

# A Guide to the Formation of Washington State's Early Learning and Development Benchmarks



*"I've got brain power. My potential is limitless.  
My early learning and development are vital  
to my later success in school and life.  
The starting point is you. Help me build on  
my desire to learn about our world."*

# INTRODUCTION

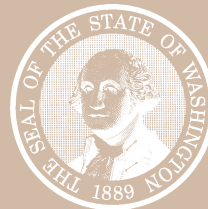
Washington State is embarking on a process to develop voluntary Early Learning and Development Benchmarks (Benchmarks). The Benchmarks will be based on the best information research provides and will describe characteristic knowledge, skills and approaches to learning of infants, toddlers and preschoolers across the domains of social and emotional development, physical development, cognition, language and literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge.

Parents, caregivers, and teachers can use these Benchmarks on a voluntary basis to gain information and develop shared expectations supporting children's learning and development during the critical early years of birth to five. The Benchmarks will support all those who are responsible for young children in their efforts to prepare them for success in school and life.

The development of the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks is a partnership between the Office of the Governor and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and is sponsored by the Head Start-State Collaboration Office and OSPI. The current funding for this project will pay for the development and drafting of the Benchmarks. Additional funding will be needed for full dissemination (printing and distribution) and implementation (pilot testing and integration into the professional development system). The Governor's Office is currently seeking supplementary funding from the State Legislature and sponsorship and in-kind donations from other public and private organizations interested in supporting these vital, additional phases. The information in this guide is intended to provide insight into the purpose, process and goals for establishing the Washington Early Learning and Development Benchmarks.

# CONTENTS

Who decides what is best for children? .....	1
What is the role of state and local agencies and schools in educating young children? .....	2
What are the purposes of the Benchmarks? .....	2
What will the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks look like? .....	3
What are important considerations in creating the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks? .....	3
How are laws, policies, and research influencing the creation of Benchmarks? .....	5
How will the Benchmarks be used? .....	7
The Proposed Process for Developing the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks .....	8
The Proposed Process for Disseminating and Implementing the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks ....	12
Conclusion .....	14
References .....	15
Essential Terms Defined .....	16



# BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

## WHO DECIDES WHAT IS BEST FOR CHILDREN?

Raising young children is, first and foremost, the responsibility of their families. Parents will always be their children's first and most important teachers, caregivers and decision makers. To varying degrees, based on their preferences and needs, individual families seek the support of extended families and community agencies to access information about healthy child rearing.

Families decide what is best for their children and choose the environment they believe will benefit their young child the most. But, in a national survey conducted in 2000, only 1/3 of parents felt "very prepared" for parenthood (DYG, Inc., 2000). The current popularity of parenting magazines, videos and classes illustrates that many parents are searching for guidance and information on:

- ❑ The growth and developmental processes of young children;
- ❑ What children need to know to move to the next developmental phase; and
- ❑ How they, as parents, can raise their children to be happy, confident, creative, intelligent and emotionally healthy.

In today's families-including those with working parents and those with a parent at home-close to 70% of young children (under the age of five) are in some form of early care and education setting on a regular basis (Business Roundtable, 2003). When parents know how to recognize quality out-of-home care they often find that such environments are not accessible or affordable (Helburn, et al, 1995). The need for out-of-home settings for young children arises primarily from the fact that many mothers are in the workforce. Hundreds of thousands of women in Washington State choose to work outside the home for a variety of reasons-even during their child's first year. This trend is attributable to several factors: escalation in living costs, successful legal efforts to expand women's access to the workplace, work requirements associated with welfare reform, and the mechanization of many household tasks (Education Commission of the States, 2000).



## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND SCHOOLS IN EDUCATING YOUNG CHILDREN?

The public school's responsibility for educating children does not officially begin until the child enters kindergarten, unless a child has a disability. Thus, parents have the primary responsibility for nurturing and educating young children before they enter the school system. To assist parents, state and local agencies offer a variety of programs and information such as parent education, early care and education programs, and other resources which families can choose to access. To support this important governmental role, Washington State policymakers and those most interested in the success of young children—their parents, caregivers, teachers and administrators in early childhood and elementary settings, and others—are coming together over the next year to create a description and framework of the skills, knowledge, and approaches to learning that contribute to children's success when they go to kindergarten. This framework will be called the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks.

## WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF THE BENCHMARKS?

The Benchmarks are intended to:

- ❑ Promote reasonable expectations and practical strategies for parents and others who care for and teach young children to support their learning and development.
- ❑ Contribute to a unified vision for the early care and education system in Washington State; and
- ❑ Create a continuum of learning that links early development to later success in school and life by aligning the Benchmarks with Washington State's Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and K-3 Grade Level Expectations (GLEs).

The goals and objectives of the Benchmark's project are deeply aligned with Washington State's Child Care Policy, RCW 74.13.085, which recognizes the family as the most important social and economic unit of society and supports the central role parents play in child rearing. The child care policy further states that parents who find it necessary to work outside the home are encouraged to participate in efforts to improve the quality of early care and education settings, especially the capacity of such settings to promote the growth, development, and safety of children.

Washington State's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) also has policy and standards which reinforce the primacy of parental role in the nurturance and education of young children (RCW 28A.215.150). In addition, other publicly supported programs such as Head Start and the Even Start Family Literacy Program also emphasize the importance of parental role.

## WHAT WILL THE EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT BENCHMARKS LOOK LIKE?

The Benchmarks will be presented in language that clearly communicates to the diverse groups who will use them. For example, a Benchmark in the area of reading will suggest that children need to understand the meaning of what is read to them. Infants who can focus attention on simple picture books, toddlers who can make up or finish a story, and preschoolers who can “read” a picture book by making up a story to go with the pictures are developing pre-literacy skills. The Benchmarks will help adults support children as they gain these important skills, knowledge, and approaches to learning. The Benchmarks will be linked to related Washington State EALRS and the K-3 GLEs, thus supporting children as they move from their homes and early care and education settings into the elementary school.

## WHAT ARE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS IN CREATING THE EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT BENCHMARKS?

**Society is changing and becoming more diverse.** Every fall nearly 90,000 boys and girls enter kindergarten at one of Washington State’s public or private elementary schools. Every child comes to this new adventure with great expectations. Fifty years ago these new kindergarteners were much more alike than they are today. More of them came from homes where their mother was their primary caregiver and teacher. More spoke English as their first language. Fewer of them were from families who were poor and less well educated (Zill, 1995). In those days children with disabilities were not typically educated with their non disabled peers. Fewer children participated in some kind of group preschool experience.

Greater diversity in its broadest sense is a fact of life today as the state’s kindergarten teachers try to craft educational experiences that will advance the learning of this broad range of children. This greater diversity represents significant progress in extending educational opportunity to a wider range of children. Therefore the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks must be sensitive to the cultural and linguistic diversity and differing learning needs of today’s young children.



**Learning expectations have increased.** At the same time that today's young children are more diverse, schooling is becoming more demanding and complex. It is not an exaggeration to say that the learning expectations for kindergarteners are about a year beyond what was expected of them fifty years ago. In addition to both increasing diversity and heightened expectations, there is expanding knowledge about learning and development itself. Research on brain development and the implications of those findings for our understanding of development and learning are helping parents, caregivers and teachers to understand that very young children have greater capabilities than have ever been understood before. *Therefore-the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks will assist those who care for and teach young children to create learning environments that provide rich and intellectually engaging activities and experiences.*

**Learning and development are unique for each child.** Greater cultural, linguistic, economic, and experiential diversity, the wider range of capabilities among entering kindergarteners, and expanding knowledge about human growth and development accompanies what has always been true about young children. Within and across any group is an expected unevenness of learning and development across the domains of social and emotional development, physical development, cognition, language and literacy, numeracy, and general knowledge. It is not uncommon for children to be more advanced in one area than another, to seem to be stuck for at time, and then to appear to leap ahead in a very short time. Caregivers and teachers have always needed to plan to address this normal range and variation in learning and development. *Therefore-the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks must accommodate the typical range of development common across groups of children in the birth through five age range and avoid the expectation that all children will reach the same milestones at the same time or in the same way.*

The avenues for young children's learning have not changed. Children learn most effectively: when they have warm and secure relationships with parents and other caring adults; through play—alone and with peers; in environments that are rich in language stimulation; through their interactions with other children and adults; and, when given opportunities to explore engaging materials. Our new knowledge calls upon adults to be more intentional about how they interact with young children from infancy on and about how they organize children's play and learning environments. *Therefore-the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks must reflect current understandings about children's capabilities and avoid further escalation of expectations that make it impossible for children to "catch up."*



## HOW ARE LAWS, POLICIES, AND RESEARCH INFLUENCING THE CREATION OF BENCHMARKS?

The standards-based reform taking place in K-12 education across the nation is having an impact on how the development and learning of very young children is now viewed. In Washington State, the passage of the Education Reform Act of 1993 created the framework for the establishment of standards and assessments for students in K-12 education settings. Recently enacted federal reform legislation, No Child Left Behind, is building upon these state efforts.

