that meets the Early Achievers accreditation requirements. The accreditation must be current at the time the request for on-site evaluation was approved.
- Meet the minimum score requirements in ERS-R and CLASS.

8. Data Collection

Overview

On-site evaluation is conducted by data collectors from the University of Washington Cultivate Learning (UW) and is necessary to achieve Levels 3 and higher. Once the request for on-site evaluation is reviewed, the UW data collection team, which includes data collectors and community liaisons, will work with providers to gather the data necessary to assign a program rating.

Data Collection Schedule

Early learning programs should consider their timeline and the data collection schedule when submitting the request for on-site evaluation. Submitting a request for on-site evaluation will maintain both subsidy and ECEAP eligibility until the rating is released. The data collection schedule was designed to efficiently process a high volume of Early Achievers ratings requests across the state. The data collection schedule allows early learning programs to request a baseline assessment, or an initial or renewal rating as soon as they are ready.

Early learning programs are added to the ratings queue based on the date the request for on-site evaluation was submitted. When a program reaches the top of the queue in their region the community liaison will contact the provider to collect the details needed to schedule data collection. Early learning programs will receive unannounced data collection visits according to the schedule below in figure 7. Programs are assigned to a data collection window once all required information has been submitted to their Community Liaison. Beginning in Cohort 1 2020, all early learning programs will be notified of placement in either the first or second half of the Early Achievers data collection window, section A or section B.

Please note: Programs may not choose which half of the data collection window they will be placed in.

Figure 7: Data Collection Schedule

Data Collection Window	On-Site Data Collection Occurs	Data Collection Section	Data Collection Section	Rating Release
1	November 16 - January 15	1A	November 16 – December 15	15-Feb
		1B	December 16 – January 15	
2	January 16 - March 15	2A	January 16 – February 15	15-Apr
		2B	February 16 – March 15	
3	March 16 - May 15	3A	March 16 – April 15	15-Jun
		3B	April 16 – May 15	
4	May 16 - July 15	4A	May 16 – June 15	15-Aug
		4B	June 16 – July 15	
5	July 16 - September 15	5A	July 16 – August 15	15-Oct
		5B	August 16 – September 15	
6	September 16 - November 15	6A	September 16 – October 15	15-Dec
		6B	October 16 – November 15	

Block-Out Dates

Early learning programs will work with their community liaison to identify “block-out” dates when the early learning program is not available for data collection visits.

Programs can select up to four block-out dates per data collection window. These block-out dates are in addition to days that the program is closed. Once the community liaison has all necessary information, they will contact the program with the data collection section (refer to figure 7), this will happen at least two weeks in advance of data collection. The four-week data collection section will indicate when data collection will begin. Depending on the size of the program and location in the window, data collection may extend beyond this period. The notification of the data collection section is a courtesy and not subject to provider requests.

Requesting a Deferment

Programs that have submitted a request for on-site evaluation but are experiencing exceptional circumstances should contact their community liaison or cqel@uw.edu to request a 90-day deferment. Providers may only request one deferment per rating cycle. Once the 90-day time period has passed, the program will be placed at the bottom of the rating queue and will be re-contacted by their community liaison when they reach the top.

Exceptional Circumstances Include:

- Leadership changes on site — such as director, assistant director or program supervisor.
- Organizational leadership changes — such as changes in Tribal Council membership or other agency leads.
- High staff turnover in a child care center, Head Start or ECEAP program – more than 30 percent of lead staff, as defined in MERIT, have changed since the request for on-site evaluation was submitted (this is limited to staff who work with children in the birth to 5 years age range).
- Staff turnover in family home child care – family home child care assistant or lead staff have changed since the request for on-site evaluation was submitted.
- Community defined events/subsistence lifestyles/seasonal events — such as ceremony or canoe journey.
- The facility is engaged in a grievance process with DCYF, Child Care Aware of Washington or another entity providing Early Achievers supports.
- Reallocation of Head Start or ECEAP slots that may impact data collection procedures.
- Extended illness of either the site director, family home child care provider or a lead teacher.
- Low enrollment – At least three children between birth and 5 years old must be enrolled in a child care center and one child between birth and 5 years old in a family home child care home.
- 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.

Withdrawing from the Rating Queue

Providers that do not qualify for an exceptional circumstance will need to proceed with data collection or withdraw from the queue. To withdraw from the queue you must contact QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov with a withdrawal request. Programs that withdraw from the rating queue will need to re-submit their request for on-site evaluation when ready. Providers that accept state funding should consider their timeline requirements before withdrawing from the queue, since this may affect their eligibility to accept subsidy and/or serve ECEAP.

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 early learning program 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 early learning program and enable a successful data collection visit.

For programs receiving streamlined data collection, the community liaison duties include:

- Explaining the on-site visit and answering any questions or concerns.
- Gathering necessary information (including schedules, languages and facility size) for the program.

For programs receiving full data collection, the community liaison duties include the above as well as:

- Reviewing the completed IRRT with the early learning program.
- Confirming that all early learning program documentation and files are ready and in place so the data collectors are able to easily find and review materials during data collection. Please note, the community liaison does not review or evaluate the content of the documentation, they simply confirm that the location of the documentation matches the instructions on the IRRT.
- 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/guardians interested in participating in a phone or email interview about their child's program.
- Gathering information about the early learning program, including layout and classroom schedules.
- Conducting the Early Achievers contact interview.
- Conducting parent interviews.

Upon successful completion of the visit, the community liaison will indicate that the early learning program is prepared for the on-site evaluation visits.

