



Washington State Department of
Early Learning



2009-2013 Strategic Plan



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Department of Early Learning 2009-2013 strategic plan



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Director's message

One of the most exciting and challenging aspects of launching the Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL) is strategic “right-sizing” of expectations and aspirations. As the first Cabinet-level state agency in the nation that focuses on our youngest citizens’ development and ultimately their success in school and life, what can be accomplished, in collaboration with parents and the vast array of state and local, public and private partners that have a stake in our children’s development, and by when?

At the heart of DEL’s work is a vision for our children—that they *all* get to have experiences and opportunities that help them reach their full human potential. We are ever-mindful of children’s overall development: their physical, social and emotional well-being, their ability to understand and think, use language, and communicate well. At DEL, we believe parents are children’s first and most important teachers—and we are honored to take action every day that inspires “grown-ups” to discover, love and nurture the greatness in every child.

Our approach to strategic planning was organized around the following simple questions:

- What do we know right now?
- What will we do about it (together with parents and partners)—our strategic priorities?
- What do we need to do it?
- What could stop us?

Thousands of Washingtonians and many national experts helped us answer these questions as we created this strategic plan. We have gathered information from: our statewide parent needs assessment and conversations with the DEL Parent Advisory Group; our public poll that set a baseline for what voters believe about early learning and want to see happen for our state’s children; studies of national trends and best practices in key administrative aspects of early learning such as child care subsidies and licensing; evaluations of our agency’s current capacity; conversations with our new Early Learning Advisory Council; local communities we funded to conduct their own data gathering on what they have and what they need to raise the quality of care and education for children; and the DEL staff who serve on “Accountability Core Teams” that put forth recommendations for goals, objectives, strategies and performance measures.

All this input is embodied in a “big picture” way in DEL’s 2009 – 2013 Strategic Plan. We sought to balance expectations and aspirations, the “doable” and the “desirable.” As a young state agency, we know that like any 2-year old, we will learn a lot in the coming months and years.

I am pleased to present this agency strategic plan, and invite you to join me in answering “*What have you done to help a child today?*” Government cannot and should not act alone—we look forward to sharing the accountability for our children’s success with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane M. Bosworth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jone Bosworth, Director

Mission

Every day, we are honored to take action that inspires the world to discover, love and nurture the greatness in all children.

Vision

Together, with parents and partners, we offer children world-class learning opportunities so they realize their full potential.

Strategic Goals



Washington State Department of
Early Learning

The ABCs of what we do

Statutory authority

The Washington State Department of Early Learning (DEL) was established on July 1, 2006, under House Bill 2964. Our establishing legislation states: “a more cohesive and integrated voluntary early learning system would result in greater efficiencies for the state, increased partnership between the state and the private sector, improved access to high quality early learning services, and better employment and early learning outcomes for families and all children.”

DEL’s authority for setting guidelines, using funds and evaluating programs includes:

WHAT WE KNOW

“Early care and education is being transformed by a changing social and political context, and by public interest in the field. Almost every facet of the field’s work is undergoing change: the relationship between “care” and “education”; our independence in deciding what and how we will teach; the rules and regulations that finance and govern our work; and our relationship with the K-12 school system.”

— *Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education*

Primary Duties (RCW 43.215.020)

DEL’s primary duties are to implement state early learning policy and to coordinate, consolidate, and integrate child care and early learning programs to administer programs and funding as efficiently as possible. DEL’s duties include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Supporting both public and private sectors toward a comprehensive and collaborative system of early learning that serves parents, children, and providers and to encourage best practices in child care and early learning programs;
- (b) Making early learning resources available to parents and caregivers;
- (c) Carrying out activities, including providing clear and easily accessible information about quality and improving the quality of early learning opportunities for young children, in cooperation with the nongovernmental private-public partnership;
- (d) Administering child care and early learning programs;
- (e) Standardizing internal financial audits, oversight visits, performance benchmarks, and licensing criteria,

- so that programs can function in an integrated fashion;
- (f) Supporting the implementation of the nongovernmental private-public partnership and cooperate with that partnership in pursuing its goals including providing data and support necessary for the successful work of the partnership;
- (g) Working cooperatively and in coordination with the Early Learning Advisory Council;
- (h) Collaborating with the K-12 school system at the state and local levels to ensure appropriate connections and smooth transitions between early learning and K-12 programs; and
- (i) Upon the development of an early learning information system, making available to parents timely inspection and licensing action information through the Internet and other means.



The ABCs of what we do (cont'd)

Statutory authority

Child Care Development Fund (Code of Federal Regulations Chapter 45, Parts 98 and 99)

Washington's major investment directed toward early learning is the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). DEL uses this federal funding for child care licensing, and related quality activities and child care subsidies in the state of Washington. Eighty-four percent (84%) of DEL's state funding is provided (76 percent for the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program). Another 13 percent is budget line items, leaving less than 3 percent of state funds not targeted for specific activities. A number of 2007-09 provided programs were one-time funding that may or may not be carried forward in the 2009-2011 biennial budget.



Child Care Licensing (RCW 43.215.200 – 43.215.370)

DEL is responsible for licensing child care settings: family homes, centers and school-age programs. Licensing regulations are focused on minimum safety and health requirements that serve as the foundation from which quality learning opportunities can be built. Certain types of child care arrangements, such as child care by specified relatives, are exempt from licensing (RCW 43.215.010).

