

Expand Access to High-Quality Child Care

Pass [HB 1671](#)/[SB 5595](#)

❖ Charting a Path for Increasing Access to Quality

Science tells us that, long before they reach kindergarten, children lay down the mental foundation for future learning. When we fail to surround young children with quality opportunities to build that foundation, it's much harder for them to catch up later. Child care providers want the best for children in their care, but they need resources to improve and maintain quality. Investments now can lead to benefits for children, families, and society in the future.

Chart a path for increasing access to high-quality care that includes:

- *Raising the reimbursement rate for Working Connections Child Care by 10 percent*
- *Supporting quality improvement activities by providing a 5 percent rate enhancement to providers in Level 2 of Early Achievers*
- *Creating a plan for implementing tiered reimbursement to cultivate quality care*
- *Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Working Connections Child Care System*



❖ Why does Quality Matter?

High-quality early learning and after-school programs provide children and families positive learning experiences and supports that build a strong foundation for social, emotional, and cognitive functioning. Research has also shown that early interventions in early learning settings can counteract the opportunity and achievement gap, which is visible in children as young as 9 months. We won't see desired outcomes, such as these, unless we invest in supports that improve quality.

❖ How would Increased Rates Support Quality?

Currently, Working Connections subsidies, on average, only allow parents to access one third of providers in the market. Additionally, recent cuts to the program have created instability in income for providers accepting families with Working Connections Child Care. Over the past five years, many licensed facilities have shut down and some families have been forced to rely on underground care. We must increase the base rate to stabilize providers fighting to stay afloat and incentivize licensed care.

Washington State needs to create a thoughtful plan for implementing tiered reimbursement. Tiered reimbursement recognizes the higher costs of providing higher quality care. Providers would receive additional compensation based on their level in Early Achievers, Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System. This would incentivize providers to engage in quality improvement activities, while making high-quality care more accessible for families.

❖ System Improvements

A recent third-party report on Washington's child care eligibility system confirmed that the system is in crisis. The report offers a number of short- and long-term solutions to make the system more efficient and accurate, while improving the experiences of parents and providers and, ultimately, the continuity of care for children.

What is a Quality Child Care Program?

- ✓ Nurturing and supportive relationships between adults and children
- ✓ Care and education that meets each student's individual needs
- ✓ Facilities that are safe, well-organized, promote health and have age-appropriate resources
- ✓ Programs that support the development of the whole child
- ✓ Open communication and genuine engagement with families
- ✓ Meaningful efforts to embrace diversity