

PIERCE COUNTY REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN EARLY LEARNING & CARE



Pierce County, Washington

72,559

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



14,559 (20%) OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN LOW-INCOME* HOUSEHOLDS

Spanish, Korean

MOST COMMON LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME OTHER THAN ENGLISH

52%

 (37,553)

CHILDREN OF COLOR

CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

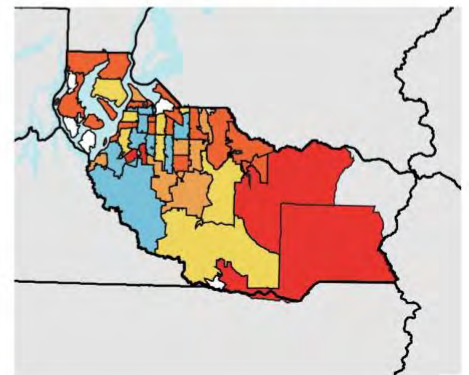
Lack of access to **child care costs employers an estimated \$256.5M** due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. **46% of children do not have access to a licensed child care.** For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$27,036, **27% of the average family's 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 6,249 children in our region who need them.

40% (2,490) OF CHILDREN WHO NEED AN ECEAP/HS SLOT HAVE A SPACE AVAILABLE TO THEM

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

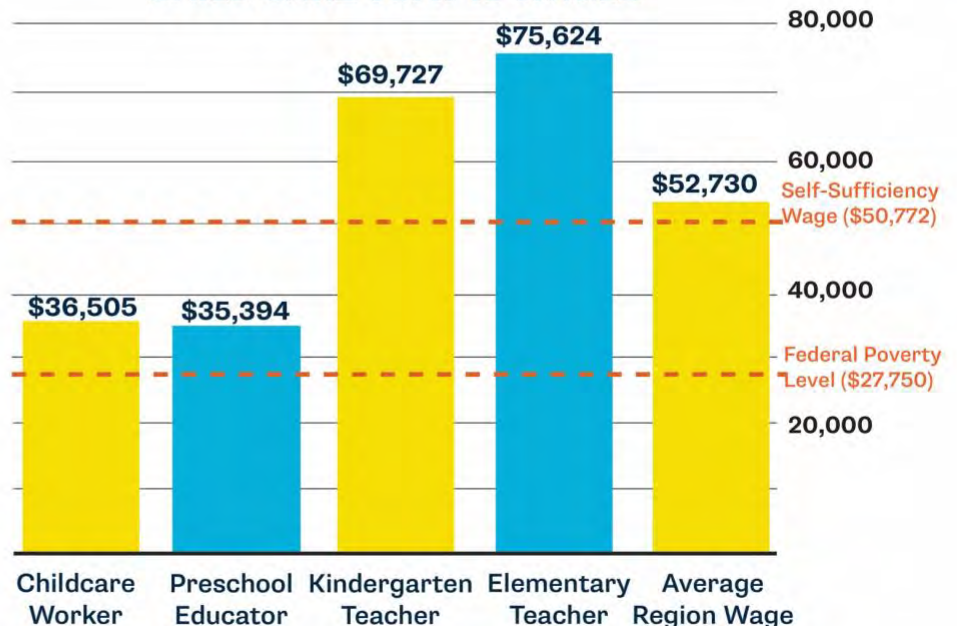
EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE

Our early learning and care system currently depends on **2,056 early learning and child care professionals** in the Pierce County, 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



BARRIERS TO ACCESSING CHILD CARE

Families in Pierce County are struggling to find safe, affordable, and equitable child care. Child care centers have extremely long waitlists, are costly, and are not sufficiently culturally diverse or inclusive. It becomes even more challenging if care is needed for multiple children or a child with special needs. These are just some of the many barriers that exist to accessing high-quality child care. When parents cannot access child care, they are left to make difficult decisions that affect the whole family. Community members have shared their experiences, some of which include leaving employment, not returning to work after the birth of the child, relying on friends and family, or leaving their child in a child care center they would not otherwise choose. Community members also refused increases in compensation for fear of losing their child care subsidy, further increasing the cost of care. These cannot be the choices families must make. For families to thrive, they need concrete support and the ability to locate and *choose* safe, affordable, and equitable childcare that works best for them.



CHALLENGES OF CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Over 250 Pierce County Early Learning Providers were recently interviewed for the Child Care Capacity Initiative to assess their current needs and obstacles. Several barriers were identified for preventing stability, business growth, and expansion. The top five barriers were taxes and wages, staffing, education access, financial development, and Washington Administrative Code compliance. While all identified barriers warrant attention, taxes and wages must be a priority to establish a sustainable childcare system. **An astounding 98% of providers shared they make below living wages.** Full-time, experienced child care providers not connected to a center are often responsible for their own medical insurance, spending almost one-third of their income on basic health coverage. Unfortunately, providers are not currently able to maintain a basic standard of living with their current wages.

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 Pierce County, time is of the essence. Children, families, and educators need and deserve a fully funded system that supports and uplifts 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
- Increasing the number of child care spots in Pierce County by supporting local initiatives like the Child Care Capacity Initiative. To join the Child Care Voice Network or to learn more about the initiative please contact Project Manager, Cheri Beavers, at cherib@first5fundamentals.org