Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook

2020 Edition
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Acknowledgments

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Disclaimer

The materials available in this Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook are for informational purposes only. These materials are not intended to be relied upon as a comprehensive view of licensing regulations or legal advice. Each individual is responsible for understanding and following current Washington State laws and regulations. Current child care laws and rules can be found at chapters 43.216 Revised Code of Washington (RCW) [app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.216] and 110-300 Washington Administrative Code (WAC) [app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=110-300].
Introduction

The Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs (Chapter 110-300 WAC – app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=110-300) provides a practical framework for early learning professionals, including those who deliver as well as those who monitor services. The Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook is designed to support early learning programs and licensors alike with successful implementation of licensing standards. It does this by:

1. Highlighting selected foundational quality standards in Chapter 110-300 WAC,
2. Providing explanation of the “why” of selected standards, and
3. Sharing examples, tools and resources that can inform early learning professionals in their work.

The Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook is timely. After a multi-year process of review and revision, the Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs were implemented on August 1, 2019. Prior to the Foundational Quality Standards implementation, DCYF provided a year-long orientation and education series to support early learning professionals with the interpretation of the updated WACs.

The Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook is a product of DCYF’s continued commitment to provide ongoing support to early learning professionals and give families equitable access to quality early learning environments. This ensures that all children in the state of Washington receive the full benefits of high-quality care and early learning settings to support their safe, healthy and developmentally rich growth.

Children who spend time in high-quality child care have lasting benefits from the experience. Research indicates that children who receive high-quality early learning have better cognitive, language, emotional and social skills as they grow older. Additionally, research shows these children require less special education, progress further in school, have fewer interactions with the justice system and have higher earnings as adults.

The purpose of the Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook is to help support the success of all early learning professionals – early learning program providers and staff, licensors, coaches, health professionals, parents, guardians or community partners.
INTRODUCTION

Approach
The Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook is organized around the seven major WAC sections:

- Intent and Authority
- Child Outcomes
- Family Engagement and Partnerships
- Professional Development, and Training and Requirements
- Environment
- Interactions and Curriculum
- Program Administration and Oversight

The WACs, which are the regulations for implementing licensing, are grounded in the RCW at Chapter 43.216, which provides the legal authority for licensing and is available at apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw.

WACs are reinforced by policies and procedures that provide guidance and support for implementing licensing regulations. The Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook is part of the support for the Foundational Standards for Early Learning Programs. You can search Chapter 110-300 WAC online at apps.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=110-300.

The Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook focuses on the foundational quality standards – the WAC themselves – and is designed to interpret selected sections for clarity and consistency of licensing regulations. As you navigate each section of the Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook, you will see that relevant sections of the WAC are followed by information that helps to clarify why the bolded section is important and to provide examples, references and tools that can inform successful implementation.

There are references in the Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook to other important early learning programs sponsored by DCYF, such as Early Achievers and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). You can learn more about these programs by following links contained throughout this resource.

While all programs participating in Early Achievers and ECEAP are required to follow the Foundational Quality Standards, there are additional standards that these programs must achieve. The Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook does not address these additional standards or requirements.

Audience
The Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook is designed for those who are engaged in providing child care services and early learning programs. It is not intended to orient individuals or organizations who are considering entering the early learning field as it focuses on selected standards and does not seek to provide additional information about each and every standard that makes up Chapter 110-300 WAC.

Washington State has a mixed delivery early learning system representing different types of providers including family home, center, school age and outdoor programs. There are multiple early learning programs in our state, such as Montessori, Waldorf, ECEAP and Head Start.
The mixed delivery early learning programs offer a variety of settings, such as homes, school districts, non-profit and for-profit entities. While parents are choosing what type of provider, program and setting will meet their child’s needs, DCYF is making sure that all Washington children have equitable access to services that are high-quality, safe and healthy. We do that by promoting an adequate supply of care, ensuring our rules reflect best practices in health and safety and supporting our providers as professionals.