Background Checks (RCW 43.215.215 and 43.43.832)

DEL has authority to conduct background checks on licensed child care providers working in or having unsupervised access to children in a licensed or regulated child care facility, as well as unlicensed providers who care for children whose parents receive financial support from DEL child care subsidy programs. DEL also is required to disclose, via Web site or in an easily accessible physical location, the receipt, general nature, and resolution or current status of all complaints on record with the department after July 24, 2005, against a child care center or family child care provider that result in an enforcement action. (RCW 43.215.525)

Child Care Subsidies

Currently, DEL sets the policy that guides use of the child care subsidy funds. The subsidy program, Working Connections Child Care, is administered by the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, which determines and authorizes eligibility and makes payments to eligible child caregivers. DEL also administers the seasonal and homeless child care subsidy programs.

State-Funded Preschool (RCW 43.215.400 – 43.215.450)

The state-funded preschool program, the Early Childhood and Education Assistance Program (ECEAP), is a comprehensive, child-focused program that includes education, health, social, nutritional, cultural and family support services to eligible children and their families. DEL has authority to award funds to approved contractors, adopt rules for use of those funds, and evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the programs. An advisory group to DEL is required by law.

The ABCs of what we do (cont'd)

Statutory authority

Head Start (RCW 43.06.110 and Public Law 110-134)

Head Start is a federal program serving children ages birth to 5 that promotes school readiness by providing educational, health, nutrition, social and other services to enrolled children and families. The federal government awards grants directly to grantees within the state.

DEL's Head Start-State Collaboration Office, authorized through the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, requires DEL to collaborate with the Head Start grantees to develop partnerships that benefit low-income families and children in healthy family development.

Longitudinal Study (RCW 43.215.080)

Two years after the implementation of the department's early learning program, and every two years thereafter by July 1, DEL must submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature measuring the effectiveness of its programs in improving early childhood education.

The first report shall include program objectives and identified valid performance measures for evaluating progress toward achieving the objectives, as well as a plan for commissioning a longitudinal study comparing the kindergarten readiness of children participating in DEL's programs with the readiness of other children, using nationally accepted testing and assessment methods. Such comparison shall include, but not be limited to, achievement as children of both groups progress through the K-12 system and identify year-to-year changes in achievement, if any, in later years of elementary, middle school and high school education.

WHAT WE KNOW

In late 2007, 29 percent of Washington voters polled had heard of or were familiar with the Department of Early Learning.

— DEL public polling conducted by Craciun Research Group

WHAT WE KNOW

“Because the interpretation of program evaluation research is so often highly politicized, it is essential that policy-makers and civic leaders have the independent knowledge needed to be able to evaluate the quality and relevance of the evidence provided in reports.”

— *Early Childhood Program Evaluations: A Decision-Maker's Guide*



The ABCs of what we do (cont'd)

DEL 2007-2009 funding

Licensing and licensing activities	\$20,341,796
Subsidies	\$127,323,941
Agency operations	\$13,682,936
Major initiatives	
Early Learning Advisory Council	\$250,000
Quality Rating and Improvement System	\$4,750,000
Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program	\$104,356,000
Parent, family and caregiver support	\$2,000,000
Child care contracts	\$46,499,263
Benchmark partnership	\$200,000
Negotiated rulemaking/improved regulations	\$200,000
Tiered reimbursement	\$500,000
Kindergarten entry assessment	\$150,000
Early learning coalitions	\$120,000
Early learning partnerships	\$190,000
Child care resource and referral	\$1,700,000
Child care consultations	\$500,000
Early Reading Initiative account	\$3,050,000
Information technology	\$806,500
Head Start/ECEAP study	\$250,000
Head Start State Collaboration Office	\$406,000
Professional development	\$7,450,000

The ABCs of what we do (cont'd)

What we do

Since its inception in 2006, DEL has invested in helping Washington's parents, educators, child caregivers and communities support children in their earliest years of life in innovative and enhanced ways.

Offer a healthy start

DEL's state-funded preschool program for families with low incomes will reach more than 8,000 4-year-olds and their families in 2008-2009 school year, offering classroom learning, health services and family support to help prepare children for success in school and life.



Progress since DEL's creation:

Historic 38% **program expansion** and per-child rate increases.

Requirement that programs use **one common approach to assessing children's social and emotional learning** (Devereux Early Childhood Assessment) so that reporting on child outcomes is possible.

38 of the 39 Washington counties reached through 2008-2009 school year contracts.

In the 2006-2007 school year, increased by 35% the number of families served in ECEAP that have been touched by the **child welfare system**.

C

WHAT WE KNOW

"School readiness initiatives should be judged not only on the basis of their effectiveness in improving performance of the children whom they reach, but also the extent to which they make progress in reducing the disparities that are observed at school entry in the skills of young children with differing backgrounds."

*From Neurons to Neighborhoods:
The Science of Early Childhood*

The ABCs of what we do (cont'd)

Ensure safe places

DEL licenses child care settings to signal that they are safe, healthy places where parents can be sure their children are cared for and have the chance to *play and learn*.

We set the rules for Washington's more than 7,400 licensed child care settings in family homes or child care centers; these businesses serve about 174,000 children. The majority of DEL's staff focus on licensing activities (approximately 132 of 208 staff) around the state and support business owners and their staff in meeting the state's rules for minimum safety and health. DEL child care licensors take action if settings are found to be unsafe for Washington children.

DEL also offers the online Licensed Child Care Information System so parents and others can learn more about licensed child care providers. We partner with the Washington State Child Care Resource & Referral Network, the entity responsible for matching families' child care needs with licensed providers. (RCW 43.215.545)

Progress since DEL's creation:

Best practices learned through **National Association of Regulatory Administration study** on Washington's child care licensing practice and regulations and national comparisons.



Increased transparency through **new DEL Web site and online Licensed Child Care Information System** that includes posting of compliance agreements.

