



Support for Early Learning and Families

2006 EARLY LEARNING LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

Washington Learns (a citizen panel) and Governor Christine Gregoire are advocating several policy proposals to the 2006 Washington Legislature. They are a bold initiative that will elevate early learning and can result in a seamless, integrated statewide system. It makes sense - from the standpoint of a wise economic investment and can prepare our youngest children for success in school and life.

The state should support local solutions and recognize that each community's stakeholders and priority needs may be different, and that not all local agencies are linked to state funding. The legislature should fully fund the early learning proposals and maintain that commitment over time.

These specific proposals are:

- **Department of Early Learning.** *Overview:* The Governor proposes a cabinet level department with a director appointed by the Governor. Consolidating management of child care and early learning programs in a single agency will demonstrate the state's commitment to great priority and viability for early learning, improve parent and family support and early learning choices, reduce fragmentation among programs, and increase the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of early learning programs. *SELF's view:* A cabinet level position is a key to success. The programs to be included are limited and focused at poverty level families. A talented, experienced early learning administrator is needed to head the Department. The Department needs to support the whole child - social, emotional, cognitive and behavioral - by integrating physical health, literacy, special needs and mental health. School ready families need a strong link to their public school system.
- **Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS).** *Overview:* The proposed QRIS would offer incentives to improve quality and tiered reimbursement. It provides clear steps, supports and incentives for early learning and school-age providers to increase the quality of services they provide. The program ratings will provide parents and communities with information about the type and quality of programs that are available in the community. *SELF's view:* Full funding - to support providers achieving education and enhanced learning environments and increased subsidy rates - is needed to ensure success. The economic incentives - other than the marketplace - only exist for parents with subsidized care (tiered reimbursement). The current subsidy rate is set at 34% of the 2004 Market Rate Study. The QRIS must be fully funded to be successful. QRIS should move statewide quickly, not incrementally over a long period of time. Unresolved is how the quality of care for children in unlicensed will be addressed.
- **Public - Private Partnership.** *Overview:* A public-private partnership will focus on public engagement and quality improvement. The partnership will coordinate a public outreach campaign to reach parents and providers, and partner with local communities to support promising models. *SELF's view:* The partnership (statewide and local) should be inclusive of traditional and non-traditional service providers. The SELF collaborative is capable of serving as a community coordinating partner. Locally, SELF has already initiated the Clark County Early Learning Fund, in partnership with the Foundation for Early Learning, raising \$300,000 in just its first year.