**History of Updated Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs**

In 2015, DCYF recognized our child care licensing rules were outdated, disorganized and internally conflicting. We embarked on an inclusive process, known as standards alignment. Family home providers, center providers and other stakeholders reviewed and updated our state’s child care licensing rules. The updated rules are a product of a collaborative four-year effort by representatives of all Washington providers. Thousands of providers, stakeholders, parents and early learning partners provided their input, feedback and public comments to draft the aligned rules together, creating the Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs. These licensing standards, which include both center and family home rules, acknowledge the uniqueness of settings and programs and ensure the alignment of quality and equity. The standards alignment process also helped providers and DCYF establish better partnership relationships based on trust, collaboration and transparent communication.

For further details on this historical journey of the Foundational Quality Standards (Chapter 110-300 WAC), please visit the online Foundational Quality Standards for Early Learning Programs Guidebook which will provide more information and additional resources at [www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/standards-alignment/events](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/early-learning-providers/standards-alignment/events).

To aid in locating helpful information, icons are included throughout the Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook to easily identify data and research, examples of compliance and early learning provider testimonials and resources. The guidebook also has a graphic to signify important things to remember.
Section Two: Child Outcomes
Child Outcomes

The Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook addresses only selected sections of the Foundational Quality Standards found in Chapter 110-300 WAC. This guidebook includes pertinent resources, current data and practical examples. It is not intended to offer a comprehensive view of Child Outcomes.

WAC 110-300-0055

Developmental screening and communication to parents or guardians.

(1) An early learning provider must inform parents or guardians about the importance of developmental screenings for each child from birth through age five.

(2) If not conducted on-site, an early learning provider must share information with parents or guardians about organizations that conduct developmental screenings such as a local business, school district, health care provider, specialist, or resources listed on the department website.

Caring adults involved in children’s lives informally observe and monitor children day-to-day to see how they are growing, learning, moving and behaving as they develop. Developmental screening looks more closely at this progress.

Developmental screening is used to determine if a child is at risk for cognitive, motor, communication and language or social and emotional delays. These delays may interfere with expected growth, learning and development, but there are opportunities for positive supports. For this reason, the licensing standards require an early learning provider to discuss the importance of developmental screenings with parents and guardians.

This information from Help Me Grow Washington is useful to help early learning professionals and families understand why this regulation is good for children:

“Developmental screening is important for ALL kids! 1 in 6 kids has a developmental delay, but only 30% of those kids are detected through parent observations and regular checkups. Often, the signs are hard to see, even for a professional.

Screening all kids regularly is the best way to catch delays early, when intervention is most effective. Even for families with kids developing on track, screening is a fast, flexible and fun way to learn about what’s coming next and what you can do to encourage healthy growth!”

There are many ways to share information with parents and guardians about developmental screening. An early learning provider may choose to inform the parent or guardian about developmental screenings in the manner that best suits the early learning program and the individual family. The information might be communicated through written handouts, on your website, within the parent handbook, posted on-site for easy viewing or communicated verbally at enrollment orientation or during meetings with the parent or guardian.

To support effective exchange about developmental screening, the following is an example of a key message an early learning provider might communicate with a parent or guardian about developmental screenings.

“Have you ever heard of or done a developmental checkup (or screening) with your child?”

“Developmental checkup is done as part of a developmental screening process like we practice here to learn more about your child and how we can best support your child’s healthy development. The first five years of a child’s life are very important in their development – there is so much going on. From infancy, children are learning all about how their bodies work and exploring the world around them.”

“Their brains are developing so fast and they are learning important skills connected to many areas of development. These areas can be thought of like developmental milestones or markers of development within gross motor, fine motor, communication and social-emotional development. (This can stem into a more detailed conversation about each area of development.)”

“As a parent, you know your child better than anyone else and it’s important for us to work together to learn about your child’s development so we can learn about your child’s strengths and any areas of need.”