Licensing "dashboards" created that demonstrate DEL staff's daily progress on meeting core performance measures.

Public forums attended by hundreds of stakeholders focused on key issues such as unlicensed child care and information shared on the Licensed Child Care Information System.

Agency licensing policies developed and implemented to begin ensuring greater consistency in decision-making.

Negotiated Rulemaking Team with SEIU and other interested parties to develop research-based regulations for family home child care providers.

Curriculum designed for child care licensors on observation, documentation and interviewing.

The ABCs of what we do (cont'd)

Support working parents

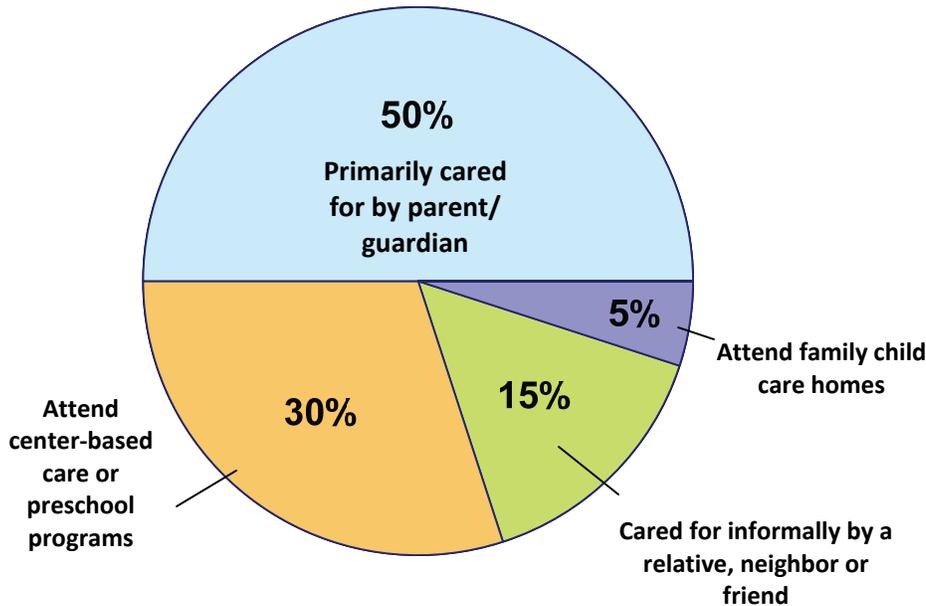
Parents deserve to know their children are well cared for while parents are at work. We set the rules for Working Connections Child Care (WCCC), a subsidy program that provides money to child care businesses and relatives who care for children while parents work or look for work to support their families.

We partner with the Department of Social and Health Services, the state agency that decides who is able to receive WCCC and makes the payments to child caregivers. DEL also oversees seasonal and homeless child care subsidy programs.

Progress since DEL's creation:

DEL has conducted two **subsidy policy studies** that provide Washington with national best practice information and recommendations for strengthening both business processes and the continuity of care children receive.

Implementation of the **collective bargaining agreement** through rate increases and training on subsidy administration for licensed and exempt child caregivers.



Percentage of Washington children under age 6 cared for in various settings.
— DEL 2008 Parent Needs and Desires Assessment

WHAT WE KNOW

Parents choose a variety of care arrangements to meet their needs.

The type of child care chosen by families differs by a child's age, with younger children more often in parental care and older children more often in center-based care.

— DEL 2008 Parent Needs and Desires Assessment

The ABCs of what we do (cont'd)

Ensure lifelong learning

DEL invests millions of dollars to support the quality of care Washington children receive from teachers and child care providers. DEL encourages early childhood professionals to seek learning experiences that will strengthen their ability to spark the joy of learning in children. We support early childhood professionals through basic child development and licensing training, English language learning classes, college scholarships, an apprenticeship program and a leadership institute.

Progress since DEL's creation:

- * DEL's **Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)** design involved six communities, including the two Thrive By Five Washington demonstration neighborhoods, in a "community up" process that involved thousands of parents, providers and other stakeholders.
- *The **child care consultation pilot program** gives child caregivers access to behavioral health experts to support them in their work with children who experience behavioral issues.
- *DEL's **Building Bridges to Higher Education program**, in partnership with the Washington Association for Educators of Personnel in Early Childhood Programs, helps hundreds of providers around the state to meet continuing education requirements and receive college credit.
- *Through the **Early Learning Partnership**, DEL, OSPI and Thrive by Five Washington agreed to collaborate on key issues, including professional development for early learning educators.

Invest in growing minds and local communities

DEL invests in local projects that support parents and communities throughout Washington in instilling children with a love of learning.

Progress since DEL's creation:

- *Fund the **Reading Readiness Initiative**, which helps local families use storytelling and reading to encourage brain and language development. Thrive by Five Washington provides an additional investment to nurture the emerging reader in *all* children.
- * Fund 16 **public/private early learning partnerships** in local communities.
- * Fund expanded services on the **Parent Trust for Washington's Children Family Help Line**.
- * Fund services for **community-based play and learn activities** for license-exempt families, friends and neighbors who care for children.
- ***Partner with 13 of the state's children's museums** to help open the door to these rich early learning environments to families who may otherwise not be able to access them.
- *Fund **culturally and linguistically relevant parent support projects** in 22 Washington communities.
- *23 of the 29 federally recognized Tribal Nations in Washington participated in a May 2007 **early learning summit** and will be involved in a September 2008 summit.

