

Capacity, Ratio and Supervision in Center Early Learning Programs-Key Elements for Success

Slide #1 Welcome

Welcome to this course titled, **“Capacity, Ratio and Supervision in Center Early Learning Programs-Key Elements for Success”**.

This course is developed as part of the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (or DCYF) alignment process, to prepare providers and licensors in their understanding of the “why”, the “what” and the “how” of complying with the updated Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs (referred to in each course as the Foundational Quality Standards).

Slide #2 Helpful Hints

WA DCYF is pleased to present this e-Learning course! To help provide a positive learning experience for you, please take a moment to review the following “Helpful Hints” summary, detailing what you can expect from this course. A complete listing of Helpful Hints has been added to the Resources section of your learner’s screen for reference.

- If you would like to access and review the full course text, please visit the Resources section of your learner’s screen. You can view, print, or download a full version of the course text that is narrated within each module. The full text will be included in each course and listed as the first resource in the Resources section of your course frame.
- The time to complete the course will depend on the course topic and the pace at which you advance through the slides.
- To help you get the most out of the course, settings are in place to prevent users from skipping ahead through the slides. You can advance through the course when the narration for each slide concludes by selecting the “Next” button, or, go back to review material already presented by selecting the “Previous” button.
- Web links and additional resources will be utilized in some of the courses to enhance your learning experience. We hope you will take time to explore them to further develop your knowledge about the topics being presented.

Slide #3 Introduction

This course is designed to introduce you to the updated Washington Administrative Code or WAC, as well as outline strategies and examples of WAC compliance. Updated WACs will be detailed in each course as a reference and a full listing of the WAC is included in the Resources section of your learner’s screen. You can print or download this resource at any time, either as a reference while you complete this course, or as a resource after the course is completed.

Slide #4 Learning Outcomes

This course will help early learning professionals understand how to meet, assess for, and demonstrate ongoing compliance with the Foundational Quality Standards.

Upon completion of this course, participants will:

- Understand who is allowed to have unsupervised access to a child in care in a center early learning program
- Know the requirements for staff-to-child ratios for all early learning activities
- Recognize how active supervision positively impacts the safety of children in care
- Be familiar with how capacity is determined for a center early learning program indoor space

Slide #5 Guiding Principles

As we cover the material in this course, please keep in mind the following Guiding Principles. We will revisit these at the end of the course to “check in” with you and give you an opportunity to assess your understanding and application of the course content.

Guiding Principles:

- Center early learning programs must always consider capacity, group size, and staff-to-child ratio throughout daily routines and off-site activities.
- Active and engaged supervision by early learning providers is essential in keeping children safe.
- Water activities place children at a higher risk for injury and require an increased level of supervision to ensure child safety.

Slide #6 Terms and Definitions

Take a moment to review and familiarize yourself with the following terms and definitions. For your reference, a listing of these terms has been added to the Resources section of your learner’s screen. You can access the list at any time by visiting the Resources section of your learner’s screen. You can download the file to keep as a future reference or print as a desk guide.

Active supervision or **actively supervise** means a heightened standard of care beyond supervision. This standard requires an early learning provider to see and hear the children they are responsible for during higher risk activities. The provider must be able to prevent or instantly respond to unsafe or harmful events.

Capacity means the maximum number of children an early learning provider is authorized by the department to have in care at any given time. This includes any children on-site at the early learning program and any children in transit to or from the program or other activities such as field trips while the children are signed in to the care of the program.

Early learning professionals are all early learning providers, child care licensing staff, and other professionals in the early learning field.

Early learning program space means the licensed indoor and outdoor space on the premises approved by the department for the purpose of providing licensed child care.

Early learning program staff refers to all persons who work, substitute, or volunteer in an early learning program during hours when children are or may be present, excluding licensees.

Early learning provider or **provider** refers to an early learning licensee or designee who works in an early learning program during hours when children are or may be present. Designees include center directors, assistant directors, program supervisors, lead teachers, assistants, aides and volunteers.

Center early learning program is a facility providing regularly scheduled care for a group of children birth through twelve years of age for periods of less than twenty-four hours a day, pursuant to RCW **43.216.010(1)(a)** (child day care center).

Center early learning program licensee or **center licensee** means an entity licensed and authorized by the department to operate a center early learning program.

Infant is a child birth through eleven months of age.

Preschool-age children means children thirty months through six years of age not attending kindergarten or elementary school.

School-age children means a child not less than five years of age through twelve years of age who is attending kindergarten or elementary school.

Toddler means a child twelve months of age through twenty-nine months of age.

RCW means Revised Code of Washington.

WAC means Washington Administrative Code.

Water activities means early learning program activities in which enrolled children swim or play in a body of water that poses a risk for drowning for children. Water activities do not include using sensory tables.

Slide #7 Course Introduction

Across the State of Washington, there are approximately 1,700 licensed or certified center early learning programs, providing child care slots for just over 118,000 children birth through twelve years of age.

