

# NORTH CENTRAL REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN

## EARLY LEARNING & CARE



Okanogan, Chelan, Douglas,  
and Grant Counties

# 30,658

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



**7,973 (26%)** OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX  
IN LOW-INCOME\* HOUSEHOLDS

## Spanish, Russian

MOST COMMON LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT  
HOME OTHER THAN ENGLISH

# 67%

(20,395)  
CHILDREN OF COLOR

## CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

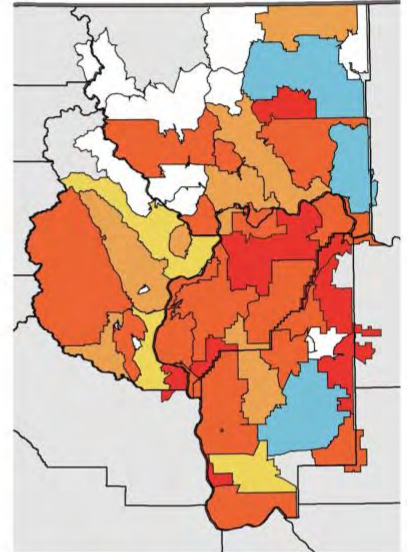
Lack of access to **child care costs employers an estimated \$71.1M** due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. **49% of children do not have access to a licensed child care.** For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$20,532, **32% of the average family's income.**

### ECEAP AND HEAD START

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) and Head Start preschool programs specialize in inclusive and high-quality care for low-income families and children with disabilities. Right now, these critical programs only serve half of the 3,207 children in our region who need them.

**44%** OF CHILDREN WHO NEED  
AN ECEAP/HS SLOT HAVE A  
SPACE AVAILABLE TO THEM  
(1,412)

### 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

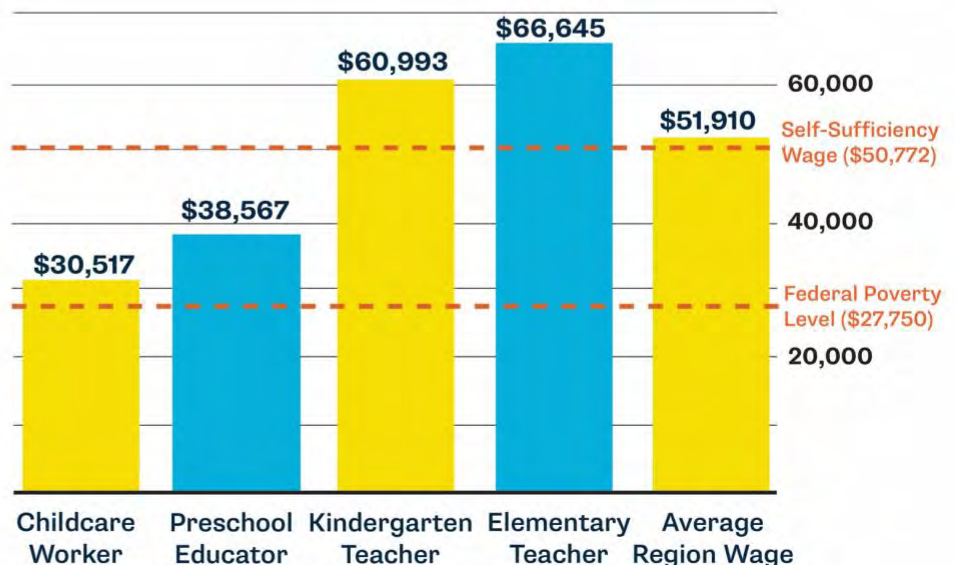
## EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE

Our early learning and care system currently depends on **942 early learning and child care professionals** in the North Central region, of whom **more than half are people of color** and more than 80% are female. While providing an essential service, most child care providers make near poverty wages and **50% 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 \$52,400 for a family of four.

\*\*Visual of 2020 data. Capacity includes Child Care Centers and Family Homes

## CHILD CARE VS. K-12 WAGES



## OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ACCESS CHILD CARE

“My name is Irma Acosta and I live in Brewster, Washington, and have been working as a child care provider since 2002. Brewster used to be considered a child care desert due to the lack of providers and early learning programs to support children. There was also a lack of information in the community where many people did not have immigration papers and believed that without documentation they could not progress, so they spent most of their lives working in orchards and produce-packing warehouses. Fortunately, these issues have improved thanks to a state-funded program and the work I have done as a mentor to train new child care providers in my community. There are now more early childhood education programs available in schools for young children, and people working in produce-packing warehouses are allowed to request child care assistance. The community has flourished thanks to people who care about it.” - Irma Acosta, Child Care Provider (pictured second from right) *\*This story was originally captured in Spanish and translated.*



## PLAY AND LEARN GROUPS: HELPING FAMILIES FIND RESOURCES AND INCLUSIVE CARE

Many parents in North Central Washington struggle to find information and access to needed childcare services. For example, Mayra is a mother of six children, three of whom are under the age of five years. Mayra had concerns about two of her children and wasn't sure where she could go for help. She needed a trusted place to seek advice and she needed to know where to go for resources and local services. She joined the Early Connections Play & Learn Group in March of 2022, and there, she connected with trusted professionals who encouraged her to speak with her medical provider for a referral for occupational therapy for one child, and helped connect her with a local preschool to meet the needs of her second child.

### IMPACT OF THE FAIR START FOR KIDS ACT

Passed in 2021, the Fair Start for Kids Act made historic investments that were intended to accomplish the following:

- Make child care more affordable for low-income families
- Expand early intervention and behavioral health services for young children and caregivers.

While these investments are a good start, the majority of child care providers continue to make near poverty wages, child care deserts persist, and children with disabilities are often unable to access inclusive care. Continued and increased support for our early childhood systems is necessary to create true access and equity for all Washington's children and caregivers.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO GET INVOLVED



*The mission of the **North Central Early Learning Coalition (NCELC)** is to partner and collaborate to (i) expand program options and access, (ii) invest in early learning educators and care providers, and (iii) engage local communities, to ensure that all children and families have equitable access to quality childcare and early learning options that meet their unique needs.*

The North Central Region stretches across a diverse landscape that includes Okanogan, Grant, Douglas, and Chelan counties. The unique voice of our region deserves to be heard at the local, regional, and state level. NCELC is committed to investing in early learning and care providers and engaging local communities to ultimately expand program options and access. Here are some things you can do:

- Consider joining the [North Central Early Learning Coalition](#) or contact [janelleb@ncesd.org](mailto:janelleb@ncesd.org)
- [Take action](#) on advocacy efforts to expand access to quality early care & education.
- Connect communities, businesses, and individuals to the [Family Center](#) to find local quality child care.

- Invest time and resources to support young children and their families.

