



Child Care Aware of Washington 2018 Public Policy Agenda

In order to stabilize the child care field and reach our state's goal of ensuring that 90% of our children enter kindergarten ready for school, Child Care Aware of WA calls on the Legislature and Governor to:

- 1. Restore the \$21 million that has been cut from Early Achievers to make sure child care small businesses can continue their momentum toward high-quality care, and retain low income families' access to quality, licensed child care, and**
- 2. Invest \$32 million into Working Connections Child Care, and prioritize the rates that are farthest from their market rate.**

Washington State earned national recognition in 2015 when it passed the Early Start Act, groundbreaking legislation that moved high-quality child care forward across the state. The new law defined high-quality child care, enabled child care businesses to deliver it with robust supports and provided independent quality assessment information to families seeking child care. Passage of the law formed a commitment between the state and licensed providers who care for 60% of our children under the age of six. Since then, providers have kept their commitment. However, the state has not held up its end of the bargain.

Since the passage of the Early Start Act, Washington has replaced state funding for Early Achievers with temporary new federal dollars, creating a \$21 million hole in the budget. This will derail the progress child care small businesses are making toward the 2020 mandate for all providers who serve children on Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) to be rated "high quality" in Early Achievers. High-quality child care is incredibly important, particularly for infants, babies and toddlers because 85% of a person's brain develops by age 3. Meanwhile, WCCC reimbursement rates continue to fall behind the true cost of providing care, driving down wages and increasing turnover. (Child care professionals already rank in just the third percentile for wages, earning less than pet groomers.) Reimbursement rates are now about 20% behind private rates statewide. Private-pay families with children in child care are paying more for child care than tuition at our state's universities.