While most of the aligned WAC has been written to encompass both family home and center early learning programs, this content area of the WAC contains requirements that are specific to each individual type of early learning program.

DCYF recognized that family home and center programs have some strong differences in this area, with different group sizes and age mixing, as well as physical set up of the programs. As a result, the content areas of supervision, capacity, ratio, and group size have WACs written specifically to address the uniqueness of each provider type. These Foundational Quality Standards contain important details and information for all center early learning providers and their staff, as well as for licensors. Quite comprehensive in scope, they provide a wealth of straightforward information about how to demonstrate, and assess for, compliance with the WAC.

The following WACs will be reviewed in this learning module:

- WAC 110-300-0345 Supervising children
- WAC 110-300-0350 Supervising children during water activities
- WAC 110-300-0354 Indoor early learning program space capacity
- WAC 110-300-0356 Center capacity, ratio, and group size
- WAC 110-300-0357 Center mixed age grouping capacity, ratio, and group size

Slide #8 WAC 110-300-0345

Supervision is an indicator of quality¹ in child care early learning programs. It is also a primary foundational service early learning programs provide to children in their care.

Caring for Our Children, 3rd Edition², states the importance of supervision very clearly in Standard 2.2.0.1 Methods of Supervision of Children: “Supervision is basic to safety and the prevention of injury and maintaining quality child care”.

¹ Fiene, R. (2002). *13 Indicators of Quality*. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and Health Resources and Services Administration/Maternal and Child Health Bureau U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/13-indicators-quality-child-care-research-update>

² Caring for Our Children, 3rd Edition. National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs http://nrckids.org/files/CFOC3_updated_final.pdf

Slide #9 WAC 110-300-0345 continued

WAC 110-300-0345 specifies which persons an early learning provider may allow to have unsupervised access to a child in their care. Let's review section (1) to find out more about this.

WAC 110-300-0345 Supervising children.

(1) An early learning provider must only allow the following persons to have unsupervised access to a child in care:

- (a) That child's own parent or guardian;**
- (b) Licensees or early learning program staff authorized by the department in chapter [110-06](#) WAC;**
- (c) A government representative including an emergency responder who has specific and verifiable authority for access, supported by documentation; and**
- (d) A person authorized in writing or over the phone by that child's parent such as a family member, family friend, or the child's therapist or health care provider.**

Preventing unauthorized persons from having unsupervised access to children creates a safeguard that protects children while in the care of an early learning program. It is the responsibility of the center early learning program staff to be familiar with these requirements to ensure that only approved individuals are allowed to be unsupervised with children in their care.

Slide #10 WAC 110-300-0345 continued

The section of the WAC referenced in subsection (b) relates to DCYF background checks. For more information on this topic, select the Background Checks link shown here to review the complete chapter.

DCYF also has a page on their website dedicated to background check information. Navigate to the [dcyf.wa.gov](https://www.dcyf.wa.gov) site for additional information about requirements, fingerprint processing, and payment.³

³ Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families. (2018). *Background Check Requirements*. Retrieved from <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/background-checks>

Slide #11 WAC 110-300-0345 continued

Research shows staffing ratios and group size are some of the best indicators of quality child care and they significantly affect many other health and safety issues.⁴

Section (2) of this Foundational Quality Standard begins by informing early learning providers that they must meet capacity, group size, mixed age grouping, and staff-to-child ratios when children are in their care.

Subsections (a) through (g) go on to list some of the specific situations where these requirements must be met. Capacity and staff-to-child ratios are dependent upon many factors in a center early learning program, such as usable floor space, the amount and types of materials available, group size, and the ages of children in care.

Slide #12 WAC 110-300-0345 continued

Let's review the requirements contained in this section.

WAC 110-300-0345 Supervising children.

(2) An early learning provider must meet capacity, group size, mixed age grouping, and staff-to-child ratios while children are in care. This includes, but is not limited to:

- (a) Indoor and outdoor play activities;**
- (b) Off-site activities;**
- (c) During transportation;**
- (d) Meal times;**
- (e) Rest periods;**
- (f) Evening or overnight care; and**
- (g) When children are on different floor levels of the early learning program.**

Each of these activities and situations will require center early learning program staff to be continually aware of many factors, including how many children are present and in

⁴ Fiene, R. (2002). 13 Indicators of Quality. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and Health Resources and Services Administration/Maternal and Child Health Bureau U.S. Department of Health and Human Services <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/13-indicators-quality-child-care-research-update>.

care, the ages of the children in care, group size, and the type of activity or situation that the children are engaged in.

Slide #13 WAC 110-300-0345 continued

The purpose of supervision is to minimize the risk of harm to a child. When the center early learning provider is aware of and involved with children and their environment, they are better able to anticipate and intervene to safeguard the well-being of children in care. Let's review section (3) for detailed guidance on supervision of children in care.

WAC 110-300-0345 Supervising children.