“Are you interested in learning more about your child’s development?”
There are many resources available to educate early learning professionals and families about child development and screening, and how to meet a child’s needs. Both national and state-level sites provide information about assessing the need for and the approach to screening. The following sites represent a small cross-section of the resources available to support early learning professionals and families.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CDC works to protect America from health, safety and security threats, both foreign and in the U.S.
  www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/screening.html

- ParentHelp123. ParentHelp123 offers information about Washington State health and food services, benefit programs and resources
  www.parenthelp123.org/child-development/child-development-screening-public

- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Child Find (children over 3 years of age). OSPI is the primary agency responsible for overseeing public K-12 education in Washington State.
  www.k12.wa.us/student-success/special-education/program-improvement/technical-assistance/child-find

- OSPI Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (WaKIDS). WaKIDS is a process that helps children and families transition to the K-12 educational system.
  www.k12.wa.us/student-success/testing/state-testing-overview/washington-kindergarten-inventory-developing-skills-wakids/whole-child-assessment

- Early Support for Infants and Toddlers (ESIT) (children under 3 years of age). ESIT is a DCYF program for early intervention services to support children’s success during early childhood and in their future.
  www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/child-development-supports/esit

- Washington Communities for Children (WCFC). WCFC is a network of coalitions dedicated to improving the well-being of children, families and communities.
  www.washingtoncfc.org
WAC 110-300-0065

School readiness and family engagement activities.

(1) At least once per calendar year, an early learning provider must supply to parents or guardians kindergarten or school readiness materials when developmentally appropriate for enrolled children.

(2) Kindergarten or school readiness materials must be the same or similar to resources posted online by OSPI, the department, or other equivalent organizations. These materials may address:

(a) Kindergarten transition activities, if applicable; and
(b) Developmentally appropriate local school and school district activities designed to engage families.

This graph shows that in Washington State, across all ethnic groups, less than 50 percent of children are ready for kindergarten (as measured by the WaKIDS assessment).

This important assessment is part of a transition process that supports successful school experiences for K-12 children and takes the whole child approach. Furthermore, the inventory found that discrepancies exist across ethnic groups for readiness in math and language and literacy proficiencies, as well as gender discrepancies in math proficiencies. This information helps to underscore the critical role early learning professionals play with young children.

Kindergarten Readiness by Race/Ethnicity, 2018

Licensing requirements related to school readiness support the premise that children have more success when families have a connection to kindergarten or school readiness. The requirements are applicable to early learning programs that serve a child or children developmentally ready to transition to kindergarten or school. Early learning providers can help families understand and navigate the change from preschool to kindergarten in many different ways.

One action an early learning provider can take is to develop a relationship with nearby schools and kindergarten programs. An early learning provider with connections to local kindergarten programs can help inform families about upcoming transition activities. Providers may also be able to help familiarize families with the systems used by the kindergarten or school or even help coordinate initial contact between the parent or guardian and the school. Additional supports are available through the local Educational Services Districts (ESD) and Early Learning Regional Group through WCFC.
A helpful resource is the WaKIDS page on the OSPI website: www.k12.wa.us/student-success/testing/state-testing-overview/washington-kindergarten-inventory-developing-skills-wakids.

One of the main components of WaKIDS is to promote collaboration between early learning providers and school districts. On the website, an early learning provider will find useful information and tools to help children and families experience a smooth transition.

When thinking about how a provider might deliver school readiness materials, consider the clientele being served. Families may have easy access to electronic documents or documents might be better handed out as paper copies. Furthermore, all program staff can help promote children’s success by being informed about local resources and sharing information with families regarding kindergarten transition and school readiness.

For examples of strategies related to school readiness, review the following statements from two Washington State early learning providers.

