

# SOUTHWEST REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN

## EARLY CARE & EDUCATION



Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat,  
Pacific (South), Skamania,  
and Wahkiakum Counties

# 44,961

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



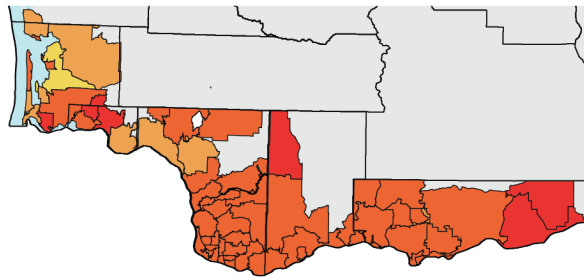
**14,821 (33%)** OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX  
IN LOW-INCOME\* HOUSEHOLDS

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

**39%** (17,539)  
CHILDREN OF COLOR

## CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

Lack of access to child care **costs employers an estimated \$224M** due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. Meanwhile, **83% of children do not have access to licensed child care**. For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$33,645, **25% 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 51% of the 4,773 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.

**51%**  
(2,429)  
OF CHILDREN WHO NEED ECEAP/HS  
HAVE A SPACE AVAILABLE TO THEM

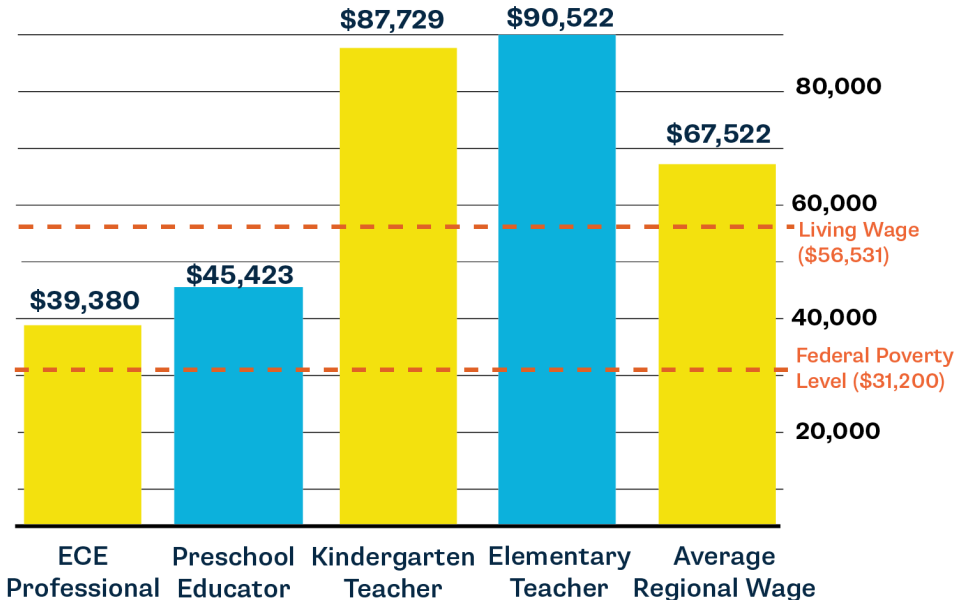
## EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION WORKFORCE

Our early care and education (ECE) system currently depends on **2,310 ECE professionals** in the Southwest 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.

## ECE VS. K-12 WAGES



## CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING CARE AND EDUCATION

“Not everyone has the economic resources to afford child care, but as a provider in my community, I try to provide affordable services so families can work. Many times, there is no space for families, and they are on the waiting list. When there is no true love or concern for children’s wellbeing and future, providers only care about earning money. Child care should be out of the interest in the children. Sometimes parents need to be supported so their children can have a better home and behavior. I’ve always tried to put myself in the parents’ place, listen, and if they allow me, advise them with resources and guidance. There is a lot of communication between parents and us so we can work on the child’s development and education together. Parents love to know their children are well and safe, so we send them videos, photos and reports.” —**Gloria Yuliana Soto Martínez, ECE professional**



## CHALLENGES TO INCLUSIVE CARE AND EDUCATION

“I never realized how many barriers exist in Clark County until I had a special needs son. He began early intervention at two for behavior, sensory processing disorder and a speech delay. His pediatrician said he likely had autism but would need a formal diagnosis. However, no place in Vancouver can evaluate a child on state insurance. Portland and Seattle have 12+ month waits. Without this diagnosis, we cannot get additional services. I can’t find a child care that will work through his behaviors. I cannot afford private evaluations or care. The lack of providers is traumatizing to the health of our children. Early Intervention was a godsend. My child was so destructive and physical, I was often in tears. A behavioral coach and occupational therapy provided tools that would help him learn to cope with his big emotions, sleep better and eat. In time, the therapists helped transition him to a developmental preschool, where he had an IEP and minimal services — helpful, but not nearly enough for us to succeed. We need providers to evaluate our children, work with them and support parents’ needs. I’ve felt stuck and alone for over a year because my own community provides such a bare minimum. It is time to care about the care of our children.” —**Baylee Gonzales, parent**

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Washington state has passed legislation to increase the child care quality and access, leading to 827 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: Debbie Ham, Southwest Washington Early Learning Coalition (SWEL), [debbie.ham@selfwa.org](mailto:debbie.ham@selfwa.org).
- Contacting your STEM Network Director: Vickei Hrdina, Career Connect Southwest, [vickei.hrdina@esd112.org](mailto:vickei.hrdina@esd112.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).*



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