(3) An early learning provider must supervise children in care by:

- (a) Scanning the environment looking and listening for both verbal and nonverbal cues to anticipate problems and plan accordingly;**
- (b) Visibly checking children on many occasions with little time in between;**
- (c) Positioning him or herself to supervise all areas accessible to children;**
- (d) Attending to children and being aware of what children are doing at all times;**
- (e) Being available and able to promptly assist or redirect a child as necessary; and**

(f) Considering the following when deciding whether increased supervision is needed:

- (i) Ages of children;**
- (ii) Individual differences and abilities of children;**
- (iii) Layout of the indoor and outdoor licensed space and play area;**
- (iv) The risk associated with the activities children are engaged in; and**
- (v) Any nearby hazards including those in the licensed or unlicensed space.**

Slide #14 WAC 110-300-0345

The days of center early learning providers can be full of demands, often requiring providers to balance supervision of children with the many other responsibilities they have. Subsection (4) provides guidance on when an early learning provider may temporarily undertake other activities while still attending to children.

WAC 110-300-0345 Supervising children.

(4) An early learning program staff member may undertake other activities for a temporary time period when not required to be providing active supervision required under subsection (5)(c) of this section. Such activities include, but are not limited to, cleaning up after an activity or preparing items for a new activity. This early learning staff member must remain in visual or auditory range and be available and able to respond if needed.

Slide #15 WAC 110-300-0345 continued

For example, a center early learning provider needs to prepare for a painting activity at the table with the preschool class. One small group of children is working in the block area, while another group is looking at books on the rug. Both groups of preschool aged children are visible to the early learning provider from the table. The early learning provider can set up the paint materials at the table while visually monitoring the children engaged in the activity stations in the room.

Slide #16 WAC 110-300-0345 continued

According to the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness, active supervision “requires focused attention and intentional observation of children at all times.” The document containing this information recommends and describes the following strategies to implement active supervision:

- Set up the environment
- Position staff
- Scan and count
- Listen
- Anticipate children’s behavior
- Engage and redirect

This document also provides three vignettes that early learning professionals can use to practice identifying active supervision opportunities, a self-reflection tool, and an active supervision implementation plan. You can download a PDF version of this resource by selecting this link. eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov⁵

Slide #17 WAC 110-300-0345 continued

There are times in a center early learning program when children need, and are required, to be actively supervised. DCYF has defined active supervision, or actively supervise, as meaning a heightened standard of care beyond supervision. This standard requires an early learning provider to see and hear the children they are responsible for during higher risk activities. The provider must be able to prevent or instantly respond to unsafe or harmful events. This is important as it allows the early learning provider to anticipate and be ready to intervene in situations where higher risk factors are involved.

Please refer to WAC 110-300-0270 for supervision requirements for overnight care. This WAC will be covered in a future learning course.

Let's explore section (5) to learn more about active supervision requirements.

WAC 110-300-0345 Supervising children.

(5) An early learning provider must:

- (a) Not use devices such as a baby monitor, video monitors, or mirrors in place of supervision, unless used pursuant to WAC [110-300-0270\(5\)](#);**
- (b) Be able to hear when doors in the immediate area are opened to prevent children from leaving unsupervised;**

(c) Actively supervise children when the children:

- (i) Interact with pets or animals;**
- (ii) Engage in water or sand play;**
- (iii) Play in an area in close proximity to a body of water;**
- (iv) Use a safe route to access an outdoor play area not immediately adjacent to the early learning program;**
- (v) Engage in planned activities in the kitchen;**
- (vi) Ride on public transportation;**
- (vii) Engage in outdoor play; and**
- (viii) During field trips.**

⁵ Administration for Children and Families. (N.D.). *Active Supervision*. Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/active-supervision.pdf>

WAC 110-300-0345 Supervising children.

(d) Ensure no infant or child is left unattended during:

- (i) Diapering;**
- (ii) Bottle feeding; or**
- (iii) Tummy time.**

(e) Provide developmentally appropriate supervision to children while bathing.

Slide #18 WAC 110-300-0350 continued

Let's explore subsection (5)(b) a little bit. This subsection states that an early learning provider must be able to hear when doors in the immediate area are opened to prevent children from leaving unsupervised. This WAC language is different than the current rules, which require a center early learning provider to have a method on exit doors to alert the licensee or staff when an exit door is opened, and states the licensee may use a chime, bell, alarm, or other device as an alert method.

Slide #19 WAC 110-300-0350 continued

Center licensees and licensors may find themselves asking, "Will alerts still be required on an exit door in a center when this WAC goes into effect?"

While WAC 110-300-0345(5)(b) does not specifically require an alert on an exit door, or on doors in the immediate area, it does require that the provider be able to hear when doors in the immediate area are opened. Center providers who have had success with using door alarms or other methods to sound an alert on exit doors may find it makes sense to continue to use this method to ensure they are able to hear when doors in the immediate area are opened.

If a center provider chooses to use another method to be able to hear when doors in the immediate area are being opened, they will need to be able to demonstrate to licensors how they are meeting this requirement.