With this advent of standards-based and performance-based education in the K-12 system, policymakers and others are trying find ways to determine what should be expected of children as they enter kindergarten. Additionally, the K-12 system itself is developing a better understanding of the role that early care and education programs play toward preparing children for school and academic success.

In 1990, the nation's governors and the President set eight national educational goals, the very first of which was that "By the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn." In 1995, the Technical Resource Panel appointed by the National Education Goals Panel published *Reconsidering Children's Early Development and Learning: Toward Common Views and Vocabulary* (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995). The document helped frame a new understanding of the breadth of the components of readiness for school that continues to influence the work of groups now engaged in the development of early learning guidelines throughout the nation.

Since then three groundbreaking reports by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences have furthered understanding of the importance of Goal 1 by summarizing current research on early development and learning. They are: *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (1998), *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: Applying the Science of Early Childhood Development* (2000) and *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers* (2001). In light of these important reports, there is an increased national interest in developing early learning Benchmarks as a strategy to help parents, caregivers and teachers, and others understand what knowledge, skills and approaches to learning increase children's likelihood of success when they enter school.



Interest in developing Benchmarks also comes from within the early care and education field in Washington State. Currently, each of the various types of early childhood programs in the state has its own set of standards, infrastructure, funding streams, and leadership.

Benchmarks can be the vehicle to assist these diverse entities to:

- ❑ Align what children do before they enter school with what they need to know when they begin school;
- ❑ Appreciate the extent to which high quality early care and education experiences prepare children to succeed in school;
- ❑ Assess how well schools help children and their families make the transition to kindergarten; and
- ❑ Make the connection and better understand how closing the student achievement gap in the K-12 system depends on closing the school readiness gap for young children. There is no question that children who enter kindergarten behind are unlikely to ever catch up, and gaps in achievement grow as they continue in school (Coley, 2002; West, Denton, & Reaney, 2001).

Further interest in establishing Benchmarks is also being stimulated by other activity at the federal level. In 2002, President Bush announced a new federal early childhood initiative, Good Start, Grow Smart, which called upon states to develop voluntary early learning guidelines (GSGS, 2002). While the guidelines themselves are voluntary, having them has now become a condition for receiving funding through the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant. These funds comprise a major portion of the resources each state uses to support child care subsidies and child care quality initiatives.

This is the landscape in which an initiative to define Benchmarks for the learning and development of young children in Washington State must fit. It is fraught with both challenges and opportunities. However, it is informed and strengthened by work already completed or underway, work that demonstrates the capacity of parents and the early care and education community in Washington to work together with K-12 educators and policy leaders to make a positive difference for the young, and sometimes most vulnerable, residents of the state.



## HOW WILL THE BENCHMARKS BE USED?

The Early Learning and Development Benchmarks are intended to support parents in their critical role as children's first teachers and to inform the work of caregivers and teachers in all the various settings comprising Washington State's early care and education system. Although the Benchmarks will be designed to be appropriate for all children in all group settings and in their homes, their use is voluntary. The Benchmarks will help parents, caregivers and teachers understand reasonable, but challenging, expectations for the young children in the birth to five age range.

**Benefits especially for parents.** Parents can use the voluntary Early Learning and Development Benchmarks and the guidance that will accompany them in several ways:

- ❑ First time parents will find them especially helpful as they observe their children's development and watch them learn on a daily basis;
- ❑ Parents are often eager to know what to expect at certain ages, whether particular behaviors are "normal" for their child's age, and how to help children learn important new skills and
- ❑ They may alert parents to an emerging issue with their child's development to help them know when to seek the advice of their pediatrician or a child development specialist.

**Benefits especially for caregivers, teachers and the early care and education system.**

Caregivers, teachers and the early care and education system will be able to use the Benchmarks to:

- ❑ Better understand reasonable expectations for children's learning and development at various ages and access strategies and tools on how to support those processes;
- ❑ Develop a deeper understanding of what children need to know and be able to do when they enter school that is sensitive to the diverse ways that children grow and learn; and
- ❑ Adopt research-based curriculum options and program standards that enable more early care and education settings to achieve and sustain better results for children.



