About Washington’s early learning professional development system

Research shows that increased training and education for early learning professionals relates to higher-quality interactions with children. Washington is working to improve the quality of early learning programs by increasing the skills and education levels of those who work with children. Our state’s professional development system helps those who care for and teach young children:

• Understand what they need to know and be able to do when caring for children.
• Manage their training and education records.
• Find training and education opportunities to help them move forward in their careers.
• Find resources and financial support for individual professional development.

Children who are nurtured and taught by sensitive, well-trained and well-compensated caregivers are more prepared for school and life. These results are especially significant for children from low-income families. Recent research findings also indicate that professional development for the early care and education work force is linked to program quality, child outcomes and positive adult-child interactions and work force stability. Elements of professional development include:

• Continuing education.
• Community-based training.
• Higher education including certificate and degree programs.
• On-site consultation and technical assistance.
• Coaching and mentoring.
• Career guidance tools such as information on career pathways.
• Work force initiatives such as scholarships and wage enhancements to support professionals.

Many of Washington’s professional development supports and system enhancements in the past year were funded by Washington’s Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge grant.

MERIT

The Managed Education and Registry Information Tool (MERIT) is Washington’s online tool for early care and education and school-age care professionals to find training, access information on career pathways and track career progress. MERIT provides online access to support professionals, trainers and DEL licensing staff. In 2012, MERIT development efforts included the integration of a trainer approval system, the Washington State Career Lattice, facility registration that associates individuals to the current employer, Early Achievers applications, and a collection of work force data to inform professional development planning.

State-approved trainers

DEL’s new trainer approval process promotes high-quality training opportunities around the state. This will help ensure all trainings are grounded in the state’s core competencies for professionals and the Early Learning and Development Guidelines. A new process has been identified to simplify the application process for K-12 teachers to become state-approved trainers. A trainer feedback model is under development and will provide trainers a resource for continued professional growth.

Partnerships with higher education

DEL, in partnership with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, adopted statewide “stackable certificates” in early childhood education (ECE). All community colleges around the state that provide ECE programs have an opportunity to adopt the new certificates, which offer consistent early learning curriculum, course descriptions and course numbers at participating colleges.

Participating colleges also are offering Early Achievers Opportunity Grants. These grants help pay for tuition, books and other resources such as tutoring. One advisor serves as the single point of contact for all Early Achievers Opportunity Grant recipients to facilitate academic advising, registration and support student success.

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Coaching

In 2012, DEL implemented a new coaching framework through Early Achievers, Washington's quality rating and improvement system. Professional development through coaching allows child care programs to receive one-on-one support to improve quality. Coaches and providers work together to identify goals, enhance skills and improve child success through a reflective process. In the coming year, DEL will work with partners to build professional competencies and standards for professionals who serve in a relationship-based professional development role such as coaches, technical assistance specialists, trainers and consultants.

Career Lattice

Washington’s career lattice details a clear pathway of professional progression from novice providers to experienced professionals based on education and training qualifications. There are 15 steps on the lattice that align with program standards in licensed child care, ECEAP, Head Start programs and other career options working with children birth through 18 years of age.

Through the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge grant, professionals are eligible to apply for awards after being placed on the career lattice. This is a new incentive to acknowledge employment in early care and education, training and educational achievements, and continued progress.

Washington’s career lattice informs the collection of work force data. Gathering this information will help identify trends to support the continual growth and integration of Washington’s professional development system.

### Professional development by the numbers

As of November 2012:

- 134 state-approved trainers in Washington
- 30,338 active professionals use MERIT
- 288 organizations, statewide and nationally combined, use MERIT

### Washington State Career Lattice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Education Mastery</th>
<th>Core Competency Level</th>
<th>Career opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Entry-Level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>FCC Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20 credits towards Bachelor’s degree with 30 or more approved ECE or school-age college credits</td>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ECE Director (without program supervisor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>50 credits towards Bachelor’s degree with 30 or more approved ECE or school-age college credits</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Head Start Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20 credits towards Master’s degree in any field with 30 or more approved ECE or school-age college credits at any level of coursework</td>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>CCC College Instructor/Professor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Minimum requirements for the aligned positions.

For more information: [www.del.wa.gov/requirements/professional/Default.aspx](http://www.del.wa.gov/requirements/professional/Default.aspx)