

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN EARLY CARE & EDUCATION



Kittitas and Yakima Counties

23,459

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



13,640 (58%) OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX
IN LOW-INCOME* HOUSEHOLDS

Spanish, German

MOST COMMON LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT
HOME OTHER THAN ENGLISH

73%

(17,175)
CHILDREN OF COLOR

CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

Lack of access to child care costs employers an estimated \$140M due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. Meanwhile, **71% of children do not have access to licensed child care.** For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$26,010, **21% of the average family's income.**

ECEAP AND HEAD START

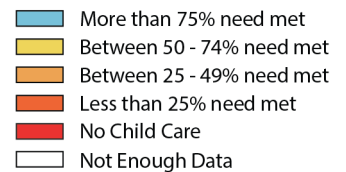
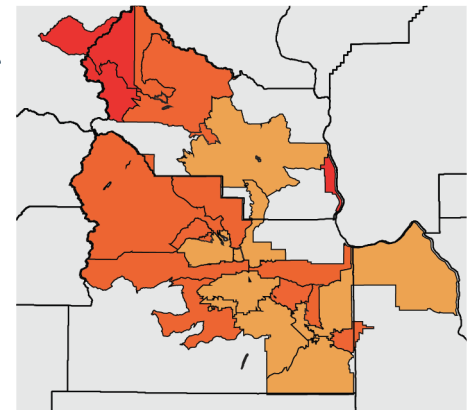
Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Head Start (HS) preschool programs specialize in inclusive and high-quality care for low-income families and children with disabilities. **While there are funded slots for 60% of the 4,307 children in our region who need them,** many of these slots go unfilled due to a lack of staffing. More must be done to recruit and retain educators for this critical programing.

60%

(2,597)

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

PERCENT OF CHILD CARE DEMAND MET**



EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE

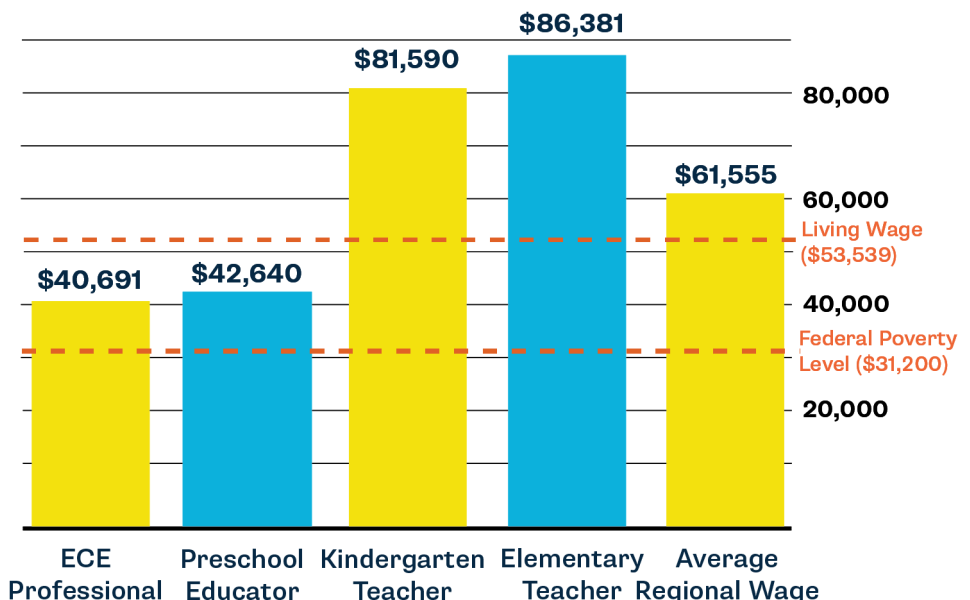
Our early education and care (ECE) system currently depends on **671 ECE professionals** in the South Central region, of whom **48% are people of color** and **96% are women.** While providing an essential service, most ECE professionals make significantly less than the regional living wage and **67% 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.

UPDATED SEPTEMBER 2024

ECE VS. K-12 WAGES



CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING CARE AND EDUCATION

Child care services in Yakima and Kittitas counties are primarily provided by women of color who are small business owners. Historically, the work of women of color has been undervalued and under-resourced, and, unfortunately, child care is no exception. In South Central Washington, many child care providers run their businesses alone and are in charge of cleaning, finances, cooking, and the care and education of children. Even though the service provided by this workforce of mostly women enables parents to work and supports our economy, many earn less than fast food workers. Many are discouraged from working in the child care sector and it is not rare for child care providers to switch careers to make a better living. These factors all contribute to South Central Washington being a *child care desert*, meaning that there are many more children who *need* child care than there are child care spots *available*.



RETAINING CHILD CARE PROVIDERS THROUGH ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

Because South Central Washington is a child care desert, it is difficult for most families to find affordable and quality child care. To address this challenge, in 2021 the Investing in Children Coalition (ICC) received a Child Care Partnership Grant from the Department of Commerce. With this grant the ICC was able to hold listening sessions in four communities to understand child care providers' needs, one of which was access to technology. Based on what they shared, the ICC was able to purchase technology packages for 32 child care providers to meet their needs, including laptops, software, wireless mics, headsets, and printers. In 2022, we received a second round of the grant and were able to buy 20 additional technology packages for providers in two more regions. In total, we provided over 50 providers with technology packages, which some have even used to apply for expansion grants to increase the number of spots in their programs!

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Washington state has passed legislation to increase the child care quality and access, leading to 1,282 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: Lindsay Boswell, Investing In Children Coalition, lindsayb@yakimavalleycf.org.
- Contacting your STEM Network Director: Mark Cheney, South Central Washington STEM, Mark.Cheney@esd105.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.