Perhaps, as importantly, the Benchmarks will help parents, caregivers, and teachers identify and understand expectations that are not reasonable for children of these ages. While it is critical that children be challenged to take that next step in learning through nurturing support, it is not in their best interest to have expectations that are beyond their capabilities. Unreasonable expectations, when overemphasized, can erode children's sense of competence. Well-conceived Benchmarks will help everyone focus on skills and content that are important for children's current and future learning.

It is of particular concern to those charged with developing Early Learning and Development Benchmarks that they not be used in ways that are counterproductive or that have the potential to have negative consequences for children. For example, the Benchmarks are not intended:

- ❑ For use as a group or individual screening tool;
- ❑ To place children in programs, or to make determinations about school entry; or
- ❑ To be used either as an assessment checklist or as an evaluation tool to make high-stakes decisions about children's program placements.

Rather, they are intended to guide parents, caregivers, and teachers as they work with the children in their care to plan experiences and select activities. While Benchmarks hold great promise for having positive effects, the potential for negative consequences is also present and calls upon those who develop them and use them to use special care in their development and application.

## THE PROPOSED PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE WASHINGTON STATE EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT BENCHMARKS

**The process will build on existing documents and research.** This initiative will be based on significant work already completed by broadly representative groups of Washington early care and education professionals and by lessons learned from other states. It will use research to determine the appropriateness and importance of Benchmarks to be included.

Documents to be accessed include:

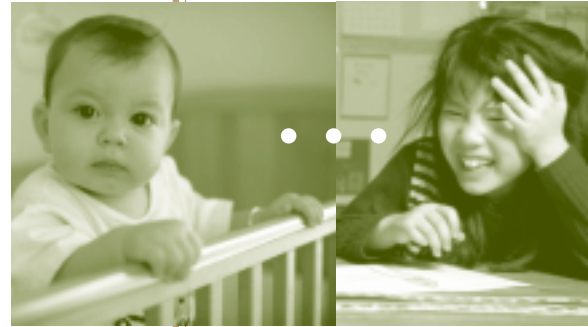
- ❑ Framework for Achieving the Essential Academic Learning Requirements in Reading, Writing, Communication-Birth to 5 Years. This document focuses on children from birth to age five, but it does not address all of the domains of learning and development.

- ❑ Even Start Family Literacy Program Indicators of Progress. Each state which administers local Even Start programs is required by the U.S. Department of Education to assess the effectiveness of the programs by using a set of indicators which address children's progress in attaining skills leading to reading success in elementary school.
- ❑ ECEAP and Head Start Early Learning Goals (developed by the Puget Sound ESD). The ECEAP and Head Start Early Learning Goals support school readiness by aligning early learning with the EALRs and GLEs. This document addresses all of the learning and development domains, but is limited to children just prior to kindergarten entrance.
- ❑ Head Start Child Outcomes Framework. This framework addresses all of the learning domains and is intended to guide Head Start programs as they structure curriculum and assessment for three- and four-year olds. It has been widely used in efforts to promote collaboration among Head Start and other community early childhood care and education programs.
- ❑ Early Head Start Program Performance Measures. This document addresses expected outcomes for children and families in Head Start programs serving infant and toddlers.

Together these documents form a strong base for undertaking this new work to develop the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks.

In addition, research on children's early learning will be extensively accessed and incorporated. Major documents include several previously cited (e.g., Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Shonkoff, & Phillips, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The work of other states and other related initiatives regarding the development of early learning and development Benchmarks is another important source of guidance. The Washington State process can benefit extensively from the lessons learned through these initiatives (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002; NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003; Scott-Little, 2003).

**The process will involve key stakeholders.** The developmental process will be structured to draw upon the considerable expertise of those who will use the Benchmarks in their work with children and families, families themselves, and those who provide support to the early care and education system. These stakeholders will be represented on an Early Learning Benchmarks Advisory Panel. The participation of this Panel is considered essential to the success of the project.



*My early learning and development is key to my later success in school and life.*

The Panel will provide input in the following ways:

- ❑ Refine guiding principles to inform the development of the Benchmarks
- ❑ Review and make suggestions for refining existing documents (e.g., Framework for Achieving the Essential Academic Learning Requirements in Reading, Writing, Communication-Birth to 5 Years, the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework)
- ❑ Review and provide input regarding drafts submitted by a contracted writer
- ❑ Give input into the formats for production (e.g., print, Web-based, etc.).
- ❑ Assist in the refinement of the plan for dissemination.
- ❑ Serve as “ambassadors” in the dissemination and implementation process.

