

Washington Revisits, Tightens Child Care Regulations

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Starting next week, preschoolers in Washington could be watching less TV. Restricting screen time to two hours a day in home-based child care is one of the rule changes made by the Department of Early Learning (DEL), in what it says is an attempt to improve school readiness for young children. Child-care providers who work out of their homes will also have to have high school diplomas or GED certificates if they're new to the business.

Some of the changes have been controversial, but Amy Blondin, DEL government and community relations manager, says they are backed up by research that wasn't available to previous generations.

We now know so much about how the brain develops in the first years of life, and to not use that research to inform early-learning programs would be a real missed opportunity for our state. - Amy Blondin

Under the new rules, current family child-care providers have five years to get the educational credentials they need. Other rule changes enhance food safety and playground safety. A new national report ranks Washington second in the country for its oversight of home-based child care and screening of child-care workers.

Next, the DEL is turning its attention to updating the rules for before- and after-school programs for school-age children. The current rules are more than 90 pages long. Some providers say they gave detailed input more than a year ago, but the process appeared to stall with the state budget crisis. Blondin says the agency plans to draft new rules this year.

"We want to hear from parents. They know what's best for their children, and they should inform this process of updating the rules. We want to hear from parents, providers - anyone who has an opinion or an idea about these rules as we're going through this process."

Public hearings have been held in Moses Lake and Pasco, and continue today in Vancouver and Tuesday in Seattle, at the Department of Early Learning offices in both those cities. Comments also can be submitted online until April 30.

The public meetings at DEL offices are scheduled today from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at 907 Harney St., Vancouver, and Tuesday from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at 3600 S. Graham St., Seattle. The proposed rules and a comment submission form are available at apps.del.wa.gov/PolicyProposalComment/Detail.aspx.