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Goal: Build a Comprehensive Early Learning System

DEL is charged with creating “a more cohesive and integrated voluntary early learning system” (HB 2964). Additionally, in 2007 the Early Learning Advisory Council was established “to advise the department on statewide early learning community needs and progress. The council shall work in conjunction with the department to *develop a statewide early learning plan that crosses systems and sectors* to promote alignment of private and public sector actions, objectives, and resources, and to ensure school readiness.” (SB 5828—emphasis added)

Strategic Priorities

Increase the quality of early care and education

DEL will work with the Thrive by Five Washington partnership and local communities/neighborhoods to design, field test, evaluate, propose implementation and implement a voluntary QRIS that will provide incentives and resources for early learning programs to improve quality of teaching and environments.



DEL believes that inclusion of all early learning programs who wish to voluntarily participate in QRIS will provide the foundation for statewide, comprehensive early learning programs and services.

Parents need “consumer report” information that shows the range of characteristics of early learning programs beyond minimal licensing, tribal certification, or ECEAP or Head Start standards. Including all early learning programs in QRIS will create a synergy and integration as this improvement system of encouragement, incentives, training, coaching, rating and evaluation is an organizing tool that must center on the quality of early care and education needed for children to succeed in school and life.

WHAT WE KNOW

“It is well known that the present early care and education delivery system is chaotic, uncoordinated, and of uneven quality...

Achieving consistent program results will necessitate moving beyond a focus on individual programs and individualistic practices to collective adherence to accepted standards, while still encompassing reflective, creative, and culturally sensitive practices.”

— *Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education*

“Start with a simple system, something doable and build on it. The standard is not a perfect QRIS. It is a system that fits your resources and ability to implement. Expect to make regular adjustments and improve implementation strategies as you learn what works best for Washington.”

— *Peggy Ball, National Child Care Information Center*

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Goal: Build a Comprehensive Early Learning System (cont'd)

Create a cohesive map: professional training, education and development pathways

DEL will convene stakeholders and lead the creation of Washington's statewide map of professional training, education and development pathways that will result in higher quality care.

DEL will align researched-based child development guidelines with linked data-gathering/evaluation of all currently funded professional development opportunities and experiences to promote a comprehensive early learning system. This process will include involvement of the education system, from early learning to K-12, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Phase in evaluation for all DEL investments

Independent evaluation of all DEL programs is needed so that the department and Washington state decision-makers will learn what's working and what's not, and importantly, what to invest in to achieve cost savings and return on investment. State and national expertise will be required to support establishing program evaluations in a methodical, phased-in manner.

Increase the continuity of care for the highest-risk children

Parents deserve to know that their children are well cared for while they are at work. Instability in subsidy receipt may contribute to multiple changes in care arrangements, which developmental experts identify as a risk to healthy socio-emotional development in children.

For parents, instability in subsidy receipt may mean the difference between keeping and losing a job, and, for those employed, between self-sufficiency and poverty. DEL will propose solutions, drawn from its Public Works Subsidy Policy Studies, to help children remain in continuous care.

WHAT WE KNOW

Parents are paying attention to the quality of early learning programs.

97% of parents report having a clean and safe environment, and how the provider talks and plays with the child, were very important reasons in choosing and keeping their child care arrangement.

The provider's experience and training, the learning activities and materials children use, and how children get along with each other are also important to more than 80% of parents.

—*DEL 2008 Parent Needs and Desires Assessment*

WHAT WE KNOW

"In the first three years, every child needs one or two primary caregivers who remain a steady, intimate relationship with that child."

—*The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn and Flourish*

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Goal: Build a Comprehensive Early Learning System (cont'd)

Create an Early Learning Information System

The need for information technology that supports the efficient administration and evaluation of early learning investments is imperative to DEL and to Washington. Dependency on proprietary, legacy-based systems can be expensive and potentially unsustainable. DEL will seek a department-based Early Learning Information System, enhanced technological tools to assist DEL staff and stakeholders in gathering key data around child safety and well-being, and supporting information technology that assists DEL in linking with other public and private entities' systems.

Improve capacity to lead and collaborate

To build a comprehensive early learning system in Washington, it will be necessary to increase DEL's staff and consultant capacity to lead and to collaborate with Tribal Nations and state, regional, and local entities. Like other more evolved statewide early learning systems (e.g. North Carolina), the three DEL Service Areas are positioned to engage in a wider variety of activities than child care licensing and have the ability to enhance effective partnerships as well as obtain continuous parent input about localized needs.

DEL will put forward proposals aimed at strengthening its capacity to lead and partner with: parents; state, regional and local (both public and private) organizations; the K-12 system (local and state); and Tribal Nations.



DEL also will continue its work with the Early Learning Advisory Council to advise and collaborate on building the required statewide early learning plan. And, continued support of local coalitions is critical to creating a system that meets rural and urban Washington's needs and raises the level of participation and quality of care and education in all communities.

Finally, rules and regulations must be updated—some, such as those for seasonal child care programs and school-age child care programs, are decades old. DEL must have resources, internally or for contracting with external stakeholders, to lead collaborative rule/regulations' revisions so that they are research-based, commonsensical, and understandable to parents and programs. Since DEL is mandated to conduct negotiated rulemaking on family home provider regulations, there is currently no extra staff capacity to launch this critical work on other rules and regulations that are largely outdated and not written in plain talk.

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Goal: Build a Comprehensive Early Learning System (cont'd)

Reach infants and toddlers

DEL will work with policy-makers on the inclusion of birth-to-3 programs to strengthen the early learning focus in Washington. The majority of infants and toddlers are not cared for in out-of-home settings—parents and other primary caregivers need information and resources on child development as well as more formal programs to support their confidence in meeting developmental needs. In addition, DEL wants to work with the National Infant Toddler Care Quality Initiative to develop a specific plan, with parents and stakeholders, to determine the most achievable methods and measures for raising the quality of experiences babies and toddlers receive in Washington.

