DCYF Staff Qualification Workgroup

Thursday, May 28, 2026 | 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Objectives

- Share input coming from the field.
- Review and discuss initial ideas for high-level recommendations based on workgroup discussions.
- Discuss options for calculating experience in cases of promotions.

In attendance

Guest speakers and presenters noted in the source materials:

- Jennifer Jennings-Shaffer (facilitator)
- DCYF staff and workgroup members, including Adriana Terrones, Brett Skinner, Suzie Endersbe, Tiffany Lee, Karma Hugo, and workgroup members who participated in discussion.

Welcome and Opening – Jennifer Jennings-Shaffer

Jennifer sets the stage for the meeting, reviewing:

- Objectives
- Agenda
- Community agreements
- June meeting poll to identify an in-person meeting that works for the majority of participants. Poll includes both in-person and virtual to determine which might have the most participation.

Date options:

- 6/23 In-person
- 6/23 Zoom
- 6/25 In-person
- 6/25 Zoom
- 7/13 In-person – top choice
- 7/13 Zoom – second choice

Before a decision is made about the date, an email will also be sent to people who were not able to participate or vote during the meeting.

Engagement Report Backs – Jennifer Jennings-Shaffer, Suzie Endersbe

Provider Supports

Suzie shared a high-level summary of discussion at the Provider Supports Subcommittee Meeting:

- Heard concerns that education verification takes too long and concern about how long experience verification will take. We can't determine this until we know what the final recommendations are.
- Concerns were expressed about whether individuals with many years of experience will automatically qualify. This can't be determined until we know what the final recommendations are.
- Once the workgroup concludes, will the recommendations move forward? Ruben Reeves and Nicole Rose will be the final authority on determining what moves forward, based on technical, legal and other considerations.
- If there is no consensus as a workgroup, or between the workgroup and DCYF, what are the guarantees that what the workgroup has recommended will be in the report? Can the workgroup write a separate report? Jennifer reminded the group that we are aiming for consensus, which would eliminate the need for a separate report. She offered that this topic could be a part of the in-person meeting, so that there is time to discuss, while Nicole and Ruben are present.

Jennifer opened discussion up for others to share anything they're hearing from the communities they represent.

Johnny Otto shared that he has an updated survey summary, after an additional 100 responses were collected. He shared a link to the survey (https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8ZPVXKB) with the group via chat and will share the updated results at the end of today's meetings.

Highlights: People appreciate getting college credits for training. Biggest barriers continue to be low wages and cost of obtaining education.

Ka'ohe Wong shared that SOWA is also conducting a survey with school-age only programs that will close mid-June.

High Level Draft Recommendations - Jennifer Jennings-Shaffer

Jennifer reviewed the list of overarching recommendation areas that could potentially form the sections of the report:

- Compensation
- Experience

- Education Access
- Education Verification
- The Community-Based Pathway
- Out-of-State Training
- Staff Qualification Requirements
- Navigation Data

Compensation (20 minutes) – Tiffany Lee

- **Background:** ECE professionals in Washington support children's healthy development and parents' ability to work. Despite the critical role they play in the lives of children and families, as well as our State economy, these professionals continue to face the barriers of low wages, insufficient benefits, and stressful working conditions. These barriers contribute to economic instability for the ECE workforce, difficulty recruiting staff, burnout, and high rates of turnover. For families, this directly contributes to barriers in accessing high quality, affordable ECE opportunities. While outside the direct scope of this workgroup, addressing compensation is critical to the success of any long-term effort to retain and grow the ECE workforce.
- **Existing recommendations**: The ECE Access and Living Wage Implementation Plan released in 2025 outlines recommendations for achieving access to high quality ECE opportunities for all Washington Families and living wages and benefits for the ECE workforce over 10 years. The Implementation Plan recommends adoption and funding of, the Cost of Quality Child Care Rate Model released in 2022 which was developed collaboratively with the Early Educator Design Team. The Cost of Quality Child Care Rate Model is designed to set WCCC rates based upon the true cost to deliver high quality care, including living wages and benefits for the ECE workforce.

