

# NORTHEAST REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN

## EARLY CARE & EDUCATION



Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille,  
Lincoln, Spokane, Adams, and  
Whitman Counties

# 44,961

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



**18,777 (42%)** OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX  
IN LOW-INCOME\* HOUSEHOLDS

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

**35%** (15,575)  
CHILDREN OF COLOR

## CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

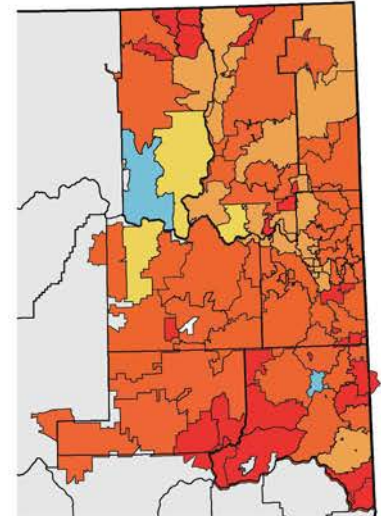
Lack of access to child care **costs employers an estimated \$252M** due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. Meanwhile, **76% of children do not have access to licensed child care**. For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$29,766, **23% of the average 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 62% of the 5,894 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 programing.

**62%** OF CHILDREN WHO NEED  
ECEAP/HS HAVE A SPACE  
(3,671) 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

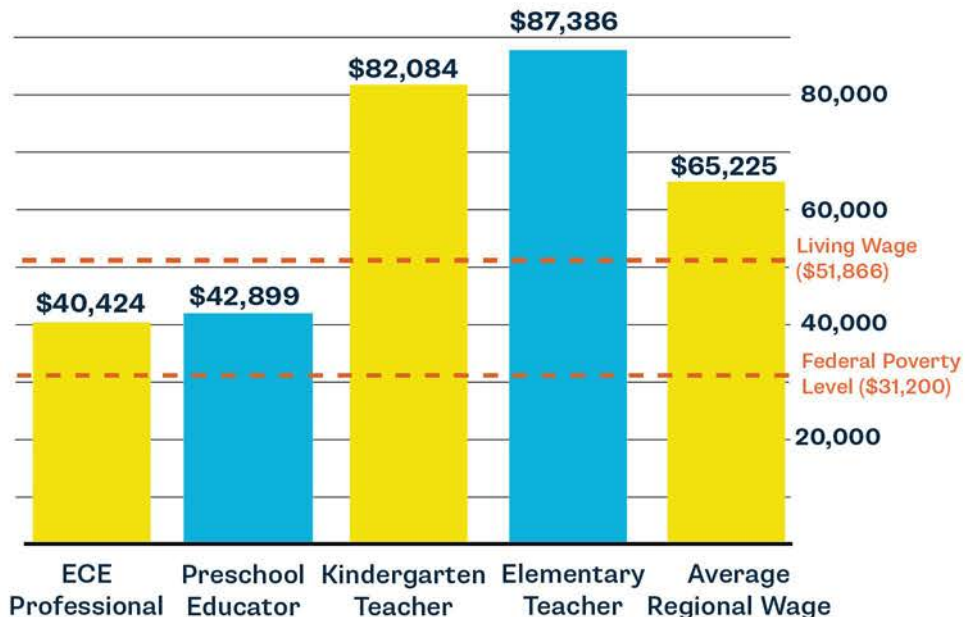
## EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Our early care and education (ECE) system currently depends on **1,374 ECE professionals** in the Northeast 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 **68% 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



## CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING CARE AND EDUCATION

“Providing education and child care in my rural county is quite difficult. I currently have a 3-year-old and a 6-year-old, and I teach part time at our parent co-op. We have many parents interested in joining, but as soon as they realize that we are not a full time child care facility they are unable to participate. We also see an influx of the grandparent generation bringing children to our co-op. Many parents in our rural area rely on their own parents as caregivers. While our co-op does offer limited drop off care, most parents need more than a few hours. It’s unfortunate because becoming a full time child care center is costly and difficult, and our co-op environment provides a rich learning, socialization, and parent support system.” – Jana Mueller, parent (pictured right)



## CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING CARE AND EDUCATION

Amber Swain has five children (pictured below), three of whom are adopted. She has experienced many challenges when it comes to finding care for her children. When her three oldest boys were younger and in her care as children in foster care, licensed child care wasn't an option, and Amber and her husband had to rely solely on babysitters. Now her boys are older and in school, but she continues to have challenges finding care for her younger children. There are very few options for full-time care in the rural county where Amber lives, and the ones that do exist are full. She has been on the waitlist for over a year for a center in her town. Until a spot opens up, Amber’s husband is staying home with their children. Her family could really use an additional income, but they don't have another option. Previously, Amber’s daughter received unacceptable and harmful care at a licensed child care center, so she feels strongly about finding the right location for her kids, even if that means sacrificing in other areas of her life.

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Washington state has passed legislation to increase the child care quality and access, leading to 1,234 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: Colleen Condon, Inland Northwest Early Alliance, [colleen@lilaccityelc.com](mailto:colleen@lilaccityelc.com).
- Contacting your STEM Network Director: Erin Vincent, Career Connect Northeast, [EVincent@greaterspokane.org](mailto:EVincent@greaterspokane.org).
- Learning more on the Washington STEM website using the QR code or the link: [https://washingtonstem.org/focus\\_area/early-stem/](https://washingtonstem.org/focus_area/early-stem/).
- Talking to your local representatives.

