

SOUTHEAST REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION



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

30,245

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



12,688 (42%) OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX
IN LOW-INCOME* HOUSEHOLDS

Spanish, Slavic languages

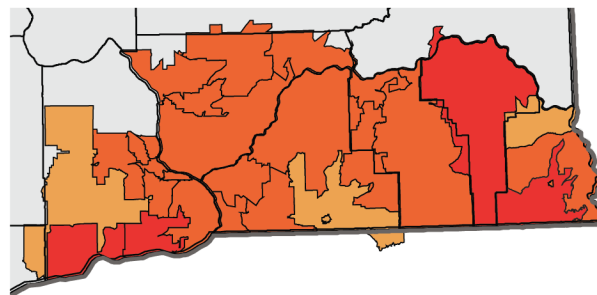
MOST COMMON LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT
HOME OTHER THAN ENGLISH

58%

(17,469)
CHILDREN OF COLOR

CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

Lack of access to child care **costs employers an estimated \$168M** due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. Meanwhile, **80% of children do not have access to licensed child care**. For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$27,903, **21% of the average family's income**.



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

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 3,670 children 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 programming.

61% OF CHILDREN WHO NEED ECEAP/HS
(2,257) HAVE A SPACE AVAILABLE TO THEM

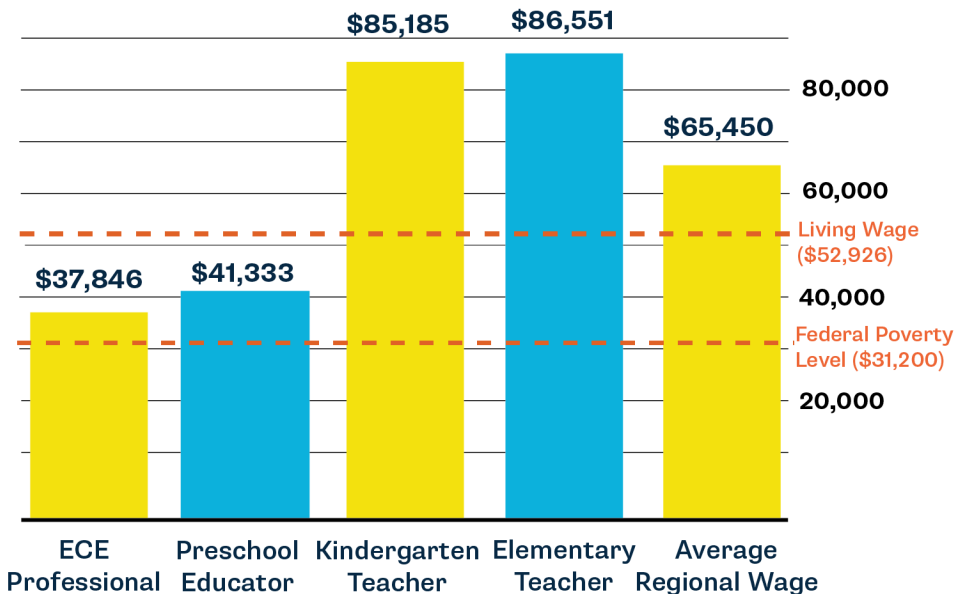
EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Our early care and education (ECE) system currently depends on **996 ECE professionals** in the Southeast 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 **88% 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

Child care providers in Southeast Washington are experiencing challenges as a result of the recent pandemic. Many have reported that even though they are finally starting to see an increase in the number of families wanting care for their children, they are unable to enroll due to not being able to find employees to staff their programs. The staffing challenges are affecting all early learning programs, including private child care centers, family child care providers, as well as Head Start and ECEAP programs. Ginger Still, owner of Kid's World Child Care in West Richland said, "In my thirty plus years in child care, I have never experienced this level of challenge in hiring staff. I am hiring 2-3 staff nearly every week and hoping they show up. It's disheartening to say that many of them don't show up, or quit within the first month, sometimes even week or day."



CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING CARE AND EDUCATION

Long waiting lists and lack of staffing has made it increasingly difficult for families to find care for their children. ECEAP programs all around the Southeast region, particularly in rural areas like Walla Walla County, are having to put holds on enrollment due to teacher shortages. "It's difficult to tell families that they qualify for our program, but we can't enroll them until we find teachers. The majority of the families we serve are from the most vulnerable populations, but we are having to wait weeks, sometimes months to enroll while we find qualified staff," says Brittany Hartikainen, an ECEAP Administrator for ESD 123. Barriers to accessing quality early care and education have contributed to young families moving out of towns like Walla Walla and into larger cities where there are more options for infant/toddler care and preschool, with the additional long-term impact of declining enrollment in the Walla Walla school district.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Washington state has passed legislation to increase the child care quality and access, leading to 1,233 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: Eiledon McClellan, Southeast Early Learning Coalition, eiledon.mcclellan@wwcc.edu.
- 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.*

