



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



1. What is Early Achievers? Why is it a focus of the Department of Early Learning?

The Department of Early Learning (DEL) developed Early Achievers, Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), to help early learning professionals offer high-quality care that supports each child's learning and development. Because so many of Washington's young children participate in early learning programs, it's important to make sure these programs provide children with the best possible start.

Early Achievers:

- ▶ Supports programs to provide high-quality care through training, coaching, and incentives.
- ▶ Provides information to families about program quality to help them make informed child care choices that fit their needs.
- ▶ Ensure that children have high-quality learning experiences that help them develop the skills they need to be successful in school and life.

Early Achievers supports, aligns with and builds upon other key early learning programs, including WaKIDS, Washington's Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, and is a key strategy of the Statewide Early Learning Plan. Creating seamless programs for children and families in Washington is key to helping all children grow, develop, and successfully transition from early childhood into early elementary school.

2. Who can participate in Early Achievers?

Providers who serve children birth through age 5 may participate in Early Achievers if they are:

Early Achievers, Washington's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS)

This is an exciting time to be in early learning in Washington! As a result of Washington winning the [Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge](#) grant in December 2011, the Department of Early Learning (DEL) expanded [Early Achievers, Washington's Quality Rating and Improvement System \(QRIS\)](#), statewide beginning July 1, 2012.

- ▶ Licensed child care centers and family child care homes.
- ▶ Tribal and military facilities that are certified for child care subsidy payments.
- ▶ Head Start and ECEAP programs.

3. What incentives and resources are available to Early Achievers participants?

Early Achievers resources and incentives support quality improvement efforts, including:

- ▶ Level 2 technical assistance.
- ▶ Free Level 2 professional training series for child care center directors and family child care providers.
- ▶ Scholarships and Opportunity Grants to pursue CDA programs, stackable certificates, associate's degrees and bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood Education (ECE).

Facilities that are rated Levels 3-5 receive additional incentives to support achievement of quality improvement goals, including:

- ▶ Early Achievers coaching.
- ▶ Quality Improvement Grants.

4. Do I need to apply for Early Achievers or am I automatically enrolled because I am a licensed provider?

All licensed and certified facilities that want to participate in Early Achievers must register. Level 1 is equal to licensing or certification to recognize the critical importance of health and safety as the foundation of quality. Programs decide whether they want to participate and attain Levels 2 - 5.

5. Does my licensing status affect my participation?

Facilities licenses must be in good standing to participate in Early Achievers. A license that is in good standing is defined as a license that is not suspended, revoked or on probation. Facilities with an initial license or on a probationary license may register to participate in Early Achievers and begin work on Level 2 activities; however, they must be fully licensed and in good standing before they can achieve Level 2 status.

6. Is there a cost to sign up for Early Achievers?

No, there is no cost to participants to register for Early Achievers. Level 2 activities and resources including required training and technical assistance are provided free of charge to center directors and family child care providers.

7. Are providers that accept child care subsidies required to participate in Early Achievers?

No. Child care providers do not need to participate in Early Achievers to continue to receive child care subsidy. However, starting September 1, 2013, Early Achievers participants will receive higher subsidy payment rates, called tiered subsidy reimbursement. Tiered reimbursement for family child care providers is a mandatory subject of bargaining with SEIU 925.

8. How do I sign up for Early Achievers?

The first step is to attend an Early Achievers orientation, which are held in all regions of the state and provide information about the requirements, benefits and available resources for Early Achievers participants. Orientation attendance is required before a facility can register for Early Achievers. Contact your regional Child Care Aware of Washington agency for orientation schedules.

9. My program is closed in the summer. Can we still participate?

Yes. Facilities that operate part-year programs are eligible to participate in Early Achievers.

10. I am the director of a center with multiple sites. Can I enter one application for all sites?

If a center has multiple sites, each site must register to participate and will be considered an individual Early Achievers participant. Each site must designate one on-site employee responsible for overseeing and completing Level 2 activities.

11. How are Head Start and ECEAP included in Early Achievers?

A separate Early Achievers pathway has been designed for Head Start and ECEAP programs that recognizes and builds upon existing quality standards, streamlines participation and reduces

duplication of efforts. This pathway was built based on feedback and lessons learned from [DEL's 2012-13 pilot of Head Start and ECEAP programs in Early Achievers](#). Head Start and ECEAP programs can participate in Early Achievers as training resource centers. Head Start and ECEAP programs can participate in Early Achievers as of Fall 2013.

12. How do I participate if I am licensed and also have Head Start or ECEAP slots?

Beginning in Fall 2013, blended licensed and Head Start/ECEAP programs will participate in one of two Early Achievers pathways: the licensed pathway or the Head Start/ECEAP pathway. If less than 75 percent of your birth-age 5 slots are Head Start or ECEAP, you will follow the licensed pathway. If 75 percent or more of your slots are Head Start or ECEAP, you will follow the Head Start/ECEAP pathway.

13. Do I need to register in MERIT to participate in Early Achievers?

Yes. Registering and participating in MERIT (Washington's Managed Education and Registry Information Tool) is a requirement for Early Achievers participants. MERIT helps you participate in Early Achievers. MERIT allows providers and employees to document online and recognize the professional achievements of early care and education and school-age professionals. Early Achievers Level 2 activities are accessed and tracked in MERIT. MERIT is the source of verification of Professional Training Series attendance and staff education.

14. What do I need to do in MERIT before I can register for Early Achievers?

- ▶ Child care center director/family child care primary provider must have a professional record in MERIT with current employment.

