

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN EARLY LEARNING & CARE



Kittitas and Yakima Counties

27,226

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



11,328 (42%) OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX
IN LOW-INCOME* HOUSEHOLDS

Spanish, German

MOST COMMON LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT
HOME OTHER THAN ENGLISH

75%

(20,351)

CHILDREN OF COLOR

CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

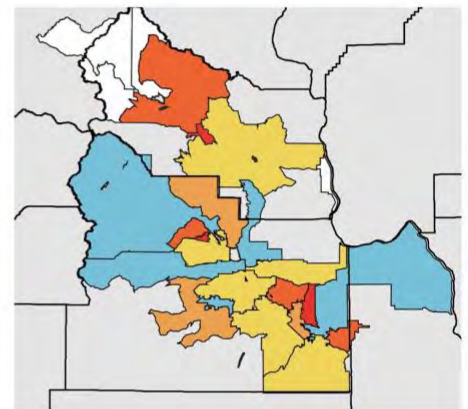
Lack of access to **child care costs employers an estimated \$92.3M** due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. **42% of children do not have access to a licensed child care.** For those that do, the average cost of child care for two children is \$22,752, **33% of the average family's 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 4,605 children in our region who need them.

46% OF CHILDREN WHO NEED
AN ECEAP/HS SLOT HAVE A
SPACE AVAILABLE TO THEM
(2,126)

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

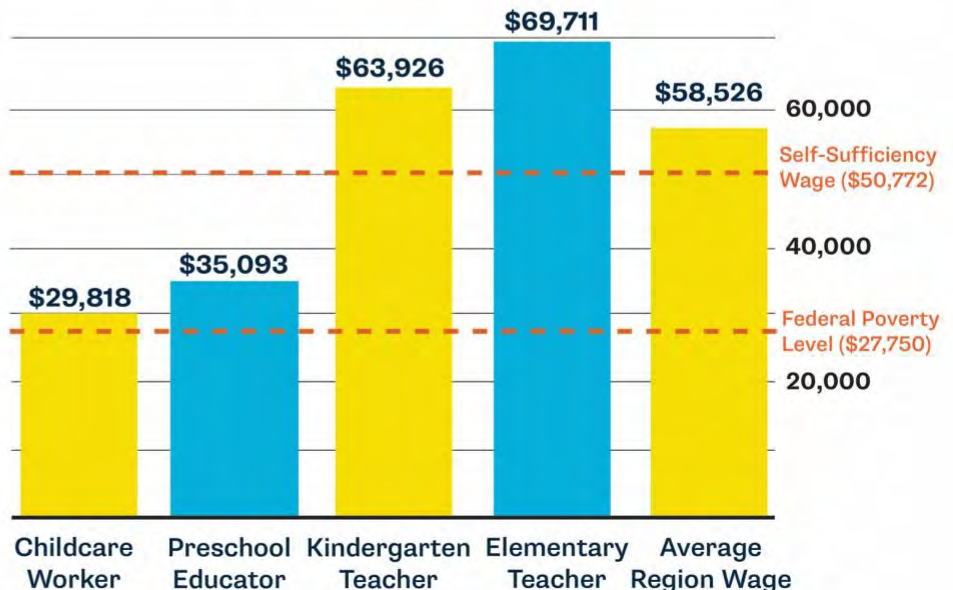
EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE

Our early learning and care system currently depends on **913 early learning and child care professionals** in the South 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



CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING CARE AND EDUCATION

Child care services in Yakima and Kittitas counties are primarily provided by women of color who are small business owners. Historically, the work of women of color has been undervalued and under-resourced, and, unfortunately, child care is no exception. In South Central Washington, many child care providers run their businesses alone and are in charge of cleaning, finances, cooking, caring for, and educating children. Even though the service provided by this workforce of mostly women enables parents to work and supports our economy, many earn less than fast food workers. Many are discouraged from working in the child care sector and it is not rare for child care providers to switch careers to make a better living. These factors all contribute to South Central Washington being a *child care desert*, meaning that there are many more children who *need* child care than there are child care spots *available*.



RETAINING CHILD CARE PROVIDERS THROUGH ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY

Because South Central Washington is a child care desert, it is difficult for most families to find affordable and quality child care. To address this challenge, in 2021 the Investing in Children Coalition (ICC) received a Child Care Partnership Grant from the Department of Commerce. With this grant the ICC was able to hold listening sessions in four communities to understand child care providers' needs, one of which was access to technology. Based on what they shared, the ICC was able to purchase technology packages for 32 child care providers to meet their needs, including laptops, software, wireless mics, headsets, and printers. In 2022, we received a second round of the grant and were able to buy 20 additional technology packages for providers in two more regions. In total, we provided over 50 providers with technology packages, which some have even used to apply for expansion grants to increase the number of spots in their programs!

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 support for families.

To learn more or to get involved with the Investing in Children Coalition's work, please contact our Coalition Coordinator, Marina Medrano, at marinam@yakimavalleycf.org.

