

NORTHWEST REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN

EARLY LEARNING & CARE



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

89,454

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



19,320 (22%) OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX
IN LOW-INCOME* HOUSEHOLDS

Spanish, Korean

MOST COMMON LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT
HOME OTHER THAN ENGLISH

46%

 (41,485)

CHILDREN OF COLOR

CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

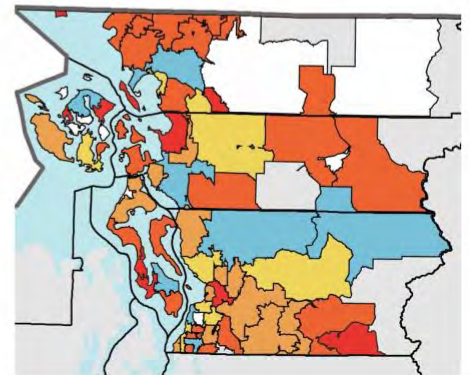
Lack of access to child care costs employers an estimated \$335.8M due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. **43% of children do not have access to a licensed child care.** For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$29,568, **28% of the average family's 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 6,961 children in our region who need them.

48% OF CHILDREN WHO NEED
AN ECEAP/HS SLOT HAVE A
SPACE AVAILABLE TO THEM
(3,368)

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

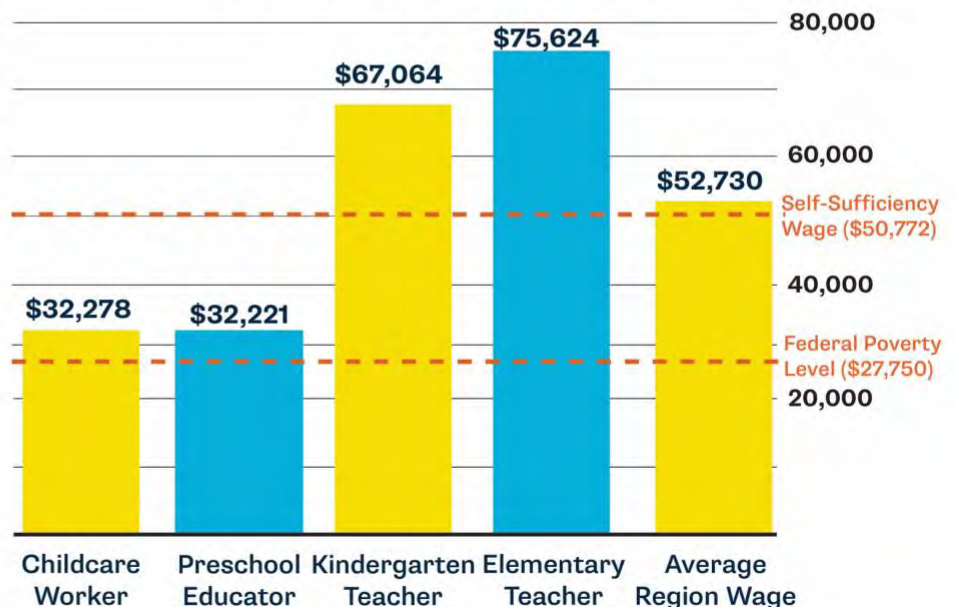
EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE

Our early learning and care system currently depends on **2,533 early learning and child care professionals** in the Northwest 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



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.

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

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 for:

- Sustained funding for partners like Washington Communities for Children
- Inclusive, accessible, and affordable early care
- Household sustaining wages and professional supports for early care and education providers
- Aligning systems across early learning, K-12, health, and mental health to connect and coordinate supports for families

Connect with Northwest Early Learning Coalition! Contact Linden at linden@nwelcoalition.org for more info.

