

**DEPARTMENT OF
EARLY LEARNING
PERFORMANCE AUDIT**

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

SEPTEMBER 26, 2007



STATE OF WASHINGTON
JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT AND
REVIEW COMMITTEE

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Why a JLARC Evaluation of The Department of Early Learning?

Second Substitute House Bill 2964 (2006) established the Department of Early Learning. This legislation also directs JLARC to evaluate the Department's efforts in nine areas.

Background

The Legislature created the Department of Early Learning in 2006 (2SHB 2964). Statute directs the Department to implement state early learning policy and to coordinate, consolidate, and integrate child care and early learning programs in order to administer programs and funding as efficiently as possible.

As part of this broad mandate, the Legislature transferred the administration of three early learning programs to the new Department of Early Learning:

- The Working Connections Child Care Program, transferred from the Department of Social and Health Services. Administration of this program includes:
 - Providing child care subsidies to eligible low-income families; and
 - Licensing child care facilities throughout the state;
- The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, transferred from the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development. Administration of this program is through contracts with regional providers for the state preschool program; and
- The Early Reading Initiative, transferred from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. This program provides grant funds for early literacy projects.

Statute also directs the Department to participate in a nongovernmental public-private partnership, improve parent education and support, carry out quality improvement activities, standardize a variety of administrative functions, and coordinate with the K-12 system and advisory bodies.

Scope

As directed by the Legislature, JLARC will evaluate the implementation and operation of the Department of Early Learning. The review will focus on the evaluation areas specified in statute.

Study Objectives

Per the direction from the Legislature, this study will address the following questions: To what extent

- 1) Have services and programs that were previously administered separately been effectively integrated?
- 2) Have reporting and monitoring activities been consolidated and made more efficient?
- 3) Has consolidation resulted in administrative efficiencies within the Department?
- 4) Have child care and early learning services improved?
- 5) Is subsidized child care available?
- 6) Is subsidized child care affordable?
- 7) Has the Department been an effective partner in the nongovernmental private-public partnership?
- 8) Has the Department put in place procedures to respect parents and legal guardians and provide them the opportunity to participate in the development of policies and program decisions affecting their children?
- 9) Has the Department conducted parent outreach and education?

Data Collection

Per JLARC's request, the Department of Early Learning prepared an initial data collection plan for the committee in advance of this evaluation. JLARC has also identified additional data needed for the evaluation. The overall data collection plan is described in the Department of Early Learning Pre-Audit Briefing Report.

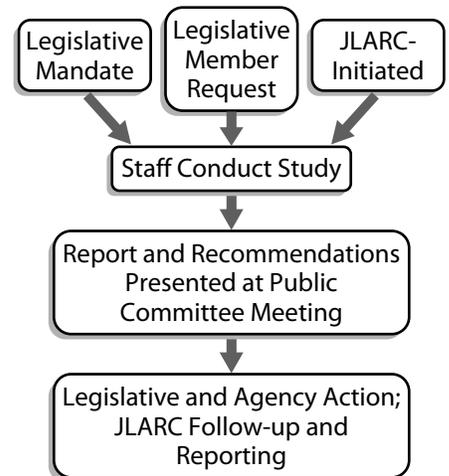
Timeframe for the Study

Staff will present its preliminary and final reports at the JLARC meetings in July and August 2010.

JLARC Staff Contact for the Study

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JLARC Study Process



Criteria for Establishing JLARC Work Program Priorities

- Is study consistent with JLARC mission? Is it mandated?
- Is this an area of significant fiscal or program impact, a major policy issue facing the state, or otherwise of compelling public interest?
- Will there likely be substantive findings and recommendations?
- Is this the best use of JLARC resources? For example:
 - Is JLARC the most appropriate agency to perform the work?
 - Would the study be nonduplicating?
 - Would this study be cost-effective compared to other projects (e.g., larger, more substantive studies take longer and cost more, but might also yield more useful results)?
- Is funding available to carry out the project?