



ALL START — INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WASHINGTON'S YOUNGEST LEARNERS

Washington's youngest learners should have the benefit of early learning so they will be successful in school and in life. This principle was endorsed by Washington Learns, the commission established several years ago to create a blueprint for a world-class state education system, when it set the goal of supporting parents as their children's first and most important teachers.

Washington Learns recommended the creation of a Cabinet-level Department of Early Learning, subsequently established in 2006. The department consolidates child care and early learning programs that were spread among three state agencies. It is the focal point in working with the early learning sector to coordinate investments and improve coordination between early learning and K-12.



Governor Chris Gregoire believes that the early learning needs of children must be centered on family and community. She feels strongly that we need flexible early learning programs that fit the unique needs of young children rather than fitting children into programs not specifically designed for them. And she believes that we must support preschool programs offered by diverse providers, from community and faith-based institutions to universities and schools.

Last spring, Governor Gregoire asked Betty Hyde, director of the Department of Early Learning, and Randy Dorn, superintendent of Public Instruction, to draft a proposal delineating the state's role in providing early learning opportunities for children from birth to 5, their families, early learning caregivers and educators. The All Start program is the Governor's plan to boost preschool opportunities for Washington's children. The Governor is introducing the All Start proposal this session to give all of Washington's youngest learners a solid start on their education path. The department will establish certification requirements for preschools with the use of expertise of early learning educators, parents and constituents.

SUMMARY OF THE LEGISLATION:

Creates the All Start preschool program for 3- and 4-year-olds. All 3- and 4-year-olds will have the opportunity to go to preschool. Preschool quality will be improved, children will have better outcomes and parents will have better information.

- » Preschools will be required to be certified and meet requirements established by the Department of Early Learning. Currently there are no standards set for preschool programs, and preschool teachers are not required to undergo background checks.
- » Programs that accept state funds will need to meet other criteria in addition to achieving certification, such as a minimum number of program hours, ratio of students to early childhood educators and standards for developmentally appropriate curriculum.
- » Parent participation will be required.
- » Preschools will help children transition to kindergarten.
- » Low-income parents (with less than 200 percent of the federally established family median income) will get help on a sliding scale to send their child to the certified preschool of their choice.
- » The doors of the state preschool program — the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program — are opened to those parents who can afford to pay.



Coordinates state and federal preschool programs for low-income children. The state-funded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program and the federally funded Head Start program provide education, health, nutrition and family support to 3- and 4-year-old children and their families. The department is charged with collaborating with the federal program to improve how the programs work together.

Serves infants and toddlers. The department will develop, coordinate and implement programs for infants and toddlers, which must include services in community settings such as doctor's offices, libraries, children's museums, and park and recreation programs.

Promotes diversity. Programs must be designed to recognize cultural and linguistic diversity.