Slide #20 WAC 110-300-0350 continued

When licensors are conducting site visits and are observing for compliance with this requirement, there are several steps they can take to assist with this. Licensors can begin by asking the center provider and their staff what method they are using to be able to hear when doors in the immediate area are being opened.

If the staff report that the door is squeaky and they can always hear when it is opened, the licensor can ask the staff to demonstrate. The licensor should pay attention to how

far the door opens before the squeaking begins or stops, checking to see if children might have a chance to slip out unnoticed before the squeaking begins or ceases.

The licensor may also want to pay attention to how easy or difficult it is to hear the squeaking door during various activities, such as during quiet time, circle time, music time, outdoor play time, etc.

The next step is for the licensor to take time to observe the program in action, checking to see if and when the provider is able to hear and notice the door being opened.

If the licensor notices that the provider heard parents or staff entering or leaving through a door in the immediate area during quieter activities, but failed to notice this exit during louder activities, the licensor can use this as an opportunity to provide technical assistance. The provider may not have been aware that he or she was able to hear doors open only during quieter activities, and this feedback and technical assistance can provide them with an opportunity to make some changes to their environment to ensure that they are able to remain compliant with this requirement.

Slide #21 WAC 110-300-0350

Water play can be an enjoyable and engaging activity for children, promoting gross motor skills and offering a great form of exercise. At the same time, water can also pose a serious safety hazard to children.

On their HealthyChildren.org website, the AcademyofPediatrics.org states that drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury-related death in children between ages one and four. The CDC reports the following statistics on their [Unintentional Drowning: Get the Facts](#) webpage:

“Children ages 1 to 4 have the highest drowning rates. In 2014, among children 1 to 4 years old who died from an unintentional injury, one-third died from drowning. Among children ages 1 to 4, most drownings occur in home swimming pools. Drowning is responsible for more deaths among children 1-4 than any other cause except congenital anomalies (or birth defects). Among those 1-14, fatal drowning remains the second-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death behind motor vehicle crashes.”

Slide #22 WAC 110-300-0350 continued

Another startling statistic presented by the CDC is that “For every child who dies from drowning, another five receive emergency department care for nonfatal submersion injuries.”⁶

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreationalafety/water-safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html>.

DCYF recognizes the importance of water safety in center early learning program environments. In the updated Foundational Quality Standards, you will find a WAC dedicated solely to the supervision of children during water activities.

Section (1) of WAC 110-300-0350 mandates that early learning providers maintain all of the supervision requirements that were just reviewed in WAC 110-300-0345, as well as the requirements of this section we are going to be reviewing next.

WAC 110-300-0350 Supervising children during water activities.

(1) During water activities, an early learning provider must meet all supervision requirements of this section and WAC [110-300-0345](#).

DCYF defines water activities as early learning program activities in which enrolled children swim or play in a body of water that poses a risk for drowning for children. Water activities do not include using sensory tables.

Slide #23 WAC 110-300-0350 continued

Section (2) focuses on the requirements for supervision of infants, toddlers, and children with special needs during water activities. Subsection 2(a), ensuring a one-to-one staff to child ratio with infants, complies with Standard 1.1.1.5 from Caring for Our Children.

WAC 110-300-0350 Supervising children during water activities.

(2) During water activities, an early learning provider must:

- (a) Ensure a one-to-one (1:1) staff-to-child ratio for infants;**
- (b) Hold or have continuous touch of infants, nonambulatory toddlers, and children with special needs as required; and**
- (c) Keep toddlers within arm's length.**

(3) An early learning provider must have written permission for water activities from each child's parent or guardian.

Slide #24 WAC 110-300-0350 continued

Requiring written permission for water play is important for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, this allows parents to remain the primary decision maker about the level of risk they are willing to allow their child to engage in when they are not the primary caregiver.

This also opens communication between the center early learning program and the parents, allowing the provider to share with parents that they recognize any water

activity comes with additional risk, and gives the provider an opportunity to inform parents of steps that will be taken to ensure child safety during water play activities.

This also allows parents to share any concerns they may have and give them an opportunity to ask questions.

Written permission also provides documentation of parental consent for a child to participate in a water activity, which will be important to have in the event that a child sustains an injury while engaged in water play. This is documentation that licensors will want to be sure and look for when conducting site visits and reviewing child files.

Slide #25 WAC 110-300-0350 continued

Lifeguards and additional staff members provide further layers of protection for children when they are engaged in water play or water activities.

The additional staff members lower the staff-to-child ratios, increasing supervision capabilities. Research has found lower child to staff ratios are associated with fewer situations involving potential danger.⁷ The presence of a lifeguard ensures professional-level assistance is ready and available should a water rescue become necessary.

WAC 110-300-0350 Supervising children during water activities.

(4) For water activities on or off the early learning program premises, where the water is more than twenty-four inches deep, an early learning provider must ensure:

(a) A certified lifeguard is present and on duty; and

(b) At least one additional staff member than would otherwise be required is present to help actively supervise if the children are preschool age or older.

