



# Early Achievers & ECEAP Standards Alignment Community Meetings Executive Summary

July 2018

## PROJECT INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Washington passed the Early Start Act, requiring the state Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) to align child care standards across Licensing, Early Achievers and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP). A clear progression of early learning standards connects Licensing, Early Achievers, and ECEAP to help children develop and learn. To inform this alignment process, DCYF – in collaboration with Thrive Washington (Thrive), the Early Learning Regional Coalitions (ELRCs) and other community partners – organized three rounds of community feedback meetings (18 total) across the state between June and October 2017 around revisions to the Early Achievers and ECEAP standards.

Child care and ECEAP providers were recruited and hosted by ELRCs and other community partners as meeting participants. They provided written feedback and participated in open-ended discussion on topic areas related to select revisions to the Early Achievers and ECEAP standards. Questions for written feedback and discussion centered on: clarity and rationale for revisions; systems and supports to implement revised standards; potential unintended consequences of revised standards for providers or communities; and other feedback around the standards alignment process as a whole. Responses for all three rounds of meetings were summarized and analyzed by Thrive and then provided to DCYF to inform final revisions to the Early Achievers and ECEAP standards.

There were four key goals for the community feedback meetings and subsequent reports:

(1) Collect diverse feedback from providers regarding the impact the proposed Early Achievers and ECEAP standards would have on their programs and identify needed supports or systems.	(2) Provide concrete and actionable feedback to DCYF to improve the language and content of the revised standards, ensuring they are clear and that any unintended consequences are identified, such as a standard disproportionately affecting certain communities and/or providers.
(3) Communicate high-level feedback to DCYF on the standards alignment process to improve both the alignment of standards and the community engagement process through fall 2017.	(4) Communicate back to providers, partners and the general public how and why certain feedback from the report was used, creating a positive feedback loop between providers and DCYF.

This executive summary will review the overall community engagement process, highlight key findings, and discuss recommendations and next steps.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS**

The following steps outline the general phases of the community engagement process, including development, implementation and analysis.

### **1. DCYF and Thrive scheduled the following meetings:**

- Round 1: Child Outcomes, and Family Engagement
- Round 2: Professional Development, and Program Administration & Oversight.
- Round 3: Environments, and Interactions & Curriculum.

For each round, DCYF provided proposed standards to Thrive with documentation and rationales for the revisions.

### **2. Thrive and DCYF identified revisions to prioritize for feedback, focusing on significant changes that could affect child outcomes, financial and/or logistical requirements for providers.**

- A portion of DCYF's Alignment Advisory Committee participated in the selection of the final revisions that went to the community.
- At the outset of the project, Thrive and DCYF decided to present three Early Achievers and ECEAP revisions per round to meeting participants. The objective in using focused topics was to collect nuanced, detailed feedback from the community.

### **3. ELRCs and community partners recruited meeting participants.**

- To help guide recruitment of diverse providers from across the state, DCYF shared demographic and provider data for each coalition region, as well as information about ECEAP and Head Start. For each meeting, coalitions and partners recruited 10-20 participants, representing different geographic regions of the state, demographic groups, languages spoken and variety of early learning settings (e.g., centers and family homes, ECEAP, Head Start and providers participating in Early Achievers).
  - i. The second round of meetings focused on proposed ECEAP standards. ELRCs and community partners recruited ECEAP providers and Early Achievers providers who were knowledgeable and interested in ECEAP.
- To include a diverse mix of participants across the state, some regions with large populations of certain ethnic or tribal groups had community meetings that focused on these particular communities. Of the regions involved, King County hosted Somali provider meetings; Yakima hosted meetings focused on Hispanic providers; and tribal providers hosted meetings in locations across the state.