Data Collection

Data collectors from UW visit the early learning program to conduct an on-site evaluation. The visits are unannounced and occur within the data collection windows described earlier in this section. The data collectors collect early learning program information through a variety of methods, including:

- Direct observation of the learning environment.
- Interviews with teachers receiving the ERS-R 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 early learning program 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 percent of center classrooms will be observed. The early learning program 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 early learning program is participating in full data collection, the data collection team will refer to IRRT to determine which records review components the early learning program is attempting to meet. IRRT also serves as a reference for data collectors by providing information about how to locate and access materials in a way that works best for the early learning program. 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 early learning program's evaluation process.

Post-Visit Surveys

Community liaisons will send a mandatory post-visit survey link via email after the final on-site evaluation visit. The Early Achievers primary contact should complete this survey within three business days. DCYF will not release the early learning program rating until this survey is complete.

The purpose of this mandatory post-visit survey is to document concerns and feedback about the visits. The UW evaluation team will consider concerns documented in the mandatory survey and contact the Early Achievers primary contact directly to address concerns, if applicable. To avoid a delay in assigning a rating, the Early Achievers primary contact must complete and submit the mandatory survey online within three business days of receipt.

In addition to the mandatory survey for the Early Achievers contact, data collectors will provide an optional post-visit teacher survey link to teachers following both the CLASS and ERS-R observation visits. Teachers who choose 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 early learning program's community liaison. Both surveys are used for professional development of staff, ensuring that the UW evaluation team is following protocol as well as for the continuous quality improvement of the process for all children and programs that the University of Washington serves.

9. Program Rating

Rating Assignment

Rating Determination

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

Rating Notification

Early learning programs will receive access to their Early Achievers Rating Report on the rating release date identified in the Data Collection Schedule. The rating report lists overall early learning program rating, ERS-R and CLASS assessment score averages and points earned in each Quality Standard area.

Rating results will help early learning programs 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 early learning programs.

Areas of Specialization

DCYF will mail Early Achievers Rating Certificates to early learning programs 30 days after their rating release date. Certificates will highlight the early learning program's Early Achievers Level as well as information about early learning program strengths, or Areas of Specialization. Areas of Specialization offer recognition of high quality and provide more substantive information to families and are highlighted in the provider referral process. Areas of Specialization are awarded based on total points earned in each Quality Standard area. Find more information about [Areas of Specialization \(PDF\)](#) on the DCYF website.

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. The Early Achievers rating levels are available 30 days after the rating is released to the provider on DCYF's [Child Care Check](#) online search tool to acknowledge the commitment of participating early learning programs and provide this information to families. The CCA of WA website and call center also provide rating levels.

Rating Cycle

Early Achievers ratings are valid for three years from the most recent rating release date. During this period, the early learning program must maintain active participation. Early learning programs may begin the renewal process 12 months prior to the expiration of their current rating. More information can be found below in the 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 DCYF will do to address the appeal. Early learning programs may pursue a rating appeal after the receipt of their Early Achievers Rating Report.

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

Eligibility

The Early Achievers ratings appeals process applies to Early Achievers participants that have participated in on-site evaluation and received an early learning program rating.

Early learning programs may pursue one rating appeal per Early Achievers rating cycle.

Criteria for Appeal

Early learning programs that wish to pursue a rating appeal must, using the DCYF-provided [Early Achievers Rating Appeal Form \(PDF\)](#), demonstrate that a successful appeal would result in an increase of at least one rating level, for example, an increase from Level 3 to Level 4.

Early learning programs may not appeal ratings based on the following:

- Additional information gathered by early learning program after on-site evaluation visits.
- Components that early learning program marked “opt out” on the completed IRRF provided to their regional lead agency.
- Self-Assessment or Baseline Assessment scores were higher than official assessment scores.
- ERS-R 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 early learning program on their request for on-site evaluation, including early learning program hours/days of operation; two-month evaluation window requested by early learning program; early learning program-chosen block-out dates (four). Visits are rescheduled only in the case of early learning program 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.
- Express concerns about evaluators, such as inappropriate or unprofessional behavior or perceived conflict of interest between data collectors and the early learning program. These issues should be submitted in the post-visit survey, described above in On-Site Evaluation, so DCYF can address any issues before a rating is finalized.

Initiating a Rating Appeal

The Early Achievers Rating Appeal Form and supporting documentation must be received by DCYF no later than 5 p.m. (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 early learning programs.

Please note: In order to protect the integrity of the rating appeal process and ensure that all early learning program information is fully considered, all communication with DCYF 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 early learning program to address misunderstandings or questions about general ratings calculations. This initial step is intended to help early learning programs clarify how ratings are calculated in general based on the Quality Standards, which may prevent the need to appeal the rating.
- If the early learning program still has concerns, the Early Achievers contact will complete the [Early Achievers Rating Appeal form \(PDF\)](#) and attach detailed written information including:
 - Description of why the early learning program 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).
 - Documentation and evidence of early learning program practice specific to each Quality Standard component under dispute.
 - Date(s) of communication with regional coordinator.
 - A copy of completed post-visit survey and, if applicable, date(s) of communication with UW regarding survey feedback. Participants may request a copy of their completed survey from their community liaison.
- The Early Achievers contact will submit a completed Rating Appeal Form and supporting documentation to QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov or by certified mail, at the participant's expense, to the following address:
 - Department of Children, Youth, and Families
 - Attention: QRIS Support Services
 - P.O. Box 40970
 - Olympia, WA 98504-0970

DCYF assumes no responsibility for delays caused by mail delivery service. Materials received after 5 p.m. on the 30th calendar day after the early learning program's rating release will not be considered.

