# HS/ECEAP Challenges with Early Achievers:

#### Prepared by WSA based on feedback from approximately 25 programs via email, phone and 6/5/18 Zoom meeting between DEL and directors

Early Achievers works well in most cases, and many programs have very good relationships with their Child Care Aware coaches and the way the system operates. However, certain challenges keep coming up for our programs, and we’re interested in seeing how DEL/DCYF may address this going forward as we attempt to improve quality and expand ECEAP and Head Start access.

**Inconsistency.** I hear from multiple programs that classrooms they have in different buildings, with virtually identical “Files of Supporting Materials”, practices, and backup paperwork and files, end up with very different scores. If I only heard this once I wouldn’t be concerned, but it seems to happen fairly frequently.

**Lack of detail and delayed results.** It would be great if programs could use their EA results to improve their practice and procedures, but in practice it takes so long to get the results that the school year is either over or almost over or over by the time they get any info, and the detail is so minimal that it doesn’t help much and makes EA rating feel like even more of a burden. The lack of detail is also VERY frustrating to programs who do not understand why they got a low score in a given area. It is difficult to appeal or improve when you don’t know what you’re getting marked down for. One program in a licensed site noted that they were marked down in EA for having a ‘dangerous playground’ with absolutely no information about why it was dangerous. Another ECEAP program got a zero on the family engagement portion and had no idea why.

**Rigidity of ERS tool.** First, most of our programs are part-day, and the rigidity of the tool means that many times programs get marked down due to scheduling. For example, programs must have free play for a ‘substantial portion’ of the day, which they do. However, if one kid sits at the breakfast table for 40 minutes while all the other kids are playing, that’s still considered mealtime and they are not considered to be offering enough free play. Second, the ERS tool is not in alignment with Creative Curriculum and a more open approach to curriculum and play. Programs will get marked down if legos end up in the blocks area, for example. We are told that we just have to give up something – either child development best practice or our score on ERS - or to be ‘more creative’, but the reviewers do not approach reviews in a creative way, so something loses.

**Focus on issues not as closely tied to child outcomes**. There is concern that a move away from CLASS will mean that this will be even greater – counting toys, playground issues, endless washing of hands, etc, rather than teacher/child interactions. School districts are often unevenly affected here – they are moved around from classroom to classroom and building to building so building a new playground may not be feasible, and their physical space is constrained by SD requirements, while at the same time they tend to invest in teacher quality.

**Special Education**. Several programs have mentioned that the ERS sometimes conflicts with accommodations for children with special needs, but reviewers do not account for this. Some of the comments related to family child care are pertinent in this area as well – it’s not best practice to put out every toy, for example, but when the ERS people are coming, we throw the whole lot out there.

**File of Supporting Materials**. This is a MAJOR paperwork burden for programs, and the assessment of it is extremely nitpicky and uneven. Most programs report that doing this file takes a minimum of 1 week of staff time (and I am being very conservative here), which is time not well spent in most people’s estimation. Due to the ECEAP/HS Track (which has its own issues of inequity given that CC providers all have to do the FSM) not requiring this, programs are incentivized away from mixed income or inclusion classrooms, since going under 70% ECEAP or HS would trigger a major paperwork hassle. We do not want to disincentivize these things. If I am hearing reports from on the ground correctly, this FSM burden has also led to many CC centers not doing it at all and just doing the CLASS/ERS review, and has led to coaches having to focus on the nitpicky details of how the UW will interpret your FSM, rather than on the things that we know are more important to child outcomes – teacher interactions, curriculum fidelity, supportive learning environment.

Additionally, 100% compliance is simply too high a bar for many of the elements of the FSM. We recognize that you ‘sample’, but 100% of the sample leaves no room for human error. We our primary work is to effectively serve children and families, and even we in HS/ECEAP are not 100% infallible when it comes to paperwork. Reviewers are extremely inflexible – one missing date or signature on a form in one child record and you lose those points for the program, for example. This feels unreasonable.

**New classrooms**. I’ve heard this from multiple programs who went through expansion – getting a new site up and running and then getting EA rated within a few months of starting is extremely challenging. I think this is in statute, but is there any flexibility? Would be great for existing programs with a good track record to be able to really focus internally on creating a good classroom until the following winter rather than jump through the EA hoops at the same time.

**Moving classrooms.** This is another one that may require a change in statute. School districts often move classrooms around buildings, portables, and from school to school, so often a classroom must be rated multiple times over the 3 years rather than just once, even if there’s little change in personnel, practices, furniture and materials, etc.

## Family Childcare HS/ECEAP Model comments:

Are all 3 CLASS tools (Infant, Toddler and Pre-K) used, or have they created a “hybrid?” And if the latter is true, can that contribute to the concern about one of our veteran Providers rating at a Level 3 while others rate at Level 4?

The overall requirements that must be met for Family Child Care providers with ages birth through 5 is a task that most if not all child care providers struggle with being able to achieve. For example, each age group needs to have three different varieties of blocks, which means 9 sets of blocks when you have three different age groups. (Lack of space)

With all the materials that need to be out at all times, in many cases is causing sensory overload for the children, as well as the staff. And is certainly a different philosophy then what they have be trained on in the past. More is not necessarily better or appropriate. Hence, the rotation of supplies and activities. Rotating materials keeps the children interested and wondering what’s coming next, when they have everything out at all times it no longer is something to be curious about.

The expense of all the added materials that are encouraged to be purchased and changes to the child care spaces becomes very burdensome.

The need for having all materials open for all age groups during the day. For instance, preschoolers should have access to all art materials throughout the day, all while keeping the materials out of the reach of the toddlers. If certain types of containers are used to address this, it is not counted as being available during most of the day. Special projects that have been typically brought out during rest time for infants/toddlers, to prevent choking hazards while providing the activities

The inconsistency of the data collectors and raters. They have not had any experience with Family Child Care and really are not aware of the model and the day to day duties of the child care providers.

The inconsistency of ratings from one provider to the next, meaning sites that have received a higher level 3 versus sites that received a level two. In some cases, it’s a true disparage and with providers all knowing each other it has caused a bit of dissention among the child care community. Which is the last thing we need as we are trying to build a strong sense of community.

The inconsistency of coaches and the information they bring forward. Also, the coaches changes fairly often.

Child Care Providers have reported they feel like they are being asked to put on a “show “ for the raters rather than doing what is best and appropriate for the children in their care at the time. The flexibility to meet the individual children's needs at the time of rating is being put on the back burner because if they don’t exhibit in that moment what the raters are checking off, somehow that means that requirement is not being met. The providers feel frustrated because the raters have no idea what transpired before they stepped into the room or after they have left.

#### For more information:

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