“I really want ideas about how to make an ideal learning activity happen in your home. Some simple how-to’s on how to support early learning—like a shopping list of things I could buy for under \$100 for my home.”

—*DEL 2008 Parent Needs and Desires Assessment focus group*

Improve school readiness and transition to kindergarten

For child outcomes to improve, there must be shared understanding of children’s developmental stages and agreed upon processes for observing and recommending to parents and caregiver/providers/teachers what children need help with to progress. DEL, with parents, stakeholders and national consultants, will establish, promote and use a shared:

- Understanding of child development by the early learning and K-3 community;
- Set of guidelines for observing, documenting and planning with parents and caregivers for transition before entering kindergarten; and
- Statewide process for individualizing learning approaches upon kindergarten entry.

Based on initial school readiness and transition to kindergarten planning results, DEL will explore and propose an expansion of services and programs, in partnership with Thrive by Five Washington and other partners, to reach a broader population of developmentally at-risk children than is currently eligible.

Enhance support for family, friend and neighbor care

We know that thousands of Washington children are in the care of license-exempt family, friends and neighbors (FFN). DEL will work to build support and resources for FFN care that meet the unique needs of families.



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Goal: Build a Comprehensive Early Learning System (cont'd)

What could stop us?

The following key factors, external to the Department of Early Learning, could significantly affect the achievement of the goal:

- Early childhood professionals and communities resisting cohesion.
- Lack of public awareness of the importance of early brain development and stimulation to later development.
- Need for additional information technology solutions to enhance availability of data/evidence.
- Expanding need for well-prepared and sufficient numbers of teachers and caregivers to deliver quality services to preschool children.
- Expanding need for bilingual and culturally proficient teachers and caregivers in all early learning environments.
- Economic downturn nationally.
- Federal policy changes or funding reduction.

WHAT WE KNOW

“What happens during the first months and years of life matters a lot. It does not matter because all early damage is irreversible, because missed opportunities can never be made up later, or because the early years provide an indelible blueprint for adult outcomes...Rather, the early years of life matter because early damage...can seriously compromise children’s life prospects.”

—*From Neurons to Neighborhoods:
The Science of Early Childhood*

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Goal: Strengthen Dialogue with Parents and Caregivers

Parents are children's first and most important teachers. At the same time, research shows many children spend the majority of their waking hours in the care of someone other than their parents. For this reason, strengthening our dialogue with both parents and child caregivers is critical to our success as an agency.

Strategic Priorities

Increase research-based information offered to parents and caregivers

Using the results of our 2008 "Parent Needs and Desires Assessment," conducted by SRI International (report dissemination anticipated in July 2008), DEL will target the provision and content of materials to what parents say they want and need – and, get that information in the hands of those who parents access and trust the most.

We do not have the present ability to meet the needs for translation and interpretation, nor the internal cultural and linguistic proficiency. Enhancing the current Family Help Line (for which DEL provides some funding to the Parent Trust for Washington Children) and our Licensed Child Care Information System will be priority items for DEL.

WHAT WE KNOW

"Parents of very young children are particularly eager for authoritative guidance, and this insatiable thirst provides a highly receptive environment for both responsible education and irresponsible manipulation. Within this context, research-based knowledge can be both informative and useful, but the reality of childrearing is always more of an art than a science."

—From *Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood*

FROM DEL'S 2008 PARENT NEEDS AND DESIRES ASSESSMENT

"I ask my pediatrician, or friends and family."

"Make the Internet information in the families' home languages."

More than half of the parents in the focus groups said that they preferred getting information on early learning at pediatricians and doctors' offices and at community service providers. In the survey, the Women, Infants and Children program was cited as one of the best places for materials on early learning to be made accessible.

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Goal: Strengthen Dialogue with Parents and Caregivers (cont'd)

Increase parent involvement in DEL decision-making
DEL will strive to ensure all of our work is parent-tested by considering how every piece of work we do will affect parents, our primary customers. To hear from an even more diverse group of parents, DEL will expand its existing Parent Advisory Group and propose regional groups linked to our three Service Areas. Further, Quality Rating and Improvement System contracts will prioritize parent involvement in program level decision-making.



Routinize research-based collection of parent input

DEL's 2008 Parents Needs and Desires Assessment forms the basis for many budget and policy decisions. We will conduct a similar study every four years, depending on funding, to ensure we are on track with what Washington parents want and need from DEL and a comprehensive early learning system.

Establish training on parent involvement

High-quality early learning programs involve parents and families consistently. For parents to be involved in a meaningful way, the agency staff and external stakeholders will be offered training and approaches on parent involvement that is tied to child development and strengthening families.

“DEL should plan to repeat this kind of parent needs assessment on a regular basis to monitor how its work is addressing parents' needs and preferences.”

—*Parent participating in DEL
2008 Parent Needs and Desires
Assessment focus group*

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Goal: Strengthen Dialogue with Parents and Caregivers (cont'd)

What could stop us?

The following key factors, external to the Department of Early Learning, could significantly affect the achievement of the goal:

- The increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of Washington's population and a work force that is unprepared to meet their needs with compassion and proficiency.
- Need for future parent needs assessments so Washington acts upon parents' stated needs and desires.
- Lack of capacity at local and regional levels that work together in cohesive system with the state.
- Federal budget for economic assistance, early learning and child care decreases.

WHAT WE KNOW

"Children's early development depends on the health and well-being of their parents."

