



Early Learning Fellows Legislative Corner

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Rhode Island is looking to full-day kindergarten



Senator Hanna Gallo is from the second year of NCSL's Early Learning Fellows program. Senator Gallo recently proposed legislation—[S 144](#)—that would give a financial incentive to school districts to offer full-day kindergarten by accelerating a portion of the school funding formula. Currently, some school districts in Rhode Island do not offer full-day kindergarten because the cost is too prohibitive to implement.

Under the current funding formula, districts that offer only half-day kindergarten are reimbursed for only half the aid of a full-time student.

Districts that adopt all-day kindergarten this fall will not get their full reimbursement for another three years because of the funding formula being phased in over seven years. Senator Gallo, who chairs the Senate Education Committee, said that this could possibly discourage school districts from moving forward with full-day kindergarten. The proposed bill would provide funding for kindergartens that have been converted from part-day to full-day beginning with the 2015-2016 school year and would fully fund beginning fiscal year 2016.

Senator Gallo estimates it would cost about \$3 million to pay for full-day kindergarten if school districts implemented it at once. "This is actually saving state dollars if we implement full-day kindergarten quicker," explained Senator Gallo.

The state recently received \$2.3 million in federal dollars from the U.S. Department of Education's Preschool Development Grants program to expand preschool services to low-income children. Senator Gallo applauds that Rhode Island is expanding access to early childhood education, but would like to see the same opportunities for full-day kindergarten. "It doesn't make any sense that our students would go to a full-day preschool and then go to a half-day kindergarten, especially since the students and teachers are responsible while we implement Common Core," says Gallo.

Washington is looking to high quality early learning

The Washington Legislature is considering a bill—[HB 1491](#)—that, if signed into law, would strengthen the quality of early learning environments in the state. The proposed bill has bipartisan support and one of the co-sponsors is third year NCSL Early Learning Fellow Representative Maureen Walsh.



The proposed bill expands the state’s quality rating improvement system (Early Achievers) for child care and early learning programs and also proposes to link quality ratings with improved educational outcomes in children.

Specifically the proposed legislation:

- Requires the Department of Early Learning (DEL) to provide a foundation of quality through the Early Achievers program for early learning and licensed child care programs.
- Expands the Early Achievers program, which was established in 2007, and authorizes the DEL to require all licensed or certified child care facilities and early learning programs serving non-school age children and receiving state funds to participate in the Early Achievers program.
- Requires the DEL to focus the early care and education system on supporting school readiness for young learners and improving educational outcomes in response to the Early Achievers program data collection and analysis.
- Creates an Early Achievers Review subcommittee to provide feedback and guidance on strategies to improve the quality of instruction and environment for early learning and provide input and recommendations on the implementation and refinement of the Early Achievers program.

Representative Walsh, who is the Ranking Minority Member of Washington’s Early Learning and Human Services House Committee, says that the proposed legislation makes sense for Washington state. She has been focusing on policies that work to help empower parents to be their children’s first teachers. “Making sure all Washington kids are prepared and excited about entering kindergarten is important,” explained Representative Walsh. “And investing early saves money in K-12 education as well.”