- ▶ Director/FCC primary provider must complete a Facility Registration in MERIT and list themselves as the current director/FCC primary provider.

15. What are the Early Achievers Level 2 requirements?

Facility leadership is key to successful participation, so Level 2 is focused on professional growth and facility management. Child care center directors and family child care primary providers complete a series of activities to prepare for successful participation and ratings. Level 2 requirements include:

- ▶ Attend Early Achievers orientation.
- ▶ Register for in MERIT.
- ▶ Complete required Level 2 activities, including:
 - Environment Rating Scales (ERS) and Washington Quality Standards Self-Assessment.
 - Professional Training Series.
 - All teaching staff have professional records in MERIT.

16. What support is available in Level 2?

Your facility will receive free training and technical assistance during Level 2 to support your successful participation in Early Achievers. Your regional Child Care Aware of Washington agency will provide you with a Technical Assistance Specialist, who can help you:

- ▶ Navigate Early Achievers and answer questions about participation.
- ▶ Provide technical support with MERIT.
- ▶ Share resources and materials to help you get ready for a rating.

17. How long will it take to complete Level 2?

Level 2 is multipart and ongoing, so the time to complete all requirements will vary across facilities. It is estimated that it will take between six months and one year to complete all requirements.

18. My facility is already high-quality and ready to be rated—do we have to start with Level 2?

Yes. In Washington’s quality standards, Levels 1-2 are the foundation of quality for all programs. All licensed child care facilities must complete Level 2 requirements in order to be eligible to request an evaluation for rating. Completion of Level 2 activities such as self-assessment and training prepares the facility for a successful evaluation.

19. What is the Professional Training Series?

Participants complete the Professional Training Series during Level 2. The six core trainings are completed online or in-person. The director or family child care provider is responsible for attendance at all trainings. Trainings are offered free of charge to the director/family child care provider and will provide STARS hours.

Online trainings:

- ▶ Introduction to the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Overview.
- ▶ Introduction to the Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines.
- ▶ Introduction to the Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals.

In-person trainings:

- ▶ Introduction to Cultural Competence.

- ▶ QRIS Strengthening Families for Early Learning Professionals.
- ▶ QRIS School Readiness.

20. What happens when I finish Level 2?

When you have completed all Level 2 activities, you will submit an Early Achievers Application for Level 2 in MERIT. Upon DEL approval of your application, your facility has achieved Level 2 status. Achievement of Level 2 status demonstrates your commitment to providing high-quality care to children and families—you and your staff should be proud of your accomplishment. Your facility is then eligible to work toward Levels 3-5. Child Care Aware of Washington regional staff can help you prepare for a successful evaluation.

21. How is my facility’s participation shared publicly?

Early Achievers provides information to families about child care quality in order to help them make informed choices. While facility ratings will not be publicly displayed at this time, Early Achievers participation status is posted on DEL’s Child Care Check. In addition, Child Care Aware of Washington shares Early Achievers participation status as part of the child care referral process.

- ▶ If you have registered for Early Achievers and are working on Level 2, have not been rated, or have been rated a Level 2, your public status is “Participating in Quality Improvement.”
- ▶ If you have been rated a Level 3, 4, or 5, your public status is, “Quality Level of Excellence.”

22. What are the Early Achievers levels and what do they mean?

- ▶ Level 1 is licensing or certification that includes all licensed child care centers and family child care, military, tribal, Head Start and ECEAP, and other state-funded programs.

- ▶ Level 2 focuses on facility leadership, and helps directors and family child care providers understand the quality standards and requirements, and the child outcome and school readiness goals of the system. To achieve Level 2, facilities must complete a series of activities including participation in MERIT, the Professional Training series and self-assessment.
- ▶ Levels 3-5 are points-based and earned through on-site evaluation conducted by the University of Washington (UW) in the following quality standard areas:
 - Child Outcomes
 - Facility Curriculum and Learning Environments and Interactions
 - Professional Development and Training
 - Family Engagement and Partnership

Facility ratings are based on total points earned:

- ▶ Level 3: 30-69 points
- ▶ Level 4: 70-90 points
- ▶ Level 5: 91-100 points

23. What are the Quality Standard areas and what do they measure?

- ▶ **Child Outcomes (up to 10 points):** Facilities earn points in this area by demonstrating use of developmental screenings, ongoing child assessment, individualized instruction, and partnership with families around individual children's strengths and needs.
- ▶ **Curriculum & Learning Environment & Interactions (up to 70 points):** Facilities earn points in this area through observations by the UW evaluation team including the Environment rating Scales (ERS) and the Classroom Assessment

Scoring System (CLASS). This area also looks at curriculum and staff supports, including planning time, peer mentoring, and reflective practice.

- ▶ **Professional Development & Training (up to 10 points):** Facilities earn points in this area based on staff education levels. This quality standard aligns with the education levels in the Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals.
- ▶ **Family Engagement & Partnerships (up to 10 points):** Facilities earn points in this area by demonstrating partnership with families, including parent education, connection to community resources and sharing child data. Facilities use the research-based Strengthening Families self-assessment to create a plan of action for continuous feedback and improvement.

24. How will Early Achievers improve child outcomes?

Early Achievers is unique in the nation because it was built with the specific goal of improving outcomes for kids. The initial pilot was developed, tested and evaluated by Thrive by Five Washington (Thrive). Based on Thrive's initial work and findings, DEL worked with UW to make revisions that are shown through research to strengthen instruction and affect child outcomes, with an emphasis on children with special needs. DEL will continue to work with our research partner UW to ensure the strongest alignment between the Early Achievers standards, the rating levels, and outcomes for children.