Jennifer introduced the small group discussion questions

- Does specifically calling out compensation even though it isn't directly in our scope feel important?
- Does the initial proposed language resonate? Why or why not?

Report backs: Generally, most groups agreed some acknowledgement of compensation should be included in the report. Groups discussed how central compensation is to be supporting a stable certificated workforce. None of this can be successful without state investment of funds into wage.

Education Access – Suzie Endersbe

- **Background:** Washington's stackable certificates include the ECE Initial (12 credits), Short (20 credits) and State (45 credits) Certificates. Stackable certificates are one of the pathways for child care providers to meet staff qualification requirements. For individuals who wish to continue their education, the certificates build toward an associate's or bachelor's degree in ECE. Implementation of stackable certificates should build on what is working well and address barriers to improve access for ECE professionals.

Proposed recommendations:

- **Navigation and awareness:** Create centralized online, easy to find information about offerings across the state's 27 community and technical colleges and resources available to support students.
- **Cost:** Reduce barriers for ECE professionals by providing resources including grants, scholarships, and release time.
- **Responsiveness**: Encourage the community college system to continue to expand responsive offerings such as online availability, evening and weekend classes, courses in multiple languages, cohort models and community partnerships, and ECE specific versions of standard courses such as math.
- **Connections and alignment**: Encourage the community college system to clarify and improve connections between stackable certificates and CDAs and PACE so that ECE professionals who move between pathways understand how they connect and are fairly recognized for their prior learning.

Jennifer introduced the small group discussion questions:

- Do the initial proposed high-level recommendations resonate? Why or why not?

Report backs: Group wants more directness of actions to be taken in the report. Also, adding more action-oriented language, for example instead of "encourage" use words like "urge". There were questions about what DCYF has authority over versus Community Colleges.

Note: While DCYF can collaborate with institutions of higher education, decisions related to academic credit, course equivalencies, and certificate requirements are made by individual colleges in accordance with their academic governance processes. Therefore, DCYF cannot require colleges to articulate PACE training to specific courses or credentials.

It was noted that many years ago there was a grant that supported a bilingual career navigator at DCYF. When the funding ended, the position was not continued, though participants shared that the need for this type of support remains.

Education Verification – Suzie Endersbe

- **Processing time**: Establish clear and reasonable timelines for verification, which may require increased capacity to conduct verification in a timely manner, and provide status information that allows ECE professionals to track the status of their verification request. Current delays are particularly challenging to ECE professionals with international education, which has a disproportionate impact on immigrant and refugee communities.
- **Transparency**: Create a guidance manual that clearly explains how determinations are made about what credit counts as ECE, how to submit education for verification, how to file an appeal, waivers, and resources available to support ECE professionals such as translation for international education. Ensure that guidance is available in multiple languages, is kept up to date, and links to appropriate resources.
- **Navigation:** Leverage trusted messengers and community partners by providing training modules about the verification process so that they can be a resource to ECE professionals in their communities.
- **Waivers:** Continue to work with child care programs to implement waivers to remain in compliance while individuals work to meet hiring requirements if it is determined after education verification that they do not currently. The workgroup also suggested waiver/affidavit for individuals who are unable to obtain international documentation due to factors such as war or political instability. DCYF is not currently seeing requests for this but can address it on a case-by-case basis if the need arises.

Jennifer introduced the small group discussion questions:

- Do the initial proposed high-level recommendations resonate? Why or why not?

Break: 10:30 -10:45

High-Level Draft Recommendations Continued – Adriana Terrones, Jennifer Jennings-Shaffer

Out of State Training – Adriana Terrones

Background: Out-of-state training is one of the ways that ECE professionals grow their knowledge and skills. The process to have out-of-state training recognized for annual in-service hours should be improved to make it easier to understand and reduce administrative burden for ECE professionals where possible.