DCYF's Rating Appeal Resolution Process

- The QRIS administrator will review the early learning program Early Achievers Rating Appeal Form and may request additional documentation from the early learning program or partners, including the UW evaluation team and the early learning program'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 early learning program.
- If the early learning program disagrees with the decision, the Early Achievers Contact must respond in writing by either email or certified mail within 10 business days from the date of the DCYF decision. Correspondence received by DCYF after 5 p.m. (PST) on the 10th business day after the appeal decision will not be considered. DCYF assumes no responsibility for delays caused by mail delivery service.
- The QRIS administrator will summarize the early learning program appeal and the initial DCYF decision and submit it to the DCYF Director of Eligibility and Provider Supports for review within 10 business days.

- DCYF will notify the early learning program of the final decision in writing.
- If rating appeal is granted:
 - If it is determined that an error was made in calculation, the scores will be adjusted and the early learning program will be issued an updated rating report. The early learning program's participation status and/or rating will be updated on DCYF's Child Care Check and publicly referenced by CCA of WA, when applicable.
 - In the case that the appeal outcome requires a re-rating, DCYF 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 early learning program documentation or evidence that was not available during original on-site visits will be reviewed.
- If rating appeal is denied:
 - Early learning program will be notified in writing of decision including information about why the appeal was denied. Early learning program rating will remain valid for three years from the rating release date.
- While appeal is in process:
 - Distribution of Quality Improvement (QI) Awards will be put on hold until final rating appeal decision.

Request for Re-Rating

Early Achievers participants that accept state funding and do not meet their mandated rating level qualify for one free re-rate per initial or renewal rating. Participants who do not accept subsidies or provide ECEAP/Head Start services are eligible for paid re-rates. Going through a re-rate and achieving a higher rating can give sites access to larger QI Awards and higher subsidy reimbursement rates. Early learning programs can request a re-rate by submitting the [Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation \(PDF\)](#) in MERIT. The community liaison will document block-out dates and provide information about the expected timeframe for the re-rating visit. The re-rate rating release date will become the new rating release date, with renewal ratings due three years after the most recent rating release date.

Free Re-Rate Eligibility and Options

Qualifying Early Achievers participants may request a free re-rate up until 12 months before the renewal deadline. 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

Accessing a free re-rate can help sites reach the rating mandate for their program type ([RCW 43.216.085](#)). Early learning programs that receive a free re-rate but do not reach the mandated rating level may request a paid re-rate.

Early Achievers participants may select any combination of the following measures for their free re-rate:

- Environment Rating Scale-R (ERS)
- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- Full Records Review

Paid Re-Rate Eligibility and Options

All Early Achievers participants are eligible for a paid re-rate. Re-rates can be requested until 12 months before the rating expiration. The cost is based on early learning program size. A check or purchase order made payable to “Cultivate Learning” should be mailed to:

Cultivate Learning
 Attention: Early Achievers Re-Rate
 5001 25th Ave. NE, Suite 201E
 Seattle, WA 98105

Figure 8: Fees for Paid Re-Rate

Number of Classrooms / Learning Environments	Program’s Portion of Re-Rate Cost for One to Two Measures	Program’s Portion of Re-Rate Cost for Three Measures
1-2	\$750	\$1,000
3-4	\$1,500	\$2,000
5-10	\$2,500	\$3,000
11 or More	\$3,500	\$4,000

Early learning programs 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

Re-Rates and Quality Improvement Awards

Participants who re-rate at a higher level and 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. QI Awards may be used toward the cost of re-rating. More information about QI Awards can be found in Participant Supports and Incentives.

Additional Information

- Participants may address questions via email to QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov or by reaching out to their local CCA of WA office/ECEAP contractor/Head Start grantee.
- Access the full [re-rate policy \(PDF\)](#) on the DCYF website.

Renewal Rating

Early Achievers participants must request a new on-site evaluation within three years of their most recent rating or re-rate in order to maintain their participation status and be eligible for Early Achievers supports and incentives. Early learning programs receiving ECEAP 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 12 months before the rating expiration date. Early learning programs must request their renewal rating on or before their initial rating release anniversary. The full renewal rating policy can be found on the [DCYF website \(PDF\)](#).

Renewal Rating Process

- DCYF will email the Early Achievers contact six and 12 months before the early learning program’s third rating anniversary a reminder to complete the Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation application.
- The Early Achievers contact can access the renewal rating option in the application. Providers cannot request a renewal rating more than 12 months before the third rating release anniversary.
- The CCA of WA regional coordinator will review the request to ensure that all requirements are met before submitting it to DCYF for processing. DCYF 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.
- The early learning program will receive its renewal rating on their cohort’s rating release date. Participants can appeal their rating based on criteria outlined in Rating Appeals.

Remedial Activities

Early Achievers participants who serve children receiving subsidy or provide ECEAP 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, Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) or Early Head Start/Child Care (EHS/CC) Partnership funding. [The full remedial activities policy \(PDF\)](#) can be found online.

Remedial Activities Participant Requirements

After rating below the required level, the 12-month remedial activities timeline begins. The participant submits a re-rating request and is placed in the UW data collection scheduling queue.

Participants have 60 days from the rating release date to meet with their coach and review the early learning program 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.

Timeline of Remedial Activities

Participants have 12 months from their rating release date to complete the remedial activities and rate at their mandated level or request a rating. Re-rates are conducted and published on a rolling basis.

Coach and Participant Accountability

Active participation in remedial activities must be documented and updated regularly:

- The 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.

