

STATE OF THE CHILDREN: EARLY LEARNING & CARE



Southeast Region

Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, and Asotin Counties





VISION & EQUITY STATEMENT

Our dream is that all children have a chance for a great start in life. We believe that they deserve access to high-quality basics of health, education, nurturing, and love. In fall 2019, one-third of the children in our region started their first day of kindergarten unprepared. We can do better! It is true that children and families living in poverty, or children learning English as a second language, may need a little extra support, but we are not talking about “those” children or “other” children. We are talking about “our” children.

Statement on Equity

Washington Communities for Children and Washington STEM recognize and respect social, linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity, and the unique needs of families and communities. We acknowledge opportunity gaps, based on race, ethnicity, gender, income, ability, culture, and geography, exist for children and families. We are actively engaged in systems-level change and approach these objectives with cultural humility, passion, and a commitment to persist in achieving equity.

Research and data play critical roles in identifying and elevating the needs of children and families in Washington state. However, existing research methods, and resulting data, are not immune to institutionalized and systemic racism, so we must analyze them with racial justice at the forefront. This report attempts to center community experiences and access to systems supports through the thoughtful selection and presentation of data that focuses on systems rather than individual outcomes. It uses the measures we have, though sometimes flawed, to illuminate systemic issues—policies, programs, and funding—that impact young children and families and that disparately affect racial groups. It also engages community to illustrate local, lived experiences in relation to these systemic issues. The data available to us as of the writing of this report is limited in depth and scope. We hope, in future reports, to include information on issues such as father engagement and the ability to disaggregate all system input data by race/ethnicity. We call on you to support efforts to listen to and learn from families, providers, and communities about their needs and strengths, and to ensure that we collect and analyze data with communities and co-design the necessary solutions.

Numbers included in this report are approximations used to provide regional estimates.

February 2021

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OVERALL STATE OF YOUNG CHILDREN:

The Southeast region is home to **32,000 young children and their families**. This report will address systems and conditions that promote their development and the actions you can take to support young children and families.

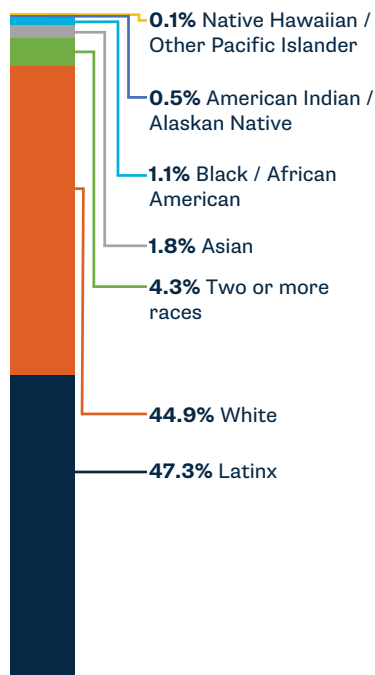
32,000 CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



15,100 (47 percent) of children under six are living in poverty*

**We define children in poverty as those in households at 200 percent of the federal poverty line, which is \$52,400 a year.*

Race & Ethnicity of Children Under Age 6



Spanish, Vietnamese

Most common languages spoken at home other than English.

60% (19,300)

of children under the age of six have all parents in the workforce.

55% (10,600)

of children in our region with all parents in the workforce **don't have access** to early learning in a licensed child care or ECEAP/Head Start program.

20% (1,700)

of child care licensed capacity was temporarily lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic shutdown as of June 2020.

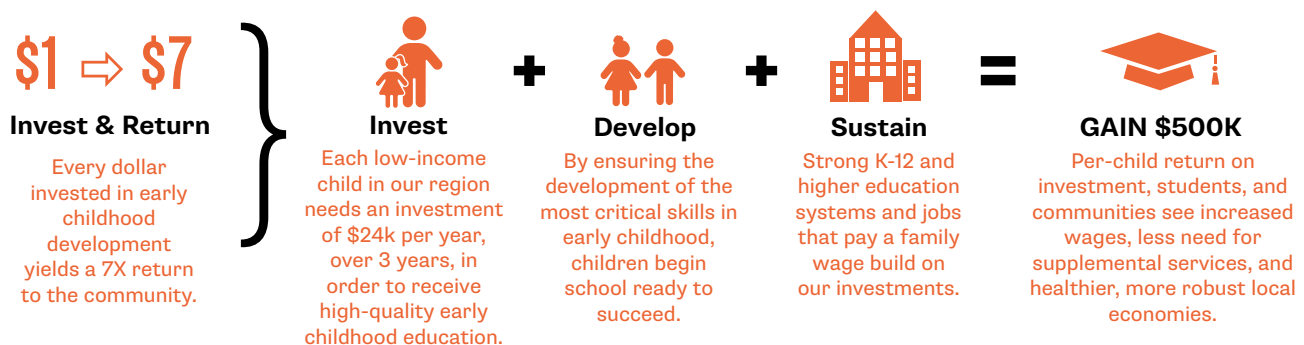
THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS

OF INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION

Research has shown that investing in high-quality early child care and education does more than provide a strong foundation for young learners. The ‘spillover’ effects of investing in children at an early age have been linked to a stronger economy, increased caregiver job stability, and a reduction in the cost for special education, healthcare, and criminal justice spending later in life.

Unequal opportunities due to poverty reduce our region’s economic prosperity. However, early investments can make a big difference down the road. For every **one dollar invested** in high-quality care in the early years of life there is a more than **seven dollars return** in terms of dollars saved on later interventions and upward economic mobility in adulthood.

Return on Investment*



*Investment and gain figures are based on an estimate of year-round, full-day, quality care for low-income children, derived from the average cost (\$1,960 per month) of programs currently providing this care.

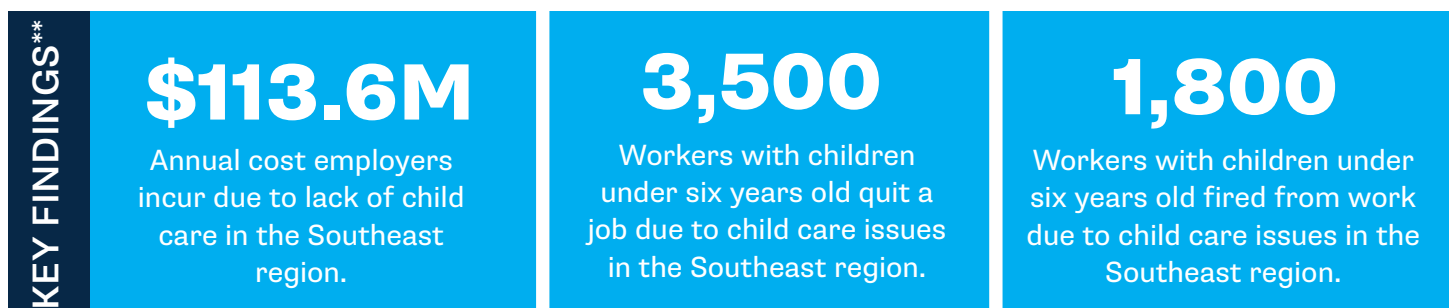
This is a current estimate; however, the Department of Commerce is creating a report, to be released in 2021, that will provide more specific and regionalized estimates.

ECONOMIC IMPACT ON EMPLOYERS

Washington employers incurred costs of \$2.08 billion in 2019 due to employee absenteeism resulting from a breakdown in child care coverage.

“Our state’s current child care system does not work for everyone and impacts our local and state economies every day. Investing in our child care systems to ensure access, options, and affordability is investing in the economic development and growth of our region. Child care is an essential infrastructure for strengthening our state and local economy.”

