



## GUIDE TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS (PDP) FOR EARLY LEARNING PROVIDERS



Washington State Department of  
**CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

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## Introduction

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) appreciates everything that you do in supporting the children, youth, and families in Washington State. Thank you! Our goal as an agency is to have pathways for everyone to meet their professional goals.

This guide is a resource to help you create a Professional Development Plan (PDP) that is unique to your own personal and professional goals. It is intended to help you find the educational pathway that is right for you.

## What Does it Mean to Meet Staff Qualifications?

The [Staff Qualifications Page](#) explains these main parts:

- Pre-Service and Hiring
- Training
- Education

This guide focuses on how you can meet the education portion of Staff Qualifications. Depending on your role, you may have a hiring education requirement. To learn about hiring requirements, review the [General Staff Qualifications chart](#).

For more information about training requirements, review the [Guide to Training Requirements for Licensed Early Learning Providers](#).



## Getting Started

There are many different ways you can meet the education for your role. We encourage you to take your time to consider which option is best for you in reaching your goals. The following steps will help you in this process:

Step 1: Know the education needed for your role

Step 2: Think about your goals

Step 3: Know where you are now

Step 4: Learn about options for meeting the education requirement

Step 5: Make a plan and tell DCYF

## Step 1: Know the Education Needed for Your Role

### What are the Education Qualifications?

Licensed and ECEAP early learning professionals have both a minimum hiring requirement and full education requirement depending on their role. For a full list of role requirements, see our [General Staff Qualifications chart](#). You can use this chart to identify what education is needed for your current role, as well as any role that you hope to have in the future.

There are a couple things to consider when meeting these requirements:

There are other options, known as equivalents, for meeting the education requirements in WAC.

Every program must have at least one person who meets the education requirement for the following roles:

- Center director
- Assistant director
- Program supervisor

In ECEAP, if the newly hired staff person is not fully qualified, they can be on a Professional Development Plan (PDP) to fully meet the qualifications within five years from the date of hire.

## What If You Don't Meet The Education For Your Role?

If you do not meet the hiring requirement for your role, contact your licenser for options. Remember, if you do not meet the full education requirement, you have five years to complete the requirement for that role.

Go to the [Professional Development Planning Worksheet](#) and select which education is needed for your role.

## Step 2: Think About Your Goals



### Where Do You Want to Be in the Future?

Included below are some helpful questions to ask yourself as you think about your future goals and options. Use your answers to these questions to guide your decision-making as you work through this guide.

- What are my education goals?
  - Am I adding to education that I already have?
  - Am I wanting to study something other than Early Childhood Education?
- What are my job goals?
  - Am I wanting to stay in my current role or be promoted to another role?
  - Do I have a lot of experience in my current role or am I new to this role?
- Where do I want to be in the future?
  - Am I interested in other early learning jobs like coaching or advocacy work?
  - Am I looking to retire soon?
- How do my choices today get me closer to my goals?

If you are unsure what you may want to do, that's okay! This guide is here to help you navigate your decision making. Keep in mind that as you work on your plan, you may hear information and ideas about your options from your peers, coaches, and other early learning community members. It can sometimes be useful to hear other ideas, but remember: *every person's situation is unique.*

The decision that you make should be the best one for **you** and **your** future goals.

## Step 3: Where Are You Starting From?

It is important to understand where you are starting. Do you have prior education or credentials that have been earned? Have you submitted any education through MERIT yet? Follow the question prompts on the PDP worksheet to understand what your next steps may be. You can also use the image below to guide your next steps.



I have my education for my role and it is recorded in MERIT.

You do not need to do anything else. MERIT will reflect your education.



I have my education but it is not recorded in MERIT.

Submit your education in MERIT.



I need to work on my education qualifications. I have some education, education other than ECE or have not started yet.

You have many options to choose and time to do it.

## Resources For Submitting Education

DCYF has several helpful resources for submitting your education. Visit the MERIT Workforce Registry webpage ([dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-profdev/merit](http://dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-profdev/merit)) to learn about:

- How to submit education and have it verified
- International Education
- ECEAP Staff Qualification Verification
- Education Awards

If you need help, contact our MERIT Support Team at [merit@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:merit@dcyf.wa.gov).

## When You Are Close

What should you do if you already have education, but it doesn't fill your education qualification completely? This might be you if:

- You have another degree that is not ECE but some of your courses fit ECE topics or competency areas.
- You have taken many college courses but have not completed a degree and some of your courses fit ECE topics or competency areas.

If you already have completed some college coursework, you might already meet or be close to meeting the education requirement for your role through one of these options:

- You may have a **related** degree, even though you don't have an ECE major.
- You may have a lot of credits that are **aligned** to an ECE certificate.



*To learn more about how college coursework is evaluated, read the [Evaluating Coursework for Staff Qualifications Guide](#).*

To learn more about these options, reference our [Alternative Credentials Guide](#).

## Step 4: Know Your Options for Meeting the Education Requirement

This section will tell you about the different pathways for meeting the education requirement. Take a look at the options that are available, each labeled with its own color. To learn more about the option, find the section with the matching color. **Remember:**

- Not all of the options below are available for all roles.
- Not all of the options below will meet ECEAP qualifications or give you professional development points for Early Achievers.

- Not all of the options below allow you to switch roles and move forward in your early learning career.



If you have met the staff qualification requirement after education verification, you do not need to take any of the additional steps listed below. This section is for professionals who are still working on meeting their full education requirement.

## Option 1: Education

### The Washington State Early Childhood Education Stackable Certificates

You can use the [Career Planning Portal](#) to learn more about education options, including the ECE Stackable Certificates. This option is available for all roles, including ECEAP, and will go toward Early Achievers professional development points. Further education can build on this option for those who want an AA, BA, or beyond.