10. Early Achievers Participation for Rated Early Learning Programs

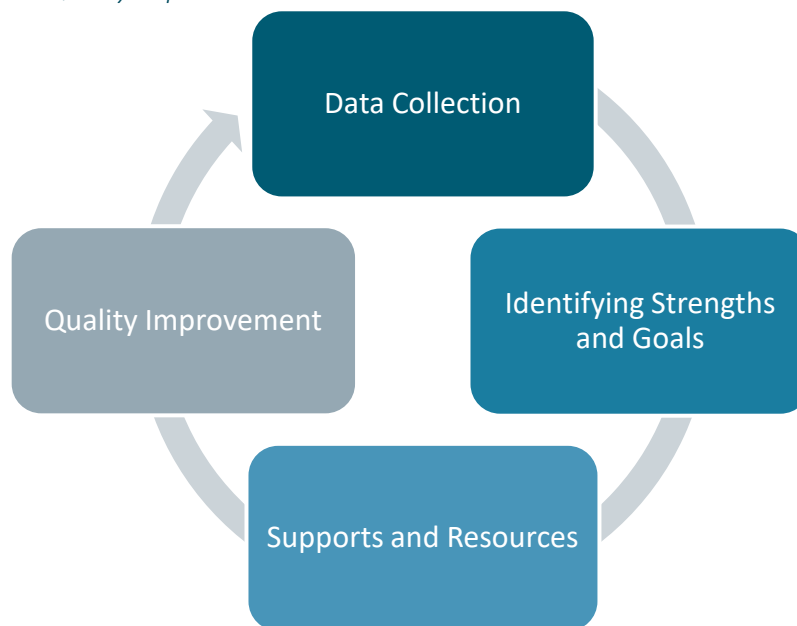
Commitment to Quality

For Early Achievers participants, data collection and achieving a quality rating is just the beginning of providing high-quality care to Washington children and families. Early Achievers empowers early learning program 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 core of a first-class statewide early learning system.

Providers that have completed an on-site evaluation receive detailed and personalized information about their early learning program 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 \(PDF\)](#) in the post-rating toolkit on the DCYF website.

The Early Achievers rating is a measure of early learning program 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 an early learning program receives will vary based on the program's rating level and the needs identified in their QIP. Coaching services will change as the rating level increases, with rated Level 2 and 3 programs receiving more coaching than rated Level 4 and 5 programs. Coaches partner with participants through the quality improvement process – the early learning program 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. QIPs and any documentation of work are accessible to all coaches and licensors working with an early learning program and are 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 early learning program evaluation results including:

- ERS-R and CLASS assessment scores.
- Components of the Quality Standards.
- Overall early learning program rating.
- Components of the Early Achievers Coach Framework.

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

11. Participant Supports and Incentives

Overview

Early Achievers includes a range of supports and incentives to assist participants with quality improvement efforts throughout their participation. All incentives are designed to help early learning programs implement goals, increase early learning program quality and ultimately improve child outcomes. Early learning programs 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 provided within Early Achievers to help participants understand Early Achievers policies and navigate the process successfully. Most coaching services are provided through regional CCA of WA agencies. Participants with 75 percent or more dedicated Head Start or ECEAP slots may receive coaching services through their grantee/contractor.

Coaching is available to actively participating early learning programs. Active participation means the early learning program responds to communications, participates fully and demonstrates program growth based on consultation and coaching. Coaching is designed to:

- Help early learning programs understand the Early Achievers Quality Standards.
- Help early learning programs implement continuous quality improvement and prepare for data collection.
- Understand and use Early Achievers ratings and assessment data.
- Identify goals and make plans to achieve goals.
- Access resources to support achievement of goals.

Coaching services are delivered in multiple ways, including on-site visits, email, phone calls and group sessions. Participants may work individually with their coach or within small group sessions on topics that support continuous quality improvement and best practices.

Infant-Toddler Consultation

Washington State and DCYF 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 support to professionals working with infants and toddlers.

Eligibility

Early learning programs that have infants and toddlers receiving subsidy payments may be eligible to request focused classroom coaching by an infant-toddler coaching team.

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 the program'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), a strengths-based intervention offered to support early learning professionals who work with infants and toddlers. This voluntary program 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.

Professional Development Scholarships

Scholarships are available for students working in Early Achievers early learning programs 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 early learning programs. Each scholarship has different eligibility criteria and financial benefits. [Learn more about these scholarships](#) on the DCYF website.

Child Care Aware of Washington Scholarships

CCA of WA Scholarships support educators working toward BA degrees in ECE. Find more information on [CCA of WA's website](#).

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 early learning programs pursue ECE 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.

Substitute Pool

Washington's Early Care and Education Substitute Pool is designed to support family child care and child care center providers in accessing release time so that they can work on professional development goals to reach Early Achievers Level 3 or higher.

All substitutes meet the current minimum education standard for a licensed program lead teacher, have completed DCYF training and have a cleared Portable Background Check. Visit the DCYF website for more information about [the substitute pool](#).

Needs-Based Grants

Needs-Based Grants are available to support early learning programs participating in Early Achievers to assist with purchasing curriculum development, instructional materials, supplies, focused infant-toddler improvements, equipment and environment improvements to improve program quality. Prior to applying, please thoroughly review the Early Achievers [Needs-Based Grant Overview](#) (PDF) to ensure that you are eligible. A program may receive a Needs-Based Grant one time during each qualifying participation or rating type. Early Achievers participants may work with their coach to prepare and submit a Needs-Based Grant application online in [WA Compass](#). Translated applications and additional information about Needs-Based Grants can be found on the [DCYF website](#).