A family home early learning provider in Thurston County reports:

“I request every parent attend an orientation where we go over kindergarten readiness, transitions and what it might look like for their child and for them as the parent or guardian. At conferences, we review the developmental progression information on WaKIDS and then set goals together for their child. We have district information posted in our entryway in all the languages spoken in our care. Parents are encouraged to check the materials out whenever they have questions or come to me if there’s something they cannot find. In the spring, we take a field trip to the local elementary school and visit a classroom. At our end of year graduation program, we invite a kindergarten teacher to come and talk to the parents about what they can do to help their child throughout the summer.”
A child care center early learning provider in Whitman County reports:

“We start transition meetings and supports with our children’s very first transition at the center to help our parents become familiar with what it feels like for a child to transition. We set up time for them to meet the new teachers, tour the classroom and other activities. We also provide guides to our individual classrooms to help them anticipate what to expect in the new room.

Because we make transitioning with support such a part of their lives here at the center, the transition to kindergarten is no different. We provide our parents with the contact information for the schools, we notify them of the upcoming kindergarten enrollment days and roundups that are happening and we have built a great relationship with our local elementary schools to make the relationship one that parents can trust. We give each parent a copy of the full enrollment packet they will need to go to kindergarten along with a copy of their child’s most recent assessment and our contact information if they want to share it with the child’s kindergarten teacher. We have had several kindergarten teachers reach out to us with questions about certain children throughout the years.

We spend a lot of time in our classroom discussing kindergarten with our pre-k class before they make the move to school. By the time August comes, they are so excited about their next adventure! Our teachers have incorporated curriculum in the classroom using some of the same things used in the public schools (Zoo Phonics, for example) so the transition into kindergarten can be as seamless as possible.”

As you have experienced here, there are a variety of ways to communicate with families and partner with them in your support toward successful outcomes for children. From educating parents or guardians about the value of developmental screening to kindergarten readiness, relationships and communication are key to smooth transitions and children getting the supports that they may need in their development.
Section Three:
Family Engagement and Partnerships
Family Engagement and Partnerships

The Child Care and Early Learning Licensing Guidebook addresses only selected sections of the Foundational Quality Standards found in Chapter 110-300 WAC. This guidebook includes pertinent resources, current data and practical examples. It is not intended to offer a comprehensive view Family Engagement and Partnerships.

**WAC 110-300-0080**

**Family support self-assessment.**

An early learning provider must assess their program within one year of being licensed, or within six months of the date this section becomes effective, to identify ways to support the families of enrolled children. A provider must complete the strengthening families program self-assessment, or an equivalent assessment, applicable to the early learning program type (center or family home).

It is important that early learning professionals understand and recognize children as part of a family. The Strengthening Families framework is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.\(^2\)

The Strengthening Families self-assessment aims to engage families, programs and communities in building five protective factors:

1. Parental resilience
2. Social connections
3. Knowledge of parenting and child development
4. Concrete support in times of need
5. Social and emotional competence of children

The Strengthening Families Self-Assessment tool is based on findings from a national study of early learning programs from across the country. This tool can help you customize your program to support the families you serve.

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\(^2\) Center for the Study of Social Policy [www.cssp.org/our-work/project/strengthening-families](http://www.cssp.org/our-work/project/strengthening-families)
The Strengthening Families Self-Assessment tools for center and family home early learning programs are available at no cost online at [www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com](http://www.strengtheningfamiliesevaluation.com).

Upon completion of the online Strengthening Families Assessment, programs can run reports that will assist them in identifying their strengths and areas to enhance their programs.

When an early learning provider uses an equivalent self-assessment approved by DCYF, it must include the five protective factors as found in the Strengthening Families Self-Assessment:

1. **Parental Resilience**: Managing stress and functioning well even when faced with challenges, adversity and trauma.

2. **Social Connections**: Positive relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental and spiritual support.

3. **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development**: Understanding child development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development.

4. **Concrete Support in Times of Need**: Access to concrete support and services that address a family's needs and helps minimize stress caused by challenges.

5. **Social and Emotional Competence of Children**: Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions, and establish and maintain relationships.