A broader stakeholder group will be invited to serve as reviewers of initial drafts. This group will be comprised of representatives of child care homes and centers, resource and referral agencies, ECEAP, Head Start, Even Start, early childhood special education and early intervention, private preschools, local district preschools, higher education, professional organizations, research community, state agency program administrators, child care licensors and other program monitors, ESDs, public/private schools, advocates, private foundations, parents and parent groups and grant making groups.

**The development process will be guided by a Core Team and move forward under agreed-upon timelines.** The Core Team will be comprised of representatives from the Office of the Governor, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Head Start-State Collaboration Office, Division of Child Care and Early Learning, and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program.

The Core Team will be responsible for the following:

- ❑ With the advice of constituent groups, oversee the appointment of a representative team of individuals who will be known as the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks Advisory Panel
- ❑ Issue a Request for Qualifications and Quotations to employ a content expert/entity to do the major development work for the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks
- ❑ Oversee the issuance of a contract for the employment of this person

- ❑ Cooperatively arrange for facilitated meetings of the Advisory Panel on a schedule to be determined by the pace of the work
- ❑ Assure that documents in process are disseminated widely for public input
- ❑ Take the lead in arranging for the editing and production of the document
- ❑ Assign responsibility for the dissemination of the document
- ❑ Assign responsibility for the execution of a professional development plan
- ❑ Oversee the agreed upon steps to assess the implementation of the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks
- ❑ In cooperation with the Advisory Panel, develop a plan to regularly revise the Benchmarks

**The development process will be led by a contracted expert/entity.** This person/organization will have major responsibility for writing the Benchmarks. These responsibilities include:

- ❑ Reviewing similar documents developed in other states
- ❑ Using research to determine the appropriateness and relevance of proposed Benchmarks
- ❑ Reviewing standards and related documents already developed in Washington State
- ❑ Accessing and including relevant local and national expertise
- ❑ Meeting with Early Learning and Development Benchmarks Advisory Panel to identify document(s) to be modified for use in this initiative
- ❑ Developing an initial draft of Washington Early Learning and Development Benchmarks
- ❑ Finalizing proposed Benchmarks based on input from the Advisory Panel and the Core Team
- ❑ Acting in an advisory capacity in the publishing phase of the initiative



## THE PROPOSED PROCESS FOR DISSEMINATING AND IMPLEMENTING THE WASHINGTON STATE EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT BENCHMARKS

**Key dissemination strategies will be identified.** Dissemination and implementation are critical aspects of the developmental process to assure that the Benchmarks reach intended audiences and can be incorporated into the everyday practice of early care and education professionals. This aspect of the work will also be led by the Core Team and informed by the Advisory Panel.

Dissemination and implementation should be viewed as a professional development opportunity for members of the early care and education field and should be applicable to the range of stakeholder/users. Well-designed dissemination should lead to implementation. Key strategies will include:

- ❑ Publication in a variety of formats (e.g. booklets, Web pages, CDs, brochures for parents)
- ❑ Distribution to the variety of stakeholders via multiple means (e.g. mail, Internet, face-to-face regional meetings with stakeholder groups, professional meetings and conferences)
- ❑ Distribution coordinated across stakeholders and existing networks serving them (child care homes and centers, resource and referral, ECEAP, Head Start, Head Start TA, Even Start, early childhood special education/early intervention, private preschools, local district preschools, professional organizations, higher education, research community, state agency program administrators, child care licensors and other program monitors, ESDs, public/private schools, advocates, private foundations, parents and parent groups)
- ❑ Development of presentation materials targeted to specific audiences
- ❑ Development of technical assistance tools
- ❑ A timeline for redistribution to assure that high turnover in early care and education settings does not result in lack of access to the Benchmarks by new staff

The professional development aspect of the dissemination and implementation will target specific constituent groups. These groups include:

**Parents.** Workshops about the Benchmarks that are targeted to parents should strive to help parents use the Benchmarks to:

- ❑ Support their children's learning and development in the home;
- ❑ Select more effective early learning settings for their children; and
- ❑ Develop and sustain reasonable expectations for their children.