—*From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood*



2009-2013 strategic plan

Goal: Build Public Awareness and Will to Act

Strategic Priorities

Build general public awareness about the importance of early learning

DEL will work to build public awareness about the importance of a child's earliest years—and about the statewide shared responsibility to create a child-friendly state. Through our Web site, print materials and other communications tools, we will offer Washington residents information about child development, DEL programs, resources and ways they can support healthy child development in their communities.

We began this effort by conducting a public awareness poll in January 2008 that set the baseline for what Washingtonians know and believe about early learning and our work. Our general awareness campaign, "What Have You Done to Help a Child Today?" will be promoted more broadly through public service announcements and tips for how to make Washington the most child-friendly state in the nation.

Create culturally and linguistically relevant public awareness materials

Washington is home to an increasingly diverse population. We will ensure DEL public awareness materials are informative, in plain talk, and available in culturally and linguistically appropriate formats. Resources for additional communications and outreach are necessary.

Strengthen DEL capacity on legislative policy work

DEL was established without positions dedicated to legislative policy and relations work. Consideration will be given to this critical area of public awareness and will to act, and DEL will put forward analysis and proposals for strengthening this capacity.

"The time has come to stop blaming parents, communities, business and government – and to shape a shared agenda to ensure both a rewarding childhood and a promising future for all children."

— *From Neurons to Neighborhoods:
The Science of Early Childhood*



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Goal: Build Public Awareness and Will to Act (cont'd)

What could stop us?

The following key factors, external to the Department of Early Learning, could significantly affect the achievement of the goal:

- Infiltrating the high volume of messaging public already encounters daily.
- Cost of production and translation of communications materials that parents say they want and need.
- Infrastructure of DEL and other programs not sufficient to meet parents' needs and preferences.
- Lack of an Early Learning Information System to ensure communication efforts are based on accurate and up-to-date data.



“The charge to society is to blend the skepticism of a scientist, the passion of an advocate, the pragmatism of a policy maker, the creativity of a practitioner and the devotion of a parent—and to use existing knowledge to ensure both a decent quality of life for all of our children and a promising future for the nation.”

—*From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood*

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Goal: Build Organizational Excellence

We are building an agency where all of our 200 employees are committed to—and inspired by—our shared purpose of creating a child-friendly Washington where children grow up safe, healthy and with a love of learning.

As a young state agency, we have the unusual opportunity in state government of establishing a new internal “agency culture.” We strive to ensure our employees are valued, supported, and receive the training and tools they need to do their jobs well. At DEL, we believe that “good enough” is not good enough for Washington’s families. We support and encourage employees in constantly improving their knowledge, skills and abilities.

“Every state agency, program and employee must be accountable for producing measurable results that matter to citizens. Holding government responsible for results is just common sense.”

—Gov. Chris Gregoire

Strategic Priorities

Improve performance management and accountability

DEL is committed to results for Washington. Increasing our capacity for performance management and accountability will help us to focus more clearly on critical outcomes, and reinforce the accountability of leadership and all staff for getting results.

We are building performance measurement processes and tracking systems, and dedicating staff to these efforts. The department is committed to implementing a continuous quality improvement plan beyond its current child care licensing plan, so that all staff identify, plan and implement improvements in service delivery. Given the dozens of required reports, measures, and plans for submission to the federal and state government entities and auditors, DEL must build internal capacity to meet these requirements—the skill sets needed include research, data analysis and evaluation.

Enhance staff development

DEL will work to increase staff satisfaction, competencies and knowledge through quality training and improvements to our Performance Development Plan process. A 2007 employee survey provides the baseline for employee satisfaction and all employee training will have an evaluation component to ensure that our investments in staff development are effective.

Increase technology and tools

We are dedicated to data-driven management, driven by the vision that every child has great potential. We are working hard to build our capacity for data and technology. DEL implemented “licensing dashboards” to monitor our progress and are committed to improving data and management tools to inform and improve our business. An Early Learning Information System, and technology training for staff is critical to our mission of helping children reach their potential.

2009-2013 strategic plan

Goal: Build Organizational Excellence (cont'd)

What could stop us?

The following key factors, external to the Department of Early Learning, could significantly affect the achievement of the goal:

- Shifts in the labor market.
- Advances in technology and information systems.
- Changes in IT and facilities needs of other agencies on whom we are dependent; and lack of information technology within DEL.



“(The early learning field faces) two adaptive challenges:

1. A performance gap that calls for closing the distance between an expressed commitment to children's high-quality early care and education and the field's uneven competence and
2. A credibility gap that calls for closing the distance between the desire to be recognized as leaders on behalf of early care and education and the field's self-protective behaviors.”

— *Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education*

Required components of the strategic plan

Every Washington state agency is required to include certain core components in its strategic plan. Several of these components have already been presented: our agency's mission; statutory references; goals, objectives (strategic priorities) and highlights of key strategies; external challenges and opportunities aligned with each of our goals.

What follows are additional core components, including assessment of our internal capacity and financial health, our activity-related performance measures and targets for Washington's Office of Financial Management, and discussion of performance analysis.

Internal capacity

Staffing and organizational capacity

Changing work force: In 2000, the non-Hispanic white population comprised 79.4 percent of Washington's population, while the minority population was 20.6 percent. By 2030, the minority population is projected to increase to 31.6 percent of the total population; from one in five to one in three. DEL is committed to ensuring our work force reflects the populations we serve.



Aging work force: Washington state employers are faced with a large number of long-term employees becoming eligible to retire in the near future. More than 60 DEL employees will be eligible to retire (some with reduced benefits) by December 31, 2011. Efforts need to be made to preserve and transfer the knowledge of these employees.