Grant Eligibility and Prioritization

In order to be eligible, Early Achievers participants must meet the following criteria:

- Be registered for Early Achievers and participating in Level 2, or
- Be registered for Early Achievers and rated a Level 2
- Be registered for Early Achievers and rated a Level 3, 3+, 4 or 5 (available January-June 2020)

AND meet at least one of the following:

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

Prioritization

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) may prioritize applications for those participants who provide services to non-school age children accessing Working Connections Child Care (WCCC), by the estimated percentage of children accessing services in a center or family home child care, and for those who 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 the program's completed grant application is approved by DCYF.

- Early learning programs must be registered as a vendor of Washington State by submitting the [Statewide Payee Registration form and W-9](#) to DCYF prior to receiving a Needs-Based Grant. Early learning programs that fail to provide this information to DCYF 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.

Early learning programs that receive a Needs-Based Grant are required to keep their receipts for seven years. An [overview of Needs-Based Grants](#) can be found in the pre-rating toolkit on the DCYF website.

Tiered Subsidy Reimbursement

Enrolled providers who serve children receiving Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) or Seasonal Child Care subsidies will receive a 2 percent increase to the subsidy base rate. Providers who accept subsidy payments must have submitted an Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation or advance to a rated level of 3 or higher within 30 months of enrolling in Early Achievers or submitting their first subsidy invoice, whichever comes later, 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.

Early learning programs that receive a Level 3 through 5 rating and serve children receiving WCCC or Seasonal Child Care subsidies are eligible to earn a higher incentive added to the base rate as follows.

Family home child care programs:*

- Level 3: 12 percent above the base rate
- Level 4: 17 percent above the base rate
- Level 5: 20 percent above the base rate

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

Center-based providers:

- Level 3: 8 percent above the base rate
- Level 4: 15 percent above the base rate
- Level 5: 20 percent 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 early learning program 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 period.

Quality Improvement Awards

Quality Improvement (QI) Awards are paid to qualifying rated Early Achievers participants that serve children receiving state child care subsidies. QI Awards recognize achievement and support early learning programs 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, early learning programs must:

- Achieve an Early Achievers rating of Level 3 or higher. Family home child care providers who are rated Level 2 or higher may qualify for QI Awards.
- Serve an enrollment population of which at least 5 percent of total licensed capacity consists of non-school-age children receiving state or other qualifying child care subsidies.¹
 - For the purpose of the calculation, DCYF defines “children receiving state subsidy” to mean children receiving state funding for child care through any of the following programs:
 - Working Connections Child Care (WCCC)
 - Seasonal Child Care (SCC)
 - 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 QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov by the provider.
- Agree to create a QIP with an assigned coach within six months of the rating release. Sites with no QIP six months after their initial rating release may be asked to repay their QI Award.
- Maintain active and engaged participation throughout the three-year rating cycle by participating in ongoing coaching and working on the goals set in the early learning program’s QIP.
- Register as a vendor of Washington State by submitting the [Statewide Payee Registration form](#) and W-9 to DCYF. Registration must be completed under the early learning program name, as funds will not be awarded to individuals. All early learning programs 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 \(PDF\)](#) can be found on the DCYF website.

Calculation of the Percentage of Subsidized Enrollment

Providers must have an enrollment population of which at least 5 percent are children receiving state subsidy. This percentage is based on the number of non-school-age² children served for centers and the number of both non-school-age and school-age children for family home child care providers. The percentage is calculated annually 31 days after the early learning program’s rating release date. All subsidy invoices must be received 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.

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

² Through negotiations with SEIU 925, both school-age and non-school age children using subsidies are considered when calculating the 5 percent subsidy requirement for family home child care providers.

Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

- The total number of children served during the 12-month award period is then divided by the number of months the early learning program was open at least one day in the month. This is the monthly average number of children receiving state subsidy the early learning program served.
- The early learning program's average monthly licensed capacity is determined by adding the licensed capacity for all months the early learning program was open during the 12 months preceding the rating release date and dividing by the number of months the early learning program was open.
- DCYF calculates the final percentage of children receiving state subsidy for a program by dividing the monthly average number of children receiving state subsidy the early learning program served by the early learning program'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

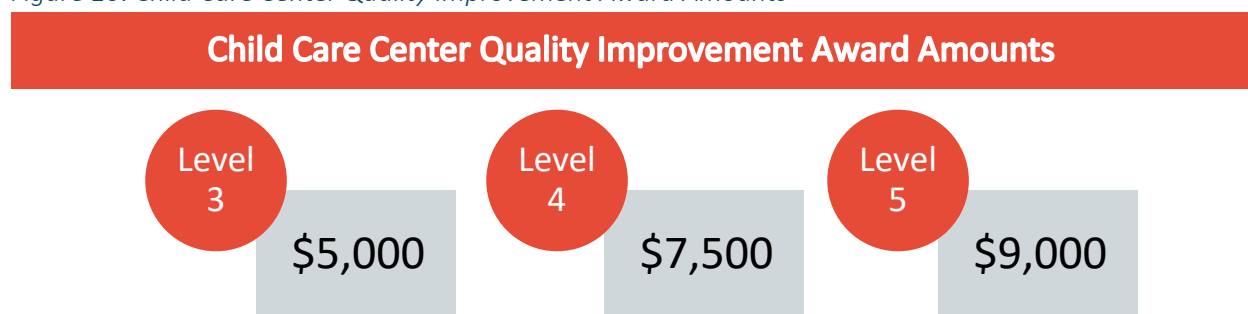


Figure 11: Family Home Child Care Quality Improvement Award Amounts



Distribution of Award Funds

QI Awards are distributed approximately 60 days after the early learning program's rating release date. Early learning programs 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 early learning program 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.