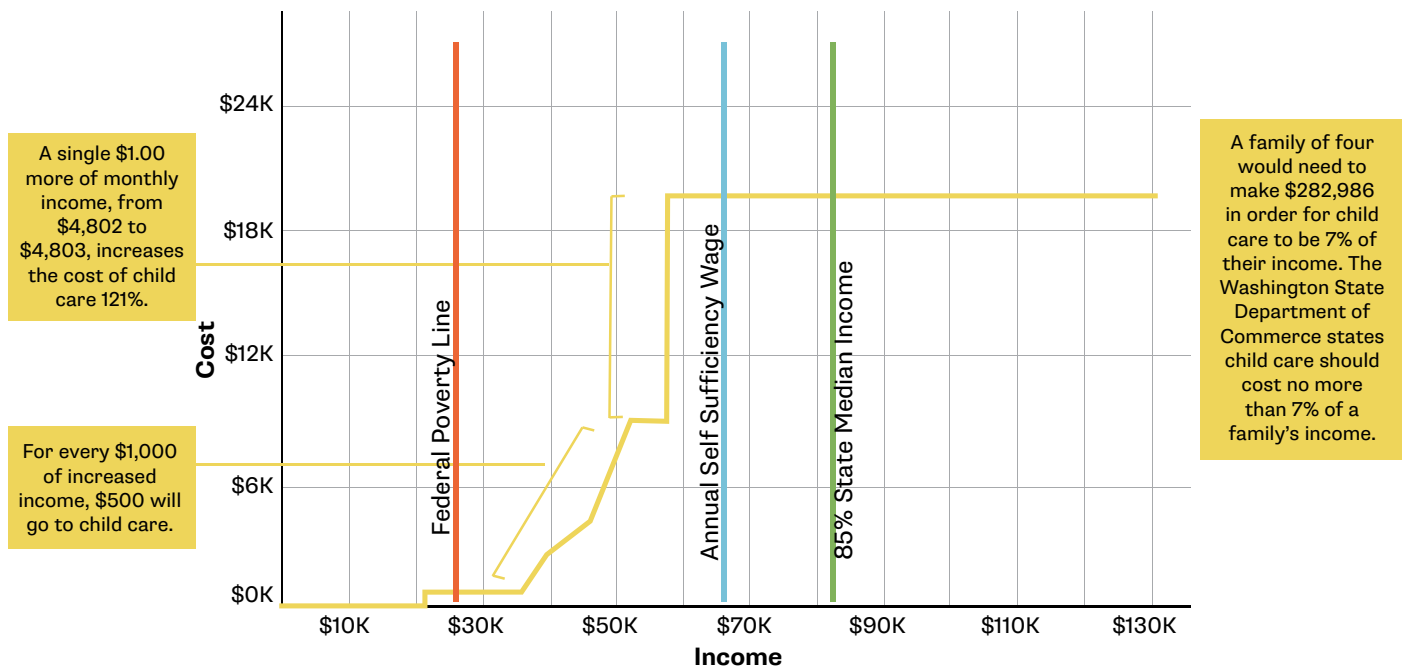
May Hays, Executive Director, West Richland Chamber of Commerce; Owner, Mayfield Gathering Place & Gardens



ECONOMIC IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Child care costs place a tremendous burden on families, impacting income in three areas: work time commitment, productivity levels, and long-term career. The median income of a family in our region is **\$62,019**. The typical cost of child care is **\$10,467**. The average family in our region pays **17 percent** of their income for one child in child care.

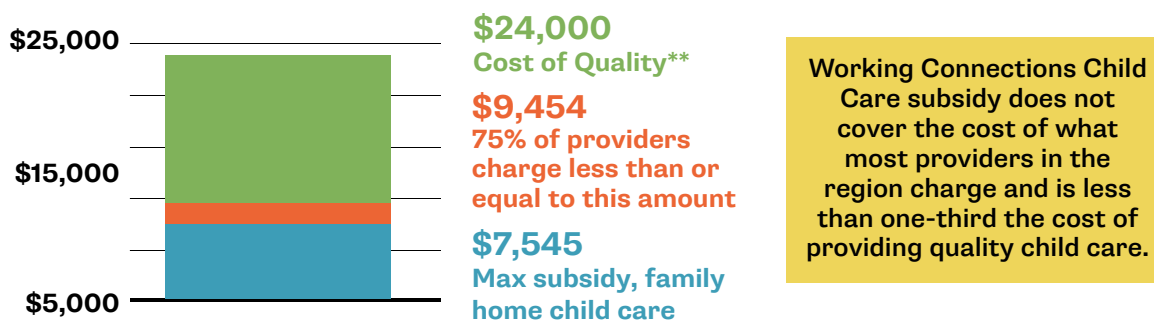
Percent of Annual Income Spent on Child Care 2 Adults, 1 Preschooler, and 1 Infant



ECONOMIC IMPACT FOR CHILD CARE PROGRAMS AS SMALL BUSINESSES

Working Connections Child Care is a subsidy program that helps income-eligible families pay for child care. The 75th percentile represents the subsidy rate at which families can access 75 percent of the child care market. **Subsidy rates are currently far below the market rate for child care.** Child care providers who accept Working Connections subsidies incur financial loss when the subsidy rate is below the actual cost to provide care. The Washington Child Care Collaborative Task Force will release a report in 2021 that will include the cost of quality care for early education programs. We will update the graphic below with those updated numbers when those reports are released.

