

NORTH CENTRAL REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN EARLY CARE & EDUCATION



Okanogan, Chelan, Douglas,
and Grant Counties

19,293

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



8,888 (46%) OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX
IN LOW-INCOME* HOUSEHOLDS

Spanish, Slavic languages
MOST COMMON LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT
HOME OTHER THAN ENGLISH

62% (12,002)
CHILDREN OF COLOR

CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

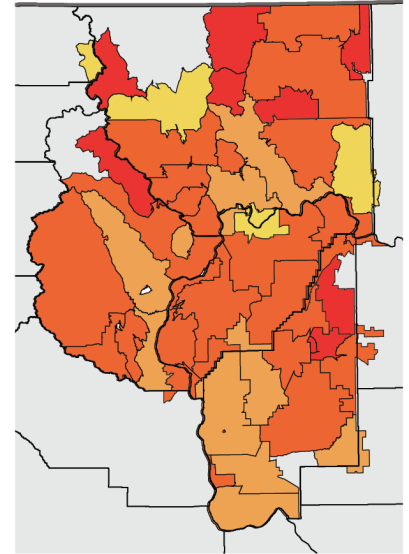
Lack of access to child care **costs employers an estimated \$84M** due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. Meanwhile, **74% of children do not have access to licensed child care**. For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$23,715, **19% of the average family's income**.

ECEAP AND HEAD START

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Head Start (HS) preschool programs specialize in inclusive and high-quality care for low-income families and children with disabilities. **While there are funded slots for 61% of the 2,784 children in our region who qualify for them**, many of these slots go unfilled due to a lack of staffing. More must be done to recruit and retain educators for this critical programming.

61% OF CHILDREN WHO NEED
ECEAP/HS HAVE A SPACE
AVAILABLE TO THEM

PERCENT OF CHILD CARE DEMAND MET**



- More than 75% need met
- Between 50 - 74% need met
- Between 25 - 49% need met
- Less than 25% need met
- No Child Care
- Not Enough Data

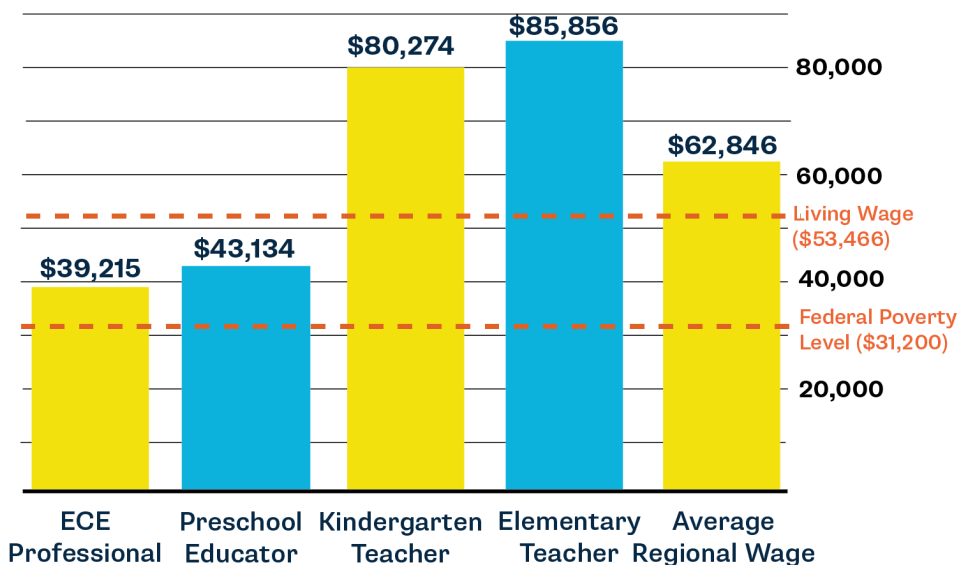
EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Our early care and education (ECE) system currently depends on **372 ECE professionals** in the North Central region, of whom **48% are people of color** and **96% are women**. While providing an essential service, most ECE professionals make significantly less than the regional living wage and **73% with one dependent would qualify for some form of government assistance**.

*We define low-income as 200 percent of the federal poverty line, which is \$62,400 for a family of four.

**Visual of 2024 data. Capacity includes licensed child care; ECEAP; HS; and Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care.

ECE VS. K-12 WAGES



OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS CHILD CARE

“My name is Irma Acosta and I live in Brewster, Washington, and have been working as a child care provider since 2002. Brewster used to be considered a child care desert due to the lack of providers and early learning programs to support children. There was also a lack of information in the community where many people did not have immigration papers and believed that without documentation they could not progress, so they spent most of their lives working in orchards and produce-packing warehouses. Fortunately, these issues have improved thanks to a state-funded program and the work I have done as a mentor to train new child care providers in my community. There are now more early childhood education programs available in schools for young children, and people working in produce-packing warehouses are allowed to request child care assistance. The community has flourished thanks to people who care about it.” - Irma Acosta, Child Care Provider (pictured second from right) **This story was originally shared in Spanish and translated.*



PLAY AND LEARN GROUPS: HELPING FAMILIES FIND RESOURCES AND INCLUSIVE CARE

Many parents in North Central Washington struggle to find information and access to needed child care services. For example, Mayra is a mother of six children, three of whom are under the age of five years. Mayra had concerns about two of her children and wasn't sure where she could go for help. She needed a trusted place to seek advice and she needed to know where to go for resources and local services. She joined the Early Connections Play & Learn Group in March of 2022, and there, she connected with trusted professionals who encouraged her to speak with her medical provider for a referral for occupational therapy for one child, and helped connect her with a local preschool to meet the needs of her second child.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Washington state has passed legislation to increase the child care quality and access, leading to 1,150 more children served in our region. Unfortunately, these investments have not funded the true cost of providing high-quality* care, and many ECE professionals make far less than a living wage. In partnership with the Child Care for Washington campaign, we are advocating for the following:

- Maintain the promise of the Fair Start for Kids Act by increasing Working Connections Child Care eligibility** and expanding ECEAP.
- Ensure that Working Connections Child Care rates reflect the true cost for providing high-quality child care.
- Increase capacity for child care by investing in the Early Learning Facilities (ELF) Fund.



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO GET INVOLVED

For Washington state, time is of the essence. Children, families, and educators need and deserve a fully funded system that supports them. Please join us in advocating with them by:

- Contacting your Early Learning Coalition Lead: Janelle Bersch, North Central Early Learning Coalition, janelleb@ncesd.org.
- Contacting your STEM Network Director: Holly Bringman, Apple STEM Network, hollyb@ncesd.org.
- Learning more on the Washington STEM website using the QR code or the link: https://washingtonstem.org/focus_area/early-stem/.
- Talking to your local representatives.

**High-quality ECE is defined here as participation in the Washington Early Achievers Quality Rating and Improvement System; the cost is defined by the 2022 Department of Commerce Cost of Quality Report.*

***Learn more about the Working Connections Child Care subsidy program at www.dcyf.wa.gov.*