**Early care and education professionals.** These are the teachers, caregivers and ancillary personnel in any early childhood setting. Professional development targeted to them needs to:

- ❑ Ease fears about working with the Benchmarks;
- ❑ Relate the Benchmarks to everyday activities in early care and education settings (e.g. child care homes and centers, Head Start, ECEAP, and Even Start); and
- ❑ Demonstrate how Benchmarks can help them plan their curricula.

**K-3 teachers, administrators and specialists.** Teachers and administrators at this level are no strangers to standards-based education. Professional development targeted to them should aim to increase familiarity with the Early Learning and Development Benchmarks. This will help them plan more effectively and have realistic expectations for children coming to them from the variety of early care and education settings in their communities.

**Higher education personnel and other trainers.** The Benchmarks will help them assure that newly prepared teachers and teachers and caregivers participating in in-service professional development understand the Benchmarks and how they can be used to strengthen the learning settings offered to young children. Professional development associated with the Benchmarks should assist them to map course syllabi and STARS training to the Benchmarks to assure that essential content and concepts are addressed.

**An evaluation of their effect will be part of the plan.** The initial dissemination and implementation activities are expected to take approximately a year from the time the Benchmarks are initially completed. During this time data should be collected systematically to assess:

- ❑ How useful the Benchmarks have been to parents;
- ❑ How many early care and education professionals have been reached and their responses to the Benchmarks;
- ❑ Initial effects on program practice; and
- ❑ Initial responses of kindergarten teachers, administrators and other specialists in elementary schools.



## CONCLUSION

The Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks project holds great potential to improve the learning outcomes for children enrolled in the variety of early care and education settings in Washington and to help parents access important information about child development and learning. They will create a continuum of learning goals that link early learning and development to later success in school and life. The Benchmarks will give caregivers, preschool teachers, and kindergarten teachers common language to discuss the important transition children make from home, child care, and other early care and education settings to the elementary school. The creation of a quality set of Benchmarks and their successful implementation will require the participation and cooperation of a wide range of stakeholders. The beneficiaries will be the young children of Washington State. Their success as learners in the long term depends on it.

This guide was created to explore and define the key issues for the establishment of the Benchmarks. The development of the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks is a joint effort of the Office of the Governor and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), sponsored by the Head Start-State Collaboration Office and OSPI. The Office of the Governor is currently seeking supplementary funding from the State Legislature and sponsorship and in-kind donations from other public and private organizations interested in supporting these vital, additional phases. For more information, please contact Robin Zukoski in the Office of the Governor (PO Box 43113, Olympia, WA 98504-3113; (360) 902-0660; [robin.zukoski@gov.wa.gov](mailto:robin.zukoski@gov.wa.gov)) for the particular needs associated with developing, implementing and evaluating the Benchmarks. We hope the information in this guide will provide further insight into the purpose, process and goals for establishing the Washington Early Learning and Development Benchmarks.



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## ESSENTIAL TERMS DEFINED

**Benchmarks** - Clear, specific descriptions of knowledge or skill that can be supported through observations, descriptions and documentations of a child's performance or behavior and by samples of child's work, often used as points of reference in connection with more broadly stated content standards (CCSSO, 2003).

**Early learning standards** (May also be referred to as benchmarks, guidelines, indicators, etc.) - Statements that describe expectations for the learning and development of young children across the domains of: health and physical well being; social and emotional well being; approaches to learning; language development and symbol systems; and, general knowledge about the world around them (CCSSO, 2003).

**Program standards** - Widely accepted expectations for the characteristics or quality of early childhood settings in homes, centers and schools. Such

characteristics typically include: the ratio of adults to children; the qualifications and stability of the staff; characteristics of adult-child relationships; the program philosophy and curriculum model, the nature of relationships with families; the quality and quantity of equipment and materials; the quality and quantity of space per child, and safety and health provisions (CCSSO, 2003).

**Readiness** - A broad construct that incorporates all aspects of a child's life that contribute directly to that child's ability to learn. An adequate understanding of readiness takes into account the child's environment, context, and conditions under which the child acquires skills and is encouraged to learn (Meisels, 1999). The construct embraces five dimensions: (1) physical well-being and motor development; (2) social and emotional development; (3) approaches toward learning; (4) language development; and (5) cognition and general knowledge (Kagan, Moore, and Bredekamp, 1995).

*“The creation  
of a quality set  
of Benchmarks  
and their successful  
implementation  
requires your participation.  
I will be the beneficiary.  
My success as a learner  
in the long term  
depends on it.”*





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