(5) An early learning provider must have life-saving equipment readily accessible during water activities if a pool is six feet or more in any direction and two feet or more in depth. Life-saving equipment may include a ring buoy and rope, a rescue tube, or a throwing line and a shepherd's hook that will not conduct electricity.

⁷ <https://aspe.hhs.gov/basic-report/13-indicators-quality-child-care-research-update>.

Slide #26 WAC 110-300-0350 continued

Section (5) aligns with Standard 6.3.2.1 from Caring for our Children which states “Each swimming pool more than six feet in width, length, or diameter should be provided with a ring buoy and rope, a rescue tube, or a throwing line and a shepherd’s hook that will not conduct electricity.”

Slide #27 WAC 110-300-0350 continued

Not only does water play increase the risk of harm to a child, Caring for Our Children states “injuries are more likely to occur when a child’s surroundings or routine changes. Activities outside the facility may pose increased risk for injury.” Section (6) addresses supervision requirements for center early learning programs when taking children off-site where a body of water is accessible.

WAC 110-300-0350 Supervising children during water activities.

(6) If an early learning provider takes children off-site to an area with an accessible body of water more than four inches deep (for example, a park with a lake or stream) but children are not engaging in a water activity, there must be:

- (a) At least one more staff person than required in the staff-to-child ratio;**
- and**
- (b) At least one attending staff person must be able to swim.**

Slide #28 WAC 110-300-0350 continued

The requirements for demonstrating and assessing for compliance with this WAC are specific, detailed, and thorough. Before engaging children in any onsite or offsite water activities, center early learning providers **MUST** ensure that they have the ability to meet all of the specific supervision requirements of this section.

Let’s add to your toolbox! Visit HealthyChildren.org and the AcademyofPediatrics.org websites. Bookmark or download at least one document from each site that provides useful safety information. Early learning providers can share this information with parents and other center early learning providers, while licensors may find useful information to share with providers and other licensors.

Side #29 Test Your Learning!

Before we continue, let’s test your learning. Review the question and select the best response.

During which activities must a center early learning provider actively supervise children in care?

- A. Water play
- B. During outdoor play
- C. When interacting with animals
- D. All of the above

Slide #30 Test Your Learning! continued

During which of the following water activity scenarios must a certified lifeguard be present?

- A. A class of three-year-olds visit a forestry center where there is a shallow creek, about 12 inches deep
- B. The early learning program set up a wading pool on-site for the toddler's class to play in where the water depth is 8 inches
- C. A group of preschoolers is taking swim lessons for a week at a local pool where the depth is 3 feet
- D. All of the above

Slide #31 WAC 110-300-0354

WAC 110-300-0354 addresses the requirements for Indoor early learning program space capacity, defining how capacity is determined for an early learning program.

WAC 110-300-0354 Indoor early learning program space capacity.

(1) To define capacity, licensed indoor early learning program space must have a minimum of thirty-five square feet per child in attendance and further comply with the requirements of this chapter.

(a) Center early learning program space must provide fifteen additional square feet for each infant or toddler using a crib or playpen if the crib or playpen is located or placed in the sleeping or play area.

(b) Floor space under tables, desks, chairs, and other equipment used as part of children's activities must be included in the overall capacity.

(c) Office or kitchen space that is inaccessible to children and not intended for their use must not be included in the overall capacity.

(d) Napping areas may be used as early learning program space if mats and cots are removed when not in use and children have free access to the area.

Slide #32 WAC 110-300-0354

There are certain areas within a center early learning program that are not counted as usable space for children in care. These are spaces that serve other purposes or may be unsafe for children. Let's review what these areas are.

WAC 110-300-0354 Indoor early learning program space capacity.

(2) The following indoor space must not be counted in the overall capacity:

- (a) Unlicensed space;**
- (b) Hallway space that is used for emergency evacuation or is not approved to be used for program activities;**
- (c) Bathrooms and diaper changing areas (including twenty-four inches surrounding diaper changing areas and handwashing sink, unless the diaper changing area has a two foot high barrier);**

WAC 110-300-0354 Indoor early learning program space capacity.

- (d) Laundry areas;**
- (e) Closets;**
- (f) Stairways; and**
- (g) Floor space occupied by shelves, built-in cabinets, file cabinets, desks, or other office equipment not intended to be accessible to children.**

Slide #33 WAC 110-300-0354

Play is essential for the growth and development of young children. When it is not possible for children to play outdoors, the alternative is to play indoors. One way to offer indoor gross motor play opportunities is to license a large, indoor space designed to supplement the requirements of outdoor play space. Section (3) addresses how this space is used for determining overall capacity of an early learning program.

WAC 110-300-0354 Indoor early learning program space capacity.