Learn more about the stackable certificates here: [ececareers.del.wa.gov/what-is-early-learning](https://ececareers.del.wa.gov/what-is-early-learning).

The Stackable Certificates are a good fit for you if:

- You are interested in a career in early learning.
- You see yourself moving into other roles with a greater education requirement.
- You would like to keep all possible career options open.
- You want to take advantage of scholarship funding to earn a degree.
- You want to earn an AA or BA in ECE.



*Are you interested in getting started on your education?*

*Maybe you already have some education, and want to keep going in ECE?*

### Other Education – Equivalents

To learn about how other education, including alternative credentials and certificates, may meet the equivalent for the stackable certificates, visit: [Equivalent Options for Education](#).

If you are wondering about the college courses you already have completed and want to know how they align, visit:

- [Evaluating Coursework for Staff Qualifications: A Guide to Assist Providers in Meeting Staff Qualifications](#)
- [Alternative Credentials Guide](#)

### Paying for Your Education

Learn more more about scholarships here: [dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-profdev/scholarships-incentives-awards](https://dcyf.wa.gov/services/earlylearning-profdev/scholarships-incentives-awards)

## Option 2: Training | Provider Accessible Community Equivalent (PACE)

PACE is the community-based training option is available for family home licensees, lead teachers, and assistant teachers beginning January 2022. This pathway consists of:

- Child Care Basics
- Enhancing Quality of Early Learning (EQEL)
- PACE modules
- Job-Embedded Learning

If this option best fits your needs, it will allow you to meet your licensing education requirement.

Please note that this option does not help providers to earn professional development points in Early Achievers or meet ECEAP performance standards for staff qualifications.

To learn more and know about funding for this option, visit: [tinyurl.com/CBTrainingUpdate](https://tinyurl.com/CBTrainingUpdate).



*Would you like to meet the licensing requirement with a training option in your community?*

*Are you interested in roles that only require an ECE Initial or Short Certificate?*

### Option 3: Experience | Experience-Based Competency Demonstration

People who have experience to meet learning competencies will have a simple way to let DCYF know this option in MERIT, as of October 2021.

Please note that this option is not available for ECEAP qualifications and does not go toward any Early Achievers professional development points.

To learn more about this option and if you are eligible, visit: [tinyurl.com/ExperienceOption](https://tinyurl.com/ExperienceOption).



*Would you like to meet the licensing requirement based on your work experience?*

*Are you interested in roles that only require an ECE Initial or Short Certificate?*

### Step 5: Make a Plan and Tell DCYF

By now, you probably have a good idea about your plan for meeting the education portion of staff qualifications. If you still aren't sure – that's okay! Remember, you have five years to meet the requirement for your role.

- **Professional Development Planning (PDP) Worksheet:** Use this to write down your ideas. Access to the PDP worksheet [here](#). This worksheet is for your reference and should be included in your staff file. ECEAP PDPs should be available upon request during monitoring visits.
- **MERIT:** Your next step is to go in MERIT to identify your pathway. If you need assistance, please reach out to our MERIT support team, your Early Achievers coach, mentor, or local community college for additional resources.

### Know Your Timeline to Complete Your Plan

- **Early learning professionals hired before Aug. 1, 2019:** must meet the education requirement for their role by Aug. 1, 2026.
- **Early learning professionals hired after Aug. 1, 2019:** timeline outlined in [WAC 110-300-0100](#) meet their full education requirement. If you are part of an ECEAP program, you must follow the timeline outlined in your professional development plan per the ECEAP Performance Standards.

### Tell Us Your Plan

DCYF is creating an online form in the [MERIT](#) Workforce Registry that will allow professionals to select their option for meeting the education requirement. Once this function is available as of October 2021 for licensed early learning providers, and you have decided on the best option for you, you will need to complete the online form in MERIT. If you are an ECEAP provider, you will continue to use the existing PDP process until this is incorporated in MERIT for ECEAP specific programs.

**Note:** If you choose the **experience pathway**, you will not need to do anything else. Eligibility will be confirmed by DCYF once the required seven years are met in MERIT.

The online form will allow you to select your chosen pathway from the following options:

1. I meet the eligibility requirements for experience-based competency, and want to meet education requirement with my experience.
2. I am going to college to complete my required education within five years.
3. I am going to complete the community-based approach.
4. I believe the education I have will qualify me, and I will get my education verified.

Go to your [PDP Worksheet](#) to mark which pathway you have chosen.

### Keep Going!

Get started on your plan and update it in MERIT Workforce Registry every year. Tell us about your annual progress and any changes to your plan.

We understand that situations change over time. If you decide that the option that you selected for meeting the education requirement does not reflect your current career goals, you can make a change in your MERIT account.

## Resources

The following links are available resources for you to print. We hope that you will use the resources provided throughout this guide and listed at the end to help you choose the pathway that best meets your needs.

- [Alternative Credentials Guide](#)
- [Education Award Guide](#)
- Education Verification Instructions
- [Equivalent Options for Education](#)
- [Evaluating Coursework for Staff Qualifications](#)
- [Experience-Based Competency \(tinyurl.com/ExperienceOption\)](https://tinyurl.com/ExperienceOption)
- [General Staff Qualifications](#)
- International Degrees
- [MERIT Workforce Registry Support](#)
- [Professional Development Planning Worksheet](#)

## Questions?

If you need additional information, contact our [MERIT](#) Workforce Registry support team by emailing [merit@dcyf.wa.gov](mailto:merit@dcyf.wa.gov) or calling 1-866-482-4325, option 5.