According to Child Welfare Gateway Information,[3] these protective factors help parents to find resources, supports or coping strategies that allow them to parent effectively, even under stress. When an early learning provider completes the self-assessment, they learn where they can focus their efforts to support families and children's well-being. This requirement must be met within the first year of licensing. Be sure to retain a copy of your assessment.

Your time and attention in assessing your program are valuable. It is paramount to learning how to meet the needs of the families within your program. Now that you have successfully discovered important information, it's time to take action! There are a variety of methods to create an action plan and you will need to pick a format that works best for you. The important item to remember is that now that your assessment has uncovered programmatic needs, the action plan lays out your strategies to support your families. A customized program ensures that any gaps or areas needing extra supports will be prioritized.


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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES – CHILD CARE AND EARLY LEARNING LICENSING GUIDEBOOK

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

WAC 110-300-0085

Family partnerships and communication.

(1) An early learning provider must communicate with families to identify individual children's developmental goals.

(2) An early learning provider must attempt to obtain information from each child's family about that child's developmental, behavioral, health, linguistic, cultural, social, and other relevant information. The provider must make this attempt upon that child's enrollment and annually thereafter.

(3) An early learning provider must determine how the program can best accommodate each child's individual characteristics, strengths, and needs. The provider must utilize the information in subsection (2) of this section and seek input from family members and staff familiar with a child's behavior, developmental, and learning patterns.

(4) An early learning provider must:

   (a) Attempt to discuss with parents or guardians information including, but not limited to:

      (i) A child's strength in areas of development, health issues, special needs, and other concerns;

      (ii) Family routines or events, approaches to parenting, family beliefs, culture, language, and child rearing practices;

      (iii) Internal transitions within the early learning program and transitions to external services or programs, as necessary;

      (iv) Collaboration between the provider and the parent or guardian in behavior management; and

      (v) A child's progress, at least two times per year.

   (b) Communicate the importance of regular attendance for the child;

   (c) Give parents or guardians contact information for questions or concerns;

   (d) Give families opportunities to share their language and culture in the early learning program;

   (e) Arrange a confidential time and space for individual conversations regarding children, as needed;

   (f) Allow parents or guardians access to their child during normal hours of operation, except as excluded by a court order; and

   (g) Communicate verbally or in writing:

      (i) Changes in drop-off and pickup arrangements as needed; and

      (ii) Daily activities.

Strong connections with parents or guardians is imperative to children's success and there is flexibility in an early learning program's ability to meet this licensing standard. In order to demonstrate that you are communicating with families, it will be important for you to develop a systematic and intentional approach.

This proactive communication is a way for children and families to see themselves, their culture, their race and their ethnicity reflected in the early learning environment and program. Building strong connections with families by determining what they believe their child's strengths and needs are helps to improve family and child outcomes.
There are many resources that include tips and strategies for building relationships with families, including the “Family Partnerships for Children’s Success” and “Creating a Positive Learning Environment” modules at www.dcyftraining.com.

A few highlights to point out in WAC 110-300-0085 are:

1. The rules in 110-300-0085(4) do not state how the specified information needs to be communicated. This will be an important discussion between licensors and providers that communication is happening with families. Providers can decide how best to meet the requirements of this subsection, except for the information detailed under subsection 0085(4)(g) which is information about drop off, pick up and daily activities. This must be communicated “verbally or in writing.”

2. Subsection 0085(4)(a)(v): An attempted discussion with families on their child’s progress is required two times per year. The discussion allows for two-way communication. The early learning program needs to be able to demonstrate how this requirement is met.

3. Subsection 0085(4)(e): There are many methods available for early learning programs to provide confidential time and space for individual conversations, including on-site, telephone, electronic or home visiting.

4. Subsection 0085(4)(f): Families must have open access to their child at all times while in care, except as excluded by court order.

Remember: WAC 110-300-0450(2)(b) requires you to develop a Family Engagement and Partnership Communication Plan.