Improvements: DCYF is in the process of making these changes for release early this summer, these include:

- Simplifying the application for requesting in-service hours for trainings, conferences, or series that are not listed as state-approved in MERIT.

- Reducing reflection questions from several to one.
- Updating the list of early care and education and school-age core competencies.
- Offering a new way to upload documents.

For more information, see the last topic in the dropdown: "Conference/Special Event": Training Requirements | Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families

Jennifer introduced the small group discussion questions

- Do the changes coming address concerns? Why or why not?

Promotions and the Experience-based Pathway – Jennifer Jennings-Shaffer, Tiffany Lee, Suzie Endersbe, Brett Skinner

Tiffany Lee

Bill Intent

"The legislature intends to delay the requirement for child care providers to meet certification and training qualification conditions and honor the experience of child care providers by extending the timeline for licensed child care providers to demonstrate experience-based competency. Extending these timelines will support child care providers in their professional journey."

Who is Eligible for the Experience-based Pathway

Per HB 1648, individuals are eligible for the experience-based pathway if:

They are actively employed in a role requiring an ECE Initial, Short, or State Certificate (we are adding school age roles to the pathway);

They have 5 years of cumulative experience in a licensed or certified child care center or licensed family home by August 1, 2030;

They have completed and maintained compliance with all health and safety and child care or school age basics training required by DCY

How Experience is Calculated

- Verification that an individual meets staff qualification requirements via 5 years of **experience is calculated in MERIT** based on employment information that the individual adds to MERIT.
- Anyone **hired before August 1, 2025 can reach the five years** of cumulative experience necessary to meet staff qualification requirements via the experience-based pathway **by the August 1, 2030 deadline.**
- **Hiring education requirements will be waived** for individuals using the experience-based pathway to meet job role education requirements.

- We are working on **solutions to capture out-of-state experience** in licensed child care and experience in tribal or military settings not included in MERIT.
- **Once someone is verified** as meeting staff qualification requirements for a role, their **verification for that role will remain valid after 2030**, even if they change jobs and move to a different facility.
- The experience-based pathway (and the community-based pathway) **do not include ECEAP**. Anyone who wants to work in an ECEAP setting will need to meet ECEAP staff qualification requirements.

Suzie Endersbe

Provided an orientation to current workforce data (who meets requirements by role based on education, who will meet them based upon experience, who will need to meet them based on education/PACE)

Current Workforce Data: Staff Meeting Requirements by Role

Role	Currently Meet Requirement Via Education	Will Be Eligible to Meet Requirement Based on Years of Experience by 2030 (Hired before 8/1/2025)	Will Not Have 5 Years in Role by 2030 AND Do Not Meet Requirement Based on Current Education (Hired after 8/1/2025)
Center Directors **(1,773)**	**1,201** (67.7%)	**472** (26.6%)	**100** (5.6%)
Center Assistant Directors **(685)**	**314** (45.8%)	**280** (40.9%)	**91** (13.3%)
Center Program Supervisors **(654)**	**356** (54.4%)	**238** (36.4%)	**60** (9.2%)
Family Home Owners **(4,266)**	**1,965** (46.1%)	**2,020** (47.4%)	**281** (5.6%)
Center/Family Home Lead Teachers **(10,389)**	**3,135** (30.2%)	**5,152** (49.6%)	**2,102** (20.2%)
Center/ Family Home Assistant Teachers **(12,385)**	**2,037** (16.4%)	**6,593** (53.2%)	**3,755** (30.3%)

*Center/ Family Home Aides **(3,756)**: Requirement is high school diploma or enrolled in high school or GED program*
***Source:** MERIT, Data Retrieved May 11, 2026*

What We Know:

For those not eligible for the experience-based pathway and not yet meeting education requirements, they have 5 years from their date of hire to get their education.

What We Do Not Know:

- How many people hired after August 1, 2025 have experience in different role?
- How many people have qualifying education that they haven't yet verified?
- How many people are currently enrolled or planning to pursue education?
- How many people will leave the field before 5 years?
- How many people will be hired each year between now and 2030?