Allowable Uses

Award funds may only be used in the following categories, based on the Early Achievers Quality Standards, and must reflect active QIP goals:

- **Child Outcomes:** Funds may be used for materials, tools and resources to support ongoing child assessment and developmental screening.
 - **Early Learning Program Curriculum, Learning Environment and Interactions:** Funds may be used to strengthen and enhance an early learning program’s capacity to provide high-quality, individualized experiences and environments for children in the following areas:
 - **Program/Classroom Materials:** Examples of acceptable items include developmentally appropriate materials, educational toys and equipment to support learning and basic routines.
 - **Curriculum:** Examples of acceptable items include curriculum guides, reference books and other resources that supplement the curriculum.
 - **Observational Assessment Resources:** Examples of acceptable items include tools that help early learning programs document children’s growth and development and increase staff ability to individualize programming for children. Early learning programs may also use funds to purchase tools and supporting materials for Early Achievers assessments, including ERS books and CLASS guides.
- **Family Engagement and Partnership:**
 - **Parenting Education/Support Program:** Funds may be used to support the implementation of parenting support and education.
 - **Strengthening Families Plan of Action Implementation:** Funds may be used to strengthen and enhance the early learning program’s work with families based on the results of their Strengthening Families Plan of Action. Examples of acceptable items include parent education resources and training materials; program materials to create a welcoming environment for families; and social/educational gatherings/events for families.
- **Professional Development and Training:**
 - **Staff Development:** 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 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. Early learning programs 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 early learning program 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 mandated timeline 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 may 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 early learning programs for purchases made prior to receipt of award funds.

Documentation and Reporting

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

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

- 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 the spending of QI Awards on site for a minimum of seven years.
- DCYF will conduct audits of QI Award expenditures and tracking for randomly selected early learning programs.
 - Sites need to have a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) in place within six months of the rating release in order to remain eligible for QI Award payments (QIP process described on page 39. If a site does not have a QIP in place at the six-month mark, DCYF will send an email. Sites will then have 90 days from the date of the email to work with their coach to submit the QIP. If at the end of the 90 days the site has not submitted a QIP, then the site is not eligible for their next QI Award payment.

Misuse of Funds

Misuse of QI Award funds may result in immediate dismissal from Early Achievers as outlined in Participation Requirements and Expectations: Procedure for Dismissal. Misuse of funds is defined as the

use of funds for any purchases not included in Allowable Use of Funds; use of funds for any purchases included in Restrictions; and use of funds for purposes not related to early learning program QIPs.

Marketing and Outreach Materials

DCYF encourages Early Achievers participants to share their commitment to quality with families and the community. DCYF has created materials, including an informational brochure, sample letter to families and a rating certificate, to assist early learning programs with communication. Early learning programs may share their Early Achievers participation by accessing the many valuable outreach tools available online at <https://www.childcarebizedge.org/default.aspx>.

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

12. Participant Requirements and Expectations

The following section details early learning program responsibilities and expectations of participation. Additionally, early learning programs should refer to the Early Achievers Participation Agreement for participation expectations.

Early Achievers Services Agreement

CCA of WA provides pre-rating and post-rating coaching services to Early Achievers participants serving less than 75 percent of Head Start/ECEAP slots. Each regional representative's purpose is to help early learning programs complete Level 2 activities, prepare for data collection and continue quality improvement efforts after rating. The Early Achievers Services Agreement provides detailed information about the roles and responsibilities of both parties. Each early learning program is required to be engaged and participate in Early Achievers activities as outlined in these Operating Guidelines.

In the event that circumstances prevent a provider from being fully engaged, they may request to temporarily discontinue services. It is important to note that although CCA of WA services may be discontinued, any timelines required by [RCW 43.216.085](#) remain unchanged.

On occasion, CCA of WA staff may elect to discontinue services if an early learning program's Early Achievers contact is not maintaining active participation. If early learning programs are unresponsive, repeatedly absent from trainings and scheduled meeting times or do not make good faith efforts to abide by the services agreement, CCA of WA will notify early learning programs in writing that services may be discontinued temporarily for one quarter.

Regardless of who initiates discontinuation of services, early learning programs will continue to be enrolled in Early Achievers and eligible for all related incentives. Providers will have the opportunity to resume CCA of WA services at designated times on a quarterly basis.

Head Start Grantee/ ECEAP Contractor Responsibilities

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

- 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-R and CLASS).
- Training and orienting their staff in Early Achievers.
- Assisting early learning program staff in completing all required Early Achievers registration, application forms and professional records in MERIT.
- Tracking, monitoring and coordinating early learning program Early Achievers activities.
- Preparing early learning program staff for data collection. The rating process for these early learning programs is streamlined with a focus on teacher-child interactions and early learning environments as measured by ERS-R and CLASS.
- Grantees/contractors can contact DCYF for information on available ERS-R and CLASS training.

Recordkeeping

The following records must be kept on site by early learning programs:

- All signed agreements, including the Early Achievers services agreement.

- All receipts, records and documentation of use of QI Awards (must be kept for seven years).
- A copy of the Needs-Based Grant application spend plan and all receipts, records and documentation of how Needs-Based Grant funding were used (must be kept for seven years).
- All parent/guardian consents for children to participate in evaluation.

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

Notification Requirements

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

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

How Address and Ownership Changes Affect Early Achievers Participation

Change in Ownership

Providers who have a change in ownership during any stage of Early Achievers participation must contact QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov. DCYF staff will work with the provider to determine how the change of ownership affects 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.

