



## HB 2059: Spark Program Reorganization

### **Background:**

Spark is a statewide program administered by the Early Learning Division, which helps child care programs assess and improve their quality and to help parents and families access quality child care. Spark serves as Oregon's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which is required by federal and state statute. When Spark was first created in 2012, it followed the trend of QRIS at the time, which focused primarily on assessing and rating programs.

Spark has served as a sort of pilot for the QRIS since 2012 and the division has learned ways to make this system work better for families and child care providers since that time. The current system has a narrow interpretation of quality standards and program participation does not represent a cross section of the diversity of providers and programs across the state.

### **Statutory Change:**

Two statutory changes include removing the requirement of tiered ratings and removing the requirement of tiered financial incentives. The goal is to give the Early Learning Division the latitude to design, in concert with families and providers, a program that increases its reach to a more diverse set of early care and education programs and professionals while designing a more effective set of financial incentives to increase program participation.

The aim of HB 2059 is to offer a new vision for the direction of the Spark program that focuses resources on support for ongoing learning and improvement for providers and better ways of communication with providers. In addition, HB 2059 sets up the Division for developing Spark in a way that can develop a more inclusive definition of quality to be culturally responsive and support the inclusion of all children.

These statutory changes would initiate a process that includes the following:

- The Early Learning Division would use funds from the Federal Preschool Development Grant to help design this system with providers and families. Currently, the Division has contracted with a consultant to do this work with a goal to complete this by early 2022.
- The redesign work will use human-centered design to redesign quality standards and quality improvement processes, as well as work with families to design ways to represent a quality model separate from stars that will help with family decision-making.
- The Early Learning Division will seek to change Spark gradually over the next 1.5 years, so providers will experience a gradual change in the program.