What We Can Assume

Some individuals hired after August 1, 2025 have experience in other roles and will have a cumulative total of 5 years' experience in child care by 2030, but it won't all be in their current role.

Concerns were raised about the potential Early Achievers point implications of using experience in place of education. The workgroup suggested that this be something that should be understood as soon as possible, ideally before the next meeting. Tiffany committed to bringing this forward to DCYF staff who can speak to the rationale and potential implications.

Brett Skinner

What We Heard from This Group

- Washington is currently facing an ECE staffing shortage and must prioritize stabilizing and retaining the ECE workforce.
- There is a desire to take a flexible approach to counting experience for center-based leadership roles that have been made newly eligible for the experience-based pathway in order to remove barriers to hiring.
- Workgroup members suggested that experience in any role count toward the 5 years of cumulative experience to meet the requirement for leadership roles.
- There is a desire to explore ways to recognize leadership/managerial experience gained in other fields.
- There are questions about the role of experience gained in FFN settings.

DCYF Responses and Ideas

- Per HB 1648, experience must be in a licensed or certified setting. A broader conversation about experience as part of staff qualification requirements could take place in a future negotiated rulemaking process, the workgroup could recommend that be explored.
- Because the roles and responsibilities are different, particularly for leadership roles, verifying someone as qualified for a role based on experience in any role may compromise child safety and well-being.
- DCYF also recognizes the importance of supporting flexibility for the field.

Proposed solution: For the purpose of counting years of experience to meet staff qualification requirements via the experience-based pathway by 2030, allow interchangeability of experience in roles with similar requirements. Establish 2 groupings:

- Assistant teacher, lead teacher, family child care owner
- Center program supervisor, assistant director, director

Examples of What This Would Look Like in Practice

Example 1: An assistant teacher was hired in 2024 and is promoted to a lead teacher role in 2027.

- MERIT would verify them as meeting requirements for a lead teacher role once they attain 5 years of cumulative experience in 2029, which is prior to the August 1, 2030 deadline. They will remain qualified for a lead teacher role beyond 2030, including if they move to a different center/home.

Example 2: A lead teacher was hired in 2025 and promoted to a center director role in 2028.

- They will have five years from the date they were hired into the center director role to obtain and ECE State Certificate or equivalent.

Discussion (Full Group):

Comment: Being a really good lead teacher does not mean you would be a really good director. With example 2, for a lead teacher who meets their requirements for a lead teacher will they be able to go into a director role, or would they need to start over again? Answer: Experience as a teacher qualifies the individual to be a teacher and does not relate to a director role.

Comment: Could there be a pathway for lead teachers to become directors? A center director is already required to get an ECE certificate, which does not meet their role's leadership needs. There is no alternate pathway for leaders.

Comment: This seems to create a significant barrier for family home providers who want to open a center. The qualifications to run a licensed family home are very similar to being a center director. If that person later wanted to move into operating a center, they need to obtain additional education at that point.

Comment: If child safety is not within someone's capacity as a teacher, they would not stay employed, let alone to become a director. This makes it harder to promote people into leadership roles. This feels over-engineered and counter to what the group has been asking for.

Comment: Many directors started as teachers, perhaps being promoted to an assistant center director, which is currently combined with director experience requirements. Should an assistant director be expected to have the same experience as a director?

Question: A key point for this workgroup is the recognition of staffing shortages. These recommendations don't seem to address that but rather would make it worse.

Tiffany: The points raised in response to the recommendations will be shared with the Executive Steering Committee.

Wrap-up and Next Steps - Jennifer Jennings-Shaffer

- DCYF will follow up with individuals who weren't able to vote on the in-person meeting date and will send a meeting invitation once the date is confirmed.
- DCYF will follow up with Early Achievers regarding potential impacts of experience on points/rating.
- DCYF will share feedback collected today with the Executive Steering Committee.