(3) A large, licensed indoor gross motor activity space may be used to supplement the requirements of outdoor program space, pursuant to WAC [110-300-0145](#), but must not be counted in the overall capacity if:

- (a) The space provides seventy-five square feet per child for the maximum number of children listed on the license or the provider rotates groups of children; and**
- (b) The space is safe and appropriate for activities otherwise performed in an outdoor play space.**

Slide #34 WAC 110-300-0354

For example, a center early learning program may have limited outdoor program space due to location in a busy neighborhood in an urban area. However, the building has a large multipurpose room that is used as an indoor “gymnasium” space for gross motor activities.

Slide #35 WAC 110-300-0356

Capacity, ratio, and group size can all have an impact on a child’s experience in care, as well as affecting child outcomes. WAC 110-300-0356 focuses on center early learning program capacity, ratio, and group size. Let’s start by reviewing the requirements contained in sections (1) and (2). These sections specify what factors are considered when determining capacity for a center early learning program.

WAC 110-300-0356 Center capacity, ratio, and group size.

(1) The department issues initial or nonexpiring center early learning provider licenses. The department will not issue a center license to care for more children than permitted by the rules in this chapter. The department may issue a license to care for fewer than the maximum allowable enrolled children. For each center, licenses state:

- (a) The maximum number of children that may be in care at any one time (total capacity);**
- (b) The licensed capacity for each space within the center licensed for use by children; and**
- (c) The age range of children allowed in care.**

(2) The department determines capacity for a center early learning program after considering:

- (a) Square footage of the early learning program;**
- (b) A provider's education and ongoing training;**
- (c) The age range of children requested or approved by the department;**
- (d) The amount of developmentally appropriate equipment, materials, and toys an early learning program can provide children to use;**
- (e) A provider's licensing history with the department; and**
- (f) The number of qualified staff available to meet staff-to-child ratios.**

It is important to point out that subsections (d) and (e) of section (2) are high-priority updates for DCYF. These two subsections address the amount of developmentally appropriate equipment, materials, and toys an early learning provider should have available for children to use and an early learning provider's previous licensing history with the department.

DCYF added these updates based on an overall perspective that, without these key components fostering a child's healthy growth, a child could suffer indirect harm to their overall development and future success.

DCYF also recognized that equipment, materials and toys are required in sufficient quantity to meet the basic needs of the children, and a previous licensing history provides a sound indicator for future success.

WAC 110-300-0356 Center capacity, ratio, and group size.

(3) A center licensee must not exceed the total capacity or age range stated on the child care license at any time except as provided in this section. All children on the premises, signed in to child care, on an off-site trip from the early learning program, or being transported by the early learning program staff are counted in capacity including the children of staff.

(a) A center licensee must receive department approval to care for a child with special needs, pursuant to WAC [110-300-0300](#), if the child is older than the maximum age identified on the license. A child with documented special needs may be in care up to age nineteen and must be counted in capacity and staff-to-child ratio.

Slide #37 WAC 110-300-0356

WAC 110-300-0356 Center capacity, ratio, and group size.

(b) A child with special needs who requires individualized supervision pursuant to WAC [110-300-0300](#) does not count in the staff-to-child ratio.

(c) A child who turns thirteen years old permitted by chapter [110-15](#) WAC must be counted in both capacity and staff-to-child ratio.

Slide #38 WAC 110-300-0356

Subsection (3)(a) references the WAC that outlines the requirements of an Individual Care Plan for children with special needs who are enrolled in an early learning program. You can review WAC 110-300-0300 for more information about Individual Care Plan requirements.

Subsection (3)(c) references chapter 110-15 WAC, which is regarding the Working Connections and Seasonal Child Care Subsidy Programs. You can find out more about each of these programs by accessing the following website: dshs.wa.gov

Slide #39 WAC 110-300-0356

Let's add to your toolbox! Navigate to WAC [110-300-0300](#), review the requirements of an Individual Care Plan, and bookmark the page for future reference.⁸

Now navigate to WAC [110-15](#), review the information on the Working Connections and Seasonal Child Care Subsidy Programs, and bookmark the page for future reference.⁹

WAC 110-300-0356 Center capacity, ratio, and group size.

(4) A center licensee must provide qualified staff to fulfill staffing requirements, staff-to-child ratios, group size, and mixed age grouping during operating hours, including off-site activities or when transporting children in care.

Slide #40 WAC 110-300-0356

WAC 110-300-0356 Center capacity, ratio, and group size.

(5) In each classroom or well-defined space, the maximum group size and ratio of center staff members to children, including children related to staff or the licensee, must be:

(a) Infants (birth through eleven months of age) with a:

(i) Maximum group size of eight with a ratio of one staff to four children (1:4);

(ii) Maximum group size of nine with a ratio of 1:3.

⁹

Working Connections and Seasonal Child Care Subsidy Programs, WAC 110-15,
<http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=110-15>

- (b) Toddlers (twelve through twenty-nine months of age) with a:
- (i) Maximum group size of fourteen with a ratio of 1:7;
 - (ii) Maximum group size of fifteen with a ratio of 1:5.
- (c) Preschoolers (thirty months through six years of age who are not attending kindergarten or elementary school) with a maximum group size of twenty with a ratio of 1:10; and
- (d) School-age children (five years through twelve years of age who are enrolled in or attending kindergarten or elementary school) with a maximum group size of thirty with a ratio of 1:15.