Change of Address

Beginning July 1, 2019 when a rated ECEAP site changes classroom locations to a comparable or improved space within the same facility, a rerating is not required outside of the regular rating and renewal cycle. A rated ECEAP site that moves to a new facility may keep their facility rating by requesting a baseline assessment*. A baseline assessment can be requested by emailing QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov. The baseline assessment is an observational visit to ensure the new classroom space is of comparable or improved environmental quality. If a provider fails to notify the department within six months of a move, the Early Achievers rating will change from the posted rated level to "Participating, Not Yet Rated" and the provider will no longer receive tiered reimbursement incentives until a new rating is completed. Providers that submit a request to re-rate or renew their existing rating will be considered in compliance with this requirement and do not need to complete a baseline assessment.

Beginning July 1, 2019, rated family child care homes that move to a new location may keep their existing rating if they request a baseline assessment within six months of the new license taking effect. A baseline assessment* can be requested by emailing QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov. If a provider fails to notify the department within six months of a move, the Early Achievers rating will change from the posted rated level to "Participating, Not Yet Rated" and the provider will no longer receive tiered reimbursement incentives until a new rating is completed. Providers that submit a request to re-rate or renew their existing rating will be considered in compliance with this requirement and do not need to complete a baseline assessment.

*Baseline assessments use the Environment Rating Scale-Third Edition (ERS-3) to provide participants with information about program strengths and inform the development of quality improvement goals. The results of this assessment do not affect the early learning program's rating. If the provider chooses to request a re-rate or renewal rating instead of a baseline assessment, the results of that evaluation will become the program's new rating level. If, after requesting a baseline assessment, the provider's renewal window opens up, the provider may withdraw their baseline assessment request and submit a renewal request without any negative consequences.

Child care centers that do not serve ECEAP and move to a new location are considered new providers. Centers that move and accept subsidy will restart on the [new subsidy provider timeline](#).

Information Sharing

DCYF and UW are subject to chapter 42.56 RCW, the Public Records Act. Early Achievers participant records in the possession of DCYF or 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 DCYF, CCA of WA and UW Cultivate Learning 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 early learning program. 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

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

Early Learning Program 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 DCYF's website](#). This is the only logo use approved for an early learning program's website.

DCYF must be notified when the Early Achievers logo is used on an early learning program business website. The Early Achievers participant and their regional coordinator should contact DCYF by email at QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov before the logo is live on the website. Please place “Use of Early Achievers Logo” in the email subject line.

Early Learning Program Business Brochure/Flyer

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

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

Participants can work with their Early Achievers regional lead agency for support with family and community outreach. Early learning programs may also share their Early Achievers participation by accessing the many valuable outreach tools available online at <https://childcareawarewa.org/providers/>

Conflict of Interest

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

Criteria for Dismissal

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

Criteria for dismissal include:

- Not maintaining good standing with licensing: good standing is defined as having an active license that is not suspended, revoked or on probation.
- Changes in ages served: early learning program no longer serves children birth to age five due to provider preference or DCYF licensing enforcement action.
- Changes in early learning program enrollment: no children ages birth to five enrolled for 60 calendar days.
- Providing false information on the Early Achievers application or any participation documents.
- Not meeting Early Achievers active participation expectations: failure to return calls, keep appointments or submit required paperwork, including the Quality Improvement Award Funds Use report.
- Not fully participating in Early Achievers coaching services, including participation in on-site coaching and creation of a QIP based on evaluation data and Early Achievers Quality Standards.
- Misuse of Needs-Based Grant or QI Award funds.
- Not maintaining all records, including receipts and documentation of the use of Needs-Based Grants or QI Award funds on-site for seven years.

- Not reporting changes to Early Achievers regional lead agency that may render the early learning program ineligible for Early Achievers participation.
- Unprofessional conduct and behavior with Early Achievers representatives or DCYF staff.
- Not following the Early Achievers Operating Guidelines or other administrative and statutory guidelines issued by any local, state or federal government agency.

Procedure for Dismissal

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

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

Please note: In the event that Early Achievers dismissal is triggered by early learning program licensing status, DCYF is responsible for dismissal as outlined in Eligibility: Licensing Status.

Obligations of Participants upon Dismissal or Withdrawal from Early Achievers

Early learning programs 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 early learning program rating certificate, from early learning program premises, website and all promotional materials.
- If an early learning program has voluntarily withdrawn from Early Achievers, they are obligated to finalize their withdrawal in an email sent to DCYF at QRIS@dcyf.wa.gov.

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

Reapplication to Early Achievers

This section outlines the steps that an early learning program 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 dismissal.

Eligibility and Process for Reapplication – No Waiting Period

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

- Early learning program was withdrawn due to:
 - Address or ownership change.
 - Early learning program closure—non-licensing reasons.
 - Low or no enrollment.
 - Change in licensed capacity or ages served.
 - Voluntary withdrawal.

In order to reapply, early learning programs must complete a new Early Achievers Registration. Early learning program information will not be saved from prior participation.

Early learning programs that reapply within 12 months will retain all current participation information, including rated level and timeline requirements. Participants returning within 12 months of withdrawal will not resume the timeline where they left off at the time of withdrawal. For example, if an early learning program withdraws after six months of participation and decides to reenter into Early Achievers three months later, the program would be in its ninth month of enrollment upon reentry. Early learning programs are not due any tiered reimbursement or QI Awards for the period when they were withdrawn.