Working Connections Reimbursement Rate vs. Cost of Quality Care



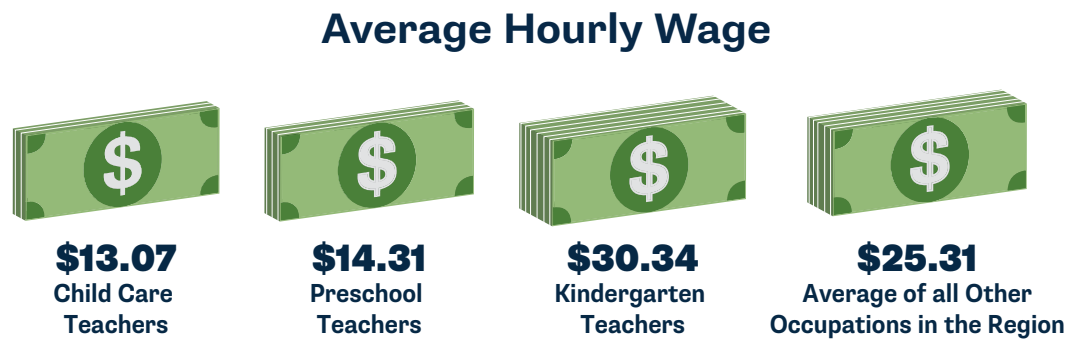
***Quality refers to the average cost of programs that have been awarded the highest levels of quality (levels 4 or 5) by Early Achievers, Washington State's Quality Rating System. This is a current estimate; however, the Department of Commerce is creating a report that will be released in 2021 that will provide more specific and regionalized estimates.*

EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE

Our early learning and care system currently depends on 32,000 early learning and child care professionals in Washington state, and **850 in the Southeast region**, of whom 83 percent are female. These individuals play a critical role in promoting the development and well-being of the young children in our region.

COMPENSATION

While early childhood educators are an invaluable resource, **early childhood educators make far less than their K-12 peers**, even when accounting for level of education. We expect child care employees to care for our children while their wages fall near poverty levels.



\$27K The average full-time child care teacher makes \$27,186, compared to a self-sufficiency wage of \$44,344 for one adult with one toddler.

50% of child care teachers with one dependent in our region would qualify for Medicaid.

25% of child care teachers with one dependent in our region would qualify for the low-income special supplemental nutrition program Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

The low pay of child care teachers is driven in large part by the fact that their salaries are paid out of tuition paid by families. The margins in the child care business are very narrow and this sector of the education workforce is essentially **subsidizing the true costs of care with their personal income**.

GROWING THE WORKFORCE

Strengthening the early care and education workforce in our region requires a focus on compensation and professional development investments to help sustain and expand the workforce needed to address our early care and education crisis. In order to **meet the unmet early care and education workforce** need in our region we would **need over 910 additional educators**.

Additional Educators Needed to Meet Regional Need

	Infants (<12 months old)	Toddlers (12-29 months old)	Preschoolers (30-71 months old)	Total Educators Needed
Educators Needed	280	240	390	910

Numbers based on the assumption that 63 percent of children with all caregivers in the workforce would indeed use child care if it were to be available. (See citations on the last page for methodology.)

COVID-19 IMPACT

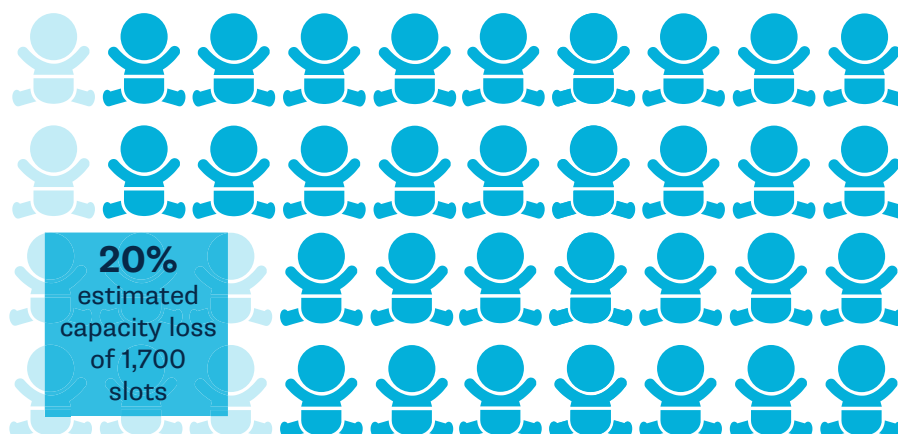
COVID-19 has further exacerbated the strain on the early child education system, putting it at **risk of collapse**. Families and employers will continue to struggle as parents in the workforce are even less likely to have the child care they need to return to work. Children are missing out on needed services.

