

# NORTHWEST REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN

## EARLY CARE & EDUCATION



San Juan, Island, Skagit,  
Snohomish, and Whatcom  
Counties

# 87,813

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



**21,646 (25%)** OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX  
IN LOW-INCOME\* HOUSEHOLDS

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

# 50%

(43,686)

CHILDREN OF COLOR

## CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

Lack of access to child care **costs employers an estimated \$448M** due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. Meanwhile, **83% of children do not have access to child care.** For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$38,170, **27% of the average family's income.**

### ECEAP AND HEAD START

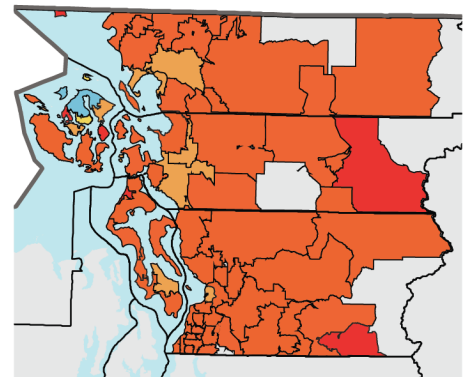
Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Head Start (HS) preschool programs specialize in inclusive and high-quality care for low-income families and children with disabilities. **While there are funded slots for 57% of the 7,084 children in our region who qualify for them,** many of these slots go unfilled due to a lack of staffing. More must be done to recruit and retain educators for this critical programing.

# 57%

(4,032)

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

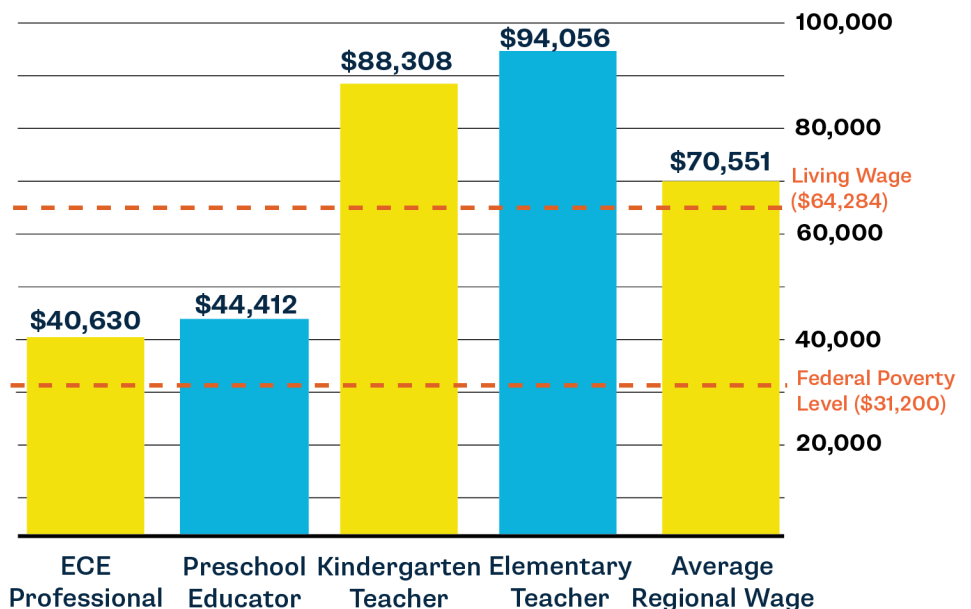
## EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Our early care and education (ECE) system currently depends on **4,232 ECE professionals** in the Northwest 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 **71% 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 ACCESSING CARE AND EDUCATION: STORIES FROM FAMILIES IN THE NORTHWEST REGION

**Amanda is a mother of two children on the autism spectrum**, both with significant developmental delays. Despite her best efforts, neither of them has mastered toilet training. This has been the biggest barrier to accessing child care since most child care facilities do not accommodate older children who require assistance toileting. Amanda doesn't have family nearby for support, and hiring private care is extremely cost prohibitive, especially for two children with substantial needs. Her family is not eligible for services like respite care that would offset the cost; even if they were, there is an extreme shortage of providers due to unsustainable wages.

Lack of child care support for families can lead to parental burnout, which increases the likelihood of substance abuse, marital strain, child abuse and neglect, and other health impacts. To increase accessibility to child care options for families and strengthen the early learning field, we must ensure a living wage for providers.



**Malachi is a funny, sweet, curious four-year-old**, who loves color crayons, race cars and Sesame Street. He lives with his parents and dogs. Malachi was born with a developmental disability and complex medical needs that require 24-hour skilled nursing care and accommodations to fully participate in school, community programs, and recreational activities. Like others, Malachi's family struggled to find a child care program that would accept him in an inclusive early learning setting and provide for him alongside his non-disabled peers. Options for kids like Malachi are largely non-existent, so his family sacrificed an income to care for and educate him at home. With the high cost of living in their region, eliminating a full-time job came at a significant cost, and the impact resonates daily.

Families need accessible, affordable child care options that are inclusive and meet each child's individual care needs, including children with disabilities. Anything less than full inclusion and care reinforces systemic ableism in the education and early learning sector and harms children with disabilities, their parents, and their support network.

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Washington state has passed legislation to increase the child care quality and access, leading to 1,612 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: Breana Ramos, Northwest Early Learning Coalition, [breana@nwelcoalition.org](mailto:breana@nwelcoalition.org).
- Contacting your STEM Network Director: Jenny Veltri, Career Connect NW, [jveltri@nwesd.org](mailto:jveltri@nwesd.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.

\*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](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov).