Slide #41 WAC 110-300-0356

WAC 110-300-0356 Center capacity, ratio, and group size.

(6) A center licensee may combine children of different age groups for periods of no more than the first two hours of the day or the last two hours of the day, not to exceed two hours in any given day, provided the staff-to-child ratio and group size designated for the youngest child in the mixed group are maintained.

Slide #42 WAC 110-300-0356

Section (6) provides allowance for mixed age groups at the beginning or end of the day. For example, a center early learning program may provide care until 6:00 pm each day, but most children may be picked up around 5:00 when the majority of parents get off from work. The remaining children in care after 5:00 pm can be combined into a mixed age group with appropriate staffing, which may allow for other early learning program staff to attend to other tasks or leave for the day.

WAC 110-300-0356 Center capacity, ratio, and group size.

- (7) Children at least five years old and enrolled in or attending kindergarten may be a part of the preschool or school-age group if developmentally appropriate and the child's parent or guardian agrees to this placement.
- (8) A center licensee must conduct activities for each group of children in a specific room or other defined space within a larger area.
- (9) A center licensee must provide additional staff as described in WAC [110-300-0350](#) when children are participating in water activities or activities near water.

Slide #43 WAC 110-300-0356

Before we move on, let's stop for a minute and talk about why staff-to-child ratios and group size are important in early learning programs.

Children learn in the context of relationships, and they benefit from social interactions with their peers. Research finds smaller groups are generally associated with more positive interactions and developmental outcomes.

One researcher states it well: "Group size and ratio of children to adults are limited to allow for one to one interaction, intimate knowledge of individual children, and consistent caregiving." ¹⁰

(10) When only one center staff is required to care for the only group of children on-site for up to an hour at the beginning or end of the day, the center licensee must ensure:

- (a) That staff member provides an appropriate level of supervision at all times to the children in care;**
- (b) That staff member is free of all other duties while providing care to children; and**
- (c) A second individual with a cleared background check is on-site and readily available to respond if needed, or the department approves an alternate plan.**

Slide #44 WAC 110-300-0356

It is important to make note of section (10), as it addresses the beginning and ending of an early learning programs' day, when attendance is typically lighter. During these times, often only one staff person is needed to provide care for the children in attendance.

This WAC allows for the children to be combined, with care being provided by one staff person, as long as a second individual with a cleared background is on-site and readily available to respond if needed. This allows for safety of both the children and the staff present in the center early learning program.

¹⁰ Bradley, R. H., D. L. Vandell. 2007. Child care and the well-being of children. *Arch Ped Adolescent Med* 161:669-76.

Slide # 45 Test Your Learning!

Before we continue, let's test your learning. Review the question and select the best response.

What is the required staff to child ratio for a group of 14 toddlers in a center early learning program?

- A. 1 staff to 4 children
- B. 1 staff to 7 children
- C. 1 staff to 10 children

Slide #46 Test Your Learning!

Review the scenario and determine whether a center early learning program may combine children from different age groups into one group and remain in compliance.

Around lunch time, many children in part-day care are picked up and classroom sizes are small. Can the early learning program combine age groups?

- Yes
- No

Slide #47 Test Your Learning!

Review the scenario and determine whether a center early learning program may combine children from different age groups into one group and remain in compliance.

A center early learning program opens at 6:30 am, though most children arrive around 7:45 a.m. Can the early learning program combine the age groups?

- Yes
- No

Slide # 48 WAC 110-300-0357

WAC 110-300-0357 is titled Center mixed age group capacity, ratio, and group size. Let's begin by reviewing section (1).

WAC 110-300-0357 Center mixed age group capacity, ratio, and group size.

(1) A center early learning program must do the following to mix age groups of children in care (in addition to any specific requirements of this section):

- (a) Meet the square footage and staff-to-child ratio requirements for the youngest child present in the group;**
- (b) Meet the health, safety, and developmental needs for all ages of children in the mixed group; and**
- (c) Inform the department of the center's mixed age group policy.**

Slide #49 WAC 110-300-0357

This WAC provides an exciting opportunity for center early learning programs to have classrooms that are made up of mixed age groups. DCYF's decision to add this age category was based on recommendations found in Caring from Our Children, Standard 1.1.1.2. This mixing of age groups will allow center programs to have greater flexibility in meeting the demands of infant and toddler care.

Early learning professionals will need to work closely with each other to ensure all requirements of mixed groupings are met.

Sections (2) and (3) address the requirements for mixed age groupings of children birth to thirty-six months. Let's review those requirements.

Slide #50 WAC 110-300-0357

WAC 110-300-0357 Center mixed age group capacity, ratio, and group size.