63 child care programs (as of June 2020) have temporarily closed, and it's likely that many of them will not open their doors again.

31 child care programs (totaling 164 jobs) in the Southeast region received a Paycheck Protection Loan.

Child care providers are essential workers. Those continuing to provide care during the pandemic are left to balance their need for income, risk of contracting COVID-19, and work of caring for their own children at home.

Child Care Licensed Capacity Temporarily Lost



COMMUNITY COLLABORATION IN SERVICE OF FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

The new Walla Walla Center for Children and Families has opened to Head Start, ECEAP, and Transitional Kindergarten students on a hybrid schedule. The center also houses area nonprofits who support children and families. The center was formerly Blue Ridge Elementary School and was repurposed to meet the growing demand for early learning programs.

Columbia County is losing their last licensed child care provider in June and it's affecting the health system's ability to recruit new employees. The Walla Walla Valley Early Learning Coalition is excited to partner with the City of Walla Walla and the Columbia County Health System on a Department of Commerce Child Care Partnerships Grant. These partners have come together to conduct a feasibility study to improve access and affordability of child care in the Walla Walla Valley. With this community effort, we hope to better serve the needs of the families and children who rely on the services of our child care systems.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

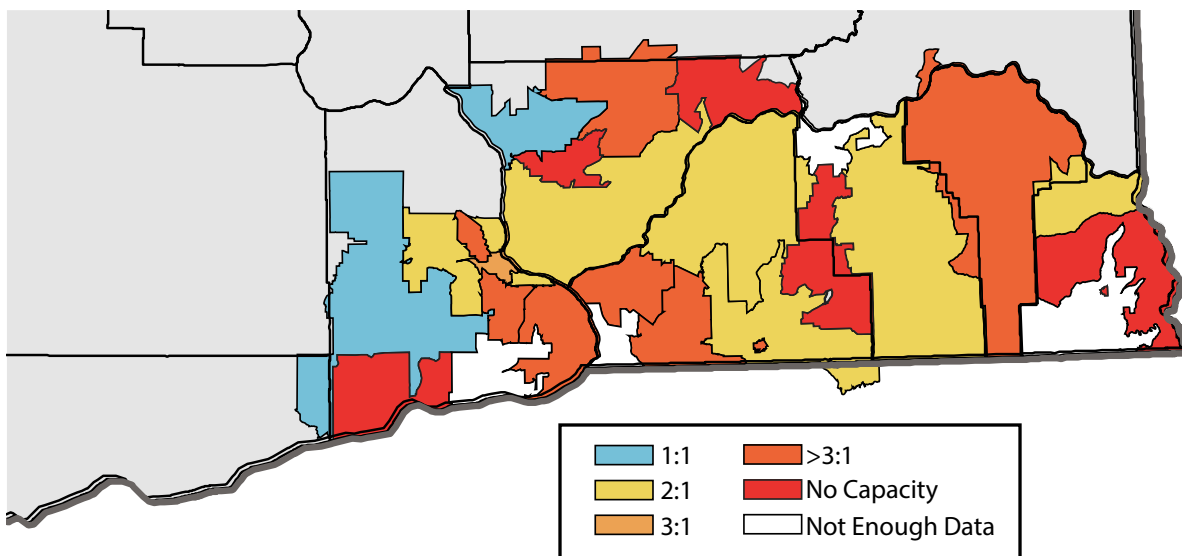
ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AND QUALITY

By age five, 90 percent of a child's brain has developed. Investing in high-quality early childhood education builds the foundation for future learning, behavior, and health. We must focus on policies and programs that promote access, affordability, and quality for the 32,00 young children in our region.

