

## Near-Term Policy Position Priorities for Recommendations to the Governor

As announced this summer in the Early Learning Partnership Joint Resolution, the Department of Early Learning, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Thrive by Five Washington have committed to collaborate on behalf of all young children --birth through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade-- and their families in Washington State in developing a comprehensive early learning system. Together with the state Early Learning Advisory Council, these partners are engaged in developing both a long-term Early Learning Plan for our state and near-term recommendations to Governor Gregoire. In making recommendations to the Governor, the Drafting Team and partner agencies agreed that it is important to address both the Governor's directive "to develop a broad proposal about what early learning opportunities should be available to every child and their families" and the need to close the preparation gap. The following near-term policy position priorities include strategies and funding opportunities that support services and programs available to all who wish to access them, as well as a number of opportunities for at-risk children and families. This set of near-term policy positions represents a first focus of a phased-in, comprehensive early learning system.

- **Birth through 3 Continuum.** Build and fund an aligned, integrated continuum of supports, services and programs for all children birth to age 3, and their families. Ensuring that infants and toddlers have good health, strong families, and positive early learning experiences will lay the foundation for success throughout their lives. Because this is also a critical period for meaningful intervention for children at-risk, and with special needs, a first focus will be on early intervention programs and services, such as: developmental screening; home visitation; programs consistent with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C; Family, Friend and Neighbors support; and Early Head Start.
  - Amend state ITEIP policy to include serving infants and toddlers identified as at-risk of developmental delay, based upon established risk categories (i.e. serving foster care, level of prematurity, etc.)
  - Amend state Medicaid plan to include payment for the developmental therapy to support IDEA, Part C service provision for existing and new population
  - Sustain funding for existing B-3 continuum of services and programs
  - Use the Early Learning Plan and Recommendations to the Governor to set direction for how to invest CCDF/ARRA dollars for improving the quality of care for infants and toddlers
  - Federal grant opportunities: Health Care Reform; and Early Learning Challenge Fund
  
- **Voluntary Universal Prekindergarten for 4-year olds implemented in mixed-delivery system.** Prekindergarten programs for 4-year olds aim to promote the acquisition of skills, knowledge, and behaviors that are associated with success in elementary school. "Universal" means that the program is universally available (or nearly so) but that parents are free to enroll their children or not as they see fit.
  - Open ECEAP to all families on a tuition basis and/or using a sliding fee scale
  - Sustain funding for the state's pre-kindergarten program for low-income children and families (Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program)

- Create voluntary universal preschool program for 4-year-olds as part of basic education; phase in to serve highest poverty communities first. Integrate and coordinate phase-in of all-day K with phase-in of universal preschool for 4-year-olds
  - Federal grant opportunity: Early Learning Challenge Fund
  
- **State-Funded Full-Day Kindergarten – Enhancing Equity, Continuity and Quality** Based on research, the Legislature prioritized full-day kindergarten funding for schools with the highest percentage of students living in poverty (as measured by the number of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch). Full-day kindergarten gives young children, particularly those living in poverty, the time to learn the foundational skills and knowledge that is so important to future school success.
  - Continue to fund and phase-in full-day kindergarten (900 hours of instruction/annually) as passed in HB2261
  - Coordinate the phase-in of full-day kindergarten with universal preschool for 4-year-olds
  - Support an expansion of kindergarten assessment pilot
  - Part of a larger general fund revenue enhancement strategy (QEC)
  
- **Early Literacy.** Promote early literacy and reading success in school for children birth through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in the context of whole child development.
  - Early Learning Plan implementation grants to PreK-K partnerships
  - Federal grants could also support early literacy (e.g. Race to the Top)
  - State funding “ask” for professional development offered in local communities
  - Reinstate the \$2.5 million Reading Achievement Account (dedicated sub-account of GF-S). An early reading initiative fund that was called out in the Department of Early Learning enabling legislation.
    - ◆ An early reading grant program for evidence-based or promising community-based initiatives that develop early literacy skills; specific to ages birth to 5 and diverse communities
    - ◆ Statewide literacy systems development to support community-based reading initiatives
  - New state investment for the professional development offered in local communities
  - Federal grant opportunity - Race To The Top grants
  
- **Early Learning Educator/Provider Supports.** Continue to implement and expand a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) so that early learning and school-age providers have the support and resources necessary to improve the quality of their programs and environments and so that families have the necessary consumer education to choose high quality programs for their children. Ensure that licensing is the foundation of QRIS, and that all licensed early learning programs participate. As QRIS is implemented, ensure that it is: tied to child care subsidy (e.g. tiered reimbursement); and integrated within the Professional Development Consortium’s recommendations for a comprehensive professional development system that focuses on achieving high-quality, and that promotes a qualified and well compensated early learning workforce.
  - Early learning licensing “reboot”: work to strengthen licensing consistency.
  - Use CCDF child care subsidy and quality “earmark” dollars to incentivize quality improvement
  - Federal grant opportunity: Early Learning Challenge Funds
  - New state investment required to leverage private investments to match state funding
  
- **Enhance/Strengthen the Early Learning System Infrastructure.** Continue to develop, strengthen and resource infrastructure elements needed to support the early learning system so that it functions effectively and with quality.
  - Develop a shared governance model that works at both the state and community/regional level (federal State Advisory Council grant)
  - Longitudinal data system birth through post secondary (ARRA P-20 longitudinal system)

- Revise (based on constituent input) Benchmarks, and implement them so that: they work in alignment with K-3 education; and inform the standards and curriculum used for professional development of early learning providers and K-3 teachers (Benchmarks survey under way)
  - Expand private/public partnerships
  - New state investment necessary for roll-out implementation in communities
  - Federal grant opportunity – State Advisory Council grant and ARRA funds
- **Strengthen Partnerships with Families and Communities.** Promote and support parenting education and information. Engage parents, families, caregivers, and communities in shaping policies and systems.
    - Engage parent, family and caregiver voices in governance at the state and local community levels
    - Use CCDF quality earmark dollars
    - Early Learning Challenge Fund
    - New state investment for embedding the Strengthening Families Initiative in the early learning system
- **Health Insurance and Medical Home.** All children have health insurance and a medical home.
    - Support the Governor’s health care goal “All Washingtonians will have access to health coverage that provides effective care by 2012, with all children having such coverage by 2010.”
    - Support public awareness to enroll children
    - Utilize medical home professionals in supporting early learning and families