

SOUTHWEST REGION STATE OF THE CHILDREN

EARLY LEARNING & CARE



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

45,998

CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN THE REGION



14,419 (31%) OF CHILDREN UNDER SIX IN LOW-INCOME* HOUSEHOLDS

Spanish, Russian

MOST COMMON LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME OTHER THAN ENGLISH

35%

 (16,172)

CHILDREN OF COLOR

CHILD CARE ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY AFFECTS US ALL

Lack of access to **child care costs employers an estimated \$169.2M** due to employee absenteeism, turnover, and lost productivity. **39% 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 \$25,788, **30% of the average family's income.**

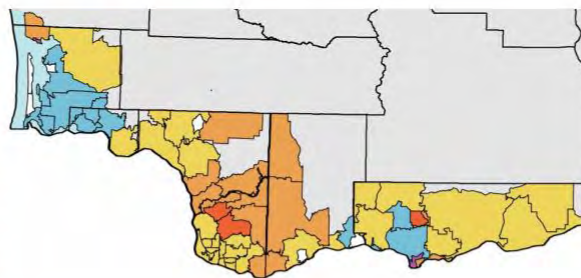
ECEAP AND HEAD START

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 4,762 children in our region who need them.

45%

 (2,130)

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

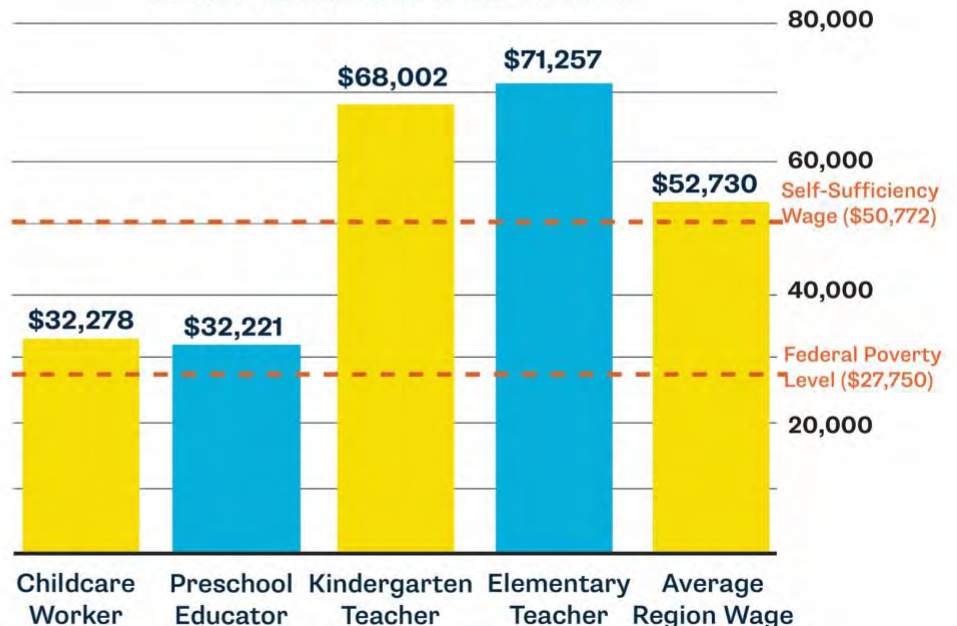
EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE

Our early learning and care system currently depends on **1,204 early learning and child care professionals** in the Southwest 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

“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 Martinez, child care provider**



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 childcare 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**

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.
- For more information go to www.selfwa.org