LICENSED EARLY CARE: ACCESS

One major issue facing our early care and education system is access. Current licensed child care availability **only meets the needs of approximately 33 percent (6,300) of children under six whose parents are in the workforce and need care** in our region, with lower availability for infants compared to preschoolers. About 19,300 children under age six in this region have all parents in the workforce, and this lack of access to child care can, and likely will, have dramatic impacts on families and employers. We estimate that of children with all parents in the workforce, **63 percent would access child care if it was available**, based on estimates from other state funded child care caseload forecasting reports. Researchers monitored supply and demand data and found pre-COVID data to be the best estimate for assessing access to early care and education systems.

Children with all Caregivers in the Workforce vs Child Care Capacity*

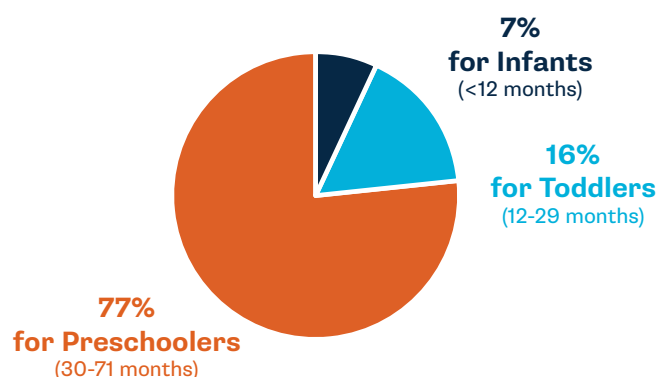


Child Care Licensed Capacity Available by Age

	Licensed Child Care	Gap by age
Infants (<12 Months)	470	77%
Toddlers (12-29 months)	1,000	67%
Preschoolers (30-71 months)	4,850	31%

Gap by age indicates the shortfall in licensed child care spots. Children may be in care with family, friends, neighbors, or license-exempt care.

Age Group as a Percent of Child Care Capacity



Numbers based on the assumption that 63 percent of children with all caregivers in the workforce would indeed use child care if it were to be available. (See citations on the last page for methodology.)

LICENSED EARLY CARE: AFFORDABILITY

Child care costs are unaffordable for most families in our region. Families with two young children who make the regional median income spend up to 33 percent of their income on child care. The Washington State Department of Commerce states child care should cost no more than 7 percent of a family’s income.

43% the percent of income paid to child care by families of color (median income of \$52,500 a year) in the Southeast region, compared to 27 percent paid by white families (median income of \$83,800 a year).

Price by Age Group

	Yearly Price
Infants (<1 year old)	\$11,892
Toddlers (1-2 years old)	\$11,040
Preschoolers (3-5 years old)	\$9,948
Average net price for Walla Walla Community College	\$6,795

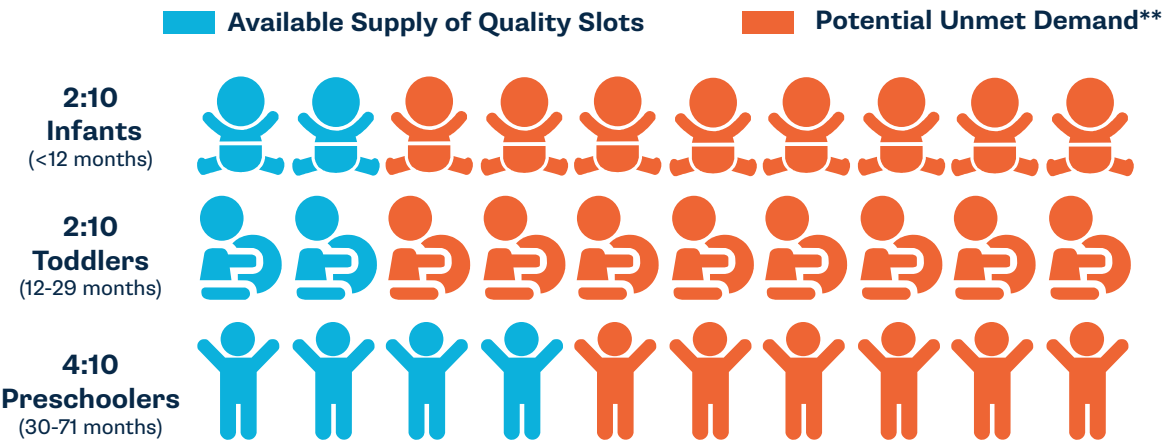
The average cost of early care across all ages is higher than the cost of attending Walla Walla Community College full-time.