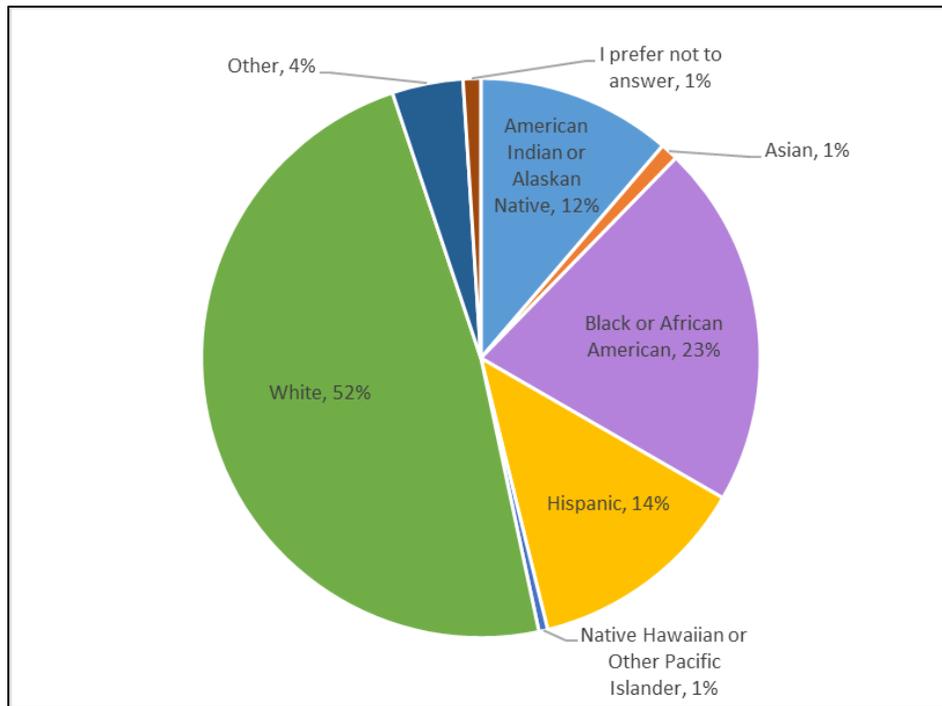
### **4. Community engagement meetings were held across the state in three rounds.**

- "Topic Area" documents were provided to participants prior to and during the meeting, which included the actual language of the revised standard (highlighting where new requirements were included), as well as an explanation of the differences between the previous standard and the revised standard, and the rationale for these changes.
- Participants answered the same five questions for each revised standard. Questions 1 and 2 were multiple choice (with the option to provide open-ended feedback as well). Questions 3-5 were open-ended and targeted toward understanding necessary supports and any unintended consequences of the standard. After filling out the questionnaire, participants engaged in small group discussion with recorded notes.

### **5. Thrive collected meeting feedback, analyzed the responses, and created analysis reports for DCYF (one report for each round of meetings).**

## **RESULTS**

Total demographic breakdown of meeting participants



Efforts were made to recruit a diverse provider population from across the state for these meetings. We saw the greatest success of reflecting the diversity in Washington when trusted local leaders directed recruitment efforts within their respective ethnic/racial communities.

Common themes of participant feedback across all rounds

- Standards that have cost, staff and/or training implications should be supported by DCYF funding.
- Language in the standards must be clear, simple and direct for providers.
- Added flexibility in the standards was requested, especially related to establishing timelines and policies that fit the unique needs of programs across the state.
- Knowledge of and access to community resources are necessary to comply with the standards and to support children and families.
- Access barriers for rural communities and for ESL providers were consistently highlighted.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

Based on the entirety of this process – ranging from meeting data, to participant feedback, to other respondent evaluations – Thrive has developed the following recommendations:

- Providers in different kinds of programs have varying availability throughout the day (e.g., directors vs. teachers, family homes vs. centers, etc.). It is important to offer a variety of meeting times throughout the community engagement process to enable different kinds of providers to participate.
- For those providers not in ECEAP, there was a degree of confusion about how ECEAP revisions would affect their programs. Some were concerned they were being required to provide ECEAP services or otherwise run their programs like ECEAP. Others expressed confusion about ECEAP in general. In future public engagement processes, it is important to provide greater context around ECEAP so that participants unfamiliar with the program understand why they're being asked to give feedback and what they're giving feedback on.

- While there were translated meeting materials for this process, providers whose primary language is not English could benefit from more guidance and training in their own languages to better equip them to participate in community engagements. This will enable a deeper level of engagement and allow DCYF to understand what supports these communities need.
- In general, participants appeared to respond more favorably to revisions when there were clear rationales for changes made to the standards. There were also consistent questions raised in each round about implementation and monitoring. An accompanying document to the revised standards, including rationales for changes and DCYF's plans for implementation, would be a helpful resource for providers.

## **NEXT STEPS**

DCYF has used Thrive's three rounds of feedback reports to make final edits to the standards. DCYF will produce and share a companion report to this executive summary that communicates their process for using community feedback to revise the final standards.