Leadership and supervisory development: With DEL's creation in 2006, focused efforts were made to enhance supervisory skills and abilities through a variety of developmental opportunities for supervisors. Better management of employees increases our ability to achieve our goals, and has positive impacts on employee morale—both of which translate to a public better served. Work will continue to ensure agency managers

at all levels develop related policies, programs and tools to support a strong leadership culture.

Employee satisfaction and engagement: 100 percent of DEL employees participated in the state's employee survey process in Fall 2007. While DEL's overall score on this 12-question survey was slightly below the statewide average, *every* DEL employee provided us with feedback. DEL has identified three specific areas to focus on improving prior to the next survey:
Question 1—I have the opportunity to give input on decisions affecting my work.
Question 9—I receive recognition for a job well done.
Question 10—My performance evaluation provides me with meaningful information about my performance.

Required components of the strategic plan

Performance management

DEL must fulfill multiple performance management and accountability requirements including Gov. Gregoire's Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) reviews, performance audits, and multiple state and federal reporting requirements.

To meet these mandates, DEL must have a coordinated approach to doing the work of constant process improvement and measuring effectiveness, tracking the work internally, and presenting the information in an understandable, meaningful way for stakeholders and policymakers. We do not currently have dedicated staff for this.

Child care licensing

Research shows increased monitoring visits result in increased safety for children. The current licensor-to-licensed-child-care-provider ratio does not allow DEL to make unannounced and announced monitoring visits frequently enough.

Increasing licensing staff also would bring the DEL licensing ratios closer to the recommended national standards from the National Association for the Education of Young Children. With increased monitoring, child care providers can have more frequent contact to resolve licensing compliance issues and children will be in healthier and safer environments.

Facilities and office space

DEL's state office is headquartered in the Harborstone Credit Union building in Lacey and occupies the entire second floor and part of the first floor. There is little capacity for additional staff. While the agency has looked into efficiency efforts such as freeing up all valuable floor space, we have maximized our existing workspace. The agency will need to procure additional space elsewhere in the building or in another facility.

DEL also faces facilities issues with its 18 service area offices, all of which are co-located with either Economic Services Administration (ESA) or Children's Administration (CA) in leased space. As leases come up in our Service Areas, and as ESA and CAs space needs grow, we are being asked to look for alternative spaces.

Included in all of our assessments is a discussion of whether it is cost-effective to invest in a significant upgrade or consider another facility.

Financial health

Sixty percent of DEL's budget is federal funding through the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The Child Care and Development Block Grant funds 100 percent of DEL's child care licensing activities and many child care contracts.



Required components of the strategic plan

What could stop us?

The following key factors, external to the Department of Early Learning, could significantly affect internal capacity, facilities issues and financial health:

Child Care and Development Block Grant

The President's proposed FY 2009 budget would maintain the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) at the same level as FY 2008. The budget requests a total of \$5 billion for CCDF, which includes \$2.1 billion in discretionary funds for the Child Care and Development Block Grant and \$2.9 billion for Child Care Entitlement to States (CCES).

Of total CCES funds, 2 percent are reserved for eligible tribal organizations; 70 percent are set aside for families receiving TANF, transitioning from TANF, or at risk of becoming eligible for TANF; and a minimum of 4 percent continues to be set aside for quality improvements to programs.

CCDF discretionary funds are allocated to states through a formula based on each state's share of children under age 5, the state's share of children receiving free or reduced-price lunches and the state per capita income. Demographic changes in Washington and other states may impact the amount of funding Washington receives.

Social Services Block Grant

The President's proposed budget eliminates the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) beginning in 2010. A portion of Washington's SSBG allocation is expended on child care programs.



Required components of the strategic plan

Performance measures and analysis

Through established cross-divisional “Accountability Core Teams,” DEL is involving staff from across the agency in performance management. We are providing our employees the opportunities to see the link between their work and the agency goals every day.

This process will help us understand what is working and what is not, enabling us to quickly make course corrections. This will help us to test our assumptions, engage in timely problem solving and improve cross-agency learning.

As DEL continues to improve the quality of our performance management structure, we are continuously looking for the best ways to measure, analyze and recognize our performance. Increasing our capacity for performance measurement and accountability will help us to focus more clearly on critical outcomes, and reinforce the accountability of DEL leadership and all staff for getting results.

As one of Washington’s newest state agencies, we have much more work to do in this area, and are benefiting from the technical assistance and mentoring provided by the Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP) office as we develop our initial GMAP measures.

We have multiple performance measures reporting mandates including the longitudinal study and specific program area reports, the Joint Legislative Audit Review Committee pre-audit, other state audits and GMAP, in addition to our internal measures unique to specific programs, such as our Early Childhood and Education Assistance Program performance standards and many others that require committed time and attention.



Required components of the strategic plan

Activity inventory statewide performance measures

In our infancy as an agency, four initial measures were established to tie our work to statewide strategies and result areas. It is expected that as we grow and change as an agency, changes and/or additions to these are inevitable.

Investments in early learning contribute to Washington's Priorities of Government across the board and are recognized as a core investment for Washington, from the everyday safety, health, and happiness of children through their success in school and life, to Washington's local economy and ability to compete in the global marketplace.

While DEL's work touches many priorities of government, including health, economic vitality, cultural and recreational activities, and public safety, there are two specific areas to which we are directly tied:

Improve the security of Washington's vulnerable children and adults

Child Care Licensing

Percent of licensed homes and centers that will be monitored within the timeframe required by the Department of Early Learning's agency policy.