LICENSED EARLY CARE: QUALITY

Quality child care provides safe, loving, and stimulating environments for young children. Many early learning programs in the Southeast region have achieved a quality rating. However, quality care has a financial cost that varies by age. Families with infants and toddlers might not be able to afford quality care and may also have a more difficult time finding available slots in quality care programs.

Researchers have found that children who receive quality child care enter school with better math, language, and social skills.

Regional Access to Quality Care by Age

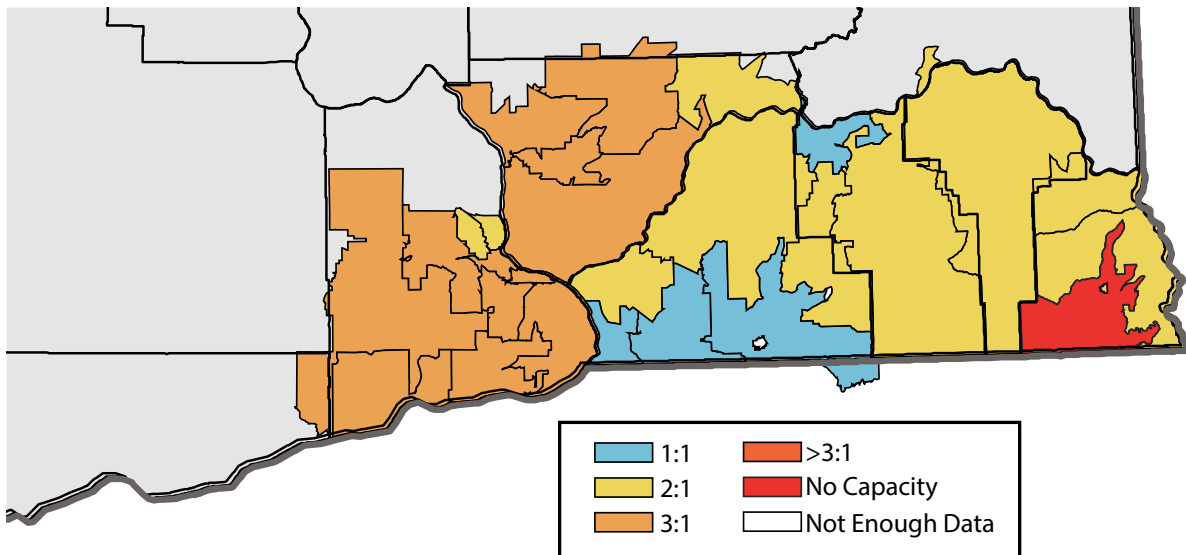


Numbers are based on the assumption that 63 percent of children with all caregivers in the workforce would indeed use child care if it were to be available. (See citations on the last page for methodology.)

ECEAP, HEAD START, AND EARLY HEAD START

The Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), funded by Washington state, and federally funded Head Start and Early Head Start are preschool programs for children of low-income families. ECEAP and Head Start allow low-income children to access high-quality preschool programs. Programming is either part-day or full school day (seven hours). Working families are often left to piece together care, relying on other licensed child care facilities, or family, friends, or neighbors to accommodate unmet child care needs.

Children Eligible vs ECEAP & Head Start Slots Available



3%*

With only 68 slots in the Southeast region, only 3% of the infants and toddlers who qualify for Early Head Start have a spot available to them.

COVID-19 IMPACT

As a result of the pandemic, 17 percent of the child care programs in our state have temporarily closed their doors, many of them for good, representing a **temporary loss of approximately 30,000 in licensed capacity**. At a time when many families are returning to work, and when many K-12 schools are shifting away from in-person instruction, the supports and care they need now more than ever are in question.

90%

of ECEAP programs moved to a distance model in which educators met with children and families online or in socially distanced settings. In-person instruction was maintained for children with special needs.

233

child care programs in the region received Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding in order to stay open.