Circumstances Requiring One-Year Waiting Period

In the event that an early learning program is dismissed from Early Achievers for the following reasons, the early learning program must wait 12 months from the date of dismissal to reapply:

- 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 Achievers 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 DCYF staff.
- Early learning program 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.

Glossary of Terms

Active Participation	An early learning program that responds to communications, participates fully and demonstrates program growth based on consultation and coaching.
Certified for Payment Only	Child care early learning programs 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 .
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 with less than 75 percent Head Start/ECEAP slots. For more information, visit www.childcareawarewa.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 early learning program’s on-site evaluation for rating. Early learning program CLASS scores make up 40 percent of the total Early Achievers Quality Standards points.
Coach	All early learning programs will be assigned a coach who will work with them to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigate the Early Achievers participation process • Help early learning programs prepare for data collection • Identify goals based on evaluation data and Early Achievers Quality Standards • Make plans to achieve goals • Access resources • Implement quality improvements • Help early learning programs implement sustainable practices Coaches are highly trained early learning professionals with experience and education in early childhood education and participate in ongoing professional development. CCA of WA provides coaching services, unless the program has more than 75 percent Head Start or ECEAP slots, in which case the Head Start Grantee/ECEAP Contractor will provide coaches.

<p>Community Liaison</p>	<p>The Community Liaison is a member of the UW evaluation team that supports the early learning program and the Data Collectors to have a successful visit. The Community Liaison checks in before the Data Collectors and works with the Early Achievers Contact to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the on-site visit and answer any early learning program questions and concerns • Review the completed Interactive Rating Readiness Tool with the early learning program • Confirm that all early learning program documentation and files are ready and in place for data collection • Gather information for Data Collectors about the early learning program layout, including early learning program maps, classroom schedules and other pertinent logistical information
<p>Contractor</p>	<p>Contractors oversee Washington State ECEAP Programs. In Early Achievers, a Contractor holds the <i>Grantee/Contractor Tab</i> for some sites that offer ECEAP services and uses this function to verify employment, assign early learning program designees and approve applications for Early Achievers.</p>
<p>Data Collector</p>	<p>The Data Collector is a member of the UW evaluation team responsible for data collection. Data Collectors visit early learning programs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct observations including ERS and CLASS • Review records and documentation • Conduct staff interviews
<p>Early Achievers</p>	<p>Early Achievers is Washington’s quality, rating and improvement system (QRIS) and is designed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support child care providers to provide high-quality care by providing resources including training, coaching and incentives • Help parents and caregivers find high-quality child care and early learning programs that fit their needs • Ensure that children have high-quality early learning experiences that help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school and life
<p>Early Achievers Contact(s)</p>	<p>The primary early learning program contact responsible for oversight and completion of all Early Achievers activities. Early learning programs may appoint a second Early Achievers contact assist in participation on behalf of the early learning program. Designation of a second contact is optional.</p>
<p>Environment Rating Scale Revised Edition (ERS-R)</p>	<p>The ERS-R 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 early learning program on-site evaluation for rating. Early learning program ERS scores make up 20 percent of the total Early Achievers Quality Standards points.</p>

Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

Environment Rating Scale Third Edition (ERS-3)	The ERS-3 is an observation-based assessment that measures classroom/family home child care environment quality focused on child engagement in the learning environment and teacher-child interactions. The ERS-3 is used in sites that request a baseline assessment and sites that move and wish to maintain their rating.
Early Learning Program	In this document, early learning program refers to the participating early learning facility.
Grantee	Responsible for oversight of Head Start/Early Head Start Programs. In Early Achievers, a Grantee holds the <i>Grantee/Contractor Tab</i> for some sites that provide Head Start services and uses this function to verify employment, assign early learning program designees and approve applications for Early Achievers.
Interactive Rating Readiness Tool (IRRT)	The Interactive Rating Readiness Tool (IRRT) is a document that helps early learning programs prepare for full data collection and ensure that all requirements are in place before on-site evaluation visits occur. Participants complete the IRRT as part of their Early Achievers Request for On-Site Evaluation Application.
MERIT	Washington’s Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT) is used to document and recognize the professional achievements of early care and education and school-age professionals. MERIT is the source of evidence during evaluation for staff education qualifications for early learning program Professional Development & Training. Use of MERIT is a requirement for Early Achievers Participation.
Minimum Thresholds	An early learning program must achieve designated minimum CLASS and ERS scores in order to achieve a rating of Level 3, regardless of total early learning program points earned. Each assessed child care early learning program/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 early learning programs must have in order to be rated Levels 3-5. Early learning programs that do not meet the minimum thresholds will receive a rating of Level 2.
Non-School-Age Children	Non-school-age is defined as children ages six and under who are not enrolled in Kindergarten or grade school.
On-Site Evaluation	Early learning programs participate in on-site evaluation conducted by the University of Washington in order to earn an early learning program rating. On-site evaluation includes ERS and CLASS observations, review of records and documentation and staff interviews.
Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)	All Level 3-5 early learning programs will create a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) in partnership with their coaches based on early learning program evaluation results, ERS-R and CLASS scores, components of the Quality Standards and overall early learning program rating. The QIP is a plan that includes goals, action steps to achieve goals, timelines and resources needed.

Early Achievers Participant Operating Guidelines

Quality Standards	The Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System Standards (Quality Standards) is a comprehensive, research-based framework to support positive outcomes in early learning settings. There are four Quality Standard 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. Early learning program ratings are based on total points earned during evaluation on the Quality 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 early learning program 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. All licensed or certified providers receiving WCCC funds for non-school-age children must participate in Early Achievers.