(2) A center early learning program must do the following to mix groups of children birth to thirty-six months old with a maximum group size of eight children:

- (a) Have at least two staff present with the group, consisting of one lead teacher and one other staff member qualified under this chapter; and**
- (b) Keep a staff-to-child ratio of 1:4.**

(3) A center early learning program must do the following to mix groups of children birth to thirty-six months old with a maximum group size of nine children:

- (a) Have at least three staff present with the group, consisting of one lead teacher and two other staff members qualified under this chapter; and**
- (b) Keep a staff-to-child ratio of 1:3.**

Let's continue by reviewing sections (4) and (5), which addresses mixed age-grouping for children twelve to thirty-six months in age.

WAC 110-300-0357 Center mixed age group capacity, ratio, and group size.

(4) A center early learning program must do the following to mix groups of children twelve to thirty-six months old:

- (a) Have at least two staff present with the group, consisting of one lead teacher and one other staff member qualified under this chapter; and**
- (b) Keep a staff-to-child ratio of 1:7 with a maximum group size of fourteen children.**

(5) A center early learning program must do the following to mix groups of children twelve to thirty-six months old:

- (a) Have at least three staff present with the group, consisting of one lead teacher and two other staff members qualified under this chapter; and**
- (b) Keep a staff-to-child ratio of 1:5 with a maximum group size of fifteen children.**

Slide #52 WAC 110-300-0357

Sections (6) and (7) address the mixed age groupings for children between thirty-six months through kindergarten.

WAC 110-300-0357 Center mixed age group capacity, ratio, and group size.

(6) A center early learning program must do the following to mix groups of children between thirty-six months old through kindergarten with a maximum group size of twenty children:

- (a) Have at least two staff present with the group, consisting of one lead teacher and one other staff member qualified under this chapter; and**
- (b) Keep a staff-to-child ratio of 1:10.**

(7) A center early learning program must do the following to mix groups of children between thirty-six months old through kindergarten with a maximum group size of twenty-six children:

- (a) Have at least three staff present with the group, consisting of one lead teacher and two other staff members qualified under this chapter; and**
- (b) Keep a staff-to-child ratio of 1:10.**

The final sections of this mixed age group WAC are (8) and (9) and they address the mixed groups of children ages four and one-half to nine years old.

WAC 110-300-0357 Center mixed age group capacity, ratio, and group size.

(8) A center early learning program must do the following to mix groups of children four and one-half to nine years old with a maximum group size of twenty children:

- (a) Have at least two staff present with the group, consisting of one lead teacher and one other staff member qualified under this chapter; and**
- (b) Keep a staff-to-child ratio of 1:10.**

(9) A center early learning program must do the following to mix groups of children four and one-half to nine years old with a maximum group size of twenty-six children:

- (a) Have at least three staff present with the group, consisting of one lead teacher and two other staff members qualified under this chapter; and**
- (b) Keep a staff-to-child ratio of 1:10.**

Slide #54 Test Your Learning!

Before we continue, let's test your learning. Review the question and select the best response.

Before caring for mixed age groups of children, a center early learning provider must comply with the following three requirements:

1. Meet the square footage and staff-to-child ratio requirements for the youngest child present in the group
2. Meet the health, safety, and developmental needs for all ages of children in the mixed group
3. Inform the department of the center's mixed age group policy

- True
- False

Slide #55 Test Your Learning!

Review the statement and select the best response.

Requirements for mixed age groups where children are birth through 36 months old include whether or not the children in care are mobile.

- True
- False

Slide #56 Closing

This concludes the content portion of this course! Thank you for your participation!

Before this course ends, please take a moment to reflect and set personal goals related to the following Guiding Principles and ways that each of the principles relate to early learning professionals.

Guiding Principles:

- Center early learning programs must always consider capacity, group size, mixed age grouping, and staff-to-child ratio throughout daily routines and off-site activities.
- Active and engaged supervision by early learning providers is essential in keeping children safe.
- Water activities place children at a higher risk for injury and require an increased level of supervision to ensure child safety.

What take-a-ways do you have? How will you change your practices as a result of participation in this learning module?

Slide #57 Course Evaluation

Please take a moment to answer the following end-of-course evaluation questions by selecting the appropriate choice.

This course improved my understanding of this course content.

- True
- False

Slide #58 Course Evaluation continued

The information presented in this course was clearly connected to the session and the Learning Outcomes.

- True
- False

Slide #59 Course Evaluation continued

There are opportunities for application of this course content in my role as an early learning professional.

- True
- False

Slide #60 Course Evaluation continued

I would recommend this course to others who work in the field.

- True
- False

Slide #61 End of Course

This concludes this course! If you have questions following this session, please contact your supervisor or licensor. We hope this course has been helpful in providing information about the WAC and how programs can meet the new standards with compliance.

Our goal is that all early learning professionals viewing this course have left with an increased understanding and knowledge of the updated WAC, and that you will be able to either assess programs for compliance or be able to maintain and demonstrate compliance. Be sure to visit the Learning Management System to review and select additional learning modules that are part of this series.