**Early Head Start can be delivered in a child care program or in a home visiting model. These data reflect Early Head Start delivered in child care programs only.*

HELP ME GROW:

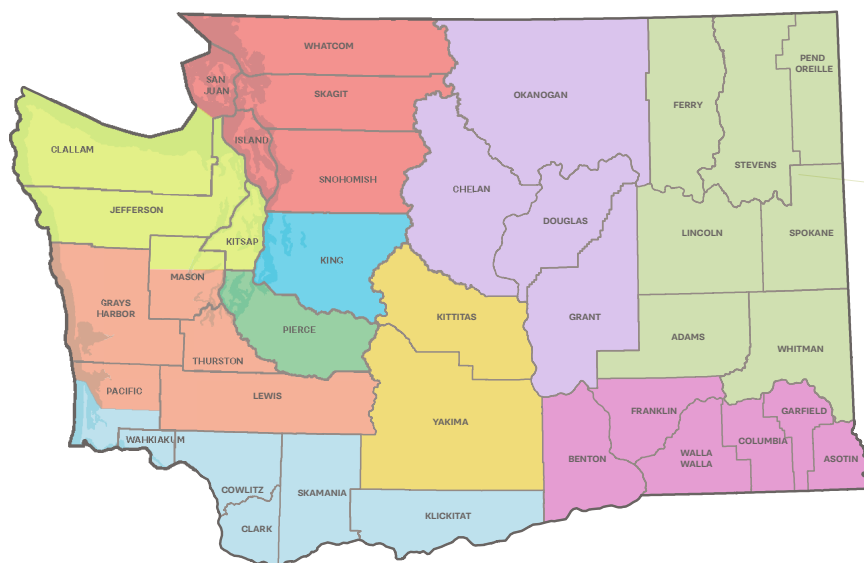
CONNECTING FAMILIES TO RESOURCES



Help Me Grow is a statewide, community-driven, resource and referral linkage system that connects young children and their families to appropriate services and community supports. Parents, caregivers, early learning, health, and other service providers can call, text, or email Help Me Grow and connect to caring people who are highly trained in child development. The resource navigators listen to families' needs and link them to the most appropriate services.

Help Me Grow Washington: A Statewide, Regional Effort

Help Me Grow Washington is a network of communities across Washington that work together to create a resource grid of community services and supports. Help Me Grow listens to families, links them to services, and provides ongoing support.



Help Me Grow's Key Components

- Child Health Care Provider Outreach
- Family & Community Outreach
- Coordinated Access Point
- Data Collection & Analysis
- Equity
- Policy & Advocacy

218 families were connected to Help Me Grow in the Southeast region in the last year.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Learn more about Help Me Grow at www.helpmegrowwa.org and get involved in the action team at www.bit.ly/HelpMeGrowAction.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES - PAID FAMILY LEAVE

Bonding is essential for infant development. When a caregiver consistently responds to their infant's needs, it sets the stage for the growing child to build healthy relationships. In Washington, parents qualify for 12 weeks of paid leave to bond with a new baby or child. Birthing parents qualify for up to 16 weeks (18 for complicated pregnancies/births) of combined medical and family leave.

2,726 parents in the Southeast region took Paid Family Leave bonding time (January through September 2020).



NEXT STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- Learn more about the Southeast Early Learning Coalition by visiting www.sewelrc.org and joining our monthly newsletter.
- Learn more about the Walla Walla Valley Early Learning Coalition by visiting www.earlylearningwallawalla.org.
- Learn more about the Benton Franklin Early Learning Alliance (BFELA) by visiting www.sewelrc.org/bfela.
- Learn about statewide efforts and resources: The Washington Child Care Collaborative Task Force, led by the Department of Commerce, is currently producing a series of reports on child care access and costs, with the goal of making recommendations to the legislature. Please visit <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/> to see the latest reports and recommendations.
- Learn more about Washington STEM by visiting www.washingtonstem.org, and learn more about how this report was created at www.washingtonstem.org/STEMbythenumbers.

THANK YOU

Washington STEM and Washington Communities for Children would like to thank the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) and Child Care Aware of Washington for providing data and collaboration on methodology and visualization. We would also like to thank the Department of Commerce (DOC) for providing funding support for these reports and the members of the DOC's Child Care Collaborative Task Force for feedback and insight on the State of the Children project overall. The Southeast Washington Early Learning Regional Coalition would like to thank Asotin Early Learning Coalition, Benton Franklin Early Learning Alliance, Community Minded Enterprises, Child Care Aware of Eastern Washington, Educational Service District 123, Walla Walla Public Schools, and the Walla Walla Valley Early Learning Coalition

SOURCES

The following sources were used for the data and methodologies used throughout this report. Specific data elements, formulas, and other information about the numbers and figures can be found at www.washingtonstem.org/stembythenumbers or by scanning the QR code below.

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