(Targets: Fourth quarter 85 percent; eighth quarter 90 percent)

Child Care and Early Learning Quality Initiatives

Number of early learning providers who advance their level of education as a result of the Department's early learning investment.

(Targets and baseline to be reported at end of the fourth quarter)

Child Care Subsidies

Ratio of licensed child care providers that accept subsidies as compared to the number of families eligible for subsidies.

(Targets and baseline to be reported at end of the fourth quarter)

Improve student achievement in elementary, middle and high schools

Early Learning Programs

Percent of Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program teachers who are in compliance with the Department's teacher qualification performance standards.

(Targets: Fourth quarter 75 percent; eighth quarter 80 percent)

Information sources

In addition to input from DEL staff and consultants, sources used in creating the agency strategic plan include:

DEL 2007 Public Awareness Poll (Conducted for DEL by Craciun Research Group)

DEL 2008 Parent Needs and Desires Assessment (Conducted for DEL by SRI International)

Early Childhood Program Evaluations: A Decision-Maker's Guide, National Forum on Early Childhood Program Evaluation, 2007

From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development, Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips, editors, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Press, 2000

The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn and Flourish, T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley L.. Greenspan, Da Capo Press, 2001

Licensed Child Care in Washington State, 2006 (DEL publication)

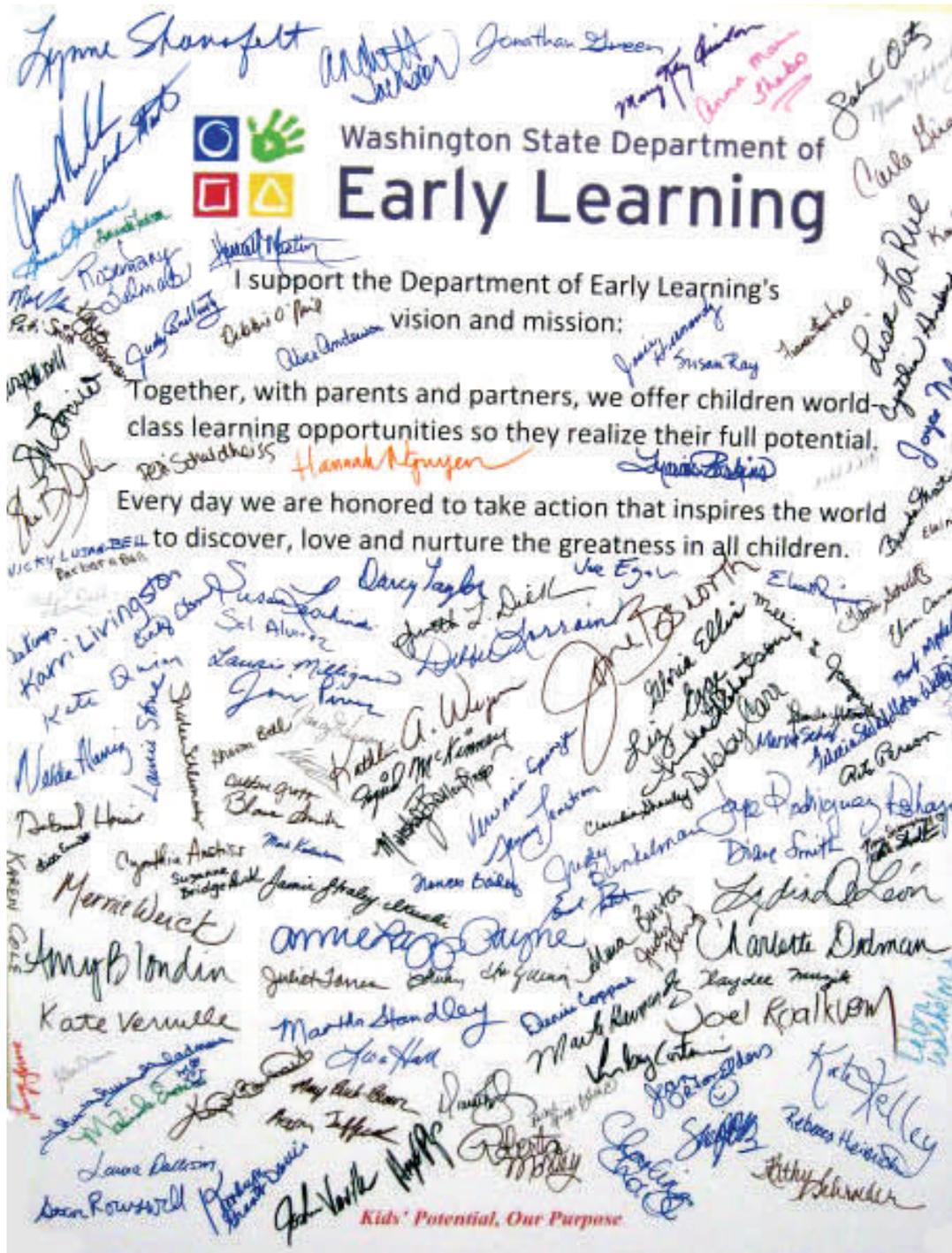
National Association for Regulatory Administration Workload Study and Analysis (Prepared for DEL by NARA, 2007)

Ready or Not: Leadership Choices in Early Care and Education, Stacie G. Goffin and Valora Washington, Teachers College Press, 2007

Recommendations and Issues Relating to the Planning Phase for Implementing a Quality Rating and Improvement System in Washington (Prepared for DEL by Jarod A. Lisonbee, 2007)

Washington State Child Care Subsidy and Policy Reports (Prepared for DEL by Public Works, 2007)

Staff commitment





Washington State Department of
Early Learning

Kids' Potential, Our Purpose

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